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The White Album

By Joan Didion

Created by Lars Jan / Early Morning Opera

BAM Harvey Theater

Nov 28—30, Dec 1 at 7:30pm

Running time: approx. 1 hour 30 minutes

Performed by and created with **Mia Barron**

With performances by **Stephanie Regina, Andrew Schneider,
Micaela Taylor, Sharon Udoh**

Architectural design by **P-A-T-T-E-R-N-S Architecture**

Lighting by **Andrew Schneider** and **Chu-hsuan Chang**

Music and sound design by **Jonathan Snipes**

Choreography by **Stephanie Zaletel**

Dramaturgy by **David Bruin**

Season Sponsor:

**Bloomberg
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Major support for The White Album provided by Agnes Gund

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MIA BARRON



LARS JAN



STEPHANIE REGINA



ANDREW SCHNEIDER



MICAELA TAYLOR



SHARON UDOH

The White Album

Assistant director **Madeline Barasch**
Costume design **Kate Fry**
Sound engineer **Duncan Woodbury**
Design consultant **Shannon Scrofano**
Special effects **Steve Tolin / TolinFX**
Scenic fabrication **Stereobot, Inc.**
Technical director **Michaelangelo DeSerio**
Production manager **Sarah Peterson**
Stage manager **Amanda Eno**
Company manager **Marisa Blankier**
Producer **Miranda Wright**

Produced with Los Angeles Performance Practice / PerformancePractice.org

The White Album was commissioned by Center Theatre Group with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, by BAM for the 2018 Next Wave Festival, by the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University, and by The Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA. *The White Album* received generous development support from CalArts Center for New Performance, Eliza Coburn, Jane Kaczmarek, Xander Duell and Emma McMahon, Rebecca Gold Milikowsky, the Shiva Foundation, the Mark E. Pollack Foundation, and the UCross Foundation.

With special thanks to Joan Didion, Griffin Dunne, and ICM Partners.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The dancing fools
And the watching fools
Are the same
So why not dance
— *Awa Odori Festival chant*

I first encountered *The White Album* when I was 16 and full of anti-establishment zeal. I fell in love—a teenage love—with the cool remove, the collage, the word-to-word manufacture of the sentences, and with Joan Didion herself. That same year, I was lucky to see Roger Guenveur Smith's brilliant solo performance *A Huey P. Newton Story*. Ever since, the Black Panthers, theater, revolution, and Didion have been tangled in my mind. There's nothing like the art, the people, the movements that knock you out when you're young and the brain is both awakening and pliable.

The White Album is the piece of writing to which I've returned most frequently. I've built my artistic identity around the double-edged truth of the first sentence, which has evolved in emphasis as I've aged: "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." First, storytelling is living. Second—and this is the sharper of the edges—stories are creative acts of self-delusion, coping mechanisms to get by.

I keep seeing a meme of a woman who clearly lived the Sixties holding a sign that reads, "I can't believe I still have to protest this fucking shit." My impulse—every time the image flashes before me—is to apologize to her. I can't believe it either. And then I realize that the story I've been telling myself, some variant of "things will bend toward justice if we help bend them," is my longest-running delusion of all.

"If I could believe that going to a barricade would affect a man's fate in the slightest," Didion writes

in “On the Morning After the Sixties,” another essay included in the 1979 *White Album* collection, “I would go to that barricade, and quite often I wish that I could, but it would be less than honest to say that I expect to happen upon such a happy ending.”

I’m grateful to Joan Didion for channeling her experience of the narrative’s fracture into words, for laying bare the near breakdown of her coping mechanisms—to which I feel too capable of relating—and thereby crafting one of the most illuminating stories of all. I am humbled to have the opportunity to do this dance with Didion’s voice and, thereby, to turn the monologue into a conversation.

In the spirit of my 16-year-old self, I remain a believer in the barricades, whatever form they take and wherever we may erect them. I hope to meet you there, armed with the power of a delusion well-sharpened.

— Lars Jan

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Joan Didion began working on *The White Album* in 1968, and the essay chronicles the rebellion and paranoia of the late 1960s. Although its purview ends around 1971, Didion continued to work on the piece until 1978. A year later, it appeared as the title essay in her second collection of nonfiction.

