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TESTIMONY



Singer-Composer Misha Penton photo by R. Casares

SEPTEMBER 25-28, 2025
MIDTOWN ARTS THEATER CENTER HOUSTON

TESTIMONY

**Directed and Choreographed by Toni Leago Valle
Original Music Composed by George Heathco and Misha Penton**

Lighting Design by Edgar Guarjado

Costume Design by Ashley Horn Knot

Steel Sculpture Design by Shelby Craze

Aerial Choreography by Emily Aven, Mars Morillo, Carlos Perez, Michelle Reyes, Toni Valle

Performed by Misha Penton and 6 Degrees Company Members:

Emily Aven, Shelby Craze, Tempest McLendon, Mars Morillo, Carlos Perez, Mia Pham, Michelle Reyes

Instrumentalists and Voices:

George Heathco- guitars, percussion, whispers, programming, engineering

Misha Penton- voice, engineering

Nick Bissen- saxophones

Stephen Martin- bass

Amanda Heathco, Ella Heathco, Amy Grisbee, Teresa Campbell, Julie Hoeltzel, Cari DeHoyos, Blair Ault, Kelly Dolan, Alisa Magallón, Abby Powell- spoken voice

Stage Manager: Jasmine Farrish

Light Board Operator: Justin Thomas

Sound Board Operator: George Heathco

COMPOSITION CREDITS

I. She Takes Her Roots with Her Heathco; text by Heathco

II. Braids Heathco

III. Mosaics Heathco/Penton; text from Genesis

IV. Fire in Her Belly Heathco

V. Calm Before the Storm Heathco

VI. The Storm Heathco

VII. Jabot Heathco/Penton; text by Ruth Bader Ginsburg

VIII. Delirium Heathco; text by Penton

IX. Her Voice Penton

X. Full Circle Heathco

TESTIMONY

Testimony is an artistic response to the protests and vandalism surrounding the sculpture “Witness” by Pakistani-American artist Shahzia Sikander. Testimony is an aerial/contemporay dance performance and art installation featuring an innovative music score. The work celebrates the intention behind Shahzia Sikander’s sculpture “Witness”- to honor the strength and resilience of women in a patriarchal society and affirm the importance of feminism and bodily autonomy.

The Heart - Freedom of Artistic Expression

Anti-abortion groups protested the “Witness” sculpture, calling it demonic and pro-choice—a controversy that made headlines and culminated in the work’s vandalism during Hurricane Beryl. These events sparked urgent conversations around free speech and artistic expression, especially in today’s political climate.

Testimony is a multidisciplinary collaboration between Artistic Director of 6 Degrees/Choreographer Toni Leago Valle, Composer George Heathco, and Singer-Composer Misha Penton, with steel sculptures by visual artist Shelby Craze. Each collaborator brings their own unique voice, resulting is a layered environment that represents multidimensional perspectives on art and freedom of expression.

Meet the Collaborators

Heathco and Valle have collaborated on various projects since 2012: ReGifting Lions (2012) - a dance performance to Heathco’s original sound score, “HUMAN re/con/struct/” (2021) - both a live and dance for film performance to the score “Shifting Landscape” by Heathco, “POP DEMO” (2023), with original music by Heathco, and “make/SHIFT” (2025), an aerial dance performance with Heathco’s original compositions played live. In 2024, Heathco and Valle premiered “Testimony: Seen and Heard,” the first draft of tonight’s performance.

Since 2004, Valle has partnered with vocalist Misha Penton in various works, both as a collaborator and choreographer. Penton has written and performed original music for *CRACKED* and performed text written by Valle in “Mockingbird.” Valle has choreographed for Penton’s “The Ottavia Project” and “Autumn Spectre.” Valle featured the painted Butoh goddess in Penton’s experimental opera on film, “The Captured Goddess” (2015). Penton presented a live presentation of improvisation dance and voice at Penton’s video release party December 9, 2023, with Heathco and 6 Degrees company members.

Penton and Heathco have collaborated on a number of projects since 2014.

