



Chicago

# Chay Yew Will Depart as Victory Gardens Artistic Director at End of Season

by BWW News Desk Dec. 5, 2019



The **Victory Gardens Theater** Board of Directors and Artistic Director **Chay Yew** today announce plans for Yew's departure from Victory Gardens at the end of the 2019-20 Season. An internationally renowned stage director and playwright, Yew has been the Artistic Director of Victory Gardens since July 2011. Yew will finish his ninth and final season through June 2020, and will pursue personal projects upon leaving the theater.

Victory Gardens will begin a national search for a successor who, in partnership with Executive Director **Erica Daniels**, will continue to elevate the company's mission by developing and producing new works that provoke a relevant and engaging civic dialogue; and strengthening Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives.

From the beginning of his tenure, Yew expanded upon Victory Garden's commitment to new work development by focusing on diverse playwrights, with the aim of cultivating some of the most dynamic and relevant voices in American theater today. With the company thriving under his leadership, Victory Gardens has secured its position as one of the region's top theaters through its productions of World Premieres, many of which have gone on to national and international productions.

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Board President **Steve Miller** comments, "We are so grateful to Chay for his leadership at Victory Gardens through the past eight-plus years. Chay has shepherded Victory Gardens to a new level of engagement and artistic excellence. He has heightened the theater's visibility and leaves us in a very strong position poised for continued success."

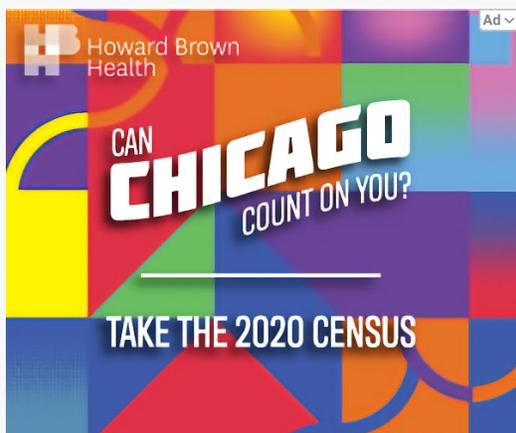
"My journey with Victory Gardens has been a tremendous gift and joy. Together with my passionate board and staff, we've accomplished much in the last eight and half years and it is at this extraordinary moment in our theater's history that I have chosen to depart. It is important for me to set our next artistic leader up for success, taking our theater to even greater heights, building on what **Dennis Zacek** and I have created," comments **Chay Yew**. "From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank all the incredible artists, community partners and audiences who have made their home at Victory Gardens; my **Board Chair, Steve Miller**, for his unwavering belief and support throughout my

tenure; and my Executive Director, [Erica Daniels](#), for being a steadfast partner in helping me realize my vision for our theater. I will serve through the end of our current season, and will foster artistic projects in future Victory Gardens seasons while exploring new opportunities and challenges."



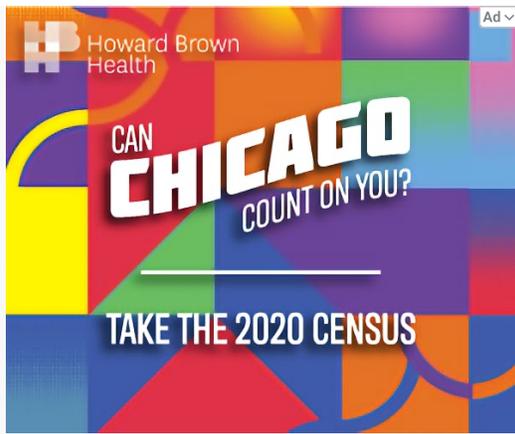
[Erica Daniels](#) states, "It has been an honor to work alongside my friend, Chay, for the past three years. In partnership with him, we have achieved artistic and financial success and Victory Gardens is poised to be Chicago's National Center for New Plays. Joining with Chay in a mission steeped in new voices, inclusion, and meaningful civic change has been deeply gratifying. I am thrilled Chay will continue to have an artistic home at Victory Gardens and look forward to working with the board to move Victory Gardens into our semi-centennial."

