

# One Hundred Animals of the Same Color:

## A Conversation with Ensemble Member Matthew C. Yee and Ensemble Member & Creative Producer Kareem Bandoaly

**Kareem Bandoaly:** Hey, mayne! Can you believe we're finally here?

**Matthew C. Yee:** I know! It's been a long road and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to see this play in its final form.

**KB:** Yeah. This Rooster's been cooking a long time. Almost 6 years. Remember when it was almost called *One Hundred Animals of the Same Color*?

**MCY:** I do! I was into it, but Kasey Foster pointed out it made the play sound like theatre for young audiences, which it definitely isn't. *White Rooster* is snappier.

**KB:** Well, I'm glad of your choice. But know that the other name wasn't given in vain. We're using it for the title of our Artist Conversation. Ta-da! Everyone's a winner.

**MCY:**

**KB:** Let's start with broad strokes. Then we'll bite down to the bone on this juicy piece of poultry. Every new work goes through changes, phases, reversals, unearthings. What does all that shifty-shifty feel like? Thrilling? Maddening?

**MCY:** Both. The process of creating new work is incredibly exciting, but it can also drive you crazy. Sometimes it feels like you're chasing a little ball rolling across the floor, and every time you almost grab it, you kick it on accident and it goes under the couch. But with each successive draft, the characters, structure, and themes become clearer and clearer.

**KB:** Copy that. To be sure. Oh! In case folk haven't heard yet about the origin of *White Rooster*, can you recount for us the family circumstances that set you down this path?

**MCY:** Sure. It was Chinese New Year 2020, and my great aunt Winnie told the family a story about the circumstances of her father's adoption when he was a baby in rural southern China. Basically what happened was his adopted parents lost their newborn son, and in an effort to make their deceased child happy in the afterlife, they performed a ghost marriage after finding another family who has recent lost their daughter. They then adopted my great grandfather as the son of their deceased married children.



**KB:** What a tale, Matthew. Really. I remember earlier versions of WR were set in China and also featured a focus on the underground market that is sustained by the ghost marriage ritual. Can you share a bit more about that previous aspect of *White Rooster*, and track for us your decision to settle on the setting in the version we're about to see?

**MCY:** Yeah as times changed in China so did the shape of ghost marriage. As a result of the one child policy, and a preference for boys, the population of eligible women drastically declined, especially in smaller rural communities, which increased the prevalence of ghost marriages. Take for example, two brothers, the younger is engaged to be married, and the other has zero prospects. Tradition would dictate that the oldest son be married first, and a quick and easy solution to this problem is a ghost marriage. So families go searching for a recently deceased, unmarried woman to marry to their living son. Problem is the family of the dead won't give their blessing without payment, so they hold an auction outside the morgue, where the suitors wait to bid. The going rate is around 50K. To top that insanity off, the high price of ghost brides created a black market for grave robbers and murderers, who would falsify