

★ ★ CHICAGO PREMIERE ★ ★

CHIMERICA

BY LUCY KIRKWOOD
DIRECTED BY NICK BOWLING

Timeline
Theatre Company

BACKSTORY YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the final show in TimeLine's 2015-16 season—*Chimerica* by Lucy Kirkwood. Winner of the Evening Standard Award for Best Play and the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play, *Chimerica* arrives at TimeLine as one of the most acclaimed pieces of theater to hail from London in the last decade, and we're proud to present its second production in the United States.

The play begins in June 1989 in the center of Beijing, China, as a U.S. photographer takes an iconic photograph. Student-led protests had gripped the city for nearly two months, culminating in a troop-led massacre on June 4. On the following day in Tiananmen Square, a Chinese man holding two shopping bags stood defiantly in front of a line of tanks attempting to leave the city square.

As the lead tank attempted to go around him, the daring "Tank Man" repositioned himself, standing in its path, halting it, challenging it. His confrontation continued for some time, before he climbed up onto the lead tank to provoke a discussion with the soldiers inside.

Following that verbal encounter, "Tank Man" returned to his position blocking the tank's path. Then he was ushered aside by a group of

people—rather mysteriously and ominously, considering the horrific events of the previous day.

Captured in video footage and photographs, the image of "Tank Man" spread across the globe, becoming one of the most iconic moments of the 20th century and the ignition for the epic journey of *Chimerica*.

In the opening stage direction of the play, Lucy writes: "*It is a photograph of heroism. It is a photograph of protest. It is a photograph of one country by another country.*"

While the play's title comes from an economics term about how the U.S. and China are intrinsically linked, Lucy explores far more in *Chimerica* than just these countries' financial co-dependence. She examines how one country views another country. How two superpowers regard each other culturally and politically—how they mirror each other, vie with each other, criticize each other, and strategize to supplant each other, all while being intrinsically reliant upon one another.

Fascinating in this examination is the fact that, being from Great Britain, Lucy wrote this play as an outsider with a vantage point in between her two subjects, somewhat removed yet incredibly well-studied. She acknowledges that *Chimerica* is her imaginative leap.

While we know there was indeed a "Tank Man" captured on film, and that there are at least six recognized versions of the historic photo, Lucy's character of Joe is her own creation,

Coburn Goss, pictured at first rehearsal, portrays the fictional photographer Joe in TimeLine's Chimerica.



The symbiotic relationship between the U.S. and China adds layers of intrigue and curiosity to an ongoing debate about the ways in which these two countries have grown more different, and the ways in which they've grown more similar.

not matching any of the real-life photographers present in Tiananmen Square that day. Joe is a fictionalized version, and *Chimerica* takes us well beyond the known events of 1989, stretching 23 years later and taking us on a ride to determine whatever became of "Tank Man." Was he murdered? Is he still alive? If so, where is he living? Where was he during the June 4 massacre? What prompted his act of defiance in front of the tanks? What was inside those mysterious shopping bags he held? And why does his image still live not only in our minds but also in the (uncensored) history books?

These questions linger, and the symbiotic relationship between the U.S. and China—intertwined as consumer and manufacturer, buyer and lender—adds layers of intrigue and curiosity to an ongoing debate about the ways in which these two countries have grown more different since 1989, and the ways in which they've grown more similar.

As we've worked on this play, we've questioned what the actions of both the "Tank Man" and the photojournalist mean to us today. As one country looking at another, how do they impact our notions of freedom, activism, courage, provocation and understanding?

In this age of connectivity, we now find ourselves far more globally intertwined than we were in 1989, able to look at one another across the world with greater ease and more immediate access to events either mundane or of historic proportion. Armed with our own lens and windows into diverse cultures, we're able to consider not only the ways in which we differ

with the "other," but also the ways in which we relate.

The word "Chimerica" blends two disparate parts, with each half informed and influenced by the other to create a whole. Inspired by that idea, Lucy has crafted a remarkably theatrical story that pieces together countless disparate parts, creating a wholly dynamic tale laced with humor, intelligence, drama and curiosity.

I am so proud that TimeLine is introducing her play and artistry to Chicago for the first time, under the direction of our esteemed Associate Artistic Director Nick Bowling. Yet again, Nick and his team of collaborators have reimagined our theater in a way that surrounds and immerses you in Lucy's play, split between two halves and connecting the parts of the whole.

I hope you enjoy the electrifying odyssey of *Chimerica*, capping off a thrilling 19th season for TimeLine Theatre Company.

Onward to our twenties!

