

**BOSTON  
UNIVERSITY**

**Boston University** College of Fine Arts  
School of Music: Opera Institute  
and School of Theatre

# Hydrogen Jukebox

**OCTOBER 27 - 29, 2023  
STUDIO ONE**



**MUSIC BY  
PHILIP GLASS**

**LIBRETTO BY  
ALLEN GINSBERG**

**MUSIC DIRECTOR  
MATTHEW LARSON**

**STAGE DIRECTOR  
SARAH DAHNKE**

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The annual Boston University Fringe Festival, now in its 27th season, is a collaboration between the College of Fine Arts School of Music: Opera Institute and School of Theatre. Fringe's mission is to produce new or rarely performed significant works in the opera and theatre repertoire, bringing performances and audiences together in unique theatrical settings. For over two decades, Fringe Festival at BU has celebrated and amplified new work, shown in spare and minimal productions.

Spurred by the dynamic and diverse programs within BU College of Fine Arts, this year's Fringe features additional programming from BU School of Visual Arts and School of Music.

You're invited to experience the innovation and artistry at this year's performances!

Boston University College of Fine Arts  
School of Music: Opera Institute and School of Theatre

*present*

# **HYDROGEN JUKEBOX**

Music by Philip Glass  
Poetry by Allen Ginsberg

Matthew Larson, music director  
Ken Yanagisawa, conductor  
Sarah Dahnke, stage director

Lily Bitner, Scenic Designer  
Yao Kuang Lee, Costume Designer  
Molly Beall, Lighting Designer

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## CAST

Soprano I.....\* Gretchen Struckmeyer, +Jordan Knapick

Soprano II.....\*Olivia Pellegrino,+Courtney Fitzgerald

Mezzo.....\*Sarah Zieba, +Becca Allen

Tenor.....\*Andrew Bearden Brown, +Ilhee Lee

Baritone.....\*Nathan Savant, +Noah B. Rogers

Bass-Baritone.....\*Wanchun Liang, +William O'Brien

\*Denotes Friday evening & Saturday afternoon performances  
+Denotes Saturday evening & Sunday afternoon performances

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## ENSEMBLE

### Conductor

Ken Yanagisawa

### Keyboard

Matthew Larson  
Maria Rabbia

### Flute

Dancen Luo

### Bass Clarinet

Andrew Battaglia

### Saxophone

Scott Chamberlin

### Percussion

Ricardo Ferrer  
Harry Zhang

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## DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Scenic Designer.....	Lily Bitner
Costume Designer.....	Yao Kuang Lee
Lighting Designer.....	Molly Beall
Technical Director.....	Reanna Valencia
Stage Manager.....	Emily Cady
Production Manager.....	Lauren Davis
Associate Production Manager.....	Ash Strange
SOT Fringe Festival Producer.....	River Hayes
Assistant Stage Manager.....	Rowen Bailey
Production Assistant.....	Emme Livingston, Carly Stegall
Assistant Scenic Designer.....	Cameron Carcasson
Properties Coordinator.....	Cameron Carcasson
Assistant Technical Director.....	Lizzie Anderson
Scenic Charge Artist.....	Cameron Carcasson, Liv King, Ethan Vettesse
Associate Lighting Designer.....	Zack Connell
Production Electrician.....	Noah Wrafter
Assistant Production Electrician.....	Davin Martin
Conventionals Programmer.....	Lena Broach, Davin Martin
Lighting Crew.....	Kate Dickinson, Shrutant Ramaswamy, Paul Zenas, BU Lighting Department
Light Board Operator.....	Delaney Jankanish
Assistant Costume Designer.....	Joice Caldeira Simao
Drapers.....	Quinn Nayenezgni Barnes, Sofia Nastri
First Hand.....	Saber Stetson
Audio Engineer.....	Irene Wang
Assistant Audio Engineer.....	Rory Shea
Sound Crew....	Margaret Deely, Gavin Mariani, Tori Pascrell
Sound Board Operator.....	Sydney Elliot
Supertitles.....	Allison Voth
SOT Lighting & Sound Shop Manager.....	Ben Sigda
SOM Director of Production.....	Christopher Dempsey
SOM Ensembles Manager.....	Katharine Hurd
SOM Stage Manager.....	Anna Richardson
Opera Institute Artistic Director.....	William Lumpkin
Opera Institute Managing Director.....	Oshin Gregorian

