

# VARIETY

## Love in American Times

(San Jose Rep, San Jose; 525 seats; \$74 top)

By [Dennis Harvey](#)

Thu., May. 19, 2011

A San Jose Repertory Theater presentation of a play in two acts by Philip Kan Gotanda. Directed by Rick Lombardo. Set, Robin Sanford Roberts; costumes, Cathleen Edwards; lighting, David Lee Cuthbert; original music/sound design, Tamara Roberts; fight choreographer, Dave Maier. Opened, reviewed May 18, 2011. Running time: 2 HOURS, 30 MIN.

Jack Heller - J. Michael Flynn  
Scarlett Mori-Yang - Linda Park  
Desiree/Mrs. Green/Abby - Rosina Reynolds  
Calvin/Edward - Craig Marker  
Evelyn/Sophie - Arwen Anderson  
With: Gabriel Marin, Zarah Mahler

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**The materials accompanying Philip Kan Gotanda's new play make much of a trend among rich, old white men to marry much younger Asian women, one such relationship being the focus here. Yet, "Love in American Times" never really addresses that phenom; we never even learn if its fictive tycoon is especially attracted to Asians. That's odd, because this overstuffed evening has room for everything else imaginable, much of it superfluous, excessive and/or repetitive. Gotanda says he's usually happy with his plays by the third production. Maybe two stagings from now this one will have sharpened a point that eludes it now.**

The nearly hour-long first scene is a first date between two Type A personalities so driven they've both discreetly brought personal assistants. Jack Heller (J. Michael Flynn) is a famous, fabulously wealthy corporate raider who's just turned 70, is divorcing his long-separated longtime wife and seeks "one last big acquisition" in the form of a woman who'll devote herself utterly to him and his still-active libido. Scarlett Mori-Yang (Linda Park) is a Japanese-Korean emigre risen from humble origins to running a major nonprofit foundation.

He's crude, confessedly "ruthless," given to broad racial generalizations, and brags "I say what I know, not what you want to hear." She's equally forthright about telling him how close she is to bailing, but also that she likes "successful people"...and their money.

Much single-malt scotch (he has his own custom-crafted) later, these two selfish, pushy and obnoxious -- albeit interesting -- people are seriously intrigued by one another.

This sequence goes off the rails somewhat with a stretch proving what a tough customer Jack is -- believe it or not, the show has two instances of Russian roulette -- followed by a second underlining of that fact involving a coffin he's built for himself.

(Seemingly hale, Jack lives in great pain from an unspecified illness and doesn't expect to live much longer.)

It's not until the second act, however, that "love" really jumps the shark. Jack is yachting in the tropics on his annual Christmas holiday, the only time he sees his family. And no wonder: They're an endlessly squabbling bunch of shrill stereotypes from shrewish ex-wife (Rosina Reynolds) to spoiled-brat son (Craig Marker) and druggie-mess daughter (Arwen Anderson). Spitting painfully arch insults at each other, they're nonplussed by dad's newfound happiness with his new bride.

But Scarlett wasn't invited, and when she shows up unannounced, bearing big news for Jack, farcical broadness gradually turns into heavy histrionics. How many shocking revelations can one play take? Not this many.

This is ultimately a romance, although frankly it's hard to care about two uber-privileged gorgons learning to love despite the emotional shutdown suffered since melodramatic childhood tragedies. "Love in American Times" -- a vague, grandiose title that doesn't really fit -- would be more honest if we weren't asked to like these people, or think of them as victims. It would also be better if Gotanda jettisoned gratuitous song interludes, pretentious monologues by matchmaker Mrs. Green (Reynolds), and a whole lot else. Including an actual (offstage) shark attack.

Closing out San Jose Rep's 30th anniversary season, artistic director Rick Lombardo's production is well-cast and well-designed, although the actors always can't elevate such erratic material.

And the yacht set is kinda tacky. Surely a billionaire's vessel wouldn't look so much like a daytripping tourists' party boat.

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