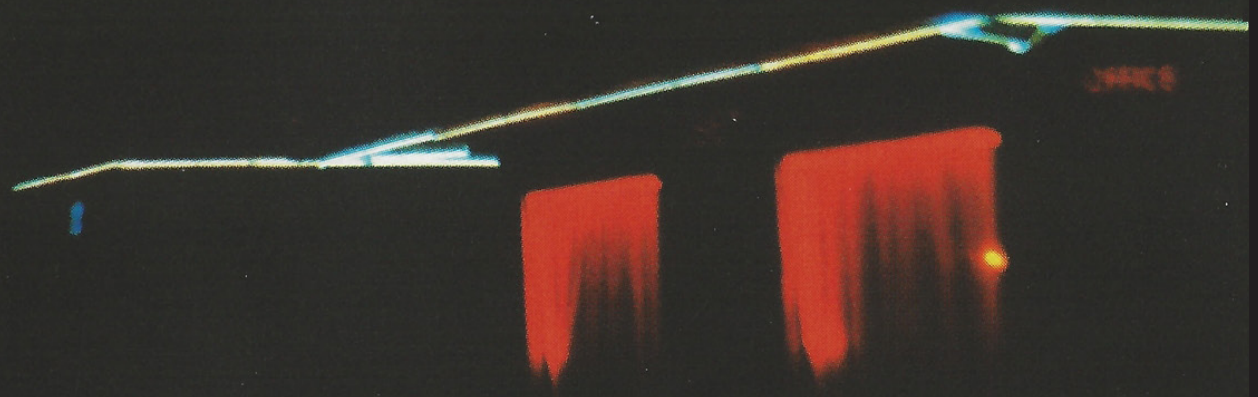
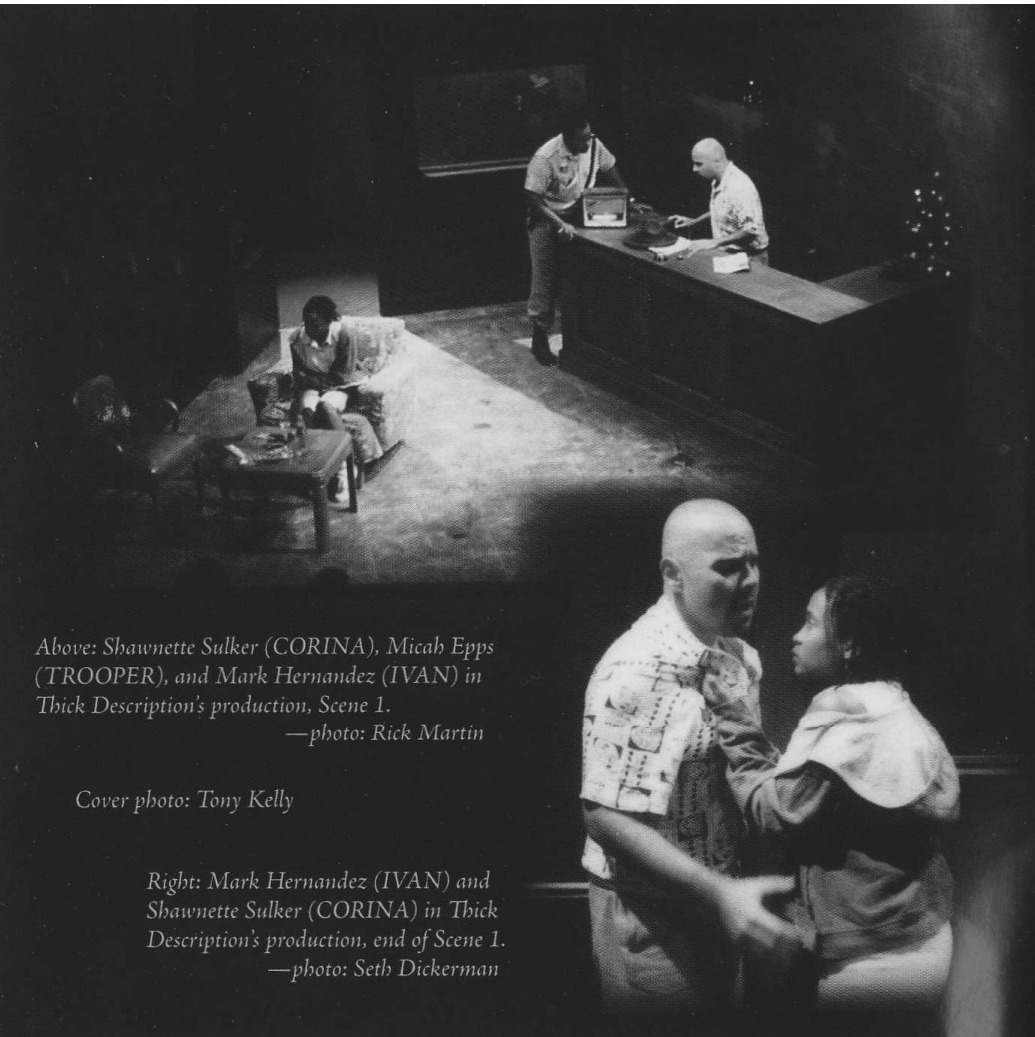