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## STAGE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

At the time the Opera Institute approached me to direct this production of *Hydrogen Jukebox*, we had no idea how what would be happening in the world once we began rehearsals. It was already true that much of Allen Ginsberg's text in this show holds a timeliness, despite it being written decades ago. What we did not know is that on October 7, our first day of staging rehearsals, the war in Israel and Palestine would escalate to a level that is still unfolding. On October 7, we staged the second song in this show: *Jahweh and Allah Battle*.

Thousands of lives have been lost. At the time of this writing, Gaza is a war zone, and hundreds of Israelis are still held hostage. The world has erupted into shouting at each other about who is right, who is moral, and whose lives are more important. The rage in Philip Glass' musical arrangement of this song could not be more accurate.

*Hydrogen Jukebox* is described as a "portrait of America," but this portrait spreads out from California to the Great Plains, to the Middle East, to India and Australia, to the heart, and to the death bed. It has an intention, as Allen Ginsberg stated, "to relieve human suffering by communicating some kind of enlightened awareness."

To quote our conductor, Ken Yanagisawa, "Art is a conduit for emotions, reflection, and putting into words our experiences during times of war and unprecedented terror. Through art, we establish similarities between past and future, near and far, abstract and concrete."

It is my hope that this show can both remind us of the cycles of war humans continue to perpetuate, and of our shared collective humanity.

-Sarah Dahnke

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## PROGRAM NOTE

In 1988, I accepted an invitation from Tom Bird of the Viet Nam Veteran Theater to perform at a benefit for the company. I happened to run into Allen Ginsberg at St. Mark's bookshop in New York and asked him if he would perform with me. We were in the poetry section, and he grabbed a book from the shelf and pointed out Wichita Vortex Sutra. The poem, written in 1966 and reflecting the anti-war mood of the times, seemed highly appropriate for the occasion. I composed a piano piece to accompany Allen's reading, which took place at the Schubert Theater on Broadway.

Allen and I so thoroughly enjoyed the collaboration that we soon began talking about expanding our performance into an evening-length music-theater work. It was right after the 1988 presidential election, and neither Bush nor Dukakis seemed to talk about anything that was going on. I remember saying to Allen, if these guys aren't going to talk about the issues then we should.

By the spring of 1989 we had invited designer Jerome Sirlin to join us in a series of meetings, mainly in Allen's East Village apartment, in which we picked through his collected works to find a coherent "libretto." Jerome began a series of drawings that would eventually form the sets and drops. Later on we were joined by director-choreographer Ann Carlson, who began discussing with us the staging of the work.

By this time we had arrived at a scenario based on eighteen poems. Together they formed a "portrait" of America, at least in our eyes, that covered the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s. It also ranged in content from highly personal poems of Allen's to his reflection on social issues: the anti-war movement, the sexual revolution, drugs, Eastern philosophy, environmental awareness — all issues that seemed "counter-cultural" in their day. Now, in the late '80s, they seemed to have become more "mainstream" and yet, because of the power of Allen's poetry, still with their youthful energy intact. Ann chose to stage the work by using the six vocal parts to represent six archetypal American characters — a waitress, a policewoman, a businessman, a priest, a mechanic and a cheerleader.

In the past when I addressed social issues in music theater works I often used unfamiliar — even obscure— languages: Sanskrit for Satyagraha, ancient Egyptian for

Akhnaten, Latin for the CIVIL warS, or just numbers and syllables in Einstein on the Beach. With Jukebox I was working with a vernacular language that we all know.