Throughout the past eight and half years, Yew put diversity, equity and inclusion at the forefront of the Victory Gardens mission and, in doing so, he created the Director Inclusion Initiative, the Resident Theater Company Initiative, and the Rising Leaders of Color Fellowship. Together with the board, diversity of the board, staff, production staff and artists became an institutional core value. He has nurtured artists and new works through the Victory Gardens season and the IGNITION Festival of New Plays. Through his passion for integrating art and social justice, Yew also created Victory Gardens' Public Programs that comprised of AfterWords, a post-play dialogue after every performance; the Town Hall series (which included We Must Breathe in 2014, The Color Game in 2016 and Reunite! in 2018); and Panel Conversations to enhance and deepen audience's experience with the issues that surrounds our plays.



The company has been instrumental in nurturing and elevating the careers of now nationally prominent writers such as [Luis Alfaro](#), [Lee Edward Colston](#), [Philip Dawkins](#), [Jackie Sibblies Drury](#), [Marcus Gardley](#), [Ike Holter](#), [Samuel D. Hunter](#), [Branden Jacobs-Jenkins](#), [Boo Killebrew](#), [Antoinette Nwandu](#), [Iliana Padilla](#), [Madhuri Shekar](#), and [Lauren Yee](#), among many others. He has been a mentor to the careers of many artists and leaders, including past Victory Gardens artistic staff members, playwright [Isaac Gomez](#), and directors [Monty Cole](#) and [Joanie Schultz](#).

Yew instituted The Chicago Play Cycle, a key VG new work initiative that focuses on plays that reflect the rich history, cultures, and peoples of Chicago. He was committed to producing World Premieres, and together with Playwrights Ensemble, this has resulted in the creation and production of an impressive body of theatrical work at Victory Gardens. A sample of recent work that has gone on to a robust life in the American Theater includes the following:



Hillary and Clinton by **Lucas Hnath**, developed through IGNITION in 2014, had its VG world premiere 2016 with Yew directing. Hillary and Clinton had its Broadway debut at the Golden Theatre under the direction of **Joe Mantello** in 2019.

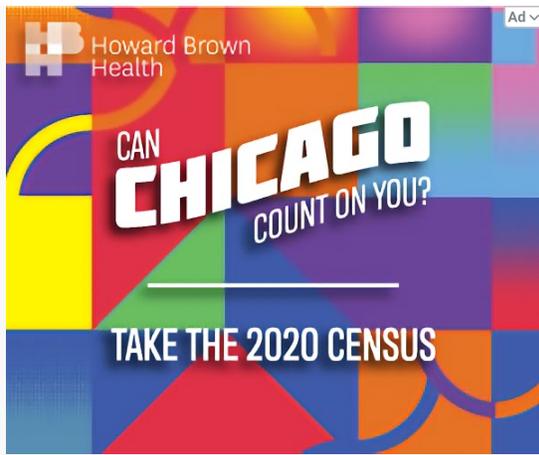
Oedipus el Rey, a Victory Gardens Midwest premiere in 2012, and Mojada, a VG premiere in 2013, both written by **Luis Alfaro** and directed by Yew, are seminal works that use classical Greek tragedy as a springboard to explore incarceration and immigration, respectively. Oedipus el Rey has had productions throughout the country, including at **The Public Theater** in 2017, with Yew directing. Mojada had its New York premiere at **The Public Theater** in 2019, with Yew directing; its West Coast premiere in 2015 at the Getty Villa Theater in Los Angeles; and a production at Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2017. Mojada also received a **Joseph Jefferson Award** for Best New Play.



Appropriate by **Branden Jacobs-Jenkins**, a Victory Gardens world premiere 2013, won the Obie Award for Best New Play and debuted at London's Donmar Warehouse in 2019. Appropriate had its East Coast premiere at the Signature Theater in New York in 2014, West Coast premiere at **Mark Taper Forum** in Los Angeles in 2015, and more than a dozen full productions across the country.

We Are Proud to Present a Presentation... by **Jackie Sibblies Drury**, a Victory Gardens world premiere in 2012, has been performed in London at the **Bush Theatre** and from coast to coast, including **Soho Rep** in New York, the Matrix Theater in Los Angeles, The Guthrie in Minneapolis, Stages Rep in Houston and a subsequent production in Chicago with Steppenwolf for Young Adults.

