

J O H N A Y L W A R D
O B L I V I O N
O P E R A I N O N E A C T





JOHN AYLWARD
OBLIVION
OPERA IN ONE ACT

1	I. Prologue	4:13
2	II. Scene 1	6:29
3	III. Scene 2	8:21
4	IV. Scene 3	6:05
5	V. Scene 4	12:48
6	VI. Scene 5 & Interlude	12:19
7	VII. Scene 6	14:20

Total: 64:35

Music and Libretto by John Aylward

Nina Guo, soprano	Laura Williamson, viola
Lukas Papenfusscline, tenor	Issei Herr, cello
Tyler Boque, baritone	Greg Chudzik, contrabass
Cailin Marcel Manson, baritone	Daniel Lippel, electric guitar
	John Aylward, electronics
	Tianyi Wang, electronic sound design assistant
	Stratis Minakakis, music director & conductor

Composer's Note

The protagonists in *Oblivion* are two Wanderers, loosely related to the eponymous first-person narrator of Dante's *Purgatory*, the second part of his *Divine Comedy*. As in that famous depiction of the afterlife, my Wanderers confront allegorical figures who challenge them to more deeply understand themselves: here, the Hunter and the King. The Wanderers remember nothing of their lives before the start of the opera, which is set in an ambiguously supernatural realm, and a central question is what might be gained from remembering. Will remembrance bring them knowledge and perspective, or pain and regret? Near the end of *Purgatory*, Dante remarks that, having been submerged in the river Lethe that takes away all memory, he has a clean conscience – but the mere fact that he has drunk may be an indication of prior guilt. My Wanderers are confronted with a similar scenario: the King, a charismatic but inscrutable figure with shadowy motivations, promises their absolution if they will only drink from a fountain to remember their lives. He asks, “how can you be forgiven for what you know nothing of?”

The Wanderers are also confronted with the dangers of the wild, and the Hunter, a stoic figure of grim warning, suggests that only by surviving in the wild will they truly know themselves. The Hunter sees nature as an inescapable part

of his world, while the King insists that its trials are meaningless. In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell writes: “there is a totally different way of living according to your myth as to whether nature is fallen or whether nature is itself a manifestation of divinity”. One of the Wanderers ultimately comes to see nature as worth the risk, and memory of the past as a path toward nothing. The other Wanderer is swept up in the promises of the King.

When I set out to compose *Oblivion*, I had the idea of a mythological protagonist faced with an existential moral dilemma. As I refined and revised the story during two years of tumultuous world history, I began to feel a pull toward my own past, and the religious ideas I have carried with me since youth. I was raised in a Catholic household by a mother and father both from immigrant families. As an adult, able to see my parents simply as people trying to make sense of life, I have realized how much they struggled to find distance from their Catholic upbringings. These reflections led me to want to explore the difficulties they must have endured in finding themselves. Ultimately, the opera asks if we can escape ourselves through forgetting and whether redemption, that highest of Catholic concepts, is worth seeking after all.

Opera Synopsis

Scene I

As the opera opens, the First Wanderer, a young man, has come out of a mysterious wilderness into a cavernous shelter where he meets the Hunter. The First Wanderer sees a man bound up in a corner. The Hunter is unnerved by the First Wanderer's arrival but greets him and allows him to eat. The First Wanderer asks where he is and why he can't remember anything. The Hunter tells the First Wanderer that the answers he seeks are back out in the wild, and that he can stay for a short while to rest but then must leave. He pontificates on his own life and his duty to guard his lair. He then retires and instructs the First Wanderer not to speak with the Bound Man because he is dangerous.

Scene II

The First Wanderer sits by the fire and prays. The Bound Man, in mental and physical stress, tries to get the First Wanderer's attention. All is interrupted as the Second Wanderer, a young woman, enters from the wild, also with no memory. The Bound Man begins to engage the Second Wanderer, saying that he can help her understand where they are. Suddenly, the Hunter returns and is enraged to see them all speaking with each other. The Hunter offers

his own explanation of the circumstances that the Wanderers are in and urges them to seek the path in the wilderness despite how dangerous it seems.

Scene III

At night, the Wanderers discuss their situation. The Second Wanderer wants to explore the Hunter's lair despite the Hunter's warning. Though fearing the Hunter, the First Wanderer agrees to try and explore. The Bound Man overhears their plan and asks to be freed. The Wanderers worry that the Bound Man could spoil their plans so they unchain him and take him with them.

