

# THE NATIONAL **OPERA** CENTER **AMERICA**

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## **WOMEN TAKE OPERA'S CENTER STAGE**

*OPERA America Announces Projects to Advance the Work of Female Composers and Administrators*

### **INCLUDING:**

## **OPERA GRANTS FOR FEMALE COMPOSERS**

\$100,000 Awarded to Eight Composers to Fund Work Development

The World Premiere of

### ***FIERCE GRACE: JEANNETTE RANKIN***

A song cycle about the first woman elected to Congress

Composed by Kitty Brazelton, Laura Kaminsky,  
Laura Karpman and Ellen Reid; text by Kimberly Reed

## **WOMEN'S OPERA NETWORK BACKSTAGE BRUNCH**

Over \$15,000 Raised for Pilot Mentorship Program for Administrators

May 30, 2017 (New York) — OPERA America, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, announces a series of special initiatives to advance and highlight the work of women in opera. These programs are emblematic of OPERA America's deep commitment to achieving gender equity in the field.

Among these initiatives are the granting of \$100,000 to female composers to further their work (**Opera Grants for Female Composers**), a song cycle commissioned from four female composers and a female librettist about the first woman elected to Congress (***Fierce Grace: Jeannette Rankin***) and an event raising more than \$15,000 to help fund a new mentorship program for female opera administrators (**Backstage Brunch**).

## OPERA GRANTS FOR FEMALE COMPOSERS: DISCOVERY GRANTS

OPERA America is pleased to announce the composers who have received Discovery Grants from its Opera Grants for Female Composers program, which is made possible through the generosity of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation. From among 81 applicants, an independent panel of adjudicators selected eight composers to receive a total of \$100,000 to support the development of their opera compositions.

The recipients of Discovery Grants are **Faye Chiao** for *Island of the Moon*, **Ellen Fishman** for *Marie Begins*, **Grace Oberhofer** for *ICONS/IDOLS*, **Tawnie Olson** for *Sanctuary and Storm* (working title), **Frances Pollock** for *Stinney: An American Execution*, **Kate Soper** for *The Romance of the Rose*, **Dalit Warshaw** for *Delusion of Grandeur* and **Cynthia Lee Wong** for *No Guarantees*. See below for additional information about the composers and their works.

Over the past 30 years, OPERA America has awarded more than \$13 million to Professional Company Members in support of new American operas. However, fewer than five percent of the organization's grants supporting repertoire development have been awarded to works by female composers. Launched in December 2013, Opera Grants for Female Composers provide support for the development of new operas by women, both directly to individual composers (Discovery Grants) and to opera companies producing their work (Commissioning Grants), advancing the important objective to increase diversity across the field.

Discovery Grants aim to identify and support the work of female composers writing operas, raising their visibility and promoting awareness of their compositions. In addition to receiving financial assistance, grant recipients will be introduced to leaders in the field through *Opera America* magazine and future New Works Forum meetings and annual conferences.

The independent panel of adjudicators for these Discovery Grants included conductor David Bloom, composer Kitty Brazelton, vocalist Katherine Ciesinski, composer Conrad Cummings, director Leonard Foglia and librettist Mac Wellman.

Since the Opera Grants for Female Composers program was announced in December 2013, a total of \$600,000 has been awarded to the following composers and opera companies in support of works by women.

## ABOUT THE 2017 DISCOVERY GRANT RECIPIENTS

Opera Grants for Female Composers: Discovery Grants were awarded to the following eight composers:



### FAYE CHIAO

Composer, *Island of the Moon* | Libretto by Anton Dudley

In this chamber opera, the queen of a sinking island hopes to save her people by moving them to a neighboring realm. But first she must marry her son Akoni off to the princess of the nearby island. Akoni refuses to carry off the scheme, worrying that the move will mark the end of their island's culture. The queen responds by setting forth an impossible task: He may marry the woman who shatters the moon.



### ELLEN FISHMAN

Composer, *Marie Begins* | Libretto by Julia Curcio

As a modern woman, Marie lives in a world of endless possibilities. But on her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, she realizes how little she has actually achieved. The audience guides Marie's trajectory in this interactive work, making choices for her at the end of each two- to six-minute scene to help her pull her life together.



**GRACE OBERHOFER**

Composer, *ICONS/IDOLS* | Libretto by Helen Banner

This trilogy of choral plays, written for over a dozen woman singers, tells the stories of three Byzantine empresses in the eighth and ninth centuries: Irene, Euphrosyne and Theodora. All three sacrifice personal relationships in order to gain power and end iconoclasm within the Eastern Church.



**TAWNIE OLSON**

Composer, *Sanctuary and Storm* (working title) | Libretto by Roberta Barker

Inspired by actual historical correspondence, *Sanctuary and Storm* imagines an impassioned and wide-ranging dialogue between two titanic women of the 12<sup>th</sup> century: Eleanor of Aquitaine and Hildegard of Bingen. The women wrestle with their own mortality as they fiercely debate questions of power, beauty and the divine.



