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OPERA America Awards \$100,000 to Support Opera by Women at Five Opera Companies

Supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation

September 12, 2024 (New York) — **OPERA America** is pleased to announce grants to five companies to support the commissioning of new works by women composers as part of its Opera Grants for Women Composers program, generously supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation. These Commissioning Grants promote the development of new works by women and bring visibility to women composers in the field. They award opera companies with up to 50 percent of the composer's fee for a full production of a commissioned work, with grants of up to \$50,000.

Commissioning Grants totaling \$100,000 were awarded to:

- **American Lyric Theater** (New York, NY) for *She Who Dared*, composed by Jasmine Arielle Barnes (libretto by Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton)
- **On Site Opera** (New York, NY) for *Lucidity*, composed by Laura Kaminsky (libretto by David Cote)
Co-producers: Seattle Opera (Seattle, WA), Tri-Cities Opera (Binghamton, NY), and Opera in the Heights (Houston, TX)
- **Opera on Tap** (Brooklyn, NY) for *The Singing Cabinets*, composed by Kamala Sankaram (libretto by Jerre Dye)
- **Opera Saratoga** (Saratoga Springs, NY) for *DRIFT*, composed by Alyssa Weinberg (libretto by J. Mae Barizo)
- **Spoletto Festival USA** (Charleston, SC) for a not yet titled project for the 50th anniversary of Spoleto Festival USA, composed by Paola Prestini (libretto by Robin Coste Lewis)

See below for descriptions of the projects and composer biographies.

The five opera company recipients were selected from a pool of eligible OPERA America Professional Company Members. The independent adjudication panel of industry experts included Alyson Cambridge, soprano and producer; Michael Ching, composer; Beth Greenberg, stage director and dramaturg; Blythe Gaissert, mezzo-soprano; Timothy Long, conductor, pianist, and composer; and Brenda Shaughnessy, poet, librettist and professor (librettist beneficiary of a 2023 Opera Grants for Women Composers: Commissioning Grant).

The Opera Grants for Women Composers program enriches the art form by supporting the work of women who bring their creative perspectives, experiences, and stories to stages across the country. It consists of two parallel granting initiatives: Discovery Grants, awarded directly to women composers to advance the development of new work; and Commissioning Grants, awarded to opera companies for commissions by women composers.

The program has distributed nearly \$1.8 million to composers and companies since its creation in 2014 and has helped propel the careers of countless women creators in the opera field. Of the five composers supported through 2024 Commissioning Grants, four received Discovery Grants for prior projects.

“Uplifting the voices of women composers is essential to the success of opera,” commented Marc A. Scorca, president and CEO of OPERA America. “We are profoundly grateful to the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation for their steadfast support and partnership in advancing gender parity in the field.”

OPERA America is committed to increasing gender parity in all areas of the industry. In addition to Opera Grants for Women Composers, the organization offers Opera Grants for Women Stage Directors and Conductors (generously supported by the Marineau Family Foundation), its Mentorship Program for Women Administrators, and its Women’s Opera Network.

More information about OPERA America’s grant programs is available at operaamerica.org/Grants.

ABOUT THE GRANT-COMMISSIONED PROJECTS & ARTISTS ([Publicity Photos](#))



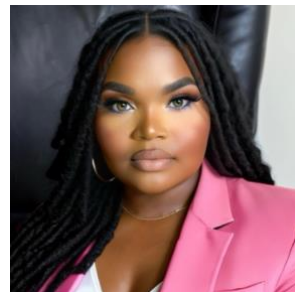
American Lyric Theater (New York, NY)

She Who Dared

Jasmine Arielle Barnes, composer

Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton, librettist

She Who Dared is a new opera by composer Jasmine Arielle Barnes and librettist Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton. Commissioned by American Lyric Theater, the opera is scheduled for its world premiere in June 2025 at Chicago Opera Theater. Everyone has heard of Rosa Parks, but she wasn’t the first to refuse to move. *She Who Dared* recenters the spotlight on the courageous women who helped desegregate the Montgomery bus system in the 1950s. These civil rights pioneers pay homage to the quiet struggle for justice that has often gone unknown — further amplifying the effects of the historic case of *Browder v. Gayle*. While often riotous and sometimes hilarious, these women demonstrate how everyday people have the power to challenge the systems around them and effect tangible change — if only they dare.



