



MICHAEL DELLAIRA

Arctic Explorations

Levin • Haslett • Nuka Alice • Brittain • Celentano

New Amsterdam Singers

The Harlem Chamber Players • Clara Longstreth



Michael
DELLAIRA
(b. 1949)

Arctic Explorations

Folk opera in one act (2023)

Libretto by Michael Dellaira

Cast (in order of appearance)

Siarnaq	Nuka Alice, Vocal soloist
Maggie Fox	Nicole Haslett, Soprano
President Zachary Taylor	Michael Celentano, Tenor
Lady Jane Franklin	Erin Brittain, Soprano
Elisha Kent Kane	Colin Levin, Baritone

New Amsterdam Singers

The Harlem Chamber Players

Liz Player, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

Justin Rothberg, Guitars • Zac Larson, Banjo

Ashley Horne, Violin • Audrey Mitchell, Viola • Anthony Morris, Double Bass

Scott Still, Percussion

Clara Longstreth, Conductor

Arctic Explorations was commissioned and developed by Nancy Manocherian's the cell theater and New Amsterdam Singers.

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❶	Prelude “Sullualuk” (The Northwest Passage): Qaagit, Ujartigut (<i>Chorus, Siarnaq</i>)	3:42
❷	Scene 1 “Maggie Fox and the spirit circle”: Margaret Fox Kane, that’s me (<i>Maggie, Chorus</i>)	4:55
❸	Scene 2 “Lady Jane”: Message from the President of the United States (<i>Chorus, President, Lady Jane</i>)	6:52
❹	Scene 3 “The Expedition”: In the month of December, 1852 (<i>Kane, Chorus</i>)	3:16
❺	Scene 4 “Love Letters – Interlude 1”: My dearest Maggie (<i>Kane, Chorus, Maggie</i>)	2:31
❻	Scene 5 “In the Ice”: Bay ice, drift-ice, field-ice, floe (<i>Chorus, Kane</i>)	3:46
❼	Scene 6 “Love Letters – Interlude 2”: My dearest Maggie (<i>Kane, Maggie</i>)	1:34
❽	Scene 7 “Siarnaq”: In Christ there is no East or West (<i>Chorus, Siarnaq, Kane</i>)	7:55
❾	Scene 8 “Natural Laws”: I am convinced (<i>Kane, Maggie, Chorus</i>)	2:47
❿	Scene 9 “Christmas”: December 25, Christmas, Monday (<i>Kane, Chorus</i>)	2:35
⓫	Scene 10 “Sir John: Died in Her Majesty’s service”: In Christ there is no East or West (<i>Chorus, Reporter, Lady Jane, Siarnaq, Kane</i>)	5:01
⓬	Scene 11 “The Escape”: The summer was wearing on (<i>Kane, Chorus</i>)	5:27
⓭	Scene 12 “New York”: October 12th, 1855 (<i>Chorus, Siarnaq</i>)	1:53
⓮	Scene 13 “Spirit World”: He died still a young man (<i>Chorus, Maggie, Lady Jane, Siarnaq, Kane</i>)	11:32
⓯	Postlude “Sullualuk”: We are the spirit of the Northwest Passage (<i>Chorus</i>)	2:18

Drum dance for “Siarnaq” ❽ by Nuka Alice
“Every Single Thing” ❽ by Nuka Alice and Michael Dellaira

Michael Dellaira (b. 1949)

Arctic Explorations (2023)

Michael Dellaira (b. 1949)

Michael Dellaira is the composer of four previous operas: *Chéri*, developed at The Actors Studio and a finalist for the American Academy of Arts and Letters Richard Rodgers Award for Musical Theater; *The Secret Agent*, premiered in 2011 by Center for Contemporary Opera and awarded the “Laureat” at the Arnel Opera Festival in Hungary that same year; *The Death of Webern*, premiered by the Pocket Opera Players at Symphony Space and recorded by Frost Opera Theater with Alan Johnson, conductor, and selected as one of the “Five Best New Works” of 2016 by *Opera News*; and *The Leopard*, premiered by the Frost Opera Theater in 2022 with Gerard Schwarz, conductor (Naxos 8.669052-53). Dellaira is a recipient of an ASCAP Foundation Morton Gould Award, a Jerome Commission from the American Composers Forum, a Fulbright Fellowship, and grants from the Ford and Mellon Foundations, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, Cary Trust and the American Music Center.

www.michaeldellaira.com

Arctic Explorations (2023)

The background: In the mid-19th century, the United States and the Western European nations were obsessed with finding a shipping route through the Arctic that would connect the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. Such a route, if navigable, would shorten the trip between London and China from six months to just six weeks. With that in mind, the British explorer Sir John Franklin set sail in search of this Northwest Passage, and after five years, when he hadn't returned, the British Navy declared him dead. His widow, the bereft but insistent Lady Jane, turned to American president Zachary Taylor for assistance: wasn't the great United States as capable of laying claim to the Northwest Passage as England; and if so, couldn't it rescue her husband at the same time? Moved and savvy, President Taylor asked Congress to commission US Navy surgeon Elisha Kent Kane, a well-connected Philadelphian, to lead an expedition to the Arctic to rescue Sir John while of course finding and laying claim to the Northwest Passage.

In pursuit of Franklin and the Northwest Passage, Kane and his crew were trapped in the ice off the coast of Greenland for two years. But they survived, not because they brought with them the technology of the modern world (though they did do that), but because they turned to and learned from the Inuit. This set him apart from other Arctic explorers – Franklin included – who, always at their peril, considered themselves superior to the Inuit. When Kane returned to America, he began writing a detailed account of his expedition, which was so popular that by 1900 every household owned at least two books: Kane's *Arctic Explorations* and the Bible.

