

# THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

STUDY GUIDE 2024

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# FROM THE BOOK TO THE STAGE THE DRAMATURG / DIRECTOR

For me, dramaturgical work always begins by immersing myself in the source material that inspired the opera—in this case it is the book *Flight of the Hummingbird: A Parable for the Environment* by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas. A deceptively simple parable, it conveys in just a few elegant words a clear message of resilience and hope, empowering all of us to choose the path of the Hummingbird and effect momentous change with personal action.

The initial challenge facing our creative team was preserving the essence of our source story while expanding it meaningfully into a chamber length opera. As dramaturg / director, my role was to support the creators in a rigorous exploration of the new story elements that emerged as the opera evolved from the original story.

In a series of intense workshops, and months of emails and phone calls, we worked to create a compelling story of life in the forest before the arrival of the fire. Librettists Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and Barry Gilson wanted to create a dynamic exchange between four very different characters—Hummingbird, Bear, Bunny and Owl—and have that exchange culminate in the defining action of Dukdukdiya, our tiny Hummingbird.

As dramaturg in these workshops, I tried to imagine myself as the audience, hearing and experiencing the story for the first time. All the characters and their actions needed be clear to the audience and contribute to the overall narrative arc of the story. Through literally hundreds of changes and many drafts, our creative team has worked to create an opera we are proud to be sharing with you on this tour.

**Glynis Leyshon**

Director, *The Flight of The Hummingbird*



# THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The parable of the hummingbird originates with the Quechuan people of South America. Nekita Garcia-Gravel, a member of the Hummingbird Advisory Council, remembers hearing the story below from her father when she was a child. Nekita is Peruvian with Andean Quechuan ancestry on her father's side. When she shared the story with the advisory council she said, "In some variations the hummingbird dies from exhaustion, but I was never told this version. I don't know exactly where the story originated, but I was told it is from the Ecuador/Peru region."

## THE STORY OF Q'INTI

One day a fire broke out in the jungle.

All the animals ran out of the jungle fearing for their lives. Suddenly the Jaguar saw a little hummingbird (q'inti). The Jaguar asked him what he was doing and the q'inti said "I am flying to the lake to get water to help put out the fire."

The Jaguar laughed at him and said, "You're crazy, you can't put out this fire!" The q'inti replied, "At least I am doing my part."

## THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

This is an old story.

It is older than any tree but still younger than the mother forest.

It is older than any paved highway but still younger than the mountains.

First told on a mountain in the Altiplano.

Then inscribed into the earthen walls under a roof that brushes the edge of the sky.

It is a timeless story.

It does not begin with "Once upon a time."

It doesn't really have an end.

It does not have fantastical heroes defeating evil forces and

Maybe that is because these things are not really as important as the one thing this story has.

It has you.

And there's something you will do.

### **Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas**

Author *Flight of the Hummingbird: A Parable for the Environment*

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE STORY

## THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# SYNOPSIS

### PROLOGUE

High above the beautiful land Owl flies in terror. A fierce fire burns below. He circles anxiously as a flock of Crows, crying in pain as they are caught by the lashing of the flames, try to escape. Owl cannot help them and can only watch as they fall. He turns and flies away, searching for safety.

### SCENE ONE

Dukdukdiya (DDD) is happy to be home. She darts around the water, swoops under tree boughs, and lands near the pool's edge. DDD had been away for a long time and had missed her friends.

### SCENE TWO

Bear greets DDD with a warm embrace. They both notice a new smell, a sweet smoky perfume that has filled the air. The smoky wind and dusty breeze make them feel uneasy. Bear is overwhelmed, not knowing what to do. As DDD calms her friend, Bear's face takes on a dreamy look. He is thinking about his love – Bunny.

### SCENE THREE

In the distance, a thumping noise can be heard, getting louder and louder as it gets closer. Suddenly, Bunny stomps into the clearing and walks right up to Bear. She is very frustrated with him as he hasn't done any housework! Bear and DDD tell Bunny about the smell. Bunny isn't concerned with the smell when there is so much work to do. "Stop caring about what's far away!" DDD replies, "I think we should do something about it." She then shares inspiring stories of faraway people who work to protect our Earth.

### SCENE FOUR

The friends are interrupted by the sudden arrival of Owl. He seems to have fallen from the sky. DDD leans over him to see if he is okay. Suddenly, he screams, "FIRE," and looks around with fear in his eyes. When he realizes he is safe, Owl assures his friends that he is fine and doesn't need their help.

