

# YSC MAG

Spring/Summer 2022



Yale SCHWARZMAN CENTER



**As an organization that strives to embrace fully the ideals of a just and equitable society, we at Yale Schwarzman Center humbly acknowledge the indigenous peoples and nations—including Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Niantic, and the Quinnipiac and other Algonquian speaking peoples—who have stewarded through generations the lands and waterways of what is now the state of Connecticut. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations and this land.**

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Dear Friends,

On November 11th, 2021, I sat in the orchestra of the Shubert Theater in New Haven and witnessed Dance Theatre of Harlem's first performance in the city in over twenty years. The gratitude for and the appreciation of the return of the company was palpable. What was also being celebrated might have been the return to live performance indoors, or the resiliency of a community after surviving twenty of the most challenging months in most of our lifetimes. Celebrating that occasion with the sublime beauty of highly skilled artists, illustrating the power and grace of the human body, the standing ovation was as much for the artists on stage as it was for each of us in the audience.

That night also marked my second year as the Associate Artistic Director at Yale Schwarzman Center. The significance of this confluence is a personal one. Dance Theatre of Harlem was one of the dance companies my parents made sure to expose me to as a child. In fact, I still have the framed photo of a DTH ballerina that my parents hung on the wall of my childhood bedroom. I count myself lucky to have had parents that illustrated to me early on that a life in the arts was possible. And now at YSC, I have the privilege of working every day with artists—either student, faculty, local, or international—in collaboration with our extraordinary community of learners, scholars, and practitioners.

The last two years have provided a tremendous opportunity for reflection and catalytic change. Each of the projects that we have undertaken at YSC has influenced and inspired my thinking about the role art and artists can play in that change. Whether exploring notions of place and community, or identity and representation, we have come together virtually and over meals to exchange ideas and to think critically about our past, present, and collective futures. It has been a tremendous honor and I am deeply grateful to all who have graced our spaces to date. This is just the beginning.

See you at the Center,

**Jennifer Harrison Newman**  
Associate Artistic Director

Dear Friends,

You hold in your hands, or on your desk or lap, the first edition of YSC MAG. It is by design both retrospective and forward looking—a catalog of sorts, and an invitation to see yourself in some or all of what's here.

I am grateful to have worked so closely with the Center's visionary inaugural executive director, Garth Ross; with the exceptional team of folks originating their roles; and with so many of you who've contributed to the build and launch of Yale Schwarzman Center over the past couple of years.

The spring semester holds much excitement here at YSC—read on, and I hope you'll join us!

**Laura Paul**  
Deputy Director &  
Interim Executive Director





# Break Bread, Break Boundaries: Welcome to Yale Schwarzman Center

Since opening our doors digitally in October 2020, and then in real life for dining on September 1, 2021, Yale's first-ever center for student life and the arts has come to life with students, faculty, staff, visiting fellows, and community members—local and global—at its core.

## A Culture of Invitation

In the summer of 2020, YSC's cadre of staff, students, and fellows gathered on Zoom to plan for the opening of the Center. The challenge was to essentialize the invitation—to describe in just a few words what we were inviting communities within and beyond Yale to come and experience. With dining, performance, and exhibition spaces, and a charge to bridge Yale, New Haven, and communities beyond, we imagined human connection as a phenomenon more dynamic than the virus that kept us restricted to separate spaces.

The Zoom conversation rendered many ideas, and one hit home. "Break bread. Break boundaries." It's a theme that represents our invitation to Yale and the public, an aspiration for the Center's future, and the action bringing YSC and its programming to life.

The start of spring on Yale's academic calendar feels like a rebirth despite the challenges of the public health crisis. The distances between invitation, aspiration, and action are beginning to fade as we plan gatherings in spaces like Commons and The Underground—not just for meals, but also for performances—and open the doors to refurbished spaces like The Dome.

When we say that YSC is a center for student life and the arts, we are declaring that academic study is enhanced through the arts. We recognize that artistry is inherent in all forms of experimentation, be it in a laboratory, a gallery, or on a stage. When we say that YSC is a center for student life and the arts, we are embracing our role as gate-opener. We take seriously our ability to increase access between artists, scholars, and non-academics in ways that build empathy and belonging. When we say that YSC is a center for student life and the arts, we are holding space for those who have come to explore. The building may prove itself just large enough to embody our ambitious vision.

Although our doors have opened to Yale badge holders this academic year, it's still too soon to say that we've fully

opened. We've delayed our ribbon-cutting until we can celebrate with the city that makes it possible. We are eager for campus to reopen more widely to our families, friends, and neighbors. In the meantime, the YSC invitation stands: "Break bread. Break boundaries."





# Arts at the Intersection

## Access & Digital Programs

YSC's foray into digital programming, beginning with the launch of our website in October 2020, was as much a response to the pandemic as the acceleration of a plan already several years in motion. When student governments came together in 2014 and issued a joint report calling for a university-wide student center, they stated that "technology should be a key component so that individuals from around the world can participate in certain center events and so that some programs at the center can be live-streamed or otherwise shared widely." This meant that long before COVID reshaped our lives, infrastructure was being built into YSC's walls and floors and woven into our conversations about the arts, community engagement, and web design. Over the course of an unusual year, virtual programs have become familiar YSC offerings, augmented in recent months with hybrid and in-person events.

## Rewind 2020–2021

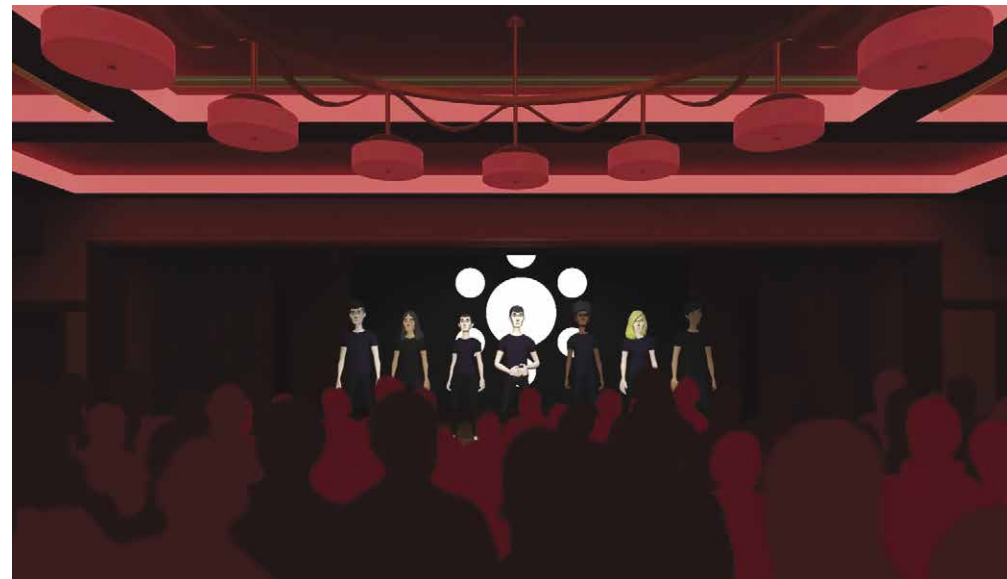
To follow is just a sampling of the many programs available in Replay, YSC's online media gallery.

**One.** A 22-episode web series about students' ingenuity and interconnectedness in a time of physical distance.

**Transpositions: Dance Poems for an Online World.** A web series made in partnership with Associate Professor Emily Coates, students from the Yale Dance Lab, sixty-six dancers, nine sound designers, three student producers, a video artist, an artistic director, two advisers, and sixteen choreographers from across the globe.



