

THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

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OPERA AMERICA ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF OPERA GRANTS FOR FEMALE COMPOSERS

Supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation

**EIGHT COMPOSERS
AWARDED A TOTAL OF \$100,000**

March 13, 2018 (New York) — **OPERA America**, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, is pleased to announce the latest recipients of **Discovery Grants** from the **Opera Grants for Female Composers** program, made possible through the generosity of the **Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**.

Opera Grants for Female Composers seek to promote the development of works by women, as well as raise the visibility of women writing for the operatic medium and increase diversity across the field. The program consists of two granting components: Discovery Grants of up to \$15,000 that are awarded directly to female composers to advance new works; and Commissioning Grants of up to \$50,000 that are awarded to opera companies for commissions by female composers. Since its inception, the program has awarded a total of \$800,000 to opera companies and composers.

The most recent round of Discovery Grants attracted 47 applicants, and an independent adjudication panel selected eight composers to receive a total of \$100,000 to support operas in development. The recipients are:

- **Lisa DeSpain** for *That Hell-Bound Train*
- **Alexa Dexa** for *Be a Doll*
- **Germaine Franco** for *¡La Capitana!*
- **Elizabeth Kelly** for *Losing Her Voice*
- **Leanna Kirchoff** for *Friday After Friday*
- **Veronika Krausas** for *Ghost Opera*
- **Julia Meinwald** for *REB+VoDKa+ME*
- **Liza Seigido** for *Cyborgs Are Dancing*

These grants, the only ones awarded by OPERA America directly to individual artists, provide the composers with financial assistance to advance and promote their operas. (See below for descriptions of the supported projects.)

Over the past 30 years, OPERA America has awarded \$13 million to its Professional Company Members in support of new American operas. However, until the launch of Opera Grants for Female Composers in 2013, fewer than five percent of the organization's grants for repertoire development had been awarded to works by female composers.

“Opera is experiencing a groundswell of support for gender parity across all sectors of the industry, both artistic and administrative, and we are proud to be a part of that movement through Opera Grants for Female Composers,” stated **Marc A. Scorca**, president/CEO of OPERA America. “Through the generosity of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, these grants have invigorated our art form with a wealth of new works that display the extraordinary skill of their composers, as well as a diverse range of artistic sensibilities.”

The independent adjudication panelists for the Discovery Grants were **Michael Ching**, composer; **Lillian Groag**, director; **Sari Gruber**, soprano; **Justina Lee**, pianist and coach; **Vanessa Rose**, executive and fundraising consultant; and **Gene Scheer**, librettist.

Information about the next round of Discovery Grants will be available in October 2018.

Applications for Commissioning Grants are currently open, and Professional Company Members may submit intents to apply by April 10, 2018.

ABOUT THE 2018 DISCOVERY GRANT RECIPIENTS



Photo: Leslie Hassler

LISA DESPAIN

Composer: *That Hell-Bound Train* | Libretto based on a short story by Robert Bloch

Lisa DeSpain is a New York City-based jazz composer and pianist. Her awards include the ASCAP Commission Honoring the Duke Ellington Centennial, an NEA Jazz Fellowship, an Aaron Copland Award and a Dramatists Guild Fellowship. Notable commissions include *Into the Realm of the Gods* (U.S. Air Force), *Rise & Fall* (Cassatt String Quartet) and the oratorio *American Nativity*. DeSpain is currently working on a musical adaptation of the novel *A Gracious Plenty*, as well as *Storyville*, an original musical set during the final days of New Orleans' red-light district, with lyricist Kristen Anderson-Lopez.

In *That Hell-Bound Train*, Martin, a petty thief and drifter makes a bargain with “The Conductor” for the chance to find perfect happiness and live forever. Armed with a magical watch that can stop time, Martin spends his life searching for that perfect moment in which to live forever. Will Martin cheat death and avoid that final ride to “The Depot Down Yonder”?



Photo: Anjipan

ALEXA DEXA

Composer and librettist: *Be a Doll*

Alexa Dexa is a composer, sound designer and performer noted as “an example of pure charm and whimsy” by *The New York Times* and as “unarguably personifying DIY for the millennium” by *Creative Loafing*. Her “toychestral” electroacoustic compositions showcase her soulful vocals, labyrinthine electronic sound-worlds, and an expansive collection of toy instruments, including toy piano, desk bells and typatune. Her self-booked tours have taken her throughout North America, Europe, Oceania and Asia.

