

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

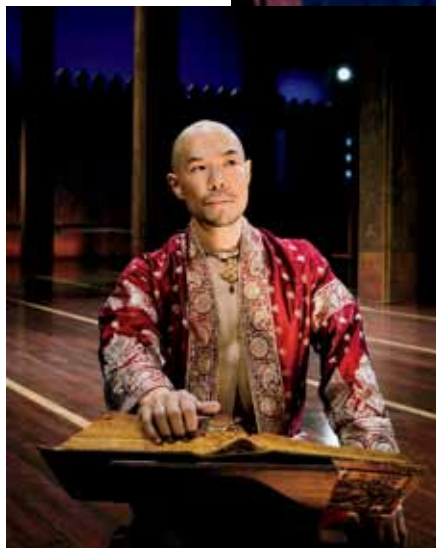
THREE TIMES, Hoon Lee ’94 has been lord of all he surveyed on stage: as Ferdinand of Navarre in the Public Theater’s *Love’s Labor’s Lost*; as Polixenes, sovereign of a petal-strewn Bohemia in *A Winter’s Tale* at the Yale Rep; and most recently as Broadway’s reigning King of Siam in *The King and I*. 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



Lee as the outlaw Job in *Banshee*, a role he calls "liberating"

Past versions of the script were mined for material that brought out these politics. The king's first scene has him confer with his prime minister about Cambodia's fall to the French. "That creates a very different atmosphere in the kingdom," Lee says. Especially among the ensemble, "You see, in a sense, that they are looking to the king to guide them to safety, and to steward their nation." He continues, "The king on stage is really only as powerful as the others allow him to be. If the other people on stage do not greet him with deference, then the audience has no indication that they should feel that."

On paper, the character can be painfully oblivious—an object of occasional condescension for Anna (the "I" of the title), and thus the viewer. It would therefore be simple to play the king as a broadly charismatic blank, onto which these competing perceptions are projected. A theatergoer better acquainted with Yul Brynner's version (all

eyebrows and spindly severity) might be struck by the richness of Lee's. At its center are deep reserves of humor, a joviality to match his petulance and pride. His wit complements the heroine's. It leads naturally to the sparring, startling chemistry that culminates in the famous "Shall We Dance?" scene. In seconds, through silent gesture—extended arm; turned cheek—a romance unfolds and is foreclosed. When *New York Times* theatre critic Ben Brantley revisited the show, urged by readers to see Lee opposite co-star Kelli O'Hara, he commented, "It's as if the spirits of Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn have entered the royal palace."

But being alone on stage spotlights the king's self-awareness—especially in "A Puzzlement," in which he admits, "There are times I almost think/I am not sure of what I absolutely know." An oddity of the libretto is that he is the only major character who doesn't switch to unaccented, vernacular English in his lyrics. But Lee brings real conviction to the soliloquy. His big, resonant voice lends dignity, and tragedy, to the broken grammar. By the time he reaches the final, beseeching lines ("If my Lord in Heaven Buddha show the way/Every day I do my best for one more day"), sweat beads his forehead, and his chest heaves. There's surprising pathos in this scene of a man reckoning with his scale in the world. Here's a king grappling with his power—and a performer in total command of his own.

of lightning." And off the set, he notes, the role has subtly changed the texture of daily life: news articles about cybersecurity "ping a little differently" for him. "And on the lighter side, you find yourself by a store and kind of checking out a pair of thongs."

In an intensely physical show, Job stands out amid the hulking thugs. His work is basically invisible; his presence anything but. His intimidating glamor—featuring a wardrobe of wigs, stilettos, and the odd corset—is as essential to *Banshee*'s aesthetic as its bravura action sequences. The character does join in the cartoonish carnage, swearing a blue streak through a glossily painted mouth. Lee seems to savor every syllable.

Last September, he returned to Broadway to take the title role in *The King and I*, Rodgers and Hammerstein's classic musical about an Englishwoman who arrives in Bangkok to tutor the children of the autocratic king of Siam, who is striving to modernize his country. The Lincoln Center revival clarifies the show's East meets West dynamics: the central characters' mutual incomprehension is foregrounded by a larger colonial drama, in which the kingdom tries to stave off foreign interference.

The "Little Republics"

Thomas Jefferson's "fractal" view of American self-governance

by SUSAN DUNN

"I AM GOING to Virginia," Thomas Jefferson wrote in November 1793, shortly before resigning as George Washington's secretary of state. He was anxious "to be liberated from the hated occupations of politics, and to sink into the bosom of my family, my farm and my books.... I shall imagine myself as blessed as the most blessed of the patriarchs."

What kind of patriarch did this American founder wish and imagine himself to be? ask two eminent Jefferson scholars.

In their fascinating, subtle, and deeply insightful new book, Annette Gordon-Reed, Warren professor of American legal history at Harvard Law School and professor of history, and Peter S. Onuf, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation professor emeritus at the University of Virginia, seek to understand, as dispassionately as possible, how

"Most Blessed of the Patriarchs": Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination, by Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter S. Onuf (Liveright, \$27.95)