

Kurt Weill

THE KURT WEILL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC

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2015 Lotte Lenya Competition Finalists and Judges Announced

**14 Finalists from the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany
Will Compete for Top Prize of \$15,000;
Rebecca Luker, Theodore S. Chapin, and James Holmes Will Judge**

New York (March 19, 2015) — Fourteen exceptionally talented singer-actors from the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany have been selected as finalists in the 2015 Lotte Lenya Competition, held annually by the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music. They will compete for top prizes of \$15,000, \$10,000 and \$7,500 on Saturday, April 18, 2015, in Rochester, New York. Broadway leading lady and Tony Award nominee **Rebecca Luker**, British opera and musical theater conductor **James Holmes**, and Rodgers & Hammerstein President and American Theatre Wing Vice-Chairman **Theodore S. Chapin** will judge.

Now in its 17th year, the Lotte Lenya Competition is an international theater singing contest that recognizes talented young singer-actors, ages 19-32, who are dramatically and musically convincing in a wide range of repertoire, from opera and operetta to contemporary Broadway musicals, with a focus on the works of Kurt Weill.

Rebecca Luker, who judges for the fifth time this year, said of the contest, “There is no other singing competition quite like it. The Lotte Lenya competitor must have it all: acting and singing chops from a wide variety of theatrical and musical realms and also that certain something—charisma, star-quality, call it what you will—that puts them above all others. It’s always extremely difficult to pick only a handful of winners from a group that is always wholly excellent.”

Finalists were selected from a group of twenty-eight semi-finalists from the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom after auditions in New York on March 13-14, 2015. Contestants were required to prepare four selections: an aria from the opera or operetta repertoire; two songs from the American musical theater repertoire (one from the pre-1968 “Golden Age” and one from 1968 or later); and a theatrical selection by Kurt Weill. Drama Desk nominated singer, actor, and voice teacher **Judy Blazer** and Broadway music director and conductor **Andy Einhorn** served as adjudicator/coaches, evaluating and working with each of the semi-finalists.

The 2015 finalists, ranging in age this year from 23 to 31, are: **Robin Bailey** (London, UK), **Jordan Davidson** (New York, USA), **Adam Fieldson** (Nebraska, USA), **Briana Silvie Gantsweg** (California, USA), **Anthony Heinemann** (Missouri, USA), **Talya Lieberman** (Ohio, USA), **Carter Lynch** (Maryland, USA), **Michael Maliakel** (New Jersey, USA), **Lauren Michelle** (California, USA), **Florian Peters** (Köln,

Germany), **Katherine Riddle** (Maryland, USA), **Jim Schubin** (Colorado, USA), **Annie Sherman** (Maryland, USA), and **Christine Cornish Smith** (Texas, USA).

Finalists will perform their entire programs for the judges on **Saturday, April 18** between **11 am** and **3:30 pm**. At **8 pm**, they will perform a **concert** of selections which will conclude with the announcement of the winners. Both events are free and open to the public, and will take place in **Kilbourn Hall** at the **Eastman School of Music, 26 Gibbs Street, Rochester, N.Y.**

