

# SFGate

home of the

**San Francisco Chronicle**

Subscribe to the weekend Chronicle

## 'Love in American Times' review: SWM seeks merger

[Robert Hurwitt, Chronicle Theater Critic](#)

Friday, May 20, 2011



Kevin Berne

Jack Heller (J. Michael Flynn) and Scarlett (Linda Park) blend sexy and success on a date.



**Love in American Times:** Comedy. By Philip Kan Gotanda. Directed by Rick Lombardo. Through June 5. San Jose Repertory, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose. Two hours, 20 minutes. \$35-\$69. (408) 367-7255. [www.sjrep.com](http://www.sjrep.com).

Philip Kan Gotanda puts some clever twists on the old first-date scene in "Love in American Times," which opened Wednesday at San Jose Repertory Theatre. When the 70-year-old corporate powerhouse Jack (J. Michael Flynn) meets the sexy and very together 33-year-old Scarlett (Linda Park), the sparks that fly have less to do with physical attraction than the cagey posturing, missteps and negotiations of a business merger.

The latest world premiere from the prolific Gotanda ("The Wash," "Yankee Dawg You Die") grows thinner in its second act, on Jack's yacht with his pre-existing family. But the inventive, slyly witty beginning of his exploration of pragmatic mating practices casts a persistent glow.

That's partly a result of the degree to which Gotanda has subsumed his original idea within the reality of his principal characters. The play, Gotanda says in the program, began as a look at arranged matches "between very wealthy white males and very beautiful, well-accomplished Asian females." That's the basic setup of the first act, in a handsome bar (sets by Robin Sanford Roberts) with "Fever" providing ironic counterpoint.

Instead of making it the focus, Gotanda treats the interracial aspect as a contemporary given, using it to flavor a spicy courtship between frank, driven and sharply drawn people. Despite the best efforts of director Rick Lombardo and a talented cast, the other characters look like outtakes from many other wealthy family plays - the flaky daughter (Arwen Anderson), corporate son (Craig Marker) and formidable ex (Rosina Reynolds).

If their family and corporate control issues are too thinly developed to raise much interest, though, the thorny, oddly sexy interplay between Jack and Scarlett remains enchanting. As a self-made kingpin, Flynn walks a fine line between good-old-boy caricature bluster and empathetic need. Park, a former "Star Trek: Enterprise" regular making her hometown stage debut, brings a lively, levelheaded intelligence to the ambitious Scarlett's quest for wealth, power and motherhood.

Even when Gotanda's yacht seems in danger of foundering, the voyage of his oddly matched lovers remains a pleasure cruise.

E-mail Robert Hurwitt at [rhurwitt@sfchronicle.com](mailto:rhurwitt@sfchronicle.com).

This article appeared on page **E - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle