SCOTT WHEELER
NAGA
OPERA IN TWO ACTS
LIBRETTO BY
CERISE LIM JACOBS
ANTHONY ROTH COSTANZO  SANDRA PIQUES EDDY  DAVID SALSBERRY FRY
STACEY TAPPAN  MATTHEW WORTH
WHITE SNAKE PROJECTS ORCHESTRA & CHORUS
CAROLYN KUAN
CONDUCTOR
NAGA
Opera in Two Acts
Music by
Scott Wheeler
Creator and Librettist
Cerise Lim Jacobs

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Actor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xiao Qing (Green Snake)</td>
<td>Anthony Roth Costanzo</td>
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<tr>
<td>A green grass snake who loved the White Snake in a prior life and is now her companion and servant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master/Abbot</td>
<td>David Salsbery Fry</td>
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<td>An ancient herbalist and apothecary, now at the end of his life, who has dedicated himself to curing the diseases of the body and soul</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madame White Snake</td>
<td>Stacey Tappan</td>
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<td>A powerful snake spirit/demon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Monk</td>
<td>Matthew Worth</td>
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<td>A devoted husband who is seeking the Way and has renounced his wife and family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Wife</td>
<td>Sandra Piques Eddy</td>
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<td>The young Monk’s wife</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chorus (Nagas, Parents of drowned children, Celestial Voices)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s Chorus (Spirits of drowned children)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s Chorus soloist</td>
<td>Emily Kang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice knocking at Master’s Door</td>
<td>Andy Papas</td>
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DISC 1 [55:14]

PRELUDE
1. “I am the Sata-snake, long of years” (Chorus) 9:24
2. “Apophis comes, Apophis comes…” (Chorus) 3:46

ACT I
3. “It is time, I must go now” (Young Monk) 5:55
4. “Twelve years, One red peony” (Young Wife) 3:01
5. Aria: “What moves these mortals?” (White Snake) 1:28
6. Aria: “Amitabha Buddha, Infinite Light” (White Snake) 3:34
7. “I renounce all that I am” (White Snake) 3:45
8. “We have watched many humans come and go” (Xiao Qing) 1:45
9. “We see clearly only after the fact” (Chorus) 6:38
10. “And the serpent said unto the woman” (Master) 2:35
11. Aria: “Ling long, ling long” (Young Wife & Children) 3:06
12. Aria: “You hellish gods” (Young Wife) 1:42
13. “We see clearly only after the fact” (Chorus) 0:58
In Vienna in 1791, two months before his death, Mozart presented his last opera, *The Magic Flute (Die Zauberflöte)*, radically different from his other mature operatic works in part because of its fairy tale story but also because of the solemnly religious (Masonic, not Christian) spirit of much of the music. Fairy tale opera has been a challenging genre for composers, with even some of the musically most successful examples, like Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel* of 1893, more often presented for children than for adults. Scott Wheeler’s *Naga*, working from a text that lies between fairy tale and mythology, stands much closer to Mozart’s marvelous exemplar in its musical account of a restless man setting out on a spiritual quest in a world polarized between good and evil forces that are not easily distinguishable one from another. Set to a libretto by Singapore-born writer and impresario Cerise Lim Jacobs, the opera follows a Buddhist monk as he leaves his wife and sets off in search of spiritual enlightenment, under the tutelage of a stern Buddhist master and the surveillance of two fiercely passionate snakes, the “naga” of the title, designating Hindu and Buddhist serpentine deities.

*Naga* had its premiere in Boston in September 2016 at a festival of three operas with different composers, all with librettos by Jacobs, all on serpent subjects—*The Ouroboros Trilogy*. Wheeler’s *Naga*, the first opera of the trilogy, stands easily on its own, and reflects chorally on the mythology of creation, intermingling Hindu-Buddhist and Judeo-Christian strands. “The prelude,” according to Jacobs, “expresses some of the key roles the Snake has played in human civilization, history, myth, and psyche, feared and revered, loathed and sanctified.” Wheeler opens the prelude “misterioso” with rain stick, cymbals, harp, and electric guitar; the English horn and the soprano saxophone, closely associated with the two principal snakes, enter with a quivering triplet figure, and they are joined lower down the staff by the alto saxophone and the bassoon. After some fifty bars, the chorus enters, singing “I am the Sata snake,” for they are also naga, and the chorus returns throughout the opera, playing a very large role, with a presence similar to that of the choral forces in a Handel oratorio, while singing with the modernist rhythms of a Britten operatic chorus.

### DISC 2 [TT: 35:00]

**ACT II**

1. **Aria:** “A young wife sat at river’s edge” (Young Monk) 3:37
2. **Aria:** “We’ve been here since we led him” (Xiao Qing) 2:11
3. **Aria:** “How many winters have changed to spring?” (Xiao Qing) 3:28
4. **Aria:** “Is the fever potion ready?” (Master) 1:13
5. **Aria:** “Love seeketh not itself to please” (Master & Children’s Chorus) 5:12
6. **Aria:** “Aaia, snake, snake” (Master) 4:45
7. **Aria:** “He has cast a spell on this cage” (Xiao Qing) 0:42
8. **Aria:** “What a beautiful snake” (Young Monk) 4:44
9. **Aria:** “Snake, he is not your Saviour” (Master) 1:51
10. **Aria:** “We spit upon you, O Apophis” (Chorus) 0:54
11. **Aria:** “Slice off my tongue” (White Snake) 1:52
12. **Aria:** “Magic whiteness, magic albino” (Chorus) 0:45
13. **Aria:** “My loving embrace” (White Snake, Monk, Master, Xiao Qing) 2:07
14. **Aria:** “Open the cage” (Master) 1:39
The prominence of the chorus is unusual here, but even more unusual is the very large role of the children’s chorus, also sometimes singing as snake spirits: “I am the Sata snake, I am reborn.” Around the hundredth bar, however, the vocal forces shift their spiritual emphasis to the language of Genesis: “In the beginning, God said...” For the snakes of Naga recall the fateful snake in the Garden of Eden, coiled around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Naga also belongs to a long tradition of reflections on Eden that have been recently explored in Stephen Greenblatt’s study of The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve (2017). Greenblatt not only brings an alternative counter-biblical tradition, proposing that “the serpent was a benefactor rather than a destroyer of the human race”—and this alternative view is very relevant to the opera Naga. At the biblical climax of the prelude Madame White Snake herself enters at the top of the staff to celebrate her own creation, singing over the children’s chorus, accompanied by harp, “I am the Sata snake, I am reborn.” She rises to high A-flat, high B-flat, high C, as if to affirm her place as the pinnacle of God’s creation. The dominant key of the prelude is E-flat, Mozart’s Masonic key for The Magic Flute.

