

## The Voyage Home: Linda Park

by Sam Hurwitt  
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### Linda Park Makes Her Hometown Debut at San Jose Rep

Linda Park's local debut on the professional stage in San Jose Repertory Theatre's *Love in American Times* has been a long time coming. Born in South Korea, the 32-year-old former *Star Trek* actress grew up in Milpitas and San Jose, heavily involved in theatre all along the way, then went off to get her bachelor of fine arts degree in acting from Boston University.

In her first year out of college she scored the role of communications officer Hoshi Sato on *Star Trek: Enterprise*, the last television series in the popular sci-fi franchise (albeit set a century before the events of the original 1960s *Star Trek* series and 200 years before *Star Trek: The Next Generation*). Park remained a series regular of *Enterprise* for the show's four seasons from 2001 to 2005 and then went on to ongoing roles in the shorter-lived TV series *Raines*, *Women's Murder Club* and *Crash*.

She's also managed to squeeze in a fair amount of stage work, most recently playing Chrysothemis in a production of Sophocles's *Elektra* at the Getty Villa last September, directed by American Conservatory Theater's Carey Perloff and costarring Olympia Dukakis and ACT regulars Jack Willis and Manoel Felciano. That was actually a return to the House of Atreus for Park, who had played Clytemnestra in Vortex Theater Company's 2005 adaptation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* in New York. She and her friends briefly started their own theatre company in Los Angeles called Underground Asylum.

Although based in L.A., she's currently back home in San Jose starring in the world premiere of Philip Kan Gotanda's *Love in American Times*, examining the phenomenon of rich white men marrying much younger, successful Asian American professional women.

"I always really love working on new works," Park said when I spoke to her on the phone. (She was in the car at the time, on her way home from a table read for an episode of *House*.) "I find that it's such a discovery process. I mean, every rehearsal process is a discovery process, but particularly when it's new work and hasn't been done before. Also I'm a Philip Kan Gotanda fan, and just to be able to be the first cast with a new play of his is very exciting. When I was in drama school I actually understudied his play *Sisters Matsumoto* at the Huntington Theatre Company. Philip probably does not remember me, but I understudied Rose. Besides David Henry Hwang I hadn't read a lot of other Asian American playwrights at the time, and although Philip and *Sisters Matsumoto* were Japanese and I'm Korean, there was something that really made me feel that my community had a voice and made me look into more Asian American playwrights."

Park grew up seeing plays at San Jose Rep and other Bay Area theatres, mostly through school outings, and she told me she always wanted to be a performer. "I don't remember a time when I wasn't doing theatre," she said. "I got involved with the children's community theatre Milpitas Rainbow Theatre, and my first play was *The Phantom*

*Tollbooth* there. I think I was eight years old or so. But I'm an only child, and my parents had come to the States with me when I was two, and theatre was the last thing they had ever wanted their child to do, coming from postwar survival, make-money instincts. So I have no recollection of how I actually found the community theatre and found out how to get involved. And it was a struggle with my parents. I had to barter by getting certain grades to be able to audition for a new play or be in rehearsal."

By the time she got to the all-girls Notre Dame High School in San Jose, Park was a full-time theatre junkie, involved in shows not just at her own school but at the neighboring boys' school. "Bellarmine College Prep has a very thriving theatre program with Tom Alessandri, who was one of my great mentors," said Park. "He ended up sending many of his students to audition for theatre programs, and they have built this amazing theatre complex that rivals college theatre complexes. There are two small black boxes and a huge main stage for a high school. When I'm at San Jose Rep, I'm going to do some workshops with the kids there who are now going to be auditioning for drama schools. And at Notre Dame, when I was there in junior year, Ken Kelleher, a Bay Area director, was a huge influence on me. We didn't have a very strong theatre program at my school, and Ken came on for a year, and on the fourth floor of this old mansion connected to Notre Dame we built a black box theatre. He let me direct *Agnes of God*, we did this production of *Trojan Women* that he pulled from actors who had worked at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and he let me write and produce a series of monologues of different women's voices you hear in the city. We almost got closed down for some of the racier stuff and we really fought for it, but Ken really taught me how to push boundaries in theatre in a way that I'd never seen before, and I'm so grateful to him."

Park also volunteered at San Jose Stage Company, where artistic director Randall King was also helpful to her. "He set me up with film auditions in San Francisco," she said. "I was in high school, but I definitely had a whole leg out the door, just ready to do what I wanted to do."

Although *Love in American Times* is her first Bay Area stage play outside of school, Park confessed that her San Jose Rep debut was originally supposed to happen a full decade ago, back in 2001.

"When I first moved to L.A. after drama school, I got cast in *Cyrano* at San Jose Rep as Roxane," she said. "Very shortly after that I got *Star Trek*, and it was one of those things where I thought it was actually a hard decision and my agent said, 'Are you crazy? You can always do a play!' But in my mind it was a serious contest, because for me it seemed this very Odyssean thing to have left San Jose, gone to drama school, and then to come back and do a play where I grew up at a theatre that was *the* professional theatre in town and that I'd put up on a pedestal. I thought there was some kind of meaning there for me to do that. It has even more meaning now because now it's been 10 years instead of four years. And 10 years is much more Odyssean."

Having done something as high-profile as a *Star Trek* show, with such a large and dedicated fan base, has pigeonholed many an actor in the past to be largely identified with a particular role they played years ago. Park said that fortunately she hasn't had that experience.

"I don't really feel that it's affected my career one way or another," she said of having done *Enterprise* right out of the gate. "But it did give me what I like to compare to a grad school experience. It was four years of filming anything from 22 to 26 episodes a year, which is a lot. Now people do 10 to 13 episodes a year. It's an amazing job, but doing it day in and day out, the romanticizing of it was quickly dispelled for me. There was also that fear that after *Star Trek* you have a hard time working on anything else, and shortly after *Star Trek*, actually that same year, I went to New York and did *Agamemnon* and then I came back and did *Raines*. That was a huge breath of relief for me. That really helped me feel, OK, I'm not just a sci-fi girl forever. And then after that I've been very lucky to have worked continuously."

Right now, Park said, she's excited to get another chance to flex her theatre muscle after a long stretch of TV roles and guest-star gigs, and to do it in her hometown near her parents is icing on the cake. "I'm so, so excited not only to go back home but to be in process for a month and perform for a month," she said. "It's like serious, serious nourishment for an actor who lives in L.A."

That's not to say she's abandoning the small screen for the big stage—or vice versa, for that matter. "You know, people ask me, 'Do you like theatre, TV or film better?' I just want to do really good work," she said. "I would love to continue doing theatre, but also there's so much great TV, and it's really got to be balanced with what pays the bills. Growing up surrounded by the theatre there—San Jose Rep, San Jose Stage, Berkeley Rep, ACT—I always had that list of the theatres that I wanted to work at. When I graduated from school I didn't think I was going to have a TV career; I thought I was going to perform at the Public, I was going to do Shakespeare in the Park. I think I'm older and wiser enough now to know that life isn't a checklist like that, but I can put it out there that I would like to work in some of these theatres I always dreamed about working at when I was a young thing, the places where I thought the magic happened. And the grass is always greener; my friends in New York who work at those theatres, for them where the magic happens may be at Paramount or at Fox, where I was today."

**Love in American Times** plays May 12 through June 5 at San Jose Repertory Theatre. Visit [sjrep.com](http://sjrep.com).