

Soulpepper | TRIA Theatre

# KING GILGAMESH & THE MAN OF THE WILD

CREATED BY SETH BOCKLEY, JESSE LAVERCOMBE AND AHMED MONEKA

A SOULPEPPER THEATRE AND TRIA THEATRE CO-PRODUCTION



Illustrations: Gracia Lam Design: lighthupthesky.ca

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Welcome to our second installment of our “Summer of Song” series, *King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild*. We have been lucky to have watched this show grow, supporting its development through a sold-out New York showcase at last year’s Under the Radar festival to this Canadian Premiere.

This piece weaves together a contemporary story of friendship with the ancient text of the “Epic of Gilgamesh”, set to the fusion sounds of Arabic-maqam and jazz. We were drawn to the honesty and magnetic energy of Ahmed Moneka and Jesse LaVercombe who pull moments from their real-life relationship into this timeless tale. We are especially excited for Ahmed’s mainstage debut after graduating from the Soulpepper Academy in 2021. We are also happy to welcome his long-time collaborators and co-creators Jesse and Seth Bockley who are making their Soulpepper debuts, alongside the acclaimed Moneka Arabic Jazz band.

We thank you for coming to this show and for supporting live theatre. If you enjoy tonight, we invite you to continue the party with us at our “Live from the Stage Door” concert series, held in our courtyard at 9pm every Friday night throughout the summer. Dancing shoes welcome.

We also encourage you to book your tickets to experience our upcoming concert *Detroit: Music of the Motor City*, opening August 9th.

Enjoy the show and we look forward to welcoming you back this summer.

**GIDEON ARTHURS**

Executive Director,  
Soulpepper Theatre Company

**WEYNI MENGESHA**

Artistic Director,  
Soulpepper Theatre Company

**“Gilgamesh goes in search of eternal life, but what he is really looking for is a person to be and a road to take. The only thing that is left of his usual self is the storm in his heart, the constant force that drives him on, and on, and on.” - Sophus Helle**

The oldest story in the world is a tale of an unlikely friendship. The “Epic of Gilgamesh” is many things– a guide to good kingship, a meditation on mortality, an action-adventure yarn, a mysterious, funny, profane and profoundly human tale of hope and loss, arrogance and humbling, ambition and self-acceptance. But above all it is the story of friendship– of two people who found meaning in life by finding each other. This universal truth sings to us across four millennia.

We created this play organically, and as the three of us explored the themes of this ancient epic, a second, contemporary story of friendship emerged between another unlikely pair. In real life, Ahmed and Jesse, an Iraqi and an American, met at an Ontario cabin in the summer of 2017 with Driftwood Theatre. In our play, they meet in a Toronto coffee shop. In both realities, a spark became a conversation, out of which formed a brotherhood that transcended their differences in language, skin color, religion, and even the war between their homelands.

There is a lesson common to both of these stories, ancient and contemporary: we need friends to help us become our truest and best and strongest selves. Friends are our memory-holders, our tough-truth-tellers, our witnesses in the journey of life. This is a love as vital as the romantic, and one that, especially in North America, wants to be examined and celebrated.

This is also a Toronto story deep in its heart, a labor of love that has brought us together as a company over several years of joyful collaboration. Ahmed’s band, Moneka Arabic Jazz, was itself created as part of this process and has grown to be a jewel in the Toronto music scene. We could not be more grateful for their artistry and spirit as we brought them, full circle, into this production.

Thank you for joining us on this epic journey.

**SETH BOCKLEY, JESSE LAVERCOMBE, AHMED MONEKA**

TRIA Theatre

**I have a friend at my side.  
I feel no fear.**

The “Epic of Gilgamesh”, the first story ever written down, comes from Ancient Iraq. It was originally written on clay tablets in cuneiform, the world’s oldest writing system. Clay can survive the passage of time, but it can also shatter easily (like our own hearts). Cuneiform texts come to us in fragments, so we do not have all of Gilgamesh; words and entire lines are missing. It’s unique: an ancient epic that’s still unfolding in our time. The creators of this show take that idea to heart, and like Gilgamesh himself, they search the depths of their own lives to find where they belong.