While the Buddhist quest provides the spiritual structure of the opera (analogous to the mission of Prince Tamino in The Magic Flute), it is the two singing snakes who give the opera its remarkable mythological character. There is an important Chinese legend of the White Snake and the Green Snake, and Madame White Snake is depicted on the walls of the imperial Summer Palace in Beijing. That legend is freely adapted in the opera libretto, and while The Magic Flute begins with the slaying of a giant serpent, in Naga the two snakes drive the entire drama and dominate the top of the musical staff throughout the opera. Madame White Snake is cast as a high soprano, Stacey Tappan, singing with elaborate ornamentation at the very top of the soprano range, recalling Mozart’s Queen of the Night, and, like that queen at her first appearance, of uncertain moral valence: Is she a force for good or for evil in the life of the Buddhist monk? The Green Snake, her servant and companion, is no less musically striking, cast androgynously as a countertenor, a man singing in the female range, here Anthony Roth Costanzo, most recently celebrated for his performance at the Metropolitan Opera in 2019 in the eponymous pharaonic role of Philip Glass’s Akhnaten. The hint of uncanniness in the countertenor timbre beautifully suggests a preternatural character, though it is important to note that these are very human snakes: In Chinese legend they easily transform themselves into humans, and in Naga there is a further religious dimension that suggests they have been, and may become, human in other lives and incarnations.

The first scene of the first act is set in a sort of Eden, with a man and a woman at the edge of the water. The alto sax sings in triplets, joined by the flute, above the accompaniment of the harp and vibraphone. The man is the Buddhist monk and the woman his wife, and he is about to abandon his happy marriage to set out on the dangerous road to spiritual enlightenment. The interweaving of the English horn and the soprano saxophone tells us that the snakes are watching, as baritone Matthew Worth and mezzo-soprano Sandra Piques Eddy launch themselves into a moving duet of human love and separation, in three-quarter time, the first signal in the opera of Wheeler’s passionate romanticism. They sing delicately of “one red peony”—recalling the garden in which they first loved—while they hope to meet in another world, as the children’s chorus joins them in cherishing the memory of red peonies.

Once the monk has departed, however, the stage belongs to the snakes. Madame White Snake unfurls a spectacular aria “What moves these mortals?” She tries to “imagine pain” in three-quarter time again (Wheeler is the master of the unusual waltz), with a small wind band of flute, oboe, and alto saxophone that follows her imaginings. The aria has a solemn central section, introduced by the soprano saxophone and the electric guitar, as the snake prayerfully invokes “Amithaba Buddha.” In the fairy tale spirit of Hans Christian Andersen’s “Little Mermaid” she imagines renouncing her aquatic incarnation to become human, and riotously scales the staff in a series of flashing staccato notes that take her all the way up to high C, time and again, the lyrics collapsing into an ecstatic ha ha ha ha, as her coloratura runs inevitably call to mind the brilliant display of Mozart’s Queen of the Night.

Madame White Snake’s hypnotic coloratura aria is followed by an achingly beautiful duet for the two snakes, taking up each other’s musical phrases,
addition to timpani, vibraphone, and glockenspiel (so important for *The Magic Flute*), Wheeler employs snare drum, tambourine, slapstick, rain stick, wood blocks, temple blocks, finger cymbals, suspended cymbals, log drums, anvil, maracas, tom-tom, and tam-tam. While the tam-tam—sometimes called the Chinese gong—has long been associated with Eastern inflections, the unusual elements of percussion here create not so much an atmosphere of orientalism or even exoticism, so much as a sense of the supernatural that fits very well with the mythological and fairy tale elements of the drama. One thinks of the way that Britten used the Balinese gamelan not just for the *Prince of the Pagodas* ballet (originally conceived under the title *The Green Serpent*), but also to suggest the mysterious forces in play in *Death in Venice*. Britten comes to mind again, not just for the complexity of the choral writing, as in *Peter Grimes*, but also for the spiritual dimensions of such questing works as *Curlew River*, designed for church performance. One of the striking features of *Naga* is the way that its operatic character is inflected by some of the religious and choral aspects of oratorio—including a powerful otherworldly dimension in the orchestration and in the unusual vocal characterization of the two snakes as high soprano and countertenor.

The four characters of the monk, his wife, the White Snake, and the Green Snake, give the opera its romantic power, its tragic intensity of separation, of unreciprocated longing, of jealous suffering—but standing outside and above the musical exchange of their passions is the figure of the Buddhist Master. He is a mentor to the younger monk, but also the declared enemy of all snakes, indeed a killer of snakes, for he practices a form of traditional medicine that makes use of the snake’s magical healing properties. Righteous and compassionate, immune to the longings of the other characters, he sings in solemn voice—as here performed by resonant basso David Salsbery Fry—as the counterpart of Mozart’s Sarastro, the high priest of the Masonic temple, and often in the musical company of the children’s chorus. “O Guan Yin,” sings the Master in his moving aria of prayer in the second act, invoking the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion, accompanied by harp and glockenspiel. The flute, the oboe, and the horns join to support him, to convey his own compassion, as he sings of human suffering.

The use of the saxophone in the opera is very striking, adding an element of American blues to the emotional resonance of late Romantic opera, while the harp is used to great effect to underlie the magical fairy tale aspects of the piece. Most notable, however, is the richness of the percussion that Wheeler employs. In addition to timpani, vibraphone, and glockenspiel (so important for *The Magic Flute*), Wheeler employs snare drum, tambourine, slapstick, rain stick, wood blocks, temple blocks, finger cymbals, suspended cymbals, log drums, anvil, maracas, tom-tom, and tam-tam. While the tam-tam—sometimes called the Chinese gong—has long been associated with Eastern inflections, the unusual elements of percussion here create not so much an atmosphere of orientalism or even exoticism, so much as a sense of the supernatural that fits very well with the mythological and fairy tale elements of the drama. One thinks of the way that Britten used the Balinese gamelan not just for the *Prince of the Pagodas* ballet (originally conceived under the title *The Green Serpent*), but also to suggest the mysterious forces in play in *Death in Venice*. Britten comes to mind again, not just for the complexity of the choral writing, as in *Peter Grimes*, but also for the spiritual dimensions of such questing works as *Curlew River*, designed for church performance. One of the striking features of *Naga* is the way that its operatic character is inflected by some of the religious and choral aspects of oratorio—including a powerful otherworldly dimension in the orchestration and in the unusual vocal characterization of the two snakes as high soprano and countertenor.

