The Listeners

Missy Mazzoli · Royce Vavrek

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO · ENRIQUE MAZZOLA



The Listeners (2022)

Opera in two acts in English

Commissioned by Opera Philadelphia, the Norwegian National Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago · Lyric Opera of Chicago Premiere

Music by **Missy Mazzoli**
Libretto by **Royce Vavrek**, based on an original story by Jordan Tannahill

Disc 1

Act I

1	Prologue, Part 1: "This is how we live now."	3. 42
2	Prologue, Part 2: "Do you hear it?"	1. 35
3	Scene 1: Our Hackles at Full-Mast	5. 49
4	Scene 1: "For God's sake, Mom!"	3. 23
5	Scene 2: "Kyle, hang back a minute."	5. 44
6	Scene 2: "Hey, get this, my mom is fucking my uncle."	1. 18
7	Scene 2: Hortense's Confessional	2. 41
8	Scene 3: "You close?"	3. 53
9	Scene 3: Bitch and Moan	3. 30
10	Scene 4: Classroom Chaos	4. 23
11	Scene 4: Vince's Confessional	2. 53
12	Scene 5: "I get the feeling they're fancy."	0. 27
13	Scene 5: Oversharing	4. 33
14	Scene 5: "He sounds a little too good to be true."	3. 58
15	Scene 5: The Hum	2. 26
16	Scene 5: "Yes. I've brought some literature."	3. 03
17	Scene 5: "Do you hear it?"	4. 48
18	Scene 6: Mailbox Fire	6. 13
	Total playing time Disc 1:	64. 29

Disc 2

Act II

1	Entr'acte: Angela's Confessional	6. 04
2	Scene 1: I Built this For You	5. 38
3	Scene 1: "I'm not into this shit."	3. 27
4	Scene 1: A Vice on Our Ears	4. 07
5	Scene 1: Claire's Confessional	5. 38
6	Scene 2: "I have a bipolar relationship with the hum."	3. 39
7	Scene 2: "I give my mind, my heart, my body to you."	4. 07
8	Scene 2: "What is happening here?"	3. 04
9	Scene 3: Dillon vs. the Tower	1. 40
10	Scene 3: Newscast	1. 45
11	Scene 4: Surrender	2. 25
12	Scene 4: "You don't make love to me like that anymore."	2. 27
13	Scene 4: He Built Nothing	2. 32
14	Scene 4: "See?! Look! He doesn't even hear it!"	2. 29
15	Scene 4: "Four are dead."	0. 26
16	Scene 4: Kyle's First Confessional	3. 03
17	Epilogue	5. 33
	Total playing time Disc 2:	58. 12

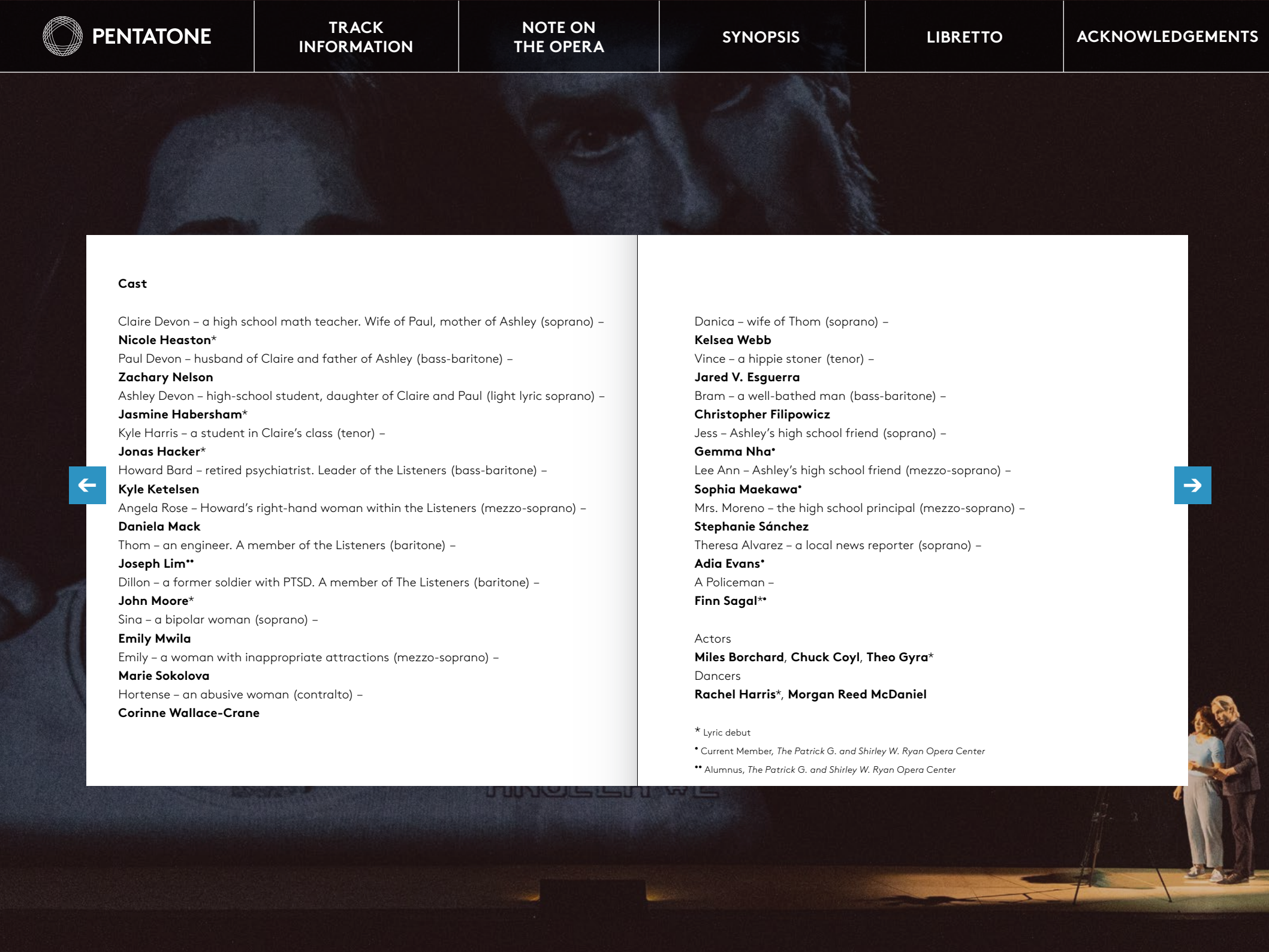
Cast

Claire Devon – a high school math teacher. Wife of Paul, mother of Ashley (soprano) –
Nicole Heaston*
Paul Devon – husband of Claire and father of Ashley (bass-baritone) –
Zachary Nelson
Ashley Devon – high-school student, daughter of Claire and Paul (light lyric soprano) –
Jasmine Habersham*
Kyle Harris – a student in Claire's class (tenor) –
Jonas Hacker*
Howard Bard – retired psychiatrist. Leader of the Listeners (bass-baritone) –
Kyle Ketelsen
Angela Rose – Howard's right-hand woman within the Listeners (mezzo-soprano) –
Daniela Mack
Thom – an engineer. A member of the Listeners (baritone) –
Joseph Lim••
Dillon – a former soldier with PTSD. A member of The Listeners (baritone) –
John Moore*
Sina – a bipolar woman (soprano) –
Emily Mwila
Emily – a woman with inappropriate attractions (mezzo-soprano) –
Marie Sokolova
Hortense – an abusive woman (contralto) –
Corinne Wallace-Crane

Danica – wife of Thom (soprano) –
Kelsea Webb
Vince – a hippie stoner (tenor) –
Jared V. Esguerra
Bram – a well-bathed man (bass-baritone) –
Christopher Filipowicz
Jess – Ashley's high school friend (soprano) –
Gemma Nha•
Lee Ann – Ashley's high school friend (mezzo-soprano) –
Sophia Maekawa•
Mrs. Moreno – the high school principal (mezzo-soprano) –
Stephanie Sánchez
Theresa Alvarez – a local news reporter (soprano) –
Adia Evans•
A Policeman –
Finn Sagal*•

Actors
Miles Borchard, **Chuck Coyl**, **Theo Gyra***
Dancers
Rachel Harris*, **Morgan Reed McDaniel**

* Lyric debut
• Current Member, *The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center*
•• Alumnus, *The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center*

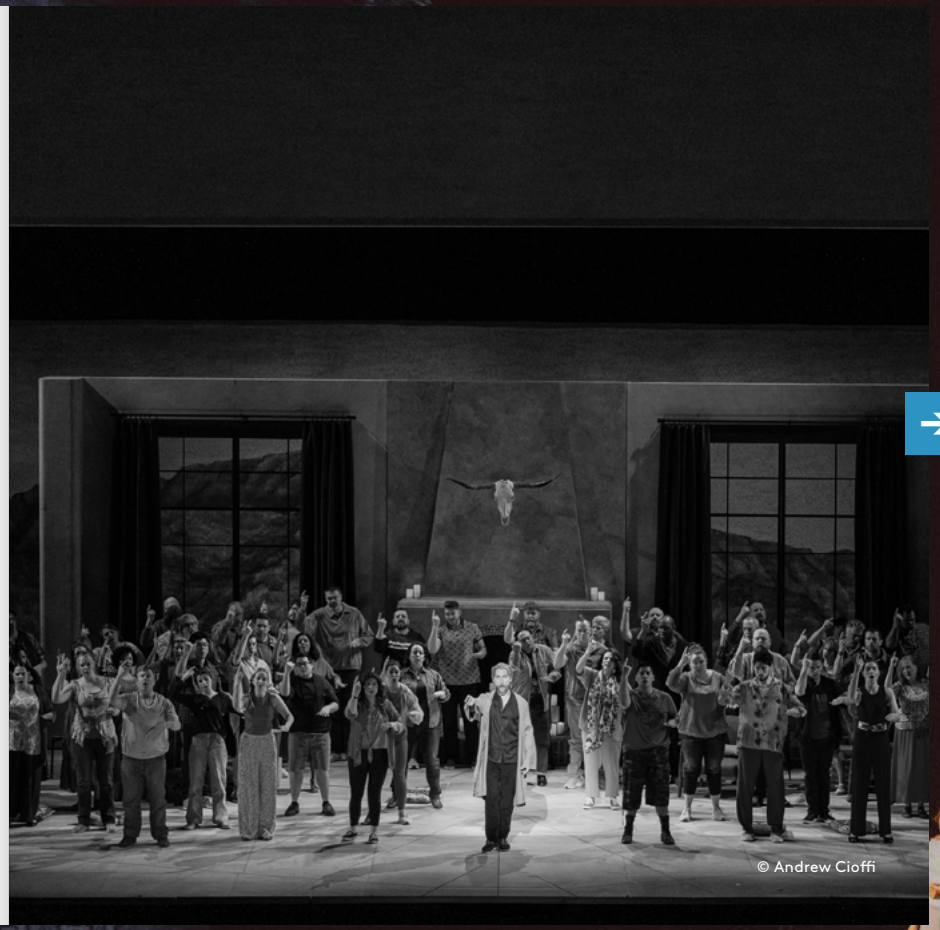


Lyric Opera of Chicago

Creative, Production, & Musical Team

Conductor	**Enrique Mazzola**
Stage Director	**Lileana Blain-Cruz***
Set Designer	**Adam Rigg***
Costume Designer	**Kaye Voyce***
Lighting Designer	**Yi Zhao***
Projection Designer	**Hannah Wasileski***
Chorus Director	**Michael Black**
Choreographer	**Raja Feather Kelly***
Wigmaster & Makeup Designer	**John Metzner**
Assistant Director	**Jordan Braun**
Stage Manager	**Rachel A. Tobias**
Musical Preparation	**Elizabeth Askren**
	William C. Billingham
	Susan Miller Hult
	Noah Lindquist
	Laura Poe
Prompter	**Susan Miller Hult**

