

PROJECT DESCRIPTION



THE THREE ASTRONAUTS will be the sixth new work commissioned by ARDEA ARTS/Family Opera Initiative, a company committed to exploding the notion that opera need not be the 'ultimate other.' Our operas embrace a contemporary vernacular energy and resonate with our own culture and language(s). They enchant, challenge and inspire multigenerational audiences; make us laugh, cry and acknowledge who we are.

In this extraordinary picture book made for all ages by world-renowned author, political philosopher and semiotician Umberto Eco, and by revered Italian visual artist Eugenio Carmi, an American, a Russian, and a Chinese astronaut take off separately in their rockets to Mars. Each wants to be the first; they all land at the same time. The story of how they evolve from enemies into allies and then confront the ultimate 'other' is ripe for the stage; the abstract beauty of Carmi's imagery captures the

fantastic physical as well as interior journey. Available around the world, *The Three Astronauts* has been published in 40 languages. The publisher plans to re-release the book worldwide with the premiere.

An international creative team will bring the story to life on the stage. As conceived by American director-producer Grethe Barrett Holby, the work will embrace orchestral and choral passages, sung and spoken text, movement, media and visual theater. It will be performed in four languages – English, Russian, Chinese and Martian. Each of the astronauts will perform in his/her own language without sur-titles, sharing his or her isolation and alienation with the audience. The Martian will speak Pirahan, a language of a remote Amazonian tribe.

Authors from the corresponding countries will write the dialogues for each of the astronauts; Daniel L. Everett the dialogue for the Martian. Likewise, composers from the corresponding countries will compose the music for the corresponding astronaut and his/her journey. Italian artist, illustrator Eugenio Carmi will lead the design team. Holby will collaborate with the writers to create the libretto and oversee the international collaboration, the music director with the composers. The text for the children's chorus will be excerpts from Nikki Giovanni's poem, translated into the language of the country in which we are performing – "We're Going To Mars."

"We're going to Mars for the same reason / Marco Polo rocketed to China / for the same reason Columbus / trimmed his sails on a dream of spices / for the very same reason Shackleton / was enchanted with penguins / for the reason we fall in love / It's the only adventure."

This gentle tale about our need in this world, or any other, for understanding, presents an important and very timely political and world-wide message. In the U.S., we are part of a multi-national, multilingual country, and an interrelated global community; the same is true in China and Russia. Yet communication across cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries is at an all time low

Even with our own differences, Martians present the ultimate "other". Not only will the Martian's language be impossible to parse, but the Martian, according to Eco and Carmi, should be terrifying and impossibly alien. Yet he encompasses humor and humanity. To our eyes and ears, a huge barrier to cross, but a being who will win our hearts and souls and bring us all together.

Join us on this exciting new adventure!

contact Grethe Holby

gbholby@ardeaarts.com 917-690-0272

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

I found the book *The Three Astronauts* twenty-one years ago when my first child, now 25, was four years old. It has held a place in my imagination ever since. Twenty years ago, as much as today, it addresses an important and very timely issue in the broadest sense of the term: Are we ever ready to reach beyond ourselves?

With an author like Umberto Eco, it is no wonder that the simple text plumbs such depths. But this is a true picture book, and the story is powerfully told in Eugenio Carmi's collages as well as in the words, and that is why I often describe this piece as an Opera Tone Poem. The pictures are extraordinary: Worlds unto themselves. Worlds to contemplate. Unknown. On stage, the story will be told visually as well as musically and dramatically. Portraying the aural otherness of Mars will be an un-staged children's chorus.

I met with Umberto Eco and Eugenio Carmi Fall '07 to discuss the project. The most unexpected thing I took away with me from our exchange was the humor and openness with which they viewed their story. Carmi will participate as lead designer, and Eco will contribute his ideas. The book will be re-released to coincide with the premiere.

The *Three Astronauts* is about the ultimate other, and the difficulty of communicating across cultural and language barriers. Each of the three astronauts will speak and sing in his/her own language without sur-titles, communicating their alienation from each other first-hand to the audience. And yet, approached first by fear, then by loneliness, and finally by the 'ultimate other' (the Martian), how easy it is for the three astronauts to band together.

The interior meditations and dialogues for each of the astronauts and the Martian will be written by authors from each 'universe' – American, Chinese, Russian, and Martian - in order to capture not only each language in its truest, vernacular form, but reactions and thoughts from uniquely cultural perspectives. Musically, the piece will be built in the same way. I will work in collaboration with the creative team to create the libretto from the story and these texts; the music director will work with the composers. The Bird, Eco's dove of peace, who ultimately brings the astronauts and the Martian together, will be wordless – a flute song. I look at this international collaboration as a way to forge our own discoveries, here on planet Earth.

