

Actor, Trailblazer, and Cherished Collaborator  
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## Remembering Joseph Anthony Foronda

(January 17, 1954 - September 1, 2023)



Joseph Foronda (left) and David Rhee (right) in Silk Road Rising's 2011 Chicago Premiere of David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*, presented in association with Goodman Theatre and directed by Steve Scott.

Joseph Anthony Foronda was a great American actor and an outstanding human being. He was both humble and larger than life, embodying the rare disposition of the rooted raconteur. Californian by birth, Chicagoan by choice, and Filipino by heritage, Joseph was the proud son of immigrant parents who found a home on the stage and a place in many hearts.

Joseph's career spanned Broadway, London's West End, national tours, regional theatres, feature films, and of course, Silk Road Rising.

On Broadway, Joseph riveted audiences as Lord Buntaro in *Shogun, The Musical* (1990) and as Samurai, Soothsayer, Storyteller, and Thief in *Pacific Overtures* (2004). But his most celebrated role was that of The Engineer in *Miss Saigon* (1996), which he went on to play across the US, and for which he won a 2009 Joseph Jefferson Award (Drury Lane Theatre, Oakbrook, IL).

Thank you, Joseph Foronda, for all the artistry, beauty, and kindness you brought into this world. Thank you for nurturing and mentoring generations of theatremakers. Thank you for showing us how it's done and for doing so with integrity and class. Thank you for gracing the Silk Road Rising stage with your signature talent and panache. And most of all, thank you for being our friend.

Joseph is survived by his wife, Laura, and their three children, Aaron, Macey, and Moriah. We send them abundant love during this time of grief and healing.

Heaven has welcomed home a consummate showman. No doubt, Joe's already putting on a show!

Memory eternal Joseph Anthony Foronda!



Joseph Foronda (left) and Erik Kaiko (right) in Silk Road Rising's 2008 Midwest Premiere of Julia Cho's *Durango*, directed by Carlos Murillo.

## A Timeline of Our Work With Joseph

### **June 10, 2007**

Performed in a staged reading of *Durango*, by Julia Cho

### **May 1–June 15, 2008**

Played the role of Boo-Seng in our production of Julia Cho's *Durango*

### **October 21–November 1, 2009**

Performed in the ensemble of *Silk Road Cabaret: Broadway Sings the Silk Road*

### **July 28, 2010**

Performed the national anthem for Asian Heritage Night at U.S. Cellular Field, home of the Chicago White Sox

**November 13, 2010**

Performed at our *Threads of Silk Gala*

**February 17-19, 2011**

Performed in a staged reading of *Paulus*, by Motti Lerner

**June 14–July 31, 2011**

Played the role of HYH in our production of David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*

**June 8-10, 2012**

Performed in a staged reading of *Mahal*, by Danny Bernardo

**February 7–9, 2014**

Performed in a staged reading of *Rumi: Love, Madness & Ecstasy*, by Sheri Winkelmann

**June 7, 2014**

Performed in our event, *Silk Road Rising Salutes: A Celebration of Reverend Philip Blackwell*

**August 4-5, 2018**

Performed in a staged reading of *Speaking as Then*, by Ruoxin Xu

**August 18-19, 2018**

Performed in a staged reading of *Sand on a Distant Star*, by Stan Lai



A clip from Silk Road Rising's 2009 World Premiere of *Silk Road Cabaret: Broadway Sings the Silk Road*, directed by Elizabeth Margolius.

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## A Riotous Rendezvous with David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*



Actor Clayton Stamper (foreground) with Lydia Berger, Joseph Foronda, Christopher Meister, Tanya McBride (background from left to right) in our 2011 production of David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*.

Produced in 2011 in association with the Goodman Theatre and directed by Steve Scott, *Yellow Face* was a revelatory backstage comedy by Silk Road Rising's Artistic Ambassador and Tony Award-winning playwright, David Henry Hwang. This ferociously funny, utterly unreliable memoir chronicles David's struggle to define racial identity in the mixed-up melting pot of contemporary America. Part fact, part fiction, *Yellow Face* explored the pitfalls and promise of our "PC" world.



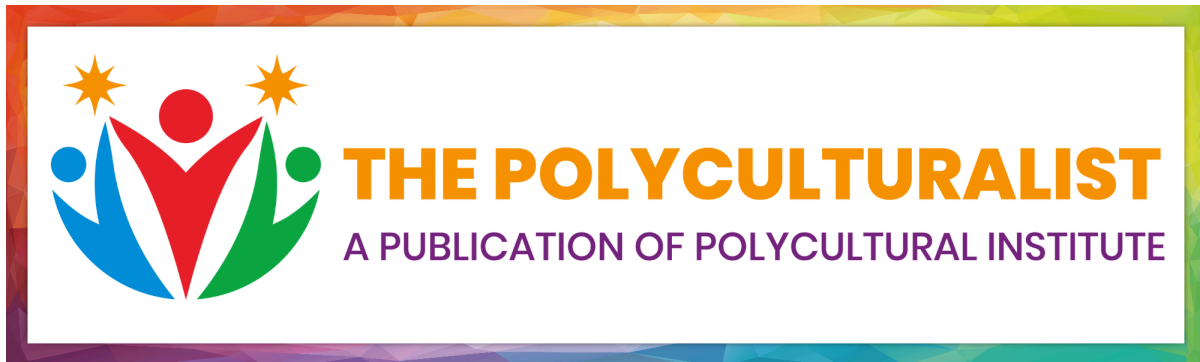
A scene between characters DHH (David Rhee) and HYH (Joseph Foronda).