* Lyric debut



Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestra

Violin I
Robert Hanford, *concertmaster, Mrs. R. Robert Funderburg Endowed Chair*
Emily Nebel, *assistant concertmaster*
Eleanor Bartsch
Alexander Belavsky
Kathleen Brauer
Renée-Paule Gauthier
Laura Miller
Liba Shacht
Heather Wittels
Bing Jing Yu

Violin II
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John Macfarlane, *assistant principal*
Diane Duraffourg-Robinson
Ann Palen
Irene Radetzky
John D. Robinson
David Volfe

Viola
Carol Cook, *principal*
Terri Van Valkinburgh, *assistant principal*
Patrick Brennan
Amy Hess
Melissa Trier Kirk

Cello
Calum Cook, *principal*
Ana Kim, *assistant principal*
Mark Brandfonbrener
William H. Cernota
Walter Preucil

String Bass
Samuel Shuhan, *acting principal*
Andrew L. W. Anderson, *acting assistant principal*
Gregory Sarchet
Collins R. Trier

Flute
Marie Tachouet, *principal*
Dionne Jackson, *assistant principal*
Alyce Johnson

Piccolo
Alyce Johnson

Oboe
Paul Lueders, *principal*
Judith Zunamon Lewis, *assistant principal*

English Horn
Judith Zunamon Lewis

Clarinet
Heesoo Kim, *principal*
Susan Warner, *assistant principal*

Bass Clarinet
Susan Warner, *acting*

Bassoon
Preman Tilson, *principal*
Lewis Kirk, *assistant principal*

Contrabassoon
Lewis Kirk

Horn
Jonathan Boen, *principal*
Fritz Foss, *assistant principal/utility*
Robert E. Johnson, *third horn*
Samuel Hamzem
Neil Kimel

Trumpet
William Denton, *principal*
Rebecca Oliverio, *acting assistant principal*

Trombone
Jeremy Moeller, *principal*
Mark Fisher, *assistant principal*
Will Baker

Bass Trombone
Will Baker

Tuba
Andrew Smith, *principal*

Timpani
Edward Harrison, *principal*

Percussion
Douglas Waddell, *acting principal*
Eric Millstein, *acting assistant principal*

Harp
Lynn Williams, *principal*

Librarian
John Rosenkrans, *principal*

Stage Band Contractor
Christine Janicki

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Cristina Buçiu, *violin*
Injoo Choi, *violin*
Christine Chon, *violin*
Kate Carter, *violin*
Carmen Kassinger, *violin*
Beatrice Chen, *viola*
Kunjing Dai, *viola*
Rebecca Swan, *viola*
Bruno Vaz da Silva, *viola*
Mara McClain, *cello*
Jeremy Attanaseo, *bass*
Amy Barwan, *oboe*
Vincent Karamanov, *bassoon & contrabassoon*
Jordan Thomas, *harp*
William C. Billingham, *piano*

Lyric Opera of Chicago Chorus

Chorus Director & Head of Music
Michael Black, *The Howard A. Stotler Endowed Chair*

Regular Chorus

Soprano
Cathleen Dunn
Desirée Hassler
Rachael Holzhausen
Laureen Janeczek-Wysocki
Kimberly McCord
Heidi Spoor
Stephani Springer
Sherry Watkins
Tara Wheeker

Mezzo-Soprano
Emma Dickens
Marianna Kulikova
Yvette Smith
Marie Sokolova
Maia Surace
Corinne Wallace-Crane
Pamela Williams
Michelle K. Wrighte

Tenor
Geoffrey Agpalo
Timothy Bradley
Hoss Brock
William M. Combs
John J. Concepcion
Kenneth Donovan
Jared V. Esguerra
Joseph A. Fosselman
Cullen Gandy
Cameo T. Humes
Tyler Samuel Lee
Joseph Shadday

Bass
David DuBois
Christopher Filipowicz
Robert Morrissey
Rafael W. Porto
Craig Springer
Nicholas Ward
Ronald Watkins
Nikolas Wenzel
Max Wier
Jonathan Wilson

Core Supplementary Chorus

Soprano
Carla Janzen
Emily Mwila
Kelsea Webb

Mezzo-Soprano
Christina G. Adams
Cara Collins
Ola Rafalo

Tenor
Joshua Benevento
Ace Gangoso

Bass
Michael Cavalieri
David Govertsen
Nicolai Janitzky
Atticus Yonnan-Rego

Supplementary Chorus

Soprano
Nicole Besa
Anna Donnelly
Megan Fleischmann
Elise Hurwitz
Diana Stoic

Mezzo-Soprano
Leah Dexter
Emily Price

Tenor
Christopher Sierra

Bass
Samuel James Dewese



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I'm thrilled that the world premiere recording of *The Listeners* has been recorded by this superb cast and all the gifted people working at Lyric Opera of Chicago. I feel lucky to be able to write operas at this large scale, and particularly lucky to have the opportunity to write and record an opera with distinctly American preoccupations. I think of the cult at the center of *The Listeners* as a microcosm of our country, a group of people drawn together by circumstance, willing to lay bare their vulnerability, tenderness, rage, and hope, and singing it all into existence with heartbreaking optimism.

In working with the brilliant soprano Nicole Heaston, we were able to create in Claire Devon not just a character discovering her own potential but a woman who questions nearly everything, with a fierceness and precision that only Nicole could deliver. I'm extremely grateful to the entire cast, the musicians, and producers of this opera for bringing this story to life on stage and on this recording. Thank you especially to Nicole, Peggy Monastra, Jordan Tannahill, Royce Vavrek, Lileana Blain-Cruz, Annilese Miskimmon, David Devan, John Mangum, and Scott Blumenthal.

Missy Mazzoli

What a gift it is to preserve an opera through recording, especially one that captures the extraordinary artistry of Nicole Heaston and the cast of Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of *The Listeners*. It feels as though it takes more than a miracle to make recordings happen these days, and I remain deeply indebted to the many collaborators, onstage and off, who brought this to life.

I continue to be struck by how directly this opera has spoken to audiences. The vernacular libretto, paired with Missy's contemporary score, invites people to encounter truly modern and familiar characters on the grand opera stage, often for the first time. With this recording, we are able to extend that encounter, sharing the story of a suburban teacher who unwittingly is drawn into the clutches of a cult leader with a far wider world. We couldn't be more excited to share this opera with you!

Royce Vavrek



© Helgi Reynisson



© Jean-Baptiste Millot

Missy Mazzoli is a master of creating musical tension. The score of *The Listeners* contains a mix of angular accents and sweeping lines of melody. The seen and the unseen. And equally, the heard and the unheard. She never lets us forget that we are in an operatic world — a world where the things we don't hear remain charged in the air. Her rich sonic moments continually amplify our curiosity about what will come next. It has been a great pleasure to prepare, perform, and record this important work.

The Listeners deftly portrays interior worlds, dramatic human elements manifesting in part from Mazzoli's extensive use of the extreme colors in the orchestra — in the very high frequencies of the violin, or the very low notes of the trombones or double basses. The score will feature almost relentless action, action, action, action — then a fermata. Sung phrases may begin apparently unconnected to the orchestral phrasing, only to reach a resolution some pages later. And at the same time, throughout the work, there are many pages with a beautiful, flowing horizontality.

Above all, this opera, filled with spectacular moments of energy and expansion, raises important questions about our society, and provides a superb answer to why we must continue to produce work that speaks to the conversations of today.

Enrique Mazzola

Longing to Belong: The Politics of Listening in the 21st Century

By **Justin Vickers**

In its reckoning with an invisible sound, Missy Mazzoli's and Royce Vavrek's opera *The Listeners* delivers a haunting meditation on perception, power, and collective delusion. Through an intricate sonic landscape that blurs the line between external reality and crippling inner obsession, the opera explores how disorientation fosters belief, how sound becomes a tool of both revelation and control, and how the search for meaning can spiral into hysteria. In the opera, a cult-like leader has emerged, intent on deceiving a group of suffering yet acquiescent followers. *The Listeners* is as much an auditory labyrinth as it is a psychological one, amplifying modern anxieties over technology, while immersing its audience in the unsettling politics of listening.

The opera critiques sociopolitical structures that take advantage of the defenseless, illustrating how sound — both real and imagined — can become a catalyst for manipulation, coercion, and the construction of alternative realities. Sometimes we may hear a noise that we cannot quite put our finger on. A nondescript din. We may simply put music on in the background to mask the sound of a hum. Maybe that hum is a side effect of tinnitus, a clinical ringing in the inner ear. But when is it something more?

A three-company commission from the Norwegian National Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and Lyric Opera of Chicago, the work is centered on the inexplicable: the eerie enigma of the "global hum," a ceaseless, low-frequency vibration — or high-frequency environmental noise — said to torment between 2% and 4% of humanity. Vavrek crafted the libretto based on an original idea by fellow-

Canadian author and playwright Jordan Tannahill. A search for "global hum" online — where the most cloistered and conspiracy-prone live — will generate a litany of disquieting results. The hum is an auditory specter that is both alienating and inescapable.

Mazzoli herself has spoken of the hum's inherent invitation: "This idea lends itself perfectly to opera: it's about sound and the soundscape that shapes our lives for better or for worse. And *that* is what opera is all about."

The opera also taps into an undercurrent of deep social distrust. At the time it was being composed, Mazzoli recognized that Americans were "divided as a society, increasingly drawn towards our own echo chambers." An awareness of that silo effect served as an inspiration. "I wanted to create an opera about power imbalances and a middle-aged woman who finds herself in an extreme situation," Mazzoli recalls. "When this is transformed into a dramatic distillate, the result can be summed up as a cult."

Increasingly desperate people embody the dramatic essence Mazzoli describes. They seek comfort and relief. The confluence of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and the unknown creates a nexus of significant vulnerability. The relentless hum in the opera — a metaphor for the way isolation and uncertainty drive individuals toward collective belief systems, conspiracy theories, and cult-like devotion — invites the desperate to seek a leader, someone to make sense of what they are experiencing.

The results, in *The Listeners*, are chilling and extreme. The work occupies a liminal space in contemporary American society, situated as it is between the nodes of fact-based

reality and a small group who hear something most cannot. That small group huddles together. They find a psychiatrist who provides them with answers, taking advantage of their need for belonging and community. It begs a question of modern society: If someone listened to you — when seemingly no one else would — could you stomach the loss of your spouse? Your child? Your job?

The opening chorus in the Prologue — as a sort of answer to the painful struggle we have learned is tormenting Thom, Danica, and Dillon — asks: "Do you hear it? Do you always hear it?" The sustained urgency, voice grinding against voice, builds to a unison second statement of "*hear it*." The group continues: "A dull hum. An aggressive drone. The disruptor of our lives." The men's voices close the word "hum" to a sustained *hmmm*... vibrating beneath the women's voices. Half-step clashing between the voices creates a jarring, beautiful effect. Theories are espoused for the cacophonous presence of the hum: *Ghost radio frequencies. The foundation rumbling. Governmental mind control. Radiation leaked from cell phone towers*. Mazzoli generates a new soundworld to maximum consequence as the opera unfolds.

But it is the central character of Claire who ushers us into this humming world. Solitary. In the moonlight. In her backyard. She is a woman on the edge. And on that precipice, she is joined by a coyote with whom she communicates, who just may be talking with her. She sees that they are not so very different, she and the coyote. Claire is interrupted by the painful noise she hears — Vavrek's libretto indicates "she clutches her head and winces when the sound returns" — which Mazzoli creates by asking the pianist to scrape the middle C string with a credit card or plectrum while sustaining the pedal; meanwhile the percussionist slowly rolls a marble around a metal colander.

