

TREE OF CODES

US Premiere

Music and Libretto by Liza Lim

Libretto based upon: *Tree of Codes* by Johnathan Safran Foer, first published by Visual Editions, 2010;
Bruno Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles* (English translation by Celina Wieniewska);
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Erlkönig*; and the writings of Michel Foucault

Dock Street Theatre May 26, 7:00pm; May 29, 7:30pm; June 1, 7:30pm;
June 4, 7:30pm; June 7, 7:30pm

Artistic Team

Conductor	John Kennedy
Director	Ong Keng Sen
Set Designer	Scott Zielinski
Costume Designer	Walter Dundervill
Lighting Designer	James F. Ingalls
Video Designer	Austin Switser

Cast

Adela	Marisol Montalvo
Son	Elliot Madore
The Dresser	Walter Dundervill

Flute	Viola Chan, Martha Chan
Oboe	Lauren Williams
Clarinet	Andrew O'Donnell
Bassoon	Benjamin Roidl-Ward
Horn	Valerie Sly
Trumpet	Noah Dugan
Trombone	Nicole Hillis
Euphonium	Andrew Abel
Percussion	Rainice Lai
Piano	Aya Yamamoto
Violin	Giancarlo Latta, Emma Powell
Viola	Alfonso Noriega Fernandez
Cello	Jesse Christeson
Bass	Austin Lewellen

Assistant Conductor	Jeffrey Means
Musical Preparation	Siyi Fang
Vocal Coach	Diane Richardson
Costume Construction	Walter Dundervill
Production Stage Manager	Zach Kennedy
Supertitles	Bruno Ingram

1 hour, 15 minutes | Performed without an intermission
Sung in English with English supertitles

Opera programming is endowed by the Arthur and Holly Magill Foundation.

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By arrangement with Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes company, o/b/o G. Ricordi & Co., Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH.

CBS News journalist Martha Teichner hosts a Conversation with Director Ong Keng Sen and composer Liza Lim at 3:00pm on Saturday, May 26, at the Charleston Library Society, 164 King St.

 Structure

I. An Enormous Last Day of Life**II. The Comet**

Carnival

Father

The Escape Artist

III. The Ventriloquist

The Ballad (part 1)

A Boat Song

The Ballad (part 2)

IV. The Tree of Codes

 Composer's Note

Tree of Codes takes place during an extra day grafted on to the continuity of life. Within this margin of secret time, a “backstage” area, the boundaries between the natural world, animals, birds, humans, and machines are dissolving. Dead matter is combined with the living and becomes animated. It learns to dream, to speak, to sing...

A bird mimics language, and humans sing like birds. Father... does he know he's dead?...conjurs birds made out of rubbish into mutant forms of being, recuperating strange life across a boundary of death. There is a kaleidoscope of relationships joined by ventriloquism—one thing speaks for another—this world is made up of contingent parts where form is an excuse for slippage. Scene 3: “Ventriloquism,” begins with a comet, its sounds recorded by the Rosetta space mission, whilst far, far below, perhaps effected by some strange gravitational pull, a brass band blurts into life. The bubbling, percussive song of the comet is mirrored in a chorus of frogs and insects, Father's *generatio aequivoca* which he had dreamed up—not real frogs and insects but “a kind of pseudofauna and pseudoflora, the result of a fantastic fermentation of matter.” Musicians play the most primitive of violins in the form of blocks of wood that are bowed with sticks to sound out this pseudo animal kingdom yet, out of this, emerge rhythmic patterns that recite Goethe's *Erkönig*.

Displacement and dissociation of time, space, and identity create effects of menace and wonder. What is authentic? What is fake? The opera *Tree of Codes* asks: “How do the inheritances of our genes, our stories, and the unconscious beliefs passed down through generations, shape who we are, our desires, our curses? Do the living and dead exist in a relationship of ventriloquism?”

The multiple stories in the opera are, for me, about opening up emotional or psychic spaces. For the audience, I hope that people will see different things and plug into different aspects of the stories depending on their frame of mind at the time. If there is a “story,” it is about the basic ephemerality that attends our lives and our deaths, and a longing for intensity, iridescence, for epiphany. The last lines in the libretto are:

Why did you not tell me?
the last secret of the tree of codes:
nothing reaches a definite conclusion.
Reality is only as thin as paper
behind the screen
sawdust in an empty theatre.
there we feel possibilities
shaken by the nearness of realization
I wanted a night that would not end

These words remind me of Prospero's speech in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where all is but an “insubstantial pageant”...our dreamlike life dissolves, yet still we reach out to try and touch some moment of splendor. At the moment of death, everything is in flux and somehow full of potential and infinite yearning. Bruno Schulz writes: “What is a Spring dusk? A multitude of unfinished stories. Here are the great breeding grounds of history. The tree roots want to speak...memories awake...”

