



Episode 5 Transcript: Listening to our inner voices with Sarah Jones

- Alicia Garza: Welcome to Sunstorm, where we get real about what's happening in the world and what we're doing about it because we are the light in the storm. Hi, I'm Alicia Garza.
- Ai-jen Poo: And I'm Ai-jen Poo. And today on Sunstorm, we have an amazing treat, the brilliant artist, Sarah Jones, to inspire us. Thank you so much for joining us, Sarah.
- Sarah Jones: Thank you for having me. You all are the sun in my storm right now and I'm so excited for this work that you're doing and to get to be part of it.
- Alicia Garza: We always like to start off with a lightning round. Are you ready for the lightning round?
- Sarah Jones: Yes and no, which means yes.
- Alicia Garza: Okay, so let's kick it off.
- Ai-jen Poo: Okay. Favorite historical figure?
- Sarah Jones: Right now, my favorite historical figure is Shirley Chisholm.
- Alicia Garza: Come on and bring this seat to the table, Sarah. Okay.
- Sarah Jones: Bring my folding chair, that's right.
- Alicia Garza: Bring your folding chair. So what is your go-to comfort food?
- Sarah Jones: I grew up in, I didn't grow up there, but my family, I was born in Maryland and all you have to say to me is crab cake and everything becomes okay. Maryland crab cake, do not come near me with your breadcrumbs.
- Alicia Garza: Ooh.
- Ai-jen Poo: Oh.



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- Sarah Jones: Please don't bring your bread crumbs, your remoulade. I don't want to hear any of that.
- Alicia Garza: I really was about to ask about aioli, but you've just schooled me, but okay.
- Sarah Jones: Oh, no honey.
- Alicia Garza: No aioli. Okay. No mayonnaise, mustard.
- Sarah Jones: Run the other way.
- Alicia Garza: Okay.
- Sarah Jones: Run.
- Ai-jen Poo: Okay. Inspirational quote?
- Sarah Jones: The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.
- Ai-jen Poo: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Alicia Garza: So if you were not an amazing award winning writer, performer, producer, what job would you have?
- Sarah Jones: I think I would be a dancer. I just love watching what you know has evolved in hip-hop dancing and African diasporic dance, like what people can do with their bodies is language, it's miraculous. And it makes you know the hip-hop dancing I did when I was a kid look like hieroglyphics or something compared to digital images, you know what I mean? So that's what I would be doing now.
- Ai-jen Poo: Guilty pleasure.
- Sarah Jones: Well, it kind of follows from what I just said, it's twerking. It's not guilty at all. It is freaking fantastic.



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- Ai-jen Poo: I did not think that was coming.
- Sarah Jones: You didn't see twerking coming?
- Ai-jen Poo: I didn't think that was coming, but you almost inspired me to get up and twerk in the studio, almost.
- Sarah Jones: Do it. And also I feel like we were all at dinner together somehow.
- Ai-jen Poo: Was I twerking?
- Sarah Jones: Were we there with Tarana?
- Ai-jen Poo: Yes.
- Sarah Jones: We were talking about twerking as like twerking as part of the sacred work of activism?
- Alicia Garza: I think it be. Twerking might be therapy.
- Sarah Jones: Twerking might be therapy. Might be therapy. Make it clap as part of your revolution. That's what I'm saying.
- Alicia Garza: Yes!
- Ai-jen Poo: So good.
- Alicia Garza: You know what? Make it clap so we can heal. That's what I'm talking about. OK
- Sarah Jones: Yes!
- Alicia Garza: That might be the Sunstorm bumper sticker. Make it clap so we can heal.
- Sarah Jones: Woo.



