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AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS AWARDS FELLOWSHIPS TO BI-ANNUAL TRAINING PROGRAM IN OPERA COMPOSITION

NINE COMPOSERS AND LIBRETTISTS WILL RECEIVE FREE TRAINING WITH PROFESSIONAL OPERA SINGERS, INSTRUCTORS, PRODUCERS, MENTORS IN NINTH SEASON OF “COMPOSERS & THE VOICE”



BROOKLYN, NY – AOP (American Opera Projects) and Composers & the Voice Artistic Director **Steven Osgood** have selected six composers and three librettists to receive fellowships for its upcoming ninth season of *Composers & the Voice*. The 2017-2019 season will train, and present new works from, composers **Matthew Browne**, **Scott Ordway**, **Frances Pollack**, **Pamela Stein Lynde**, **Liliya Ugay**, and **Amber Vistein** and librettists **Laura Barati**, **Kim Davies**, and **Sokunthary Svay**. The primary focus of *Composers & the Voice* is to give emerging composers and librettists experience working collaboratively with singers on writing for the voice and contemporary opera stage.

“The philosophy of Composers & the Voice since its beginning has been that by immersing composers and librettists in hands-on work with skilled singers and music directors, we empower them to create groundbreaking works that are true to each of their artistic languages,” says Osgood. “Composers rarely have the opportunity to work with opera singers during their training, and C&V was designed to address this void. I could not be prouder of the commissions and premieres that have flowed from the alumni of C&V.”

The fellows were chosen from an extensive pool of applicants by a panel made up of C&V and AOP staff and professional artists that included Osgood, AOP General Director **Charles Jarden**, AOP Producing Director/C&V Head of Drama **Matt Gray**, C&V Head of Music **Mila Henry**, librettist **Sara Cooper**, singer **Amy van Roekel**, and composers **Conrad Cummings**, **Jeremy Gill**, **Jennifer Griffith**, **Laura Kaminsky**, **Kristin Kuster**, and **Gregory Spears**.

The *Composers & the Voice* fellowships include a year of working with the company's Resident Ensemble of Singers and Artistic Team, over 45 hours of "Skill-Building Sessions" of acting courses with director **Mary Birnbaum** (*Die Zauberflöte* at Juilliard), theatrical improvisation led by **Terry Greiss** (Co-Founder, Ensemble Actor, Executive Director of Irondale Ensemble Project), and libretto development with Libretto Writing Instructor **Mark Campbell** (*Silent Night*, *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, *As One*), and two public concerts of new works. This is followed by a year of continued promotion and development through AOP and its strategic partnerships.

Composers **Ricky Ian Gordon** (*27*, *The Grapes of Wrath*), **David T. Little** (*Dog Days*, *JFK*), **Missy Mazzoli** (*Breaking the Waves*, *Songs From the Uproar*), **Tobias Picker** (*An American Tragedy*, *Emmeline*), **Stephen Schwartz** (*Wicked*, *Godspell*), and **Gregory Spears** (*Fellow Travelers*, *Paul's Case*), and librettists **Gene Scheer** (*Cold Mountain*, *Moby Dick*) and **Royce Vavrek** (*Dog Days*, *JFK*) will serve as the upcoming season's "Artistic Chairs," each of whom are assigned a fellow, providing one-on-one artistic advice and career guidance.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation continues its support of AOP's *Composers & the Voice* program through 2019 as part of a multi-year grant award, which also covers artistic personnel and other program activities.

Bios of C&V fellows, singers, instructors, and music directors available at www.aopopera.org/composers_voice/2017-19.html

YEAR ONE FELLOWSHIP

The *Composers & the Voice* workshop sessions between October 2017 and April 2018, include composition of works for the season's Resident Ensemble - coloratura soprano Tookah Sapper, lyric soprano Jennifer Goode Cooper, mezzo-soprano Blythe Gaissert, tenor Blake Friedman, baritone Mario Diaz-Moresco and bass-baritone Adrian Rosas – who, along with Osgood, Head of Music Mila Henry, and Music Director Kelly Horsted, help guide the creation of the new musical material.

In addition, over 45 hours of "Skill-Building Sessions" for composers and librettists will provide an in-depth and firsthand knowledge of how singers build characters, act in scenes and sing text. These will include acting courses, theatrical improvisation, and libretto development, under the guidance Matt Gray (AOP Producing Director and Resident Dramaturg) in the newly formed position of Head of Drama.

