



Gene Tree:

Listen. Now. Again

by **ST MARTINS**

in partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria
and Dandenong Primary School

4–13 November 2022

CREDITS

PERFORMERS

Dandenong Primary School Outreach

Issabelle Antoine
Ayen Anyuon
Amelia Burekovic
Jayden Chilcott-Clarke
Violet (Heather) Eghanian
Christian Falua
Bella Lakusa
Naomi Ogunyemi
Farid Reyazee
Gaatha Sivom
Nila Sivom
Mojkouth Teal
Nyaruot Teal
Sri Venkatraman

Congress

Grace Annan
Spike Angwin
Sunday Bickford
Victoria Candeira Faulkner
Clea Carney
Roy Crawley
Keima Dahmani-Asher
Kleopatra (Kleo) Dukas
Noray Hosny
Juneau Le Miere
Minka Lukey
Oscar Munro
Vito van Hout
Harriet Turner-Browne

CREATIVE TEAM AND CREW

Script / Gene Tree Participants and Creatives
Concept, Composer, Musician / Elissa Goodrich
Director / Nadja Kostich
Producer / Lara Week
Associate Director / Katrina Cornwell
Set / Nature and Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne
Lighting / The Sun
Production Design / Emily Barrie and Rachel Burke
Video Design and Dramaturgy / Michael Carmody
St Martins Collaborating Artists / Amelia Ducker, Nicolette Forte, Cassandra Gray,
Maria Theodorakis and Alice Qin
Musicians / Gideon Brazil (woodwinds), Elissa Goodrich (percussion),
Rodrigo Salgado (double bass) and Leah Scholes (percussion)
Dandenong Teacher / Leanne Skaftouros
Production Manager / Rain Iyahan
Stage Manager / Zsuzsa Gaynor Mihaly
Technical Manager / Russell Goldsmith
Production Assistant / Millie Levakis-Lucas
Assistant Stage Manager / Klari Agar
Technical Assistant / Giovanna Yate Gonzales
Access Consultants / Artemis Muñoz and Kian Hall
PR / Diane Falzon
Graphic Designers / Jason Cheetham, Ramona Lindsay
Images / Michael Carmody
Videographers / Michael Carmody, Jason Cheetham, Filip Laureys
Sound Design / Elissa Goodrich
Photographer / Ayman Kaake

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Gene Tree: Listen. Now. Again has been a thriving hive of evolution and collaboration over four years at St Martins. It seems like a decade, or an eon, has passed in that time. Almost 100 children from 40 cultures have contributed words, stories, melodies, rhythms and ideas to shape what *Gene Tree* is today. Dozens of adults—professional artists, musicians, arts workers, production crew, teachers, scientists, parents and carers—have interacted with the growing work every step of the way. *Gene Tree* has died, renewed, mutated, multiplied and transformed with every creative contribution, dialogue and experiment. Even now, every day, it continues to evolve as we interact with the elements and each other, discovering new possibilities for it. In various moments, it's a collective dream for our planet, an ode to nature, a call to attention, a simple listening.

Elissa Goodrich's sublime and essential score has arisen from a musician's study of science, in collaboration with and response to the young people. It evokes the incessant, relentless rhythms of our biology—cells duplicating, dying, birthing—and is embodied by the young people who lead a humming celebration of adaptation and change in a delicious procession through Melbourne's gem: Royal Botanic Gardens. The distillation of their stories, reflections and impossible questions about the planet and nature takes the audience into a state of hyper-focus, into our senses and bodies, to "Listen. Now. Again."

Investigating impossible questions about our relationship with nature and our planet began in Dandenong with a child asking: "Do we have to have *hope* to evolve?" This became a core contemplation in the fusion of connection, evolution, the living planet, music and children's stories and questions about change and adaptation.

Our astonishing design team has pushed at the edge of form in working within a natural environment. Years of dialogue and exploration have led to the shedding of concepts, ideas and interventions, and into an exquisite design offering in its minimalism. Its colours, reflections, refractions, re-framings and gentle calls to attention ask us to look and listen in new ways, and so bring into relief both the majesty and the minutiae of what nature presents us.

Our extraordinary relationship with Dandenong Primary School has been a joy. Their lovely, supportive staff, principal Daniel Riley, and the unwavering dedication of Leanne Skaftouros, has produced immensely beautiful moments with the children there.