Best,

Harvard historian Niall Ferguson coined the term "Chimerica" in his 2008 book *The Ascent of Money* to capture the unique and co-dependent economic relationship between China and the United States. Ferguson argues that the two countries—which did \$450 billion worth of trade with one another in 2008—are "one intertwined, integrated hypereconomy."

The word "Chimerica" not only refers to a combination of the words "China" and "America," but also to the word "Chimera," the Greek mythological hybrid monster that is part goat, part lion, and part snake (or sometimes dragon, pictured below).

The symbiotic economic relationship of Chimerica became

The two countries—which did \$450 billion worth of trade with one another in 2008—are "one intertwined, integrated hypereconomy."

— Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money*

possible in the 1990s, when China made a series of economic reforms that allowed foreign capital into China, and which caused domestic growth in China such that a larger portion of the population had disposable income. In what he calls a "marriage of opposites," Ferguson writes: "China saved, exported and lent while America consumed, imported and borrowed. For ... years, the odd couple were happy together. Not only did the glut of Chinese savings lower the cost of capital, the glut of Chinese workers reduced

the cost of labor." Between 1998 and 2007, China and America accounted for 40 percent of all global economic growth. And for the first time in history, capital began flowing from East to West. While the United States ran a large trade deficit, China ran a surplus, essentially bankrolling American consumer spending, much like a credit card.

Although the two economies are intertwined, China did not suffer nearly as much as the United States during the mortgage default crisis of 2008. In part this was due to the Chinese government (instead of the free market) controlling the value of China's currency.

For decades, American investors and economists have suspected that China has been undervaluing its currency in order to subsidize its manufacturing and export industry. In more recent years, China's economy has shown cracks at the same time as its domestic consumer base has grown.

Lucy Kirkwood's play makes reference to the economic dynamics of the idea of Chimerica, but it focuses more on Chimerica as a cultural paradigm. Chinese activists protest, and the West watches; American universities enroll more than 300,000 Chinese students each year; people living in China—both Americans and Chinese—buy Nikes and watch *Game of Thrones*. People from both countries live in cross-global families, with members living in both nations.

The play asks if this hybrid animal can cooperate with itself, or if the head of the lion will fight against its dragon's tail. Can the beast move in a mutually beneficial direction, or will it forever misunderstand its component parts? Or, is the chimera simply an illusion, and the two are really one and the same?

Is the chimera simply an illusion, and the two are really one and the same?

THE TIMELINE:

LEAD-UP TO THE TIANANMEN SQUARE PROTESTS

1966 The Cultural Revolution in China begins: Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China, implements policies that eliminate all traditional and "bourgeois" aspects of Chinese society. As a result, the economy declines, many universities close, and many people suffer. This will end in September 1976, when Mao dies.

1978 – 1979 China adopts economic reforms, ushering in a new era wherein the national economy is more important than communist ideology. Universities closed during the Cultural Revolution reopen.

1981 Hu Yaobang becomes Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary. Mao is openly criticized in a CCP meeting for the first time. And a private economic system is formally accepted; foreign investors are allowed into the People's Republic for the first time.

1982 to 1985 A new university opens in China every 3 to 4 days.

1985 and 1986 Traditional college student funding changes from a need-based stipend to a merit-based scholarship system. Many students from poor families lose their stipends, while some students from wealthy families receive generous scholarships. Inflation grows at the same time, meaning those who still received a stipend now live in poverty. Students protest about the slow pace of political and economic reform.

1987 Because China now has some foreign- and privately owned businesses, a small percentage of college graduates assigned to work at them are rejected. (In the older system of exclusively state-owned businesses, owners had to employ all graduates assigned to them.) Students begin to panic about their futures in a country that seems to no longer value intellectuals and experts. Hu Yaobang is forced to resign his position with the CCP and is disgraced over his lenient handling of student protests.

Bronze sculpture of Chimera D'arezzo, circa 400 B.C.



Lucy Kirkwood is a playwright and screenwriter based in the United Kingdom. Her plays have garnered attention since 2006, when her first full-length play, *Grady Hot Potato*, won the PMA award (which is presented at the British national student drama festival to the most promising playwright).

In the last 10 years, Kirkwood has set British theatre aflame. Her 2009 play, *It Felt Empty When The Heart Went At First But It Is Alright Now* won the Evening Standard Best Newcomer award in 2010. Her other plays, including *Tinderbox*, *Hedda*, *Psychogeography*, *Beauty and the Beast* (adaptation co-devised by Katie Mitchell), *Small Hours* (co-written with Ed Hime), *Housekeeping* and *NSFW* have debuted at esteemed theatres across the UK.

