

Gymnossema

A DIRGE FROM THE DOG'S TOMB

Wednesday, April 12, 2023, at 7 p.m.
Joyce J. Cammilleri Hall
University of Southern California



Photo: Gabe Ruelas

CAST

Hecuba	GRETCHEN JOHNSON
Polyxena	MARIAH RAE
Kassandra	MOLLY PEASE
Leda	JOANNA WALLFISCH
Agathe	ANGELICA ROWELL
Odysseus	SCOTT GRAFF
Praxis	MARK WILLENBRING
Alexio	KION HEIDARI
Harpist	ALISON BJORKEDAL

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director	NATHAN SINGH
Librettist	MEGAN BREEN
Musical Director and Co-Composer	RICHARD AN
Co-Composer	O-LAN JONES
Choreographer	KRISTIN CONDON
Costume Designer	ANNA POLLNOW
Scenic Designer and Hecuba Sculptor	CHRISTOPHER SLATOFF
Stage Manager	XIMENA MORELLON
Assistant Stage Manager	ANNA MORICZ
Development and Communications Manager (Overtone Industries)	LIZ ELDRIDGE
Managing Director	FAHAD SIADAT
USC Faculty Presenter and Producer	SABINA ZÚÑIGA VARELA

The performance will be followed by a conversation with creators and performers.

This production contains elements of sexual/physical violence and suicide.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

USC Visions and Voices acknowledges that the University of Southern California was built on the sacred and unceded land of the Tongva, Chumash, and Kizh people. We honor them and all indigenous people—past, present, and future—and their continued survival and contributions to our society. We also honor the legacy of the African Diaspora and recognize that this country would not exist without the free, enslaved labor of Black people. We share these acknowledgments to raise awareness about histories that are too often forgotten, to recognize our place in this history, and to affirm our commitment to social change.

A NOTE FROM THE PRODUCER

We thank you for joining us tonight for this special presentation of *Cynossema: A Dirge From The Dog's Tomb*. By The Souls of Our Feet, comprised of four USC School of Dramatic Arts alumni, and award-winning Overtone Industries are honored to share this creation with you as a part of the remarkable Visions and Voices programming at USC.

In 2017, the School of Dramatic Arts MFA program held a celebration of life for MFA alum David Zurak (Class of 2012). After a ritual of mourning and remembrance, a few of us went on a pilgrimage to the brand-new USC Village and encountered the Hecuba statue sculpted by Christopher Slatoff. In the words of our librettist Megan Breen (USC SDA MFA 2010): “David, an exquisite dancer and devoted yoga practitioner, was deeply spiritual, his soul as transcendent as his dancing... We believe David’s spirit led us to the newly erected statue on campus—he wanted us to tell the Queen of Troy’s story of respite from grief via *Cynossema*. We were struck with awe and curiosity by the statue’s regal, maternal, and grounded presence amidst the hustle and bustle of campus life. What was this grieving, captive queen’s story?”

Working with both USC alumni and other L.A. artists, By The Souls of Our Feet and Overtone Industries held creative workshops in 2018 to begin developing *Cynossema*. Artistic director O-Lan Jones composed the primitive music using the mythic and viscerally poetic words from librettist Megan Breen. Choreographer Kristin Condon and fellow theatre maker Nathan Singh and I led the workshop participants in movement-based exercises, and soon the shape of our piece began to present itself. With the support of the Son of Semele Ensemble, we presented the first half of *Cynossema* to sold-out audiences in fall 2018. *Los Angeles Times* Classical Music critic Mark Swed stated in his review, “The beauty of the opera—is finding where the differences lie, what is gray and what is silver, what is and what almost is. Even the title may not be what it seems. *Cynossema* is the dog-shaped harbor where a battle in the Peloponnesian War was fought, and it is said to have been the tomb of Hecuba, who was turned into a dog by the gods. But ‘cynossema’ has also come to be a term of belittlement, the kind a president might employ if tweeting in Greek.”

Now our story comes home to where the seeds were first planted. When we contacted sculptor Christopher Slatoff to investigate if he would be interested in being involved with the project, he didn’t hesitate to express his wish for his public work of art to inspire conversation. Not only that, his granddaughter, Anna Pollnow, who is studying to receive her USC SDA BFA in costume design, came on board to design our costumes, and her mother Elizabeth helped with our scenic design. It’s a family and community affair, intended to explore the themes that the myth evokes with YOU. Thank you for completing the creative circle, and don’t forget to say hello to Hecuba when you find yourself at the USC Village. She may have a message especially for you.

