

# Jeannie Barroga



By Emma Wimsatt &  
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# Who is Jeannie Barroga?



“Writers have to say words that other people cannot.”

- Award Winning Bay Area playwright
- Author of more than 50 plays
- Explores issues of mental illness, racism, colonialism, and sexism in plays
- Director, actor, teacher, activist

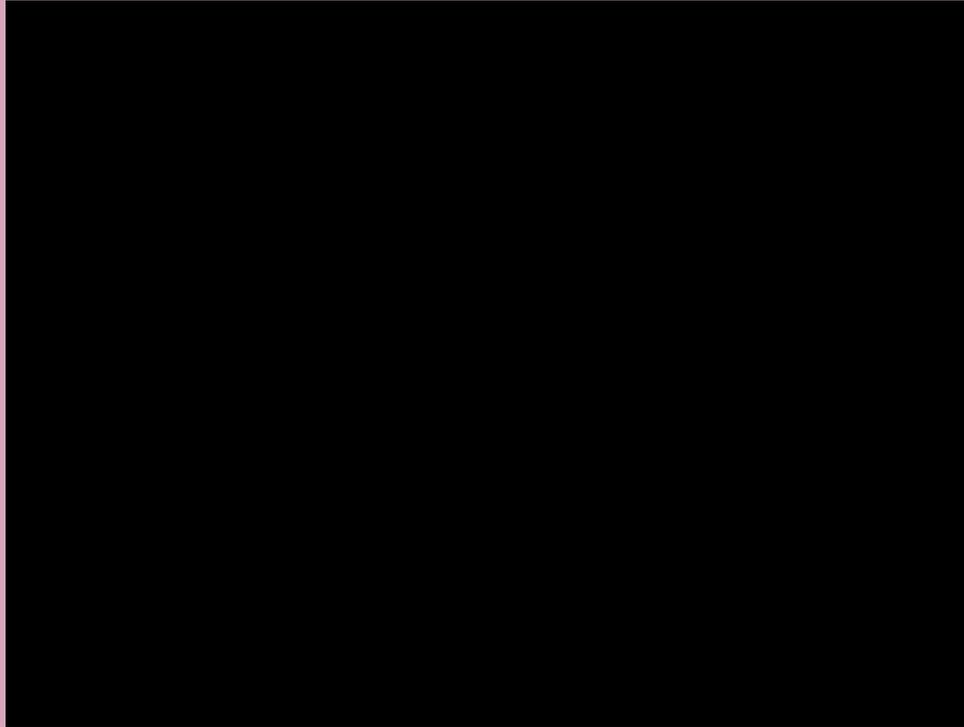
Barroga exemplifies what it means to be an artist activist. She gives voices to those who have been silenced in history.



Barroga draws inspiration from current political events; predominantly the impacts of major wars on our most vulnerable communities



# Video



# Performing Arts and Social Justice

Performing Arts and Social Justice expresses truths that best motivate people to action and empathy.

“Social justice almost begs to be focused and addressed. When you add terms like social justice, the fact is that once you see issues covered in theater form, you know it applies. You know it is important” (Interview 2017)



# PASJ for Barroga: Writing as Rebellion

Barroga views writing as way to stand up against injustice. She writes about barely covered subjects like mental illness. She also addresses racism, colonialism, sexism, and their intersectionality. Writing plays gives her a vast platform to stand up against injustices.

“We have to say words that other people cannot. It is important to tell the passing of history.” (Barroga, 2017)



# Biography



- Born (1949) and grew up in mostly white Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Being cast in a play in HS changed her life
- Attended the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, Class of '72. Earned a BA in Fine Arts.
- Early experience of racism - watching her parents endure discrimination- spurred her to confront racism in her plays
- Early experience with Filipino identity -having to explain what a Filipino was or what she was among all the other ethnic groups- also influenced her

# Art & Social Justice: The Younger Years

- In response to early exposure to injustice of racism and hypocritical doctrines, she began writing

“I did not have a voice. I thought, isn’t anyone gonna respond to this? I decided to write what I saw in my diary. I felt the need to bullet the unjust things I saw. **I started critiquing** the systems of power and their contradictions within my school.” (Interview 2017)

- Started writing journals at age 8 and never stopped



# Pivotal Move to Bay Area

- Before moving, she felt isolated.

