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International Excellence – *Made In America*

Posted on May 17, 2019 by Marti Sichel in **Playing Around**



What kind of show is TerryandTheCuz's *Made in America*? It's a suspenseful blackmail thriller! It's a post-war romance! It's a family crime saga! "But wait," you say, "how can it be all of those things at once?" Fear not; it can be all those things, and more! It's a comedy! A musical! A Western! A sexy testosterone-fueled shoot-'em-up! A sensitive and progressive feminist manifesto film! "Isn't that confusing?" you may ask. It is! At first. But it grabs you quickly with its undeniably intriguing structure, dialogue, and characters. Within a few patient minutes all starts to become clear. So yes, a little confusing. But also entertaining? Definitely.



Douglas Lim

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Once you get a handle on the situation, you can let it take you on the wild ride it is. As the story unfolds (and re-folds, unfolds again, and eventually starts to resemble origami), the characters slide into a pastiche parfait of American film genres, one after another, in pursuit of theatrically cinematic – or perhaps its cinematically theatrical – perfection. Written by Terry and TheCuz, Martin Blum, Mark Winter and Chris Ryan, *Made in America* is a hydra of genres and tropes, a sometimes delightfully over-the-top mish-mosh of wildly conflicting themes and ideas that somehow find a way to work well together, much like its protagonists, played by Douglas Lim & Gavin Yap. The writers have borrowed from all over the entertainment spectrum, but still created something individual and uniquely creative. And it's so entertaining that it ceases to matter whether any of it makes sense at all.

There is a long and illustrious history in film and theater of faux behind-the-scenes stories that wink and nudge at us, as if to say "see? Don't idolize them. They're just people, too." Think *Noises Off*, *Topsy Turvy*, *Something Rotten*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, *Six Characters In Search of an Author*. These are *Made In America's* predecessors, and it does them justice with its creativity and charm.



Marcus Gladney Jr., Megan Koumis, and Gavin Yap

The creative process is a mysterious one, and those who choose to build a life on it are a particular breed, often half composed of stubborn ego and half terrified of secretly being an imposter who just got lucky. It's no different in *Made in America*. In this story, two best friends and filmmaking partners, played by Douglas Lim and Gavin Yap, are the first Malaysians to win an international film festival competition. To prove their win isn't a fluke, they travel to New York seeking inspiration, to capture lightning in a bottle and transform inspiration into a project that will rock the world.

Unfortunately, they have very different ideas about what their next script should be, the tone it should take, the audience it should play to, its themes and potential. Genres collide while the writers argue over these not-so-minor points, their personalities and ideas shifting and changing as they challenge each other. It's a desperate brainstorming session that evolves and transforms not only the script but the friends' views of each other. Can this life-long friendship survive minor success? Can they see eye-to-eye, or at least find a place of compromise, when so much depends on it? And while this last piece is underplayed, there is a lot depending on it, even more than their long friendship.



Marina Kondo

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What evolves out of the two friends' on-the-spot imaginings is one surprising turn after another. You never know when the cast of characters could expand, with each new twist and turn generating a whole new plotline or complication for their growing cast of characters: the magnate's plotting wife, the assistant with an ax to grind, the chubby transracially adopted veteran son, the drunken hitman, the waitress with a secret of her own. How their paths turn and cross can change with each real-time revision, but thankfully that never becomes a point of confusion, unless it's that of their creators.

Where the play gets a little serious is in the undertones and suggestions of how Americans see and value themselves and others in the world. It holds a mirror up to American pop culture, showing us just what kind of people we are. In short: ridiculous and quite frankly a bit scattered. We are a ridiculously diverse and unpredictable people, whose tastes are both broad and fickle, who talk a good game about high quality entertainment but can be pacified by gratuitous sex and violence. But for now, let us eat, drink, and be merry. The world outside may be troubled, but inside, with a theater full of talented and funny people, we can laugh at ourselves just a few minutes more.

Top photo: Gavin Yap and Douglas Lim (Credit: Prakash Daniel)

Other photos: Credit: Zane Gan

Made In America – Playing at Joe's Pub through May 19, 2019



About Marti Sichel (70 Articles)

Marti Davidson Sichel is happy to be a part of such an impressive lineup of talented contributors. She has always loved the capital-A Arts. Some of her fondest early memories include standing starry-eyed at stage doors to meet musical cast members who smiled and signed playbills, singing along to Broadway classics and dancing as only a six-year-old can to Cats. She was also a voracious and precocious reader. The bigger the words and more complex the ideas her books contained, the better — even (especially) if a teacher raised an eyebrow at the titles. Marti's educational and professional experience tends toward the scientific, though science and art are often more connected than they seem. Being able to combine her love of culture and wordsmithing is a true pleasure, and she is grateful to Woman Around Town's fearless leaders for the opportunity. A 2014 New York Press Club award winner, Marti finds the trek in from Connecticut and the excursions to distant corners of the theater world as exciting as ever. When she's not working, you can often find Marti in search of great music, smart comedy and interesting recipes.

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