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CAAM KQED

CENTER FOR ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA



Corporation
for Public
Broadcasting

Off the Menu: Asian America

*A film by Grace Lee, co-produced by the Center for Asian American Media and KQED
with support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting*

Coming December 2015 to PBS

Off the Menu: Asian America is an exploration of food in changing communities, families, traditions, and faiths. Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Grace Lee (*American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*), the film will broadcast nationally on PBS this fall. The program is co-produced by the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) and KQED and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

In the one-hour documentary, Lee travels from Houston, Texas to New York's Lower East Side, from Oak Creek, Wisconsin to Oahu, Hawaii seeking stories that reflect an evolving Asian Pacific America and the role food plays in peoples' lives.

"We wanted to find unexpected stories that embodied the Asian American experience," Lee said. "Asian America is already such a vast, complex, and contested idea. Focusing on food was a way to explore the deeper connections of culture, family, and ideas of authenticity and adaptation that link us all."

"KQED is deeply committed to independent films and filmmakers and we are proud to partner with CAAM to highlight the work of such a talented and unique filmmaker like Grace Lee," said Michael Isip, KQED's chief content officer and co-executive producer of the film. "*Off the Menu* brings audiences closer to Asian American culture through something we can all appreciate: food. Grace takes us on a cultural journey with thoughtful observations of how Asian traditions around the preparation, sharing and creation of meals can bring people and communities together."

In Houston, Lee meets two entrepreneurial food pioneers: third-generation Japanese American Glen Gondo of Gondo Co., dubbed "the sushi king of Texas" and Gary Chiu, whose family-run factory, Banyan Foods, has been providing tofu throughout Texas since 1978. Over the decades that their businesses have grown, they have re-defined Asian staples like sushi and tofu into uniquely Asian American dishes that cater to the Texan palate, offering items like sushi rolls with deep fried jalapenos stuffed with cream cheese and spicy crab and Asian Tex-Mex fusion with tofu tamales.

STORIES TO LIGHT

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In New York's Lower East Side, French-trained chef Jonathan Wu and his business partner Wilson Tang open Fung Tu, a modern Chinese restaurant based on family stories and recipes as well as Wu's desire to cook food that was personal to his upbringing. Wu applies classic French techniques to ingredients more familiar to Chinese cooking, resulting in menu items that he says have "an authenticity of spirit."

Just south of Milwaukee, a growing immigrant community at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin participate in langar, a centuries-old practice that shows how the making and sharing of a meal can feed a community spiritually. The temple made headlines in 2012 when a gunman killed six people and wounded many others during a racially motivated shooting spree. Temple members tell the story of how the people who were preparing the meal that morning continue with this tradition, and how langar became an essential part of the healing process for this tight-knit community.

Finally, *Off the Menu* travels to Hawai'i, the only state in the US where Asian Pacific Islanders make up the majority, to explore how native Hawaiians are working to make their food system sustainable. On an island where most food is imported, Hi'ilei Kawelo is dedicated to preserving her family's tradition of fishing for octopus, but it is her commitment to restoring an 800-year-old fishpond that will resurrect a long lost Hawaiian practice. Neglected in the last 100 years, Kawelo's organization has rebuilt an 88-acre pond designed to grow fish for the community.

Across the island, young adults work the land at MA'O Organic Farm, the largest on the island. Cheryse Sana, the farm co-manager, along with other young people working the fields express how they're following in the footsteps of their ancestors who took care of the land, in hopes that the land would take care of and provide for them.

"So many times, people associate food with Asian or Asian American culture. With *Off the Menu*, I hope we can expand the conversation to explore our stories as well," Lee said.

CAAM has created a robust companion website, www.caamedia.org/offthemenue, that delves into these Asian American food stories and beyond, including interviews, essays, articles, recipes, cooking tips, and videos.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

GRACE LEE (Director, Producer)

Grace Lee's credits include directing and producing the documentary *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*, which premiered at the 2013 Los Angeles Film Festival before its broadcast on the PBS series POV. Other projects included documentaries *Makers: Women in Politics* (PBS 2014), *The Grace Lee Project* (2005) and feature film *Janeane from Des Moines*, which premiered at the 2012 Toronto Film Festival. Lee lives in Los Angeles.

EURIE CHUNG (Producer)

As a graduate student at UCLA in Asian American Studies, Eurie Chung produced and directed *Metro es Para Todos: Hee Pok 'Grandma' Kim* and *The Bus Riders Union*, a documentary short profiling an elderly Korean immigrant activist. Other work includes independent documentaries *Jake Shimabukuro: Life on Four Strings* (Dir. Tad Nakamura) and *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* (Dir. Grace Lee) as well as projects for ABC/Disney, Warner Bros., and HGTV.

TINA NGUYEN (Editor)

Tina Nguyen is a documentary editor based in Los Angeles. She worked on the feature documentary *Fed Up*, which premiered at Sundance and was released theatrically in 2014. She edited and co-produced *Seeking Asian Female* (Dir. Debbie Lum), which premiered at SXSW in 2012 and was broadcast by PBS as part of the "Independent Lens" showcase in May 2013. Her additional credits include the feature documentaries *Holy Wars* and *Bilalian*, which won awards while on the festival circuit, and the upcoming films *Breathin': The Eddy Zheng Story* and *Out Run*.

QUYEN TRAN (Director of Photography)

Quyen Tran is an award winning cinematographer based in Los Angeles. Beginning her career as a stills photographer, her work has been published in numerous magazines and newspapers including the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Scientific American*. A graduate of UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television, her films have screened at Telluride, Sundance, Tribeca, Festroia and Toronto. Her most recent short, *Smilf*, won best U.S. Fiction Short at Sundance 2015. *Off the Menu* is her second collaboration with director Grace Lee, first partnering together on *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*.

CEIRI TORJUSSEN (Composer)

Multi-award winning composer Ceiri Torjussen's music was described by the *Los Angeles Times* as "a sudden bolt of creative lightning." Welsh-born but based in Los Angeles, his credits run the gamut of independent films, documentaries, network TV, animation and large-budget studio films. Recent projects include *The Canal*, premiering at Tribeca 2014, and *Big Ass Spider*. He composed additional music for *Repo Man*, *Live Free or Die Hard* and *Underworld Evolution*. An accomplished composer of concert music, he has been commissioned by groups such as the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, The Vale of Glamorgan Festival and the Henry Mancini Institute. His work has been recorded and released commercially and performed worldwide, including the USA, UK, Germany, France and India.

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