# Firebird MOTEL



*an opera in one act*  
*music by DAVID CONTE*  
*libretto by DAVID YEZZI*

*Thick Description Theatre Company*  
*San Francisco Conservatory Chorus and Chamber Ensemble*  
*Jeffrey Thomas, conductor*



Above: Shawnette Sulker (CORINA), Micah Epps (TROOPER), and Mark Hernandez (IVAN) in Thick Description's production, Scene 1.  
—photo: Rick Martin

Cover photo: Tony Kelly

Right: Mark Hernandez (IVAN) and Shawnette Sulker (CORINA) in Thick Description's production, end of Scene 1.  
—photo: Seth Dickerman

# Firebird Motel

an opera in one act

Music by David Conte

Libretto by David Yezzi

Scenario by David Yezzi and Tony Kelly

*That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,  
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard  
Of any world where promises were kept,  
Or one could weep because another wept.*

—W. H. Auden, "The Shield of Achilles"

*... four of every five people in the desert are armed.*

—David Darlington, The Mojave

## Firebird Motel

An opera in one act based on a scenario by David Yezzi and Tony Kelly, *Firebird Motel* was commissioned by Thick Description with the support of the Flintridge Foundation. The work was premiered at Thick House on November 17th, 2003, Jeffrey Thomas, conductor; Tony Kelly, stage director. The premiere production was also supported in part through Subito, the quick advancement grant program of the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of the American Composers Forum.

### CAST of CHARACTERS

IVAN + Mark Hernandez, tenor + *night clerk at the Firebird Motel, he keeps to himself.*

NOVA + Milissa Carey, mezzo-soprano + *longtime Firebird resident.*

JULIE + Julie Queen, soprano + *she danced in Vegas, wound up at the Firebird, disappeared some time ago.*

CORINA + Shawnette Sulker, soprano + *she looks young for her age, a weary sensuality like a desert mirage.*

TROOPER + Micah Epps, baritone + *petty and easily angered, with the torpor and menace of a horned lizard.*

CHORUS + *Church choir heard through Ivan's radio.*

Elena de Mattos, Elena Krell, (soprano) + Ruby Fulton, Gabrielle McColgan, (alto) + Robin Estrada, Lawrence Pech, (tenor) + Abraham Fabella, Patrick Leveque, (basses)

### INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE

Megumi Stohs (violin) + Robert Howard (cello) + Alden F. Cohen (bass)  
Jonathan Russell (clarinet) + Keisuke Nakagoshi (piano)

Jeffrey Thomas, conductor

## SYNOPSIS

### Prologue: Nova's Warning

A few months earlier at the Firebird Motel, a young woman named Julie disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Nova sings a song of the desert, joined by the wordless voice of the missing woman.

### Scene One: The Graveyard Shift

In the Firebird's lobby, denizens of the motel are waiting out a violent storm. The local cop, Trooper, taunts Corina, with whom he has been having a series of forced assignations. As he exits, he orders her to meet him outside. Corina, who mocks Trooper in front of the night clerk Ivan, ultimately goes to him as a way to avoid a beating and possibly jail.

### Scene Two: Ivan and His Radio

Ivan is unable to stop Corina from leaving. He has seen this destructive cycle played out before with Julie, whose disappearance haunts him and whose voice he hears over the radio. The lights go out. Julie appears to Ivan and reveals that she was shot by Trooper and left in the desert to die. She warns Ivan that Corina is in danger and urges him to help her.

### Scene Three: Ivan's Ideal

A few hours later, Nova enters the lobby brandishing a pistol, as the lights come back on and Ivan is startled awake. Corina enters with Trooper's blood on her shirt. They have been fighting. Nova offers her, first, a cup of tea and, then, a pistol to protect herself. Corina discovers a picture of Julie as a girl and sings of her own childhood. Ivan comforts Corina and dreams of a world without violence, warning Corina to get away from the motel and Trooper. Corina explains that she has nowhere else to go.

### Scene Four: A Shot in the Dark

Trooper enters. His ear is crudely bandaged, and blood stains his clothing. He confronts Corina, with his gun drawn. The lights go out again, and a shot is heard. Nova believes that Corina has been killed and flees to her room. Corina, who has collapsed on the floor, was too scared to fire her gun. Ivan makes a confession, and Julie's voice is heard, as the sun rises and Ivan and Corina escape to an unknown fate.

**1 Prologue: Nova's Warning** *(The office of a small, mostly vacant motel in the Mojave Desert. Christmas Week. The present. Night. A windstorm outside, which knocks out the electricity at times.)*

NOVA *(In a pool of light, center stage.)*  
This place hides a spirit  
that I've learned to hear  
on my freezing nighttime walks.  
Most learn to fear  
the desert when it talks  
from Pleistocene lakes  
and broken stalks:

Whatever you do here,  
whatever you say here,  
whatever you see here,  
let it stay here.

We who were born here  
And those who wind up here  
can't live in other places.  
We never leave; we disappear.  
Look at our faces.  
Can you see the traces  
of our secret disgraces?

*(From offstage, JULIE sings a wordless theme.)*

NOVA  
Whatever you do here,  
whatever you say here,

whatever you see here,  
let it stay here.

