



A Period of Animate Existence

Pig Iron Theatre Company

Conceived and created by

Troy Herion Composer **Mimi Lien** Set Designer **Dan Rothenberg** Director

Collaborators

Kate Tarker Co-Librettist

Will Eno Co-Librettist

Tyler Micoleau Lighting Designer

Loren Shaw Costume Designer

Nick Kourtides Sound Designer

Dave Tennent Video Designer

Katherine Freer Associate Video Designer

Beth Gill Choreographer

Melissa Krodman Studio Dramaturg

Bethany Wiggan Dramaturg

David Bloom Conductor

(Movements 1, 2 and 4)

Donald Nally Conductor (Movement 5)

Amanda Morton Choir Director

(Movement 2 and 4)

Justin Yoder Associate Choir Director

(Movement 2 and 4)

Nell Bang-Jensen Assistant Director

Meiyin Wang Creative Producer

PROGRAM

The piece is performed in five movements.

There is no intermission, but there will be a short pause between each movement.

Friday, September 22 @ 8 PM
Saturday, September 23 @ 2 PM
Saturday, September 23 @ 8 PM
Sunday, September 24 @ 2 PM
Sunday, September 24 @ 7 PM

Zellerbach Theatre

A Period of Animate Existence is co-commissioned and co-presented by the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Pennsylvania and FringeArts.

A Period of Animate Existence was developed in part during residencies at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, School of the Arts at SUNY Purchase, Swarthmore College and EMPAC/Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Rothenberg, Lien and Herion were artists-in-residence at the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities for 2016-17.

**The
PewCenters
forArts
&Heritage**

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Performers

Movement 1

Vicente Alexim, David Bloom, Mary Cappillino, Marilu Donovan, Val Dunn, Ricki Eisenstein, John Gattis, Molly Germer, Thomas Giles, Amanda Gookin, Audrey Hayes, Devin Hinzo, Josh Henderson, Melissa Krodman, Jenson Titus Lavallee, Daniel Linden, Christian Ortiz, TJ Robinson, Evan Runyon, Scott Sheppard, Joe Tucker, Clara Warnaar, Fanny Wyrick-Flax

Movement 2

Katy Avery, Aaron Bell, Yvette Bedgood, Dan Bruskwicz, Daniel de Jesús, Natalie Dickinson, Ricki Eisenstein, Allie Faulkner, John Hawthorne, Dan Higbee, Jessica Johnson, Pat Jordan, Melissa Krodman, Jenson Titus Lavallee, Fang-Hsuan Li, Jason Lindner, Walter McCready, Adrian Miller, Yoshi Nomura, Rebecca Oehlers, Geraldine Oliver, Umer Piracha, Brianna Pope-McBride, Rebecca Siler, BrendaRose Simkin, Stephen Tornetta, Dito van Reigersberg, Suzanna Yoshida

(Alternates: Peter Christian, Jeanne Lyons, Rebecca Posner, Izzy Szak)

Movement 4

Vanessa Ballard, David Bloom, Nancy Boykin*, Abigail Brown, Lucas Collazo, Karrington Riley Colón, Margalit Eisenstein, Naia Gomes, Sean Harrington, Arlene Hilton, Jennifer Kidwell, Simon Kiley, Melissa Krodman, Jenson Titus Lavallee, Maggie Madison, Barry Marron, Elva McGraw, Griffin Miller, Christian Ortiz, Rut Patil, Anne Roller, Sara Schwartz, Scott Sheppard, Marilyn Sifford, Owen Skidmore, Mark Smith, Christopher Stouffer, Camiel Warren-Taylor, Mary Webb

Movement 5

Katy Avery, Felix Belga, Steven Bradshaw, Nathan Brennan, Josh Dziewa, Robby Eisentrout, Allie Faulkner, Zachary Fuentes, Dimitri German, Steven Hyder, Frank Laucerica, Chelsea Lyons, Donald Nally, Rebecca Oehlers, Zachary Sheaffer, Cameron Shields, Rebecca Siler, Ian Sison, Elisa Sutherland, Jason Weisinger, Henry Williams

(* appears through the courtesy of Actors' Equity Association)

