

# THE JONAH PEOPLE: A LEGACY OF STRUGGLE & TRIUMPH



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**WORLD PREMIERE | NASHVILLE SYMPHONY COMMISSION**

THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2023 AT 7 PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, APRIL 14 & 15, 2023 AT 8 PM

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2023 AT 2 PM

**NASHVILLE SYMPHONY**

**GIANCARLO GUERRERO**, *conductor*

**HANNIBAL LOKUMBE**, *composer and director*

**KAREN SLACK**, *soprano*

**DEBO RAY**, *mezzo-soprano*

**RODRICK DIXON**, *tenor*

**ARMAND HUTTON**, *bass*

**JON ROYAL**, *assistant stage director*

**THE JONAH PEOPLE CHOIR**

**DR. LLOYD MALLORY, JR.**, *chorus master*

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## **OVERTURE**

### **Veil I: "Ilé - Home"**

Scene I: Knowing

Scene II: The Griot

Scene III: Harvest

### **Veil II: "They Swallowed The Ocean For Me"**

### **Veil III: "Searching - Na Lelakole"**

Scene I: Atonement

Scene II: Red Coffee

**- INTERMISSION -**

### **Veil III: "Searching - Na Lelakole"**

Scene III: The Last Supper

Scene IV: Wind and Bones

Scene V: Rebirth

Scene VI: Bois Caiman (Alligator Forest)

### **Veil IV: "The New Being"**

Scene I: So Many Fields, So Many Fortunes,  
So Many Souls

Scene II: Minton's Playhouse, 1950s

Scene III: Prophecy

Scene IV: Healing

*This concert will last approximately 2 hours, including one 20-minute intermission.*

## WELCOME TO THE SCHERMERHORN

The Nashville Symphony is widely known for its commissioning of new works from—and giving voice to—American composers. *The Jonah People: A Legacy of Struggle and Triumph* stands out as one of the largest and most significant bodies of work our organization has ever commissioned and produced. I applaud our staff—in particular our operations and artistic team, and our education and community engagement team—for the two years they have dedicated to mounting this monumental production and shepherding Hannibal's many visits to public schools, churches, universities, and other partner organizations throughout the community.

Hannibal's music and his story will cause every person in the audience to think about their own heritage and ancestry. To call it 'powerful' doesn't even begin to describe how deeply profound this experience will be, and we are proud that Hannibal chose our orchestra—and our community—to bring his magnum opus into the world.

Though the subject matter early in the work is challenging, Hannibal's message is ultimately one of peace, love, and transcendence, and a celebration of the American spirit.

We thank you for being here. And we hope Hannibal's prayer comes true: that you leave us today transformed.

Alan D. Valentine  
President & CEO  
Nashville Symphony

Giancarlo Guerrero  
Music Director  
Nashville Symphony

## ARTIST STATEMENT

Primarily, I consider myself to be a musician and a human being. Often, however, I am referred to as being an African American, jazz musician, and composer. My infinite soul increasingly rejects all such useless restrictions and thrives on being able to reveal its presence in whatever dimension of music it is willing to explore. Music categorizations are only markers. Jazz, classical, country and western, blues and so on are much like the many categorizations of religion. They are all simply attempts—some noble, some not—to define that which, in fact, cannot be defined and need not be defined.

The source of music is sound. Sound, to varying degrees, is everywhere, and like energy and spirit, cannot be created or destroyed. Given our station as humans in the existing sphere, we are able to take a reed of grass and produce sound paintings. And with the miracle of mathematics, we have created systems of sound that can even be recorded and accessed when desired. With sound we are able to paint images, convey historical data, and have a profound effect on human perception. And oh what a sacred thing to be able to do.

Thank you for joining us on this journey of immense human struggle and triumph.

We ask that you are transformed by the power of this story. One too seldom told and one that is yet to be told in the manner you are about to witness.

To share it with you, from its inception to its fruition, has required our complete devotion. We have labored hard and long into the nights and have given new meaning to the word sacrifice in order that we might bathe your senses in music, lights, sound, costumes, visuals, sets, and words.

