

Blue

Jeanine Tesori & Tazewell Thompson

Washington National Opera · Roderick Cox



Blue (2019)

An Opera in Two Acts
 Music by Jeanine Tesori
 Libretto by Tazewell Thompson
 Commissioned by The Glimmerglass Festival
 Recording produced by Washington National Opera

Disc 1

1	Prologue (<i>instrumental</i>)	2. 42
Act I - Scene 1		
2	–Urgent! –Drop ev’rything!	1. 01
3	I was in the heyday of being in love	0. 53
4	Damn, girl!	2. 24
5	You married a cop?	0. 34
6	I love him	3. 31
7	What about your obsession?	0. 56
8	I’m gonna strap my baby on my back	1. 07
9	You havin’ a what?	1. 15
10	–Forgive our sistah. –She knows not what she do	1. 19
11	Birth that baby boy to term	2. 24
12	Ha. Ha ha ha	0. 52
13	I’m having this boy. I’m keeping this boy close	0. 51
14	We wish on ev’rything you can wish on	1. 54

15	Scrape the wax off your wings	1. 49
16	<i>Transition to Scene 2 (instrumental)</i>	1. 17

Scene 2

17	How you doin’, baby?	1. 25
18	I’m somebody’s mother	2. 07
19	Hello...Mom!	1. 49
20	Cup your hand under his head and neck	1. 14
21	Hello...Hello, my son	3. 02

Scene 3

22	Go, go, go!	1. 49
23	–Halftime! –We’re all yours, buddy	1. 04
24	How do you feel?	2. 03
25	Welcome to the daddy club!	1. 17
26	How did you produce a son?	0. 50
27	I’ve got a baby boy	0. 57
28	Here’s a toast	1. 18

Scene 4

29	<i>Introduction (instrumental)</i>	0. 48
30	You not getting off that easy	1. 25
31	Yes, sir! Got my own private warden	1. 05
32	Moved up here so you could spread out and be by yourself	1. 49
33	No! New York is the richest city in the world	2. 15
34	Stat Stat Statue of Liberty	1. 29



35	The world done change	1. 28
36	–What am I supposed to do? – Stay alive	1. 10
37	You alive, ain't you?	0. 47
38	I am out there in the jungle	2. 29
39	Whatcha gonna do?	1. 11
40	– Let me go. – No, my son, I will never let you go	2. 33

Total playing time Disc 1: 62.14

Disc 2

Act II - Scene 1

1	What is your name, my son?	1. 31
2	Ah! You are the father whose child was lost	1. 56
3	Ah! Your heart is broken, I hear it knocking against your ribs	1. 42
4	This is my badge	2. 09
5	When my boy was taken from me	0. 50
6	I did not come here seeking redemption	2. 08
7	Only a white God	1. 51
8	You are walking in a terrible darkness, my son	3. 12
9	May restoring waters clear the night's weeping	0. 56
10	In my hour of need I seek no salvation from you	2. 16

Scene 2

11	Come away from the window	1. 57
12	She sits in this matchbox disguised as a house	2. 04

13	She was lying in her bed. In her own home. In her bed	1. 57
14	–Look at her. –She wears the captive shroud of stony death	1. 17
15	Let us go forth	0. 59
16	Oh God! Bring my baby back	2. 27
17	God, give me back any part of my baby	2. 48

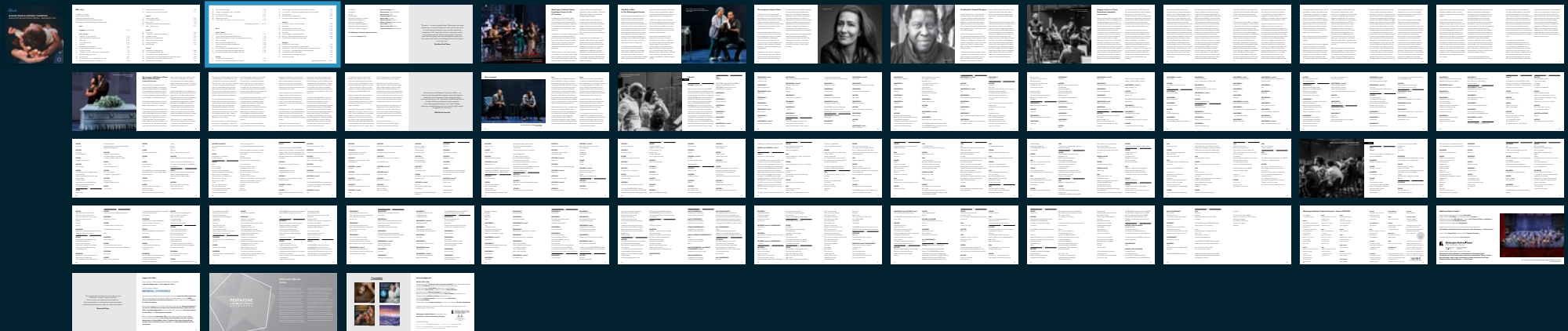
Scene 3

18	My heart...my heart is heavy tonight	1. 09
19	Somebody...	2. 36
20	A mother, clear out of her mind	2. 37
21	God, we ask you, take care of this boy	0. 56
22	Stay alive	0. 41
23	Son, the light is turning amber. Run!	1. 34
24	We sing...Christ wore the crown of thorns	3. 09
25	Cup your hand under his head and neck	1. 46

Epilogue

26	<i>Introduction (instrumental)</i>	1. 14
27	I don't know what the hell you talkin' about	0. 55
28	Set aside your sides, eat some set-asides I set aside for my boys	1. 09
29	–You my son. – I got deep fried, red-eyed, drip-dried...	1. 18
30	Kneaded, pinched, and prodded	3. 32
31	Heavenly Father, we humbly thank you	3. 18
32	Hey Mom, hey Dad	1. 32

Total playing time Disc 2: 59.31



The Father
 The Mother
 The Son
 The Reverend
 Girlfriend 1/Congregant 1/Nurse
 Girlfriend 2/Congregant 2
 Girlfriend 3/Congregant 3
 Policeman 1/Male Congregant 1
 Policeman 2/Male Congregant 2
 Policeman 3/Male Congregant 3

Kenneth Kellogg, Bass
Briana Hunter, Mezzo-Soprano
Aaron Crouch, Tenor
Gordon Hawkins, Baritone
Ariana Wehr, Soprano
Katerina Burton, Soprano
Rehanna Thelwell, Mezzo-Soprano
Joshua Blue, Tenor
Martin Luther Clark, Tenor
Christian Simmons, Bass-Baritone

The Washington National Opera Orchestra

Conducted by **Roderick Cox**

~

“Powerful — as well as sadly timely. Drawing on her deep experience in musical theater, her keen ear for elements of contemporary classical music and her abundant imagination, Ms. Tesori has written a strong yet subtle score that avoids the obvious and exudes a personal voice. Mr. Thompson, who also directed the production, has written one of the most elegant librettos I’ve heard in a long time.”

The New York Times

~





Rehanna Thelwell, Katerina Burton, Ariana Wehr, and Briana Hunter
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Washington National Opera: Creating a Canon for the 21st Century

At Washington National Opera (WNO), opera is a *living art form*. In addition to producing great works of the past, WNO provides a platform for today’s composers and librettists to tell stories that invite us to reflect on who we are and who we are becoming.

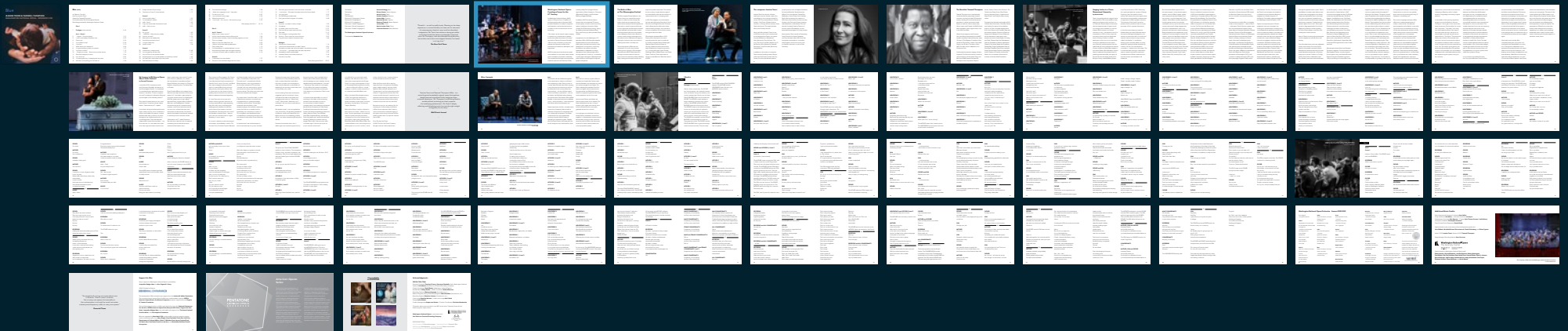
“Our mission as the nation’s opera company is rooted in our commitment to present stories that reflect the America of today,” says Artistic Director Francesca Zambello. “*Blue* is a story of America, a story that explores the humanity we find at the intersection of heartache, redemption, and forgiveness.”

WNO’s investment in the American opera canon reflects its core values, which include artistic excellence and artistic citizenship. The company has brought many important American operas to the Kennedy Center,

including *Moby Dick* (Heggie/Scheer), *Appomattox* (Glass/Hampton), *Champion* (Blanchard/Cristofer), and *Dead Man Walking* (Heggie/McNally).

In addition, WNO’s American Opera Initiative has commissioned 27 twenty-minute operas, as well as seven hour-long operas, including *An American Soldier* (Huang Ruo/David Henry Huang), *Taking Up Serpents* (Kamala Sankaram/Jerre Dye), and *Proving Up* (Missy Mazzoli/Royce Vavrek).

In preparation for the Washington, D.C. premiere of *Blue*, WNO brought together representatives from law enforcement, public policy, the faith community, youth development, social justice, community foundations, art/culture, and other stakeholders to collaborate on events designed to foster dialogue about *Blue*. Among these was “Listen Up,” an initiative in which eight teenagers collaborated with police officers to write original songs and spoken-word pieces.



The Birth of *Blue* at The Glimmerglass Festival

The Glimmerglass Festival believes in the power of story as a cultural force and a means to create concrete change. We believe stories are strongest when they reflect diverse identities and life experiences. We envision a world of opera and the arts in which all people see themselves and their stories reflected, and all are able to reach their full potential. We strive to be leaders in the realization of that vision. We aim to create a world onstage, backstage and in the audience that celebrates and supports all people, so that we may move closer to realizing that world in our daily lives.

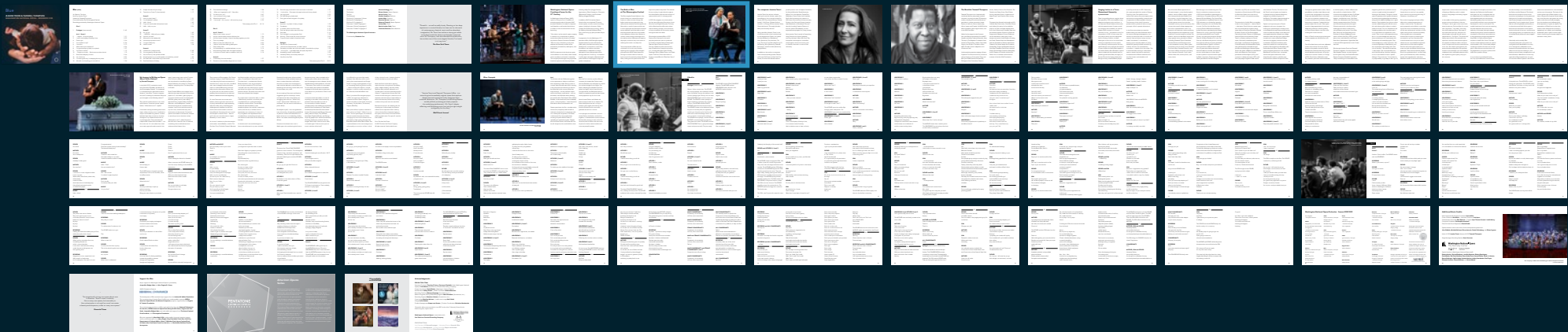
The world premiere of *Blue* was the culmination of a multi-year initiative exploring race in America. Glimmerglass partnered with WFMT Radio Network in Chicago to create a series of national forums and a five-episode podcast, *Breaking Glass*, looking at how opera and the arts

respond to present-day issues. The national forums, touring in eight cities throughout the United States, explored the evolution of opera and the arts in a changing world.

In 2017, Glimmerglass commissioned the hip-hop opera *Stomping Grounds*, by Victor Simonson and Paige Hernandez. The show, which offered positive affirmation about cultural identity, diversity, and connection to home, traveled to 14 community venues throughout New York State.

Glimmerglass presented *Blue* in 2019. Scenery and costumes for the world premiere production were co-produced by The Glimmerglass Festival, Washington National Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Additional performances have been scheduled at companies across the U.S., including Michigan Opera Theater, Pittsburgh Opera, Seattle Opera, and Toledo Opera. The Music Critics Association of America named *Blue* the “Best New Opera” of 2020.

Ariana Wehr and Kenneth Kellogg
in the world premiere production of *Blue*
© Karli Cadel



The composer: Jeanine Tesori

Jeanine Tesori has written a diverse catalog for musical theatre, opera, film, and television. Her musicals include *Fun Home* (2015 Tony Award Winner, Pulitzer finalist), *Soft Power* (Pulitzer finalist), *Caroline, or Change* (Olivier award), *Violet*, *Shrek the Musical*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and *Kimberly Akimbo*.

