

# RESONANCE

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ON STAGE: *RESONANCE*  
SPRING PERFORMANCE SERIES  
MAR 28–MAY 11, 2024

MUSEUM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
CHICAGO



## Schedule

**Anna Martine Whitehead,**  
*FORCE! an opera in three acts*

Edlis Neeson Theater

Mar 28, 7:30 pm  
Mar 29, 7:30 pm  
Mar 30, 7:30 pm **CC AD**

Run time is approx. 90–100 minutes with no intermission.

This performance begins in the theater lobby. Audiences will take a behind-the-scenes route to their seats with the performers as their guides. All seating for this performance is on stage. A live band plays in close proximity to the audience. The performance includes the use of theatrical haze. The performance features loud sounds and bright, moving lights throughout.

**Samita Sinha,**  
*Tremor*

Edlis Neeson Theater

Apr 18, 7:30 pm  
Apr 19, 7:30 pm  
Apr 20, 7:30 pm **AD**

Run time is approx. 60–75 minutes with no intermission.

Seating for this performance is general admission and on stage. A limited number of cushions are available for sitting on the floor, and provide the closest proximity to the performance. If you require a chair, please speak with a staff member who can assist you. The performance includes the use of theatrical haze. Some loud sounds may occur throughout. There will be intervals of very low light, including complete darkness at times.

**Laura Ortman,**  
*Smoke Rings Shimmers Endless Blur*

Edlis Neeson Theater

Apr 26, 7:30 pm  
Apr 27, 7:30 pm **AD**

Run time is approx. 45–60 minutes with no intermission.

This performance includes the use of theatrical haze, moving images, and loud, sometimes abrupt, sounds.

**7NMS | Marjani Forté-Saunders and  
Everett Saunders,**  
*Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist*

Edlis Neeson Theater

May 9, 7:30 pm  
May 10, 7:30 pm  
May 11, 7:30 pm **CC AD**

Run time is approx. 60 minutes with no intermission.

This performance includes the use of theatrical haze and moving images projected throughout the space.

Ear plugs are available upon request for all performances. If you need wheelchair seating or have mobility impairments, staff members are available to assist you.

**ASL** American Sign Language  
**CC** Closed Captions  
**AD** Audio Description

## Related Programs

**Workshop: 7NMS | Marjani Forté-Saunders  
and Everett Saunders**  
The Dance Center, Columbia College  
Mar 2, 1 pm

The artists of 7NMS share the history and ideas of Black radical expression that inform *Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist*.

**Attunement: A Workshop with Samita  
Sinha and Amber Jamilla Musser**  
Northwestern University, Abbott Hall  
Apr 8, 6 pm

Hosted in conjunction with Musser's new book, *Between Shadows and Noise*, this workshop for graduate students in performance studies is an immersive experience that focuses on ways to connect with the body and voice through movement and performance.

**Concert: Laura Ortman**  
Elastic Arts, Logan Square  
Apr 24, 8 pm

An intimate evening of original compositions and improvisation with Laura Ortman.

**Listening Party and Reading: 7NMS | Marjani  
Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders**  
May 3, 6:30 pm  
Miyagi Records, Bronzeville

Over food and drinks, the artists of 7NMS share an album and read from a book developed alongside their work, *Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist*.

**Post-performance talk: 7NMS | Marjani  
Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders**  
Edlis Neeson Theater  
May 11

Following their May 11 performance of *Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist*, join the artists of 7NMS for a discussion about their creative process and an audience Q&A. There will be a short break between the performance and the talk.

To access these Program Notes online, or to read them in Spanish, visit: [mcachicago.org/resonance](https://mcachicago.org/resonance)

Para acceder a las Notas del Programa en línea o leerlas en español, visita [mcachicago.org/resonancia](https://mcachicago.org/resonancia)

## A Note from the Curator

This year's On Stage series, *Resonance*, brings together four performances by artists exploring sound and how it moves us: Anna Martine Whitehead, Samita Sinha, Laura Ortman, and 7NMS | Marjani Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders. Through distinct ideas, practices, and forms, their works explore how sound resonates in, through, and from the body; how it vibrates in the space between oneself and others; and how lived experiences are voiced in society with resounding force.