May our efforts prove to be worthy of your presence.

Many Blessings,

Hannibal Lokumbe  
Man of Jonah  
Chief Musician  
The Tribe Of Jonah

# CAST

*In order of appearance*

<b>Child Spirit</b>	Damion Horton
	Jordan Marie Elizabeth Nixon
<b>Griot</b>	Rodrick Dixon
<b>Portuguese Slave Trader</b>	Geoffrey Davin
<b>Jesuit Priest</b>	Alex White
<b>Aid to Chief</b>	Milton Jackson
<b>African Chief</b>	William Jenkins
<b>Marabout</b>	Patrick Dailey
<b>Boukman</b>	Armand Hutton
<b>Sailor</b>	Joe Mobley
<b>Yemaya</b>	Nicole Simone
<b>Enslaved Man</b>	Joel Diggs
<b>Ship Captain</b>	David Lowe
<b>Enslaved Man</b>	Milton Jackson
<b>Enslaved Women</b>	Mahoganye McFarland
	Taliyah Neal
<b>Asase</b>	Debo Ray
<b>Silas/Kerkula</b>	David Gipson
<b>Auctioneer</b>	Geoffrey Davin
<b>Auctioneer Assistant</b>	Andy Kanies
<b>French Soldier</b>	Jack E. Chambers
<b>Monsieur Dauphin</b>	Galen Fott
<b>French Men</b>	Alex White
	Joe Mobley
	Sawyer Latham
	Josh Kiev
<b>Beaufort/Flomo</b>	Michael Daniels, Jr.
<b>Madame Dauphin</b>	Tamara Todres
<b>Noble French Women</b>	Leslie "Les" Marberry
	Christen Heilman
<b>French Women</b>	Brittany Nelson
	Jennifer Richmond
	Karen Slack
<b>Fatiman</b>	Karen Slack
<b>Elder/Spirit of Boukman's Mother</b>	Rodrick Dixon
<b>Spirit of Boukman's Father</b>	Jordan Marie Elizabeth Nixon
<b>Female Spirit</b>	Joe Mobley
<b>Civilian</b>	Geoffrey Davin
<b>French Soldiers</b>	Andy Kanies
	Jack E. Chambers



<b>Civilians</b>	Leslie "Les" Marberry
	Christen Heilman
	Karen Slack
<b>Susie</b>	David Gipson
<b>Male Spirit</b>	Elliott Robinson
<b>Grandfather</b>	Joel Diggs
<b>Master of Ceremony</b>	Milton Jackson
<b>Minton's Waiter/Server</b>	Brandon Johnson
<b>Minton's Audience</b>	Cornell Kennedy
	Kyrah Granberry
	Mahoganye McFarland
<b>Minton's Waitress/Server</b>	Morgan Perry
<b>Creator</b>	Karen Slack
<b>Seer</b>	Rodrick Dixon
<b>Shaman</b>	Nomi Eniafe
<b>The Jonah Ensemble</b>	
	Brandon "Sunni" Corlew
	Brandon Johnson
	Cornell Kennedy
	Erica Taylor
	Kyrah Granberry
	Mahoganye McFarland
	Morgan Perry
	Nomalanga (Nomi) Eniafe
	Panya Noamalyasy
	Preston Weaver
	Semira Graham
	Shabaz Chijioke Uijima
	Taliyah Neal
	Titilayo Eniafe
<b>On-Stage Musicians</b>	
<b>Master Drummer</b>	Jerome "Junior" Simeon, <i>Haitian Historian</i>
<b>Kora Player</b>	Mardochee Dade
<b>Djun Djun Player</b>	Baba Musa Amen
<b>Blues Guitarist/Singer</b>	Kirk Fletcher
<b>Jazz Quintet</b>	
<b>Drummer</b>	Brannen Temple
<b>Pianist</b>	Dayne Reliford
<b>Bassist</b>	David Pulphus
<b>Alto Sax</b>	Jovan Quallo
<b>Trumpet</b>	Hannibal Lokumbe