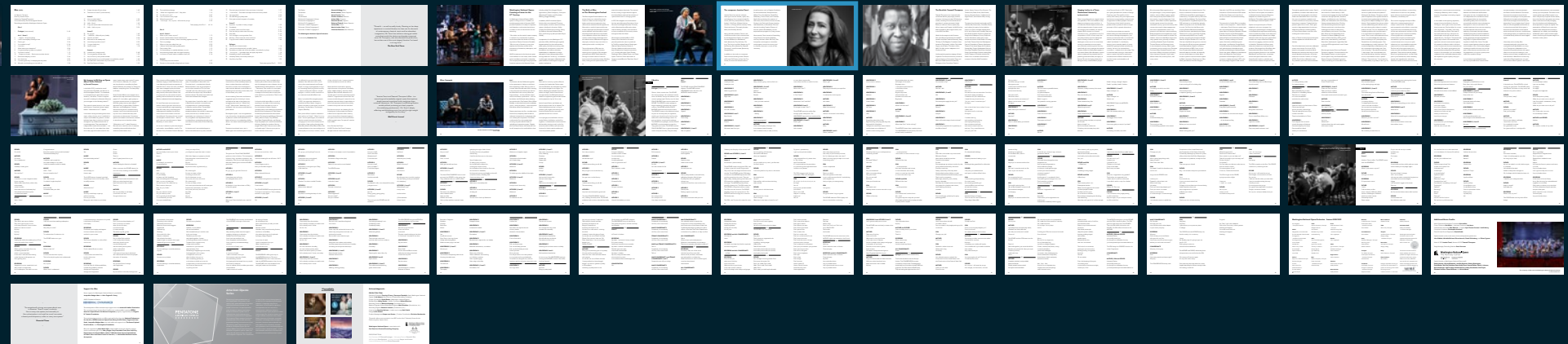
Along with Missy Mazzoli, Tesori is one of the first women to be commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera. Her operas include *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* (libretto by Tony Kushner), *The Lion, The Unicorn and Me* (libretto by J.D. McClatchy), *Blue* (libretto by Tazewell Thompson), and *Grounded* (libretto by George Brant).

In addition to her work as a composer, Tesori was the founding Artistic Director of *Encores! Off-Center* at New York City Center, for which she helmed seasons

joined by artists such as Stephen Sondheim, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Randy Newman, William Finn, Alan Menken, Renée Elise Goldsberry, Sutton Foster, and Jonathan Groff. After producing four seasons of *Off-Center*, she took one of those concerts, *Sunday in the Park with George* (starring Jake Gyllenhaal) to Broadway. She was also the founding Creative Director of the non-profit A BroaderWay, an arts empowerment program for young women.

Most recently, Tesori served as Supervising Vocal Producer for Steven Spielberg and Tony Kushner's *West Side Story*. She has spoken and taught at universities and programs across the country and is currently a lecturer in music at Yale University.

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The librettist: Tazewell Thompson

Tazewell Thompson is an internationally acclaimed director, playwright, teacher, and actor. He has more than 150 directing credits, including 30 world and American premieres, in venues across the United States, as well as in France, Spain, Italy, Africa, Japan, and Canada. At WNO he has been engaged to direct *Appomattox*, *Lost in the Stars*, and *Blue*.

Works for the stage include *Constant Star* (nine Barrymore Awards, five NAACP Awards and three Carbonell Awards), *Mary T & Lizzy K* (The Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award), *Jubilee: Fisk Jubilee Singers*, *Jam & Spice: The Music of Kurt Weill*, *Our War*, and an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*.

He directed the premiere staging of Aaron Copland's *The Second Hurricane*, as well as new productions of the operas *Porgy and Bess* (two EMMY Award nominations), *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, *Death in*

Venice, *Xerxes*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Tender Land*, *Street Scene*, *Pearl Fishers*, *Norma*, *Margaret Garner*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, and *Freedom Ride*, among others.

Thompson has directed and taught at NYU, Juilliard, Yale, Dartmouth, Columbia, Tulane, and Indiana University. He has held the position of Chair of theater departments at St. Ann's School and Columbia Prep, and has served as Artistic Director of Syracuse Stage and of Westport County Playhouse. He has directed at nearly every major theater across the United States, including the Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival, Roundabout Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Arena Stage, the Goodman, Seattle Rep, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Soho Rep, Cleveland Play House, Hartford Stage, Second Stage, Guthrie, Indiana Rep, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and the Old Globe. He is a member of the board of trustees of the Kurt Weill Foundation.





Roderick Cox and Jeanine Tesori
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Staging Justice in a Three-Dimensional Humanity
by Naomi André

There is something almost magical about the opera *Blue*. This work straddles many edges around genre, style, and form. It is a dramatic theatrical piece that works with the expansiveness of opera as well as conveying the immediacy of musical theater. *Blue* connects to a rooted moment in time — the present time of its composition in 2019. In many ways, this story about family and the undisputed horror of losing a child to a violent death gets to the root of our worst fears uniting our experiences across nation, race, ethnicity, and time period. Yet very specifically this story captures the essence of past conflicts involving Black people in the United States. *Blue* delineates a space where modern policing extends back to patrolling enslaved bodies, the legacy of Emmet Till, and the highly visible police killings of many unarmed Black people

since Trayvon Martin in 2012. Presciently, this opera preceded the murder of George Floyd by a year. The specifics of this twenty-first century story encompass what has become a transcending universal truth of oppression for Black people in America. The intimacy of this family’s situation presents both a private as well as an epic portrayal of life in operatic dimensions.

In the first scene where we meet the Mother telling her three Girlfriends about her recent marriage and pregnancy, we witness an event that feels so normal and natural. Here we have an every-woman, called “the Mother” in the libretto, sharing joyous everyday details of young adulthood: getting married and starting a family. Yet this is an extraordinary occurrence — indeed, this is the magic. This is what had been missing in mainstream opera, a space that had not previously included stories of Black characters who are fully human and relatable to all audiences.



Blue showcases Black experiences on the opera stage in a way that brought a shadow culture of Black operas, operas that have previously been hidden from the majority, into the foreground. Such shadow culture Black creative expressions include operas written from the late nineteenth century up into the twenty-first century that reveal a deep engagement and care in representation that is not present in the dominant culture and bring Black perspectives and experiences to the forefront in how the narrative unfolds. This shadow culture includes Black singers who sang operatic arias, primarily in recitals (including Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, Thomas Bowers and Sissieretta Jones in the nineteenth century); Black opera companies (such as those run by Theodore Drury and Mary Cardwell Dawson); and the works of Black composers (including Harry Lawrence Freeman, Scott Joplin, William Grant Still, Anthony Davis, and many more).

Blue belongs to two intersecting trios. The first trio marks the momentous summer of 2019 when three Black operas began to make history. Composer Anthony Davis and librettist Richard Wesley's *The Central Park Five* premiered at Long Beach Opera in June 2019 and went on to be the first opera by a Black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize in music. *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, with music by Terence Blanchard and libretto by Kasi Lemmons, premiered at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis in June 2019. Originally commissioned by WNO's own Timothy O'Leary, who previously served as General Director of Opera Theatre of St. Louis, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* has gone on to be the first opera by a Black composer presented at the Metropolitan Opera in its history (that goes back to 1883). Such a move, sixty-six years after Marian Anderson's historical debut at the Met, will hopefully act as a similar beacon to other opera houses to perform and commission operas by Black composers. This brings us to *Blue*, which premiered at The Glimmerglass

Festival in July 2019, won the Music Critics Association of North America 2020 Award for Best New Opera, and is the first of this trio to have a commercial recording available.

The second trio of which *Blue* is a member, is that it is the composer's — Jeanine Tesori's — third opera. Tesori's first two operas were also commissioned by forward-looking opera director Francesca Zambello, General & Artistic Director of The Glimmerglass Festival and Artistic Director of Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center. Tesori is currently working on a fourth opera, *Grounded* (collaborating with playwright, now librettist, George Brant), commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, with performances scheduled at both the Met and Washington National Opera. Tesori's first opera, *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck*, with libretto by Tony Kushner, premiered at Glimmerglass (2011), and concerns a volatile scene from 1951 in the life of playwright Eugene O'Neill and his

wife Carlotta. *The Lion, The Unicorn and Me*, Tesori's second opera, was based on a children's book by Jeanette Winterson, adapted into a libretto by poet J.D. McClatchy. This holiday opera premiered at the Washington National Opera in 2013.

Opera is an important part of Tesori's polyphonic voice as a composer. Her training as a pianist began in finding tunes on the keyboard at age three and becoming a serious classical musician in her teens; this was supplemented by a liberal arts college education when she was a pre-med student turned music major at Barnard College. Her work as a gigging musician took her to Nashville, Tennessee for fifteen years where she worked as a vocal and record producer. She learned from Buryl Red (who had studied with Elliott Carter at Yale), and found great influence in Leoš Janáček, Béla Bartók, and Tania León, composers whose work spans classical art music shaped by folk rhythms, melodies, and structures from eastern Europe and Cuba.



Through her grandmother's stories, Tesori's grandfather, an Italian band director and musician who immigrated to the United States and died before Tesori could meet him, was an important inspiration and musical touchstone in her journey towards becoming a composer. Coupled with her parents' great love of music, Tesori grew up with a deep appreciation for the arts. Additional influences include traveling to China, Ghana, Mexico, and Peru, and working with local musicians.

Many of Tesori's recent projects have given voice to experiences outside of her own identity.

One of her best known and most celebrated works is the musical *Fun Home* (2013), based on the graphic memoir by Alison Bechdel that treats the discovery of queer sexual identities and the pain of losing a loved one to suicide. *Caroline, or Change* (2003), Tesori's first collaboration with Tony Kushner (who later wrote the libretto

to her first opera), is about a Black maid who works for a Jewish family in 1963 Louisiana and engages the early Civil Rights movement through Spirituals, the Blues, Motown, and Klezmer music. *Soft Power* (2018), her collaboration with David Henry Hwang, reverses the lens from *The King and I* by exoticizing America through a Chinese musical set in the future that challenges the nature of democracy, cultural identity, and racism. Soon after *Blue*, Tesori was the Supervising Vocal Producer for Steven Spielberg's movie version of *West Side Story* (2021), a work about class, racial ethnicity, and Puerto Rican life in Manhattan's Upper West Side in the late 1950s right before Lincoln Center was built.

Blue brought Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson together. Commissioned for the Glimmerglass Festival, an early impetus for the opera's story was General & Artistic Director Francesca Zambello's question, "Why is the killing of innocent Black men

happening all the time, and how can we use art to speak and ask the question?" Writing his first libretto, Thompson carried years of experience from spoken theater as an award-winning playwright and director, along with his deep knowledge as an opera director. Tesori speaks of her role as a white woman collaborating with a Black man in this work about police violence in today's political climate, "For me, Tazewell has the underlying rights to this story because it is so connected to his experience in the world...That to me is what reparations look like. It is to acknowledge that that story does not belong to me. I participate, but Tazewell has the underlying rights. That acknowledgment is really important." She moves thoughtfully in these spaces, joins this conversation with energy and "with a lot of humility." She admits sometimes "I feel scared, I feel uncomfortable, but I don't feel like exiting. And that staying in, to me, is the invitation to be in specific dialogue." She continues, "I know that it is my responsibility to go deep or don't go. So,

if I'm going to be writing in a community, I better know as much as I can possibly know, without truly knowing with a big 'K'. Otherwise, I should stay out."

The musical language and style of *Blue* reflect the contemporaneousness of today's current issues. The dramatic pacing expands and unfolds in a way that comes alive and is enriched by bouncing off the vast architectural acoustics of the opera house yet also has the immediacy of sitting right next to the speaker and the direct impact of watching the conversation up close. Narrative and musical themes recur not just as quick references, but as embedded tropes that weave sections of the opera together. The first half of the opera opens up in scene one with the Mother and her three girlfriends. These women feel like people I know from graduate school, as they chide, joke in jovial banter and, when necessary, express their apprehension with drop-dead seriousness. At the end of the scene,



despite their concerns about the difficulty of keeping a Black boy safe in today's America, they pledge unwavering support and love.

In the middle of this opening exposition, we get to know the Mother in her aria "Go figure," which gets to the core of who these women are. She has fallen for a man with "big hands," "big ideas," and a big love that makes her pause. She stops in her tracks when she says, almost as an afterthought as though she still cannot really believe it, "Go figure." The pause and falling major third in the orchestra that opens this aria and continues throughout this expressive reflection adds a shimmer to this moment and its return several times in act one. This wistful lyrical gesture, the pause and descending third, brings these women to life and helps us in the audience understand their vulnerable existence while also experiencing the mystery and joy in this moment.

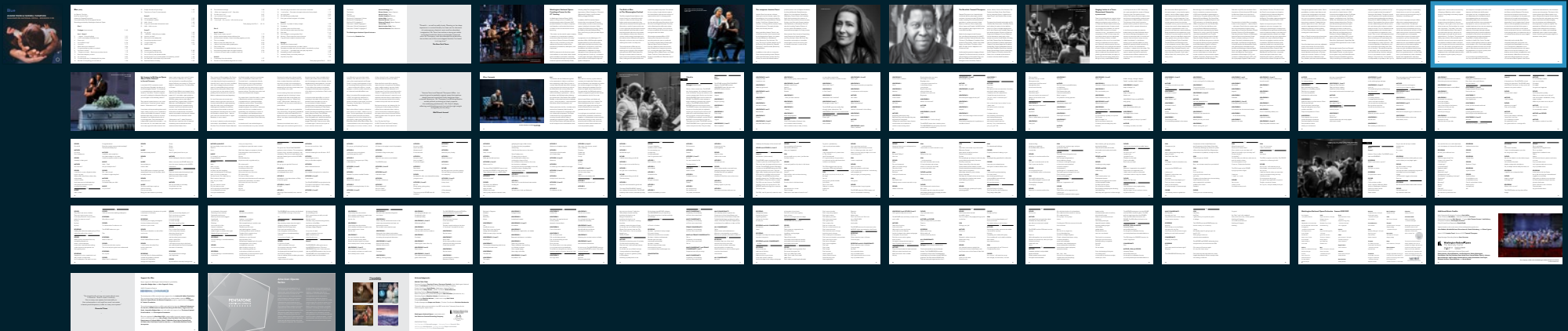
The midpoint of the opera, the heroic duet between the Father and the Reverend that opens act two, is weighted down by two deep basses who narrate the events that happened after act one and the devastating reality that now faces the young family and their community that we have grown to care so much about. The somber heaviness of two men encountering the clash between the misuse of the authority of the state (through a deadly mistake by the police) and the ineffective consolation of the church are reminiscent of the oppressively fraught duet between King Philip II of Spain and the Grand Inquisitor in Verdi's *Don Carlos*. The dark moods contrast between these two operas as the leaders in *Don Carlos* rashly bargain murder and sacrifice for their own corrupt gain. In *Blue* the men are the victims, not the perpetrators, of a gross injustice; both suffer from systemic wrongs.