– Liza Lim, March 2018

 Director's Note

This production is the third cut-out from Bruno Schulz's book of short stories, *Street of Crocodiles*. The first was Jonathan Safran Foer's *Trees of Codes*, and the second, Liza Lim's opera of the same title. Our production is a cut out of Liza's opera in that we keep her wonderful aural panoramas of birds, tree roots, nature, and fantastic fermentation of matter. However, we return the material to mankind's epic lodestone of loss, the Jewish narrative in the years leading up to World War II, as well as its aftermath. This was the life of Bruno Schulz that butted up against the existential text that Foer cut out, which Liza has retained in her libretto. “All attempts are transient and easy to dissolve,” “reality is only paper thin,” “we wish, we want,” “the feeling of no permanence in life”...these lines reverberate deeply for me and even echo the spiritual philosophies of Buddhism. Our production of *Tree of Codes* suggests the constant evolution of life from non-life (Lim), counterpointed with the constant destruction of life by man (Foer/Schulz).

To this end, we built a stage space with a colossal monolith inspired by Rachel Whiteread's Jewish Memorial (“Nameless Library”) in Vienna. Whiteread created sculptures of negative space where she casted the volume of entire houses and rooms, which she termed “mummifying the air in a room.” These giant sculptures often contained traces of the original room, evoking ghosts and memories of that space. Our colossal monolith evokes Foer's book, which is itself a negative space of Schulz's: S TREE t OF Cro COD il ES.

This onstage monolith evokes the loss of Jewish lives in the last century, which is the loss for all mankind. In my travels to small towns throughout Europe, there have been installed simple and complex memorials which mark this loss. I have always found them poignant reminders of guilt and regret for those who disappeared and those who were left behind. The boy's emotional search for his father (the escape artist) brings us to the action onstage. The son encounters a space where Adela dwells, a space dominated by the monolithic monument. Together, they remember the past and the future, games that the father once played with the child, *Kristallnacht*, terrifying comets which portended disasters for mankind, and *generatio aequivoca* (the continuous evolution of life from non-life). Together, they spin the wheel of life, as Buddhists do when they walk clockwise around venerated objects, by walking around the monolith. As Foer and Lim both emphasized in their cut-outs, "human dreams, rubbish heaps, abundant, ephemeral, sudden and splendid, only to wilt and perish."

Embedded in all good new operas are the ghosts of earlier operas, and in my view, *Tree of Codes* is no exception. These poetic traces range from Adela welcoming the son into the secret of life ("Come take my hand, dip your face into that dusk, under the lid of a coffin, push across the dull humus") to the son embarking on a boat (a boat song), to the far side of life and the infinite possibilities of an endless night. In the shimmering end, we as the audiences of the boy's search, embrace the beauty of the tree of codes, which was always there amongst us, but we could not perceive it.

– Ong Keng Sen, May 2018

Artistic Team



LIZA LIM (composer) has been described as "an artist of the contemporary globalized era drawing on an exceptionally wide range of influences, from ecology to Asian ritual; from modernism to an Australian Aboriginal aesthetics of 'shimmer'" (Tim Rutherford Johnson). Lim's music has been performed by the LA Phil, BBC Symphony Orchestra,

Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain, and the International Contemporary Ensemble in New York. She has written four operas: *The Oresteia* (1993); a Chinese street opera, *Moon Spirit Feasting* (2000); and *The Navigator* (1996), all commissioned by the ELISION Ensemble; and *Tree of Codes* (2016), commissioned by Opera Cologne and MusikFabrik. She is a professor of composition at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and at the University of Huddersfield. Her work is published by Casa Ricordi. Honors include Australia's 2018 Don Banks Prize, the Paul Lowin Prize for Orchestral Composition (2004), and DAAD artist-in-Berlin (2007 – 08). lizalimcomposer.wordpress.com



JOHN KENNEDY (conductor), Spoleto Festival USA Resident Conductor and Director of Orchestral Activities, has led acclaimed performances and premieres worldwide of opera, orchestral, ballet, and new music. Kennedy has had a long association with Spoleto Festival USA, and in recent seasons has conducted the Festival's American

premiere productions of operas including *Émilie* by Kaija Saariaho (2011), *Kepler* by Philip Glass (2012), *Matsukaze* by Toshio Hosokawa (2013), *Facing Goya* by Michael Nyman (2014), the world premiere production of Huang Ruo's *Paradise Interrupted* (2015), *The Little Match Girl* by Helmut Lachenmann (2016), and *Quartett* by Luca Francesconi (2017). Especially noted for his interpretations of contemporary music, Kennedy has worked with many of the leading composers of our time in over 300 premieres and numerous recordings. He has designed and led many orchestral concerts integrating classic works with the new, and recently led a multimedia production of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* directed by Seon Yim in South Korea. Kennedy has recently guest conducted at West Edge Opera, Daejeon Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra 21, Singapore International Festival of the Arts, the Crested Butte Music Festival, and with many organizations including the Lincoln Center Festival, Other Minds Festival, sfSound, Talea Ensemble, Santa Fe Opera, and New York City Ballet. Kennedy is the composer of more than 90 works, including opera, orchestral, chamber, and experimental works that have been performed throughout the world. His operas *Trinity* and *The Language of Birds* are both receiving new productions this year by Santa Fe Opera as their spring and fall presentations.