# PRODUCTION

## ADMINISTRATIVE

Bernadette Gildspinel,  
*Artist Representative*  
Taneal Williams, *Project Manager*

## CAST/STAGING

Jon Royal, *Assistant Stage Director*  
Kat Tierney-Smith, *Stage Manager*  
Ashley Wolfe, *Assistant Stage Manager*  
Arianna Aroya-Derosier,  
*Assistant Stage Manager*  
Nomalanga (Nomi) Eniafe, *Choreographer*  
Cynthia Harris,  
*Sensitive Content Specialist*  
Eric Pasto-Crosby,  
*Combat and Weaponry Specialist*

## PROJECTION & ANIMATION

Miko Simmons, *Projections Design*  
John Durbin, *Animator*  
Dale Vincent, *Programmer*  
Andy Cope,  
*Animation Liaison/Documentarian*

## SCENIC & PROPS

Shaun Motley, *Set/Scenic Designer*  
Steve Prince,  
*Fine Artist for Stage Design/Props*  
Landon Dixon, *Props Master*  
Martin Payton, *Sculptor*

## VOCAL PREPARATION

Tucker Biddlecombe, *Choir Preparation*  
Mary Biddlecombe, *Cocal Coach*  
Alessandra Volpi, *Rehearsal Pianist*

## COSTUMING

Christelle Matou, *Costume Designer*  
Megan Rutherford,  
*Associate Costume Designer*  
Bonny Green, *Assistant Costume Designer*  
Matt Logan, *Wardrobe Supervisor*  
Porche Pope, *Associate Supervisor/Dresser*  
Brooks Bennett,  
*Associate Supervisor/Dresser*  
Billy Ditty, *Draper/Sticher*  
Rebecca Sloan, *Draper/Sticher*  
Ellen Danforth, *Draper/Sticher*  
Natalyn McCants, *Dresser*  
Brianna Darnell, *Dresser*  
Jayme Locke, *Dresser*  
Garris Wimmer, *Dresser*  
Chris Nick, *Sticher*  
Lauren Terry, *Sticher*  
Nottingham Design, *Wig Design*  
Sondra Nottingham, *Wigs/Make-up*  
Michealle Vanderpool, *Assistant Designer*  
Julia Gallimore, *Wig/Makeup Artist*  
Taylor Martin, *Wig/Makeup Artist*  
Dakota Williams, *Wig/Makeup Artist*  
Robin Hamrick, *Wig/Makeup Artist*  
**Special Thanks to Back Stage Artistry**  
Keisha Cunningham,  
*Hairstylist & Natural Hair Specialist*  
**Special Thanks to Serenity Hair Salon**  
Katie Sellers, *Fabric Dyer*  
Eternal Lokumbe, *Mask Design*  
Morgan Matens, *Mask Fabricator*

## LIGHTING & SOUND

Kelly Landry, *Lighting Designer*  
Cameron Lambert, *Audio Engineer*

# HANNIBAL LOKUMBE

*The Jonah People: A Legacy of Struggle and Triumph*

**Dedicated to the Women of Jonah**

Born on November 11, 1948, in Smithville, Texas, where he currently resides.



**Estimated length:**  
100 minutes

**Composed:** 2017-22

**First performance & Nashville Symphony premiere:**

These performances are the world premiere.

Whenever he senses that the time has come to start an important new project, Hannibal Lokumbe heads out to the piney woods of Rosanky near his home in Smithville, Texas (in the greater Austin area). It was here—equipped with just a tent, water, and a small lantern—that he received the life-changing revelation leading to *The Jonah People: A Legacy of Struggle and Triumph*. The composer and jazz icon recalls being awakened by the star-flooded sky and peering into the Milky Way; it seemed so clear and close that he imagined being able to reach out and touch the galaxy.