"Help me, coyote," Claire exclaims. She cries out: "Howling. Owwoo! Owwoo!" The coyote joins her, baying. The animal may be an embodiment of her subconscious, capable of illuminating truth, or representative of latent desire. It offers a sort of ritual dance, a dance that Claire will repeat at the opera's dénouement. "Maybe I am canine. Maybe I am you, coyote," Claire suggests, pleadingly. Tethered to Claire, the coyote just as likely represents chaos being introduced into Claire's existence.

At school, Claire finds an unexpected connection with her student Kyle. Asked to stay after class to discuss his unusual behavior, and ultimately revealing a "hard buzz" he has been hearing, Kyle begs: "How do you murder a sound that no one else hears?" Shocked, Claire — who thought she was entirely alone — somehow finds connection, triggering the opera's cascade of events. That connection immediately begins to cost Claire something. When Ashley overhears her mother on the phone with Kyle, she inaccurately assumes an affair, not the potential of shared distress or trauma. (Given Claire's nearly absent parenting, Ashley's rush to judgment is understandable.) Claire's reply to her daughter is among the opera's most revealing: "It's just nice to talk to someone who believes me." Claire seeks, simply, to no longer feel the isolation of being dismissed and misunderstood.

This is the crux of the opera: she is not merely searching for the source of the hum, but for belief, for connection, for a place to belong. Belief, before it hardens into ideology, arrives first as consolation.



The Coyote (Rachel Harris) looks up at Claire (Nicole Heaston)
© Cory Weaver

Claire and Kyle find understanding and solace through a group led by Howard Bard, which Kyle found in an online video. Angela Rose — "Howard's number two" — initially welcomes them to the home filled with his followers. Those who hear the hum are "concerned citizens" with especially "sensitive ears," Howard assures them. The Prologue's Thom, Danica, and Dillon are there. Howard's Listeners possess the ability "to understand this plague of sound." Kyle is subsumed into the chorus, a follower. But Claire repeats her opening phrases with the coyote. And she all too easily steps into the world of Howard and Angela, literally falling into the rhythm and cadence of their well-practiced speeches. "I see you, Claire," Howard says. "There's a leader sleeping inside you."

Leaders have a vision. The way they express it can gain adherents, a power that can be used for great good, but can also have a darker purpose. Charismatic leaders can woo followers without limit. They can manipulate an individual's complex psyche; they can pry apart — or insert themselves into — interpersonal relationships; they can create a paradigm in which their followers feel lost in their absence. The title of a "cult leader" and the idea of a "cult following" is part of our vernacular. We have seen this in American society before, and indeed, in societies around the world.

The danger lies in what may follow when vulnerable needs are met by the wrong voice. As Howard's authority tightens, private uncertainty is converted into collective belief. Angela's loyalty curdles into humiliation. Dillon's instability is inflamed rather than soothed. Claire, meanwhile, begins to discover in herself an authority equal to or greater than the extant leader's.

By the opera's climactic final scenes, the unbearable hum becomes the measure of Howard's deceit: Angela realizes that the leader does not hear it at all. When the police converge on the group after Dillon's false claim that the Listeners are armed, catastrophe follows. Howard is exposed as a fraud, but exposure brings no clean resolution. There is only violence, loss, and the emergence of a new center of power.

The characters are enveloped by Mazzoli's translucent score, a soundworld shimmering with timbral creativity and a rhythmically pulsing orchestration that is as exciting as it is cinematic. It is neither ugly nor harsh, and never quite as disturbing as the adjacent primordial humming tormenting the community. Perhaps that is part of the score's genius.

Mazzoli achieves the psychological tension and sonic complexity partly through the sheer scale of the forces at her disposal — a 62-person orchestra deployed for her largest orchestral score to date. Among her operas, the steady expansion is unmistakable: *Breaking the Waves* (2016) and *Proving Up* (2018) are composed for chamber orchestra; and *Song from the Uproar* (2012) uses only five instruments plus electronics. Thus, the dynamic soundmass that can be realized and exploited in *The Listeners* is boundless.

Because so much of the opera exists in the interiority of the human psyche — in which the audience genuinely has no idea what the Listeners may or may not be hearing — it was vital that Mazzoli have a clear sense of how to portray the hum. "It had to be something different from any other sound coming out of the orchestra," she notes. "I wanted the audience to know, as soon as the electronics entered, that they were hearing the hum." At distinct moments in the opera, we hear electronic cues and an aural wave that leaves nothing to the imagination. On recording, the distinction between the hum itself and the orchestra's psychosomatic response to it emerges with unusual force. The hum itself is held apart — an electronic intrusion, categorically different from the orchestra — while the pit traces its aftereffects in pulsing strings and piano, finely etched wind and brass writing, and percussion that crackles at the edge of menace.

At times, the orchestra creates the psychosomatic effects of the hum on the characters in the opera. Alternating rhythmic pulses in the piano and in the strings, and especially fabulously detailed demands on the woodwinds and brass, illustrate tormented interior lives. Demanding percussion parts solidify the point. The suggestion of fear and uncertainty is never always there. It is never even almost there. It exists rather as a veneer of "oh" and "ah" vowels set atop the repetition of text. It is in the hum's absence that we — as an audience of listeners — begin looking for it, begin listening for it, wondering when it will return. And in this curious not-quite-frightening waiting, our anticipation building, Mazzoli has us in her grip. At the end of the first act, the score indicates that Claire breaks the fourth wall and looks directly at the audience, inviting us onto her plane: "You hear it too?" Even Claire's encounter with the coyote is orchestrated as a darkening of timbre, the music dropping from metallic brightness into tritone-shadowed low sonorities.

Mazzoli's masterful creation of the sound environment in the Listeners' meetings is a marvel of layering. (This same adeptness at layering is present in the bustling classroom scenes where Claire teaches, a veritable tsunami of student-generated chaos resulting in Claire's expletive shriek: "Shut the fuck up!") Vavrek's texts are supple and concise, providing Mazzoli everything she needs to create seductive, mystifying scenes. One recurring phenomenon is the disturbing amalgam of the Listeners humming on top of an "ahh" vowel against their own repetition of the phrase "the hum is cruel but kind."

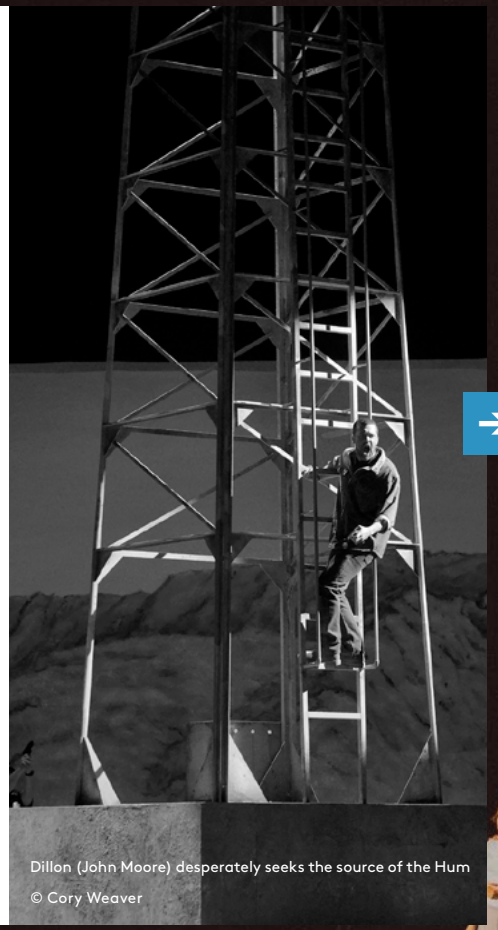
But the opening scene inside Howard's house exposes incipits of each of the neuroses of his Listeners. "We have all come here seeking a solution and we choose not to suffer alone," Howard declares. It is evident that he is calling the collective together: "Now let us all give voice to our personal relationship... with the hum." The choral voices of the Listeners join together in an incantation, varyingly singing "da da da," "la la la," "na na na," and "sa sa sa" on their

respectively assigned pitches, each closing to "ahmm" and a hum. For the soloists' declarations that follow, Mazzoli creates miniature vignettes, each stylized to the Listener and their individual plight: rhythmically discrete, melodically idiosyncratic, and — in mere seconds — revelatory of their personal relationship with the hum. "I can blur the hum with my thoughts," one sings; "I am free-floating particles of love," sings another; "I lie in the tub, my ears under the water, muffling the hum," yet another. The choral humming swells and subsides beneath each of the Listener's revelations. We hear the characters from the opening Prologue repeating fragments of their video confessionals. Angela suggests sensually, again: "Forever your number two," aligning herself with Howard's mission. "Claire," Howard finally implores, "add your voice to the choir." And with the intensifying strings, woodwinds, and the chorus — now opening to an "ah" vowel — as Kyle is submerged into the ensemble of Listeners, Claire repeats her previous interaction with the coyote: "We're not so dif'frent, me and you. I'm not so dif'frent." And, at the apex of the phrase, she howls again: "Owwoo!"

In performance, the layering technique is visually evident as well, through a series of the Listeners' pre-recorded and live-streaming video confessionals. For the audience, this results in a three-dimensional view of the cast and set-pieces, with the multivalent effect of the one-dimensional broadcasting of the confessionals. Those confessionals are weaponized as a tool of control and a means of psychological manipulation, exploiting those who make the recordings even as they seem to grant voice and visibility. These recorded testimonies isolate individuals in direct address, somewhere between private introspection and public declaration.

By framing confession as personal revelation, Howard encourages members to articulate their doubts, fears, and spiritual breakthroughs, turning private thought into the performative. The device appears to center voice and presence; more darkly, it supplies Howard with information he can later weaponize. Private testimony becomes communal ritual, and communal ritual becomes a mechanism of control.

Mazzoli creates instrumental textures within a shifting harmonic setting, occasional hypnotic repetition, and a layered sonic sphere in which electronics play a crucial role. The electronic "hum" operates as both an auditory apparition and an oppressive presence, an ambiguous force that demands interpretation, drawing



Dillon (John Moore) desperately seeks the source of the Hum

© Cory Weaver

individuals into a collective obsession where faith and paranoia become indistinguishable. The percussion snaps with electricity, offering distant warning signals. Mazzoli's score is an animated, living force that shifts between menace and seduction, economic sparsity countered by disconcerting swells that turn disarmingly tender by measure.

Her orchestration reveals a symphonist's expertise. Associations between Mazzoli's musical language and John Adams — and even nuances of Benjamin Britten — have been suggested in the past. Yet there are also reverberations with the exacting structural precision of Kaija Saariaho, Judith Weir, George Benjamin, Lori Laitman, Errollyn Wallen, Thomas Adès, and Peter Maxwell Davies.

The score for *The Listeners* exhibits Missy Mazzoli among the most preëminent at the craft of exploiting the very limits of the orchestra and what we presume it can achieve. The vocal writing is persuasive and elegant, displaying the bona fides of a singer's opera composer. A staggering example is "Claire's Confessional," an aria dedicated to the role's originator, Nicole Heaston. Her first words — "To be chosen... to be seen" — are pregnant with all of the confusion of a wounded soul. As the aria builds, Claire realizes the power that has been dormant within her. This new addition to the soprano repertory results in an aria that is as challenging as it is deftly sinuous, and results in a showpiece for both Mazzoli and Heaston alike.

***The Listeners* underscores** how the human need to find meaning — whether in myth, religion, politics, or sound itself — can give rise at once to transcendence and delusion. Here, it leads not to clarity, but to gunfire.

Our need for connection, belonging, and the assurance that someone really hears us may lead us on dizzying journeys of discovery, with ample risk of losing ourselves along that path. Circumstances in today's America have led many to consider how members of their own society — neighbors and family members — could so easily fall prey to misrepresentations and mischaracterizations. Could they even lose their hold on reality? Regrettably, we may be closer to an answer to that rhetorical flourish than we care to admit. Amplified by that frame, Vavrek's libretto is a study of psychological vulnerability with timeless relevance and poignancy. Disorientation is often, after all, incremental.

