

# THE *Lotte Lenya* COMPETITION SONGBOOK

## “The Language Lesson” from *On This Side of the World*

*Music and lyrics by Paulo K Tiról*

*Developed with and originally directed for the stage by Noam Shapiro*

### **SHOW SYNOPSIS**

Stories of overseas workers, young lovers, and gossipy church ladies. Snapshots of undocumented immigrants, millennial princesses, and first-generation Americans. In *On This Side of the World*, six actors give voice to Filipino immigrants navigating old lives and new beginnings, as a one-way ticket sends them on a journey eight thousand miles from home.

### **SONG CONTEXT & SCENE DESCRIPTION**

“The Language Lesson” is inspired by “*kilig*”, a word in Filipino (Tagalog) for the experience of being in love — a word so loaded with meaning and emotion that it has no direct English translation. The song is sung by Jenny, an immigrant who has developed feelings for her E.S.L. teacher. The narrative unfolds as an inner monologue during an E.S.L. class, as Jenny gathers up the courage to admit that she is in love with the teacher.

### **CHARACTER DESCRIPTION**

Jenny is a recent immigrant from the Philippines to the U.S. She can be anywhere from 19 to 32 years old. She has been interpreted in several ways: a sweet and naive ingénue, an awkward international student, an earnest young lady, “one of the boys”. However Jenny is depicted, what’s important is that she is someone in love, is itching to profess her feelings but afraid of how it will turn out, and uses the song to summon up the courage to do so.

### **NOTES ON PERFORMANCE**

The song is suited to a contemporary mezzo with a high belt, but who is also able to produce a sweet, vulnerable sound. The singer’s ability to navigate and execute the beats and shifts in detailed text is paramount. This includes the huge shift from the awkward, jittery, word-vomit-y A-sections, to the wave of emotions unleashed in the belt-y B-section. But it also shifts from line to line, with Jenny rushing forward one moment and then retreating the next, shuttling between determination and defensiveness — until at the very end of the song she arrives at a moment of sweet vulnerability. How does Jenny’s teacher react to her question at the very end? Actors’ portrayals of that final non-verbal moment — of Jenny’s reaction to her unseen companion’s reaction — have always been a subtle, delightful button to the song.