**If you totally got it, it wouldn’t be  
a good story.**

The gaps in the epic are actually part of its allure. They tickle our curiosity; they leave room for artists to imagine. This play weaves the lives of two of our three co-creators Ahmed Moneka and Jesse LaVercombe together with those of Gilgamesh and his friend, Enkidu. Set equally in modern day Toronto, Ancient Iraq, and in the minds and hearts of its protagonists, and scored by the remarkable Moneka Arabic Jazz Band, the play is both completely contemporary and rooted in tradition. The evolving friendship of the two men in the present day, a Muslim and a Jew, an actor and a musician, embraces struggle and the search for connection. Today as in ancient times love, challenge, and loss transform characters in ways they cannot prepare for but must only live.

**Who are you?  
Who brought you to this place?  
Why?**

Whatever brought you to our theatre tonight, welcome. When the lights go down, this amazing company will tell you an old, new story that goes straight to your heart.

## **Original Author Biography**

Gilgamesh first appeared in the 11th century BCE. Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian storytellers braided the story together, with smaller cultures like the Chaldeans, Hittites, and Akkadians contributing to it. Some parts of the story were written on cuneiform tablets, others came from oral literature, copied out by scribes. Translation and adaptation are constant in Gilgamesh’s history. In the 12th century BCE, a Babylonian scholar named Sin-leqi-unninni created one of the most well-known versions of the tale, pulling from many sources and adding his own ideas for good measure. Copies of the epic have been found in Israel, Syria, and Turkey. A new fragment was discovered in 2018.

Background Notes by Paula Wing





## The Story of the Epic of Gilgamesh – Spoilers Ahead! “

The “Epic of Gilgamesh” is an ancient Mesopotamian poem that recounts the adventures of Gilgamesh, the legendary king of Uruk. The epic is divided into several sections, each capturing different aspects of Gilgamesh’s journey. The story begins by portraying Gilgamesh as a tyrannical ruler who oppresses his people. In response to their cries for help, the Gods create Enkidu, a wild man, to challenge and eventually befriend Gilgamesh. The two embark on a series of epic quests, including defeating the monstrous Humbaba and encountering the divine Bull of Heaven. However, tragedy strikes when Enkidu dies, sending Gilgamesh into a deep grief and existential crisis. He sets out on a quest for immortality but ultimately learns the value of living a meaningful life and accepting mortality. The epic concludes with Gilgamesh returning to Uruk, transformed by his experiences and leaving behind a legacy that endures through his city and the written account of his epic tale.



Illustration of the Flood Tablet, relating part of the Epic of Gilgamesh  
credit: Nastasic. istock, Getty Images.

## CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

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### Cast & Band

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**Jesse LaVercombe\***  
Enkidu/Jesse

**Demetrios Petsalakis**  
Bandleader,  
Multi-Instrumentalist

**Max Senitt**  
Drums

**Ahmed Moneka\***  
King Gilgamesh/Ahmed

**Waleed Abdulhamid**  
Bass, Vocals

**Selcuk Suna**  
Saxophone, Clarinet

**Jessica Deutsch**  
Violin

### Creative Team

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**Seth Bockley**  
Director, Playwright

**Sara Schwartz Geller**  
Producer, TRIA Theatre

**Guillermo Verdecchia**  
Dramaturg

**Jesse LaVercombe**  
Playwright

**Lorenzo Savoini**  
Set and Lighting Designer

**Maya Bowers\***  
Stage Manager

**Ahmed Moneka**  
Playwright

**Adrian Shepherd Gawinski**  
Sound Designer

**Megan Robinson**  
Production Assistant,  
TRIA Theatre

### Production

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**Gunes Agduk**  
Lighting Operator

**Greg Chambers**  
1st Props Builder/Buyer

**Ilia Lagutin**  
Audio Operator

**Paul Boddum**  
Head Scenic

**Lisa Nighswander**  
Head of Props

\* The participation of this Artist is arranged by permission of Canadian Actors' Equity Association under the provisions of the Dance•Opera•Theatre Policy.

*King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild* was previously developed and presented with Pivot Arts Festival, Chicago, as well as La MaMa Experimental Theater Club, New York, in association with the Public Theater's Under The Radar Festival.

*King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild* is generously supported by  
**Toronto Arts Council & Canada Council for the Arts**

**TRIA Theatre sends a special thank you to:** Elissa Cottle, Larry LaVercombe, Pat Francisco, Lucas Schumacher, Nadja Milena, Paolo Santalucia, Pranay Noel, Soulepper, Rebecca Desmarais, Owais Lightwala, Christina Baldwin, The Jungle Theater, Segal Centre, The Guthrie Theater, The Moving Company, Driftwood Theatre, Jeremy D. Smith, Richard Rose, Xina P. Gilani, Wes Bockley, Sina Moneka, Sarah Kravetz, Moneka Family, Saif, Andrea Donaldson & Rob Baker.

