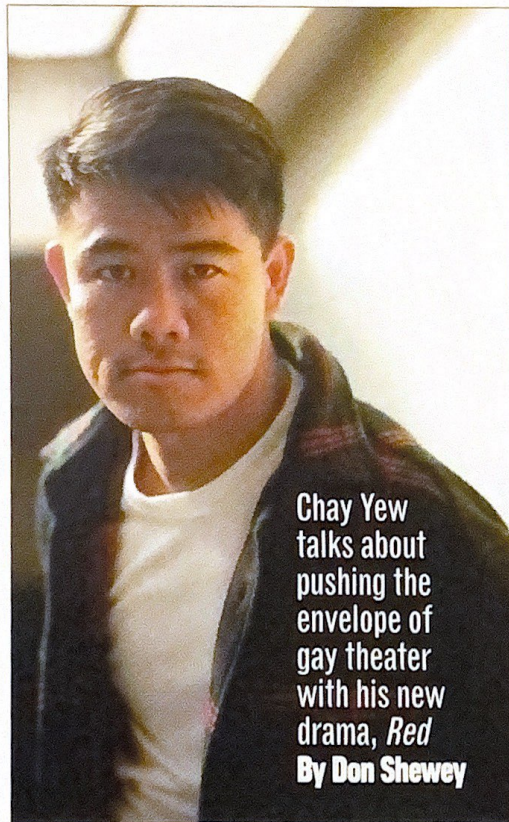


**"G**ay theater has become more diverse in terms of aesthetics and stories," says playwright Chay Yew. "But let's face it. How many gay plays are being done? Quite a few. Who are they about? Beautiful young white men. And they're usually not deep.

t h e a t e r

# Nothing compares to Yew



Chay Yew talks about pushing the envelope of gay theater with his new drama, *Red*  
By Don Shewey

came out utterly moved, rejuvenated, and angry," he recalls. Still a communications major at Boston University, he wrote his first play, *Porcelain*, about a young Asian man who kills the would-be lover he meets in a public toilet. His second play, *A Language of Their Own* (which received a stellar production at New York

City's Public Theater in 1995), portrays a gay Asian-American couple who break up when one discovers he is HIV-positive. In September the La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego will mount *Wonderland*, a play in monologue form about an Asian-American couple and their gay son who gets kicked out of the house by his father and takes to drugs and hustling. Now on the boards at New York's Manhattan Theatre Club is *Red*, in which a best-selling Asian-American novelist tracks down a former star of the Beijing Opera, a gay father famous for playing female roles.

Yew says he originally wanted *Red* to make a connection between the Cultural Revolution that destroyed a generation of Chinese artists and Newt Gingrich's attempt to abolish the National Endowment for the Arts. But he also jokes that he wanted to write "a big Chinky play" that would impress 60-year-old regional theatergo-

ers. Inevitably, though, "it's a very gay play," he says, "because it's about divas. All the characters are passionate about their art. Sort of like *All About Eve*." ■

They affirm the image we want of ourselves, or they're titillating. There's a place for that, but it's not my kind of gay theater."

The 33-year-old playwright, who was born in Singapore but moved to the United States as a teenager, got his first hit of gay theater from seeing Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*. "I

Shewey is the editor of *Out Front: Contemporary Gay and Lesbian Plays*, published by Grove Press.