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Wheeler builds to thrilling ensemble finales in both acts, masterpieces of operatic composition. The first act concludes with Madame White Snake fighting against demons to protect the unconscious monk and leaving drops of her snake blood on the snow. He awakens into an A major aria in three-quarter time, expressing his perverse aestheticism—“Beauty beyond belief”—as the drops of blood remind him of red peonies. Both snakes and also the children’s chorus join him in a finale of expansive melody, arching phrases of longing, that might make you think of Leonard Bernstein or Stephen Sondheim. For in Naga Wheeler’s fundamentally operatic score also engages the melodic beauty of musical theater. The second act finale also mediates between these musical worlds, richly combining melody and drama, beginning with the beautiful quartet, “My loving embrace,” for the Master, the Monk, and the two snakes. Madame White Snake dominates the top of the treble staff, while her enemy, the Master, presides over the bottom of the bass. He has caged her, and seizes a knife to sacrifice her, as the chorus, including the children, turn furious, and sing “Hack her, chop her, hack her, chop her,” almost in the mob spirit of a Passion play. Returning to the Masonic key of E-flat, the quartet evokes “magic whiteness,” as the Master prepares to wield his knife, until, at the last moment, the monk intervenes to obstruct the sacrifice and save the snake who loves him. “You and I shall meet again,” sings Madame White Snake to her savior, as she exits on a high C, diva that she is, and the curtain falls.

Music history gives us very little guidance for imagining the song of a snake. There is an early modern wind instrument called the Serpent, with a sinuously curved shape, and a very low range on the bass clef, comparable in range to the contrabassoon (which is also somewhat snakelike in its coiled formation). When Haydn described the Creation in his oratorio of the 1790s he signaled the advent of snakes—“creeps with sinuous trace the worm”—by having the basso Archangel Raphael reach down to the very bottom of his range. There are not a lot of singing snakes in the nineteenth century, but Wagner’s Fafner—a “Wurm” rather than a conventional dragon—was also voiced by a deep basso and accompanied with the darkest orchestral colorings. Mendelssohn, in his A Midsummer Night’s Dream, offered a soprano aria to ward away “ye spotted snakes” and protect the sleep of the fairy queen. In the 1941 Preston Sturges film The Lady Eve, Henry Fonda plays an endearingly eccentric herpetologist (opposite the seductive Eve of Barbara Stanwyck), and the film credits show an animated top-hatted snake, winding itself around the screen to movie music somewhat suggestive of snake charming. In 1967 Walt Disney presented a singing animated snake in The Jungle Book: Kaa’s song “Trust in Me,” rising stepwise up and down the scale, to hypnotic effect and with malicious purpose.

In Naga, with its beautiful, disturbing, passionate pair of snakes, playing morally ambivalent roles, vocalized with the otherworldly timbres of a high coloratura soprano and a plaintive countertenor, Wheeler stakes out new operatic terrain, while also returning to the domain of fairy tale and legendry in opera and the precedent of Mozart’s Magic Flute. Naga richly suggests some of the ways in which contemporary opera might engage not just with the intensity of human emotions but also with the complex relation between human beings and the natural world.

—Larry Wolff

Larry Wolff is Silver Professor of History at New York University, Executive Director of the NYU Remarque Institute, and Co-Director of NYU Florence. He is the author of The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and European Emotions on the Operatic Stage from the Siege of Vienna to the Age of Napoleon, and he writes frequently about opera.

Scott Wheeler has written four full-length operas, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, the Guggenheim Foundation, and White Snake Projects. Smaller operatic works have been commissioned by Boston Opera Collaborative, the Institute for Dramatic Voices, and Sequitur. Wheeler’s music has been performed by violinist Gil Shaham, conductor Kent Nagano, and singers Renee Fleming, Anthony Roth Costanzo, and Susanna Phillips. Recordings of his music are available on Naxos, Bridge, and BMOP Sound. He received the Stoeger Award from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center for distinguished contribution to chamber music and the Composer of the Year Award from the Classical Recording Foundation for his Naxos song CD, Wasting the Night.
Wheeler has appeared as a conductor in New York, Berlin, Boston, and on several recordings, often with the Boston-based ensemble Dinosaur Annex, which he co-founded and directed for many years. He has also conducted many productions of opera and musical theater works and has appeared as a pianist in a wide repertoire of classical, jazz, and cabaret.

Scott Wheeler was born in 1952 in Washington, DC. He grew up in various cities in the American Midwest and east, then studied at Amherst College, New England Conservatory, and Brandeis. His principal teachers were Lewis Spratlan, Arthur Berger, and Virgil Thomson, along with studies at Darlington with Peter Maxwell Davies and at Tanglewood with Olivier Messiaen. He is Senior Distinguished Artist in Residence at Emerson College in Boston, where he teaches musical theater and songwriting.

Creator and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs creates new American opera from her past in multicultural Singapore and her sojourns around the world. Her original librettis are inspired by the myths that live in our imaginations and the excitement of current events and people she encounters. Her work includes Ouroboros Trilogy, comprising Naga (by Scott Wheeler), Gilgamesh (by Paola Prestini), and the 2011 Pulitzer Prize-winning Madame White Snake (by Zhou Long). Ms. Jacobs’s other operas include REV. 23 with Julian Wachner (2017), which received its New York City premiere in 2020; PermaDeath, A Video Game Opera, the first in the world using real-time facial motion capture, with Dan Visconti (2018); and I Am A Dreamer Who No Longer Dreams (2019) and Alice in the Pandemic (2020), both with Jorge Sosa. The latter has been acquired by the Library of Congress for its Performing Arts COVID-19 Response Collection as an example of “artistic excellence.”

Ms. Jacobs was born in colonial Singapore under British rule into a traditional Chinese family. She grew up absorbing the disparate influences of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Western cultures, and the world religions of Christianity (indeed, she was educated by American Methodist missionaries), Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Her sojourns took her from Melbourne to Oxford, Michigan, Vancouver, and Pittsburgh, until she finally settled in Boston, Massachusetts. She graduated from the University of Pittsburgh and from Harvard Law School, spent twenty years practicing law, and is now president of the Charles and Cerise Jacobs Charitable Foundation. She is a founder of White Snake Projects, (formerly, the Friends of Madame White Snake). Ms. Jacobs was named a 2017 Mover & Shaper by Musical America, and one of Boston’s 100 Most Influential People of Color in 2018.

Recognized as a conductor of extraordinary versatility, Carolyn Kuan has enjoyed successful associations with top-tier orchestras, opera companies, ballet companies, and festivals worldwide. Her commitment to contemporary music has defined her approach to programming and established her as an international resource for new music and world premieres. Appointed Music Director of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra in 2011, she signed a six-year contract extending their creative collaboration through May 2022. Highlights of recent seasons include appearances with the Baltimore Symphony, Singapore Symphony, Santa Barbara Symphony, and Portland Opera, conducting a production of Rossini’s La Cenerentola. She led the premiere of Iain Bell and Mark Campbell’s Stonewall with New York City Opera in June 2019. She conducted the premiere of Philip Glass’s opera The Trial with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis and has conducted the Santa Fe Opera in Huang Ruo’s Dr. Sun Yat-sen.