We often use the word “resonant” to describe sounds which are full, deep, and sonorous; we think of resonance as happening to material objects, spaces, and vessels. Resonance occurs when a sound is sustained or extended because it encounters a surface; when one object responds to the sonic vibrations of another and begins to produce sound itself.<sup>1</sup> Resonating inside the human ear, the gap between two tones of different frequencies can even be perceived as a third tone.<sup>2</sup> Alternately, art is often described as “resonating” with audiences and viewers—an apt metaphor for the dynamics of performance. As artist and author Sonia Louise Davis writes, “Resonance is the physical vibration of sonic depth, and is also used to describe something evocative or emotive, so resonance can be at once the scientific fact of sound and its ability to produce affect.”<sup>3</sup>

As with sound, resonance between people happens, as music scholar Juliana Hodkinson writes, “When the space between subject and object starts to be reduced, without them fusing into one.”<sup>4</sup> This vacillation and vibration keeps

differences in focus on both sides of the exchange—between performers and audience, voice or instrument and idea, music and choreography or video—while generating something new. In these resonant encounters, distinct elements vibrate and attune without combining. They may even produce a third, distinct thing: a kind of empathy—but one in which we understand another's experiences as theirs alone, without projecting our own bodily sensations, life stories, or past encounters with societal structures. Instead, we hold both in a vibrating, energetic unfolding. Resonance is a material force, one that we experience emotionally, physically, and socially as we attend to ourselves and others simultaneously, within that in-between.<sup>5</sup>

While all four works use sound—voice and instrument alike—they also create charged energetic interchanges. Whitehead's *FORCE!* takes up the willpower necessary to inhabit the in-between of the prison waiting room, and performance's power to make that force crackle through song and movement. Sinha's *Tremor* is concerned with how sonic vibrations and resonances cause performers, audience, and architecture to reverberate across each other, making space for feeling to emerge. Laura Ortman's sonic textures ring out across the layered histories and present realities of the places where she performs, sculpting the air. The artists of 7NMS use spoken language, storytelling, and hip-hop lyricism alongside the dancing body to ask how one person's story might resonate with others and within longer creative lineages.

It is no accident that these artists largely identify as women of color: intersectional experiences in our society are often where distinction and difference are most ingrained in lived experience, and where practices of creating resonance across them are most honed. Unsurprisingly, most of these works are crafted through the shared exchange of cross-genre, collaborative groups. Lastly, many of these performances integrate dance—and even when they don't, the body is considered deeply. After all, to resonate is also to vibrate, to oscillate, to move. These artists invite you to listen with your whole body. To feel and attune. There is power in these vibrations.

— Tara Aisha Willis  
Former Curator of Performance

There is  
power in these  
vibrations.

- 1 “Resonance,” accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resonance>.
- 2 Karen Christopher, “Resonance of two,” in *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, eds. Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca and Alice Lagaay (New York: Routledge, 2020), 218.
- 3 Sonia Louise Davis, *slow and soft and righteous, improvising at the end of the world (and how we make a new one)* (Los Angeles: Co-Conspirator Press, 2021), 14.
- 4 Juliana Hodkinson, “Moving and being moved: Affective resonance at play in sonic performances,” in *Performance, Subjectivity and Experimentation*, ed. Catherine Laws (Leuven: University of Leuven Press, 2020): 45.
- 5 Birgit Abels, *Music Worlding in Palau: Chanting, Atmospheres, and Meaningfulness* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 156.

# FORCE!

## an opera in three acts



Anna Martine Whitehead, *FORCE! an opera in three acts*. Photo: Wills Glasspiegel, courtesy of the artist.

## Anna Martine Whitehead

MAR 28–30, 2024

7:30 PM

EDLIS NEESON THEATER

Somewhere along the way, amidst starting to teach full-time in a primarily white institution of higher education, a difficult breakup, and the isolation and political revelations of the COVID-19 pandemic, Anna Martine Whitehead began formulating a question to be explored through performance: “Where would you find the loneliest Black woman in the world?” The answer? A prison waiting room.