Sabina Zúñiga Varela
USC School of Dramatic Arts

**In Memory of David Zurak (USC SDA MFA Class of 2012)
October 11, 1970—March 9, 2017**

THANK YOU

Overtone Industries and By The Souls of Our Feet would like to extend heartfelt thanks to the following:

USC SCHOOL OF DRAMATIC ARTS

Dean Emily Roxworthy, Crystal Balthrop, Megan Laughlin

USC VISIONS AND VOICES

David Delgado, Marie-Reine Velez, Eve NaRanong, Martin Wong, Daria Yudacufski, Tara McPherson

CYNOSSEMA 2018 WORKSHOP PRESENTATION CAST AND CREW

Camille Cardinale, Liz Eldridge, Lauren Han, Michael Harris, Abe Martell, Livia Reiner, MJ Silva, O-Lan Jones, Michelle Prudente

WESTWOOD UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS AND SUPPORTERS

John McGuinn, Marty and Kathy Breen, Bart Hopkin, Bernard Addison, Kelsey Siepser, Rachel Applebaum, Caitlin Ary, Patty Cornell, Ron Hanks, Natan Fabric, Kate Noonan (Artistic Director of Rachel Rosenthal Company), Matthew McCray (Artistic Director of Son of Semele Ensemble)

ABOUT THE CO-PRODUCERS

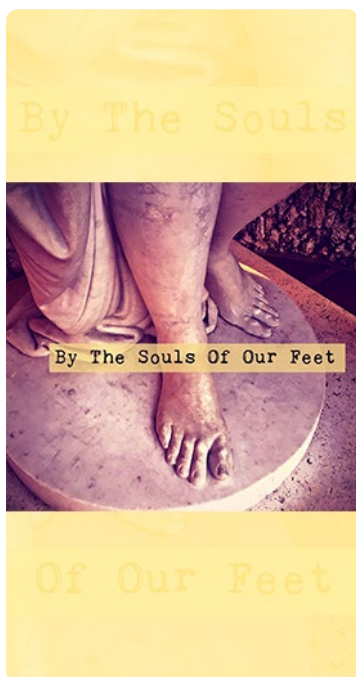
OVERTONE INDUSTRIES



Founded in 1980 by artistic director O-Lan Jones, Overtone Industries brings to life vivid, original stories and myths through new multidisciplinary operas and music theatre. Passionate about live performance and its power to generate transformation as performers and audience participate together in each unfolding moment, the Los Angeles-based company believes artistic expression is an essential part of living that serves as a catalyst for both artists and audience members to understand themselves in a new way. Creating work that brings together a broad demographic of people to experience the joys of being alive, it also stays connected to the community by providing opportunities for participatory art making.

Collaboration is at the heart of their process and each project is given the time and devotion it requires to come to life. Since its first production of *After Stardrive*, Overtone Industries has produced and performed more than eighteen original works across the country at lauded venues such as La Mama and The Met in New York and The Ford theaters in Los Angeles. Overtone Industries has received numerous awards including the Bay Area Critics Circle Award for Original Score, Dramalogue Award for Best Overall Production, Ovation Award for Best Costumes, and two Emmy Awards for best Original Score and Design. In March 2023, Overtone Industries presented *Iceland*, a new music theatre work written and composed by artistic director O-Lan Jones, and Irish singer-songwriter Emmett Tinley, which opened to rave reviews at La Mama.

BY THE SOULS OF OUR FEET



By The Souls of Our Feet was founded by four alumni of the USC School of Dramatic Arts in 2012. Conjuring visceral, poetic theatre, music, dance, and film experiences locally and expansively—even if it's rooted in classic source material—the Los Angeles integrative art company develops only brand-new work and values the power of both epic and intimate approaches to production and space, as well as the educational benefits of navigating through the various levels of a narrative's progress. They believe in confronting the scope of humanity's existential complications and contradictions so the curative powers of mythic storytelling can rousingly incite catharsis for both artists and audiences, the individual and the community, with its most authentic marrow.

Revealing the ceremonial roots and healing power of theatre, By The Souls of Our Feet embraces the fiery spirit that makes great performances stir emotions described by Spanish poet and theatre director Federico García Lorca in a lecture titled *Play and Theory of the Duende*. "The Duende, then, is a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought," explained Garcia Lorca in Buenos Aires in 1933. "I have heard an old maestro of the guitar say, 'The Duende is not in the throat; the Duende climbs up inside you, from the soles of the feet.' Meaning this: It is not a question of ability, but of true, living style, of blood, of the most ancient culture, of spontaneous creation ... everything that has black sounds in it, has Duende."