Scene IV

The Wanderers explore the Hunter's lair, which seems endless, until they come upon a dazzling fountain. They set the Bound Man by the fountain to drink, seeing that he is nearly dead. As the Bound Man drinks, his memory returns. He explains that the fountain has restorative powers for both the body and mind. He says that he remembers that he is a King, that the Wanderers have died and are in the afterlife, and that the Hunter has taken possession of this realm through force. The King invites the Wanderers to

drink from the fountain and reclaim their memories. The First Wanderer drinks and realizes he and the Second Wanderer were in love. Troubling memories surface for him and he suspects that the Second Wanderer may have killed them both. He urges her to drink so that she can fill in the gaps of their story. Troubled and spooked, she refuses. The King decries how the Hunter trapped him, coveting the passage to the fountain and the doorway to heaven back at the Hunter's lair. The King promises that if they help him vanquish the Hunter, he will lead them out of this circle of purgatory.

Scene V

As the King rests from his ecstatic awakening, the Wanderers discuss their situation. The Second Wanderer remains troubled that she may have been an instrument in their death. The First Wanderer is at peace with the situation and encourages the other to remember. They sing to each other about their changing feelings, the Second Wanderer now wanting to explore the Hunter's wilderness and the First Wanderer now wanting to trust the King's offer of redemption.

Scene VI

The King and the Wanderers return to the Hunter's lair. The King, in a fury, lambasts the Hunter, who insists that the King is insane. The Hunter explains that the King once

ruled purgatory, allowing no one to leave and ascend to heaven, until the Hunter was able to wrest control of the circle and keep the King bound. The King insists this is all a lie and that the Hunter wants to keep control and ignore his own shame. The First Wanderer, filled with anger incited by the King, expels the Hunter. The King rejoices and the Second Wanderer, stunned, runs out to the wilderness. The King congratulates the First Wanderer, telling him that he has fulfilled a great prophesy and that now he may be redeemed and ascend to heaven. The King opens the door that the Hunter had been guarding. They both walk through and vanish. As the music fades, the lights flicker to reveal the King, enjoying the space on his own. In a final image, it is revealed that the First Wanderer is now chained where the King was initially bound. The Hunter enters, as if a Wanderer.



The Hunter warns the First Wanderer, "Choose your way".

OBLIVION

Libretto

Characters

(in order of appearance)

The Bound Man / The King (tenor)

Lukas Papenfusscline

The Hunter (baritone)

Cailin Marcel Manson

First Wanderer (baritone)

Tyler Boque

Second Wanderer (soprano)

Nina Guo

SCENE I

Lights up on a mysterious room, appearing to be a relic of a distant or otherworldly time. Light emanates periodically from the surrounding walls but otherwise the space is dark.

A door stage right opens up onto an ante space. Center stage is a door flanked by sitting spaces and a table. Just beyond there appears a darkened exit leading deeper into the space.

A Bound Man is sitting between the table and the door, his feet chained to the wall. The Hunter is at the table, tearing apart a large animal with a variety of tools.

Bound Man: In a great... a great... in a great battle. We are locked... in a... in a great... We are... beyond your perception... beyond, be...

Hunter: Quiet!

The Hunter continues working.

The Bound Man begins to quietly babble again and then slowly raise his voice.

BM: Even, even as we.... Even as we... as we.... pass on we are unaware of it.

H: I said quiet! (more to himself) He'll never leave me alone.

A large rumble drowns out the Hunter and the Bound Man. There is a loud thud. The Hunter looks stage left as dust begins to flood in through the door.

H: Who goes there?

The First Wanderer appears through the door stage left, completely disoriented, dusting himself off.

H: Be gone!

First Wanderer: I'm lost! The storm!

H: Be gone!

FW: The wild! I'll die back out there.

H: You've just arrived.

FW: Arrived where?

H: You don't know yet.

FW: For the moment, may I rest?

H: (pause) For the moment, you wretch.

The Hunter takes the Wanderer to the table.

H: You may eat.

FW: Where did you find this food?

H: I hunt the beasts.

FW: You hunt the beasts?

H: What else is there?

FW: You are a warrior.

H: And who are you?

FW: I can't remember anything of myself. I wandered for what seemed an eternity. You must have answered my prayers.

H: I have answered no prayers.

FW: Why.... can I not remember?

H: You must experience this world for yourself. I could tell you now but you wouldn't believe me.

