

Temple University Opera Theater Presents



Libretto by Stephen Karam

Music Director and Conductor
Danielle Jagelski

Stage Director
Brandon McShaffrey

Scenic Design
Fred Duer

Costume Design
Rebecca Kanach

Lighting and Projection Design
Jason Norris

Friday, November 4, 2022 • 7:00PM
Sunday, November 6, 2022 • 3:00PM
Tuesday, November 8, 2022 • 7:00PM

Tomlinson Theater | 1301 W. Norris St. | Philadelphia, PA 19122

Dark Sisters by Nico Muhly presented under license from G. Schirmer Inc. and
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Run time: 2 hours, including a 15 minute intermission

This production is sponsored in part by The Temple University General Activities Fund.

Fifty-eighth, fifty-ninth, and sixty-ninth performances of the 2022-2023 season.

Cast

Eliza	Kristen Marie Gillis Jessica Santino (cover)
Presendia	Valentina Sierra Olivia Quinn (cover)
Ruth.....	Serafina Belletini McKenna Brunson (cover)
Zina	Carleen Baron Chloe Lucente (cover)
Almera.....	Taylor Rawlings Kelly Monteith (cover)
Lucinda	Wonyoung Seo Marlena St. Jean (cover)
Prophet / King.....	Kyle Chastulik Adam Rodgers (cover)

Offstage Chorus

McKenna Brunson, Chloe Lucente, Kelly Monteith, Olivia Quinn,
Adam Rodgers, Jessica Santino

Music Staff

Christopher Turbessi (Principal Coach)
Kendra Bigley (Offstage Conductor/Coach)
Andrew Samlal (Assistant Conductor/Coach)
Lily Carmichael (Assistant Conductor)

Orchestra

VIOLIN I

Samuel Allen-Chapkovski

FLUTE/PICCOLO

Samantha Humen

VIOLIN II

Taisiya Losmakova

OBOE/ENGLISH HORN

Amanda Rearden

VIOLA

Andrew Stump

CLARINET/BASS CLARINET

Tian Qin

CELLO

Samuel Divirgilio

HORN

Natalie Haynes

DOUBLE BASS

Maggie Cox

TROMBONE

Carynn O'Banion

HARP

Katherine Ventura

PERCUSSION

Milo Paperman

PIANO/CELESTE

Andrew Samlal

Land Acknowledgement

“The land upon which we gather is part of the traditional territory of the Lenni-Lenape, called “Lenapehoking.” The Lenape People lived in harmony with one another upon this territory for thousands of years. During the colonial era and early federal period, many were removed west and north, but some also remain among the continuing historical tribal communities of the region: The Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation; the Ramapough Lenape Nation; and the Powhatan Renape Nation, The Nanticoke of Millsboro Delaware, and the Lenape of Cheswold Delaware. We acknowledge the Lenni-Lenape as the original people of this land and their continuing relationship with their territory. In our acknowledgment of the continued presence of Lenape people in their homeland, we affirm the aspiration of the great Lenape Chief Tamanend, that there be harmony between the indigenous people of this land and the descendants of the immigrants to this land, “as long as the rivers and creeks flow, and the sun, moon, and stars shine.”

Content Warning

This opera contains scenes involving physical and emotional abuse, physical violence, religious extremism and suicide.

Temple University On-Campus Resources

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Synopsis

Act 1

A lunar eclipse. Against the severe landscape – red earth, sharp cliffs and endless sky – that surrounds a polygamist compound in the American Southwest, five mothers cry out in despair. State officials have just raided their homes and removed all of their children, under the suspicion that minors are being abused and forced to marry by members of the sect.

The husband of the five women, a professed **Prophet** of God, discloses that he has received a Revelation. He must journey into the desert, where he will receive guidance: holy words that will ensure the return of the children. The Prophet instructs his wives to “keep sweet” while he is away, explaining that total obedience is necessary to ensure their salvation and the safe return of their children.

Eliza has visions of her only daughter, **Lucinda**. This vision triggers a memory: the day of her wedding. She was 15, afraid, an unwilling bride. Eliza does not want her daughter to suffer the same fate but can’t imagine how they could ever leave this life. She has no friends or knowledge of the outside world. She has no way of making or affording a place to live.

