

A.C.T. AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

Press Contact

Kevin Kopjak, Charles Zukow Associates
kevink@charleszukow.com | 650-722-3371 (m)

"Dazzlingly original! A combination requiem mass, séance, revival meeting, metaphysical lecture, rock concert."

VOGUE

"Heather Christian's truly one-of-a-kind opus."

The New York Times

"A Southern-style avant-cabaret séance...part concert, part painful para-autobiography and part old-fashioned magic act."

Time Out New York

American Conservatory Theater and Woolly Mammoth Theatre

To Produce an Original Film Adaptation of
The Bushwick Starr's Production of

ANIMAL WISDOM

By **Heather Christian**

Film Directed by

Amber McGinnis (*International Falls*)

Stage Direction by **Emilyn Kowaleski** (*Delicious Filth*)

Filming Now at Woolly Mammoth

Available for Streaming Nationwide in Late Spring 2021

SAN FRANCISCO (March 11, 2021)—**American Conservatory Theater** (Pam MacKinnon, Artistic Director; Jennifer Bielstein, Executive Director) and **Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company** (María Manuela Goyanes, Artistic Director; Emika Abe, Managing Director) announced today an original film of **The Bushwick Starr's** (Noel Allain, Co-Founder/Artistic Director; Sue Kessler, Co-Founder/Creative Director) critically-acclaimed production of ***Animal Wisdom***, created by and starring **Heather Christian**. ***Animal Wisdom*** is currently being filmed at Woolly Mammoth Theatre in Washington, D.C., in March of 2021, with a streaming release slated for late Spring of 2021. **Amber McGinnis** (*International Falls*) will direct the film, with stage direction by **Emilyn Kowaleski** (*Delicious Filth*). The film of ***Animal Wisdom*** is produced in association with **Matt Ross**, **Madeleine Foster Bersin**, **Outskirt Media**, and **The Bushwick Starr**.

Streaming and ticketing information will be announced at a later date. Those wishing to sign up for advance notice and early pricing options should visit www.animalwisdomfilm.com.

Do you believe in ghosts? Take a virtual front row seat for this original film of the acclaimed musical séance, ***Animal Wisdom***, where singer-songwriter-soothsayer **Heather Christian** lays to rest the souls that haunt her. Christian shapeshifts between rock star, folklorist and high priestess as she conjures a constellation of souls in an effort to confront her family's mythologies.

With their raucous, ferocious music that fuses blues, gospel and folk, **Heather Christian** invites you to raise a glass to the unseen forces that shape our lives. Adapted from the stage production that had a sold-out and acclaimed run at The Bushwick Starr, ***Animal Wisdom*** offers a transporting experience where a concert becomes a mass, and a mass becomes a séance, all in your living room.

"At its heart, *Animal Wisdom* is an admission and ritualization of grief, and an acknowledgement that we carry those that we lose with us every day. It's about the reconsecration of spaces as much as it is about the reconsecration of feelings that we all have and bury in order to get us from one day to the next," said **Heather Christian**.

"This has been a year of immense loss and turmoil. More than ever, I am being asked to confront those things in my day-to-day life, and I think after this year, that's a pretty universal experience. I am excited beyond measure that this piece has new utility on a much wider scale. I have reimagined *Animal Wisdom* as a ritual to sanctify and consecrate the spaces that we are currently stuck in: our homes, and sing out the gnarly painful bits that we have lost. We will be consecrating a theater that had remained dark for a year, and we will be consecrating your living rooms across the country in hopes that a little light can come on back in."

"I am thrilled that A.C.T. is able to partner with Woolly Mammoth and Bushwick Starr to create a ritual for us all," said **Pam MacKinnon**, Artistic Director of **American Conservatory Theater**. "Heather Christian is the artist to take us through these times—to mourn, to heal, to touch where we come from, so we can move forward. I cannot wait to share this film."

"Seeing *Animal Wisdom* at the Bushwick Starr changed me, and the music still haunts me in the most beautiful ways," said **María Manuela Goyanes**, Artistic Director of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. "Woolly is leaning into musicals this year, especially those breaking the

boundaries of the form, like this one. This film adaptation of *Animal Wisdom* aims to conjure the divine of the original, and a way to honor all those we have lost.”

“When *Animal Wisdom* was at the Starr I watched nightly as audiences were profoundly changed by the journey Heather guided them through,” said **Noel Allain**, Co-Founder/Artistic Director of the **Bushwick Starr**. “I’m so excited to share this experience with a much wider audience through this unique film that Heather, Amber, and Emylin are making, supported by this special partnership with Woolly Mammoth and A.C.T. Heather’s unique vision will bring this intimate experience out of the theater and into people’s homes so anyone can share in this healing ritual that feels so needed right now.”

Amber McGinnis (*International Falls*) will direct the film with stage direction by **Emilyn Kowaleski** (*Delicious Filth*). Production design is by **Christopher Bowser** (*The Undertow*), with costume design by **Heather McDevitt Barton** (*Folk Wandering*) and percussion design by **Eric Farber**.

