

# POM

## PRISONER OF MERCY

Produced by Silentwoods Collective

Librettist: Luisamaria Hernandez | Poet: Clare McCallan | Director: Jane Struss

Tethered: Keith Eric Brinkley | Misunderstood Low: Taka Komagata

Misunderstood High: Théodora Cottarel | Broken: Luisamaria Hernandez

Producers: Luisamaria Hernandez and Théodora Cottarel

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LIBRETTO AND EXHIBIT PREVIEW 10.27.2022

**Prisoner of Mercy (POM)** is a developing operatic performance piece that invites us to examine our relationship to mercy and identify the impact it has or could have on our lives, the lives of others and the world around us. POM is based on the true stories of individuals confronted with life altering systemic and societal prejudice. We witness how mercy - given, received, and withheld - affects the course of their lives. Librettist, Luisamaria Hernandez, uses her interviews and letters with these individuals to create the characters: Tethered, in prison for life; Misunderstood, who struggles with addiction; and Broken, who has undergone abortions. She underlines their experience with mercy throughout key moments of their lives to exemplify the power that it has had on them and show how ultimately it unites us all. While steeped in the operatic tradition, the piece takes a multidisciplinary approach using poetry, dance, and the visual arts.

**Tethered** is based on an African American man who has been serving a life sentence since he was only twenty years old. Growing up in an environment riddled with abuse, violence, and drugs led Tethered to where he is today. His capacity to accept mercy in his life has led him to leverage the system to better himself through every class and certification provided by the correctional institution where he is incarcerated. This capacity despite the systemic oppression towards young black men is a testament to one person's determination to overcome even the most hopeless of situations.

**Broken** takes the stories of multiple women who have had abortions and presents them throughout time, highlighting the complexity of their choice and where the women are now. The women whom we have spoken with vary in age, background, and experience with abortion. It is our goal to honor them while showing how they are more than the choices they've had to make.

**Misunderstood** explores the highs and lows of a person whose identity has been consumed by addiction. This character will be played by two singing-actors to illustrate the many facets of addiction and how far we can stray away from ourselves. The hope is that through seeing addiction in this way, people will recognize how nuanced and complicated a person's relationship with everything around them and themselves can be.

*When you can be in an environment like this and keep your good health and a good heart full of love and compassion then you are truly blessed by God and he has shown mercy on you.*

## CAST AND CREW



### **Librettist/Broken Producer**

#### **Luisamaria Hernandez**

is a Dominican American vocalist and storyteller based in Boston. As an active recitalist and concert curator, Luisamaria has made Latin American, Caribbean, and Spanish art music the center of her storytelling and performance practice. Luisamaria believes representation on and off the stage are key to developing community and well-rounded artistry. Her experiences as a Sphinx Connect Fellow and Sistema Side-by-Side Instructor have been integral to her work as she strives to tell stories that will reach those who need it most. [www.luisamariahernandez.com](http://www.luisamariahernandez.com)  
IG: @lmhdz



### **Director**

**Jane Struss** has had a long and illustrious career as a mezzo-soprano who is best known for her many Mahler performances with Benjamin Zander and the Boston Philharmonic and other orchestras throughout the US. She appeared as soloist with almost every Boston musical organization and was celebrated for her performances of Winterreise and other works of the late Romantic period. She was also well-known as a performer of new music. Peter Maxwell Davies and Milton Babbitt have written pieces for her as well as a number of younger composers.

She is currently active as a masterclass teacher, stage and music director, particularly noted for her innovative staging of Mozart operas for Longfellow House, several churches and other venues in the Boston area. She Initiated the practice of staging

lieder with her Winterreise at the Longy School of Music in 2016, which won “Best Performance of the Year” from both the Boston Globe, and Lloyd Schwartz of PBS. Since then, she has directed staged productions of the Schumann song cycles, songs of Brahms, Hugo Wolf and Gustav Mahler as well as songs of Leonard Bernstein during the Bernstein Centenary Year. She attended Boston University and Harvard University, taught at Bradford College and the New School of Music, and is a currently member of the faculty at the Longy School of Music of Bard College in Cambridge where she has taught and mentored singers, pianists and composers for over 40 years.