As night slowly turns to day, Eliza passes the time with her other sister wives. **Almera** is haunted by dreams of her mother and grandmother, while Ruth is tormented by mental illness and the memory of her two sons: one drowned in a tragic accident, the other died of cancer. **Presendia** and **Zina** work diligently to pass the time, longing for their husband’s return, and to maintain order and power in the household.

Eliza discovers a letter voicing Lucinda’s concerns about being promised to a man so much older, almost 60. Eliza is shocked to learn that her daughter would be eternally promised so soon. She resolves to leave life at the compound and hatches a plan to escape. The Prophet returns, and Eliza convinces him to spend the night with her. She needs his full trust so that she can travel with him the next day and enact a plan to share her own message with the world. Alone and forgotten in their bedrooms, the other women seethe with jealousy, sadness and longing.

Act 2

Split scene: the women sit in front of a TV camera in their large meeting room, while in Los Angeles a TV personality, **King**, interviews the women via satellite. The women are careful to stay on message. Afraid and distraught by the onslaught of all the attention, Ruth suffers a breakdown during the interview. The women, paralyzed with fear and the intrusion of the media, continue with the show.

Eliza, nervous she may not have the courage to speak out, suddenly explodes with the announcement that she was, indeed, married underage. She also seizes the opportunity to speak to her daughter – she looks directly into the camera and begs Lucinda to have faith, and to know that she, Eliza, has received her own divine message: “Say goodbye to men who encourage silent suffering – only a false Prophet

would ask such things of you. Don't be afraid of what lies beyond the sharp cliffs, the red earth – blaze a trail beyond the canyons, past the forests and gorges. This is my hope for you, Sisters of Zion! Hope and pray! I promise you; kind hearts beat for all of us in the outside world!” Chaos ensues. Eliza's sisterwives cannot believe she would betray them.

Later that night, Ruth sits atop the mesa near the compound, under a starlit sky. She has been hiking all day. Praying for relief from her pain, and longing to be with her two children in heaven, she jumps off the cliff to her death.

Back at the compound, a few days later: Ruth's funeral. The children have been returned to the ranch. Eliza arrives at the gate of the compound and is shunned by the other women. Lucinda approaches her mother, furious – she is sickened that Eliza has lost her faith and will not gain eternal salvation. She would have preferred Eliza's death to the course she is taking. Lucinda has no desire to leave the compound.

Eliza, watching Lucinda join the other women, realizes she cannot force her daughter to leave. She hopes she will see her daughter again, and pledges that she will always be waiting for her and will always love her. Heartbroken, she walks away from the compound and into the unknown.

A note from the composer

When Stephen Karam and I set out to write *Dark Sisters*, the FLDS (The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) had been all over the news. The sect – which split from mainstream Mormonism in the early 1900's – is very media savvy, despite the visibly anachronistic way its women speak and dress, and after a government raid on a Texas ranch in 2008 in which just under five hundred children were removed from the compound after an anonymous accusation of child abuse, mourning mothers popped up on cable news, telling not just their individual stories, but the story of how their religion came to be. Stephen and I investigated deeper and found, in addition to the popular and fascinating “I escaped a cult”-style memoirs, a long tradition of diary-keeping among women living in polygamy, stretching all the way back to Emma Smith, the first wife of Joseph Smith, who would have been 28 when her husband began marrying other women in secret.

What emerged from months of research was a complicated tapestry of relationships about – but never focused on – women. The willpower of the patriarch permeates everything, despite the population demographics (polygamy, practically, requires that there be many more women than men). The women's stories mirror the narrative of the American expansion westward and all of the political and emotional worries surrounding an adolescent nation.

The debates about polygamy stretch back to the origins of all three Abrahamic religions – Sarah allowed Abraham to take her servant, Hagar, as a sanctioned mistress (a wife, in the Islamic tradition). Arguments against gay marriage in modern America often use polygamy as an inevitable endpoint at the bottom of the slippery

slope. All of these arguments are still playing out in the newspapers and on TV: who determines how a family is composed? Should individual states have different definitions of marriage? What is the role of the federal government in any of this?

Stephen constructed a story around a family of women, all in a complicated dance with a single man and with one another. Two of the women — Eliza and Ruth — are in crisis, and each tries to escape the situation in her own way. The other women establish emotional and practical coping strategies — brave and tragic and submissive and aggressive and subtle and pointed.