Americans in the mid-19th century were also obsessed with a quasi-religion called Spiritualism, which was the belief that the living could communicate with the dead through special people called mediums. Among the most famous of these were the Fox sisters, two young women from upstate New York. That Elisha Kent Kane and Maggie Fox were romantically involved was the stuff of scandal. And though opposites in almost every respect (from background to belief) both were sought-after speakers. Kane told tales of far-away places, of glaciers and of polar bears, to wide-eyed crowds, and Fox diverted an eager public with messages communicated through her from another untraveled place, the hereafter.

My opera, *Arctic Explorations*, registers that human desire to discover what lies beyond the boundaries of our experience. Explorers, all of us, our success often comes at a cost, and nowhere can this cost be witnessed more than in the Arctic, one of the most beautiful – and endangered – places on earth. Today, the Inuit, who have lived in the Arctic for centuries, are watching their land disappear. Over 300 billion tons of ice can melt from the Humboldt Glacier on a single day.

I based my libretto on Kane's book, as well as on letters and newspaper articles from the period, including the love letters between Kane and Fox and the correspondence between Lady Jane Franklin and President Taylor. And since the Inuit and their homeland are also essential to my opera, I worked closely with Greenlandic (and Inuk) drum-dancer Nuka Alice. She helped me with the pronunciation and translation of a number of words in the Inuit language Kalaallisut (now called Greenlandic since Greenland's independence from Denmark), she vetted the libretto, making sure that the words spoken and sung by the 19th-century Inuit characters are as true to life as possible, provided melodic material for Siarnaq's song, and created her drum-dance. The two organizations that commissioned the opera, Nancy Manocherian's cell theater and New Amsterdam Singers, also helped develop the story and music, via workshops and many meetings, both virtual and in person. I want to thank not just Nancy Manocherian and Clara Longstreth for their numerous suggestions about how to make *Arctic Explorations* better than it might otherwise have been, but also the members of the cell's staff and members of the chorus, who also actively participated in the development process.

To be sure, I hope to illuminate audiences about the Arctic, but I want just as much to tell a story about the human desire to explore the unknown. That desire, after all, is what gave birth to science. But it also gives rise to superstition, deception, ignorance, and exploitation.

Michael Dellaira

Nicole Haslett as Maggie Fox

Performance photos courtesy of Eric Alexander, Document This!



Erin Brittain as Lady Jane Franklin



Arctic Explorations

Libretto by Michael Dellaira

Characters

(in order of appearance)

Chorus

Sometimes commenting collectively on the action, sometimes amplifying the thoughts, words, and actions of one of the characters, but always a member of the orchestra.

Siarnaq

Inuk shaman who befriended Kane and his crew when they were trapped in the Arctic, teaching them how to survive a long, dark, Arctic winter. Without Siarnaq's generosity and humanity Kane and his men would have suffered the same fate as Sir John Franklin.

President Zachary Taylor

Twelfth president of the United States. A former army colonel and Mexican War hero, Taylor served as president from March 1849 to July 1850. It was he who asked Congress to commission Elisha Kent Kane to lead an expedition to the Arctic in search of Sir John Franklin and the fabled Northwest Passage.

Lady Jane Franklin

Wife (and widow, though she doesn't know that) of Sir John Franklin, who, with 134 men, set out from London in 1845 in search of the Northwest Passage and should have returned home by now. After numerous rescue missions the British navy has given up. Undaunted, Lady Jane turns to United States President Zachary Taylor for help.

Margaret (Maggie) Fox

Starting in 1849, and for the next 20 years, she and her sister Kate conducted séances (which they called "spirit circles") across the US and Europe, with many of the rich and famous as her clients. Maggie was engaged to, and then presumably married, the Arctic explorer Elisha Kent Kane. Kane's prominent Philadelphia family disapproved of Maggie, a farm girl from upstate New York; they considered her a charlatan.

Elisha Kent Kane

A navy surgeon and explorer, he was commissioned by Congress to lead the 1853 expedition in search of Sir John Franklin and the Northwest Passage. Trapped in the Arctic ice for two years, on his return he was treated by the press and public as a national hero. He quickly published a book about the trials and travails of his crew, Arctic Explorations, which was a huge bestseller. Dr. Kane tried to keep his romance with Maggie Fox a secret, knowing it would damage his reputation.

1 Prelude "Sullualuk" (The Northwest Passage)

CHORUS

Qaagit ("Come here")

Qaagit, Ujartigut ("... come find us")

Qaagit, Ujarniartigut ("... come and find us")

Maaniippugut ("we are here")

We are the spirit of the Northwest Passage.

That mythical route from the West to the East.

Come find us, if you can, come face the challenge;

Come sail north to the cold coast of Greenland

Then head west, straight for Alaska.

In our ocean of ice that is ready to trap you,

Crush you and starve you and bring you disaster.

But glory awaits you if you can find us:

Lumber and furs from New York to China

Silks and spices from Canton to London

Glory awaits you if you can find us.

We are the spirit of the Northwest Passage.

Siarnaq enters.

SIARNAQ

(spoken)

Sullualuk. Ujartigut. The Northwest Passage.

Connecting the Atlantic to the Pacific by way of the Arctic. It's where I live.

Think of it: only six weeks to sail from New York to Guangzhou. Whoever controlled this passage controlled the world.

For 300 years, explorers came here looking for it; filled with dreams of power and glory, they didn't know how brutal this land could be, how deadly. Most never returned home.

Sir John Franklin of the British Royal Navy was one such explorer. He left London in May of 1845 with a crew of 134 men and was never heard from again.

Those who did make it back did so because they turned to us, the Inuit, for help.

This is the land where I lived, where the Inuit people have lived for hundreds of years. It is changing. Today ships sail through the Northwest passage every day. Some of them even carry tourists.

But the spirit of the Northwest Passage is not silent.

Listen.

2 Scene 1 "Maggie Fox and the spirit circle"

Lights come up on Maggie Fox. Projected behind is her New York Times obituary.

MAGGIE

Margaret Fox Kane (that's me, though I was mostly known as Maggie), the youngest of the once celebrated Fox sisters, died early Wednesday morning.

