

OPERA

LONG BEACH

TOBIN STOKES

FALLUJAH

Libretto by Heather Raffo

Story Consultant Christian Ellis

World Premiere in Partnership with:

explore.org

a direct charitable activity of the Annenberg Foundation

KCET live on Friday, March 18 at 8:00 p.m. Pacific, throughout Southern CA on KCET-HD channel 28.1

Link TV live on Friday, March 18 at 8:00 p.m. Pacific (11:00 p.m Eastern) on DIRECTV ch. 375 and DISH Network ch. 9410.

Link TV will repeat the 90-minute program on Saturday, March 19 at 5:00 p.m. Pacific (8:00 p.m. Eastern).

Note to broadcast viewers: the opera's supertitles are available through closed captioning on your TV.

The world broadcast premiere of FALLUJAH presented by KCETLink Media Group and Long Beach Opera in partnership with explore.org, a direct charitable activity of the Annenberg Foundation. The opera was originally commissioned by City Opera Vancouver in 2010 – 2012 through the initiative of Charles Annenberg Weingarten.

CAST

Philip, USMC Lance Corporal	LaMarcus Miller
Taylor, USMC Lance Corporal (Philip's best friend)	Todd Strange
Lalo, USMC Senior Lance Corporal	Gregorio González
Rocks, USMC Private	Jason Switzer
Corpsman, HM3	Arnold Livingston Geis
Colleen (Philip's adopted mother)	Suzan Hanson
Wissam (Iraqi boy from Fallujah)	Jonathan Lacayo
Shatha (Wissam's mother)	Ani Maldjian
Kassim (Iraqi man from Fallujah)	Zeffin Quinn Hollis

ARTISTIC TEAM

Conductor	Kristof Van Grysperre
Stage Director/Production Designer	Andreas Mitisek
Light Designer	Dan Weingarten
Video Designer	Hana S. Kim
Art Designers/Consultants	Jon Harguindeguy Michael Hebert
Sound Designer	Bob Christian

ABOUT THE OPERA

The opera's characters were inspired by people US Marine Christian Ellis encountered, including fallen comrades. In 2004, Christian Ellis was a young US Marine fighting in the Iraq War. He suffered a broken back when his platoon was ambushed, and was one of the few survivors. When eventually he returned home he found himself battling post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Fallujah offers a rare, operatic glimpse into the mind of a vet struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The opera Fallujah began with a generous grant from Charles Annenberg Weingarten and his organization Explore.Org to City Opera Vancouver. Charles tasked City Opera Vancouver with creating a contemporary opera inspired by the life and work of USMC Sergeant Christian Ellis. Ellis served with the Marines in Fallujah, Iraq in 2004. Award-winning Iraqi-American playwright and Librettist Heather Raffo met Ellis in the winter of 2011. After extensive interviews, Raffo began the process with composer Tobin Stokes of translating elements of Ellis's wartime experience into the opera Fallujah. The opera had four workshops at City Opera Vancouver. The final workshop in 2012 was filmed as part of the legacy of Explore.Org to use the web to create a portal into the soul of humanity and inspire life-long learning. Over the last four years the opera has had developmental workshops at the Kennedy Center, Georgetown University, Arena Stage, Noor Theater (NYC), The Culture Project (NYC), and was written in part at the McCarter Theater's Sallie B. Goodman Artist Residency. LBO's production presents the world premiere.

SYNOPSIS

Fallujah is a contemporary libretto that excavates the human and social effects of the legacy of the Iraq war. Through youth on both sides of battle, we follow mothers and sons reconciling with a war that changed their relationships forever. It exposes a daily fight for identity and belonging where PTSD is not experienced by a select few. It is lived by everybody involved: each marine, their mothers, their medics, and the Iraqis they are both fighting and protecting.

