



KENTUCKY

BY

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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KENTUCKY received its world premiere on April 20, 2016 in a co-production presented by the Ensemble Studio Theatre (William Carden, Artistic Director; Paul A. Slee, Executive Director) / Radio Drama Network (Melina Brown, President) and Page 73 Productions (Michael Walkup, Producing Artistic Director; Jennifer Lagundino, Managing Director; Liz Jones and Asher Richelli, Founding Directors). It was directed by Morgan Gould; the scenic design was by Nick Francone; the costume design was by Suzanne Chesney; the lighting design was by Ryan Seelig; the sound design was by Shane Rettig; the choreography was by Katie Spelman; the musical direction was by Sariva Goetz; the production manager was Joe Lankheet; and the production stage manager was Eileen Lalley. The cast was as follows:

HIRO	Satomi Blair
SOPHIE	Sasha Diamond
JAMES	Jay Patterson
MASAKO	Ako
DA'RAN	Ronald Alexander Peet
ERNEST	Mikumari Caiyhe
AMY	Lynnette Freeman
LARRY	Curran Connor
NICOLE	Megan Hill
LAURA	Emily Kunkel
ADAM	Alex Grubbs
GRANDMA	Marcia Haufrecht
SYLVIE	Amir Wachterman
BRIDESMAID 1	Merissa Czyz
BRIDESMAID 2	Samantha Sembler
BRIDESMAID 3	Shannon Tyo

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

KENTUCKY would not exist without R.J. Tolan, Graeme Gillis and Youngblood at Ensemble Studio Theatre. I'd also like to thank Page 73, Melina Brown of the Radio Drama Network, Morgan Gould, and the amazing cast and crew.

This play is for my mom who showed up with twelve born-again Christian Japanese ladies in NYC to see the show, and my baby sister, Lenore Kei Williams. I love you.

NOTES

On casting:

Although I encourage the appropriate ethnicities of each cast member to be honored, there is very little in this play written specifically for a singular race. Which means, for educational purposes:

Hiro and her family (the Rose family) can be a family of any race—played by actors of any race. However, there can be no yellowface, or white people playing Asian people. If you cast the Rose family with white actors, just make them white people. The same rule applies to Da’Ran and his family (the Williams family), but absolutely NO blackface or non-black actors playing black (though you should keep in mind that white people are not typically named Da’Ran and you will probably get a lot of questions). I also encourage you to think outside of the box—a mixed race family is a strong choice that reflects the world we live in (i.e. Amy is white, Ernest is black, and Da’Ran is mixed—etc). A colorblind cast is also definitely a possibility as long as colorblind doesn’t mean “all white.”

If you decide to change the ethnicity of any of the characters, these lines on page 44 would need to be cut:

GRANDMA. Well. I can’t believe that I have a grandchild who is part Chinese who’s marrying a black man. What will their children be? Tan Chinese?

HIRO. We’re Japanese. Grandma. My apologies Pastor father holy father. My apologies. Daaay Ran.

DA’RAN. It’s Da’ran.

HIRO. Sorry.

GRANDMA. Ah the Japs. Always apologizing. Which is good. Considering what they’ve done.

JAMES. HEY. PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE. Smartest guy I knew was a Shaolin peace-loving monk, Kwai Chang Caine. He knew Kun fu. Could move spoons with his mind. They say he died of AUTO-erotic asphyxiation but *I think he was murdered.*

Additionally, if Masako is not played by an API actor, the following rules should apply:

- Change Masako's name to "Emily" or "Em" for short
- Change the word "onigiri" to "ham" on every occasion
- Change Masako's theme song from something that sounds like "Sukiyaki," first introduced on page 19, to the first verse of Stephen Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home," on every occurrence.
- Use the footnote translations on every single instance of Japanese dialogue
- Cut the following lines on page 31:

Sophie and the three bridesmaids squeal. Masako enters, squealing as well.

~~MASAKO. (Gleeful.) I brought Japanese snacks!~~

~~SOPHIE. Mama! You made my favorite! Onigiri!~~

~~BRIDESMAID 2. What's onigiri?~~

~~SOPHIE. Rice balls wrapped in seaweed.~~

~~BRIDESMAID 1. AWESOME!~~

~~SOPHIE. Mama would make onigiri for me every morning and I used to be so ashamed to bring them to school because some kids would make fun of me while saying "ching chong bing bong"! So I'd beg her to buy Lunchables instead.~~

~~BRIDESMAID 3. Hillbillies!~~

~~BRIDESMAID 2. We're accepting of all cultures.~~

~~BRIDESMAID 1. Just like Jesus intended.~~

~~SOPHIE. I'm glad you never bought me Lunchables, Mama. Thank you for all the love you poured into making onigiri both today and the years before.~~

Sophie tears up.