**Warning:** mature language and sexual content.

**Running Time:**  
95 minutes,  
no intermission



**WALEED ABDULHAMID** is a Canadian multi-instrumentalist; Composer; Vocalist; Music and Film Producer. This educator-artist of demonstrated versatility plays 20 instruments. He has recorded, performed and toured with celebrated artists including David Clayton Thomas of the Grammy award-winning band Blood, Sweat & Tears and Motown legends, The Drifters. He is the recipient of the Canadian New Pioneer Award; African Tama Award; Reel World Film Festival Award and Canadian Film Board of Excellence Award, and has been twice honoured with a DORA Award. As an actor, Waleed has performed in many films, most recently for CBC, CANN Film Festival France, and TIFF. Waleed is currently a faculty member in the music department of the University of Toronto.



**SETH BOCKLEY** is a Midwest-based theater director and writer of plays, fiction and screenplays. SOULPEPPER 2023: King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild. OTHER THEATRE: 2666 (Goodman Theater); February House (The Public Theater); Wilderness and Basetrack Live (En Garde Arts). OTHER: His first opera, The Crash, will premiere in Oldenburg, Germany in 2024. He teaches at the University of Chicago. Sethbockley.com



**MAYA BOWERS** SOULPEPPER 2023: King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild. Other Theatre: Billy Elliot (Neptune Theatre), You and I (Young Peoples Theatre), Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo (Crow's/Modern Times), On Golden Pond (Drayton), The Curious Voyage (Talk is Free Theatre), Sweat (Canadian Stage/Studio 180), Actually (Obsidian Theatre/Harold Green Jewish Theatre), Antigone: 方 (Young People's Theatre), The Christmas Express, The Great Kooshog Lake Hollis McCauley Fishing Derby, Knickers!, Boeing Boeing (Upper Canada Playhouse).



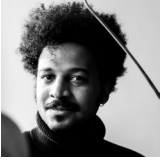
**JESSICA DEUTSCH** is an in-demand violinist, vocalist, bassist, arranger and composer in Toronto. She is incredibly versatile in many styles, and began classical training at age 3, and was a three-time national finalist in the Canadian Music Competition. She works with many artists, including Leif Vollebekk, Tyler Shaw, Sarah Slean, Tara Moneka, and Ventanas. She played fiddle in Come From Away, and the Musical Stage Co's Kelly V Kelly. She is an MD for several projects including: Dijlah, Lenka Lichtenberg's "The Thieves of Dreams," and FabCollab's Women in Song.



**ADRIAN SHEPHERD-GAWINSKI** heard what you said about him, and he's mad. SOULPEPPER 2023: King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild (debut). OTHER THEATRE: Bed & Breakfast (Lighthouse Festival Theatre; Actor), The Hooves Belonged to the Deer (Tarragon; Actor), Every Day She Rose (Buddies in Bad Times; Actor), Box 4901 (Buddies in Bad Times; Composer) AWARDS: Perfect Attendance (W.J. Fricker Senior Elementary Convocation); Most Improved Player – Senior Boys Volleyball Team (Widdifield Secondary School Athletic Awards); Outstanding Sound Design/Composition – Independent Theatre (2020 Dora Mavor Moore Awards).



**JESSE LAVERCOMBE** was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. SOULPEPPER 2023: King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild (debut). OTHER THEATRE: Post-Democracy, Bunny, Hamlet, Sequence (Tarragon), Beautiful Man (Factory), Copenhagen (National Arts Centre). FILM & TELEVISION: Violation (Toronto ACTRA Award, Canadian Screen Award nominee), Murdoch Mysteries (4 seasons). WRITING: Code 8: Part II (Netflix/Collective Pictures), Float (Lionsgate/Collective Pictures). Playwrights Guild of Canada Emerging Writing Award. TRAINING: National Theatre School, Canadian Film Centre Actors Conservatory.