GRAMMY®-nominated countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo began performing professionally at the age of eleven and has since appeared in opera, concert, recital, film, and on Broadway. Costanzo has appeared with many of the world’s leading opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, English National Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Los Angeles Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Glyndebourne Opera Festival, Dallas Opera, and Teatro Real Madrid. In concert he has sung with the New York Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, and National Symphony Orchestra, among others. He has performed at a wide variety of venues including Carnegie Hall, Versailles, the Kennedy Center, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Sawdust,
Mr. Fry is the grand-prize winner of the 9th Bidu Sayão International Vocal Competition. He is also a proud member of the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

Soprano Stacey Tappan is highly sought after as a performer of modern works. Her professional debut in 2000 was in the role of Beth in the mainstage premiere of Mark Adamo’s Little Women with Houston Grand Opera, also broadcast on PBS, and released on CD by Ondine and on DVD by Naxos. One of Ms. Tappan’s signature roles is Stella in André Previn’s A Streetcar Named Desire, which she has performed with Los Angeles Opera (opposite Renée Fleming), Opera San Jose, and Hawaii Opera Theatre. In close collaboration with composer Ricky Ian Gordon, Tappan created the stage work Once I Was, a monodrama built from twenty-two of Gordon’s songs, which she subsequently recorded for Blue Griffin Records. She played Dawn in Nico Muhly’s Marnie at the Metropolitan Opera, and she has sung fourteen productions with Los Angeles Opera, where she was Florestine on the multiple GRAMMY®-award-winning recording of John Corigliano’s The Ghosts of Versailles. She has performed Woglinde and the Woodbird in Ring cycles with Lyric Opera of Chicago, LA Opera, and San Francisco Opera. http://staceytappan.com

Matthew Worth is a Professor of Voice at San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Performing highlights from recent seasons include the title role in the world premiere of David T. Little’s JFK with Fort Worth Opera, the title role in Il barbiere di Siviglia with Boston Lyric Opera, the Narrator in the world premiere and recording of Richard Danielpour’s The Passion of Yeshua, the world premiere of Kevin Puts’s The Manchurian Candidate with Minnesota Opera, and Jake Heggie’s Moby Dick at Washington National Opera. He has performed principal roles at Santa Fe Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Opéra de Montréal, Tanglewood Festival, Cincinnati Opera, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, under conductors James Levine, Lorin Maazel, and Sir Andrew Davis. Mr. Worth holds degrees from the University of Richmond, Manhattan School of Music and The Juilliard School. http://matthewworthbaritone.com

A tireless advocate for new music and composer-performer collaboration, bass David Salsbery Fry has premiered works by Robert Aldridge, Shawn Brogan Allison, Lembt Beecher, Frank Corcoran, Chaya Czernowin, John David Earnest, Ruby Fulton, Juliana Hall, Jenny Olivia Johnson, Louis Karchin, Lowell Liebermann, Adam Maor, Eric Nathan, Osnat Netzer, Steve Potter, Arnold Rosner, Joseph Summer, Kristian Twombly, and Nicholas Vines. He has also collaborated with Justine F. Chen, James Granville Eakin III, Oliver Knussen, Ari Benjamin Meyers, Nico Muhly, John Musto, Judith Shatin, and Charles Wuorinen. Before creating the roles of Abbot and Master Chen in Naga, he worked with Scott Wheeler on his opera The Sorrows of Frederick. Mr. Fry is the grand-prize winner of the 9th Bidu Sayão International Vocal Competition. He is also a proud member of the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

davidsalsberyfry.com
Russian-American conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya is a fiercely committed advocate for Russian masterpieces, operatic rarities, and contemporary works on the leading edge of classical music. She has conducted more than forty world premieres, including sixteen operas, and her strength as an innovative and multi-faceted collaborator has brought together the worlds of puppetry, robotics, circus arts, symphonic repertoire, and opera onstage. Ms. Yankovskaya has shared her vision for the industry as a featured speaker at the League of American Orchestras and Opera America conferences and as U.S. Representative to the World Opera Forum in Madrid. She has served as Music Director of Chicago Opera Theater since 2017.

Michele Adams served for ten seasons as Director of Choirs for the award-winning Boston Children’s Chorus, where she conducted choirs of all levels, managed the innovative education program, and administered artistic programming. Ms. Adams is currently the Executive Director of the Performing Arts Center of Metrowest in Massachusetts. She is an active guest conductor, educator, and adjudicator. Ms. Adams completed a Master of Music in Choral Conducting at Florida State University and earned a Bachelor of Music in Music Education from The University of South Carolina.

SYNOPSIS

Prelude

*Naga* is the story of a young Monk who renounces everything, like Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, to find nirvana. The Prelude is in the form of a ritual, featuring the Chorus as both Nagas (snakes) and the parents of drowned children, who are sung by the Children’s Chorus. Madame White Snake, Xiao Qing, and the Master take part in this ritual, whose text draws from the book of Genesis, the poetry of William Blake, and modern astronomy. The Prelude explores some of the key roles the Snake has played in human civilization, history, myth, and psyche—feared and revered, loathed and sanctified, a thing reviled and a thing of beauty, all coexisting in one image. The White Snake is part of this dialectic. She is the more powerful for her whiteness, another symbol of contrary elements—light, death, purity, healing, nihilism.

ACT I

In the Peony Garden, the Young Monk says goodbye to his wife. This departure and his quest for nirvana were foretold from his birth. Madame White Snake and the Green Snake Xiao Qing observe; the couple’s grief moves the White Snake, who realizes that despite her immortality, she has never experienced such emotion. She renounces her immortal powers in order to follow the monk, ignoring the warnings of Xiao Qing.

The Monk sets out on his journey, hearing Celestial Voices singing the Song of Renunciation. He encounters the demon, Mara, who tempts him three times (as he did Buddha.) The Monk resists the first two onslaughts, but in the third temptation, he sees his wife dying after the birth of their child. In this vision, the Young Wife sings a lullaby to her child. The Monk starts to turn back, but is stopped by the White Snake, who steals the baby and gives it to Xiao Qing. The Wife curses the gods and dies. The Monk continues through a snowstorm in which he is attacked by demon rats. The White Snake attacks the demons, saving the Monk. Having renounced her immortal invulnerability, the White Snake is wounded in the attack of the rats. As her blood streams through the snow, Xiao Qing rushes to her aid. The Monk sees the White Snake’s blood on the snow and imagines that these red drops are peonies. Tormented by guilt from the vision of his wife’s death, the Monk follows the trail of “red peonies” to continue his journey. The White Snake sings of her love for the Monk, while Xiao Qing sings of love for the White Snake. Children strew red peonies in the snow.