“I was brought up as the other. I always felt lonely. Feeling unwelcome set up doors that I didn't think I could open.” (Interview 2017)

- After moving to Bay Area, she found community

“I found home. My Bay Area community thinks alike in more manners than one. We all thought about politics, sexuality, and art in the same way. The arts community here changed my life and helped me focus. I felt reformed. I became a better artist.” (Interview 2017)



# Career

- Most produced Filipina playwright. She has written more than 50 plays
- Established the Playwright Forum in 1983
- Literary Manager, 3 theaters; interim Artistic Director at Asian American Theater Company
- Teacher and Professor (Bay Area, Chicago, Colorado)
- Consultant for local and national productions
- Director, Author, and Actor



# Accomplishments



- Received the Maverick Award at the Los Angeles Women's Festival
- Nominated for the CalArts Herb Alpert award 2000.
- Won the Bay Area Playwrights Festival 10-Minute Play Contest
- Houses her full collection at Stanford University Green Library Special Collections
- Awarded the W. Alexander Gerbode and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Playwright Award for BUFFALO'ED
- Won the NEA Access to Artistic Excellence for WALLS
- Won Best Production Arty Award Solano for BANYAN
- Awarded the East Bay Fund for Artists for MATTIE MAE'S
- Served on panels for Theatre Communications Group, the National endowment for the Arts, the San Francisco Arts Commission, and Santa Clara, Oakland, and Marin Arts Councils

# PASJ in Barroga's Words



- At just 8 years old, as one of the few non-white student in her school, she wanted to respond to the injustices that she saw  
“I decided to write what I saw in my diary. I felt the need to bullet the unjust things I saw. I started critiquing the systems of power and their contradictions” (Interview 2017)
- As a playwright, Barroga uses her words to give a voice to the voiceless...  
“[Writers] have to say words that other people cannot. I base work on unsung heroes, especially women, politics, culture. These people are heroes because they do not have to shout, they just do it.” (Interview 2017)
- **... and to confront audiences with the injustices surrounding them.**  
“Walls is a high point of my life. As a social and political playwright, this highlighted many social justice issues. The play brought into issue everything I wanted to express to audiences” (Interview 2017)

# Mental Illness

- Barroga frequently addresses mental illness issues in her plays. This includes a lack of equal access to mental health care. Showcases daily struggles.
- In *Walls*, a vet tries to cope with PTSD, his friend wants to know what it's like
- In *Banyan*, Ona and her brother fight evil spirits in a magical alternate world
- *Monday Golden Sun* was created to give Vets recovering from PTSD a therapeutic voice. The Vets performed the play as part of their treatment.
- In *Talk-Story*, Frank, the father, prefers his fantasized versions to reality
- In *Aurora*, the mass shooter pleads insanity and several characters appear to be psychic.
- Barroga's plays warp reality or break from it, leading audiences blithely across boundaries of time and place.
- Plays give audiences tools for empathy for people living with Mental Illness

# Monday Golden Sun



**ASIAN AMERICAN  
RECOVERY SERVICES, INC.**

- Performed by 4 members of Asian American Recovery Services, a treatment and intervention program for alcohol and drug abusers
- 9 months of collaboration with the goal of helping Vets with PTSD come to terms with their experience
- “They had to spend hours at rehearsal after a normal day in the recovery center. It was exhausting. It was a very ritual like workshop” (Interview 2017)
- Barroga wrote a script based on Vets own stories. Vets performed in the play, so their voices were heard.
- Form of Drama Therapy

# Monday Golden Sun Cont.

“We filled the BRAVA theater for two nights. Each night we had a standing ovation. The show was dynamic and powerful because these are real people reliving their stories and real emotions. The portrayals were believable, tough, and heartfelt” (Interview 2017).