**FRANCES POLLOCK**

Composer, *Stinney: An American Execution* | Libretto by Frances Pollock and Tia Price

Steeped in Southern music, *Stinney* follows the true story of George Stinney Jr., the youngest person to be legally executed in 20<sup>th</sup>-century America. In 1944, the fourteen-year-old black boy was wrongfully accused of raping and murdering two white girls, and was subsequently arrested, tried and executed via electric chair.



**KATE SOPER**

Composer, *The Romance of the Rose*

*The Romance of the Rose* is a loose adaptation of the eponymous medieval French poem, a tale of courtly love that covers a dizzying philosophical landscape. Running the stylistic gamut from medieval poetic forms to electronic “noisescapes,” the opera uses allegorical figures to dramatize humankind’s response to emotion, desire and music itself.



**DALIT WARSHAW**

Composer, *Delusion of Grandeur* | Libretto by Carol Heald

The Fat Lady from the Coney Island Zoo unexpectedly wakes up in heaven. Poets storm the Tower of Babel, rallying to abolish misunderstanding through a universal language, and a quarrel escalates to the brink of war. God, asleep since the Holocaust, is roused from his nap and reveals the Fat Lady’s true identity. The action culminates in a symbolic marriage uniting all racial and religious denominations.



**CYNTHIA LEE WONG**

Composer, *No Guarantees* | Libretto by Richard Aellen

In this romantic comedy set in the future, a secret attempt to use an android as an understudy for a real-life lover has unexpected consequences.

### Discovery Grants: Recipients to Date (30)

Composer	Work	Award Year
Julia Adolphe	<i>A Barrel of Laughs, A Vale of Tears</i>	2016
Kitty Brazelton	<i>The Art of Memory</i>	2015
Faye Chiao	<i>Island of the Moon</i>	2017
Mary Ellen Childs	<i>On Beyond</i>	2016
Anna Clyne	<i>Eva</i>	2014
Michelle DiBucci	<i>Charlotte Salomon: Der Tod und die Malerin (Death and the Painter)</i>	2014
Emily Doolittle	<i>Jan Tait and the Bear</i>	2016
Ellen Fishman	<i>Marie Begins</i>	2017
Laura Kaminsky	<i>As One</i>	2014
Laura Karpman	<i>Balls</i>	2015
Kristin Kuster	<i>Kept</i>	2014
Anne LeBaron	<i>Psyche &amp; Delia</i>	2017
Patricia Leonard	<i>My Dearest Friend</i>	2015
Jing Jing Luo	<i>Ashima</i>	2015
Fang Man	<i>Golden Lily</i>	2014
Odaline de la Martinez	<i>Imoinda</i>	2015
Grace Oberhofer	<i>ICONS/IDOLS</i>	2017
Nkeiru Okoye	<i>We've Got Our Eye on You</i>	2016
Tawnie Olson	<i>Sanctuary and Storm</i>	2017
Rene Orth	<i>Machine</i>	2016
Frances Pollock	<i>Stinney: An American Execution</i>	2017
Elena Ruehr	<i>Crafting the Bonds</i>	2016
Kamala Sankaram	<i>The Privacy Show</i>	2015
Laura Elise Schwendinger	<i>Artemisia</i>	2016
Sheila Silver	<i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	2014
Kate Soper	<i>The Romance of the Rose</i>	2017
Su Lian Tan	<i>Lotus Lives</i>	2015
Dalit Warshaw	<i>Delusion of Grandeur</i>	2017
Cynthia Lee Wong	<i>No Guarantees</i>	2017
Luna Pearl Wolf	<i>THE PILLAR</i>	2014

### Commissioning Grants: Recipients to Date (13)

Opera Company	Composer	Work	Award Year
American Opera Projects	Victoria Bond	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	2016
American Opera Projects	Wang Jie	<i>Rated R for Rat</i>	2015
Ardea Arts/ Family Opera Initiative	Kitty Brazelton	<i>Animal Tales</i>	2016
Arizona Opera	Gabriela Lena Frank	<i>The Last Dream of Frida and Diego</i>	2015
Beth Morrison Projects	Sarah Kirkland Snider	<i>The Living Light</i>	2016
Beth Morrison Projects	Ellen Reid	<i>Prism</i>	2015
The Glimmerglass Festival	Jeanine Tesori	Title TBA	2016
The Glimmerglass Festival	Laura Karpman	<i>Wilde Tales</i>	2015
Houston Grand Opera	Laura Kaminsky	<i>Some Light Emerges</i>	2016
The Industry	Ellen Reid	<i>HOPSCOTCH</i> (selection)	2015
Opera Colorado	Lori Laitman	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	2016
Opera Columbus	Korine Fujiwara	<i>The Flood of 1913</i>	2016
Opera Philadelphia	Missy Mazzoli	<i>Breaking the Waves</i>	2015

The next round of Commissioning Grants is currently in the evaluation and adjudication process, and recipients will be announced in summer 2017. These grants provide opera companies with financial support for female composers' commissioning fees.