During lockdown, prisons were profoundly cut off from the world. Yet they have long been made strategically invisible in a country that nonetheless maintains the most prolific incarceration system in the world (despite making up less than 5 percent of the global population, the US contains more than 20 percent of the world’s prison population, and a vastly disproportionate number are Black<sup>1</sup>). Prisons and their waiting rooms are spaces charged with invisibility, with the knowledge that those in the room are among the few looking directly at it rather than away. Set inside one such waiting room, Whitehead’s

*FORCE! an opera in three acts* tackles the experience of moving through a space that exists between outside and inside: a conduit where “freedom” meets the physical, legal, and psychological realities of incarceration, where people who are not locked up (often women-identifying family members and partners) go to see people who are, in a regular cycle of entering and exiting. Yet, while Whitehead is adamant that *FORCE!* takes place in a prison waiting room, there is no literal depiction of one to be found on stage—an artistic choice that reflects her awareness of the danger in rehearsing or restaging pain and violence. Rather than trying to avoid these slippages altogether, though, the contradiction is crucial: the waiting room is where it all goes down, and yet it is not there at all.

Whitehead knows, from regularly visiting friends in prison in California and teaching at Chicago’s Stateville Correctional Center through the Prison + Neighborhood Arts and Education Project, that waiting rooms impact how you move, make sound, think, and feel. In these rooms,

every gesture is heightened (like a telenovela or, indeed, an opera), loaded with the intensity and indignity of waiting; the rare chance to visit a loved one between other responsibilities; the possibility that you will be turned away today or the time won't be enough; worry for their safety or the effectiveness of lawyers; the complexity of encountering correctional officers, cinder block walls, and barbed wire; and the exhausting accumulation of time spent itself. *FORCE!* explores how people occupy, move through, and make sound in these spaces, and how audiences might encounter and embody that experience. It is about the practice of experimenting with the way carceral structures show up no matter where we are: when we wait in lines, navigate walled-in institutions, maneuver through bureaucracy, or come up against the limits of our rights.

Something becomes possible in the resonance between performers and audience in the waiting room of *FORCE!* Whitehead calls it "somatic solidarity," or the momentary, embodied flashes where an experience from inside is possible outside, and we gain a deeper understanding of the way carceral structures connect our varied life experiences. Whitehead's hope is that the waiting room of *FORCE!* is not a place where violence is rehearsed, but where audiences share an experience and fill a carceral space with joy and solidarity. After all, both are already present in prison waiting rooms every day, a reminder that, as Whitehead puts it, "The places where we find ourselves highly compromised and subjugated can also be spaces where we find pleasure, camaraderie, fellowship,"<sup>2</sup> as well as movement and song.

— Tara Aisha Willis  
Former Curator of Performance

RIGHT: Anna Martine Whitehead,  
*FORCE!* an opera in three acts. Photo:  
Ricardo Adame, courtesy of the artist.



1 "Mass Incarceration," accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-justice/mass-incarceration>.  
2 Anna Martine Whitehead, conversation with the author, November 18, 2023.

Read more about  
the artist and her  
collaborators:  
[mcachicago.org/  
force](http://mcachicago.org/force)



# Tremor



## Samita Sinha

APR 18–20, 2024

7:30 PM

EDLIS NEESON THEATER

In *Tremor*, the theater is a cosmology: a vast universe where complex interconnections and the most elemental building blocks of performance (voice, light, body) take shape.

Artist Samita Sinha and architect Sunil Bald arrived at this understanding of the theater in part through studying South Asian art from as early as the fifth or sixth century CE.<sup>1</sup> These sublime and sacred cosmological diagrams are often symmetrical, geometric, and architectural in a way that Western viewers might call abstract or minimal, though they arise from an entirely distinct tradition and intention, and predate those terms by centuries. Alongside this design influence is Sinha's long-standing vocal practice, which filters traditional Indian music techniques through space at a cellular scale, vibrating her body as a microcosm interconnected well beyond her own skin. Like the minimalism of the diagrams, a single hum might seem simple, but comes to feel complex and changing in Sinha's approach. Bald's stage design reshapes the theater to create a sense

of expansive scale which, nonetheless, frames the performers' delicate, energetic exchange of sound with intimacy and detail.