The intrepid St Martins 'creative think tank', Congress, has given their all in an intense year-long rehearsal and preparation process. You are amazing humans! All our young people have made us laugh and cry, and delight in their discoveries and offers. Any little hardship of making a work of this scope is worth it for these breakthroughs and joys.

Royal Botanic Gardens is St Martins' neighbour and now a life long friend. We could not have asked for more of their remarkable team—they have championed this project from our first reach out, they are world class.

The crew, St Martins team and collaborating artists and musicians have made a herculean effort—each one doing their part, assisting others to do theirs, filling the gaps, inventing the solutions, making the work better together! To you all, what a shining effort of collaboration. Massive, colossal thank yous to each one!

Nadja Kostich

COMPOSER'S NOTE

Gene Tree began in friendship and collaboration—a conversation between myself and dear friend Dr Anna Syme, at these very Gardens, enthusing over how the scientist's role and the artist's are not so dissimilar: to be curious, to ask questions, to test hunches, to ask again.

Years on, and *Gene Tree* has become a collaboration hundreds of times over, like the very cells and species we first marvelled over, adapting, mutating, transforming as every artist, creative, child and adult continue to contribute to it.

Musically it has taken a similar form, changing and adapting to the participants and the environments in which we are working. Composing simultaneously on meta and micro scales—composing not just with musical notes, but with the words, and the patterns and the movement, and the individual contributing voices. *Gene Tree* is a bee-hive-like convergence of music, evolutionary biology and storytelling. It allows us to imagine, make and listen for the music within the science. We bring out the rhythms and the stories that alert us to patterns and change and hope, and to unavoidable, impossible questions. In doing so, I hope we can then pay attention and, like Seamus Heaney reminds us in his poem “The Rain Stick”, hear a ‘music’ that we may have never known to listen for.

Inevitably, the music I write for *Gene Tree* is also dedicated to the incredible Nadja, for your vision, creative generosity and fortitude, holding and shaping this work and all within it, as it grows, changes and regrows, and to each and every child and adult that has created and shared in *Gene Tree*.

Elissa Goodrich

**“DO WE HAVE
TO HAVE
HOPE
TO EVOLVE?”**

**TORREYZ, 11 YEARS OLD,
DANDENONG PRIMARY SCHOOL
OUTREACH PROGRAM**

NATURE BIOGRAPHIES

Performers, Dandenong Primary School Outreach

ISSABELLE ANTOINE

My favourite part in nature is the autumn tree and flowers as well as the atmosphere.

AYEN ANYUON

If I was a piece of nature I would be a lavender flower in a group of other lavender flowers waiting to be picked and smelt on a sunny day.

AMELIA BUREKOVIC

I am a ladybug on a little green grassy leaf.

JAYDEN CHILCOTT-CLARKE

My favourite trees are gumtrees because they make me feel calm.

VIOLET (HEATHER) EGHANIAN

My favourite place in nature is on the beach during the sunset and I feel free, calm and complete.

CHRISTIAN FALUA

My favourite part of nature is the clouds that move and let me be calm. Also I want to be grass waving my body to the humans.

BELLA LAKUSA

My favourite part of nature is when you find a dandelion in your backyard and you blow a wish. P.S. Eucalyptus smells so good.

NAOMI OGUNYEMI

If I was a piece of nature right now I would be a flower because flowers have a natural beauty. Please enjoy nature!

FARID REYAZEE

My favourite part of nature is the African lions in the jungle because they are big and ferocious carnivores. When I see them I feel amazement!

GAATHA SIVOM

When I went for a road trip to the Great Ocean Road I saw beaches and the sea meeting the sky with the sunlight in the middle. This made me feel free, calm and that life is great.

NILA SIVOM

My favourite place in nature is on the beach. It makes me feel calm and free.

MOJKOUTH TEAL

The cassowary lives in Northern Queensland and it is the most dangerous bird in the world because their kicks are so fast and their foot is massive.

NYAROUT TEAL

When it rains, water pours on you and it feels cold. I like it because you can play in the rain.

SRI VENKATRAMAN

One thing about nature that I love is the trees and when the birds sing in the morning.

Performers, Congress

GRACE ANNAN

I like to watch and notice how leaves in autumn change colour, it reminds me of how the world works in mysterious ways.