*(A missing-persons poster of JULIE, made from a candid photograph, is illuminated.)*

This is the song  
of a woman who's gone.  
Hard earth hides her face.  
Unlucky and young;  
Julie's her name.  
The missing don't complain,  
and their song is always the same:

*(JULIE's theme, more distant now, as if sung over a radio with poor reception.)*

NOVA  
Whatever you do here,  
whatever you say here,  
whatever you see here,  
let it stay here.  
*(NOVA takes a pistol out from beneath her clothing.)*

Our rules aren't the rules  
that they teach in schools.  
The uncivil sun  
doesn't suffer fools.  
If you want protection,  
carry a gun.  
Out here in the desert, there's no place  
to run. *(Fade out.)*

**2 Scene One: The Graveyard Shift**

*(Sounds of a desert storm. On stage, the glow of a radio. Flashes of heat lightning spill in from windows on the sides of the stage. Lights up to reveal CORINA drinking wine coolers from a small glass, like shots. She is smoking and reading a magazine. IVAN, tucked behind the bar, fiddles with the radio, over which, as the music lowers, a voice is heard. TROOPER lurks upstage, slowly circling CORINA.)*

RADIO CHORUS *(Through the crackle and whine of a signal blown around by the storm, a flat, soothing Southern voice.)*

... and what is His promise tonight,  
His promise to the hungry,  
and His promise to the lonely,  
His promise to the sickly,  
and His promise to the dying?  
What is His promise to us this Christmastime?  
That he will save the world.

*(The signal swerves briefly to a different channel. Then static. CORINA brushes off TROOPER, who has descended on her from behind.)*

**3 CORINA** *(To IVAN.)*  
Can't you make it stop that din?

IVAN  
Sorry. It's the storm.

CORINA  
They should call this the Junkyard Inn.  
Broken is the norm.

TROOPER  
Such a pretty mouth on you.  
A pretty way to use it, too.

*(Ivan brings CORINA her third or fourth wine cooler on a tray.)*

IVAN  
Maybe I should shut it off.

CORINA  
I don't care what you do.

IVAN  
That sure is some storm.  
At Christmastime, too.

TROOPER  
What's Christmas to her?  
She's an agnostic Jew.

CORINA *(To herself.)*  
He acts like he knows me,  
but he doesn't know me.

IVAN *(To himself.)*  
She acts like she's free of him,  
but she always goes to him.

Tonight, it's all preaching.

TROOPER  
What crap are they're teaching?  
(IVAN switches off the radio.)

CORINA  
That's better. Thanks, Ivan.  
You're sweet,  
unlike some guys.

TROOPER  
Ha. Ivan, you sucker.  
She won't let you fuck her.  
At least not for free.

CORINA  
You leave him be.

4 TROOPER  
You drink, you cry,  
but you have your way,  
with guys who pay  
for the top of the line  
in cheap lingerie.  
It's quarter past nine.  
Is one on the way?  
Finish your wine.  
There's time.  
And after his lay,  
how about mine?

(With this last, TROOPER pulls a chair up  
close behind CORINA, straddling her.)

CORINA  
No one else is coming tonight.  
No need to be jealous, hon.  
Does your wife know you're here?  
Go polish your gun.

TROOPER (Sotto voce.)  
If you're nice,  
I might let you hold it.

(He reaches down the front of her shirt. CO-  
RINA tries to strike him. He grabs her arm.)

CORINA  
Get off me, you slob.  
Keep dreaming.

The day  
you own me  
is the day  
the desert turns to ice.

Go do your job.  
Take my advice.  
You think I want you?  
You better think twice.

TROOPER (Rising.)  
It's quarter past nine.  
Is one on the way?  
Finish your wine.  
There's time.  
And after his lay,  
how about mine?

TROOPER (Rebuffed.)  
Or would you prefer Ivan?  
I'll throw a five in.

(He tosses a bill on the bar then pulls out his sidearm  
and points it at Ivan, who ducks behind his book,  
then behind the bar.)

You want her?  
Don't worry.  
You're broke?  
It's on me.

(TROOPER takes back his money. He turns to  
CORINA.)

Don't keep me waitin', darlin'.  
I hate to wait.

(TROOPER exits. IVAN locks the door behind  
him. He begins fiddling with the radio.)

CORINA  
(Mocking.) Don't keep him waiting.  
He hates to wait.

5 I Hear the wind tonight?  
It's howling like sin tonight.  
I'm waiting alone  
for the end of the world.

Just one more drink tonight.  
Try not to think tonight.  
Who will save me  
from the end of the world?

Life's a bitter pill.  
Love's anatomical.  
Why am I living still?  
Death's economical.

He's in his car tonight.  
Clouds dim the stars tonight.  
I'll go to him  
at the end of the world.

Who rules my fate tonight,  
me or my date tonight?  
It won't be long  
till the end of the world.

Life's a bitter pill.  
Love's anatomical.  
Why am I living still?  
Death's economical.

6 (Ruefully.) Don't keep him waiting.  
He hates to wait.

(A special on TROOPER, who is waiting  
outside for CORINA.)

TROOPER  
Don't keep me waitin'.  
I hate to wait.

She acts like she's not  
just another lost loser  
washed up in this town.  
Beggars aren't choosers.

They come in, and I catch them  
on the way down.  
Some slip through my hands.  
A few hit the ground.

But sometimes I help them.  
Life's a roll of the dice:  
it can be hard,  
or it can be nice.

