



HEARTBEAT OPERA

THE EXTINCTIONIST

A NEW ONE-ACT OPERA IN DEVELOPMENT

SEMI-STAGED PRESENTATIONS

SATURDAY, MAY 29, 7:30 PM

SUNDAY, MAY 30, 3:00 PM

TEAM

Music by Daniel Schlosberg

Libretto by Amanda Quaid, based on her play

Directed, Conceived, and Developed by Louisa Proske

Music Directed by Jacob Ashworth

CAST

WOMAN - Kelly Griffin

MAN - Benjamin Dickerson

FRIEND - Claire Leyden

DOCTOR - Matthew Gamble

MEDITATION TEACHER - Louisa Proske

BAND

VIOLIN/CONDUCTOR - Jacob Ashworth

GUITARS - Thomas Flippin

PERCUSSION - Caitlin Cawley

PIANO - Daniel Schlosberg

NOTES FROM THE CREATORS

Welcome, friends: We are HERE. What a simple thing to say. How we've longed to say it over the past fifteen months.

Looking back at the last year, the course of our first opera commission, *The Extinctionist*, embodies the planning, pivoting, and re-planning that was and is the fate of all arts organizations during the pandemic. Initially an independent project by Daniel, Amanda and Louisa, Heartbeat Opera officially commissioned the piece in the spring of 2020, finding poignant resonance in the Woman's lonely struggle with a global problem.

Our first idea was to refashion the story into a video opera. But as we employed Zoom for Heartbeat's online projects, we realized that Dan's musical ambition would be ill-served by remote rehearsal. Our next idea was a hybrid, in-person/ Zoom production: performed for an audience in NYC with an intricate video system streaming to



viewers at home. But by the end of 2020, the unthinkable morphed into policy: indoor spaces in New York would remain closed indefinitely.

Then our “angel” Elena Siyanko suggested we think about a residency at PS21, with its open-air theater and socially distanced performance model. We realized that we needed to understand this complex new opera better before thinking about a full production. Most of all, we needed, after a year of online creation, to be together, to feel the inbreathing of the lead player, the vibrations of a singer’s voice in our bones, the magic of failing and succeeding together that is rehearsal.

As we work on this piece, we realize it is not preaching “absolute” truths about climate change. It is full of sticky ambiguity; it invites debate, encourages critical questioning, even fervent disagreement, with the fallible and all-too-human heroine. The music and the words take us inside one woman’s attempt to define herself and her choices in a rapidly shifting world. The central relationship of this story, we’ve discovered, is between the Woman and you. We need the audience to complete this piece: How do you answer its central ethical question?

We are beyond grateful to Elena, Kelly, Oleg, Tristan, and the board of PS21 for inviting us into this sanctuary and giving us space to make opera *together*. Our offering to you, the audience here us *and* the audience at home, is this opera-in-progress. Teach us about it. We are here. Together. WE ARE HERE.

With love,

Louisa Proske, Ethan Heard, and Annie Middleton

Co-Artistic Directors and Managing Director of Heartbeat Opera

Daniel Schlosberg, Composer

For me, opera is the most liberating form of theatrical storytelling, since it can encompass every possible means of musical expression. Through the characters that Amanda has so skillfully crafted, I’m afforded the great privilege of revealing humanity through music, in all its beauty, ugliness, and fallibility. At the center of *The Extinctionist* is the Woman, who desperately tries to control her own decisions and a musical landscape that swings ceaselessly from one extreme to another—from unabashedly romantic, heart-wrenching melodies to gnarly avant-garde figurations, to bits of heavy metal, free jazz, and even Muzak. The piece is tied together by the musical motif of the “heartbeat,” two repeated notes in a short-long rhythm, which is heard at the opening of the opera and continues until the very last notes. The four-person band is as much a part of the drama as the singers, serving as a mirror for the four characters and occasionally



externalizing their inner desires and fears—for instance, in the penultimate scene where the band dons vocal microphones to embody the Woman’s nightmare version of a routine medical examination.

Amanda Quaid, Librettist

For all the impact climate change is having on our lives, we see very few stories about it on stage. Yet we need stories to reflect our hopes, fears, and ambivalence. On one level, *The Extinctionist* can be read as a tale of one woman’s spiral into a kind of eco-madness. On another, it is a story about trying to maintain control in the face of overpowering realities—climate change, yes, but also a body that betrays our best-laid plans. We’re all, in our way, searching for solid ground in an ever-shifting landscape.

Jacob Ashworth, Conductor

I’ve been asked, “What is it like to conduct an opera with the composer in the room? How does that change your role as conductor?”