FW: I would believe!

The Hunter prepares to leave.

H: For now, as you begin, you'll remember nothing.

BM: You are in danger!

H: Ah! This man! He has infected everything. This place, my mind.

BM: I shall tell you the truth!

H: (to the Wanderer, trying to ignore the Bound Man) He's here to haunt me. He insists I remember and repent. I am not a violent man, but his evil I could not stand. I have sought peace and balance, away from others, with only glimpses of my past.

BM: Those who sleep in the dust of the earth...

H: I can't remember what I'm so afraid of, but I don't wish to know. So it is best I am alone. There is a way to reclaim your past in the wild. Choose your way, but leave me be.

FW: The wild is so dangerous.



The Bound Man pleads, "Take me with you!"

H: If you stay, do not speak to this man. He will infect your mind. Some voices are best left unheard.



SCENE II

The Hunter is away and the Wanderer is praying by the fire. The Bound Man continues to babble.

BM: But for now... for now... you are blind. It is why... why... you must have...

FW: Oh God, please help this sad and tortured man, and free me from this place.

There is a rumbling as another Wanderer approaches from the outside. The First Wanderer begins to hear her voice.

FW: Who's there?

Second Wanderer: Hello?

The Second Wanderer appears in the entrance, disheveled.

FW: Ah! Who are you?

SW: Where am I?

FW: I don't know.

SW: The storm is frightful.

FW: You were out there?

SW: I was wandering. I seemed to be going nowhere.

FW: I did the same until I found myself here, like you. How long did you wander?

SW: It seemed like an eternity.

FW: The storm is so powerful. It has the strength to disorient.

SW: Why are we here?

FW: Are we just lost?

SW: Is it some trick?

FW: Have we been injured? Or is someone taking vengeance on us?

SW: Perhaps we've been abducted!

Both Wanderers speak, overlapping each other:

FW: If someone is playing a trick on us, they better show up and explain themselves. That's got to be a pretty evil person. I mean don't you think that it's most likely that we're lost? I really don't think we've been abducted, so it must be that we are lost. But I have no idea, I mean it could be anything, it could be anything.

SW: Well, if we've been abducted then wouldn't we have marks on us somewhere because we probably struggled somehow, but then again, what if we were just knocked out and then dragged here? But you look fine, so maybe it was something even worse, like, well, I don't know it could be anything.

SW: What do you remember?



The Second Wanderer finds something to eat.

FW: I ... remember nothing...

SW: I too... remember ... nothing.

Pause

SW: I'm starving!

FW: Don't touch! It's the Hunter's.

SW: Who?

FW: He took me in.

SW: And who is this? (pointing to the Bound Man).

FW: Don't speak with him, he's dangerous!

BM: Help! Help! I can... can...

SW: What?

FW: If we disobey the Hunter, we'll die. He'll kill us.

BM: Look! Look! (pointing to a passageway)

SW: A passageway!

FW: Don't go there. The Hunter told me not to! He will be angry to see you here!

SW: I will tell him I am lost. Like you.

FW: He insists I go back to the wild. He will expect the same of you.

SW: Why hasn't he killed you anyway?

FW: I am no threat to him.

SW: Maybe he is tricking you. He could tie us up! Just like him!

BM: Take me!

FW: He must be bound here for a reason.

SW: It's true. Who should we trust?

FW: Who should we trust?

BM: Take me! There is a... a... a great... judgement coming!

FW: He's been speaking gibberish since I got here.

BM: To dust... to dust...

SW: It sounds like a riddle or a warning.

BM: There is a great battle coming. Some shall fall so that the rest may be refined! Until the end!

The Hunter enters abruptly

H: What is this?!

FW: We were...

H: I told you not to speak with him.

SW: He wouldn't stop!

H: Who are you?

FW: She, she...

SW: I arrived just as he did. Where are we?

H: I will kill you both for disobeying me.

SW: Please! He was doing what he thought was right.

FW: Spare her. I let her in.

BM: It is, it is, the way!

H: Silence! You are testing my patience. If you wish to stay you must do as I say, or all will be chaos.

SW: Why do we remember nothing?

FW: Nothing!

H: If you wish to remember, you must choose to walk the path in the wild. There all will be revealed.

SW: Why do you stay here?

H: I... I have glimpses. They are too painful. I've said I wish not to know.

SW: It's true – this not knowing is freeing. I feel I can be anyone.