Screenshot from One, Episode 17 featuring excerpt from "Pandemic Voices," courtesy of Daniela Hart MFA '21/Uptown Works. Dancer: Mamiko Nakatsugawa



Screenshot from AREAS, Ep. 2 - The Underground, courtesy of the Yale Student Immersive Media Club

**Between the World and Me.** Screenings and conversations in African American studies and film studies around the HBO premiere, which includes a collegiate panel featuring Yale Professor Daphne A. Brooks, Howard University Assistant Professor Natalie Hopkinson, and composer Jason Moran.

**The Art of Storytelling in a Time of Disinformation.** A conversation with Yale Senior Lecturer Thomas Allen Harris, award-winning filmmakers Sarah Burns '04 and Ken Burns, and Florentine Films associate digital producer Clark Burnett '19.

**Making the Archive Public: Radical History in Public Television.** A screening of the film *Mr. Soul* by award-winning filmmaker and Yale alumna Melissa Haizlip and conversation about the lasting significance of public art as demonstrated through the Black Arts Movement with Haizlip, Brooks, and Harris.

**The Artist and the Institution: Bill T Jones and Marc Bamuthi Joseph in Conversation.** Yale drama students join Professor Tamilla Woodard in *The Underground* for a talk with legendary choreographer Bill T Jones and artist/educator Marc Bamuthi Joseph.

**A Conversation with Dance Theatre of Harlem Artistic Director Virginia Johnson.** A college tea conversation, streamed live from Trumbull College in the run-up to Dance Theatre of Harlem's performance at New Haven's Shubert Theater.

## Research & Scholarship

Faculty-led conversations and virtual events are only a small part of YSC's contribution to Yale's educational mission. Our staff includes fellows whose research

and scholarship are fueled in part by the YSC platform and mission.

**Taiga Christie MPH '19, Arts & Public Health Fellow.** In partnership with Yale School of Public Health, Taiga co-developed the Humanities, Arts, and Public Health Practice at Yale (HAPPY). Her work has led to forthcoming programs including *Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man*, a play that interrogates public health at the intersections of environmental, cultural, and spiritual conflict.

**Ye Qin Zhu MFA '20, Innovation Fellow.** In a joint fellowship with the Tsai Center for Innovative Thinking at Yale (Tsai CITY), Ye leveraged his experiences as an artist and educator to launch *Beyond the Studio*, a series of talks and workshops by artists engaged in social change, and *Hub and Spoke*, a youth-led platform where Yale and New Haven collaborators generate solutions to common problems.

**Jon-Paul Lapeña GRD '26, Sessions Fellow.** In a joint fellowship with Yale's Office for Graduate Student Development & Diversity, Jon-Paul, in partnership with YSC's Assistant Director for Stakeholder Engagement Yuhan Zhang MFA/MBA '22, is co-developing Sessions, a model for interdisciplinary conversations that move ideas into action.

**Neftalie Williams, PhD, Visiting Fellow in Race, Culture, and Community.** A sociologist and University of Southern California Provost's Post-Doctoral Scholar at the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, Neftalie investigates global issues of race, diversity, identity, and youth empowerment, using the lens of skateboarding and action sports culture.



## Fast Forward

What you'll find in the pages to follow is a snapshot of the view from here, cataloging much of what YSC offers today and providing a glimpse of some of what's ahead. Much will emerge along the way. Rather than offering pre-packaged "seasons" of events, we are excited to offer continual programming throughout the year, often in response to current themes in academic or public discourse. Some YSC programs will even span multiple years, engaging campus and the wider community in the development of new works and in relationships with artists and thought leaders along the way. This is only the beginning as we make space for future academic collaborations and respond to the changing needs of Yale and New Haven.



Screenshot from "Transpositions: dance poems for an online world." Video Artist: Kyla Arsadjaja MFA '20. Episodes and full credits at <https://bit.ly/YaleTranspositions>



Partnering with Yale Schwarzman Center through the Sessions program is an enjoyable and very effective way for our graduate students to make connections across Yale and to percolate new ideas over a meal and some conversation. With its beautiful space and creative programming, YSC is becoming a center of gravity on campus where cross-disciplinary thinking can thrive.

Lynn Cooley,  
Dean, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences,  
Vice Provost for Postdoctoral Affairs,  
C.N.H. Long Professor of Genetics,  
Professor of Cell Biology and of Molecular,  
Cellular & Developmental Biology

**YSC Sessions**

Dana Tai Soon Burgess, long-serving Cultural Ambassador to the U.S. State Department and the Smithsonian's first choreographer-in-residence at the National Portrait Gallery, logged into Zoom in May 2021 for dinner with novelist and Yale Lecturer in English Susan Choi and 10 on-screen guests. Their conversation topic: Building Bridges in Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities. This virtual bread-breaking was one of the earliest adaptations of YSC Sessions (<https://schwarzman.yale.edu/sessions>), 12-person gatherings that bring students, faculty, and staff into dialogue with thought leaders and community members over a meal. Since then, YSC has set the table either virtually or in person for conversations on *New Creative Producing Models*, *Sleep Disparities in the Arts and Healthcare*, *Disability and Accessibility at Yale*, and *Media and the Shaping of Identities*. Anyone can be a Sessionist by proposing a topic or registering to attend a scheduled Session that has available seats.

**Storyboard**

In preparation for the April 2021 premiere of *The Wandering*, Yale alumni Calista Small '14 and Jeremy Weiss '15 workshopped their immersive media production with a cohort of Yale undergraduate and graduate students. The students, representing a wide range of academic disciplines and creative interests, were selected from submissions on Storyboard (<https://schwarzman.yale.edu/storyboard-projects>), YSC's proprietary media-sharing platform. The workshop experience included opportunities for the students to receive coaching on their own artistic projects from creative professionals. Later that year, YSC launched *off the grid*, a virtual gallery of Storyboard submissions that centered on navigating space, change, and truth during the pandemic. Experience *off the grid* in Replay (<https://schwarzman.yale.edu/replay>).

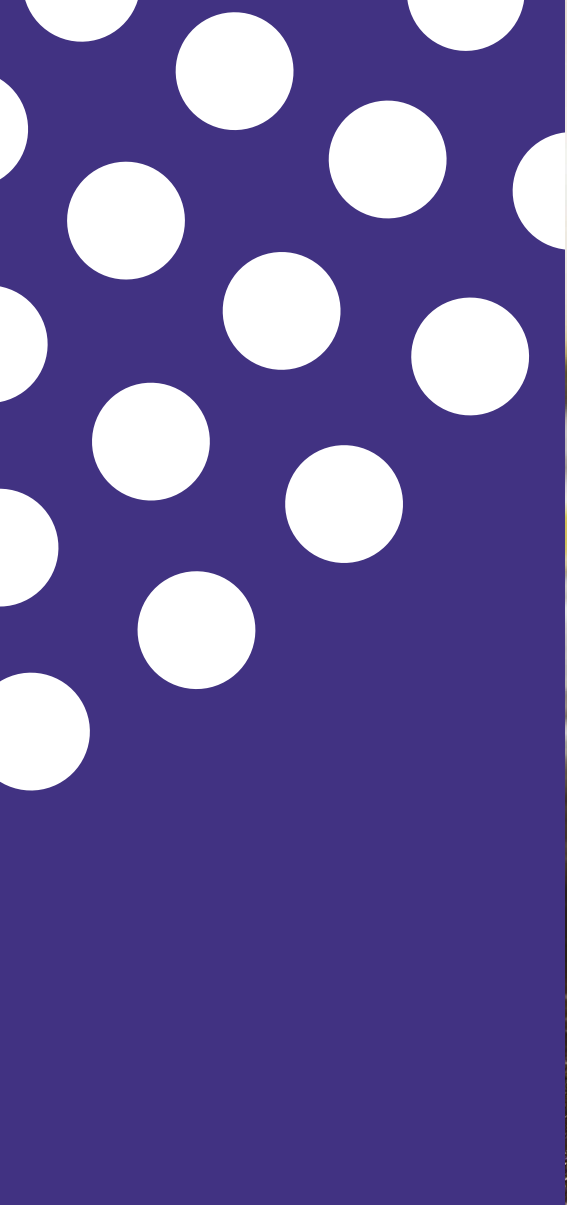


Susan Choi

Bambi Banks Couleé plays The Performer in The Wandering







# Spring 2022 Offerings

Welcome to YSC—a center for student life and the arts with dining at its core. Here you'll find ways to connect with people from all over campus, around New Haven, and across the globe—in happy collisions as you travel across campus, over coffee or lunch, in conversation with artists and thinkers—in a place that sparks creativity and self-expression. The vision looks like this...