And so, when someone *hears* us, *sees* us, or chooses *us*, even the strongest among us may accede to that pull. "Do you hear it?" Calling to us, that voice — even that *hum* — might pierce the otherwise quiet stillness of our well-constructed world, as yet another twist in an endlessly manipulative series of patterns. By the end, then, the score has moved from shared disturbance to collective possession, and the final sonority hovers on the border between dissonance and noise. Perhaps the most unsettling reality at the opera's conclusion is this: while the Listeners' new leader, Claire, cannot control the hum — not yet — she can actually hear it.

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Synopsis

Time Present day
Place Southwestern United States

The Listeners follows Claire, a suburban high school teacher living in the southwestern United States. Her life spirals out of control when she begins to hear a mysterious high-frequency hum. The Hum keeps her awake at night, alienates her family, and threatens her sanity, but she finds an ally in Kyle, one of her students who also hears the all-consuming noise.

When Kyle discovers a group that meets regularly in hopes of understanding and eliminating the source of the Hum, Claire is optimistic. The group is led by the charismatic Howard and his second-in-command, Angela, who provide a compassionate environment for the beleaguered Claire and Kyle.

As the group grows in number, and the meetings become increasingly strange and ritualistic, internal fractures appear, and it becomes clear that this community of "Listeners" is on a perilous path.



Ashley (Jasmine Habersham), Jess (Gemma Nha), and Lee Ann (Sophia Maekawa) gossip outside the classroom

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Libretto

Disc 1

1

Prologue
Confessional #1, 2 and 3

On a large screen we see crude camcorder-filmed videos of people offering personal confessionals. The lights slowly come up behind the screen to reveal that they are all being filmed live, an enigmatic figure, Howard Bard and his assistant/ secretary Angela behind the camera.

Three parallel filmed videos dominate the stage, projecting Thom, Danica and Dillon as they provide their taped confessions.

Thom
This is how we live now.
Unbelievable.
Our home, a forensic lab
Of hoarded evidence,
Piles of paper, literature, all trash.
It's embarrassing...

Danica
I take an X-Acto knife
Cut small lines,
Patterns, like plaid,
In my thighs.
Gets my mind off of it.

Dillon
I have been an unfaithful husband,
An absent father.
I lose my temper.
I hurt the people I love.

Thom
Unbelievable.
A fungus,
Mushrooming in your head...
It ruins your life,
Takes over your house.
Unbelievable.

Danica
When I dribble blood,
I leave it on the floor,
A mess.
For someone else to clean up.
Let someone else clean it up.

(Thom, Danica and Dillon sing together)

Danica
Gets my mind off of it.

Thom
This is how we live now.

Dillon
I have been an unfaithful husband, an absent father.
I am a ballistic missile, I am a ballistic missile, I am a ballistic missile.
You know I hate talking about this.
That's all I got.

(Danica, Dillon and Thom grab their ears as if trying to block out a piercing noise. A group of Listeners enter.)

2

The Listeners
Do you hear it?
Do you always hear it?
A dull hum.
An aggressive drone.
The disruptor of our lives.
Ghost radio frequencies.
The foundation rumbling.
Governmental mind control.
Radiation leaked from cellphone towers.
Do you hear it?
Do you always hear it?

(The scene shifts to a desolate suburban street. Midnight. A Coyote prowls around the shadows.)

(Claire Devon emerges from her house in a nightgown.)

Act I

3

Scene 1: Nightgown in the Moonlight

Claire slowly approaches the Coyote, it hesitantly approaches her, almost eating from her hand.

Claire
(to the coyote, her sanity on the rocks)
Our hackles at full mast.
We're not so different,
me and you.

Anxiety fires up my nerves,
Waking me up at odd hours,
An electric current frying me.
You hear it, too, right?
We're not so different,
me and you...

Uneasily displaced in
An unfriendly world...
Squeezing, pushing,
Forced to the brink.

We try to hide,
But the attack is from every angle.
Should we run, coyote?
Me and you,
Could we run, coyote?

The refrigerator, I thought.
Keeping me awake.
No.
The air conditioner...
Hot water heater...
No... no...
It sounds like an electric drill.
Grinding into my brain.

I went to the fuse box,
I cut the power.
Thought I found the source.
And for a second,
For one single second,
I thought it stopped.

(A blissful moment of silence, Claire clutches her head and winces when the sound returns.)

Help me, coyote.
Help me, before a wildness overtakes me.
Sniff out the real source.
I beg you... sniff!

(louder)
Our hackles at full mast,
We're not so different,
Me and you.

Maybe I am canine.
Maybe I am you, coyote,
In a frayed nightgown, rabid.
And you, a solitary schoolteacher,
Howling.

Houuuuuuuuuuwwwwwwwwwww!

Claire & Coyote
Houuuuuuuuuuwwwwwwwwwww!

(The lights come on in Claire's house. Claire's husband Paul and daughter Ashley appear in pajamas at the door and run up to Claire. The Coyote stops howling and runs away.)

Paul
Claire...
Claire!
(Claire snaps out of her trance.)

4

Ashley
For God's sake, Mom!

Paul
You'll wake the neighbors!

Ashley
It's 2 o'clock in the morning!

Claire
I cut the power.

Paul
Come inside, now.

Claire
I cut the power, but it's still there.

Paul
Claire, please, just come back to bed.
We'll get you an Ambien.

Claire
You don't believe me.
You think I'm making this up...

Ashley
She's being belligerent.

Paul
Ashley! Go back to bed.

(Ashley huffs, goes inside the house.)

Paul
How about some tea?
(Claire with her back to Paul, pretending to give in.)
Inside.

Claire
Hot, herbal tea?

Paul
Come inside, please.

Claire
I'll be right in.

(Paul goes back into the house. Claire stays on the lawn. In the shadows she sees the figure of the Coyote.)

Claire
I bet nobody believes you either.
Lunatics out at midnight,
Terrorizing the neighborhood.
I like the wild in you,
Brings out the wild in me.
Not so different...

(Claire looks over her shoulder at the house to make sure Paul isn't looking, then joins the Coyote for one last soft howl.)

Houuuuuuuuuuwwwwwwwwww!

(Claire exits into the house. The Coyote begins a strange dance.)

(The scene transforms into a classroom.)

Scene Two: School

Kyle, a 12th-grade student, is the last to exit. We see Claire at her desk. She calls out to him as he leaves.

Claire
Kyle, hang back a minute.

(Kyle reluctantly turns around and sits in a chair next to Claire's desk.)

Claire
Your essay...
I ask for three pages,
You give me three paragraphs.
This isn't like you.
(Kyle starts to cry)
You don't participate.
You seem unfocused...
(Claire looks up and notices his tears.)
Kyle! Kyle?

Kyle
It's everything.
My dad gets transferred every year,
We pack up, ship off, move in...
Another house that looks the same.
I don't make friends,
It's not easy for me.
I try to read,
But the letters get all messed up.
My mom is sad,
Like deep depression sad.
What else do you want to know?!
(a beat)
And on top of all that,
I haven't been sleeping well.
I've been hearing things.
(beat)
A hard buzz,
Like the engine of a truck.
It's driving its way to hell,
Colliding into the
wall of a cemetery.
(Claire puts a hand on Kyle's shoulder. He jumps up out of his seat at her touch, growing increasingly agitated.)

Have you ever wanted to strangle something?
Wring it to death?
But there's nothing to kill.
How do you murder a sound?
How do you murder a sound that no-one else hears?

Claire
I hear it.

Kyle
Don't make fun of me.

Claire
I'm not.

Kyle
So it's not in my head?

Claire
(Claire bursts into tears.)
I thought I was the only one.
I've been a wreck too.

(Claire smiles weakly.)

Claire
Anxiety fires up my nerves.
An electric current frying me.
A drill grinding into my brain.

Kyle
(in duet with Claire)
A hard buzz
Like the engine of a truck.
It's rumbling it's way to hell,
Colliding into the
wall of a cemetery.

Claire & Kyle
You hear it too.
You hear it too.
You hear it too.

(We see the Custodian, the same actor who plays the Coyote, standing on a ladder fixing a speaker for the school's bell system. The scene shifts to outside the classroom window, where Ashley and two of her girlfriends, Jess and Lee Ann, smoke a joint outside of the school.)

6

Jess
Hey, get this, my mom is fucking my uncle.

Ashley
No way.

Jess
Even sent her a pic of his dick.
I saw it.

Ashley
That's gross, Jess.
You can't unsee that.

Lee Ann
Of all the men in the world,
She fucks her brother?

(A stunned silence. Lee Ann continues to smoke the joint.)

Jess
God, no! Lee Ann,
Don't be sick.
My dad's brother.

Lee Ann
Still.
That's probably gonna end bad.
Thank God my mom just humps the couch while watching her soaps.

Ashley
Whatever works, I guess.
(takes a drag)
Just be glad you don't live with a world class narcissist.

(The Coyote, as Custodian, sees Claire embrace Kyle. The Coyote somehow makes Ashley see this.)

(The scene shifts to another confessional.)



Kyle (Jonas Hacker) and Claire (Nicole Heaston) discover their common affliction

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7

Confessional #4

Hortense, a Listener, is filmed and projected on a giant screen.

Hortense
My husband was an ugly man,
Even before he was a cripple.
I tell 'ya,
He tested me.
Kept getting' slower.
Spit his food out at me.
Vomit all over the blankets,
His mess all over the house...
He was an ugly man.
(beat)
Always had a disgusting smirk,
So I wiped it off his face.
Yeah, I hit him.
Took out a tooth.

I have confessed my sins,
Now I wonder if this thing, this "hum"
Is my penance.

8

Scene Three: Home

Nighttime. Claire and Paul have sex in their bed.

Claire
You close?

Paul
Yeah,
You?

Claire
Maybe?
Keep going.

(A beat. Claire's cellphone rings on the nightstand.)

Paul
Ignore it.

(The phone rings again. Claire answers the phone.)

Claire
(into the phone)
Hello, hello?

(Claire gets out of bed and hurries into the living room. We see Kyle on the street, talking into his mobile phone.)

Kyle
Mrs. Devon, it's Kyle. Is now a good time?

Claire
Yes, um...

Kyle
You gave me your number.

Claire
Of course I did.
Everything okay?

Kyle
There's a video, I found online.
Homemade.
A group of people in action.

Claire
This sounds inappropriate.

Kyle
(Kyle shakes his head.)
A community action group...
Coping with noise pollution.
"A dull hum," "aggressive drones,"
They meet, Mrs. Devon,
Mondays and Thursdays.

Claire
I can't this week.
My husband is...

Kyle
But what if this is the answer?

Claire
Next Thursday?

Kyle
Deal.
This is exciting, Mrs. Devon.

Claire
Please, call me Claire...

Kyle
Goodnight, Claire.

Claire
Goodnight.

(Claire hangs up. A little smile spreads across her face. Suddenly, Ashley pops up, previously unnoticed on the couch.)

Ashley
You're cheating on Dad.

Claire
(Claire jumps.)
You scared me.

Ashley
Who were you talking to?

Claire
A friend...

Ashley
Who was on the goddamn phone, Mom?

Claire
Kyle.

Ashley
Kyle Harris?
He's your friend??

Claire
Kyle has similar symptoms.
I'm sorry that my health,
My brain...
I'm sorry.
It's just nice to talk to someone who believes me.

Ashley
Do you know what people are saying?
There are rumors.
You picked out your favorite...
You hugged him in your classroom...

Claire
I... it wasn't...

Ashley
(putting her hand up)
I forbid you to talk to him.

Claire
You forbid me??
Check yourself, Ashley Marie Devon.

(Ashley crumbles a bit, then steels herself.)

Ashley
Bitch and moan
All you want about the noise.
How nobody will help you.
How nobody *can* help you.

So selfish,
Always the victim.
You never noticed the small stuff,
Now you don't notice the big stuff.

