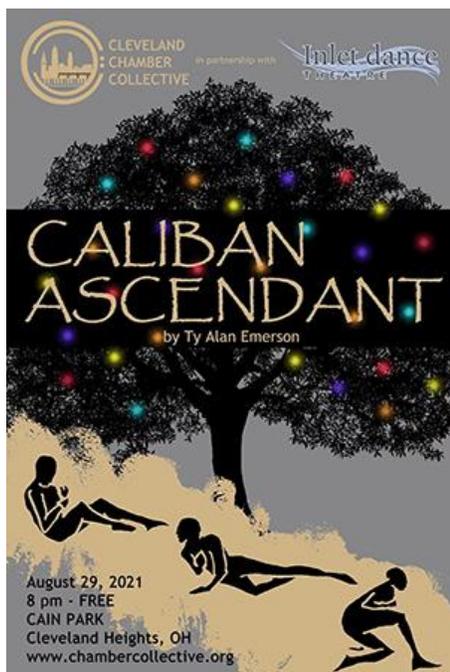


Cleveland Chamber Collective and Inlet Dance Theater at Cain Park

by Mike Telin



In her article [Four Qualities of Classic Literature](#), MJ Booklover says that

A great writer has something specific to say, or perhaps, more typically, a big question to ask about the nature of the world as it was in the times of that writer. But a great work also observes truths about the human condition as it occurs in any age.

Perhaps no writer has captured the timeless truths of the human condition more profoundly than William Shakespeare, and nowhere as persuasively as in *The Tempest*, the inspiration for Ty Alan Emerson's new ballet, *Caliban Ascendant*.

“This project started about eight years ago when I was working with a friend of mine, Josh Legg,” Emerson (*pictured*) said during a telephone conversation. “He’s a choreographer and a wonderful person. We wanted to collaborate on a project so we started talking about what we’d like to do. I had seen many productions of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. I saw one at Bowling Green that was really fun — they actually put a gamelan onstage and Caliban was played by a two-person puppet. So I thought, ‘I’d like to dig into that.’”

On Sunday, August 29 at 8:00 pm at Cain Park Amphitheater, the Cleveland Chamber Music Collective in partnership with Inlet Dance Theatre will present the world premiere of *Caliban Ascendant*. The ballet is based on a story developed by Joshua Legg and Ty Alan



Emerson and features music by Emerson and choreography by Bill Wade in collaboration with Dominic Moore-Dunson, Kevin Parker, Emily Stonecipher, and Katie Wilber.

The free concert will also include the first movement of Nebojsa Jovan Zivkovic's *Trio per Uno* for three percussionists, David Lang's *Lean/Lease* for piccolo and percussion, and Reena Esmail's *String Quartet* ("RAGAMALA").



While *Caliban Ascendant* is grounded in Shakespeare's play, Legg's and Emerson's story centers around the plight of the Indigenous people from the island in *The Tempest*. "Josh and I were talking about how there's just so much information in the play — it's so dense. But we agreed that the most interesting theme that spoke to us was that of colonialism."

While digging further into the play's themes, Emerson and Legg realized that it was written shortly after the founding of Jamestown. "There were

Indigenous people from North America being brought to England where this exploitation was already well-entrenched. And we know that Africans were also being brought to England. So it's a powerful theme — Josh has Indigenous heritage so it really glommed onto us."

In Movement 1 — "Prospero on the Beach" — we are introduced to the characters of Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel. We witness Prospero's dominance of the Islanders and the beginnings of the famous storm. Movement 2 — "Ariel" — is a flashback where we witness the peace and beauty of the life of the Islanders before Prospero's arrival.

"I was talking to my friend who is a Caribbean scholar — his speciality is the connection between the Caribbean and the Harlem Renaissance — and he said that *The Tempest* is the urtext for Caribbean poetry about colonization and fighting through it," Emerson said.

Movement 3 — "Caliban" — is a character study where we see Caliban's anguish and determination to be free. And Movement 4 — "Prospero Exiled" — is the final confrontation between Prospero and the Islanders.



But just as things were coming together, “Everything shut down and the project was put on hold,” Emerson said. “This was also when the Black Lives Matter movement began to gain momentum and we were afraid we had missed an opportunity. But then the horror of the Residential Schools in Canada hit the media, and Josh and I thought — this story will always be timely.”



The production also addresses gender identity — the characters of Ariel and Caliban are each performed both by a male and a female dancer. “One of the ways we’re working that out is when Prospero divides each character, their bodies won’t work properly. But when they are whole and their bodies are connected, there are some gorgeous moments.”

While the story of *Caliban Ascendant* was always intended to be told through dance, Emerson said that it was Cleveland Chamber Collective member Lisa Boyko who suggested Inlet Dance Theater. “She’s on the board of Inlet and said that I should talk to Bill Wade (*pictured*). I did and we had an immediate rapport.”

When asked about Wade's choreography, Emerson said, "It's awesome. He's very thoughtful, compassionate, and very collaborative. There's an amazing moment in the Ariel movement where the male counterpart is on his back and he extends legs upward and the female stands on his feet, so she's this towering, beautiful siren overseeing the entire stage. It's really stunning."

Emerson said the 30-minute score took several years to complete, and that the individual movements have been performed with different instrumentations, by various performers. "So over the years I had the opportunity to create these pieces, and then rescore them for the Chamber Collective — it was a process."

The cast includes Drake Dombroski (Prospero), Mason Alexander and Stephanie Ruth Roston (Ariel), Sabrina Lindhout and Josh Schaeffer (Caliban), and Anna Rhodes (understudy).

The Cleveland Chamber Collective musicians are Mary Kay Fink, flute, Kim Gomez and Emma Shook, violins, Lisa Boyko, viola, Linda Atherton, cello, Nicholas Underhill, piano, Bruce Golden, Dylan Moffitt, and Liam Smith, percussion, and Ty Alan Emerson, conductor.

Rehearsal photos by Mike Telin.

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