

WELCOMING LGBTQ YOUTH TO THE OPERA

KEN HOWARD



As *One*, by composer Laura Kaminsky and librettists Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed, is one of the most popular works in Palm Beach Opera's database of LGBTQ-friendly operas. Pictured above is the opera's world premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2014, with baritone Kelly Markgraf (Hannah before) and the Fry Street Quartet.

Forging a connection to young people has long been a core objective of **PALM BEACH OPERA**'s mission. From its Story Time Series for young audiences, to PBO Studio, a vocal apprentice program for high school students, to Community Concerts featuring young artists, PBO has continually expanded its suite of programs that engage youth. The company's latest initiative, Opera Out Loud, extends the company's civic commitment to the LGBTQ community.

Opera Out Loud began last spring when a member of the Compass Gay and Lesbian Community Center, based in nearby Lake Worth, Florida, approached Jourdan Laine Howell, PBO's education and community engagement manager, after a performance to express her concern that opera felt "heteronormative" to the point of

exclusion. Howell acknowledges that the term itself — used to describe a worldview biased against alternative sexual and gender identities — invokes "quizzical" looks from those unfamiliar with it, but she also acknowledges that accepting the language of identity is part of a culture of inclusiveness.

"You connect people to opera by finding stories that are accessible, relatable and personal," says Howell, "and you keep them engaged by giving them a sense of ownership over their own experience."

Opera Out Loud is still in its development phase, but for now it comprises numerous objectives: to discover

librettos to which LGBTQ youth can relate through reading groups; to research and catalogue repertoire whose central plots or characters are representative of the LGBTQ community; to spotlight professionals in the opera industry who identify with the LGBTQ community; and to provide a resource to those looking for LGBTQ-affirming opera events.

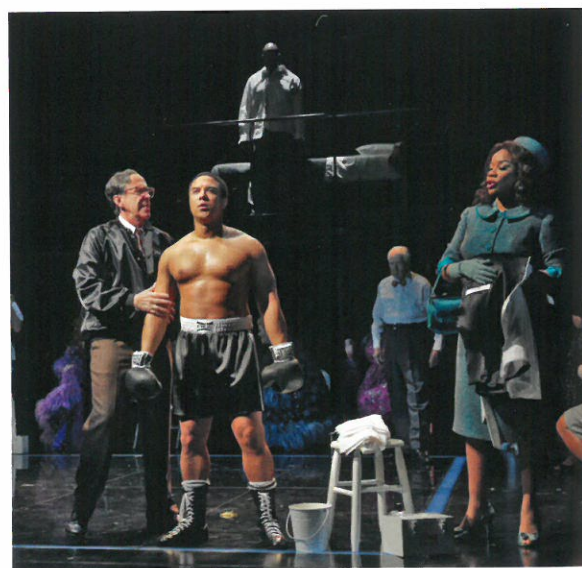
Howell says the most popular opera for reading and discussion has been *As One*, with music by Laura Kaminsky and a libretto by Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed. The story of a transgender person in transition, *As One* was commissioned by **AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS** and supported in part by OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers program, funded by The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation. *As One*

received its world premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2014 and recently received its West Coast premiere by **WEST EDGE OPERA**.

Among the other works currently in Opera Out Loud's online database are *Two Boys* by Nico Muhly and Craig Lucas (commissioned and co-produced by **THE METROPOLITAN OPERA**); *Champion* by Terence Blanchard and Michael Cristofer, and *27* by Ricky Ian Gordon and Royce Vavrek (both commissioned and premiered by **OPERA THEATRE OF SAINT LOUIS**); *Harvey Milk* by Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie, *Three Decembers* by Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer, and *A Quiet Place* by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Wadsworth (all three commissioned and premiered by **HOUSTON GRAND OPERA**); and *Oscar* by Theodore Morrison and John Cox (co-commissioned by **THE SANTA FE OPERA** and **OPERA PHILADELPHIA**).

Palm Beach Opera welcomes additional contributions to the database, which can be found at operaoutloud.org. Send suggestions to JLaineHowell@pbopera.org.

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—Jourdan Laine Howell



Champion, by Terence Blanchard and Michael Cristofer, explores the life of Emile Griffith, the prize-winning boxer who struggled with his sexual identity. Pictured above is Opera Theatre of Saint Louis' 2013 world premiere with (l-r) baritone Robert Orth (Howie Albert), bass-baritone Aubrey Allcock (Young Emile Griffith) and mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves (Emelda Griffith).

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