



present

On Call: COVID-19

from Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence



Christine Steyer *librettist*
David Shenton *composer*
Carl Ratner *director*

WorkingInConcert.org/CovidOpera



ON CALL: COVID-19

Presented by Working In Concert & Bellissima Opera

Music by David Shenton
Libretto by Christine Steyer

On Call's story is drawn from 200 articles about health care workers facing the pandemic.

The poem "Risorgeremo"
was written by Gino Impellizzieri.

David Shenton *music director*
Carl Ratner *director*
Christine Steyer *artistic director*
Claudia Hommel *executive producer*

Bellissima Opera premiered *On Call* on
April 17, 2021 with this production.

On Call is performed in English, with English subtitles.
60 minutes in length.
Appropriate for ages 8+.

Bellissima Opera is an initiative of the Chicago-based collaborative vocal arts organization Working In Concert. Support this opera with a donation at:
<https://workinginconcert.org/donate> Working In Concert is a 501(c)(3)

From the artistic director and librettist

No one was left untouched by the daily images of Health Care Workers around the world risking their lives in service to others as events of the pandemic unfolded.

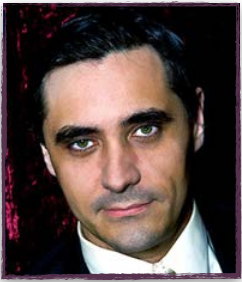
Composer David Shenton and I were in the midst of preparing for the premiere of *Future Perfect*, the first opera in Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence—works celebrating those transcending the human divide. When the pandemic hit, *Future Perfect* was delayed indefinitely. In keeping the the transcendence theme, we quickly turned our focus to writing this new opera honoring those self-sacrificing workers.



On Call: COVID-19 is dedicated to all Health Care Workers serving during this pandemic, and to the many journalists who wrote the 200+ articles which inspired this story

~Christine Steyer

From the music director and composer



I believe that it is of vital importance that artists continue to create, especially in times of heightened emotion, and even more so when they are challenged to create a work whose subject matter relates directly to the circumstances of that time in history, a snapshot in time, if you will.

On Call: COVID-19 serves to argue the point that out of something bad always comes something good.

~David Shenton

From the director

It was a great honor to be involved in the development and the premier of this extraordinary work. One of the marvelous things about the piece from the viewpoint of the director is that it offers the chance to truly integrate the actors' own experiences into the characters.

Shenton's music is singable and accessible, while also quite sophisticated, with many different musical and social resonances that give it depth. The score is haunting and deeply moving.



Steyer's libretto is touching, simultaneously contemporary and universal. Every word seems natural and heartfelt. Her libretto explores difficult issues of our time presented through the communal emotional responses that they evoke.

~Carl Ratner

From the executive producer



Early in the pandemic, when Christine first raised the idea to write an opera about the frontline health care workers, we were "all in". With or without the aid of technology, it always helps to hear others who are going through the same kinds of things.

The opera you're about to see was devised to look like something we have all become too familiar with, and on which many of us have had to rely for personal connection: the video conference call. The cast members, virtual chorus and directors were obliged to learn, rehearse and record their part in front of their own computer screen—and we have yet to meet in person.

It's wonderful how Steyer's libretto, Shenton's music and these passionate voices can literally raise our hopes together as one.

~Claudia Hommel

Cast*

Gwendolyn BrownChicago Health Care Worker “Sandra Jazmond Walker”
Emanuel-Cristian Caraman.....Lombardy Health Care Worker “Paulo Zaninelli”
Russell HokeNew York Health Care Worker “Mario Suffice”
Jeong Eun Joo.....Seoul Health Care Worker “Jane Kim”
Carl RatnerLebanon Health Care Worker “Gordon Cole”
Christine Steyer.....Rio de Janeiro Health Care Worker “Rolanda Couto”

*Each cast member has chosen their own character’s name to honor a health care worker or someone who has died from COVID.

Musician

David Shenton, piano & violin

International Choir

Mark Allen
Kathryn Atwood
John Atwood
Nathaniel Bauman
Nicole Cooper
Stefanie Cruz
Evelyn Danner
Diane Deckert
Jenny Earlandson
Miranda Flanagan

Dominique Frigo
Phil Frigo
Paul Geiger
Aaron Grace
Marie Labellarte
Shirley Lundin
Brinn Miller
Gillian Norris
Jean-Claude Orfali
Christina Ray

Katie Rub
Eleanor Sharpe
David Shenton
Erin Shields
Anthony Smith
Lydia Smith
Christine Steyer
Peter Storms
Suzanne Walsh
Jackson Wells

