



## THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Jesse Leong Named Julius Rudel/Kurt Weill Conducting Fellow**

*Leong to serve as assistant conductor to Ted Sperling for MasterVoice's presentation of Lady in the Dark as part of New York City Center's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season.*

**NEW YORK (February 26, 2019)** — The Kurt Weill Foundation is pleased to announce the appointment of **Jesse Leong** as the recipient of the **Julius Rudel/Kurt Weill Conducting Fellowship**. Established in 2015 to honor Rudel's extraordinary artistic achievements and dedication to the music of Kurt Weill, this award enables a young conductor in the early stages of a career to assist a master conductor in the preparation and performance of a work by Weill or Marc Blitzstein and expand his or her knowledge of their works. The fellowship carries a stipend of \$10,000.

Leong will serve as assistant conductor to Fellowship Mentor **Ted Sperling**, Artistic Director of MasterVoices, for that organization's presentation of Weill's *Lady in the Dark* in April 2019 at New York City Center. Leong, age 26, completed his Bachelor's degree in Piano Performance and Master's degree in Orchestral Conducting at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He has worked as assistant conductor at Cincinnati Opera, and the Glimmerglass Festival; Interim Music Director at CCM Opera d'Arte; and currently holds the post of Associate Music Director at Queen City Opera in Cincinnati. His repertoire spans the standard operatic canon, as well as new works, and works of Golden Age and contemporary musical theater.

"I am thrilled and honored to be selected as a Julius Rudel/Kurt Weill Conducting Fellow," said Leong. "I look forward to working with Maestro Ted Sperling, Victoria Clark, and everyone at both MasterVoices and the Kurt Weill Foundation! Coming from a Broadway family myself (my father is a fight choreographer, and my stepmom is a dancer/choreographer), I have always had a love and affinity for music theater." As a passionate proponent of American music, he also plans to present several recitals this year focusing on the music of "crossover" composers, including Gershwin, Bernstein, Sondheim, Bolcom, Weill, and Blitzstein.

Sperling, sharing in Leong's enthusiasm, said, "We at MasterVoices are thrilled and grateful to be working with Jesse Leong. With his background in both opera and musical theater, he is a perfect fit for this position. Jesse will play piano for all cast rehearsals, and be a standby for me as conductor when we move into dress rehearsals and performances. As I'm both directing and conducting these performances, it's crucial to have someone I trust to listen and watch for me, as well as to step in and conduct rehearsals so I can take a longer view."

Sperling is a long-time proponent of Weill's music. As Artistic Director of MasterVoices, he has directed concert performances of *Knickerbocker Holiday* and conducted *The Firebrand of Florence*. In 2015, he conducted the US premiere and world premiere recording of *The Road of Promise*. He has also previously served as a judge of the Lotte Lenya Competition. His history with *Lady in the Dark* dates back to 2001 when he directed the Prince Music Theatre production in Philadelphia. He returns to the work now eighteen years later, in a new semi-staged concert version featuring choreography by **Doug Varone**, and starring Tony Award-winning theater, film, and television actor and director **Victoria Clark** as Liza Elliott. Sperling described the performances: "Our presentation of *Lady* is turning out to be quite ambitious. Our collaborations with Doug Varone and Dancers, as well as our incredible design team (which include contributions from couture designers Zac Posen, Christian Cowan and Thom Browne) are yielding very exciting results—this will be a one-of-a-kind event."

*Lady in the Dark* will have two performances, 25 and 26 April, at New York City Center, as part of its landmark 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary season. For more information, visit [www.mastervoices.org](http://www.mastervoices.org) and [www.nycitycenter.org](http://www.nycitycenter.org).

#### **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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