### SCENE FIVE

Bear and DDD recognize the smoky scent on Owl and begin to wonder if the smell is coming from a fire. Bunny is more suspicious and accuses him of smoking. What else could explain the smell and the ash falling from his wings? When Owl tells his story of escaping the forest fire, Bunny realizes he is seeking shelter and instead of treating him as a stranger she welcomes him. She tells Owl that she too once fled from her home and found peace, friendship, and love with DDD and Bear.

## SCENE SIX

Bear fears that Owl is telling the truth about the fire and raises his concerns with Bunny and DDD. Bunny pushes his worries aside as she tends to Owl's injuries. Owl refuses their help. He feels badly about leaving the other animals behind when he fled from the fire. The animals come together as they tend to Owl and tuck him into bed.

## SCENE SEVEN

Struggling to fall asleep, Owl remains tense. He is remembering the dusty red sky and all the smoke. He is remembering all the crows that didn't make it to safety. DDD watches over her new friend as he finally rests.

## SCENE EIGHT

Owl begins to dream and is visited by the spirits of the crows who died in the fire. These are the crows that watched Owl fly away! The crows try to entice Owl to join their flock and leave the others.

## SCENE NINE

Before they can succeed, DDD wakes Owl up. He tells her about the crows and his plans to join them. DDD looks around. There are no crows to be seen. It was only a bad dream. DDD assures Owl that she, his true friend, has been by his side as he slept. Bunny bursts in, crying out for Bear, who has gone off alone. The friends set off to try and find Bear.

## SCENE TEN

Meanwhile Bear has gone into the forest and discovers the fire is real! He rushes back to his friends and they frantically search for a way to deal with the fierce fire. They can think of nothing to do but run away. But as they start to escape the flames, they realize that DDD is not following them.

Instead, DDD picks up one drop of water and tosses it on the fire. "Now, I do what I can."

Owl, realizing that he too can help, picks up a drop of water and tosses it on the fire. "The nothing we do is the something undone."

Instead of washing dishes and sweeping floors, Bunny picks up a drop of water and tosses it on the fire. Instead of refusing to see the danger, Bear picks up a drop of water and tosses it on the fire.

"The nothing we did is the something undone."

"Now, we do what we can!"

## THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# PREPARING FOR A PERFORMANCE

## AN INVITATION TO CONSIDER

The story behind the opera itself is equally important. From the beginning of the creative process, it has been Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's interpretation of the parable that is at the centre of the opera. This is an important distinction because as producers, Vancouver Opera and Pacific Opera Victoria were not seeking to create an opera based on an Indigenous story – the intent was to produce an opera written and created by an Indigenous artist.

Michael's mother is Haida, his father Scottish. Self-taught, his unique artistic style is informed by lessons learned from Chinese painter Cai Ben Kwon. The result is a conscious fusion of Haida and Asian artistic influences called Haida manga. Michael describes Haida manga as 'blending North Pacific Indigenous iconographies and frame lines with the graphic dynamism of Asian manga. It is committed to hybridity as a positive force that opens a third space for critical engagement'. The artistic heritage of the opera is informed by the lived experience of not only Michael, but the entire creative team. This collaboration is informed by a living Indigenous culture, the Haida and their outreaches into other regions of the world.

## AN INVITATION TO CONSULT

Consulting with leaders from the local Indigenous Peoples' government is an important aspect of preparing for the performance. Part of this process will include establishing expectations for remuneration and gifting for all Indigenous officials, Elders, storytellers, and/or knowledge keepers who participate in the work related to the performance. If your district does not have such staff members, you might consider contacting local native friendship centres, and Indigenous leaders within the community.