FW: You wish to be someone else?

SW: Why not? To have a second chance – what a thrill! Think of all I could get right.

FW: You sound like a perfectionist.

H: It is perfect not to know. There is balance in not knowing.

BM: Then you will never know yourself.

H: I know enough to be content.

BM: How will you atone?!

H: I will not atone! And live in torment. And be punished. (to the Wanderers) This man has been ruined. As for you... you will go.

FW and SW: But the wild is deadly! The storm is deadly! We can't go back. We'll die.

H: No, here I am safe, because I seek nothing. You seek knowing and remembrance. You may stay the night, but then you must go, to walk the path. All else is temptation.



SCENE III

As the Hunter sleeps, the Wanderers discuss their situation by the fire.

SW: Are you sleeping?

FW: I think I am.

SW: So it's true we're not dreaming.

FW: We would have awakened by now.

SW: We would have awakened.

FW: We would have awakened. So we know this is not a dream.

SW: We are here, as ourselves, but with nothing.

FW: Ourselves, with nothing.

SW: We need a plan.

FW: We must pray we can live in the wild.

SW: Let's just stay here. The storm is dangerous. We'll die!

FW: The Hunter says it is the way. We must go and have faith.

SW: No! Let's explore while the Hunter sleeps.

FW: We must have faith that he's right.

SW: We must explore beyond. You saw the passageway he took.

FW: He may be waiting there to kill us if we disobey!

SW: The Hunter is hiding something. How does he survive here?

FW: We must not ask such questions.

SW: Listen! Listen! He is sleeping so loudly! He'll never hear us.

FW: Shh! Are you mad? Tomorrow we can help each other in the wild.

SW: Why should we leave this all behind? Why should the Hunter live in safety while we suffer? Ah! What have I done? How could this be my fate?

Pause

SW: Be honest. Aren't you afraid of who you are? Or that some tragedy befell you? I have a feeling I have always been searching for myself. Why continue now if here we can become someone new? It seems that all we have to do is start

again. We can go back through the storm. It won't change that we're nothing.

FW: Nothing. It's true. Perhaps there is a reason we found this place and each other. There must be a reason why. If we find nothing here, we must return while the Hunter sleeps and walk the path in the wild.

The Bound Man lurches, still in chains.

BM: Take me! Take me with you! Can't you see, I'm being tortured? I'll show you! Show you everything!

SW: Perhaps he will be useful.

FW: If the Hunter sees he's gone, he will come after us.

BM: I can show... I can show you! The way!

SW: See! He will help!

FW: What if he's lying? The Hunter warned us of temptation.

BM: Freedom! Freedom!

SW: If we leave him, he may tell the Hunter of our plans.

FW: Then we must.

SW: How wrong can it be to free a tortured soul?

*The Wanderers untie the Bound Man and help him up.
They all exit.*





The Second Wanderer asks the First Wanderer, "Aren't you afraid of who you are?"

SCENE IV

The Wanderers carry the Bound Man through the passageway, searching for escape.

SW: The passageway is endless.

FW: This world is so strange.

SW: I feel I'm floating.

FW: Or swimming far from shore.

SW: With no land in sight.

FW: And slowly drowning. After all this time of trying to make life right, I see I've been all wrong. Look at us, just we two. All my wanting to be lost in the greatness of the living. And here we are, solitary. Was it all an illusion? Those who judged us then must surely be laughing, "such diminutive creatures, in this wasteland!" What is it we're looking for? Freedom? Perfection? Greatness? Even peace, we are so far away from that now.

BM: Do not despair, my friend. I won't forsake you. I feel we are close. Is it...

FW: What?

BM: Is it...

SW: What?

BM: Is it there?

FW: What's there?

SW: What's there?

BM: The fountain?

SW: Ah! It's true!

FW: You knew it would be here?

BM: I had a glimpse!

SW: Let him drink!

The Wanderers set the Bound Man by the water and he drinks

BM: (Drinking) Thank you! You've no idea what you've done!

SW: Are you healed?

BM: Very much so. The water is healing. And it restores your memory!

SW: A miracle!

FW: A miracle!

SW: How can it be?

BM: It's true. (continues to drink). I remember!

SW: What?

BM: It's coming back... I have passed here many times.... Wait... wait... returning... it's returning... over and over again... Souls. Destined to...Dying! Each time... again... each time... escaping... only to.... return. It is the Hunter who keeps me here.

SW: Why the Hunter?