# Collection of Plays

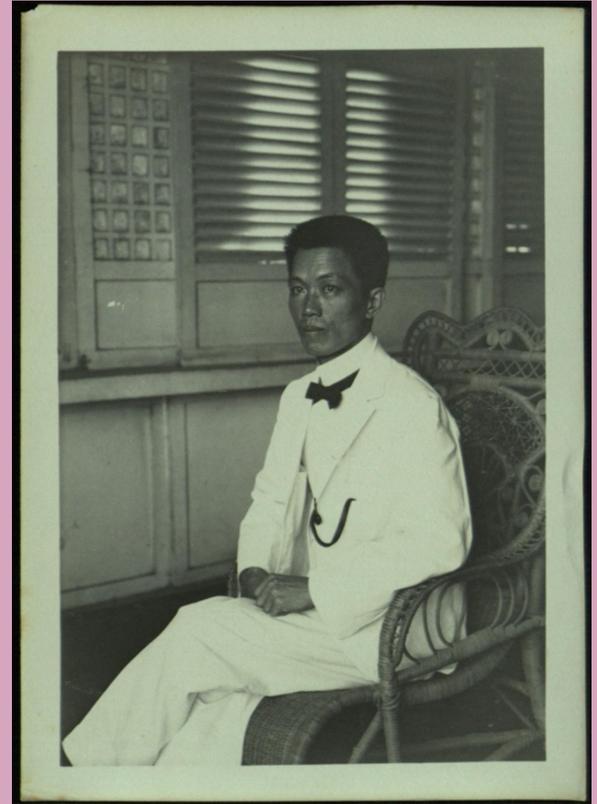
- Playwright for past 35 yrs
- Filipino heritage and culture inspired many of her plays
- Isolation from growing up in Wisconsin influenced plays
- Best known Plays with major social justice themes:
  - Talk-Story
  - Buffalo'ed
  - Walls
  - Rita's Resources



Buffalo'ed, The Mercury News, 2012

# Talk-Story

- Focuses on the Filipino immigrant experience
- A newspaper copy assistant beginning a series of articles on the Filipino experience, most of which are based on her father's colorful and often-told stories
- Using fantasies as coping mechanisms for harsh realities (discrimination, denial, prejudice, ignorance)
- The father, Frank prefers his fantasized versions to reality.





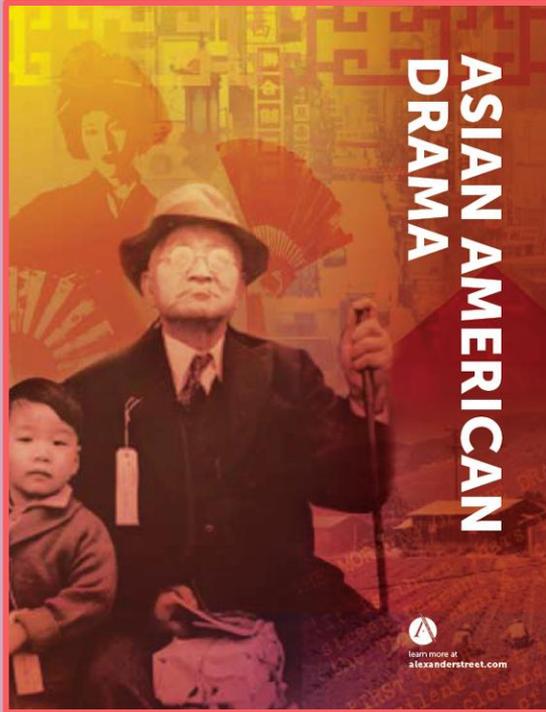
# Walls

- Bases work on unsung heroes, the veterans of color who fought in the Vietnam War
- Barroga highlights discrimination, PTSD and mental illness, and other social justice issues faced by many of the Asian and African American characters.
- Barroga uses ghosts and of course the Wall itself to represent the way we hide from our past



Asian American Theater Company, 2006

# Rita's Resources



- Set in the turbulent 1970's and explores the plight of a Filipina-American seamstress in her challenge to keep her dreams alive.
- An intriguing look at the challenge to one immigrant family to maintain the spirit of the American dream and the price paid to do so.

# Interview

- <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xCi7oXfNs4dmB55bWP2en1zw5b6V6a9-MUYvzDAMoJE/edit>

