

THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC

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Announcing the Winners of the 20th Annual Lotte Lenya Competition

Bradley Smoak wins top prize of \$20,000; Felipe Bombonato wins \$15,000 2nd Prize, and Paulina Villarreal wins \$10,000 3rd Prize; eleven Special Awards of \$3,000 each granted to remaining contestants; Most prizes and awards bestowed in competition history!

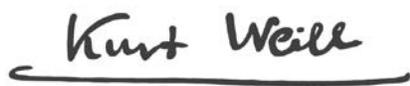
NEW YORK (April 24, 2017) — Bradley Smoak, 32 of Cary, NC, won First Prize in the 2017 Lotte Lenya Competition, sponsored by the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music. Smoak took home \$20,000, the largest single prize amount given in the competition's nineteen year history.

Felipe Bombonato, 28 of Gainesville, FL, earned Second Prize of \$15,000, and Paulina Villarreal, 27, of Torreón, Mexico received Third Prize of \$10,000. The remaining eleven contestants garnered a Special Award in the amount of \$3,000 in recognition of the excellence demonstrated by all finalists: Curtis Bannister, Green Bay, WI; Gan-Ya Ben-Gur Akselrod, Tel Aviv, Israel; Molly Dunn, South Orange, NJ; Jasmine Habersham, Macon, GA; Michael Hewitt, Denver, CO; Philip Kalmanovitch, Ottawa, ON; Tony Potts, Fargo, ND; Marie Oppert, Paris, France; Taylor Raven, Fayetteville, NC; Katherine Riddle, Crownsville, MD; and Lisa Marie Rogali, Bergenfield, NJ. Fourteen prizes and awards were granted, the most in competition history, an indication of the unprecedented level of talent showcased at this year's competition.

Foundation President and CEO, and founder of the competition, **Kim H. Kowalke** said of this year's finals, "The judges simply couldn't find a way to single out any of the eleven Special Award winners. Their scores were all so close. So they all deserved recognition."

The finals, held April 22 in Kilbourn Hall at the Eastman School of Music, consisted of a Daytime Round, during which each contestant performed a full fifteen-minute program of four selections ranging from opera/opera to contemporary musical theater; and an Evening Concert, at which each contestant repeated one or two selections as requested by the judges. A capacity crowd had already filled Kilbourn Hall a half hour prior to the Evening Concert and an additional 200+ viewers tuned in to watch via livestream. The audience leapt to their feet when the finalists took the stage for the awards ceremony, and continued to applaud vociferously throughout the announcements of the three individual top prizes and eleven Special Awards.

Smoak impressed the judges with his "beautifully crafted program," consisting of "This is the Life" from *Love Life* by Weill, "Vi ravviso, o luoghi ameni" from *La sonnambula*, "Higher Than a Hawk" from *Calamity Jane*, and "Me" from *Beauty and the Beast*. They noted his performances were "motivated by genuine emotion and ranged from strength to vulnerability to physical humor. His program took us to unexpected places and the repertoire took us from genre to genre, all with vocal ease and acting finesse."



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Bombonato displayed “a special quality from the moment he entered, with a natural rhythm that made each of his four characterizations believable.” He nailed Jimmy Mahoney’s high C in “Nur die Nacht” from *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* twice in one day, a feat rarely attempted, and even less frequently achieved. His program also included “Fanny” from *Fanny*, “I Am Adolpho” from *The Drowsy Chaperone*, which elicited much laughter from the audience, and “E lucevan le stelle” from *Tosca*. “Bombonato is both a strong actor and a formidable singer,” an apt depiction of what sets the Lenya Competition apart.

Villarreal captivated the judges and audience with a fiery zarzuela number, “Carceleras” from *Las hijas del Zebedeo*. She followed this with two Weill numbers, “One Life to Live” from *Lady in the Dark*, and “Der Abschiedsbrief”; and ended with “Maybe I Like it This Way” from *The Wild Party*. The judges praised her “courageous risk-taking,” and “charisma to burn.”

The group of fourteen finalists represented a diverse group of versatile performers hailing from eight states, as well as Mexico, Canada, France, and Israel, and fully spanning the boundaries of age eligibility from 19 to 32, including the youngest contestant ever to reach the finals, 19-year-old Oppert.

The panel of judges included renowned stage director **Anne Bogart**, Tony and Olivier Award-winning actor **Shuler Hensley**, and Broadway music director **Rob Berman**. This year’s preliminary round drew 266 audition videos (a 20% increase over the previous record) from contestants in 17 countries and 31 states. This pool was narrowed to thirty-two semifinalists, who auditioned live in March for judges **Judy Blazer** and **Ted Sperling**. Prior to the finals round, eighteen non-advancing semifinalists received an award of \$500 each. Following the preliminary round, six contestants were recognized with Emerging Talent Awards (\$500), and one with the Grace Keagy Award for Outstanding Vocal Promise (\$500), bringing the total awarded to \$89,500.

International opera star **Teresa Stratas**, the Special Guest of Honor, made her eleventh appearance at the competition finals. Stratas charged the finalists with a mandate: “The Gift has chosen you. You don’t have a choice. You are here because something compels you to get up and sing.... If you remember to connect to that pulse, you will always be the messengers of that light.” Stratas—whose career defied conventional categories and earned awards for her work in opera, musical theater, film, and television—served as the inspiration for the competition and has been integral to it since its inception in 1998, on the 100th anniversary of Lenya’s birth. It remains the only competition she has ever agreed to judge.

Over the last nineteen 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 singing competitions. Past prize winners have gone on to appear on major theater,

Kurt Weill

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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, Vienna State Opera, in concert with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, on national and international theatrical tours, and on two Grammy Award-winning recordings. To 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,” watch the winners’ performances on YouTube (www.youtube.com/KurtWeillFoundation).

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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