In a momentous groundswell of pain, the "Lay my burden down" theme is first

introduced briefly in the duet between the Father and the Reverend. This theme becomes the connective tissue for the second act and epilogue. As the pause and falling third of wonder and anticipation were woven throughout the first half, the descending "Lay my burden down" theme feels at once recognizable and familiar as it unites the second half of the opera. It becomes the culmination of the funeral service at the end of act two, and the point in the epilogue when you realize that the joy of a shared family dinner will never happen again.

Historically and musically, *Blue* compassionately tells a story that is at once painful and identifiable to so many of us. Through the collaboration of an interracial compositional team, this opera offers a microcosm for listening to, and learning across, diverse vantage points and lived narratives. While *Blue* is not the only opera about Black experiences, it is part of a new era of Black operas in the United

States that extends back to the nineteenth century up to the present. The luster of this current golden age of Black operas is not due to the paucity of operas written before, but to the fact that new operas are joining earlier works that are finally emerging from the shadows and challenging the elitist reputation of opera as a genre. The presentation of Black lives in ways that reveal a three-dimensional humanity is appearing in an unlikely, yet increasingly emblematic place: opera. And the opera house is becoming an eloquent stage for a trenchant social justice.





Briana Hunter and Kenneth Kellogg
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My Journey to Writing an Opera About Police Violence
by Tazewell Thompson

In the fall of 2015, I received an email from Francesca Zambello, the director of the Glimmerglass Festival. “I’m interested in commissioning an opera about race in America,” she wrote. “I have a composer set, and I’m looking for a librettist. What are your thoughts on the following writers?”

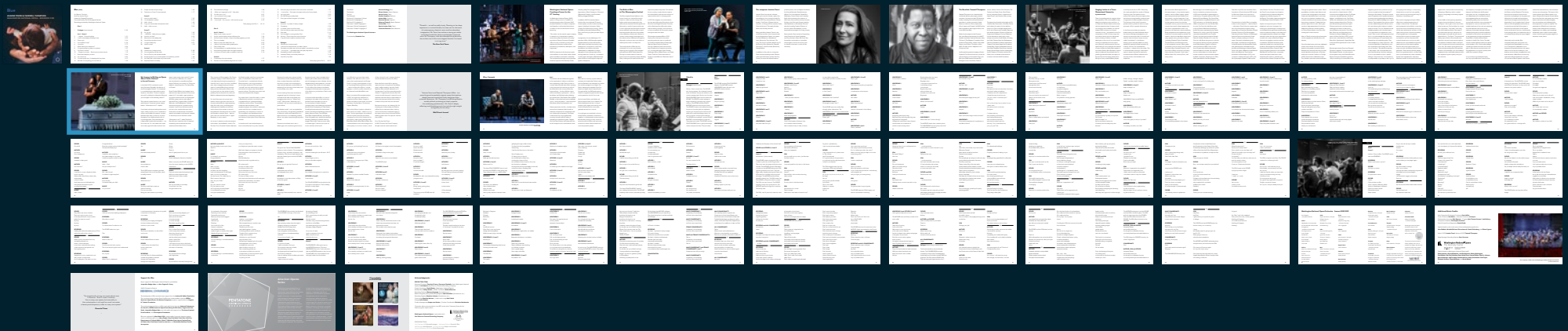
They were all names known to me, some quite famous. Some had written operas before. “What about me?” I replied.

I have been writing something down each night, a diary of sorts, since I could hold a crayon and scribble. My parents’ criminal behavior kept them in and out of prison throughout my childhood and most of my teenage years. They were deemed irresponsible, unsafe and unsuitable — not fit to raise me. So I was taken from them at an early age and made a ward of the

state. I spent seven years at the Convent of St. Dominic in Blauvelt, N.Y., where I was introduced to storytelling by Sister Martin DePorres, who read to us 30 boys at bedtime, everything from *The Hardy Boys* to Dickens.

Sister Charles Williams encouraged me to take the next step and write for the school paper. At 9, I was editor, getting high on my power and the aroma of mimeograph fluid. But poetry was my real calling. I devoured Frost, Hughes, Millay, Dickinson, Whitman, and Shakespeare. I walked around reciting aloud; I entered oratory contests. I was in love with the sound of my own voice, and the discovery that words were not democratic: Some were special and needed to be framed, stressed or served up more or less than others.

“What about me?” I asked Francesca. She told me to send her a bit of material, something that would indicate that I understood the libretto form.



That summer at Glimmerglass, Eric Owens had been singing in Verdi's *Macbeth*, and I was directing the American premiere of Vivaldi's *Cato in Utica*. Eric and I, two Black men, were outraged by the prominent cases of unarmed Black boys and men being shot by white police officers. We, of course, had our own stories of racial profiling that we shared as we tried and failed to understand what was happening...

So I sent Francesca two scenes set in Harlem, where I was born and now live: A young married Black couple expecting their first child, a boy, and fearing the challenges and obstacles he will face; and a scene of the mother-to-be and her girlfriends. Francesca told me to send the samples to Jeanine Tesori...Jeanine and I met over avocado toast on Upper Broadway. It was a match.

As I wrote, I looked to my favorite essayist and novelist, James Baldwin, and his *The Fire Next Time*; Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between*

the World and Me; and, from my teenage years, Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*. I consulted with friends, Black and white: How do you prepare a son for what awaits him? Do you have "the talk" with him, about how to survive and thrive from day to day? All the Black parents said yes. The white ones said it had never even entered their thoughts.

Six months later I had a first draft, in which a Black family and their community are convulsed when an unarmed teenager is killed by a police officer. The principal characters were the father, a jazz saxophone player; the mother, a restaurant owner; and the son, a student activist interested in art and poetry. A chorus of 30 young Black men represented other murdered boys, attempting through music and dance to make sense of the world they had left.

As Jeanine and I met and she began to hear musical themes in my text, and with

Francesca's tough notes, things evolved. I learned how to edit rambling sentences down to select bites that would allow the music to enter; how counterpoint is used, and the dramatic musical effect of repeating lines and using active verbs; how to write duets, trios, arias.

At one meeting, Francesca and Jeanine suggested I get rid of the boys' chorus, and rethink the idea of the father as a struggling jazz musician. "What if he's a cop?" Jeanine said. "Absolutely not," I answered. I did not want to write about a police officer.

But despite myself, I soon recognized the irony, the tension, the glittering possibilities of personal conflict and heartache for a father whose son is murdered by a fellow officer. I set about interviewing Black police officers.

Francesca introduced me to one in Washington who was leaving the force to

become an actor. I also consulted with a Harlem police officer whose relationship with his teenage son was a disaster, the son appalled that his dad worked for "the man" — the enemy. That conflict is in the opera. For this officer, life insurance and dental coverage for his family were a major part of his decision to join the force. That's in the opera, too.

It is hard to think about *Blue*, or much of anything, in the midst of the continuing pandemic that has taken so much of my community in Harlem. Massive unemployment; lines snaking around several blocks for the food pantry on 116th Street. Small family businesses that have closed forever. The recent brutal killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Sean Reed, Rayshard Brooks, and George Floyd: My people and I are left shocked and shivering, fending for ourselves. Moving targets. Who's next? How are we to catch our breath again? How are we to put our trust in the laws of the land?



It is difficult for me not to feel utterly defeated. Not difficult at all for me to see my face superimposed over George Floyd's. I'm angry and frightened, living in an increasingly terrifying, divisive country — where a white police officer, in broad daylight, in uniform, snuffs out the life of an unarmed, handcuffed Black man.

When I joined the Glimmerglass project in 2015, the opera was referred to in shorthand as *Race Opera*. I began to attach new titles to each draft: *No Name Necessary*, *Say My Name*, *The Hunted*, *Targets*, *Black Boy*.

Both police officers I spoke to referred to their uniform as "blues": "When I'm in my blues." As the opera begins, the audience sees the central character, the father, changing from his civilian clothes into his police blues. I kept cycling through titles: *Black Blue*, *Black In Blue*, *Black Is Blue*. But it seemed better to be more ambiguous, to refer equally to a mood, a uniform, a kind

of day, a kind of music. I wrote to Jeanine and we decided we should call it *Blue*.

When the final curtain fell on opening night, there was a long silence, followed by gasps, audible weeping, and then, finally, applause. *Blue* has been referred to as a "protest opera" and "the opera about police violence." I suppose both are true. But I did not set out with that goal. I wrote it from an obsessive need and sense of responsibility to tell an intimate story behind the numbing numbers of boys and men who are killed.

But here we are now: art imitating life, life imitating art. Unfortunately, the themes in *Blue* have no expiration date. I add my voice to those of the characters singing in the opera, and to those of the real families suffering great losses. Our eyes will never be free of tears.

From The New York Times.

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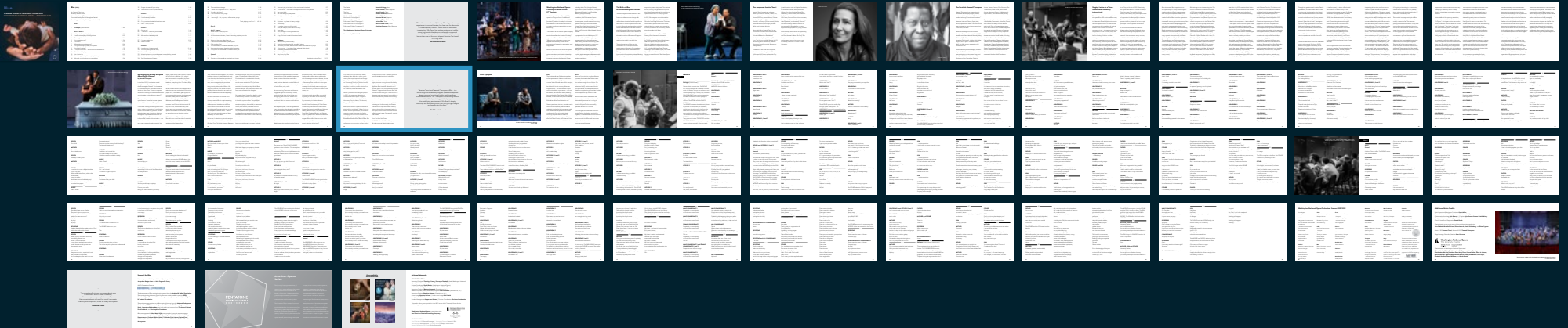
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~

"Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's *Blue*...is a wrenching and remarkably original opera that explores deeply personal emotional truths and gives them universal resonance...Mr. Thompson's unflinching libretto avoids political posturing yet clearly exposes the underlying predicament...Ms. Tesori's deeply affecting and disturbing music has just the right weight and gravity for the story."

Wall Street Journal

~



Blue – Synopsis

Gordon Hawkins and Kenneth Kellogg
© Karli Cadel

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Act I

The Mother calls her Girlfriends together to her apartment in Harlem to tell them she is expecting a child. Their joy turns to concern when she tells them she is carrying a boy; they warn her that her son will not be welcomed in this country. When her hope and love — for the child she carries and for the Father, a policeman — will not be shaken, her Girlfriends relent, blessing her and the child. The Father's Police Officer Buddies, on the other hand, are immediately joyful — and a bit jealous — when they learn their fellow officer has fathered a son.

Sixteen years later, the Son, a student artist and activist, frequently finds himself at odds with the law for his involvement with non-violent political protests. The Father confronts the Son, who pushes back, accusing his police officer Father of upholding an oppressive system. Despite the Son's bitter words, the Father tells him he will always love him and hold him close.

Act II

After the Son is shot by a police officer at a protest, the heartbroken Father meets with the Reverend, who attempts to comfort him and encourages him to forgive. The Father, adopting the attitude of the Son, lashes out angrily. As the funeral for the Son approaches, the Girlfriends return to Harlem to support the grief-stricken Mother as she prepares to lay her Son to rest.

At the funeral, Father and Mother ask God to welcome their Son to Heaven. The Father briefly becomes lost in a fog of emotion, guilt, regret, and memory, then finds his way back to the community gathered around him in church.

In an epilogue, we travel back in time to see the Father, the Mother, and the Son, together, in a bittersweet moment around a kitchen table, sharing a meal, as the Son reconciles with his Father and announces his plans for further artistic studies and one more peaceful protest.

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Kevin Miller and Rehanna Thelwell
© Yassine El Mansouri



Libretto

Disc 1

1

Prologue (instrumental)

Silence. A slow curtain rises. The FATHER sits, facing upstage. He is dressed in street-wear. He stands, surveys the audience, and crosses upstage right. One by one, his three POLICE BUDDIES enter and encounter the FATHER. The FATHER crosses upstage to begin undressing, changing into a police uniform. The FATHER and the POLICE BUDDIES respond to the sound of sirens. The FATHER crosses to the sideboard, where he puts on his utility belt, his nightstick, and his gun. He picks up his hat from the table and crosses downstage center. He puts on his hat, surveying the audience. The FATHER turns upstage, and the POLICE BUDDIES cross downstage to meet him. They greet each other. The FATHER and the POLICE BUDDIES form a group downstage center and pose stoically. They are ready.

