



presents

WHAT LIES BENEATH

August 28-September 2, 2021

In Partnership with the South Street Seaport Museum
Aboard the Tall Ship *Wavertree*

Content Advisory

Please be advised that the story of the production centers around the enslavement of African people. This subject matter could elicit a strong or unexpected response from you or those around you.

Required Face Coverings

Please remember to wear your masks at all times aboard the tall ship *Wavertree*.

REPERTOIRE

The unknown is my realm (Trickster's Aria)

from the opera *Amistad*

Music by Anthony Davis | Libretto by Thulani Davis

Ahab

a monodrama for bass-baritone

Music by Juliana Hall | Libretto by Caitlin Vincent

Staged Premiere

1619: A Song Cycle

Music and Text by Damien Geter

East Coast Premiere

O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness (Claggart's Aria)

from the opera *Billy Budd*

Music by Benjamin Britten | Libretto by E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier

Sea Fever

Music by John Ireland | Text by John Masefield

World Premiere arrangement by James Davis Jr.

They are all gone now (Maurya's Lament)

from the opera *Riders to the Sea*

Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Text based on the play of the same name by John Millington Synge



CAST

(in alphabetical order)

Click names to read bios

[Matthew Anchel](#) - JOHN CLAGGART

[Lindell Carter](#) - SHACK THOMAS

[Edwin Jhamal Davis](#) - JOHN BROWN

[Nicholas Davis](#) - THOMAS JOHNS

[Chantal Freeman](#) - MARTHA KING

[Carami Hilaire](#) - GRANDMOTHER

[Bernard Holcomb](#) - TRICKSTER

[Zachary James](#) - CAPTAIN AHAB

[Tesia Kwarteng](#) - DELLA FOUNTAIN/MAURYA

[Elliott Paige](#) - LUKE DIXON

[Karmesha K. Peake](#) - AUNTIE ADELINE

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[Byron Burford-Phearse](#)

PIANIST

[Dmitry Glivinskiy](#)

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[Charity Wicks](#)

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[Rasaan Talu Green](#)

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Ciara DiSeta

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Jamal Bing

Lewis Fender

Chris Griswold

Shelley Mitchell

Kate Theis

OUR VENUE PARTNER



The 1885 ship [Wavertree](#) has a well-documented and fascinating history. Built in Southampton, Great Britain, she circled the globe four times in her career, carrying a wide variety of cargoes. The ship called on New York in 1896, no doubt one of hundreds like her berthed in the city. In 1910, after thirty-five years of sailing, she was caught in a Cape Horn storm that tore down her masts and ended her career as a cargo ship. She was salvaged and used as a floating warehouse and then a sand barge in South America, where the waterfront workers referred to her as “el gran Valero,” the great sailing ship, because even without her masts she was obviously a great windjammer. She was saved by the [Seaport Museum](#) in 1968 and towed to New York to become the iconic centerpiece of the “Street of Ships” at South Street. The 130-year-old *Wavertree*, built of riveted wrought iron, is an archetype of the sailing cargo ships of the latter half of the 19th century that, during the “age of sail,” lined South Street by the dozens, creating a forest of masts from the Battery to the Brooklyn Bridge.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On Site Opera's primary activities take place on and around the island of Mannahatta (presently and commonly known as Manhattan), the Homeland of the indigenous Lenape people, and on the ancestral land of the Wappinger people and many other Indigenous groups.

Read our full land acknowledgment [here](#).

ON SITE OPERA STAFF

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Piper Gunnarson, *Executive Director*
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PUBLISHER CREDITS

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1619: A Song Cycle composed by Damien Geter is presented through special arrangement with DG Music: Sans Fear Publishing www.damiengetermusic.com. Revised narration written by Damien Geter was commissioned by On Site Opera for *What Lies Beneath*.

"O Beauty, O Handsomeness" from *Billy Budd* composed by Benjamin Britten to a libretto by E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier; by arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

"Sea Fever" composed by John Ireland to a poem by John Masefield.

"Maurya's Lament" from *Riders to the Sea* composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams based on the play of the same name by John Millington Synge; licensed by arrangement with Oxford University Press

What Lies Beneath Text

TRICKSTER

The unknown is my realm, calamity my kingdom
I am a God, am I not?
Master of mortal disasters
I will meet this moment as I meet all others:
Stalwart, audacious, and bold.
What they call tragedy, I will make my history
I will make a story to be told
Of genius born of necessity
Of courage come easy when the heart is cold

I am the dancer of all dancers
Liar, thief, and lover,
The one who eats when the forest hungers
When a mortal says there's a bird on the wing
They say a prayer to me
When a mortal says there's a bird on the wing
This wily god comes to sing

I am the dancer of all dancers
Liar, thief, and lover,
The one who eats when the forest hungers

It is only a slight mishap
My sight's a little dazed
It is only a momentary lapse
My powers retire but I do not fail
These are the trials a hero must suffer
To make his story bold