Funeral services will be conducted tonight in Bradbury Hall, 292 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, at eight o'clock.

The Rev. Charles Hicks and other prominent Spiritualists will make addresses.

My sister Kate and I claimed that spirits could communicate with us by tapping out messages on a table.

CHORUS

Qaagit, Ujartigut.

Many have tried and all of them failed

Many have died but still they set sail

They came and sailed north to the cold coast of Greenland,

Then headed west, straight for Alaska.

In our ocean of ice we were ready to trap them,

Crush them and starve them. We brought them disaster.

Qaagit.

Qaagit, Ujartigut.

Qaagit, Ujarniartigut.

Maaniippugut.

Qaagit, Ujartigut.

Qaagit.

MAGGIE (*holding hands with a chorus member on either side of her*)
(*spoken*)

Is someone there?

Orchestra and CHORUS answer (“spirit-circle music.”)

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)

Yes, we are here.

(*spoken*)

What is your mission to the world?

(*Spirit-circle music*)

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)

To do good.

(*spoken*)

Of what benefit will it be to mankind?

(*Spirit-circle music.*)

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)

We can reveal truths to the world – and men will become more harmonious.

(*spoken*)

Some people imagine that the spirits are evil and deceive us. What shall we say to them?

(*Spirit-circle music.*)

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)

Tell them to dispense with their bigotry. Tell them we are good. Good spirits. Ask them why they refuse to investigate. Tell them they are not as wise as they think they are.

(*spoken*)

Can your sounds be heard by all persons?

(*Spirit-circle music*)

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)

No. The time will come when they can.

We became world famous.

Many noted people came to our “spirit circles.” Czar Alexander, Sojourner Truth. The author James Fenimore Cooper said on his deathbed: “Tell the Fox girls they have prepared me for this very hour.”

I had a long, much-talked-about romance with the Arctic explorer, Dr. Elisha Kent Kane. We were married in a private Quaker ceremony. His family never acknowledged me.

3 Scene 2 “Lady Jane”

(*Projected behind is a page from the Congressional Record, which reads: “31st Congress 1st Session, House of Representatives, Ex. Doc. No. 16. MESSAGE from the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. Copies of a correspondence with the lady of Sir John Franklin, relative to the expedition of Sir John Franklin. January 22, 1850. Referred to the Committee on Naval Affairs, and ordered to be printed.”*)

CHORUS

Message from the President of the United States.

January 22, 1850.

To the Senate and House of Representatives.

PRESIDENT ZACHARY TAYLOR

I submit here copies of a correspondence

With the wife of Sir John Franklin,

The Commander of the well-known expedition

To the Arctic regions

To discover the Northwest Passage.

LADY JANE (*at her writing desk*)

Sir, I address myself to you, as the head of a great nation,

Whose power to help me I cannot doubt,
And in whose disposition to do so, I have a confidence
Which I trust you will not deem presumptuous.
The name of my husband, Sir John Franklin,
Is probably not unknown to you.

(standing)

LADY JANE

He and his crew were not expected home
Unless success had early rewarded their efforts,
Or some casualty hastened their return.
But when the autumn of 1847 arrived,
Without any news of the Ships,
The attention of Her Majesty
Was directed to the necessity
Of searching for them,
In case of their being imprisoned in ice,
Or wrecked and in want of provisions.

CHORUS

Without any news of the ships.

LADY JANE

It must be remembered that the ships
Carried supplies for only three years,

CHORUS

Or wrecked and in want of provisions.

LADY JANE

But nearly four years have now elapsed,
The survivors of so many winters in the ice
Must be at the last extremity.

CHORUS

Without any news of the ships.

LADY JANE

And so now I address you
On behalf of hundreds, if not thousands, of others.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR

I want to help her.
I think our country should help her.

I have thrown myself on your generosity
And pay homage to your own high character,
And to that of the people over whom
You have the distinction to preside.

I have the honor to be Sir,
With great respect,
your obedient Servant

LADY JANE

Jane Franklin.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR

We will go – we will find Sir John Franklin
And save the poor man from a lingering fate
The mind sickens to dwell on.
And while we're at it
We will go and discover the Northwest passage,
Discover that mythical route to China.
Sail due north to the cold coast of Greenland
Then head west, straight for Alaska
In an ocean of ice, that is ready to trap us,
Crush us and starve us and bring us disaster.
Glory awaits us if we can do it. Glory.

CHORUS

Thank you America, the whole world will shout
You saved Sir John Franklin, there's not any doubt.
America's rich and is noble,
Its power soon will be global,
Thank you America, the whole world will shout.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR

That's what this expedition's about.

4 Scene 3 "The Expedition"

The office of Commander Elisha Kent Kane. On the wall is a map of the Arctic region, showing possible Northwest Passage routes from Greenland to the Pacific.

CHORUS

on behalf of hundreds, if not thousands, of others
I have thrown myself on your generosity.

KANE

In the month of December, 1852,
I had the honor of receiving special orders from the Navy,
To “conduct an expedition to the Arctic seas in search of Sir John Franklin.”

Because of the harsh conditions under which we’d be living,
We did not sail under the rules that normally govern our ships;
We had our own regulations.

First, absolute subordination to the officer in command.
Second, abstinence from all intoxicating liquors –
Except when dispensed by special order.
Third, the habitual disuse of profane language.
We had no other laws.

MEN

We left New York on the 30th of May, 1853.

KANE

Our store of provisions was chosen with little regard for luxury.

Two thousand pounds of well-made pemmican.
A parcel of Borden’s meat biscuit.

KANE

Some packages of powdered potato.
Some pickled cabbage.

And a liberal quantity
Of American dried fruits and vegetables.

KANE

Besides these, the ordinary etceteras of an Arctic cruiser.

MEN

We reached Baffin’s Bay without incident

A few days more found us off the
coast of Greenland.

