



THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC

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Finalists Announced for the 2018 Lotte Lenya Competition

Fifteen performers selected as finalists for Competition's 20th anniversary year.

NEW YORK (March 14, 2018) — Kim H. Kowalke, President of the Kurt Weill Foundation, has announced the finalists for the 2018 annual Lotte Lenya Competition, its twentieth anniversary year. Fifteen performers from Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, and the United States will compete for top prizes of \$20,000, \$15,000, and \$10,000.

Christine Amon (31, Grand Rapids, MI)
Gan-ya Ben-gur Akselrod (30, Tel-Aviv, ISR)
Daniel Berryman (27, New York, NY)
John Brancy (29, Mullica Hill, NJ)
Nkrumah Gatling (32, Houston, TX)
Richard Glöckner (23, Salzburg, AT)
Caroline Hewitt (26, Houston, TX)

Christian Hoff (25, Towson, MD)
Andrea Lett (27, Winnipeg, MB)
Christof Messner (31, Vienna, AT)
Reilly Nelson (28, Sault Ste. Marie, ON)
Benjamin Pattison (27, Arlington, VA)
Laura Sanders (23, San Francisco, CA)
Philip Stoddard (26, Phoenix, AZ)
John Tibbetts (27, Tifton, GA)



Finals take place on 14 April at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY and are open to the public. The evening concert, beginning at 8:00 pm and followed immediately by the awards presentation, will be live-streamed for free online viewing. Information about where and when to watch will be published on www.KWF.org closer to the date.

All contestants will perform a program of four selections from the operatic, “Golden Age,” and contemporary musical theater repertoires, including, of course, at least one number by Kurt Weill. Their performances will be adjudicated by a star-studded jury composed of Tony Award-winning actress and singer **Victoria Clark**, renowned opera and musical theater conductor

James Holmes, and **Jack Viertel**, Broadway producer, author, and Artistic Director of New York City Center *Encores!*

The finalists represent a diverse and highly accomplished group of versatile performers, many of whom have already embarked on major performing careers, including two current members of the United States Army Chorus (Hoff and Pattison), with multiple Broadway, national tour, opera, and concert credits with major companies and performing venues around the world. Several contestants return to the finals for a second time: Amon (2012), Ben-gur Akselrod (2017, Special Award), Berryman (2013), Nelson (2016, Carolyn Weber Award), and Brancy, who in 2008 received a Lys Symonette Award for Prodigious Vocal Promise at the age of 19.

An initial pool of 235 contestants submitted audition videos; that group was winnowed down to twenty-eight semifinalists, who auditioned live last week in New York City for judges **Lisa Vroman** and **Jeanine Tesori**. Vroman and Tesori also coached each of the contestants individually. Vroman said of the experience, “Our goal is to inspire each participant to be the best singer/actor they possibly can, and to give equal emphasis to both.”

The finals judges also bring their multi-faceted experience to bear. Broadway, film, and television actress and director Clark returns as judge for the fourth time. Perhaps best known for her Tony Award-winning portrayal of Margaret in *The Light in the Piazza*, her recent work includes Sara Jane Moore in *Assassins* (City Center *Encores!* Off-Center), Tony nominations for her roles in *Gigi* and *Cinderella*, and directing *Newton’s Cradle*, for which she won the New York Musical Festival Best Director Award. Holmes’s wide-ranging credits include work in major opera houses and theaters around the world, with a particular focus on the music of Weill. This season, he leads the German stage premiere of Weill’s *Love Life* at Theater Freiburg, a production which stars two past Lenya Competition winners in the leading roles, Rebecca Jo Loeb (1st Prize, 2008) and David Arnsperger (2nd Prize, 2010). He previously held the posts of Head of Music at English National Opera and Opera North, where this season he is music director for *Kiss Me, Kate!* 2018 marks his sixth appearance as a finals judge. At City Center, Viertel has overseen fifty-two productions, including Weill’s *Lost in the Stars* and Blitzstein’s *Juno*. Additionally, he is senior vice president of Jujamcyn Theaters on Broadway and the author of *The Secret Life of the American Musical*, published in 2016 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. This is his first time judging the Competition.

In addition to the top prizes, individual awards of \$3,500 may be bestowed at the judges’ discretion in recognition of outstanding performances of individual numbers or excellence in a particular genre or aspect of performance. The Kurt Weill Award of \$5,000 may be given for an outstanding performance of two contrasting numbers by Weill. All finalists will receive at least \$1,000. Total prizes will exceed \$75,000.

Founded by Kowalke in 1998 to celebrate the centenary of Lotte Lenya’s birth, the Competition recognizes talented young singer/actors who are dramatically and musically convincing in wide-ranging theatrical repertoire, with a focus on the works of Kurt Weill. Since its inception, the LLC has grown into an internationally recognized leader in identifying and nurturing the next

Kurt Weill

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generation of “total-package performers” (*Opera News*) and rising stars in both the opera and musical theater worlds. The roster of prizewinners has likewise grown to over 100 laureates, many of whom have gone on to major performing careers.

ABOUT THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION

The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, Inc. (<http://www.kwf.org>) is dedicated to promoting understanding of the life and works of composer Kurt Weill (1900-1950) and preserving the legacies of Weill and his wife, actress-singer Lotte Lenya (1898-1981). The Foundation administers the Weill-Lenya Research Center, a Grant Program, the Kurt Weill Book Prize and the Lotte Lenya Competition, and publishes the Kurt Weill Edition and the *Kurt Weill Newsletter*.

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