

Acting Edition

Young Americans

by Lauren Yee

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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YOUNG AMERICANS was originally co-produced by Portland Center Stage (Marissa Wolf, Artistic Director; Liam Kaas-Lentz, Managing Director) and Pittsburgh Public Theater (Marya Sea Kaminski, Artistic Director; Shaunda McDill, Managing Director).

The Portland Center Stage production of *YOUNG AMERICANS* premiered on February 11, 2023, in the Ellyn Bye Studio in Portland, OR. The production was directed by Desdemona Chiang, with scenic design by Junghyun Georgia Lee, costume design by Susan Tsu, lighting design by Solomon Weisbard, and sound design by Andre Pluess. The production stage manager was Janine Vanderhoff. The cast was as follows:

JOE.....Danny Bernardo
JENNY.....Marielle Young
LUCY.....Sammy Rat Rios

The Pittsburgh Public Theater production premiered on April 26, 2023, at the O'Reilly Theater in Pittsburgh, PA. The cast and creative team were the same, with the addition of production stage manager Taylor K. Meszaros.

CHARACTERS

JOE – male, about 30 and about 50, an immigrant

JENNY – female, 20s, his soon-to-be wife, also an immigrant

LUCY – female, 21, an immigrant who came over at a young age

JOE and **JENNY** are played by actors of the same race. **LUCY** is played by an actor of a different race than **JOE** and **JENNY**. None of the characters should be played by white actors.

SETTING

This play is set in the United States.

Two road trips following an identical path.

From Washington, D.C., to Portland, Oregon.

TIME

The present and twenty years earlier.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The play runs with no intermission.

Prologue

(JENNY speaks to us. here, english is her second language.)

JENNY. it was something you realized
early on
as a child.
“you will never be happy here.”
heavy, am i right?!
quite SOMETHING so young!
“you will never be happy here.”
but the flip side?
you were always meant to wander.
this is your curse, to make your roots in sand.
your curse, yeah, but also your strength.
so okay, you think.
why not?
why not see who you have always been meant to be?

Scene 1

(LUCY coming out of the airport gate with her carry-on suitcase. JOE intercepts her. she stops in her tracks.)

JOE. welcome to america!

welcome back.

LUCY. ...

JOE. lucy.

you got nothing to say?

you got nothing to say to your own dad?

what? you go away for a year and you do not remember me?

you forget my face so easily?

LUCY. omigod! dad! DAD. what're you doing here?

did you have a conference, did you –

wait.

JOE. i said i would pick you up from the airport.

LUCY. in portland. you said you would pick me up from the airport in portland. oregon. where you live. this is washington d.c. the other side of the country.

JOE. ah ah ah, i did not say i would pick you up in portland! i said i would pick you up from the airport. i did not say which.

LUCY. why would you do that? i'm flying into portland. i've got a layover and then i'm going to get on a connecting flight TO portland.

JOE. don't worry. your connection, i have cancelled it!

LUCY. what? how?!

JOE. i did not know you could do that. but many things i am learning about airplane travel.

but this way, we save on money.

LUCY. by driving all the way here to get me?

JOE. i read online about carbon footprints! so i drive instead, much better for the planet! recycle reduce reuse, close the lid! you come back, let me drive you home. let me take you home to portland.

LUCY. in which car? your car?

(maybe this is a moment to first reveal joe's car?)

you want to take me all the way across the country in that car?

JOE. same car i always use! same car i drive all the time!

LUCY. is it gonna make it all the way?

JOE. what? junior year abroad and now you too cool to be seen in your dad's old car? you think you gonna seem like a lame-o with me?

LUCY. no –

JOE. what, you think someone see me driving you around, they gonna think i am kidnapping you?

LUCY. well, you kind of are.

JOE. like some pedophile!

LUCY. i'm twenty-one.

JOE. or else i am a good catch! rich man!

LUCY. you couldn't have waited, what, seven more hours, till my plane got into portland?

JOE. why would i wait?

LUCY. so instead you come all the way out here?

JOE. i wanted to be spontaneous! do things i have not done before! hey, you ask me what i wanted to do? this is what i want to do. go on a trip with my daughter! keep me from having a MOFO.

LUCY. a what?

JOE. a MOFO! “the fear of missing out.”