“When I go to the forest, I pray and I ask the Creator to give me what it is that will be worthy of the people to experience,” Lokumbe says. To “the Creator of us all” he addressed the question: “Who do you say that we are?” The issue of identity is central to *The Jonah People*. The opera traverses centuries of the African diaspora, from the harmony of tribal life in Africa through its brutal disruption by the transatlantic slave trade up to the present.

In the process, Lokumbe emphasizes that one of the most powerful tools of subjugation was to steal and destroy the identities of the people who were enslaved by forcing new ones on them. “With my whip, I will own his body, and with my name and my god, I will own his soul,” as Monsieur Dauphin icily proclaims upon concluding his purchase in a scene depicting a slave auction.

A central message of *The Jonah People* is the healing power of reclaiming these lost identities. And so, Lokumbe dramatizes his forest encounter

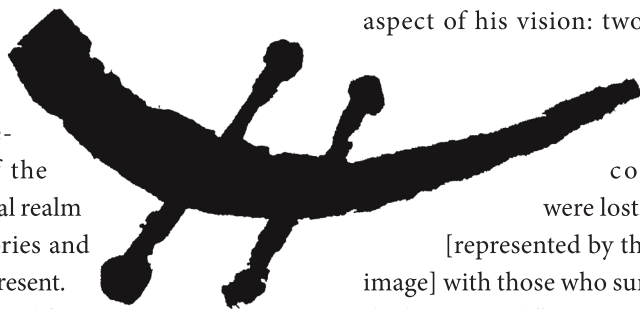
with the Creator at the opera’s climax in the second-to-last scene, where the response to his question—“Who do you say that we are?”—is given as follows: “Like Jonah you are. In the womb of a ship, he like you, wrestled with both his faith and his fate. His ship was followed by seagulls. Your ship was followed by sharks. And you are to never forget that those and the descendants of those whose ships were followed by sharks are born of three wombs; the womb of me, the womb of a mother, and the womb of a ship.”

“The Jonah People,” in other words, is Lokumbe’s image not only for the countless Africans stolen from their homeland, but for all their descendants through the generations up to the present day. It signifies a bond extending beyond the United States and including those who ended up wherever the colonizers enslaved people throughout the New World.

The opera’s geography thus relocates some of the historical events that are shown—the aforementioned auction takes place in Port au Prince, Haiti, for example, instead of Charleston, South Carolina—so as “to pay homage to those who had that happen to them in other countries,” Lokumbe explains. “There is no difference between us: our struggle is the same.” The message is reinforced by the opera’s final words: “The sky is not big enough to hold the suffering of our people, and it could never be big enough to hold my love for you.”



The opera's time frame is similarly expansive. Instead of tracing a merely linear narrative, Lokumbe seamlessly shifts from the time-bound constraints of the real world to the spiritual realm where ancestral memories and guidance are eternally present. The main symbol he devised for



*The Jonah People* illustrates this all-embracing aspect of his vision: two graphic lines which intersect an image of a boat. As Lokumbe explains, the lines connect “those who were lost in the Middle Passage [represented by the lines below the boat image] with those who survived [the lines above the boat image].”

## SAVED BY MUSIC

“Imagery and sound, to me, are one and the same,” Lokumbe says. He speaks of grasping the totality of a composition before mapping out its details. At the same time, *The Jonah People* was five years in the making from start to finish: on June 10, 2022, Lokumbe placed a yellow paint print of his right palm on a tapestry he keeps to record his creative process.

*The Jonah People* might also be described as a summation of his entire life's work. His most ambitious and intricately collaborative project to date, it brings together Lokumbe's legacies as a trailblazing, category-defying composer and performer; as a poet and playwright; and as a mentor and educator who has dedicated his art to the liberation of human thought. (While many jazz trumpeters follow the custom of inscribing their own name on the bell of the horn, Lokumbe has engraved his instrument with the word “liberation.”)

Lokumbe was only 13 when he realized his life's vocation was to be a musician. “I've always seen the immediate impact music has on human behavior,” he says. “It had the ability to save my life. It saved my ancestors in the cotton field as well and gave them the strength to withstand the unrelenting sun. They withstood that by singing when it got too hot to even talk.”