The theater-universe of *Tremor* implicates audience alongside artists: even the most cavernous of silences (never precisely empty) calls us to be utterly present, to regard each other mutually. The sounds that emerge come as much from the space around the performers as from their voices and instruments, as if it is already present in the room. These resonances weave and ricochet between amplifiers, walls, and bodies.

Sinha and her collaborators are simultaneously sounding and listening. Together, they form a singular, vibrating "motor" but retain distinction and difference. In rehearsals, they discuss how to attune to the motor of the piece, even if it means each taking a different path through the performance; the sound can feel right to everyone without feeling the same to everyone. In the space of *Tremor*, it is possible to reach toward connection across these differences.



How that reaching occurs is where resonance emerges: a crack or fissure from which it might go anywhere next.

For artists and audiences alike, *Tremor* is a reminder to connect with feeling, to be present with our sensations and those of the people around us—a critical practice in our exhausted, disconnected contemporary world. In fact, this feeling is the material of the piece, despite the darkness, silence, disconnection, and breakage that may arise when we fully feel. Vocal sound can carry a listener from the most painful sensation to the most blissful, and make evident how often these are inseparable.

During the process, Sinha pondered Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant's words on trembling:

*Trembling thinking is the instinctual feeling that we must refuse all categories of fixed and imperial thought . . . thinking in which we can lose time, lose time searching, in which we can wander and in which we can counter all the systems of terror, domination, and imperialism with the poetics of trembling . . . we cannot escape the inextricability of the world. And in order to be in contact with the world and to try to help the world, we cannot be tied to a system of thinking. We need trembling thinking—because the world trembles, and our sensibility, our affect trembles . . . even when I am fighting for my identity, I consider my identity not as the only possible identity in the world.<sup>2</sup>*



*Tremor* does not attempt to resolve society's troubles, nor is it merely "atmospheric" sound. It demands focus and invites us to practice trembling between fixed categories and states of feeling. The piece "offers technologies of listening and being together," Sinha has remarked.<sup>3</sup> To feel, she believes, is to know—to sense—something outside oneself, and to admit to that sensing. To stay with our feelings is a much-needed practice, which aesthetic, ecstatic experiences like *Tremor* allow us to rehearse. Fortunately, the end of its forty-five minutes is no conclusion: only *Tremor's* submergence, for a time.

— Tara Aisha Willis  
Former Curator of Performance

1 Ajit Mookerjee, *Tantra Art: Its Philosophy & Physics* (Paris: Rupa & Co. in collaboration with Ravi Kumar, 1994).  
2 "The Earth is Trembling," Édouard Glissant in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, *032c Magazine*, December 20, 2021, <https://032c.com/magazine/edouard-glissant-and-hans-ulrich-obrist>.  
3 Samita Sinha, conversation with the author, November 18, 2023.



# Smoke Rings Shimmers Endless Blur

Laura Ortman. Image courtesy of the artist.

Laura Ortman

APR 26-27, 2024

7:30 PM

EDLIS NEESON THEATER

"My Eyes Twirl Rounds With You," the first song from Laura Ortman's (White Mountain Apache) latest studio album *Smoke Rings Shimmers Endless Blur*, opens with the chime of a single bell. Around it, Ortman's violin creates layered patterns of sound that phase in and out of sync with each other. A heavy bass chord separates this introduction from the song's first lyrics, as Ortman's voice cuts a clearing in the sonic landscape. As if surfacing from under water, Ortman's haunting voice and romantic words stay with me for days after listening, and visit me in my dreams, too:

*only the lonely  
gets one kiss  
maybe two  
in a lifetime not worried  
cause once is so true  
my eyes twirl rounds with you*

Ortman is a prodigious solo violinist and composer; her cross-disciplinary, genre-bending approach to music draws on her training in classical violin and

Indigenous musical traditions, as well as her skills as an improviser. Using a four-track tape recorder to layer sounds, Ortman works with a range of instruments, including her voice, the Apache violin (a one or two-string bowed instrument made from a hollowed agave stalk), amplified piano, and electric guitar. She incorporates extensive field recordings, such as squealing trains in the subway tunnels, cars passing on a busy freeway, or the gentle patter of rainfall. Her heartbreakingly poignant lyrics are juxtaposed with an electronic sound heavy enough to carry the grit and metal of a rock concert.