Did you know I broke up with Sean?
Did you know I pierced my nipple?
Did you know I got caught shoplifting?
Thank God I have Dad.

Did you know I had a pregnancy scare?
Where were you?
Where were you?
Where are you?
My own mother doesn't care.
Not about me.
Not when she can bitch and moan and howl at the pavement.

Bitch and moan.
Just admit you've given up.
That you're not interested in being my mom.

Claire
I am proud to be your mom.

Ashley
Listen then.
Listen.
(a moment of silence.)
What do you hear?
(a very long silence as they both listen.)

Claire
The hum.

Ashley
(she explodes)
Nothing!
(beat)
That's the sound of nothing.

Claire
(clipped, angry)
Goodnight, Ashley.

Scene Four: Termination

A chaotic, bustling classroom. Claire stands in front of the class as the sound swells.

Random Students
-I usually just mark myself absent and walk out of the class.
-Jess and Lee Ann were protesting in the parking lot: More P.A.T.! What the fuck does that even mean?
-He beat the shit out of him in the hallway between third and fourth period.
-Daniel Myers got expelled for lighting the bathroom on fire.
-The tenth graders are saying that Mrs. Devon gave Kyle a blow-job after school last week.
-They brought the drug-sniffing dogs in again today. Went crazy.
-If I beat my head into the wall will the bell ring? Will the damn bell ring? Damn bell.
-Damn bell, ring...
-I ordered a tattoo kit online but my dad found it before I could open it.
-Yo you catch the Eagles game last night? I was grounded and my dumb mom wouldn't let me watch it.

Lee Ann
Listen to me baby.

Claire
OK.
Quiet.
(The cacophony grows louder, Claire holds her head, the sound of the hum digging its way into her ears while the noise of the class drives to a climax.)

Hey.
(beat)
Settle down.
(becoming louder herself)
Hey!
Quiet.
Quiet!!
(The classroom noise continues to grow louder and more grotesque, exaggerated.
The CHORUS falls out of time, fades out when CLAIRE starts singing.)
Shut the fuck up!
Shut the fuck up!
Shut the fuck up!
(escalate howl)

(The tension immediately dissipates and Claire falls into her chair. The students clear out. Mrs. Moreno, the principal, enters to have a private conversation with Claire.)

Mrs. Moreno
Claire, what is going on with you?

Claire
Nothing, a sleepless night.

Mrs. Moreno
(cuts Claire off.)
You screamed profanity at your class, Claire.

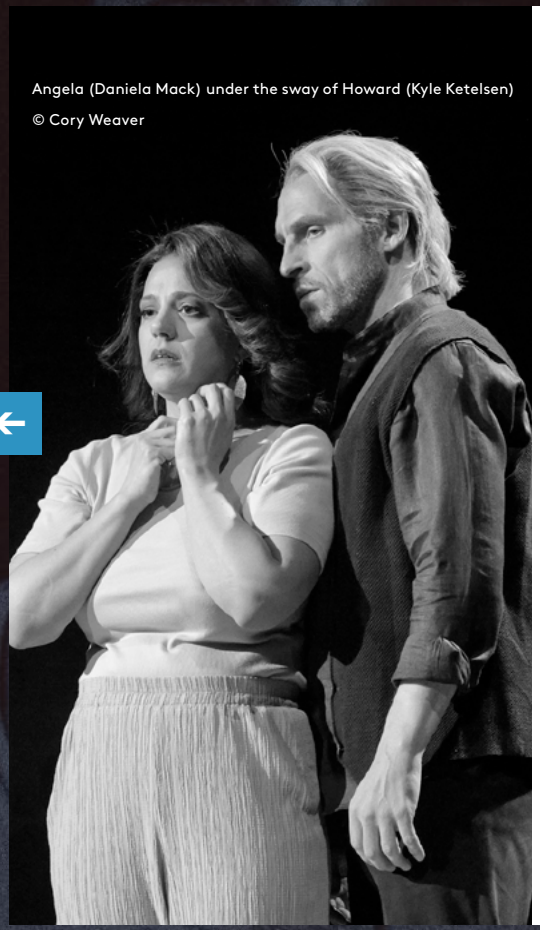
Claire
I lost it for a moment.

Mrs. Moreno
And there are allegations you were inappropriate with one of your students.

Claire
Couldn't be further from the truth...

(Mrs. Moreno takes her time, sits back in her chair.)

Mrs. Moreno
Collect your things.



Angela (Daniela Mack) under the sway of Howard (Kyle Ketelsen)
© Cory Weaver

Claire
I... I'm in so much pain.

Mrs. Moreno
Collect your things. And get some sleep.

(Claire stares in disbelief as Mrs. Moreno returns to her desk and starts shuffling papers.)

Claire
Sleep???
Mrs. Moreno...
(beat)
Fuck you.
(Claire grabs her coat and heads for the exit.)
Wow.
Finally some peace and quiet.

(Claire exits.)

11

Confessional #5

The confessional camera turns on, revealing a cloud of smoke. As it clears we see Vince, a Listener, with a joint or vape pen in his hand. His look suggests he subscribes to a new-age ethos.

Vince
I elevate myself.
My vibrations increase.
It's prismatic.
The hum enters my body,
Shatters me into molecules
That assemble into stained glass.
It's beautiful.
So beautiful.
Sometimes I sleepwalk in the backyard,
Led on the leash of the hum.
I wake up covered in strawberries.
Sometimes the sound
Makes me come
Without touching myself,
The most ecstatic feeling.
The Hum is a lover that's always there.
I don't care where it comes from.
I go to these meetings, but I don't need to know what it is.

12

Scene 5 – Meeting

Claire and Kyle stand outside of a beautiful house. Claire holds a plate of cookies in her hands.

Claire
I get the feeling that they're fancy.

Kyle
Fancy houses usually have good snacks.

(Claire rings the bell. The door immediately flies open, revealing Angela, a woman in her 30s with a beaming smile and lots of energy.)

Angela
Ahhhhh!
(Angela pulls Claire and Kyle inside.)
You must be Claire,

And Kyle...
Such a beautiful pair, you two.

Claire
(Claire starts to explain that she's Kyle's teacher, but Angela does not let her get a word in edgewise.)
Actually...

Angela
I hope you don't mind me saying that.
Sometimes I put *both* feet in my mouth!

(Angela gets herself together, smooths her skirt and holds out her hand for them to shake.)

13

Let me start again.
I'm Angela.
We spoke.
I'm Howard's #2.
The philosopher's secretary!
Did I mention he's a philosopher?
Wrote his first book at nine,
College at twelve,
Made his first fortune at seventeen.
Travelled Antarctica, met the Dalai Lama, even!
He's very... aspirational.
Beautiful home, isn't it?
Ha ha!!
Big house for a man all alone.
His wife had cancer, you know...
Left him a widower.
Ahhhh! I'm oversharing...

Oh, you'll love him...
Howard could be Jesus incarnate.
Miracles up his sleeve.
Connects with your body's inner logic.
Completely realigns everything.
And he's handsome.
A handsome philosopher.
And a poet, a professor, and a...
A prophet.

Howard has taught me everything,
Absolutely everything. Everything important.

(Quoting Howard)
He has helped me "reclaim my position

at the steering wheel of my own experience."
He has made me feel loved,
And listened to.
And now I'm his #2.
The philosopher's secretary.
(vaguely threatening)
All makes sense, doesn't it?
Why I'm his number two?
Ahhh!!!!
I'm oversharing.

(Angela pulls Claire and Kyle over to join the rest of the group.)

14

Claire
He sounds a little
Too good to be true.

Angela
He exists!
That's what's so remarkable –

(Howard enters interrupting Angela.)

Howard
(coming up to Claire and Kyle, extending his hand.)
Claire, Kyle, Welcome.
I'm Howard.
Your ears have guided you here today,
And our ears are open to receive you.
Please...
Introduce yourselves to our family.

(a pause)

Claire
Um.
Well...
I just lost my job.
I'm on the brink of losing my mind.
I... um... well...

(Claire begins to cry. Kyle sees that she can't continue and he jumps in.)

Kyle
It sounds like
Jackhammers grinding away at my skull.
In the beginning I could ignore it,

But not anymore.
This constant, eternal hum.

_____ 15 _____

Claire
The hum...
Has stolen everything, everything from me.

(Claire wipes her eyes and face, regains her strength. The group sighs in agreement.)

Howard
I promise you, Claire.
And Kyle...
Together we will find a solution.
The world has been known
To conspire against our personal equilibrium.
But we are lucky...
Intelligent life – we humans –
(gesturing to group)
Intelligent humans,
Can seek rebalance.

Angela
(leaning to Claire, quietly)
Such a philosopher!

Howard
We have all come here seeking a solution.
And we choose not to suffer alone.
(beat)
Now let us all give voice to our personal relationship with the hum...

(with Angela leading them, the group begins an incantation. The following lines happen on top of each other, creating a tapestry of intentions.)

Sina
I can blur the hum with my thoughts.
I am free-floating particles of love.

Bram
I lie in the tub, my ears under the water, muffling the hum.

Dillon
I know the answers are tied up in code, puzzles on the dark web.

Emily
I get the giggles, hee hee.

Danica
Breathe, burrow, blink. Breathe, burrow, blink.

Thom
I wish we would follow the trail of science.

Vince
I am the reincarnation of wind.

Angela
Forever your number two.

Howard
(overtop of the group drone)
Claire, add your voice to the choir.

Claire
We're not so different.
Me and you.
I'm not so different.

(a beat, she howls)
Houuuuuuuuuuwwwwwwwwwwwww!

Howard
Such beauty.
And better with two more voices in the choir.
(pause)
Thom, you have something to share?

_____ 16 _____

Thom
(Thom stands up, his hands full of papers.)
Yes.
I've brought some literature,
An article by physicists out of Toronto addressing a similar phenomenon...
They think they found the source...

Howard
(cutting Thom off)
Thom, this is not a scientific problem,
But a spiritual conundrum.
Perhaps the sound was meant to build this circle.
Perhaps the evidence

Is found in self-reflection?
What if the source of the hum is the clear blue sky?
What if the source of the hum is you, Thom?
You can't outrun yourself.
We cannot destroy the sky.
We cannot lose you, Thom.

Thom
The hum loses strength as I drive out of town.

Howard
And yet you come back.

Thom
This is my home.

Howard
You choose to come home.
You choose to live with the hum.

Thom
I wish you'd consider the science.

Claire
As a teacher
I'd love to consider the science!

Howard
I am a man of science,
(beat – Howard realizes he has lost control, recovers)
And healing.
The bigger the army we assemble,
The more energy we can channel.
We must focus on recruitment.
There are more of us out there.

(The group suddenly becomes active, preparing to create a video for Facebook Live.)



© Andrew Cioffi

17

Interlude

Howard puts on a suit jacket, Angela puts on makeup and smoothes down Howard's hair as he arranges himself in an elegant leather chair. Claire, somewhat bewildered, is led behind the chair, where she stands stiffly next to Angela, both of them flanking Howard. One of the group members films the trio with a smartphone.

Howard
Do you hear it?
Do you always hear it?
The hum, the buzz, the drone,
The disrupter of our lives.

My name is Howard Bard.

Angela
(into a microphone)
And I'm Angela Rose.

(Howard and Angela look expectantly at Claire, who seems frozen. Angela elbows her.)

Claire
(into a microphone)
Claire... Claire Devon.

Howard
We represent a group
Of concerned citizens
Suffering from an intense,
Consuming phenomenon.
A hum, heard by sensitive ears... only.
(Claire nods in agreement. She becomes energized by Howard's words.)
I offer a place of solace,
Here in my home.
We come together to understand
This plague of sound.

Angela
(stumbling over herself)
We're a... family...
We'd like to fold you into our... fold.

(Claire speaks up suddenly, maintaining eye contact with the camera, though she is speaking as much to herself as she is to the others. Howard and Angela are shocked.)

