

When I met our playwright, Hortense Gerardo, in the late 90s, we were introduced to each other since we were the only two Filipinos in our little theater world back then, and this mutual friend thought we should know each other, perhaps work together. Because it's true, there weren't a lot of us in the Boston theater community then. Our meeting had an awkward beginning, especially after asking Hortense if she "writes a lot about Filipinos?" She responded "I write about Humans!" We laugh about that memory so much now.

Hortense and I have come a long way since then, bumping into each other over the years. I wondered if we would ever work together. The opportunity would come in 2018 when I was involved in a play that Hortense wrote. We have remained connected since, working on many plays and projects together, stories that centered on Filipino characters. However, this one, Middleton Heights, is our first together in a fully produced World Premiere at The Umbrella.

Middleton Heights focuses on a Filipino family making a life here in the United States. There so much in this play that Hortense and I obviously relate to, since we are both products of very similar experiences. But I also believe Hortense has written a play that most anyone can relate to, especially if you come from an immigrant family.

I am so proud to be part of a company that tells diverse stories. I could not be more grateful to Brian Boruta and the entire Umbrella Stage Company family for entrusting us in the telling of this play, and for support and encouragement.

Big shout out to the Asian American Playwright Collective (AAPC) of Boston for being the breeding ground for Hortense's and my plays and stories. More shoutouts to the Asian American Theater Artists of Boston (AATAB) and Chuang Stage for their inspiration and support.

I am also so grateful to the many Asian American Pacific Islander actors who came out to audition for this play. New England should be proud to have such talent amongst us and they should all be working in every theater space possible! Thank you to our Middleton Heights cast for taking on this play and embodying its characters so beautifully.

I am most grateful to Hortense for her play. Our collaborations, especially this one, made us closer and we've become like sisters, and closer as colleagues and artists. I feel happy and privileged to be able to work on such a piece and with Hortense.

-Michelle Aguillon, **Director**