Collaboration is critical to Ortman's artistic practice. Since moving to New York, NY, in the 1990s she has collaborated with several modern dancers, including Jennifer Chin; artist, choreographer, and writer Tanya Lukin Linklater (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq); and ballet dancer Jock Soto (Diné/Puerto Rican), who appears in her music videos *I Lost My Shadow* (2011) and *My Soul Remainer* (2017), which was featured in the 2019 Whitney Biennial. With her background as



a visual artist, she often describes her practice as “sculpting sound” and “creating atmospheres.” The physicality of her sonic creations is made visible in performance; at times she has used excess rosin dust (a hard substance made from tree resin that is applied to the bow to increase friction with the strings of the violin) to create a plume in the air around her as she plays.

It may be tempting to contextualize Ortman within the history of avant-garde music. Yet over dinner near her home in Brooklyn last fall, Ortman resisted a barrage of questions on her background and influences, preferring to keep the conversation about her life at the present. She focused on her recently announced inclusion in the 2024 Venice Biennale, her

ongoing collaboration with friend and composer Autumn Chacon (Diné/Xicana)—with whom she would premier a new opera in January 2024 as a part of the Prototype Festival—and the recording of her latest album with legendary producer Martin Bisi, as well as her personal joy and pain as a human with bills to pay and a heart to nourish. Leaving the dinner, I contemplated how any attempt to place Ortman’s work within a history of contemporary avant-garde music—which has historically ignored female or woman-identified artists, and especially Indigenous artists—risked decontextualizing it from its entirely unique place in the present.

Performance view, Laura Ortman in *Demian Dinéyazhi: An Infected Sunset*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018. Photo: Filip Wolak, courtesy of the artist.



Scholar and curator Joseph M. Pierce (Cherokee) draws a direct connection between the misrepresentation of Indigenous artists as part of a singular art history and the long record of museums categorizing Indigenous peoples as a part of “natural history” rather than alive and part of the present.<sup>1</sup> After all, if institutions that have historically excluded Indigenous stories continue to see Indigenous people as a part of the past, there is no need for them to engage in reciprocity or reparations in the present. Meanwhile, scholar Mark Rifkin describes “settler time,” a dominant conception of time that has “reorder[ed] Indigenous temporalities, to remake them in ways that fit non-native timescapes of expansion and dispossession,” in contrast to “temporal multiplicity,” or the existence of many distinct and self-determined notions of time.<sup>2</sup>

*An Indigenous Present*, a 2023 publication edited by Ortman’s frequent collaborator Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Choctaw/Cherokee), gathers the work of more than sixty contemporary artists including Ortman. Gibson’s book places the diversity of approaches to Indigenous concepts, forms, and mediums alongside shared histories—a transculturalist rejection of historicization, categorization, and misrepresentation. Such projects within contemporary art—as well as major television, book, and movie releases focused on Indigenous voices and stories, such as *Reservation Dogs* and *Killers of the Flower Moon*—reflect a larger conversation on Indigenous sovereignty, temporality, and culture, as well as institutional culpability in displacement, disenfranchisement, and violence.

Poet laureate and musician Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek) has described the infinite personal stories that exist in the world at any given moment: “. . . every place, every window, every doorway is an opening to a life, a whole different life, a whole series of stories. And it’s multiplied hundreds and thousands of times. And some don’t overlap at all. Some are in their very private universes; other universes are more expansive.”<sup>3</sup> There’s a resonance between these ideas and the cyclical, layered, multifarious patterns of Ortman’s music.



Laura Ortman, *My Soul Remainer* (still). Video: Nanobah Becker.