ACT II

The Monk is now in the apothecary shop of the Master, a renowned healer. Led there by the White Snake, the Monk works as an apprentice in the healing arts. He sings to himself the ballad of a young wife and the loss of her child. Madame White Snake and Xiao Qing observe, and sings an aria describing how when he was a man the White Snake scorned his love. He died and transformed into a snake in order to follow her. The White Snake sings of her love for the Monk, while Xiao Qing sings of love for the White Snake. Children strew red peonies in the snow.
The Master, alone in his apothecary, prays to Guan Yin for a way to fulfill his spiritual healing mission, incomplete after a thousand years. Suddenly he discovers the White Snake hiding in the shop. He captures her and recognizes her magic—she is the answer to his prayers for the salvation of the world. Anyone who eats of her will be cured of all ills. The Monk returns to find the captured snake, who begs to be freed and convinces the Monk that they are kindred spirits.

The Chorus and Children’s chorus unite in denunciation of the White Snake, who offers power to the Monk through her loving embrace. The Master orders the Monk to hold the White Snake so he can sacrifice her. In the ensuing struggle, the Monk stabs his Master and releases the snake. Xiao Qing drags the White Snake to safety as she vows to meet the Monk again. The Monk begs forgiveness of the Master he has killed.

DISC 1

[Track 1]

Prelude

Chorus [from Genesis]
In the beginning
God said,
Xiao Qing
“Let the earth bring forth the living creatures after his kind, cattle, and the creeping thing, and beasts of the earth after his kind.”

Master
And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was good.

Solo Girl
Where are you now almighty Jehovah?
Cursed to fade away?

Children’s Chorus [Introduction to Blake’s “Songs of Experience”]

“Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk’d among the ancient trees”

Chorus
In the beginning,
Vasuki, the Great Serpent,
was bound to Mount Mandara
And used by gods and demons
As a churning rope in the Ocean of Milk
To make the Nectar of Immortality

Xiao Qing
Lord Krishna pays him homage, proclaiming

White Snake
“Of weapons I am the thunderbolt . . .
of serpents I am Vasuki”

Solo Girl
Where are you now triumphant Krishna?
Cursed to fade away?

Children’s Chorus [Introduction to Blake’s “Songs of Experience”]

“Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew; I am the Sata-snake
That might control I am reborn
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!”

Chorus
In the beginning,
Nuwa made man and woman from yellow clay.
Chorus
Apophis opened the heavens
A great flood arose

Children’s Chorus
We are dying drowning drowning drowning

Chorus
Dying drowning, dying drowning

Children’s Chorus
Nuwa, Noah, Nuwa, Noah,
save us, save us

Master
Apophis, fiend of chaos and darkness
Your head is crushed, O Groundling!
Your eyes are stone,
No more to turn my blood to stone, O Snake

Chorus
We spit upon you, O Apophis
We defile you with our left foot
We smite you, we fetter you, we stab you
We put fire upon you
For your great sin for which there is no atonement
Drowning our children
There is no atonement
Master
Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over;
That they turn not again to cover the earth.

White Snake
I am the Sata-snake
I am reborn

ACT I

Scene 1: In the Peony Garden

The White Snake and Xiao Qing lie in the sun at the edge of the lake in the peony garden. A young man dressed in monk's robes enters. He is accompanied by a young woman. They walk to the water's edge. The Monk kneels down and cups the water in his hands. He brings it to the woman's lips. She sips the water and sighs. He bends down again and cups more water. He takes a deep drink.

Monk
It is time, I must go now
Our goodbyes have been said many times
I have no more words

Wife
We said our goodbyes the day we met
Our twelve years together stolen from the Way
Yet there will never be enough goodbyes
There will never be enough words

Monk
This parting was foretold when I was born
Son of the White Elephant
Who came to my mother in the night
My divine father foretelling my destiny
As a seeker of salvation
I renounce my life to find life
To break samsara
That pitiless cycle of life, death and rebirth
Meeting you was my blessing
Loving you, my sin
Forgive me, my wife
For my sin of loving you
Forgive me my wife
For my sin of leaving you
I must continue my journey
The robe you sewed my only dress
The bowl you made my only possession

Wife
Do you remember when we first met
In this garden of red peonies?
I bent to pick up a fallen bloom
Then turned and gave it to you
Your eyes held mine, and I knew
That our meeting was meant to be
You touched my face with your gentle hands
They told me you could not stay
Your hands were seized by a jealous god
Who had touched your soul at birth
No one can withstand that mighty touch
Nor turn from his allotted path
I do not ask for you to stay
I do not ask for what you cannot give
For the bargain I made with fate
Was to take you as my lover—yes
Knowing you could not stay

Monk
Yes, my beloved, I remember
I remember this garden
I remember

I said I cannot stay
I cannot stay to love you
To love you, love you, love you

Fate has decreed I cannot stay
Yet stay I did
With you, my lover

Monk
Dear red peony
My golden heart

Dear red peony

Alone you die
No you will not die
As long as I love you . . .
I love you so

Wife

Monk

Children’s Chorus

You could never love me so
I love you so

You are bound to something else
I am bound to you forever

That love endures for eternity
My love endures for eternity

You cannot follow, follow, follow

It is your immortality
At the end of our years on this earth

You cannot follow where he will go

Follow, follow

[Track 4]

Wife (handing the red peony with a yellow center to her husband)

Twelve years
One red peony
Spring flower
One red peony
First bloom
One red peony
You will never see summer
Dear red peony

Red petals, holding my heart
O golden heart

Alone you die
No you will not die
As long as I love you . . .
I love you so
As the vengeful powerful snake
Reflecting the bloody warrior I was in life
Sustained only by lust for power
I am weary now
I am overwhelmed by this savage hunger
I beg you Amitabha Buddha
Have mercy on my soul
Reincarnated as a snake so I never can weep
I atone for the coldness in my heart
Cursed with immortality
So I can meditate on my cruelty forever
I pray you Amitabha Buddha
Let my tears fall softly
My eyes fade gently
My ears harken dimly
My hands despair bitterly
My feet drag painfully
Let my heart crack thunderously
As my tears fall now
Softly softly
Now

[Track 7]

I renounce all that I am
To experience such a moment
For once in my long life,
I long to really live
My heart wrenched from its complacent bed
Crashing on the stony earth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>But this I promise you</th>
<th>I promise you this</th>
<th>Red petals</th>
<th>Red blood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We shall meet in another world</td>
<td>We shall meet in another world</td>
<td>Red peonies</td>
<td>Red peonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In another time and another place</td>
<td>In another time and another place</td>
<td>Red peonies, blood peonies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shall stroke your dear sweet face</td>
<td>I shall stroke your dear sweet face</td>
<td>Follow, follow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Track 5]

**White Snake**

What moves these mortals?
What makes them feel
So intensely?
Imagine pain etching my brow
Grief sculpting my mouth
Tears filling my eyes
Running rivers down my checks
Feel spasms knotting my belly
Sorrow knitting my chest
Regret trembling my hands
Spinning circles around his bowl
Imagine pain
Imagine tears filling my eyes

[Track 6]

Amitabha Buddha, Infinite Light
I call on you to save my soul
From this eternal sentence
Xiao Qing
My lady, this is foolishness
This is madness
Beware what you wish for
I renounced all that I was
To be with you
I renounced my manhood
To follow you
I am not man, not woman, not snake
I am all man and woman and snake
A new immortal created for you

The Monk loosens his embrace, cups his wife's face in his hands. His hands drop to his side. He sends his wife away and watches her leave then turns resolutely away and sets off.

