

Acting Edition

Poor Yella Rednecks Vietgone Part 2

by Qui Nguyen

Original Music by
Shane Rettig

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-71129-9

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POOR YELLA REDNECKS was originally commissioned and developed by South Coast Repertory and Manhattan Theatre Club. The play received a world premiere co-production by South Coast Repertory (David Ivers, Artistic Director; Paula Tomei, Managing Director) on March 30, 2019. The performance was directed by May Adrales, with scenic design by Arnulfo Maldonado, costume design by Valérie Thérèse Bart, lighting design by Lap Chi Chu, original music/sound design by Shane Rettig with arrangements by Kenny Seymour, puppet design/direction by Sean Cawalti, and projection design by Jared Mezzocchi. The Stage Manager was Kathryn Davies, and the Dramaturg was Kimberly Colburn. The cast was as follows:

TONG Maureen Sebastian
HUONG/THU/SAN/COP Samantha Quan
QUANG/CHRIS Tim Chiou
NHAN/LITTLE MAN/BOYFRIEND/COWBOY/2ND GROCER Eugene Young
PLAYWRIGHT/STAN LEE/IMMIGRATION OFFICER/BRITISH NARRATOR/BOBBY/TOMMY/GROCERY BOY Paco Tolson

POOR YELLA REDNECKS received a world premiere co-production by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Chris Jennings, Executive Director) at Manhattan Theatre Club's Stage I Theatre on November 1, 2023. The performance was directed by May Adrales, with scenic design by Tim Mackabee, costume design by Valérie Thérèse Bart, lighting design by Lap Chi Chu, original music/sound design by Shane Rettig with arrangements by Kenny Seymour, design by David Valentine, puppet direction by Jon Hoche, dance choreography by William Carlos Angulo, and projection design by Jared Mezzocchi. The Stage Manager was Alyssa K. Howard. The cast was as follows:

TONG Maureen Sebastian
HUONG/THU/SAN/COP Samantha Quan
QUANG/CHRIS Ben Levin
NHAN/BOYFRIEND/COWBOY/2ND GROCER Jon Hoche
PLAYWRIGHT/LITTLE MAN Jon Norman Schneider
IMMIGRATION OFFICER/STAN LEE/BRITISH NARRATOR/BOBBY/TOMMY/GROCERY BOY Paco Tolson

CHARACTERS

TONG

HUONG/THU/SAN/COP

QUANG/CHRIS

NHAN/THU'S BOYFRIEND/COWBOY/2ND GROCER

PLAYWRIGHT/LITTLE MAN

IMMIGRATION OFFICER/STAN LEE/ BRITISH NARRATOR

BOBBY/TOMMY/GROCERY BOY

SETTING

El Dorado, Arkansas.

TIME

1980.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Staging note

Three helpful hints when staging this show:

1. This play has a lot of scenes. Many of which are quite short. Because of that, the play works best when scenes “seamlessly transition” to the next without ever having to stop the show to reset furniture/props. Speed and velocity are your friends here.
2. The show walks a fine line between raucous comedy and touching drama. It literally goes from a puppet kung fu-training montage to a very real emotional breakup. The key to holding it all together is remembering that this is a play about six folks who desperately love each other but are not great at expressing that love.
3. Welcome to the *Vietgone* family. That's not really a staging note, just a thank you from me for reading/making this show.

SONG LIST

ACT ONE

- 01. "Proposal" Quang & Tong
- 02. "Lemme Reintroduce Myself"..... Thu
- 03. "Gimme a Chance" Quang
- 04. "Houston" Nahn
- 05. "Lemme Reintroduce Myself (Reprise)" Tong

ACT TWO

- 06. "Poor Yella Rednecks"..... Tong, Huong & Company
- 07. "I Don't Give A..." Tong
- 08. "Bobby's Proposal" Bobby
- 09. "I'll Fix This" Quang
- 10. "Proposal (Reprise)" Quang & Tong
- 11. "Poor Yella Rednecks (Finale)"..... Company

ACT ONE

0.