Among gods it's true
If you live a human life
You forget what a god knows
If you live a human life
You'll regret it like they all do

Speaking sorrow
Singing blue
Men meet with disaster
No matter what they do

The hand moves first and the heart's sick later
They think their gods take pity on them
They think their gods are heartsick too
But gods are greater than men, not nicer

I am the dancer
My sight's a little dazed
It is only a momentary lapse

I am the dancer of all dancers
Liar, thief, and lover
Liar, thief, and lover
Liar, thief, and lover

Goddess of the waters
Mother of all gods
Mistress of oceans, rivers

I know you think me just a small god
A god unarmed and weak
With only wit and brain, words and guile
But it only seems
I am aboard a ship I cannot sail
I will prevail
Mark my words and hear my tale

Certain audiences may observe the following selections in a different order than printed below.

AHAB

The sea is calm now
Heavy with the broken bodies of my men
The splintered pieces of my ship
We and brittle when it mattered
Now empty shells in the deep
I had him!
Gods above
I had him!
The steel in my hand
The throw and the thrust
The gush of his blood
Then the rope round my neck
The pull and the snap
And then... then... silence
Darkness
Where are you?
Destroyer!
I know you're here!
I can taste your bitter blood in the brine
Come and face me!
Come and conquer me if you can!
I sense him
Lurking
Like a viper in a dark abyss
But I'm ready
Ready to stab
To spit my last breath!
Do you hear me?
Demon!
Silence.
The moon will be out now
Anna will be asleep

Will she feel it when she wakes?
Will she weep for the husband she barely knew?
This inky blackness
How it seeps into my eyes
Starbuck? Is that you?
No
I'm alone in the cold and the dark
Alone
Except for you
I'm ready
Waiting
Do you hear me?
I'll wait for you.
Rest my head on the floor of the sea
Rest my head
And wait...

SEA FEVER

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking
Grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying
And the flung spray and the blown spume and the seagulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again to the vagrant wandering life
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife
And all I ask if a merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

CLAGGART'S ARIA

Handsomely done, my lad
Handsome indeed... handsome
O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness,
Would that I never encountered you
Would that I lived in my own world always,
In that depravity to which I was born.
There I found peace a sort.
There I established an order such as reigns in hell.
But alas, alas!
The light shines in the darkness,
And the darkness comprehends it and suffers

O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness,
Would that I'd never seen you!
Would that I'd never seen you!
Having seen you, what choice remains to me?
None! None! I am doomed to annihilate you.

I am vowed to your destruction.
I will wipe you off the face of the earth!
Off this tiny floating fragment of earth
Off this ship where fortune has led you

First I will trouble your happiness
I will mutilate and silence the body where you dwell.
It shall hang from the yard-arm
It shall fall into the depths of the sea
And all shall be as if nothing had been!

No! You cannot escape.
With hate and envy I am stronger than love
So may it be!
So may it be!

O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness
You are surely in my power tonight
Nothing can defend you!
Nothing can defend you!
Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!
So may it be! So may it be!
For what hope remains if love can escape?
If love still lives and grows strong
Where I cannot enter
What hope is there in my own dark world for me?
No! I cannot believe it! No!
That were torment too keen!

I, John Claggart, Master-At-Arms upon the Indomitable
Have you in my power and I will destroy you
I will destroy you...

1619

The first documented Africans in the New World arrived in Virginia in Aug. 1619 on the White Lion, an English privateer based in the Netherlands. Colonial officials traded food for these '20 and odd' Africans, who had been captured from a Portuguese slave ship." Seven years later, the Dutch brought 11 enslaved Africans to the newly-settled colony of New Amsterdam.

Little did we know that our arrival would give birth to a system which would inflict trauma on our people for over 400 hundred years, continuing even to this day.

Ever since I was a child I was told I was a Negro of African stock, and that there was no disgrace in being so. If it wasn't for white folks, we wouldn't be here, and we would have been much better off.

Red.

My grandmother said they used pretty red handkerchiefs and jewels to lure the people from her village to the shore. She hadn't seen anything like them before, so she was curious about them. And when she

got closer and closer to the boat, the white folks showed them more and more things; until next thing she knew - she was on board the ship and it was sailing away. I am Martha King, I was enslaved in Virginia and Alabama.

I. RED

My grandmother was captured in Africa
When she was a little girl
A big boat was down on the edge of the bay
Some of the bravest went up pretty close to look at it
The men on the boat told them that they could come on board
That they could have red
Pretty red handkerchiefs
Red and blue beads and big rings
And the ship sailed away with them
My grandmother never saw any of her kinfolks again
My grandma never saw any of her kinfolks again

Cattle.

Our ancestors passed down first hand accounts of their voyage to America. My grandmother in particular said they were herded like cattle and placed in stalls on the boat. They had room enough to sit or lie down, but they were bound together. I am Luke Dixon. I was enslaved in Virginia.

