

New Line has produced several times, he scrounged up a first-person account of an LSD experience to help his actors bring the psychedelic scenes to life. As Miller does more research, “he gets more and more excited, and that fuels us,” Dowdy says. “He’s really about creating a world for the actors to live in.”

Miller’s production choices strategically highlight each story’s social relevance. His version of *Rent* offers one example. For the set’s focal point, he requested a vast round platform painted to look like the moon. The platform represented everything from a table to a dance floor to a state of limbo for characters forced to navigate lives shattered by addiction and disease. He also cast unusually young actors, judging that the show’s wrenching narrative was much sadder that way.

According to Miller, shows like *Rent*, which debuted in 1996, are part of a new age of musical theater created by writers and

lyricists who spurn commercial norms and turn instead to productions focused on social and political issues. “People were writing these shows that felt like old-school musicals, but with new dark, ironic content,” he says. “It was happening all around the country, but all the little pieces didn’t know about each other.”

New Line started as one of those pieces, a radical Midwestern theater lonely in its mission. But after two-plus decades operating out of church basements and college theaters, it finally has a permanent brick-and-mortar home. The Marcelle Theater is tucked inside a renovated warehouse on a gentrified street in the city center. Designed especially for New Line thanks to local philanthropists Ken and Nancy Kranzberg, the facility

New Line’s 2014 production of *Rent*



holds a black-box theater, rehearsal space, studios, and offices. New Line inaugurated the space in November with its sold-out production of *Heathers*. Next up is *American Idiot*, opening in March.

As for his dream production of *Promenade*? Well, Miller says, “We’ll do that one when we have \$20,000 in the bank.”

Exact Changes

Musicians Damon & Naomi’s many pursuits

by LYDIALYLE GIBSON

IN 2002—the year the Argentine peso collapsed, eliminating half the scheduled shows in their South American tour—husband-and-wife bandmates Damon Krukowski ’85 and Naomi Yang ’86 flew to neighboring Brazil to play the rest of the dates. The trip was a risk; Brazil’s economy was also faltering, and they knew they might not get paid. But they loved Brazilian music, they’d dreamed of seeing the country, and the promoter who invited them was, in Krukowski’s words, “a lovely man.” Other bands might have canceled, but, Yang says, “I think in general we’re curious.” They went.

In the end, the promoter couldn’t pay. He’d guaranteed their fee in American dollars, and Brazil’s soaring inflation put it out of reach. As the tour drew to a close and they headed for the airport, Krukowski asked the promoter to send him instead a classical guitar that had caught his eye in a São Paulo shop, a beautiful instrument with nylon strings and a luminous body. (He knew that the man, who happily agreed, could barter for it.) “And now,” he

Damon Krukowski and Naomi Yang

says, “I have this marvelous Brazilian guitar. And it’s changed how I play my other guitars, how I write songs.”

That episode is not really so unusual for the couple in their plural pursuits. Krukowski is also an essayist and poet; Yang, the daughter of photographer John Yang ’54,

is also a photographer, as well as a graphic designer and filmmaker. Together they run a small press. Their modus operandi is curious more than cautious, headlong, willing to take a chance on the unknown.

The pair formed the influential indie-rock trio Galaxie 500 with fellow Harvard alumnus Dean Wareham ’85 in 1987: Krukowski on drums (lacking a drum kit at first, he famously borrowed one from classmate Conan O’Brien), Yang on bass, and Wareham on guitar. They had been high-school friends in New York City, listening to punk, post-punk, and New Wave music:



Photograph by Stu Rosner



Krukowski and Yang with their *Galaxie 500* bandmate Dean Wareham in 1988, and a still from Yang's film, *Fortune*



COURTESY OF NAOMI YANG AND DAMON KRUKOWSKI

bands like the Velvet Underground and Joy Division. "When we started, it was the beginning of indie rock, before it got codified by major record labels," Yang says. "And it was an irresponsible thing to do—there wasn't any way you were going to make any money. It wasn't the popular form of the day; it was what the freaks did." At the time, both Krukowski and Yang were in graduate school at Harvard, studying comparative literature and architecture,

respectively. They dropped out to give their full attention to the band.

