

Birds in the Moon



Go behind the scenes! Explore our creative Learning Guides with insights, fun facts and activities to enrich and inform your performance experience at The Broad Stage. For families, students and learners of all ages, Learning Guides place arts education center stage.

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THE BROAD STAGE AT THE SANTA MONICA COLLEGE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
EDUCATION & COMMUNITY PROGRAMS | THEBROADSTAGE.ORG/COMMUNITY
1310 11TH STREET, SANTA MONICA, CA 90401 | 310.434.3650



“The poem, the song, the picture, is only water drawn from the well of the people, and it should be given back to them in a cup of beauty so that they may drink—and in drinking understand themselves.”

– Federico Garcia Lorca

Birds in the Moon

Birds in the Moon is a new mobile chamber opera performed inside and on top of a specially designed shipping container (just like those you might see on the back of a train or in a shipyard). This portable, state of the art theater will travel around the country and meet audience members in outdoor non-traditional settings to enter into an alternative world.

Inspired by the 17th century scientist Charles Morton’s *hypothesis* that birds migrate to the moon each season, *Birds in the Moon* was created as an *allegory* with a mythical journey, in which the characters are making their way to the moon.

In this chamber opera, the Bird-Mother protects her young daughter from menacing forces, which threaten to derail their journey. The urgency and hope she experiences while searching for a better future come across through live music, *soundscapes* and video projections, as the themes of freedom, borders and belonging are explored.

The music for *Birds in the Moon* was created by composer Mark Grey and the story was written by *librettist* Júlia Canosa i Serra. Director Elkanah Pulitzer believes that the power of stories can inspire and influence people, and that as theater and music hold up a mirror to our lives, this allows us to better understand ourselves and the world around us.



“It’s not something one learns. It has never been written. It is the thing we know.”

– *Bird-Mother, Birds in the Moon*

WHAT IS AN ORIGIN STORY OR MYTH?

Birds in the Moon is also inspired by origin stories and myths. In *Birds in the Moon*, the Bird-Mother fits the Mother **archetype** as she is the nurturing caretaker who makes sacrifices to ensure that her daughter continues safely along a journey that they have been following for generations.

Origin stories and **myths** from around the world include characters like the Bird-Mother who are Goddesses or deities that represent motherhood, creation, protection and fertility. Among these are Coatlicue (Nahuatl/Mexico), Spider Grandmother (Hopi/Turtle Island-aka USA), (Asase Ya (Ashanti/Ghana), Pachamama (Inca/Peru), Gaia (Mycenaean/Greece), Yemoja (Yoruba/Nigeria/African Diaspora/Cuba/Brazil) and Ixchel (Maya/Mexico & Guatemala), all of whom also relinquish much of themselves for the sake of those they protect.

Journeys or migrations are often central to origin stories or myths. One ancient migration is that of the Mexica people,

also known as the Aztecs, who migrated from Aztlán to Tenochtitlan, current day Mexico City. Their journey south from Aztlán, thought to be located in what is now the United States, was guided by their deity, Huitzilopochtli, who told them to settle in the place where they saw this symbol: an eagle on a cactus devouring a serpent. This symbol represents an ancient Indigenous worldview, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all life; Sky/Earth. Many generations later, this migration south is still a significant element in the identity of Mexican people.

In *Birds in the Moon*, the Bird-Mother’s relationship with the Ringmaster brings to light their individual values, but also the extent of their desperation and how this influences their choices as they each struggle to move forward to “a place for the downtrodden...a place with no borders, no orders...a paradise.” Their story, and others like them, are passed down through generations by oral tradition, or storytelling, or as with *Birds in the Moon*, by way of a mobile chamber opera.

“Mobility is resilience.”

– Lorenzo Guadagno, U.N. Organization for Migration

WHAT IS MIGRATION?

In *Birds in the Moon*, the Bird-Mother and her daughter, who we actually never see in the opera, face a challenge that threatens to impede their migration to the moon. The importance of their continued movement on this path, which has existed for generations, becomes the Bird-Mother’s plight and struggle.

