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THE KING AND I

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WOW!

Bangkok in the early 1860s comes to vivid, tuneful life as seen through the eyes of an English schoolteacher named Anna Leonowens in the Rodgers & Hammerstein classic *The King And I*, now being given a top-of-the-line revival at the La Mirada Theatre.



Richard Rodgers and Oscar

Hammerstein's fifth Broadway musical has been revived so many times over the past seven decades, and the film classic (starring Yul Brynner, Deborah Kerr, and the voice of Marni Nixon) seen by so many millions, that few adults must remain unfamiliar with the tale of "Mrs. Anna," who arrived in Siam to teach the King's many offspring as Civil War raged halfway between England and what is now Thailand.



Like R&H's *The Sound Of Music*,

The King And I takes plenty of liberties with the lives of its real-life characters, but no matter. *The King And I* has become its own cottage industry, spawning not only the Oscar-winning movie and a full-length animated feature but multiple Broadway revivals and more regional productions than anyone could possibly ever count.



Millions upon millions have heard the

show's oft-performed and recorded hits, including "I Whistle A Happy Tune," "Hello Young Lovers," "Getting To Know You," "Something Wonderful," "I Have Dreamed," and "Shall We Dance." In fact, there's hardly a song in *The King And I* that hasn't become a standard.

Even today, the 1951 Tony winner provides a still relevant example of how people from very different cultures can learn from each other and grow as human beings.

Admittedly, in *The King And I*'s case, it's mostly the "Siamese" who learn from the British, yet schoolteacher Anna Leonowens also learns a great deal from her experiences with the



ABOUT STAGESCENE LA

Since 2007, Steven Stanley's StageSceneLA.com has spotlighted the best in Southern California theater via reviews, interviews, and its annual StageSceneLA Scenies.

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King of Siam and his people—how to be less judgmental and more respectful of a foreign culture, and how to look beyond the surface to the person within.



What has set the show's most recent revivals (including La Mirada's) apart from those that came before is the respect given Thai culture, and the intentionally all-Asian casting of its Thai and Burmese characters, aspects sadly lacking in many a King And I of years past.

Director Glenn Casale pays every bit as much attention to eliciting authentic, three-dimensional performances from lead and featured actors as choreographer Rumi Oyama does to replicating Thai native dance moves and music director Dennis Castellano does to bringing out the cast's vocal best, and what a joy it is to hear Richard Rodgers' gorgeous melodies performed by a live eighteen-piece orchestra.



Broadway's Anastasia Barzee not only gives Anna Leonowens the role's requisite radiance, grace, and charm (and glorious pipes to match) but a steely resolve and the grit to face even the toughest challenges, making her Mrs. Anna one of the very best.

And Barzee could not have asked for a more magnificent scene partner than Paul Nakauchi's charismatic King, a role he invests with innate intelligence and a sly sense of humor while guaranteeing male-female sparks galore whenever his East meets her West.



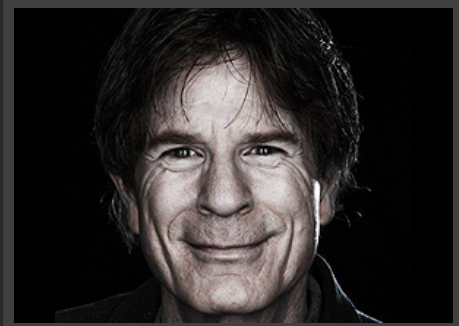
I'd already declared Joan Almedilla the best Lady Thiang ever when the 2015 Broadway revival's National Tour played Southern California several years back, and the added new dimensions she brings to the role this time round make her performance even more stunning.



Tuptim's signature songs don't get any more exquisitely sung than by the absolutely lovely Paulina Yeung, and Ethan Le Phong's tenor soars as Lun Tha, the bare-chested Burmese hunk who's set Tuptim's heart aflame.

Alan Ariano's Kralahome and Richard Bulda's Interpreter provide solid support in both English and Thai, young performers Luke Naphat (Prince Chulalongkorn) and Oliver Stewart (Louis Leonowens) are charmers in their own right, and Michael Rothhaar's

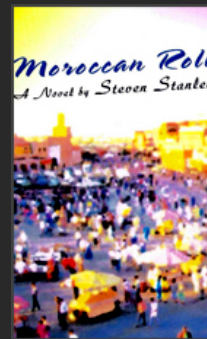
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WOW!



ABOUT STEVEN STANLEY

As editor of StageSceneLA.com, Steven Stanley is one of Los Angeles' most prolific theater reviewers. He is also the author of *Moroccan Roll*, and an ESL instructor in the English Language Program at California State University, Los Angeles since 1979. ([read more](#))

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Steven Stanley's MOROCCAN ROLL

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commanding Captain Orton and Kevin Symons' debonair Sir Edward Ramsey make the most of their limited stage time, with Eric Badiqué's Phra Alack and Emma Gong-Koiso's Princess Ying Yaowalak completing the principal cast to fine effect.



Lastly, "The Small House Of Uncle

Thomas," strikingly choreographed by Oyama and exquisitely performed by Cristyn Dang (Simon Of Legree), Arielle Dettmer (Angel, George), Chad Takeda (Uncle Thomas), Michiko Takemasa (Eliza), Callula Sawyer (Topsy), and Angel Strittmater (Little Eva), remains as iconic as Broadway ballets get.

Badiqué, Johnisa Breault, Bulda, Joven Calloway, Harry Cho, Dang, Dettmer, Lauren Han, Eleen Hsu-Wentlandt, Linda Igarashi, Jonathan Kim, Kevin Kulp, Sawyer, Francesca Ling, Saki Masuda, Strittmater, Takeda, Takemasa, Jee Teo, and Bernice Wang lend toprnotch support as wives, palace servants, and more.



Child performers Isabella

Abiera, Sierra Tolentino Chavez, Hailey Choi, Iris Choi, Aubrey Chun, Julian Paz Fedorov, Grace Jenkins, Layla Rose Lovin, Adrienne Amanda Morrow, Analeigh Charlize Singhi, Oliver Stellan, Natalie Yokota, and Aiaru Zhumakhmet make for the most adorable of Princes and Princesses.

The production's rented sets may not stand comparison with the Michael Yeargan Broadway/Touring designs on which they are based (don't expect the Tour's massive schooner to appear or the revival's equally stunning opening sequence to dazzle), but costumes based on Catherine Zuber's revival designs are every bit as beautiful, particularly as lit to uber-vibrant effect by Steven Young.



Add to that Kaitlin Yagen and

Madison Medrano's hair, wig, and makeup designs and Kevin William's properties, and you've got another terrific looking La Mirada production, and Cricket S. Myers makes it sound as terrific as it looks.

Casting is by Julia Flores. Andrea Dobbins and Ryan Wong are offstage swings. Kevin Clowes is technical director. Donna R. Parsons is production stage manager and Katherine Barrett is assistant stage manager. David Elzer is publicist.



Once again pulling out the stops to deliver the finest in Broadway-caliber musical theater, La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts and McCoy Rigby Entertainment's *The King And I* gives SoCal audiences more than ample reason to "Whistle A Happy Tune." It is "Something Wonderful" indeed.

La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts, 14900 La Mirada Boulevard, La Mirada.
www.lamiradatheatre.com

—Steven Stanley
April 22, 2023
Photos: Jason Niede

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