They all want a friend,  
a friend who can be trusted.  
Most act the part  
to avoid getting busted.

*(Light out on Trooper. The sound of a car horn  
from outside, a long low blast.)*

CORINA  
Now, I've kept him waiting.  
He hates to wait.

IVAN  
CORINA, forget him.  
I've seen this before.  
Don't open that door.  
You'll let in the storm.

CORINA  
He is the law he breaks.  
He takes what he likes  
and likes what he takes.  
And all laws fail.

CORINA  
I will go to him.  
It's better than jail.

*(She exits to the parking lot.)*

IVAN  
Corina, wait.  
It's not safe.

CORINA  
Ivan, don't block the door.  
Have you never settled for  
something before?

IVAN  
You should get far away from him.

CORINA  
I have to stay.  
I'm tired of running.  
Thank you, Ivan, for trying.  
I won't be long.

IVAN *(He unlocks the door, then locks it be-  
hind her.)*

Corina. She's gone.  
Corina, he's wrong.  
He's wrong.

## 7 Scene 2: Ivan and His Radio

IVAN *(At the window.)*  
She is only his passing whim,  
a bump in the night to him.

Another woman walked out that door.  
She's not around anymore.

*(IVAN tunes in the radio. A pure, comforting mu-  
sic, during which Ivan seems to almost embrace the  
radio, his cherished means of escape.)*

At night, all I have of my own  
is this radio.  
It's all that I know  
and all I need to know.

*(The signal is lost, then the preacher's voice returns.)*

RADIO CHORUS  
... and we are washed in the blood  
of the Lamb, children,  
washed in the blood  
that He shed for our souls.  
Our savior is with us this evening.  
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins  
of the world, grant us peace.

*(As he listens to the preacher, IVAN brings out the  
box of JULIE's things. He sorts through them, taking  
out first a dress, then a gun. He sights down it, then  
puts it back, frightened. The signal is lost.)*

IVAN  
A cop should protect you.  
But what good can I do?  
I'm only the night clerk.  
I watch the night come in,  
the darkness that stings  
like a snakebite until  
its poison runs  
through the heart of the desert  
and everything's quiet  
and perfectly still.

It almost peaceful,  
this waking oblivion,  
a good time for thinking  
and counting your sins.  
And each morning  
when sunlight redraws the horizon  
it drains off the cold  
sleep of death. Life begins.

Again, life begins.  
When will life begin?  
Out there, all he touches  
turns permanent darkness  
and the law is his pistol,  
the weapon he wields,  
like a shard of hot steel  
or a knife in a carcass.

Now sun-rise is only  
a prelude to blackness,  
as the clock sweeps away  
the last hint of the light,  
when evening is rolled out  
like a corpse on cold marble,  
and night comes down  
like a sledge on a spike.

*(Julie's wordless theme comes over the radio, which IVAN has turned back on. He tunes in the signal, and the singing becomes clearer.)*

8 Julie. Is it you?  
Julie, I knew  
you would never desert me.

RADIO/JULIE *(Sung by JULIE through static. IVAN climbs up on the table with the antenna wire in his hand to try to improve the reception.)*

I am the news from the air,  
a voice you can take anywhere,  
a message that floats on the wind,  
the music that plays in your mind.

*(Thunder. The lights go out. The signal is lost.)*

IVAN  
Julie!

*(IVAN switches on a lantern, then goes to the radio to hook up a car battery as an alternate*

12

*power source. He attempts to tune in the voice.)*

That song had a beautiful strain.  
Her voice has a beautiful name.

This is the song  
of a woman who's gone.  
She didn't stay here very long.

Julie, what happened to you  
when you walked out that door?

RADIO/JULIE *(JULIE enters.)*

I am the news from the air,  
a voice you can take anywhere,  
a message that floats on the wind,  
the music you hear in your mind.

IVAN  
I watched every night for your car.  
I gave up watching.

Now, here you are.

Julie.

JULIE  
Don't touch me, Ivan.  
I'm so frozen I hurt.  
I didn't get far.  
I died in the desert.

9  
The night I was shot  
I remember the stars,  
the sounds from the highway  
of west-streaming cars.

It happened so fast.  
When I heard the shot,  
I thought he'd missed me,  
then I felt hot

and numb all over  
the stars went black.  
I saw the sky  
as I lay on my back.

It felt like falling.  
It felt like flying.  
Then I looked down on him,  
as I was dying.

When he left,  
I became part the desert,  
miles from the road,  
alone in the dirt.

Now he has someone else  
in his power.  
It's happening again,  
as hour by hour,

night follows day,  
like a terrible specter.  
She's his next secret.  
Try to protect her.

*(She reaches toward IVAN, but knows that she cannot touch him. She turns to leave.)*

10 IVAN  
Julie, don't go.  
I still have your things.  
I've kept them hidden.

*(IVAN produces the box of her things from behind the counter.)*

Here are your rings,  
your pictures of home,  
the letters you hid,  
your Mexican pearls,  
the scarves for your head.

And this, Julie.  
What was it for?

*(He takes JULIE's pistol from the box.)*

JULIE  
Someone gave it to me  
for protection.  
It scared me.  
I kept it hidden away.  
Put them back, Ivan.  
I've got to go,  
before someone comes in.

