



PENELOPE DREAMWALKER

GHOST OF SHIRREFF HALL

MARCH 1-15 2025

WOMEN'S COUNCIL HOUSE- 989 YOUNG AVE.

Three mini operas by Canadian composers:

The House Rules of Order by Sophie Dupuis

Penelope: Dreamwalker by Janice I. Jackson

Do You Hear Me by James Rolfe, libretto by Luke Hathaway

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PENELOPE DREAMWALKER – Ghost of Shirreff Hall

PLOT SUMMARIES

The House Rules of Order of Sheriff Hall: Penelope's Story

Libretto: Monica Pearce and **Composition:** Sophie Dupuis

The House Rules of Order of Sheriff Hall tells a version of Penelope's story that highlights the sad reality of young girls who have been taken advantage of and the dramatic consequences that continue to cost the victims and not the culprits. In this story, Penelope was seduced by a French teacher and becomes pregnant. She confronts him, and he takes her life in what appears to be a suicide. The opera is treated as a theme-and-variation scheme: from one scene to another, Penelope replays the event in her head, gradually revealing the events as they truly unfolded. Incorporates English and French, highlighting the teacher's speech. This opera was written with a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Penelope Dreamwalker – Ghost of Shirreff Hall

Libretto and Composition: Janice I Jackson

Penelope works as a maid in Shirreff Hall. Her mother has passed away, her father a drunk, and brother a con. She becomes pregnant and ultimately rejected by her lover. She understands that her options are limited and dire and has also heard about the laundries created by the Catholic Church in the late where unwed mothers were housed. These religious prisons turned orphans, young girls, and pregnant women into slaves inside convent walls. Penelope, being Irish, understands this fate and takes another path, to end her life. "All that I am and all that I dream is leavin' me." Incorporates English and Latin (Catholic prayers) This opera was written with a grant from Arts Nova Scotia.

Do you hear me?

Libretto: Luke Hathaway and **Composition:** James Rolfe

Plot Summary: *Do you hear me?* Tells a story that intertwines themes of identity, love, and communication. Set in the present, it shows us Penelope as ghost: 100 years after her death, she continues to linger in Dalhousie University's Sheriff Hall, listening to/for students whose plight resembles her own — particularly students who are pregnant, and whose situations are complicated. At one time, she saw these students in binary terms: they were women, whose aggressors and oppressors were men. But now some of the pregnant students are men. (And some, of course, are other genders — or none.) As she processes, she imagines that she sees Pete Lepage, the father of her child, and then sees that he is pregnant. Passionate to connect, Penelope tries to speak and sing across the walls of time and space and culture, telling him not to harm himself; the violin stands in for the voices of the students she has tried to talk to and listen for/to — hundreds of them, down the years. Incorporates English and Latin (Catholic prayers). This opera was written with a grant from the Ontario Arts Council.

Do You Hear Me? was commissioned by Janice Jackson and inspired by the story of Penelope the Ghost of Shirreff Hall, as told by generations of undergraduates and as codified in various compendia of Halifax lore, including in *The Dalhousie Gazette* (see especially the 2021 article by Ryan McNutt). The characters are fictional; the 'Alma Redemptoris Mater' is traditional. Special thanks to Raine Forbes-Myers for research support. – **Luke Hathaway, librettist**

ARTISTS AND CREATIVE TEAM



Janice I. Jackson — Soprano & Composer (Penelope Dreamwalker)

Janice Isabel Jackson is an acclaimed soprano celebrated for her fearless commitment to new music, having premiered more than 250 works, many written for her. She has performed internationally in leading contemporary music festivals in Beijing, Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Torino, Toronto, Montreal, New York, Berlin, Johannesburg, and Cape Town and more. Since 2006, she is the Artistic Director of Vocalypse Productions, Halifax's contemporary vocal arts organization. In recent years, she has been composing for solo voice. Jackson's contributions to Nova Scotian culture have been recognized by a Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia Award. She has received an Established Artist Award from the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council, and a Friends of Canadian Music Award from the Canadian League of Composers and the Canadian Music Centre.



Sarah Frank — Violin, Voice

Halifax-based musician Sarah Frank is a versatile violinist, singer, and banjo player whose work spans folk, classical, and improvised traditions. She has performed in theatre, opera, and orchestral settings, including Neptune Theatre and the National Arts Centre's production of *Controlled Damage*, Sandy Moore's opera *Escape to Freedom*, and engagements with Symphony Nova Scotia. As a folk artist, she collaborates widely, appearing with Dave Gunning, Basia Bulat, and in her award-winning duo The Bombadils. Trained at McGill University and through mentorship with leading classical and folk musicians, Sarah brings technical fluency and emotional clarity to every project. The *Montreal Gazette* praised her "stratospheric beauty" in both fiddle playing and vocal harmony. Whether performing contemporary works, traditional tunes, or original songs, Sarah is known for her warmth and curiosity.