Jasmine Arielle Barnes, composer

Emmy Award-winning composer Jasmine Arielle Barnes is a Baltimore native and Dallas-based artist. Her music has been described as “refreshing,” “engaging,” and “exciting” by *San Francisco Classical Voice*; “beautifully lyrical” by *The Telegraph* (U.K.); and “the best possible blend of Billie Holiday and Claude Debussy” by *The*

Boston Globe. Barnes is managed by UIA talent and is an alumna of the Composer Librettist Development Program at American Lyric Theater. She has been commissioned by the New York Philharmonic and Juilliard, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as part of their New Works Collective, and Washington National Opera in celebration of the Kennedy Center’s 50th Anniversary, among others. She has also held residencies as a composer fellow at Chautauqua Opera and All Classical Portland. Barnes received a 2023 Capital Emmy Award for the PBS documentary *Dreamer*, about her choral/orchestral song cycle *Portraits: Douglass and Tubman* and work with Baltimore Choral Arts. Recent premieres include the world premiere of *Plumshuga* at Stages Houston; an

	<p>arrangement of spirituals commissioned by Orpheus Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall and performed by Karen Slack and Will Liverman; a composition for Lawrence Brownlee’s recital tour <i>Rising</i>; and a new song cycle commissioned by world-renowned tenor Russell Thomas for LA Opera.</p> <p><i>Jasmine Arielle Barnes received a 2024 Discovery Grant for her opera She Who Dared.</i></p>
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	<p>On Site Opera (New York, NY) <i>Lucidity</i> Laura Kaminsky, composer David Cote, librettist</p> <p>On Site Opera’s commission of <i>Lucidity</i>, in consortium with Seattle Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, and Opera in the Heights, will bring to the stage an intimate chamber opera specially written for soprano Lucy Shelton, as composer Laura Kaminsky and librettist David Cote explore the relationship between music and memory. On Site Opera’s world premiere production of <i>Lucidity</i> will take place at the Abrons Arts Center in November 2024. The staging places the seated audience on stage and the performers in the house, immersing the audience members in the world of the central character’s strongest memories. In her twilight years, a retired singer grapples with dementia while her son forsakes his own music career to care for her. Their lives converge with a young clarinetist and a music therapy researcher, igniting an exploration of music and memory. Amid their individual struggles, moments of joy and profound sacrifice illuminate their intertwining paths.</p>
	<div data-bbox="516 1192 802 1482" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Laura Kaminsky, composer</p> <p>With “an ear for the new and interesting” (<i>The New York Times</i>), Laura Kaminsky frequently addresses social and political issues in her work with a distinct musical language that is “full of fire as well as ice, contrasting dissonance and violence with tonal beauty and meditative reflection” (<i>American Record Guide</i>). Her first opera, <i>As One</i> (co-librettists Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed) is the most produced contemporary opera since its 2014 premiere, with more than 60 productions to date internationally. Her other operas are <i>Some Light Emerges</i>, <i>Today It Rains</i>, and <i>Hometown to the World</i> (Kimberly Reed, librettist); <i>Finding Wright</i> (Andrea Fellows Fineberg, librettist); and <i>February</i> (libretto co-written with Lisa Moore). Kaminsky has been recognized by the NEA, Koussevitzky Music Foundation, OPERA America, Chamber Music America, and USArtists International, among others. She is on the faculty of Purchase College Conservatory of Music and Boston Conservatory at Berklee and is a mentor for Seattle Opera’s Creation Lab.</p> <p><i>Laura Kaminsky previously received a 2014 Discovery Grant for As One (libretto by Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed). This is the fifth work by</i></p>

Kaminsky that will be produced with support from Commissioning Grants from the Opera Grants for Women Composers program. Those works include Some Light Emerges (libretto by Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed, 2016, Houston Grand Opera), Today It Rains (libretto by Mark Campbell, 2017, Opera Parallèle), and Time to Act (working title) (libretto by Crystal Manich, 2023, Pittsburgh Opera).