IVAN  
Julie, please stay.

JULIE  
In the desert no laws protect you.

13

Evil flows in like an arroyo  
that carves a path to destroy you.

Use what you know  
and keep what happened  
from happening again.

It's happening again  
just like before.  
Another woman walked out that door.

You won't see me anymore.

IVAN  
Julie, you swore  
you'd take me with you  
when you left this place.  
Julie, I need you.

You were my firebird,  
in this dirty motel.  
I thought we could dig  
our way out of this hell.

We'd drive to the coast,  
that's what you told me,  
where every night  
the sun touches the sea.

We would be happy  
and forget the Mojave,  
where everything's broken  
and dirty and shoddy.

JULIE  
Your dream isn't over  
just because I am gone.  
That place still exists  
like the tune of a song  
that sticks in your head.  
It will always be yours.  
A place of your own,  
ideal and pure.

If you think of me, Ivan,  
do me a favor?  
Look after Corina.  
It's you who can save her.

*(JULIE exits.)*

IVAN  
Julie. Don't go.  
What should I do?  
Julie.

*(The radio tunes in.)*

[11] RADIO CHORUS  
And Thomas asked for the proof,  
the proof that he was risen.  
And he saw the wounds and he believed.  
Alleluia,  
Alleluia,  
Alleluia,  
Alleluia.

*(Lights out.)*

[12] Scene 3: Ivan's Ideal

*(It is now early morning, predawn. IVAN has fallen asleep with his head on the counter beside the radio. The lights are still out. One lantern glows near IVAN. NOVA enters with a flashlight and a gun, just as the lights come back on. IVAN wakes, startled.)*

NOVA  
Thank God, the lights are back.  
I nearly had a heart attack.  
My whole room just went black.  
You know you snore?

IVAN  
Jesus Christ, put that thing down.  
You're only scared of the sound  
of the wind when it pounds  
at your door.

NOVA  
The desert is crawling with scum.  
A woman's best friend is her gun.  
And my luck has run  
out before.

You'd better take care.  
My inner voice says beware.  
There's some evil shit out there,  
that's for sure.

*(A buzzer. IVAN unlocks the door. CORINA enters.)*

You see what I mean?  
What happened to you?

CORINA  
He's right behind me.  
Ivan, hide me.

IVAN  
Are you hurt?

CORINNA  
Hide me, please.  
If he finds me,  
he'll kill me.

*(CORINA huddles on the couch, clutching a pillow and slowly rocking.)*

NOVA *(Offering tea to CORINA.)*  
Drink some of this.  
It's cactus flower tea.  
It will help you to sleep.  
Sleep is what you need.

It's my own special brew:  
joshua leaves,  
creosote bushes,  
tumbleweeds, too.

Add honey mesquite  
and wild ephedra.  
Take catclaw arcadia  
and you will feel better.



The desert can heal.  
It knows what we feel,  
and what will become of us  
in this home in the wilderness.

*(Handing CORINA the gun.)*

And take this, too.  
If he comes after you,  
just hiding won't do.

[13] IVAN *(Bringing CORINA a blanket.)*

Ignore her rants.  
She knows zilch about plants.  
You're frozen.  
Corrina, you're bleeding.

CORINA *(To IVAN, showing him the blood  
on her hands.)*

It's his blood, not mine.  
I really fixed him this time.  
Maybe now he'll leave me alone.  
Ivan, I'm tired.  
I want to go home.

NOVA

It's almost morning.  
Soon the light will be coming  
over the dry land.

IVAN

It's almost morning.  
The storm is passing.  
Give me your hand.

CORINA

It's almost morning.  
Comfort's deceiving.  
It's no use believing  
that I can escape his demands.  
Comfort's deceiving.  
It runs out like sand.

[14] CORINA *(To herself.)*

Whose things are these?

*(Holding out a picture of JULIE.)*

Who is this girl in the picture,  
This child so happy,  
This child so pretty.  
I remember that world.  
When did life get so dirty and gritty?

I remember the long walk from school  
in the low autumn sun  
when the trees seemed on fire  
and I was the one

that the evening held  
in its gentle embrace  
and the damp air was soothing  
and warm on my face.

If I met her now  
the girl I was then, what could I say  
she could hope for today?

How lucky children are,  
with no thought of what's to come.  
They wouldn't get far, if they knew.

*(IVAN takes the picture from CORINA.)*

[15] IVAN

Her name was Julie.  
She was my firebird.  
She promised to save me.

NOVA

Too bad she ran off.

IVAN

She didn't run;  
she died in the desert.  
She was taken away.  
I saw her tonight.

NOVA

Sure, kid. You were dreaming!

IVAN

I was awake.  
I stood right beside her.  
She says we'll be safe.  
I believe what she said.

I know a place,  
a place without fear  
A place where disgrace  
doesn't mark every face.

I thought I could make  
a world of my own  
by being alone.  
I made a mistake.

The world can be beautiful.  
You will be free of him,  
I know you will.

The spirit breaks, but it will endure,  
like the song of the firebird,  
ideal and pure.

[16] Let's leave tonight.  
We'll start a new life.

Don't wait for that cop.  
He wants to hurt you.  
He'll never stop.

CORINA

It's too late for me.  
I can't leave here.  
I've nowhere to go.

