

arts
at Williams

CENTERSERIES PRESENTS

STAR CHOIR, PHASE 1: DIALOGUE

AN INTRODUCTION TO STAR CHOIR WITH

CO-CREATORS ALEXANDRO SEGADE &

MALIK GAINES, SAMUEL DELANY, PAMELA

GAY, AND ANJULI FATIMA RAZA KOLB

62.CENTER.WILLIAMS.EDU

62

SUN | NOV 15 | 7PM | VIRTUAL

WILLIAMS CENTER**SERIES**

PRESENTS

Star Choir

Phase 1: Dialogue

Co-Directed

by

Malik Gaines & Alexandro Segade

Score by

Malik Gaines

Libretto and Art direction by

Alexandro Segade

Star Choir, Phase 1: Dialogue puts Gaines and Segade in conversation with Samuel R. Delany, Pamela Gay, and Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb to discuss space travel, exoplanetary colonization and the life spans of stars.

In a time when Earth is no longer habitable, a band of humans attempt to colonize Planet 85K: Aurora. A performance for six voices, six instruments, and animated video scenography, STAR CHOIR explores a world occupied by an intelligence invisible to humans. Inspired in part by the science-fiction of Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany, the performance will develop over the course of the year in conversation with scholars, artists, and audiences, creating a new work of art from multidisciplinary contemplation.

Currently in development, STAR CHOIR is part of the CenterSeries' 2020-2021 Artist's Studio program, supporting the creative process of theater and dance makers through the COVID-19.

The CenterSeries performances are made possible in part by the W. Ford Schumann '50 Endowment for the Arts and the Lipp Family Fund for the Performing Arts.

Bios

Malik Gaines & Alexandro Segade are interdisciplinary artists working in performance, video, writing, drawing, and music. They work solo, as a pair, and in other collaborative groups. Their projects offer dystopian/utopian narratives that speculate about the histories and futures of social groups, countercultures, regimes, teams, and relationships.

Since 2000, they have performed and exhibited with collaborator Jade Gordon as the group My Barbarian. The trio has presented plays, concerts, installations, and video works at arts venues including MoMA, The Kitchen, Studio Museum in Harlem, LACMA, REDCAT, MOCA, SFMoMA, ICA Philadelphia, Miami Light Project, The Power Plant, De Appel, El Matadero, Galleria Civica di Trento, and Townhouse Gallery. My Barbarian has had solo exhibitions at New Museum, Participant Inc., Hammer Museum, Museo El Eco, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, and others. The group was included in the Whitney Biennial, Baltic Triennial, Montreal Biennial, California Biennial, and Performa. They've received grants and awards from United States Artists, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Creative Capital, Art Matters, and the City of LA. Their work has been discussed in the New Yorker, Artforum, Art in America, Frieze, Texte zur Kunst, Bomb and various international newspapers, and by scholars including Shannon Jackson in *The Drama Review*, Tavia Nyong'o in *Social Text*, and José Muñoz in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. The group is currently preparing for a survey of their work at the Whitney Museum in New York.

Gaines and Segade's collaborations also include Courtesy the Artists, a shifting constellation of artists that has done projects at Recess, The Kitchen, MoMA PS1, NYU Skirball, Studio Museum in Harlem and others; and A.R.M., a gay art trio that has shown work at DD55 Gallery in Cologne, Espacio Odeon in Bogota, Whitney Museum and the High Line in New York, and Stavanger Kunsthall in Stavanger. Segade has presented his own sci-fi theater work in festivals for TBA, Bard Summerscape, REDCAT, and the Broad Museum. Gaines sings at the piano.

Segade is the author and illustrator of the graphic novel *The Context* (Primary Information, 2020). His essays about art and fan culture have appeared in Artforum and elsewhere.

Gaines is the author of *Black Performance on the Outskirts of the Left: A History of the Impossible* (NYU Press, 2017) and many essays about art and performance for exhibition publications and other books.

Gaines is associate professor of Performance Studies at NYU Tisch; Segade is assistant professor of Art at Cornell University.

Samuel R. Delany Writer, literary critic and professor Samuel Delany first rose to prominence in the mid 1960s with his experimental and genre-deviating science fiction novels and short stories. His fiction is critically acclaimed for revisiting themes of language, knowledge, societal norms, sexuality, and that which society considers taboo. In July of 2002, he was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame.

Pamela Gay is an astronomer, writer, and podcaster focused on using new media to engage people in science and technology. Her most well-known project is *Astronomy Cast*, a podcast she co-hosts with Fraser Cain.