Opera on Tap (Brooklyn, NY)

The Singing Cabinets

Kamala Sankaram, composer

Jerre Dye, librettist

The Singing Cabinets is a haunted, interactive, site-specific, choose-your-own-adventure, scavenger hunt opera that fits squarely into Opera on Tap’s mission of building audiences by taking new opera to new places. Six different pieces of automata or coin-operated “singing cabinets” will be strategically placed throughout a city, town, campus, building, grounds, et cetera. Each interactive singing cabinet houses a unique, lifelike automaton played by a female vocalist. When a coin is dropped into the cabinet, the curtains part, the gears whir, the elaborately decorated cabinet comes to life, and a mysterious aria/monodrama is revealed. The singer tells the tale of a captured soul yearning to be free and the men who trapped her there. Each aria unearths a secret, and each mechanical cabinet divulges a piece of a much larger narrative puzzle. When all six singing cabinets are viewed in succession, the vast metaverse comes to life. *The Singing Cabinets* is a tale of misogyny, technology, witchcraft, and revenge.



Kamala Sankaram, composer



Praised as “one of the most exciting opera composers in the country” (*The Washington Post*), composer Kamala Sankaram moves freely between the worlds of experimental music and contemporary opera. Known for her work pushing the boundaries of the operatic form, she has created operas as varied as *The Last Stand*, a 10-

hour opera created for the trees of Prospect Park, Brooklyn; *Looking at You*, a techno-noir featuring live data mining of the audience and a chorus of 25 singing tablet computers; *all decisions will be made by consensus*, one of the first live performances over Zoom; and *The Parkville Murders*, the world’s first virtual reality opera. Recent commissions include works for The Glimmerglass Festival (where Sankaram was the 2022 composer in residence), Washington National Opera, PROTOTYPE Festival, and Creative Time, among others. As a biracial Indian American and trained sitarist, Sankaram has also drawn on Indian classical music in many of her works, including *Thumbprint*, *A Rose*, *Monkey and Francine in the City of Tigers*, and *Jungle Book*. Select awards, grants, and residencies include composer in residence at the Kaufman Music Center, the Jonathan Larson Award, NEA

	<p>ArtWorks, MAP Fund, OPERA America, HERE Artist Residency Program, the MacDowell Colony, and the Watermill Center.</p> <p><i>Kamala Sankaram previously received a 2015 Discovery Grant for The Privacy Show (libretto by Rob Handel). This is the fourth work by Sankaram that will be produced with support from Commissioning Grants from the Opera Grants for Women Composers program. Those works include Looking at You (libretto by Jerre Dye, 2018, Opera on Tap), Taking Up Serpents (libretto by Jerre Dye, 2018, Washington National Opera), and Joan of the City (libretto by Kamala Sankaram, Kristin Marting, original texts from interviews with homeless individuals, and found texts; 2020; Opera on Tap).</i></p>
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<p>OPERA SARATOGA™</p>	<p>Opera Saratoga (Saratoga Springs, NY) <i>DRIFT</i> Alyssa Weinberg, composer J. Mae Barizo, librettist</p> <p>Opera Saratoga has commissioned <i>DRIFT</i> by composer Alyssa Weinberg and librettist J. Mae Barizo. <i>DRIFT</i> is a story of migration and climate change exploring the forces that drive families from their homes into the uncertain refuge of new lands. Esmerelda’s memory has been damaged in a country teetering on the brink of civil war. Braiding an intimate narrative between Esmeralda and her childhood friend, James, <i>DRIFT</i> opens in the glacial landscape of a post-war period scarred by ecological disaster. Swinging between the domestic and the surreal, the second act will return to the terminal green of the characters’ youths as they navigate a toxic-laden panorama of swamplands and power plants. Touching on themes of motherhood, exile, and climate change, the narrative delves into the complexities of identity and nationhood; <i>DRIFT</i> is a prismatic journey of migration, with all its losses and wonders.</p>
	<div data-bbox="516 1381 808 1675" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Alyssa Weinberg, composer</p> <p>Composer Alyssa Weinberg uses color, texture, and gesture to channel big emotions, creating music that is “quite literally stunning” (<i>Chicago Tribune</i>). She is fascinated with perception and loves to play with form, subverting expectations to create surreal scenarios, often in dreamy, multidisciplinary productions. Weinberg’s 2023–2024 season features the world premiere of her monodrama <i>ISOLA</i>, a prismatic meditation on time, mental health, and isolation, written in collaboration with poet J. Mae Barizo and presented by Long Beach Opera. Her work <i>time to stretch</i>, commissioned for the inaugural celebration of the Paris Dance Project founded by Benjamin Millepied, was recently premiered at the Philharmonie de Paris with dancer/choreographer Mellina Boubetra and violinist Diego Tosi in collaboration with Ensemble intercontemporain. Weinberg has received commissions and awards from organizations including</p>