*(A spotlight comes up on an actor playing the **PLAYWRIGHT**.)*

PLAYWRIGHT. Hi, I'm playwright Qui Nguyen. I'm here to introduce you to my show *POOR YELLA REDNECKS*. But first, some pre-show announcements:

*(The **PLAYWRIGHT** formally reads from a notecard.)*

Please silence all cellphones, the use of recording devices of any kind is strictly prohibited, in case of emergency please exit the door you just came in, and finally...this story is based on true events. All heavily researched. All one hundred percent historically accurate. Well, at least according to my mom. Now to begin our show, cue the single greatest narrator of all time from any medium!

*(The **PLAYWRIGHT** and **TONG** walk into place as...)*

*(A spotlight falls onto **STAN LEE**.)*

STAN LEE. (*Backed with superhero theme music.**)
Greetings, true believers, it's your old pal Stan Lee here – And right now, we are in the mysterious and marvelous land of El Dorado, Arkansas where our not-so-Far East hero currently conducts an interview with his immigrant mother for a play he is writing.

(**PLAYWRIGHT** [*thirties*] sits across from his mother **TONG** [*seventy*] at a table. A tape recorder between them.)

PLAYWRIGHT. So I want to interview you for a play that I'm writing.

TONG. Why?

PLAYWRIGHT. Because I think it'd be interesting to tell a story about how you built a life here in America as a Vietnamese refugee.

TONG. That a terrible idea.

PLAYWRIGHT. It's not terrible.

TONG. This is why you so poor.

PLAYWRIGHT. I'm not *so* poor.

TONG. No one want to hear story about old woman who speak bad English with bald son.

PLAYWRIGHT. I'm not bald.

TONG. Not yet.

PLAYWRIGHT. This isn't about me or my hairline.

TONG. Let me tell you what kind of story white people want to hear.

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PLAYWRIGHT. Wait, why only “white people?”

TONG. Because only white people like to watch a play.

PLAYWRIGHT. All sorts of people watch plays, Mom.

TONG. Yes, all sorts of white people. It look like a Fleetwood Mac concert. It so white.

PLAYWRIGHT. Date: August 7, 2015

Interview with Tong Nguyen.

So when did you meet Dad?

TONG. (*Suddenly defensive.*) Why you want to talk about him?

PLAYWRIGHT. Because you both made me.

TONG. Only thing he made is trouble. I the one who made things work. That’s all you need to know. Write that down.

PLAYWRIGHT. I need to know a little bit more than that if I’m gonna write a whole story about you.

TONG. Then maybe I don’t want to dig up old history just so you can make a few dollar on play white people won’t like.

PLAYWRIGHT. Then don’t do it for “my play,” do it for your grandkids: Sam and Felix – They love you.

You’re their bà ngoai.

They’ll want to know all this one day.

You won’t be around forever.

Don’t make them sad.

TONG. That is so manipulative.

Fine.

But before you write anything, I need to make some ground rule.

TONG. Rule number one: I don't want you to only tell happy thing.

PLAYWRIGHT. Why would I –

TONG. I see your other play. You like to write romantic and funny. But no life is all romance. And it is not all fun. Sometimes it is hard. We Vietnamese. We good at being hard. I want it to be true and hard.

PLAYWRIGHT. Fine.

(PLAYWRIGHT types a note into his computer, when he hits enter, we hear a... Ding!)

(STAN LEE appears in the Playwright's home, uncomfortably close.)

STAN LEE. Hey there, heroes, Stan Lee here, reminding all of you kids, no matter what you may see or hear today, this is a story that's *hard!*

(STAN LEE exits.)

PLAYWRIGHT. Happy?

TONG. Rule number two: If this going to be my play, I want all the white people to sound like the way I hear them. Let them hear all the stupid stuff they say.

(Ding!)

(TWO ASIAN ACTORS in "White Face" pop out from the wings.)

WHITE GUY. Yeehaw! Get'er Done! I reckon!

WHITE GIRL. Catawampus! Kombucha! Woke!

WHITE GUY. *(As if proposing to her.)* Five dollar footlong!

WHITE GIRL. *(Hops into his arms.)* Hoochie Coochie!

(They exit.)

TONG. And finally, I want to talk good. I want to talk like the way you talk.

PLAYWRIGHT. You sure about that? I got a fucking potty mouth.

TONG. Yes. I want a pot and a mouth. Like that.

PLAYWRIGHT. Alright.

(PLAYWRIGHT types. Ding!)