For me, the greatest respect I can show a composer is to trust that all the answers are in the score. For seven years now, I have led Heartbeat Opera through processes of reimagining and reinterpreting each score, looking for new ways to get to the heart of Puccini, Purcell, Mozart, and Verdi. For this project, I get to treat a new score like a classic, and part of the joy is interpreting Dan’s score in his presence. The first day here, I said, Let’s not wait for Dan to tell us how to play his music. He spent a year doing that, and he gave us this score. It’s ours now. Let’s show him what he made. And if we are thoughtful and imaginative enough, we’ll be right.

PROGRAM

A young couple is trying to have a baby. Ice caps are melting. Brooklyn will soon be under water. Upcycling is the new recycling. The Woman wonders: What if the only way to protect her future daughter was to not have her? What if she could save the planet from unspeakable future destruction by sterilizing herself ... by becoming the very first “Extinctionist”? In this dark comedy, a woman’s body becomes the battlefield of our political anguish, conflicting desires, and individual responsibility.

Scored for four singers and four multi-instrumentalist players. Schlosberg’s music follows Quaid’s tightly-drawn libretto, from contemporary small talk to roiling dreamscape, its acute style encompassing witty gesture, expressionist stichomythia, and full-on dramatic pathos in the tradition of opera’s great mad scenes.



Director Louisa Proske gives dramatic shape to the work's frightening central question: whether to bring children into a world threatened with environmental apocalypse.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Composer, Piano | Daniel Schlosberg's work has been described as "richly detailed yet delicate" by the New York Times. His recent projects include the release of *A Demonstration* on New Amsterdam Records, *Canal Songs* for the Albany Symphony's Erie Canal bicentennial, a fantasy on *Twin Peaks* for the Dover Quartet, and music for Jeremy O'Harris's *A Boy's Company Presents*. Last spring, Daniel was the pianist for Steven Spielberg's upcoming film *West Side Story*. He has received the Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and two ASCAP Morton Gould Awards. www.danschlosberg.com

Librettist | Amanda Quaid adapts her play *The Extinctionist* to her original libretto. Her other plays include *The Clam*, a winner of the James Stevenson Prize; *Circumstances Affecting the Heat of the Sun's Rays*, an EST/Sloan Commission; and *Echo and Narcissus* for the Red Bull Short New Play Festival. Beyond her role as playwright, Amanda is also a nonfiction writer and filmmaker. *Toys*, a short film she adapted, directed and hand-animated, won a Lunafest prize and best animation award at DC Shorts. www.amandaquaid.com



Direction & Conception | Louisa Proske, Founding Co-Artistic Director of Heartbeat Opera and designated Associate Artistic Director and Resident Director at Oper Halle, Germany (Fall 2021), where she worked on *Rigoletto*. At home in opera, classical theater, and contemporary drama, her Heartbeat Opera productions include *Der Freischütz*, *Don Giovanni*, *Carmen*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Daphnis & Chloé*. She received a 2018 Princess Grace Award and was recently featured in Opernwelt. www.louisaproske.com.



Music Director, Violin & Conductor | Jacob Ashworth:

Co-Music Director of Heartbeat Opera, Jacob is the Artistic Director of Heartbeat's sister company Cantata Profana, which won the 2016 CMA/ASCAP National Award for Adventurous Programming. He has been called a "lithe and nimble" baroque violinist (New York Times), and has gained a reputation as a consummate stylist and curator of music from early baroque to contemporary. www.jacobashworth.com



WOMAN | Soprano | Kelly Griffin

demonstrates the range of her versatile soprano on operatic and concert stages, as well as on-screen. She appeared as Leonore in Heartbeat Opera's *Fidelio* and on the group's innovative visual album, *Breathing Free*. Her emotional color has enlivened the roles of Leonora in *La Forza del Destino*, Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, the title role of *Aida*, Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly*, and the title role of *Tosca*, among many others. A prominent concert performer, Kelly has

been heard with symphonies across the United States, including Miami Symphony Orchestra and Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra. www.kellygriffinsoprano.com

MAN | Baritone | Benjamin Dickerson has sung in *The Grapes of Wrath* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, taken the role of the Wigmaker in *Ariadne auf Naxos* and performed Schaunard in *La Bohème* at Florida Grand Opera. In 2015 Benjamin completed a national recital tour as the winner of the Marilyn Horne Competition, and is currently a resident artist at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia. He has recently been seen in recital on the stages of Carnegie Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, the Caramoor Center for the Performing Arts, the Jerome L. Greene Space, and Music Academy of the West.