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- Alicia Garza: I feel like I have known you my whole life, from the 90's and seeing you at Nuyorican Poets Cafe and then on Broadway and, but for our listeners who may not know you as well, can you share a little bit about your journey?
- Sarah Jones: So I thought I wanted to be a lawyer when I was in college and then fell in love with spoken word and quickly discovered that I could make closing arguments that would get me, you know, drinks at the bar instead of passing the bar. I did a deep dive into the spoken word scene, started writing monologues, and the next thing I knew I was doing, one person shows that centered the voices of multiethnic characters who are a lot like the family that I come from. If you are familiar with my work, you will recognize.
- Sarah Jones: Hello, my name is Lorraine Levine and I'm here because [crosstalk 00:04:17] Sarah wanted me to come for the Sunstorm. Hi sweetheart, I have to go apply sunscreen now because you know the melanoma, so Lorraine's here.
- Alicia Garza: Oh, Lorraine.
- Sarah Jones: Lit Ava is here. Hi Ai-jen oh my God. So good to talk to you and Alicia you guys, you have to know that you give me life. So I'm just very excited to be here as a Latin X woman, as somebody who was in the struggle with you, I know what you're doing with NDWA way right now.
- Alicia Garza: Yes.
- Sarah Jones: You're just killing it in a pacifist way. I love you. [inaudible 00:04:46] So some of my people are here and I bring my people to the stage and now we've gotten to go lots of different places including landing here with you.
- Ai-jen Poo: And you're working on this crazy, amazing new show. Tell us about it and what excites you about it.
- Sarah Jones: So I'm redirecting my energy right now to a documentary of Sell By Date, which is a one woman show that I wrote and got to produce about, you know, kind of this moment we're living in and power and sex and you know, sex work,



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commercial sexual exploitation, who calls it sex work and why Sell By Date actually is inspired in large part by some of the work I've learned about from Ai-jen, some of the black lives matter work. I really kind of pulled from the treasure trove of beautiful activists in my own community and lots of interviews to create that piece. And we're looking forward to making this doc.

Ai-jen Poo: I am so excited to talk about this. You play 19 characters.

Alicia Garza: That's a lot.

Ai-jen Poo: Nineteen that only is that talent, but that's like emotional resilience cause that's a lot of people and their stuff. Like you've got women characters of all ages, all races. Well first of all, how do you play 19 characters and two, how do you bring them all together?

Sarah Jones: What I wanted to illuminate or explored for myself was how many preconceived notions I had about this topic. You know, how I had grown up with the kind of pretty woman, you know, hooker with a heart of gold and the brunt of jokes and all of this kind of stuff and never thought about the self determination and dignity of women. You know the vast majority of people in this work are women and femmes women of trans experience. I wanted to make sure that I found as many voices as I could that helped me get a better understanding of a topic that I think, you know, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is not going out of their way to center these voices.

Alicia Garza: Say it three times fast.

Sarah Jones: Obviously we need a hashtag that's a little shorter than that. But you know, so that was my idea. Bring together the voices. And you know what, I ended up bringing women from, you know, all over the country and all over the world. And also men, you know, there isn't anyone who isn't touched by this topic in some way, whether they realize it or not. And so that was my goal, kind of how can we have almost a town hall feeling and how can we look at this and come away hopeful. And I, I got to tell you, whether it's plays that I've seen or episodes of SVU or whatever it may be, every time this topic was touched upon,



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I felt so demoralized. Oh my God, all these, you know, millions and millions of human beings being trafficked. It's happening right under our noses. We are literally jailing and you know imprisoning black and Brown, largely black and Brown women and girls for supposed crimes.

Sarah Jones: When you know, really what's happening is most people are survivors of all kinds of violence and trauma and end up in situations that, you know, they would like to be able to exit if they could or that there's a lot more complexity to it than we think. I wanted to hear all of those voices as, as much as I could without being prescriptive to the audience. I don't want you feeling like you came to a Sarah Jones seminar and you know, you heard me, I am in the thing in the very beginning when you meet me, I am at a rally out rally for sex worker rights. All right. And I am wearing my head dress because even though I have to represent for Trinidad [crosstalk 00:08:29] and I am there reminding people who look at the protest sign, it said no justice, no peace. P. I. E. C. E, [inaudible 00:08:38] no justice, no peace of ass.

