The Downstairs
66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003
October 12 - 29, 2017

in association with
Ping Chong + Company
presents
ALAXSXA | ALASKA

LA MAMA
EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE CLUB

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ALAXSXA | ALASKA

Created by:
Ping Chong, Ryan Conarro,
Gary Upay’aq Beaver (Yup’ik), & Justin Perkins

Directors:
Ping Chong & Ryan Conarro

Performers:
Gary Upay’aq Beaver, Justin Perkins, Ryan Conarro

Puppet and Object Design by Justin Perkins
Video & Projections Design by Katherine Freer
Lighting Design by Marika Kent
Sound Design by Lucy Peckham
Costume Design by Stefani Mar
Screen Design by Seth Kirby

Yuraq Song, Music, Dance by
Gary Upay’aq Beaver & Wassilie Berlin, Sr. (Yup’ik)

Mask Design by
Phillip Charette (Yup’ik), Alaska Native Heritage Center

Qaspeq Collaborator: Loni Hoover (Yup’ik)

Executive Director, Ping Chong + Company: Bruce Allardice

Cover Photo by Adam Nadel

The performance of ALAXSXA | ALASKA runs approximately 85 minutes with no intermission.
ABOUT THE SHOW

“Alaxsxa” (uh-LUK-shkuh) is the indigenous Unangax tribal name for “the mainland,” mirrored by and juxtaposed with the Anglicized version of the place name, “Alaska.” In 2015, Ping Chong, Ryan Conarro, Justin Perkins, and Gary Upay’aq Beaver began a series of developmental residencies in Alaska and New York to create a work exploring cross-cultural encounter in Alaska. In close collaboration with the design team, the creators interwove historical narratives; personal stories from Gary and Ryan; and the recorded voices of numerous Alaskans who were interviewed by the artists.

PRODUCTION SUPPORT

ALAXSXA | ALASKA is made possible with funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Theater Project with lead funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This production is a National Performance Network/Visual Artists Network (NPN/VAN) Creation and Development Fund Project co-commissioned by Bunnell Street Art Center in partnership with Juneau Arts and Humanities Council, La MaMa and NPN with logistical support from the University of Alaska Anchorage Department of Theater & Dance and the Alaska Native Heritage Center. The Creation and Development Fund is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more information: www.npnweb.org.

This production is made possible with additional support from National Endowment for the Arts; New York State Council on the Arts; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; Jim Henson Foundation; The Hugh and Jane Ferguson Foundation, Ford Foundation, The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, The Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, The Howard Gilman Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, and The Lucille Lortel Foundation, the Network of Ensemble Theaters’ Travel & Exchange Network, supported by lead funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; the Audience (R)Evolution: Travel Grant program, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group. Production design support provided by the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Design Enhancement Fund, a program of the Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York (A.R.T./New York).

ALAXSXA | ALASKA was developed, in part, with assistance from The Orchard Project, a program of The Exchange (www.exchangenyc.org). The project was also developed through residencies at Bunnell Street Arts Center, Lincoln Center Education, Downtown Art, and La MaMa Great Jones Studio.

ALAXSXA | ALASKA premiered at University of Alaska Anchorage and toured the state in September 2017.
Ping Chong (co-director and co-creator) is an internationally acclaimed artist and pioneer in the use of media in the theater. Since 1972, he has created over 100 productions which have been presented worldwide including Collidescope: Adventures in Pre and Post Racial America (with Talvin Wilks at University of Maryland in 2014, University of Massachusetts Amherst in 2015, Wake Forest University in 2017), Throne of Blood (2010, Brooklyn Academy of Music and Oregon Shakespeare Festival), Cathay: Three Tales of China (2005, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts), Kwaidan (1998, Center for Puppetry Arts, The Henson International Festival & Puppet Theater) and Deshima (1990, Mickery Workshop). He has presented 25 productions at La MaMa since 1978, including Angels of Swedenborg with the Great Jones Repertory in 2011. In 1992, he created the first Undesirable Elements production, an ongoing series of community specific, interview-based works performed by the individuals themselves. Beyond Sacred: Voices of Muslim Identity premiered at LaGuardia Performing Arts Center and continues to tour. Beyond Sacred has been performed over 60 times in eight states and was broadcast on WNYC. Theatre Communications Group has published two volumes of his plays, The East West Quartet and Undesirable Elements: Real People, Real Lives, Real Theatre. Ping Chong is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a USA Artist Fellowship, two BESSIE awards, two OBIE awards, a Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship and a National Medal of Arts.