## Arts Programming

Once we're fully open, no one day at YSC will look the same. To start the week, you might catch a comedy act or an a cappella show on the intimate proscenium stage in **The Underground**, the same place you went for coffee earlier in the day. Tuesday night, you might see a dance performance in **The Dome** and come to find out that you observed the artists in rehearsal in the **Dance Studio** all week on your way to **The Bow Wow**. On Wednesday, you might attend a formal dinner, reception, or meeting in the **Presidents' Room**, or rendezvous with friends for drinks and trivia, spoken word, or live music in **The Well**. Thursday comes around, perhaps

take a stroll through the **galleries** to see the works of your friend or favorite artist. Then cap off the week in **Commons**, transformed from Yale's most-used dining hall in the day to a venue for a gathering or a large-scale production by a renowned composer.

Beyond all we hope you will encounter—on the premises, in person, virtually, or sometimes both—we invite you to make the Center your own through signature YSC offerings like Sessions, Storyboard, and Replay.

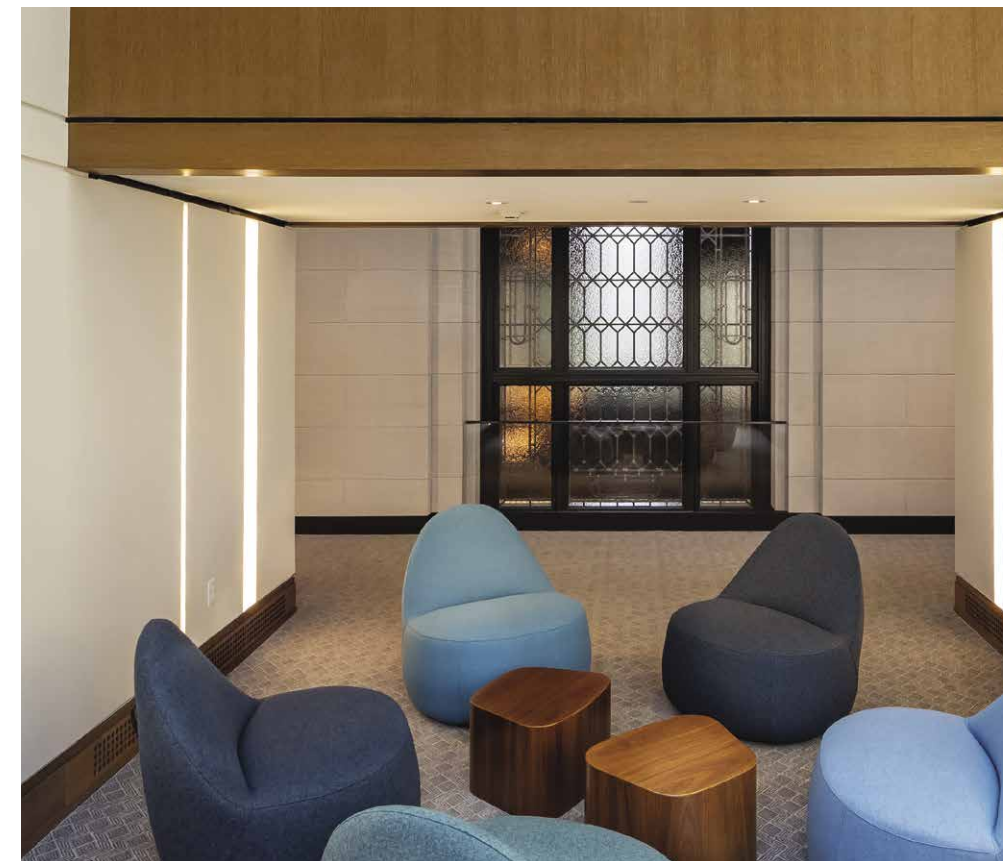
**Sessions** are peer-led gatherings where conversations over meals generate collaborations and move ideas to action. Open to the public, Sessions are valuable opportunities to gather diverse perspectives on a topic that interests you. To encourage wide-ranging collaborations, every proposed Session must meet specific criteria. First, the Session must include at least one participant from three of the following affiliations: undergraduate student, graduate student, community member, Yale faculty, and Yale staff. Second, the Session topic must clearly indicate interdisciplinary inquiry. Third, the Session must be an open-invitation engagement. Whether you're new to

a field or an expert in it, Sessions are a way for you to bring your curiosity to the table and leave with creative possibilities. What are you curious about? Interested in? Hungry for? Learn more and pitch a Session at <https://schwarzman.yale.edu/sessions>.

**Storyboard** invites students to respond to creative prompts on the YSC website. Responses are uploaded to Storyboard in the form of music, video, imagery, or words, and are curated as exhibitions or reused as building blocks in other student works. As the Storyboard platform continues to develop, Yale creators will gain access to a collective media library and post-production resources to shape raw media into finished content.

**Replay** is a media gallery where experiences are shared and live on. Events are searchable on the Replay page of our website by recency or by topic, so you never have to worry about missing a YSC event again. Browse content on Replay related to anything from applied arts to cultural celebrations, or from comedy to Yale traditions. Whether the event is standalone or part of a series, you can find it on Replay (<https://schwarzman.yale.edu/replay>). Play it, share it, play it again.





## New Spaces & Spaces Made New

### The Annex: Lounges, Meeting Rooms, and The Good Life Center

*Located on the second floor of YSC, you'll find quiet spaces for studying, meeting, and relaxing mindfully.*

At the west end of the corridor, three bays provide comfy **lounges** filled with soft, movable seating and loads of natural light. Plunk down and stay for a while.

In between are three bookable **meeting rooms** for student use, each outfitted with a pan-tilt-zoom camera and a large display, so you can jump on a Zoom call using the in-built computer or wirelessly share your screen's content to get work done. Host a workshop, hold a club meeting, or rendezvous with a study group.

A new extension of **The Good Life Center** at Silliman College, established by Chandrika and Ranjan Tandon Professor of Psychology Laurie Santos in 2018, the YSC location offers free wellness-focused programming for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. Through evidence-backed research on mindfulness, gratitude, social connection, exercise,

sleep, acts of kindness, time in nature, play, and time affluence, The Good Life Center encourages students to slow down and figure out just what wellness means for them, personally. Relax—or learn to relax!

### Graduate & Professional Student Lounge

The West Balcony, accessible through the Annex, is a dedicated space for graduate and professional students. Quiet lighting and soft, movable furnishings make it ideal for quiet gatherings, study, and breaks between classes.

### Dance Studio

Practice spaces for dance have always been in high demand on campus. The YSC Dance Studio answers the call for dedicated space with Harlequin Standfast vinyl over a sprung floor, a full mirror, dance barre, and changing rooms. The 45'x35' studio is also equipped with mounted speakers, a projector with drop-down screen, and PTZ camera. Enter the building, perhaps on your way to another space, and stop to admire poetry in motion. And if you're not on campus, the PTZ camera means you might be able to admire creation in progress from wherever you are. While currently serving the Yale community as a COVID-19 testing site, the space will ultimately be made available for reservations via our website.

