

THE AMERICAN OPERA PROJECT
AND BOSTON ATHENÆUM
PRESENT

WORKING WOMEN

SONGS OF
SUFFERING
& SUFFRAGE

NOVEMBER 11, 2020
7PM EST

PRESENTED BY:

 **the AMERICAN OPERA PROJECT** and



**BOSTON
ATHENÆUM**



A series of new songs connecting the women of World War I and the women who fought for suffrage, presented and discussed by the creators.

Working Women: Songs of Suffering and Suffrage is an online concert tour that features three **Songs of Suffrage** presented alongside excerpts from the chamber opera ***Letters That You Will Not Get: Women's Voices from the Great War***, connecting the women of World War I, the women who fought for suffrage, and the women of today through the power of song, using archival footage alongside documentary-style music videos.

Guest Speakers: the creative team of *Letters That You Will Not Get* – composer Kirsten Volness, librettist/director Kate Holland, librettist/dramaturg Susan Werbe

Host: Mila Henry, music director for the project and Artistic Director of AOP

PROGRAM ORDER

Working Women: Songs of Suffering & Suffrage

Running time: 60 minutes, no intermission

VIDEO PRESENTATION - SONGS OF SUFFRAGE

"Revolution Begins in the Bedroom" by Tony Solitro & Alice Eve Cohen
 "Beyond the Power of Any to Deny" by Jessica Rudman, text adapted from Susan B. Anthony
 "Her Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light" by Kathryn Bostic

WELCOME

Victoria O'Malley, Director of Events

INTRODUCTION TO WORKING WOMEN AND OPENING SONGS OF SUFFRAGE

Mila Henry, Artistic Director of The American Opera Project

INTRODUCTION TO SONGS OF SUFFERING

excerpts from *Letters That You Will Not Get: Women's Voices from the Great War* -
 composer Kirsten Volness, librettists Kate Holland and Susan Werbe

VIDEO PRESENTATION - SONGS OF SUFFERING

"War Girls", text by Jessie Pope
 "The Dancers", text by Edith Sitwell
 "The Gift of India", text by Sarojini Naidu

MUSICAL INFLUENCES OF LETTERS THAT YOU WILL NOT GET

composer Kirsten Volness

AUDIO PRESENTATION - FOUR EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS THAT YOU WILL NOT GET

composer Kirsten Volness, librettists Kate Holland and Susan Werbe

"Women of Europe"
 text by Lida Gustava Heymann, from *A Group of Letters of the Warring Nations* (Chicago: Woman's Peace Party, 1915)
 "I Sit and Sew", text by Alice Dunbar-Nelson
 "When the Vision Dies", text by May Wedderburn Cannan
 "There Will Come Soft Rains", text by Sara Teasdale

CLOSING THOUGHTS

AUDIENCE Q&A

SONGS OF SUFFRAGE

Her Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light by Kathryn Bostic
Beyond the Power of Any to Deny by Jessica Rudman, text adapted from Susan B. Anthony
Revolution Begins in the Bedroom by Tony Solitro and librettist Alice Eve Cohen

Created for the 2020 Centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote in the United States, three newly commissioned art songs celebrate the complex history of the fight for progress and honor those women that were left behind.

MUSIC DIRECTION BY MILA HENRY
 VIDEO DIRECTION, EDITING AND 16MM CINEMATOGRAPHY BY LESLEY STEELE
 ADDITIONAL CINEMATOGRAPHY BY MATT GRAY
 RECORDED AND MIXED BY ANDRYA AMBRO
 RECORDED AT BRIC ARTS MEDIA

ARTISTS INCLUDE:
 EVE GIGLIOTTI / MEZZO-SOPRANO
 JASMINE MUHAMMAD / SOPRANO
 LORI PHILLIPS / SOPRANO
 MILA HENRY / PIANIST

FILMED ON LOCATION AT:
 A.R.T./NY SOUTH OXFORD SPACE,
 FORT GREENE, BROOKLYN
 WOMEN'S RIGHTS PIONEERS MONUMENT, CENTRAL PARK, NYC

LETTERS THAT YOU WILL NOT GET: WOMEN'S VOICES FROM THE GREAT WAR

Composed by Kirsten Volness
 Libretto by Kate Holland and Susan Werbe

Combining powerful contemporary music with excerpts from women's writings on both sides of the conflict, *Letters That You Will Not Get: Women's Voices from the Great War* gives voice to American, British, European, Asian, African and Caribbean women affected by WWI through a series of vignettes that share their responses to the war. *Letters* tells the story of the Great War as experienced by the women who lived through it.