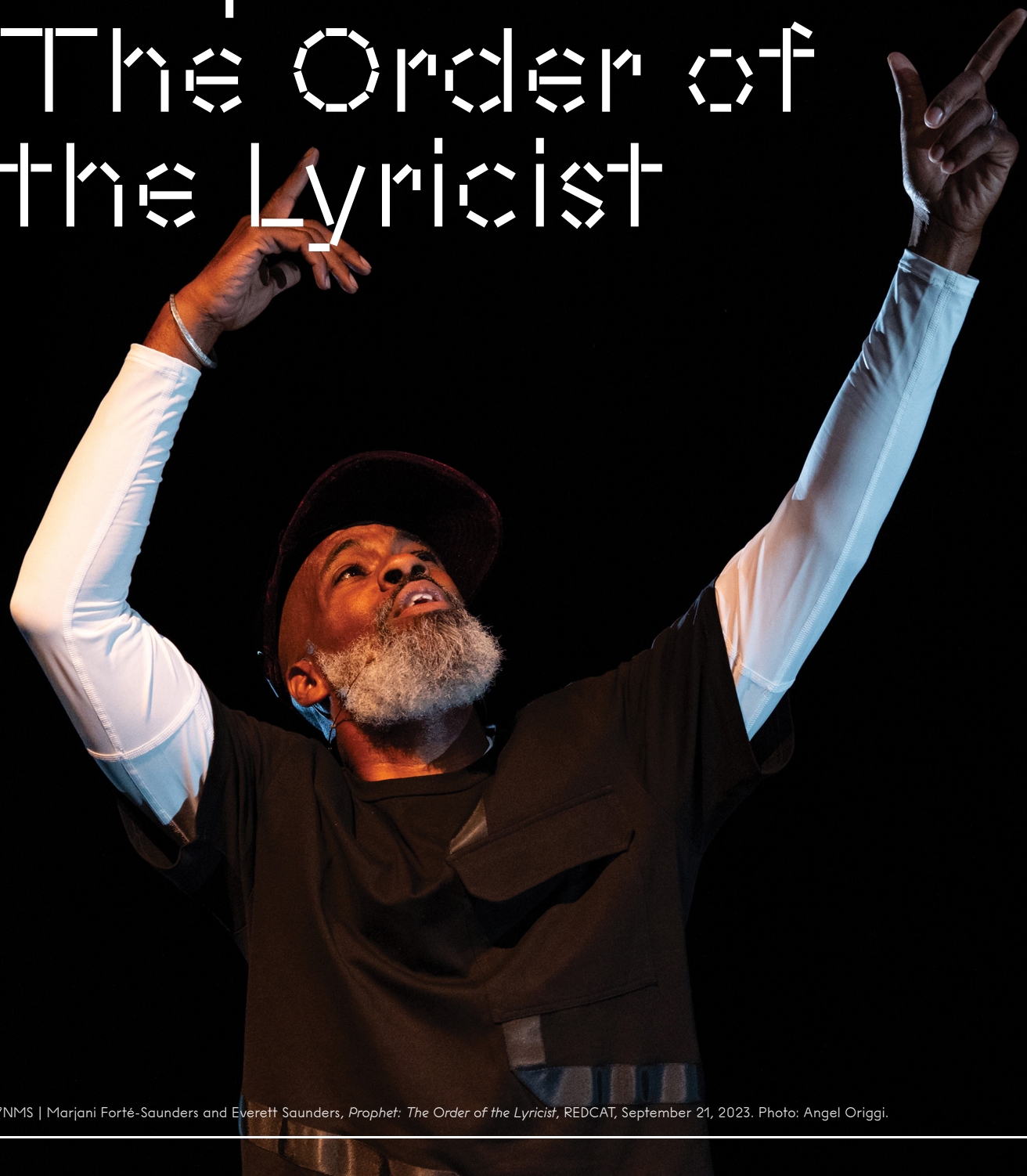
Indeed, she has described her work as “music for your most solo moments.”<sup>4</sup> Over these two evenings of performance, the intimacy of her music invites us to consider time as it exists within us—a cyclical past, present, and future.

