

**Hopkins Center
for the Arts**
at Dartmouth

presents

The Metropolitan Opera



Grounded

Jeanine Tesori / Libretto by George Brant

Saturday, October 19, 1 pm

Loew Auditorium • Dartmouth College • 2024

*Free tickets for Dartmouth students to attend The Met: Live in HD are supported by a gift from
Cynthia and Jeffrey Manocherian P'15, '18*

Grounded

Jeanine Tesori / Libretto by George Brant

Duration: 2 hours, 45 minutes including intermission

(Cast in order of vocal appearance)

Jess.....	Emily D’Angelo
Also Jess.....	Ellie Dehn
Eric	Ben Bliss
Sensor.....	Kyle Miller
Commander	Greer Grimsley
Conductor.....	Yannick Nézet-Séguin
Production.....	Michael Mayer
Set Designer.....	Mimi Lien
Costume Designer	Tom Broecker
Lighting Designer.....	Kevin Adams
Co-Projection Designer	Jason H. Thompson
Co-Projection Designer	Kaitlyn Pietras
Sound Designer	Palmer Hefferan
Choreographer	David Neumann
Dramaturg	Paul Cremo
Live in HD Director	Gary Halvorson
Live in HD Host.....	Nadine Sierra

Synopsis

ACT I

Jess is an ace F-16 fighter pilot serving in Iraq who loves what she does, loves being part of a squadron of (male) flyers and loves soaring in what she calls “the Blue.” While on leave in Wyoming, she meets Eric, a rancher, and the two make an unexpected connection on their one night together. This results in an equally unexpected pregnancy and ultimately, marriage.

Jess stays home for five years to raise their daughter, Sam, but misses the Blue. When she returns to the Air Force, her commanding officer tells her she has a new assignment: operating a Reaper—a missile-carrying drone—from a remote base outside of Las Vegas. At first, she resists being relegated to the “Chair Force,” but the fact that she’ll be able to return home to Eric and Sam every night convinces her to take the assignment. She takes her place in an air-conditioned trailer next to a Sensor—an incongruously boyish 19-year-old gamer—who operates the drone’s multiple cameras and introduces her to the Kill Chain, a group of off-site strategic advisors who direct Jess’s actions through her headset. As she becomes acclimated to her new life, Jess discovers she can still experience some of the excitement and satisfaction she once felt when actually flying.

Intermission (33 Minutes)

ACT II

The 12-hour, seven-days-a-week shifts are grueling for Jess. Long periods of staring at the video monitor to track a subject or detect a threat alternate with sudden action and split-second moral decisions involving lives on the ground—lives that she is accustomed to flying away from. Witnessing the human toll of her missile strikes has a shattering emotional and psychological effect on Jess, and she begins to dissociate, her psyche splitting to reveal an alternate self who can hold the trauma wrought by her actions. The stress also begins to affect her relationship with Eric, who has taken a job working the late shift at a casino.

When Jess is assigned to track and eliminate a highly placed enemy target known as the Serpent, she becomes obsessed with her prey, who drives incessantly through the desert, never leaving his car, thus preventing him from being positively identified and eliminated.

As Jess’s fixation on taking out the Serpent overtakes her, she becomes unable to focus on her home and family. Eric tries to help Jess shake off the strain of the job with a ritual he’s learned at the casino, but she is beyond such measures. When Jess comes home late one night in a manic state, she and Eric argue, and Jess withdraws, but he manages to momentarily pull her back from the brink. Soon, however, Jess finds herself back in the trailer. She is thrilled when she tracks the Serpent to his home, and when he finally reveals himself, stepping from his car to wave his daughter away, Jess is instructed to take the shot.

Jess is on the verge of firing her missiles, but suddenly focuses on the Serpent’s daughter—a girl near Sam’s age. In an instant, she realizes she cannot be the agent of this girl’s death. She pulls the drone off

Synopsis *continued*

course and crashes it. Jess defiantly ignores the outraged voices on her headset but quickly discovers that another drone has been shadowing her, and she watches in horror as its Hellfire missiles obliterate the Serpent and his daughter.

Jess is alone, entombed in a cell. She has been court-martialed, but her imprisonment has brought her a degree of clarity and release—and freedom.

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