NOVA

Well, you've got to go somewhere.  
You'd better get cooking  
before he comes looking for you.

IVAN

Corina, let's go.

CORINA

I want to believe in your firebird, Ivan.

I remember a world without fear.  
I can see it so clearly inside of my head.  
But it's so far away from here.

That's the problem with firebirds:  
they're mythical, distant, and dead.

**17** Scene Four: A Shot in the Dark

NOVA  
He's coming inside.  
We all better hide.

CORINA  
I'm too tired to run.  
I don't care if he finds me.

*(TROOPER enters from the parking lot. IVAN pulls the blanket over CORINA on the couch.)*

IVAN  
What happened to you?  
You don't look so good.  
How about a beer?  
I bet you could use one.

TROOPER  
Where is she?  
That bitch almost bit off me ear.  
Don't pretend like she's not around.  
I'll burn this whole place to the ground.

*(Seeing CORINA.)*

At night, the laws change.  
At night, I make the law.

NOVA  
I'll be in my room.

TROOPER  
Stay where you are.  
No one goes till I say so.

CORINA *(Coming out from under the blanket. She points NOVA's pistol at TROOPER.)*

Leave her alone.  
You want me?  
You found me.  
Now what will you do?

TROOPER  
Be careful.  
It's easy to lose your grip  
on your life:  
the twist of a knife or a slip  
down the stairs.  
When they find your body stripped  
in the desert,  
they write a report and ship it  
for filing.

Why are you smiling?  
I'll fix that smile.

CORINA *(Pulling out NOVA's gun.)*  
Don't come any closer.

TROOPER *(He starts to reach for his gun, then freezes.)*  
Are you sure you can use it?

IVAN  
Corina, wait.  
He'll kill you.

NOVA  
I'm leaving. I don't care what you do.

*(TROOPER pulls out his gun as NOVA rushes past and points it at CORINA.)*

CORINA *(Still holding her gun on TROOPER.)*  
Ivan, I'm so very tired.

TROOPER  
Well, then, say goodnight.  
It's almost over.  
Your kisses draw blood.  
You're already dead to me.

IVAN *(to Trooper)*  
No. Please wait!  
*(to Corina)*  
Corina, you can be free of him.  
Put that gun away.

CORINA  
Ivan, I'm so tired of running away.

NOVA  
I'm going to my room.

I don't care what you do.  
*(The lights flicker out, and a shot is heard. Then silence.)*

*(Slowly, music returns. A spotlight up on NOVA downstage.)*

**18** That was the last time I saw her.  
A shot in the dark  
like the harsh clack of thunder  
and I knew that he'd got her.

*(Lights down on NOVA. Lights up on CORINA, crumpled on the floor. After a moment, she rises to kneeling.)*

CORINA  
I was sure when the lights went out  
I was dead.  
I pointed my gun straight  
at his head.  
But I couldn't shoot him. I dropped it  
instead.

*(Lights back up on NOVA)*

NOVA  
I dropped to the floor.  
The smoke smelled like sulfur  
as I groped in the blackness  
and crawled out the door.

*(Lights back up on CORINA)*

CORINNA  
Then one shot rang out, and I waited  
for more,  
but the office was quiet as I lay  
on the floor,  
He missed,  
thank the lord.

*(Lights back up on NOVA)*

NOVA  
Afterward, silence.  
I didn't look back.  
Another life over.  
Life is violence.

*(Lights out on NOVA and CORINA. Lights up on IVAN.)*

IVAN *(With JULIE's gun in his hand.)*  
I knew in that second that I could save her.  
I took Julie's gun from the box of her things.  
I pointed and fired.

In the dark and the quiet,  
I knew he was dying.  
I knew when the lights came back on we  
would live.

[19] *(As the lights come up on IVAN and CORINA, TROOPER lies dead on the floor up-stage.)*

IVAN and CORINA

The storm is over.  
The sun is rising.  
CORINA *takes the gun from IVAN's hand, wipes it with her shirt, and drops it on the floor.)*

CORINA  
I want to go away from here.

IVAN  
Give me your hand.

[20] CORINA  
Where can we go?

IVAN  
It doesn't matter what we do  
or where we go.  
The unknown is better than  
the life we've known.  
We will learn to forget  
these desert voices,  
Somewhere we'll be free of them. I'll go  
there with you.

IVAN and CORINA  
The morning sky  
is perfect and blue.

*(joined by JULIE's wordless theme)*

Whatever we do here,  
whatever we say here,  
whatever we see here,  
let it stay here.

IVAN *(Out of the blackness, the CHORUS sings, joined by the voice of IVAN.)*

[21] CHORUS  
As bright the star of morning gleams,  
So Jesus sheddeth glorious beams  
Of light and consolation.  
Thy Word, O Lord,  
Radiance darting,  
Truth imparting,  
Gives salvation;  
Thine be praise and adoration!

IVAN  
The world warms with the touch of  
the sun,  
which follows even the coldest night  
with light and consolation.  
Into that light,  
Radiance darting,  
Storm departing,  
Headlong starting  
To unknown days and new salvation.