CREATORS



NATHAN SINGH (DIRECTOR)

Nathan is an educator, facilitator, and artist focused on the intersection of theatre and healing. He has been a stage director for 15 years and his works have included theatre, opera, and site-specific performance. He directed two previous operas for USC Vision and *Voices: America Tropical* in 2010 and *A Shipwreck Opera* in 2013. He also served as an adjunct professor/director at the USC School of Dramatic Arts in 2018, where he directed the new play *Tunnels* and the American classic *When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder?* Nathan co-founded the experimental theatre company *By The Souls Of Our Feet* in 2013 with fellow USC alumni Megan Breen, Kristin Condon, and Sabina Zúñiga Varela, and together they have created the theatrical desert noir *Serpentine Pink* in 2013 and a workshop production of the mythic opera *Cynosemma: A Dirge from the Dog's Tomb* in 2018, both presented at the Son of Semele Theatre. He is also co-founded *MaiM Theatre Company* with USC alum Julie Taiwo Oni, and they produced the new plays *Bunk* and *Sown*, both at the Son of Semele Theatre and, recently, *Bola-Blue Eyes* for Center Theatre Group's digital stage. Other directing credits include readings of the new plays *LA as DNA* and *A Wake* through Center Theatre Group's Community Stories program, a reading of *Spoiled* at East West Players, a workshop presentation of *Everything You Wanted to Know About Chinese People* at Pasadena Playhouse, *Scar Tissue* at Company of Angels (published in *Best American Short Plays of 2010–2011*), and *See What I Wanna See* at Musical Theatre Repertory at USC. His site-specific works include *Day's Pay for Moveable Piece* at the Hollywood Fringe Festival and *Flash Theatre: Go Thy Way with Joy* and *Flash Theatre: A Call To Art* for Playwrights' Arena. Nathan received an MFA in Directing from the Theatre School at DePaul University in Chicago, where he directed the Chicago premiere of *Wig Out!* by Tarell Alvin McCraney. His other favorite directing experiences there include *The Children's Hour*, *Next Fall*, and *The Great God Pan*. As an assistant director, he assisted Seret Scott on a production of the ancient Greek classic *Electra* at the Court Theatre in Chicago. He has also assisted Michael Rohd on *Willful* and Laurie Woolery on *The Tenth Muse* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Nancy Keystone on a civic workshop entitled *Bread: An Experimentation of the Staff of Life* at Cornerstone Theatre Company, and Jon Lawrence Rivera on *Oedipus El Rey* at The Theatre @ Boston Court. Nathan serves as a board member for *Satrang*, a South Asian LGBTQ community organization, and his creative and leadership work there is fueled by his ongoing research in queerness, cultural diasporas, and healing the wounds of generational trauma. Nathan is a proud graduate of the USC School of Dramatic Arts and is a recipient of the 2016 SDCF Sir John Gielgud Fellowship in Directing.



MEGAN BREEN (LIBRETTIST)

Firstly, Megan is thrilled to again be conjuring magic sounds and stories with her fellow *By-the-Soul-of-Our-Feet*'ers and O-Lan Jones' *Overtone Industries!* She received her BFA in Dramaturgy at the Theatre School at DePaul University in Chicago in 2002 and her MFA in Dramatic Writing at the USC School of Dramatic Arts in Los Angeles in 2010. Her thesis play, *My First, My Fist, My Bleeding Seeded Spirit*, a contemporary sequel to Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, was part of the 2010 MFA Playwrights' Workshop at

the Kennedy Center and the National New Play Network's Showcase of New Plays before receiving its world premiere at Miami's New Theatre in November of 2013. Her Cain and Abel story set to the Blues, *The Dirt and Its Harp in Her Mouth*, was produced at OC Centric's 2012 New Play Festival, and made the *OC Examiner's* "Best New Plays of Orange County" list. Her sexy desert noir *Serpentine Pink*, originally commissioned by Cock and Bull Theatre in Chicago, was produced as a part of L.A.'s Son of Semele's Company Creation Festival, and was a finalist for Washington D.C.'s 2015 Source Festival. It had its world premiere at James Madison University in October 2016, and the independent cinematic version of her screenplay adaptation produced by Hard Knock Productions premiered at L.A. Film Fest's Indie Film Showcase last September. It stars the original Los Angeles cast, including two USC SDA MFA Acting alumni, Sabina Zúñiga Varela and Kristin Condon, and the legendary actress, composer, and director O-Lan Jones. Megan wrote the screenplay for Ron Hanks' short film *Dirt Eaters* which premiered at Cannes' 2015 Court Métrage, and her short play *Sexy Popcorn* was selected for and published in *The Best of PlayGround 2015—Los Angeles*. *Lecherous Honey*, Megan's haunted mansion riff of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*, had its world premiere production with Cock and Bull in October 2016. A monologue from her most recent play *Christine*, a feminist response to Russian satirist Nikolai Gogol's *The Nose*, was featured as a part of Cock and Bull's Sessions/Isolation 2020—a virtual festival of works and survival guide for isolation during the pandemic. Her most recent work is an immersive theatre-ritual spell about an Irish succubus, *St. Brigid and the Never Wife*.