— Laura Paige Kyber  
Assistant Curator of Performance

- 1 Joseph M. Pierce, “Museum must engage more with Indigenous peoples,” *The Art Newspaper*, November 5, 2019.
- 2 Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), ix.
- 3 Joy Harjo, “Joy Harjo: The Whole of Time,” interview by Krista Tippett, *On Being with Krista Tippett*, May 13, 2021, <https://onbeing.org/programs/joy-harjo-the-whole-of-time>.
- 4 Ben Davis, “Laura Ortman Has One of the Standout Works of the Whitney Biennial. Her Inclusion Was a Surprise Even to Her,” *ArtNet*, May 23, 2019, [news.artnet.com/art-world/laura-ortman-whitney-biennial-1554919](https://www.artnet.com/art-world/laura-ortman-whitney-biennial-1554919).



# Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist



7NMS | Marjani Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders, *Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist*, REDCAT, September 21, 2023. Photo: Angel Origgi.

## 7NMS | Marjani Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders

MAY 9-11, 2024

7:30 PM

EDLIS NEESON THEATER

*Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist* has evolved in relation to each unique venue, city, and community in which its creators, 7NMS | Marjani Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders, have performed the piece. It was originally incubated through the artists' own platform, Art x Power—a residency and fellowship program they created in 2020 to address the under-resourcing of radical, Black creators—and co-commissioned by four organizations: Abrons Art Center in New York, NY; the Yard in Martha's Vineyard, MA; Lawrence University in Appleton, WI; and Kelly Strayhorn Theater in Pittsburgh, PA. It was developed in residence at the Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY. The MCA's presentation of *Prophet*, meanwhile, represents the culmination of a year of relationship-building with organizations, artists, and archives here in Chicago, with support from the MCA's New Works Initiative.

The New Works Initiative funds and supports the development of new artworks with special

emphasis on the museum's relationship with Chicago. The initiative includes three programs: a Chicago Performance Commission, a National Performance Engagement, and the In Progress series. The track by which 7NMS comes to the MCA stage, the National Performance Engagement, centers our city in the creative processes of national and international artists by connecting them with Chicago's artistic and cultural communities as they develop new works or new models of engagement in advance of a final presentation.

Kicking off this engagement in May 2023, Everett, Marjani, and their team traveled to Chicago for the first of several site visits to explore and connect with the city's neighborhoods and culture-makers. Their first trip provided a wide-ranging introduction as they immersed themselves in Chicago's cultural landscape; visits to the South Side Community Arts Center and Rebuild Foundation's Stony Island Arts Bank led to an affinity for the historic Bronzeville neighborhood, as they learned of its history as



a center of African American life and culture in Chicago. A return trip in October 2023 solidified their plans to collaborate with Bronzeville's Miyagi Records on a special event that invited audiences to gather in community and learn more about their practice and vision. In March 2024, the pair returned once again to share their creative practice with students of the dance department at Columbia College Chicago. Time spent in the Sun Ra Archives at Experimental Sound Studio left an imprint on the Chicago iteration of the project, with sounds from the archive now woven into the work on stage.

We owe a special debt of thanks to the artists and cultural leaders who opened their doors and hearts to the 7NMS team, including Nigel Ridgeway and Marco Jacobo of Miyagi Records; Columbia College Chicago faculty members Amina Norman-Hawkins, Darrell Jones, and Meredith Sutton; zakkiiyah najeebah dumas o'neal of South Side Community Art Center;

artists Sam Thousand, Add2, NEAK, and Seed Lynn; Adam Vida and Haruhi Kobayashi of Experimental Sound Studio; and former MCA Manager of Community Engagement Otez Gary.

The passage on the following page is excerpted from an essay by artist and scholar Omi Osun Joni L. Jones and writer and artist Sharon Bridgforth, who spent time in residence with Everett and Marjani as they developed the piece. Originally published in 2022 on the occasion of an early public preview of *Prophet* at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center in Troy, their essay shares a few questions offered to Everett and Marjani as pathways toward a rich creative process.