2

Act I

Scene 1

The FATHER and the POLICE BUDDIES disperse. The MOTHER and the GIRLFRIENDS enter. We are in the MOTHER's Harlem kitchen.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Urgent!

GIRLFRIEND 3

Drop ev'rything!

GIRLFRIEND 1

Urgent!

GIRLFRIEND 2

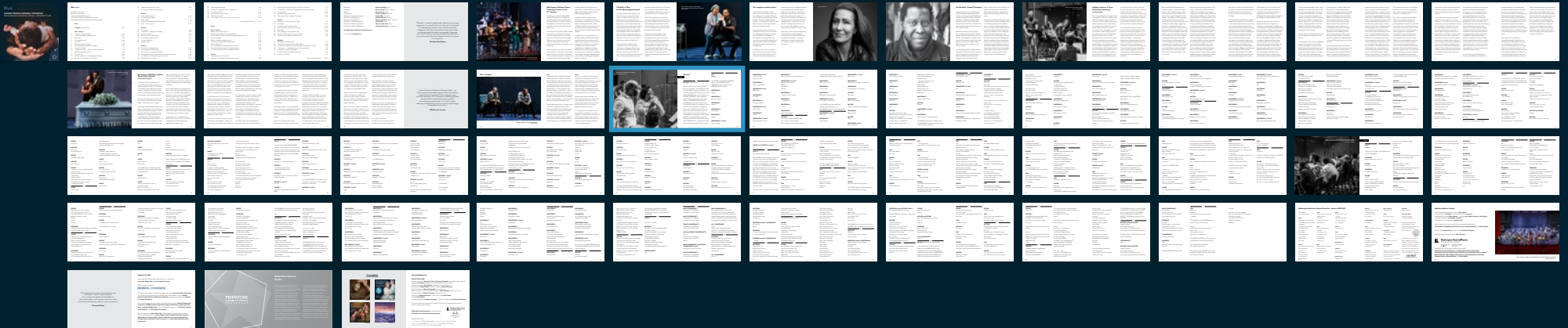
Pack a bag!

GIRLFRIEND 1

Urgent!

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Get on a plane!



GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

I need you here.
I need you now.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Need my girlfriends.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

Right here.

GIRLFRIEND 3

In Harlem.

GIRLFRIEND 2

You call us sisters.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 3

Best friends.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Forever.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

We never hear from you.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Many months go by, come to find out –

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

We didn't even know...
Nuthin'!

Best friends!

Sistahs!

GIRLFRIEND 3

...that you were married...

GIRLFRIEND 1

...engaged, or...

GIRLFRIEND 2

...dating.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Much less pregnant!

MOTHER

I was in the heyday of being in love,
in a constant state of ecstasy.
Had no desire to see, to hear, to know,

to care about anyone else.

I was either with him or waitin' for him.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Who is this "him"?

GIRLFRIEND 2

Is "him" here?

GIRLFRIEND 3

What does "him" look like?

GIRLFRIENDS 2 and 3

Do we get to meet "him"?

The MOTHER opens her wallet, flips through photo after photo. The GIRLFRIENDS react with non-verbal ad libs.

————— 4 —————
GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Damn, girl!

GIRLFRIEND 3

He's a looker!

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Damn, girl!

GIRLFRIEND 2

They say you eat with your eyes first.

GIRLFRIEND 1

I could eat him with a spoon.

MOTHER

He's taken.

GIRLFRIEND 3

What's he wearing?

MOTHER

Uniform. He served in the military.

GIRLFRIEND 1

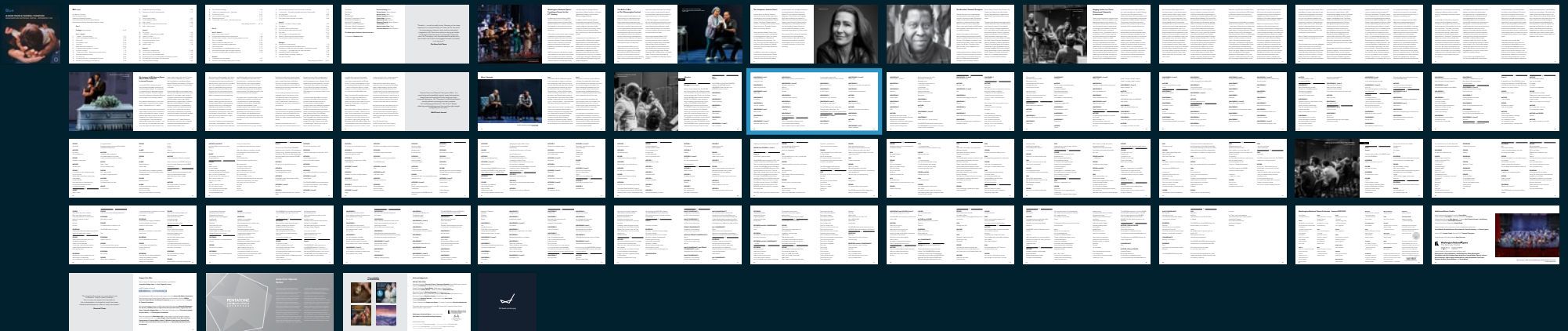
What branch?

MOTHER

Navy.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

Ooooo, seafood!



GIRLFRIEND 3

Love a man in uniform.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Army.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Marines.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Coast Guard.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Air Force.

GIRLFRIEND 3

UPS!

MOTHER

Everything about him is big.
Big frame, big smile, big eyes, big ears,
big head full of big ideas.
I whisper his name from Lenox Avenue
and he hears me on Malcolm X
and he comes running home.

Big shoulders that can carry
the weight of the world.
Big deep voice –
I could pitch a tent and live
in the body of that
voice forever.
Big thick lips that,
when he kisses me,
he takes me to the river!
Big hands...

GIRLFRIEND 2

What's his shoe size?

MOTHER

Sixteen.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Lord!

GIRLFRIEND 3

What does "him" do for a living?

*The MOTHER shows them another photo.
The GIRLFRIENDS see the photo, then look
at each other, incredulous.*

5

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

You married a cop?

MOTHER

Yes! Yes, I did!

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Girl.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Did nobody else apply for the job?

GIRLFRIEND 1

Doctor?

GIRLFRIEND 2

Lawyer?

GIRLFRIEND 3

Multi-millionaire mega-church minister?

GIRLFRIEND 1

Community organizer with a pathway to
the White House?

6

GIRLFRIEND 3

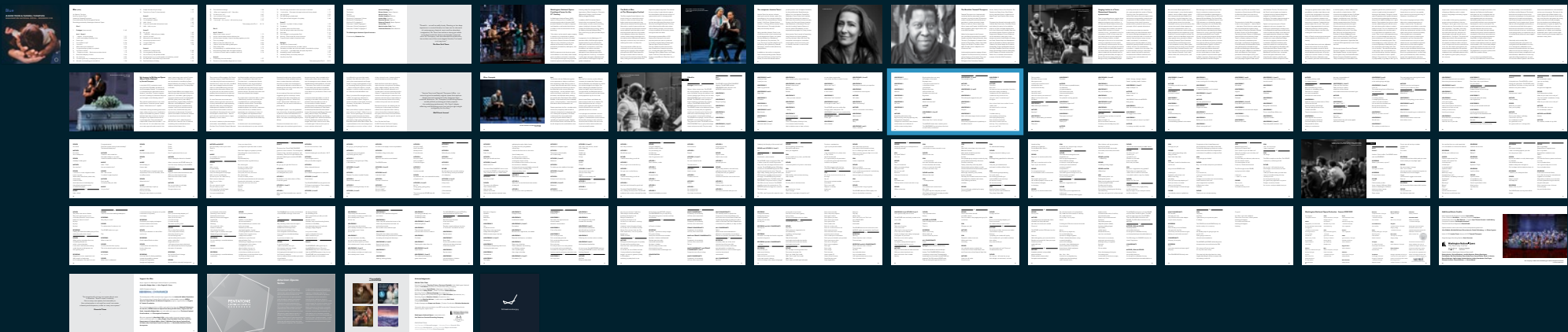
UPS Driver!

MOTHER

I love him.
Mm, mm...
He seems to love me more than I love him,
and that's saying something.
I looked at him, he looked at me –
I heard him say, he said to me,
"It's you I want. I must have you."
Go figure.

Not a clue of who I am or what I'm not –
I didn't care.
He said to me I'm in his hair.
Go figure.

I've been waiting
and watching and wanting
and hoping and praying
that someone would wait,
and want to watch over me,
and say, "You, come follow me,
you, you, you!" Ah!



This joy within –
But other men go to work.
Mine goes to war.
I never know if he'll be comin'
through that door
at the end of the day.

How will it end?
How did it start?
How can it be he just wants me?
Where I am he wants to be.
Go figure.

————— 7 —————
GIRLFRIEND 3
What about your obsession?

MOTHER
My what?

GIRLFRIEND 2
That so-called eatery you started.

GIRLFRIEND 1
That joint.

GIRLFRIEND 3
The diner.

MOTHER
Oh! You mean my establishment,
my livelihood,
my prize enterprise.
Doin' better than ever.
Lines around the block.
Bribin' to get in.
You passed it coming upstairs.

GIRLFRIEND 3
That pretty supper club?

GIRLFRIEND 2
That cute corner café?

GIRLFRIEND 1
That super soul bowl?

GIRLFRIEND 3
That's you?

MOTHER
All me.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3
Damn, girl!

GIRLFRIEND 2
However, a baby is twenty-four seven.

GIRLFRIEND 3
Fifty-two double yours.

GIRLFRIEND 1
Three hundred sixty-five.

GIRLFRIENDS 2 and 3
Whatcha gonna do?

GIRLFRIEND 1
Three hundred sixty-five.

————— 8 —————
MOTHER
I'm gonna strap my baby on my back.
Go to work.
Keep on keepin' on,
like our ancestors used to do.
I'll be busy with the baby, busy with
business.

Makin' change, changin' diapers.
Feedin' my baby, feedin' Harlem.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3
Keep on keepin' on.

MOTHER
Keep on keepin' on.
Watch me!

*GIRLFRIEND 2 feels the MOTHER's
belly gently.*

GIRLFRIEND 2
Well. He certainly did his job.

GIRLFRIEND 3
You bigger than a house.

GIRLFRIEND 1
How many girls you carryin' up there?

MOTHER
I'm having one child, one child.



GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

A girl! A girl!

MOTHER

I'm having one child, one child.

A boy.

9

GIRLFRIEND 3

You havin' a what?

GIRLFRIEND 2

What did you say?

GIRLFRIEND 1

You havin' a who?

MOTHER

A boy!

A beautiful baby boy.

GIRLFRIEND 1

The sound you hear

is horses being spooked in the streets.

GIRLFRIEND 2

The sound you hear

is rats running off of a sinking ship.

GIRLFRIEND 3

The sound you hear

is serpents growing out of my head.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Oh Lord!

MOTHER

Oh Lord, please be kind.

10

GIRLFRIEND 1

Forgive our sistah.

GIRLFRIEND 3

She knows not what she do.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Before you lost your mind –

GIRLFRIEND 1

What's wrong with you?

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

You know better than this.

GIRLFRIEND 3

We talked.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Argued.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Debated.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Every Black girl knows this.

GIRLFRIEND 2

It's stitched into the stars and stripes...

GIRLFRIEND 1

...of the American flag.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Baked in the cake.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Thou shalt bring forth no Black boys into this world!

GIRLFRIEND 3

Girl.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Girlfriend.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Listen.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Bring that man home.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Put on some Barry White, mm...

GIRLFRIEND 2

Light the candles.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Drop rose petals and start over!



MOTHER

I'm having this boy child.
I'm having this boy.

11

GIRLFRIEND 3

Birth that baby boy to term.
Wrap him in swaddling clothes.
Take him to a manger –
to a cave somewhere –
and raise him with wolves.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Steal him away on a fast boat to China.
Climb over the wall.
Ask for amnesty, seek refuge.
They will take good care of you,
mother and child.
They love boy babies in China.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Don't deposit him on some
church doorstep or firehouse.
Get that baby boy far away!
Get yourself an island,
where you can become

the cray, cray president of
Cloud Cuckoo Land.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Clear out! Don't be here.
Take your boy to a place
where he can be revered.
Not scared at the end of someone's gun.

MOTHER

That's not fair!

GIRLFRIEND 3

Fair, what's "fair"?

12

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

Ha! Ha, ha, ha!

GIRLFRIEND 3

La, la, la...
What's fair?
A place where they sell candy apples
and cotton candy.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

Give out blue ribbons
to fat stinking hogs and pigs.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

La, la, la...
Thou shalt bring forth no Black boys
into this world!

13

MOTHER

I'm having this boy.
I'm keeping this boy close.
I don't care who he will be.
He can even love another man.
But he will be mine first.
He will be mine first to love.

GIRLFRIEND 1

What do you wish us to do?

GIRLFRIEND 2

We will do it.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Tell us what you wish from us.

*They each take turns placing their hands
on the MOTHER's belly.*

MOTHER

I wish for your love and support.
I wish for you to bless my child.

14

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 3

We wish on...

GIRLFRIEND 2

We wish on everything you can wish on.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 3

We wish for...

GIRLFRIEND 2

We wish for everything you could wish for.

GIRLFRIEND 1

We wish those wishes to be more
than wishes, hmm...



GIRLFRIEND 3

More than figments and concoctions.
More than promises and dreams.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

We wish those wishes to be fulfilled!

GIRLFRIEND 3

We wish, we wish.

GIRLFRIEND 1

At the end of a rainbow,
not a pot of gold,
but a pot of greens
with a ham hock at the bottom,
remind you of who you are,
where you came from,
how far you may go.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Know that who you are begins,
but does not end,
with the color of your skin.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Subjugate yourself before no one.
Bow down only to pick flowers
for your mama.