Ryan Conarro (co-director, co-creator, and performer) is a theater maker, arts educator, and a facilitator of community engagement. At Ping Chong + Company (PCC), he is Artistic Collaborator in Residence and Education & Community Projects Associate. Conarro moved from New York to Alaska in 2001 as a journalist for Nome’s KNOM Radio, and became a long-time collaborator with Alaska State Council on the Arts, the Alaska Arts Education Consortium, the Department of Education State System of Support, the Kennedy Center Partners In Education Program, and KTOO Media. He’s a company member with Alaska’s Perseverance Theatre, Resident Artist with international ensemble Theater Mitu, and a teaching artist for Maine’s Deer Isle-Stonington Schools. Ryan was a lead teaching artist for Lower Kuskokwim School District’s 7-year arts integration program, Project Pilinguat, where he collaborated with Gary Upay’aq Beaver. The TCG Leadership One-on-One Fellowship brought Ryan to PCC in 2014. With Ping Chong and Sara Zatz, he co-wrote PCC’s interview-based work Beyond Sacred: Voices of Muslim Identity. Ryan’s work has been seen at the Kennedy Center; Dixon Place; the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian; Oregon Contemporary Theatre; Stonington Opera House; Gainesville Theatre Alliance; and numerous Alaska venues. Recognitions include the Rasmuson Foundation Individual Artist Award, Connie Boochever Fellowship, Ann Shaw Fellowship for Arts Education, and three Alaska Broadcasters Association Goldie Awards. www.ryanconarro.com
Justin Perkins (co-creator, puppet designer, and performer) is a puppet artist and performer who has appeared in works by David Neumann, Tom Lee (Shank’s Mare, La MaMa, Ringling International Arts Festival), Lake Simons, Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew, Patti Bradshaw, Puppet Cinema, Unitards, innotlost, as well as multiple works at Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater, Cosmic Bicycle, PuppetBloc at Dixon Place, Sinking Ship Productions’ Puppet Playlist and more. As a puppet designer and maker, he has built for BAM (The Hard Nut promotional videos), Basil Twist (Sisters’ Follies, ongoing studio work), regular performances for Friends’ Seminary’s theater program, TheaterWorksUSA, New York Musical Theater Festival, New York Children’s Theater Festival, Swedish Cottage, Unitards. He created and directed a puppet and live video adaptation of Gulliver’s Travels during St. Ann’s Warehouse’s Puppet Lab 2014. Justin studied theater at Vassar and Sarah Lawrence Colleges, and is a teacher of puppetry, theater and filmmaking in schools and community centers around New York. www.justinaperkins.com

Gary Upay’aq Beaver (Yup’ik) (co-creator, musician and choreographer, and performer) was born in Bethel, Alaska and raised in his family’s village of Kasigluk. He began learning yuraq (Yup’ik drum and dance) as a child at Kasigluk’s Akiuk Memorial School. He credits four elders as his primary teachers: Kalila Slim, Wassilie Berlin, Wassilie Nicholas, and Alexie Nicholas. Gary is leader of the Kasigluk dance group and has taught yuraq at schools throughout southwest Alaska, including Akula Elitnaurviat, Akiuk Memorial School, Yupiit School District, and for the village of Akiak. He was lead drummer, singer, and dancer for the multidisciplinary event This Is Who We Are in 2011 at Bethel Cultural Center, a performance of traditional Yup’ik stories as songs, dances, theatrical pieces, and digital stories, a year-long project directed by Ryan Conarro. He has performed traditional and contemporary work in Bethel at the annual Cama’i Festival and Mink Festival; in Anchorage at the Alaska Federation of Natives convention; on Quyana Alaska television; and in villages throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim region.

Lucy Peckham (sound design) lives in Anchorage, Alaska, and is a composer/arranger, live engineer, and field recordist, as well as sound designer. Her work is characterized by her musicality, and her delight in recording and utilizing unique sounds in her designs. Some of her favorites have been collected at museums such as the Spark Museum of Electric Invention, the Antique Vibrator Museum, and the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum. Lucy has recorded environmental and human-made sounds on three continents, but Alaska remains her chosen aural home. As an engineer, she recently live-mixed the first opera ever produced in Nepal (Arjuna’s Dilemma) for One World Theatre, Kathmandu. Regional theatres include Perseverance Theatre, Intiman, and the Old Globe Theatre. Documentary work includes Alaska’s Marine Highway. Lucy is a recipient of an L.A. Critics Circle Dramalogue Award. www.both-ears.com