While focused on events in her home state (“California belongs to Joan Didion,” *The New York Times* declared upon the book’s publication), *The White Album* achieves a wider aperture than her previous nonfiction. The essay features an eclectic set of topics, including The Doors, the Black Panthers, the Third World Liberation Front’s and the Black Student Union’s strike at San Francisco State College, and the Manson Family murders. As in much of her other work, however, Didion herself is the essay’s central character, one of the many reasons why she is regarded as a pioneer of New Journalism, a term used to describe writing that applies techniques typically associated with fiction and drama—scenic construction, dialogue, first-person narration—to essays and articles.

Charged with her personal voice, *The White Album* attests to Didion’s stark view of the late Sixties: not the best of times or the worst of times but, rather, sound and fury, signifying nothing. Her exacting style combined with her piquant descriptions delivered a sobering tonic to the delirious fantasies of the young and the old, the Left and the Right.

Neither The Beatles nor their self-titled 1968 LP receive mention in *The White Album*, but for Didion the record is both a cultural touchstone and stylistic homage. Charles Manson received The Beatles’ album as a prophecy. He believed it foretold an imminent race war, and the Manson family carried out their murders in the hopes that the police would blame them on African-Americans. Manson’s interpretation is just one—albeit extreme—instance of the bizarre hermeneutics that, as Didion argues, made the period impervious to any intelligible narrative.

Both *White Albums* embrace montage and medley. The Beatles’ album features an array of ballads, instrumentals, vaudevillian jingles, sound collages, and more. Similarly, Didion’s essay is an assemblage of reportage, anecdotes, court testimony, lyrics, and more. “Another flash cut,” Didion calls one passage, thereby naming her preferred structuring device. This was not entirely new for her. In “Why I Write” (1976), Didion states that while working on *Play It As It Lays* (1970), she wanted “to write a novel so elliptical and fast that it would be over before you noticed it... a book in which anything that happened would happen off the page, a ‘white’ book to which the reader would have to bring his or



Faith Ringgold, *American People Series #20: Die* (1967, Oil on canvas, 72" × 144")

her own bad dreams..." It is with this sense of whiteness that Didion's album shimmers.

No invocation of whiteness, however, can evade its racial valence, and *The White Album* is no exception. Didion is a master of the character study, and, as she explains in "Why I Write," she invests her prose in the personal as opposed to the programmatic. This predilection accounts in large part for the varying degrees of elision surrounding questions of systemic injustice in *The White Album*. Although she would go on to write incisively about race and politics at length in her 1991 account of the Central Park Five and other works, Didion only briefly addresses the racism, economic inequity, and police brutality that motivated the Black Panthers and the students in the Bay Area. Notable achievements on the part of activists, such as the Panthers' Free Breakfast for Children program and the establishment of the College of Ethnic Studies at SF State—the first of its kind—won by the protestors there, receive no mention. Our production attempts to bring the threefold present of the essay's historical events, Didion's retrospective account, and our reception of both—a triangulation we often articulate as 1968, 1978, and 2018—into conversation.

The last decade or so has seen a resurgence of interest in both Didion and many of her subjects. In addition to her numerous accolades and milestones—including a 2017 documentary, directed by her nephew Griffin Dunne—Didion's legacy radiates in the many writers who have followed the path blazed by her style, including Hilton Als, Maggie Nelson, and Ta-Nehisi Coates. In the last several years, scholars, writers, and filmmakers have also evidenced a renewed interest in the Black Panthers and the protests at SF State and other campuses. But no doubt the greatest legacy of the Panthers and other agents of social change lives on in the streets. Movements such as Black Lives Matter and Occupy share an affinity—if not an agenda—with their 1968 forbearers.

Our production—another *White Album*—engages with these legacies, as well as that of Didion's masterpiece of American letters. A mixture of forms, from theater to installation, from scripted monologue to participatory improvisation, shapes our invitation to the audience to complete our work in the act of the performance and to ponder the possibilities for action far beyond the theater.

—David Bruin, *dramaturg*

LARS JAN, (director) the son of émigrés from Afghanistan and Poland, is a director, artist, writer, and activist known for visually striking, genre-bending performance and installation works exploring emerging technologies, live gatherings, and unclassifiable experience. With his performance and art lab Early Morning Opera, Jan's original works—including *Holoscenes*, *The Institute of Memory (TIME)*, and *Abacus* (2014 Next Wave)—have been presented by the BAM Next Wave Festival, Whitney Museum, Sundance Film Festival, Under the Radar Festival, PICA's Time Base Arts Festival, Hammer Museum, REDCAT, ICA Boston, Toronto Nuit Blanche, London's Burning Festival, Poland's Divine Comedy Festival, NYU Abu Dhabi, and Istanbul Modern. In June 2017, his climate change-themed installation, *Holoscenes*, created a sensation in Times Square. As the winner of the 2017 Audemars Piguet Art Commission, Jan exhibited *Slow-Moving Luminaries*, a kinetic pavilion on an acre of beach during Art Basel Miami. He is represented by Charlie James Gallery in Los Angeles. Jan is a Sherwood and YBCA100 Awardee, on faculty at CalArts, and a TED Senior Fellow.