www.benjamindickersonbaritone.com



FRIEND | Soprano | Claire Leyden is a New York-based actor and singer hailed by Opera News as a “star” whose “lyric soprano is a major instrument.” Recent performances include Heartbeat Opera’s *Der Freischütz*, the role of Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance*, and the title role in *Madeleine*. About her role as Madeleine, Operetta Research Center wrote, “Leyden brought splendid conviction to the part of the lonely and increasingly angry heroine, in addition to lustrous vocal sheen.” Claire received the Emerging Talent Award in the 2018 Lotte Lenya Competition. The diversity of her recent performances speaks to her love of, and versatility in, “crossover” repertoire. www.claireleyden.com

DOCTOR | Baritone | Matthew Gamble has established himself as an artist of rare versatility in roles as diverse as the “wildly amusing, deeply sympathetic Leporello” in Heartbeat Opera’s *Don Giovanni*, the “foppishly entertaining Signor Fontana” in *Falstaff*, and the Undertaker in *Porgy and Bess*. He recently completed an extended collaboration as Principal Soloist (2014–2019) with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in the development of two new works: *Analogy/Lance* and *A Letter to My Nephew*, which has led to countless performances throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.



www.mathewgamblebaritone.com



Percussion | Caitlin Cawley is a percussionist, improviser, composer, and educator based in Brooklyn, NY. She is interested in the ability of live performance to engender empathy and facilitate authentic contact between human beings. She has played, sung, danced, and yelled in concert halls, garages, bars, living rooms, kitchens, forests, art galleries, and rooftops using megaphones, triangles, gongs, drums, balloons, and lamps—with newts, birds, Talujon, Cantata Profana, Heartbeat Opera, Novus NY, and others. She teaches with Bash

The Trash, Midori & Friends, and at The Spence School.

www.caitlincawley.me



Guitars | Thomas Flippin is an original and versatile voice in the world of contemporary music, a guitarist who advocates for the creation of new works and equality in classical music. His recent album, *Night Triptych*, features original works entirely by women composers and has been described as "astounding" for its "sheer musicality" and a "goldmine of ideas and feelings" (*Stereophile*). Flippin has performed at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center and frequently collaborates with Porgy and Bess national tour star Alicia Hall Moran, MacArthur Fellow Jason Moran, and members of the American Repertory Theater production *The Black Clown*.
www.thomasflippin.com



HEARTBEAT OPERA

Ethan Heard and Louisa Proske founded Heartbeat Opera in 2014, after they graduated from Yale School of Drama's directing program, to create radical adaptations of classic operas in intimate spaces for 21st century audiences. "One of the most agile and dynamic companies on New York's indie opera scene" (*Opera News*), Heartbeat has already established itself as a highly-respected, innovative force in the opera world.

In its first seven seasons, Heartbeat has presented twelve fully-realized productions, often featuring new chamber arrangements and English translations. Heartbeat adaptations, which can be seen as world premieres of classics, speak to the moment, here and now. *Fidelio* featured a primarily-Black cast and more than 100 incarcerated singers from six prison choirs. *Carmen* was set on the U.S./Mexico border and featured accordion, electric guitar, and saxophone. Last spring, Heartbeat took *Lady M*, its adaptation of Verdi's *Macbeth*, online and sold out 32 Virtual Soirées, reaching 740 households across 5 continents. Heartbeat has taken its productions to the Kennedy Center, BAM, and Chamber Music North West in Portland, Oregon. It staged the first-ever opera performance on The High Line and has mounted its immensely popular, interdisciplinary Halloween Drag Extravaganza each year since its founding, in cutting-edge venues such as National Sawdust and Roulette.

Heartbeat has been hailed across the national and international press: "Bracing—icy vodka shots of opera instead of ladles of cream sauce" (*New York Times*), "elegant and boisterous" (*New Yorker*), "fascinating and gorgeous" (*Observer*), "ingenious" (*Wall*



Street Journal), "gripping and entertaining" (*Opernwelt*), "a flatout triumph" (*Opera News*).

Heartbeat has collaborated with organizations such as Atlas DIY and A BroaderWay to bring opera education to young people in NYC. It is represented by the world class artist agency Opus 3 Artists.