White Snake
We must follow him
He will teach us

Xiao Qing
We cannot cross into the earthly realm
Without the gods' permission

White Snake
A new quest awaits us, Xiao Qing
A new quest
We shall learn the secret of being human
A secret jealously guarded by the gods
Who made mortals in their image
But oh so much more beautiful
Because they live and then they die

White Snake
I renounce all that I am
To experience such a moment
For once in my long life, I long to really live

White Snake
We have watched many humans come and go
They are weak, they are puny
They cry when they find this thing called love
They cry when they lose this thing called love
They live like there is no tomorrow
Yet worry and worry about tomorrow
Damn their mortality

The White Snake looks sadly at Xiao Qing, then turns to follow the Monk. Xiao Qing follows her.

Scene 2: Time Passing
[Track 9]
The Monk walks clockwise in a circle depicting the passage of time. The two snakes follow him. Voices are heard singing the Song of Renunciation.

Celestial voices
We see clearly only after the fact
We love dearly only after the loss
The wind blows dust in our eyes
We are blinded as tears hide the truth
When we cease yearning the wind will be at our backs
The dust dispels and we are emptied

Chorus
Mara comes, Mara comes
Children's Chorus
Mara comes, Mara comes

The Monk shakes with fright as he sees Mara, the demon who tempted Buddha three times.

Chorus
Mara opens his gaping mouth
He bares his bloodstained fangs
His hideous maw looms over us
His saliva drowns us
We are dying, drowning, dying, drowning

**Chorus**
Dying drowning, dying drowning
Save us, save us

_Naga, the multi-headed serpent, champion of Buddha, rears over the monk protectively as the Mara's maw approaches the Monk._

**Chorus**
Naga, protector Buddha
Unsheath your sword

**Monk**
Begone, O beautiful ones
I do not have you

_The Monk continues walking clockwise._

**Celestial voices**
We see clearly only after the fact
We love dearly only after the loss
The dust dispels and we are emptied

_The Monk stops suddenly confronted by a vision of home._

**Monk**
I see my wife
I did not know . . . she has a child

**Chorus**
Naga, protector Buddha
Your sword shatters!

_The Monk sees his wife in a pool of blood, red peonies scattered around her. She is cradling a baby wrapped in white silk. He falls to his knees, arms raised in supplication. A shadow passes between him and his vision of his wife._

**Children's Chorus**
They stroke his body
They arouse his lust

**Chorus**
Dying, drowning, dying, drowning
_The Naga raises its hood again._

**Chorus**
Naga, protector Buddha
Ready your sword

**Monk**
Begone, O beautiful ones
I will not have you

_The Monk continues walking clockwise._

**Celestial voices**
We see clearly only after the fact
We love dearly only after the loss
The dust dispels and we are emptied

_The Monk stops suddenly confronted by a vision of home._

**Monk**
I see my wife
I did not know . . . she has a child

**Chorus**
Naga, protector Buddha
Your sword shatters!
And it was so
Xiao Qing
Unto the woman he said,
Solo Girl and Children’s Chorus (to the Wife)
“I will greatly multiply thy sorrow
and thy conception;
in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.”

The White Snake approaches the Wife. She holds out a golden anklet. It rings and chimes. The Wife takes it. She puts it around her baby’s ankle. She is surrounded by the Children who hold red peonies.

[Track 11]
Wife (accompanied by Children’s Chorus)
Ling long, ling long, ding a ling long
A little golden bell rings ding a ling long
Nodding to the golden cat
Waving at the long life bat
Ling long, ling long, ding a ling long
Ling long, ling long, ding a ling long
I feel your legs kicking hard and strong
Once I’m holding you when you are born
Your mother will tenderly put your anklet on
Ling long, ling long, ding a ling long
Ling long, ling long, ding a ling long
Your mother’s baby girl sings all night long
As long as you wear this magic singing bell
Your mother will always find you wherever you dwell
Ling long, ling long, ding a . . .
Wife (raising herself from her bloodsoaked bed with her last ounce of strength)
You hellish gods
Rapacious, greedy gods
Your jealousy knows no end
I kept my bargain
I let the man I love go
But that sacrifice was not enough
You would take my child too
I curse you O gods
I curse you to fade away
To live eternally
As shadows, a mockery of yourselves
Worshipped only by the superstitious
Feared only by the ignorant
Revered by no one
Until you are finally forgotten
She collapses.

Monk
Spring flower
Monk
First bloom
Monk
You will never see summer
Monk
Red petals
Monk
Red petals
Monk
My golden heart
Monk
I must turn back
He struggles around and walks in an anti-clockwise direction.

White Snake
You cannot go back to her
I will not let you turn back
You have to complete the circle
Xiao Qing, take the baby
The Wife tries to hold on to her baby. Xiao Qing manages to wrest the baby from her. In the struggle, the anklet falls off and the Wife is left holding it in her hands.
Celestial voices
We see clearly only after the fact
We love dearly only after the loss
The wind blows dust in our eyes
We are blinded as tears hide the truth
When we cease yearning the wind will be at our backs
The dust dispels and we are emptied

The wind is now howling; it has started to snow. The Monk collapses from exhaustion. As he lies on the ground, demon rats come sidling up to him and start gnawing his bony frame.

Monk (deliriously)
What terrible famine wracks this land
Thousands starve each day
Even the rats are skin and bones
Coming out to feast on me
Eat, rats, eat
Rip flesh from these unholy bones
Tear this black heart out
Chew off the hands that held the knife
My hands!
Plunged the knife into her belly
Carved out our child
And threw mother and child
Onto the garbage heap of the world

Children’s Chorus, still holding their red peonies [from Blake’s “Songs of Experience,” selections from Holy Thursday]
“Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,

We crossed the great divide without permission
We have no powers
How would I save you
(My dearest one)?

We must save him without magic
We must, we must

The White Snake, followed reluctantly by Xiao Qing, attacks the demons. White Snake fights ferociously, blood streaming from her wounds. The demons retreat.

White Snake rushes to the Monk’s side.