Since the inception of the Lotte Lenya Competition in 1998, the Kurt Weill Foundation has awarded over \$600,000 in prize money to young performers and continues to support previous winners through professional development grants. Previous winners enjoy successful stage, concert, and recording careers around the globe. Their 2014-15 credits range from Broadway (Lauren Worsham [Tony nominee], Amy Justman, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*; Analisa Leaming, *On the Twentieth Century*; Kyle Scatliffe, *Les Misérables*), National Tours (Cooper Grodin, Katie Travis, Amy Justman, *The Phantom of the Opera*; Doug Carpenter, *Dirty Dancing*; Maria Failla, *Evita*; Jacob Keith Watson, *Chicago*), and regional theaters (Erik Liberman, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, La Jolla Playhouse and Paper Mill Playhouse; Ariela Morgenstern, *Next to Normal*, Baltimore Center Stage) to major opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera (Ginger Costa-Jackson), San Francisco Opera (Matthew Grills), Los Angeles Opera (Liam Bonner, Jonathan Michie, Lauren Worsham), Glimmerglass Festival (Ben Edquist, Maren Weinberger), Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and English National Opera (Noah Stewart), Deutsche Oper Berlin (Edward Mout), Oper Frankfurt (Elizabeth Reiter), Dutch National Opera (Rebecca Jo Loeb), and Théâtre Royal de La Monnaie (Justin Hopkins). Concert highlights include *Sweeney Todd* (Zachary James, Justin Lee Miller) and *Show Boat* (Lauren Worsham) with the New York Philharmonic and the upcoming U.S. premiere of *The Road of Promise*, a concert adaptation of Kurt Weill and Franz Werfel's *The Eternal Road* (Justin Hopkins, Megan Marino) with The Collegiate Chorale and Orchestra of St. Luke's on May 6-7 at Carnegie Hall.

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.

Judges:

Theodore S. Chapin: Theodore S. Chapin is President of Rodgers & Hammerstein, a position he has held for many years. They are currently represented on Broadway with the Lincoln Center Theater production of *The King and I*, and *Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella* is currently touring the country. Chapin serves on several boards including The American Theatre Wing (where he was Chairman for four years), Goodspeed Musicals, and New York City Center where he was part of the creation of the *Encores!* series. He served as a Tony Awards nominator for two seasons, and is currently a member of the Tony Administration Committee. His career began as production or directorial assistant for the Broadway productions of *Follies*, *The Rothschilds* and *The Unknown Soldier and His Wife*, as well as Bernstein's *Mass* at the Kennedy Center and *Candide* in San Francisco. As Associate to Alan Arkin, he worked on the original Broadway production of Neil Simon's *The Sunshine Boys* and the CBS-TV special of George Furth's *Twigs* starring Carol Burnett. He has been a visiting lecturer at several universities and colleges, including Yale, NYU, Lawrence University, and St. Catherine's College in Oxford. His book *Everything Was Possible: The Birth of the Musical "Follies,"* was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 2003, and is

currently in print in paperback by Applause Books. He is honored to be making his ninth appearance as a judge of the Lotte Lenya Competition.

James Holmes: Equally at home in the fields of opera and musical theater, James Holmes has enjoyed an extremely wide ranging musical life as conductor, pianist and arranger. As principal coach and staff conductor with English National Opera and later Opera North as Head of Music he conducted a wide range of operatic repertoire as well as working with many leading singers and conductors: he has been Simon Rattle's assistant for productions at the Metropolitan Opera, the Aix and Salzburg Festivals and at Glyndebourne—including the much acclaimed *Porgy and Bess*. Classic musical theater has been a career-long interest and includes productions of *Sweeney Todd*, *Of Thee I Sing*, *Paradise Moscow* (Opera North), *Candide* (Manchester RNCM), *Into The Woods* (Royal Opera House), *Pacific Overtures* (ENO and a US Grammy-nominated recording), two acclaimed productions of *Carousel* (Royal National Theatre and Opera North) and last year, an acclaimed production of *The King and I* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. He has as wide an association with the works of Kurt Weill as anyone in the world, encompassing, among others, *Street Scene* (ENO, Berlin and recordings for BBC TV and arte DVD); *Mahagonny* (ENO); *Seven Deadly Sins*, *Arms And The Cow* (*Der Kuhhandel*), *One Touch of Venus* (all Opera North); *One Touch of Venus*, *Down In The Valley* (Kurt Weill Festival); *Songs From A Hotel Bedroom* and the British première of *Zaubernacht* (Royal Opera House) as well as concerts with ensembles ranging from the London Sinfonietta to Symphony Silicon Valley and recently, the Ensemble Modern. He was conductor for *I'm A Stranger Here Myself*, a BBC TV documentary on Weill in America, and worked on the first complete recording of *One Touch of Venus*, released in the fall of 2013. He has also appeared with such orchestras as the Halle, LSO, CBSO, Montreal Symphony and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, and with artists ranging from Willard White, Lesley Garrett and Lisa Vroman to Eartha Kitt, Patti Smith and Antony and the Johnsons. He has arranged material for concerts and recordings featuring leading British singers such as Bryn Terfel and Sally Burgess. As Artist-In-Residence for the 2013 Kurt Weill Festival in Dessau he premiered *Raft On The River*, his new version of Weill's last songs for *Huckleberry Finn*, with former Lenya Competition prizewinners and the Ensemble Modern Academy. In December 2012 he joined the Board of Trustees of the Kurt Weill Foundation.