## Dining

### Fresh, Contemporary Cuisine at the Crossroads

Two of YSC's premier dining platforms, **Elm** and **Ivy**, are stationed in The Underground and offer dimensions of Yale foodie culture that will make you forget, however briefly, that you're on a university campus. Elm, magnified by its floating chandelier and square-shaped bar setting, offers freshly roasted coffee and espresso brewed from onsite small-batch coffee roasters, plus teas and other specials. For those with a sweet tooth, enjoy baked goods from New Haven's own Sanctuary Kitchen and Havenly, or dig into a scoop of specialty gelato. Hungry for lunch? Try a delectable sandwich, soup, or salad with global flare. In the evening, order classic pub fare from Ivy, the perfect accompaniment to refreshments served at The Well. With an open kitchen layout, guests can watch fresh sushi being rolled, sliders on the grill, and more.

A great place to enjoy friends and conversation, The Well is a twenty-one-and-over pub with comfortable seating situated beneath the Rotunda and encircled by the building's original pink granite foundation. Ambient lighting and fun furniture will make it a popular spot to relax after hours over delicious tapas-style bites and draft beverages including beer and wine. In a rush to your next lecture or meeting but don't want to be hungry for the rest of the day? The Bow Wow solves this dilemma by providing grab-and-go meal service that's beaten in speed only by your walk to the next event on your calendar. Swing by to enjoy an assortment of grab-and-go sandwiches, sushi, salads, beverages, snacks, campus essentials, spirit gear, and more.





Commons is a magnificent dining hall and, like many YSC spaces, can be transformed into a multi-use venue. It's a central destination for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students as well as faculty, staff, and hungry passersby. Serving the freshest contemporary cuisines prepared in open kitchens, Commons offers a multiplicity of chef-tested culinary selections. Discover bold and innovative vegetable entrees at **Rooted**. Find fresh pasta made in-home at **Pasta e Basta**. At **Rostir**, order slow-roasted gluten-free proteins and vegetables. And, at **Lotus**, try wok-fired and steamed dishes with authentic southeastern and southwestern Asian flavors. Break bread (and boundaries!) with every visit.

## Traditions Old & New

Legacy events long central to the Yale experience are returning to Commons and The Presidents' Room. Alumni returning to their alma mater will gather in the fondly remembered and now renovated Commons during reunion weekend events. Admitted students will create fond memories in Commons when they get a taste of Yale for the first time during Bulldog Days. The Presidents' Room will also see the return of the Yale Trustee Reunion dinner, luncheons for honorary degree

recipients, and the Yale Medal Dinner, where the Yale Alumni Association presents its highest award to honor outstanding individual service to the university. Alongside events like holiday dinners and formals for first years, seniors are sure to make lasting and last-minute memories in Commons when they dance the night away at the Senior Masquerade Ball and Last Chance Dance. And before they get together on Old Campus for commencement, the Class Day Brunch in Commons will be their bittersweet last meal—until they come back for reunions, that is.

**As a student new to the job community here at Yale, working with Yale Schwarzman Center has been an incredibly welcoming learning experience ... YSC highlights what I love most about Yale: the thriving community and countless opportunities to explore passions.**

Mark Chung '25  
Graphic Artist



Commons, Yale University's largest dining hall and part of the newly renovated Yale Schwarzman Center, opened for lunch on Sept. 1, the first day of undergraduate classes. Yale President Peter Salovey helped celebrate the occasion by serving lunch to students, faculty, and staff. Photo: Leigh Busby



Photo: Herve Locus

Since I started working with YSC, I have met incredible people, participated in great discussions, and learned so much about marketing and communications. I love how my team and my work push me to improve myself and learn more every day. For me YSC is the center of campus, a lovely hub of joy that brings people together. I love dining in Commons and that feeling of "Oh this is Yale" every single time I walk in. I am very excited to sit with my friends and talk for hours over delicious food and spend time in The Good Life Center!

**Dilge Buksur '24**  
Communications Coordinator,  
Social Media

Helping YSC fulfill its goals through video editing has been incredibly rewarding. I'm continuously learning, and it has been great being a part of the welcoming YSC community. As YSC opens more widely, I look forward to making use of the Annex and seeing what comes out of the performance spaces.

**Alanna Rivera '25**  
Video Editor

## Community Collaborations

Don't be surprised when you see an event across town bearing the Yale Schwarzman Center name. YSC nurtures partnerships with agencies and organizations across New Haven to support and strengthen a robust arts ecosystem. Creating arts experiences with the wider community is foundational to YSC's mission to build an inclusive, collaborative future.

A few examples include:

**The 2021 International Festival of Arts & Ideas** "Everything You Touch, You Change: Visionary Science Fiction and Liberation", a conversation between musician, composer and curator Toshi Reagon, cultural producer and sacred activist Hanifa Nayo Washington, and writer, activist, educator and spoken word artist Walidah Imarisha;

**Dance Theatre of Harlem's** performance at the Shubert Theater in November 2021; and

**The Finding a Line New Haven Initiative's** participation in the installment of Scantlebury Skatepark in the Dixwell neighborhood and the moveable skate bowl at 25 George Street in October 2021.

It has been so wonderful to walk through the new Schwarzman Center and see the beautiful connections between past and present in the architecture. Between the history embedded into every surface and all the new spaces for performance and art, there is so much potential to create something really exciting. YSC's digital programming has also been a great way to foster relationships between the community and artists. As someone working behind the scenes, I am excited to see all these voices being given space, paving the way forward for a stronger community.

**Hannah Tran DRA '23**  
Video Editor





# Defying Genre: A Conversation with Musician-Composer Nathalie Joachim

Nathalie Joachim is in New York City on the eve of premiering *Note to Self*, a collaboration with *Sō Percussion* at Carnegie Hall. She is thoughtful and excited with eyes that sparkle with creativity, a deep intellect, and a willingness to draw you in and connect. “Who knows if I’ve even had my big break?” she jokes with humility. The Grammy-nominated flutist, composer, and vocalist is one of the performance artists forming part of the Bryce Dessner Residency at Yale Schwarzman Center. This extraordinary group of visionary musicians, artists, thinkers, and doers will create new music and collaborate with Grammy award-winning writer, musician, arranger and composer Bryce Dessner ’96 over the next three years.

The Brooklyn-born Haitian-American artist is co-founder of the critically-acclaimed duo, *Flutronix*, and comfortably navigates everything from classical to indie-rock, all while advocating for social change and cultural awareness. She has performed and recorded with an impressive range of

today’s most exciting artists and ensembles. As a composer, Joachim is regularly commissioned to write for instrumental and vocal artists, dance, and interdisciplinary theater, often highlighting her unique electroacoustic style.

The YSC team sat down with Joachim to talk about her groundbreaking work, her inspiration and what she hopes to accomplish at Yale and beyond.

## **How did you get your start in music? Who inspired you the most?**

Music has always been such a huge part of my life, and I really credit my grandmother as being the beginning of that story. We had a unique way of connecting... We spent countless hours together in her yard in Haiti, sitting under the mango trees in her yard, singing and making up songs together. She would ask me to tell her about my day or tell her about something that was on my mind, but through song. And what I didn’t recognize at the time

was that, for us, as Haitian people, music was the way of preserving our history.

Through this loving exchange between us, my grandmother brought me into this centuries-old practice of storytelling through song and music, and I credit her for igniting the young composer and improviser in me, and for being the first person to reinforce that sharing my voice, wholly and honestly, through music is something that I should always really honor and cherish.

Joachim’s most recent touring project, “*Fanm d’Ayiti*,” is an evening-length work for flute, voice, string quartet and electronics that celebrate and explore her personal Haitian heritage. Commissioned and developed in residence through St. Paul Chamber Orchestra’s *Liquid Music* series, “*Fanm d’Ayiti*” was recorded with Chicago-based ensemble *Spektral Quartet*. The work, released in 2019 on *New Amsterdam Records* as Joachim’s first featured solo album, received a Grammy nomination for Best World Music Album, and will make its orchestral debut in 2022 with the *Oregon Symphony*, where Joachim currently serves as an Artistic Partner.