The opera spans a 72-hour holding period in a veterans' hospital following USMC Philip Houston's third suicide attempt. His mother waits to see him outside his hospital room, but Philip has not been able to face her since he returned from war. The loyal marines he served with stand vigilant, more equipped to care for his particular demons than she. In these 72 hours, Philip's battle is as vivid and deadly as the war in which he fought. In the opening scene, Wissam, a young

Iraqi boy, enters his hospital room and in a befriending gesture, writes his name on Philip's hand. Suddenly one of Philip's most humanizing memories becomes the catalyst through which he remembers how to live.

Philip's hours in the hospital force him to face both past and present. Scenes fly back and forth to Fallujah, providing a rare glimpse inside real hearts and minds before one of the biggest battles of the Iraq War. Act Two begins on the eve of the Battle of Fallujah. Assuming heavy losses ahead, we see Philip and his fellow marines make final calls home to their families to say goodbye, without hinting at the horror to come. Nearby, Wissam and his mother must abandon their centuries old family home. The act finally joins these worlds, mothers and sons, with each lingering "goodbye" reminding us just how much each character has to lose.

In a war where every heart is blown open, Fallujah questions who we become when bearing witness to violence and what relationships piece us back together.

NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER

Don't mention the war.

I wish my Grandpa had had some exposure to art as a way of expressing what his experience in World War Two had been. Instead, he sat quietly in his old easy chair, while I sat, as a boy, equally quiet nearby on simple instructions: Don't mention the war.

Opera, like war, is a crazy, collaborative, expensive and combative process speeding along on a brink of total chaos.

That's where the similarities end, of course. War happens when we become too dysfunctional for peace, and art happens when we try to figure out why we're all so dysfunctional.

I'm grateful to everyone at Long Beach Opera for understanding and sharing the vision Heather and I had, piecing together multiple versions of the score with poor archival recordings of bits and pieces from various workshops and read-throughs. Thanks goes to Andreas' insights and suggestions, our amazing present cast and crew, and our previous singers, musicians and others from our Tampa workshop and Kennedy Centre concert adventure, and to our original collaborators at City Opera Vancouver, and our friends Charlie and Tom from explore.org. Thanks also of course to Heather and



Tobin Stokes

the clear thinking she always comes through with (all the while caring for toddlers) and to Christian Ellis, for his outstanding courage to come back and join us to see this through, making it all the more worthwhile.

Over the past few years chamber opera has become less predictable, more visceral, immediate, more relevant. I'm thrilled that Fallujah's been invited into this art form's exciting trajectory. I'm feeling very fortunate for LBO's support to use a larger-than-average cast and orchestra to tell our story. The performers we've been working with are extraordinary, and the orchestral textures I've been able to create can reach from rock trio, inspired by Christian Ellis' iPod playlist from his time in Fallujah, to influences of Middle Eastern flavours the Marines heard when they first arrived in Iraq: that haunting, foreign "otherness" drifting through the heavy air in an early morning call to prayer. All of this helps tremendously to create a world where we can tell our story, one we hope helps serve a bigger purpose: to explore trauma and loss, and offer hope and healing by, yes indeed, mentioning the war.

–Tobin Stokes, Composer

NOTE FROM THE LIBRETTIST

There is a chasm in our country between those who have experienced war and those who haven't. Perhaps there is a greater, ever-widening chasm, between those who dare to speak about the true costs of war and those afraid to know.

In 1990, when I was a student at the University of Michigan, we had our first war with Iraq. As a young American with Iraqi heritage, I knew I would never be able to see myself or the world in the same way again. For the past two decades I have been trying to make sense of our relationship with the Middle East, its people, its culture and the culture of war.



HEATHER RAFFO

Why an opera? Because music is able to express something that conversation cannot. It demands in size and in emotion, something from the human voice that goes beyond what can comfortably be spoken.

This opera tells the story of people who want to communicate but don't know how. They are afraid of what they have to say and who they've become.

have survived and in many ways are still severely burdened on a day-to-day basis. Audiences will bear witness to life as experienced by Philp Houston. Haunted by memories of guilt, shame, regret, rage, isolation and fear, the emotional anchors to a conflict long over yet seen in quotidian details. No life is spared when war is the shared commonality. Viewers will appreciate through music and performance many of the influences which contribute to PTSD with explicit clarity and reliability.

