

Show's leading lady arrives

She's blown into town from a steamy Las Vegas summer, but American actress Melinda Chua already loves winter in Palmerston North.

"I'm just kind of wide-eyed about everything. It's a little bit quiet compared to Las Vegas or Chicago, but I'm the kind of person who likes a smaller city - it's not quite as overwhelming," the star said yesterday.

"I'm like - 'I'm on Broadway again!' it's exciting, I like it." Ms Chua is in town to rehearse for her lead role as Kim in *Miss Saigon* at the Regent on Broadway next month.

Set in 1975 in the days before Saigon's fall to Communist forces at the end of the Vietnam War, *Miss Saigon* is the epic love story between American GI Chris and a young Vietnamese woman, Kim.

The American songstress has played Kim thousands of times, on stage at the glitzy Broadway Theatre on Broadway in New York and around the world.

Yesterday, a smiling Ms Chua was bubbling with excitement at the thought of living in Palmerston North for the next five weeks.

"I've always wanted to come to New Zealand, it just looked so beautiful and pristine - you just don't see things like that in the United States."

Ms Chua, who is Phillipino and Chinese, began singing at a young age and always dreamed of playing Kim in *Miss Saigon*.

"This show is very special to me, I kind of grew up doing it, I admire her [Kim's] strength so much and never get tired of playing it.

"I'm a romantic so I love love stories, and it's a tragedy as well you know ... she's so young, but she's been through so much, and will go to any lengths for her child."

She has no doubts at the strength of the Palmerston North cast, saying her first rehearsal with co-star Bradford Meurk was a success.

"It was great - he's new to the show so he's still learning it, but he has a wonderful voice and the



Excited: Miss Saigon star, American actress Melinda Chua, has been playing the lead role of Kim around the world for seven years and will take to the Regent on Broadway stage in August.

Photo: WARWICK SMITH

chemistry will come from there. Production manager Allan Nagy said there wasn't a dry eye in the

house when Chua and Meurk sang the duet last night. "When most of the directorial team is in tears, you

know you've got a good thing." ■ Miss Saigon will be on stage in Palmerston North from August 14 - 29.