Born Marvin Peterson in 1948, he grew up on a Texas cotton farm that his great-grandfather Silas Burgess had acquired. He later was given

the name Lokumbe (“the spirit that lives in the wind”) after living in Kenya among the Maasai in the late 1970s (he'd traveled there to find healing for a nearly fatal illness); “Hannibal” honors the ancient Carthaginian general who fought against ancient Rome.

*The Jonah People* draws on Lokumbe's own family history, which he says was communicated to him by one of his shaman ancestors and by an aunt to whom the record of their struggles over generations had been passed down. Silas and his mother Asase had survived the hellish voyage of the Middle Passage across the Atlantic that is portrayed in the opera and were then sold at auction. Following his enslavement, Silas made his way to Texas and raised 22 children from two wives.

As a teenager, Lokumbe fell in love with jazz when he discovered John Coltrane on recordings. He started his own group and quickly earned a reputation for his trumpet artistry. He moved to New York City in 1970 and performed and recorded with numerous jazz legends, including the saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, the drummers Elvin Jones and Roy Haynes, and the pianist, composer, and bandleader Gil Evans. Lokumbe also made albums in the U.S. and Europe with his own band. Characteristically, he became known for working across multiple jazz idioms, from hard bop to free jazz.

# The Jonah People



## NOT AN “I” STORY, BUT A “WE” STORY

Alongside his jazz career, Lokumbe began experimenting with large-scale compositions combining jazz and classical forces (orchestra, chorus and soloists). Lokumbe's breakthrough work in this vein was *African Portraits* (premiered in 1990 at Carnegie Hall and widely performed since). It addresses much of the same material as *The Jonah People*, tracing the legacy of people enslaved in the United States over centuries as well as their indispensable contributions to American culture.

Lokumbe likes to refer to these large-scale choral-symphonic creations as “spiritatorios” (his take on the classical idea of the oratorio). Among his other works are compositions honoring Medgar Evers (*God, Mississippi and a Man Called Evers*), Rosa Parks (*Dear Mrs. Parks*), and even his great-grandfather Silas (*Can You Hear God Crying?*). Another major composition explores the idea of creation itself (*One Land, One River, One People*, written for the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2015).

What sets *The Jonah People* apart from the rest of Lokumbe's work—in addition to its sheer scope and many tiers of collaboration—is that it synthesizes the musical, visual, poetic and

theatrical dimensions that for this artist are all integral parts of his original vision, realizing all of this on the stage to a degree he has never attempted before. Which is another way of saying that *The Jonah People* is a full-on opera.

Opera is all about collaboration, and *The Jonah People* would not make its impact without the contributions of the top-tier artists who comprise the creative team—the set design, projection, costumes, lighting and animation—and of course the performers, from the huge cast of singers, actors and dancers to the orchestra, chorus, solo instrumentalists, jazz band and drum ensemble.

But Lokumbe also sees *The Jonah People* as a collaboration with the audience that he hopes will bring healing. Referring back to his trip to the forest, he points out that he first has to “completely annihilate my ego” before he's ready to receive what the Creator has deemed “worthy for the people to experience.” Though Lokumbe has drawn on episodes from his own family history, the work is intended to represent the ordeal and the hope of *all* of the Jonah People: not an “I” story but a “we” story.



## SYNOPSIS

Lokumbe uses the term “veils” in lieu of “acts” to describe the larger units of his musical-dramatic structure. The word choice, he explains, “has to do with our spiritual development. Sometimes in life, and in our understanding, we can move one step forward and then digress 15 steps behind. But when the Creator lifts the veil from our consciousness, we never go back to where we were before that veil of understanding was lifted from our minds.”

Unfolding in four such “veils,” *The Jonah People* begins with an overture in which the orchestra and chorus participate while, onstage, chalk-colored “Spirit” actors—a female and a male child representing the undying spirit of the Jonah People, who appear at pivotal points throughout the opera. They bless the audience and space with the sound of their rattles created by renowned New Orleans sculptor, Martin Payton.



