

Press Release

BERLIN, May 2026



International Performing Arts Center

A BEE IN THE HEART OF HER

Music Theater | Premiere (World Premiere): June 24, 2026 | 8pm

Additional Performances: June 25 to 27, 2026 | 8pm

If Nora Helmer, Henrik Ibsen's famous female protagonist, could speak anything besides Henrik's text, what would she say? How about Hedda Gabler, Mrs. Sørby or Ellida Wangel? Can characters express themselves beyond their playwright? In song, perhaps?

This is exactly where Sibyl Kempson's alchemical new work *A Bee in the Heart of Her* comes in. Over the course of a weaving workshop for recovering Ibsen women led by Mrs. Sørby in a rundown community center, these trailblazing characters confront mistranslations, misunderstood origins, mistaken fates, mansplaining and everything else that Ibsen got wrong, in detail.

With Kempson's lyrical text set to original music composed by Robert M. Johanson (Nature Theater of Oklahoma), these women tell their own stories and finally set the record straight, once and for all.

Music

In writing the music for *A Bee in the Heart of Her*, Robert M. Johanson gave each of Ibsen's heroines a distinct style of music from Appalachian Folk to New England Sea Shanties to 70's Hard Rock to Chamber Pop. These styles begin to mix and morph and the characters personalities shift flowing through the soup of American popular music and releasing into operatic moments of high drama. Trigger warning: there is also some Hall and Oates and Billy Joel!

Background Information

A Bee in the Heart of Her was awarded an Ibsen Scope Grant. Ibsen Scope Grants are awarded every two years by the Ibsen Scope Festival to innovative projects in the field of theater and the performing arts that highlight world issues through the works of Henrik Ibsen.

<https://ibsen-scope.com/grants/winner/a-bee-in-the-heart-of-her/>

A Bee in the Heart of Her is a collaboration between English Theatre Berlin | International Performing Arts Center, 7 Daughters of Eve Thtr & Perf. Co. and Ibsen Scope Festival in Skien (Norway), supported by the University of Texas (Dallas) and the Mercury Store in Brooklyn (New York).

The Mercury Store offers theater artists in New York City access to people, space and time to draft in three dimensions. Alongside a fully equipped studio, residencies include work with an ensemble and opportunities for artistic collaboration. <https://www.mercurystore.com/>

English Theatre Berlin | International Performing Arts Center is supported by Berlin's Senate Department for Culture and Community.

The world premiere of *A Bee in the Heart of Her* is made possible thanks to an Ibsen Scope Grant from the Ibsen Scope Festival in Skien, Norway, an organization dedicated to highlighting world issues through the works of Henrik Ibsen and an axh grant from the University of Texas at Dallas. It was developed over the course of multiple workshops at English Theatre Berlin | International Performing Arts Center (thanks to Theater Thikwa for the use of their studio!) as well as The Mercury Store in Brooklyn, NY.

Biographies

Sibyl Kempson writes and makes durational, immersive, and proscenium performance, as well as visual narratives on film and video for the stage, museum, chamber, altar, specific site, and for screens large and small. She has collaborated with experimental theater companies such as Elevator Repair Service, Big Dance Theater, the Rude Mechs, Richard Maxwell/NYC Players, Nature Theater of Oklahoma and David Neumann/Advanced Beginner Group and many other artists and groups. Works have been presented at New York Theatre Workshop, the Walker Art Center, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Kitchen NYC, New York Live Arts, the Chocolate Factory Theater, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, P.S. 122 (now Performance Space New York), Dixon Place, Theater Bonn, Teater Ibsen and elsewhere. Sibyl is currently Assistant Professor of Theater at the Harry W. Bass School of Art, Humanities and Technology at the University of Texas at Dallas. This fall, she will take the helm of the master's program in playwriting at Brown University.

Robert M. Johanson is a freelance performer/composer/director in New York City. He is a founding member of Nature Theater of Oklahoma and has performed with them in *No Dice, Poetics: a Ballet Brut*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *No President*; and composed music for and performed in their epic cycle *Life and Times: Episodes 1-9*, *Burt Turrido: an Opera* and most recently *Pizza or A Door in the Dark Does Not Dance*. Robert has also created and composed his own pieces. He has worked with many other companies both in New York City and abroad including: Elevator Repair Service, *7 Daughters of Eve*, *Radiohole*, *Pan Pan*, *The Civilians* and *Jim Findlay*. He was a frequent guest teacher at the Norwegian Theatre Academy, and has given workshops and master classes at Rutgers, Columbia University and MIT. The most recent production of Nature Theater of Oklahoma, *Pizza or A Door in the Dark Does Not Dance* has been invited to the 2026 edition of Impulse Festival.

Daniel Brunet is a director, performer, educator and translator. He was born in Syracuse, New York in 1979 and received a BA in theater arts and film studies from Boston College. He moved to Berlin in 2001 with the support of a Fulbright Scholarship. Brunet became Producing Artistic Director of English Theatre Berlin | International Performing Arts Center in 2012 and established an artistic concept there that mirrors his own work: English as an international working language. Brunet has received multiple awards for his over thirty play translations, including the Literary Fellowship in Translation from the U.S. National Endowment of the Arts. As an actor, he received a prize from the jury of the 2024 Kurzfilmsause Freiburg Festival for his lead role in the short film *Quintessential Boredom*, which also won the audience award for best film. Brunet has served as the speaker for the performing arts within the Speakers' Circle of the Coalition of the Independent Arts and as a co-opted board member of LAFT – Landesverband freie darstellende Künste Berlin e.V. since the end of 2018. He has taught at the New School University in New York and BIMM University and Macromedia University of Applied Sciences in Berlin.

Credits

Written by Sibyl Kempson | Directed by Sibyl Kempson & Daniel Brunet | Original Music by Robert M. Johanson | Performed by Sibyl Kempson, Robert M. Johanson & Daniel Brunet | Lighting Design by Christian Maith | Projection Mapping by Gabby Espana & Raine Wofford | Assistant Directors: Alejandra Rodríguez González and Stanislava Švekušová | Production Assistant: Joseph Schumm

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