Nathalie Joachim, Photo: Erin Patrice O'Brien



**Tell us about *Fanm d'Ayiti* and what it meant to you to honor your culture, your grandmother, and be recognized for it by the Recording Academy?**

My journey to *Fanm d'Ayiti* started in late 2015 shortly after the passing of my grandmother. Her absence ignited a deep desire for understanding in me. In what ways did our voices connect with the voices of other Haitian women? What did our songs tell us about our past, and what might they mean for the future? So, *Fanm d'Ayiti* was the first project for me where I really, truly felt that I embraced my entire identity within that work as a Black woman, as a Haitian American, and as a 21st century creative thinker and artist. To not only have it be well received by my colleagues, but to get the Grammy nod was really something... It confirmed that my grandmother was right! That sharing exactly who you are, and doing so unapologetically and honestly, is the very best way to be received.



Nathalie Joachim, Photo: Josué Azor

**How did your partnership with Bryce Dessner come about?**

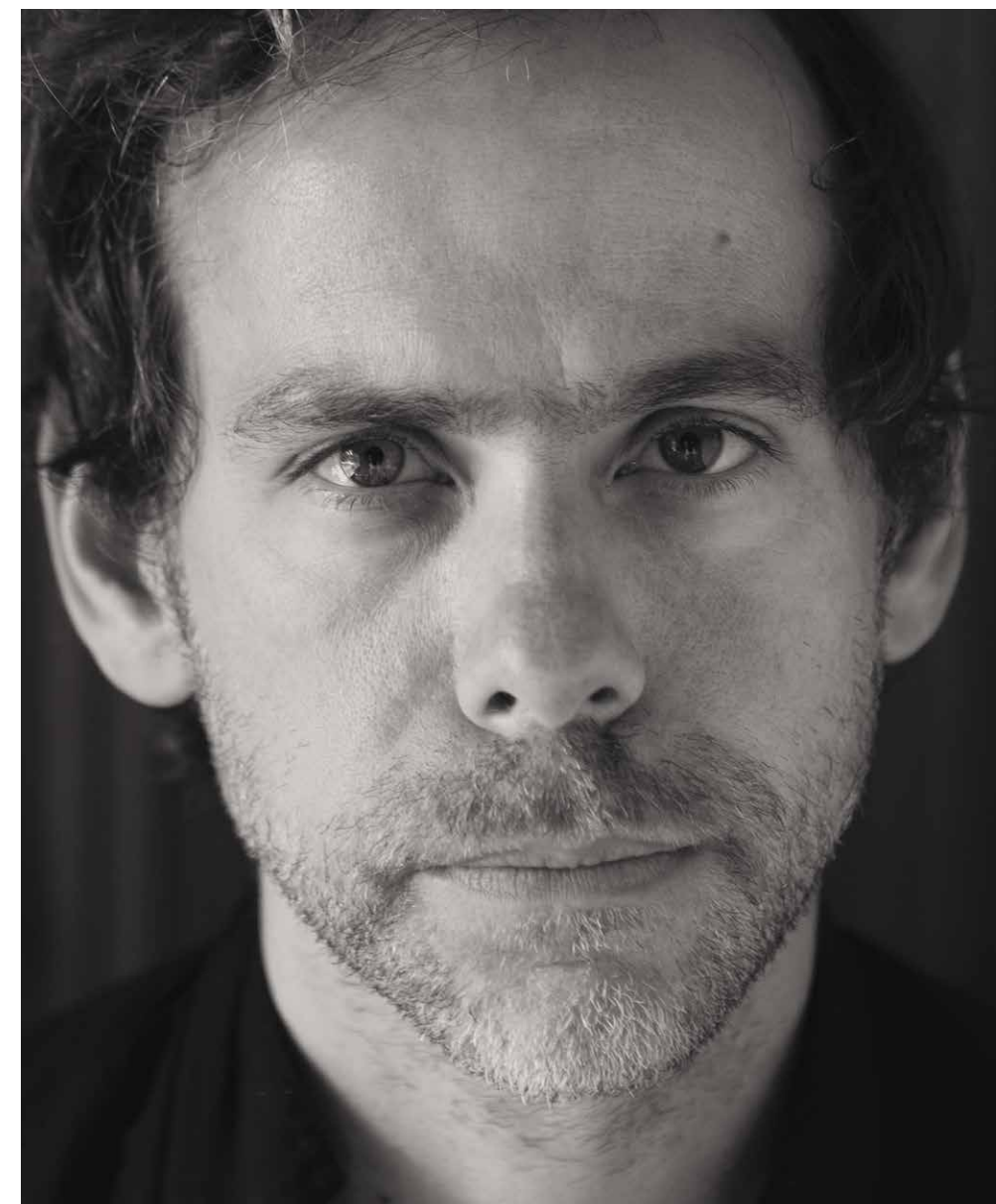
I first learned about Bryce while I was working for the Brooklyn Youth Chorus—he was commissioned to write a piece for them. I knew of him through his band The Nationals, so I remember thinking, “I thought that this guy was in a band. And now I’m hearing some of his concert music, and it’s exciting stuff!” Soon afterwards, he was commissioned to write new work for Eighth Blackbird, just as I was joining the ensemble, and so I got to play some of his music in a chamber setting. And that relationship also evolved from the classical to indie rock. We worked together on a beautiful record with Bonnie “Prince” Billy, in which I got to sing in addition to play flute with him.

Bryce and I share this mutual versatility, where we’re not hamstrung by genre, where we are excited about all of the intricacies and technical prowess of classical music. And yet we both come from

other traditions that involve communal music-making. So, when he first wrote to me about this residency, I was excited to be involved. I have appreciated Bryce’s curation and his ability to have his ear to the ground and be excited about what might come next from an artist.

**Your work tends to honor truth and history. How does that factor into the work that you will be developing around your engagement at the YSC?**

So much of my work now has become connected to place and honoring the history of spaces in many ways, but also to be able to transform spaces into something new. This opportunity to unveil this new iteration of the Schwarzman Center in this way intrigued me. What does it mean to actually create a piece that’s very specific to the space itself? What does it mean to transform this space into a sonic environment for a unique experience here? And so, I hope to honor this place in that way.



# Bryce Dessner Residency

Launching this spring, Bryce Dessner’s YSC residency is a multi-year engagement anchored by the renowned composer and Yale School of Music alumnus in collaboration with extraordinary musicians, artists, thinkers, and doers at and beyond Yale. As a feature of the residency, Dessner has assembled a roster of women creators—including Nathalie Joachim, Ash Fure, and Julia Bullock—whose music amplifies their lived experiences across gender, race, and culture. Each artist, including Dessner, will spend time on campus engaging in research and conversation as they develop new music and co-create unique artistic experiences with the university and New Haven community.





# Bryce and I share this mutual versatility, where we're not hamstrung by genre, where we are excited about all of the intricacies and technical prowess of classical music.

## **What is the relationship between your music as a creative process and social change?**

As people, we are drawn to individual stories. As an artist, that is how I can affect change. I can't tell you how many times I describe my relationship with my grandmother, and the person on the other side of that conversation is like, "I have a grandmother who I'm really close to," or, "This reminds me of my mom and my relationship..." It's the idea of being able to connect through personal stories—as humans, we really crave that kind of connectivity. And so, for me in my work, I'm most active as an advocate and changemaker by creating and holding space for as many voices and as many stories as I possibly can... to honor what is offered to me and acknowledge that we have a shared existence.