**AHMED MONEKA** is a celebrated actor and musician from Baghdad, Iraq, who now calls Toronto home. SOULPEPPER 2023: King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild (debut); SOULPEPPER: Soulpepper Academy (2021). OTHER THEATRE: Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo (Crow's/Modern Times, Dora nominated for Leading Role); The Abduction from the Seraglio (Canadian Opera Company). FILM & TELEVISION: The Society; The Blind Ferryman (forthcoming). OTHER: Founder of musical group Moskitto Bar and creator and leader of Moneka Arabic Jazz; one of the Stingray Rising Stars finalists in 2019 at the TD Toronto Jazz festival and Stingray Rising Stars winner 2022 at Mundial Montreal. [ahmedmoneka.com](http://ahmedmoneka.com)



**DEMETRI PETSALAKIS** is originally from Athens Greece, and is a Toronto-based musician performing in a variety of styles with a focus on Greek and Middle Eastern lutes. An active member of the Toronto world music scene, Demetri has composed for, recorded, and performed with many groups including Kune, Niyaz, Tafelmusik, Ventanas, Near East Trio, Zephyr, Turkwaz, Moneka Arabic Jazz and Moskitto Bar. Demetri has studied with many great teachers including oud masters Bassam Bishara, and Christos Tsiamoulis, and master of the Cretan Lyra Astrinos Zaharioudakis and renowned jazz guitarist Lorne Lofsky.



**LORENZO SAVOINI** was born and raised in Thornhill, ON. SOULPEPPER 2023: King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild. FOR SOULPEPPER: Over forty productions, most notably set design for Pipeline (2022), A Streetcar Named Desire (2019), set and lighting for Rose (2019). Idomeneus (2018). OTHER THEATRE: Pomegranate (Canadian Opera Company); New (RMTC/Necessary Angel/CanStage); set and lighting for Grand Magic (Stratford Festival), Kelly V. Kelly (Musical Stage Co./Canadian Stage), Network (Citadel/RMTC), Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo (Crow's Theatre), Of Mice and Men (Joffrey Ballet). OTHER: Lorenzo is the recipient of five Dora Awards for outstanding design and is a member of the Associated Designers of Canada. [www.lorenzosavoini.com](http://www.lorenzosavoini.com)







**SARA SCHWARTZ GELLER** is a theatre and television producer and professional chef. Sara is the owner of Toronto shop, Soul Provisions and soup delivery company, Toronto Soup Co. Combining passions, Sara is the producer and host of a reality food tv show coming out this fall. THEATRE: Lady Gaga #ARTBIRTH (Tour & Toronto) Wrestling Jerusalem (Tour & Toronto) The Curious Voyage (UK.) Sara was the Executive Director of SF based, Traveling Jewish Theatre, from 2007-2015 where she produced an annual season. FILM & TELEVISION: Freedom Talks (CBC), FreeUp! Emancipation Day 2022 & 2023 (CBC), City Girl Eats the Country (Bell, 2023), Wrestling Jerusalem (Apple TV).



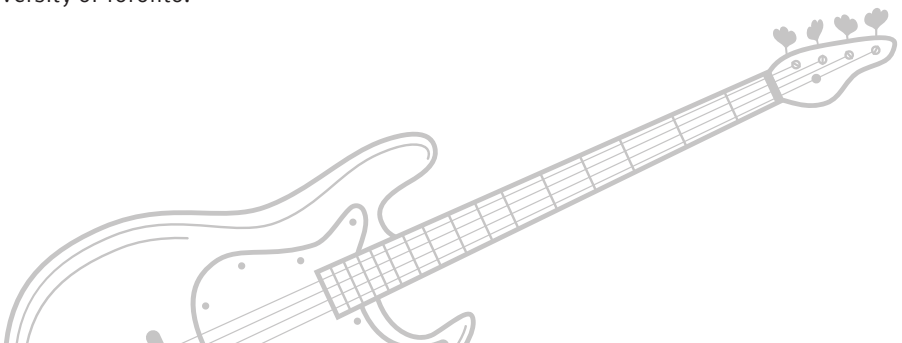
**MAX SENITT** is a Juno Award winning Drummer/Percussionist, and is a highly regarded and in-demand freelance musician specializing in music from around the world. Besides performing with acclaimed Grammy and Juno award winning artists such as: Josh Groban, Alex Cuba, Measha Brueggergosman, Kiran Ahluwalia, and Hilario Duran, he is also a proud member of Moneka Arabic Jazz band, Avataar, Kazdoura, Fractal Sufi and WAPAMA. As an educator, Max teaches privately, is a frequent contributing writer for various music magazines, and a faculty member at Centennial College in Toronto, Canada where he lives.



**SELCUK SUNA** was born in Istanbul and was performing on numerous television programs with countless Turkish pop and jazz stars by 18. While in Turkey, Selcuk performed weekly on the popular late-night show, Beyaz Show. He recorded his last album, “Turkish Standards / Non-standard”, with both Canadian and Turkish musicians. Selcuk is a member of the Royal Conservatory’s New Canadian Global Music Orchestra, KUNÉ. He regularly performs traditional Turkish music with the Istanbul Band throughout the Greater Toronto Area. You can see him playing jazz, flamenco, Latin, indie, middle eastern and other types of world music.



