



Mixie & the Halfbreeds

electronic press package

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Mixie & the Halfbreeds

WORLD PREMIERE

By Adrienne Wong and Julie Tamiko Manning

Directed by Maiko Bae Yamamoto

June 18-28, 2009

The VanCity Culture Lab (1895 Venables, Vancouver)

Wednesday-Saturday, 8:00pm

Free Preview June 18, 8:00pm

PWYC Matinees Saturday June 20 & Sunday June 28, 2:00pm

Tickets \$20/\$18

Ticketmaster: www.ticketmaster.ca or 604-280-4444

www.newworldtheatre.com

"Then Bowie says, 'Iggy would have loved you my little china girl.' And I say, 'shhh...' and throw my drink in his face. 'I'm Japanese you moron!' Then I wake up."

In Newworld Theatre's **Mixie & the Halfbreeds**, two estranged neighbours are not as different as they think. Haunted by peroxide teeth and blondissima hair, Mixie and Trixie tackle a question that has plagued mankind through the ages: do blondes really have more fun?

Funny, biting, fantastical, and profound, the new play by **Julie Tamiko Manning** and **Adrienne Wong** revolves around two Asian Canadian women of mixed race who approach their cultural dualism in very different ways. **Mixie & the Halfbreeds** invites its audience to explore complex and relevant issues of culture, identity, and race, and tackles questions of mixing in contemporary Canadian society and popular culture. Where does culture come from? How do we mix cultures without losing our whole sense of self? What does it mean to be mixed race? "I am the sum of my parts and when some of my parts are ignored, I feel like I'm not seen at all," confesses Mixie.

A no-holds-barred identity throw-down, **Mixie and the Halfbreeds** is an optimistic tale for a remixed nation.

Officially incorporated in 1994, Newworld Theatre is a professional, Vancouver-based theatre company that creates, develops, produces and tours new plays that reflect multiple facets of Canada's diverse populations. Since 1992, Newworld has produced seventeen original shows and received seventeen Jessie Richardson Awards, the Canada Council TYA Award and the Alcan Performing Arts Award. Cited by both the National Post and the Globe and Mail as one of the companies driving the nationally recognized renaissance in independent Vancouver theatre, Newworld produces work that is passionate, entertaining and thought-provoking.

Mixie & the Halfbreeds is directed by **Maiko Bae Yamamoto** and runs June 18-28 at The VanCity Culture Lab (1895 Venables Street, Vancouver). **Mixie & the Halfbreeds** is presented in association with the Powell Street Festival. For tickets, please call 604.280.4444 or visit www.ticketmaster.ca. Part of See Seven! Pass Holders can reserve through Tickets Tonight: 604-684-2787.

Mixie & Trixie Speak

An Interview with Julie Tamiko Manning & Adrienne Wong

Co-writers Adrienne Wong (Trixie) and Julie Tamiko Manning (Mixie) might not be carbon copies of their *Mixie & the Halfbreeds* personas, but as Asian Canadian women of mixed race, they've struggled to find a balance between their individual senses of self and the push-and-pull of their racial hybridity. Below, Adrienne and Julie reflect on embracing their mixie-ness and what it takes to survive and thrive as a self-aware hybrid in 21st century Canada.

Mixie and Trixie each deal with their hybridity in their own unique way. How common do you think their attitudes are among Canadians of mixed race?

JULIE: Funnily enough, I have never discussed hybridity with my sister, brother nor my cousins, the majority of whom are of mixed race, nor have I with most hapas within the Japanese-Canadian community. Until recently, at least for me, my attitude towards being of two races has been more about identifying as “different” than identifying with a “community of mixies.” So, it’s hard to know. It’s a bit of undiscovered country. I am hoping that *Mixie and the Halfbreeds* will at least awaken some sort of recognition within the mixed race community. Sometimes it can change everything when you discover that you are not the only one out there with these feelings. Maybe when mixies discover their new label, they can find some pride and identity in that!

ADRIENNE: I think that we intentionally chose two extremes because of the dramatic potential. These two characters have opposing points of view and a yearning for otherness. The characters are set inside of contemporary North American society where the other is still defined as racially different. I think that there’s opposing tension in Mixie and Trixie, a yearning for that otherness and the specialness it confers. We live inside a media culture that places things Eastern on a bit of a pedestal. We have a bit of hangover from Orientalism, and then you add in the contemporary images of China and Japan and what’s happening there now, and the nostalgia for your ancestors’ time, the stories that you may have heard or invented, and all of that affects how you live your life now, and whether or not you see people like you on the street.