Four years and three albums after it began, the Boston-based *Galaxie 500*, a pioneering influence on "slowcore's" dreamy sound, broke up abruptly in 1991, when Wareham left on the cusp of a major-label deal and what might have been mainstream stardom. "That was the path we were tentatively considering," Krukowski says, but "it fell apart amid all the pres-

ures"—like a movie star dying young, offers Yang, with mystique intact.

Afterward, the couple, based in Cambridge, fanned out artistically. They began performing as Damon & Naomi. They launched their press, *Exact Change*, reviving out-of-print books focused on "Surrealism, Dadaism, Pataphysics, and other nineteenth and twentieth century avant-garde art movements," including works by Louis Aragon, Guillaume Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein—"basically," Yang says, "books Damon was reading in Widener Library and couldn't go buy his own copy.... We wanted to make these available to people."

Meanwhile, Yang moved into filmmaking. "All of a sudden it was like being hit by lightning," she says. "It's a wonderful thing to discover, in mid life, something that you never thought you would do, and to find this passion for it. It's like, in a used bookstore, finding a whole other section." She's directed music videos for other artists, and in February 2015 released *Fortune*, a gorgeous and evocative 30-minute silent-film study of filial grief, laid over an original Damon & Naomi soundtrack. With a visual sensibility not unlike her musical one, Yang's videos are stylish and emotive, full of metaphorical possibilities.

For Krukowski, who's published two volumes of prose poems, a consuming interest is the digital shift that upended the creative worlds he and Yang inhabit: music and publishing. A fellow this year at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society, he is at work on a book of essays on that topic. The book's discussion, he says, reaches beyond the much-lamented economic fallout for musicians when listeners stopped buying albums and began streaming music online—though it covers

Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Dan Jacobson asks if anyone can provide definitive attribution for the assertion, "From the music they love, you shall know the texture of men's souls." That line, he writes, is quoted in the 1949 movie *The Passionate Friends*, where the character played by Trevor Howard states, "I copied it out a book of Galsworthy's to impress you."

"a bad 15 minutes at the end" (January-February). Laurence Senelick replied: "The quotation seems to be a literal if awkward translation of the French catchphrase *un mauvais quart d'heure*. The notorious highwayman Cartouche (1693-1721) is supposed to have remarked, after he was sentenced to be broken on the wheel, "A mauvais quart d'heure is soon over!" It became proverbial very quickly. In his *Système de la nature* (1770), Baron d'Holbach extended it to the axiom that "Most criminals envisage death as merely un mauvais quart

d'heure," and Cartouche's remark is quoted verbatim in Antoine Servan's *Le Soldat citoyen* (1780).

"My Little Papaya Tree" (January-February). Michael Saxton wrote, "Try Googling 'and a mynah bird in a papaya tree' to get a Hawaiian version of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas.' I heard this long ago on The Midnight Special, WFMT, Chicago." According to a 1979 article by Michael Scott-Blair of the Copley News Service, quoting UCLA folklorist Joan Perkal, the list runs: 12 televisions, 11 missionaries, 10 cans of beer, nine pounds of poi, eight ukeleles, seven shrimps a-swimming, six hula lessons, five big fat pigs, four flower leis, three dry squid, two coconuts, and...."

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that, too. (In 2012, Krukowski created a stir by publicizing in the magazine *Pitchfork* his own meager streaming royalties.) But he also explores the social media channels that replaced fanzines, postcards, and mail-order record catalogs: “a sea change in how subcultures exist.” And he is interested in how digital processing compresses sound, eliminating ancillary “noise”—sighs, breaths, the tension of inhabited silence—in order to trans-

mit words. “The choice of what sound is meaningful is very serious and not obvious,” he says, “and it’s been made according to technological demands. A lot of sonic information gets lost.”