Chimerica debuted to critical acclaim at the Almeida Theatre and then transferred to London's West



Benedict Wong in Almeida Theatre's world premiere of *Chimerica*. (Photo: Johan Persson)

End in 2013. The play won Kirkwood the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for the 2013-14 theatre season, as well as the Evening Standard Award for Best Play and the 2014 Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play.

Chimerica's first United States production opened in September 2015 at Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C. Canadian Stage, in affiliation with the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, opened the second North American production in Toronto in March 2016. TimeLine's production is the play's second U.S. production and the third North American production.

Kirkwood is currently under commission with the Royal Court and National Theatres (London) and with Manhattan Theatre Club in New York.

This image of "Tank Man" in Tiananmen Square on June 5, 1989—widely considered one of the iconic images of the 20th Century—was the inspiration for Lucy Kirkwood's *Chimerica*. (Associated Press)



1988 Inflation rises to 18.5%. In Beijing, about 200 small student protests take place that draw attention to the income disparity between intellectuals and CCP officials. The government makes a price adjustment, but inflation keeps rising.

January 1989 A petition movement to free all political prisoners in China begins as a way to mark the 40th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, the 70th anniversary of the May 4th Chinese student protests against the Treaty of Versailles, and the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.

April 15, 1989 Hu Yaobang dies of a heart attack.

April 17, 1989 Thousands of students and faculty from the University of Political Science and Law at Beijing University march to Tiananmen Square to lay wreaths for Hu.

April 22, 1989 50,000 students march to Tiananmen Square for Hu's state funeral. Three students kneel in front of the steps of the Great Hall of the People for nearly 40 minutes demanding to meet with Premier Li Peng and deliver a petition asking for (among other things): an official reevaluation of Hu, to reveal the salaries of government officials, to allow the publication of unofficial newspapers and stop press censorship, and to raise wages of intellectuals and increase government spending on education.

April 26 – 29, 1989 *The People's Daily*, the official CCP newspaper, publishes an editorial lambasting the student protests. Outraged, 100,000 students march to Tiananmen Square to protest the editorial and demand a meeting with Party officials. They begin a boycott of university classes. On the 29th, CCP officials meet with student protesters and grant them some concessions.

May 4, 1989 After a march to the Square to commemorate the historic May 4th protests, most students return to school and end the class boycott.

May 13 – 15, 1989 A small group of students returns to the Square and begins a hunger strike to protest a visit by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This is the first state meeting between Russia and China in 30 years, and is done as a show of solidarity between the two communist countries dealing with unrest.

May 17 – 19, 1989 More than a million Beijing residents (who are not students) march to the Square to express concern over the hunger strikers, and to express grievance with the government. Premier Li Peng declares martial law and orders People's Liberation Army troops into the Square to remove the protesters.

Beijing's citizens block the convoys, and the soldiers are forced to turn back.

May 30, 1989 Students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts erect the Goddess of Democracy, a sculpture modeled on the Statue of Liberty, which tens of thousands of people go to Tiananmen Square to view.

June 2, 1989 A second hunger strike begins; thousands more go to the Square.

June 2 – 3, 1989 People's Liberation Army soldiers successfully enter Beijing by dressing as civilians. They meet at the Hall of the People to receive their uniforms and weapons. Some protestors realize what is happening, throw things at the soldiers, and confiscate military weapons.

June 3, 1989 at 9pm Soldiers advance into central Beijing, marching toward Tiananmen Square from all directions. Protestors resist.

June 4, 1989 at 1:30 am Troops reach Tiananmen Square and block all roads. Government-controlled loudspeakers broadcast a message telling people to go home if they wish to remain safe. Many protestors leave. About 4,000 stay and start singing "L'Internationale," the anthem sung during the French Revolution.

3:30 am Student leaders successfully negotiate with the army to create a pathway for remaining protestors to exit the Square.

4:35 am The army turns on all the lights in the square, shoots out the students' loudspeakers, and begins marching south to squeeze the students out. Some protestors advance on the approaching army, yelling "fascists" at them. The army opens fire. Accounts vary, but most likely around 2,000 people—both civilians and soldiers—are killed.

6:15 am The army declares victory. For the rest of the day, they clear the Square of bodies, tents, and other remnants of the occupation.

June 5 "Tank Man" stands up to the tanks on Chang'An Avenue as the army begins leaving Tiananmen Square.

During rehearsals, Associate Artistic Director and *Chimerica* director Nick Bowling (NB) caught up with British playwright Lucy Kirkwood (LK) to ask about the inspirations for the play, America's blind spots, and the meaning of Tank Man.