SPIKE ANGWIN AKA THE SLUDGE

I love when the sky is blue and the air is cold enough to bite but not enough to leave a mark. It gets you ready and makes the warmth just that little bit better.

SUNDAY BICKFORD

I really love the beach. I love it because once I swam with wild dolphins, and once I swam in the moonlight. Being at the beach makes me feel calm and gives me time to think. I've had a lot of my happiest memories surrounded by nature.

VICTORIA CANDEIRA FAULKNER

One of my favourite places in nature is Fern Gully, in the Botanic Gardens. It is a beautiful area where I can sit and relax, surrounded by plants.

CLEA CARNEY

I feel most connected to nature through observation. Just sitting on my porch and watching a jumping spider pass by my feet, fiddling with a leaf in my hand. Complete silence. Completely alone.

ROY CRAWLEY

I love travelling to Japan.

KEIMA DAHMANI-ASHER

The place I love the most is home and school.

KLEOPATRA (KLEO) DUKAS

My favourite place in nature is any deep green forest, while it's raining. It's so vast and silent, dark and deep, soft with the wetness of rain, while it's also ragged and square. It's tall like me, I feel like I could lose my mind in there and no one would notice, or that I was gone. I could finally be in my own body. I wouldn't care. The Earth would care for me. The rain would cleanse me, for the first time.

NORAY HOSNY

I love the rain. It brings such joy to the ears but is so misunderstood.

JUNEAU LE MIERE

I love ducks because they walk cool. I love my grandma's duck pond because the ducks waddle up to me whenever I am around.

MINKA LUKEY

I love the idea of lying on a boat in the middle of nowhere with the sun warming your skin. It reminds me of when my sisters and I floated on an old blow up mattresses together years ago.

OSCAR MUNRO

A place in nature I love is the forest in Foster. As a kid I would run wild exploring every hill, tree and puddle of water because every time I went it was different somehow. There was one tree that was not tall, but what it lacked in height it gained in strength and seclusion. Its canopy was so low and thick it looked like a hedge and I would just sit there and listen to the country. Listen to the birds and the wind. And if it was quiet enough, and you listened really close, you could almost hear the sea.

HARRIET TURNER-BROWNE

I think the most peaceful place is a snowy forest. I feel free when I swim in the surf. I think a tree is the most grounding place to be. Rain is the nicest sound (and smell). I hope to soon breathe the forest air. I hope the bugs outlive us all. I'd like a garden when I grow up.

VITO VAN HOUT

I feel most strongly attached and identify with birds – they soar above everything and dive down for worms, but are also weak, a glass cannon if you will.

Creatives and Crew

ELISSA GOODRICH / CONCEPT, COMPOSER, MUSICIAN

I love rain on the ocean; watching it and the sky change colour, swimming in it.

The rainforest; being in it, breathing it in, listening to its world, from the sound of the birds, to the ladybugs crawling over the fern fronds, and the worms busily burrowing in the soil.

NADJA KOSTICH / DIRECTOR

When I was a kid I loved my feet on the round smooth white pebbles at Sveti Stefan Beach on the Adriatic Sea. The water was crystal aquamarine. I had to pay extra attention to keep my balance as I walked on the water's edge. The light, the colours, the smells were mysterious, magical, full of possibility. That feeling lives inside me today.

LARA WEEK / PRODUCER

My partner and I have been planting a garden in the scrap of earth between our house and the warehouse next door. I love noticing all the different lives we now share a home with: bees drunk with pollen, praying mantises and their mosquito-sized babies, a blue-tongue lizard, trees that will outlive us.

KATRINA CORNWELL / ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

One day, after a cyclone had passed, my Dad let me skip school so that we could swim in the wild, wind-swept ocean. The waves crashed and thundered around us and I screamed between perfectly timed dives. Amidst thumping adrenaline I felt a deep sense of calm and knew that these waters would never harm me as long as I listened to them and moved in harmony with their rhythms.

EMILY BARRIE / PRODUCTION DESIGNER

I am drawn to water for relaxation and self restoration.

The sea lapping at your feet, or fresh rain running wildly down a creek, a river with calm rock pools, the bashing waves of the ocean hitting a cliff face. I grew up next to the beach, and have wonderful memories of hot nights when we would swim in the bay, and open the house to the cooler air the ocean brought.