DIRECTION BY KATE HOLLAND
 MUSIC DIRECTION BY MILA HENRY
 DRAMATURGY BY SUSAN WERBE
 VIDEO DIRECTION, EDITING AND 16MM CINEMATOGRAPHY BY LESLEY STEELE
 AUDIO ENGINEERING BY BRETT PARNELL AT BEAR IN A BARN
 ADDITIONAL AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING BY CHRIS COMFORT

ARTISTS INCLUDE:
 MARIA LINDSEY / SOPRANO
 JESSICA SANDIDGE / SOPRANO
 SARAH BECKHAM-TURNER / SOPRANO
 CAITLIN MCKECHNEY / MEZZO-SOPRANO
 BRIANA HUNTER / MEZZO-SOPRANO
 ANGEL DESAI / MEZZO-SOPRANO

MELISSA TONG / VIOLIN I
 ELENA MOON PARK / VIOLIN II
 ANDIE TANNING / VIOLA
 MEAGHAN BURKE / CELLO
 MIMI JONES / DOUBLE BASS

FILMED ON LOCATION IN ARTISTS' HOMES

SONGS OF SUFFRAGE

Revolution Begins in the Bedroom

Music by Tony Solitro
Libretto by Alice Eve Cohen

Program Note:

"Revolution Begins in the Bedroom" is the opening aria of *Mrs. Satan and the Nasty Woman*, an opera-in-progress by librettist Alice Eve Cohen and composer Tony Solitro, adapted from Cohen's play. The opera examines the roles of two women- Victoria Woodhull and Hillary Clinton- in the long path to a woman President.

Aria Premise: November 4, 1872. It's the day before the election. The Town Hall, NYC. Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for President, delivers an impassioned speech on free love and equal rights to a standing-room crowd of her supporters. She hears a hostile mob outside chanting "Lock her up!" Refusing to be silenced, Victoria is arrested and jailed for indecency.

Almost erased from the history books, Woodhull was a suffrage fighter, radical activist, stockbroker, clairvoyant, and free love advocate. Once hailed by Susan B. Anthony as "the new leader of our fight for Suffrage," Woodhull fell out of favor with suffrage leaders when she had the audacity to run for president. She was jailed right before the 1872 election.

- Alice Eve Cohen, librettist and Tony Solitro, composer

Text:

I'm plotting a Marriage revolution!
Waging war against the institution.

What is marriage but woman's legal bondage?
Her children belong to him.
Her body belongs to him.
As long as husbands own their wives,
Nothing will change in women's lives

The revolution begins in the bedroom!
A vote for love will set all of us free!

Yes, I'm a free lover, I believe in free love
The right to love whomever I may
To love for as short or as long as I wish and
find a new love every day

Black or white, woman or man, Christian, pagan, or Jew
I want to love you all,
and be loved by all of you.

Because I believe in sexual freedom
They call me Mrs. Satan...
They call me Jezebel...
If that's the cost of fighting for change
I'm proud to be called the Queen of Hell!

You can lock me up
but my thoughts are unbound,
my ideas are unchained...
Go on and lock me up,
but my words will be heard.
Yes, my voice will be heard.

SONGS OF SUFFRAGE

Beyond the Power of Any to Deny

Music by Jessica Rudman

Text adapted from Susan B. Anthony

Program Note:

In 1872—long before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment—Susan B. Anthony and fourteen other women voted in the presidential election. Anthony, the other women who voted, and the election inspectors who permitted them to do so were arrested. Prior to her trial, Anthony toured the towns near the courthouse, giving a speech titled “Is it a Crime for a U.S. Citizen to Vote?”

Anthony’s central argument stemmed from the premise that voting is a natural right of all citizens and is “beyond the power of any state to deny.” She drew on evidence from the Constitution as well as the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to make the case that she and her companions committed no crime in voting.

“Beyond the Power of Any to Deny” grew out of a desire to set excerpts (and eventually, a song cycle) from Anthony’s speech, and her ideas resonate strongly with the current struggles against voter disenfranchisement. An ardent abolitionist as well as a suffragist, Anthony believed that all citizens—regardless of gender, race, or other factors—have the right to vote. By emphasizing that underlying sentiment in the adapted text, my goal is to highlight the relevance of the argument for today’s society.

- Jessica Rudman, composer

Text:

Nowhere can you find a word in any of the grand documents left to us by the founders that assumes for government the power to create or confer rights. And nowhere is there the slightest permission to discriminate against the right of any class of citizens to vote.

It was we the people— not we the white male citizens, nor we the male citizens— but we the whole people who formed this Union. And we formed it not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them. Not for half of ourselves, and not for half of our posterity, but for the whole people, women as well as men.

No one denies that before governments were formed, each individual possessed the right to protect their own life, liberty, and property. And when one hundred people—or one million people— enter into a free government, they do not barter away their natural rights. And yet today, more than half this nation’s people are utterly powerless to blot from the statute— books an unjust law, or inscribe there a new and just one.

