

CREATED BY **CHRIS THORNBORROW & DAVID YEE** DIRECTED BY **NINA LEE AQUINO** FROM **MAY 5-24, 2026**

# cicadas



**TARRAGON** THEATRE



NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE  
CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS  
*Canada is our stage. Le Canada en scène.*



ASIAN CANADIAN THEATRE COMPANY

A TARRAGON THEATRE AND NAC ENGLISH THEATRE CO-PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH FU-GEN ASIAN THEATRE COMPANY

**May 5 - 24**  
**Mainspace**

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Please Note: icons highlighted in light green may be of particular interest to educators.

# About the Co-Creator/Playwright

**David Yee** is a mixed race (half Chinese, half Scottish) playwright and actor, born and raised in Toronto. He is the co-founding Artistic Director of fu-GEN Theatre Company, Canada's premiere professional Asian Canadian theatre company. A Dora Mavor Moore Award-nominated Dora Mavor Moore Award-nominated actor and playwright, his work has been produced internationally and at home. He is a two-time Governor General's Literary Award nominee for his plays *lady in the red dress* and *carried away on the crest of a wave*, which won the award in 2015 along with the Carol Bolt Award in 2013. In 2023 he was named Laureate of the prestigious Siminovitch Prize in Theatre for his groundbreaking work in playwriting. He currently teaches playwriting at the University of Toronto and works extensively in the Asian Canadian community as an artist and an advocate.

[Learn more about fu-GEN Theatre Company here.](#)

# About the Co-Creator/Composer

**Chris Thornborrow** is an award-winning composer for film, theatre, and the concert stage. His work has been described as “heightened and brashly percussive” (Variety), “urgent, masterful” (NOW Magazine), “powerfully virtuosic” (Barcza Blog), and “elegiac music that casts a spell” (Hollywood Reporter). Recognition for his work includes the Karen Kieser Prize in Canadian Music, multiple SOCAN Awards for Audio Visual Composers, two Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations, and the Louis Applebaum Composers Award Nomination.

His instrumental music has been performed, recorded, and commissioned by Array Ensemble, the Bicycle Opera Project, Ensemble Paramirabo, Esprit Orchestra, junctQin keyboard collective, the National Arts Centre, Tapestry Opera, the Thin Edge New Music Collective, and The Toy Piano Composers, of which he was the Co-Founder and Artistic Director for eight seasons.

# Cast

**Monica Dottor** - Janie

**Ryan Hollyman** - Trim

**Ellora Patnaik** - Adeline and others

# Musicians

**Amahl Arulanandam** - Cello

**Marc Blouin** - Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

**Nathan Petitpas** - Percussion

**Wesley Shen** - Piano

# Creative Team

**David Yee** - Creator

**Chris Thornborrow** - Creator

**Nina Lee Aquino** - Director

**Ric Knowles** - Dramaturg

**Vicki Stroich** - Climate Dramaturg

**Jawon Kang** - Set & Costume Designer

**Michelle Ramsay** - Lighting Designer

**John Gzowski** - Sound Designer

**Monica Dottor** - Movement Designer

**Jeff Ho** - fu-GEN Creation Mentee

**MinGyeong Lee** - Assistant Set & Costume Designer

**Tushar Dalvi** - Assistant Lighting Designer

**Julian Smith** - Assistant Sound Designer

**Tamara Protić** - Stage Manager

**Jackie McCormick** - Assistant Stage Manager

# About the Play

## Synopsis

In 2032, while on the hunt for a new home in Toronto's Trinity Bellwoods, Trim and Janie are drawn to a very peculiar house. A flood with no leak, an ominous voice, and hordes of cicadas are only three of the many strange things seeping up through the old floorboards. Could a strangely luminous painting unlock long-hidden secrets of what lies beneath the home? Howling winds, storms, and the ever-present sound of cicadas remind us that nothing stays buried.

*cicadas* is a modern eco-thriller from the minds of Governor General's Award and Siminovitch Prize laureate David Yee and award-winning composer Chris Thornborrow that serves as both mystery and warning.



### **BONUS!**

Check out an earlier radio-play version of *cicadas* [here](#).

# Creators' Note

*cicadas* began as a grand experiment, commissioned by the NAC English Theatre and Orchestra, two bodies inside the same structure, yet who rarely collaborate creatively. Usually, a musical score is one of the last things to be implemented into a story. In opera, the composer generally starts only after the libretto has been finished. Music tends to be one of the last components to be added in the production of a film. And in the theatre, music is typically a component of sound design in response to a finished script.

With *cicadas*, we wrote in tandem, using music to inspire text and text to inspire music. The result is a singular and deeply integrated experience, in which the score is inextricably linked to the story. The band is an extension of the cast. Music bubbles up to embody the landscapes, structures, environment, and characters.

To be able to create this way, you need explicit trust and faith in the other creator. You need to know that they will take what you've given and respond creatively, respond with the heart. We first met when we were both much younger, in Tapestry New Opera's experimental residency "Lib Lab", our relationship forged in the fire of opera and practical jokes.

Our collaborations there lay the foundation for this process, in many ways. We have both been surprised and challenged, provoked and inspired by the other's contributions. We've kept each other on our toes, have lost sleep over finding the right response that matches the beauty and heart of an offer, and (though it pains us to publicly admit it this way) have made each other better artists.

Whether composition or text, our process has been fundamentally musical: finding our common language in rhythm, each transposing to his own form. Sometimes one will introduce a melody that the other will support, enhance or interrupt, then hand it back. In that way, this process has been a lot like an extended conversation and, as such, maybe this is less a co-creation and more of a duet.