Migration, the movement of humans across the land and sea, is motivated by many factors. As humans we have an innate instinct to search for the environment that is best suited to our needs, whether that is for individual survival or for a collective purpose. Historically, voluntary and involuntary migration has moved populations across short and long distances. While voluntary migration can be said to be by choice, it is nonetheless influenced by ‘push-pull’ factors. The ‘push’ elements are those that are unfavorable about the area that one lives in and the ‘pull’ elements are those that are favorable and attract to another area. Involuntary migration includes forced displacement (i.e. deportation, slave trade) and flight, such as from war, genocide, political, economic, and environmental disasters.

When the Bird-Mother states that she has broken all of her own “laws” except one, she is referring to the law of thrust that she needs in order to fly, which metaphorically refers to the power and courage it takes to be on a journey such as hers. Furthermore, this force cannot be learned, “it must be in you.” – Bird-Mother

WHAT IS A PORTABLE, STATE OF THE ART THEATER?

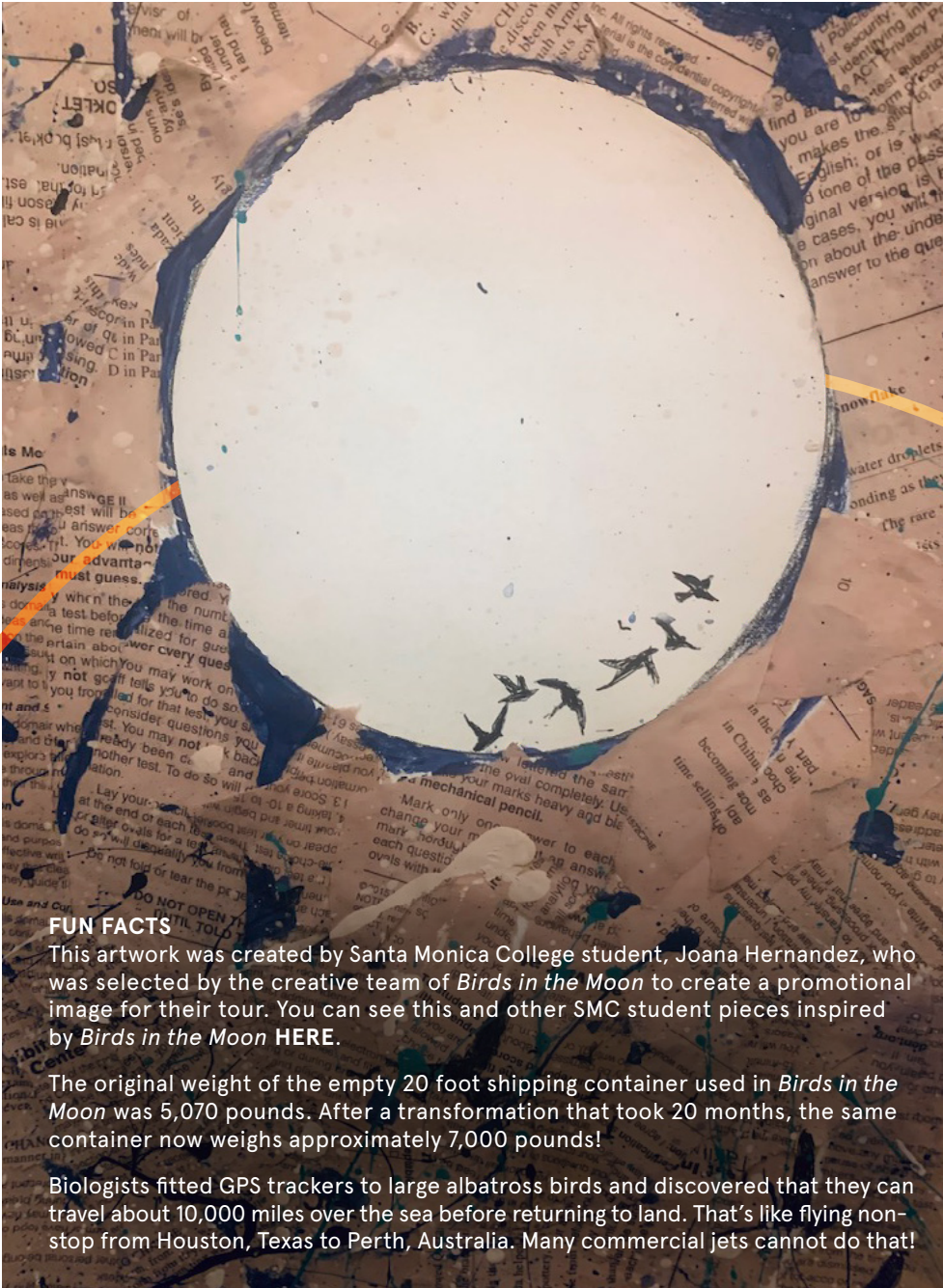
Birds in the Moon takes place on a 20ft shipping container that has been fully customized with precision and ingenuity to serve as a mobile theater stage. This process took container and set designer Chad Owens and the artistic team approximately 20 months to complete. The mobile theater stage is fitted with the latest in sound, lighting and video technology making it state of the art. An integrated wireless network allows full control of these elements from a single iPad!