KRISTIN D'ANDREA CONDON (CHOREOGRAPHER)

Kristin D'Andrea is an actor, dancer, writer, and choreographer. Originally trained as a classical ballet dancer at Boston Ballet, she went on to explore various genres and dance professionally with California Ballet and many others. As she is often reminded by her cousins, she has been choreographing since she was a child, but her first official presentation was at Boston Ballet. She earned her MFA in Acting at USC, and has performed with many award-winning theatres and theatre companies around the country including Getty Villa, Geffen Playhouse, Jewish Ensemble Theatre, Troubadour Theatre Company, Will & Co, LA Women's Shakespeare Company, and, currently, On The Road Rep in New York City where she now lives. She has narrated over 60 books, hosted for Amazon and Condé Nast, appeared on TV and in film, including *Serpentine Pink*, based on the play version that was written by Megan Breen and premiered in Los Angeles. She has taught movement for over 20 years, and performed as a fitness personality for many top producers including the Emmy-nominated Daily Burn and most recently Bodi. As a producer she wrote and directed at Daily Burn, and produced the stage and film version of *Serpentine Pink*. Her articles on health, wellness, and fitness have been published by 24Life and many others. Her podcast *Women Crush Weekly*, which she produced, wrote, and co-hosted, had guests such as acclaimed author Wayetu Moore, and award-winning actress, writer, and activist DeLanna Studi. Internationally, she was invited to Italy to work at the famed Grotowski Work Center, and had the opportunity to perform with the company throughout that region. As an actress and an artist, Kristin is interested in bringing new works to life that challenge our perceptions of time and space, that delight and MOVE, and ultimately create healing.



O-LAN JONES (CO-COMPOSER)

O-Lan Jones is an award-winning composer, sound designer, writer, and actress who has been involved in experimental theatre, music, and opera since the age of sixteen. Referred to by the press as an “uncategorizable legend,” Jones has created original sound designs and scores for over 50 productions in San Francisco, Los Angeles, London, and New York, in collaboration with Padua Hills Playwrights, LA Woman’s Shakespeare Company, the Taper Too, Playwrights Horizons, and Bay Area Shakespeare Festival, among others. As an actress, she has originated roles in productions and readings of over 100 plays including those of Sam Shepard, Julie Hébert, and Beth Henley. Her screen credits include iconic works such as *Natural Born Killers*, *The Truman Show*, *Seinfeld*, *The X-Files*, *Shameless*, and three of Tim Burton’s films including *Edward Scissorhands*. Since 2015, Jones has been working with Lauren Bon and Metabolic Studio as a composer as well as conductor of the Metabolic Choir weekly singing practice. During the pandemic, she conducted its offshoot, Interdependence Community Choir, using the improvisational methods she invented for the Spontaneous Combustion Choir. The year-and-a-half long project culminated in Lauren Bon’s film, *Satellite Radio Choir*. In 1980, O-Lan founded Overtone Industries to develop and produce original opera-theater. Their work has been performed in traditional and non-traditional settings such as La Mama, The Magic Theater, REDCAT, the Kurt Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, The Ford Amphitheater in Los Angeles, and a 25,000 square-foot empty car dealership in Culver City. In 2021, she and Overtone Industries executive director Fahad Siadat mentored three teams of composer/librettists in the development of scenes from their original operas for Overtone’s maiden voyage of their mentoring program, Original Vision.



SABINA ZÚÑIGA VARELA (PRODUCER)

Originally from New Mexico, Sabina holds an MA in Special Education from the University of New Mexico and an MFA in Acting from USC. As a proud member of Actor’s Equity, she has performed in all three of Luis Alfaro’s Greek adaptations: *Bruja* at the Magic Theatre; *Mojada* at the Public Theatre; *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles* at the Portland Center Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival and The Getty Villa; *Oedipus El Rey* at the Dallas Theater Center; and *Electricidad* at The National Hispanic Cultural Center). Other regional theatre credits include *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* (Mark Taper Forum/Center Theatre Group), *Uncle Vanya* (Pasadena Playhouse), Culture Clash’s *Bordertown Now* (Pasadena Playhouse), *You Never Can Tell* (CalShakes), the world premiere of *Native Gardens* (Cincinnati Playhouse), Culture Clash’s *Chavez Ravine* (Kirk Douglas Theatre), *A Christmas Carol* (Dallas Theater Center), *Water By The Spoonful* (TheatreWorks), *The Tenth Muse* and *The Heart of Robin Hood* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *El Nogalar* (The Fountain Theatre), and *Still Life* (National Hispanic Cultural Center). Television credits include *Madame Secretary*, *Snowfall*, and *American Crime*. Awards include 2015 Lead Performance Award from the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle for *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles*, 2015 Ovation Award for Best Production for *Chavez Ravine*, 2014 Bay Area Theatre Critic’s Circle Nomination for Principal Actress in a Drama for *Water by the Spoonful*, and 2007 New Mexico Hispano Entertainer’s Association: Female Performer of the Year for *Still Life* and *The Magdalena Cantata*. Sabina began her journey in theatre as a director, and credits include *Conduct of Life* by Maria Irene Fornes, *Rio De Lagrimas* by Las Meganenas, *Bernabé* by Luis Valdez, *Gas* by Elizabeth Otero, and *Kino and Teresa* by James Lujan. Currently, she is an adjunct professor at the USC School of Dramatic Arts, teaching movement to graduate and undergraduate students.