### **Redeemer/Poet**

**Clare McCallan** is a Catholic spoken word artist, community organizer, and television host whose work focuses on the intersection of virtue and adventure. She has

completed two North American poetry tours, performing at universities, churches, and community centers. She is the author of two books, “STATIONS” and “MANGERS”. In 2022, she began co-hosting Catholic TV’s morning show, “This is the Day” and the Bleav Network’s “Crushed The Podcast”. She has been selected for and completed two artist residencies, at the Grunewald Guild (Washington, 2020) and Gamli Skoli (Iceland, 2022). Clare is currently serving as the Creative Director of St. Joseph’s Home for Artisans - A Boston art residency that gives housing to early career artists while encouraging them to give back to the neighborhood through their gifts.

You can find out more about her journey and work in the award-winning short film, “Clare McCallan: Little Victories” or by streaming her poetry album (“Lice n’ Greys, 2019”) or



podcast (“Letters from the Least”, 2021) both available on all streaming platforms.



### **Misunderstood High/ Producer**

French-American soprano, **Théodora Cottarel** has been recognized for her “electrifying” (Schmopera) performances and “beauty of tone” (Houston Press).

She has sung in operas and concerts internationally with companies like the Rome Philharmonic, Odyssey Opera and at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées among others. Roles include: Madame Goldentrill (The Impresario), Cendrillon (Cendrillon), Micaëla (Carmen), Fiordiligi (Cosi fan tutte), Pamina (Die Zauberflöte), Gretel (Hansel and Gretel), Elvira (Don Giovanni), Servilia (La Clemenza di Tito), Arminda (La Finta Giardinera), and Despina (Cosi fan tutte). In 2022/23 she will sing Donna Anna with Long Island Lyric Opera at Madison Theater, premiere *Misunderstood* in the new opera *Prisoner of Mercy* and sing in “You’ll find an enchanted neighborhood” by Arturo Fernandez. Théodora is also cofounder and Chief Creative Officer of Helios Opera “one of the forerunners of producing digital opera.”

[www.theodoracottarel.com](http://www.theodoracottarel.com)

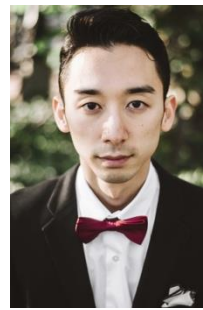
IG: @theodoracottarel



### **Tethered**

Baritone, **Keith Eric Brinkley** is a multi-faceted performer with style credits in opera, musical theater, gospel and religious music. His formative musical training

began in church and singing male soprano with the world-renowned Indianapolis Children’s Choir. Keith holds a BM from Heidelberg University, a MM from Boston University and a GPD from the Longy School of Music at Bard College. Keith is passionate about creating performance opportunities and funding initiatives that promote social change through the arts.



### **Misunderstood Low**

Praised for his “soaring lines” and “particularly lyrical” singing (Boston Musical Intelligencer), tenor **Taka Komagata** performs “with earnest gusto” (The Boston Globe), brightening classical music internationally with his

sincere vocal style. Currently, as a Resident Artist at the Hawai’i Opera Theatre, Taka performed the role of Colin Craven in *The Secret Garden*, Goro in *Madama Butterfly*, and Bastien in a studio version of Mozart’s *Bastien und Bastienne*. Recent engagements include Manny (Ellis), Rinuccio (Gianni Schicchi), Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni), Ferrando (Cosi fan tutte), King Kasper (Amahl and the Night Visitors). Mr. Komagata is the co-founder of Balcony Series, an artistic troupe delivering timeless compositions to the unsuspecting listener through impromptu performances.