Creative/Production Team

Leonard Luvera Production Manager

Flora Vassar Production Stage Manager

David Ogle Technical Director

Alicia Crosby Props Designer

Chelsea Murphy Children's Choir Coach

Tenara Calem Children's Choir Guardian

Toby Pettit Associate Sound Designer/Mixer

Jeff Sugg Visual Consultant

Angela Harner Assistant Costume Designer

Jon Reilly Second Assistant Costume Designer

Noah Fishman Copyist/Assistant to the Composer

Val Dunn Script & Dramaturgy Coordinator

Essie Windham Assistant Props Master

Eddie Donlevie Assistant Production Manager

Rachel Beecher Assistant Stage Manager

Madeline Jones Assistant Stage Manager

Stephanie Smith Production Assistant

Creative Partners

Penn Program in Environmental Humanities

The Crossing

Contemporaneous

Philomusica

Philadelphia Boys Choir and Chorale

Philadelphia Girls Choir

PROGRAM NOTES

Children, elders, and machines contemplate the future

“Many think our most important task is to try to save the planet, but surely this is hubris.”
– James Lovelock, *The Earth and I*

“Conditions on Earth change only very slowly, except when they don’t ... Any event that has occurred just five times since the first animal with a backbone appeared, some five hundred million years ago, must qualify as exceedingly rare.”
– Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*

ARTISTS’ STATEMENT

WE FIND OURSELVES IN A PERILOUS TIME.

One that is being called the Sixth Extinction, an era in which we foresee the loss of 20% to 50% of all living species on earth.

Today we are living in the geologic age called the Anthropocene (*anthropo*, for “man,” and *cene*, for “new”), defined as the time when humans are the dominant force on Earth, creating undeniable lasting impacts on the planet as a whole.

The gravity of these issues has entered mainstream consciousness, affecting our politics, media, and ultimately our individual beliefs about the trajectory of life.

How do we contemplate the future in such a moment?

– Troy Herion, Mimi Lien and Dan Rothenberg

About the title:

If you open the dictionary and look up the word “life,” one entry reads: “a period of animate existence.”

The “period” depends on how we measure. In one sense, each of us has our own period of animate existence, which we call a lifetime. And yet, we know that life has evolved only once on this planet - it was never fully extinguished and forced to start again. Zooming out to this much longer time scale, we see one generation succeeding another, beginning once and continuing in an unbroken chain of life that continues to this very moment.

– Troy Herion

A note on the form:

Our piece is in five movements and is modeled after a symphony.

In the 19th century, the symphony was the largest and most ambitious form of instrumental music used by classical composers. Traditionally, the symphony breaks into four separate movements, each one highly individual with its own texture, mood and tempo. Melodies from one movement rarely show up in another movement. Instead, there is a strong sense of contrast from one movement to the next, juxtaposing loud and soft, fast and slow, aggressive and emotional, serious and comical. Overall, it is a form of accumulation, where highly contrasting points of views are presented together as a whole.

– Troy Herion

A note on extinction:

We owe a great debt to Elizabeth Kolbert's book *The Sixth Extinction*. It seems to me that people in my community – my NPR-listening, contemporary art-loving community – know what's inside *The Sixth Extinction* vaguely but not specifically. When I was reading the book, I sometimes looked up from the page, hoping to catch the eye of some fellow human being and ask "Are you getting this? Did you know this? Why isn't everyone talking about this?"

Here's some of what's inside it. The idea of "extinction" is a relatively new concept, just a couple hundred years old. For a long time, scientists couldn't imagine that species existed and then disappeared.

Now, the fossil record tells us that extinction is happening all the time, at a slow background rate. But several times in history, the rate of extinction spiked. The one that exists in the popular imagination is the extinction of the dinosaurs, 66 million years ago.

And right now, around us, a mass extinction event is occurring.

– Dan Rothenberg

A note about the Anthropocene:

"The Anthropocene is an epoch in which human activity has become a geophysical force on a planetary scale."

– Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology*

"[Changes to the soil, climate, and species distribution] would leave behind 'a global stratigraphic signature' that would still be legible millions of years from now."

– Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*

When I first heard the term "Anthropocene," I thought it was ad-speak. Something in the vein of "Earth Day" or "Atomic Age."

But no – "Anthropocene" is a term coined by geologists in conversation with other geologists. Stratigraphers, geologists who study the layers of rock and sediment, define geological eras and epochs based on the changes they observe in the rocks all across the planet.

12,000 years ago, the most recent geologic era, the Holocene, began with the end of the last ice age. In 2017, geologists continued to debate when this new era, the Anthropocene, began. Human activity is currently the dominant force shaping the land and the ocean, as well as the atmosphere. As we change the atmosphere with carbon dioxide (and this began even before the Industrial Revolution), as we reshape every ecosystem and change the rate and patterns of extinction, we make a mark in the rocks. Modern humans have been around for maybe 200,000 years. But this mark we have made will be locked inside the rocks, all over the planet, for many millions of years, and visible to whatever kind of stratigrapher takes a look in that far distant future.