Reflection upon what it really means to suffer from PTSD will hopefully inspire conversation between civilians and veterans. The current communication gap between both groups causes too many veterans, their loved ones and strangers to dismiss a serious issue often resulting with veterans taking their own life. This Opera strives to create healthy discussions with the goal to assist everyone to not just understand, but to listen to those hurting and in their own way, asking for help. Listening passionately and with sincerity can truly be the difference between life and death for veterans with PTSD.

Thank you for participating in this critically important conversation and I sincerely hope you experience Fallujah as a beautiful, mind opening story that brings awareness and helps to heal our community beyond all borders.

–USMC Sergeant (ret) Christian Ellis, Story Consultant Fallujah



fallujah cast & ARTISTICTEAM

ARTIST BIOS

Arnold Livingston Geis - Corpsman

Arnold Livingston Geis, tenor, graduated in May 2014 with an MM in vocal arts from USC and immediately began working as a full time professional singer making a career singing in films, television, concert, and on the opera stage. Since graduating, Geis has debuted at the Walt Disney Concert Hall under the direction of Grant Gershon, Michael Tilson-Thomas, and Gustavo Dudamel. In 2015, Arnold made his mainstage debut with LA Opera under the baton of Placido Domingo and is further engaged to sing Parpignol in *La bohème* under the baton of James Conlon and Gustavo Dudamel in May-June, 2016.



Gregorio González - Lalo

Critically-acclaimed singer Gregorio González began his operatic career in 2002 after being hired as a resident artist by Placido Domingo at the Los Angeles Opera. Since then, Gregorio has sung extensively throughout the United States, parts of Latin-America and Europe. He has sung at LAO in more than a dozen productions including appearances in two *Placido Domingo and Friends Gala Concerts*. Gregorio has sung at venues of international renown such as Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, De Nederlandse Opera, Theater an der Wien, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Connecticut Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, San Diego Opera, and The Ojai International Festival, to name a few. In the last three years, Gregorio has created roles in 4 new operas. His last collaboration with LBO was his portrayal of El Payador in the acclaimed production of *Maria de Buenos Aires*. gregoriogonzalez.com



Suzan Hanson - Colleen

With LBO: Marilyn (*Death of Klinghoffer*), Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth* - also for Chicago Opera Theater), Madeline (*Fall of the House of Usher* - also for COT), Mrs. P (*The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*), Margarita (*Ainadamar*), Medea (*Medea*), Mrs. Williamson (*The Difficulty of Crossing a Field*), Pat Nixon (*Nixon in China*), Brünnhilde (*Siegfried, Götterdämmerung*). Premiered works by Philip Glass, Rinde Eckert, Michel LeGrand, Henry Mollicone, Craig Bohmler... Other Opera companies: San Francisco, Arizona, Connecticut, Carnegie Hall, Pittsburgh, Verona, Tel Aviv,



Madrid, Spoleto, Florence... Theater companies: Old Globe, Denver Center, San Jose Rep... Recordings: *The Tender Land* (Koch), *Coyote Tales* (Newport Classics).

Zeffin Quinn Hollis - Kassim

Zeffin Quinn Hollis headed the Live International broadcasts of the Ward opera rendition of Miller's *The Crucible* & Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*, both for MezzoTV. No stranger to world premieres, Hollis has taken part in many inaugural productions for composers like Jake Heggie, Thomas Pasatieri, & Tarik O'Regan. He has been heard at Dallas Opera, Santa Fe Opera, New York City Opera, Palm Beach Opera, New Orleans Opera, Pécs & Szeged National Theaters Hungary, Lviv National Theatre Ukraine, this is his fourth production with Long Beach Opera. Recent roles include Sweeney Todd, Falstaff, & Scarpia. Zeffin's performance is in tribute to his brother's service: James Edward Elliott (Sergeant, USMC). Find more at zeffin.com!