White Snake
He is burning in the snow
We must get him to shelter
We must
**Xiao Qing**
My lady, you are wounded
I must get you to shelter
I must

[Track 16]

**Monk** *(opening his eyes, he sees the White Snake's blood on the snow)*
O beauty beyond belief
Red peonies on snow
I pick them for my journey
To the other world
O beauty beyond belief
Red blood on snow
My guilty secret sacrifice
Staining me red
Guide me in my journey
To hell

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monk</th>
<th>White Snake</th>
<th>Xiao Qing</th>
<th>Children’s Chorus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You could never love me so</td>
<td>You are bound to someone else</td>
<td>I am bound to you forever</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O beauty beyond belief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red peonies on snow</td>
<td>Your love endures for eternity</td>
<td>My love endures for eternity</td>
<td>Follow, follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your red peonies</td>
<td>It is your immortality</td>
<td>Through our years of immortality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red petals</td>
<td>Holding my heart</td>
<td></td>
<td>Follow, follow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Red petals too soon you fall  | But this I promise you                             | I promise you this                            |
Your fallen petals            | We shall meet in another world                     | As together we journey to other worlds        |
My fallen heart                | In another time and another place                 | In another time and another place             |
I shall stroke your dear sweet face |                                      | I shall stroke your dear sweet face           |
Follow the red peonies         |                                                  |                                               |
Follow the red peonies         | Follow the red peonies                            |                                               |

White Snake and Xiao Qing slide away; White Snake leaves a trail of blood which the Monk follows. The Children strew red peonies in the snow.

**DISC 2**

**ACT II**

**Scene 1: The apothecary shop of the Master**

[Track 1]

White Snake and Xiao Qing are seated at the side of the store, obscured by large storage bins. The Monk is busy reading an ancient text and then searching for the right ingredients which he grinds in a stone mortar.

**Monk** *(singing softly to himself)*
A young wife sat at river’s edge
O ma O ma O
The tears she wept were deep blood red
O ma O ma O
Yet I followed you in death as a snake
Giving up my humanity and manhood
To be with you
Now you wait for this mortal man
You, my stonehearted queen
You, who can rip out his heaving chest
And swallow his bloody heart whole
Now you wait for this puny man
To give you his heart, his soul
You wait helpless with love
Even as I wait, helpless with love
And the seasons pass us by . . .

[Track 3]
How many winters have changed to spring?
How many seasons have passed?
White on white, you sigh with delight
Cooling your fevered blood
But my blood boils with rage
As I watch and wait
To tear out his worthless heart
Then you’ll see that it’s just
An ordinary mortal heart
When spring turns to summer
You will turn, white among green
From him
When fall overtakes summer
You will run, white over gold
To me

"How could you leave me," so she said
"Lying in our bloody bed?
Our baby rent from my warm wet womb
She’s gone, she may be dead"
A young wife sat at river's edge
O ma O ma O
"Forgive me please," the young monk begged
"I left to find the Way
But can it be, the Way for me
Leads always back to you?"
A young wife sat at river's edge
O ma O ma O
"We will not meet in the other world"
The wretched Monk he cried
"For cursed I am, and damned to hell
Demons ring my dark death knell"
A young wife sat at river's edge
O ma O ma O
The tears she wept were deep blood red
O ma O ma O . . .

[Track 2]
Xiao Qing (watching her mistress watch the Monk)
We’ve been here since we led him to this herbalist’s shop
Winter has now changed to spring
How much longer can I wait for you
My enchanted warrior queen?
Do you remember how you scorned my love
When you were a woman and I, a man?
How many falls have changed to winter?
How many seasons have passed?
I will sit and dream, of you my queen
Of the day you'll reach for me
Until that day, come what may
I will sit forever, never failing you
Watching and waiting, for you
Xiao Qing is interrupted by the Master who enters the room.

[Track 4]

Master
Is the fever potion ready?
I will deliver it to the Choo family

Monk
Yes, Master
Each day I thank the gods
For leading me to you
Your healing hands held back my soul
As I watched the demons circle round in hell
Tongues flickering in and out
Winding around me
I owe my life to you

Master
It was a blessed day
That sent me out in the snow
To feed the birds
Only to find you frozen
Clutching a red peony to your chest

Monk
With your help, I have found my calling
Teach me your secret arts of healing
That I may better serve humanity
On my journey along the Way

Master
You are the son I never had
My time is coming
I make way for a new healer

Monk
Here is the potion (handing potion to Master)
The young Monk leaves.

[Track 5]

Children's Chorus [from Blake's "Songs of Experience, The Clod & the Pebble"]
"Love seeketh not itself to please,

Nor for itself hath any care,

But for another gives its ease,

And builds a heaven in hell's despair."

Master
Sometimes I see myself in him
A young man not so long ago
Eyes filled with bright vision
Untainted by the world's blight
Dedicated to the healing arts
To save humankind
But life has been disheartening
Most of humankind is undeserving
People are ungrateful and grasping
They take and take, and take and take
Master (gazing at her in amazement)
You are extraordinary
Perhaps other-worldly
A powerful medicine for this sick world
White Snake
Free me, please free me
And I will grant your heart’s desire
Master
Are you speaking to me, do I really hear you?
Or is the sibilant sound of your voice
The feverish whispering of my heart?
White Snake
Free me, please free me
And I will grant your heart’s desire
Master
You are a demon clothed in snake’s body
A powerful medicine for this sick world
White Snake
Free me, and I will grant your heart’s desire
If you will free me
Master
Your tail will make the lame to walk
Your tongue the dumb to speak
Your red eyes make the blind to see
Your stomach feed the hungry

They took everything and left me their waste
I fear this young man will learn at great cost
Oh, Guan Yin, I too hear the world weeping
Crying louder with each passing day
Its pain claws at me
Gouging welts in my flesh
Its longing stabs my sides
Drilling holes in my heart
Its fever consumes me
Scorching my brain
After one thousand years of searching
I have not found the cure for the soul’s diseases
Now my hands tremble
My eyes dim
My heart quakes
Guan Yin, could it be that my time is coming
And I have not come one step closer
To fulfilling my mission?

Children’s Chorus [from Blake’s “Songs of Experience, The Clod & the Pebble”]
“Love seeketh only Self to please,
To bind another to Its delight:
Joys in another’s loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heavens despite”

Master moves the storage bins, searching for his walking stick. The two snakes try to hide behind a desk.

Track 6

Master
Aaia, snake, snake
Xiao Qing
He has cast a spell on this cage
I cannot lift it
We need magic to fight magic
I have none now
To be helpless to save you
Slays me, my dearest one

Xiao Qing is interrupted as the Monk enters. She slithers behind a bureau. The Monk stops in amazement when he sees a white snake in the cage. He walks slowly around the cage, inspecting the snake with great curiosity.

Monk
What a beautiful snake
You are incandescent
You glisten like mother of pearl
Gleaming with ghostly light

White Snake
Free me, please free me
And I will grant your heart’s desire

Monk
You speak to me
Tell me, are you a human spirit in a snake’s body
Or a snake demon incarnate?