At the end of the workshop sessions, AOP will present the results of the participants' work in public performances – *First Glimpse*, a concert of songs in Spring 2016, and *Six Scenes*, an evening of short opera scenes in Fall 2016.

YEAR TWO FELLOWSHIP

Following the *Six Scenes* performances, *Composers & the Voice* enters its second year of its two-year cycle and focuses on the development and further promotion of the Fellows' C&V-created works. This includes potential workshops and readings in AOP's "First Chance" opera development program and with partner organizations that have previously included as well as with partners concert series that have included partnerships with Opera Memphis, The Manhattan School of Music, and Opera on Tap, to name a few.

The second year of the cycle will also include continued partnerships with **The Hermitage Artist Retreat** (<http://hermitageartistretreat.org>), which will select a C&V Fellow (or Fellowship team) to receive a 6-week residency to continue opera development at the Hermitage's Florida estate, and the **Chautauqua Opera Company** (<http://ciweb.org/opera>), which annually invites one C&V alumnus to join the company for their 8-week summer season as a Composer-in-Residence and receive world premieres of three works commissioned by AOP.

HISTORY OF COMPOSERS & THE VOICE

“Hearing singers discuss in detail their experience learning and performing a new piece revolutionized the way I write for the voice.” - Gregory Spears, C&V fellow 2007-08, composer *Paul’s Case* (2013, UrbanArias world premiere) and *Fellow Travelers* (2016, Cincinnati Opera world premiere)

Since launching in 2002, C&V has fostered the development of 54 composers & librettists including Stefan Weisman (*The Scarlet Ibis*, PROTOTYPE Festival, 2015), Hannah Lash (Aspen Music Festival), Aleksandra Vrebalov (*Mileva*, Serbian National Theater), and Vivian Fung (2013 Juno Award “Classical Composition of the Year”). 2017 has already seen the world premieres of three operas initially created in Composers & the Voice – Daniel Sonenberg’s *The Summer King* at Pittsburgh Opera, Robert Paterson’s *Three Way* with AOP and Nashville Opera, and Sidney Marquez Boquiren’s *Independence Eve* at UrbanArias. Additional alumni works that went through AOP’s opera development program and continued to a world premiere include *Paul’s Case* (UrbanArias 2013, Gregory Spears) and *Love/Hate* (ODC/San Francisco Opera 2012, Jack Perla). A complete list of alumni can be found at www.aopopera.org/composers_voice.

“Artistic Chairs,” sponsorships named in honor of mentors and their support of Composers & the Voice, have included composers John Corigliano, Daron Hagen, Jake Heggie, Lee Hoiby, Libby Larsen, John Musto, Kaija Saariaho, and Tan Dun.

AOP Composers & the Voice Fellows have received grants and honors from the following organizations: Aaron Copland Fund for Music, ASCAP, BMI, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Music Center, the American Composers Forum, OPERA America, the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer, the Argosy Foundation Contemporary Music Fund, the Fulbright Foundation, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Douglas Moore Fellowship, Tapestry New Opera Works, the Frederick Loewe Foundation, New Dramatists, and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Foundation.

SUPPORT

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation continues its support of AOP’s Composers & the Voice program through 2019 as part of a multi-year grant award, which also covers artistic personnel and other program activities. The Victor Herbert Foundation will sponsor one fellow’s expenses for travel and costs of preparing and producing scenes with The Victor Herbert Foundation Composers & the Voice Chair, created in memory of longtime opera supporter and former AOP board member, Lois C. Schwartz.

COMPOSER AND LIBRETTIST FELLOW BIOS

Composers

New York-based composer **Matthew Browne**’s music has been praised for its “unbridled humor” (*New Music Box*) and described as “witty” (*The Strad*) and “beautifully crafted and considered” (*What’s On London*). He recently received honors such as the 2017 ASCAP Rudolf Nissim Prize, a BMI Student Composer Award (2015), an ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers award (2014), fellow at CULTIVATE Copland House (2017), winner of the New England Philharmonic Call for Scores (2014), and participant at the Minnesota Orchestra Composers Institute (2016). Matthew has had the honor to collaborate with such ensembles as the Minnesota Orchestra, Alarm Will Sound, the Albany Symphony, the New Jersey Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, the New England Philharmonic, the Villiers Quartet, the Donald Sinta Quartet, the Tesla Quartet, and PUBLIQuartet. He received his DMA from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. Previous teachers include Michael Daugherty and Kristin Kuster. www.matthewbrownecomposer.com

