

# The Hidden Sky

Music & Lyrics by Peter Foley  
Book by Kate Chisholm

Based on the short story "The Masters" by Ursula K. Le Guin

## SYNOPSIS

The world as we know it is no more. An apocalypse, brought on by the misuse of technology, has ravaged the earth. The sun, obscured by clouds of ash, is seldom seen, and is worshipped as God. A society has arisen where science, mathematics, and the pursuit of knowledge are strictly forbidden by the ruling Priests. Invention and scientific inquiry have been declared heresies. Even Arabic numerals are prohibited and have been forgotten. In this repressive theocracy, the only machine permitted is the steam engine, maintained and protected by the secretive and elite Engine Masters. Forbidden from computing, they must use cumbersome tables of Roman numerals to look up simple calculations.

*The Hidden Sky* is performed by chorus of storytellers who celebrate the story of Ganil Kalson, a bright young woman from the town of Adan, a walled city that few have ever dared to leave. The story begins as Ganil is initiated to the high rank of Engine Master. Full of hope for her future, she feels she has found her home—through her work and with her betrothed, Lani. She is sure that as a Master, she will finally be taught the secret, ancient knowledge—in particular, how to compute. Ganil quickly discovers that her job is routine, and desperately longs to learn more. Her boss, Lee, chastises her and reminds Ganil that it is more important to preserve their fragile society than to fulfill their own personal ambitions.

Not satisfied, Ganil becomes perfect prey for her co-Master Mede, who has observed how smart and hungry for knowledge she is. He teaches her the unfamiliar and forbidden concept of zero, and Ganil is captivated. Sharing their longing for knowledge and awakening, Ganil and Mede become instant friends. Mede tries to recruit Ganil to join an underground community of Seekers (scientists and mathematicians), but Ganil is terrified by the suggestion of heresy. Distraught, she seeks advice from Lani, who is studying to become a Priest. He tells her a cautionary tale warning her against seeking knowledge, thereby reinforcing the values of the society.

Ganil believes she is back on the straight path but then is swept away by a revelatory dream in which she makes a major mathematical discovery. After sharing her discovery with Mede and learning more from him, she realizes there is no turning back and decides that she must meet his teacher. Mede introduces her to Yin, an older woman mathematician, and Ganil is welcomed into the community of Seekers—her new home. As Ganil becomes a Seeker, Lani is ordained to the Priesthood.

Ganil blossoms in her new secret community and quickly advances in her studies. Mede is determined to overthrow the Priests by debunking the belief that the Sun is God and enlists Ganil to help him prove his theory. While deep at work, solving equations for Mede and the other Seekers, Ganil starts playing number games. This playful search leads her to uncover a numerical series which she realizes occurs as a pattern throughout nature—from flower petals to the proportions of the body, to spirals—and she is completely transformed by her mystical journey of discovery. Certain that she has seen the mind of God at work in the patterned beauty of creation, she now finds herself in conflict with the potentially destructive revolution being planned by Mede and the Seekers.

When the sky finally clears, Mede gets caught trying to measure the Sun, and is condemned to die as a heretic. Ganil is arrested and tortured for information, but is released. After witnessing Mede's execution, Ganil feels completely lost. She knows she can't go back to work for Lee or be content with Lani, denying who she really is; nor can she participate in the Seekers' path to destruction, and the cycle of violence it implies. Yin tries to persuade Ganil to seek revenge, but Ganil realizes she must pursue her vision of truth and unity—of a world in which science and religion are not at war with one another—even if it means leaving the only home she has ever known. Surrendering to her destiny, Ganil walks outside the city walls for the first time in her life, and begins her solitary journey in search of a new way, toward her true home.

## ARTIST BIOS

**PETER FOLEY** (1967–2021) was a composer, lyricist, arranger, orchestrator, and music director. Musical theater works include *The Hidden Sky* (world premiere at Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia, nominated for six Barrymore Awards; New York premiere at Prospect Theater Company), *The Names We Gave Him* (Book & Lyrics by Ellen McLaughlin; commissioned by the Public Theater), *I Capture the Castle* (Lyrics by Marion Adler; Book by Cara Reichel; commissioned by Signature Theatre), *Bloom*, an original musical comedy, *The Bear*, a short operetta, and *Whitechapel*, a large-scale original musical. He received the Richard Rodgers Award, Stephen Sondheim Award, Jonathan Larson Foundation Award and an NEA New American Works grant for his music and lyrics to *The Hidden Sky*.

Other stage works include music for “To Sing” in Mark Campbell’s *Songs from An Unmade Bed* (New York Theatre Workshop; original cast album on Sh-K-Boom Records) and scores for several plays, including *Newton’s Universe* (St. Ann’s Warehouse), *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Henry V* (Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey), and Andre Gregory’s *Alice in Wonderland* (Berkeley Theater Project). Peter’s songs have been performed at Lincoln Center’s American Songbook, Kennedy Center’s Millennium Stage, the New York Festival of Song, Symphony Space, Town Hall, Joe’s Pub, and many other venues.

Peter composed scores and themes for numerous television documentaries, including *Listening to America with Bill Moyers* and seven seasons of the Emmy-nominated, Peabody Award-winning PBS series *Art:21*.

Peter was a fellow/resident artist at the MacDowell Colony, Millay Colony, Eugene O’Neill Theater Center National Music Theater Conference, and Sundance Institute Playwrights Retreat at Ucross. He was an alumnus of the BMI Lehman Engle Musical Theatre Workshop, New Dramatists’ Composer-Librettist Studio, American Lyric Theater Composer Librettist Development Program, and Yale University.

**KATE CHISHOLM** is an award-winning writer, director, and multidisciplinary theater artist. She has directed original works at Prospect Theater Company, The Culture Project, La MaMa, St. Ann’s Warehouse, Joe’s Pub, Baltimore Theatre Project, Columbia University, and Towson University. Directing highlights include: the New York premiere of *The Hidden Sky* (Prospect Theater Company); *Newton’s Universe*, a play for actor and puppets, which she also wrote and designed (St. Ann’s Warehouse); and the world premiere of *Heartfield*, Kenneth Allan Vega’s musical about the German photomontage artist John Heartfield (Baltimore Theatre Project).

As a writer, Kate won a Richard Rodgers Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for *The Hidden Sky*. *The Hidden Sky* premiered at the Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia, where it was nominated for six Barrymore Awards, including Outstanding New Play; it was subsequently produced at Spirit of Broadway Theater (12 Spirit Award nominations, including Best New Book and Best New Work), Prospect Theater Company, and in concert at Ars Nova and Joe’s Pub.

Kate holds a BA in English from Yale University and an MFA in Theatre (Directing) from Towson University; she also studied acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse and theatre education at Hunter College through the Lincoln Center Scholars Program. She has performed in dozens of plays, musicals, cabarets, and concerts in NYC and regionally. She is an alum of the Lincoln Center Theater Director’s Lab and St. Ann’s Warehouse Puppet Lab.