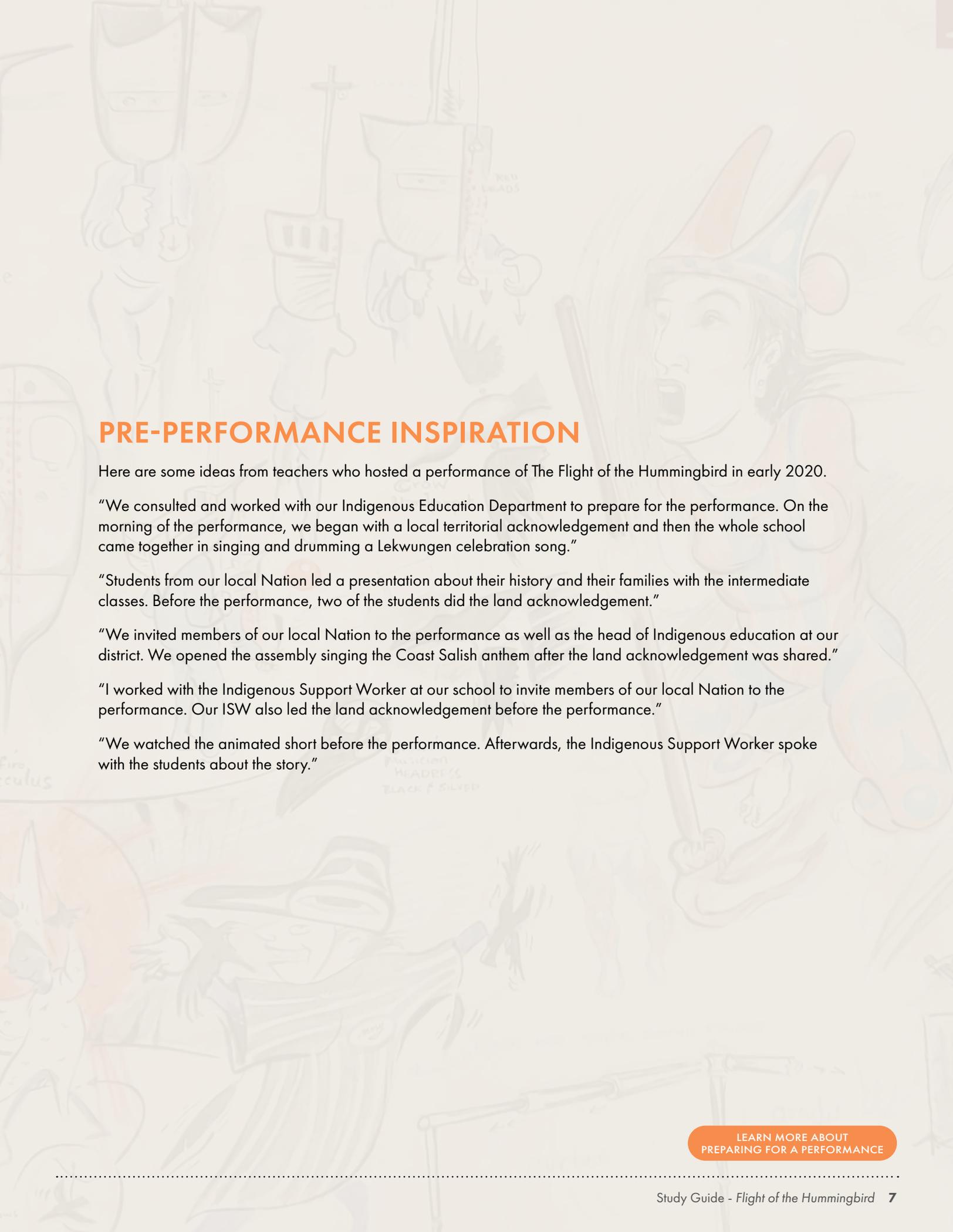
## AN INVITATION TO ACKNOWLEDGE

Once the audience has gathered and before the performance begins, ensure that either a welcome from an Indigenous community member or an acknowledgement takes place. Use this moment as one of recognition, a welcome for all involved, and an invitation into relationship.

Ask if it is possible to invite an Elder or other community member to offer a welcome to the territory and acknowledge that you will offer an honorarium.

If an Elder or local leader is not available, begin with a land acknowledgement. Please see Bob Joseph's (Gwawaenuk Nation) website for his article on "First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory" for guidance in creating your own.

Recognize the history of the story and the opera's origins. Honouring the land on which the opera is being performed is a way to activate the teachings of reconciliation.



## PRE-PERFORMANCE INSPIRATION

Here are some ideas from teachers who hosted a performance of *The Flight of the Hummingbird* in early 2020.

“We consulted and worked with our Indigenous Education Department to prepare for the performance. On the morning of the performance, we began with a local territorial acknowledgement and then the whole school came together in singing and drumming a Lekwungen celebration song.”

“Students from our local Nation led a presentation about their history and their families with the intermediate classes. Before the performance, two of the students did the land acknowledgement.”

“We invited members of our local Nation to the performance as well as the head of Indigenous education at our district. We opened the assembly singing the Coast Salish anthem after the land acknowledgement was shared.”

“I worked with the Indigenous Support Worker at our school to invite members of our local Nation to the performance. Our ISW also led the land acknowledgement before the performance.”

“We watched the animated short before the performance. Afterwards, the Indigenous Support Worker spoke with the students about the story.”

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
PREPARING FOR A PERFORMANCE

## THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# THE SONG OF PERSISTENCE

*The Flight of the Hummingbird* composer Maxime Goulet arranged "The Song of Persistence" for young voices.