I wanted to give each woman her own musical world within a more homogenous choral texture; many times, the women sing in a traditional ensemble way, and other times, they repeat small fragments of text in their own time — little mantras to keep the household together. Almera, the true believer, sings in a radiant, descant-like way; Ruth, wracked with grief, sings in a kind of broken folksong, whereas Lucinda, a teenage girl, sings actual hymn tunes which transform into an adult severity at the end of Act II. The orchestra represents, at times, the wonderfully severe landscape in southern Utah — sharp cliffs, a pervasive red dust, and the night sky.

Nico Muhly

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Mitten Hall, 3rd Floor Auditorium
1913 N Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122



For further information or to confirm events, please call 215.204.7609
or visit boyer.temple.edu.

Nico Muhly, born in 1981, is an American composer who writes orchestral music, works for the stage, chamber music and sacred music. He's received commissions from The Metropolitan Opera: *Two Boys* (2011), and *Marnie* (2018); Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Tallis Scholars, and King's College, Cambridge, among others. He is a collaborative partner at the San Francisco Symphony and has been featured at the Barbican and the Philharmonie de Paris as composer, performer, and curator. An avid collaborator, he has worked with choreographers Benjamin Millepied at the Paris Opéra Ballet, Bobbi Jene Smith at the Juilliard School, Justin Peck and Kyle Abraham at New York City Ballet; artists Sufjan Stevens, The National, Teitur, Anohni, James Blake and Paul Simon. His work for film includes scores for *The Reader* (2008) and *Kill Your Darlings* (2013), and the BBC adaptation of *Howards End* (2017). Recordings of his works have been released by Decca and Nonesuch, and he is part of the artist-run record label Bedroom Community, which released his first two albums, *Speaks Volumes* (2006) and *Mothertongue* (2008).

Stephen Karam is the Tony Award-winning author of *The Humans*, *Sons of the Prophet* and *Speech & Debate*. For his work he's received two Drama Critics Circle Awards, an OBIE Award and is a two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist. Stephen recently directed his first feature film, a rethought version of *The Humans* for A24 films, to be released in 2021. He wrote a film adaptation of Chekhov's *The Seagull* starring Annette Bening, which was released by Sony Picture Classics. His adaptation of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* premiered on Broadway as part of Roundabout's 2016 season. Recent honors include the inaugural Horton Foote Playwriting Award, the inaugural Sam Norkin Drama Desk Award, two Outer Critics Circle Awards, a Lucille Lortel Award, Drama League Award, and Hull-Warriner Award. Stephen teaches graduate playwriting at The New School. He is a graduate of Brown University and grew up in Scranton, PA.

Danielle Jagelski is a conductor and composer based in New York City. At home in both operatic and orchestral realms, she is the Music Director of Renegade Opera, interim conductor of Norwalk Youth Symphony, and mentor for Girls Who Conduct. Recent engagements include *Garden of Alice* by Elizabeth Raum with City Lyric Opera (NYC), *La clemenza di Tito* at Renegade Opera, assistant conductor for *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Estates Theater (Prague, CZ), and Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Portland, OR). Sought out for her execution of newly written and contemporary works, upcoming performances include *Dark Sisters* by Nico Muhly at Temple University Opera Theater, *Adam's Run* by Ruby Fulton, and guest conductor at National Music & Global Culture Society. Past engagements include working with ensembles such as the Stanford Symphony Orchestra, Rhymes with Opera, Manhattan School of Music Orchestra, Norwalk Youth Symphony, Minnesota Chorale, MOTUS vocal ensemble, and University of Idaho Symphony. A member of the Oneida Nation, Danielle is a fierce advocate for equity in musical spaces and has presented her research in mixed-race studies and classical music throughout the US and Canada.

Brandon McShaffrey has been teaching at Temple University since 2009 where he is currently the Head of Opera Production at Temple University. With TU Opera Theater he has directed *Le nozze di Figaro* (Mozart), *Turn of the Screw* (Britten), *L'elisir d'amore* (Donizetti), *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (Monteverdi), *Der schauspieldirektor* (Mozart), *La Canterina* (Hady), *Trouble in Tahiti* (Bernstein), *Dido and Aeneas* (Purcell), *The Merry Widow* (Lehar), and *Hansel und Gretel* (Humperdink) and has directed and choreographed many plays and musicals in the theater department. He runs both graduate and Undergraduate Opera workshops and produces 6 annual Aria/Scenes program. Professionally he has directed over 20 productions at Maples Repertory Theater. Is an active member of the National Opera Association. He is a founding member and Producing Director of Mauckingbird Theater Company.