**GUILLERMO VERDECCHIA** was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. SOULPEPPER 2023: Co-Director English. Dramaturg: The Seagull and King Gilgamesh & the Man of the Wild. FOR SOULPEPPER: Fronteras Americanas; Animal Farm; Of Human Bondage (dramaturg); Queen Goneril (Dramaturg); The Parliament of the Birds (playwright; Around the World in 80 plays) Other Theatre: King Gilgamesh & The Man of the Wild (dramaturg: Jungle Theatre); The Jungle (director: Tarragon Theatre); The Orchard (dramaturg: Shaw Festival); The Art of Building a Bunker (co-creator: Quiptake/Factory Theatre). Other: A recipient of the Governor-General’s Award for Drama for his play Fronteras Americanas, his newest play, Feast, will premiere in the fall of 2023. He is the Jury Chair of the Siminovitch Prize in Theatre. He teaches at the University of Toronto.



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## **Weyni Mengesha**

Artistic Director

## **Gideon Arthurs**

Executive Director

## **Administration**

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### **Ece Aydin**

Executive Assistant to the Executive Director

### **Luke Reece**

Associate Artistic Director

### **Joanna Falck**

Artistic Associate, Literary

## **Producing**

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### **Jonathan Heppner**

Executive Producer

### **Annie Clarke**

Producer

### **Robyn Hoja**

Producer

### **Malika Daya**

Assistant Producer

## **Production**

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### **Jasmine Knox**

Senior Production Manager

### **Julian Bulof**

Technical Director

### **Nicholas Beardsley**

Assistant Technical Director

### **Rhett Costin**

Assistant Technical Director

### **Julia Carrano**

Assistant Production Manager

### **Andy DeVries**

Head Carpenter

### **Lisa Nighswander**

Head of Properties

### **Paul Boddum**

Head Scenic Artist

### **Ellie Koffman**

Head of Wardrobe

## **Kalina Popova**

Assistant Head of Wardrobe

## **Alex Edwards**

Production Assistant

## **Development**

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### **Liza Hersh**

Development Officer, Corporate & Foundation

### **Adele Kei**

Development Coordinator

## **Marketing**

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Director of Marketing & Communications

### **Riaz Charania**

Associate Director of Marketing

### **Ajay Patel**

Content Manager

### **Nathan Schwartzberg**

Audience Relationship Manager

## **Education & Community**

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### **Rohan Kulkarni**

Director of Education & Community Engagement

### **Ahlam Hassan**

Education Coordinator

### **Abby Esteireiro**

Academy Administrator

### **Jacqui Arntfield**

Community Activator

## **Finance**

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### **Michelle Beveridge**

Director of Finance

### **Maria Larina**

Finance Manager

### **Shishi Chen**

Payroll Coordinator

### **Nilsa Rivero**

Accounting Coordinator

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Susan Coyne

Ted Dykstra

Michael Hanrahan

Stuart Hughes

Diana Leblanc

Diego Matamoros

Nancy Palk

Albert Schultz

Robyn Stevan

William Webster

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**Maureen Dodig**

**Denise Donlon**

**Charmain Emerson**

**Beverley Flynn**

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**Maja Neable**

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**Roxana Tavana**

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Operation Services Coordinator

**Kenzie Delo**

**Emily Templeman**

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**Elyssia Giancola**

**Chloe MacPherson**

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**Melissa Avalos**

**Adrian Chevalier**

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**Shayna Linds**

**Riley Kelk**

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**Tavaree Daniel-Simms**

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**Maxwell Gemmell**

**Shreya Khana**

**Saurabh Nimkar**

**Yohannes Taye**

**Yezhi Kuo**

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**I.T.**

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**Fernando Arriola**

I.T. Manager

**Sheila Kearney Miller**

Tessitura Administrator

**Andrew Ho**

I.T. Systems Administrator

**Building Operations**

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**Greg Poulin**

Manager of Building Operation & Production

**Cole Vincent**

Building Operator

**Niamh Cunningham-Closs**

Building Supervisor

**Technicians**

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**Gunes Agduk**

**Andres Castillo-Smith**

**Ethan Robinson**

**Dalton Villeneuve-Marini**

**Board of Directors**

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**John Chang**

**Annie Clarke**

**Rob Brouwer**

**Luigi Ferrara**

**Beverley Flynn**

**Michael Herrera**

**Nancy Prenevost**

**Thank You!**

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**Young Centre**

Thanks to our wonderful legion of Young Centre volunteers for their continued support!