And the WMU University Chorale, Kimberly Dunn Adams, Conductor

Brianna Attard
Camille Booth
Joey Buan
Helen Delphia
Katelyn Dietz
JP Dizon
Alana Dyer
Hannah Elandt
Justin Hamann
Grace Hauschild

Caleb Heemstra
Emily Hoekstra
Jaydenn Knepp
Carson Lampert
Brooke Leinbaugh
Candace MacMurray
Amelia Marciniak
Bethany Moses
Lindsay Nichols

Kaleb Nuesse
Jack Reeves
Kayla Rose
Evan Stoor
Isaac Thompson
Kevin Tran
Josh Vreeland
Ashton Watkins
Marcell Whitfield
Margaret Winchell

Team

Director
Carl Ratner

Audio Engineer
David Shenton

Video Production
Mark Wade–Mission & Message Communications

Visual Designer & Subtitles
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Juliana Engel Storms

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Bellisima Opera Artistic Director
Christine Steyer

Working In Concert Executive Producer
Claudia Hommel

“On Call” Creators and Cast Biographies



David Shenton—Composer

David Shenton is an English pianist, violinist, composer, and arranger, based in New York City. Shenton has collaborated with musicians in diverse genres, including Vanessa Williams, Tony Bennett, Sierra Boggess, Denyce Graves, Renée Fleming, Sherrill

Milnes, Sir André Previn, Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz.

Composing since the age of nine, Shenton has written hundreds of works including sonatas, concerti, a symphony, an oratorio, string quartets, numerous songs, instrumental works, and operas.

Shenton's career includes conducting his orchestra/big band at Carnegie Hall in 2014; Jazz @ Lincoln Center Rose Theater as a jazz pianist in 2008; classical piano at Lincoln Center's Rubenstein Atrium for the 200th anniversary Schumann and Chopin celebration, and as music director/arranger/pianist for the Center's 100th Anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. Shenton is a founding member of the acclaimed classical crossover group, Empire Trio.

A prolific arranger, Shenton has worked at Abbey Road and CTS Studios (London), on Hollywood movies, and Broadway shows. Shenton has co-created more than a dozen shows with lyricist Martin Charnin (*Annie*). He arranged and orchestrated for the long-running West End production of Howard Blake's *The Snowman*, for Charnin's last musical, *Robin Hood: the Untold Story*, and for Opus X, with trumpeter Chris Botti. Shenton has composed numerous art songs and collaborated with Steyer on *Six Songs for Soprano*. He is a composer-in-residence at the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theater Workshop. His recordings include several albums for major record labels, including the award-winning solo piano CD, *Sunnyside Blues*.

Shenton is composing Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence—a series of operas exploring our shared humanity. The first, *On Call: COVID-19*, honoring healthcare workers, will premiered in April 2021. *Future Perfect*, co-created with 1300 local students, will have its Chicago premiere in June, 2022.

Christine Steyer—Librettist

As a performer, the soprano has distinguished herself as an artist of great versatility. In addition to being the recipient of national awards such as the 2020 Honored Artist of The American Prize for outstanding contributions to the arts, and the Johnny Mercer Award, Steyer has received acclaim for her portrayals of the title role in *Madama Butterfly* and Violetta in *La Traviata*. Since 2000, she has sung as a chorister and in several small roles in over 40 productions at Lyric Opera of Chicago.



A frequent recitalist, Steyer sang several concerts of Russian and American music with pianist Philip Morehead and concerts of Spanish music with guitarist Brandon Acker. In 2019 Steyer sang in France with The Chicago Paris Cabaret Connexion at the Montpellier Opera House, Paris' Salle Olympe de Gouges and the Lapin Agile. Last year, she sang at the Schubert Festival at Unity Temple, in Oak Park, where Steyer shared the stage with Lawrence Brownlee and members of the Chicago Symphony and Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestras, and a recital at The 19th Century Club *Music of Hope and Healing*.

As a music advocate, Steyer has brought classical music to 23,000 youth in underserved areas with her organization, Bellissima Opera Outreach. She collaborates with other professional musicians to create new works on relevant, contemporary themes. She and composer Jean-Claude Orfali are writing a book of original cabaret songs. Steyer's songbook, *Six Songs for Soprano*, was written with several musicians including David Shenton.

In 2014 Steyer, as librettist, and Shenton, as composer, began writing Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence: a series of new operas exploring our shared humanity. The first, *On Call: COVID-19*, honoring healthcare workers, premiered in April 2021. *Future Perfect*, co-created with 1300 local students, will have its Chicago premiere in June 2022.



Carl Ratner – director

Carl Ratner began his career as an opera director/stage manager and learned his craft assisting directors, including eminent composer Gian Carlo Menotti, at the world's major opera houses, including the Royal Opera at London Covent Garden, the New

York's Metropolitan Opera, the Munich Opera, the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, New York City Opera and the Santa Fe Opera, among others. He has worked with such notable artists as Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, Renata Scottò and Mirella Freni. He served as Artistic Director of Chicago Opera Theater from 1994-1999, and previously held the same post at Chamber Opera Chicago from 1985-1993.