Sarah Jones: And so I want you to hear her. I want you to hear what her journey is as an immigrant. And then I want to hear from Maureen, who's an Irish woman who's, you know, she's older lady and she's literally got the experience of having been both in the convent and in the prostitution. And let me tell you, the thing that has in common is that there's men in power. In both instances, you can easily end up never getting your voice, you know? So I wanted to bring that range of voices together. And so it's worth it. Girl, I get my massage, I make sure I go have dinner with people like you. I meditate, I do whatever I have to do to hold space for those emotional experiences. [crosstalk 00:09:20] Because it's a journey.

Alicia Garza: What do you think your characters would say to us about why it's important that they are all woven into a fabric that is really who we are as a country?

Sarah Jones: So part of my joy is that in the struggle we need, you know, that kind of reminder of our beauty, the beauty that's in the world and joy we need that it's, it's part of our fuel. You know, I like the funny, like if I'm not bringing the funny, I don't feel like I'm really doing justice to our humanity. And so I thought, how do



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I make this topic, you know, something that we can kind of come away feeling entertained at the end as well as engaged. And I realized if I said it in the future [inaudible 00:10:06] then we could look back on where we are now with some perspective and maybe some humor gathering these folks together. You know, having them look back like I'm thinking of a somebody who loves you both. Hi, my name is Bella. I'm super super excited to be here.

Alicia Garza: Bella your my favorite. [inaudible 00:10:26]

Sarah Jones: I know, I try to tell Sarah Jones that she thinks she's your fav but I don't tell her don't worry. But anyway, like I'm there because like I'm in Sell By Date because I'm a feminist. Obvi and the like, it's so important to like talk about like women and what does empowered sex look like and all of that and like to look back from now when like, you know, I just want to say like white women, a lot of white women are like whitesplaining what sex and power and all of that has to look like. And like I think looking back from the future or just like gives us that opportunity to just be like, Oh my gosh, like where we are right now. Like our grandkids are probably going to look back and be like, you guys were super super ridiculous. Like you were totally like not not like understanding what was happening.

Sarah Jones: So I think that's the idea to kind of have a retrospective where all of these voices are mingling together and where will we end up if we, you know, do we course correct, do we need course correcting, where will we land? Like I think that's the point of bringing all those folks together. So. [Inaudible]

Ai-jen Poo: And I love the way you bring the funny, it's the best it is. It just kind of opens our hearts in a way that we might not naturally do if we're talking about something that people disagree about and that people have really strong feelings about or that people don't know a lot about. And I just think it's, it's so powerful. Well let me tell you something I'm working on, which is fashion. I am obsessed and in fact today what we're doing is a little Bay area uniform T shirt with my man on it, Prince black jeans cause they're staples and then Jordan's. Cause that's how we get down. But I read that you are like a serious fashionista. What are the elements of your style?



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- Sarah Jones: I love fashion. I love design. I've had wonderful things happen like you know, landing in the Vogue September issue at one point around Sell By Date and honey, you should have seen me around these clothes and all that Vogue energy. Oh it was delicious. And I, I love contrast. I love the kind of clashes that someone like Jenna Lyons, my fun buddy Jenna brought to the mainstream. Like the idea that leopard is neutral and stripes are neutral and we gonna put that shit together. And you know, I've always loved that and I've always loved how culture informs fashion. I remember visiting South Africa years ago, my first trip to South Africa and seeing people who, the way they cock their hat to the side and the hang of like the sweater and the way they drape, they're bringing you like a some kind of incredible Sub Saharan African mashup of like the Cape Cod sweater toss with like you know.
- Ai-jen Poo: It's excellent.
- Sarah Jones: You know what I'm saying?
- Ai-jen Poo: Yes.
- Sarah Jones: Some kind of sutoo, like patterned pants. I was just like, you all are killing it. So I'm loving Sub Saharan African patterns in mainstream fashion right now. I'm on the fence about like, where's the cultural appropriation? Where are we? Right? Like where are we with all of that? But I want to honor that, you know, fashion houses have taken their time coming around.
- Ai-jen Poo: That's ture.
- Sarah Jones: They've taken their time and I love seeing Dapper Dan get his shine when I'm old enough to remember when, you know, people were trying to come for Dapper Dan because he was, you know, a not an officially sanctioned Gucci producer or whatever.
- Ai-jen Poo: And now look, now look, he brought right now look now look.