Scott Ordway (1984, Santa Cruz, California) is a composer, conductor, and Assistant Professor of Music Composition at Rutgers University. From 2014–17, he was a member of the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music. In recent years, Ordway has focused on a series of extended works fusing vocal and instrumental music with original text, video, digital soundscape, and experimental theater. These compositions explore a diverse array of contemporary themes, including natural landscape, protest and revolution, and the lives of cities. His music has been called “exquisite” by *The New York Times*, “a marvel” by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and “an American response to

Sibelius" by *The Boston Globe*, and has been presented by leading American and international festivals and institutions with projects in Berlin, Beijing, Tunis, Mexico City, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston. In 2016, his debut recording with the Hong Kong Philharmonic was released on NAXOS Records.

Known for her "bold and bracing" (*Baltimore Sun*) opera writing, **Frances Pollock's** music "pulls no punches and never flinches." (*City Paper*) Originally from North Carolina, Frances's music has been performed all over the country by the Bridge Ensemble, Prima Volta, The North Carolina Governors' School, Divine Waters Ensemble, and many others. In 2015, she wrote her first opera, *Stinney*, which won multiple awards including JHU's Diversity Innovation Grant and Best of Baltimore award. From 2016-2017, Frances was composer in residence for the Divine Water's Ensemble. In 2016, Frances was commissioned by Washington National Opera to write an opera entitled *What Gets Kept* as part of the "American Opera Initiative" Festival. Frances is a founding member of the new music non-profit, Prima Volta. She holds a B.M. in Theory and Composition from Furman University and a M.M. Peabody Conservatory. Frances will be continuing her studies at Yale this coming fall.

Praised for her "rich dramatics" (*The Boston Globe*), **Pamela Stein Lynde** is a versatile classical singer, composer, educator, and producer. As a composer, Pamela has had her works premiered by Oh My Ears Festival of Phoenix, Patchwork American Song Project, Guided Imagery Opera, TEDx Carnegie Lake, Contemporary Undercurrent of Song Project, and by many other performers across the US. As a performer, she has premiered works by some of today's most prominent living composers, appearing with Yamaha Young Concert Artist Series, the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, Rhymes With Opera, New Music New Haven, Saratoga Fine Arts Festival, Beth Morrison Projects, The Bang on a Can Summer Institute at Mass MoCA, and many others. She can be heard as a vocalist on minimalist composer Alexander Turnquist's latest album *Flying Fantasy*, released on the Western Vinyl label. She is the founder and director of Stone Mason Projects, a production company specializing in new music for voice.

Described as "particularly evocative," "fluid and theatrical... the music [that] makes its case with immediacy" (*The Arts Fuse*) as well as both "assertive and steely," and "lovely, subtle writing" (*Wall Street Journal*) the music by the award-winning composer and pianist **Liliya Ugay** has been performed in many countries around the globe. Recipient of a 2016 Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a 2017 Horatio Parker Memorial prize from the Yale School of Music, Ugay has collaborated with the Nashville Symphony, Albany Symphony, New England Philharmonic, Yale Philharmonia, Raleigh Civic Symphony, Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, Molinari Quartet, Antico Moderno, Omnibus ensemble, and Paul Neubauer among others. Her music has been featured at the Aspen, American Composers, New York Electroacoustic Music, June in Buffalo, and Darmstadt New Music festivals, as well as the 52nd Venice Biennale. Originally from Uzbekistan, Liliya is currently a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate at the Yale School of Music. Liliya is passionate about the music of the repressed composers from the Soviet era, regularly appearing with the lecture-recitals on this topic.

Amber Vistein is a composer and sound artist who is intensely interested in the physicality of sound and delves deeply into the poetics of timbre, texture, and gesture. She deploys a diverse array of techniques in her compositions to create complex 'sonic worlds' that blossom, radiate, and continually transform. Her use of electronics and digital signal processing further expands the expressive potential immanent within her sonic materials. These tools allow her to develop an immense range of sonorities and compose music designed to envelop the listener in an immersive, evolving situation. Amber is currently a PhD student in the Computer Music and Multimedia (MEME) department at Brown University and received her MFA from the Studio for Interrelated Media at Massachusetts College of Art and Design in 2013.