FINIS

---

Librettist **DAVID YEZZI** was one of the founders of Thick Description in New York City in 1988, acting in all of the company's shows in 1988 and 1989 and writing a verse drama for the company, *The Killer and the Corpse*. He is the author of *The Hidden Model* (TriQuarterly Books) and *Sad Is Eros* (Aralia Press). His poems and criticism have appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The New Republic*, *The Paris Review*, *The Yale Review* and elsewhere. Recipient of a Stegner Fellowship in poetry from Stanford University, he was director of the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street Y in New York City from 2001 to 2006. He is executive editor of *The New Criterion*.

**THICK DESCRIPTION** is one of the country's smallest professional theater companies, founded in New York City in 1988 by Karen Amano, Tony Kelly, Rick Martin, and David Yezzi and now based in San Francisco. The name comes from anthropologist Clifford Geertz's "The Interpretation of Cultures." Since its founding nearly 20 years ago, it has dedicated itself to the realization of a new American dramaturgy inclusive of America's diversity of race, culture, and sexual orientation. It seeks out artists who innovate and scripts that challenge; it continues to focus on representing the perspectives of people of color; and it is also concentrating on the development of new music theater works that draw inspiration from sources as varied as hip-hop and opera.

Composer **DAVID CONTE** is Professor of Composition at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Composer-In-Residence for Thick Description. He has received commissions from Chanticleer, the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, The Oakland-East Bay Symphony, Sonoma City Opera, the Dayton Philharmonic and the Stockton Symphony, and has composed songs for Barbara Bonney, Thomas Hampson, and Phyllis Bryn-Julson. He is the composer of three operas: *The Dreamers* (with librettist Philip Littell); *The Gift of the Magi* (with Nicholas Giardini, and recorded on ARSIS CD 141), *Firebird Motel* (with David Yezzi) and a musical, *The Passion of Rita St. James* (with John Stirling Walker). *The Gift of the Magi* has been produced at the San Francisco Conservatory, Winnipeg Opera, Asheville Lyric Opera, Muddy River Opera Company, and Opera South. Conte received degrees from Bowling Green State University and Cornell University, where he studied with Karel Husa, Robert Palmer, and Steven Stucky, and was a Fulbright Scholar in Paris where he was one of the last students of Nadia Boulanger. For Thick Description, he has scored five productions, including the premieres of the company's adaptations of *Iphigenia at the Bay of Aulis* and *Elektra*, the West Coast premieres of Thomas Disch's *Ben-Hur* and Horvath's *Figaro Gets a Divorce*, and the premiere of Octavio Solis's *Santos & Santos*. He has published over 60 works with E. C. Schirmer Music Company, Boston, and his music has been recorded by Chanticleer, Elektra, St. Olaf's Choir, The Choir of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., organist David Higgs, and many others. Conte co-wrote the film score for the documentary *Ballets Russes*, shown at the Sundance and Toronto Film Festivals in 2005, and the score for the PBS documentary *Orocco: Man of Fire*.

Mezzo-soprano **MILISSA CAREY**'s most recent engagements include the Broadway National Tour of *Evita*, directed by Hal Prince, and currently, Desiree in *A Little Night Music* at Pacific Alliance Theatre Company. An award winning actor and singer, Milissa has performed principal roles throughout the Bay Area with companies like AMTSJ, Theatreworks, Center Repertory Theater, San Jose Repertory Theatre, TheatreFirst, Thick Description, Foothill Music Theatre, Willows Theatre, 42nd Street Moon, Broadway by the Bay, California Conservatory Theater, Theatre Rhinoceros, San Francisco Playwrights Festival, PlayGround and George Coates Performance Works.

Baritone **MICAH EPPS**, a native of Houston, Texas, and his experience ranges from opera to classical and sacred choral literature. His operatic roles include Eumolpus in *Satyricon* by Lisa Scola Prosek; Kaiaphas and Tiberius in *Sub Pontio Pilato* by Erling Wold; Creon in Mark Alburger's *Antigone*, the Secret Policeman in *The Consul*; Figaro and Bartolo in *The Marriage of Figaro*; Guillermo in *Così fan tutte*; Ctseipe in *Penelope*; Sarastro, 1st Priest and Armored Man in *The Magic Flute*; Simone in *Gianni Schicci*; and Masetto in *Don Giovanni*. He has performed as a soloist in such groups as the San Mateo Masterworks Chorale (An Eastern European Tour soloist), and the San Francisco Symphony Chorus. He was recently soloist in Mozart's *Requiem* in Hermosillo, Mexico.

Tenor **MARK HERNANDEZ** has sung over fifty roles with San Francisco Bay Area companies such as Berkeley Opera, Cinnabar Opera, Lamplighters, Music Theater Collaborative, Pocket Opera, Thick Description, and West Bay Opera. An experienced performer of contemporary music, he has worked with several composers on their operas, including Hector Armienta (*River of Women, Z*), David Conte (*Firebird Motel, The Dreamers, The Passion of Rita St. James*), Myron Fink (*The Conquistador*), Carla Lucero (*Wuornos, Sor Juana*), Henry Mollicone (*Emperor Norton, The Face on the Barroom Floor*), and Conrad Susa (*Transformations*). Mark has worked as a teaching artist for San Francisco Opera, San Diego Opera, and West Bay Opera, and has sung with San Francisco Opera's Extra Chorus for several seasons.