ONG KENG SEN (director) is a performance director who has actively contributed to the evolution and the subsequent transglobalization of the Asian aesthetic in contemporary arts. This summer, his Korean pansori opera with the National Theater of Korea, *Trojan Women*, will be seen in London, Amsterdam, and Vienna. Work he has

directed has been presented to much acclaim all over the world, including Lincoln Center, Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, Edinburgh International Festival, Theater der Welt in Berlin, Shakespeare Festival at Hamlet's Castle in Denmark, Roma Europa Festival in Rome, Cocoon Theater in Tokyo, Idans Festival in Istanbul, Panorama Festival in Rio de Janeiro, and Adelaide Festival. Ong is artistic director of TheatreWorks and the artspace 72-13 in Singapore. He is renowned for the nomadic artist residency that he created, The Flying Circus Project, which brings together international artists traveling through Asia, sharing their contexts among themselves and young people in local sites from Vietnam to Cambodia to Myanmar. He created and directed the In-Transit Festival in Berlin from 2001 – 03. A Fulbright scholar, Ong recently founded the new Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) in 2013 and was the festival director for four editions, from 2014 – 17. He completed his postgraduate studies at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and also holds a law degree. He was the first Singaporean artist to have received both the Young Artist Award (1992) and the Cultural Medallion Award (2003). He was awarded the prestigious international Fukuoka Asian Arts and Culture Prize in 2010.



SCOTT ZIELINSKI (set designer) is based in New York and has created lighting designs for theater, dance, and opera throughout the world. Opera highlights include *Turandot* for Opera Australia, *Miss Fortune* for Bregenz Festspiele and Royal Opera House, *The Magic Flute* for Canadian Opera Company, *Yarbird* for Lyric Opera

of Chicago, *Orfeo* for English National Opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Houston Grand Opera and New York City Opera, *Trojan Women* for the National Changgeuk Company of Korea, *La traviata* for Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre, *La Commedia* for Dutch National Opera, *Red Waters* for Opéra de Rouen Normandie, and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* for San Francisco Opera. Upcoming projects include *Trojan Women* for LIFT Festival London, Holland Festival, and Wiener Festwochen; and *La Dame aux Camélias* for Theatre National de Bretagne (France). He is happy to be returning to Spoleto Festival USA, where his designs have been seen for *Eugene Onegin*, *Facing Goya*, *Matsukaze*, *The Silver River*, and *Geisha*. scottzielinski.com



WALTER DUNDERVILL (costume designer/The Dresser) is a choreographer, dancer, and visual artist based in New York City. He creates performance environments fusing dance, art, costume, and sound design. His work has been presented at Dance Theater Workshop; New York Live Arts; MoMA PS1; The New Museum; Danspace Project; Participant

Inc.; Pioneer Works; JACK; and at the Solo in Azione Festival in Milan, Italy. Dundervill is a recipient of the 2016 Foundation for the Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists Award and is a 2016 New York Foundation for the Arts finalist. He has received three New York Dance and Performance Bessie Awards as a dancer and designer. Dundervill has performed for various artists including DD Dorvillier, RoseAnne Spradlin, Bruce Nauman, and David Wojnarowicz. He is a member of the Artist Advisory Council at Movement Research. He has been an artist in residence at Movement Research, the New Museum, and New York Live Arts.



JAMES F. INGALLS (lighting designer) has previously designed *Farnace*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Little Match Girl*, and *Kat'a Kabanová* for Spoleto Festival USA. Recent designs for opera include *La clemenza di Tito* for Dutch National Opera, Kaija Saariaho's *Only the Sound Remains* for Opéra national de Paris at Palais Garnier, and John Adams's *Girls of*

the Golden West for San Francisco Opera, all directed by Peter Sellars. Recent work in dance includes San Francisco Ballet's 2018 Unbound: A Festival of New Works; *Concertiana*, *Half Life*, and *The Beauty in Gray* for Paul Taylor American Modern Dance; *The Nutcracker* for Miami City Ballet; and *Layla and Majnun* for Mark Morris Dance Group. He often collaborates with The Wooden Floor dancers in Santa Ana, California.