After he had established himself as an opera director and producer, he began to study singing and earned his doctorate in vocal performance from Northwestern University. An accomplished baritone, he has performed the title roles in Verdi's *Falstaff* and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, as well as Papageno in *The Magic Flute* and John Proctor in *The Crucible*. A frequent soloist for oratorio, he has sung Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *Magnificat* with The Bach Ensemble of Naples and *Dona Nobis Pacem* by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs* with the Cedar Rapids Concert Chorale.

He received a Fulbright grant to teach and study at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in Russia, where he directed a chamber opera, gave master classes and lectures, coached voice students in multiple languages, and performed a recital of songs by Russian, American, and Russian-American composers. He subsequently toured this program around the Eastern United States, performing it at the Russian Cultural Center in Washington and the Chicago Cultural Center as part of a seminar called The Soviet Experience.

He currently serves as Co-Chair of Voice and Director of Opera at Western Michigan University.

Gwendolyn Brown – contralto



Contralto Gwendolyn Brown's more than 25-year international career includes performances in opera, symphonic music, classical art song and spirituals, as well as the contemporary and the avant-garde. She has received critical acclaim in these works and has performed in many large opera houses (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, Seattle Opera, New Orleans Opera, to name a few), and symphony homes in the United States including Boston Symphony, LA Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl and Tanglewood.

Her international career includes performances in Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic, Amsterdam and Australia. She has created roles for Anne LeBaron for the Contemporary Opera Company The Industry, and for George Lewis for new music festivals in the UK, and the Ojai Music Festival in California. Gwendolyn has also premiered and commissioned art songs and spirituals of up and rising young composers.

Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, Gwendolyn obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Music at Fisk University (Nashville, TN), and pursued the master's degree in Vocal Performance at the University of Memphis (Memphis, TN). She completed her master's degree at the American Music Conservatory (Hammond, IN). Her young artist development included *The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center for the Lyric Opera of Chicago* and *The Des Moines Metro Opera Young Artist Program*.

Ms. Brown currently lives in Nashville, Tennessee where she is the Assistant Professor of Music in Voice and Opera Workshop at her alma mater, Fisk University and is often asked to conduct Masterclasses in vocal technique, performance practice of Spirituals and Black/African American Art Song as well as career planning and advisement in the Classical music field.



Jeong Eun Joo – soprano

Jeong Eun Joo is a Korean soprano with a wide range of musical interests, from Baroque to contemporary repertoire. Ms. Joo is a skilled performer on the lyric stage with a flexible and rich vocal sound. She has been described as "a commanding stage performer, communicating with assurance and grace" and "having a technically-solid, lyric coloratura voice."

continued...

Ms. Joo made her debut at the Eastman Theater's Kodak Hall as Giulietta in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* and returned to perform the roles of Monica in Menotti's *The Medium* and Euridice in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. She appeared as a soloist in Haydn's *The Creation* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with Chicago Oratorio Choir. She was also a soloist in Haydn's *Nelson Mass* with Chicago Christian Chorale.

She holds a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts in voice performance and literature from Eastman school of Music, as well as a Bachelor of Music degree at Seoul National University. Additional studies include graduate work and teaching assistantships at Seoul National University and Eastman School of Music, language study and coaching in Milan and Florence, Italy. She has taken masterclasses from Swedish baritone Håkan Hagegård, distinguished American soprano Benita Valente, and composer, Lee Hoiby. Performing credits in Korea and Chicago include numerous recitals, oratorios, and operas.



Emanuel-Cristian Caraman – tenor

Emanuel-Cristian Caraman is a Romanian tenor. He has appeared with opera companies, symphony orchestras and on recital stages in Europe, North and South America. He has performed with opera companies throughout the

world. Operatic highlights include Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore*, Rodolfo in *La Boheme*, Alfredo in *La Traviata*, Don José in *Carmen*, Fritz in *L'Amico Fritz*, Riccardo in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, Ernesto in *Don Pasquale*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* and Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*.

Mr. Caraman has performed the tenor solos in Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Mozart's *Great Mass in C Minor*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Bach's *B Minor Mass*, Bach's *Magnificat*, Ramirez's *Misa Criolla*, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation*, Haydn's *Stabat Mater*, Bruckner's *Te Deum* and Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*. Mr. Caraman recorded Spanish composer Jorge Muniz's vocal catalog written for tenor, cello and piano. For this project, Mr. Muniz composed a new song cycle specifically for Mr. Caraman's voice. *Cantos del Emigrante* on Afinat Records.