Looking forward, Krukowski looks back. “We’ve always been very inspired by the 1920s in publishing,” he says; *Exact Change* was meant to pay homage to the little magazines from that era. But the early modernist period just before World

War II, he explains, was “actually a very unsettled moment for American media. A lot was changing, and some really curious forms came out, some interesting experimental work—and a lot of dead ends. But interesting dead ends.” The current moment has similar cultural and economic confusions. He and Yang, he says, will keep trying things. And if someone offers them a ticket to perform in Brazil, they’ll probably go.

The Man Who Has Been King

An actor’s ascent

by SOPHIA NGUYEN

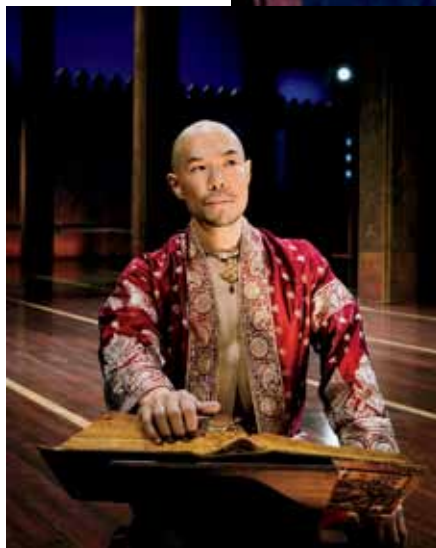
THREE TIMES, Hoon Lee ’94 has been lord of all he surveyed on stage: as Ferdinand of Navarre in the Public Theater’s *Love’s Labor’s Lost*; as Polixenes, sovereign of a petal-strewn Bohemia in *A Winter’s Tale* at the Yale Rep; and most recently as Broadway’s reigning King of Siam in *The King and I*. Each time, he’s been alert to what makes the head that wears a crown lie so uneasily. Authority bumps up against mortal limits; grandeur flips, revealing foolishness as its opposing face. Lee has a knack for playing monarchs as men.

He didn’t really plan on being an actor. At Harvard, he was president of the Din & Tonics—a 1991 review in *The Crimson* commends his “fetching solo” in their a cappella rendition of “Sam, You Made the Pants Too Long”—and did a few plays, but afterward pursued a job in tech. The industry burned him out. “At the tail of the first dot-com bubble,” Lee recalls, “we were losing our minds, working way too hard.” When he joined a production of a friend’s musical touring Taiwan in 2001, the 28-year-old saw the gig less as an entry point than an escape. But a year later, he made his Broadway debut in *Urinetown*, and the year after that, his television debut in *Sex and the City*. Then he was recognized with a Theatre World Award in 2008 for his first lead role, in *Yellow Face*, David Henry Hwang’s searching satire about race and reputation. Lee “has the ability to

translate physically what he understands mentally,” the playwright told the *Los Angeles Times*, “which is rare in actors.”

“This is going to sound a little funny,” Lee says, before admitting that he’s only recently come to view acting as his vocation, and as a career that he could sustain and deepen over time. “I don’t mean that I’ve been waffling,” he continues. “It has more to do with a certain comfort level.” For a while, he saw himself taking whatever opportunity was right in front of him, his talent too green to afford a longer view. Whatever the size of a given role, he felt like he was playing catch-up with his cast-mates.

That changed with the cable series *Banshee*, set in a small Amish town ridden with (surprisingly multinational) crime. The pulp thriller gave Lee his most prominent screen role so far: as Job, a fluidly



Lee (left) leaps down the stage (right) with co-star Kelli O’Hara in the show’s iconic polka, “Shall We Dance?”

gendered hacker and forger. The actor describes his experience on the show as having “people around the pool, and they’ve got life vests and rafts and stuff for you, but you’re being plunged into the deep end, and that forces you to swim.” He worked with the show’s physical trainer and stunt team to condition himself for the role: “If you’re a guy who’s built like me, to play somebody who not only wants to wear women’s clothes, but wants to appear powerful and beautiful in them—I thought this person would probably try to shape himself a certain way.”

The work also had mental demands. In theatre, acting requires “managing your ability to concentrate over a long period of time, and to keep reinventing what you’re doing, even if it’s technically the same thing.” Screen acting has other requirements: “to gather your energy toward execution on a take, to try to create a flash