[www.takakmagata.com](http://www.takakmagata.com)

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## **CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS**



### **Associate Graphic Designer & Photographer**

**Matthew Smith** is the Associate Graphic Designer and Photographer at New York Festivals in NYC, an alumnus of St. Joseph’s Artist

Residency, and the Photographer for NYC Young Catholic Professionals. Matthew founded Myndful Mystic, an initiative where he fuses his spiritual thoughts through nature, phrases, delicate imagery, and the Catholic Saints. Using collage, he seamlessly blends photography, illustration and design to evoke the beauty he sees. This beauty includes dynamic compositions and vibrant, lively colors. Matthew’s hope is that you may encounter the otherworldly transcendent God, who inspires this work. That you may experience light and hope from the lives of the saints and the honesty of his heart.



### **Narrative Photographer**

Born in Ypsilanti, Michigan, into the rich tradition of Irish storytelling and art, **Fiona Cousino** is a photographer, writer and storyteller. When she isn't obsessing over light, she is constantly at work

noticing and examining people. She finds story in the texture of all of her work, and an inexhaustible delight in shared humanity accessed through the uniqueness of each person. Fiona has had the privilege of being in residence in Boston at St. Joseph's Home for Artisans, and is working on her first book. Fiona currently resides in Texas, where she works in a Catholic parish.



### **Assistant Composer**

**John-William Gambrell** was raised in Southern California and received a bachelor of music in composition in 2020. He has worked alongside PigPen Theatre Co., as well as composer, Mark

Bennett at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego. John-William has since moved to Boston, where he freelances as a composer and accompanist. His mission is to compose and collaborate, with a passion to create evocative art.

### **SUPPORT POM**

There are many ways to support POM and help see it into the future.

~ A donation is the most effective way to help Prisoner of Mercy reach its final form. A fully tax-deductible contribution can be made via check written to Silentwoods Collective Inc. 501 © (3).

~ Spread the word, through social media, word of mouth, or any other media you can think of! Follow us on IG: @prisonerofmercy

### **A MESSAGE FROM THE LIBRETTIST**

Dear all,

Mercy is the name of the game here and I hope everyone who gets to experience this work in its many forms and stages will remember that at the core of every person there is just that, a person. One deserving love, forgiveness, respect, and mercy.

None of this would be possible without the help of so many people. I would like to thank:

St. Paul's Parish, Nancy Nicolaou, Estuardo, and Wilson for the use of the space and for helping the show come together.

Br. Paul O'Keefe, MJ Kriz, Andrew Koutroubas and Silentwoods Collective for being integral to making the connections with our story subjects possible.

Tethered, Misunderstood, and Broken for being some of the bravest people I've ever had the chance to interact with and for trusting me with your stories.

My entire family, and in a special way Jamie, Miriam, Thais, Ally, Maria, Alessandra, Mateo, Edwin and Nancy for being the original cast and crew in the unofficial table read in the middle of a hurricane.

St. Joseph's Home for Artisans for their continued support and all of the talented artists, past and present who are involved in this project - Amanda and Sean - you have been such a joy to work with!

Theodora, Taka, Keith, Clare - for being a dream cast, your artistry and commitment in such a short period of time is a true gift.

Special shoutout to Theodora, for being such an amazing producer, colleague, and friend - this evening would not have happened without you.

Jane, for believing in this piece and putting up with my many notes.

My cousins, Izzy and Caro for spending a month in middle of nowhere Georgia with me as I let this idea develop.

Fiona and Matthew for sharing your art with us so that we can see mercy in as many ways as possible.

To all of you, for sharing this experience with me. I cannot wait to see this piece develop and I hope to see you all there as it does.

As St. Maximilian Kolbe would say, "love alone creates" so let's love deeply, sweetly, and with lots of mercy.

Sincerely,

Luisamaria Hernandez