**VEIL ONE** “*Ilé*”—the Yoruba word for “home” portrays the life of the ancestral homeland in an African village before the arrival of colonizing slave traders and missionaries. **Scene One** (“Atonement” or “Knowing”) introduces the Griot player, who changes from the “garment of my captor” to “a garment woven of Kente, indigo and the memories of home.” **Scene Two** (“The Griot”) shows images of life as it was in Africa unfolding to the Griot’s recitation—a combination song and prayer. In **Scene Three** (“Harvest”), the festivity represented by the troupe of dancers is suddenly cut short by the appearance of a Portuguese slave trader, a Jesuit priest and an African Chief. Their inhuman transaction brings the music and dancing to an abrupt halt.

**VEIL TWO** “They Swallowed The Ocean For Me” dramatizes the horror of the Middle Passage in the “womb” of the slave ship. Captain George C. Stevens writes a letter to his wife in which, with no remorse, he justifies the brutality over which he presides. The enslaved African Boukman recalls how his village was raided, and a marabout (a Muslim holy man) prophesies the future of the Jonah People.

**VEIL THREE** “Searching”—“Na Lelakole” is the longest of the four veils. **Scene One** (“Atonement”) takes place during the slave auction at Port-au-Prince. First Boukman and then his daughter Asase are sold. To keep her two sons from being taken from her, Asase crawls on her belly to beg the bidder, Monsieur Henri Dauphin. She is whipped until he relents and purchases her sons as well. In **Scene Two** (“Red Coffee”), Asase discovers the power of music to help the enslaved workers endure their labor in the sugarcane fields.

After an intermission, **Scene Three** (“The Last Supper”) takes place a year later: Asase decides to run away in order to escape the temptation of mercy killing her children “to end the terror of their bondage.” She instructs Silas to cherish his true heritage as the descendent of his nation’s chief musician. We learn in **Scene Four** (“Wind and Bones”) what befell Asase: she is captured and lynched. In **Scene Five** (“Reunion”) her father, Boukman is guided by the ancestors and escapes the plantation to search for her. Discovering her lifeless body, he proclaims: “Even death could not keep you from the warmth of my arms.” **Scene Six** (“Bois Caiman”—“Alligator Forest”) depicts a Voudoun ceremony that inspires the enslaved Haitians to revolt. As Lokumbe points out, the Haitian Revolution “was the first successful armed rebellion against European domination in the world.”

Costume illustrations courtesy of Christelle Matu, costume designer.



**VEIL FOUR** “The New Being” focuses on the triumph of the Jonah People. **Scene One** (“So Many Fields, So Many Fortunes, So Many Souls”) again illustrates the spiritual power of music to liberate. The theme is continued in **Scene Two** (“Minton’s Playhouse, 1950s”), which celebrates the art form of jazz as practiced at one of the most famous clubs in Harlem. Lokumbe’s encounter in the forest is reenacted in **Scene Three** (“Prophecy”): a seer is visited by a Native American shaman woman and then receives directly from the Creator a revelation of the identity of the Jonah People—and of his mission to transform these “kindred souls” through the power of art.

**Scene Four** (“Healing”) shifts to the Old Plateau Cemetery in Mobile, Alabama (also known as the Africatown Graveyard), which was founded by freed survivors of the last slave ship documented to reach the United States from Africa (the *Clotilda*). It is here, in a space that links the generations, that the opera culminates in a dramatic representation of “the moment of healing for the Tribe of Jonah” as the two spirit children together touch the marker of Cudjoe “Kazoola” Lewis, one of the last survivors of the *Clotilda*.