Rebecca Luker: Rebecca Luker most recently starred in the Kennedy Center production of the world premiere of Ahrens and Flaherty's critically acclaimed new musical, *Little Dancer*, directed by Susan Stroman. Her Broadway credits are Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, *Mary Poppins*, *Nine*, *The Music Man*, *The Sound of Music*, *Showboat*, *The Secret Garden*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*. Other New York productions include Maury Yeston's *Death Takes a Holiday*, *X*, *The Life and Times of Malcolm X* and *Brigadoon* with New York City Opera. Off-Broadway: *Indian Blood* (Primary Stages), *Can't Let Go* (Keen Company) and *The Vagina Monologues*. Regional theater: *Passion* (Clara, Kennedy Center), *Time and Again* (Old Globe), *Harmony* (La Jolla Playhouse) and *She Loves Me* (Reprise! series, LA). Concert: *Boys From Syracuse* and *Where's Charley? (Encores!)*. As a guest artist she appeared with the Royal Stockholm and London Symphonies and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, and has performed at Carnegie Hall, the Library of Congress, and the White House. Ms. Luker has appeared multiple times with the American Songbook Series in the Allen Room, as well as the the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater for the Barbara Cook Spotlight Series, at Feinstein's at the Regency, and Café Carlyle. Film credits include *Not Fade Away* (dir. David Chase) and *The Rewrite*, starring Hugh Grant (dir. Marc Lawrence). Television appearances include: *Boardwalk Empire*, *The Good Wife*, *Law and Order-SVU*, CBS TV Movie *Cupid and Cate*, *An Evening with the Pops*, *An Oscar Hammerstein Celebration*, *A Tribute to Rodgers and Hart* (PBS), *The Kennedy Center Honors* honoring Julie Andrews and also Barbara Cook, and a Richard Rodgers celebration with the Boston Pops (PBS). Recordings: *I Got Love*, *Greenwich Time*, *Leaving Home*, *Anything Goes: Rebecca Luker Sings Cole Porter*, the *Aria* series, and original cast recordings of *The Secret Garden* and the revivals of *Showboat*, *The Sound of Music* and *The Music Man*. Born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, Rebecca received an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from The University of Montevallo, and now resides in New York City with her husband, actor Danny Burstein, and her stepsons Alex and Zach.

Finalists

Robin Bailey: The singer-actor hails from the United Kingdom where he recently performed Rodolpho in the Olivier Award-winning OperaUpClose production of *La bohème*, Tony in *West Side Story* and Nanki-Poo in *The Mikado*. Robin completed his Bachelor of Music degree at the Royal Academy of Music and is working toward a Masters of Music/Opera at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Jordan Davidson: The 2012 First Prize winner in Syracuse's Civic Morning Musicals Competition just completed a term as a Young Artist at Utah Festival Opera and was also a 2013 Studio Artist at Saratoga Opera. While a 2011 College Light Opera Resident Artist, Jordan appeared in *On the Twentieth Century*, *Oklahoma!*, and *Kiss Me, Kate*. A graduate of the Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam, the New Yorker is continuing his studies toward a Masters of Music in Vocal Performance at James Madison University.