_____ 15 _____

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Scrape the wax off your wings.
Soar to the sun.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Stand tall before all others,
like a lighthouse.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Know you are wanted and loved.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Let the goodness within you
flash a light on the darkened road.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

We wish.

_____ 16 _____

Transition to Scene 2 (instrumental)

Scene 2

*A hospital room. The MOTHER is in bed,
having just given birth. The FATHER enters
with flowers. He's been on-duty and is still
dressed in his police uniform.*

FATHER

How you doin', baby?

MOTHER

I ain't ya baby.

FATHER

What do you mean?
Sure, you my baby.

MOTHER

No! No more!
Got my own baby to call baby.
I know who I am now.
I'm somebody's mother.
You gave that to me.
You gave me life so I could give life.

MOTHER

I'm somebody's mother.
I got my own baby.
I'm happy.
So happy.
You gave me happiness.

FATHER

You'll always be my baby.
What do you want me to call you?
How 'bout darlin' sweetheart, honey,
sugar, mother –
What do you want me to call you?

MOTHER

No – I know who I am now.
I'm somebody's mother.

MOTHER and FATHER

Mother.

MOTHER

Yes, mother, mother of my child.



FATHER

Our child!

MOTHER

Our child.
You a daddy now.

FATHER

A daddy! It feels good.

MOTHER

You saw him?

FATHER

I saw him in a room all glacial white.
It hurt my eyes.
White walls, white floors, white cribs,
white sheets,
nurses in white –
And there was our little baby boy!
Like a black exclamation point
on white linen paper.

NURSE

Hello...Mom!

Congratulations!
Does the mother want to hold the baby?
The beautiful baby boy?

MOTHER

I held him and nursed him.
He's been asleep on my chest.
I think he needs to meet his daddy.

NURSE

Hello...Dad!
Are you ready for him?

FATHER

Oh! I don't know!
I'm afraid I might drop him!

MOTHER

Don't be silly.
You better take your child.

NURSE

It's your first?

FATHER

Yes.

NURSE

Ever held a baby before?

FATHER

No.

NURSE

Let me help you.
Have a seat.

The NURSE places a hospital-provided striped burp cloth on his shoulder, which he stiffly receives.

FATHER

What's this for?

NURSE

Your boy could burp or spit-up
without warning.
Put out your arms.
Bring your arms closer to your body.

Closer.
Closer.
Closer!
That's it!
Now I'll gently hand him to you.

MOTHER

You're holding him like he's a football!

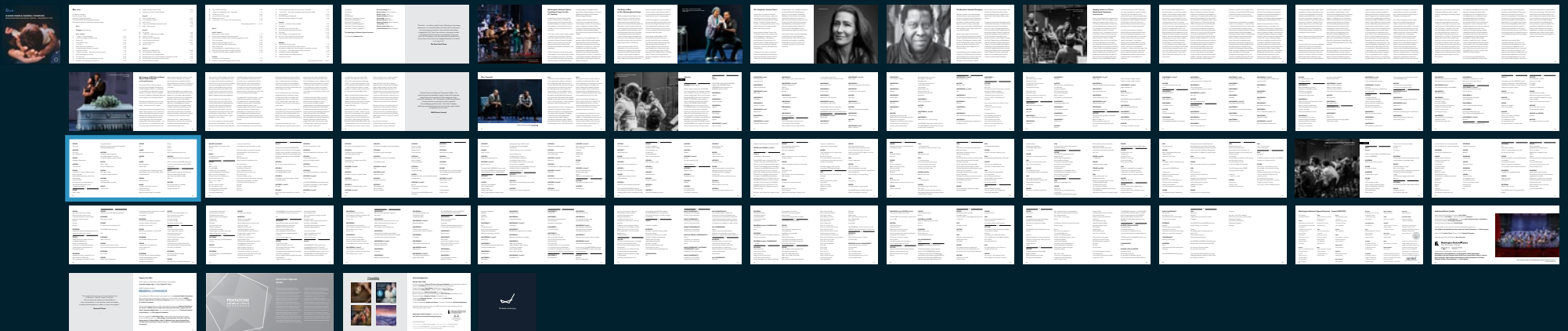
After a moment, the FATHER relaxes, his son in his arms, listening to the NURSE's instructions.

NURSE

Cup your hand under his head and neck.
With your other hand and arm,
bend and crook it like a cradle –
That's it!

MOTHER

Got my own baby to call baby.
I know who I am now.
You gave that to me.



MOTHER and NURSE

Hold your baby close to your chest.
That's it!
Hmm...

NURSE

I'm nearby if you need me.
Congratulations!

21

FATHER

Hello...
Hello, my son.
It's your daddy.
He hears me! He's laughing!
Look, he's taking hold of my finger.
Hello, my son, my baby boy.
You are my son. You make me cry.
Didn't want to have you.
Now, for you, I'd die –
I'd die.
Oh, your mama's mouth.
Oh, you have my nose.
You've got all your little fingers.
I've counted all your toes.
I love your seashell ears.

I love your wisp of hair,
your big brown eyes that seem to stare.

With little fingers you grasp my thumb.
Everything that moves inside of me
goes numb.

My son.
My little baby boy.
My all the world, my pride and joy.

Oh, what a gift!
So rare, so sweet, so fine.
You bring our lives a lift.
No rifts between us now.
He's yours, he's ours, he's mine.
Oh, what a gift!
So rare, so sweet, so fine.
Let's start a promise that we will never part.
Entwine this child within our hearts.
He's yours, he's ours, he's mine.
My child.
My boy.
My son.
He's mine!

22

Scene 3

*The sports bar. Three POLICE BUDDIES
gather at a bar in Harlem. The atmosphere
is festive, lively, animated, exuberant, and
celebratory. Their focus is split between the
televised football game and the FATHER's
good news.*

OFFICER 1

Go, go, go, you got this! Come on!

OFFICER 2

I hate these new uniforms,
who designed them, who?

OFFICER 3

My brother-in-law drove down to Philly
to see this game!

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

All right!

OFFICER 1

Way to go! Catch the ball, man, catch it!
Argh!

OFFICER 2

No one can touch him. Uhh!

OFFICER 3

I bet he's freezing his ass off when – SHIT!

OFFICER 1

If your fingers touch it,
then you shoulda caught it.

OFFICER 2

What a beautiful throw!

OFFICER 3

He could be sitting here in a warm bar.

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

Fourth down.

*The POLICE BUDDIES remain glued to the
TV, frozen in anticipation. Then suddenly,
the ball is in play again.*

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

Go!



OFFICER 1

Go, go, go, you're joking! Come on!

OFFICER 2

I hate their new running back, why'd they get him, why?

OFFICER 3

My brother-in-law grew up in Philly, a die-hard fan.

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

All right!

OFFICER 1

Fletcher Cox, what a tackle! Fumble –

OFFICER 2

Where is the defense?

OFFICER 3

My sister's counting the days 'til the...

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

Argh!

OFFICER 1

It'll show on the replay it was in his possession.

OFFICER 2

Should be a flag on that play!

OFFICER 3

Season is over and no more football.

The FATHER enters.

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

Hey!

OFFICERS 2 and 3

Look who's here!

OFFICER 2

The man of the hour.

OFFICER 3

What happened?

Are you a dad?

Are you a father?

OFFICER 1

Are you a dad?
How's the wife?
Whadja have?
Count the toes.

OFFICER 2

Are you a dad?
How you feelin'?
Count the fingers.

OFFICER 3

Slow down!
Let the man talk.

FATHER

My beautiful wife, now a beautiful mother,
just gave me a...

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

No! Go!
Going, going, going, going –
Touchdown!

They now give the FATHER their full attention.

OFFICER 3

Halftime!

OFFICER 2

We're all yours, buddy.

OFFICER 1

What's the story?

OFFICER 3

Let's have it.

FATHER

My wife gave me a son this morning.
You are looking at the proud father
of a baby boy!

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

What did you say?
A boy! A son!

to themselves

(I'll be damned.
A boy! A son!)



OFFICER 3
Are you sure?

FATHER
Sure, I'm sure!

OFFICER 1
Well, get the hell over here.

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3
We're comin' in!

The three POLICE BUDDIES move in and surround the FATHER in a big group hug. They celebrate with non-verbal ad libs.

_____ 24 _____

OFFICER 3
How do you feel?

FATHER
The same, only different.
Like a drunken sailor.
High as a kite.
Head in the clouds.
Like a jockey astride a carousel horse,

galloping through a field of stars.
A jockey who has just grabbed
a brass ring.
I feel like the first man on the moon.

Some Sunday soon,
I'll take my boy to church
for the Rev'rend to bless him,
to bring him closer to God,
for the ladies of the church to fuss over,
for the choir to celebrate,
for his proud mommy and daddy to show off,
to bend our knee, thanking God.
I have me a boy, a son!

_____ 25 _____

OFFICER 3
Welcome to the daddy club!

OFFICER 2
Welcome! You are the brand-new warden
of baby jail!

OFFICER 1
You are now in lock-up. Welcome!

OFFICER 3
Welcome to sleepless nights.

OFFICER 1
That precious little bundle
will murder sleep.

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3
Welcome!

OFFICER 2
To hollering in the middle of the night.

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3
Welcome!

OFFICER 2
And you won't know why.

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3
Welcome!

OFFICER 3
To infections of the...

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3
Ears, eyes, nose, throat, mouth!
Colic, teething.
Diarrhea.
Cradle cap.
Nappy rash.
Croup!

FATHER
spoken
Croup?

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3
And you don't know why...
And you never sleep...
(Sigh.)
Welcome to the daddy club!

_____ 26 _____

OFFICER 2
How did you produce a son?

OFFICER 3
We been tryin'.



OFFICER 1

You lucky so and so.

OFFICER 3

We all been tryin'.

FATHER

I did the same thing you all did.

OFFICER 3

But you got a son on the first try.

OFFICER 1

You got a son on the first try.

FATHER

I did the same thing you all did.

The same thing.

OFFICER 2

Hey! Let's rub his head for good luck!

The three POLICE BUDDIES "attack" him, rubbing his head, ad lib. The FATHER suddenly looks to them, daunted by reality.

FATHER

I've got a baby boy.
Another mouth to feed.
I'm just starting out.
A rookie cop.
A rookie paycheck.
How I'm gonna do this?

OFFICER 1

Don't sweat it, rookie.

OFFICER 2

You covered.

OFFICER 3

Covered for life.

OFFICER 1

You got insurance.

OFFICER 2

Dental!

OFFICER 3

Have all the babies you want.

OFFICER 1

Full insurance.

OFFICER 2

Dental!

OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

For life!
You are covered for life!

The beers kick in.

OFFICER 3

Here's a toast.

OFFICER 2

To father and son.

OFFICER 3

Dental...

OFFICER 1

You and your boy.
You and your son.
Live, learn, love forever.

OFFICER 2

Long may you live,
both together.

FATHER

High as a kite.
Head in the clouds.

OFFICER 3

You and your son.

FATHER

Like a jockey astride a carousel horse,
galloping through a field of stars.
A jockey who has just grabbed
a brass ring.
I feel like I'm the first man on the moon.

OFFICER 3

Side by side –
Raising a glass to your boy.

OFFICER 2

Your name continues with your son.



Suddenly the first play of the second half!

FATHER and OFFICERS 1, 2 and 3

Go!

29

Scene 4

Introduction (instrumental)

The MOTHER enters carrying the SON, who is about a year old, as well as groceries.

They cross onto the stage as the bar scene recedes. The MOTHER and the SON take a moment as the MOTHER adjusts the SON and the groceries in her arms. They exit.

Right away, literally passing each other, the SON enters as a toddler and runs across the stage. The MOTHER quickly follows, playfully chasing him. The SON evades her.

The FATHER, in his police uniform, enters. The SON runs into his arms. The FATHER playfully scoops him up into the air. The MOTHER watches lovingly for a moment. The family exits.

The SON, now 16 years old, enters his room.

30

FATHER

You not getting off that easy.
We need to talk about
what just happened.

SON

You just walk into my room, just like that.
You don't knock.

FATHER

I own and paid for ev'ry door in this house.

SON

Ha ha ha ha ha!
House?!
Railroad flat, with me down the long,
dark corridor.

FATHER

For ev'ry door in this here home.

SON

Ha ha ha ha ha – Home.
That's a laugh.
When has it ever been a home for me?

Try prison – penitentiary.
I got my own private warden.

FATHER

I own and paid for ev'ry damn door.
In. This. House.
And I'll be damned
if I'm gonna ask you for permission
to come and go through these doors.
I will do so as I please.

The SON swaggers with hip-hop movement. Filled with disrespect.

31

SON

Ch, ch-ch, ch, ch-ch, ch-ch, ch, ch,
brr-bap!
Yes, sir!
Got my own private warden.
Lock down!
This is not a drill!
Subject in custody.
Lights out!
Yes, sir!

FATHER

How many boys you know,
how many of your friends you know
livin' in Harlem got their own room?
Wasn't too long ago you slept on a couch
in the living room.

SON

I never complained.

FATHER

Damn you didn't.
We move upstairs to this here
so you could stop your bitchin' and whining
and complaining.
And you right, you were growing.