Photo: Eric Waters, 2020



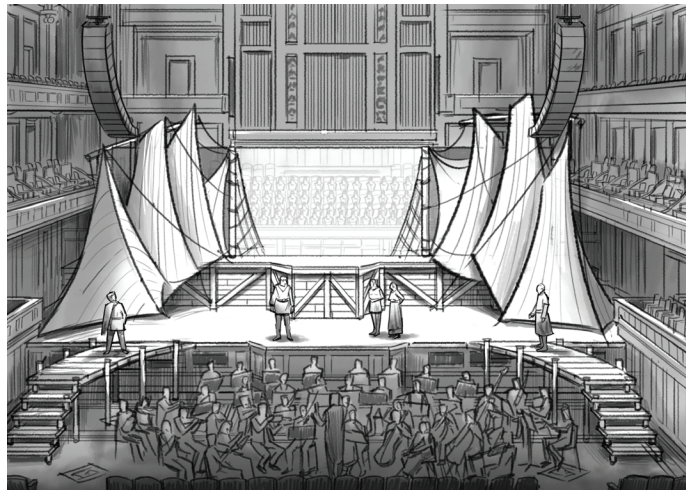
## SYMBOLISM AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION

Lokumbe’s musical creativity is inextricable from his powerfully visual sensibility. An intricate network of symbols enhances his libretto and theatrical conception for *The Jonah People*. Here’s a brief overview of some of the most important of these:



The **calligraphic sign** of the Jonah People—the sweeping line of the boat cutting the waves intersected by two thin lines—represents all those who survived the Middle Passage and all those who perished (the portions above and below the boat, respectively), both females and males (the shorter and longer lines, respectively).

The **wooden ship** in which the Jonah People were transported looms as a symbol throughout the entire opera in the set designed by Shaun Motley. “The main playing space is the hull of the ship, surrounded by abstractions of sails on each side. This is where everything takes place,” he explains. “It is always present, even when the location shifts.” In Lokumbe’s metaphor, the area where the enslaved are held captive also symbolizes one of the three “wombs” from which the Jonah People have emerged (together with the womb of the Creator and the womb of a mother).



Shaun L. Motley, Set Designer | Render by Rashad Roan

Motley’s design concept is intended to create a “blank canvas” for Miko Simmons to paint using a remarkable array of projection technology and digital effects. “These tools give us the ability to create a magical, dimensional, immersive experience,” says Simmons—a flexibility that transforms the playing space from interiors to exteriors and across historical eras and changing seasons. He adds that

the projections, film and animations also encompass “magical places that are not part of reality, including dream worlds and the world in between the real world and the heavens, where the ancestors are beholding the others.” After intermission, an ascending platform is added to the ship design and becomes the symbolic space for the opera’s spiritual journey. This allows for a shift in focus to the triumph and healing of the Jonah People.



Mask illustration courtesy of Eternal Lokumbe

The **Mask of the Lost Soul**, first seen at the end of Veil One, was designed by Eternal Lokumbe, the composer’s daughter. Subtly combining images of predator and prey, the mask is worn by those who have lost a sense of the humanity of others—by those, in Lokumbe’s words, “who feel it acceptable to enslave others, to brutalize, destroy and eradicate the culture of nations in the name of God, king or country.”

Another potent symbol is the **African crow**, whose cries are first heard at the beginning of Veil Two. This “most intelligent of all known birds,” writes Lokumbe, “is a witness to what is about to occur and continues to occur in a world where some humans have come to think that they are not its steward, but its ruler.” Simmons understands the crow as “an ancestor energy that follows and tells the story, acting as the watcher.”



Costume illustrations courtesy of Christelle Matou, costume designer

**Color choices** are also highly symbolic. In the costumes designed by Christelle Matou, for example, the colonizers wear red, while the Jonah People are dressed in white that starts bleeding red toward the bottom. The blue chalk of the spirit children symbolizes the aura that can never be destroyed. They carry pouches filled with sand to symbolize connection to the earth and its wisdom.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The music of *The Jonah People* is inseparable from the opera's other layers: the poetry and drama from which Lokumbe fashioned his libretto, his network of symbols, the many-faceted design elements intended to realize his visualization of the story. All of these reinforce the total effect. Like his story, Lokumbe's score amalgamates a lifetime of wisdom: it brings together his experiences with various jazz idioms and other American musical vernaculars, with the expressive power of the Western classical chorus and orchestra, with the vitality of African traditions.