Craze was commissioned in 2024 to create an art installation for the the original performance of ““Testimony: Seen and Heard.” Tonight’s steel sculptures were a part of that exhibition.

6° THE COMPANY

6 Degrees mission is to promote within dance the central theme of human connection and relationships as the healing component of human adversity. 6 Degrees maintains the core values that art is a profession, that artists should be compensated for their time and effort, and that art content and choreography is worthy of time, research, and experimentation.

6 Degrees was the featured dance company of the Houston Women's March On rallies 2019-2021, presenting excerpts from Never Again in 2019, "HUMAN" in 2020 at City Hall, and 5 dance for camera works for "Making HERstory" in 2021 at the march online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.



Shelby Craze and Mia Pham

photo by Adri Richey Photography



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**Cynthia Woods
Mitchell Center
for the Arts**

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON



Dance

Kathrine G. McGovern
College of the Arts

Testimony is funded in part by Dance Source Houston's Groundwork Grant Program, the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, an Innovation Grant awarded by the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts, and is supported through the University of Houston School of Theatre & Dance.

6° COLLABORATORS



Toni Leago Valle, known for creating politically engaged dance works, recognizes that public discourse often fails to reflect the nuance of these issues. Many women do not feel safe voicing support for bodily autonomy in such a polarized environment. Testimony counters the narrative of the anti-abortion protests, offering an alternative perspective: that “Witness” is a celebration of feminism, of the right to take up space, and of Sikander’s freedom to speak as both an artist and a woman.

Toni Leago Valle (Artistic Director, 6 Degrees) has a 23-year career as a choreographer and performer and is trained in contemporary and aerial dance.

Valle is a Professor of Practice at University of Houston Kathrine G. McGovern College for the Arts, School of Theatre & Dance, where she teaches Grant Writing, Dance Production, Marketing for Entrepreneurs, the GYROTONIC® Method and Aerial Dance. Valle is an aerial teacher and a Certified Level 1 Foundation Trainer in the GYROTONIC® Method. Valle was featured as one of four Texas aerialists in Arts and Culture Texas Magazine, June 2019. Her evening-length concert, POP DEMO, was featured on the cover of OutSmart Magazine (September, 2023). Valle received a B.A. in Dance from University of Houston.

Valle has produced nine evening length concerts: It's All Relative (2002), CRACKED (2006 & 2016), tetris (2009), Baptism (2010), Regifting Lions (2012), Never Again (2018), POP DEMO (2023) and Testimony (2025). Valle's choreography has been seen at DiverseWorks, HRJCC, University of Houston, San Jacinto College, HSPVA/Houston, Fringe Festivals, Kinky Circus, and various art openings.

Valle was a company member with Karen Stokes Dance (12 seasons), Becky Valls & Company for Young Audiences (19 seasons), and Becky Valls' Memoirs of the Sistahood Series (4 Seasons). Valle has guest performed with Chapman Dance, Dancepatheatre, Divergence Vocal Theatre, Psophonia Dance Company, Suchu Dance, and Vault. Valle was featured in "Natural Acts in Artificial Water" and "Open Book, Open House" by Bessie Award winner Stephan Koplowitz, "A Weekend of Texas Contemporary Dance," and Marta Lichlyter's "A Thin Line" as part of the University of Houston's "Choreography in Action" series on PBS.

Valle currently is on the Advisory Board of ROADWomen, the oldest democratic organization in Houston, and works with the Houston Chapter of the National Organization for Women. www.6degreesdance.org

6. COLLABORATORS



The music approaches different perspectives of the life of Sikander's sculpture, almost as a before and after, where the barbarous act of vandalism serves as a fulcrum. The development and evolution of the human voice runs across the entire work as a throughline to highlight the many ways voice has been used as a tool for agency.

Heathco has built a diverse career playing pop/rock/metal with numerous bands and artists (Grisbee, Alex Riddle, The Pant Factory, and many others), contemporary classical music (Houston Symphony, Houston Grand Opera, Liminal Space Contemporary Music Ensemble, Divergence Vocal Theater, Da Camera of Houston, Aperio, Opera Vista, VOX), pit musician work for musical theater (The Alley Theatre, A.D. Players, SHSU, Island ETC, PMT Productions, and many others), and playing for numerous churches and contemporary worship services in the Houston area. He was the Co-Artistic Director and guitarist for Liminal Space Contemporary Music Ensemble, a Houston-based ensemble founded by Heathco and percussionist Luke Hubley.