Anjuli Raza Kolb is a scholar of colonial and post-colonial literature and theory with particular research interests in the history of science and intellectual history, poetry and poetics, gender and sexuality studies, political theory and independence movements, the gothic and horror, and comparative literary studies.

Scholar Notes - Part 1

Just Made of Stars

In Alexandro Segade's 1995 video "The Power and the Pity," Malik Gaines plays one of five immortal Power Gods. Following the lead of the Goddess Xenica, the divinities journey down to Earth to learn about the mortal race. Humans, they discover, "want everything" precisely because "they know they can't have it." They are violent, needy, and destructive creatures, intent on bringing suffering to all creatures. The Power Gods—giving up on empathy—pronounce a plague on all humanity. Life on planet Earth "is nowhere."

Flash forward twenty-five years and Segade and Gaines have teamed up to imagine a reverse migration, of sorts. In their co-created musical performance piece *Star Choir*, a small band of humans, fleeing an uninhabitable Earth, attempts to colonize a "hostile planet" known as 85K: Aurora. As in "The Power and the Pity," humans are again portrayed as vulnerable, fleshy, and flawed. Yet, we also possess the ability to think, to dream, and, crucially, to *feel*. The things that doom us can also save us. This time around, however, there are no Power Gods: we have only each other to blame for our failures. The human colonists argue, riot, and, at one point, destroy the colony, but they manage to rebuild, forming a hybrid race, comprised of "two species in the same body." Through telepathy, the intelligent microbiome of Aurora merges with the bodies of the human settlers. In the closing moments of the performance, the voices of the Star Choir fade in and out of harmony, heeding a call to "Give life time."

Yet, how do we give life time when we've already run out of time? Answering this is, partly, the work of science fiction. Drawing inspiration from sci-fi writers like Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Samuel Delany, and many others, *Star Choir* dreams up not only the possibility of cosmic life after the Anthropocene but also, as with many of Segade and Gaines' other artworks, the potential for new forms of sociality here on Earth. As both an illustrator and performer, Segade often reaches across disciplines to create works that envision opportunities for refuge, belonging, and collective action by queer and minoritarian publics. In Segade's 2017 "sci-fi saga" *Future St.*, presented at Bard's Fisher Center and LA's Broad Museum, an "intersectional resistance force" comprised of "queer dissidents and a feminist underground" overthrows a hegemonically normative police state. Drawn to similar imaginings, Gaines, as both an artist and scholar, has examined the limits and expansive possibilities of Black performance and art in the context of Leftist politics. Both Segade and Gaines have also collaborated extensively, alongside co-founder Jade Gordon, within the art collective My Barbarian, whose theatrical and playful interventions often concern the status of radical counter-publics. Whether oper-

ating solo or in concert, works by Segade and Gaines invite reflection upon the power of creativity as a force for change and, in some cases even, good.

With *Star Choir*, Segade and Gaines turn their focus upwards, towards the stars and their futuristic capacity to sustain human life. In Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, stargazing also figures prominently. Gazing at the stars can be an act of extrospection, a way of looking beyond the self, but it can also be a way of seeing inward. Like the Power Gods, the cosmos is immortal and limitless. But maybe, as Gaines and Segade suggest, there's something inside us humans that's limitless too. "After all," as members of Star Choir sing, "we all are just made of stars."

—Amy Holzapfel is a Professor of Theatre at Williams College

Scholar Notes - Part 2

Singing Together: The Speculative Worlds of Malik Gaines & Alexandro Segade's Star Choir

How do we sing in a group? Singing together is a collective act. It requires paying attention to the way our own individual voice sounds in relation to a larger group. In order to create harmony, we must understand how all the voices in the group fit together. In the '62 CenterSeries presentation of their in-process performance *Star Choir*, multidisciplinary artists Malik Gaines and Alexandro Segade will form their work through interdisciplinary collaboration. Unfolding over three phases, Gaines and Segade consider the themes of interstellar travel, time, and the structure of human communities in space. *Star Choir* is inspired by both astronomers and authors of Black speculative fiction: science and literature alike. By bringing together many voices through written and oral conversation, they will develop a work born from collective practice.

Earlier versions of *Star Choir* incorporated material from science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler's archive at the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. Butler's unfinished "Earthseed" series tells the tale of a young African-American woman who founds a new religion after climate change, wealth inequality, and right-wing Christian extremism threaten humanity's existence. The followers of the "Earthseed" movement eventually migrate to a different planet. Written in the 1990s and set in the 2020s United States, the premises of *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*, and the unfinished *Parable of the Trickster* seem eerily prescient in our current moment. The United States described in Butler's novels is not as far-fetched as it appeared when it was written. The 2020 Atlantic hurricane season now has the most named tropical storms on record. The wealth gap between the richest and poorest families in the United States more than doubled between 1989 and 2016. And the 45th U.S. President has refused to condemn white terrorist groups, whose actions, according to a 2019 U.S. State Department report, have become more frequent and geographically widespread.

