



**Second Generation**  
*bringing our stories to the world's stage*



**QUEER VOICES SPEAK OUT**

HERE Arts Center. November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Panelists: Deen, Clarence Coo, Ryan Shen

Moderator: Kyoung H. Park

Transcript: John Ho

**Kyoung Park:** Hi and welcome, my name is Kyoung Park and I am Director of Strategic Planning here at 2G. I would like to welcome you all to “Queer Voices Speak Out.”

“Queer Voices Speak Out” is a pre-show panel that we've organized in collaboration with three local, queer, API organizations called GAPIMNY, SALGA and Q-Wave. For just a very brief, twenty-minute discussion, we'd like to let you know about [“Community Voices,”] this exciting new program in the organization. I'm here with Ryan Shen, community organizer, Clarence Coo, playwright, and Deen, playwright and our “Community Voices: Queer API” facilitator this year.

So, let me tell you a little bit about “Community Voices.” “Community Voices” is a new space for unheard new writers, that supports the telling of urgent new stories in the Asian-American community. This year we're really excited to support the queer API community that is here in New York City.

Deen will be facilitating this program; he is a playwright and performer. Deen is author of *Shut Up!, Where Children Play: The Story of Tank and Horse* and *Draw the Circle*. Deen has won the Dennis Johnston Playwriting Prize, the James Baldwin Award, is a member of the Public Theater's Emerging Writers Group.

Next to Deen is Clarence Coo. Clarence's play *Beautiful Province* won the 2012 Yale Drama Series Prize. Clarence is a member of the Ma-Yi Writer's Lab, resident playwright at New Dramatists, and a 2012-2013 Dramatists Guild Fellow.

Ryan Shen is a trans-identified Taiwanese Chinese American community organizer. He is on the Steering Committee of Q-Wave, serves on the board of NQAPIA - The National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance and is involved with the Asian Pride Project and GAPIMNY. As an organizer, he builds community with emphasis on inclusion, collaboration and storytelling.

Ryan, I'd like to start the conversation with you. I was hoping you'd talk to us about

your involvement with the queer API community and your interest as a community organizer in supporting a writer's program.

**Ryan Shen:** I'm actually involved in Asian Pride Project, which is an online portal that collects stories about the process of coming-out for parents, and supporting parents in the process of realizing that their children are queer, or even [helping] family members [understand their queer relatives]. I've actually been personally involved in a writing workshop as well, hosted by D'Lo, who is a queer, Sri Lankan activist, performer. The series he was doing was: "Coming Out, Coming Home," which was talking about, writing about the coming out story and telling some family member. It was four writing sessions; we would gather together, do exercises and warm up to the process of story telling. At the end of our time together, which was one or even two months, we actually had to read and we even got a little bit into performing, which was about reading our writing [and speaking out].

For me, it was a powerful experience because I wrote about my process coming out to my dad and in the process D'Lo would push me to expand on certain elements of the story. [He] really challenged and tapped into my sensitive emotions and touchy subjects that I wanted to maybe forget. So he said: "elaborate on that," and reading during performance he also challenged us to invite people who I normally would not invite to such a performance. He particularly challenged us to invite those close to us; for instance I actually invited my sister and it was the first time she heard the story from my perspective. We actually never talked about the story so afterwards she was upset because of the way it was portrayed, and we had to talk about it and started the process of family healing.

**Kyoung Park:** Thank you. I think for us here, as part of 2G, part of this program is also about understanding the Asian-American identity and the diversity of what it is to be Asian-American by celebrating not only diversity, but also minority voices within the community. That is enforced through the writing process, which also helps us to understand the self-identification process.

I've invited Clarence to talk about this because I feel that sharing your story is a really vulnerable moment, yet coming out is a right of passage in the gay community. I wanted Clarence to speak about his play *Belle Province (Beautiful Province)*, which won the Yale Drama series this year and his play *Natural Voice*, which is part of *Instant Vaudeville*, and talk about how your gender identity influences your writing

**Clarence Coo:** OK, sure. *Beautiful Province*, my play that won the 2012 Yale Drama Prize, is about a fifteen year old boy who is coming to terms with his sexuality and his relationship with his French teacher. The two characters form a bond over their mutual love of the French language, but at the same time there is an underlying sexual tension between the two. I think that play came from when I was first coming

out, I had this fear of the mysterious power of sexual desire that seemed to creep up over this beautiful intellectual world I had created for myself as a teenager. I was kinda' a nerd growing up and *Beautiful Province* came about because that was something I was trying to reconcile, still trying to reconcile, about this world in which we can't have beautiful things, but at the same time, there are darker forces we can't control. And sometimes they're the same thing.

So my play *Natural Voice*, part of *Instant Vaudeville*, isn't specifically queer, but gayness is something that permeates all of my work. I like to think that there's this synergistic combination of being both Asian and gay, [which] is something that naturally lead me into the theatre. On one hand, "Asianness" is a physical aspect of myself which people can look at and make predeterminations based on that. On the other hand, being gay is something that is inside you which you choose to reveal or hide and for some people it is fluid and something that goes in and out of their life. So I think for me, this tension between the body and the voice, both in a metaphorical and literal sense, is something that we can really play with in the theatre and I think that's why I naturally ended up in the world of playwriting. It's something that we can experiment with and do really neat things I always wanted to do as a child.