LUCY. you mean FOMO.

JOE. no, “MOFO.”

LUCY. no, “FOMO.” it’s an acronym for the “fear of missing out.”

JOE. well, i don’t want that either! so what do you say?

LUCY. what other choice do i have?

JOE. exactly!

LUCY. (*beat*) fine. it’s fine. let’s go.

JOE. and that is what i like to hear!

Scene 2

(twenty years earlier: JOE and JENNY in the car. in their scenes together, they speak in their native language, so no accents. this is the past. their conversation has the vibe of a once promising date gone bad.)

JOE. *(out of the blue)* that wedding was nice!

JENNY. what?

JOE. that wedding.

JENNY. which wedding?

JOE. the one we just went to.

JENNY. the wedding from six months ago?

JOE. yeah,

JENNY. oh. um. yeah. it was nice.

JOE. that couple seemed like a very nice couple.

JENNY. my cousin just wants to have kids, they'll be fine.

JOE. it's good to see you again!

JENNY. *(beat, then)* you too.

JOE. been a while!

JENNY. six months.

JOE. haven't seen you since that wedding! you didn't run into any trouble, did you?

JENNY. at the airport?

JOE. with customs? paperwork?

JENNY. not really, no.

JOE. so you just like, generally run late.

JENNY. was i late?

JOE. you took a long time to come out.

JENNY. i think i came out in a normal amount of time.

JOE. i almost wasn't sure you'd show!

JENNY. it was a big airport.

JOE. washington dulles! one of the biggest!

JENNY. yeah.

JOE. also! your parents left me a message saying they were going to mail more of your stuff over once we're settled, but i don't think i gave them my mailing address... unless you did?

JENNY. ...no?

JOE. so. that's something we should figure out.

JENNY. yeah.

JOE. are you hungry?

JENNY. we just ate.

JOE. right.

JENNY. are YOU hungry?

JOE. yes.

JENNY. then why didn't you –

JOE. i was trying not to eat so much. first impressions!

JENNY. oh okay –

JOE. can you be quiet for a minute?

JENNY. what?

JOE. i'm trying to concentrate. there's an exit i'm trying to – shoot, i think i missed it.

JENNY. oh. sorry. do you want me to help you –

JOE. no, no, you can just – okay, i think i know where i'm going now.

(silence)

WOW!

JENNY. what?

JOE. WOW! out the window. WOW.

JENNY. what what?!

JOE. you missed it. *(with awe)* it was a bird.

JENNY. oh.

JOE. i'm a bird watcher. oregon's a good place for that.
here's not so bad either, if you're interested in learning.

JENNY. okay.

JOE. once i moved to oregon, i got really into it.

JENNY. i can tell.

JOE. one thing i found amazing – when i first started – is
that people think we've already discovered all the birds
out there, when that is actually not the case.

JENNY. okay.

JOE. what is ACTUALLY the case is that there are SO
MANY more birds out that no one's ever seen before.
(corrects) or that people have seen before, but no
one's NOTED, officially. so they're still technically
undiscovered.

JENNY. so how do you "discover" a bird?

JOE. well, you see it. and you write it down. and if it's a
bird no one's ever described before, that's yours! you
found it!

JENNY. oh.

(a lull. the silence bothers her.)

so i hear you're also into music?

JOE. what? no?

JENNY. oh.

JOE. no, i do. i do like music. i just didn't know what you were asking.

JENNY. oh.

(silence)

JOE. *(realizes)* did you want to play music?

JENNY. we don't have to.

JOE. no! music, music.

(he pushes in a tape. top 40 music of the era plays.)*

JENNY. thanks, j-

JOE. *(stops her)* joe. you can call me joe.

JENNY. what?

JOE. now that we're here. that's my name, here. "joe."
i chose it myself!

JENNY. oh.

JOE. i mean, i still have my actual name, you can call me that, if you prefer.

JENNY. no, that's fine, "joe."

JOE. you might want to think about what you want people to call you.

JENNY. i already have a name.

JOE. an american name.

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ideally, something people will have positive associations with.

“joe montana.”

“joe dimaggio.”

JENNY. “joseph stalin.”