**Young Centre Facilities Funding:**

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All front of house staff – floor captains, patron service representatives, baristas and ushers - working for the Young Centre for the Performing Arts are represented by Local B-173 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

House and Stage Technicians employed by the Young Centre for the Performing Arts are represented by Local 58 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.



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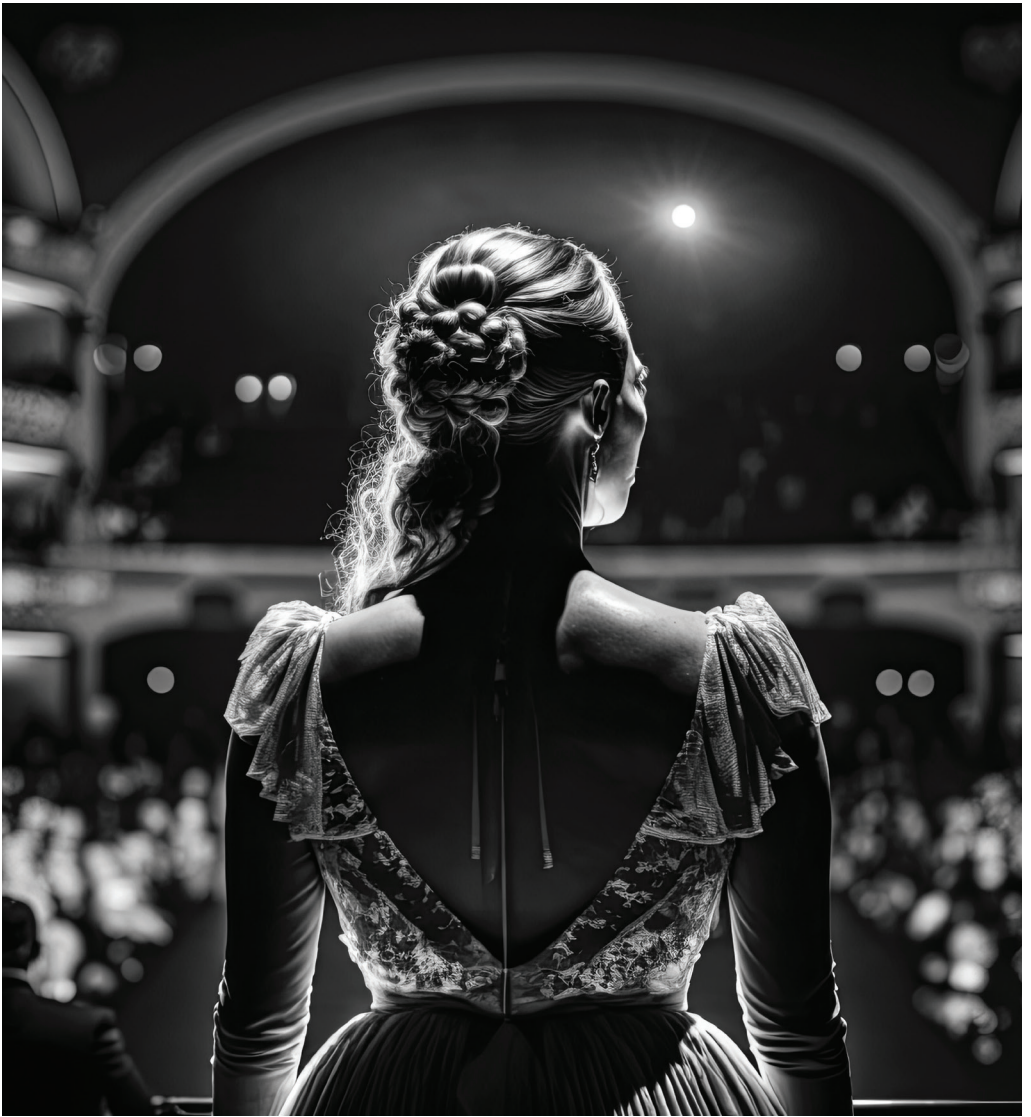
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The artists and staff of Soulpepper and the Young Centre for the Performing Arts acknowledge the original caretakers and storytellers of this land —the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Wendat First Nations. We commit to honouring and celebrating their past, present and future.