

LITERATURE TO LIFE PRESENTS: *The Latehomecomer*



7:30 p.m. March 16 and 17, 2023

**Gorecki Family Theater
College of Saint Benedict**

The impossible happens every day in the life of the refugee. Minnesota writer Kao Kalia Yang captured that experience in her gripping memoir. Now accomplished actress and traditional Hmong Flower Singer Gaosong Heu brings it to life in this moving stage production. Told with the immediacy of the author as a young girl, born in the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in Thailand, the story follows her journey to a new land and a new life. For the author, for her parents and for her grandmother, the story explores themes of home, family, opportunity, acceptance, and obligation.

TERMINOLOGY

Refugee: a person who has fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. Often refugees have had to flee with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs and loved ones.

Hmong people: The Hmong are an ethnic group of people with a specific language and culture, who migrated from southern China in the nineteenth century to the mountainous areas of Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. During the Vietnam War the Hmong worked with the American CIA in the “secret war” in Laos, and therefore were forced to flee their homeland after the victory of the communists. After spending time in refugee camps in Thailand, many Hmong settled in a third country including Australia, France, Canada, Germany and the United States. Today there are more than 66,000 Hmong in Minnesota.

ONLINE RESOURCES

<https://www.csbsju.edu/fine-arts/performances/the-latehomecomer>

<https://kaokaliayang.com/>

<https://www.mnhs.org/hmong>

ENGAGE

The Latehomecomer was a book before it was adapted into a one-person show of the same title. Kao Kalia Yang's writing style is highly influenced by Hmong culture's oral storytelling traditions. She weaves smaller storylines into the larger overarching ones giving the listener a sense of the historical events and how they affected individuals.

- How do you experience a performance differently when it's one person compared to a troupe of actors?
- What were you thinking at the beginning of the performance? What were you thinking and feeling at the end?
- How does a story or history acquire significance when it's orally passed down through generations?

In the late 1980s, a large wave of Hmong people immigrated to the USA. The Twin Cities has one of the largest urban populations of Hmong people in the world. Arrival for many Hmong people in the United States means learning English and having to navigate a new culture in that language.

- How do the languages of our families, communities, and cultures color how we inhabit those spaces? How do they create and sustain those bonds?
- What challenges do Yang and her family face in Laos? What challenges do they face in Minnesota?

Yang pays close attention to her characters' surroundings—we can see, smell, and hear the mountains of Laos, the refugee camps in Thailand, and the family's first winter in St. Paul.

- How does evoking the spaces her family inhabits create emotion? How do the feelings and emotions change or stay the same as they move from place to place?
- How do objects and personal items take on meaning and significance beyond their utility in the story?

Yang's grandmother is a powerful figure in *The Latehomecomer*, and her resourcefulness and wisdom in many ways make possible the family's journey from Laos to Minnesota. The attention to her role in the story is one of many ways the author focuses on others, making this a “family memoir.”

- What does it mean for an author to define “self” in the context of “family”?