CAST



ALISON BJORKEDAL (HARPIST)

Hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as “a force field unto her own, yet joined in something bigger,” Alison Bjorkedal is a passionate ambassador for the harp and a Grammy Award–winning specialist in performing the music of Harry Partch. Ensemble and chamber performances include The Industry, San Diego Symphony, Pasadena Symphony/Pops Orchestra, Los Angeles Opera, American Contemporary Ballet, wildUP, Jacaranda Chamber Music, Salastina Music Society, Microfest, and Southwest Chamber Music. She is principal harpist of the Bakersfield Symphony and was featured as soloist with Pasadena Symphony, Downey Symphony, California Chamber Orchestra, and Palimpsest at UC San Diego. Notable world premieres include William Kraft’s *Encounters XII* for harp and percussion, James Tenney’s *Changes: 64 Studies for 6 Harps*, and Wadada Leo Smith’s *Ten Freedom Summers* (a 2013 Pulitzer Prize finalist), and she premieres Masatoshi Mitsumoto’s harp concerto in June 2023. A member of Partch ensemble, which has performed for San Francisco Symphony’s American Maverick Series, at Walt Disney Concert Hall’s REDCAT, and the 2023 Tongyeong International Music Festival in South Korea, Alison received harp performance degrees from University of Oregon (BM) and USC Thornton School of Music (MM, DMA). She is harp faculty at California Institute of the Arts, Occidental College, and Pomona College.



SCOTT GRAFF (ODYSSEUS)

Bass/baritone Scott Graff is a Los Angeles–based concert soloist, opera singer, ensemble singer, and recording artist. He has appeared as a soloist with numerous ensembles including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Musica Angelica, the Carmel Bach Festival, California Bach Society, Synchrony, and HEX. He has originated roles in several new operas and, most recently, he performed the role of The Therapist in the premiere of Vera Ivanova’s *The Double*, which premiered in June 2022 as part of Synchrony’s inaugural Opera Festival. As an active ensemble singer, Graff enters his 22nd season with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and is part of their touring company presenting the staged production of Orlando di Lasso’s monumental *Lagrime di San Pietro*, directed by Peter Sellars, which premiered in Los Angeles and has been seen around the world. As part of the Los Angeles Chamber Singers, led by Peter Rutenberg, he lent his voice to *Padilla: Sun of Justice*, which was awarded the 2007 Grammy for Best Small Ensemble recording. Scott has also sung on the soundtracks for more than 70 feature films and television projects.



KION HEIDARI (ALEXIO)

Kion Heidari is a musician, composer, and actor from San Diego, CA. Having graduated from the California Institute of the Arts with a BFA in composition, Kion has created instrumental and vocal music for independent films, the stage, video games, and concerts. Kion is new to Los Angeles County and has recently begun his career there by performing in new opera/theatre productions and with ensembles including Tonality and C3LA. He is very excited to see what the future has in store.



GRETCHEN JOHNSON (HECUBA)

Cynosemma is Gretchen Johnson's seventh collaboration with Overtone Industries. The new music theater specialist has performed in museums, performing arts centers, an empty Culver City car dealership, a Masonic temple, on Echo Park's historic Delta Street steps, on the outdoor balcony of a private home, Carnegie Hall, and the Shrine Auditorium in recitals, traditional works, and works written specifically for her. As a member of Minnesota Opera's New Music Theater Ensemble, she premiered works by Meredith Monk and The Bobs. For nearly 30 years, she has performed with the Los Angeles-based Overtone Industries, premiering O-Lan Jones' *Herakles and the Hydra*, *The Woman Who Forgot Her Sweater*, *Songs and Dances of Imaginary Lands*, *Woman in the Wall*, and *Iceland*. In 2021, she appeared in Overtone Industries' inauguration of *Original Vision*, a workshop series of innovative new works. Gretchen toured with the Los Angeles Opera and participated as a performer in the composer/playwright studio sponsored by the Audrey Skirball-Kenis Theater Projects. In recital, she has performed song cycles of Darius Milhaud, Ned Rorem, and Richard Wagner. She is currently performing a program of American art songs, featuring works by Amy Beach, Richard Hageman, John Duke, and Elinor Remick Warren. Gretchen is also a certified trainer in the GYROTONIC EXPANSION SYSTEM®.