Emily Jewer — Director

Emily Jewer (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist working in theatre, film, and the visual arts. Emily graduated from Mount Allison with a BFA and spent a year training with Neptune Theatre's Pre-Professional Training Program in acting and was part of the inaugural Chrysalis Project at Neptune in the directing stream, assisting on productions such as *Shakespeare in Love*, *KAMP*, and *Hamlet* and directing a presentation of Brecht's *The Jewish Wife* with a modern day slant contrasting the experiences of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community with pre-WWII Germany. In recent years, Emily has expanded into opera directing, assisting on the 2022 world premiere of Sandy Moore's *Escape to Freedom* and co-directing Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum* in 2021. She has also taught acting master classes for opera singers for the past three years at Vocalypse's *Opera from Scratch*. In 2026 Emily will direct the premiere of Fiona's Ryan's new opera *In Her Hands* with Essential Opera.



Arianne Pollet-Brannen — Wearable Art

Halifax artist Arianne Pollet-Brannen is known for her imaginative sculptural art wear and visually striking costume designs. A graduate of NSCAD University, where she received multiple scholarships, she has created costumes for numerous opera and film projects. Her work for Vocalypse Productions' *Vonda de Ville in Temporal Follies* earned the Theatre Nova Scotia Merritt Award for Outstanding Costume Design. Pollet-Brannen's wearable sculptures have been exhibited widely, including solo shows at Cape Breton University Art Gallery and Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, as well as at Fashion Art Toronto. Her pieces are held in the Nova Scotia Art Bank, MSVU Art Gallery's permanent collection, and private collections.



Dylan Hay — Audio Technician

Dylan Hay (they/he) is a technician, multi-instrumentalist, composer, sound designer, and educator based in K'jipuktuk/Halifax. Their recent technical work includes live sound for the Open Waters Festival, production support for Live Art Dance and Breaking Circus, and assisting renowned engineer John DS Adams. As a performer, Dylan's musical practice spans genres: they play trombone with reggae artist Jah'mila, contribute to the improvising Upstream Orchestra, perform trombone and keyboard with pop-soul artist Avery Dakin, play electric bass with jazz-fusion group Under The Bus, and write and perform original music as a singer-songwriter. Dylan teaches Sound Design at Dalhousie University, where they share their passion for audio experimentation and interdisciplinary collaboration.



Sophie Dupuis — Composer (The House Rules of Order of Shirreff Hall)

Francophone composer Sophie Dupuis, originally from New Brunswick, creates vivid, eclectic music shaped by her background in visual art, stage performance, and the landscapes of the Maritime provinces. Her debut album *Comme bon lui semble* was nominated for the 2024 NB Music Award for Enregistrement de l'année, reflecting her distinctive voice as both composer and performer. In addition to her compositional work, Sophie is an active freelance violinist, arranger, and music educator, contributing to a wide range of artistic projects. She is also deeply engaged in community arts, volunteering and working within cultural organizations to support local creativity. Her opera *The House Rules of Order of Shirreff Hall: Penelope's Story*, created with librettist Monica Pearce, highlights her

interest in storytelling, character, and theatricality.



Monica Pearce — Composer & Librettist (The House Rules of Order of Shirreff Hall)

Monica Pearce is a Canadian librettist and composer known for her inventive approach to opera, chamber music, and toy-piano repertoire. Born in Prince Edward Island and long based in Toronto, she now lives in Lansing, Michigan, where she continues to develop new interdisciplinary projects. As a librettist, she has collaborated widely, including with composer Cecilia Livingston on the Dora-nominated *Singing Only Softly*, an opera exploring the life of Anne Frank. She also wrote the libretto for Michael Donovan's *Caroline's Sweeper*, centred on astronomer Caroline Herschel, and for Sophie Dupuis' opera *The House Rules of Order of Shirreff Hall: Penelope's Story*. Her compositions have been performed by Banff Centre, Opera Laurier, Essential Opera, Loose Tea Theatre, Bicycle Opera Project, Opera Nova Scotia, Vocalypse Productions, and the Toy Piano Composers.



James Rolfe — Composer (Do you hear me?)

Toronto composer James Rolfe is internationally recognized for his wide-ranging contributions to contemporary music. His works have been commissioned and performed by ensembles, choirs, orchestras, theatres, and opera companies across Canada, the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Rolfe has received numerous honours, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the K. M. Hunter Music Award, the Louis Applebaum Composers Award, the Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music, Choral Canada's Outstanding Choral Work Award, and the Johanna Metcalf Performing Arts Prize. He holds composition degrees from Princeton University and the University of Toronto, where he now teaches composition and mentors emerging artists. Rolfe's operas have been staged in Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver, Banff, Edmonton, and New York.



Luke Hathaway — Librettist (Do you hear me?)

Librettist Luke Hathaway (he/him) is a trans and queer writer and theatre-maker based in Kijipuktuk/Halifax. He teaches creative writing and English literature at Saint Mary's University. He is the author of four books of poems, including *The Affirmations*, a *Times* (London) Best Book of 2022. Luke is a co-creator of numerous works for theatre including re:naissance opera's touring production *Eurydice Fragments*, heading to Finland for Ensemble Nylandia's inaugural festival of censored voices in 2026; and the new work of music-theatre *Mme Caeneus's Canteen* (music by James Rolfe / ANIMA producing), which will premiere at the Open Ears Festival in Kitchener, Ontario, also in 2026.