Do you think it’s possible to be a hybrid and live without tension or struggle or conflict?

ADRIENNE: I think so. To me, conflict lies in any person’s struggle to understand their identity and their social identity as a human. In the case of these two characters, they’re really hung up on the racial and cultural identity, but I think for some people, those cultural differences are not necessarily in conflict with each other. Instead, they are avenues that open doors where what’s wonderful about being a hybrid or a mixie is the feeling of having the best of all worlds. You can choose this but not that part of your heritage. You can put all those best things together into your own image of yourself.



JULIE: I believe that the conflict is partially within ourselves (sometimes literally!) and partially from outside society. There is a sense of pressure from the outside world to be what people identify you as. Many people will identify people of mixed race with their non-white part. A perfect example is President Barack Obama. He is almost constantly referred to as black. Not to take away from such an historical moment for African Americans, but every time he is referred to as black, a large part of his existence is being denied. There is a comedy bit from *The Chappelle Show*, called Racial Draft, where delegates of different races (Black, Jewish, White, Latinos and Asian) draft people identified

with multi-cultures into their race. For example: the Black delegation drafted Tiger Woods (played by Dave Chappelle) onto their racial team. Woods' response was: "It's a tremendous opportunity for me to finally be part of a race, have a home. I've been so confused. I Love you Dad!" This is a perfect and hilarious commentary on life as a multi-racial person. Feelings of not fitting in, confusion, guilt for identifying with the race of one parent over the other's. Then again, some people may never look at life that way. If you see yourself not as half, but someone with two cultures instead of one or none, the conflict dissipates.

How closely does your life experience mirror that of either of the characters?

ADRIENNE: Not that closely. I think what's interesting is that often when you see pieces about identity, frequently the writers are writing from personal experience, and I think that also happens in the immigrant storylines we've seen and the reconciliation between generation's storylines that we've seen. What's different about this is that it's not based entirely on Julie's life or my life. We have definitely exaggerated some things, and hyped some things, and created opposing tensions so that we can explore this issue from extreme angles, from angles of extreme entry, and hopefully by doing that throw some ideas or notions into relief.

JULIE: I would love for this play to not be my diary or my therapy session because I don't think that that would be very interesting or accessible to anyone else, though I can only write from my own experiences, so most things are based in truth. This being my first written work I've fallen into that way of writing a lot. That has been and remains a big challenge for me. On the other hand, the reason why I wanted to write this is because I wanted to add my voice to the Canadian plays already out there. I didn't think that this voice, the voice of a mixie, was out there yet. Mixie is pretty much me magnified. For example, though I am not a recluse like Mixie, her behaviour is a magnification of my feelings of being an outsider.

Was there a moment in your life when you realized that you were a hybrid?

ADRIENNE: I grew up in Calgary and because my last name was Wong, I felt like I was Chinese even though there weren't really any Chinese kids in school with me, but that's what I identified with. But at the same time I went to French immersion school and my mom is French-Canadian from Manitoba, so we spoke French, and learned French Canadian traditions, all the food and songs and so I felt, growing up in Calgary, very connected to that French Canadian legacy. I remember feeling very different.

JULIE: As soon as I started to attend school I knew that I was different. In kindergarten I was the only English kid in a completely French environment. I don't even think I recognized that our differences were racial. In grade 1 my best friend was the typical blonde, pretty one. Even though her adopted sister was Korean, I only saw that I was not the blonde, pretty one. It still wasn't about race, I guess. But it WAS about being blonde. It was only when I was around 10, 11, 12 that I realized that my parents were of different race and that made MY existence confusing, because then I had to negotiate around TWO cultures when I had never even recognized them previously.

Have you found in your career that being of mixed heritage has been an advantage or a hindrance?

ADRIENNE: I think that what's interesting is that being of mixed heritage, I will always be seen as Asian, but I'll never be seen as White, so the French Canadian side of my heritage is in some ways invisible. Nobody would look at me and say, are you French Canadian?

Because our culture is so visual, and we take in a lot of information through our eyes, and when white people look at me they see an Asian person, and when I meet Chinese people, they know that I'm not fully Chinese, and they want to know what I am, and that's really the question that always surfaces: what are you? Which is a strange question and doesn't occur as much as I've grown older, although it still happens, although people have found different ways of asking that question, such as: where are your parents from originally? I think that it sets up a false idea that we are somehow pie charts that can be sectioned off. Always people say you're half, and I say, which half? Top half? Bottom half? We are all mixed up inside of us, and we are intrinsically mixed. You cannot take half away and be left with half. You take half away and you're left with nothing. The math doesn't work.

