

The Wallis

Rachel Fine
Executive Director & CEO

Paul Crewes
Artistic Director

AND FOUR LARKS WORLD PREMIERE PRODUCTION OF

FRANKENSTEIN

ADAPTED FROM MARY SHELLEY'S NOVEL BY
Mat Sweeney, Sebastian Peters-Lazaro, Jesse Rasmussen

A Note from the Creators

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley (1797-1851) began writing *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* at age eighteen. The novel prophetically allegorized the forces of innovation and industry that have propelled western civilization in the two hundred years since its first publication in 1818. Shelley's dual protagonists embody both the reckless pursuit of individual glory inherent to capitalism, and its devastating consequences on the disenfranchised and the earth itself.

Shelley's nightmarish vision of inverted creation has spawned countless adaptations across form, culture, and generation. Even within her own lifetime, Mary bore witness to many theatrical mutations of her "monstrous progeny," and delighted in the first crediting of her nameless creature as "_____." As we set out to create a *Frankenstein* relevant to Los Angeles in 2020, we were continually drawn back to the original text and to the author herself. The historical context of Mary's life and the radical empathy of her personal politics create a fascinating prism through which to view the characters. As such, we've centered her authorship in our staging and preserved her language in our collaged libretto, though we have liberally grafted onto her ideas and imagery in our design, music, and lyrics (written with Jesse Rasmussen).

We have also drawn on intertextual material within the novel, including poetry by the author's husband Percy Shelley and family friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, that color Victor's journey, and passages from 17th-century English poet John Milton's *Paradise Lost* that the creature encounters in his education. Mary, the scion of two intellectual titans, drew upon the words that preceded her to navigate her life and art. In that tradition, we take this adaptation as an opportunity to consider the labyrinth of stories, histories, technologies and monsters that we've been born into, and imagine how we might carve a path forward for those to come.

—Mat Sweeney / Four Larks

Additional Credits

MUSIC

Mat Sweeney's score was developed and arranged with this **ensemble of musicians**.

Ellen Warkentine collaborated on the 'Elizabeth' and 'Lightning' themes and led the composition of the 'Female Creature' aria.

Sound Designer **Alex Hawthorn** composed and produced all electronic orchestrations.

MAKE-UP DESIGN

Jesse Rasmussen
and Pamela Bjorklund

SET DRESSING

Regan Baumgarten

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

Julia Zayas-Meléndez*
(Previously Danny Crisp)

JULIA ZAYAS-MELÉNDEZ (Production Stage Manager) is excited to be joining the team at the Wallis for this partnership with Four Larks. A recent transplant from Chicago, Julia has had the honor of working with many theatres there, including Writers Theatre, First Folio, Paramount Theatre, Windy City Playhouse, Porchlight Music Theatre, Route 66, Marriott Theatre, Drury Lane, Apple Tree, About Face, ShawChicago, Chicago Dramatists, Steppenwolf, Remy Bumppo, Next, Court, Madison Rep, and Theater at the Center. A graduate of Emerson College, Julia began her career in Massachusetts, with companies like Opera Boston, Boston Theatre Works, The Theatre Offensive, Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, SpeakEasy Stage, and Shakespeare & Company. She took the acclaimed Route 66 production of *A Twist of Water* Off-Broadway in 2012, and celebrated World Theatre Day 2009 in Konya, Turkey with ShawChicago. Here in Los Angeles, she has been privileged to stage manage for *A Noise Within*, Latino Theatre Company, and *Ghost Road*. Julia has been a proud member of Actors' Equity Association for 17 years.



*The noted stage manager employed in this production is a member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

OUR PRODUCTION OF *FRANKENSTEIN*

In this production, MARY SHELLEY is narrating the story of *FRANKENSTEIN*. Almost all of the words spoken are lifted directly from her novel, including the quotes from other authors that Shelley pointedly weaves into her text. In the first half, she narrates as the voice of VICTOR, and in the second half as the voice of the CREATURE. Why? SHELLEY's "nightmare of male birth" (in which a solitary man recklessly creates human life and then neglects all of the responsibilities of parenthood) speaks to the toxic masculinity that pervades our age and its violent consequences. We decided that this was best emphasized by preserving the voice of its young female author, allowing her to speak 'for' her problematic male protagonists. The poetic text of *FRANKENSTEIN* is knotty and archaic. It was written over 200 years ago, but its language, themes, and imagery resonate in new ways for each generation. This production considers all that has transpired since Shelley's first edition was published. We move through history as the performance unfolds. VICTOR begins to tell his tale in the late 18th century (the novel's original setting), but by the time it comes to a close we are in the near future. VICTOR's experiment to artificially create human life is a metaphor for the dangerous drive towards innovation for the sake of infinite economic growth that defines American life and culture. This "monstrous" impulse shapes the ever evolving technologies that we interface with, but also the way that we interact with one another, our relationship to our bodies, the way we create and experience art and music, and the ways that we tell stories.

THE STORY

CAPTAIN WALTON is an ambitious young man leading his crew on a dangerous expedition through the Arctic. He encounters a tormented wanderer, VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN, who relays the story of his life. VICTOR was born to a privileged family and enjoyed a coddled upbringing, alongside his inquisitive companions, HENRY and ELIZABETH. Young VICTOR wants to harness the awesome power of nature and is frustrated by the limits of human knowledge. His idyllic childhood comes to a devastating halt with the unexpected death of his mother. He is abruptly thrust into adulthood, betrothed to ELIZABETH, and sent away to UNIVERSITY, where he isolates himself through obsessive study. Propelled by festering grief and an unrestrained ego, his study of the human body and its limits leads him to create a humanoid from the collected limbs and organs of nefariously collected cadavers. With no community of advisors or peers to question or quell his secret experiment, he impulsively charges this new being to life. But once he is faced with the hideous manifestation of his experiment, he flees in terror.

The circumstances of the nameless CREATURE's birth and education are the inverse of VICTOR's. With no language or guide to make sense of the world he was born into, he stumbles out of the lab, through the city and the surrounding woods, his ghastly appearance inducing fear in all he encounters. He happens upon a hut, where he peers in on a destitute family; a blind FATHER, a BROTHER (Felix), and two SISTERS (Agatha & Agnes). Unbeknownst to them, he watches the family for a year, learns their language, manners, philosophy, and love for one another. He finally reveals himself to the FATHER and enjoys a fleeting moment of human connection, only to be interrupted by the return of the children, who attack him in fright. The CREATURE, left alone with a combustible combination of knowledge and rage, burns down their cottage and sets off in search of his irresponsible creator. He hunts down VICTOR's closest companions, including HENRY.

When the CREATURE finally comes face to face with his maker, he demands VICTOR repeat the grotesque experiment which brought him into being, this time to build him a companion FEMALE CREATURE. VICTOR accedes, but, at the last moment, destroys the new monster, terrified by the prospect of an even more destructive being. Denied a mate of his own, the CREATURE murders VICTOR's beloved ELIZABETH. Lost in loneliness and guilt, VICTOR pursues his creation across the continent, seeking revenge. This impossible quest ultimately leads VICTOR to the Arctic (where we first encountered him). He finishes his story. WALTON, moved by VICTOR's warning, checks his own reckless ambition, and decides to turn his ship around, for the safety and well being of his crew.