Adam Fieldson: The Nebraskan's credits include performances as Nicely Nicely in *Guys and Dolls* and Galahad in *A Connecticut Yankee* at Ohio Light Opera Company, Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* at New York Opera Exchange and Jack in *Into the Woods* at Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre. Adam holds both a Bachelors and Masters of Music from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he performed the title role of *Candide* and Romeo in *Roméo et Juliette* in UNL productions.

Briana Silvie Gantsweg: Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, Briana now calls Brooklyn home. The singer-actor is a recent graduate of UCLA, where she performed Lillian Holiday in Weill's *Happy End*, L'enfant in Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, and Valletto in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. At the Interlochen Arts Academy, she performed Gertrude McFuzz in *Seussical: The Musical* and Meg March in *Little Women the Broadway Musical*. Briana can be heard on video games, musical, and soundtrack recordings for Sony Music Entertainment Japan, Hal Leonard, MTI Broadway Jr., Skywalker Sound, and Universal Pictures.

Anthony Heinemann: The singer-actor from the "Show Me State" is a graduate of St. Louis University (Bachelor of Music – Vocal Performance) and Washington University (Master of Music – Vocal Performance). His operatic roles include Pedrillo in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore* and the title role in *Albert Herring*, which he performed while a graduate student. Upcoming opera engagements include the title role in *The Impresario* with Gateway Opera and Borsa in *Rigoletto* with Union Avenue Opera in St. Louis. Currently a Young Artist with the Bach Society of St. Louis, he recently performed as soloist in Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Christ* with the First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood, MO.

Talya Lieberman: An alumna of San Francisco's 2014 Merola Opera Program, Talya returns this spring to the San Francisco Opera Center to make her debut as part of the Schwabacher Debut Recital series. This summer she will perform Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* at Wolf Trap Opera. While pursuing her Artist Diploma at Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, the Italo Tajo Award recipient performed Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*. She anticipates her first professional opera engagement in 2016 when she will perform Musetta in *La bohème* at Opera Columbus. In addition to her vocal studies, Talya completed a Master of Music degree in Trumpet Performance at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and a Bachelor of Arts degree with Highest Distinction in Linguistics at Duke University. Born in New York, Talya now calls Ohio home.

Carter Lynch: A leading artist at College Light Opera Company, Carter has performed Tommy in *Brigadoon*, Giuseppe in *The Most Happy Fella*, Bill Snibson in *Me and My Girl*, Mr. Andrews in *Titanic* and the title role(s) in *Jekyll & Hyde*. In demand for Gilbert & Sullivan productions, Carter has performed Frederic in *Pirates of Penzance* at New York's Symphony Space and Richard Dauntless in *Ruddigore* at the 2014 G&S Festival in Harrogate, England. The Maryland native is a graduate of the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill where he majored in Dramatic Arts with minors in Music and History. Upon graduation, Carter joined the National Tour of *Beauty and the Beast* covering the roles of the Beast and Gaston and performing both roles on numerous occasions. Carter was a Finalist in the 2014 Lotte Lenya Competition.

Michael Maliakel: The First Place Winner of the 2014 National Music Theater Competition appeared on the musical theater stage as Roger in *A New Brain*, Sky Masterson in *Guys and Dolls* and Man 2 in *Songs for a New World*. While an undergraduate at Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University, the singer-actor appeared in productions of *Postcard from Morocco*, *Manon*, *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, and *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. The New Jersey native also performed Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Bethesda Summer Music Festival and as the baritone in Phillip Glass' *Hydrogen Jukebox* with the American Opera Theatre at Georgetown University.

Lauren Michelle: A finalist in the 2014 Lotte Lenya Competition, Lauren will make her Carnegie Hall debut this spring performing in the US Premiere of Kurt Weill's *The Road of Promise* with The Collegiate Chorale. A graduate of both The Juilliard School and UCLA, the singer-actor has appeared internationally as Musetta in *La bohème* in Tel Aviv, Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at The Banff Center in Canada, and both Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi* at Teatro Romano di Fiesole and Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte* at Teatro Malibran in Italy. As a participant in the Britten-Pears Programme, Lauren performed at Aldeburgh Music in England. The Californian is honored to represent the United States in the 2015 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World contest.