The moment you deprive a person of their right to a voice in the government you degrade them from the status of a citizen to that of a subject. And however destructive this government might become, a disfranchised class could neither alter nor abolish it. They are powerless subjects, serfs, or slaves. They are not citizens.

And it matters little to them whether their monarch be an individual tyrant or a fifteen-million-headed monster.

SONGS OF SUFFRAGE

Her Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light

Music & lyrics by Kathryn Bostic

Program Note:

The pairing of suffrage-themed songs with excerpts from *Letters That You Will Not Get* began as an optional invitation for participants in AOP's Composers & the Voice (C&V) training program to create songs related to the Women's Suffrage Centennial; it expanded into a conversation about the necessity of including the success and struggles of the Women's Suffrage Movement, and evolved into the trio included here: two songs created during C&V, and a third by composer Kathryn Bostic, commissioned by AOP for soprano Jasmine Muhammad.

Bostic states,

"Her Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light' expresses the injustice and disenfranchisement Black women faced during the Women's Suffrage Movement. It was written to commemorate the presence, power, dignity and leadership of African American women suffragists long overlooked who helped pave the way for Equal Rights. During the formation of the Women's Suffrage movement and throughout its history, the blatant lack of acknowledgement of the huge and important contribution by African American women is a travesty that must be rectified. It is my hope that my song be a part of much needed action to heal and truth speak awareness that brings our overall community together."

- Mila Henry, music director and Kathryn Bostic, composer

Text:

I shine golden
From a mighty Love Supreme
And when my journey takes me to walk upon troubled land I shine golden
Hosanna Hosanna

My ancestral temple holds a Light filled path
I trail blaze
I womb speak
My Brown mother, her mother and all before her
We Rise and shatter narrow ways of darkness

Her Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light
Her Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light

Mighty seeds are scattered from her sun kissed womb
anointing
our calling
from my mother, her mother and all before her
Deep from her center birthing Queens and Kings

So hear me now to right this wrong
as history falsely claims
no mention of our leadership, our fight for equal rights
Our Black skinned voices silenced
and kept far out of sight
and kept far out of sight
White suffragists demanding justice
in word but not in deed
Our Black skinned voices silenced
so only they succeed
So hear me now to right this wrong in these United States
Black woman majesty a greater partner
commanded equal rights
I stand above deception shining truth upon this stain
My sovereign Blackness a beautiful light

I am the opening of all fragile hearts long forgetful of strength
long forgetful of Birthright
Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light
Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light
Her Sovereign Blackness a Beautiful Light

SONGS OF SUFFERING

Letters That You Will Not Get: *Women's Voices from the Great War*

Music by Kirsten Volness

Libretto by Kate Holland and Susan Werbe

Program Note:

On a sunny day in June, 1914, a Bosnian Serb nationalist assassinated the Austro-Hungarian heir Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. One month later The Great War began. The war was fought in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, China, Indian Ocean, North and South Atlantic Ocean. Four years, 3 months and 2 weeks later, the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. Military deaths on both sides of the conflict: over 9 million. Civilian deaths on both sides of the conflict: over 7 million.

How to make sense of the enormity of WWI, the 20th century's first global conflict? Not by deconstructing these figures, but rather by listening to the stories of the individuals whose lives were lost or forever changed by this catastrophic historical period. Considered the most literary of all wars - The Great War was represented until quite recently through the writings of the young men who fought (and often died) in the war, and the old men who sent these young men to war.

Missing were the voices of women - from both sides of the conflict. Mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, friends, and lovers. White, Black, and Brown Women. Women who worked on the home front in factories, on the land, drove buses in the cities, organized hospitals. Women who were very close to the battles - nursing sisters in casualty clearing stations, women doctors, ambulance drivers, staffers of YWCA rest huts. Women who, by virtue of the color of their skin, were not allowed to participate.

With *Letters That You Will Not Get*, we seek to honor all women whose experiences are an integral part of this history. Their voices are as powerful today as when they responded to the conflict that swept them into the war's bloody and unforgiving maw.

- Susan Werbe, co-librettist and dramaturg

WAR GIRLS

There's the girl who clips your ticket for the train,
And the girl who speeds the lift from floor to floor,
There's the girl who does a milk-round in the rain,
And the girl who calls for orders at your door.
Strong, sensible, and fit,
They're out to show their grit,
And tackle jobs with energy and knack.
No longer caged and penned up,
They're going to keep their end up
Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back.

—Jessie Pope (British)

THE GIFT OF INDIA

Lo! I have flung to the East and West
Priceless treasures torn from my breast,
And yielded the sons of my stricken womb
To the drum-beats of duty, the sabres of doom.
Scattered like shells on Egyptian sands,
They lie with pale brows and brave, broken hands,
They are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance
On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France.
When your love shall offer memorial thanks
To the comrades who fought in your dauntless ranks,
And you honour the deeds of the deathless ones,
Remember the blood of my martyred sons!