## **What has your role as an educator meant to you?**

As an artist, education is one of the spaces where I can actively affect change. I'm constantly lecturing at universities, all over the country—it's another reason why I'm excited to be connected with the Schwarzman Center, because it's a space for really incredible thinkers, active learners and educators. For me, the key to education is not necessarily to make anybody the best composer or the best flutist or the best vocalist, but in fact,

to bring every single student that I work with a little bit closer to being themselves. If I can do that every day as an educator and engage people in that practice for themselves, then it feels like I'm making the world a little bit better.

## **What's next in terms of what we might expect from you here at YSC?**

I pride myself on being someone who continues to defy genre. What's happening in this premiere at Carnegie Hall is going to be very different than what most people have heard from me before. My last record, bringing in oral histories in that way, was also quite different than what folks had heard from me before. And so, I won't pigeonhole myself into any one genre. I hope that anybody who follows my career or is a fan of my work trusts that I am a creative artist who has many mediums through which I can communicate. Whether it's flute playing, my voice, electronics; something that's traditional or rather experimental; or something that ventures into the world of sound art, there is this trust that I will approach each project with my whole self and with my whole heart, hopefully resulting in work that really resonates. I am grateful for being entrusted as an artist in this moment to create something at the Schwarzman Center that is moving, that is memorable, and that is an offering to anyone who's willing to receive it.



Rendering: Robert A. M. Stern Architects, LLP





The Yale Dance Lab partnered with YSC to create “Transpositions: dance poems for an online world,” a year-long research project that unfolded over the 2020–2021 academic year and resulted in an anthology of digital “dance poems” created by sixteen choreographers, sixty-six dancers, nine sound designers, three student producers, one video artist, one artistic director, and two advisers. Faculty and students from Yale College, David Geffen School of Drama, and Yale School of Art participated. Released online in installments by YSC, the project premiered in its entirety in November, projected high on the walls of Commons during lunchtime. The startling presence of innovative, collectively devised Yale arts in Commons—a space devoted to the daily ritual of eating lunch—was especially transformative, a culminating triumph. We never could have pulled off creative work of this scale and scope without YSC’s presence and support for big ideas.

Emily Coates,  
Professor in the Practice of Theater &  
Performance Studies, Professor in the Practice  
of Directing at the David Geffen School of Drama,  
Faculty Director of the Yale Dance Lab



Screenshot from “Transpositions: dance poems for an online world.” Video Artist: Kyla Arsadjaja MFA '20. Episodes and full credits at <https://bit.ly/YaleTranspositions>



# Bringing the Life of Anthony Shadid to the Stage

## مقابلة مع روبرت مايرز: إحضار حياة أنطوني شديد إلى المسرح



Yale Schwarzman Center, along with the Yale Council of Middle East Studies, is proud to present a staged reading of *A Thousand Strange Places*. This new play, directed and co-developed by Kirsten Sanderson, coincides with the 20th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. It follows the career of renowned Lebanese-American journalist Anthony Shadid and is based on the Shadid archive housed at American University of Beirut's Jafet Library.

YSC spoke with playwright, author and scholar Robert Myers, author of *A Thousand Strange Places*, about the life of the extraordinary Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, the playwright's artistic process and the ways in which he explores themes of interconnectivity and crossing boundaries in this new play.

### What inspired you to create a play based on the life of Anthony Shadid?

I've taught for the last 18 years at the American University in Beirut. I'm a playwright and a literature professor, but I'm also the Director of the Alwaleed Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR), which was founded in 2004 with a mission of understanding the fraught relationship between east and

west. I had the privilege to collaborate with the renowned journalist Rami Khouri, and he proposed that we use Anthony Shadid's archive for pedagogical purposes. Shadid was an absolutely fascinating writer, reporter, and journalist. Since I have written 15 or 16 plays, a dozen of which are historical and documentary, when I looked at the material in the archive, I thought, "This is a play." And so that is how *A Thousand Strange Places* came into being.

### What was it about Anthony Shadid that impacted you or made him a compelling figure?

I couldn't have found a more synergistic figure than Anthony Shadid—this kid who grew up in Oklahoma, learned Arabic as an adult and immersed himself in Arabic culture. It allowed him access to a world that was not available to other Western reporters, places like Anbar province. If you read the stories of people he talked to, you would get a counter narrative to the one being put out by the Pentagon. For example, he would have lunch with a Shia family—and these were the people who were ostensibly going to be rescued by the Americans. They were not happy about the American invasion and had vastly different point of view. So I loved

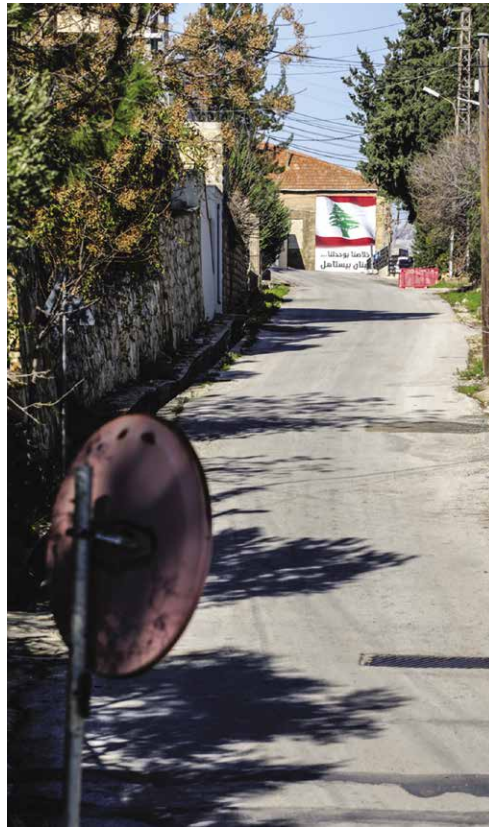
researching and writing his story, because it allowed me to go back and re-experience my own time in the Middle East through Shadid's experience.

### As a storyteller, what parts of Shadid's life did you pick to feature in the play and why?

I focus on the period from 2000 until his death in 2012. During that decade, he was a reporter, first in Afghanistan, and long before other Western reporters, he was insisting on going out to villages that had been bombed to see for himself. Even though Arabic isn't the language that was spoken there, he understood that's where the story was and was able to connect sufficiently with people to their story in a way that was authentic and engaging. Given the recent American withdrawal from Afghanistan, this story is timely and relevant today. I see this period that Shadid spent in Afghanistan as antecedent action for the American engagement with the Arab world, which is the focus of the play I wrote.

As a playwright, the story I'm tell is sort of the tip of the iceberg, but I've embedded within it a kind of complexity that performers and designers can draw upon—subtext and antecedent action.





**As the U.S. is just starting to reckon with its role in the destabilization of the Middle East, how does *A Thousand Strange Places* use Shadid's life to celebrate the Arab culture and, at the same time, the truth of that region?**

I'm very much a believer, as Mandela said, "Racism is a blight on human consciousness." Racism makes everyone sick. Apartheid makes everybody sick, and everybody must get well. The theater is a place to do that.

Over the years, I've come to conclude that if you can dramatize the complexity of situations, the audience can engage in interpretation. Take Shadid, who was a high school wrestler in Oklahoma City, sitting down with a Shia family in Iraq, beginning to put those two sides together. You dig deeper and you find, "Oh, Shadid was very connected to the Greek Orthodox Church in Oklahoma. He's an Arab and a Christian—and not just a Christian, but an Orthodox, which is a transnational Christian."

If you begin to look at the Middle East region in that way, you realize that this preposterous "us versus them" narrative that emerged in the post 9/11 period is part of what poisoned the United States in its view, conflating Arabs with Muslims, right? Well, they're Muslims but there are also Indonesian Muslims in India, Pakistan, and China. You know, it's such an utterly simplistic, reductive view.