Librettists

Laura Barati is a librettist, performer, and deviser of new works. As a librettist, Laura wrote the short operas *Uprising* and *Henna Leaves* with composer Aleksandra Weil, both of which were developed by AOP + NYU. Laura trained at Kenyon College, the National Theater Institute, the School at Steppenwolf, and received her M.F.A. in Graduate Musical Theatre Writing from NYU Tisch. She's worked with the Arden Theatre Company, Strawdog Theatre Company, Jackalope Theatre Company, and Cold Basement Dramatics. Her writing has been performed in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York, at venues including Don't Tell Mama, Duplex, NYMF, Prospect Theater Company, and Barrington Stage Company. Current projects include *We Regret To Inform You That Reza Is Dead* with the devising collective The Electric Brain and the musical *How To Create A Young Girl*, written with

composer TJ Rubin.

Kim Davies is a 2016 fellow in Playwriting from the New York Foundation for the Arts. Her play *Smoke* premiered at the Flea Theater in 2014 for a thrice-extended run, was a *New York Times* and *Time Out New York* Critics' Pick, and has been produced in cities across the United States and in translation in Brazil. She is one of eight international writers selected by Ibsen International for their New Text, New Stage program and developed a new play with local theater artists in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, China from 2015 to 2016 for a world premiere in Shanghai in 2017. In collaboration with the Muse Project, she wrote *Stet*, which in 2016 had its world premiere at Abingdon Theatre Company. Davies is a member of Youngblood at Ensemble Studio Theatre and the New Georges Jam, and received her MFA in playwriting from Brooklyn College.

Sokunthary Svay is a Pushcart-nominated Khmer writer and musician from the Bronx, New York. She and her family were refugees from Cambodia who survived the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. She is the poetry editor for Newtown Literary and a founding member of the Cambodian American Literary Arts Association (CALAA). Svay was a subject in New York Magazine's "Living in a Sanctuary City" portfolio and featured in the New York Immigration Coalition's *This is Our NY*, broadcast in Times Square. Writing credits include *Homelands: Women's Journeys Across Race, Place and Time*, *FLESH*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *The Margins*, and *Mekong Review*. Svay recently received her MA in Language & Literacy from CCNY (CUNY), where she will also be teaching college composition this fall. Her first book of poetry, *Apsara in New York*, will be published by Willow Books in September 2017.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCER

Founded in 1988, American Opera Projects (AOP) is currently developing over 20 new operas, and offers training programs for student and emerging composers and librettists. AOP has produced over 30 world premieres, including the Rob Paterson/David Cote sex comedy opera, *Three Way* (Nashville Opera & BAM 2017), Davis/Pelsue dance chamber opera *Hagoromo* starring Wendy Whelan (BAM, 2015), Kaminsky/Reed/Campbell's *As One* (BAM, 2014), Nkeiru Okoye's *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line to Freedom* (Irondale Center, 2014), and Lera Auerbach's *The Blind* (co-production with Lincoln Center Festival, 2013). Other notable premieres include Kimper/Persons' *Patience & Sarah* (1998), Weisman/Rabinowitz's *Darkling* (2006), Lee Hoiby's *This is the Rill Speaking* (2008), and Phil Kline's *Out Cold*, also at BAM (2012). AOP-developed operas that premiered with co-producers include Sonenberg/Nester/Campbell's *The Summer King* at Pittsburgh Opera (2017) and Michigan Opera Theatre (2018), Glover/Rourke's *Lucy* and Boquiren/Neer's *Independence Eve* at Urban Arias (2017), Weisman/Cote's *The Scarlet Ibis* at PROTOTYPE Festival (2015), Gregory Spears/Kathryn Walat's *Paul's Case* at Urban Arias (2013) and PROTOTYPE Festival and Pittsburgh Opera (2014), Jack Perla's *Love/Hate* at ODC Theater with San Francisco Opera (2012), Stephen Schwartz's *Séance on a Wet Afternoon* at New York City Opera (2011), Tarik O'Regan/Tom Phillips' *Heart of Darkness* at London's Royal Opera House (2011) and Opera Parallèle (2015). Upcoming: *As One* (2017: San Diego Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera) and *The Echo Drift* PROTOTYPE Festival 2018.

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The AOP 2017-18 season is made possible by The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Inc., The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, BMI, Howard Gilman Foundation, the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and the contributions of many individuals.

MORE INFO AND PRESS MATERIALS AVAILABLE AT: www.aopopera.org

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