KANE

A wardrobe of woolens,
A full supply of knives, needles
And other articles for barter.
A large, well-chosen library,
And a valuable set of instruments for scientific observation.

5 Scene 4 “Love Letters – Interlude 1”

Elisha in the captain’s quarters, Maggie in a sitting room of her house.

ELISHA

My dearest Maggie,
Just as you have your wearisome round of daily money-making,
I have my own sad vanities to pursue.

MAGGIE

Elisha, dear Elisha, it is late

MAGGIE

my beloved, late
And I have carefully stolen from my bed,
That I might write to you undisturbed
Even by the breathings of others.

It is after midnight and the sweet moon is
the only witness to my devotion.

ELISHA

Some day or other –
Polar ice permitting –
You and I will thaw out in Italy.
Italy! Land of sunshine and flowers,
And music and lovers!

MAGGIE

Doctor, there is a rumor
that you and I are to be married before you go to the Arctic.

MEN

We passed Kingitoq.
And finally Inalik
The farthest point of civilization.
Beyond which the coast may be regarded
as unknown.

ELISHA

We are sold to different destinies.
I am as devoted to my calling as you,
Poor child, can be to yours.

In a few weeks I will be away from you.
Thick ribbed ice, sterner than warrior’s steel
Will separate me from you.

ELISHA

Remember then, as a sort of dream,
That Doctor Kane of the Arctic Seas
Loved Maggie Fox of the Spirit Rappings.

6 Scene 5 “In the Ice”

Kane and his crew have reached the Arctic. He is sitting in front of a stove surrounded by scientific instruments, dressed in a pair of seal-skin pants, a dog-skin cap, a reindeer jumper, and walrus boots. We can see the landscape around him, icebergs, etc.

CHORUS

Bay ice, drift-ice, field-ice, floe,
Ice-belt, ice-face, ice-foot,
Ice-hook, ice-raft, ice-table, nip, pack,
Land ice, old-ice, young-ice.

KANE

(spoken)
December 15th, 1853

KANE

We have lost the vestige of our mid-day twilight.

KANE

We cannot see print, and hardly paper.
Our fingers cannot be counted a foot from our eyes.

The mean temperature of the last five days has been:

CHORUS (alto solo)

December 10th: forty-six point three degrees

CHORUS (all)

Below zero.

CHORUS (tenor solo)

December 11th: forty-five point sixty degrees

CHORUS

Bay-ice, drift ice, etc.

CHORUS (all)

Below zero.

CHORUS (soprano solo)

December 12th: forty-six point sixty-four degrees

CHORUS (all)

Below zero.

CHORUS (bass solo)

December 13th: forty-six point fifty-six degrees

CHORUS (all)

Below zero. Zero.

KANE

Noonday and midnight are alike,
And except for a vague glimmer in the sky
That seems to define the hill outlines to the south,
We have nothing to tell us
That this Arctic world of ours even has a sun.

KANE

At such temperatures
The dry snow resembles sand,

And any resort to snow
for purposes of allaying thirst
was followed by bloody lips and tongue.
It burnt like caustic.

KANE

(spoken)

This is the first chance I've had to draw pictures.
The observer is clad in a pair of seal-skin pants,
A dog-skin cap, a reindeer jumper, and walrus boots.
He sits upon a box.
A stove, glowing with at least a bucketful of anthracite,
Represents a heating apparatus,
And raises the thermometer as near as may be
To ten degrees below zero.

CHORUS

Below zero, below zero ...

7 Scene 6 “Love Letters – Interlude 2”

Maggie, again, writing from a sitting room in her house. Elisha is writing from inside the brig, which is trapped in ice, hundreds of miles from any village on the Greenland coast where there can possibly be mail service.

ELISHA

My dearest Maggie
In the midst of ice and desolation
I still think of you.

MAGGIE

Dear, oh dear Elisha,
I fear I am thinking too much of you.
For four days I have done nothing but weep.

ELISHA

Can you turn a thought to me?
Your portrait is a great comfort.
I often gaze on its quiet loveliness.

ELISHA

Do not be afraid of thinking too much of me.

MAGGIE

You ask if I mix in company?
No! I join no merry scenes.
Elisha, I have not laughed since we parted.

8 Scene 7 “Siarnaq”

Outside the brig a group of Inuit have assembled around their leader, Siarnaq. Inside, Kane’s crew is assembled for daily prayer. They are singing the hymn In Christ there is no East or West, when suddenly they are interrupted by a crew member.

MAGGIE

How has our separation affected you?
Without you all is darkness,
And every place seems a grave.

MAN IN CHORUS (*interrupting*)

People hollering ashore!

SIARNAQ (*on the ice*)

Aya,

Tusalerpara. ("I hear")

Samangga tusalerpaa ("I hear from the west")

CHORUS

I think I have heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

She thinks she has heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

KANE

I went up and there they were,

On all sides of our rocky harbor

As we gathered on the deck they rose

Upon the more elevated fragments of the land-ice,

Standing singly

Like the figures in the tableaux of the opera.

I proceeded, and waved my hands,

Toward a figure who made herself conspicuous.

SIARNAQ

Qissiaq samani. ("wood from the sea.")

Aya yai yo.

Tusalerpara ("I hear")

Samangga tusaavara ("I hear from the west")

Qissiat samani. ("wood from the sea.")

Aya yai yo.

WOMEN

What are they? Should we be afraid?

Are they spirits?

SIARNAQ

Every single thing has a spirit.

The stone, the willow, and polar bear.

Sometimes if it's close I can feel it

Invisibly breathing the air.

CHORUS

I think I have heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

She thinks she has heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

WOMEN

The body will change from birth until death
Every pebble, every branch, every bone.

SIARNAQ

But when the body takes its last breath
The spirit goes on breathing alone.

SIARNAQ

Aya yai yo

SIARNAQ

That's why I respect each thing that I eat
So its spirit will have peace and forgive me.