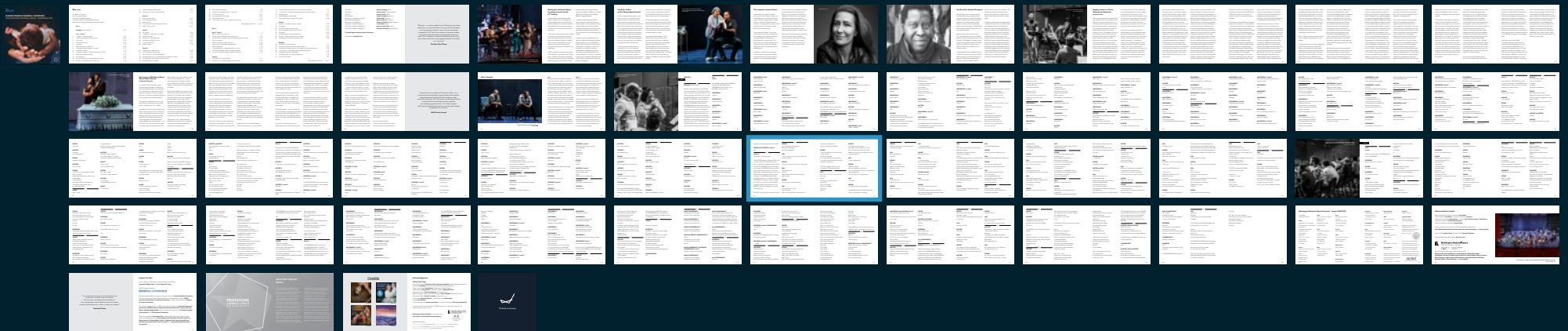
SON

I am grown.

FATHER

You grown when I say you grown.

The FATHER takes the SON's laptop and slams it shut before continuing.



FATHER

Moved up here so you could spread out
and be by yourself.

SON

By myself? When?
Not now.

FATHER

Read.
Do your homework.
Write your poetry things.
Play your music.
Do your art stuff.
Be alone.
Have your friends over.

SON

My friends over!
Nobody wants to come over with a cop...

FATHER

Officer of the Law.

SON

...on the premises.
I don't want to come over with a cop...

FATHER

Officer of the Law.

SON

...on the premises.
Not even a brother and a sister,
if I had a brother and a sister,
wants to come into the world,
to come over with a cop...

FATHER and SON

Officer of the Law!

SON

...on the premises.

FATHER

Your mother and I tried to have...
We...tried.
You gotta stop this crazy shit you doin'.
Like tonight, picked up for jumping turnstiles.
So petty and so stupid!

SON

No!
New York is the richest city in the world...
Billionaire Central.
Mass transit should be just that –
Transit for the masses.
For free.
Poor people get up and go to work ev'ry day
at two dollars and seventy-five cents.
Five-fifty round trip.
Twenty-seven fifty a five-day week.
One hundred and ten dollars a month.
One thousand three hundred twenty a year.

That's just for one person,
before gas, electricity, rent, clothes,
food on the table.
God help him if there's a lone son at home,
who yearns for a brother and a sister,
who's draining the home,
a burden.

FATHER

Four months ago, picked up for spray
painting graffiti.

SON

On abandoned buildings.

FATHER

Property that don't belong to you.

SON

Buildings being gentrified for millennials.

FATHER

Last year, you resisted arrest
and spat in a fellow officer's face.

SON

I was marching and protesting
for a real cause –
the shooting and killing of
unarmed Black men and boys
all over the country.
All over the country.

SON

Stat Stat Statue of Liberty.
The Con the Con the Constitution.
Ding dong! Liberty Bell.



American flag.
American as apple pie.
For the Black Man, all of it
a cruel joke.

FATHER
Stop tryin' to set the world on fire.

SON
Not tryin' to set the world on fire.
Tryin' to put out the fire.

FATHER
I'm not gonna lose you
to some bullshit antics on the street.

SON
The world is spinning fast.
We, as Black people, cannot sit still.
The world has changed,
is changing.

FATHER
Stop tryin' to set the world on fire.

SON
It has left you, and your age, and your
generation behind.

FATHER
The world done change because
people like me
and my age and generation
done make the change
so that you could get the right
to have your narrow behind
out there marchin'!

And protestin'!
And be spittin' in somebody's face!
The world's gonna change on its own.
Don't need you to help it.
It's not your problem.

SON
What am I supposed to do?

FATHER
Stay alive.
That's what you're supposed to do.
Look at you.
Dressed like somebody's damn gypsy.

Get a haircut, pull up your pants,
remove the jewelry.
Take off the hoodie, the hoodie,
the hoodie, the hoodie, the hoodie –
Son, you...

FATHER and SON
...a Black boy!

FATHER
A walking moving target.

FATHER and SON
A Black boy!

SON
That's exactly what I am.
Endangered species.
Black men brought into this world
as white people's fodder.
For labor and for sport.
Go so far but no further.
But we keep multiplying and climbing
and advancing.
Now they can't get rid of us fast enough.

FATHER
I don't know what the hell you talkin' about.

FATHER
You alive, ain't you?
I protect you.
I provide for you.
Clothes on your back.
Food on the table.
Roof over your head.

SON
What am I supposed to be, grateful?
That's what you supposed to do.
I didn't ask to come into this world.
I sure didn't ask for a cop for a father.

FATHER
Officer. Of. The. Law.

FATHER
I am out there in the jungle putting
my life on the line,
day into night, for you and your mama,
my life on the line.



SON

Change your job.

FATHER

Who's gonna keep things safe,
keep you safe?
Safe. Safe. Safe. Safe.

SON

You keepin' it safe for the white man,
not for me.

sung over the FATHER's oath

Look at you!
Dressed in a blue clown suit.
White man's dog.
His lackey.
Don't you know they despise you?
Don't you know, no matter
what you do for them,
it's never enough. It's never enough.

FATHER

I do solemnly swear to uphold the

Constitution of the United States and
the Constitution of the State of New York.
To faithfully discharge my duties as a police
officer of the New York Police Department
to the best of my abilities, so help me God.

SON

They sure got you fooled!

FATHER

Boy, I am minutes away from your behind!

SON

Do it!
If you struck me,
or put your arms around me,
just once,
I'd begin to know there was a human being
inside that blue clown suit
who imagines he's my father.
A Black man in blue.
Pathetic!

FATHER

That's your two-minute warning.

SON

Whatcha gonna do?
Send me to Central Park?
Get a switch so you can beat me?
Take off your belt so you can whip me?
Or why not this?
You packin'?
You can take your side arm, take me out,
and do us both a favor.
You wanna piece of me?
Come on, I'll take the first shot!

*The SON lunges at the FATHER,
trying to provoke a fight.*

I hate you.
I...hate...so...much.

FATHER

Yes, my son.
I know you do.
You hate me very much.

SON

I do. I do. Let me go.
I want outta here.

SON

Let me go.

*The SON crumples to the floor. The FATHER
catches him, softening his fall.*

FATHER

No, my son, I will never let you go.
Not tonight, not tomorrow, not ever.
You my son.
I held you like this when you were born.
I lost you somehow along the way.
I found you now.
I'm never gonna let you go.
You gonna stay right here in my arms.
Tonight, tomorrow, forever.
You my son, and your daddy loves you.





Christian Simmons, Martin Luther Clark, Joshua Blue, Gordon Hawkins, Kenneth Kellogg, and Aaron Crouch © Yassine El Mansouri

Disc 2

1

Act II

Scene 1

Harlem. Church office. The FATHER meets with the REVEREND.

REVEREND

What is your name, my son?

FATHER

Ain't got no name.

REVEREND

Ev'ryone has a name.

FATHER

I don't.

Call me what you like.

Jones. Johnson. Williams. White.

Jackson. Washington. Jefferson.

Hand-me-down names.

Ownership names.

Slave names.

Or you can call me by a number.

Number two.

Or zero.

Or a letter.

X.

REVEREND

A name tells me from which path you came and to where you may begin again.

FATHER

My name doesn't change who I am to others

who see me under a name they've given me and called me since time began - Nigger.

I am America's nigger on the street.

Fear me.

2

REVEREND

Ah! You are the father whose child was lost.

FATHER

He was never lost!

My child was never lost!



You can find him on a cold metal slab
or in the drawer of a human file cab'net.

REVEREND

Ah! Yes, your child was hurt.

FATHER

Did he scrape a knee? No.
A bone in his throat? No.
A bloody nose?
A black eye?
A stomachache?
Sprained ankle?
Poison ivy?
Bitten by a dog?
Scratched by a cat?
Ear infection, something in the eye?
Toothache?
Splinter?
Bee sting?
Blister?
Fever?
Pink eye?
No! No! No! No! And no!
Tell me how my child was hurt.

REVEREND

I believe he was shot.

FATHER

Believe?

REVEREND

He was shot.

FATHER

By whom? Say it.

REVEREND

A police officer.

FATHER

A police officer.
A cop killed my son.
A cop killed my boy.
One of my brothers in blue
killed my boy—
my baby boy.
Ah!

REVEREND

Ah!
Your heart is broken,
I hear it knocking against your ribs.
Let me give you mine.

FATHER

My son lies naked in a cold, dark morgue,
in a drawer.
He's afraid of the dark.
Needs to sleep with the light on.
Oh, he sleeps with his baby boo bear, oh.

REVEREND

I need for you to keep the faith.

FATHER

Keep it yourself.
And keep this.

REVEREND

What is this, my son?

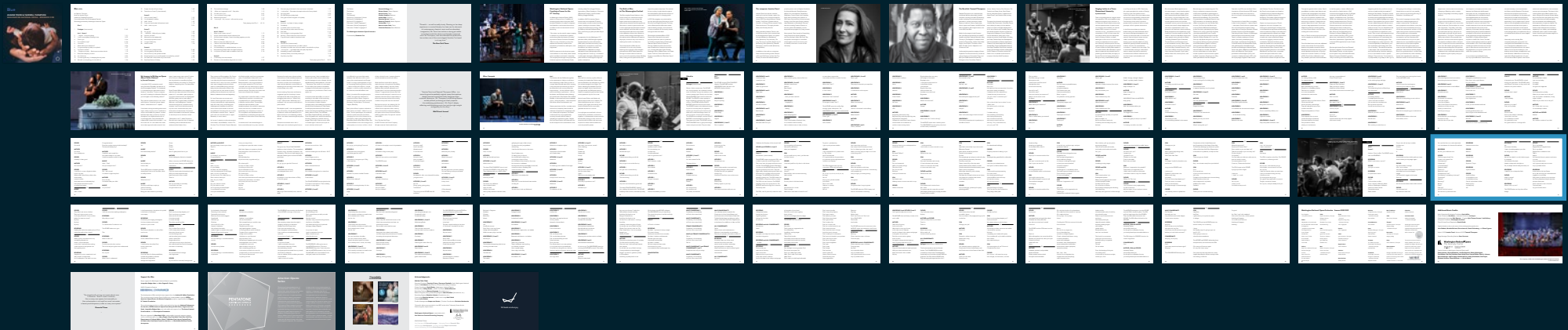
*The FATHER takes out his police officer
badge.*

FATHER

This is my badge.
Shaped like an irregular heart.
This is my shield.
Shaped like a molded tin star.
Take it.
Keep it.
No more the farce to protect and serve,
no more.
I lay my burden down.
I ain't gonna study war no more.
I lay my burden down.

REVEREND

In the name of all the Saints,
let us, like the song, let us break bread
together on our knees.
God inside you allows you to see that.
As Christ passed among his enemies,
this pain shall pass.
Christ wore the crown of thorns.
Trust and pray.
Lay your burden down.



FATHER

They didn't see me as a father.
They won't give my son to me.
How many shoes do I have to shine
before I'm seen as a man?
My boy!
My boy!
My boy!

REVEREND

Healing lies within the tender purity of God,
within the walls of this church.

5

FATHER

When my boy was taken from me,
something entered me
which I cannot describe.
It was then I resolved that nothing
under Heaven would prevent me
from getting even.

REVEREND

Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord.
Will yourself to forgiveness,
for in redemption, we await our own.

6

FATHER

I did not come here seeking redemption.

REVEREND

Why did you come?

FATHER

To confess what I'm about to do.

The FATHER takes out a gun.

This.

REVEREND

What is that for?

FATHER

For the man who shot my boy.
This is the only thing the man understands.

REVEREND

No, my son.

FATHER

What I don't understand

is the hammering in the prison of my skull,
in the heart of my heart,
now empty.

REVEREND

God hears your longing and regrets.
He has a bucket and a towel,
and he's in your corner.

FATHER

The God you describe is a white God –
not for me.

REVEREND

God is neither Black nor white.

FATHER

I cannot allow this white God,
let this white man
to go free.

REVEREND

He is the God of infinite possibilities,
toward the possibility towards
change and forgiveness,
change and forgiveness.

FATHER

Don't you know they despise you?
Don't you know, no matter
what you do for them,
it's never enough.
It's never enough.
The white cop will go free.

7

FATHER

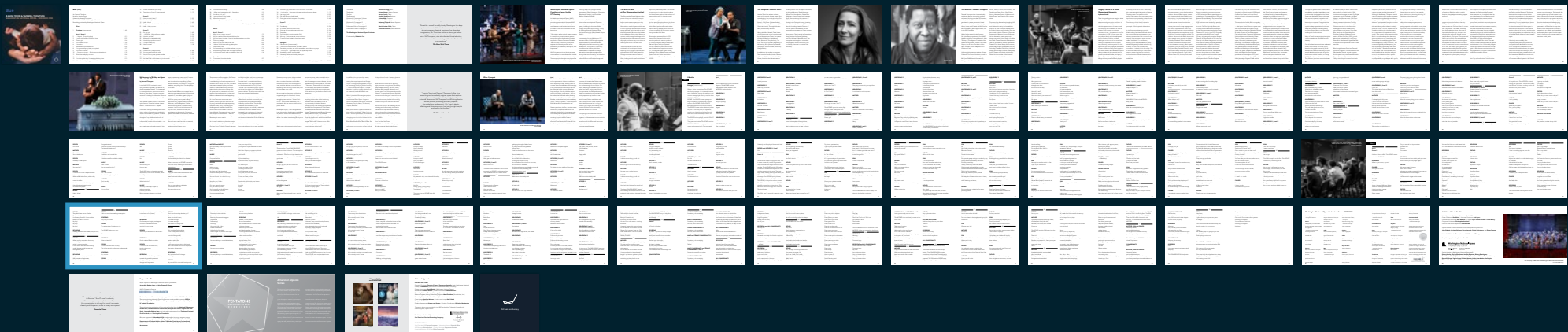
Only a white God would sit
in his cloudy white Heaven,
when they shovel my son
into the hard ground,
and the white justice system
under a white God
forgets about him.
I will want to know who is this fraud
who calls himself the God of all people –
the savior of humanity.