I want to acknowledge my enormous gratitude to the Jaffe Family Foundation, for their financial support, and especially for their moral support and belief in my work. And I invite you all to join our team to open up unforeseeable discoveries that await astronauts and explorers of all kinds – particularly those who explore beyond their known worlds, right here on Earth.

PRODUCING COMPANY

Ardea Arts Inc. is an incubator of new opera works whose goal is to redefine American opera within a contemporary framework. Our mission is to bring opera to a widely diverse audience of all ages in the form of new and original works that are accessible yet challenging. We work with exciting, unexpected artists who speak to audiences through the media of opera: music, words, theater, and visuals. We strive to involve the community to the greatest extent possible in the process and performance of our works.

These opera-musicals embrace our indigenous vernacular; bursting forth with our own cultures. They resonate with our own languages. They enchant, challenge, and inspire multi-generational audiences. These works make us laugh, cry, and acknowledge who we are. These are the same ideas that inspired the beginnings of opera back in 1590 and these are the ideas we strive to recapture in new works by composers, writers, and artists today.

Ardea Arts is a 501C3 not-for-profit corporation as recognized by the Federal Government. All contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

“ We must begin with the children.
This is where real change happens. ”
Umberto Eco & Eugenio Carmi

“ It's amazing to me – aliens.
They're not aliens, they're
undocumented workers. ”
Nikki Giovanni

“ ...the elements of fairy tales, with modern
sounds and noises...something like
an incredible dream. ”
Alexander Tchaikovsky



“ Are we ever ready to reach beyond ourselves? ”
Grethe Barrett Holby

THE ASTRONAUTS

A NEW WAVE OPERA

SEEKING PARTNERS FOR
*development
*commissioning
*premiere



based on the book by **UMBERTO ECO & EUGENIO CARMi**

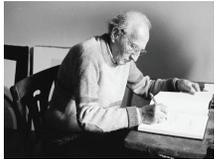
A vernacular 21st c. OPERA for family audiences about
ENEMIES, FRIENDSHIPS and ALLIANCES among PEOPLE, NATIONS, and UNIVERSES
an unprecedented collaboration across professions, genres, and cultures
the excitement of HUMAN SPACE TRAVEL and exploration
addressing STEM and STEAM educational initiatives!
Please join us on this **EXCITING NEW ADVENTURE!**

THE INTERNATIONAL TEAM

UMBERTO ECO (Author) is a world-famous specialist in semiotics, a distinguished historian, philosopher, aesthetician, and best selling novelist. His novels include *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, *The Island of the Day Before*, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, *Baudolino*, and current worldwide best seller *The Prague Cemetery*. Nonfiction works include *Travels in Hyperreality*, *History of Beauty*, *Belief or Nonbelief?*, and *Theory of Semiotics*. Eco has traveled the world lecturing on the untranslatability of languages. He teaches at the University of Bologna.



EUGENIO CARMÍ (Artist, Visual Concept) born in Genoa in 1920, calls himself a "manufacturer of images." Others call him one of the most quietly significant forces in twentieth-century Italian art. His work in the graphic art world still influences his fine art. Creating Italsider's corporate image in the 1960's, he participated in the Venice Biennale and in 1973, created a 25-minute experimental program for RAI Television Network. A bellwether of Italian taste, he may be best known for the illustrations he has created for Umberto Eco's stories.



GRETHE BARRETT HOLBY (Conception, Direction, Dramaturge) a driving force in new American opera, credited with "propelling opera into the 21st century." Holby has performed, commissioned, directed, choreographed, produced and collaborated on world premieres with many composers of our time including Leonard Bernstein, Lou Reed, Vincent Persichetti, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Kitty Brazelton, Eve Beglarian, and Philip Glass, at venues as divergent as The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center Festival, Houston Grand Opera, and The Kitchen. Founding Director of American Opera Projects (fostering 25 new works during her tenure) and currently Ardea Arts/Family Opera Initiative with six new works for multigenerational audiences, she has directed productions for opera companies across the United States.



NIKKI GIOVANNI (Writer - U.S.A.) "National Treasure", world-renowned poet, writer, commentator, activist, and educator, committed to the fight for civil rights and equality, Giovanni is the recipient of twenty-five honorary degrees, named 'Woman of the Year', and recipient of the Rosa L. Parks Award and Langston Hughes Medal for poetry. Author of over 30 books for both adults and children: *Love Poems; Blues; For All the Changes; Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea; Acolytes; Bicycles: Love Poems; Rosa (Caldecott Honors Book) and Hip Hop Speaks to Children*, many on L.A. & New York Times best-sellers lists, Giovanni is Distinguished Univ Professor at Virginia Tech, and a Mars and space travel fanatic!



