

Raúl de Nieves and Colin Self

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Raúl de Nieves and Colin Self, *The Fool*, 2014. Performance view, ISSUE Project Room, New York, November 11, 2014. Billy Fortini and Lisa Kori Chung. Photo: Whitney Mallett.

Scored for a chorus and string ensemble, Raúl de Nieves and Colin Self's chamber opera The Fool rises up with an ethos that feels equally majestic and DIY. After a 2014 premiere at ISSUE Project Room, The Fool returns with an elevated production at the Kitchen from February 9 through 11, 2017. Here, de Nieves and Self discuss the piece's catharsis and community.

IN EARLY IMAGININGS FOR *THE FOOL*, we both started identifying with the trickster archetype, a cultural figure that often uses magic or some kind of transformation to reveal or teach something. The trickster or jester is a character that can inadvertently create social or political change, usually through the process of transforming either themselves or a group of people. The Fool is all of us, it's the beginning and the end, the neither and the otherwise, the betwixt and the between.

We assembled an intimate group at ISSUE Project Room in 2014 while Raúl had a residency there. The production became about our relationships, and the way we organically came together as people who have creative vocal practices. All of a sudden, while having a collective to sing with, a group of voices to experiment with, we started realizing we could actually do an opera. What came from this production was the question of, How can we make a proposal for what future operas could be, in both their conception and their process? To have it be less about virtuosity or “doing it right,” and more about togetherness and elation—how, in this time of one catastrophe after the next, do we find elation, together?

We felt like opera could be a way to represent a narrative focus of care, whether in our art practices or in our day-to-day lives. Opera for us is this idea of a huge collaborative system in which people get energy or walk away from rehearsal or the show itself thinking, “I feel so much better than when I walked in this room.” We are looking out for each other—through art, experience, and through the joy of singing. If we had more of these

environments, on so many different social and political levels, to just devote time to making and doing things this way, there would be a lot less pain.



Excerpt from [Colin Self](#) and [Raúl de Nieves](#)' interview for 500 Words

Inevitably, the people involved in *The Fool* are invested in not letting a current social or political conundrum dictate the possibility of finding a way out or problem solving. These people genuinely see joy and beauty in everyday experiences and are bringing that to the production. There were these collaborative moments while rehearsing when it became very much coauthored; it's a porous compositional process. Everyone has a voice. That's the thing about collaborating with each other: We look into each other's world and see a landscape and think, "That's the world that I'm from." A sense of home comes from collectivity.

In this iteration, there is a chorus of twenty-two people; that feels important. It is much larger than in the original production, and the chorus is a fitting metaphor for the way we are talking about this community coming together. The collective voice now is so much richer and everyone has their own layer of where they belong. There is a soaring nature to their togetherness—a group of people trying to create a moment in time when it is difficult to do so. For us and our lives, and the people that are in our immediate surroundings in a creative community, this is what we know how to do and this is who we are in our capacity to create some kind of resistance. The Fool character carries a little bag of tricks, and every other character in this opera is one of the tricks. We can't do everything by ourselves. We needed to reach out to the people among us to put all these crazy things into one idea, which isn't even cohesive—it's still developing. It overflows with expressivity and emotional release. In 2014 the doors closed on the initial production, and we can still hear the voices, and now it's 2017 and the door is going to open once again. We're all coming together to make this happen—this isn't the end; this is the beginning for us.

— As told to Alex Fialho