Failure: A Love Story by Phillip Dawkins, a Victory Gardens world premiere in 2012, has been produced more than 100 times throughout the country.



Where Did We Sit on the Bus? was developed in the IGNITION Festival of New Plays in 2014. Teatro Vista produced the world premiere in association with Victory Gardens in 2016. It has been produced at New York's **Ensemble Studio Theatre** in 2016, Boise Contemporary Theatre in 2017, Victory Gardens' Up Close and Personal Festival in 2017, City Theatre in 2019, and **Geva Theatre** in 2020. Nominated for two 2017 Drama Desk Awards Where Did We Sit on the Bus received the 2016 **Joseph Jefferson** Award for Outstanding Solo Performance and Best Sound.

How to Defend Yourself by Iliana Padilla will have its co-world premiere at VG in 2020 following a 2019 run at Actors Theater of Louisville.

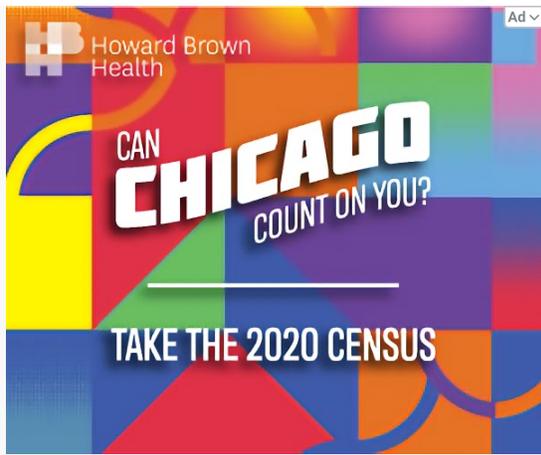
Under the leadership of Artistic Director **Chay Yew** and Executive Director **Erica Daniels**, Victory Gardens is dedicated to artistic excellence while creating a vital, contemporary American Theater that is accessible and relevant to all people through productions of challenging new plays and musicals. **Victory Gardens Theater** is committed to the development, production and support of new plays that has been the mission of the theater since its founding, set forth by Dennis Začek, **Marcelle McVay**, and the original founders of **Victory Gardens Theater**.



**Victory Gardens Theater** is a leader in developing and producing new theater work and cultivating an inclusive Chicago theater community. Victory Gardens' core strengths are nurturing and producing dynamic and inspiring new plays, reflecting the diversity of our city's and nation's culture through engaging diverse communities, and in partnership with Chicago Public Schools, bringing art and culture to our city's active student population.

Since its founding in 1974, the company has produced more world premieres than any other Chicago theater, a commitment recognized nationally when Victory Gardens received the 2001 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre. Located in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, Victory Gardens Biograph Theater includes the Začek-McVay Theater, a state-of-the-art 259-seat mainstage and the 109-seat studio theater on the second floor, named the Richard Christiansen Theater.

Victory Gardens Ensemble Playwrights include **Luis Alfaro**, **Philip Dawkins**, **Marcus Gardley**, **Ike Holter**, Samuel D. Hunter, **Naomi Iizuka**, **Tanya Saracho** and Laura Schellhardt. Each playwright has a seven-year residency at **Victory Gardens Theater**.



Victory Gardens Theater receives major funding from Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Joyce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The REAM Foundation, Shubert Foundation, Venturous Theater Fund of the Tides Foundation, Wallace Foundation.

Additional major funding comes from Crown Family Philanthropies, Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, the Illinois Arts Council Agency, Polk Bros. Foundation.

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Victory Gardens Theater is proud to be part of the 2019 Year of Chicago Theatre, presented by the City of Chicago and the League of Chicago Theatres. To truly fall in love with Chicago, you must go to our theatres. This is where the city bares its fearless soul. Home to a community of creators, risk-takers and big hearts, Chicago theatre is a hotbed for exciting new work and hundreds of world premieres every year. From Broadway musicals to storefront plays and improv, there's always a seat waiting for you at one of our 200+ theatres. Book your next show today at [ChicagoPlays.com](http://ChicagoPlays.com).

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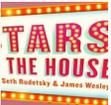
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