SIARNAQ & WOMEN

Our world is of ice, danger, starvation
Your god would not put a man here.

SIARNAQ

So when white men ask what I believe in
I say "I don't believe, I just fear."

SIARNAQ (*touching Kane*)

(*spoken*)

Cool but not as cold as a fish.

(*touching again*)

Inuugujog. He is human. Not a spirit, not a mountain dwarf, not a sea monster, not a tupilak or any other mythical creature. He is a human.

They are qallunaat, white men.

I have seen them before.

These are not spirits.

(*A projection of a large iglu, with a long, narrow and low entrance.*)

KANE

Preparations were made for my indoor reception.

WOMEN

Once the body is dead the spirit is freed
To take revenge on all who are living.

I crawled in on hands and knees,
Through an extraordinary *torsaq* thirty paces long.

As I emerged on the inside
There were guests before me.

KANE

They welcomed me.

CHORUS

Tikilluarit!
("Welcome!")

Nuanneq naapillutit
("Pleased to meet you.")

Outside it was minus forty
But the temperature inside was over ninety degrees.

A flipper quarter of walrus was cut into steaks
And put on the fire

Bursting out into profuse perspiration
I stripped like the rest

📍 **Scene 8 "Natural Laws"**

(Elisha is thinking about the scientific experiments he's conducted while in the Arctic, pacing the brig or writing them down. At the same time, Maggie is addressing a group of Spiritualists.)

ELISHA

I am convinced that the expansion of the ice
After the contraction at low temperatures

MAGGIE

The table moved on the floor with no person touching it

ELISHA

And the infiltrative or endosmometric changes thus induced

MAGGIE

Moved to the distance of a foot or more and back
In various directions

ELISHA

The differing temperatures of sea-water and ice,

MAGGIE

While the table stood in that position, by placing our hands upon it
would feel a quick, tremulous motion,

ELISHA

And their chemical relations

MAGGIE

like the action of a galvanic battery.

ELISHA

The mechanical action of pressure, collapse,

MAGGIE

This feeling of electricity seems to pervade nearly everything.

ELISHA

Fracture and disruption
The effects of sun-heated snow-surfaces,

Falls of warm snow, currents, wind, drifts, and
wave-action

All these leave the great mass of Polar ice
surfaces so broken, disintegrated, and reduced,
when the extreme cold abates,

ELISHA

And so changed in structure and molecular character,

MAGGIE

We often see, in a dark room, bright electric
flashes on the wall and other places.

We have frequently had a hand laid on our arms,
shoulders or head, when no person would or
could do it,

having all their hands held by each other.
Leaving a feeling of electricity where they touched us.
The hand feels much like one who is in a magnetic sleep,

MAGGIE

Being colder than the hand of a person in a normal state,

ELISHA

That the few weeks of summer thaw have but a small job to perform in completing their destruction.

MAGGIE

As cold as ice.

And the next as warm as a common hand of flesh.

CHORUS

Like a battery, electricity,
Flashes on the wall
And the table moved, a magnetic sleep.
Cold as ice.

10 Scene 9 “Christmas”

(In the brig. Christmas Day, 1853.)

KANE

December 25, Christmas, Monday.

KANE

We sat down to our Christmas dinner.
We forgot our discomforts and counted our blessings,
And when we thought of the long road ahead,
We thought of it hopefully.

KANE

I pledged myself to give them their next Christmas at home and with their families.

CHORUS

We passed around merrily
Our roast turkeys and roast-beef,
Onions, potatoes and cucumbers,
Watermelons ...

MAGGIE

And moist like a cold perspiration upon it.
One instant it will feel as cold as ice.

CHORUS

molecular, mechanical
Like a battery, endosmometric, low temperatures
Disintegrate, broken ice.

MEN

Christmas dinner
We counted our blessings
Christmas, Christmas.

KANE

(spoken)

And God knows what other cravings of the scurvy-sickened palate,
With the entire exclusion of the fact
That each one of these:

KANE

Roast turkeys and roast beef,
Onions, potatoes and cucumbers,
Watermelons
Was variously represented
By pork and beans.

¶ Scene 10 “Sir John: Died in Her Majesty’s Service”

(Lady Jane, reading a newspaper, is horrified.)

CHORUS

In Christ there is no East or West
In Him no South or North
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

LADY JANE *(starts to write a letter)*

My Lords,
Is this the manner in which you communicate your intentions to the public?

SIARNAQ *(to the audience)*

(spoken)

In other words, the British Royal Navy believes that Sir John Franklin and his crew are dead.
We know they are. We’ve been finding their graves for years.
They needed our help but were they too proud or too arrogant to ask for it?

CHORUS

Turkeys and roast-beef,
Onions, potatoes and cucumbers,
Watermelons ...

REPORTER (from the chorus)

(spoken)

London Gazette, January 19, 1854

NOTICE is hereby given, that if intelligence be not received, before the 31st March next, of the Officers and Crews of Her Majesty’s ships commanded by Sir John Franklin, will be considered as having died in Her Majesty’s Service.
Etcetera.

LADY JANE

If so, then it is as distressing to the feelings of the living, as it is disrespectful to the memory of those who, if they have “died in Her Majesty’s Service” might have been deemed entitled to more regretful mention.

LADY JANE

There are grounds for hope that in the Arctic, the farther north one goes the more temperate the climate.

(Kane, from far away, addresses Lady Jane)

KANE

I picture your husband and his men
On an open spot of some tidal eddy,
And under the teachings of the Inuit
Have set bravely to work.

CHORUS

We cry for our men, to whom we gave
A hearty farewell from the docks as we waved them goodbye
As they sailed off to discover The Northwest passage.

CHORUS

We cry for our men to whom we gave a hearty
farewell from the docks

as we waved them goodbye as they sailed off to
discover The Northwest Passage.

We cry for our men, those men who are brave and
gone now for years

God please let them be saved
Bring them home to their wives

LADY JANE

My Lords, is this the manner in which you
communicate your intentions to the public?