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## The Thank You Corner

Your support of our work means producing world-class actors like Joseph Anthony Foronda who paved the way for generations of Silk Road artists.

thank you  
thank you  
thank you



Our latest offering of *The Polyculturalist* features Yvonne El Ashmawi, Program Chair for Graduate Teaching and Learning at Loyola University Chicago, and a member of Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council.

## **A Polycultural Approach to "Cancel Culture" with Yvonne El Ashmawi**

*This interview was conducted on June 7, 2023, by Silk Road Rising's Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala.*

**Tasneem:** “Cancel culture” is a phenomenon that has developed in recent years in numerous circles as a reaction against language and actions that are deemed unacceptable. What are your thoughts on this phenomenon, and how do you see polyculturalism speaking to “cancel culture?”



**Yvonne:** I am both happy to see the ways in which it has made language more inclusive and has motivated people to think more inclusively, but I am also worried about cancel culture for a variety of reasons. The first is that I think that we’re all fundamentally, by design, perfectly imperfect. So, we will inevitably make a mistake and/or say things that unintentionally hurt colleagues, friends, or whoever. But cancel culture discourages people from taking risk. Also, when people are publicly canceled, they are embarrassed and feel ashamed—that can boil down to resentment. It makes people less willing to engage in these conversations, and it doesn’t bring people back into the fold. If someone is canceled, we’re kind of saying, “You’re not even worthy of coming back.” That is deeply problematic. During the Trump election, we heard from a lot of Americans about their feelings in ways they would never articulate before. I would almost rather have them articulate so that we can have a heartfelt conversation instead of seeing the actions play out in the ways they did.



**Tasneem:** Your work as a Chicana Muslim feminist who examines the experiences of Muslim American parents within America's public school systems requires that you cross many proverbial cultural boundaries. Can you share some of what you've learned about America's sociocultural landscapes through your scholarship and research?

**Yvonne:** I always thought that my research would be very scholarly and academic, but the truth is, it really taught me more about our humanity, feelings, and emotions. All of our cultural conditioning shows up in even the smallest interactions. That was a big takeaway for me. For example, something that the mothers in my dissertation study all talked about were examples of everyday, ordinary interactions that ended up being a source of Islamophobic friction. Previous to my

research, I thought of sexism, or racism, or homophobia as big events, but really, they show up every day. Working with women from and having lived in different parts of the country, what's happening in small-town America is very different from what's happening in the big cities. Here in Chicago or in the Bay area, there's a lot of Muslim visibility. But in a small town in southern New Mexico, they had a hard time with my husband's name—and it's just "Youssef." So, we're also not talking across the different sociocultural pockets in America.



Four generations of MexiCali Muslim women.

**Tasneem: As a teacher of future teachers, how might polyculturalism be an effective tool to make our classrooms more dynamic and connected spaces as we progress further into the 21st century?**

**Yvonne:** Public schools are always one of the big places for our “national debates.” The biggest thing that I see right now goes back to being concerned about cancel culture. How can we support teachers in not participating in cancel culture, and being leaders in how to facilitate those conversations? One of the things that I have found helpful as a teacher educator is to share my own missteps and weaknesses. Before I even knew about diversity and equity issues, it was a way to help teachers get comfortable with their inevitable failure. Whenever I made a mistake as a new teacher, I would never ask for help because I didn’t want to look like a bad teacher. I want to normalize the inevitability of missteps, and I think polyculturalism has that ability to bring to people as well—the ability to keep the conversation as open as we possibly can knowing that we’re all going to step into it from time to time.



Yvonne and her husband Youssef in northern Arizona.

**Tasneem: Please tell us a story of a time when someone surprised you because they supported you or demonstrated compassion towards you even though you expected otherwise.**

**Yvonne:** I have had many hijab journeys: on, off, niqab, miniskirt. One of the last places I taught, I wasn't wearing hijab when I was hired, but wanted to go back to wearing it a few months into the job. My boss said, "This was something you should mention to people before you interview." She couldn't say no legally, but it was obvious she wasn't happy. I was so distraught. But then I was talking to another colleague of mine, and they didn't even blink. I expected them to ask me all the questions I've gotten over the years, but they were like, "Cool. Are they gonna match your outfit?" Being met with that normalizing made me feel safe, included, and seen. They didn't ignore it; they just asked general, fashion-related questions. It became a happy, fun conversation instead of one in which I had to explain, justify, elaborate, and demystify. It was a big game-changer for me; I hadn't had that experience before from non-Muslim folks.



Yvonne (third person from the right) white water rafting on the Eagle River in Colorado.



**Polycultural**  
Institute

**Connecting People, Cultures, and Communities**

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