For this purpose nothing could be better than Allen's poetry, because he is inventing a poetic language from the sounds and rhythms all around us — an American language that is logical, sensual, at times abstract and always expressive. Bringing music and language together can have a most powerful effect, literally joining the senses in a way that only opera can do.

For me there are two considerations in setting text to music. There are the words themselves, which need to be set in the most natural way. With Allen's poetry I was most intent on respecting the music that was already in the words. Then there is the musical environment into which the words are set. In the poem Aunt Rose, for example, I used a 5/8 rhythm — a kind of lopsided rhythm— 1-2, 1-2-3. I heard the rhythm from the description of her toot: it's a picture of someone who walks with a limp.

That's the only specific relation of the music to the words. A portrait in music need not be a complete portrait. If you have some indication, we as listeners will fill in the rest.

The American Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia hosted a series of performances early in the Spring of 1990, and the premiere of the finished work took place at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, in June of the same year. The small music ensemble of keyboards, winds and percussion with the six singers made for a music-theater ensemble which, along with Martin Goldray, the original music director, was able to tour the U.S. the following season.

Taking this piece on tour completed something important. Allen and I have traveled around this country a lot. The piece is about that, and taking this on the road was in a way taking it back to the places where it was born. We've taken it to many different cities, and people recognize it — perhaps they see themselves in the portrait.

— Philip Glass



Philip Glass and I visited India at different times and were influenced by Indian music, philosophy and meditation forms -particularly Buddhist, since we're both Buddhist practitioners. So we're moved to make a work that penetrates many psychological worlds at once, quite a large audience.

Ultimately, the motif of Hydrogen Jukebox, the underpinning, the secret message, secret activity, is to relieve human suffering by communicating some kind of enlightened awareness of various themes, topics, obsessions, neuroses, difficulties, problems, perplexities that we encounter as we end the millennium.

So this "melodrama" is a millennial survey of what's up-what's on our minds, what's the pertinent American and Planet News. Constructing the drama, we had the idea of the decline of empire, or Fall of America as "empire," and even perhaps the loss of the planet over the next few hundred years. We made a list of things we wanted to cover — Philip and I and Jerome Serlin the scenarist— common questions. There was of course Buddhism, meditation, sex, sexual revolution — in my case awareness of homosexuality and Gay lib. There was the notion of corruption in politics, the corruption of empire at the top. There are the themes of art, travel, East-meets-West and ecology, which is on everyone's mind. And war, of course, Peace, Pacifism.

The title Hydrogen Jukebox comes from a verse in the poem Howl: "...listening to the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox..." It signifies a state of hypertrophic high-tech, a psychological state in which people are at the limit of their sensory input with civilization's military jukebox, a loud industrial roar, or a music that begins to shake the bones and penetrate the nervous system as a hydrogen bomb may do someday, reminder of apocalypse.

Having decided the topics, we then found texts that covered them, and put a mosaic or tapestry together. So the drama is interlinked, hooked together thematically, though it's not a "linear" story. Maybe more like a slow motion video. We began with heart prophesy of the Fall of America on a train, introducing the notion of Travel,

and War, sung to “Who is the enemy, year after year,” what’s going on, how come all the bombs, “what’s the picture decade after decade” — whether from Vietnam or Granada or Panama, Iraq or what’ll be next, Peru? Nicaragua? take your choice. Then we focus on one big central war -Jahweh and Allah battle- the Middle East.

Following that, a switcheroo to interior reverie, going back to the subjective, we find ourselves in India, a theme of meditative subjectivity, here a fragment from Calcutta, a little personal scene, Peter Orlovsky’s birthday in 1962 age 29. Then traveling East to West, returning to America, surveying planetary ecological damage from a plane, or it might be post-nuclear wreckage. We move from San Francisco through Denver through Chicago, back to the East Coast. Shifting to the center of America -Wichita Vortex Sutra- we make a unilateral declaration of the end of the war, a duet between myself and Philip that ends Part One. We used the poem’s central passage: I’m driving through the middle of Kansas talking to myself, saying, If the President can send troops over there and declare war on Indo-China, I can undeclare it. He doesn’t have any legal right — Congress never passed a formal declaration of war— and I don’t have any legal right. It’s simply up to us to assert our different direction of will, or different visions of the universe. My poetic visions are gonna outlast him, I thought, so “I here declare the end of the war.”