AUSTIN SWITSER (video designer) is a New York-based designer who focuses on the integration of live performance and video. Recent opera projects include *Eugene Onegin* (Spoleto Festival USA), *Trojan Women* (National Changgeuk Company of Korea), *Paradise Interrupted* (Spoleto Festival USA, Lincoln Center Festival, Singapore International Festival

of the Arts), *Facing Goya* (Spoleto Festival USA, Singapore International Festival of the Arts), *Émilie* (Spoleto Festival USA, Lincoln Center Festival, Finnish National Opera), and *Tristan and Isolde* (The Dallas Opera). Recent theatrical projects include *He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box* (Theatre for a New Audience); *Big Love* (Signature Theatre); *Sontag: Reborn* and *iEl Conquistador!* (New York Theatre Workshop); and *Elements of OZ*, *House/Divided*, and *Jet Lag 2010* (The Builders Association). He is a graduate of California Institute of the Arts and the creative director for the Brooklyn-based projection design studio Switser + Knight. switserknight.com

Cast



ELLIOT MADORE (Son) began the 2017 – 18 season making his LA Phil debut in *Mozart 1791: Scenes from The Magic Flute*. He then performed with San Francisco Opera for the world premiere of John Adams's *Girls of the Golden West*, directed by Peter Sellars, and at the Opernhaus Zürich as Germano in *La scala di seta*. Madore made his debut

with the Berliner Philharmoniker as the cat/grandfather clock in *Lenfant et les sortilèges*, conducted by Mikko Franck, and with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, conducted by Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla. He debuts at Spoleto Festival USA in *Tree of Codes*; sings *Carmina Burana* with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, with JoAnn Falletta conducting; and ends the season with a return to the Tanglewood festival to sing Bernstein's *Songfest* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.



MARISOL MONTALVO (Adela) has performed this season with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and Orquestra Nacionales de Espana, under the baton of Maestro Christoph Eschenbach. Recently, she sang Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* and Mozart's "L'amero sarò costante" with Ray Chen (Ravinia Festival/Chicago Symphony

Orchestra); Widmann's opera *Babylon* and Scriabin's *Mysterium* (Radio Filharmonisch Orkest); Boulez's *Pli selon pli* (Wien Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain); Haas's *Wie stille brannte das Licht* (Klangforum Wien); Pintscher's *Hérodiade-Fragmente* (Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra); Mahler's Symphony no. 4 (London Philharmonic Orchestra); and Mahler's Symphony no. 8 (Orchestre De Paris). She is renowned for her interpretation of Berg's *Lulu*, which she has sung with Opéra national de Paris, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro de la Maestranza, Opéra de Toulouse, Komische Oper Berlin, Theater Basel, and Theater an der Wien. Some of her future engagements include Henze's *The Bassarids* with Kent Nagano; and Mahler's Symphony no. 2 (Royal Stockholm Philharmonic).

Music Staff



SIYI FANG (musical preparation) was a repetiteur in premiere productions and workshops including *Quartett* at Spoleto Festival USA (2017); *Monkey: Journey to the West* at Lincoln Center Festival; *Dr. Sun Yat Sen* at Santa Fe Opera; and *Paradise Interrupted*, co-commissioned by Spoleto Festival USA and Lincoln Center Festival. She

served as music director for an outdoor musical theater in Inner Mongolia and had her CD released as part of JP Jofre Hard Tango Chamber Band. She was a vocal pianist at SUNY Binghamton and a staff pianist at The Juilliard School. She has performed at Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, United Nations, and Radio Television Hong Kong, among others. Her training fellowships included Music Academy of the West, SongFest, Fontainebleau Schools in France, and Aspen Music Festival and School. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan (BM) and The Juilliard School (MM in collaborative piano). A native of Guangzhou, China, she currently resides in New York City and is pursuing her doctorate degree in music education at Columbia University.



DIANE RICHARDSON (vocal coach) received degrees in music from Oberlin College and Columbia University. She continued her professional training at The Juilliard School, where she studied piano with Adele Marcus and vocal repertoire with Sergius Kagen and Robert Starer. She also trained abroad at the Mozarteum in Salzburg and

L'Università per Stranieri in Perugia, Italy. Skilled in operatic and lieder repertoire, Richardson has toured extensively with leading artists throughout the United States and Europe. For more than a decade, she was an assistant conductor with New York City Opera and subsequently taught at the Yale School of Music. She also served as assistant conductor for the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto, Italy, and has been associated with Spoleto Festival USA since its first season. Richardson holds concurrent faculty appointments at The Juilliard School and Binghamton University.

THE SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA ORCHESTRA appears at the Festival in many different configurations, performing in opera, symphonic, choral, chamber, and contemporary music performances. Formed anew each year through nationwide auditions, the orchestra is largely comprised of young professionals or players in advanced degree programs. Alumni of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra are on the rosters of leading orchestras throughout the world, including the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, LA Phil, and San Francisco Symphony, among others.