Chris wants to say thank you to Anna for her infinite patience and support. And to Liam, who will live in the futures we imagine.

David wants to thank Vienna for her constant support and love. And Anna, for sharing Chris. Not that she minded. Or so I've heard.

David Yee | Chris Thornborrow  
Creators

# Cicadas (science)



1

**Cicadas: Facts and Photos**  
From *National Geographic*.

2

**The Insane Biology of the Cicada**  
From *Real Science*.



3

**Cicada Dual Emergence Brings  
Chaos to the Food Chain**  
From the *BBC*.

4

**The Dormant Army Beneath Your Feet**  
From *TED Ed*.

Sir David Attenborough's *Life In the Undergrowth* documents the cicada's lifecycle in the 5min video



5

**Why are Cicadas so Noisy?**  
From *Britannica*.

# Cicadas (mythology)



1

**Cicada Folklore, or Why We Don't Mind Billions of Burrowing Bugs at Once**  
From *Smithsonian Centre of Folklife & Cultural Heritage*.

2

**O, Shrill-Voiced Insect**  
The cicada poems of Ancient Greece.



3

**Brood X Is Back – But Cicadas Have Been In Chinese Art For Millennia**  
From NPR's *All Things Considered*.



4

**Two Cicadas Stop By Weekend Update**  
From *Saturday Night Live*.



# Math



1

**Universal and Existential Quantifiers,  
 $\forall$  "For All" and  $\exists$  "There Exists"**  
An intro to 'quantified statements'.

2

**What is the Fibonacci Sequence  
& the Golden Ratio?**

Simple explanation and examples in everyday life.



3

**Sanskrit and Math:**

**A Perfect Pair for Logic, Learning, and Discovery**  
What do Sanskrit and mathematics have in common?

4

**Why Are Primes So Fascinating?**  
From the ancient Greeks to cicadas.



5

**$\exists$  "There Exists" and Scientific Realism**



*The Role of  
Existential  
Quantification in  
Scientific Realism*



Stanford  
Encyclopedia of  
Philosophy:  
Scientific Realism

# Trinity Bellwoods, Garrison & Denison Creeks



1

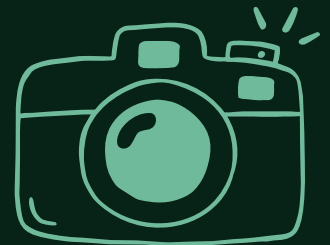
## Trinity Bellwoods

A neighbourhood analysis from *storymaps*.

2

## Trinity Bellwoods Park a Century Ago

A photo essay from *BlogTO*.



3

## Toronto's Hidden Bridge Beneath Trinity Bellwoods

From *Museum of Toronto*.



4

## Lost Rivers



Garrison Creek



Denison Creek

# Music

1



## How Music Resonates in the Brain

Scientists tune in to the brain's emotional response to music.

2



## The Importance of Music on Film & Emotion

Music effects the way we interpret what we see.

This 5 min video offers great examples of this phenomenon



3

## The Sound of Fear

How music makes the ordinary terrifying



The *Horror Flix and Music Mix* podcast delves into the fascinating realm of horror films and their captivating soundtracks.

4

## Music for Plays: A Step-by-Step Guide

The process of making music to serve the director's vision and fit into the play's production process.



# Grief

1

## Companion Podcasts About Death and the 5 Stages of Grief



*The Queen of Dying* - from Radiolab



*When Grief Doesn't Move In Stages* - from Death, Sex & Money

2

## How Your Brain Copes with Grief, and Why it Takes Time to Heal

Grief is tied to all sorts of different brain functions.



3

## TEDx Talks About the Loss of a Child



*Transforming Grief - When I Lost My Only Child.*  
Phil Cohen



*How to Support Parents After the Loss of a Child.*  
Laura Gould

4

## Losing a Loved One to Suicide



From the Stanford Centre for Health Education



*After a Parent Dies by Suicide* from the BBC's Four Thought

# Mental Health Resources

## Warm Lines (non-crises)

- Warm Line (for peer support, 18+): Call 416-960-WARM (9276) or text 647-557-5882 (everyday 6pm-midnight)
- BeanBagChat (for youth 16-29): chat-based counselling service (Monday-Thursday, 4-9pm)

## Suicide Specific

- Suicide Crisis Helpline: Call or Text 988 (24 hours a day)
- Toolkit for people who have been impacted by a suicide loss

## Youth Specific

- Kids Help Phone (for children and youth, 20yr and under): 1-800-668-6868, Text #686868, or Live Chat
- Youthdale (for children and families): 416-363-9990
- Good2Talk (for post-secondary students): 1-866-925-5454
- LGBT YouthLine (peer support helpline for youth of all sexual and gender identities, under 29 years old): 1-800-268-9688, Text 647-694-4275, or Chat (Sun-Fri 4pm-9:30pm)

## General

- Victim Services (for anyone affected by crime and sudden tragedies): 416-808-7066
- Toronto Distress Centre (for anyone in crisis or distress): 416-408-4357, Text 45645
- Gerstein Centre (for anyone in crisis or distress): 416-929-5200
- CAMH Virtual Urgent Care same-day virtual mental health advice (Monday-Thursday 11am-7pm, Friday 9am-6pm)

## Conversation Starters

How did the music affect your understanding of the plot?

Discuss your interpretation of the symbolism of the cicadas?

What is your interpretation of the world of the painting?

Have you ever had a crisis of faith?  
How did you get through it?

Are there any practices that have supported you in times of grief?  
Share them.