—Sarojini Naidu (Indian)

THE DANCERS

The floors are slippery with blood:
The world gyrates too. God is good
That while His wind blows out the light
For those who hourly die for us—
We still can dance, each night.

The music has grown numb with death—
But we will suck their dying breath,
The whispered name they breathed to chance,
To swell our music, make it loud
That we may dance,—may dance.

We are the dull blind carrion-fly
That dance and batten. Though God die
Mad from the horror of the light—
the light is mad, too, flecked with blood,—
We dance, we dance, each night

—Edith Sitwell (British)

SONGS OF SUFFERING

Letters That You Will Not Get: *Women's Voices from the Great War*

Music by Kirsten Volness

Libretto by Kate Holland and Susan Werbe

WOMEN OF EUROPE

Women of Europe, when will your call ring out?
 Summer's glory was shattered by lightning—
 The lightning of the most frightful of all wars.
 Millions of women's hearts blaze up in anguish.
 Women of Europe, where is your voice?
 Are you only great in patience and suffering?
 Women of Europe, where is your voice that should be sowing
 seeds of peace?

- text by Lida Gustava Heymann, from A Group of Letters of
 the Warring Nations (Chicago: Woman's Peace Party, 1915)

WHEN THE VISION DIES

When the vision dies in the dust of the market place,
 When the Light is dim,
 When you lift up your eyes and cannot behold his face,
 When your heart is far from him,

Know this is your war; in this loneliest hour you ride
 Down the roads he knew
 Though he comes no more,
 At night he will kneel at your side,
 For comfort to dream with you.

—May Wedderburn Cannan (British)

I SIT AND SEW

I sit and sew — a useless task it seems,
 My hands grown tired, my head weighed down with dreams —
 The little useless seam, the idle patch;
 Why dream I here beneath my homely thatch,
 When there they lie in sodden mud and rain
 Pitifully calling me, the quick ones and the slain?
 You need me, Christ! It is no roseate dream
 That beckons me—this pretty futile seam.
 It stifles me—God, must I sit and sew?

—Alice Dunbar-Nelson (American)

THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
 And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
 And wild plum trees in tremulous white,

Robins will wear their feathery fire
 Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
 Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree
 If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
 Would scarcely know that we were gone.

—Sara Teasdale (American)

CREATIVE TEAM - LETTERS THAT YOU WILL NOT GET



Kirsten Volness
Composer



Kate Holland
Co-librettist / Director



Susan Werbe
Co-librettist / Dramaturg

CREATIVE TEAM - SONGS OF SUFFRAGE



Kathryn Bostic
Composer



Jessica Rudman
Composer

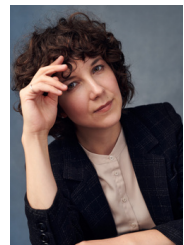


Tony Solitro
Composer

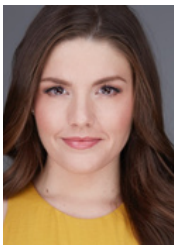


Alice Eve-Cohen
Librettist

ARTISTIC TEAM



Mila Henry
Music Director/
Piano



Sarah Beckham-Turner
Soprano



Angel Desai
Mezzo-Soprano



Briana Hunter
Mezzo-Soprano



Maria Lindsey
Soprano



Caitlin McKechney
Mezzo-Soprano



Jessica Sandidge
Soprano



Meaghan Burke
Cello



Mimi Jones
Double Bass



Elena Moon Park
Violin II



Andie Tanning
Viola



Melissa Tong
Violin I



Eve Gigliotti
Mezzo-Soprano



Jasmine Muhammad
Soprano



Lori Phillips
Soprano



Lesley Steele
Video director/
editor



Founded in 1988, The American Opera Project (AOP) has been at the forefront of contemporary opera for over 30 years. In 2019, American Opera Projects became The American Opera Project. But we are still AOP. We are going beyond being a collection of projects and becoming a mission, a vision, an unending experiment – an experiment in storytelling with the central premise that each life is an operatic story waiting to be told – and each telling of that story is an operatic experience waiting to happen.

"Beyond the Power of Any to Deny" and "The Revolution Begins in the Bedroom" were created through The American Opera Project's Composers & the Voice program, a two-year, tuition-free fellowship for composers and librettists that provides experience writing for the voice and opera stage. To learn more, visit <https://www.aopopera.org/composers-voice>

"Her Sovereign Blackness A Beautiful Light" was commissioned by
The American Opera Project

Working Women: Songs of Suffering & Suffrage is available for touring. For more information, visit <https://www.aopopera.org/working-women> or contact info@aopopera.org.

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