In Shadid you have a figure who is multifaceted, who had the ability, the wherewithal and the understanding to let people tell their own stories. He would find the most humble people, people who are shoemakers or somebody selling stuff on the street, but then he would also talk to very sophisticated people, like a psychiatrist in Iraq. He was able to connect with so many kinds of people. There is a scene that I use in the play in which someone says to him: "You're like us. You speak Arabic. But the difference is, you can leave, and we can't." In other words, he's this figure who can cross these borders, as it were, and in so doing, he has provided us with information to reinforce the complexity of the situation and the region.

It's this constant complexity which puts the onus on the audience—and that's what attracts me. I want to create a dynamic on stage so that the audience must think and interpret without my preaching to them or telling them what to think. I'm just insisting that it is infinitely more complicated than the simplistic narratives that people have been spoon-fed. Everyone needs to tell their whole story.

**What is something you admire about Shadid?**

He was a really great listener, a great journalist. Other reporters talk about his technique—he would sit there and have lunch with you. Then after two hours, he would say, "I'm a reporter, do you mind if I take my notebook out and start taking notes?" So, after he's taken the time to truly get to know his subject, he'd take the next two hours to write things down. He constantly sought a kind of understanding by looking directly at them and by trying to tell their whole story. This is what is truly beautiful about having his archives at the Jafet Library because you can see the layers of the story, almost as if it were a film script. I do think that the people who read his stories were changed.

Shadid wrote about these very deep, complex aspects of identity that many people don't have access to. I'm really interested

in the extent to which you can cross borders. Language can only get you so far, but it was this deep immersion into culture that Shadid was so adept at. Americans have this idea that they're spreading freedom, but if you go to any of these places and spend time with the people, you'll hear them say quite the contrary, that Americans are really imperialists. I can't think of a better prism to provide a different perspective than the life and work of Shadid. He valued the Arab culture and worked harder to be part of it. Through his work, you'll have a better understanding of what happened with this engagement between the U. S. and the Arab world.

**It sounds like Shadid was an extraordinary man whose stories showed us that we may be different, and yet, we're all the same. How are you exploring these themes of interconnectivity and breaking of boundaries in *A Thousand Strange Places*?**

You've got to be able to cross borders—and if theater and literature and art cannot do it, if writing cannot do it, if music cannot do it, then we're in a terrible state. I find Shadid so appealing because he's done it internationally. If you want to understand people in Cambodia or anywhere else, you have to study, work and make an effort to do so. Well, here's somebody who made an enormous effort to be part of something to which he was deeply drawn. Even though these were his roots he was going back to, Shadid was the kind of artist that had the ability to change or transform the world, even if just a little bit.

As a prelude to *A Thousand Strange Places*, YSC and the CASAR Working Group on Anthony Shadid will host a panel organized by prominent journalist and American University of Beirut Professor Rami Khouri, and consisting of celebrated foreign correspondents and journalists from The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the Columbia School of Journalism who knew and worked with Anthony Shadid. Subscribe to our newsletter at <https://schwarzman.yale.edu> for updates.

**Shadid was the kind of artist that had the ability to change or transform the world, even if just a little bit.**



**This is bayt.  
This is what we imagine.**

**هذا بيت  
هذا ما في الخيال**



# YEMANDJA & THE BIRTH OF A MUSICAL



## ONE FAMILY'S HISTORY WITH SLAVERY THROUGH ART

**L**

ove. Betrayal. Honor. Free will. Slavery. These are complex themes on their own, but an original musical developed by a mother-daughter creative team combines all these elements, taking the audience on a three-dimensional journey of body, voice, and heart. The vision of Grammy-award winning singer, songwriter, activist, and actor, Angélique Kidjo, and her daughter, actor, writer, multinational performer Naïma Hebrail Kidjo, *Yemandja: A Story of Africa*, blurs the boundaries of real life and art and uses culture-inspired storytelling to bridge gaps in human understanding and forgiveness.

The story begins with a traditional Yoruban baptism, where a child is welcomed into the family and a ceremony reveals if there is an ancestor or deity who wants to be a guiding spirit to this child on earth. Yemandja, the goddess of water, fertility, and love, breaks through the veil and becomes the guide for this timeless yet timely story of the Kidjo family who resists slavery in the West African country that is now Benin.

“Imagine you’re in a time when the wall between the real world and metaphysical world of deities is thin... and the slave trade

was in full spring. What does that tragic moment represent?” said Hebrail Kidjo. “We wanted to bring culture and history together to offer different perspectives while telling the emotionally complex story of slavery through the eyes of our family.”

With more than ten years in the making, *Yemandja: A Story of Africa* provides a nuanced yet full and human portrayal of this period. To provide balance, the Kidjos sprinkled the storyline with the magic of deities and infused powerful lyrics with West African music as a vehicle to carry the audience through a palate of emotions.

“There is something magical about two generations honoring our family’s legacy and our people’s traditions in an authentic way,” said Kidjo. “Collaborating on this story and infusing our culture into the costume design, sound, and lighting was a rewarding process.”

Both mother and daughter hope that *Yemandja: A Story of Africa* can serve as a springboard for conversation, forgiveness, and healing. “How do you carry all of those who have fought against slavery, and at the same time, let people know that forgiveness is possible, that our differences can bring us together? There is so much more interconnectedness in the world than we realize” added Hebrail Kidjo.

YSC will host “A Conversation with Angélique Kidjo and Naïma Hebrail Kidjo: The Making of a Musical” and will later present *Yemandja: A Story of Africa* in performance. Subscribe to our newsletter at <https://schwarzman.yale.edu> for updates.



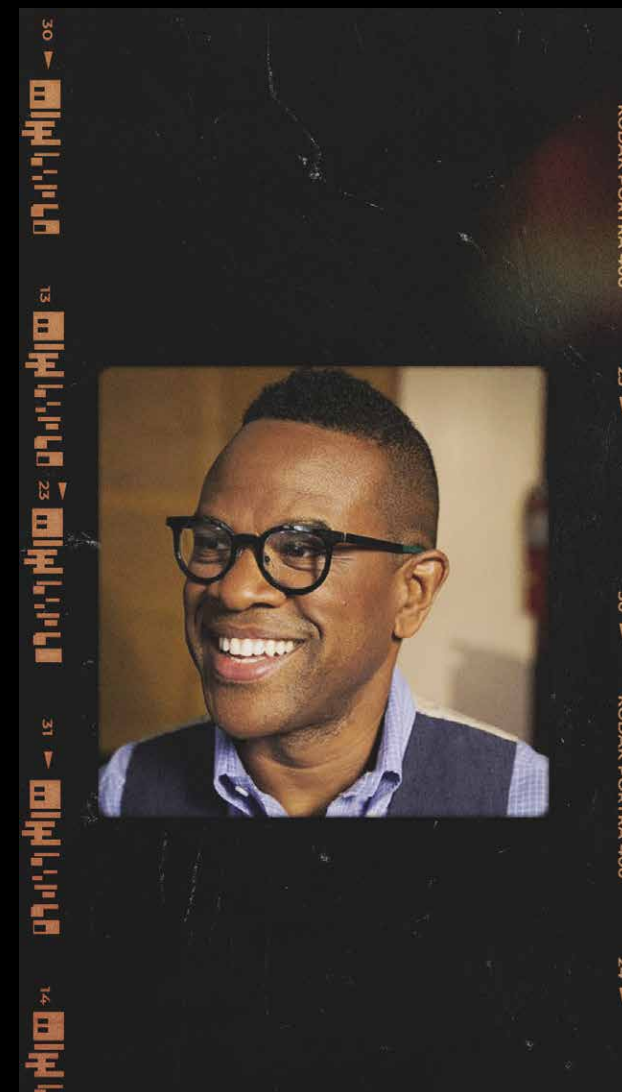
Adapted from an interview with Angélique Kidjo and Naïma Hebrail Kidjo by Broad Stage Artistic & Executive Director, Rob Bailis.