MIA BARRON (performer) was last seen in New York in Sarah Delappe's production of *The Wolves* at Lincoln Center (Obie, Drama Desk for Best Ensemble). Other stage work includes Bruce Norris' *The Pain and the Itch*, (Playwrights Horizons), *Domesticated* (Lincoln Center), Tom Stoppard's *The Coast of Utopia* (Lincoln Center), Beau Willimon's *Spirit Control* (Manhattan Theatre Club), Jonathan Marc Sherman's *Knickerbocker* (Public Theater), Moira Buffini's *Dying for It* (Atlantic Theater Company), as well as multiple productions at Williamstown Theatre Festival (*She Stoops to Conquer*, *A Great Wilderness*, *A Flea in Her Ear*), Lincoln Center (*What Once We Felt*, *QED*), Playwrights Horizons (*The World Over*, *She Stoops to Comedy*), among others. She has performed in the premieres of new plays at theaters around

the country including, the Mark Taper, the Geffen, the Old Globe, New York Stage and Film, The Long Wharf, the Guthrie, and was a co-creator/performer of the off-Broadway production of *Big Times* (Leigh Silverman, director). Recent television and film work includes the *Law and Order* series *True Crime: Mendendez Murders* opposite Edie Falco, the independent feature *I Smile Back* alongside Sarah Silverman, and a current recurring role on the Epix series *Get Shorty*, as well as a long running role as the voice of Molotov on *The Venture Brothers* (Cartoon Network). Upcoming: the New York premiere of Madeline George's play *Hurricane Diane* at New York Theatre Workshop. Barron received her MFA from the Graduate Acting Program at NYU.

MADELINE BARASCH (assistant director) is a director and producer operating out of New York and Los Angeles. Previously with Lars Jan / Early Morning Opera: *Holoscenes*. Barasch has worked with CUNY's Segal Centre (Prelude Festival), The Public Theater (Privacy, Under The Radar Festival), Creative Time (*Drifting in Daylight: Black Joy in the Hour of Chaos*), 600 HIGHWAYMEN (*The Fever*), and Catch! Performance Series. She is a former company member of Smith Street Stage, and a frequent collaborator of playwright Sophia Heinecke. Barasch holds a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts (Stella Adler Studio; ITW Amsterdam).

DAVID BRUIN (dramaturg) has upcoming dramaturgy projects include new work by Robert Woodruff, Jeremy O. Harris, Whitney White, and Asa Horvitz. He is the founding artistic director of an sphinx incompis, a New York City-based theater company which recently produced the world premiere of Erin Markey's *Singlet* at the Bushwick Starr. As an editor, he is currently working on an anthology of new writing inspired by The Foundry Theatre. He is the deputy editor of *Theater* magazine, published by Yale School of Drama, where he is also a DFA candidate and a lecturer in dramaturgy and dramatic criticism.

CHU-HSUAN CHANG (lighting design) is a Los Angeles-based lighting artist working in theater, dance, music performance, and installation. As a lighting designer, Chang's notable collaborations include Janie Geiser's puppetry production *Fugitive Time* (On Edge Festival, Automata); Maria Hassabi's live performance installation *PLASTIC* (Hammer Museum); performing artist Takao Tamaguchi's *Touch of Others* (One Archive, REDCAT); theater director Becca Wolff's *The Antigone Project* (Getty Villa); and choreographer Meryl Murman's *The Lipstick* (CAC). Recent works include *Sorry, Atlantis: Eden's Achin' Organ Seeks Revenge* (Machine Project); *Kein Paradiso* (Hammer Museum); and *The Other Side* (Gramercy Studio). Chang has also worked with Lars Jan on *The Institute of Memory (TIme)* (REDCAT, TBA Festival, Under the Radar Festival, Divine Comedy Festival, On the Boards, ICA Boston, YBCA) and *Slow-Moving Luminaries* (Art Basel Miami Beach). In addition to lighting, Chang's passions include puppeteering, model-making, and lighting instrument design. chuhsuanchang.com

MICHAELANGELO DESERIO (technical director) is a native New Yorker, artist, and adventurer recently spending more time on the West Coast. There he has had the opportunity to work with UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance, Cornerstone Theater, Center Theatre Group, Meg Wolfe Dance, and Shakespeare Center of LA. Back home Deserio has been amazingly fortunate to work with companies such as The Living Theatre, Irondale Ensemble Project, The Civilians, New Georges, Epic Theater, Letter of Marque, Pig Pen Theater Company, Theater for the New City, Strike Anywhere, and hundreds more.