Composing for a variety of ensembles in a broad range of styles, his music blends elements of contemporary concert music with rock, jazz, and various other pop genres. Ensembles and organizations he has written for include the Moores School of Music Jazz Orchestra, Da Camera of Houston, HGOCO, Duo Scordatura, the University of Houston's AURA Contemporary Ensemble, and The Ornery Theater, for their 2013 production of *Cthulhu: A Puppet Play*. In addition, his music has been performed by Musiqa, Houston Grand Opera, SOLI Chamber Ensemble, Sound Hive, Forecast Music. In March of 2016, his setting of Psalm 88 was premiered by Duo Scordatura at Carnegie Hall. Heathco has composed numerous works for dance, including ReGifting Lions, POP DEMO, Testimony: Seen and Heard and make/SHIFT with choreographer Toni Valle, as well as Three Practices for a Better Life for Chapman Dance. Since 2013, he has frequently collaborated with singer-composer Misha Penton.

He has taught guitar and music theory privately in the Houston area for over a decade, has regularly served as a faculty member of AFA (American Festival for the Arts), and has taught numerous classes at the University of Houston and Lone Star College. Heathco received a B.M. in music business and an M.M. in composition from the University of Houston and was a member of the 2010-2011 Da Camera of Houston Young Artist Program. georgeheathco.com

6. COLLABORATORS



When I encountered Sikander's sculpture, 'Witness,' I felt her as an ancestral portal and a call to remember. As a vocalist-composer, I (re)imagine the work as the liberated female body, carrying a voice that rises through centuries of oppression. In singing my own music as well as Heathco's, recorded and live, I straddle the worlds of interpretive and generative artist, becoming a metaphor for women's containment and liberation.

Misha Penton is a singer-composer, recording artist, and music video filmmaker. She invents and performs solo and collaborative new music and media works and her projects are multi-form: live performances, audio and video works, site-specific installations, and writings. Misha's music blends 21st-century art song and chamber electronica, incorporating unconventional vocal techniques and neo-operatic vocality. Her work inhabits an immersive dreamworld where poetry comes alive in the movement of sound through the voice and body, creating a language that celebrates beautiful things unseen, unnoticed, and ephemeral. She draws inspiration from mythology, fairytale, and literature of the Western canon, from sacred story, and the cycle of the seasons.

Misha has conceptualized, produced, and directed over sixteen original evening-length performance works and many music media projects. Projects have included a three-video EP, Blessings of the Moon, celebrating transformative feminine mythologies; Threshold, an ensemble piece created for the cavernous Silos at Sawyer Yards; Anecdote of the Spirit (Rothko Chapel); Siren on the Sabine (Menil Collection); The Medusa Project, a multi-version media monodrama for the giant MediaWall at Bath Spa University, UK; the music video, Last Cicada, funded in part by the Houston Arts Alliance and the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, and the winter solstice video, Earthshine, with a concert and release performance at Sawyer Yards Houston. Misha has released a series of mini music video Micro Operas including (micro)Requiem, inspired by Mozart's unfinished Requiem in D minor, and Creation Stories, based on sacred cosmogonies.

Misha holds a PhD in Music & Performance from Bath Spa University, UK, and guest artist and residencies include The Juilliard School, Concordia University Montreal, University of Houston, Sam Houston State University, Texas A&M College Station, Lone Star College Montgomery, Texas, and Houston Grand Opera. Upcoming projects: new music video works and live performances for Sculpture Month Houston 2025. mishapenton.com

6° PERFORMERS



Emily Aven has been doing aerial for eight years and practicing consistently for four years. She has performed trapeze solos at Kinky Circus' Pride and Tim Burton showcases and Mind the Gap 26 with Cai Circus. She loves being nerdy about movement, so much so that she is board certified orthopedic and women's health physical therapist. She is thrilled to be doing aerial work choreographed with 6 Degrees! She would like to thank Raphy Taffy who is an excellent stage husband.