RACHEL BURKE / PRODUCTION DESIGNER

The constant rhythm of the rising and setting of the sun, something to set our bodies, our tides, our harvests and our clocks by. Sunlight causing the bright shine of the moon and the twinkling of stars. Sunlight broken through rain, cloud and foliage, scattered in mists, smoke and rainbows. Wonderous sun, tirelessly painting the astonishing colours of nature silently and anew day after day after day...

MICHAEL CARMODY / VIDEO DESIGNER AND DRAMATURG

I often walk to this humble open field not far from my house and have recently come to notice and appreciate the mental clearing that comes from entering an actual place of clearing. So if I were a piece of nature right now, I would be a plain or a prairie.

AMELIA DUCKER / ST MARTINS COLLABORATING ARTIST

I remember the feeling of swimming at sunrise. The water was warm, the light was gentle, the waves – just the right size. The feeling of freedom and possibility like never before.

NICOLETTE FORTE / ST MARTINS COLLABORATING ARTIST

In my family every year we collect fallen acorns. You put them in a bucket of water and the ones that sink have the potential to become an oak tree. We raise them in soil hoping, until from some a tiny sprout appears. We care for the baby trees until they grow roots and leaves and then when they are big enough we go planting. It's so cool to witness the cycle of life and in our ritual of planting baby trees it keeps us thinking forward...the hope that these trees may outlive us all makes me smile.

CASSANDRA GRAY / ST MARTINS COLLABORATING ARTIST

I love hearing the sound of waves crashing onto the beach. It makes me feel calm and limitless.

MARIA THEODORAKIS / ST MARTINS COLLABORATING ARTIST

I love the golden hour, or the magic hour when the day blends with the coming night, and the colours are saturated, as though the sunset has created a natural filter on the world and demands us to notice.

ALICE QIN / ST MARTINS COLLABORATING ARTIST

The dozen or so potted plants on my balcony genuinely helped me through the lockdowns. Having green things thrive under my care, and watching them grow and change through the seasons, brought so much peace. Recently, my little grapefruit tree grew blossoms and they were so fragrant that if I left my balcony door open, it would lightly perfume my apartment as the scent was carried in by the breeze. Bliss.

GIDEON BRAZIL / MUSICIAN

I look forward every year to camping in Warbuton, Victoria. Switching off completely and spending hours just wading in the Yarra River and swinging in a hammock reading. It's amazing how much you can hear when there isn't anything demanding your attention. Taking time to just listen to nature always brings me calm and hope. Listening is the key to happiness??

RODRIGO SALGADO / MUSICIAN

I love swimming in waterfalls. It makes me connect with myself and makes me feel that I am part of nature. There, I remember that I belong to the water.

LEAH SCHOLES / MUSICIAN

For me, anywhere with water is my happy place. For some reason it speaks to my soul, it brings me calm. It can be fluid, solid, crashing with emotion, gently babbling, or comfortingly lapping the shore. I always find something in it to relate to.

RAIN IYAHEN / PRODUCTION MANAGER

I love when I feel the sun on my skin and the grass on my bare feet. It makes me happy and it fills me with energy.

ZSUZSA GAYNOR MIHALY / STAGE MANAGER

I've always thought that if I was going to be something else in nature I'd be a tree. I'd like to think of myself as a Silver Birch, but really I'm a Silver Gum, or an Ironbark. Something tall and strong, that sits just above the canopy line. I like to imagine the reach of a tree like that. The leaves that stretch way up to the sky and the roots that sink way down into the ground, and the sensation of connection that exists in ways I don't understand.

DREAM OF THE THIRD STRAND (FINAL SONG)

Lyrics by *Gene Tree* participants and creatives, Music by Grace Annan and Elissa Goodrich

I am the earth singing her own song
I am a descendant of the firstborn cell
The atom before the atom of you
History is written in my genes
I am the mutations and the variations
The replications and the proliferations
I have adapted to the changes you have sung
I share a common present with you
And I dream an unwritten future
Unstoppable
Uncrushable
I can change
I changed
I can change again
Listen now again





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gene Tree: Listen. Now. Again was created on the sovereign lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nations. We pay respects to Elders past and present, and stand in solidarity with all First Nations peoples.

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References:

“Listen. Now. Again”—inspired by “The Rain Stick” by Seamus Heany

“This is the story of light and dark..”. —inspired by “Moth” by Isabel Thomas

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