Part Two begins centering in on Moloch, Part II of Howl: the hyper-industrialized, hyper-technological Moloch consumes the planet, everyone’s thwarted desensitized or robotized by the inanimate conditioning hypnosis machine we’ve built around us. Then some statistics: the age of the universe, the age of the earth, and a few other hokey numbers.

Having presented the problem, we present the medicine — several haikus, written on meditation retreat in the Rocky Mountains it so happens. Haiku perception in calm and peace with a very sweet aria, with a singer sitting on a Zen zafu and zabutan, in meditative posture.

We return to family, to Aunt Rose, staged with photographs of my family, Aunt Rose, Aunt Honey, my mother and father and myself in Woodstock 1936. Then

the Gay lib theme, The Green Automobile, back across America, looking for love, the lover behind the poem — in this case actually, Neal Cassady, now quite well-known as the inspiration for Kerouac's *On the Road* Hero, as well as Ken Kesey's psychedelic bus driver.

The climax of Part Two, National Security Agency Dope Calypso interleaved with the poem *Violence*, names the co-actors in U.S. government intelligence "off the shelf operations drawing on cocaine and marijuana smuggling to fund Contra arms. All the information's "real," taken straight from the papers of record and Senator Kerry's Subcommittee investigating government involvement with dope pushing simultaneous with the fraudulent so-called war on Drugs. During that scene a flag is projected backstage with smoke coming out of it, while all these celestial dummy politicians dance madly.

After all the noise and wild wisdom and political statement comes the post-nuclear moment — a series of codas which ends the opera. First, *Everybody's Fantasy*: skeletons holding hands trying to get across the stage after the nuke blast. Then a return to primordial civilization in the Central Australian Desert, using the single verse form of the Aboriginal songmen, singing during a nuclear winter, snow coming down. The last song, *Buddhist-American threnody or Hymn, Father Death Blues*, written on the death of my father, philosophic reconciliation and peace, emotionally very calm, in six-part harmony a capella, quite sublime actually, as the finale. So that's the melodrama.

—Allen Ginsberg

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## ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES

Through his operas, his symphonies, his compositions for his own ensemble, and his wide-ranging collaborations with artists ranging from Twyla Tharp to Allen Ginsberg, Leonard Cohen to David Bowie, **Philip Glass** has had an extraordinary and unprecedented impact upon the musical and intellectual life of his times.

The operas – “Einstein on the Beach,” “Satyagraha,” “Akhmaten,” and “The Voyage,” among many others – play throughout the world’s leading houses, and rarely to an empty seat. Glass has written music for experimental theater and for Academy Award-winning motion pictures such as “The Hours” and Martin Scorsese’s “Kundun,” while “Koyaanisqatsi,” his initial filmic landscape with Godfrey Reggio and the Philip Glass Ensemble, may be the most radical and influential mating of sound and vision since “Fantasia.” His associations, personal and professional, with leading rock, pop and world music artists date back to the 1960s, including the beginning of his collaborative relationship with artist Robert Wilson. Indeed, Glass is the first composer to win a wide, multi-generational audience in the opera house, the concert hall, the dance world, in film and in popular music – simultaneously.

He was born in 1937 and grew up in Baltimore. He studied at the University of Chicago, the Juilliard School and in Aspen with Darius Milhaud. Finding himself dissatisfied with much of what then passed for modern music, he moved to Europe, where he studied with the legendary pedagogue Nadia Boulanger (who also taught Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson and Quincy Jones) and worked closely with the sitar virtuoso and composer Ravi Shankar. He returned to New York in 1967 and formed the Philip Glass Ensemble – seven musicians playing keyboards and a variety of woodwinds, amplified and fed through a mixer.