XIAOGANG YE (Composer-China) Regarded as one of the most influential composers in China, Ye Xiaogang is also a standing member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, vice chairman of China's Musicians' Association, vice president of the Central Conservatory of Music, and a member of its composition faculty, founder-music director of the Ensemble Eclipse, and artistic director of Beijing Modern Music Festival. Among many other awards and premieres both in China and around the world, Ye's piano concerto "Starry Sky" was premiered during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing by Lang Lang and watched by 3 billion people worldwide.



SOLA LIU (Writer-China) An award-winning Chinese author of fiction, short stories, and essays, including *You Have No Choice* (1985) – "The first truly modernism literature work in China," *Small Tales of the Great Ji Family* (2000), *Blue Sky Green Seas* – "She pulls us straight into the generation's dichotomous heart," and *Chaos and All That*, Solá is also an iconoclastic composer and vocalist. Librettist of operas *Fantasy of the Red Queen* (2006) and *The Afterlife of Li Jiantong* (2009), she has collaborated with Ye Xiaogang many times.



DANIEL L. EVERETT (Writer-Mars) Controversial linguist and anthropologist, former chair of Languages, Literatures, & Cultures at Illinois State U, now Dean of Arts & Sciences at Bentley University, Everett is an expert on Amazonian grammars, especially Piraha and Chapakuran-Wari'. His 2008 book, *Don't sleep there are snakes: life and language in the Amazonian jungle* was published in six languages, a best-seller in England and Germany, and selected as "best books of 2009" in both the US and UK. Everett's newest book, *Cognitive Fire: Language as a Cultural Tool*, has taken the linguistics world by storm. A documentary about his life and work, *The Grammar of Happiness*, is scheduled for release worldwide in 2012.



LAURENCE BERGREEN (Consultant-Mars) Award-winning biographer, historian, and chronicler of exploration, Bergreen is the renowned author of eight previous works of nonfiction, including the incredible *Voyage to Mars: NASA's Search for Life Beyond Earth*, as well as *Columbus: The Four Voyages*, *Marco Polo*, *Over the Edge of the World*, and *Capone*. His writings have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Newsweek*, and *Esquire*.



ALEXANDER TCHAIKOVSKY (Composer-Russia) 'Beloved People's Artist of Russia and the Russian Federation', & 'Artist of Merit', is director of the Saint Petersburg Conservatoire, the Moscow Academic Philharmonic, and the Youth Academy of Russia festival. His music is widely performed at international festivals and concert halls. In addition to his symphonies, oratorios, ballets and choral works, he has composed over eight operas including the extraordinary *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, based on Solzhenitsin's novel. His oeuvre also spans popular songs and music for television and movies.



DMITRY GLUKHOVSKY (Writer - Russia) 33 yr old Russian author & journalist known for Sci-Fi, Magic-Realism, and exploration of social and political structures. *Metro 2033* his first novel (2002) has become an interactive experiment, drawing in over 3 million readers world-wide, a video game, & now optioned by MGM Studios; followed by *It's Getting Darker* (2007). In 2009 *Metro 2034* became year's top Russian best-seller & also a collaborative art-project with electronic and visual artists. 2010 saw the satirical *Stories about Motherland*. Also a journalist for EuroNews TV, Deutsche Welle, RT, Harper's Bazaar, Playboy & l'Officiel.

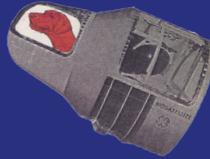


LENGTH

80 - 90 mins.
no intermission

AGE GROUP

5 - 105



CAST

ASTRONAUTS

Russian

Chinese

American

Mezzo Soprano

Baritone

Bass Baritone

MARTIAN

Male Soprano

+ 2 Dancers

CHILDRENS CHORUS

8 - 12 children
(unchanged voices)

ORCHESTRA

(anticipated sizes and instrumentation)

Touring

String Quintet

Percussion

Electronics

Electric & Acoustic Guitar

Pipa

Bayan

(USA)

(CHINA)

(RUSSIA)

Chamber Orchestra Version:
12 - 15 Musicians

“...a great team, inspired and characterized by diversity.”
Daniel Everett

“I feel this opera is part of the fight that the world needs to wage against violence – violence against others that we think we don't like because they are different from ourselves.”
Eugenio Carmi

“I look at this international collaboration as a way to forge our own discoveries, here on planet earth.”
Grethe Barrett Holby

Commissioner:

Ardea Arts / FOI

Development Partners:

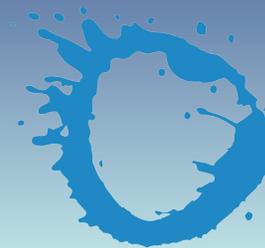
SANTA FE OPERA

Atlantic Center For The Arts,

The Jaffe Family Foundation, AKC Foundation,

Michaelcheck Foundation

Many Private Individual Foundations



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**FAMILY
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explode all expectations

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