

Hopkins Center for the Arts

The Hopkins Center for the Arts to Premiere Newly Created Contemporary Opera that Grapples with Police Violence and Social Injustice

The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist Features Music, Song, Dance, Visual Arts, and Immersive Projections to Create a Communal Experience of Healing

Debut Performances at the Hop on September 16 & 17, 2022

HANOVER, N.H.—August 16, 2022—This September, the Hopkins Center for the Arts (the Hop) at Dartmouth will premiere [*The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist*](#), a chamber opera that responds to the murder of Eric Garner and the ongoing loss of Black life at the hands of police. Commissioned and produced by the Hop, and co-commissioned by Stanford Live, the theatrical event leverages the power of music, song, dance, visual art, and text projection to create a meditative experience that encourages synchronized communal breathing. This shared experience is aimed to evoke empathy and understanding and provide the strength necessary to heal and spur activism beyond the stage. The performance will be presented on two nights at the Hop on September 16 and 17, and will then travel to Stanford Live, where it will be staged on October 14 and 15.

Erica, the protagonist of *The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist*, has lost her father to police violence. An artist and activist, Erica calls on her community to create and participate in a ritual of healing. Her action captures the profound intimacy of personal loss as well as the way such acts of violence reverberate across communities. The performance unfolds across seven movements and concludes with a summons for the audience to determine their own path forward, as communities continue to struggle and fight for social justice.

The journey to create *The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist* evolved over many years and has involved a wide range of artists and activists. In 2016, Enrico Riley, an artist and professor of Studio Arts at Dartmouth, and Jonathan Berger, a composer and professor of Music at Stanford, joined forces to collaborate on a project that would serve to help process the ongoing violence faced by marginalized communities. As the idea developed, Riley and Berger engaged Vieve Francis, a poet and member of the Dartmouth English department, to craft a powerful libretto, and pioneering theater artist Niegel Smith to direct the work. Soon, Kamna Gupta joined as conductor; Neema Bickersteth, as the lead soprano and a co-choreographer; Trebian Pollard, as dancer and co-choreographer; and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, as consulting choreographer.

Together, their work has resulted in a groundbreaking prototype for the future of contemporary opera that features Riley's captivating paintings and drawings of Black life, an evocative soundscape comprising piercing soprano vocals and the music of a chamber ensemble, poetic dance movements, and immersive projections. Onstage cameras controlled by the performers will also amplify the intimacy of the music, movement, and visual imagery. The final effect is a completely enveloping experience for the performers and the audience.

To further ground the work, the creative team engaged a group of mothers who have lost their children to state-sanctioned violence. Ms. Gwen Carr, Eric Garner’s mother, and activist Dr. Shamell Bell joined the project as Co-Social Impact Directors. Their voices add real-life perspectives and provide the context necessary to understand healing practices and rituals. Dr. Bell and director Niegel Smith led the design of a series of rituals that will be shared with ticket buyers and visitors to the Hop website over the six days preceding the opening performance on September 16. One ritual will be revealed per day and will include videos of Carr, Bell, and members of the creative team that provide sneak peeks into elements of the performance as well as guidance for engaging in personal reflection, meditation, and healing. The rituals embrace elements of music, spoken word, and visual art and recognize the different ways that people have been affected by social injustice. The rituals will continue to live on the Hop website after the performances and will also be released by Stanford in advance of their presentation.

“Healing for many of us occurs in community when we are surrounded by love and a shared sense of purpose and action. For me, the communion with other mothers of the movement brings me great healing. It brings me great purpose and great joy! I particularly love when we tell stories and dream about possibilities,” said Carr. “The creators of *The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist* find their healing, purpose, and joy through their collaboration. They magnify each other through their poetry, music, activism, and visual art. Their active collaboration focuses their purpose and brings them to action.”

“*The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist* captures the power of artistic expression to catalyze engagement with some of the most pressing and challenging social issues of our time. This performance illuminates the profound impacts of police violence on individuals and communities, while offering a moment of release and connection that is crucial to our abilities to process, grapple with, and ultimately resist,” said Mary Lou Aleskie, the Howard Gilman ’44 Executive Director of the Hopkins Center for the Arts. “At the same time, the creation of *Ritual of Breath* highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and the groundbreaking work that reaches beyond the stage. This work is designed to activate audiences and communities as co-conspirators for change. This is exactly the kind of work to which the Hop is committed and in which it will continue to invest as we enhance our program and redesign our building in the coming years.”

The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist is creatively produced by Kim Whitener/KiWi Productions, with scenic & projection by Peter Nigrini, lights by Reza Behjat, sound by Sadah Espii Proctor, and costumes by Gabriel Berry. The complete biographies for the creators, performers, and collaborators for *The Ritual of Breath Is the Rite to Resist* are available on the Hop website at <https://hop.dartmouth.edu/events/ritual-breath>.

Additionally, artist Enrico Riley, whose expressive paintings provide the visual backdrop for the opera, will have a solo exhibition of his work at Jenkins Johnson Projects in New York City. The exhibition, titled *Stand*, will be on view from September 10 - October 29, 2022.

About the Hopkins Center for the Arts

Situated on the Green of Dartmouth College, the Hopkins Center serves as a hub of performing arts and film for the College and New England region. A leader in experiential education, it is dedicated to

bringing together visiting artists, resident artists, student ensembles, and academic departments to produce and present work that represents diverse voices and perspectives and engages with a wide spectrum of artistic forms and ideas. It acts as a laboratory for creative experimentation and an instigator for exploring the connections among different artistic disciplines, the Dartmouth curriculum, and the wider community.

The Hopkins Center for the Arts is currently in the process of a major transformation, which will include the creation of 70,000 square feet of newly functional space that will allow the Center to further develop its program and better serve its student and community audiences. To learn more about the project, please visit: <https://hop.dartmouth.edu/projects-ideas/hop-reimagined>

About Dartmouth

Founded in 1769, Dartmouth is a member of the Ivy League and consistently ranks among the world's greatest academic institutions. Dartmouth has forged a singular identity for combining its deep commitment to outstanding undergraduate liberal arts and graduate education with distinguished research and scholarship in the Arts and Sciences and its four leading graduate schools—the Geisel School of Medicine, the Guarini School of Graduate and Advanced Studies, Thayer School of Engineering, and the Tuck School of Business.

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