The new musical style that Glass was evolving was eventually dubbed “minimalism.” Glass himself never liked the term and preferred to speak of himself as a composer of “music with repetitive structures.” Much of his early work was based on the extended reiteration of brief, elegant

melodic fragments that wove in and out of an aural tapestry. Or, to put it another way, it immersed a listener in a sort of sonic weather that twists, turns, surrounds, develops.

There has been nothing “minimalist” about his output. Glass has composed more than thirty operas, large and small; fourteen symphonies, thirteen concertos; soundtracks to films ranging from new scores for the stylized classics of Jean Cocteau to Errol Morris’s documentary about former defense secretary Robert McNamara; nine string quartets; a growing body of work for solo piano and organ. He has collaborated with Paul Simon, Linda Ronstadt, Yo-Yo Ma, and Doris Lessing, among many others.

**Allen Ginsberg** was born in Newark, New Jersey, on June 3, 1926. The son of Louis and Naomi Ginsberg, two Jewish members of the New York literary counterculture of the 1920s, Ginsberg was raised among several progressive political perspectives. A supporter of the Communist party, Ginsberg’s mother was a nudist whose mental health was a concern throughout the poet’s childhood. According to biographer Barry Miles, “Naomi’s illness gave Allen an enormous empathy and tolerance for madness, neurosis, and psychosis.”

As an adolescent, Ginsberg savored Walt Whitman, though in 1939, when Ginsberg graduated high school, he considered Edgar Allan Poe his favorite poet. Eager to follow a childhood hero who had received a scholarship to Columbia University, Ginsberg made a vow that if he got into the school he would devote his life to helping the working class, a cause he took seriously over the course of the next several years.

He was admitted to Columbia University, and as a student there in the 1940s, he began close friendships with William S. Burroughs, Neal Cassady, and Jack Kerouac, all of whom later became leading figures of the Beat movement. The group led Ginsberg to a “New Vision,” which he defined in his journal: “Since art is merely and ultimately self-expressive, we conclude that the fullest art, the most individual, uninfluenced, unrepressed, uninhibited expression of art is true expression and the true art.”

Around this time, Ginsberg also had what he referred to as his "Blake vision," an auditory hallucination of William Blake reading his poems "Ah! Sunflower," "The Sick Rose," and "Little Girl Lost." Ginsberg noted the occurrence several times as a pivotal moment for him in his comprehension of the universe, affecting fundamental beliefs about his life and his work. While Ginsberg claimed that no drugs were involved, he later stated that he used various drugs in an attempt to recapture the feelings inspired by the vision.

In 1954, Ginsberg moved to San Francisco. His mentor, William Carlos Williams, introduced him to key figures in the San Francisco poetry scene, including Kenneth Rexroth. He also met Michael McClure, who handed off the duties of curating a reading for the newly established "6" Gallery. With the help of Rexroth, the result was "The '6' Gallery Reading" which took place on October 7, 1955. The event has been hailed as the birth of the Beat Generation, in no small part because it was also the first public reading of Ginsberg's "Howl," a poem that garnered worldwide attention for him and the poets he associated with.

Shortly after *Howl and Other Poems* was published in 1956 by City Lights Bookstore, it was banned for obscenity. The work overcame censorship trials, however, and "Howl" became one of the most widely read poems of the century, translated into more than twenty-two languages. In the 1960s and 1970s, Ginsberg studied under gurus and Zen masters. As the leading icon of the Beats, Ginsberg was involved in countless political activities, including protests against the Vietnam War, and he spoke openly about issues that concerned him, such as free speech and gay rights agendas.