(NB) What was the impetus to write a play about "Tank Man"?

(LK) I have always been fascinated by the photograph—the mystery of it, I suppose. The fact that we cannot see the man's face, that he seems to have acted spontaneously, the David and Goliath structure of the image.

When I left university and got the original commission in 2006, I started to understand the ways in which the West and China had become economically bound, despite maintaining vast cultural differences, and found this fascinating. I also became aware of the depths of my own ignorance about China, so tracing the lines between that photograph and the present became a compelling game for me.

Also, I am deeply interested in protest and protest movements, and feel the power of these have been eroded in the West, and the Tank Man photo shows a remarkable act of protest.

Finally, I think national borders are increasingly useless tools with which to think about ourselves in the world. I am more interested in the international, and Tank Man was a way into global questions.

(NB) What were the most surprising things you learned about him, or about the 1989 protests?



Lucy Kirkwood

(LK) Going right back to the beginning of my research when I knew very little about Tiananmen, the sheer number of protestors was a great surprise, as well as the fact that they weren't just students, but people from every walk of life.

On a more trivial note, I also discovered that all of the artwork for Disney's *The Little Mermaid* was being stored at a warehouse a couple of blocks from Tiananmen Square during the protest—this tickled me, as Disney is such an archetypal American company.

(NB) Your play is an examination of the U.S. and China—our differences and similarities told from the perspective of someone who is a citizen of neither. How important is that outside perspective? Did you have to do as much research on what it means to be American as you did with the Chinese?

(LK) This is a great question. Not as much, but certainly a considerable amount! And I am still discovering linguistic errors long after the play closed in the West End of London. However, in the UK we have absorbed so much American culture as our own that the gulf is far smaller. The brilliant thing about the internet now means I can find out with great specificity where someone of Joe's class and income might live in New York—is it Brooklyn or Queens or could he just about afford Manhattan? If so which bit? And so on.

The outside perspective is very important to me, I would hate to pretend otherwise. This is an alien's view of both China and America.

(NB) There is a single female British character in the play. Is she maybe there to represent you?

(LK) For me the importance of Tess is that she comes, like me, from a country on whose empire the sun has long since set, and she is standing pretty impotently on the sidelines, watching two

countries battle for power in the way the U.S. and England battled during the War of Independence. I hope her presence brings the smell of that history, the epic timescale over which global power shifts.

The play is to some extent about the superpower of the 20th century looking at the potential superpower of the 21st century, and the fear and sense of insecurity that brings. Tess represents the superpower of the 19th century!

As a feminist writer it was strange to find myself writing such a superficially macho play, so I suppose Tess represents my desire to puncture those paradigms too, to break them down and lay them bare, see what their bones really look like. In retrospect, I feel like I am too easy on her as a character. Although she is clear-eyed and compassionate, in lots of ways I think she is also the banal face of evil! So not a representation of me, I hope.

(NB) You reference Susan Sontag's book *On Photography* in your introduction. What ideas in her book influenced you?

(LK) Her thinking on how the proliferation of images we have experienced since the democratization of photography is very apparent in the play—the suggestion that this creates in us a pathological voyeurism. Her argument that photography and political engagement are at odds with one another: If you record, you cannot intervene; if you intervene, you cannot record. This underpins Joe's entire character. That is the fire raging in his head, the disconnection between the way he sees himself, and his growing awareness that this might be empty posturing.

(NB) The word "Chimerica" is an economics term. Why did you choose it as a title?

(LK) The word was coined by Niall Ferguson and is in many ways a terrible title for a play, but it stuck and expressed most clearly for me the concept of the interdependency of China and the West. There is obviously also the echo of the word "chimera;" you don't need me to explain why that felt appropriate.

(NB) Louisa Lim wrote a great book that you recommended to us called *The People's Republic of Amnesia*, in which she suggests the Chinese are suf-

fering from a sort of amnesia regarding Tiananmen. Do you agree?

(LK) It is difficult for me to say definitively as an outsider, but of course the play ventures that this is the case. Lim's book certainly makes the case very strongly. For example, she details the flag-raising ceremony that now takes place daily in Tiananmen Square. It looks like an ancient tradition but was in fact invented in 1990, one year after the massacre. To me that is a classic piece of Don Draper—if you don't like what people are saying about you, change the conversation—and distills something many people have observed about the way the fall-out of Tiananmen was channelled into a new, vehement nationalism.