MOLLY PEASE (KASSANDRA)

Molly Pease is a versatile, experimental, and collaborative Los Angeles-based vocal artist and composer whose singing has been described as "sonically mesmerizing" (*LA Weekly*) and "amazing" (*LA Dance Chronicle*), and whose compositions defy genre. Molly premiered multiple solo roles in The Industry's acclaimed opera *Sweet Land*, and recently toured with Björk. She performed solos with Tune-Yards at Walt Disney Concert Hall, Wild Up at the Next on Grand Festival in Los Angeles, and David Rosenboom at REDCAT. TV credits include Hulu's *Castle Rock* and CBS's *Strange Angel*. Ongoing projects include C3LA (Contemporary Choral Community of Los Angeles), HEX Ensemble, Tonality, and First Congregational Church of Los Angeles's Laude. As a performer-composer, Molly incorporates improvisation, extended vocal sounds, and inter-disciplinary collaboration. Examples include her new album, *Inner Astronomy*, a blend of poetry, music, and design, and *Score for the Near Future* with sculptor Jimena Sarno. Molly's experimental rock album *ACKLAND* was pegged as "not of this world" (Emerging Indie Bands), and her song "Transform" was featured on vocalist Alicia Olatuja's 2019 album. She was also a 2019 composer fellow at N.E.O. Voice Festival. Molly has an MFA in Jazz Studies from CalArts and BFA in Jazz Voice from The New School.



MARIAH RAE (POLYXENA)

Born in the Philippines and raised in Portland, OR, soprano Mariah Rae (she/her) resides in and performs throughout Southern California. Mariah received a Master of Music in Opera Performance from the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music (BCCM) at California State University Long Beach in 2020, studying with Dr. Katharin Rundus and the late Timothy MacDougall. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Vocal Performance and Journalism from Loyola Marymount University (LMU). Mariah started in theatre and piano at a young age, and finds herself in a variety of operatic and choral spaces today. She has recently performed with Tonality Choir in Los Angeles, Lyric Opera of Orange County, and was last seen as Papagena in Pacific Opera Project's video game-themed opera *The Magic Flute AKA #Superflute*. Other roles include Soeur Constance in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Princess Anab

in the premiere of Luis Molina’s opera *Rabinal Achí*, Laetitia in *The Old Maid and the Thief*, Laretta in *Gianni Schicci*, as well as scenes as Manon in *Manon*, Cage’s *Europera 5*, and Blitzstein’s *Regina*. Adjacent from singing, Mariah maintains a balance between her consultancy work with nonprofits, and strives to use her voice and diverse skillset to uplift and advocate for creative outlets in her communities.



ANGELICA ROWELL (AGATHE)

Angelica is a singer, actress, writer, and arts educator based in Los Angeles. She is adamant about the power art has to change perspectives, and strives to create works that open doors for marginalized peoples while educating others in hopes of creating a more understanding and just world. Angelica has created workshops for youth and adults alike on creating original works that make a statement (“Arts for Activism”) and shedding light on Black musicians who have been erased and overlooked throughout history (“The Evolution of Black Music”). As a creative, Angelica has performed in musicals and operas, including The Industry’s *Sweet Land*, sung as a featured soloist for the LA Philharmonic’s centennial celebration, debuted various plays with theatre companies across Los Angeles, and wrote on AMC ALLBLK’s upcoming TV show, *SNAP*. She is also a member of Los Angeles’s premiere women’s choir, VOX Femina. In addition to her creative work, Angelica is a member of the arts non-profit Black Light Arts Collective (BLAC) and serves as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consultant on the board of Bay Area-based theatre company, Poison Apple. She holds bachelor’s degrees in Theatre and Classical Voice from the University of California, Irvine.



JOANNA WALLFISCH (LEDA)

Downbeat Magazine calls London-born, Los Angeles-based vocalist, composer, and multi-disciplinary artist Joanna Wallfisch an “exquisite singer-songwriter” and *World Music Report* describes her work as “quintessential heart-music.” She has performed internationally and has released six albums of original music to critical acclaim. Her latest, *All In Time*, will be released by Galileo Music in July 2023. After graduating with a master’s degree in jazz vocals from the Guildhall School of Music in London, she lived in New York, where she collaborated with many musicians, including the Jazz at Lincoln Centre Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis. She also joined the circus community at The Muse, and is known for her musical trapeze act! An adventurer at heart, Joanna created *The Great Song Cycle*—concert tours by bicycle—and has performed and cycled thousands of miles through the U.S. and Australia, leading to publishing an adventure biography and recording an original song-cycle on her album *Far Away from Any Place Called Home*. Joanna appears as a vocalist and songwriter on multiple film soundtracks, and sang on *Dawn FM* by The Weeknd. She dedicates much of her passion for music to educating the next generation of musicians.