Shelby Craze is a Houston based artist whose interdisciplinary practice centers around movement-based performance and sculpture. Craze has extensively studied classical ballet and contemporary techniques which inform her own improvisational practice. In her high school years, she trained at Vitacca Dance Project under the guidance of Kelly Ann Vitacca and Phillip Broomhead, former principal dancer with the Royal Ballet. She has attended intensives at American Ballet Theater, Princess Grace Academy in Monaco, and Boston Ballet, training under

artists including Gioia Masala, Lia Cirio, and Michele Gifford. After graduating high school, Craze went on to train at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Modern Ballet program, training under Scottish Ballet faculty including Louisa Ross, Diana Loosmore, and Jamiel Laurence. After returning to Houston in 2019, her artistic practice took a turn as she decided to focus on sculpture and performance art. Craze received her BFA in Sculpture from the University of Houston and has exhibited work at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, the Blaffer Art Museum, and the DeLUXE Theater through Diverse Works. She has also performed with Aufheben Ensemble under artistic director Isabella Vik. Craze enjoys teaching ballet, contemporary, and improvisation dance classes and has choreographed work for the Klein Oak Dance Company.

6 PERFORMERS



Tempest McLendon (she/they) is a graduate of University of Houston with a B.A. in Dance, double minor in Technology Leadership and Innovation Management, and Studio Arts. She just recently completed her 22-23 Artist-in-Residence program with Dance Source Houston. Improvisational work “dih-loo-zuhnn” created during this residency premiered during the June 2023 Barnstorm Dance Fest. Tempest is the current co-chair of Houston Ballet’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Committee, a member of the Advisory Leadership Alumni Group for Diversity

and Inclusion with the UH Dance Department, was a 20-21 Dance Ambassador for Dance Source Houston, and company member of 6 Degrees. Beginning her dance studies in 2017, she has since performed, choreographed, and taught in venues/studios such as Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston (MATCH), Zilkha Hall (Hobby Center), Houston City Hall, Lyndall Finley Wortham Theatre, Discovery Green, Jose Quintero Lab Theatre, Miller Outdoor Theatre, and Blaffer Art Museum. Striving for meaningful connection, equality, and positive change is an important part of her collaborative practices.



Mars Morillo is a locally based awarded aerial and circus artist with a background in modern and contemporary dance. While her primary apparatus is aerial silks, Mars is experienced in other mediums, such as straps, dance and flying trapeze, lyra, and contortion. Previous training spaces include Cai Circus, Hunter Dance Center, Dallas Circus Center, Aerial Arts NYC, Trapeze School NYC & Santa Monica, Broadway Dance Center, the New England Center for Circus Arts, and Tahoe Flow Arts Studio, Tahoe Vista, CA. Mars recently competed in Aerialympics season 12 and placed 1st in regionals and Nationals in the advanced silks category with a specialty “Make It Theater” award. She has also performed in Mind the Gap, an ongoing collaboration between Dance Source Houston and Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston (MATCH). Mars brings intention, curiosity,

and resilience to their practice, forever chasing new ways to blend strength, grace, and narrative in the vertical realm.

6 PERFORMERS



Carlos Perez is a professional dancer and aerialist based in Houston, Texas. Perez graduated from the University of Houston with a B.F.A. in Dance, Minor in Philosophy, and a Master of Science in Marketing. His choreography has been showcased at Zilkha Hall, “UH Goes to the MATCH” (2017 and 2018), ACDA South-Central Conference 2018, and The Menil Collection. Perez’s dance film, “Sandcrafting,” has been showcased at Barnstorm’s Virtual Dance Festival 2020 and in Suchu Dance’s “Falling Coconuts”(2019). Perez has been a member of 6 Degrees since 2017 and works as a Sales and Digital Marketing lead for a Texas family law firm.