(NB) Many Chinese Americans we interviewed have felt that Americans make too big a deal of Tiananmen and Tank Man. They don't necessarily see him as the hero we do. What are your thoughts about that?

(LK) Part of the gesture behind the play is to agree with them on the Tank Man certainly—to reject the figure-head/hero model of history. To me the Tank Man is a fantastic image, but just as important are the vast numbers of people—nameless, legion—who sat in that square for months before

Playwright Lucy Kirkwood with Artistic Director PJ Powers in London last year.



"The nobility of that man lies more in the protest he has made over months, not the photogenic gesture he makes in minutes."

the crackdown. The play's ending is an attempt to break down the heroism of that image. The nobility of that man lies more in the protest he has made over months, not the photogenic gesture he makes in minutes. I find it troubling how much history loves personalities.

I am too much of an optimist to agree with them on Tiananmen itself, I'm afraid. An act of peaceful protest of that magnitude is an extraordinary thing, whatever country it takes place in. And for a government to turn violently on its people is a horror that should not be forgotten.

(NB) Do you think that Americans suffer from a similar unconsciousness regarding our country's darkest moments?

(LK) I think that all ascendant countries suffer from this! England, for example, has an absolutely appalling relationship with its own colonial past and the consequences and responsibilities of this. We created a global inequality of wealth and are now baffled by the refugees flooding to our door. And protest has certainly been met with state violence both in the UK and the U.S.—the suffragettes, Kent State, to name but two.

Those of us in the arts can pat ourselves on the backs that movies are now being made about slavery, but the idea that those dark moments have been put to bed is laughable when you look at how many Black Americans are being shot on the streets by the

state. But as I say, the judgements I make about America I would apply to the UK too, absolutely.

(NB) When you wrote this play it was very much in the present (2012), but now that feels strangely historical. What particularly has changed regarding the U.S. and China since you wrote the play? Do you ever wish you could update this or other plays?

(LK) This is a beautifully timed question as I have just, in the last two hours, decided to update the time frame to 2016 for the TV adaptation of *Chimerica* that I am currently writing. Trump has proved impossible to resist. His mania around China exceeds Romney's, and he is being held up in China as an example of why democracy doesn't work as a system! I think they have a point ...

This is the only play I have written that has had such a forensically worked out timeline, so it is the only one I have a craving to rewrite in this way. The very first drafts were set over the 2008 election, by the way. That date also came to feel, as you say, strangely historical.

(NB) The original London production was an incredible success, winning the Olivier and garnering rave reviews. How has that changed your life?

(LK) The entire process of making the play changed my life in some wonderful ways, such as getting the chance to work with Lyndsey Turner, a director I had admired for many years. The process of writing also made me think in very different ways about how narrative works in the theatre. Finally, we changed more than I have ever changed before during the preview period. This was difficult and only possible because of a really heroic cast, but has encouraged me to do that more in the future.

(NB) What are your next projects?

(LK) I'm redrafting a play for the National Theatre that goes into rehearsal in November, and also writing two screenplays and the *Chimerica* adaptation for TV.

BACKSTAGE STEP INTO TIME: STUDIO 54 – 1977



Pictured, clockwise from top: Company Member Ron OJ Parson, Dorian Sylvain, Board Member Anne Stockton, and Richard Stockton; Associate Artist Chris Rickett and Jeanne Martineau; members of TimeLine's Board of Directors; Artistic Director PJ Powers, Janice Feinberg, and Kathie Romines; Master of Ceremonies and Chicago Fire star Yuri Sardarov with Board Vice President and Step Into Time Chair Eileen LaCaro; singer Bethany Thomas; Bill Kurtis, Chris Jones, and Donna La Pietra; the spontaneous dance party that almost stopped the show; and musician Colte Julian. (Photos: Ingrid Bonne Photography)

On Friday, March 18, more than 275 guests boogied the night away at The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago for our most successful event to date—Step Into Time: Studio 54 – 1977. Thank you to everyone who helped us raise a record amount of more than \$240,000 in net proceeds to directly support TimeLine's mission and programming!

**We thank everyone who made
this magical night possible!**

BACKSTORY:

THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy & Historical Research by
Megan Geigner

Written by Megan Geigner,
PJ Powers, Nick Bowling
and Lara Goetsch

Edited by Lara Goetsch

Graphic Design by
Bridget Schultz and Lara Goetsch

*Chimerica and other 2015-16
production images by*
Grip Design, Inc.

*Backstory is published four times
each season.*

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TimeLine Theatre presents stories inspired by history that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative artistic team produces provocative theatre and educational programs that engage, entertain and enlighten.

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