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- Sarah Jones: He brought Gucci to the world. But he really brought Gucci to black people and then black people really handled business with Gucci.
- Ai-jen Poo: Y'all are welcome. You're welcome. We are your Madison Avenue one suggests you're welcome.
- Sarah Jones: Let's be clear, yes.
- Ai-jen Poo: Who's your favorite designer right now?
- Sarah Jones: This is tricky for me. I want to just be keep it 100 with you right now. Because when I think about my friends who are women of size and want to be able to like rock, you know, whatever they want, most of my favorite designers fall away. And I'm really trying to live there with like, if you are not seeing all of our bodies, I kind of need to stop seeing you. Like, and that doesn't mean I can't appreciate your aesthetic, but I really want to be able to like get behind that brand. So you know what I love is people who are doing recycling. Like when you are not only bringing the beauty but also up cycling and recycling what we already have a reformation, you know, somebody who says, Hey, this price point is not impossible. Like you get to look, you know, incredible. And you, and we understand that like you have a jobby job like everybody else. So I guess there's activism in my, you know, aesthetic.
- Ai-jen Poo: So bringing it back to you and your journey, you're like me and that you and I, we were both in New York for ever and ever and it was home, home, home, and then you moved to LA to pursue your dreams. And what's that change been like for you? I think a lot of women out here like maybe we've got to move, maybe we got to relocate, maybe we got to make a big move for our dreams, for our love, for our work, for our family, for any reason. What's that change like been for you and what advice would you give for women who are thinking about relocating?
- Sarah Jones: I had an experience of having to grieve my relationship with New York and by that I mean I grew up there. It was, it's part of my DNA. It's part of my identity in such a core way that I could not let in the possibility of anywhere else.



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[inaudible 00:16:50] And that sort of manifested as like this New York chauvinism that was like, well I like these other places. They're cool, but New York is the only place I could ever live. And then I had to like really interrogate that [inaudible 00:17:02] and ask myself like, what are you afraid of babe? Like what is this? Why are we gripping so tightly to this? And I really got it that like I was afraid of what people would think I was afraid of that I would look soft or like, you know, I couldn't tough it out.

Ai-jen Poo: Totally.

Sarah Jones: And be that you know, make it anywhere and it's like, wait, like another life is available. I do not have to send my laundry out and have somebody else's underwear comeback because in New York I can't afford.

Ai-jen Poo: Oh my gosh that happens in New York every time.

Sarah Jones: I shan't this is an assault on my soul I can't do it. At a certain point you're like, this is unsustainable. This is not going to work. But I need to be clear. I adore New York. It will never be out of my system. It will never not be a part of me. But I guess what I'll say is as advice, if you feel a still small voice saying to you, is something else possible for me? Listen to that voice within the context that wherever you go, there you are. So when I left New York, I didn't leave all the crazy in New York. I brought it with me in my suitcases LA, I'm still me. You know what I mean? The crazy looks different here. It's traffic and it's, you know, you could get arrested for jaywalking, which jaywalking is part of my religion.

Sarah Jones: Like I was like what? What do you mean? But the point is if it feels like your true self is ready for a change and you don't attach too much to like this is a magic bullet. This is going to fix or change me. You don't need fixing or changing. What I found is LA has helped me soften into more self acceptance so [inaudible 00:18:48] I'm not here to improve myself. I just accept myself more and more. And then I guess I automatically sort of improve whatever that means.

Alicia Garza: Oh I love that. Can we talk about something, cause I read that you like talking on the phone and I especially with like the advances in technology and in culture



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where you can literally have the most minuscule conversation with characters. I'm super into it. I prefer not to talk on the phone. And I find it odd when people invite me to talk on the phone. I think I forgotten how to do it. Can you just say, I've heard though that you prefer phone rather than text. Tell me about why.