Florian Peters: Born in the German Rhineland, Florian studied at the Bayerische Theaterakademie August Everding in Munich, receiving the equivalent of a master's degree in Music Theater. He has performed the role of Mark in *Rent* in Berlin, Claude in *Hair* at Theater Trier and at the Nordharzer Stadtebundtheater, and Peter in *Jesus Christ Superstar* at the Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz in Munich. He is currently performing Chevalier d'Danceny in a new musical version of *Dangerous Liaisons* in Munich. The versatile singer-actor has also performed Egon von Wildehagen in the operetta *Der Vetter aus Dingsda* in Berlin and created the role of Nahino in the opera *Der Flaschengeist* by Wilfried Hiller for the Munich world premiere.

Katherine Riddle: With her Bachelor of Arts in Vocal Performance Magna Cum Laude from American University, Katherine is an in-demand singer-actor around the Capitol Beltway. She performed Sarah Brown in Rockville (MD) Musical Theatre's production of *Guys and Dolls*, and both Liesl in *The Sound of Music* and Fredericka in *A Little Night Music* with Live Arts Maryland. Weathervane Playhouse audiences enjoyed her performances as Laurey in *Oklahoma!* and Cosette in *Les Misérables*. The Annapolis native is also a frequent guest artist with the Fairfax Symphony in Virginia and the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra.

Jim Schubin: A finalist in the 2014 Lotte Lenya Competition, Jim Schubin appeared as The Boy in the long-running production of *The Fantasticks* at the Snapple Theatre in NYC. Originally from Colorado Springs, he performed the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*, Freddie in *Chess*, and Rusty Charlie in *Guys and Dolls* with Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre. Since moving east, he has appeared as The Courier in *1776* at the Cape Playhouse and The Intruder in *See How They Run* at Barrington Stage. With West Virginia Public Theatre, he performed Jesus in *Godspell*. Jim holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theater from Emerson College.

Annie Sherman: Born in Maryland, Annie headed west for her training and to launch her performing career. She completed a Bachelor of Arts in Music at Stanford, receiving a Golden Medal for Excellence. While an undergraduate, she performed the leading role of the Boy in Kurt Weill's *Der Jasager*, as well as Luisa in *The Fantasticks*, Cathy in *The Last Five Years*, and Maxine in the world premiere of Giancarlo Aquilanti's *Oxford Companions*. In 2013 Annie also performed the title role of Poppea in *L'incoronazione*

di Poppea with Opera NEO. Crown City Theatre's production of *Cabaret*, in which she played Frenchie, received an Eddon Award for "The Best in LA Theatre for 2014." Currently at UCLA completing her Masters of Music in Vocal Performance, the singer-actor was the winner of the UCLA Concerto Competition performing Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. This spring she performed Inez in the West Coast premiere of *I due Figaro* at UCLA.

Christine Cornish Smith: A graduate of University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Music Theater, Christine performed Polly Peachum in Robin Guarino's production of *The Threepenny Opera*, which was part of a year-long Kurt Weill Festival on campus. She also performed the Stepmother and covered the Witch in *Into the Woods*, and appeared in *Oklahoma!* and *Anything Goes*. Upon graduation, she performed Reuben's Wife in the National Tour of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Christine is currently performing in *Guys and Dolls* at the Goodspeed Opera House (CT). The singer-actor made her Lyric Opera of Chicago debut in the Ensemble of *Oklahoma!* In her native Texas, she made her Lyric Stage debut as Cutie in *Fiorello!* and performed as a Hot Box Girl in *Guys and Dolls* at Water Tower Theatre. She has also performed as principal dancer with the Dallas Metropolitan Ballet. Christine was a recipient of an Emerging Talent Award in the 2014 Lotte Lenya Competition.

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