Christopher Turbessi is the Opera Coach at the Boyer College of Music and Dance at Temple University; he has also been on the faculty of the Collaborative Piano Institute since its inaugural summer in 2017. Past adventures have included stints as a Lecturer at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University; guest Music Staff at the Wolf Trap Opera Company, Utah Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, and the Castleton Festival; Music Director for productions with the Santa Fe Opera Tour and the Opera Institute at Augusta University; Assistant Conductor at Virginia Opera; and Chorus Master at Virginia Opera and Syracuse Opera. Previously an Assistant Conductor and the Musical Supervisor of HGOco at Houston Grand Opera, he oversaw the musical efforts of that department, including the workshops and world premiere performances of Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players*, Gregory Spears' *O Columbia*, and David Hanlon's *After the Storm*.

Voice and Opera Faculty and Staff

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*Voice and Opera Area Coordinator

Paul Rardin, Chair, Department of Vocal Arts
Brandon McShaffrey, Director of Opera Production
Leslie Cochran, Coordinator, Department of Vocal Arts

Department of Vocal Arts Voice and Opera Graduate Assistants

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McKenna Brunson, Kyle Chastulik, Kristen Marie Gillis,
Reever Jay Gan Juilan, Kareem Mack, Alicia Melendez,
Nicholas Orth, Adam Rodgers, Valentina Sierra
Teaching AssistantsLisa Willson DeNolfo, Michael Scarcelle

Additional Staff for this Production

Music Director	Danielle Jagelski
Stage Director	Brandon McShaffrey
Scenic Designer.....	Fred Duer
Costume Designer.....	Rebecca Kanach
Wig Designer	Amari Callaway
Lighting and Projection Designer	Jason Norris
Fight Director	Ian Rose
Props Head	Amanda Hatch
Center Director of Production	Kyle Amick
Head Electrician	Shon Causer
Sound and Video Engineer	Nick Gackenbach
Costume Shop Manager.....	Jenna Gove
Cutter/Draper/Tailor.....	Kevin Ross
Costume Technician.....	Regan Mulrooney
Costume Production	Rachael Linker, Dinorah Guillen, Becky Wetzel, Vesey Banuel, Brynn Lancelotta, Judajiah Malone, Kerlin Pyun, Charlie Atchinson
Theater Department Graduate Academic Interns.....	Mike Merluzzi, April Thomson, Liam Shaffer, Madelyne Connors, Rachael Linker, Dinorah Guillen, Becky Wetzel
Stage Managers.....	Casey Christine, Cassie Licenzi
Assistant Stage Managers	Victoria Li, Faith DeShields
Music Preparation	Christopher Turbessi
Assistants to the Director	Alicia Alvarez, Yana Vilchynskaya
Assistant Fight Director	Liz Irvine
Assistant Conductors.....	Lily Carmichael, Andrew Samlal
Rehearsal Pianists	Kendra Bigley, Andrew Samlal, Christopher Turbessi
Assistant Technical Director	Shaye Harrer
Assistant Props.....	Kevin Ruehle
Head Carpenter	Andy Frank
Scenic Painters.....	Kimiko Jackson-Valle, Lysia Mogford, Amber Murray, Sarah Schunke
Scenic Charge	Sarah Schunke
Scenic Construction	Phoebe Brown, Chazzlyn Burke, Katie Guzman, Jack Mandish, Mike Merluzzi, Petra Mitchell, Andrew Robinson, Kevin Ruehl, April Thomson, Deirdre Tobin, Alexis Winner, Olivia Yeomans
Run Crew	Connor Graham

Student Head Electrician	Josiah Perez
Electricians	Jesse Burak, Julia Maggio, Alexa Pennington, Peter Smith, Nick Wacksman, Maddy Connors, Liam Shaffer
Light Board Operator	Ashley LaRoche
Spotlight Operators	RJ Duske, Abigail Reno, San Stoffell, Laila Ferguson
Deck Electrician.....	Charlie Lazin
Camera Operator.....	Blake Levinson
Wardrobe Supervisor	Regan Mulrooney
Dressers	Gabriela Comp, Juliet Morgan, Arianna DeVito
Costume Maintenance.....	Autumn Bevins, Matthu Minns, John Fioravanti
Hair and Make-up Crew	Linyae Johnson, Rasheda Sesay, Theo Kontonis
Sound Board Operator.....	Grace Newell
Titles Editor	Alicia Melendez
Supertitle Projection Operators.....	Evan Sleppy, Jacob Schmidek
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Orchestra Librarian.....	Danielle Garrett
Audience Services Coordinator	Matthew Reddin
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Assistant House Managers	Jennifer Garcia, Eun Bi Hahm
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LDS Dramaturgs	McKenna Brunson, Spicer Carr
Opera Social Media Manager.....	Kristen Marie Gillis
Opera PR and Marketing	McKenna Brunson, Reeve Jay Gan Julian
Photography	Joseph Labolito
Live Stream and Recording Engineer	David Pasbrig