MARK WILLENBRING (PRAXIS)

Mark Willenbring is a student of opera and dance at USC, where he is completing his Bachelor of Music under the instruction of Elizabeth Hynes. Known for his most recent work in the Thornton Chamber Opera’s production of *Into The Woods*, Mark has also performed endlessly on Austin’s premier musical theater stage, ZACH Theater. He completed his opera debut in *A Hundred Times More* at the First Unitarian Baptist Church, and has performed with the USC Chamber Singers on their tour of Ireland under the direction of Jo-Michael Scheibe.

PRODUCTION



RICHARD AN (MUSICAL DIRECTOR AND CO-COMPOSER)

Richard An is a composer and performer born and raised in Los Angeles. As a performer, his primary ambitions lie in interpretations of modern and contemporary music. He has performed music by Christopher Cerrone, Tristan Perich, Andrew McIntosh, Natacha Diels, Du Yun and Raven Chacon, Caroline Shaw, Øyvind Torvund, Julius Eastman, Steve Reich, Jürg Frey, and more. Richard performs with house on fire (a “piano trio”), stickytaek (a “piano duo”), and quartet friends (a 2pno 2perc quartet), and has performed with Monday Evening Concerts’ ECHOI ensemble and The Industry. Richard plays piano and percussion, and has been known to sing, conduct, and teach. Richard’s music has been performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, Calder Quartet, members of Yarn/Wire, HOCKET, Resound Duo, Great Noise Ensemble, and more. Richard has a Bachelor of Music in Composition from USC and a Master of Fine Art from the California Institute of the Arts. He is on faculty at the Pasadena Waldorf School and LAMusArt. He also plays taiko and tabla, and makes YouTube videos.



LIZ ELDRIDGE (DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR FOR OVERTONE INDUSTRIES)

Liz Eldridge is an actor, writer, and musician from Los Angeles. Theatre credits: *Louise*, *Holiday Inn* (Musical Theatre West); *Dinah*, *Katy Cruel* (Overtone Industries); *Other Woman*, *This Grief Will Be of Use* (Theatre Roscius); *Coach*, *Lesbian Love Octagon* (Sorority); *Lydia*, *Lydia Trueblood* (Edinburgh Fringe), *Ukulele Lady*, *Cafe Le Monde* by Charles Mee (ARK). TV/film credits: *Queenpins*, *Rutherford Falls*, *The Affair*, *I’m Dying Up Here*, *Devs*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, *The Middle*, *Shameless*, *Silicon Valley*.



ELISABETH POLLNOW (SCENIC DESIGN CREW)

Elisabeth Pollnow’s art borders between three-dimensional and two-dimensional forms working out themes found in the natural world. Her background of living in remote areas of North Dakota and Alaska gives her a deep sense of connection to nature which reflects in all her work. After moving to Southern California, her work has expanded to explore themes related to the beautiful desert nearby. Elisabeth has been an assistant and studio manager for the renowned sculptor Christopher Slatoff since 2012. She has collaborated on several large-scale sculpture projects such as the *Enduring Heroes* sculpture in Pasadena, the *Hecuba* project for USC, and *St. Elizabeth Seton* for the University of Oklahoma. She recently completed a solo commission for *St. Clare of Assisi* for St. Francis of Assisi High School. She also participated in *Nature of Sculpture II* at the Los Angeles Arboretum. Elisabeth has a BA in art from Evangel University and has exhibited in Pasadena, San Fernando, and the Morongo Valley. She is a currently a member of the California Art Club, the Morongo Basin Cultural Arts Council, and the 29 Palms Artist Guild.



FAHAD SIADAT (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OVERTONE INDUSTRIES)

Fahad Siadat is a community organizer, arts entrepreneur, and administrator. He is the founder of C3LA: The Contemporary Choral Collective of Los Angeles, a board member of C4 in New York, and the founder of See-A-Dot Music Publishing, Inc., a company devoted to the advocacy of new choral works and emerging composers. He has a reputation as a dynamic and engaging speaker and has received featured interviews in over a dozen podcasts, print magazines, and online publications. Fahad regularly writes articles for *NewMusicBox* and the *Choral Journal* and has presented on various topics at the American Choral Directors Association, Chorus America, the New York Choral Consortium, and Classical: NEXT. He is also a composer, performer, and conductor of music for the voice.



CHRISTOPHER SLATOFF (SCENIC DESIGNER)

Christopher Slatoff, sculptor of the Hecuba statue in University Village, is a Los Angeles-based artist and educator who specializes in public art. His work can be seen at universities, public parks, and churches throughout Southern California and the country. His sculpture *Enduring Heroes* was commissioned by the City of Pasadena for Defenders Parkway and his sculpture *Adoption* is in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. He was the first artist to be commissioned by the City of Coronado's Arts Program for his sculpture *Sheltering Wings*. His work can be seen on the campuses of Pepperdine University, Thomas Aquinas College, and USC. Slatoff's involvement in *Cynossema* is one more example of his collaboration with artists in other media. The significant example of this is with the writer, Ray Bradbury, on an 8-foot bronze sculpture based on Bradbury's iconic novel, *The Illustrated Man*. Christopher has done POV lectures and workshops at the Getty Villa, the Getty Center, and the Norton Simon Museum, as well as work with the Huntington Library. He was the recipient of a California Artist in Residency grant and has taught at the California State University California Long Beach, ArtCenter College of Design, and Fuller Seminary.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- ◉ *Cynossema: A Dirge from the Dog’s Tomb* is an experimental opera by O-Lan Jones and Overtone Industries, with By the Souls of Our Feet.
- ◉ The subject is Hecuba, a Greek legendary figure who is depicted in the Queen of Troy statue in USC Village.