REVEREND

Ah, he is the God of change
and forgiveness.

FATHER

My son will lie in the cold, hard ground.



In the bowels of the earth.
Drowning in the cold rain.
Parched by the hot sun.
Eaten by worms and maggots.
Smothered!
Suffocating!
Choking!
His mouth full of dirt,
forever in darkness.
He's afraid of the dark –
needs a light on, needs a door open.
Weeds will grow at his grave.

8

REVEREND

You are walking in a terrible darkness,
my son.

FATHER

You are not my father.

REVEREND

You are walking in a terrible darkness,
my brother.

FATHER

You are not my brother.

REVEREND

I believe, I must believe
all men are brothers.
God created both you and this man
in his own image.
Therefore you two men
are linked together – forever –
in God's goodness and in his blood.
To take a life is a grave crime,
a deep and mortal sin.
A dishonor to your first and
original father, God.
Something is happening in this world,
has happened in this country
to shape this man to do
what he did to hurt you so.
Now something pushes you
to do what you think you must do,
to fight what you see as evil and unjust.
You must not become evil
to justify your evil.

*The REVEREND then touches the forehead
of the FATHER in the sign of the cross.*

Ah!

9

REVEREND

May restoring waters clear the night's
weeping, bringing you salvation.
Redeem the hours wept clean
from lost loves and lost lives,
from slaughters and heartaches,
from injustices, misunderstandings,
and fear.
In your hour of need, may...

10

FATHER

In my hour of need
I seek no salvation from you.
No incessant ceremony of bells,
the everlasting incense.
No slipping the holy bread into my mouth.
No Dominus Vobiscum
from an endless, blind, mindless procession
of the faithful.
I seek no arms of comfort.

No laying of hands.
No anointing of oils.
Don't wanna hear you talk your talk.
Bromides!
Mumbo-jumbo!
A broken, rusty record intoning litanies,
the fiction of the Bible,
the useless spitting out of spirituals
by happy, happy Negroes!

In my hour of need,
I seek no salvation from you.
What I need from you
is the fire this time.

11

Scene 2

*The REVEREND's office gives way to
the MOTHER's bedroom. The same
GIRLFRIENDS from Act 1 have arrived to
help the MOTHER prepare to bury her son.
The MOTHER, stoic and rendered mute
with grief, stares out the window.*



GIRLFRIEND 2

Come away from the window.
Ain't nobody out there you need to see.
Ain't nobody comin' home.
No. No. No.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Come away from the window.
Ain't nobody out there you need to see.
Ain't nobody comin' home.
No. No. No.

GIRLFRIEND 3

You can look down the alley,
you can look across the street,
search the school yard if you want.
Ain't nobody comin' home, not today.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Come away from the window!
Ain't nobody out there you need to see.
Ain't nobody comin' home.

————— 12 —————

GIRLFRIEND 3

She sits in this matchbox disguised
as a house.

GIRLFRIEND 2

A star may fall and set the house on fire.
A bird may swoop down and tear out
and eat her innards.
She wouldn't even raise her eyes.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Along with the rodents and roaches,
we have swept away the shrines of candles
cluttering the stoops and doorways.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Enter the sad sorority.
Mothers without sons.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Our boys...

GIRLFRIEND 2

Walking, talking, playing.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Just being somebody's son.
Somebody's child.
Somebody's baby.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

While being Black.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Then the man came and
took her child out from under us.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Our baby!

GIRLFRIEND 3

Swatting him down like a fly.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

Open season.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

The uniformed and packing
great white hunter.

*The GIRLFRIENDS bring the MOTHER to
stand and help her into her dress.*

————— 13 —————

GIRLFRIEND 3

She was lying in her bed.
In her own home.
In her bed.
Thunder came knocking at her door.
A "No Knock" thunder at her door.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Say her name.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Shots fired!
At the unarmed Black woman
while she was lying in her bed.
Could it be anyone?

GIRLFRIEND 2

Say her name.

GIRLFRIEND 1

He has business in Harlem.
Business in Detroit.



Business in Ferguson.
Madison.
Chicago.
Baltimore.
Miami.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Yes...
Any Black woman.
Shot. Shot in her own home.
Asleep while being Black.
While she was lying in her bed.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

We see you.

GIRLFRIEND 3

The butchers sharpening their knives.
Hunting the dark meat.

GIRLFRIEND 2

The fresh kill.

GIRLFRIEND 1

The trophy.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Savage hunters.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Locked and loaded.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Our babies!

GIRLFRIEND 3

Bloodied with night sticks, our babies.

GIRLFRIEND 1

Battered with batons, our babies.

GIRLFRIEND 2

These sons of bitches.
These indifferent men hacking
our children to pieces.
Like a squealing pig.
Like a dog in the alley.

GIRLFRIENDS 1, 2 and 3

Our babies. Oh!

14

GIRLFRIEND 3

Look at her.

GIRLFRIEND 1

She wears the captive shroud
of stony death,
dressed in forever black.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Color of her child.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Pull out the pictures.
Pull out the baby pictures.
Pull out the birthday pictures.
School pictures.
Picnic pictures.
Put the pictures in our coat pockets.
In our purses and our pocketbooks.
To be laid out along her son, laid out.
Let them see him as he was, not as he is now.

15

GIRLFRIEND 3

Let us go forth.

GIRLFRIEND 1

The circus is in town.

GIRLFRIEND 2

Let us begin the long crawl
towards the cemetery.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

We have been here before.
We will walk the city blocks.
The stations of the cross.

GIRLFRIEND 3

Following the car that carries our baby.

GIRLFRIENDS 1 and 2

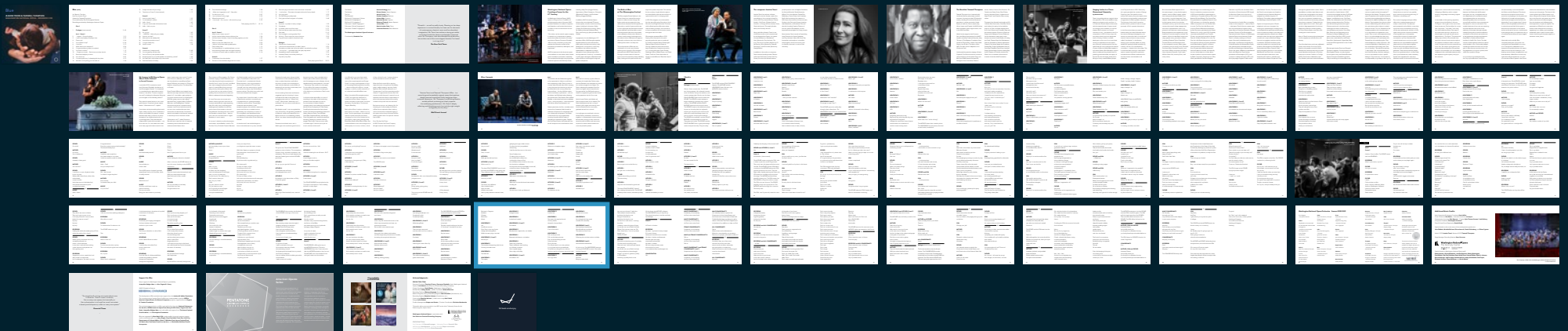
We have been here before.

*It's time to go. The GIRLFRIENDS attempt
to bring the MOTHER to stand. She resists,
lurching forward.*

16

MOTHER

Oh God!
Bring my baby back!



Any way you choose, I'll take him.
 Take away his hands and feet,
 but bring him back to me.
 Bring him back blind,
 but bring him back to me.
 His face on a milk carton – missing –
 but alive.
 Uselessly I water this plant of hope,
 for we are not one of God's fav'rites.
 Please, God, see me, hear me. Oh!
 Dear sweet Jesus, I am on my knees
 beggin' you.
 Please, PLEASE!

17

MOTHER

God, give me back any part of my baby.
 I'll never ask for anything more.
 Over and over I have stormed Heaven
 with prayers,
 for we are not one of God's fav'rites.
 I have punished my knees beggin',
 beggin' my Jesus to gather my baby
 in his embrace
 and bring my baby back to me.

*On her knees, the MOTHER collapses.
 The GIRLFRIENDS hurry to help her up.
 They slowly bring her to her feet and help
 her offstage.*

18

Scene 3

A Church in Harlem.

REVEREND

My heart...my heart is heavy tonight.
 Ev'ry part is heavy.
 Artery and ventricle is torn asunder.
 My heart is broken and battered.
 Dashed upon the rocks,
 tormented and terrified.
 My heart is shaken.
 My Lord, everyone here under
 the sound of my voice
 is wounded, bruised and brought low.

CONGREGATION

Oh...

19

MALE CONGREGANT 1

Somebody, oh somebody,
 oh God, must come forth.

MALE CONGREGANT 2

Somebody, oh somebody,
 oh God, must come forth.

FEMALE CONGREGANT 2

Somebody, oh somebody,
 oh God, must come forth.

MALE and FEMALE CONGREGANTS 2

Tell us –
 Somebody, oh somebody,
 oh God, must come forth.
 Tell us!

MALE CONGREGANT 1 and FEMALE CONGREGANTS 1 and 3

Scrape the wax off your wings.

MALE CONGREGANT 2

Somebody, oh somebody,
 oh God, must come forth.

MALE CONGREGANT 3

I do solemnly swear to uphold the
 Constitution of the United States and
 the Constitution of the State of New York.
 To faithfully discharge my duties as a police
 officer of the New York Police Department
 to the best of my abilities, so help me God.

ALL CONGREGANTS

Tell us!
 What crimes and misdemeanors –
 What sins committed by our ancestors –
 That we, as a people, are made to suffer so?

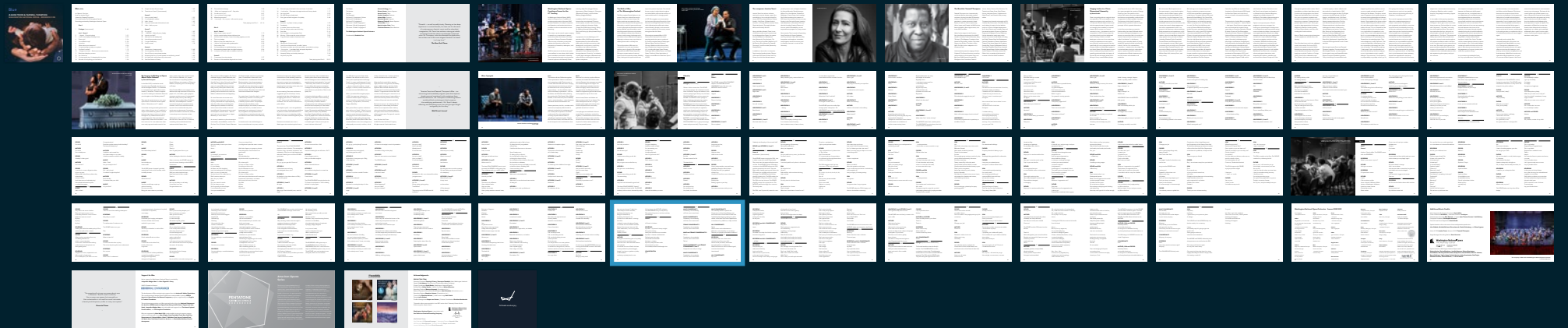
20

REVEREND

A mother, clear out of her mind
 with the loss of her man child
 cannot recall, recollect, remember
 ever giving birth to a baby boy.
 When she cried out with a mother's grief,
 none but Jesus heard.
 Jesus heard!

ALL CONGREGANTS

My Lord!



REVEREND

A desperate father,
having lost his way –
A grieving father,
having lost his child,
his only son.

REVEREND and ALL CONGREGANTS

His only son.
Jesus.

REVEREND

He needs us to help him find his way back
into the loving arms...

REVEREND and ALL CONGREGANTS

...of God.

_____ 21 _____

REVEREND

God, we ask you,
take care of this boy.
Look out for him.
Welcome him to your house,
to his new home in Heaven.
Let him lie deep in the valleys and gorges

of the palm of your hand.
Find him a room near a galaxy
burst of stars.
He will love the light when he sleeps.

_____ 22 _____

The FATHER in his own world.

FATHER

Stay alive.
That’s what you supposed to do.
You a Black boy.

A walking, moving target.
A Black boy.
Take off the hoodie...
the hoodie, the hoodie, the hoodie,
the hoodie, the hoodie, the hoodie,
the hoodie, the hoodie.

_____ 23 _____

FATHER

Son, the light is turning amber. Run!
Run across the street. No!
Don’t run. Walk. Don’t walk.
Walk. Don’t walk. Don’t walk!
Walk! Don’t...
Don’t wear your ball cap backwards.

Don’t wear a hoodie.
Don’t carry shiny objects.
Don’t get a tattoo.
Don’t pierce your ears.
Don’t shave your head.
Don’t get an Afro.
Don’t make a fist.
Don’t sit on the curb.
Don’t sit on the hood of a car.
Don’t wear cornrows.
Don’t look the man in his eye.
Look the man in the eye.
Don’t make quick movements.
Don’t put your hands in your pockets.
Don’t remove your shirt.
Don’t lie on the grass.
Don’t wear sunglasses.
Don’t spit.
Don’t chew.
Don’t laugh.
Don’t bounce.
Have a photo ID.
Have a driver’s license.
Social Security card.
Voter registration.

Passport.
Dog tag.
Library card.
Don’t run! Don’t run! Don’t run!
You a BLACK BOY!
The hoodie...
the hoodie.