King: Because... Because... I am King over all you see! He knows I have arrived to unlock the afterlife for us all.

FW: The afterlife?

SW: The afterlife. So we're dead! I knew it! How could all this be real?

K: Ah, but it is all too real, this purgatory you've found. The choices you make, and all that awaits you.

SW: The path, the wild?

K: Ha! The wild? Not at all! The wild will doom you. There is only one way to ascend from this place. To face your life, to remember each painful detail, and then repent. You will be purified and may pass on. (To the First Wanderer) Go, drink from the fountain and remember your life!

The First Wanderer drinks from the fountain.

K: (To the Second Wanderer) See, he gains strength as he regains himself.

FW: (To the Second Wanderer). Ah! It's you! I remember.

SW: What?

FW: How we...

SW: What?

FW: We were...

SW: What?

FW: In love!

SW: Ah!

FW: Yes! Love!

SW: You seem so familiar.

The Wanderers embrace, splashing water everywhere.

FW: (drinking) Yes! Wait. Oh... ah...

SW: What?

FW: It seems, maybe...

SW: What?

FW: There was... an accident?

SW: And...

FW: Perhaps you ... killed... me?

SW: It can't...

FW: Maybe I'm wrong?

FW: It can't be!

FW: Drink! You'll remember.

SW: God no! Why should I remember such violence?

FW: I cannot see it all so clearly yet.



The Bound Man transforms into the King at the fountain.

K: Keep drinking!

SW: No! It must be a lie. Are they your memories? Is it poison to make you think such things?

K: You must drink. Then we will know what you must atone for.

SW: Maybe there's a reason we forget here.

FW: But our love?

SW: Our love.

SW: If we loved each other, that all ended when we died.

FW: It could be now if you remember.

SW: How can you ask me? It seems so terrifying.

K: Every life has need for redemption. How can you be forgiven for what you know nothing of?

SW: But I wish not to know, like the Hunter.

K: The Hunter is evil. He keeps his freedom to himself and tortures those who ask him to atone.

SW: He is just a lost soul. Why does he really bind you?

K: Because he is weak. He refuses to believe there is a great battle coming. How will we ready ourselves? A powerful one shall rise with great might and by stealth or fraud will seize the kingdom. Of the wise, some shall fall so that the rest may be tested, refined, purified, until the end time. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awaken. Some

shall live in everlasting horror and disgrace, but the wise will shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament. I believed you would release me. I had glimpses! I have been waiting. With your help, we may all atone, repent, and be purified. We must vanquish the Hunter and reclaim this world. He guards the doorway to ascension. He lets no one pass, turning them to the wild.

SW: How can all this be true?

K: You will become more and more aware as you drink.

FW: Thank you my King.

K: Let us all have faith. When we are rested, we will revisit the Hunter and take our freedom.



SCENE V

The Second Wanderer is pacing. The King is asleep. The First Wanderer approaches the Second Wanderer.

FW: I remember more.

SW: Tell me.

FW: I can feel it, my whole life has returned, and our love was all of what made it worth anything.

SW: And then...

FW: I don't quite know. You must remember for yourself.

SW: Did I betray you? Perhaps it's just a vision of the King's. Anyway, to remember being wronged is easy. Would you have me remember such evil in myself? For what? So I can beg for forgiveness? This is not the stuff of death. Death is quiet. There are no choices beyond it. This is all some kind of game.

FW: It is no game to ask forgiveness.

SW: To whom? Why now? I owe you, and this man, nothing.

FW: What do you owe yourself?

SW: I owe you nothing. That is not for you or anyone, especially in death. Whenever I come to my own, I can wait.

FW: Then you will wait alone?

The Wanderers turn away from each other and begin to talk to themselves.

SW: What if what I've done cannot be redeemed? My forgiveness should be my own, granted to me by myself. Perhaps it is the path, perhaps it is the wild. It is there I will become my own. No wonder it is so mysterious? No wonder no one dares. Perhaps I am a hunter. I will absolve myself in the wild, or die again, and be at peace.

FW: Perhaps she's right – it's over. But, how can I leave who I loved all my life? Maybe it is the only way to find myself. The wild would be death again, for us both. It can be no mistake that I have come this far to be absolved. Love or redemption? Why must I choose? I'll never be at peace.

The King appears, newly rested, and interrupts both of the Wanderers

K: Come, I have gathered my strength. Now we will put an end to the Hunter's rule.



