

A NEW OPERA

THE ONION



A workshop performance of Scenes 5-7

Music by Eric Sawyer

Libretto by Eric Sawyer and Ron Bashford

Directed by Ron Bashford

Magistra, a neuroscientist and inventor

Miranda, Magistra's daughter

Octavian, Magistra's assistant

Cal, Magistra's ex

The Onion

Dana Lynne Varga

Corrine Byrne

David Thomas Mather

David Small

Ifeanyi Epum

Cover Cast: Kelsey Moisan, Emma West, Joshua Dixon, Harry Otero-Rivera, David Smith

Production Assistants: Kelsey Moisan, Emma West

This performance is supported by a generous grant from the H. Axel Schupf '57 Fund for Intellectual Life.

Summary of previous scenes:

Magistra is a neuroscientist living on an island with her teenage daughter, Miranda. For the last five years, Magistra and her assistant Octavian have been building the Onion, a device that brings back memories with a sense of visceral reality. The day has come to test the Onion on a human subject. Magistra and Octavian try to recruit Miranda to test the invention, but Miranda refuses, telling her mother, "You broke the family."

So instead, Magistra uses the Onion to re-experience her first meeting with Octavian. Afterwards, Magistra reveals that, years before, Miranda's long-absent father, Cal, stole her research and claimed credit for it as his own, leading to their break-up. Magistra believes that Miranda witnessed the theft as a small child, and hopes that if Miranda uses the Onion to revive the memory, she will understand why Magistra left her father. Octavian rushes off to catch the last ferry off the island. Left alone, Magistra considers her options before going to bed.

Having missed the ferry, Octavian returns to discover Miranda playing with the Onion's components. Aided by Octavian, Miranda uses the Onion to relive her earliest memory of Cal, and the song he used to sing to her. She also remembers his crime and her parents' break-up. Magistra discovers the pair using the Onion, and confronts Miranda, who nevertheless continues to blame Magistra for driving her father away. Infuriated, Magistra storms off. Miranda sweetly bids Octavian goodnight, and Octavian sleeps alone on the couch. In the dead of night, The Onion comes to life as Octavian's alter-ego Octavia, and threatens to expose Octavian's inner life to Magistra and Miranda if he won't come to terms with it himself. Troubled, Octavian sleeps fitfully until woken by Magistra the following morning.

Ron Bashford directed the Sawyer/Erdman opera *The Scarlet Professor* in 2017, and also their musical, *My Evil Twin*, which performs at the Toronto Fringe Festival this summer. Ron has directed more than 90 productions of plays, musicals, opera, and multimedia works at regional theater companies, and at NYC venues such as Carnegie

Hall, The Joyce Soho, The Knitting Factory, and Joe's Pub at The Public Theater in NYC. Ron anticipates that his film of *Emily & Sue, an a cappella pop opera*, will screen in Amherst this fall. Ron teaches at Amherst College.

Corrine Byrne has made her career singing repertoire from the Medieval to Baroque era as well as music by living composers. She has made solo appearances with the American Classical Orchestra, the New York City Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, REBEL Baroque Ensemble, Symphony New Hampshire, Lorelei Ensemble, Emmanuel Music, the Lake George Music Festival Orchestra, and One World Symphony. Byrne is a core member of Cut Circle, Polyphemus, Ensemble Musica Humana and The Byrne:Kozar:Duo, recently featured on NPR, American Public Media's Performance Today, and New Yorker Magazine's 2017 Notable Recordings. Byrne is a member of Beyond Artists, and is currently serving as a faculty member and the Chair of Vocal Studies at the Longy School of Music at Bard College.

Ifeanyi Epum is noted for his warm voice, polished musicianship and versatility. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, he delved into classical music by chance after he was mandated to join the church choir as part of requirements for confirmation. He was admitted to Delta state university, Abraka, Nigeria where he obtained a degree in music and was awarded the best undergraduate student in the faculty of arts. As a soloist, he performed with the music society of Nigeria and Laz Ekwueme Chorale, exploring the works of Handel, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn and works of Nigerian composers like Laz Ekwueme, Ayo Bankole, Sam Ojukwu, S.K Oretimehin. He was awarded the first prize for the Kingsley Inupee Idegun Award for Countertenors.

Praised for his "amusing" and "eloquently versatile voice" (Boston Music Intelligencer), baritone **David Thomas Mather** embraces a wide body of repertoire and draws inspiration from both classical and contemporary styles in his singing. A freelancer and section leader in Boston, David works regularly with groups including Emmanuel Music, Carduus, Boston Opera Collaborative, and others; recent performances include Orff's *Carmina Burana*, *BWV 106*, First Witch in Eccles' *Macbeth* with the Purcell Society of Boston, and solos from Handel's *Messiah: Part the First* with the Trinity Church Choirs. He holds his Masters degree in Historical Performance from the Longy School of Music of Bard College.

Eric Sawyer is the composer of an extensive catalog ranging from chamber music and songs to orchestral music to opera. His operas *Our American Cousin*, *The Garden of Martyrs*, and *The Scarlet Professor* have received New England premieres in recent years, the last two with librettos by Harley Erdman. *The Scarlet Professor* received The American Prize for best opera in 2018. A cabaret musical, *My Evil Twin*, is enjoying a run of performances across the Northeast. Mr. Sawyer is on the music faculty of Amherst College. His music is available on the Albany Records and BMOP/sound labels. A new recording of orchestra music with soloists is forthcoming.

David Small enjoys a vibrant career including performances of 65 roles in 54 different operas. Having performed Rossini's Figaro over 100 times, his repertoire includes Rigoletto, Germont, Scarpia, and many others. He has appeared with the St. Louis Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Cincinnati May Festival Orchestra, Austin Symphony in works such as Brahms' Requiem, Durufle Requiem, Elijah and recitals with pianists such as Anton Nel, Jean Anderson Collier, Claude Cymerman, and Joachim Reinhuber. In 2016 he performed Samuel Barber's Dover Beach with the Shanghai Quartet and Schubert's Winterreise for the Chamber Music Society of Detroit. Selected as a NATS Master Teacher in 2011 (one of four chosen nationally), he was an invited presenter for the 2008 NATS National Convention and has written articles for Classical Singer Magazine.

Praised for her "radiant soprano", soprano **Dana Lynne Varga** is a sought-after singer of both opera and oratorio. She performs frequently as a soloist at Carnegie Hall; most recently in the Mozart *Requiem* (Manhattan Concert Productions) and Brahms *Requiem* (Mid-America Productions). Favorite opera roles performed include Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, Musetta in *La bohème*, Rosalinda in *Die Fledermaus*, Micaëla in *Carmen* and Alcina in *Alcina*. She was the first place winner of the 2016 Classical Singer National Vocal Competition. An accomplished voice teacher, career coach and producer, Dana is a fierce advocate for singers, devoted to progressive change in the classical vocal industry.

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