Sold!

Sold!

II. SOLD

Sold
I used to sit on grandmother's lap
and she told me how they used to catch people in Africa
Sold
They herded them. Herded in stalls
and they brought them on the ship and sold them.

I used to sit on my grandmother's lap and she told me how
They used to catch people in Africa
Herded them like cattle and put in stalls
Brought them on the ship and put in stalls
Brought them on the ship and sold them

SOLD!

Dance.

Oh, how we danced, and danced, and danced! We danced when we were happy, we danced when we were sad. We danced all day and all night! We told stories through dance. It's one of the ways we connected with each other. And according to my aunt:

That's how they enticed us onto the ship - dancing with, and for, the white men. It wasn't until the early morning before I realized...there was nothing but water all around us

And then those white men sold them at auction. I am Thomas Johns. I was enslaved in Alabama.

III. DANCE

My father's name was Goerge
And my mother's name Nellie
My father was born in Africa
They were children of a chief of the Kiochi tribe
They were asked to dance on a ship
And my aunt said:
it was early in the morning
When they found that they were far away
Far away from the land and all they could see was water all around

Dance!

Trinkets!

Just like with "red handkerchiefs", my grandmother told us about the bright trinkets the white men scattered on the beach to attract them.

When we returned to the beach the next day, we saw that they put more shiny objects on the ship. We were curious about them, so we went onboard...

...which led them to the gangplank, and ultimately trapped on the ship. A chorus of screams ensued when they realized what had happened. I am John Brown. I was enslaved in Alabama.

IV. TRINKETS

The oldest ones come right from Africa
One day a big ship stopped off of the shore
The ship men scattered bright things and trinkets
On the beach
Grandmother said everybody made a rush for them things
The next day they scattered some more things
People were feeling less scared
And the next day some of them walked up the gangplank
The deck was covered with things
Like they found on the beach
Two, three hundred natives on the ship when it moved
They rushed to the side
But the plank was gone

These stories are genetic, and so is the devastation attached to them - which brings us back to...

Red

For me, this color conjures feelings of dread - a direct link to the way we were enticed from the Motherland towards an unwanted, strange place. I guess that's why I can't stand red things now. I am Shack Thomas. I was enslaved in Florida.

V. RED

Thomas' father Adam:
When quite a young man was attracted to a large ship
That had just come near his home
He was attracted onboard by bright red handkerchiefs

Surly afterwards he was securely bound
In the hold of the ship to be sold later somewhere in America
My pa hated the sight of red
I guess that's why I can't stand red things now.

If the national Constitution had been rightfully interpreted, and the Government organized under it properly administered, slavery could not have existed in this country for a single hour...I do not believe any constitution can legalize the enslavement of any people.

Let it be known that, on this 18th day of December, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-five and of the independence of the United States of America the ninetieth, that Congress has passed a resolution which I hereby certify has become valid, to all intents and purposes, as a part of the Constitution of the United States. While this resolution, the 13th amendment, technically outlawed slavery in the United States, its careful wording, "except as punishment for crime," gave birth to measures that were used to continue the oppression of African Americans. These include but are not limited to...

Black codes; laws that forced African Americans to sign yearly labor contracts...

Convict leasing; the process by which white farmers could hire people in prison to perform cheap labor without paying the convicted.

We see other systems of oppression over the years:

Through mass incarceration...

The war on drugs...

The school to prison pipeline...

Jim Crow laws...

And redlining.

Was the 13th amendment on its own enough to grant freedom to those individuals who were formerly enslaved?

The 13th amendment.

VI. 13TH

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude except
As a punishment for crime whereof the party shall
Have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States
Or any place subject to their jurisdiction

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude except
The punishment for crime
School to prison pipeline
The war on drugs
Mass incarceration

Convict leasing
Redlining
Jim Crow
The system
Freedom?
Four hundred years

MAURYA'S LAMENT

They are all gone now
And there isn't anything more the sea can do to me
I'll have no call now to be crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south
And you can hear the surf is in the east
And the surf is in the west
Making a great stir with the two noises
And they hitting one on the other
I'll have no call now
To be going down and getting holy water
In the dark nights
And I won't care what way the sea is
When the other women will be keening
Give me the Holy Water, Martha
It isn't that I haven't prayed for you
To the Almighty God
It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night
Till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying
But it's a great rest I'll have now
And it's time surely.
She's quiet now and easy
But the day all of them was drowned
you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well
It's getting old she is and broken
They are all together this time, and the end is come

May the Almighty God have mercy on Della's soul
And on John Brown's soul
And on the souls of Thomas and Luke
And Auntie and Shack
And may he have mercy on my soul
And on the soul of everyone is left living in the world

They will have a clean burial
In the far north by the grace
Of the Almighty God

They will have fine coffins out of the white boards
And deep graves surely
What more can we want than that?
No man at all can be living forever
And we must be satisfied.