Mia Pham majored in Management Information Systems and minored in English and Dance. She studied rigorously under a number of ballet masters such as Robert Underwood, Catrina Steele, and Daymel Sanchez. Pham has performed in many ballet productions such as “The Nutcracker,” “Le Sylphides,” and “Raymonda.” She began training in modern dance at the University of Houston as a dance minor. There she performed in numerous shows such as “Emerging Choreographers Showcase,” “Ensemble Dance Works,” “UH Goes to the MATCH,” “Barnstorm Dance Festival,” the Gala at the American College Dance Association, “Dancescape 2020,” as well as many other projects in the Houston area. Recently, she has worked with Pilot Dance Project, Psophonia Dance Company, and 6 Degrees.

6 PERFORMERS



Michelle Reyes is a Houston, TX based dancer, choreographer, arts administrator, dance teacher, stage manager, and aerialist with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance from the University of Houston. Reyes primarily trains and performs in the modern and contemporary dance styles but has never let her love for tap fade leading her to find joy as a tap teacher, for both children and adults, and by continuing her personal tap training.

Reyes has been dancing professionally in Houston for almost a decade and is currently contracted with 6 Degrees, Karen Stokes Dance, Wild She Dances, and Riddles Three. In addition to dancing, Reyes has trained and performed in the aerial arts since 2020 working in silks, lyra, bungee, and, her apparatus of choice, dance trapeze

A special thank you to George and Misha. The theme of the suppression of a woman's artistic voice through violence shaped not only the creation of sound and movement, but also our art practice. Testimony spurred many conversations about artistic equity, the huge invisible labor of a production, and the collaboration of our voices. Collaborations by nature demand compromise. The vast amount of perceptions and desires from all three of us to authentically shape this project without diluting ourselves became a tense obstacle at times and joyful partnership at others.

I am proud to say we rose to the challenge. The results are before you - a multi-layered sensory experience of sight and sound. I am grateful to call them friends. I personally feel this work and my own practice is stronger for it.

-Toni



Michelle Reyes
photo by Adri Richey Photography

TESTIMONY SUPPORTERS

Anonymous	Kim Karpenty	Rufi Natarajan
Keith Akins	David Lake	Kristin Newman
Lynn Aven	Melanie Lofaro	Marcos de Oliveira
Ed & Valerie Blair	Bethany Logan	Agelia Perez Marquez
Marta Bourke	Heidi Lozano	Marie Pousson
Michele Brangwen	Tammy McGinness	Niki & Alan Seese
Janie & Doss Carothers	Jerrica Mark	Karen Stokes
Teresa Chapman	Judy Masliyah	jhon r stronks
Gary Craze	Christine Milliner	Texas State NOW
Mariam Dehaini	Bonnie Milne	Margo Stutts Toombs
Stephanie Dubroff-Acosta	The Moment Band	Joani Trevino
Martha Huebel	Roger Moore	Becky & Audie Valls
Dr. Shayan Izaddoost	Mars Morillo	Michael Walsh

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Karen Stokes Dance who fiscally umbrella'd TESTIMONY.

Dean Andrew Davis for his support for this project and permission to post his Op Ed on the Witness statue.

Thank you to Melissa Noble for guiding me through the UH Mitchell Center for the Arts Convergence Research Project and the Innovaton Grant process.

The performers who contributed way more of their time, talent, and energy than I could ever pay them.

Dave Nickerson for awesome photos and video at our fundraiser.

To Misha for being my friend and behind the scenes invisible labor partner.

As always, to my husband Mark, who continues to listen ad nauseum about my views on politics and art. - Toni Valle

Amanda and Ella Heathco for their endless support and encouragement, and for their patience while so much of TESTIMONY's music echoed throughout the house over the course of the past year!

The wonderful musicians and speakers who contributed their time and talent to the recording of TESTIMONY's music. - George Heathco

Many thanks to Toni Valle and George Heathco for inviting me into this project; to the wonderful benefactors of TESTIMONY and to the warm community that supports 6 Degrees. A special thanks to Toni for her leadership of this powerful work and for her treasured friendship. And to my soulmate Dave for everything. - Misha Penton