



THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media contact: Elizabeth Blaufox

2017 Lotte Lenya Competition Finalists Announced

Fourteen young artists selected as finalists; director Anne Bogart, actor Shuler Hensley, and music director Rob Berman to adjudicate; Top prize increased to \$20,000 to mark 20th annual competition.

NEW YORK (March 14, 2017) — The Kurt Weill Foundation is pleased to announce the fourteen young singer/actors named as finalists for the 20th annual Lotte Lenya Competition:

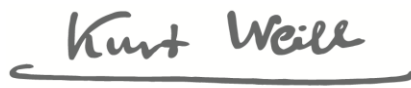
Curtis Bannister (31, Green Bay, WI)
Gan-ya Ben-gur Akselrod (29, Tel Aviv, ISR)
Felipe Bombonato (28, Gainesville, FL)
Molly Dunn (28, South Orange, NJ)
Jasmine Habersham (27, Macon, GA)
Michael Hewitt (26, Denver, CO)
Philip Kalmanovitch (32, Ottawa, ON)

Marie Oppert (19, Paris, FR)
Tony Potts (24, Fargo, ND)
Taylor Raven (25, Fayetteville, NC)
Katherine Riddle (25, Annapolis, MD)
Lisa Rogali (22, Bergenfield, NJ)
Bradley Smoak (32, Cary, NC)
Paulina Villareal (27, Torreón, MX)



The contestants represent a diverse group of versatile performers, ranging in age from 19 to 32, from across the United States, Canada, Mexico, France, and Israel. An initial pool of 266 preliminary audition videos (the most applications ever received) was narrowed down to thirty-two semifinalists, who then auditioned live last week in New York City for judges **Judy Blazer** and **Ted Sperling**. Blazer and Sperling also coached each of the contestants individually.

Blazer said of her experience coaching the semifinalists: “Working with these singers is an enlightening and thrilling experience and whether they win the brass ring or not they *all* win in a sense for having done it. This particular competition has such a warm and supportive air to it that the artists feel safe enough to put themselves out there. They learn and grow from the opportunity and develop themselves as performers in a way that they couldn't in any other environment.”



THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC

Kurt Weill Foundation President **Kim H. Kowalke** said of the 2017 competition, “This year’s semifinals were more competitive than some of our finals in previous years; the judges in Rochester are going to have their work cut out for them, especially with the stakes increased this year to a top prize of \$20,000.”

At the finals, each contestant will sing a program of four selections from the operatic, “Golden Age” and contemporary musical theater repertoires, and of course, the music of Kurt Weill, to compete for prizes totaling over \$75,000. In celebration of the 20th competition, and to match the ever rising level of talent seen at the competition since its inception, top prizes have increased to \$20,000, \$15,000, and \$10,000. Judges may also bestow additional discretionary awards of \$3,500 each for outstanding performances of individual numbers. The new Kurt Weill Award for \$5,000, established this year, will recognize an outstanding performance of two contrasting Weill selections. All finalists receive a minimum cash award of \$1,000.

The finals take place Saturday, April 22 at Kilbourn Hall at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. Each finalist will present his or her entire program in the daytime round, 11:00-4:00. An evening concert, in which contestants sing only a portion of their programs, follows at 8:00. The concert concludes with the announcement of awards and prizes. Both the daytime round and evening concert are free and open to the public.

This year’s judges’ panel brings together three internationally recognized artists. Renowned stage director **Anne Bogart** brings diverse theatrical and operatic credits to the jury. In January 2017, she directed the highly acclaimed production of *Lost in the Stars* with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. Tony Award-winning actor **Shuler Hensley** has demonstrated his versatility as an actor on Broadway in roles as wide-ranging as Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*, The Monster in *Young Frankenstein*, and a Tony and Olivier Award winning performance as Jud Fry in *Oklahoma!* Bogart and Hensley, both first-time judges, join veteran judge **Rob Berman**, who returns to the competition for a seventh time. Berman has been seen on Broadway most recently as music director for *Bright Star* and *Dames at Sea*; he is music director for the popular *Encores!* series at New York City Center.

Over the last twenty years, the Lotte Lenya Competition has grown from a small contest exclusively for students of the Eastman School of Music, to one of the widest-reaching international vocal competitions. Past prize winners have gone on to appear on major theater, opera and concert stages around the world. This season, LLC laureates can be seen in seven Broadway shows, at the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, Komische Oper, in concert with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, on national and international theatrical tours, and heard on two Grammy Award-winning recordings. See why *Opera News* said of the competition, “[N]o vocal contest better targets today’s total-package talents, unearthing up-and-coming singers who are ready for their close-ups.”

Kurt Weill

THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC

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.

###