

# Stage Thrust: Behind the Scenes at the Long Wharf



By Christopher Arnott

Tuesday, November 09, 2010 3:00pm



Playwright Aditi Brennan Kapil brings a new play to the Long Wharf Theatre.

For all its professionalism and high production values, Long Wharf Theatre just loves to open the stage doors and show audiences what's going on behind the scenes, how theater gets made. Long Wharf invites you to its own process-oriented event this week — a discussion between Associate Artistic Director Eric Ting and playwright Aditi Brennan Kapil, whose new play *Agnes Under the Big Top* will grace Long Wharf later this season. The free discussion, first of two this season designed to “give audience members an unprecedented view into the process of writing, developing and staging a new play,” takes place Nov. 10 at 7:30 p.m. in the Stage II theater.

On Nov. 15, Long Wharf hosts a different sort of stripped-down theatrically inclined oration: *Selected Shorts*. Subtitled “A Celebration of the Short Story,” this is a live version of the celebrated radio series co-produced by New York’s Symphony Space and WNYC Radio. The Long Wharf rendition — part of the theater’s new efforts to utilize its space for concerts and readings and other events besides scripted drama — features not just the accustomed *Selected Shorts* host Isaiah Sheffer but actors B.D. Wong and Denis O’Hare, who’ll recite works by Sherman Alexie, Percival Everett and John Biguenet. This one’s on the Long Wharf mainstage and costs \$25. For more, go to [longwharf.org](http://longwharf.org) (redesigned with regular blogs and everything!) or call 203-787-4282.

Jonathan Larson’s *Rent* was one of the shows that exposed the intricacies of theater process to the masses. The musical itself is about young people — a Bohemian Lower East Side gaggle that includes a filmmaker,

a performance artist, a songwriter and a drag queen — finding their creative bearings and listening to their muses. But when Larson died just as the show debuted, a number of alleged collaborators and inspirations, from dramaturgs to novelists, sought due credit for their contributions.

Given the freewheeling nature of *Rent*, it's annoying that nearly all the tours have studiously copied the original New York production. The show is intended to be multi-ethnic, and the cast members are all sizes and shapes, but if you read the play cold those diversities are not explicitly fitted to specific characters. There's room for outrageous reinterpretation of *Rent*, a show that has yet to trickle down very far into collegiate and community productions. (A major revival in London's West End a few years ago mainly revised the show by ill-advisedly downplaying its AIDS-crisis themes.) We have high hopes for the *Rent* being done by the Yale Dramat this weekend at the Yale University Theater (Nov. 10-13 at 8 p.m., plus Nov. 13 matinee at 2 p.m.; 222 York St. \$15, \$6 students; dramat.org). The director is recent Yale School of Drama grad Mike Donahue, a forward-looking and wildly inventive talent who took *Peer Gynt* and the *Bacchae* in grand modern directions at the Iseman Theater and the Yale Cabaret, respectively. He's the kind of landlord to whom we'd gladly give *Rent*.