Be a Doll is an electroacoustic opera for solo vocalist, performing choreographed play routines on musical and nonmusical toys with live and pre-programmed electronics. Living in a dollhouse, a woman carries out the traditional role of pretty plaything and keeper of the home. An existential game of hide-and-seek emerges as the distinction between woman and doll diminishes.



GERMAINE FRANCO

Composer: *¡La Capitana!* | Libretto by Nancy De Los Santos and Alejandra Martinez

Germaine Franco is one of the few women working in Hollywood as a composer, songwriter and music producer. She is the first Latina composer to join the Music Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Franco is a fellow at the Sundance Institute's Music and Sound Design Labs. She co-wrote five original songs for Disney Pixar's *Coco*, the Academy Award-winning film for Best Animated Feature. She won an Annie Award for Outstanding Achievement in Music for *Coco*. Franco has performed as a percussionist with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, the Spoleto Festival Opera Orchestra and the Belgian Radio Orchestra, among others.

¡La Capitana! is inspired by the true-life story of Petra Herrera, a *soldadera* in the Mexican Revolution, who, disguised as a man, fought with Pancho Villa in the battle of Torreón. She stood up for women's rights, confronting the patriarchal social structure of early 20th-century Mexico.



Photo: Jordan Hayes

ELIZABETH KELLY

Composer and librettist: *Losing Her Voice*

Elizabeth Kelly is an American composer currently based in the U.K. Her music embraces broad influences, running the gamut from "majestic Wagnerian lines aggressively punctuated" (*Boston Musical Intelligencer*) to "rasping jazzy exploration" (*The Guardian*). Her award-winning compositions have been performed by top ensembles throughout North America and Europe, at venues including Carnegie Hall, Tanglewood the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (U.K.) and Gaudeamus Muziekweek (Netherlands). She is director of composition and assistant professor at the University of Nottingham.

Losing Her Voice focuses on opera diva Geraldine Farrar as she films Cecil B. DeMille's 1915 silent-film adaption of Bizet's *Carmen*. The audience is invited to join Farrar's throng of "gerryflapper" fans as she journeys from stage to silver screen to the screens of their personal devices.



LEANNA KIRCHOFF

Composer: *Friday after Friday* | Libretto by Rachel J. Peters

Leanna Kirchoff describes her music as a pathway through poignant moments, soulful reflections and beautiful ideas. She composes operas, musicals, choral pieces, chamber music and audiovisual works. Her music has been performed in the U.S. and internationally, at Carnegie Hall, the International Congress of Voice Teachers, the conferences of the National Opera Association and American Choral Directors Association, Minnesota Fringe Festival, and Gateway Opera, among others. She is a faculty member at the University of Denver.

Drawing upon documentaries, interviews and memoirs, *Friday after Friday* dramatizes the violence and poverty in present-day war-torn Syria, charting the resilience of women living through the country's conflicts.



Photo: James Jacobson

VERONIKA KRAUSAS

Composer: *Ghost Opera* | Libretto by André Alexis

Of Lithuanian heritage, composer Veronika Krausas was born in Australia and raised in Canada, and she currently lives in Los Angeles. She has directed, composed for and produced multimedia events that incorporate her works with dance, acrobatics and video. Her work has been performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Industry, New York City Opera, Ensemble Musikfabrik (at Darmstadt Music Festival), Piano Spheres, Vancouver Symphony and Fort Worth Opera. She is on faculty at USC Thornton School of Music.

Ghost Opera is a fantastically spooky *dramma giocoso* about a haunted house, flying dogs, madness and crossing the River Styx. The work is being created with Old Trout Puppet Workshop in collaboration with Calgary Opera.



Photo: Sarah Sloboda

JULIA MEINWALD

Composer: *REB+VoDKa+ME* | Libretto by Gordon Leary

Julia Meinwald's musicals include *Pregnancy Pact* (2012, Weston Playhouse), *The Loneliest Girl in the World* (2018, Diversionary Theatre) and *REB+VoDKa+ME* (2017, NYU Tisch). She has developed work through the Dramatists Guild Fellows Program, American Lyric Theater, Ars Nova, the Civilians/R&D Group, Fresh Ground Pepper's Playgroup, the Musical Theatre Factory and the 92nd Street Y. She holds a B.A. in music from Yale and an M.F.A. from NYU's Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program.

