



# young post Sunday

## She's a Broadway baby

**W**hen a New York casting agent told Viveca Chow that she'd never be successful, the

young actress cried tears of disappointment. That knock-back was her first taste of how cutthroat the theatre industry can be, and came as a crushing blow for the 22-year-old Hong Kong performer, who was in the final stages of her theatre course at Point Park University, in the US.

However, not long after that, she signed with another agent, who secured her an audition for *Miss Saigon* on Broadway, in New York City. The famed musical, which is set in the 70s during the latter part of the Vietnam war, tells the tragic tale of a romance involving an Asian woman abandoned by her American soldier love.

After two auditions, Chow was summoned for a final callback. She performed songs from the musical, but thought she was out of luck when she was released midway through.

"Usually when they let people go, it means they're out of the process," she explains. Then, a few days later, her agent told her they wanted her as a swing in the female ensemble - a role similar to being an understudy, but she had to learn all nine female roles. Chow

**Telling a story is one of the biggest joys of being an actor, and so many stories are important to tell**

was overjoyed. Not only had she accomplished the rare feat of booking a Broadway show straight out of university, but she had also become the first actress born in Hong Kong to star in a musical on the prestigious New York theatre circuit.

**Six years ago, Viveca Chow starred in *Footloose* in Hong Kong. Now, she tells Lauren James, how she landed a major musical in the US**

*Young Post* first noticed Chow in 2010, when she was starring as Ariel in *Footloose* with the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), aged 15. The Island Schooler had been training with the Academy from age nine, and performed in seven summer musicals. In the fifth summer, she secured her first lead role as Sharpay in *High School Musical*, a role she believes would have never been afforded to her had she grown up in the US.

"In America, I would never be Ariel. I don't think anyone would ever cast an Asian as Sharpay Evans - they'd be cast as Kelsie the pianist because it fits more with the Asian stereotype. It has a lot to do with typecasting," she says.

The underrepresentation of non-white actors is a persistent issue in the industry. In the musical *Wicked*, which recently came to Hong Kong, the main character Elphaba has always been played by Caucasian actresses. It's laughable, says Chow, when Elphaba is painted green in the play.

The recent success of the historical musical *Hamilton* has brought colour-blind casting - allocating roles without considering someone's ethnicity - into the spotlight, and Chow is glad to see that the industry is becoming more diverse. "Not as fast as we want it to but at least it's changing," she says, adding that she hopes casting non-white actors in traditionally white roles isn't just a temporary thing. "A lot of theatres are starting to realise it doesn't matter what we look like - as long as the actors have the skill-set to tell the story."

*Miss Saigon* will be on Broadway for

a year, then it might tour for a few years after that. But the life of an actor is full of uncertainty, and it can be hard to plan for the future and move on from rejection. "No actor has a map of what will happen in the next 10 years; we have to take everything as it comes," she says.

"It's so competitive. There are always so many 'yous' in the room - people who look like you and have the same skills, and you never find out why you didn't get the part."

Luckily, Chow has the support of her parents to help her through the days she feels like giving up. But for aspiring performers, particularly in Hong Kong, whose parents might not agree with their chosen career, Chow says that communication is essential. "Help them understand why performing means so much to you. They need to see how happy it makes you. Because you never want to end up doing something you hate and living with the regret that you didn't fight for your dream."

"My goal is to always keep working," she adds. "I'm grateful to be doing what I love every day. To be able to tell a story is one of the biggest joys of being an actor, and so many stories are important to tell - especially now in the US. People go to theatre, almost in search of hope, to just escape reality for a few hours. It's amazing to be part of that."

**Viveca thought she had bombed in her *Miss Saigon* audition - but she was wrong.** Photo: Neal Kowalsky



**Communication is key, says Viveca, if you want your parents to accept your love for acting.** Photos: Jeff Swenson, Neal Kowalsky, Patrick Bellino



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