

# Director's Notes on Flower Drum Song

by Michael Baranowski

On the final pages of his best selling 1957 novel, **THE FLOWER DRUM SONG**, C. Y. Lee penned the following words:

"On Grant Avenue the cars crawled like an endless parade. There was the Chinese tranquility and patience; nobody seemed to be in a great hurry, and nobody could be even if he wanted to. The herb merchant, sitting behind his shiny counter, his hands in his sleeves, watched the street without an expression on his face. . .

". . . Perhaps in fifty years most of the familiar sights and smells in Chinatown would be gone. Perhaps there would be no more clatter of mah-jongg behind closed doors, no more operatic music of drums and gongs, no noodle factories, no old-fashioned barbershops with all the traditional services, no more retired old men reading Chinese newspapers, no more grocers with abacuses, no more thousand-year-old eggs, taro roots or dried seaweeds . . . For this was the world of the younger generation, everything was changing, slowly but steadily."

Those fifty years have nearly zoomed by now, and who could have predicted the hectic high speed world of today? And could Mr. Lee have guessed that his exotic novel about contemporary Chinatown would be subject of three additional treatments beyond his own? Thanks to **Richard Rodgers** and **Oscar Hammerstein II**, Lee's story of two young people whose love defied convention was destined to become a hit Broadway musical in 1958, and thus was introduced the first all-Chinese cast and culture display to the American musical audience. In 1961, Hollywood released its successful film version. In 2002 once again **FLOWER DRUM SONG** hit the

Broadway boards, but this time with a brand new script by famed contemporary playwright **David Henry Hwang** (who also wrote the scripts to **Tibet Through The Red Box** and **Golden Child**, produced by **CATS** in 2005 and 2008, respectively.)

The songs are the same wonderfully memorable numbers from the original version, but the story has developed many new plot elements that seem to address the sensibilities of today's audience. For example, in the original book, the love of "two decent young people" recently displaced from China is blockaded by family and the culture of tradition. Whereas in Hwang's new version their love is challenged more by inner personal obstacles having to do with the oppositional needs to assimilate into American culture and yet maintain unique Chinese cultural values.

Like the music, the story in its many treatments rings with sensuality, poignancy and romance. The conflicts that arise are universal to anyone who has experienced being in a minority, and the new version of the story, once again I am excited to report, will get to be retold by **CATS** this January and February.



Michael Baranowski

I have had the pleasure of working in three different capacities on three **CATS** productions: **Woman Warrior** (2002) as choreographer; **Tibet Through The Red Box** (as actor) and **Golden Child** (as set designer). It's a pleasure to be working on another play by **David Henry Hwang**, who is perhaps best known for his 1988 Tony-winning masterpiece **M. Butterfly**.

See the new redefined and evolved version of a venerable fifty-year old Chinese-American story. It promises to be a thrilling experience for all involved.

## The Three Directors

**CATS** is blessed with the collaboration of three titans of local theatre for our upcoming production of **FLOWER DRUM SONG**. Stage director **Michael Baranowski**, Musical Director/Conductor **Ken Hardin**, and Choreographer **George Jayne** will channel their considerable experience and skills through an impressive cast of new and familiar performers on stage and in the orchestra. The result promises to be spectacular.

**Michael Baranowski** has worked in most aspects of Nevada County theatre since playing Puck in a 1978 production of **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. A versatile actor, director, playwright, and award-winning scenic designer, Michael brings a lifelong passion for music and dance to this beloved musical. For **CATS**, Michael played Vladimir Sis in **Tibet through the Red Box**, and designed the settings for **Golden Child**, which just won an Elly.

**Ken Hardin** began studying piano, violin, trumpet, accordion and voice at the age of 4. Ken's musical know-how spans the genres of jazz, Broadway, classical and rock with a strong and diverse experience and education in conducting, performing and coaching. Since moving here in 1984, the esteemed Mr. Hardin has been sought out as pianist, conductor, coach and teacher. Hardin is currently artistic director for Twin Cities Concert Association, and choral conductor for the newly formed Sierra Master Chorale. He

serves on the faculty at Sierra College, as music director for Foothill Theatre Company, and works as a freelance pianist.

**George Jayne** began dancing at 10 years old in his hometown of Los Angeles. His credits extend over stage, television, and film in addition to teaching dance and movement. Since becoming a local, he has continued teaching at his Sierra Dance Institute. His credits include: **West Side Story**, **The Wiz**, **Bye Bye Birdie**, **Guys and Dolls** (1990 Elly Award for Best Choreographer), **Man of La Mancha**, **Oklahoma**, **Music Man**, **Peter Pan**, **Grease**, **Annie**, **Oliver**, and **Angry Housewives**. Most recently, he choreographed **Urinetown** for The Foothill Theater Company.

This trio is a dream team indeed, to help launch and guide **CATS** on our excellent adventure.

~Sandra Rockman  
Production Manager

Photo Credit: Tom Taylor



L-R: Ken Hardin, Michael Baranowski, George Jayne