SCENE VI

The Hunter is alone at his table. The King bursts in with both Wanderers

K: My dear Hunter, we have returned!

H: Where have you been?

K: Your friends took me to the fountain.

H: (To the Wanderers) What have you done?

K: They have only done what was prophesied. What you cannot prevent yourself.

H: Stay back! He's dangerous. What has he told you?

K: I have told them everything. That a great moment awaits. The fulfillment of all wonders is here. They need only follow me to avoid damnation! Their presence is a sign!

FW: You chained him up, tortured him!

H: Oh no! It's him! He's the one! There is no prophesy. Only his wickedness. We came here long ago and have found no escape. To die here means only to return. We have glimpses

of each time before, and it finally came to me that the path was the only true way. But it was too late. This man saw only a world to conquer. He killed me, again and again. I went mad. Finally, I glimpsed enough. I knew I had to wrest this world from his evil. And the path is useless for me now. My memories, shards of glass, destroyed by his torture!

K: What a story! What lies! He covets all! The fountain, the doorway! And why? He is ashamed! Ashamed of himself, of this world, of all he spoils, riddled with envy for those who will atone. Beware!

SW: What of the fountain, and the doorway?

H: If you drink, he will find what pains you and make you relive it as he promises your salvation. Then the doorway brings you back unaware. It's all just temptation.

K: He damns the magic of this world!

H: It's all just temptation.

SW: (To the First Wanderer) Ah! How can it be, we've come so far only to hear these lies. Look at them, so angry and disturbed. Locked in some torturous way. They have never found safe passage, in all their time. How can we trust them? Redemption is an illusion.

FW: (To the Second Wanderer) I have awakened as well to love and death. But perhaps you are right. Our love was over when we died. It is I who must remember! I am destroyed to let you go again.

K: It is he who must remember!

FW: But it was you who brought us here. It can be no mistake that we have come this far to be released. In the King's protection we are absolved and will ascend. It is only this foe who stands in our way.

H: Beware his temptation!

K: It is he who must be free.

SW: Redemption is an illusion.

The First Wanderer approaches the Hunter, The Second Wanderer steps away.

FW: There can be no peace without justice for this man.

The First Wanderer dispels the Hunter and the Second Wanderer runs off stage.

FW: My love! Come back!

K: Very good my friend. Justice has won and the prophesy is coming true.

FW: What have I done?

K: You have fulfilled your purpose!

FW: What have I done?

K: You will be rewarded for your faith!

FW: What have I done?



The King and the Hunter fight. The Hunter warns, "Beware his temptations!"

K: Look around you. This is a world of pain. It requires justice and repentance. You have redeemed yourself, and now you may ascend.

FW: But what of her?

K: Your love was over when she died. But now you know you have a higher calling.

FW: Yes, please release me. It would be torture to be alone with only these memories.

K: You need not suffer any longer. And you will be rewarded for the favor you have done for me and the Hunter. Through the doorway, you will find redemption.

FW: At last, I'll be at peace. But what about the others?

K: I will guide them to their destiny.

FW: Thank you, my King.

The First Wanderer passes through the door.

K: (to himself) Even as we pass on we are unaware of it. For now, we are blind.

As the musical coda continues, lights flash, each time revealing the King in various relaxed circumstances, alone in the space. Finally, the King walks off. As the lights flicker a final time, we see the First Wanderer has appeared where the King once was, chained. The Hunter enters. The Hunter and the First Wanderer exchange looks.

END



Composer and pianist **John Aylward** grew up in the Sonoran Desert, on the border of Arizona and Mexico, a child of an immigrant mother from Germany (herself a World War II refugee) and in circumstances of both tremendous diversity and economic instability. His music processes the impacts of that earlier life, filled with a deep sense of community, rich expressions of converging cultural histories, and the otherworldly landscapes of the desert. Recent awards and fellowships include those from the John S. Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University, the Koussevitzky Commission from the Library of Congress, MacDowell, Tanglewood, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, First Prize from the International Society for Contemporary Music, and many others. John lives in Northampton, Massachusetts with his wife Kate.

You can learn more about John's music at **johnaylward.com**.