– Dan Rothenberg

A note on James Lovelock and our elderly planet:

James Lovelock is a chemist, independent environmentalist, author and futurist. He was the first to detect the widespread presence of CFC's in the atmosphere in the late 60s, and his research became central to activism around banning certain chemicals in an attempt to repair the ozone holes above the polar regions of the Earth. In the 1970's, he and microbiologist Lynn Margulis put forth the "Gaia hypothesis," which postulated that the Earth functions as a self-regulating system.

"Even without the impact of human activity, [Earth] is an elderly biosphere... Many think our most important task is to try to save the planet, but surely this is hubris. We are a

powerful species, but we are, and always will be, part of a much more powerful planetary system. Rather than try to save Gaia, perhaps the most important thing we have to do is to save ourselves and, above all, our ability to think, to understand, to value wisdom, and to process information.”

– James Lovelock, *The Earth and I*

If this crisis is imagined as a rising tide that is swamping a vibrant society, of course we want to leap to action, and we wonder why no one is doing what is necessary. But this word “elderly,” written by someone who has spent his life fighting and advocating, implies an inevitable death that we need to meet with grace. As I read this, Lovelock is making common cause with the transhumanists, and insisting that we need to preserve our intelligence for a greater, unknown, interplanetary community.

– Dan Rothenberg

A note about the uncanny:

“Uncanny” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “ken” meaning the home, the familiar – the uncanny is that which is outside of familiar perceptions.

Perhaps it is futile to make an artwork about this catastrophe that is happening all around us. On the one hand, we are all aware of it – so aware that the language around it has become somewhat benign, toothless. On the other hand, many of us ensconced in our first-world lives don’t directly experience the actual fallout, can’t wrap our heads around the vast scale of it, both spatially and temporally. Most days, I can’t quite feel the catastrophe in a visceral way.

Timothy Morton invites us to contemplate a “dark ecology” – an “ecological awareness, dark-depressing... also dark-uncanny... strangely dark-sweet... a weird knowing.”

So maybe that’s something I can do – invite the uncanny into this room – since a room is a scale I understand.

– Mimi Lien

On Henri Bergson and the Elan Vital:

“The living being is above all a thoroughfare, and the essence of life is in the movement by which life is transmitted.”

– Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*

Another touchstone for this project has been the writing of the early 20th-century philosopher and biologist Henri Bergson. As part of the generation coming of age after Darwin published “On the Origin of Species,” Bergson was trying to make sense of the relatively new discipline of life science – what separates the living from the non-living, and what could possibly explain the thrust behind evolution. Bergson gives this evolutionary thrust a name, the “elan vital” which essentializes life into “mobility itself.” And what direction is life moving in? Towards “infinite novelty” of course!

This is not such an abstract idea – that living things are always changing – yet it is still not something we easily grasp. We more commonly imagine ourselves as fixed organisms, fixed things – everything, the tree, the dog, the virus, seems fixed.

“[Certain forms of life] are therefore relatively stable, and counterfeit immobility so well that we treat each of them as a thing rather than as a progress, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of a movement.” (Bergson)

– Troy Herion

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Co-Creators

Troy Herion (Composer)

Herion is a composer and filmmaker whose works unite contemporary music with visual arts through film, theatre, dance and concert music. His versatile compositions range from classical and avant-garde orchestral music to intricate and melodic electronic scores. For the last decade, he has collaborated extensively with filmmakers, choreographers and theatre companies. Recent film scores include award-winning films *The Dog*, *Mountain Fire Personnel* and *You Can Go* premiering at Toronto, SXSW, MoMA and Tribeca Film Festival. Herion composes and directs visual-music films, such as *Baroque Suite* and *New York: A City Symphony*, which were featured on MTV and in *The New York Times*, and performed with an orchestra at Carnegie Hall.

Mimi Lien (Set Designer)

Lien is a designer of sets/environments for theatre, dance and opera. Arriving at set design from a background in architecture, her work often focuses on the interaction between audience/environment and object/performer. She won the 2017 Tony® Award for Best Scenic Design of a Musical for her work on *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*. She was named a 2015 MacArthur Fellow, and is the first set designer ever to achieve this distinction. Her stage designs have been exhibited in the Prague Quadrennial in 2011 and 2015, and her sculptures were featured in the exhibition *Landscapes of Quarantine*, at the Storefront for Art and Architecture. Her work has been seen at such venues as Lincoln Center Theater, Signature Theatre, the Public Theater, the Joyce Theater, Goodman Theatre and Soho Rep, as well as at international venues.