The idea of a mobile theater stage has been around since the 14th century and possibly before that! Throughout history, artists have been presenting various types of theater outdoors.



From Passion Plays in the 14th century, originating in the ritual of the Catholic Church, to Commedia dell’arte street plays in Italy’s town squares, to El Teatro Campesino’s ‘Actos’ in the style of *carpa* presented on flatbed trucks, dramatizing the plight and cause of California’s farmworkers in the 1960’s, artists have found a way to provide audiences with direct outdoor access to their theatrical works. “If the people can’t go to the theater, the theater must go to the people.” – Luis Valdez & El Teatro Campesino

The flexibility provided by both the customized portable theater and Meyer Sound’s audio spatializing software, *Spacemap Go*, allows *Birds in the Moon* to continue in the tradition of bringing the theater to the people.



FUN FACTS

This artwork was created by Santa Monica College student, Joana Hernandez, who was selected by the creative team of *Birds in the Moon* to create a promotional image for their tour. You can see this and other SMC student pieces inspired by *Birds in the Moon* [HERE](#).

The original weight of the empty 20 foot shipping container used in *Birds in the Moon* was 5,070 pounds. After a transformation that took 20 months, the same container now weighs approximately 7,000 pounds!

Biologists fitted GPS trackers to large albatross birds and discovered that they can travel about 10,000 miles over the sea before returning to land. That's like flying non-stop from Houston, Texas to Perth, Australia. Many commercial jets cannot do that!

VOCABULARY

ALLEGORY: A story in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for ideas about human life or for a political or historical situation

ARCHETYPE: Characters in a story, tale or dream with specific qualities or traits that are copies of or represent a central, original or universal idea.

MYTH: A traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.

HYPOTHESIS: An idea or explanation for something that is based on known facts, but has not yet been proven.

LIBRETTIST: The person who writes the libretto, which is the text used in, or intended for, an extended musical work such as an opera, operetta, masque, oratorio, cantata or musical.

SOUNDSCAPE: Sound and music used to create the atmosphere of a story being told. This can include background noises, sound effects, or musical instruments that make sounds like what is happening in a given environment.

TRY THIS

DISCOVER YOUR FAMILY TREE.

Travel to the past by interviewing relatives and/or family friends. Ask about your parents, grandparents and great grandparents and learn about their journeys. See how far back you can trace your ancestral ties. Include when and where people were born and if they moved, maybe you can find out why. Migrations happen for many reasons and can be short or long. Use a family tree template to keep all the information organized or create your own design!

CREATE ART INSPIRED BY A JOURNEY YOU HAVE TAKEN.

There are different types of journeys, such as one that is physical, mental or emotional. A journey can be measured by a geographic distance or by a length of time and can also be a process by which we learn or develop something, such as a new skill, an art form or our personal identity. There can be an end point or the journey can be ongoing, even lasting a lifetime! Reflect on one of your own journeys and let it inspire you to create a drawing, a painting, write a song or a poem.