Performer Bios

Soprano **Nina Guo** is interested in the sounds of recent and ongoing times, and her performance practice includes interpreting notated music, improvising, and collaborating on interdisciplinary projects. As a contemporary music specialist, she has performed with groups like Ensemble Modern, Decoder Ensemble, and ECCE, and has been featured at festivals like Acht Brücken (Köln), Passion:SPIEL at the Deutsches National Theater (Weimar), and Music in Time at Spoleto Festival (Charleston). Nina's personal projects include several duo collaborations. Departure Duo, a contemporary music soprano+double bass duo with Edward Kass, released its debut album 'Immensity Of' on New Focus Recordings in 2022. With artist Leonie Brandner, Nina made MOSSOPERA, a long duration installation opera for two voices, dictaphones, and ceramic resonators. In the last years, radio has become an important part of her practice, and her live comedy variety show, *The Entertainment*, is hosted by Cashmere Radio (Berlin). facesound.org

Lukas Papenfusscline is a singer and performance-maker living in New York City. They specialize in medieval and contemporary song, working exclusively in collaborative environments and through the lens of queerness. A sought-after

vocalist for concert, opera, and theatre, Lukas also leads a band, mammifères, that adapts music of the past through ethnic chaos. "Olema," the band's first album, explored American folk and "Bestiary" (upcoming) dives into medieval music. Lukas' extensive performance experience has brought them all around the world to legendary venues like the Getty Villa Museum, NYPL's Jefferson Market Library, La MaMa, Théâtre du Châtelet, and the Hirshhorn Museum.

Tyler Bouque is a baritone and composer born and raised in Troy, Michigan. As a performer, Bouque specializes in contemporary music, with a repertoire largely comprised of works from the last century. He is a firm believer in directly engaging with composers to realize their compositional visions, and among his repertoire, which spans solo, chamber, and operatic works, are several pieces specifically written for him. As a composer, his interests lie in the intersection of literature, linguistics, theater, and music. Bouque's writing often turns to the "expression beyond language" — that which lies beneath text — as a primary informant. He is currently working on a musiktheater cycle after Dante's *Inferno*. Also active in music research, Bouque is currently working on a book detailing the history of opera post-1925.

Baritone **Cailin Marcel Manson**, a Philadelphia native, has enjoyed an international career as an operatic/concert soloist, conductor, and master teacher with many organizations, including the Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, SWR Sinfonieorchester, Taipei Philharmonic, Bayerische Staatsoper - Münchner Opernfestspiele, Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Teatro La Fenice, Teatro San Carlo, Konservatorium Oslo, and the Conservatoire de Luxembourg. He has also been a guest cantor and soloist at some of the world's most famous churches and cathedrals, including Notre Dame, Sacré-Coeur, and La Madeleine in Paris, San Marco in Venice, Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, San Salvatore in Montalcino, Santa Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome, Thomaskirche and Nikolai-kirche in Leipzig, and Wieskirche in Steingaden. Cailin has built a sterling reputation over an extensive 20-year career, encompassing both baritone and tenor repertoire, for his exceptional musicianship, keen dramatic instincts, and vocal flexibility. Critics have praised his performances roles as "arresting" and "revelatory," making consistent note of his "ringing projection," "commanding presence," and "ability to bring the internal drama of the music to life."

Laura Williamson is a string player in the Boston area. She received a masters degree from New England Conservatory following her undergraduate studies at Vanderbilt University. Her most influential teachers include Aaron Janse, Kathryn Plummer, and Marcus Thompson. Laura can be heard performing around Boston with the Boston Festival Orchestra, Eureka Ensemble, Cape Ann Symphony, and others. Laura teaches private lessons in violin and viola as well as violin ensemble classes and Suzuki Early Childhood Education at New England Conservatory Preparatory School.

Cellist **Issei Herr** is committed to a diverse array of music both old and new. A compelling soloist and a dedicated collaborator, Issei performs a scope of repertoire that ranges from the music of Bach, Babbitt, and Berio to Schubert, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky. Issei is a fierce advocate of the music of our time, working closely with living composers to develop emerging repertoire and presenting new works in the context of innovative concert programs.

Bassist **Greg Chudzik** has performed premieres by Steve Reich, Steve Coleman, Brian Ferneyhough, Johnny Greenwood, Mark Appelbaum, Alex Mincek, Eric Wubbels, Sam Pluta, Ted Hearne, Anthony Cheung, Dan Deacon, Paula Mathieson, Anna Clyne, and Fay Kween Wang. In the past he has performed at Carnegie Hall, La Philharmonie, The Village Vanguard, Disney Hall, Darmstadt Music Festival, and

Saalfalden Jazz Festival. He performs regularly with Ensemble Signal, Talea Ensemble, ICE Ensemble, and Wet Ink Ensemble as well as the bands Empyrean Atlas, and the Briars of North America. In 2019 he released his second album “Solo Works Vol. 2” for double bass on Panoramic Recordings.