Claire
Where do you turn?
When you've exhausted every possible solution?
(short beat)
To family.
(Howard's shock turns to admiration. He starts to see potential in Claire. Angela remains in shock.)
We all need a family that understands us.
This could be that family.

Howard
Join us Mondays and Thursdays, 103 Colcomb Road.
Share your personal pain.
This could be that family.

We could be that family.

Angela, Claire & Howard
We could be that family.

Claire & Howard
(Howard smiles at Claire. Angela drops out, miserable)
We could be that family.

(The group dissolves and Claire gets up to leave. Howard calls her back.)

Howard
Claire!
That was...

Claire
(worried she's upset him)
I'm sorry I...

Howard
Marvelous.
(beat)
...so instinctive.
Straightforward, but warm.
I see you, Claire.
There's a leader sleeping inside of you.

(beat)
Let's wake her up.

Claire
I wish you could feel the hairs
On the back of my neck.
My hackles at full mast...

Scene Six: Mailbox Fire

We suddenly see the Devon's mailbox on fire. Paul rushes out of the house to extinguish it with a bucket of water. Claire and Ashley come out to see what's going on. With the fire out, Paul looks back and sees graffiti scrawled across their garage door that reads: "Don't Fuck With Our Property Value."

Claire
Call the police, Ashley.
(Ashley runs back inside.)
What do we do now?

Paul
Exactly, Claire... what now?

Claire
Why are you mad at me!?

Paul
Your little stunt online.
You've aligned yourself with the wrong people.

Claire
They are kind people, Paul.

Paul
This isn't normal, Claire.
You need help.
Professional help.
A real psychiatrist.

Claire
Howard is a real psychiatrist.

Paul
Says who?

Claire
Says the degrees on his wall.

Paul
I'm not putting up with this shit anymore.
Either you see a professional...
A real professional...
Or I'm gone.

Claire
This treatment is working, Paul.
A short time with Howard
And I'm no longer losing my mind.

Paul
(Paul throws his hands up and walks towards the house. He turns around with one more barb.)
You're screwing him.

Claire
(Claire is momentarily speechless.)

Howard???

Paul
Sure, him too.
But no... the boy.

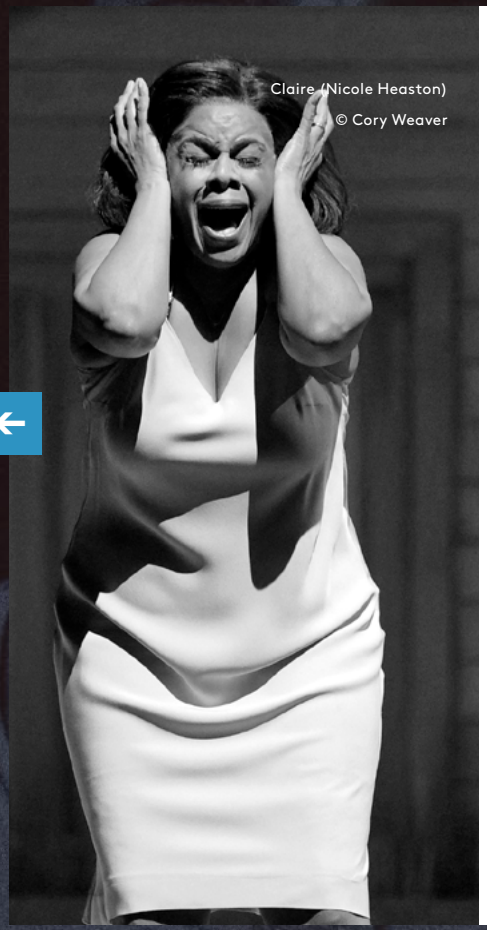
Paul
Ashley saw you with him at school.
(sarcastic)
Hugging in your classroom.

Claire
No, Paul,
(beat)
He just listens to me.

Paul
Clean up this mess.
I'm going to stay at my sister's for a while.
Ashley's coming with me.

(Paul goes inside, leaving Claire alone. Claire slowly begins to pick up the burnt pieces of the mailbox. Claire notices the Coyote in the bushes).

Claire
Me and you.
(The hum, an electronic drone, starts to fade in. Cult members walk slowly onstage and surround Claire in a tightening circle.)


Claire (Nicole Heaston)
© Cory Weaver

Me and you.
Lunatics out at midnight
Terrorizing the neighborhood.
(to the coyote)
You hear it too?

(to the cult members)
You hear it too?

The Listeners
(joining the hum)
Ahhhhhhhhhh.....

(The hum becomes overwhelmingly uncomfortable. Claire clutches her head. She stares at the audience breaking the fourth wall, demanding that we all hear it.)

Claire
(to the audience)
You hear it too?

(The orchestra cuts out, leaving the hum alone for a few seconds.)

Disc 2

Act II

1

Entr'acte (Angela's Confessional)

Streams of mascara have tumbled down Angela's face. She is not the happy-go-lucky creature we met in Act I.

Angela
Can a human combust?
Can a father vaporize?
His last words to me:
"My beautiful Angie"
That's what he called me.
"My beautiful Angie".
Kissing my forehead.
The most handsome dad.
I can still see the gray in his eyebrows,
The sunspot on his cheek.
"My beautiful Angie".
Nobody calls me Angie anymore.
I can't stand that name.
People disappear all the time.
I expect it.
Friends, boyfriends, casual flings,
They call me names:
Exasperating,
Loud,
Overbearing,
Annoying,
Unreliable.
But I am as loyal as they come.
But loyalty breaks my heart again and again.
My heart is crumbs.

People disappear all the time.
I expect it.
They put me down,
Annihilate me,
Then they dissolve into the world.
They abandon me.
(beat)
Leave me with nothing but noise.
That's why I've come.
That's why I've come.

(Howard comes out from behind the camera. We see his hand on the screen

touching Angela's face and neck in a gesture that might seem fatherly, but also quite sexual. She looks up at him and smiles.)

Howard
Angela.
Beautiful Angela.
You were right to come.
Your loyalty is a gift.
It's useful.

Angela
Use me, Howard.

(We transition to a ritual led by Howard.)

2

Scene One: Surrender

Howard appears in an isolated strand of light.

Howard
I built this for you.
I am peeling off the bad,
The rotten, weighty layer.
I am wrapping you in a healthy glow.
Your indiscretions,
A shroud of toxic smog.
I built this for you.
(The circle of light gradually widens to reveal the Listeners engaged in a ritual)
I see your shame,
A morass of muck and mud.
I lift you,
Hoist you from the quagmire.

I summon your potential.
Repressed in the pit, lodged in your core.
Massaged up and out,
Through confession, reflection.
Your true self awakened,

I set you free.
I built this for you.
I alone can harness the hum.
Find your harmony.
A note in the bigger chord.

The Listeners
Ahhhhhh.....

Howard
(Howard leads the Listeners in a series of gestures)
Extend your arm. Point your index finger.
Breathe out.
Now make the sound more beautiful...
So beautiful.

Find your harmony.
A note in the bigger chord.

The Listeners
(drone-like)
A note in the bigger chord...

Howard
Know your chosen strand of noise.

The Listeners
(drone-like)
A note in the bigger chord...

Howard
Hold it up.

(Howard encourages everyone to hold up their hands.)
Hold it up!
(The Listeners become more active, their actions becoming more exaggerated and strange.)
Yes! Feel the voltage.
I built this current for you.
Find your harmony.
Yes! Hold it up!

(Thom stands up. At first we think he's enthusiastically joining the chorus.)

3

Thom
I'm... not into this shit.

(The spell is instantly broken. The Listeners stop the ritual abruptly and

fall out of formation.)
Group meditation. Singing.
Yeah... not so much.

Howard
Thom...

Thom
These meetings are entering kumbaya territory.
We're just fucking around now.

Howard
The hum is a teacher.

The Listeners
(robotically)
The hum is a teacher.

Thom
Stop it!

Howard
The hum is not fucking around.

The Listeners
(robotically)
The hum is not fucking around.

Thom
(cutting off the Listeners)
Let's go, Danica.

Danica!

Danica
I want to stay.
I want you to stay.

Thom
(weaker, defeated.)
Let's go.

Howard
Thom, you are a compromised man.
You have revealed how corrupt you are
In video after video,
Confessing to the most repugnant,
Repulsive behavior.
(Thom cannot meet Danica's eyes.)
We can help you. You need us.

(Howard pushes Thom forcefully into a chair. Thom meets his eye but does not resist.)

Howard
We have so much work to do.
(beat)
Now, any more objections?

(An awkward silence. Howard gestures aggressively to Angela, indicating that she should get the group to resume the ritual.)

Angela
Surrender, surrender.

Listeners
Surrender.
Surrender.
(Dillon approaches Howard)

Howard
Surrender!

Dillon
Howard?
(Howard ignores him.)
I'd like to share with the group,
A theory.

Howard
We've exhausted all your theories.

Dillon
It's just,
The evidence,
It's possible...
It's convoluted shit.

Howard
Sit down Dillon.

The Listeners
Surrender.

Dillon
Unindexed knowledge, you know?
Dark web stuff.
ZeroNet.
I've been talking to some guys

My buds from the military.
Kept me out of a few honeypots.
Gave me coordinates.

Howard
Sit down, Dillon.

Dillon
Up all night up all night
Up all night up all night...
Can't sleep.
Won't sleep.
Fuck sleep!
Up all night.
I am up all night decoding, Listening!

Howard
Enough Dillon, surrender!
(Howard gestures to the Listeners to start singing.)

The Listeners
(robotically, parroting Howard)
Enough Dillon, surrender!

Dillon
36.53 degrees north,
116.93 degrees west.
Smack dab in the desert!
Government releasing
Extremely low frequencies
From disguised cell towers.

Howard
Enough!

Listeners
Enough Dillon, surrender.

Dillon
But listen,
Listen,
Big dogs in D.C.,
Combing through our every move,
They're listening.
They put a vice on our ears.
They put a vice on our ears.
They put advice in our ears,
Vice on our ears.

Fractions of decibels,
Ratcheting,
Big brother...
They're listening.
Motherfuckers.
55.35 degrees north,
An ELF hotbed.

I am up all night
Decoding,
Can't sleep,
Won't sleep,
Don't sleep,
FUCK SLEEP!

Howard
Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!
(Howard gestures to the Listeners to start singing.)

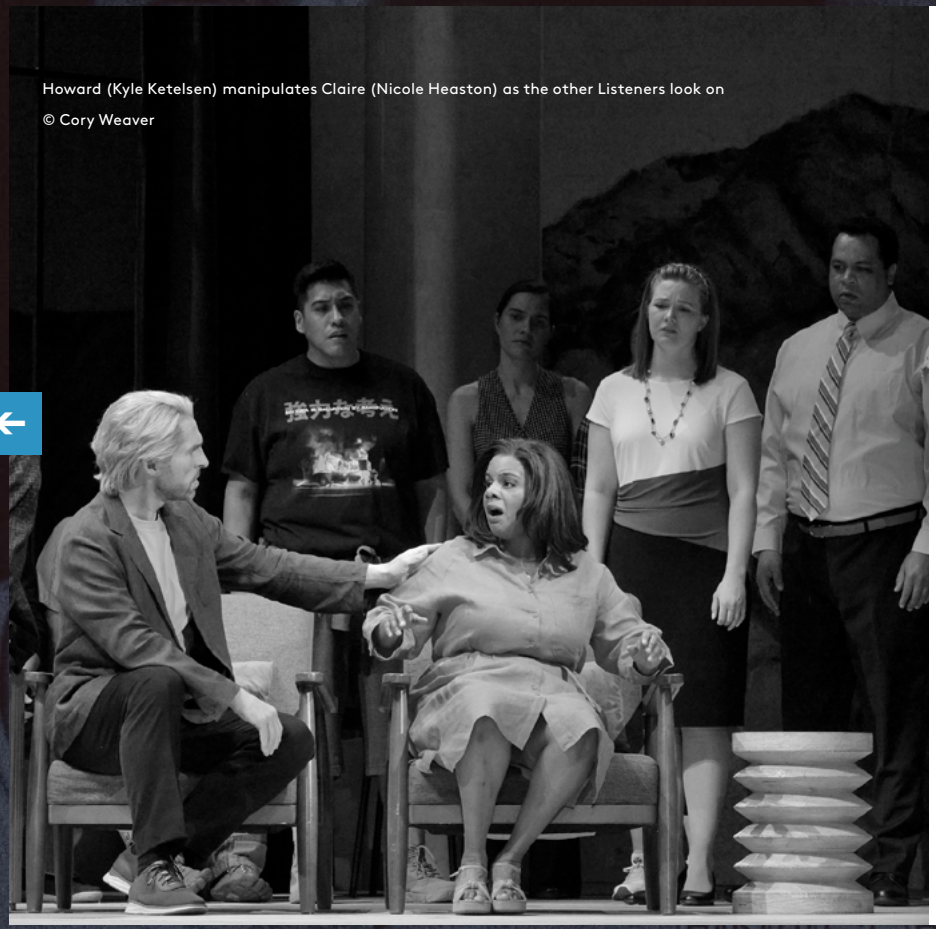
Listeners
Shut up Dillon! Shut up shut up shut up!