*The FATHER returns to his seat next to the
MOTHER. Lights are restored to the Church.*

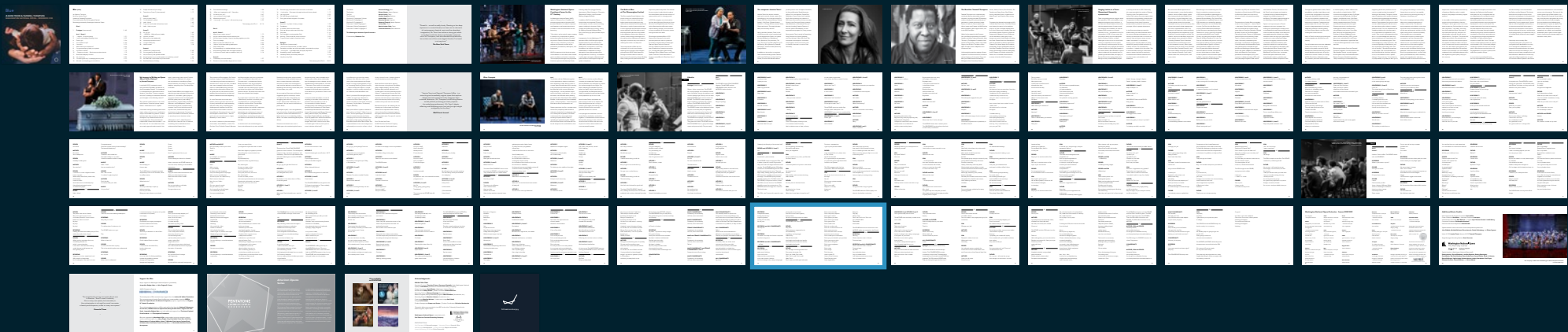
_____ 24 _____

REVEREND

We sing...
Christ wore the crown of thorns.
Trust and pray.

REVEREND and ALL CONGREGANTS

Christ wore the crown of thorns.
Trust and pray.
My God!
Lay my burden down.
I lay my burden down.
I ain’t gonna study war no more.
I lay my burden down.



GIRLFRIEND 2 and OFFICERS 2 and 3

I ain't gonna study war no more.

The MOTHER rises and slowly crosses to her son's coffin.

MOTHER

Take care of my boy.

Look out for him.

Welcome him into your house,
to his new room in Heaven.

Let him lie deep in the valleys and gorges
in the palm of your hand.

Find him a room with a galaxy
burst of stars.

He needs to sleep with the light on.

Now I'll gently hand him to you.

25

MOTHER

Cup your hand under his head and neck.

With your other hand and arm,
bend and crook it like a cradle.

My boy.

FATHER

I lay my burden down.

My boy.

MOTHER and FATHER

Hold our baby close to your chest.

That's it.

That's it.

REVEREND

What more to say.

We've said it all.

Let the church say Amen.

ALL CONGREGANTS

Amen.

26

Epilogue *(instrumental introduction)*

The funeral transforms into the family's kitchen. The CONGREGATION remains, motionless, in their chairs. The sideboard is loaded with soul food which the MOTHER has prepared. The SON and the FATHER enter. They are having the argument from Act 1.

27

FATHER

I don't know what the hell
you talkin' about.

I am out there in the jungle putting my life
on the line.

SON

Change your job!

MOTHER

Come on!

SON

Dressed in a blue clown suit.

White man's dog.

His lackey.

FATHER

I do solemnly swear to uphold the
Constitution of the United States and
the Constitution of the State of New York.

MOTHER

I hear you all inside.

Come on now.

FATHER

So help me God.

SON

Don't you know they despise you?

Don't you know?

No matter what you do for them.

28

MOTHER

Set aside your sides, eat some set-asides

I set aside for my boys.

My boys.

I prophesy your insides will liquefy.

Your outsides will cry for delicious dishes
that wishes

they were inside you.

SON

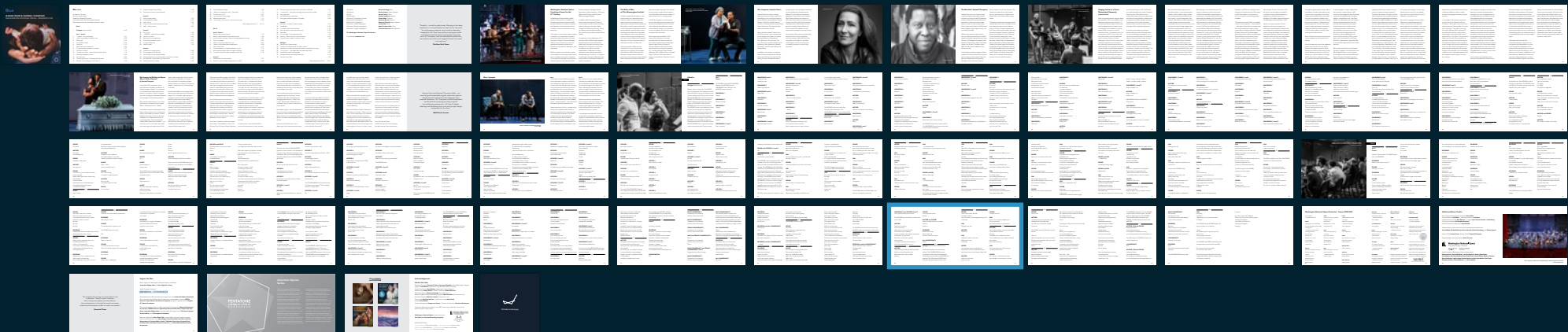
You wanna piece of me? Come on!

I'll take the first shot!

FATHER

No, my son, I will never let you go.

Not tonight, not tomorrow, not ever.



FATHER

You my son.

MOTHER

I got deep fried, red-eyed, drip-dried,
sundried, stir-fried, lake-side,
sea-side, true-ried, and unried!
Come on!

The FATHER and the SON enter into the kitchen.

That's it!

We're all together, just as we should be.
Partake your senses full, feast your eyes.
A festivity of food,
made with love.
Hmm...

MOTHER

Kneaded, pinched, and prodded,
sliced and diced.
Pulled, peeled and pounded.
Scrimped and scrambled.

Oh, with the rhythm of my heartbeat.
Oh, made from the marrow of memory.
Oh, made with love
for my boys...for my boys.
Hmm...

Scolding the SON, she removes his hoodie from his head.

Mmm...

But ah, for my vegan son,
for my little baby boy,
we have a collage of greens.
Chard, collards, kale, beets, turnip,
mustard, dandelion,
yams and rutabagas,
succotash, okra, boiled peanuts,
sweet watermelon rind pickles,
butter beans, black-eyed peas,
stewed tomatoes.

Mm...Mm...Mm.

And oh, for my big baby boy,
chicken stew with dumplings,
calf's liver and onion,

barbecue ribs,
the enthusiastic stink of chit'lins,
the colored's caviar.
Raise a cup of sweet tea and
pot liquor,
and sweet potato pie,
deep dish peach cobbler,
banana pudding ringed
with wafers,
golden brown
buttermilk biscuits,
cast-iron corn bread.

The food of our ancestors,
putting its arms around us,
holding, hurling us together.
Survived.
Thrived.
On set-asides.

From the banging of the pots
at morning time
to the clank of the bone at night,
I thank you, God.

The MOTHER attempts to join the FATHER and the SON's hands for grace. The SON pulls his hand away from the FATHER's. Then the SON offers his hand to the FATHER. The SON offers his hand to the MOTHER.

MOTHER, SON and FATHER

Heavenly Father,
we humbly thank you
for the glorious abundant bounty
you have placed upon the table before us.

The SON brings his FATHER's hand to his cheek. Forgiveness.

CONGREGANTS

Ooo...

MOTHER, SON and FATHER

Heavenly Father,
we humbly thank you
for the glorious abundant bounty
you have placed upon the table before us.



MALE CONGREGANTS

Oh Provider,
through your love
may we know each other deeper.
In your name, we pray...

REVEREND

We pray...
God, we see you as the Father
who gave his only Son.
How many sons do we have to give
before you can't hold one more?

CONGREGANTS

We pray, oh we pray.

REVEREND

God...
How many sons do we have to give?
We pray...

The CONGREGATION slowly exits.

SON

Hey Mom,
hey Dad –
I gotta show you my new art piece.
A collage...

*The FATHER and the MOTHER slowly rise,
back to reality. It is a memory.*

I know...
Ms. Bradley says it's going to get me
into R.I.S.D.
She's going to write me
a bomb recommendation.

*The MOTHER and FATHER, before they leave
the apartment, turn and look at the SON.*

Of course you'll see me again.
It's only four hours away.

*One more look, then they leave him, alone,
happily describing his future to empty chairs.
He is eating, mouth full.*

So good.

No, Dad, I can't this weekend.
One more. One more, a silent protest.
Nothing will happen.
You could come with me.
Nothing will happen.
Nothing...



Washington National Opera Orchestra · Season 2020/2021

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Principal Conductor

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Oleg Rylatko, *Concertmaster*
Eric Lee, *Associate Concertmaster*
Ko Sugiyama,
Assistant Concertmaster

Zino Bogachev #
Joan Cataldo
Michelle Kim
Karen Lowry-Tucker
Susan Midkiff
Kayla Moffett**
Laura Park

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Najin Kim, *Assistant Principal*
Richard Chang #
Xi Chen
Jessica Dan Fan
Martha Kaufman
Timothy Macek
Victoria Noyes
86

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Allyson Goodman, *Principal*
Phillipe Chao #
Leon Neal**
Elizabeth Pulju-Owen
Uri Wassertzug

Cello

Amy Frost Baumgarten,
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Ignacio Alcover #**
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Christian Gray

Flute

Adria Sternstein Foster,
Principal
Stephani Stang-Ferry,
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Piccolo

John Lagerquist

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Ashley Booher

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Samuel Blair

Contrabassoon

Samuel Blair

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Bass Trombone

Stephen Dunkel

Tuba

Seth Cook, *Principal*

Timpani

Jonathan Rance, *Principal*
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Assistant Principal

Percussion

John Spirtas, *Principal*
Gregory Akagi

Harp

Susan Robinson, *Principal*

Piano/Celesta

Kevin Miller*

begins alphabetical listing of musicians who participate in a system of revolving chairs within the string section

* Guest musician / ** On leave

Librarian

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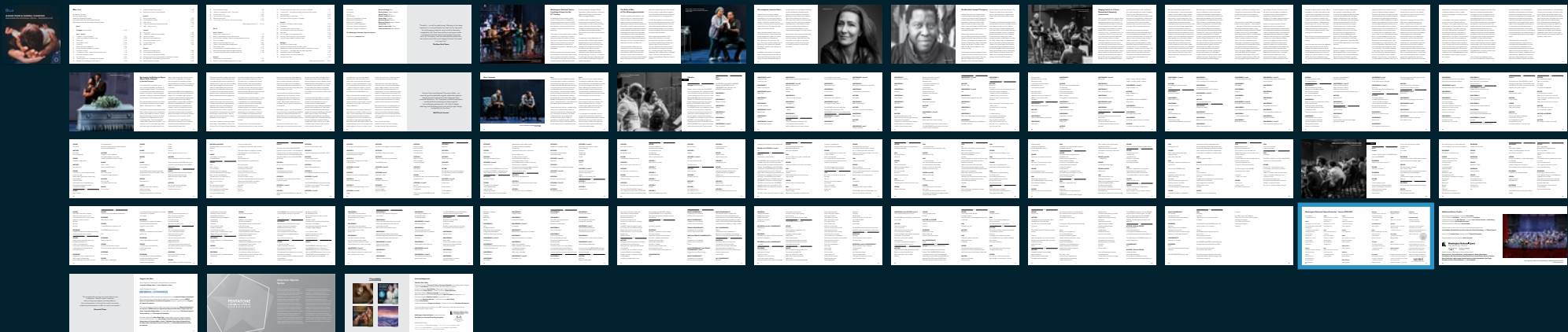
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Ashley Stonebraker,
Orchestra Manager

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 Cover Conductor **Ken Weiss** | Assistant Conductor **Joel Ayau**
 Orchestration Associate **Rick Bassett** | Copyists **Kyle Tieman-Strauss & Ashil Mistry**
 Composer's Assistant **Christopher Anselmo**
 Piano & Vocal Score Preparation **Daniel Rudin**

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Stage Manager, Recording Sessions **Sean Corcoran**

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The company of *Blue* with the Washington National Opera Orchestra
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~

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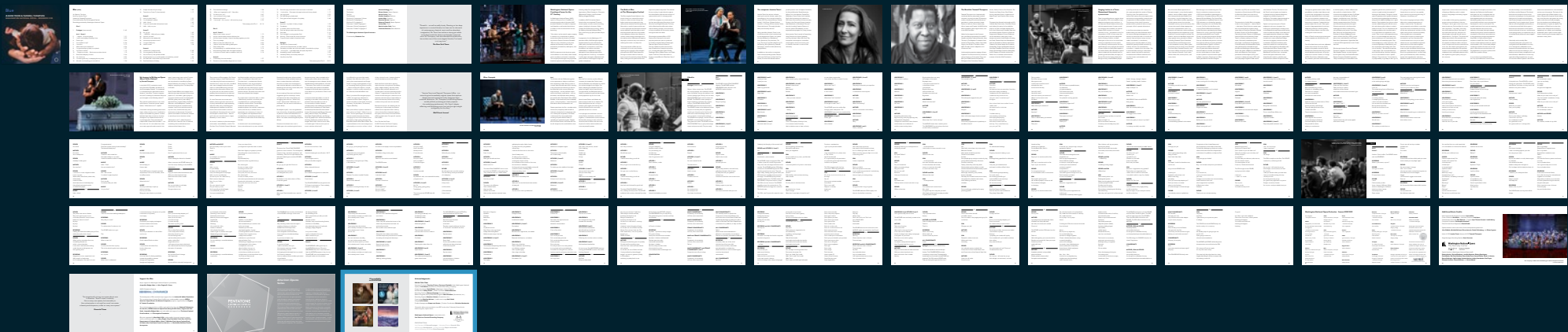


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