

A Vietnamese Actress Takes the Stage

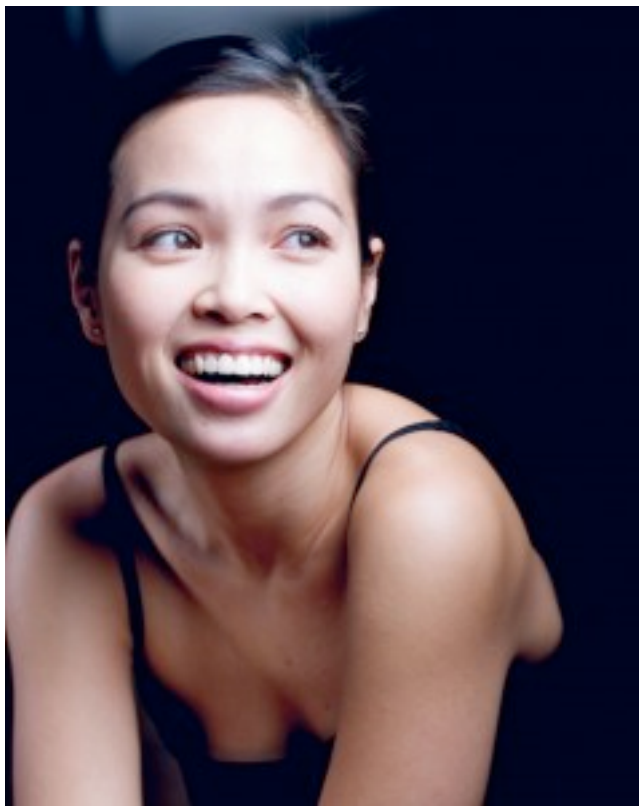
By [Roxanne Ray](#)

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For actor Khanh Doan, theatre is a true passion.

Doan took her first drama class in ninth grade. “I was quiet and shy, but was hooked pretty fast.” Although she reports being a dedicated student following her immigration as a child from Vietnam to California, she also appreciated the spontaneity of acting.

“I was able to explore sides of myself that I didn’t even know existed,” Doan says. Doan continued to study drama in high school, and later began a professional acting career after moving to Seattle in 2003. “I really enjoyed embodying another character, often so different from me.”



In the past ten years, Doan has enjoyed playing a wide range of roles in theatre and film, including several at Seattle Children’s Theatre.

“One of my favorites was playing Sleeping Beauty,” Doan says of her work at Seattle Children’s Theatre. “We had a great cast and director, Rita Giomi, and it was a fun, non-traditional princess role. I got to sword-fight and fall in love and sing and be funny.”

She also appreciated her role in “Everyone Knows What a Dragon Looks Like,” also at SCT. “It was an all-puppet show, Bunraku style, and we had a blast!” Doan says. “It was so challenging to keep your face completely neutral, while imbuing life and energy into your voice, and manipulating a puppet that required multiple people to work.”

More recently, Doan performed at the Icicle Creek Theatre Festival, in a staged reading of Mia Chung’s play “You for Me for You,” directed by Sheila Daniels. The play focuses on the escape journey of two North Korean sisters. “It was a challenging role emotionally,” says Doan, “and I had to jump from scene to scene (back and forth in time and place) and go from one emotion to another at the drop of a hat.”

Despite these successes, Doan says, “being an actor is not for the faint of heart.” The process of obtaining acting roles is particularly difficult.

“You are always auditioning, and as often as you are cast, you are rejected many times over,” Doan says. “You have to grow a pretty thick skin and learn to value yourself regardless of whether or not you are working in theatre all the time. That’s where family, friends, and others interests can keep you grounded.” Doan acknowledges that casting is often influenced by race. “Being an actor of color adds its own challenges,” she says. “There are fringe theatres in Seattle that focus on multi-ethnic plays, but the big theatres do not have as many roles for people of color.”

Doan finds this especially true for well-known theatrical works. “I would like to play Kim in ‘Miss Saigon’ at least once,” Doan says. “I don’t believe there has ever been a Vietnamese actress who has played Kim in the U.S.”

While Doan plans to expand her experience in both theatre and film, she also hopes that society will become more conducive to the performing arts. “I wish more professional theatres and audience members were willing to take risks on new works alongside the tried and true,” she says. “Some will succeed better than others,” Doan concedes, “but it’s worth the risk to make theatre relevant, current, and exciting. As the economy requires people to tighten their budgets, it’s important to encourage the public and government to continue to invest in the arts, which help us reflect on who we have been, who we are, and where we are going.”

Doan believes theatre is particularly important in this reflective process: “It can inspire us, and open our minds as well as our hearts. The value of creativity is incredibly important to us as individuals and as a society.”

And Doan expects to find lifelong inspiration as an actor. She says, “The feeling you get when you lose yourself in a scene can be electrifying.”