Guitarist **Daniel Lippel**, called an “exciting soloist” (New York Times) has a multi-faceted career as a soloist, chamber musician, collaborator, and recording artist. Recent recital highlights include Cleveland International Guitar Festival, Le Poisson Rouge (NYC), Sinus Ton Festival (Germany), the National University of Colombia, and the Triangle and NYC Guitar Societies. As a contemporary chamber musician, he has been a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble since 2005 and counter)induction since 2019, and as a guest with many others, including St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, New York City Ballet, New York New Music Ensemble, Wet Ink Ensemble, Talea Ensemble, ECCE Ensemble, and Ensemble Dal Niente, performing at such venues as the Dutch National Opera, Ultima Festival at the Oslo Opera House (Norway), Macau Festival (China), and Kunst Universitaet Graz (Austria), Mostly Mozart Festival, Ojai Festival, and Ottawa Chamber Festival (Canada). He is the co-founder, owner, and director of New Focus Recordings, performing and producing on several of its albums, as well as appearing on recordings on other labels including Kairos, Sony Classical Japan, Bridge, Tzadik, Wergo, and New World. He completed his DMA at the Manhattan

School of Music, with earlier studies at Cleveland Institute of Music and Oberlin Conservatory.

Born in China, **Tianyi Wang** is an award-winning composer, conductor, and pianist, whose music vocabulary is diverse and much inspired by subjects beyond music. Tianyi’s repertoire spans over solo, chamber, choral, orchestral, electroacoustic, as well as film scoring. His works have been performed by ensembles and festivals around the globe, including Darmstädter Ferienkurse, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, impuls Festival, Festival Mixtur, Meitar Ensemble, ensemble blank, iNensemble, Audiograft Festival, Ashmolean Museum, Ensemble MISE-EN, and many others. He is the winner of 2020 MUSIQA Emerging Composer Commission Competition, 2018-19 New England Conservatory of Music Honors Composition Competition, 2018 BMOP/NEC Composition Competition, 2017 Longy Orchestral Composition Competition, and 2016 Sanya International Choral Festival. He is also a recipient of China National Arts Fund in 2017. Tianyi’s music has been released by Navona, Ablaze, and Petrichor Records.

tianyiwangmusic.com

Stratis Minakakis is a composer and conductor whose work engages memory, cultural identity, and art as social testimony; it also explores the rich possibilities engendered by the interaction between arts and sciences. As a composer, he has received commissions from and collaborated with leading performers and ensembles, such as the Grammy award-winning Crossing Choir, Prism Saxophone Quartet, and Partch Ensemble. Other notable partners include saxophonist Don-Paul Kahl, Ensemble du Bout du Monde, pianist Jihye Chang, soprano Nina Dante, flutist Dalia Chin, and cellist Annie Jacobs-Perkins. As a conductor, he has directed numerous ensembles in contemporary repertory, including world premieres by Ken Ueno, Mathew Rosenbaum and John Aylward, and the North American premiere of Sciarrino's *Quaderno di Strada*. A highly sought-after studio instructor, he has taught in numerous institutions and festivals in the United States and Europe. Deeply committed to music pedagogy, he was awarded the Dean's Award for Distinguished Teaching at the University of Pennsylvania and the Louis Krasner Award for Teaching Excellence at New England Conservatory. Stratis Minakakis studied composition, theory, and piano performance at the University of Pennsylvania, New England Conservatory, Princeton University, and Athenaeum Conservatory. He currently teaches Composition and Music Theory at New England Conservatory.

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Produced by John Aylward
Joel Gordon, recording engineer
Peter Atkinson, recording assistant
Edited, mixed and mastered by Joel Gordon and John Aylward

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Cover Image: Composite of stills from the August 2022 film production:
Top image: Stage set; Bottom image: Nina Guo
Photo of John Aylward (p. 24) by Kate Soper

Stills from the film production, August, 2022
Graham Swon, producer
Laine Rettmer, director
Alice Millar, director of photography
Kevin McGericle, Andrea Merckx, Laine Rettmer, set design
Bethany Eddy, costumes
Joelynn Petrie, makeup & wardrobe

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