TONG. Can you do that motherfucking shit, motherfucker? Fuck yeah.

PLAYWRIGHT. So are we good? Can we start?

When did you meet Dad?

TONG. In 1975 – a little bit after I came to America.

PLAYWRIGHT. And where did you meet him?

TONG. A relocation camp in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. Then we moved here to El Dorado six months later.

PLAYWRIGHT. Aw. So it really was “love at first sight.”

TONG. Mm-hmm. And Santa Claus is real, as is the Easter Bunny, and capitalism works for everybody.

PLAYWRIGHT. You always told us it was love at first sight.

TONG. I know what we “told you.”

PLAYWRIGHT. It wasn’t –

TONG. You’re a grown ass man. You know that shit ain’t real.

PLAYWRIGHT. You weren’t in love?

TONG. If you wanna call what we did “love,” sure. We “loved” each other all over that camp. In bath stalls, in between the cabins, in our bunks, off our bunks, in other people’s bunks.

PLAYWRIGHT. Oh God.

TONG. Calm down. When Saigon fell, I was separated from my little brother, your dad was separated from his first wife and kids. We were sad. We wanted to feel something other than –

PLAYWRIGHT. Wait. Hold up. What do you mean he was separated from his “first wife?”

(Beat.)

TONG. What? I didn’t say that.

PLAYWRIGHT. Dad was married before?

TONG. That’s not really my story to tell.

PLAYWRIGHT. MOM!

TONG. Fine. Yes. Your dad was married when we met. Thus some of our problems. But he didn’t make it any better.

PLAYWRIGHT. What happened to her?

TONG. Same thing that happened to a lot of Vietnamese families. He escaped, she didn’t. So he ended up here where I met him. We were heartbroken. So we comforted each other...with our crotches.

Which eventually led him to do something incredibly stupid...

PLAYWRIGHT. *(Announces to the audience.)* 1975.

El Dorado, Arkansas.

(TONG [seventy] transforms into TONG [thirties] before our very eyes.)

(Projection: 1975.)

(Projection: El Dorado, Arkansas.)

(TONG walks over and joins QUANG [thirties].)

(They pass a joint between them.)

QUANG. I have a great idea.

(Inhales.)

Wait for it.

(Exhales.)

We should get cheeseburgers.

(Weed cough.)

And married.

TONG. Wait. Are you serious?

QUANG. Well, I am hungry.

TONG. No, stupid, about getting married.

QUANG. Why would I be joking?

TONG. One, you're stoned –

QUANG. No, you're stoned.

TONG. – Two, it's Tuesday, the least romantic day of the week. And three, you still kinda got a wife and I still kinda got a boyfriend.

QUANG. You haven't broken up with Bobby?

TONG. Shut up, he's really hard to dump. He's like the nicest dude I ever dated...unlike you, who's an asshole.

QUANG. I'm not an asshole.

TONG. You're about to ghost your wife for your sidepiece. That's not a thing nice guys do.

QUANG. She's there. I'm here. If she thinks I'm dead, she can move on. I gotta do the same.

TONG. Aw, that's like the most romantic thing you've ever said to me. I've always wanted to be someone's sloppy seconds.

QUANG. You know you're way more than that.

TONG. Yeah, whatever.

QUANG. I'm serious. I got married to Thu because I was running off to die in a war. I was doing what I thought I was supposed to do. But you and me...well, I ain't here because I'm worried about dying. I'm with you because I'm ready to live.

TONG. You are so fucking corny.

[MUSIC NO. 01 – PROPOSAL]

QUANG. You. Me. A starry night sky to dream under. If I got you, I got everything I need.

(Rapped.)

I KNOW YOU THINK I'M JOKIN'
WHAT THE HELL AM I SMOKIN'?
BUT BEING NEXT TO YOU IS WHAT'S GOT MY HEART
THUMPIN'
OUR KIDDIES WILL BE CUTIES,
BRING OVER THAT FINE BOOTIE
NOTHING'S GONNA STOP US WITH OUR COMBINED
BEAUTY

TONG.

YOU REALLY ARE SO CORNY

QUANG.

YEAH, YOU THE ONE FOR ME

TONG.

I JUST LIKE YOUR BODY
IT MAKES ME KINDA HORNY

QUANG.