Dan Rothenberg (Director)

Dan Rothenberg is a Philadelphia-based director and creator of experimental performance. A founding member and co-artistic director of the Pig Iron Theatre Company, Rothenberg has directed almost all of Pig Iron's original performance works, including *Poet In New York*, *Gentlemen Volunteers*, *Love Unpunished*, *Isabella*, *Swamp is On* and the Obie Award-winning productions *Chekhov Lizardbrain* and *Hell Meets Henry Halfway*. Rothenberg has also directed English-language premieres of the plays of Toshiki Okada for Play Company in New York.

Pig Iron Theatre Company

Founded in 1995 as an interdisciplinary ensemble, Pig Iron Theatre Company is dedicated to the creation of new and unusual performance works. Pig Iron has created over 30 original works, toured to festivals and theatres nationally and internationally, including the Under the Radar Festival, the Humana Festival, the Edinburgh Fringe and the Konfrontacje Teatralne. Pig Iron has received 12 Barrymore Awards (and 53 nominations) and two Obie awards. *The New York Times* named Pig Iron "one of the few groups successfully taking theatre in new directions." In 2011, Pig Iron launched the Pig Iron School, a program of graduate study in ensemble and physical theater; in 2015 Pig Iron partnered with University of the Arts to offer Masters of Fine Arts degrees.

Collaborators

Led by Dylan Mattingly and David Bloom, **Contemporaneous** is an ensemble of 21 musicians whose mission is to bring to life the music of now. Based in New York City and active throughout the United States, Contemporaneous has premiered more than 70 works, many of them large-scale pieces by emerging composers. Through its commissions and readiness to play challenging music, the ensemble encourages composers to take risks

and defy constraints. Contemporaneous' debut album, *Stream of Stars — Music of Dylan Mattingly* (Innova Recordings), has been featured on radio programs around the world, including WNYC's "New Sounds" and WRTI's "Now is the Time."

The Crossing is a professional choir dedicated to expanding the contemporary choral music experience through commissions, collaborations, community and performances that are characterized by a distinctive unity of sound and spirit. They are dedicated to new music and commissioning works regularly, and have performed over 40 world premieres. Formed by a group of friends in 2005, the ensemble has since grown exponentially. They are two-time winners of the Chorus America/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, received the Chorus America Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence, and were nominated for a 2017 Grammy® Award for Best Choral Performance for their recording of Thomas Lloyd's *Bonhoeffer*.

Now led by Artistic Director Gayle Wieand, **Philomusica Chorale** was formed in 1979 by Dr. Mardia Melroy. From the beginning, the Chorale's purpose has been to present to the public all types of choral music from all periods of music history. The Chorale draws together people of diverse backgrounds from communities all over the Delaware Valley. In collaboration with other local arts organizations, recent concerts have incorporated dance, theatre, Taiko drumming and classical, rock and jazz instrumentalists.

Born of students' desires for a more permanent place for environmental dialogue across disciplines, the **Penn Program in Environmental Humanities** (PPEH) was founded in 2014 by the combined forces of Professor Bethany Wiggin and student Leah Davidson to create a fresh and unique forum for work on environmental issues. PPEH brings together scientists, humanists and artists to create new language for the Anthropocene. The organization hosted work-in-progress showings of *A Period of Animate Existence* at their convenings, Timescales (October 2016) and An Ecotopian Toolkit (April 2017). ppehlab.org

Philadelphia Boys Choir & Chorale (PBCC) provides the finest musical education for young men in the Philadelphia area. Known and celebrated throughout the world, PBCC delivers a one-of-a-kind performance experience. Philadelphia Boys Choir & Chorale develops a varied repertoire every year. This repertoire is the basis for all performances of the Choir in a season, including the annual tour. It is a combination of classical, traditional, popular and patriotic songs, focusing on American composers.

Philadelphia Girls' Choir (PGC) takes a holistic approach to choral music. PGC relates singing, musicianship and choral performance to the broader human experience through art, drama, history and cultural diversity. Concerto, the most advanced choir, performs in the Pennsylvania Ballet's critically acclaimed *Nutcracker*.

For additional credits and bios, please visit pigion.org/PAEcredits.

Special Thanks

Clayton Tejada, Ashley Mills, and the Wilma Theater, Rebecca Rugg, Nathan Renner-Johnson, Barbara Milewski, Keystone Choir, Bowerbird and Dustin Hurt, Stephan Stoeckl, Wigboys

Fringe Festival Star Producers

Al & Nancy Hirsig

Fringe Festival Co-Producers

Cat, Annie, & Steven Bohnenberger
Stephen & Barbara Gold
Christie Hartwell
Nancy Lanham