Boyer College of Music and Dance

The Boyer College of Music and Dance offers over 500 events open to the public each year. Students have the unique opportunity to interact with leading performers, composers, conductors, educators, choreographers and guest artists while experiencing a challenging and diverse academic curriculum. The Boyer faculty are recognized globally as leaders in their respective fields. Boyer alumni are ambassadors of artistic leadership and perform with major orchestras, opera and dance companies, teach at schools and colleges and work as professional music therapists, choreographers and composers. Boyer's recording label, BCM&D records, has produced more than thirty recordings, five of which have received Grammy nominations.

boyer.temple.edu

The Center for the Performing and Cinematic Arts

The Center for the Performing and Cinematic Arts consists of the Boyer College of Music and Dance, School of Theater, Film and Media Arts, the George and Joy Abbott Center for Musical Theater and the Temple Performing Arts Center. The School of Theater, Film and Media Arts engages gifted students with nationally and internationally recognized faculty scholars and professionals. A hallmark of the School of Theater, Film and Media Arts is the Los Angeles Study Away program, housed at historic Raleigh Studios. The George and Joy Abbott Center for Musical Theater engages visiting performers, guest artists, set designers, playwrights and other Broadway professionals. The Temple Performing Arts Center (TPAC), a historic landmark on campus, is home to a state-of-the-art 1,200 seat auditorium and 200 seat chapel. More than 500 concerts, classes, lectures and performances take place at TPAC each year.

arts.temple.edu

Temple University

Temple University's history begins in 1884, when a young working man asked Russell Conwell if he could tutor him at night. It wasn't long before he was teaching several dozen students—working people who could only attend class at night but had a strong desire to make something of themselves. Conwell recruited volunteer faculty to participate in the burgeoning night school, and in 1888 he received a charter of incorporation for “The Temple College.” His founding vision for the school was to provide superior educational opportunities for academically talented and highly motivated students, regardless of their backgrounds or means. The fledgling college continued to grow, adding programs and students throughout the following decades. Today, Temple's more than 35,000 students continue to follow the university's official motto—*Perseverantia Vincit*, or “Perseverance Conquers”—with their supreme dedication to excellence in academics, research, athletics, the arts and more.

temple.edu

Temple University Opera Theater Past Productions

Spring 2022	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Fall 2021	<i>Impressions de Pelléas</i>	Claude Debussy / Marius Constant
Spring 2021	<i>Die Fledermaus</i> (Virtual)	Johann Strauss
Fall 2020	<i>The Turn of the Screw</i> (Virtual)	Benjamin Britten
Fall 2019	<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	Gaetano Donizetti
Spring 2019	<i>Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria</i>	Claudio Monteverdi
Fall 2018	<i>Le Pauvre Matelot</i>	Darius Milhaud
	<i>Suor Angelica</i>	Giacomo Puccini
Spring 2018	<i>Così fan tutte</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Fall 2017	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	Henry Purcell
	<i>Trouble in Tahiti</i>	Leonard Bernstein
Spring 2017	<i>Werther</i>	Jules Massenet
Fall 2016	<i>Der Schauspieldirektor</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
	<i>La Canterina</i>	Joseph Haydn
Spring 2016	<i>Lucio Silla</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Fall 2015	<i>The Merry Widow</i>	Franz Lehár
Spring 2015	<i>La Finta Giardiniera</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Fall 2014	<i>Hänsel und Gretel</i>	Engelbert Humperdinck
Spring 2014	<i>Ofreo ed Euridice</i>	Christoph Willibald Gluck
Fall 2013	<i>Albert Herring</i>	Benjamin Britten
Spring 2013	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Giacomo Puccini
	<i>Suor Angelica</i>	Giacomo Puccini

Thank You!

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