Ginsberg went on to publish numerous collections of poetry, including *Kaddish and Other Poems* (City Lights, 1961), *Planet News: Poems, 1961–1967* (City Lights, 1968), and *The Fall of America: Poems of These States* (City Lights, 1973), which won the National Book Award. In 1979, Ginsberg received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and in 1993, he received the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres (the Order of Arts and Letters) from the French minister of culture. He also

co-founded and directed the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute in Colorado. In his later years, Ginsberg became a distinguished professor at Brooklyn College.

A multi-faceted force, **Sarah Dahnke** is a choreographer, director and arts educator deeply committed to encouraging communities to use performance to reclaim narratives stripped away by colonialism. As a practitioner, Sarah specializes in devised performance for stage and screen.

This season she has directed Opera Columbus' sold-out season opener: a remixed, 90-minute version of Carmen. This was followed by directing an incredibly timely version of Hydrogen Jukebox at the Boston University Opera Institute.

Last season, she was the Crane Directing Fellow at Opera Columbus, where she was the assistant director on productions of La Cenerentola, Maria de Buenos Aires, and Rigoletto. Sarah has also been a MAP Fund awardee, an NEA Our Town-funded resident artist, and an awardee of fellowships from Gibney's Moving Toward Justice, Colt Coeur, Target Margin Institute, New Victory LabWorks, and Culture Push. She has received commissions from Little Island, PEN America and A Studio in the Woods and has been in residence at Abrons Arts Center and Brooklyn Studios for Dance. Her dance film work has been screened through the Dance Films Association, Tiny Dance Film Festival, DanceBarn Collective, BRIC, and Movies By Movers.

Sarah is also the artistic director of Dances for Solidarity, a project that co-creates choreography with people affected by the criminal legal system and performs for public audiences as advocacy toward prison abolition.

**Matthew Larson** received his Doctorate in Collaborative Piano from Arizona State University under the tutelage of Eckart Sellheim. An accomplished recitalist, Dr. Larson has played over 1,000 performances in the US and Europe. He has worked with such varied artists as Metropolitan Opera stars Carol Vaness, Maria Spacagna, Eric Owens, and Lawrence Brownlee; Academy of Ancient

Music director Christopher Hogwood; vocal pedagogy pioneer Richard Miller; and the eminent collaborative artist Dalton Baldwin, with whom Matthew was invited to study in New York. Past positions include Assistant Conductor for Boston Lyric Opera; Music Director for the University of Connecticut Opera Program; Staff Pianist for Yale University Opera; Vocal Coach at Brown University; Staff Pianist for The American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria; Music Director of Opera Providence; Vocal Coach at Walnut Hill School for the Arts; Pianist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Festival Chorus; Music Director of Cape Cod Opera; and Vocal Coach for Tanglewood Institute's Young Artist Vocal Program. Currently, Dr. Larson is on faculty at Boston University; Music Director of Seaglass Theater Company of New Bedford MA; and Minister of Music at First Congregational Church of Milton, Massachusetts. In January 2020 he earned a Grammy Award as pianist on Boston Modern Opera Project's recording of Tobias Picker's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*.



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The Opera Institute at CFA School of Music is an intensive, highly selective two-year performance-based training program for emerging operatic artists. A professional faculty and renowned guest artists provide personal support and training in all areas pertinent to a career in opera, including voice, acting, languages, and movement styles. Additionally, the Opera Institute also selects undergraduate and graduate singers from the School of Music who demonstrate true operatic potential and have mastered an intermediate integration of acting, vocal, and movement skills for the Opera Theater, Opera Workshop, and Opera Project programs.

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## **BOSTON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS SCHOOL OF THEATRE**

The School of Theatre at the College of Fine Arts at Boston University is a leading conservatory for the study of acting, stage management, design, production, and all aspects of the theatre profession. These programs of study are enriched by the School's access to the greater liberal arts programs at Boston University. The School of Theatre values the notion of "the new conservatory" and seeks to provide students with opportunities for artistic growth through a rigorous curriculum, professional connections, and an emphasis on collaboration and new work.

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