JOE. “joe namath.”

your name's too hard and they won't even bother to mispronounce it, they'll just stop saying it, is what i've found. they'll just go like, “professor!” or “hey!” or “morning,” or just skip you over entirely. that's why: joe. everyone knows joe. it also serves as a kind of act of good faith. like –

“i am here.”

“i am you.”

“i am just like you.”

“joe.”

JENNY. i'll think about it.

JOE. “jenny.”

JENNY. ...

JOE. what do you think of “jenny?”

JENNY. does it have good connotations? who're the famous jennys?

JOE. well, “jenny lind.”

“jenny mccarthy.”

“jenny...craig?”

not so many famous jennys. (*admits*) not so many famous women.

(**JOE** *off in his own thoughts* –)

JOE. how many kids do you think?

JENNY. do i think what?

JOE. how many do you think we'll have? (*adds*) not right now. later. together. for the interview. when they ask us.

JENNY. do we have to match?

JOE. not necessarily, no, but –

JENNY. i already got my visa. i passed.

JOE. the first test. but to stay here? to stay married –
i mean, once we get married –

JENNY. we've got ninety days. we don't have to get married
for ninety days, right?

JOE. but it'll come up fast. we've got to make sure we
know our story, how we met –

JENNY. so how did we meet?

JOE. (*confused*) we met at that wedding six months ago.

JENNY. okay, we met at that wedding six months ago.

JOE. (*joke*) at least i did!

JENNY. (*shrugs*) i'll say whatever you want me to say. how
many kids? give me a number, i'll say it.

JOE. you shouldn't look at it like that.

JENNY. what do you need to know?

JOE. do you want girls or boys? or do you not yet have a
preference? if you don't yet, that's okay.

JENNY. are they gonna ask us this?

JOE. you never know!

JENNY. do YOU have a preference?

JOE. girls.

JENNY. liar.

JOE. not lying!

JENNY. boys, you don't have to worry about. girls? girls are trouble. nothing but trouble.

JOE. but i love girls. i always wanted a younger sister. better than boys! you may not know now, but you'll develop a preference.

JENNY. or not.

JOE. all girls want kids. it's biologically proven.

even if you don't think you do, you do!

it's what you were made to do.

i mean, not like YOU YOU, but

you have breasts.

you have hips.

you have a, you know.

JENNY. you assume.

JOE. it's the one thing you were made to do.

more than anything else.

more than typing or making cookies or driving in a car.

it would be a subversion of your biology otherwise.

JENNY. mmm.

JOE. i always wanted to take this trip. when i got the job at PSU, i was planning to drive cross country, but schedule and all, i didn't want to be late, so that didn't happen. (*thinks*) and that would've been such a lonely trip, you know?

JENNY. you don't like driving by yourself?

JOE. also i figured this could be like, our honeymoon!

JENNY. our what?

JOE. our – (*thinks*) “trip you take once you’re married.”

JENNY. we’re not married yet.

JOE. yet.

JENNY. so doesn’t that come after?

JOE. give us a chance to get to know each other! doing something that’s new for both of us. that’s important, actually. i read somewhere that shared experiences – where the experience is new for both parties – help to form lasting emotional bonds, SO the best way to speed up any relationship is to go on a trip together because then you are both taken out of your comfort zone and forced to confront a set of new circumstances that triggers your long-term memory in more profound ways. you might say it accelerates the relationship!

(she begins to drift off to sleep.)

what about you? have you ever heard that before?

(no response)

have you? (*louder*) ever heard that?

JENNY. (*startled awake*) what?!

JOE. were you asleep?

JENNY. yeah.

JOE. you wanna sleep? you should sleep.

JENNY. thanks.

(she leans her chair back, closes her eyes. he drives, then –)

JOE. are you cold? (*louder*) are you cold? or not cold enough?

(he shifts the air flow of the a/c.)

JENNY. i'm fine.

JOE. are you sure? i can turn it higher. OR OFF! i can also turn it off.

JENNY. right there, is perfect.

JOE. okay.

(she closes her eyes again.)

goodnight! goodNAP!

(then as she sleeps...)

virginia.

virginia.

virginia.

virginia.

virginia.

virginia.

virginia.

virginia.

TENNESSEE!

(she wakes with a start.)

JENNY. what?!

JOE. state lines. we crossed the state line. WELCOME TO AMERICA!

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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