## **FIERCE GRACE: JEANNETTE RANKIN WORLD PREMIERE**

On Friday, April 7, OPERA America was honored to join the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. in presenting the world premiere of a new song cycle: ***Fierce Grace: Jeannette Rankin***. This work, composed by **Kitty Brazelton, Laura Kaminsky, Laura Karpman** and **Ellen Reid**, with a text by **Kimberly Reed**, recounts the life and accomplishments of the first woman elected to the United States Congress. Each of the five creators of this song cycle is a multiple recipient of OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers, a landmark funding program supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.

*Fierce Grace* presents a series of vignettes from the life of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress and a pioneering leader of the women's suffrage movement. Rankin served two separate terms in the House of Representatives. She was first elected in 1916 and sworn in on April 2, 1917; OPERA America's world-premiere performance came almost exactly 100 years after that momentous day. Rankin won a second term in 1940; in both terms she served as a Republican from her native Montana. "I may be the first woman member of Congress," she observed upon her election in 1916, "but I won't be the last."

OPERA America commissioned *Fierce Grace: Jeannette Rankin* in celebration of **Bank of America**, which has been a generous supporter of the organization since 2008, as well as the world's largest corporate supporter of the arts.

The world premiere performance of *Fierce Grace* took place on Friday, April 7 at the Library of Congress' Coolidge Auditorium in Washington, D.C. Following the performance by mezzo-soprano Heather Johnson and pianist Mila Henry, OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca led a panel discussion with several of the work's creators about the state of the field. This event was co-presented by the Library of Congress, and the *Fierce Grace* score will be added to its archive as part of the library's initiative to increase representation by female creators in its collection.

A video recording of the performance will be available on OPERA America's YouTube channel ([youtube.com/OPERAAmerica](https://youtube.com/OPERAAmerica)) in the coming weeks.

## **BACKSTAGE BRUNCH: WOMEN IN OPERA**

Earlier in this fiscal year at its National Opera Center in New York City, OPERA America hosted **Backstage Brunch: Women in Opera**, its first-ever special event designed to highlight and support the work of OPERA America's Women's Opera Network, an alliance founded in 2015 to foster discussion about gender parity in the opera field, create action plans to promote the advancement of talented women, and become a source of support for emerging professionals.

The Backstage Brunch event included a panel discussion moderated by OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca that featured composers Ruth Orth and Ellen Reid (both past recipients of OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers program) and librettist Donna Di Novelli. During the brunch that followed, Scorca interviewed special guest Alexander Sanger, trustee of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, the organization that supports the grants. This sold-out event raised more than \$15,000 for the Women's Opera Network, which will enable the creation of a pilot mentorship program for female administrators working in opera, to be launched this fall.

A video recording of the Backstage Brunch panel discussion is available online at [watch.operaamerica.org/WomenInOpera2016](http://watch.operaamerica.org/WomenInOpera2016).

More information about the Women's Opera Network can be found at [operaamerica.org/WON](http://operaamerica.org/WON).

For more information about OPERA America, its many programs and the National Opera Center, visit [operaamerica.org](http://operaamerica.org).



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### **About OPERA America**

OPERA America ([operaamerica.org](http://operaamerica.org)) leads and serves the entire opera community, supporting the creation, presentation and enjoyment of opera.

- Artistic services help opera companies and creative and performing artists to improve the quality of productions and increase the creation and presentation of North American works.
- Information, technical and administrative services to opera companies reflect the need for strengthened leadership among staff, trustees and volunteers.
- Education, audience development and community services are designed to enhance all forms of opera appreciation.

Founded in 1970, OPERA America's worldwide membership network includes 150 Professional Company Members, 250 Associate, Business and Educational Members, 1,200 Individual Members, and 16,000 subscribers to the association's electronic news service. In response to the critical need for suitable audition, rehearsal and recording facilities, OPERA America opened the first-ever **NATIONAL OPERA CENTER** ([operaamerica.org/OperaCenter](http://operaamerica.org/OperaCenter)) in September 2012 in New York City. With a wide range of artistic and administrative services in a purpose-built facility, OPERA America is dedicated to increasing the level of excellence, creativity and effectiveness across the field.

OPERA America's long tradition of encouraging the creation and production of new works led to the formation of The Opera Fund endowment. Since the inception of the Fund, OPERA America has made grants of more than \$13 million to assist companies with the expenses associated with the commissioning and development of new works, as well as related audience development initiatives. Through its Opera Grants for Female Composers program, launched in 2013, OPERA America has awarded a total of \$600,000 to composers and opera companies in support of works by women.