Jonathan Lacayo - Wissam

In March of 2016, Tenor Jonathan Lacayo will be making his American debut with Long Beach Opera as Wissam in the World Premiere of Heather Raffo & Tobin Stokes' *Fallujah*, an opera inspired by the story of U.S. Marine Christian Ellis in the Iraq War. Last October Jonathan made his international debut with Opera de Tijuana in Gershwin's *Blue Monday*, as the lead role Joe. During the summer, Jonathan took on the roles of Don Jose in Bizet's *Carmen* and Lensky in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* with Opera of the Rockies in Colorado. Jonathan has also participated in many productions with Point Loma Opera Theatre including the roles of Prince Charming in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, Parpignol in Puccini's *La Boheme*, Beppe in Donizetti's *Rita*, Giuseppe in Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*, Aeneas in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and covered the role of Camille in Lehar's *Die Lustige Witwe*.



Ani Maldjian - Shatha

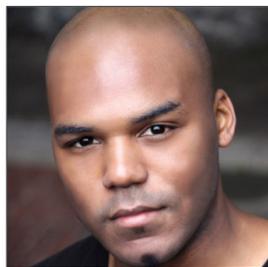
American-Armenian Soprano Ani Maldjian has been described as "Sensational, radiant, elegant, commanding, brilliant, fresh and strong... finding talent like Maldjian is no easy feat" – The *Los Angeles Times* Ms. Maldjian has performed over 35 major roles with companies such as Long Beach Opera, Seattle Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, Atlanta Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, and Opera Theatre Ireland. Past roles with LBO include the title roles in *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* and *The Cunning Little Vixen*, along with Madame Mao in *Nixon in China*, Nuria in *Ainadamar*, Dirce in



Medea, and Suzanne in *Therese Raquin*. She is best known for her critically acclaimed portrayal of Anne Frank in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which brought her success all over the US, UK, Europe and Republic of Ireland. She was the First Place Winner of the Western Region Metropolitan Opera Competition in 2005. www.animaldjian.com

LaMarcus Miller - Philip

LaMarcus made his Kennedy Center debut singing the leading role of USMC Philip in a staged reading of the new opera *Fallujah* by Tobin Stokes & Heather Raffo. He was hailed for a performance that was "sensitive and vulnerable...His vocal command will have you hanging onto every note." LaMarcus has appeared in leading operatic roles from Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus* to Don Giovanni and Il Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*, Alidoro in *Cenerentola*, soloist with Master Yao's chorus in *The Yellow River Cantata* by Xian Xinghai, and Raimondo in *Lucia Di Lammermoor*. LaMarcus has performed at Lincoln Center alongside Wynton Marsalis and was a featured recording artist on the jazz album, *The Music Always Round Me* by Gary Dial and Dick Oatts. A graduate from Manhattan School of Music, LaMarcus took First Place in the 2012 Nico Castel International Master Singer Competition at Carnegie Hall.



Todd Strange - Taylor

Tenor Todd Strange is excited to return to LBO as Taylor in *Fallujah*. Recent LBO appearances include the title role in *Candide* and the tenor in *Hydrogen Jukebox*. He has been praised as having a "glorious voice" that "is strong and clear and his acting is on point." Feeling comfortable in both leading man or character roles, Todd sings a variety of different repertoire. Career highlights include *Remendado*, *Carmen* (Arizona Opera), Tobias, *Sweeney Todd* (Arizona Opera), Basilio/Curzio, OSB, Title Role, Lehar's *The Czarevitch* (Ohio Light Opera), The Captain, *Simon Boccanegra* (LA Opera), *Almaviva*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Bakersfield Symphony).



Jason Switzer - Rocks

Jason Switzer recently performed in *Salome* with Utah Opera, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with Connecticut Lyric Opera, *La Cenerentola* with Lyrique en Mer, and *Hänsel und Gretel* with Opera Memphis. Eager to explore contemporary works, he has been heard in *The Death of Klinghoffer* (Adams) and *Tell-Tale Heart/Van Gogh* (Copeland/Gordon) with Long Beach Opera as well as world premieres of *The Always Present Present* (Westergaard), *Danse Russe* (Moravec), and *Slaying the Dragon*



(Ching). Jason is a graduate of CSU Long Beach where he studied with Marvelle Cariaga.