[Download the full piano score, vocal music, and backing tracks with melodies.](#)

I've flown the world over.  
I've witnessed its beauty.  
I've felt its fragility.

I've met many inspiring people who are facing great challenges and who persist in keeping our one world ..... safe.

Haida Sea, great Spirit Bear. Ancient woods felled floor.  
Tarry sand piped to the coast will challenge sea and shore.

Altiplano with cities high, rising through the clouds above.  
The people there defend their spud, so old and grown in mud.

There are places in the world where people take such care  
to protect all that's good for people to share.

On Arctic ice melting thin, polar bears no longer roam.  
But the Inuit persevere. There many still call home.

In moist tropic river ways the Amazon, a winding maze.  
Where hope, if lost, our children's cost, a forest in burning haze.

There are places in the world where people take such care  
to protect all that's good for people to share.

The northern temperate rainforest regions include the Salish Sea, the Great Bear Rainforests, and Haida Gwaii.

Parque de la Papa is in the highlands of the Sacred Valley in Cusco, Peru. The community is dedicated to the preservation of the native potato and the Indigenous culture.

The Inuit people inhabit the Arctic regions of Canada, Greenland, and Alaska.

There are hundreds of Indigenous nations facing devastation due to deforestation in the Amazon.

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE SONG OF PERSISTENCE

## THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# THE RELATIONSHIP SONG

Music and Lyrics by Renae Morriseau

Dedicated to Indigenous Peoples, their neighbors, and friends, who persist in keeping our one world safe for our children.

Our stories and songs that map our lands and waters.

Thank you long-ago Elders for your words of hope and love.

Stories, Songs that map our

Lands and Waters (x2)

Long-ago Ancestors

Thank you Elders,

for your words/messages

Hope (x2)

And love. (x2)

### MESSAGE FROM RENAE:

I created this song about relationships, relationships to the lands and waters, to our families and communities, and relationships to what our heart needs in the moment.

We're all about relationships. This song is a celebration and a dedication to listen deeply to those around you, to your classmates, to your teacher, and to all the people that make up your life.

When listening to the song there are moments when the M'Girls (Deanna Gestrin, Sherryl Sewepegahan, Kelsey Wavey, Michelle Bardach, and Renae Morriseau) start to whisper because we want to hear your voice, the song that bubbles up inside you. Maybe it's just a word, maybe this little song inspires you to come up with your own chant. But what do you love about the relationships you have? Who in your life makes you have happy thoughts, who makes you laugh?

Most of all please have fun when you create your addition to this song, from your heart, from your mind, and from your spirit.

**Renae Morriseau**

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE RELATIONSHIP SONG

THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# THE WALK OF GRATITUDE

The land and its power is an undeniable theme in *The Flight of the Hummingbird*, and so we asked Rebecca Hass (Métis), Director of Engagement Programs and Partnerships at Pacific Opera Victoria, to share her own unique connection to the land she lives and works on.

We hope this beautiful walk of gratitude will inspire you to think



LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE WALK OF GRATITUDE

## THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# CLIMATE ACTION

## THE GORGE WATERWAY ACTION SOCIETY



The Gorge Waterway Action Society (GWAS) is a registered charity focused on preserving and enhancing the Gorge Waterway through environmental education, restoration, conservation, stewardship, and community involvement. The core of our organization is the Gorge Waterway Nature House, an interactive environmental education centre in Esquimalt Gorge Park, on the traditional territory of the lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples, known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. The Nature House is a showcase of local ecosystems, an informational hub for local environmental organizations, and an accessible community space where everyone is welcome to learn!

### How can you become an environmental steward?

#### 1. Start With Love

Our society was founded in 1990 by a group of people who loved the Gorge Waterway, and who wanted to restore its beauty and its ecological function for the many living things who call this place home.

Ask your students: What is a natural place that you love? What lives there? What used to live there? How have people interacted with that place over time? What challenges does it face now?

#### 2. Find the Helpers

One of the best parts of environmental work is that you're never alone! A great way to begin learning about the place that you love and helping it thrive is to find out who is already doing that work. Your local Nature Centre is a great place to start!

Ask your students: Are there other people who care about the places that you love? Is there a Nature Centre in your community? Is there an organization, club, or society in your community that does environmental work? If so, how can you contribute? If not, can you create one at your school?

### FINDING A NATURE CENTRE

You can find a map with our location and the locations of many of BC's Nature Centres on our website at [gorge.ca/gorge-waterway-nature-house](http://gorge.ca/gorge-waterway-nature-house).