KEEP ON DENYIN'
I SEE THE WAY YOU SMILIN'

TONG.

IT'S ONLY 'CAUSE I'M STONED
MY MIND IS FRIKKEN FLYIN'

QUANG.

WE MAKE A GOOD TEAM THO
TOGETHER WE'RE SPECIAL
WE'LL TACKLE THIS COUNTRY
PULL OFF THE IMPOSSIBLE
LOVE WILL BE OUR BACKBONE
WE'LL MAKE THIS PLACE OUR NEW HOME
WE'LL DO IT WITH EASE AS WE MARCH THROUGH THE
UNKNOWN
WHERE THE HELL ARE WE GOING?
WE DON'T KNOW BUT WE KNOWING
HOWEVER IMPOSSIBLE THIS IS
WE'LL MAKE THIS PLACE OUR NEW HOMELAND
HOME
WE'LL MAKE IT HOME

TONG.

THIS SHIT IS KINDA SCARY
I'M NOT THE TYPE TO MARRY

QUANG.

THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR
TOGETHER WE'RE EXTR'ORDINARY

TONG.

YOU'RE FUCKING UP MY GAME PLAN
WHY CAN'T YA JUST BE COOL, MAN?
SUPPOSED TO BE A LAY BUT THIS LAY HAS GOTTEN OUTTA
HAND

QUANG.

I GET IT, PRETTY BABY
I KNOW THIS SOUNDS CRAZY
BUT YOU AND I SO DAMN FLY
WE SHOULD BE MARRIED
OUR LIFE WILL BE AMAZING
WE'LL ROCK THIS NEW NATION
WE'LL MAKE ALL THAT MOOLAH

QUANG.

WE'LL BE CRAZY RICH ASIANS
ONE DAY WE'RE GONNA THRIVE IN THIS FOREIGN LAND
BUT TODAY WE'RE GONNA DO WHATEVER WE CAN
TO CREATE A PLACE WHERE WE BOTH CAN STAND
DEFYING ALL THE HATERS WHO SAY WE CAN'T
WHERE THE HELL ARE WE GOING?
WE DON'T KNOW BUT WE KNOWING
HOWEVER IMPOSSIBLE THIS IS
WE'LL MAKE THIS PLACE OUR NEW HOMELAND

TONG.

HOME
WE'LL MAKE IT HOME
I WANNA SAY YES, BUT I GOTTA CONFESS
I'M NOT THE TYPE INT'RESTED IN BEING POSSESSED
I WON'T TAKE NO LIP,
I WON'T POUR NO TEA
IF YOU LOOKING FOR THAT BITCH
WELL, THAT BITCH AIN'T ME

QUANG.

SO WILL YOU MARRY ME?

TONG.

YA YOU FUCKED IN THE HEAD

QUANG.

ONLY FOR YOU BABY
ARE WE GONNA GET WED?

TONG.

YOUR ASS IS STILL MARRIED,
MY ASS STILL A MESS

QUANG.

I WANT YOU FOREVER –

TONG.

FUCK IT, MY ANSWER IS YES

QUANG.

STEP BACK SUCKER
CAN'T BELIEVE YOU JUST SAID IT

TONG.

BETTER PUT A RING ON IT
YOU CAN FUCKING FORGET IT

QUANG.

TOGETHER FOREVER
THIS SHIT'LL BE EPIC

TONG.

WE'RE GONNA GET MARRIED
CAN'T BELIEVE I JUST SAID IT

QUANG.

WHERE THE HELL ARE WE GOING?

TONG.

WE DON'T KNOW BUT WE KNOWING

QUANG.

HOWEVER IMPOSSIBLE THIS IS

TONG.

WE'LL MAKE THIS PLACE OUR NEW HOMELAND

TONG & QUANG.

HOME
WE'LL MAKE IT HOME
WHERE THE HELL ARE WE GOING?
WE DON'T KNOW BUT WE KNOWING
HOWEVER IMPOSSIBLE THIS IS
WE'LL MAKE THIS PLACE OUR NEW HOMELAND
HOME
WE'LL MAKE IT HOME

(They kiss.)

(The PLAYWRIGHT walks in.)

PLAYWRIGHT. Aw, that's cute. However, as my mom stated previously, this is not a love story. It's the story about surviving one.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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