If so, then it is as distressing to the feelings of the
living,

as it is disrespectful to the memory of those who,
if they have “died in Her Majesty’s Service”

might have been deemed entitled to more
regretful mention.

CHORUS

In Christ there is no East or West
In Him no South or North, etc.

KANE

I picture your husband and his men

On an open spot of some tidal eddy

And under the teachings of the Inuit have set
bravely to work.

I think of them ever with hope.

CHORUS

children and lovers.
At least send us a message

CHORUS

To tell us they're safe, and they're sound, and that they've
Set course for home, and not laying in graves.

God please tell us and the thousands of others
Those men have not vanished.

Please God just do this, just once, please bring them home
We won't ask you for anything ever again.

Pray God just do this, send them home, send them home
And we'll praise you now and forever, please God, Amen.

12 Scene 11 "The Escape"**KANE**

The summer was wearing on
And still the ice did not break up as it should.
I have now on hand twenty-four hundred pounds of chopped wood.
Two thousand pounds will barely carry us to the end of January,

And the two severest months of the Arctic year,
February and March,
Will still lie ahead of us.

I have reduced our allowance of wood to six pounds a meal.
It allows us coffee twice a day,
and soup once.

Our fare besides this is cold pork boiled in quantity and eaten as required.
I regard the abandonment of the brig as inevitable.
We have by actual inspection but thirty-six days provisions.

KANE

I sicken not to have been able to reach them.

We will attempt to escape by crossing the southern ice on sledges.

MEN

“We, the undersigned,
Being convinced of the impossibility of liberating the brig,
And equally convinced of the impossibility of remaining in the ice a third winter,
Do fervently concur with the commander
In his attempt to reach the South by means of sledges.”

MEN

“We the undersigned being convinced of the impossibility of liberating the
brig” etc.

MEN

Things grew worse and worse.
We had difficulty breathing,
Our feet swelled and we had to cut open our boots.

On the first of August we sighted the Devil’s Thumb
And were again among the familiar localities.

Two days after this, a mist had settled down upon the islands,
And when it lifted we heard a familiar sound over the water.

(solo)

Listen men!

MEN

What is it?

(beat)

It’s the sound of Danish!

KANE

Then we saw the single mast of a small schooner.

KANE

Up to the 23rd of May, the progress had been a little more than a mile a day.
We slept by day when the sun was warmest,
And travelled when we could avoid its greatest glare.

CHORUS

“Dr. Kane? Is that you?”

KANE

Yes! Yes!

13 Scene 12 “New York”

(A crowd has gathered to celebrate Kane’s return to New York.)

CHORUS

October 12th, 1855

Doctor Kane is home again!

On Sledges for Thirty Days!

Arctic Expeditions Safely Ended!

CHORUS

A Bridge of Ice from Greenland to the Continent!

Latitude eighty-two degrees twenty minutes!

An Open Sea Found! New Lands Found!

But no traces of Sir John Franklin.

CHORUS *(repeating until Siarnaq is finished.)*

Doctor Kane is home again!

New Lands Found!

On sleds for thirty days!

Latitude eighty-two degrees twenty minutes!

A Bridge of Ice from Greenland to the Continent!

CHORUS

Doctor Kane is home again!

On sleds for thirty days!

Arctic Expeditions safely ended!

SIARNAQ *(to the audience)*

(spoken)

A highly intelligent audience assembled at the new Music Hall last evening to hear my friend, Dr. Kane. They listened with profound attention and delight to one of the most interesting lectures they have heard for a long time.

He is a man full of energy, intelligence, and enthusiasm. Dr. Kane will deliver his next lecture on Thursday evening. In this lecture he will read from his new book, *Arctic Explorations*.

I am in that book.

14 Scene 13 “Spirit World”

(Maggie is standing in front of a projection of Kane’s body lying in state.)

CHORUS

He died still a young man, shocking the nation
His body was put on a train made out as a hearse.
Draped with flowers, it was met at each station
By grieving crowds singing this verse:

Dr. Kane, Dr. Kane, our hearts filled with sorrow
Sing as we now lay you down in peace
Your courage and grit make you an American hero
Dr. Kane, Dr. Kane of the cold Arctic Seas.

No, you did not find the passage
And no, you did not find Sir John
But you did find the strength to keep carrying on

Dr. Kane, Dr. Kane on behalf of the nation
We salute you with ships that sail at half mast
We shout and we give you a standing ovation
For all your brave travels, sorry this one’s your last.

MAGGIE

(spoken)

My beloved Elisha has been dead for many years.

(sung)

In my final years public interest in my powers declined, and I lived in poverty
and obscurity.
My last public appearance was on last Christmas Day, in the Carnegie
Music Hall.

*(She walks over to the front of the chorus, and stretches her arms out
seeking a chorus member’s hand on each side of her. Several seconds of
silence elapse before her hand is grasped. At the moment the hands touch,
we hear the “spirit-circle music”)*

MAGGIE

(spoken)

Elisha, is that you?

Lady Jane comes forward.

LADY JANE

It is I, Lady Jane.

I haven’t seen Elisha in quite some time.

But if you should see him, please tell him this:

LADY JANE

The Arctic is no longer a *terra incognita*.
Arctic expeditions
For the sake of the missing
Have long ceased to be familiar.
The passage that took my husband's life
One hundred and fifty years ago
Is easily navigable today.

LADY JANE

When I was alive
Brave Arctic explorers went in search of the passage
In a part of the world that is freezing and savage.
With sextant and compass,
With medicine and guns,
Arrogant and pompous
These men were the ones
Who used science to get where they're going,
Who used science, not always knowing
What could go wrong.
My husband, Sir John, would never admit it
But his plan was flawed.
Instead of the Inuit
He trusted God
To keep him strong.

(Spirit-circle music.)

MAGGIE

(spoken)
Elisha, is that you?

Siarnaq comes forward.