Angélique Kidjo, Photo: courtesy of THE OFFICE performing arts + film (top); Naïma Hebrail Kidjo, Photo: Paul Smith (bottom)

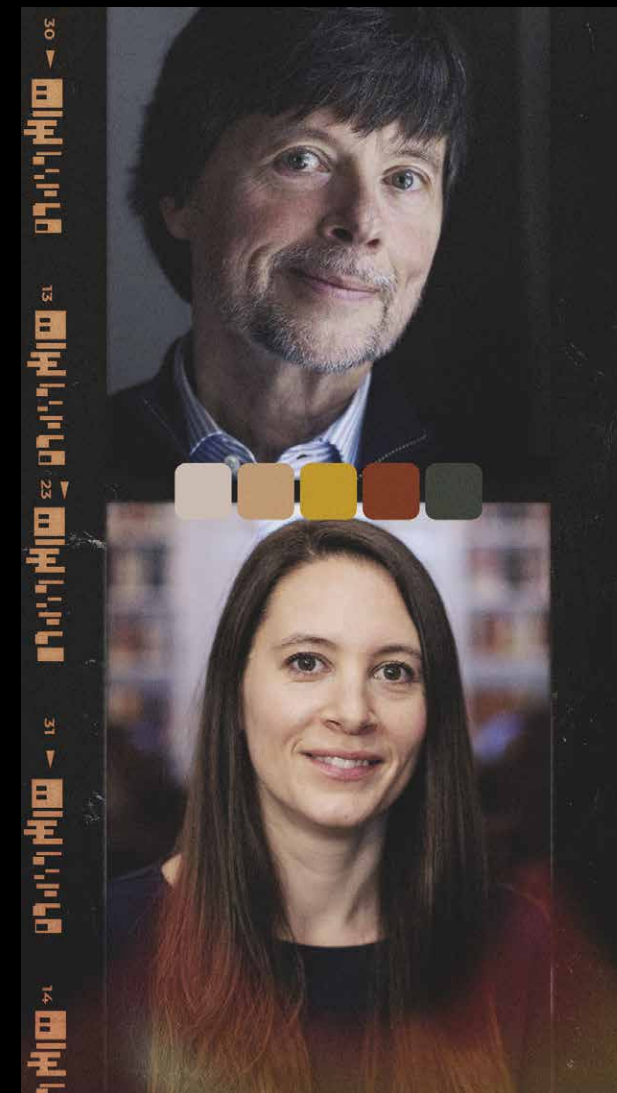


YSC has greatly contributed to the creative and intellectual life of multiple communities, harnessing the medium of film and virtual technologies to connect them—all while grappling with the limitations of the pandemic. I am looking forward to future possibilities as well as the communal collaborations with YSC.

Thomas Allen Harris,  
Senior Lecturer, Film and Media Studies &  
African American Studies



Thomas Allen Harris



Ken Burns (top), Sarah Burns '04 (bottom)



Clark Burnett '19





# Ezell

## Ezell Offers Ballad of Healing for the Appalachian Community

For artists Bob Martin and Carrie Brunk, truth-telling through performance is a way to support communities, process trauma and reframe their stories in a way that is transformative and healing. That is the enormous undertaking of *Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man*, an environmental, cultural, and spiritual parable centering on the challenges of living in the foothills of Appalachia.

In the story, Ezell is one man among many seeking to make sense of the time, place, and condition in which we live. His choices, traumas, and ancestors intersect with themes of domination and resilience as he seeks to take advantage of an anticipated fracking boom. According to Carrie Brunk, Clear Creek

Creative co-creator, community activist, facilitator, and transformative coach, *Ezell* is a piece of art that explores the complexities of today's issues of climate change, indigenous erasure, and environmental extraction.

*Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man* blurs the lines between activism and real life, but it also conveys an underlying sense of optimism and collaboration. "Whatever revelations are brought up by *Ezell*, we hope you hold those questions of climate change, of colonialism and power struggle a little bit longer and make you think, wow, these characters are really complicated, or this path has given us a lot to think about," said Clear Creek Creative Executive Producer Bob Martin.

"We all need to do the work of healing and reframing... to create a future that we all can be in, despite and in spite of tremendous challenges."

Today's headlines are not lost on Martin and Brunk. Their work continues to be relevant and hold meaning, particularly for those communities devastated by poverty, climate change, and fracking. "This is art that matters and helps us make sense of what we're going through as both a local and global community," said Brunk. "Whether you are conservative or progressive, directly affected by fracking or not, *Ezell* is for all of us, because we can see our shared humanity and the complexity that is inherent in issues surrounding trauma, displacement, and self-healing."

Full audience integration was important to Martin's vision; in fact, *Ezell* takes art imitating life to a deeper level by having its performances outdoors in nature—with the stage resembling a series of tree-houses and tarps—and culminating in a community feast. Clear Creek Creative and its partners also encourage audiences to get involved at the local level by directing their viewers to local grassroots efforts undertaking long-term climate change work.

Presented by Yale Schwarzman Center, *Ezell* will be performed outdoors at the Landscape Lab on Yale West Campus. Subscribe to our newsletter at <https://schwarzman.yale.edu> for updates.



**Ezell is for all of us,  
because we can see  
our shared humanity  
and the complexity  
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trauma, displacement,  
and self-healing.**









**ART &  
TRUTH-TELLING:  
TOTO  
KISAKU'S  
REQUIEM FOR  
AN  
ELECTRIC CHAIR**







## EACH SECOND IN OUR LIFE COUNTS

In 2015, Toto Kisaku escaped from death row in the Democratic Republic of Congo and fled to Connecticut, where he was eventually granted asylum in 2018. The crime for which he was sentenced to death by the electric chair: his series of one-man plays detailing the real-life horrors of disinformation and child abuse by local churches and the government's complicity. "I used art as a weapon. What is destroying my country is the silence. I wanted to give people on the ground the possibility to change their condition," he said.

Yale Schwarzman Center, along with Yale's Council on Middle East Studies, is proud to present Kisaku's one-man play *Requiem for an Electric Chair* that tells the story of his persecution as a truth-teller.

Challenging the boundaries between performance and daily life, Kisaku explores themes of faith, family, and courage

through the lens of oppression and poverty. The play explores Kisaku's detention experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with mannequins on stage standing in for the cellmates whose faces he could not make out in the dark. The story culminates with his harrowing escape and journey to the U.S. and exposes audiences here to the plight of many African immigrants escaping corruption, collusion, and authoritarianism.

"I want to show people what happens to people who are waiting to be executed. Two minutes before you are executed, what are you seeing? What are you thinking about the world?" he said. "*Requiem* reflects a reality that people are ignoring. People hear about people being incarcerated and executed, but they ignore what's going on inside the human being in that moment. I want the audience to know that each second in our life counts."

"What is going on today in the Congo is unacceptable because there are families torn apart—mothers don't know where their sons are, where their husbands are. They are kidnapped, tortured, imprisoned, killed. *Requiem* is not my story anymore. It's the story of people who are in this kind of place tonight, people who are still living in these kinds of places," lamented Kisaku. "It's to open the minds of people who are still ignoring that those kinds of things exist... that 12 million Congolese people have died in 15 years... that people will be killed tonight, and they will be killed tomorrow. That's why we have to tell the truth."

Subscribe to our newsletter at <https://schwarzman.yale.edu> for updates on the YSC premiere of *Requiem for an Electric Chair* by award-winning playwright, actor, director, and producer Toto Kisaku.

**I WANT TO SHOW WHAT  
HAPPENS TO PEOPLE  
WHO ARE WAITING  
TO BE EXECUTED...  
WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?  
WHAT ARE YOU THINKING  
ABOUT THE WORLD?**





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