Kristof van Grysperre - Conductor

Kristof Van Grysperre, a native of Belgium, most recently conducted for LBO *Candide*, *Hydrogen Jukebox*, *An American Soldier's Tale/Fiddler's Tale* and *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field*. Hailed by the Orange County Register as "gifted and stylistically impeccable" and as "a conductor with pugilistic power and sensitivity" he has an international career as conductor, pianist, chamber musician and vocal coach. With a repertoire of over fifty operas, Van Grysperre conducted performances for Opera Pacific, Baltimore Opera Studio, Intimate Opera Company, SongFest and USC Opera. He has collaborated with leading instrumentalists and singers, such as Angela Meade, Maria Newman, Philip Webb and Susan Mohini Kane, and is the artistic director of Angels Vocal Art. www.vangrysperre.com



Hana S. Kim - Video Designer

Recent Design Credits: Projection for Dogeaters directed by Loretta Greco at Magic Theatre in San Francisco, Projection for Subliminal with Theater Movement Bazaar at Getty Villa, Projection for *I am My Own Wife* directed by Amy Corcoran with Two Turns Theater Company, Video installation project *Emille* at Baryshnikov Arts Center, Set and Projection for *Chinglish* directed by Jeff Liu at East West Players, and *Magic Flute* directed by LeRoy Villanueva at CSULB Opera. Film Credit: Assistant Art Director on *The Great Wall*, directed by Zhang Yi Mou. Other Affiliates: Recipient of Princess Grace Award in Theater Design, Member of USA Local 829 hananow.com



Andreas Mitisek - Director/Prod. Designer

Since 2003, Mitisek has been LBO's Artistic & General Director. Recent LBO directing credits: *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field*, *King Gesar*, *Macbeth*, *Tell-Tale Heart*, *Van Gogh*, *The Paper Nautilus*, *Ainadamar*, and *Maria de Buenos Aires*. Recent LBO conducting credits: *Thérèse Raquin*, *I was Looking at the Ceiling and then I Saw the Sky*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, *Camelia la Tejana*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (co-production with COT). Other conducting credits: *Joruri* in Tokyo, *Don Giovanni* (Seattle Opera), *Madama Butterfly* (Orlando Opera), *Jane Eyre* (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis) and *Eugene Onegin* (Teatro Municipal in Santiago de Chile). Mitisek has also conducted the Austrian and Italian premieres of *Nixon in China*. In 2012, Andreas joined Chicago Opera Theater as General Director.



Dan Weingarten - Light Designer

Dan Weingarten has designed *Hydrogen Jukebox*, *Marilyn Forever*, *The Paper Nautilus*, *Ainadamar*, *Maria de Buenos Aires*, *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* (2011), *Akhnaten*, *Orpheus and Euridice*, *Nixon in China*, *The Good Soldier Schweik*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Winterreise*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *Macbeth* for Long Beach Opera. He has designed numerous other plays, musicals, operas, and ballets around the country. He is the recipient of the LA Drama Critic's Circle Angstrom Award, the LA Weekly Award, the Garland Award, and the Dramalogue Award. He is also on the faculty at California State University Northridge.



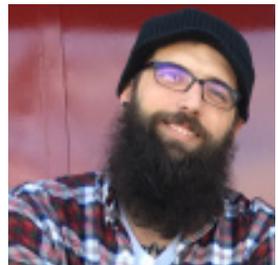
Jon Harguindeguy - Art Designer/Consultant

Jon Harguindeguy is an United States Navy Veteran who served with VAQ-132 in Operation Iraq Freedom in Al Asad, Iraq. He is also an artist who has worked mainly in the Whittier and Los Angeles area. Taking inspiration from local graffiti and the surrounding tattoo culture from his days in the Navy, Jon developed his own style of illustration and painting. Mainly working with ink and watercolor, he is also known for his work with spray paint and acrylics. Using his talents and devotion to his community, Jon is currently the Veteran Liaison for Awaken Arts, a nonprofit that reaches out to both veterans and at-risk youth in the Long Beach area.