Sarah Jones: I'm a phone person. I'm a voice person, right? I mean, you hear me, I'm this, all of this I, all of this. It's like my favorite thing to do when I was, when I was younger. I mean, I could just, you know, I literally, it's like, do I want to, you know, I don't know. Go to a party. Yes, of course. I want to go to a party. That's how it feels when you ask me. So I want to get into like a voice voice off with another person, you know? So I feel like the voice thing that I can hear you conjures, it's sort of like reading for me from like an actual book, not just a Kindle or my phone.

Sarah Jones: Something about the experience of reading in and of itself opens a portal onto, you know, the places my imagination can go. As I listened to your voice or as I listened to the words or hear the words read aloud in my head, it's very different than having images and it's very different than having kind of less information coming at me. So for me text, I'm an emoji freak. I'm ridiculous with the emojis. Here's the thing, Alicia, you when you are IRL or when you're like, you know when you are bringing your energy, you have a supernova energy that I understand. If you don't want to waste it and little drip drabs on the phone. If you're like, you know what, let's just keep this real quick. [inaudible 00:20:53] I'm not, I'm not going to be in supernova mode. Like I'll see you when I see you and we'll be together. I'm not going to just kind of dribble my essence on this phone line. You know we either go do the damn thing or you could get these couple of characters, K hundred percent.

Alicia Garza: I do hit them with the K though. If it's friendly, it's a K K and if it's not [crosstalk 00:21:16] K. Period. Yes.

Sarah Jones: A period.

Alicia Garza: Which is the equivalent of off with your head. [inaudible 00:21:27].



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- Ai-jen Poo: This is the decoder. We're getting the decoder, right? Yes. We're getting the decoder. We are about to head into a crazy year in this country. Right. Heading in now. What would some of your characters say as words of advice for how to navigate the storms ahead?
- Sarah Jones: Yeah. I first off [inaudible] yall aint heard from a, you know, I know I'm a CIS male and all that, like Sarah Jones be telling me you a Cis hetero, you know, what I'm saying she be trying to put me in a, in a spreadsheet and whatnot about gender [crosstalk 00:22:01] and all that. So I understand you gonna say I, I mean I'm binary, whatever, whatever it is. I'm just saying, I as a dude, I like to let people know, you know what's going on in the country right now.
- Sarah Jones: Not to quote Gwen Stefani, but this shit is B. A. N. A. N. A. S. You know what I'm saying. And we got to hold on to our arm. Just what y'all doing right now? Like, yo, I'm going to put it to you like this. I don't even really fuck with Twitter. You know what I'm saying? But it's black Twitter and you know what I'm saying? Instagram all that you guys used your socials very, you know, saying judiciously. That's what I'm trying to say. Go on there. Get your love. You know, what I'm saying, get your little inspiration, y'all little cat videos or whatever, whatever. Have you.
- Alicia Garza: [crosstalk 00:22:52] Slide in the DM's.
- Sarah Jones: That [inaudible] yeah, if people sliding you got a cat sliding in your DMS. I ain't going to judge you. You know what I'm saying trying to FaceTime you or whatnot. But I'm saying this right here. No for real, very serious. We living in times that's like you think something real and it's just some Russian bots. In shit I don't even know.
- Alicia Garza: Yeah that's real.
- Sarah Jones: So real right now. I feel like find your source of information that you know you could trust and then don't let yourself get inundated all day. You know what I'm saying? You ain't took no shower in a week cause you're tweeting.



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- Ai-jen Poo: And watching YouTube.
- Sarah Jones: Sending videos and all that watching YouTube dude in the white house. Idiot gonna idiot. We know this. You know what I'm saying? He going to do what he going to do. So don't exhaust yourself with all that help if you can. If y'all out there, listen, y'all got you know what I'm saying money resources give to who you know. You could actually, you know, what I'm saying make some impact. But let's be real between the electoral college. I mean, dude didn't win last time. You know what I'm saying he aint fucking win the first time so I ain't going to be surprised by no outcome.
- Alicia Garza: Listen.
- Sarah Jones: I think we just got to keep doing our activism keep, you know what I'm saying working on this prison industrial complex working on [inaudible] all these. You know what I'm saying these immigration issue's all of this work on a grassroots ground level and all keep working on your local community. Cause you know what I'm saying these people, they going to be wild. They going to be wild.
- Ai-jen Poo: I need more brothers like this in my life. [inaudible].
- Sarah Jones: You already got somebody you know what I'm saying. Don't be doing that. It ain't like we going to have no real sex relationship cause you're going to be like K K [inaudible 00:24:26].
- Alicia Garza: But if I hit you with the K K, that means. We could keep talking. [inaudible] You need to try a little harder.
- Sarah Jones: Duly noted. Duly noted.
- Alicia Garza: So I'm going to stop laughing. They're happy. They're happy to have somebody, they're happy to have somebody to talk to you besides me believe me.
- Ai-jen Poo: So good.