By describing dystopian societies set in the not-too-distant future, Butler examines how civilization can be alternatively structured in response to conditions akin to our own.

These speculative worlds, however, are complex: hope emerges out of adverse situations, but members of the newly formed community her characters create on a colonized exoplanet are homesick. In a 2014 article about Butler's archive in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, scholar Gerry Canavan writes that Butler's notes on these novels express "a hope that is made possible by constraints, our boundless human creativity channeled by necessity into productive and useful ends because otherwise we'll all die." Indeed, creativity is crucial to the process of overcoming hardship, and widespread suffering requires collective action. In early November, American citizens rallied to create change by using the democratic process to usher in new government leadership. For many, it was an act of both individual and collective survival. The health of citizens' bodies, the safety of historically marginalized groups, and the integrity of our democratic institutions were at stake. Although the administration of the U.S. government will change in January 2021, the work of healing systemic injustice has only begun.

Star Choir draws upon the power of collective creativity to offer visions of what futures might be possible. Singing is a joyful act, and expressing joy in this moment creates space for healing. We look toward the future together, tentatively optimistic that what we collectively imagine will become true.

—Lauren DiGiulio is the Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Carolina Performing Arts, UNC-Chapel Hill.

Featured Upcoming Events:

arts
at Williams

CENTERSERIES PRESENTS

DANCE ON SCREEN FILM FESTIVAL

HORIZONTES

DIRECTED BY EILEEN HOFER

FRI & SAT | NOV 20 & 21 | 7PM

SUN | NOV 22 | 12:45PM

POST-SCREENING Q&A WITH DIRECTOR EILEEN HOFER

NOV 22 | 2PM

'62 CENTER FOR THEATRE AND DANCE

Three generations of Cuban ballet dancers are portrayed in this loving, deeply observant documentary from director Eileen Hofer. Alicia Alonso's star still radiates nationwide, encouraging an aspiring ballerina who has dedicated all her efforts to gaining admission into Alonso's ballet company, and inspiring one of four celebrated dancers of the National Ballet. Together, they offer insight into the past, present, and future of Cuba's national ballet. A subtle cultural portrait of Cuba emerges, with Alonso's National Ballet a cornerstone of Castro's revolutionary nation building. What role do the arts play in the project of national identity? And how does the legacy of ballet live on through generations?

62CENTER.WILLIAMS.EDU

DANCE ON SCREEN
— FILM FESTIVAL —

IMAGES Dance on Screen is presented in special collaboration
CINEMA with Images Cinema, imagescinema.org.

'62

CenterSeries 2020/2021 Programming Committee

Safa Zaki, Chairperson, Dean of the Faculty, Professor of Psychology
Sandra L. Burton, Lipp Family Director of Dance and Senior Lecturer in Dance
Rachel Chanoff, Director of Programming, CenterSeries
Cassandra Cleghorn, Senior Lecturer in English and American Studies
Randal Fippinger, Visiting Artist Producer and Outreach Manager
Alejandro Flores Monge '21
John P. Gerry, Associate Dean of Faculty
Olivia Graceffa '22
Tendai Muparutsa, Artist in Residence in African Music Performance, Lecturer in Music
Shanti Pillai, Assistant Professor of Theatre
Amy Podmore, J. Kirk T. Varnedoe '67 Professor of Art
David Shakirov '22
Mira Sneirson '22
Nathaniel T. Wiessner, '62 Center Operations Manager

'62 Center Staff

Sound & Media Supervisor Jim Abdou
Costume Shop Supervisor..... Barbara A. Bell
Patron and Visiting Artist Services Mgr. (on leave) Corissa Bryant
Director of Programming, CenterSeries Rachel Chanoff
Production Manager, Theatre Department Ann Marie Dorr
Theatre Technician..... Ethan Eldred
Visiting Artist Producer, Outreach Manager..... Randal Fippinger
Assistant Costume Shop Supervisor..... Samantha E. Patterson
Technical Director for Theatre Maia Robbins-Zust
Interim Patron and Visiting Artist Services
Manager and House Manager Emma Whittum
Operations Manager, Dance Technical Director,
and Presenting Production Manager..... Nathaniel T. Wiessner
Production Manager, Dance Department Kyle Yager
Student marketing and outreach support: Abigail Murray-Stark '22