Michael Hebert - Art Designer/Consultant

Born and raised in Connecticut with a love for old school hip hop and art! Michael joined the Marine Corps on July 13, 2003 knowing the war on terror was going on in Iraq. Michael was an Anti Tank Assaultman 0351 in 3rd Battalion 1st Marines. 3 Deployments to Iraq. Finished Active Duty April 20, 2008.



TOBIN STOKES - COMPOSER

Former rock drummer, jazz pianist, and street performer (vibraphone) Tobin Stokes spent a few years of traveling and performing before settling into freelance composing. He's written music for the 2010 Olympic Games and the XV Commonwealth Games, and has been composer in residence with the Victoria Symphony (Canada), the International Choral Kathaumixw Festival (Canada), the Urban Youth Choir Festival (Sweden), and the Pacific Region International Music Academy (Canada). His choir music is published in the U.S. and Canada and has been performed around the world. He has scored various films for BBC, Eden Channel, CBC, and ABC, and more.

Choral and orchestral writing, along with scoring ballet, and extensive theatre collaborations as performer, music director, sound designer, arranger and composer, have all led to a passion for creating opera. He has been commissioned by the Annenberg Foundation/Explore.Org and City Opera Vancouver, and is involved in a number of new opera and music theatre projects, some as composer, and others as composer/librettist. His chamber opera *Pauline*, a collaboration with author Margaret Atwood, premiered in 2014 in Vancouver, Canada. Current opera commissions include *Rattenbury* (music and libretto) about the true story of the murder of an architect in the 1930s, and *Waterfront* (music and libretto) set on a shuttle on its way to a colony on Mars

HEATHER RAFFO - LIBRETTIST

Heather Raffo is an award winning Iraqi-American playwright and actress who has spent the last two decades performing off Broadway, off West End in regional theater and in film. She is the author and solo performer of the play *9 Parts of Desire* (Lucielle Lortel and Susan Smith Blackburn awards, Drama League, OCC, Helen Hayes and Ovation nominations), which *The New Yorker* called "an example of how art can remake the world". The play ran off Broadway for nine months and has played across the U.S. and internationally over the last ten years. In 2009, Heather created a concert version of the play for The Kennedy Center with renowned Iraqi maqam musician, Amir ElSaffar.

Heather is currently in development with a new play, *NOURA*, a play that pushes back against Ibsen's iconic *Doll's House* told from inside the marriage of a refugee family living in New York. *NOURA* had it's first work shop at the Davis Performing Arts Center in D.C. with Middle East and refugee policy experts, as well as with members of the State Department and Iraqi Embassy. This fast paced script highlights an acutely relevant awakening of

identity and offers a unique insight into the interior crisis that's lies behind the collapse of the modern Middle East.

Raffo is the recipient of two grants from the prestigious Doris Duke Foundation to use theater as a means of bridge-building between her Eastern and Western cultures. Through these grants she has developed a storytelling workshop, Places of Pilgrimage, focusing on personal narrative, which she has taken to universities and community centers both in America and in the Middle East. Her Places of Pilgrimage series and podcast have been launched on the web through the organization Bridges of Understanding as a means to connect the stories of young Arab women with their peers.

Heather wishes to thank some very special contributors to her research of the opera Fallujah: USMC Lalo Panyagua, General Steele, Maya Roth, Caitlin Cassidy, Alyaa Naser, Joanna Settle, Milos Repicky, Andrea Assaf, Barbara Mujica and Mujtaba.

LBO ORCHESTRA

Violin Robert Schumitzky

Viola Victor de Almeida

Cello Erin Breene

Bass/Electric Bass David Parmeter

Flute Melanie Lancon

Oboe/English Horn Ted Sugata

Clarinet/Bass Clarinet Damon Zick

Bassoon Elliott Moreau

French Horn Sarah Bach

Guitars Eric Brenton

Timpani/Percussion Paul Sternhagen

Orchestra Contractor Robert Schumitzky

Accompanist Neda St. Clair

Librarian Teri M. Christian