The cast of *Animal Wisdom* features **Heather Christian** (as “Ella,” “Doris,” “Heather”), **Sasha Brown** (as “Victor,” “Doris,” “Sasha”), **Eric Farber** (as “Myles,” “Doris,” “Eric”), **B.E. Farrow** (as “Doris,” “B.E.”), and **Maya Sharpe** (as “Heloise,” “Johanna,” “Doris,” “Maya”).

Animal Wisdom was made in collaboration with and features orchestrations by **Heather Christian, Sasha Brown, Fred Epstein, Eric Farber & Maya Sharpe**. The film will feature Piano & Vocals by **Christian**; Guitar, Cello & Vocals by **Brown**; Bass and Vocals by **Epstein**; Percussion & Vocals by **Farber**; Bass & Vocals by **B.E. Farrow**; and Violin & Vocals by **Sharpe**.

The stage production of *Animal Wisdom* by Heather Christian was developed with support from The Bushwick Starr and world premiered in their 2017/2018 Season. *Animal Wisdom* was originally commissioned by the Leeds Playhouse, formerly known as the West Yorkshire Playhouse, where it was originally developed and presented as part of Transform Festival 2015.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.animalwisdomfilm.com

ABOUT HEATHER CHRISTIAN

Heather Christian is an Obie Award winning composer/playwright/performer, 2021 Richard Rodgers Award winner and Sundance Institute Time Warner Fellow. Recent composing/performing credits include her own work *Oratorio for Living Things* (Ars Nova), *I am Sending You the Sacred Face* (Theater In Quarantine/ YouTube— Named Vultures #5 Theater Experience of 2020), *Prime: A Practical Breviary* (Playwrights Horizons Soundstage—named IndieWire’s #1 Podcast Episode of 2020) *Animal Wisdom* (The Bushwick Starr,) in addition to being a lead artist on devised works *Mission Drift* Nat’l Theater London, *The World Is Round* BAM). Film composition credits include *The Craft: Legacy* (Sony Pictures/ Blumhouse 2020) *Lemon*, (2017 Sundance Film Festival and SXSW) *Gregory Go Boom*, (Sundance Grand Jury Prize) Adult Swim series *The Shivering Truth*, and all four films in the Criterion Collection’s Retrospective of Janicza Bravo. She was named one of TimeOut NY’s Downtown Innovators To Watch and is a 2019 Harold an Mimi Steinberg Trust commissionee. She has been seen in Taylor Mac’s *24 Decade History of Popular Music* and in Toshi Reagon’s *Parable of the Sower* and is a longtime collaborator in devised theater with the TEAM, Jane Comfort Company, Salty Brine, Mac Wellman, Big Dance Theater, and Taylor Mac. She has released 11 records, teaches vocal-based music composition at NYU, owns and operates her own recording studio in Beacon, NY, and can be seen regularly in

concert halls and dive bars as Heather Christian & the Arbornauts.
www.heatherchristian.bandcamp.com

ABOUT WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY

Woolly Mammoth is “the hottest theater company in town” (Washington Post); priding itself on developing, producing, and making theatre that disrupts conventional processes and stimulates transformative experiences. For almost four decades, Woolly has held a unique position at the leading edge of the American theater, earning a reputation for staying “uniquely plugged in to the mad temper of the times” (New York Times). The co-leadership of María Manuela Goyanes (Artistic Director) and Emika Abe (Managing Director) is supported by a core company of artists that holds itself to a high standard of artistic excellence. Woolly is relentless in its desire to take risks, experiment, innovate, interrogate, and create a radically inclusive community. Located in Washington, DC, Woolly Mammoth stands upon occupied, unceded territory: the ancestral homeland of the Nacotchtank whose descendants belong to the Piscataway peoples. <https://www.woollymammoth.net>

ABOUT AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

American Conservatory Theater is an essential gathering place that brings artists and communities together to inspire and provoke. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Pam MacKinnon and Executive Director Jennifer Bielstein, A.C.T.'s mission is to engage the spirit of the San Francisco Bay Area, activate stories that resonate, promote a diversity of voices and points of view, and empower theater makers and audiences to celebrate liveness. A.C.T. values inclusion, transformational learning, participation and rigorous fun. A.C.T. is a Tony Award-winning nonprofit theater serving almost 200,000 people in the San Francisco Bay Area annually through theater, training, education and community programs. www.act-sf.org/

ABOUT THE BUSHWICK STARR

The Bushwick Starr is an Obie Award winning non profit theater that presents an annual Season of new performance work. We are an organization defined by both our artists and our community, and since 2007, we have grown into a thriving theatrical venue, a vital neighborhood arts center, and a destination for exciting and engaging performance. We provide a springboard for emerging professional artists to make career-defining leaps, and we are a sanctuary where established performance companies come to experiment and innovate. We are also a neighborhood playhouse, serving our Bushwick, Brooklyn community's diverse artistic needs and impulses. Our past Seasons have included new work from groundbreaking artists such as Jeremy O. Harris, Heather Christian, Diana Oh, The Mad Ones, Clare Barron, Phillip Howze, Dave Malloy, Daniel Fish, Haruna Lee, and the TEAM. www.thebushwickstarr.org