— Laura Paige Kyber,  
Assistant Curator of Performance

## An Echo of Ancient Things Dramaturgical Distillations

### WHAT WANTS TO HAPPEN?

It is a great privilege to have been Witness to the unfolding of this piece, and to have been privy to the magnitude of Marjani and Everett's artistic vision—their Love of Black people—and each other. During our time together Marjani wrestled with understanding her role in the piece, and Everett grew into clarity about this piece as his story—a telling of his personal history, lineage, growth, and relationship to being an Emcee. Their work required virtuosity through courage—going as deep as the work required—and an abiding trust that “the Ancestors got this.”

### WHAT ARE THE EMCEE'S SPIRITUAL TECHNOLOGIES/ARTISTIC METHODOLOGIES /AND ARCHITECTURES OF CRAFT AND FORM?

All the years of all the study of all the forms of dance. All the years of all the notebooks filled with words tested and released in Circles, and all the vibrations sounded and synced. *Prophet: The Order of the Lyricist* is rooted in Black brilliance through its circles; straight and diagonal lines; simultaneity; deep listening; polyrhythms and polycentrisms;<sup>1</sup> call and response; playing with time/multiple dimensions; non-linear storytelling; bodily acuity and nimbleness; Witnessing; improvisation; belief in Spirit; trust in Ancestors. This work exemplifies the Yoruba process of *ikọ̀'ṣẹ̀*—learning a skill through the transmission of wisdom from a master.<sup>2</sup> The inherent embodiment of active study with exemplars of a form remaps intuition and promotes an organically acquired wisdom.

In this world, we find *eré*, the Yoruba concept for serious play.<sup>3</sup> What if their gestures/words are not only the improvised discoveries in the moment of a public sharing, but are also the rehearsal for the Spiritual/emotional/physical intimacy of their daily lives? What if their words/gestures are not only for the amplification of their union, but also prompt our muscles/Spirits to be inspired, to emulate through the resonance of the frequencies they activate? In this way, they are practicing for their own loving lives and offering us tools to do the same. *Eré*, then, is where we all get to play together, to test possibilities and to clear new pathways. The work is for transformation—it moves in the realm of ritual—a practice with an intended result.

— Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, PhD,  
& Sharon Bridgforth

- 1 Brenda Dixon Gottschild, “The Black Dancing Body as a Measure of Culture,” in *Choras International Dance Journal* 7 (Spring 2018): 44.
- 2 Margaret Thompson Dreweal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 12–28.
- 3 Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, *Theatrical Jazz: Performance, Ase, and the Power of the Present Moment* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2015), 28.



*Resonance* is organized by Tara Aisha Willis, former Curator of Performance, with Laura Paige Kyber, Assistant Curator of Performance.

#### SUPPORT

Lead support for the 2023–24 season of MCA Performance and Public Programs is provided by Elizabeth A. Liebman.

Generous support is provided by Ginger Farley and Bob Shapiro, Martha Struthers Farley and Donald C. Farley, Jr. Family Foundation, N.A., Trustee; Susan Manning and Doug Doetsch; Carol Prins and John Hart /The Jessica Fund; and an anonymous donor.

Additional generous support is provided by Diane Kahan and Anne L. Kaplan.

The MCA is a proud member of the Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.

#### ABOUT PERFORMANCE AT THE MCA

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is committed to fostering social connections and presenting the most thought-provoking creative arts of our time. The MCA commissions and presents performing arts and opportunities for dialogue with leading artists and scholars from Chicago and around the world. These events serve as spaces for gathering throughout the museum and online. The MCA's groundbreaking live experiences are an integral part of the museum's cutting-edge, multidisciplinary programming. Along with exhibitions, publications, and programs, MCA Performance and Public Practice welcomes visitors to experience the work and ideas of living artists and exercise their own civic voices.

#### REPRODUCTION

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ASSISTANT THEATER OPERATIONS MANAGER  
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ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF VISITOR EXPERIENCE  
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Mitchell Scollon  
Gioia Sabatinelli  
Hua Song  
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Rebecca Grant  
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