AMANDA ENO (stage manager) is a native of Colorado who now calls Los Angeles her home. While she spends most of her time in the immersive theater and events realm, she is excited by the unique challenges of *The White Album* and is honored to be working with this fantastic team. Her previous projects include HULU Castle Rock Activation (San Diego Comic Con), *Wood Boy Dog Fish* and *Kaidan Project* (Rogue Artists Ensemble), and Museum of America (30 Seconds to Mars Album Release Party). Eno holds an MFA in stage management from California Institute of the Arts.

KATE FRY (costume design) designs costumes for opera, theater, film, and dance. Her work explores clothing as poetry, to illustrate the complex nature of identity as both individual and contextual within society. Recently, Fry's designs have shown with the LA Philharmonic (composer Jacob Cooper), at HERE Arts Center (*The Idiot* by Robert Lyons and Kristin Marting), and the Spoleto Festival USA (*The Little Match Girl*, a collaboration with puppeteer Mark Down and director Phelim McDermott). Beyond the stage, Fry's work ranges from fine art—teaming up with French artist Julien Previoux's project *What Shall We Do Next* (winner of the Prix Marcel Duchamp), to film and television, most recently designing costumes for a 1960s-era television pilot, *The Picture* (directed by David Winkler). Fry's work has been shown at The Public Theater, NY City Center, Grand Palais Paris, 3LD, La MaMa, REDCAT, Prototype Opera Festival, The Bootleg Theater, Honor Fraser gallery, Prague Quadrennial, and the Tribeca Film Festival. She earned an MFA from California Institute of the Arts. (KateFry.com)



STEPHANIE REGINA (performer) is collaborative performer in theater, film, and comedy, and co-creator of *Heck No Techno*, a monthly musical comedy show at The PIT, NYC. Favorite NYC credits: *Lucy in Leisure, Labor, Lust* (The Tank), *Irene in CasablancaBox* (HERE Arts, Drama Desk Nom), *The Return* (Metropolitan Museum of Art), and *Oedipus in Oedipus Rex XX/XY* (LaMaMa). Regional highlights: *Dancing Behind My Eyelids* (A.R.T./Club Oberon), Abigail Adams in *1776* (NJPAC), and Milly in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (OPTC). Films include *Molehill* (Amazon Prime) and *Rent-a-Friend* (Vimeo). Regina is a core company member of Gia Forakis & Co. stephanieregina.com

ANDREW SCHNEIDER (lighting design, performer) creates and performs solo performance works and large-scale dance works, builds interactive electronic art works and installations, and was a Wooster Group company member (video/performer) from 2007—14. Schneider's original performance work in NYC includes *YOUARENOWHERE* (2015 Obie award, 2016 Drama Desk nomination), *Field* (2014), *Tidal* (2013) and *Wow + Flutter* (2010) at The Chocolate Factory, among others. His interactive work has been featured in such publications as *Artforum* and *Wired*, and at the Center Pompidou in Paris. More at andrewjs.com

JONATHAN SNIPES (music and sound design) is a composer and sound designer for film and theater living in Los Angeles. He occasionally teaches sound design in the theater department at UCLA, and is a member of the rap group clipping.

MICAELA TAYLOR (performer) is a professional dancer/teacher/choreographer from Los Angeles, where she trained at Marat Daukayev School of Ballet and Los Angeles County High School of the Arts. She graduated from Cornish College of the Arts and earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in dance, 2014. She has performed with Ate9 Dance Company, Zoe Scofield, Camille A. Brown, Kate Wallich, and BODYTRAFFIC. Her choreographic passion led her to found Los Angeles-based contemporary dance company The TL Collective in 2016. Alongside the launch of The TL Collective, Taylor has been commissioned to choreograph and teach by LA Contemporary Dance Company, AMDA College, Springboard Danse Montreal, MoveNYC, Cal State Long Beach, BODYTRAFFIC, Gibney Dance Company (NY), and more. She most recently was the recipient of the Inaugural Emerge Choreographic Award 2018. Her work has been presented by Gelsey Kirkland Performing Arts Center, ACE Hotel, Raymond Kabaaz Theatre, Grand Performances, and Odyssey Théâtre Ensemble.