JULIE: My emotional response would say that my racial ambiguity has been a hindrance. In my experience there has rarely been much room for non-traditional thinking in Canadian theatre, and so it has been frustrating. My mindful response would be that it has been an advantage, because I have found great opportunities and challenges in the plays that I have worked on and have met inspiring and exciting artists through these projects that I never would have had I not been who I am.

“Always people say you're half, and I say, which half? Top half? Bottom half? We are all mixed up inside of us, and we are intrinsically mixed. You cannot take half away and be left with half. You take half away and you're left with nothing. The math doesn't work.”

-Adrienne Wong

What do you think that audience members who aren't of mixed race learn from Mixie?

JULIE: My hope is that people will recognize that there is a pride in being of mixed race, that being a mixie is a specific identity. AND this may sound cheesy, but that we are **all** the sum of our parts, whatever those parts may be. Whether we identify as mixed-race, mixed culture, mixed gender, mixed education, mixed emotion, mixed parts, mixed nuts, whatever the mix is- it creates a 100% whole-grain person.

ADRIENNE: For me, I always hope that when people come and see the work that they leave and have a slightly different perspective on what it is to be human and what it is that the other humans around them need to be those humans. We know ourselves, we can know ourselves as well as we can, as well as we want to, but we'll never really know other people unless other people tell us what it's like for them.

Conversation with the Director

Maiko Bae Yamamoto is a mixie, but not in quite the same way as *Mixie* and *Trixie*. Raised in Burnaby by parents of Korean and Japanese backgrounds, Maiko (co-artistic director of Vancouver's Theatre Replacement) drew upon her own experiences straddling the racial divide to direct *Mixie & the Halfbreeds*.

*Why did you want to direct *Mixie & the Halfbreeds*?*

MAIKO: The main reason I wanted to direct *Mixie & the Halfbreeds* is because I'm such a big fan of both Julie and Adrienne as artists. I really admire them. Secondary to that is that I find the content extremely interesting. I'm not a halfbreed in the same way that they are. I'm half Korean, half Japanese, which has its own share of politics and dynamics, but I certainly can draw upon that experience, and I relate to a lot of what they're talking about in the show.

*People who are mixed race often deal with a lot of conflict, and that's definitely present in *Mixie and the Halfbreeds*. Do you think it's possible to be a hybrid and live without struggle and conflict?*

MAIKO: No. That's the simple answer. I'm the type of hybrid that can sit very comfortably in one shell because I look completely Japanese or completely Korean, so for me I know, no. I grew up in the 70s in North Burnaby and there weren't a lot of Japanese people here. There were few, and so I went to school with the knowledge that my sisters and I were the only Asian people in the school. That's completely different now, but back then I had moments where I wished I was the same as everybody else, and I think that much later in my life, I went through wanting to acknowledge my Korean half, and so I took on the name Bae as a result of that, because it just became important for me to realize that there was more than meets the eye, and also just wanting to acknowledge my history and where I came from. Now I've come full circle and it's very interesting when I think about it. I try not to spend too much time thinking about it on a daily basis because I feel like I don't need to anymore. I don't want to have to underline anything or highlight anything. I just want to exist as a person in this world.

*What are some specific ways your perspective has shifted while you've worked on *Mixie & the Halfbreeds*?*

MAIKO: I think one thing is that I just acknowledge that I can't really feel how Adrienne and Julie felt when they were growing up, and I can't really feel the reasons why they want to make this particular story. That's a huge thing for me because I want to be hyper aware of that as a director in the room with them because I don't want to ever make assumptions about things, like, oh, their issues with identity and with race are exactly the same as mine, because they're not, and I think that's a huge thing that I'm carrying around with me and I'm trying to be really careful about with them, and asking them to really support me and help me with understanding that to the best that we all can together, because I just think that to me is the heart of the play.

What would you like audience members who aren't mixed race take away with them after seeing the play?

MAIKO: Even if they aren't mixed race, I hope it strikes a chord of resonance with them, too. I wish that even if you're mixed race or not that you walk away with the same feeling. I think that would be really good work for us to accomplish, that everybody walks away with the same feeling, and I think it's possible because there's so many universalisms that exist in the play, and I hope that we do find the universal message and that everybody takes that away, and it's not just about growing up Chinese or growing up White. It's about growing up.