TEAM

Composer | **Daniel Schlosberg**
Librettist | **Amanda Quaid**
Direction & Conception | **Louisa Proske**
Music Director | **Jacob Ashworth**
Company Manager | **Dustin Z West**
Recording Engineer | **Noriko Okabe**
Filmmaker | **Jonathan Burklund**
Live Stream Director | **Monk Schane-Lydon**
Supertitles Creator | **Nicholas Betson**
Supertitles Operator | **Tristan Geary**
Technical Consultant | **Max Silverman**

HEARTBEAT OPERA STAFF

Co-Artistic Director & Producer | **Ethan Heard**
Co-Artistic Director | **Louisa Proske**
Co-Music Director | **Jacob Ashworth**
Co-Music Director | **Daniel Schlosberg**
Managing Director | **Annie Middleton**
Associate Producer | **Penny Pun**
Music Assistant | **Mona Seyed-Bolorforosh**

FOLLOW HEARTBEAT

Facebook: Heartbeat Opera
Twitter: HeartbeatOpera
Instagram: @heartbeat_opera

This project is made possible with generous support by Sonja Berggren and Patrick Seaver.

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.





UPCOMING AT PS21

The Escher Quartet

June 8, 8:00 pm
Bartok & Sibelius

The Dark Master

June 17–20

Using Virtual Reality (VR) headsets and live on-stage cooking, **The Dark Master** transforms viewers into the play's protagonist—an unassuming patron of a Japanese diner. Things take an ominous turn when the owner, called the “Master,” persuades him—and you—to run the place.

Paul Taylor Dance Company

Friday & Saturday, July 2 & 3, 8:00 pm

Saturday, August 7, 8:00 pm

The Paul Taylor Dance Company will be in residence for three weeks, (June 21–July 4; August 1–8), rehearsing and performing *Aureole*, *Company B*, and *Esplanade*, three of Paul Taylor's most beloved masterworks, as well as a new staging of Kurt Jooss's *The Green Table*.

Chamber Music: *House Blend* series

Monday, July 5, 8:00 pm

Shapey: Evocation No. 1 for Violin with Percussion and Piano; **Layton:** Five Studies for Violin and Piano; **Donatoni:** Mari; **Sandford:** 22 Part 1 for cello and piano; **Kancheli:** Nach dem Weinen (Having Wept). *With Miranda Cuckson, Matt Haimovitz, Matthew Gold, and Geoffrey Burlison*

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra with Caleb Teicher & Company

Saturday July 24, 8:30 pm

Pan

Friday, July 16, 7:00 pm

The second production of Modern Opera Fest, *Pan* features visionary flute soloist Claire Chase and an all-ages ensemble of local residents as the chorus, who deliver a lament to the demigod Pan and play handheld instruments, including ocarinas, triangles, and bamboo chimes.

PS21 Chatham/Pathways 2021: *Blazing Trails to a Sustainable Future*

May 13–October 31

Our summer series of spectacle, performance, and community participation for all ages: circus arts, theater and dance, Storywalks and Ecology Walks, Wooster Group Summer Institute's Theater intensive, and Movement Without Borders.



ABOUT PS21

Nestled in an old apple orchard on a pristine 100-acre site of which only 5 acres are developed, PS21 is committed to presenting innovative performances by leading and emerging artists in our state-of-the-art black box and open-air pavilion theaters. While fostering creativity through residencies and encouraging collaborations between performers working across disciplines and genres, PS21 also serves the community via free and low-cost workshops, performances, and other programming. We work to preserve our open spaces, meadows, woodlands, and orchards. essential resources for artists and the community and to extend opportunities for arts engagement to all, regardless of age, economic status, or cultural background.

PS21's New Pavilion Theater

Completed in 2018, the theater is a 350-seat open-air proscenium stage protected by a pavilion roof that converts in cooler months to a geothermally-heated and air-conditioned black box theater seating 99. The new facility is built with technologically advanced systems that can accommodate all levels of artistic needs—from our extensive system of sprung dance floors critical to movement-based performance, to our state-of-the-art lighting and sound capacities. The theater features one of the only fully LED green theatrical lighting systems in the country.

Residencies

PS21 invites residencies of 2 to 5 weeks for performing artists and creators in interdisciplinary arts, including contemporary circus, dance, theater, music theater, and concerts. Resident artists are integral to helping us realize our future and connecting us with the broader national and international arts landscape.

Residencies offer artists the tools and flexibility to innovate and collaborate on sophisticated new multi-media work. Besides the theater, the PS21 campus includes two artists' residences for 16 and the Dance Barn, a second rehearsal and performance space, and Trails, meadows, and woodlands for site-specific events. Few US facilities offer comparable technical and material amenities.

PS21 Staff:

Elena V. Siyanko, Executive & Artistic Director

Kelly Mackerer, Operations Director

Douglas Hamilton, Director of Individual Giving

Tristan Geary, Production Associate

Haley Bader, Marketing Associate

Oleg Balitskiy, Technical Manager

Delia Ernst, Electrician

Connor Martin, Audio Engineer

Liz Connell, Stagehand

Elizabeth Legere, Community Engagement