**Kyoung Park:** So that leads us to Deen, who will be leading our writing program. We have announced the program a few weeks ago and we are opening it up to the community for anyone who identifies as part of Asian-American LGBTQ community. You don't have to necessarily be a playwright, actor, or performer to apply to this program. We want to find people who want to share with us their stories, that's part of 2G's mission, in fact it has always been 2G's mission to bring our stories on stage. We are creating and hosting this panel to let people know we are opening our doors and letting people apply to this program. You have inserts in your programs about it, but I would also like Deen to talk about how this program is different and special.

**Deen:** This program will be a space for people who are queer and API to explore "gender." So we want there to be a little bit of a focus, a topic, and ask [you] what that means in your lives, however that plays out. We are leaving it very open ended and we're really hoping that people will join us to explore and discover things about themselves within the process of this four-session workshop.

So some of the things we'll do as a group [is to] talk about things that never get talked about. It could be anything, such as how gender is thrust upon us at a young age; the way people have expectations of what it means to be a man or woman or transgendered, and how that plays out in your life. We'll also talk about how to tell stories and then take those stories and make them theatrical. We're not asking anyone to be a playwright when they come in or to know what it is to write for the theatre, but just to be open to the idea of: we're going to write and then we're going to put it on stage and how are we going to do that? And we'll play around with

different ways, whether you write in verse, or you write in dialogue, or however it is—we'll make that happen. So we want you to be part of that adventure, as well.

We'll have co-facilitators with me every week of the four-week session. So one week we might have an actor come in and talk about what it is like to be on stage. What's their process like, what kind of things do they need from the story to perform it. And then we'll have a director come in and have them talk about what it's like to work with a writer and this new, very personal piece of writing and translate it on stage.

So I am queer, trans and I'm a theatre-maker. For me, there is something very sacred about the theatre. So you are all an audience and you are all going to participate in this sacred event where you will see people be in the moment of this story that they are trying to tell you, and you are in this room and it will never happen again the way it is now. There will be another performance tonight, but it will not be the same one as what you're seeing today.

I think there is something very amazing about that aspect of storytelling that I really like and that I'm really glad we get to share with people who don't often have that opportunity to present their work on stage. It really is about community engagement, the queer API community, [and] to encourage people to go home and think about it. Can you share your story with people? Would you like to explore what that means to you and be part of that adventure?

For me as a playwright, telling my story on stage, it is frightening sometimes to put myself out there, but it is also hugely rewarding to have people see my story, be moved by it and be healed by it in different ways. You might think your story is very personal and [that] no one is interested in it, but in fact your story could do so much good out there in the world, for other people, so I encourage everyone to apply.

**Kyoung Park:** We were going to open it for some questions, but actually we're running short on time. Just in case this happened, 2g, GAPIMNY, Q-Wave and SALGA organized a reception following the show, *Instant Vaudeville*. After the show, we're all going to go to Cody's Bar and Grill which is two blocks west from here. If you'd like to join us, to ask questions about the program, or to get to meet us, or get to know some of the artists, please come. Dora, our Events Manager, has been really awesome and organized some light snacks and a really great \$5 dollar drink special. So I hope you'll all come and join us.

Before we wrap it up I'd like to give you a bit of historical trivia and why it personally means a lot to me that we're here right now. GAPIMNY, Q-Wave, and SALGA are three local queer API organizations that organized around the Miss Saigon crisis in 1990. Around twenty-two years ago, the gay and lesbian, queer, Asian community found each other and started organizing at that time and [today,] the theme of *Instant Vaudeville* ["Breaking Bamboo"] is in response to some of the

activism that is happening in tandem with our Asian American performing arts community.

We are an under-represented minority, the statistics were presented last year and they are pretty staggering. We are among minorities a decreasing minority, in terms of visibility, and within our own community the queer community is struggling to gain visibility. It is an issue and I find it really significant that twenty-two years later our communities are coming together again in a very different way and with a stronger force.

I love the emphasis on community which 2G has been supporting all along. Whether it is Asian American actors, or Asian-American playwrights through their play development programs, this is really a great new step forward.

I'd like to thank our panelists for joining us, [claps], and I'd like to very quickly thank Victor and Gladys, Artistic Director of 2g and President of the 2g Board, for allowing me to start a new, risky program in a year of transition. Also, thanks to GAPIMNY, Q-Wave, and SALGA, for being part of this ride with us, and the Stonewall Foundation and the Asian Women's Giving Circle for their support.

**Deen:** If you are interested in applying to the program, the workshops will be held next spring, do come and talk to us afterwards. Do feel like we are accessible, do feel like tomorrow or next week you can email us and say: I kinda' think I want to, but I am nervous. Feel free to have that conversation with us. If you have a friend who you think this would be a great opportunity for, also talk to them, let them talk to us—we're completely open and available to have that conversation.

**Kyoung Park:** Great, thank you so much. We'll set up in two minute and it'll be *Instant Vaudeville*. Enjoy the show.