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- Alicia Garza: You made me think about so much stress right there. There's so much to talk about, Sarah, we think that you are at 100% the light in the storm. I'm wondering if there is a piece of advice from your heart about how those of us who are feeling overwhelmed or anxious or deeply sad about the state of our country and the state of our world, what advice would you bring to someone who's feeling that level of despair about how they can be a part of the light in this storm that's happening right now?
- Sarah Jones: The thing I would say is I am right there with them like I am right there with them and this is daily work and one of the things I've learned is to get as present as I can and come home to myself, if that makes any sense. As many times a day as I can, meaning have I eaten well? Am I either, you know, stuffing myself with, with stuff. I don't really want to be eating because I'm in pain or am I starving myself because I'm believing somebody's you know, nonsense about how I'm supposed to look in the world. Either of those are self-abandonment and we can do it in so many ways. I can abandon myself by being on my phone all day. Like I said, you know, Rashid is definitely talking to me when he's talking about the people who you know, too many memes and too much.
- Sarah Jones: Did you hear what he said? And Oh my God, you know, Ooh. And you know, so how can I not abandon myself in the midst of all of this because I can't control very much. And that's an illusion that I have to put down sometimes, many times a day, right? Like I, I want to go down to that border. I want to be in a thousand places at the same time I'm, I'm just waiting for these voting that they're tampering with and you know, cyber, just all of it. Right? And yet if I'm there and haven't fed myself or slept or made sure that I'm healthy and connecting with my community and I'm not talking about just anybody, I'm not even talking about, and this might sound sacrilegious, but I'm not even talking about family. If family drives you crazy, if you're arguing with an uncle in a red hat, you're probably not listening to this.
- Sarah Jones: But if you, if you have a uncle in a red hat and you are listening to this, you know we have the right to have boundaries around our souls, our hearts, and especially in times like this in a storm. So you are your own sun, you have your own internal sun and that sun intuitively knows how to recognize the suns



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around you. Spend your time with other people who you can feel are doing their work to fill their own well and to, you know, shine their own inner sunlight. I don't care if it's a yoga class, meditation, you know, laughing your ass off with somebody who you can be your full, authentic self in front of. Go dancing, go roller skating, go skip in a park. Even if you think you look stupid, find your inner light, your inner little person and take care of them. Ask them what they need and heed it as much as you can all, all day.

Ai-jen Poo: Oh, I love that. I'm just so inspired by everything you're doing and how you show up in the world and I'm so glad our listeners get to hear that message. That's so important.

Alicia Garza: Thank you Sarah. So we know that you are up to big things and we want to make sure people can find you. So if you want to follow Sarah Jones, you can find them at. Yes, I'm Sarah Jones on all of the socials and to all you lovely listeners, write to us, tweet us, tell us about how you are making your way through the storm. We are.

Ai-jen Poo: @ Ai-jen Poo.

Alicia Garza: and @ Alicia Garza hashtag Sunstorm we cannot wait to hear from you. Ciao.

Ai-jen Poo: Ciao. Ciao. Sunstorm is a project of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and collaboration with Participant. Sunstorm is executive produced by Alicia Garza, Ai-jen Poo, Kristina Mevs-Apgar and Jess Morales Rocketto, Sunstorm is produced by Amy S Choi and Rebecca Lehrer of the Mash-Up Americans. Producers are Jocelyn Gonzales, Shelby Sandlin, Mary Phillips Sandy and Mia Warren original music composed by Jen Kwok and Jody Shelton.