

KEEP AN EYE ON: MINA MORITA, DIRECTOR

MINA MORITA HAS BEEN busy. In the summer of 2010 she wrapped up a two-year directing internship at Berkeley Repertory Theatre and immediately jumped into helming a third of *The Norman Conquests* trilogy for Shotgun Players. In March she staged *A Year with Frog and Toad* for Bay Area Children's Theatre, an organization she cofounded in 2004 as Active Arts, and this August she directed J.C. Lee's *The Nature Line* for Sleepwalkers Theatre. In between, she staged a slew of workshops and staged readings with companies all over the Bay Area—all while serving as the president of Shotgun's board of directors.

At the end of October she's helming *Annie* for Berkeley Playhouse, and next year she's directing *Fracture*, Adam Chanzit's adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, for Shotgun. Morita hopes to simplify her directing schedule in the coming year—and that's a good thing, because she's back at Berkeley Rep in a new role that promises to occupy a lot of her seemingly inexhaustible energy.

"I was just talking to Jon Tracy about this," she says. "How do you strategize and focus so that you don't compromise the work by doing too much? The next year is going to be a lot more about that. I realize that I work very well within an organization. I'm really good at helping grow an organization. So being part of Berkeley Rep now is going to be incredible."

Morita has joined the Rep staff as an artistic associate, which involves a lot of doing whatever needs to be done. In particular she'll be working on the Ground Floor, the theatre's newly announced center for the creation and development of new work. "It will be about Berkeley Rep engaging in new work and the development process in a new way," Morita says. "We're

at the very tip of the iceberg in our conversation about how it's going to be structured, so it's really super exciting."

Born on Long Island, Morita is a graduate of the directing program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Growing up in New York, she'd been involved in both theatre and visual arts in high school. "When it got to be time to go to college and major



Mina Morita.
Photo: Cheshire Isaacs

in one or the other, I thought I would do the visual arts," she says. "I went to the Rhode Island School of Design for a period and then realized I hated sitting in a studio by myself and I loved the collaborative aspects of theatre. So I switched over to Tisch and became a director at that point. I was originally thinking of acting, but they saw that I had a lot of design and visual sense to my work and suggested the directing track. And I loved it."

She came out to Berkeley originally on a whim around 2000, visiting a friend at UC Berkeley, and decided to stay. Her long association with Shotgun Players started as a walk-in, she says: "I used to do set design and costume design, so when I got here I knocked on Patrick Dooley's door and said, 'Hey, do you need any volunteers?' He looked at my resume and was like, 'You design sets—do you want to design our next show in the park?' So I did *Troilus and*

Cressida for them."

Although she's been in Berkeley for a decade, much of that time was spent under the radar, working in theatre programs for young audiences. "I started working with Kaiser Permanente's Educational Theatre Program, which is why everyone wonders where the hell I've been and then suddenly here I am," she says. "I was sort of in the booking, business manager, director roles there." It was around that time that six people who met through Kaiser, including Morita, formed Active Arts. "And then artistically and intellectually I hit a ceiling," she says. "I needed to go back to directing work for adults."

That brought her to the fellowship at Berkeley Rep, where she wound up working on many different shows, from *In the Next Room* to *Tiny Kushner*, and organized and directed the Rep's 2009 staged reading of *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later*. "I remember coming on and Tony was like, 'You'll only be doing like two shows a season,'" she recalls. "And I hit the ground running and it was five to six shows a season, and always in a different capacity."

Although Morita is very comfortable handling the organizational side of things, for her directing is really where it's at. "Very broadly, new work is something I'm incredibly interested in," she says. "I'm not interested in putting a specific stamp onto something, like 'Mina Morita directed this.' I want to listen and take in what the playwright is trying to do and make it a really collaborative process in bringing that to life. I will certainly continue to direct outside as much as possible. It's nice to have a singular focus and then be clearer with myself about what I want to do outside of that. Supporting new work as a director is definitely going to be a huge component for the foreseeable future." —Sam Hurwitz