~~MASAKO. Don't cry Sophie. You will make me cry.~~

~~BRIDESMAID 1. There is so much love.~~

- Instead, the scene will read:

Sophie and the three bridesmaids squeal. Masako enters,

squealing as well.

MASAKO. (*Gleeful.*) I brought snacks!

Sophie tears up.

Don't cry Sophie. You will make me cry.

BRIDESMAID 1. There is so much love.

On tone:

This play is highly theatrical and the tone and style can change from time to time. It's okay to be playful but everything must always be sincere. The language is lucid, shifting from naturalistic banter to poetic bursts of a character's deep conscience, and even songs, but nothing is ironic. Every single character is earnest and honest. Let the humor come from truth. Being ironic and outside of the text will not serve the play. Everyone is trying their best. Also please—treat the Christian characters with love. The intention is not to make fun of them. ALL CAPS doesn't necessarily mean yelling, it means conviction. Sometimes yelling does work very well though—so use your judgement.

On sound:

I think it's pretty essential to have sound underscoring Nicole's first two direct-address monologues since they serve as transitions, but the last one should be done in silence. Chris Thile's classical mandolin or Béla Fleck's classical banjo series has worked well in the past.

The last beat of the play relies on rhythm. Background music can be used here as well. I have found that Béla Fleck's "Prélude" from *Suite for Unaccompanied Cello No. 1* by J.S. Bach works well.

Theaters are encouraged to make up their own melody for the original song in Scene 10. (If that's not possible, there is sheet music available from Dramatists Play Service upon request.)

Also, I know the original lyrics written for the top of the play don't perfectly align with the melody for "My Old Kentucky Home." That's part of the fun!

On doubling:

Without cutting characters, the bare minimum of actors needed for the play is 11. Some doubling/tripling schemes for that option are:

The women:

HIRO

MASAKO

SOPHIE

GRANDMA

Actress 1, 20s–30s—LAURA/BRIDESMAID 1/(SYLVIE)

Actress 2, 20s–30s—NICOLE/BRIDESMAID 2

Actress 3, late 30s–50s—AMY/(SYLVIE)

The men:

JAMES

ADAM/(SYLVIE)

DA'RAN/(SYLVIE)

Actor 1—LARRY/ERNEST/(SYLVIE)

The actor playing LARRY/ERNEST (if doubled) could be any age depending on how old the actor playing Da'Ran reads (he must believably be Da'Ran's father).

SOPHIE could double with NICOLE if costume changes were kept to a minimum.

SYLVIE could potentially double with any character except Hiro, Masako, Grandma, Sophie or James. SYLVIE can be played by a male or female or non-gender identifying performer.

NICOLE can also be played by an actor who identifies as male and if needed, the name can be changed to COLE.

But you can have up to 16 actors—8F, 8M, 1n/s (Sylvie)—if no roles are doubled, plus an optional gaggle of groomsmen.

An alternative version of the play, adjusted for 9 actors (6F, 3M) is available in manuscript form through Dramatists Play Service upon request.

CHARACTERS

- HIRO—late 20s. Means well. Smart and driven. Makes sixty thousand dollars a year.
- SOPHIE—early 20s. Her sister. A born-again Christian. Elegant. Smart.
- JAMES—50s to 60s. Their father. White, mean, sad, drunk, high, and scary.
- MASAKO—50s to 60s. Japanese. Their mother, and wife to James. Her spirit is bright, though there is a deep sadness and horrifying anger within her that comes out when triggered.
- DA'RAN—mid-20s, Sophie's fiancé. Kind, adorable, and strong.
- ERNEST—50s-60s. Da'Ran's father. Rational. Charming. Unbelievably charismatic. A pastor with a deep understanding of humanity and God.
- AMY—40s or 50s. Da'Ran's mother and Ernest's wife. Kind of a ham.
- LARRY—30s or 40s. Hiro's therapist. Friendly and approachable but direct. Has a sense of humor.
- NICOLE—late 20s. Genuine and giving.
- LAURA—late 20s. Can get sassy.
- ADAM—late 20s. Handsome and adoring. Really wants to settle down.
- GRANDMA—a messed-up grandma. The mother of James.
- SYLVIE—an old, sickly cat.
- BRIDESMAIDS 1, 2, 3—a trio of Christian bridesmaids who can sing and dance. They function as a sort of "Kentucky Greek Chorus."

KENTUCKY

The bridesmaids appear to welcome us. They sing the following song in the tune of "My Old Kentucky Home" by Stephen Foster. It is genuine and appealing. Other characters may also join.

BRIDESMAIDS.