SIARNAQ

(spoken)
While you are alive
Arctic explorers go through the passage
Straight through the ice as they watch it vanish
Three hundred billion tons in a day
Melt into the ocean as the earth's getting hotter
Minke whales drifting farther away

CHORUS

We cry for our men, to whom we gave
A hearty farewell from the docks as we waved
Them goodbye,
As they sailed off to discover
The Northwest Passage.

Halibut swimming for colder water
Polar bears hunting, and needing more room,
Flowers that in winter came to full bloom
Will disappear.

These are all signs that can't be misread
Signs that I now comprehend
That my land it is dying and once it is dead
Its spirit is free to take its revenge,
That's what I fear.

(Kane appears)

MAGGIE

Oh Elisha, I am glad your lectures were so successful.

(spoken)

You always said you spoke for humanity and not for money.
And that I was wasting my time and youth and conscience
for a few paltry dollars. But when I think of the crowds who
came nightly to hear your wild stories of the frozen north I feel
we are not so far removed after all. And that there is not so much difference.

MAGGIE

You and I we both were explorers
We each told stories about mysterious places

KANE

We each told stories to crowds that adored us.

MAGGIE

You talked about Inuit, polar bears, mountains of ice
Of the strange Arctic summer, when the sun shines at midnight
Of the long, scary winter, when it's pitch dark at noon
Igloos and dog-sleds at forty-five below zero
Starvation and scurvy that turn men into heroes
A world that is frozen from September to June

ELISHA

You and I we both were explorers
We each told stories about mysterious places

MAGGIE

We each told stories to crowds that adored us
I talked about spirits, the dearly departed, who after passing
Speak to me slowly through the sound of their rappings.

ELISHA

You sat at a table holding hands with their loved ones

MAGGIE

Together we entered the world of hereafter
I lightened their grief with a moment of laughter
Hearing good news from dead lovers, daughters and sons.

MAGGIE and ELISHA

We talked of places that nobody's seen, but still they believed us
Because they want to believe us, because they want life to be
More than just living:

ELISHA

They want stories of imminent danger,

MAGGIE

Stories of awe and of wonder
Knowing those who are gone are still near

ELISHA

In some other place, but still here

MAGGIE

They paid a whole dollar to sit in a chair
To feel part of a world stranger than theirs.

(to the audience)

It'll cost you a dollar to open the doors
To a world a whole lot stranger than yours.

15 Postlude “Sullualuk”

CHORUS

We are the spirit of the Northwest Passage
We are the spirit of all places unknown.
You come when we call because you are human
Because you are vain and because you have courage

(solo 1)

And want to see what’s beyond the horizon,

(solo 2)

What’s over the mountain and under the ocean,

(solo 3)

What’s deep in the earth or above in the heavens,

(solo 4)

How to travel in time or to other dimensions,

(all four soloists)

Where you go after death.

(all)

There’s more to discover, now come hear our message

We are the spirit of the Northwest passage

We are the spirit of all places unknown.

We are here with you now, and we’ll be here forever.

Nuka Alice



Photo: Angu Motzfeldt

Nuka Alice, from Sisimiut, Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), is a pioneer in the revitalization of Inuit drum dancing and singing in her home country. She studied with Pauline Lumholt. Nuka Alice performs her own songs along with songs she has co-written with others, interwoven with storytelling. Since 2014 she has opened the annual Arctic Sounds music festival, and in 2017 she and the East Greenlandic drum dancer Anda Kuitsi opened the autumn gathering for Greenland's parliament as the first drum dancers to do so. This tradition has been inscribed in UNESCO's 2021 Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

www.siarnaq.org

Nicole Haslett



Nicole Haslett joined On Site Opera for its 2024 season, creating the role of Frog/Mechanical Nightingale in Lisa DeSpain's *Song of the Nightingale*. She also returned to the role of Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Arizona Opera. Other notable recent performances include *Yiddish and Hebrew songs in the Weimar Republic* in conjunction with Carnegie Hall and the Leo Baeck Institute. Haslett made her Opera Hong Kong debut as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, and later reprised the role at Lyric Opera of Kansas City. She has also performed with The Metropolitan Opera, Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Deutsche Oper Berlin.

www.nicolegracehaslett.com

Michael Celentano



Photo: Hannah Friesen Photography

Michael Celentano has been recognized for his breadth of work, from the standard operatic canon to new compositions. Notable roles have included Max in Bronx Opera's 50th Anniversary production of Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Sam in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*, Radames in *Aida*, the eponymous role in *Don Carlos* and the Niebechung Vassal in The Metropolitan Opera's 2019 production of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Celentano holds a Doctorate from SUNY Stony Brook University in Voice Performance. As a grand prize winner of the National Federation of Music Clubs Competition, he has been a presence around the United States presenting art song recitals and masterclasses.

Erin Brittain



Photo: Meg Rybicki

Erin Brittain has performed over 30 roles in opera, operetta and musical theater ranging from comic roles such as Clorinda in *Le Cenerentola* to dramatic roles including Beatrice in Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers*. She has appeared with the American Symphony Orchestra, Opera Fayetteville and Princeton Festival Opera, and at Bard Music and SummerScape festivals, among many others, appearing onstage at venues including Alice Tully Hall and Carnegie Hall. An enthusiast of contemporary and new music, Brittain is a founding member of The Perspective Collective ensemble (TPC). She studied at New York University and the Peabody Conservatory.

www.erinbrittain.com

Colin Levin



Photo: Jonathan Cole

American baritone Colin Levin explores a diverse array of vocal literature in both North American and Europe, with a specialization in the performance of newly created works as well as the Nordic vocal repertory. Appearances as a soloist include performances at Nordic Music Days, Summartónar and Við Djúpið, and in major venues across the United States. Levin has an extensive history of collaborating with composers, premiering operas, concert works, and art songs, including those by Stuart MacRae, Sigrid Anita Haugen, and Nino Håkansson, in addition to North American premiers by Evan Fein and Eli Tausen á Lava, among others.