SHARON UDOH (performer) has spent the past few decades of her life being the following: a C++ coder, a vegan baker, an introvert, a short-order cook, a church choir accompanist, a marathoner, a terrible saxophonist, and an enrollment coordinator at an incredible central Ohio high school named ACPA. Udoh is pianist, composer, and vocalist for Counterfeit Madison, a magnetic, raucous, tender, and genre-less project she leads, along with bassist Adam Hardy and drummer Seth Daily. Counterfeit Madison recently released its second full-length album, *Opposable Thumbs*, to warm and exciting reviews. It is currently recording its third full length LP, *Knucklehead*, and tours regularly.





DUNCAN WOODBURY (sound engineer) is a Los Angeles-based electronic musician and sound engineer applying a lifetime obsession with music towards a multitude of projects. Woodbury is president and founder of Lower Grand Records and chief operating officer of 4th Street Bridge. He creates original music under the moniker Mayacamas (Lower Grand). Performance engineering credits include Los Angeles Exchange [LAX] Festival (Los Angeles Performance Practice, 2015, 2017, 2018), *Holoscenes* and *The Institute of Memory (TIME)* (Lars Jan / Early Morning Opera, 2017—18), *Group Therapy* (Poor Dog Group, 2018), and *ANTHEM* (Milka Djordjevic, 2017). Woodbury is a graduate of California Institute of the Arts with a BFA in music technology in 2011.

MIRANDA WRIGHT (producer) launched Los Angeles Performance Practice in 2010, and the Los Angeles Exchange [LAX] Festival in 2013. Wright began her career with several internationally collaborative projects, producing work in Havana, Kampala, Kigali, and Prague. She has worked with Center Theatre Group, Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA, and CalArts Center for New Performance, among others, on special projects and initiatives, including a research initiative with neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists led by Kristy Edmunds and Sam Miller. She is the 2014 recipient of Center Theatre Group's

Richard E. Sherwood Award, awarded annually to an innovative and adventurous Los Angeles theater artist of promise, and is currently the Sherwood Award Artistic Program Coordinator. In 2015, she was awarded a Cultural Exchange International Fellowship through the City of Los Angeles and the British Council to work with ArtsAdmin in London, and in 2016 she was the Curatorial Artist in Residence at CAP UCLA. Wright holds a certificate from the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University, and an MFA in producing from California Institute of the Arts.

STEPHANIE ZALETEL (choreographer) is an LA-based choreographer, dancer, and educator. Her choreography has been commissioned for various music videos, short films, colleges, institutions, and collaborations. She holds a BFA in dance performance and choreography with a minor in humanities from California Institute of the Arts. Zaletel danced for Barak Marshall, Colin Connor, and Danielle Agami before officially forming szalt (dance co.) in 2015. szalt is a team of specialized dance artists led by Zaletel—arousing curiosity through voyeuristic feminine experiences, depictions of body memory, and dream logic—creating and facilitating highly collaborative, site-sensitive, and socially fluent dance performance and practice.

P-A-T-T-E-R-N-S ARCHITECTURE is led by partners Marcelo Spina and Georgina Huljich, and has gained international recognition as one of the most intriguing and progressive firms working in architecture today. Based on the expansive city of Los Angeles, they take advantage of the city's decidedly global stance and idiosyncratic identity. With more than 15 years of building experience, they have completed projects in the US, South America, and Asia. Its work has been exhibited worldwide, most notably at the Venice Biennale in Italy, Chicago Biennial, Art Institute of Chicago, San Francisco MOMA, and Vienna MAK Museum, where its work is also part of the permanent collections.

LOS ANGELES PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

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EARLY MORNING OPERA is a genre-bending performance and art lab whose works explore emerging technologies, live audiences, and unclassifiable experience. Directed by Lars Jan, the lab is a flexible network of principal artists and an ever-expanding group of new collaborators, with expertise in fields as diverse as data visualization, architecture, cognitive neuroscience, and experimental plumbing. EMO's original works include *The Institute of Memory (TIme)*, *Abacus* (2014 Next Wave), and *Holoscenes*, which created a sensation in Times Square in June 2017. earlymorningopera.com

THANK YOU

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