Soprano **JULIE QUEEN** is a San Francisco based singer/performer whose performance antics on ropes, trapezes, in cages, in startling operas and in diverse venues from dive bar to concert hall, have made her uncategorizable. She has performed in many premieres of new work ranging from the opera *Wuornos* in the title role about convicted serial killer Aileen Wuornos, to the role of Frida in an opera about Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Julie has sung in concert with the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Kent Nagano. She is a co-founder of the interdisciplinary performance group, The Qube Chixwho have performed in theaters and clubs throughout the Bay Area as well as The Knitting Factory and CBGB's in New York. She has collaborated on a new opera theater piece, *Burning Louise*, which premiered in 2004, and she is also co-directing/producing her first documentary film, *Tango Stories* with her filmmaker husband Paul Lundahl.

Soprano **SHAWNETTE SULKER** has been described by the San Francisco Chronicle as a singer "... displaying a bright, superbly controlled soprano with perfectly placed coloratura." A native of Guyana, Ms. Sulker has been a featured artist in two San Francisco Opera productions: *The Mother of Us All* and *Louise*, and the joint productions between San Francisco Opera and The Crucible of *Dido and Aeneas*. Shawnette has performed with the Natchez Festival of Music, American Bach Soloists, Mark Morris Dance Group, Mendocino Music Festival, San Francisco Choral Society, West Bay Opera, and Berkeley Opera. Her repertoire includes roles in *Die Fledermaus*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Treemonisha*, *La bohème*, and *Porgy and Bess*. Her concert repertoire includes the soprano solos in Handel's *Messiah*, Mahler's *Symphony No. 4*, Mozart's *Exsultate, jubilate*, Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*, Bach's *Non sa che sia dolore*, and Fauré's *Requiem*.

Conductor **JEFFREY THOMAS** is Artistic and Music Director of the American Bach Soloists and the American Classical Soloists, with whom he has directed and conducted recordings of more than 25 cantatas, the *Mass in B Minor*, the *Musical Offering*, motets, chamber music, and works by Schütz, Pergolesi, Vivaldi, Haydn, and Beethoven. He has appeared with the Baltimore, Berkeley, Boston, Detroit, Houston, National, Rochester, Minnesota, and San Francisco symphony orchestras; with the Vienna Symphony and the New Japan Philharmonic; with virtually every American baroque orchestra; and in Austria, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Mexico. He has performed at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Spoleto USA Festival, Ravinia Festival, Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Berkeley Festival and Exhibition, Boston Early Music Festival, Bethlehem Bach Festival, Göttingen Festival, Tage Alte Musik Festival in Regensburg, E. Nakamichi Baroque Festival in Los Angeles, the Smithsonian Institution, and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, and he recently collaborated as conductor with the Mark Morris Dance Group in their production of Handel's *Dixit Dominus*. Before devoting all of his time to conducting, he was one of the first recipients of the San Francisco Opera Company's prestigious Adler Fellowships. He was artist-in-residence at the University of California, where he is now associate professor of music (Barbara K. Jackson Chair in Choral Conducting) and director of choral ensembles in the Department of Music at UC Davis. In 2001 he was designated a UC Davis Chancellor's Fellow.

Bassist **ALDEN F. COHEN**, born in San Francisco, is currently a free-lance musician, performing with orchestras and small ensembles in the Bay Area. Mr. Cohen is an artist in residence with the Presidio and A. P. Gianini Middle Schools, teaching the double bass. He also teaches music theory at his *alma mater*, the San Francisco School of the Arts High School (SOTA).

Cellist **ROBERT HOWARD** has performed in festivals around the United States and in Europe including Tanglewood, Verbier, Spoleto, Accademia Chigiana, and the Sandor Vegh Academy in Prague. Robert currently divides his time between teaching and performing chamber music.

Pianist **KEISUKE NAKAGOSHI** began his study of piano at age ten under the tutelage of Kaori Fujiwara. At age 18, he came to the United States to study piano and composition. He has been a staff accompanist at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and performs regularly in the San Francisco Bay Area, Japan, Germany and many other cities in the US as both accompanist and soloist.

**JONATHAN RUSSELL** is active in the Bay Area as clarinetist, conductor, and composer. A native of Poughkeepsie, New York, he has performed locally with groups such as the Marin Symphony and the Parallel Ensemble. He conducts the recently founded San Francisco Repertory Orchestra, and he has had his compositions performed by many ensembles including the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra, San Francisco Conservatory Orchestra, San Francisco Conservatory Chorus, and the Woodstock

Violinist **MEGUMI STOHS** is a student at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Originally from Portland, Oregon, she has taken part in the Olympic, Aspen, Marrowstone, and Kneisel Hall Music Festivals and has received honors from the Oregon Symphony Corbett Competition, the Oregon Association of Music Clubs and the Willamette Valley Fiddling Association. Megumi is a member of the Chabrier String Quartet, and she has performed as a soloist with Portland's Columbia Symphony Orchestra, the Oregon Sinfonietta, the San Francisco Conservatory String Orchestra and the Sapporo Philharmonic of Hokkaido, Japan.

Mark Hernandez (IVAN) and Julie Queen (JULIE), from Scene 2 of *Thick Description's* Production.  
—photo: Rick Martin



Milissa Carey (NOVA), Mark Hernandez (IVAN), and Shawnette Sulker (CORINA) near the end of Scene 3 in *Thick Description's* production.  
—photo: Rick Martin