Dillon
(crumbling a bit, desperate)
I fought.
Three tours!
I saw men curl up like babies;
They were machines,
Then ghosts.
Now they wanna turn me into a zombie?
No fucking way.

Big dogs in D.C.,
Combing through our every move,
They're listening, listening.
They put a vice on our ears,
They put a vice on our ears,
Advice in our ears
A vice on our ears.

Howard
Enough!
Dillon, you are a disruption.
An impediment to our progress.
Listen to yourself
And realize how messed up you are.
You are a broken man.

(Dillon is crushed, he sits back down with Thom, who will not look at him. We see a glimpse of the Coyote in the



Howard (Kyle Ketelsen) manipulates Claire (Nicole Heaston) as the other Listeners look on
© Cory Weaver

window. Claire and Kyle, oblivious to the conflict with Dillon, are locked in each other's eyes as they complete a ritual. They slowly fall into a kiss just as Howard turns to them.)

Howard
Claire!
Confessional.
Kyle.
Solo reflection.

5

Confessional #5

Claire and Kyle separate. Claire sits down to give a video confessional, with Howard behind the camera. Kyle retreats to a corner where he prostrates and repeats a mantra.

Kyle
This is my shame,
A morass of muck and mud...

Claire
I haven't been kissed since... Paul...
Strange... tasting a different... person.

Howard
(derisively, from behind the camera)
A boy.

Claire
It's confusing.

Howard
It's distracting.
He's on the periphery.

Claire
(Claire moves slowly toward Howard, maintaining eye contact, flirting.)
It felt different...
Nice.

Howard
It's a waste of your energy.

Claire
It felt natural.

Howard
It was wrong.

Claire
Would it be wrong to kiss you?

Howard
Is that what you want, Claire?

Claire
Yes.

(Claire kisses Howard, long and passionately. Kyle turns his head to watch, then lowers his head, dejected.)

Howard
The prophet and his chosen disciple.

Claire
Is that what I am?

Howard
If that's what you want.
(suddenly threatening)
But you will not kiss Kyle again.
(conspiratorially, into Claire's ear)
You are my number two.
(Claire nods. Howard kisses her again as the scene shifts back to the Listeners.)

Claire
(to Howard)
To be chosen... to be seen.

Howard
Go on.

Claire
(to the camera)
My daughter tells me I'm selfish.
My whole life I've been selfless:
Selfless and practical...
The definition of a teacher.
Then the practicalities of being a wife,
A mother:
Pay the bills, buy the groceries,
Drive her to tap and jazz and piano lessons,
And swimming and soccer... the mall.

In another lifetime,
I would have been a great novelist:
Sitting by myself, with my imagination;
Or an architect,
Designer of impractical estates.
Or President of the goddamn United States!
I still have all that potential.
Even in this lifetime.
It never went away,
It just took one long-ass nap.
Now I'm awake.

Scene Two: Meetings Escalate

The actor who plays Coyote kneels by a window in Howard's house with a hunting rifle. He cocks it. The lights come up on the group meditating. They intone a drone-like tapestry, supporting each character as they go around talking about their deepest secrets.

The Listeners
Mmmmmm.....
Ahhh.....

Sina
(a little unhinged, unstable)
I have a bipolar relationship with the hum.
It's like love hate, hate love, love hate,
Hate love, love hate.

Bram
I lie in the tub until the cold water makes me wholly uncomfortable.

Sina
Love hate.

Bram
That's what I deserve.

Sina
Hate love.

Bram
That's what I deserve.

Emily
I have slept with underage women.
I can't help it.
I just can't help it.

Bram
That's what I deserve.

Emily
I just can't help it.

Hortense
(coughing incessantly)
I have no self-control. Nada.

Emily
I just can't help it.

Hortense
I tell ya, when I strike him...
It feels good.
Wrong, but good.

The Listeners
(all together)
The hum is a teacher.
Surrender.

Danica
I feel most comfortable when I am here.
Your eyes welcome me.

Vince
I am high, high, high, looking down on myself.
An objective bird's eye view.

Emily
I just can't help it.

Hortense
No self-control.

Danica
Your eyes welcome me.

Vince
It makes so much sense.

Thom
I have zero focus. I've become irrational.

Dillon
I fill with rage. I fill with anger.
It takes over. I can't control it.

The Listeners
(all together)
Peel off the bad,
The rotten, weighty layer.

Claire
The hum is cruel but kind.
It has given me the strength of a leader.

The Listeners
(all together)
Wrap yourself in a healthy glow.

Kyle
I'm in love with a married woman.

The Listeners
(all together)
The hum is a teacher.
Peel off the rotten layer.
Wrap yourself in a healthy glow.

7

Angela
(Angela walks forward out of the group and sings to Howard)
I give my mind, my heart, my body to you.
(beat)
I shed.
I surrender.
Forever your number two.
Use me.
Use me, Philosopher.
Use me.
I've completely surrendered.
Fill me with your philosophies.
Together.
Together we will elevate.
Me and you...
Together we will lead.
Me and you.

Howard
Together?!
You need to humble yourself.
You are exceeding a reasonable allotment of space.

Angela
Use me, Howard.

Howard
I will decide who is of use,
Who is of value.

Angela
Fill me, Howard. Fill me.
I surrender to you.

Howard
Angela, beautiful Angie!
You are a walking list of deficiencies.
Exasperating, loud, unhinged.
You overwhelm the collective group.
You are a syphon of my energies.
Deficient, deficient, deficient.
I find your weakness unbearable.
We all do.
You are an unreliable secretary.
What good are you to me?

Angela
I'll do anything.

Howard
Anything?

(Angela nods.)

Howard
Get the fuck out of my face.
(Angela turns away in tears.)

8

Claire
What is happening here?

Dillon
Dude... that was fucked up!
You don't talk to women like that!

Howard
I'm working here!

Dillon
You didn't have to yell at her...

Howard
I will yell at whomever I want,
Whenever I want.

Dillon
Wanna yell at me, fucker?

Howard
Stand down, boy.

Dillon
You're an asshole.

Howard
And you're a compromised soul.

(Dillon pulls out a small pistol and points it at Howard. The group pulls away, except Howard, who flinches but holds his ground. Dillon crumbles a bit, almost sobbing. He lowers the gun slightly. Claire steps in to try to de-escalate the situation. She takes the gun and gives it to Howard.)

Claire
(a mantra)
The hum is cruel but kind.

Dillon
(crumbling a bit, almost sobbing)
Of course I'm fucking compromised!
I'm fucked!
I'm fucked I'm fucked I'm fucked!
That's why I fucking come here!
I'm looking for help!
Everybody here gets help,
Everybody but me.

Howard
You're not worth it.
It's becoming very clear.

(Howard hands Dillon the gun, the implication being that he should kill himself.)
You are beyond salvation.

(Dillon lowers the gun slowly. Dillon runs out the door. Some of The Listeners seem to want to follow him to make sure he is okay, but Howard stops them.)

Howard
(to the group)
What the fuck are you looking at?

Get back to work.

(The Listeners tentatively resume their exercise. We see Angela and Claire in solo reflection, prostrating and saying their mantras.)

The Listeners
Ahhhhhhhhhhh.....

Angela
I shed, I surrender.
Use me, philosopher.

Claire
The hum is cruel but kind.
We are notes in the bigger chord.

Scene Three: Dillon vs. the Tower

The scene shifts to Dillon, who is near a cell tower. He shoots at it with his pistol. The bullets ricochet off the structure. The Chorus represents DILLON's inner thoughts, which become increasingly frantic and confused.

Listeners
Ahhhhhh.....

Dillon
(stumbling and shooting)
Fuck you.
Fuck this thing.
Fuck you.
Fuck it all.
(We hear police sirens and see flashing lights. A bright flashlight shines in Dillon's eyes. Dillon turns the gun on himself, creating a self-hostage situation.)

Listeners
You are a compromised soul!
Deficient deficient deficient!

Dillon
(his finger on the trigger)
I'll do it.
You know I'll do it.
I'll pull the trigger.
(beat)
Don't come any closer!
I demand a senior military official!
Someone with authority.
Come clean! Come clean come clean come clean!
ELF's ELF's ELF's ELF's ELF's
A pig conspiracy! A pig conspiracy!
Conspiracy!

(The police shout "Surrender!" through a bullhorn over the sound of The Listeners' chanting. For a moment it looks like Dillon might surrender.)

Police
SURRENDER!!!

The Listeners
Enough Dillon, Surrender!
Surrender!

Dillon
(Dillon holds his gun up with new resolve.)
I don't surrender!
(The police slowly begin to move towards Dillon.)
Fuck those assholes Listeners.
Fuck Howard Bard.
Fuck surrender.
I don't surrender.
I shoot out frequencies.
I cut the power.
I expose conspiracies.
(The police grab Dillon. A news crew approaches.)
Fuck those assholes Listeners,
They're the crazy ones.
Guns... and... drugs...
Perverts... all of 'em.
Fucked up shit.

(Our attention turns to the bright lights of a news crew.
Theresa Alvarez, local reporter, is shuffling papers as she prepares to go on air. An assistant applies powder to Theresa's face.)

Theresa
Dillon Humphries, 38,
was taken into custody after shots were fired at a local cell tower which the suspect said, "emits low frequency trash noise."

Mr. Humphries claims to belong to a local cult
Led by Ranchlands resident Howard Bard.

He says they're armed, and very dangerous,
With guns, and drugs, and "f'ed up stuff."
This cult also practices "mysterious humming rituals to disrupt government mind control."

Dillon
(as he's dragged away, to the camera)
Go see for yourselves,
They're the crazy ones.

Theresa
We'll continue to keep you updated as this story develops.
I'm Theresa Alvarez, reporting live from Ranchlands.
Now back to you, Ron.



Dillon (John Moore) is taken into custody on live television
© Cory Weaver

11

Confessional #6 / Scene Three

Howard and Claire walk towards each other slowly. A seductive dance. Howard and Claire kiss. They move onto a bed in front of the confessional camera and begin to have sex. We hear Claire's cellphone ring once, then go straight to voicemail. We hear her voice on the phone (pre-recorded).

Claire
Hi, you've reached Claire.
I'm probably in the middle of
mahjongg or soccer practice.
Leave a message. Bye!

Lights come up on Paul, on his phone. Ashley is close by, texting or doing homework.

Paul
(slowly, on an answering machine)
Hi, Claire,
It's Paul, again.
Been thinking of you, a lot.
I'd like to find a time to talk.
Face-to-face, if possible.