White Snake
I am a snake spirit who crossed the great divide
Where spirit world meets earthly realm
Seeking to know mortality
The birthright of humanity
**Monk**
Then we are kindred spirits
Seeking a world beyond our own
Traveling along a narrow path
Alone
Always alone

**White Snake**
Release me and I will give you your heart’s desire

**Monk**
What my heart desires no one can give
My heart itself knows not what it is
At times I despair that I will never know
Then suddenly, I behold it so
I have renounced my wife and family
To seek nirvana
Sometimes I stop in despair
And wonder if my renunciation is worth it all?

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<tr>
<th>Monk</th>
<th>White Snake</th>
<th>Xiao Qing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now, in you I have found that inexplicable Intangible incomparable wonder of the universe</td>
<td>In you I have found that inexplicable Intangible incomparable wonder of the universe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fellow seeker, a soul mate Of rarified beauty</td>
<td>A fellow seeker, a soul mate Of rarified beauty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace personified in a sinuous curve</td>
<td>Grace personified in a mortal soul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your glow illuminates me</td>
<td>Your glow illuminates me</td>
<td>You illuminate me You always have You always will</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Master** (*interrupting suddenly, lashing out with his cane at the caged White Snake)*

[Track 9]
Snake, he is not your Saviour
Your seduction is useless
He is strong, he is pure
He will turn from you
White Snake [from Kundry in Parsifal]
“My loving embrace
Will allow you to achieve godhood”

Master (to the Monk)
Stay away from that snake
She seduces you and steals your soul

Monk
She is a rare creature
Put on earth to enchant us
To remind us that our world
Is not filled merely with squalor
But with wondrous beauty
She is not ours to keep
She belongs to the universe
A free spirit
To inspire all she meets
Free her, Master

Master
She is a white demon
Her whiteness will turn red
To water the parched heart
And revive the desiccated soul
She is my life’s work

Monk
Your life’s work demands that you set her free
A unique being, she is transcendental
You will reap the vengeance of heaven
For the sacrilege of killing her

Master
She will save the world

Children’s Chorus [from Genesis]
“Ye shall be as gods
Knowing good and evil”

How do you weigh the life
Of one individual
Against all humanity?

[Track 10]

Chorus
We spit upon you, O Apophis
We defile you with our left foot
We smite you, we fetter you, we stab you
We put fire upon you

Children’s Chorus
Your head is cut off
Your blood stains the earth, O Snake
Your white flesh, your magic flesh
Powerful medicine, O Snake

Master
Your eyes are stone
No more to turn my blood to stone, O Snake

[Track 11]

White Snake
Slice off my tongue
Gouge out my eyes
Drain my blood
Dismember me

(staring into space)
Amitabha Buddha, hear me
My life now for all humanity
If I let his knife take my life
As blood sacrifice
Master moves to the table and finds a knife. He grasps it in a trembling hand and strides purposefully to the cage.

[Track 14]

**Open the cage**

**Hold her fast**

**While I slit her throat**

The Monk hesitates, and swiftly approaches the cage. He lifts the cage, then turns and holds the old man back.

**Monk**

Forgive me, Master, forgive me

In saving her, I save your immortal soul

From the karma of killing her

Your hands will not smell of blood

In the next world

---

**Children’s Chorus**

Sacrifice her to the gods of our drowned children

Release her and I shall give you everlasting gratitude

Release me and I shall give you release

Release her and she shall give us release

My magic whiteness

White magic, white magic

I want no magic

Only love magic

Her magic whiteness

White magic, white magic

Forever magic

Living magic

Her magic whiteness

Black magic, black magic

I want her magic

Powerful magic

Her magic whiteness

White and Green, White and Green

Magic colors of love

Love magic

---

**Master**

Will you let me come back

A woman?

To meet again

The man who will help me

Fulfill my destiny

---

**Chorus**

Magic whiteness, magic albino

Pure white, divine light

Pure light, divine white

We want her tail

We want her head

Give me a liver

Give me a spleen

Bless me with her whiteness

---

**Monk**

Forgive me, Master, forgive me

In saving her, I save your immortal soul

From the karma of killing her

Your hands will not smell of blood

In the next world

---

**Monk**

Forgive me, Master, forgive me

In saving her, I save your immortal soul

From the karma of killing her

Your hands will not smell of blood

In the next world

---

**Chorus**

Magic whiteness, magic albino

Magic, magic

Magic, magic

Magic

---

**Children’s Chorus**

Magic whiteness, magic albino

Pure white, divine light

Pure light, divine white

We want her tail

We want her head

Give me a liver

Give me a spleen

Bless me with her whiteness

---

**Chorus**

Magic whiteness, magic albino

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**Children’s Chorus**

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**Chorus**

Magic whiteness, magic albino

Pure white, divine light

Pure light, divine white

We want her tail

We want her head

Give me a liver

Give me a spleen

Bless me with her whiteness

---
**Master** (struggling)
I must kill her
For in killing her
I save your immortal soul
From the bonds of earthly attachment
Which tie you down

*Xiao Qing rushes out from her hiding place.*

**Monk** (to White Snake)
Go, go now

*Xiao Qing drags her mistress out. As the two snakes leave, White Snake looks back at the Monk.*

**White Snake**
You and I shall meet again
The two snakes slide out the back.

**Monk** (releasing his Master and suddenly noticing blood pouring from a wound in his Master’s side. He prostrates himself.)
Forgive me, Master.

THE END
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SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Portraits and Tributes. Donald Berman, piano. Bridge Records 9463.
Wasting the Night. Songs. Naxos Records 8.559658

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First performed September 10, 2016 at the Cutler Majestic Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts in association with Arts Emerson.
A co-production of White Snake Projects and Beth Morrison Projects, in association with Arts Emerson.
Executive Producer: White Snake Projects
Producer: Scott Wheeler
Engineers: Antonio Oliart, Stephanie Rogers

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Francis Goelet (1926–1998), *In Memoriam*

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NAGA
OPERA IN TWO ACTS

MUSIC BY SCOTT WHEELER
LIBRETTTO BY CERISE LIM JACOBS

ANTHONY ROTH COSTANZO, DAVID SALSBERY FRY, STACEY TAPPAH,
MATTHEW WORTH, SANDRA PIQUES EDDY

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BOSTON CHILDREN'S CHORUS, MICHELE ADAMS, CHORUS MASTER
WHITE SNAKE PROJECTS ORCHESTRA, CAROLYN KUAN, CONDUCTOR

DISC 1: PRELUDE, ACT 1
[TT: 55:14]

DISC 2: ACT II
[TT: 35:00]

Commissioned and produced by White Snake Projects.
Photo by Jill Steinberg.