HECUBA

Hecuba (Hekabe, in Greek) is a figure of Greek legend. She was the queen of Troy—wife of the Trojan king Priam and mother of nineteen children, including Hector, Paris, and Cassandra. Hecuba was taken prisoner when the Greeks captured Troy. When she learned that her son had been murdered, she took revenge by blinding the man responsible for her son’s death, Polymestor, and murdering his sons. In legend, Hecuba was turned into a dog. Her grave, the promontory Cynossema (Dog’s Monument), located on the coast of the ancient region Thracian Chersonesus (present-day Kilitbahir, Turkey) became a landmark for ships.

Hecuba is the eponymous subject of a tragedy by Euripides, appears in Homer’s *Iliad*, and is alluded to in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, among many other literary and theatrical representations.

Hecuba, a wretch forlorn and captive, when she saw Polyxena first slaughtered, and her son, her Polydorus, on the wild sea-beach next met the mourning woman’s view, then reft of sense did she bark like a dog; such mighty power had grief to wrench her soul.

—from Dante’s *Inferno*

WHAT IS A DIRGE?

A dirge is a song or hymn of grief or lamentation (Merriam-Webster’s). It might be part of a funeral rite. The word *dirge* is sometimes more broadly used to describe any slow, sad song.

OLYMPUS’ PENTATONIC SCALE

A pentatonic scale has five notes per octave (compared to the heptatonic scale, which has seven). Pentatonic scales are found in early music in most cultures around the world. The ancient Greek pentatonic scale used in this production is said to have been created by Olympus, an aulos (wind instrument) player who lived in the seventh century BCE. Olympus is also a mythical figure from the Trojan War.



A statue of Hecuba in the USC Village Central Piazza

Photo: Gus Ruelas



Pierre Peyron, *The Despair of Hecuba*, drawing, circa 1784



O-Lan Jones



The Met in HD: Terence Blanchard's *Champion*, April 29, 2023, at 12 p.m., Norris Cinema Theatre



Photo: M Palma Photographys

Tales of Clamor, April 30, 2023, at 5 p.m., Bing Theatre

O-LAN JONES AND OVERTONE INDUSTRIES

O-Lan Jones is a composer, sound designer, actor, director, and writer, and the artistic director of Overtone Industries. She has been involved with experimental theatre, music, and opera since she was a teenager. Her screen credits include *Natural Born Killers*, *The Truman Show*, *Seinfeld*, *The X-Files*, and three Tim Burton Films. She has created original sound designs and scores for more than 40 productions involving Padua Hills Playwrights, LA Woman's Shakespeare Company, San Diego Rep, the Taper Too, Shakespeare Festival LA, and others. Her music has been showcased at Playwright's Horizons, La Mama, and the Kurt Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.

Jones founded Overtone Industries in 1980 to develop and present new music theatre and multidisciplinary operas. The company has received honors including the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for Original Score, a Dramalogue Award for Best Overall Production, an Ovation Award for Best Costumes, and Emmy Awards for Best Original Score and Design. As artistic director of Overtone Industries, O-Lan Jones creates original stories, as well as composing and writing lyrics. In recent years, she has begun directing and choreographing Overtone Industries operas as well.

O-Lan Jones also collaborates with Rachel Rosenthal Company's TOHUBOHU! Extreme Theatre Ensemble.

BY THE SOULS OF OUR FEET

The theatre company By the Souls of Our Feet was founded in 2013 by USC School of Dramatic Arts alumni who wanted to create visceral and poetic theatre experiences.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What is experimental about this opera? How is it different from more conventional operas you have seen or heard?
- What is the effect of the use of an ancient Greek scale for the music in this production?
- What does Hecuba symbolize or embody in *Cynossema*?
- What does Hecuba symbolize or embody in the form of a statue on the USC campus?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Overtone Industries
overtoneindustries.org
- Classes and performances at the USC School of Dramatic Arts
dramaticarts.usc.edu
- Upcoming Visions and Voices events:
 - 4/29/23** [The Met in HD: Terence Blanchard's *Champion*](#)
 - 4/30/23** [Tales of Clamor](#)
 - 6/3/23** [The Met in HD: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*](#)



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ARTICLE

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