Artist Biographies

Julie Tamiko Manning -Writer/Performer

Adrienne Wong - Writer/Performer

Maiko Bae Yamamoto - Director



Julie Tamiko Manning is a Montreal-based theatre performer and creator and has been an active member of the Canadian theatre community for the last 16 years. She recently appeared on stage in Scapegoat Carnivale's production of *Life is a Dream* by Pedro Calderon de la Barca as Estrella (Montreal) and as an actor and dancer in *The Place Between* produced by Native Earth Performing Arts (Toronto). Other companies she has worked with include: Chëyikwe Performance, urban ink Productions, Rumble Productions (Vancouver), Teatro Comaneci, Projet Porte Parole, Imago Theatre, Black Theatre Workshop, The Other Theatre and Geordie Productions (Montreal). She has appeared in the Festival de Théâtre des Amériques in *girls! girls! girls!* by Greg MacArthur and *Burning Vision* by GG nominated Marie Clements, as well as The Magnetic North Theatre Festival. She was invited last year to perform a one-woman show reading of *Skim*, by another GG nominated writer, Mariko Tamaki, at Vancouver's Powell Street Festival. Julie is a graduate of "The Dome Theatre" (Dawson College).



Adrienne Wong creates, performs and produces new work for theatre and radio. Last season, she performed in Newworld Theatre and Teesri Duniya's production of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*. Other performance credits include *lives were around me* (battery opera), and her one-woman ukulele show *Hurted* (La Luna Productions). Writing collaborations include *The Empty Orchestra* (Theatre Replacement), *In the Heart of the City* (downtown eastside community play) and *Other Women* (Rumble Productions). Favourite projects include devising a miniature play for Box Theatre, recording a cross-Atlantic radio play (BBC and CBC), playing Scrabble on the radio (North by Northwest, CBC Radio One), and creating interactive letter-writing projects. Adrienne is a graduate of Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts and co-Artistic Producer of Newworld Theatre.



Maiko Bae Yamamoto Artistic Directs Theatre Replacement with fellow artist, James Long. Past works include *WeeTube*, *Train*, *Clark and I Somewhere in Connecticut*, *Yu-Fo*, *BIOBOXES*, *I am Sam Stan*, *Farther and Farther On*, *Sexual Practices of the Japanese*, *Box Theatre*, *Broiler*, and *The Empty Orchestra: a love story powered by karaoke*. Theatre Replacement has presented work both nationally and internationally. This season, the company presented two new shows at the PuSh Festival, *That Night Follows Day*, a script by Tim Etchells performed by 17 local children, and *Twenty Minute Musicals*, four short-form musicals curated by Associate Artist Veda Hille. As a freelance performer and director, Maiko has had the pleasure of working with several companies including: urban ink productions, Newworld Theatre, Stan's Cafe, Mammalian Diving Reflex, boca del lupo, and the Leaky Heaven Circus.

About Newworld Theatre

Officially incorporated in 1994, Newworld Theatre is a professional, Vancouver-based theatre company which creates, develops, produces and tours new plays that reflect multiple facets of Canada's diverse populations. Created through a potent mixture of collective creation and traditional script development, Newworld productions investigate intersections between communities and peoples. Our work examines borders — between cultures, styles, and disciplines— and our shows are hybrids of East and West, of the real and imaginary, and of story and cabaret.

We also work with numerous community-based groups, giving non-professional artists creative tools with which to examine and express their self-defined aspirations and concerns.

Philosophically, we are driven by a commitment to a broad, integrated and artistically cogent mix of diverse artists and arts-practice and a commitment to the artist's vision as the primary engine of artistic creation. We believe that Canada's artistic ecology is as culturally, economically and stylistically "diverse" as the country it emerges from. It is the inherent strengths of this ecology that we strive to reflect, and at the heart of all our work we believe in the triumph of compassion over all forms of oppression.

Since 1992, Vancouver-based Newworld has produced 17 original shows, including *Adrift on the Nile*, *Ali and Ali* and *the Axes of Evil*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Asylum of the Universe*, and received 17 Jessie Richardson Awards, The Canada Council TYA Award and the Alcan Performing Arts Award.

Newworld Theatre productions tour across Canada and have been presented by major national festivals, including the PuSh Festival, the Vancouver International Children's Festival and the National Arts Centre's Magnetic North Theatre Festival. Cited by both the National Post and the Globe and Mail as one of the companies driving the nationally recognized renaissance in independent Vancouver theatre, newworld produces work that is passionate, entertaining and thought-provoking. We consistently reach audiences that cross traditional cultural and demographic boundaries.

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