TAKE IT FURTHER

Check out our [Resource](#) pages with website links and relevant state standards to use for the classroom.



WEBSITE AND RESEARCH LINKS:

BIRDS IN THE MOON—TECH

BIRDS IN THE MOON STUDENT EXHIBITION—SANTA MONICA COLLEGE

INDIGENOUS CREATION STORIES—MOVEMENT TOWARD RECONCILIATION

THE EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE ON MIGRATION (BOOK)

FAMILY TREE

HOPI ORIGIN STORY VIDEO

HOW FAR CAN BIRDS FLY WITHOUT NEEDING TO LAND?

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

MAYAN GODDESS(ES) OF THE MOON

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC—EXPLORING SOLUTIONS TO HUMAN IMPACT ON ANIMAL MIGRATION

PEOPLE AND PLACES OF THE ANCIENT SOUTHWEST AND MEXICO

POPOL VUH—SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

SCIENTIFIC REPORTS—LONGEST TERRESTRIAL MIGRATION AND MOVEMENTS AROUND THE WORLD

WHY CHAMBER MUSIC?

WORLD MIGRATION REPORT 2020

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SUGGESTED CA STATE STANDARDS:

NINTH THROUGH TWELFTH GRADE STANDARDS

CA VAPA Theatre Grade 9-12

Proficient 1.0 Artistic Perception 1.1 Use the vocabulary of theatre, such as acting values, style, genre, design, and theme, to describe theatrical experiences.

CA VAPA Theatre Grade 9-12

Proficient 1.0 Artistic Perception 1.2 Document observations and perceptions of production elements, noting mood, pacing, and use of space through class discussion and reflective writing.

CA VAPA Theatre Grade 9-12

Advanced 1.0 Artistic Perception 1.3 Identify the use of metaphor, subtext, and symbolic elements in scripts and theatrical productions.

CA VAPA Theatre Grade 9-12

Advanced 3.0 Historical and Cultural Context 3.2 Analyze the impact of traditional and nontraditional theatre, film, television and electronic media on society.

CA VAPA Music Grade 9-12

Proficient 1.0 Artistic Perception 1.5 Identify and explain a variety of compositional devices and techniques used to provide unity, variety, tension, and release in aural examples.

CA VAPA Music Grade 9-12

Proficient 4.0 Aesthetic Valuing 4.4 Describe the means used to create images or evoke feelings and emotions in musical works from various cultures.

CA VAPA Music Grade 9-12

Advanced 1.0 Artistic Perception 1.5 Analyze and describe the use of musical elements in a given work that makes it unique, interesting, and expressive.

CA VAPA Music Grade 9-12

Advanced 4.0 Aesthetic Valuing 4.1 Compare and contrast how a composer's intentions result in a work of music and how that music is used.

CA ELA Writing Grade 9-12 Text

Types and Purposes 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CA WHST Grade 9-12 Text Types and Purposes 2. Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

CA Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills Grade 10: 10.3

Students analyze the effects of the Industrial Revolution in England, France, Germany, Japan and the United States.

CA Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills Grade 10: 10.4

Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines.

SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

ID.9-12.2 I know my family history and cultural background and can describe how my own identity is informed and shaped by my membership in multiple identity groups.

ID.9-12.5 I recognize traits of the dominant culture, my home culture and other cultures, and I am conscious of how I express my identity as I move between those spaces.

DI.9-12.6 I interact comfortably and respectfully with all people, whether they are similar to or different from me.

DI.9-12.10 I understand that diversity includes the impact of unequal power relations on the development of group identities and cultures.

JU.9-12.12 I can recognize, describe and distinguish unfairness and injustice at different levels of society.

JU.9-12.14 I am aware of the advantages and disadvantages I have in society because of my membership in different identity groups, and I know how this has affected my life.

AC.9-12.17 I take responsibility for standing up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.

AC.9-12.18 I have the courage to speak up to people when their words, actions or views are biased and hurtful, and I will communicate with respect even when we disagree.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Social Awareness: Perspective-taking, Empathy

Responsible Decision-Making: Identifying problems, Analyzing situations

Relationship Skills: Communication, Social engagement