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
CARING FOR THE LAND

## THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# CAST & CREATIVE

## THE CHARACTERS

Dukdukdiya-DDD (Hummingbird)	The hero in waiting
Bear	A responsive follower but not a leader
Bunny	The bystander, the judge and Bear's partner
Owl	The tragic figure
Crows	The memories and regrets of what was lost

## CREATIVE

Composed by Maxime Goulet

Libretto and Creative Design by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas & Barry Gilson

Production Dramaturgy by Glynis Leyshon

## CAST & CREW

Owl	Bruno Roy
Bear	Marcel d'Entremont
Bunny	Keely McPeek
Dukdukdiya	Olivia Kang
Pianist	Nathaniel Ben-Horin
Cellist	Matt Udry
Stage Manager	Elsa Orme

## DIRECTORS

Director	Glynis Leyshon
Music Director	Perri Lo

## PRODUCTION

Thank you to the craftspeople of the Vancouver Opera Shops, Members of IATSE Local 118 & Pacific Opera Shop, Members of IATSE Local 168.

## STUDY GUIDE TEAM

Ashley Daniel Foot	Director of Engagement, Civic Practice (Vancouver Opera)
Rebecca Hass	Director of Engagement Programs & Partnerships (Pacific Opera Victoria)
Jane Potter	Editor
Mack McGillivray	Editor
Robyn Martin	Graphic Designer

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE CHARACTERS

THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# WHO'S WHO

## CREATIVE



**MAXIME GOULET**

Composer



**MICHAEL NICOLL  
YAHGULANAAS**

Librettist &  
Creative Designer



**BARRY GILSON**

Librettist &  
Creative Designer



**GLYNIS LEYSHON**

Production Dramaturg



**PERRI LO**

Music Director

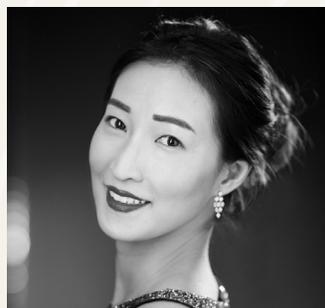
LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

## CAST & CREW



**MARCEL  
d'ENTREMONT**

Bear



**OLIVIA KANG**

Dukdukdiya



**KEELY McPEEK**

Bunny



**BRUNO ROY**

Owl



**NATHANIEL  
BEN-HORIN**

Pianist



**MATT UDRY**

Cellist



**ELSA ORME**

Stage Manager

# THE ADVISORY COUNCIL WITNESS TO THE WORK

As a woman of mixed European and Métis descent far from her territory, I have relished the opportunity to see how things are done differently by the people I've met who are Indigenous to the territory I currently live on. One of the most striking things has been the role of witness.

The first time I was present where witnesses were called forward was during a difficult time for a local arts group. There was a rift that needed healing. The healing event that was held for the community was a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, all taking part in a ceremony headed by a local Lekwungen leader. He called a number of people forward by name. Members of the board of directors went to each of them and gave them quarters, as a mark of the task and the acceptance of the task they were charged with (I was told the quarter at one time was the cost of a blanket, and this tradition of the quarter being a meaningful offer of currency remains). Those who were called forward and took the quarters were signaling their acceptance of their roles as witnesses to the ceremony to follow. Their duty was two-fold. One was to watch what happened and to report what they had witnessed at the end of the event. The second was that once they left this place, they would always be responsible to speak of what happened and to confirm that it had been done in a 'good way'. After the healing ceremony was completed, one by one these witnesses stepped forward and offered a reflection on what they had seen. Each reflection, while individual, contributed to a felt sense of the whole event. Everyone could take comfort and relax in how the community cared for one another in a way that made them proud.



There is something so beautiful about consciously asking them to stand up and say what they saw. The witnesses are the record keepers from before our smart phones. This very human act of bearing witness to what we do and how we care for one another as we walk in this world, of holding each other accountable in the very best way, is what witnessing is to me, as I have experienced it.

With this in mind, I present the Hummingbird Advisory Council as people who gathered together to hold each other accountable for the original tour (pre-pandemic) and my collaborator, Ashley Daniel Foot. We are the ones who have gathered to bring this study guide forward for this time. We are the ones who can be asked today and at any time in the future to speak truth about the process we engaged in to bring this opera and study guide to the schools and world at large. We are urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, from many nations and countries. We were there. We saw. We heard. We walked this piece forward in a good way. We witnessed.

With gratitude,

**Rebecca Hass**

Director of Engagement Programs and Partnerships, Pacific Opera Victoria

THE FLIGHT OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

# ADVISORY COUNCIL



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LIIMIUM HALYA'AT**



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LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

FACING PAGE: COSTUME AND SET DRAWINGS BY MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS



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