www.colinlevinbaritone.com

New Amsterdam Singers



New Amsterdam Singers (NAS), founded in 1968, is known for the breadth and variety of its repertoire. In addition to Michael Dellaira's *Arctic Explorations*, it has commissioned works by Carol Barnett, Lisa Bielawa and Ben Moore; other world premieres include compositions by Matthew Harris, Paul Alan Levi, Elizabeth Lim, Robert Paterson, Ronald Perera and Dale Trumbore. NAS has performed with the New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein, at Alice Tully Hall as a guest of Clarion Concerts, and with the American Russian Youth Orchestra under Leon Botstein at Tanglewood and Carnegie Hall. NAS has appeared twice with Anonymous 4 in Richard Einhorn's *Voices of Light* – in 1999 at Avery Fisher Hall under Marin Alsop, and in 2006 at the Winter Garden Atrium of the World Financial Center with Ensemble Sospeso under David Hattner, for broadcast on WNYC's *New Sounds*. NAS has appeared internationally at festivals in Heraklion in Greece, the Algarve in Portugal and Granada in Spain, as well as at the International Choral Festival in Międzyzdroje, Poland, Les Chorégies d'Orange in France, and the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod in Wales.

Soprano

Orren Alperstein
 Robin Beckhard
 Martha Beckwith
 Colleen Blain
 Susan Daum
 Naomi Draper
 Lillie Dremeaux
 Rebecca Harris
 Abigail Kniffin
 Teryn Kuzma
 Michelle Neary
 Tracey Ober
 Judith Pott
 Elizabeth Stein
 Elspeth Strang
 Jennifer Trahan

Alto

Gabi Barton
 Cindy Brome
 Isabel Colman
 Rebecca Dee
 Jenny Delson
 Nora Isacoff
 Hannah Kerwin
 Naya Mukherji
 Elisa Peimer
 Ellen Stark
 Vera Sziklai
 Briel Waxman

Tenor

Thomas Haller
 Robert Marlowe
 Nate Mickelson
 Paul Parsekian
 Robert Pietrzak
 John Pinegar
 Adam Poole
 Benjamin Prud'homme
 Hsin Wang

Bass

Bendix Anderson
 T.J. Barnes
 Steve Holtje
 John Leuenhagen
 Jeff McNerney
 Brian Murray
 Robert Palmer
 Raymond Wells
 Rafael Yuste

Chorus soloists (in order of appearance): Scene 5: Ellen Stark, Nate Mickelson, Jennifer Trahan, Bryan Murray;
 Scene 7: Benjamin Prud'homme; Scene 10 (Reporter): Robert Pietrzak;
 Epilogue: Elisa Peimer, Paul Parsekian, Michelle Neary, Bryan Murray

Cell Theatre

Nancy Manocherian's the cell theatre is a not-for-profit dedicated to the incubation and presentation of new works across all artistic disciplines that mine the mind, pierce the heart, and awaken the soul. Founded in 2006 as a "21st-century salon," the cell has provided a development home for the performing arts, food artists, cyborg theatre artists, musicians, installation artists, choreographers, and more. Past performances include *cryptochrome*, *I'm Gonna Marry You Tobey Maguire*, *The Final Veil*, Elizabeth Swados' *Nightclub Cantata*, *Fruma-Sarah (Waiting in the Wings)*, One Whale's Tale's *Persou*, *The Evolution of Mann*, *Bastard Jones* (a Drama Desk Award nominee), *Crackskull Row*, *Peter/Wendy*, *Horse Girls*, *Hard Times: An American Musical* (now the Tony Award-winning *Paradise Square*) and *Dinner and Delusion*. Work developed at the cell has been seen on Broadway and at The Irish Repertory Theatre, MCC Theater and Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre, among others.

www.thecelltheatre.org

Kira Simring

Kira Simring is the artistic director of Nancy Manocherian's the cell theatre in NYC, where she has developed and directed new works since 2006. Directing credits include the world premieres of *The Women Who Rode Away* by Natalia Zukerman (the cell and off the WALL), *Yes! Reflections of Molly Bloom* (The Irish Repertory Theatre), *Crackskull Row* by Honor Molloy (*New York Times* Critic's Pick) and *Hard Times: An American Musical* by Larry Kirwan (*New York Times* Critic's Pick). Simring is a three-time Origin Theatre 1st Irish Award Winner for Best Director.

The Harlem Chamber Players



Photo: Bob Curtis

The Harlem Chamber Players (THCP) is an ethnically diverse collective of professional musicians dedicated to bringing high caliber, affordable, accessible live music to people in the Harlem community and beyond. Founded in 2008, The Harlem Chamber Players annually presents formal live concerts indoors, outdoors, and online. THCP also promotes arts inclusion and equal access to the arts, bringing live music to underserved communities and promoting shared community arts and cultural engagement. The group was first inspired by the late Janet Wolfe, a long-time patron of minority musicians and founder of the NYC Housing Authority Symphony Orchestra. The ensemble has been featured on national radio (NPR/NBC) as well as on WQXR and WNYC's *The Greene Space* and WABC's *Here and Now*. THCP has also been mentioned in articles in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian* and *Musical America*. THCP was awarded the 2022 Sam Miller Award for the Performing Arts.

Clara Longstreth



Photo: Valerie Terranova

Clara Longstreth, founder and music director of New Amsterdam Singers, has led the group since its establishment in 1968. She has been a frequent adjudicator at choral conferences, and has served on the faculty of Rutgers University. She has also appeared as a guest conductor of the Limón Dance Company, Mannes College Orchestra, and the popular Messiah Sing-In performances at Avery Fisher Hall. Longstreth received her Bachelor of Arts from Radcliffe College of Harvard University, and her Master of Arts from The Juilliard School.

Nuka Alice as Siarnaq

Performance photos courtesy of Eric Alexander, Document This!