A girl turns 18 on September 11, 2014, the day that Chardon High School shooter T.J. Lane escapes from an Ohio prison. ***REB+VoDKa+ME*** chronicles her search for community and her efforts to understand the misunderstood.



LIZA SEIGIDO

Composer: *Cyborgs Are Dancing* | Libretto based on Petrarch's *Canzoniere*

Liza Seigido is a composer and multimedia artist based in Miami who specializes in electro-acoustic composition. In 2015, she was commissioned by BC Dance Co. to build an interactive dance floor for a new work, *TV NO*, which premiered the following year. In 2016, her customized electronic đàn tỳ bà (a traditional Vietnamese string instrument) was featured in three online music-technology magazines. Miami Light Project awarded its Jennylin Duany Light Bulb Fund Honorary Award to Seigido in 2015.

Cyborgs Are Dancing is a musical drama, powered by interactive multimedia technology, that features two dancers, a three-piece electroacoustic ensemble, a live-processed vocalist, reactive lighting and video, and audience participation via wireless gaming controllers.

Discovery Grants: Recipients to Date (38)

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
Lisa DeSpain	<i>That Hell-Bound Train</i>	2018
Alexa Dexa	<i>Be a Doll</i>	2018
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
Germaine Franco	<i>¡La Capitana!</i>	2018
Laura Kaminsky	<i>As One</i>	2014
Laura Karpman	<i>Balls</i>	2015
Elizabeth Kelly	<i>Losing Her Voice</i>	2018
Leanna Kirchoff	<i>Friday After Friday</i>	2018
Veronika Krausas	<i>Ghost Opera</i>	2018
Kristin Kuster	<i>Kept</i>	2014
Anne LeBaron	<i>Psyche & 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
Julia Meinwald	<i>REB+VoDKa+ME</i>	2018
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
Liza Seigido	<i>Cyborgs Are Dancing</i>	2018
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>Genius, Abandoned</i>	2017
Cynthia Lee Wong	<i>No Guarantees</i>	2017
Luna Pearl Woolf	<i>THE PILLAR</i>	2014

Commissioning Grants: Recipients to Date (19)

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
Beth Morrison Projects	Sarah Kirkland Snider	<i>The Living Light</i>	2016
Beth Morrison Projects	Ellen Reid	<i>Prism</i>	2015
Fort Worth Opera and San Diego Opera	Gabriela Lena Frank	<i>The Last Dream of Frida and Diego</i>	2015
The Glimmerglass Festival	Jeanine Tesori	<i>Blue</i>	2016
The Glimmerglass Festival	Laura Karpman	<i>Wilde Tales</i>	2015
Houston Grand Opera	Laura Kaminsky	<i>Some Light Emerges</i>	2016
Houston Grand Opera	Nkeiru Okoye	<i>Home of My Ancestors</i>	2017
The Industry	Ellen Reid	<i>HOPSCOTCH</i> (selection)	2015
Minnesota Opera	Paola Prestini	<i>The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane</i>	2017
Opera Colorado	Lori Laitman	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	2016
Opera Columbus	Korine Fujiwara	<i>The Flood of 1913</i>	2016
Opera Parallèle	Laura Kaminsky	<i>Today It Rains</i>	2017
Opera Philadelphia	Missy Mazzoli	<i>Breaking the Waves</i>	2015
Sarasota Opera	Rachel J. Peters	<i>Rootabaga Country</i>	2017
Seattle Opera	Sheila Silver	<i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	2017
Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha and Miller Theatre at Columbia University	Missy Mazzoli	<i>Proving Up</i>	2017

For more information about OPERA America, its many programs and the National Opera Center, visit operaamerica.org.



About OPERA America

OPERA America (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 17,500 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) 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 supporting and nurturing the creation and development of new works led to the formation of The Opera Fund, a growing endowment that allows OPERA America to make a direct impact on the ongoing creation and presentation of new opera and music-theater works. Since its inception of its granting programs, OPERA America has awarded \$13 million to assist companies with the expenses associated with the creation and development of new works.