This is music that embraces the depths of despair and the heights of ecstatic liberation. As Lokumbe writes, the "womb" in which the Africans were kidnapped also became "the ultimate music classroom of the Jonah People. No music since the sailing of the first slave ship is unaffected by that which occurred in that wooden womb room of horror and of hope."

Pay special attention to the theme stated at the very outset, prominently placed in the composer's own instrument, the trumpet: a mere four notes (first descending, then rising, then descending again), it's the central cell of the opera and corresponds to the revelation that the Jonah People are "of three wombs made"—the revelation that also brings healing at the end.

Lokumbe uses the large orchestra sparingly, at times singling out a solo instrument against textural backgrounds. The percussion section is especially extensive, allowing for a cinematic spectrum of atmospheres and impressions. One of his signature effects is to lay out a repeated pattern that becomes mesmerizing, like the surf drum representing the ocean crossing. At the end of the first half, Lokumbe's orchestration pays tribute to Grand Master Flash and Tupac Shakur.

The chorus, singing behind a scrim that allows varying degrees of transparency, is especially impressive as a sonic pillar that buttresses moments of epiphany, but it also evokes the suffering of the people — for example, through wordless moaning and sighing in the scene of the Middle Passage.

While the orchestra plays from the pit, individual

musicians are given an important role on the stage. Soloists playing the kora (West African stringed instrument) and djun djun (African drums) appear already in *Veil One*; at the end of the opera, the American blues guitarist—accompanied by a drummer—is symbolically shown in the position originally taken by the kora. For the jazz club scene at Minton's Playhouse, a quintet plays a miniature show-within-the-show to illustrate an art form Lokumbe describes as "the highest plane of physical, mental and spiritual function."

*The Jonah People* ends with a portrayal of the "New Beings" prophesied by the marabout at the most painful moment of dehumanization.

As Lokumbe explains: "They are descendants of those who came by way of the slave ship. The only way to survive such an experience would be to think of new ways to reinvent themselves. And just look at what the New Beings have created—in the fields of science, academia, visual arts, sports, literature, music!"

— *Thomas May* is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.



## ORCHESTRATION

The orchestra consists of 2 flutes (1st doubling alto) and piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets and bass clarinet, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 4 percussionists (I: balaphon, kalimba, snare drum, aereophone, berimbau, cabasa, chocallo, claves, crickets, surf drum and tambourine; II: bass drum, African crow, bean pods, bell tree, claves, doves, rain stick, shekere, slapstick, sleigh bells and vibraslap; III: agogo bells, anvil, bosom whistle, chains, crash cymbals, cuícuí, glass wind chimes, metal wind chimes, pandero, tambourine, water pipe, water splash, wood blocks and wooden crate; IV: crotales, aereophone, amoon, cabasa, aicadas, conch shell, crash cymbals, crows, floor toms, gavel, police whistle, sleigh bells and tambourine drum set), harp and strings.

Cast of characters and onstage musicians feature ten vocalists including gospel and Mississippi Delta blues singers, more than 30 actors; a 100+ person choir drawn from Tennessee and Kentucky Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the Nashville Symphony Chorus; African drummers, instrumentalists, and dancers; and, a Jazz quintet with Hannibal Lokumbe on trumpet.

### IN GRATITUDE...

The composer is hopelessly indebted to Lillian E. Peterson - Sumai Lokumbe - Haile Lokumbe - Morning Star Lokumbe - Eternal Faith Lokumbe - Amma Lokumbe - Shawn Grimes - Carter Grimes - Nile Peterson - Yohan Lokumbe - James A. Wilson - Carole Haas Gravagno - Alan Valentine - Giancarlo Guerrero - Sonja Thoms - Angelica Franzino-Brown - Kimberly McLemore - The Nashville Symphony Orchestra and Staff - Judy Bergeron - Reid Sharp - Freddy Fletcher - Jim Gray and YOU.