When you go home
You might feel
A combination of
Refreshing and sad.
Is there a correct way to live this life?
Correctly.
Correct.
Am I correct?
Don't smoke too much
Don't drink too much neither
And if something isn't right
Inside of your heart
Then something isn't right
In your sense of home.
These people have shaped you
These people are horrible
These people are lovely
You are lovely
And horrible
And the sun shines bright in my old Kentucky home.
In my old Kentucky home far away.

Scene 1

Therapist's office. New York City.

LARRY. So, Hiro. When you first described your decision of going back to Kentucky to try to stop your little sister's wedding and therefore reuniting with your family after seven years apart—I got the sense that you were craving some sort of validation. But as your therapist, I have to say...this is irresponsible. It's irresponsible to your progress, it's irresponsible to your poor mother, and most of all, it's irresponsible to Sophie who thinks you're going back to be her maid of honor!

HIRO. What's irresponsible is deciding to marry *so young* to a guy you've only known for six months. What's irresponsible is staying near an abusive father who terrorizes everyone around him. And what's IRRESPONSIBLE is *not* intervening when someone you care for is about to make a big, huge, self-destructive mistake!

LARRY. Okay then. Hiro. You're about to make a big, huge, self-destructive mistake!

HIRO. Larry, when I left home, I left Sophie alone. And I want to be there for her now, more than anything else in this world. She needs guidance. Guidance that only *I* can give. This is my one chance to get through to her before it's too late and there is nothing you can say or do to stop me from trying!

LARRY. Then why are we here, Hiro. What do you want from *me*?

HIRO. I want you to help me through this journey. I'll pay you double to be on call. It's totally doable with my raise—I make—

LARRY. —sixty thousand dollars a year. I know. You've told me a *bunch* of times.

Pause.

HIRO. What do you want me to do Larry, beg?! Fine, I'm begging you. Because the last time I saw my father, he slammed me against a wall and glass from a picture frame shattered onto my back as he screamed that I should go stick my fucking head in a computer and

die. And in that moment I felt dead. But now I'm *alive*. And I want Sophie to be alive with me! Besides, I know *in my heart* that the damage of not *trying* to save her will be greater than the inevitable fuckery that will occur when I go back to Kentucky. Can you please help me? Can you please...try to understand? Please? Please? Please? Please? Please? Please? Please? Please? Please? Pleaaaaase??? Pleaaaseeeee?

Larry looks at her. Really looks at her.

LARRY. Just don't. Drunk-dial me at three A.M. okay? I hate it when you do that. You're interrupting my dreams.

HIRO. You're the best Larry!

LARRY. I know.

HIRO. Did I tell you there isn't going to be any alcohol during the ceremony or reception?

LARRY. Does this have to do with your sister's new religion?

HIRO. I guess some born-again Christians don't drink?

LARRY. I'll write you a prescription for anxiety meds.

HIRO. I'm so nervous about seeing my father.

LARRY. Is there any period during the trip where you have to spend time with him in a non-crowded space?

HIRO. The car ride. I have a twenty-minute car ride from the airport to my childhood home.

LARRY. Take a taxi call a friend—

HIRO. He's coming Larry. He's coming to pick me up. And I have to let him. Otherwise he'll lash out at my mom or blow up at the world. And when my father blows up...*oh when he blows up*.

LARRY. I'm frightened, Hiro. I'm frightened all of the work we've done over the years is going to come undone in a matter of minutes.

Sound of a car engine. Now we're in...

KENTUCKY

by Leah Nanako Winkler

5M, 11W (doubling, flexible casting)

Hiro is a self-made woman making it in New York. But she is also single, almost thirty, and estranged from her dysfunctional family who lives in Kentucky. When her little sister, a born-again Christian, decides to marry at twenty-two, Hiro takes it up on herself to do whatever she can to stop the wedding and salvage any shred of hope she had about her sister's future. The themes of identity, religion, and love collide in this unique coming-of-age story.

"KENTUCKY marks the full-length debut of a distinctive new voice—mouthy, sly and bourbon sweet, with the expected kick."

—**The New York Times**

"...the show's voice is refreshing and witty...a fresh, affecting play..."

—**Time Out New York**

"Leah Nanako Winkler has created a sort of millennial Odyssey... [KENTUCKY] has an antic, unruly spirit. Still, Winkler's story is ultimately a serious one, about the commonplace nature of childhood trauma and the radically different paths people take to recovery."

—**The New Yorker**

"...exceptional... There is an excitement and charm to Nanako Winkler's language. ...KENTUCKY has not only put Leah Nanako Winkler on the map but ensured her as an important player in contemporary theater."

—**TheaterInTheNow.com**

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