Katherine Freer (video installation and projections) is a multimedia designer working in theater, installation, and film. Recent designs include: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (Indiana Repertory Theater and Syracuse Stage, dir. Risa
Brainin), Peculiar Patriot (National Black Theatre, dir. Talvin Wilks), Detroit 67 (Chautauqua Theater Company, dir. Steve Broadnax) The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga (TheatreWorks, dir. Leslie Martinson), Dial M For Murder (Indiana Repertory Theater, dir. James Still), Crane: on Earth, In Sky (Lied Center, dir. Maija Garcia), Mary Poppins (Syucose Stage, dir. Peter Amster), Macbeth (Richard Rodgers Amphitheater, dir. Carl Cofield), The Wholehearted (Z space, dir. Suli Holum and Deborah Stein), Poster Boy (Williamstown Theater Festival, dir. Stafford Arima), The Great Gatsby (Indiana Repertory Theater, dir. Peter Amster), Stet (The Abingdon, dir. Tony Speciale), The Christians (The Wilma, dir. Tim Bond), Collidescope 2.0 (UMASS Amherst, dir. Ping Chong and Talvin Wilks), and The Glass Menagerie (Syucose Stage, dir. Tim Bond). Katherine is a Helen Hayes nominee and an Innovative Theater Award nominee. She is a founding member of Imaginary Media. For more info, portfolio, and full production history please visit: www.katherinefreer.com

Marika Kent (lighting design) is a New York City based designer. Recent/upcoming theater and dance: Beyond Sacred (Ping Chong + Co), Piano Tales (James & Jerome), Public Enemy (The Pearl), Abigail’s Party (The Barrow Group), Now is the Time... (Little Lord), How To Hamlet; Rhinbecca, NY; You on the Moors Now (Theater Reconstruction Ensemble), No Realists Allowed (Whitey Jacobs Dance Collective), No Words; Box; Rainbow (Ariel Rivka Dance). www.marikakent.com

Stefani Mar (costumes) is an artist, textile designer & costume designer based in New York City. She has had the pleasure of designing costumes for Ping Chong for a variety of different projects since the 90s, including the re-mounting of Angels of Swedenborg (La MaMa); Throne of Blood (Oregon Shakespeare Festival, BAM); Cathay (Seattle Repertory Theatre; New Victory Theatre, Kennedy Center); Reason (Market Theatre); Edda (Lincoln Center); Pojagi (La MaMa and DMZ 2000, Korea); Curlew River (Spoleto Festival); After Sorrow (La MaMa). She has also designed for dance companies including Urban Bush Women, Alvin Ailey & Muna Tseng & Co. She was nominated for the Henry Hewes Design Award for Cathay. She is currently Sr. Textile Designer for Eileen Fisher, Inc.

Ping Chong + Company produces theatrical works addressing the important cultural and civic issues of our times, striving to reach the widest audiences with the greatest level of artistic innovation and social integrity. The company was founded in 1975 by leading theatrical innovator Ping Chong with a mission to create works of theater and art that explore the intersections of race, culture, history, art, media and technology in the modern world. Today, Ping Chong + Company produces original works by a close-knit ensemble of affiliated artists, under the artistic leadership of Ping Chong. Productions range from intimate oral history projects to grand scale cinematic multidisciplinary productions featuring puppets, performers, and full music and projection scores. The art reveals beauty, precision, and a commitment to social justice.

Visit pingchong.org and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (@pingchongco) for more about us and upcoming shows and events in your area.
Advisory Partners:
Alaska Native Heritage Center (Annette Evans-Smith, Loren Anderson, Stephen Blanchett); Moses Dirks and Ethan Petticrew for Unangan language support.

Alaskan interviewees whose voices appear in the performance: Yaayuk Alvanna-Stimpfle, Richard Beneville, Annie Conger, Margaret Conway, Jim Dory, Donna Erickson, Jens Irelan, Qutuq Irelan, Kyung Kang, Marilyn Koezuna-Irelan, Melanie Redington, Todd Sherwood, Sue Steinacher, Katiya Simonsson, Thomas Simonsson, Clarence Towarak, Ana Verzone, Brad Webster.

These and many other collaborating interviewees are featured on our web archive project, encountersalaska.org, created with generous support from the Alaska Humanities Forum.

Photos used in projection design: Karla Andrews, Katie Basile, Gary Beaver, Robin Child, Ryan Conarro, Micah Heakin, Sue Steinacher, Floyd Ulroan

Special Thanks

ENCOUNTERS : ALASKA
a web archive of real Alaskan stories from across the state

During the making of the show, Ping Chong + Company artists traveled to numerous Alaskan communities, asking questions about cross-cultural encounter in the Last Frontier.

The stories are shared here in a growing, curated archive: encountersalaska.org

Join us in the lobby post-show to share your very own story about cross-cultural encounters.

ALAXSXIA | ALASKA and encountersalaska.org are projects of Ping Chong + Company. Visit pingchong.org to learn more.
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The Downstairs

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