	<p>Chamber Music America, Copland House, New Music USA, FringeArts and Philadelphia Ballet, the Barnes Foundation, the Curtis Institute of Music, and OPERA America’s Opera Grants for Women Composers: Discovery Grants. A dedicated educator, Weinberg currently teaches at the Peabody Conservatory, Mannes School of Music, and Juilliard Pre-College. She holds a Ph.D. in composition from Princeton University, as well as degrees from Vanderbilt University, Manhattan School of Music, and the Curtis Institute of Music.</p> <p><i>Alyssa Weinberg previously received a 2022 Discovery Grant for DRIFT.</i></p>
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	<p>Spoleto Festival USA (Charleston, SC) <i>Untitled Work</i> Paola Prestini, composer Robin Coste Lewis, librettist</p> <p>Spoleto Festival USA will commission a new opera composed by Paola Prestini with a libretto by Robin Coste Lewis. This groundbreaking production will make its world premiere during the 50th annual Spoleto Festival USA, which runs from May 22 to June 7, 2026. The opera explores themes of resistance, justice, and the enduring struggle against discrimination. Prestini and Lewis bring their formidable talents and shared commitment to social justice to this ambitious project. Their collaboration promises to deliver a powerful and poignant narrative that resonates with audiences on both a personal and historical level.</p> <hr/> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;">  <div style="flex-grow: 1;"> <p>Paola Prestini, composer</p> <p>Composer Paola Prestini has cultivated a uniquely expansive artistic voice through works that transcend genre and discipline and projects whose global impact reverberates far beyond the walls of the concert hall. Prestini was named one of the Top 35 Female Composers in Classical Music by <i>The Washington Post</i>, one of the Top 100 Composers in the World by National Public Radio, and one of the Top 30 Professionals of the Year by <i>Musical America</i>. As co-founder of National Sawdust, she has collaborated with luminaries like poet Robin Coste Lewis, visual artists Julie Mehretu and Nick Cave, and musical legends David Byrne, Philip Glass, and Renée Fleming. Her works have been performed throughout the world with leading institutions like the New York Philharmonic, LA Opera, London’s Barbican Centre, Mexico’s Bellas Artes, and many more.</p> <p><i>This is the fourth work by Paola Prestini that will be produced with support from Commissioning Grants from the Opera Grants for Women Composers program. Those works include The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane (libretto by Mark Campbell, 2017, Minnesota Opera), The Old Man and the Sea (libretto by Royce Vavrek, 2022, Beth Morrison Projects), and Sensorium Ex (libretto by Brenda Shaughnessy, 2023, Beth Morrison Projects).</i></p> </div> </div>
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ABOUT OPERA AMERICA

OPERA America (operaamerica.org) leads and serves the entire opera community, supporting the creation, presentation, and enjoyment of opera. The organization is committed to:

- Promoting collaboration and effectiveness among opera companies, universities, and allied businesses.
- Delivering professional development to artists, administrators, and trustees.
- Increasing appreciation of opera through educational and audience development resources.
- Offering support and services that foster the creation and presentation of new works.
- Fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion across all aspects of the opera industry.
- Undertaking national research and representing the field to policymakers and the media.
- Managing the National Opera Center, a custom-built facility that provides a centralized space for collaboration, rehearsal, and performance.

Founded in 1970, OPERA America fulfills its mission through public programs, an annual conference, regional workshops, consultations, granting programs, publications, and online resources. It is the only organization serving all constituents of opera: artists, administrators, trustees, educators, and audience members. Membership includes 200 professional opera companies; 500 associate, business, and education members; and 3,000 individuals. OPERA America extends its reach to 80,000 annual visitors to its National Opera Center and over 83,000 subscribers and followers on digital and social media. Representing over 90 percent of eligible professional companies, OPERA America is empowered to lead field-wide change.

Over the past five decades, OPERA America has awarded over \$23 million to opera companies and artists across North America. This strategic philanthropy, made possible through OPERA America's Opera Fund endowment and in partnership with committed foundations, supports new work development, audience building, civic practice, co-productions, and field-wide innovation at its member opera companies. Awards to individuals advance the careers of women and people of the global majority in creative roles, highlight emerging artists, and recognize the leadership of exceptional trustees.