(Paul pauses, then wells up with emotion, unsure of what to say)
We miss you.
It's Ashley's birthday on Friday.
We'll have cake at my sister's.
Everyone asks about you.
Ash... want to say something to your mom?

Ashley
Nope.

Paul
(Paul's face falls)
Please, Claire.
We love you.

(Paul hangs up. He and Ashley exit. We see Angela slowly and silently enter the room where Howard and Claire are making love.)

12

Angela
You don't make love to me like that anymore.

Howard
Angela!

Claire
What is she doing here?!

Howard
This is not your confessional!

Angela
(Angela doesn't flinch. She addresses Claire directly.)
He told you you were beautiful, right?
(sarcastic, quoting Howard)
He saw your "hidden potential"?
He said all that to me, too.

Now he just hides my face.
Takes me from behind.
(Claire recoils at Angela's admission)

Howard
Angela! Leave the room!

Angela
I was your number two,
Your secretary.
Me and you, together.
Now I'm nothing.
(Angela pulls herself together, gets in Claire's face.)
Don't think you're special.
(She turns to face the other women in the group.)
Every woman who comes in here.
Same story,
Similar words:
(sarcastic again)
"Penetrating you with the hum."

Howard
You are no longer welcome here.
This is your final confession.
You're just a spiteful slut.

(Angela shrinks back, deeply hurt. Claire steps forward.)

Claire
Don't call her that!

Howard
Stop it.
Defiance is unbecoming.

Claire
Is it true? What she said?

Howard
Of course it isn't.

Claire
It's true, it's true, isn't it?

Howard
You deserve each other.
Here's the door.
Quality over quantity.
Those of us who stay
Are the ones with potential.
The true leaders.

(Claire stops in her tracks and turns slowly to face Howard.)

Claire
(to Howard)
I've valued this place so much.
I've valued you.
(to the group)
But we can do better.
I promise.
We can do so much better.

The hum is a cruel binding agent.
We've sacrificed, we've lost,
But we've come together as a family.
A chosen, perfect family.
What we believed was a solution
Has become a deception,
manipulation.
(gesturing to Howard)
He built nothing!
We built this circle.
We harness the hum.
We build the harmony.
We are the bigger chord.

I believe that science will prevail.
That we can end the lunacy.
Until then we have each other.
(gesturing to Howard)
He does not decide who is of value.

(Claire takes Angela's hand and squeezes it reassuringly.)

(The hum starts to sound, softly at first, then rapidly gaining volume. The Listeners grab their ears and double over in pain. Angela collapses into Claire's arms. Claire holds her protectively.)

The Listeners
Ahhhhhhhh.....

(Howard stands with his back to the group, oblivious to the effects of the noise. He is not affected.)

(Angela notices that Howard is unaffected. She struggles to her feet.)

Angela
(Angela points to Howard.)
See?! Look!
He doesn't even hear it.

The Listeners
(The Listeners break into chaos and confusion.)
Do you hear it?! Do you always hear it?!

Angela
He's a liar!
A liar and a fraud!

The Listeners
(The Listeners come together in anger against Howard.)
Liar! Liar and a fraud!

Howard
I... I... I have evolved.

The Listeners
Liar! Liar and a fraud!



Claire
(to the group)
It's time we all leave.

(Bright lights flood the house, then sirens. A voice from offstage, through a bullhorn.)

Police
(offstage)
This is the Ranchlands Police Department.
Howard Bard, you are surrounded.
Come out with your hands up.

(The Listeners panic.)

Howard
Get on the ground! Everybody!
On the ground!

The Listeners
(half get up to surrender, half stay chanting)
Liar liar liar liar

Claire
(to Kyle)
This is all over now.
(Claire kisses Kyle.)

The Listeners
Fraud fraud fraud fraud

(Claire and Kyle kiss quickly but tenderly, infuriating Howard. They then get up and walk to the door, holding hands.)

Howard
Get on the ground!

(The Coyote fires a gun.)

(Claire takes Kyle's hand and they lead a group of the Listeners out through the front door. Howard continues in vain to regain control of the group. A few listen to him but most follow Claire.)

Listen! Listen to me! Get down! Listen!

(The Police burst in after Claire and the Listeners exit. Howard runs the other way and escapes, the Police fire in his direction. Kyle is shot and dies.)

15

(We see Theresa reporting on the end of the story, the image live fed to the screen)

Theresa
(On Tv)
Four are dead,
And four injured in a shootout in Ranchlands this evening...
Police are monitoring the situa---

(Theresa is cut off by the Coyote, who appears on the roof and howls.)

Houuuuuuuuwwwwwwwwwwww!

16

Confessional #7

The scene shifts to Kyle's first video confession.

Kyle
(Kyle speaks hesitantly to Howard, who is behind the camera.)
My name is Kyle.
Kyle Harris.
This is my first confession.

I miss smiling.
Does that sound weird?
I was a happy kid once.
But with the hum,
You only think about survival.

I'm grateful for Mrs. Devon.
She noticed me hurting.
She was so instinctive,
Straightforward and warm.
She saw me.

(pause)

I took my father's pistol.
I considered it...
But then I found you online.
(beat)
What if this is the answer?
That's what I wondered.
What if you are the answer?
(beat)
I still hear the jackhammer.
But now,
I'm listening.

17

Epilogue: Nightgown, A while later

Claire is out at the end of the lane on a foggy morning, collecting the mail. She lowers the flag on the new mail box and begins walking back to the house when Coyote comes back onstage. Claire extends her hand and offers it a treat. The Coyote comes up to her and licks her hand.

Claire
(to the Coyote)
Haven't seen you in the longest while.
Thought you found a den,
Made a little family.
Or you died. Ha!
Little trickster.

(Paul and Ashley walk out of the fog. Claire is surprised to see them.)

Claire
Hello, strangers.

Paul
Hello, Claire.

Ashley
Hi, Mom.

Claire
Checking up on me?

Paul
We are.

Claire
(with a touch of sarcasm)
I'm flattered.

Paul
We want you to know
We'll always be here.

Ashley
We're not giving up, Mom.

Claire
(Claire pauses, chooses her words carefully.)

I've found a way for me.
I've found a way to be myself.
A way to love myself,
With people who love me
Unconditionally.

Paul
Please don't think that our love for you has conditions.

Claire
But it does, Paul.
And you never even realized.
These people lift me up.
I lift them up.
I was born to lead.
(The Listeners, including Kyle and Angela, slowly emerge from the house and surround Claire in a protective circle.)
We all need a family that understands us.
And this is that family.

(Claire does not seem to hear Paul or Ashley. She is lost in a kind of trance, dancing like the Coyote in Act 1 Scene 1.)

Paul
We will come back for you.

Ashley
Every week, Mom.
We will.

(Ashley and Paul slowly back away and exit.)

Listeners
Ahhhhhh.....

(Claire motions to The Listeners, they make an obsequious gesture that makes it clear that they now follow Claire and she has complete control over them.)
(The Coyote sits by Claire. Kyle comes to her side and takes her hand.)

Claire
Houuuuuuuuwwwwwwwwwwww!

The Listeners & Claire
Houuuuuuuuwwwwwwwwwwww!

(Blackout.)



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Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM
Executive producer **John Mangum** (Lyric Opera of Chicago)
Recording engineer **Chris Willis** | Editing, Mixing & Mastering **Brian Losch**

ARTWORK
Liner notes **Justin Vickers** | Coordination & design **Karolina Szymanik** (PENTATONE)
Cover & wallets photography **Cory Weaver** | Booklet cover photography **Andrew Cioffi**
Cover design **Marjolein Coenrady** (PENTATONE)

This album was recorded live on March 27 and 30 & April 2 and 5, 2025 at Lyric Opera of Chicago, USA.

CD wallet 1 photograph: Kyle Ketelsen as Howard
CD wallet 2 photograph: Nicole Heaston as Claire and Kyle Ketelsen as Howard

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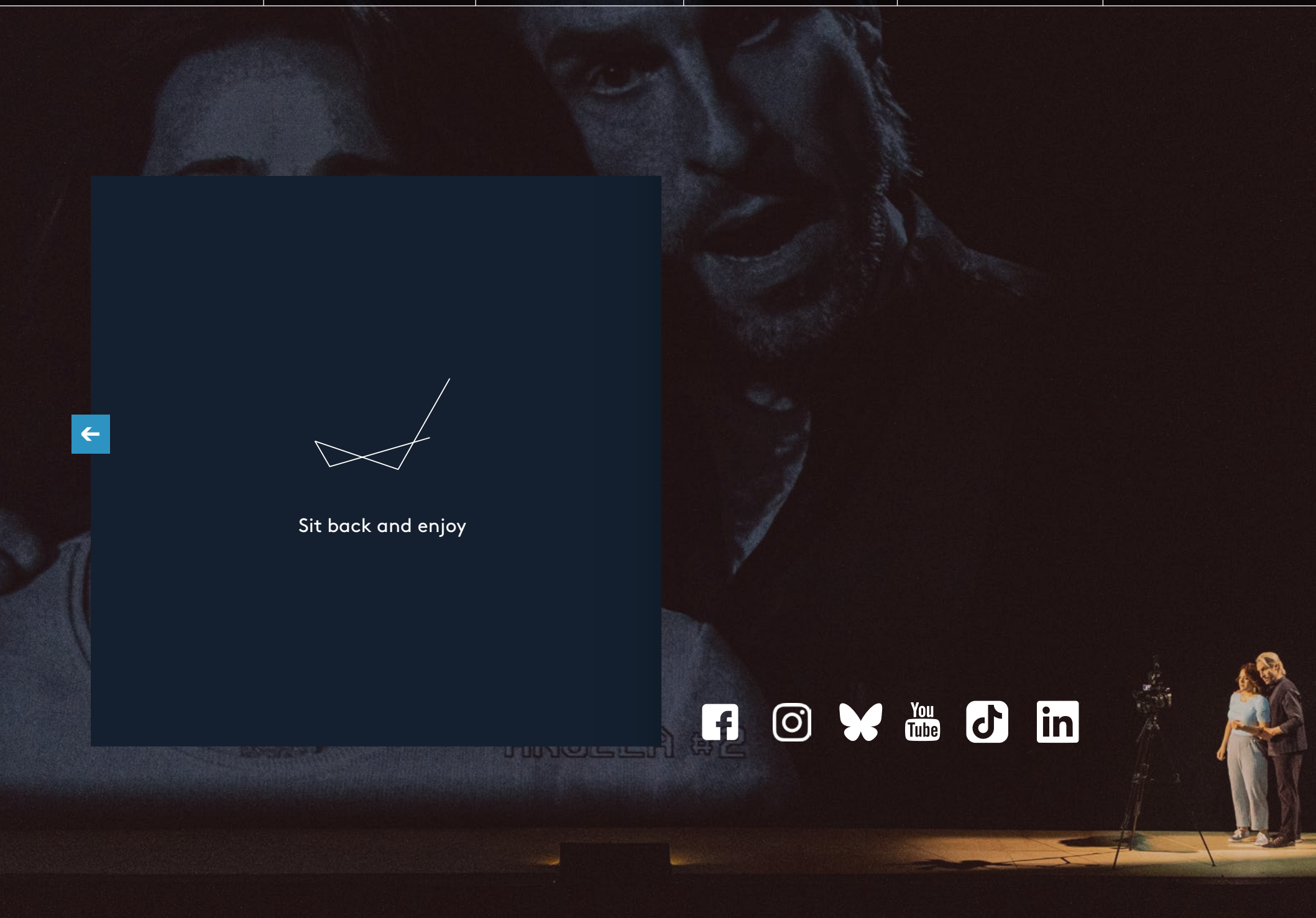
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Major support for *The New Work Fund* provided by the **Robert and Penelope Steiner Family Foundation** and **Virginia Tobiason**.

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The Listeners
Composed by Missy Mazzoli
Libretto by Royce Vavrek, based on an original story by Jordan Tannahill
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