Caraman is the recipient of the Michiana 40 under 40 recognition award, conferred by South Bend Regional Chamber of Commerce, the American Prize Oratorio Award, for an outstanding vocal symphonic artist. He is currently the general and artistic director of South Bend Lyric Opera in South Bend Indiana.

Mr. Caraman received his doctorate in music from National Music University in Bucharest, Romania under professor Dr. Grigore Constantinescu. He is the visiting assistant professor of Music in Voice at Indiana University at South Bend.



Russell Hoke – baritone

Chicago baritone Russell Hoke has performed across the United States., Europe, and South America. He has worked with Metropolitan Opera's Gail Dubinbaum and has been coached by several

Maestros, including John Massaro, Pedro Yanez, Bill Powers, and Louis Salemno. Russell also toured the United Kingdom as a part of the *Persuasion* tour with The Chamber Opera of Chicago.

Hoke's performance highlights include *Die Fledermaus*, Big Jule in *Guys and Dolls*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Giorgio Germont in *La Traviata*, Zio Bronze in *Madama Butterfly*, Dottore Bartolo in *Barber of Seville*, *The Magic Flute*, *Porgy and Bess*, Balthazar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. He has performed with Gilbert and Sullivan Co. of Chicago, Sugar Creek Symphony, Elgin Opera, Windy City Opera, Light Opera Works, daCorneto Opera, Milwaukee Opera Theatre and many others.

He recently performed as The Villains in *Les Contes d'Hoffman* in Sao Paulo, Brazil with the Festival of International Operas of Americas, conducted by Michael Borowitz and John Massaro. He also performed the role of Pilisopio Tasio from *Noli Me Tangere* as the opera made its American début.

Hoke is also a vocal coach. Along with soprano Nicole Cooper, Russell runs Heart of Singing, a school offering voice, piano, guitar, and ukulele lessons for all ages. He was featured in the *Chicago Tribune* for his work with children in music in Elgin, Illinois. Hoke has a degree in vocal performance from Northern Illinois University.

An operatic love letter to global frontline health care workers

About “On Call”

Winner of the 2020-21 National Opera Association Production Award, ON CALL was produced/commissioned by Working in Concert’s Bellissima Opera Initiative. Its story is drawn from 200 articles about global health care workers facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 60 minutes opera uses piano, a cast of six - three high and three low voices (for either gender) and an optional chorus.

ON CALL’s three scenes look in on a series of Zoom calls by six characters: medics from Chicago, Lombardy, New York City, Seoul, Lebanon and Rio de Janeiro who provide a lifeline to each other as they struggle with the pandemic unfolding in their location. Each cast member has chosen their own character’s name to honor a health care worker or someone who has died from COVID.

ON CALL provided a meaningful project for singers who had been hard-pressed to find work during the pandemic. Each singer safely recorded their parts separately and the segments were then assembled by video engineer Mark Wade to create the look of live Zoom meetings. ON CALL received its collegiate premiere by students at Western Michigan University on April 30, 2021.

More about “On Call”

Gender Flexible Opera

“On Call” is currently scored for 3 high and 3 low voices. Any of the roles can be rewritten an octave higher or lower to accommodate a performance by any gender.

The Collegiate WMU Premiere

The Western Michigan University Opera Department premiered “On Call: COVID-19” on April 30 & May 2, 2021.

Synopsis

ON CALL Opera Synopsis – 3 Scenes in 2020
Characters are identified by location, as in “Chicago HCW” (Health Care Worker). Each scene (April, September, and December 2020) begins with the actual COVID statistics* of infected and deceased persons for each location.

April—In a moment of crisis, the Chicago HCW connects virtually with 5 Health Care Workers with whom she has friendships. She expresses frustration by lack of supplies and questions returning to work. The New York HCW then admits he may have caused the death of his grandmother. The Lombardy HCW sings about the resiliency of Italians and the Seoul HCW translates it into English. The Chicago HCW resolves to return to work.

September—The Lombardy HCW is recovering from COVID; the Lebanon HCW explains the refugee situation is worsening due to the Beirut explosion; the Rio de Janeiro HCW states how deforestation spreads COVID. The Seoul HCW and the Lombardy HCW join in with other grievances. The Chicago HCW interrupts them to say that these calls should be a place of healing rather than an echo-chamber for disheartening news. The Chicago HCW insists that if they meet again, they should each find something good to share with the group.

New Year’s Eve—Everyone shares a positive anecdote. They also note that compassion is as precious a tool as vaccine and ventilator and that the lifeline they provide each other will extend into the larger world.

*Statistics Source:

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_death_rates_by_country)

[COVID-19_pandemic_death_rates_by_country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_death_rates_by_country)

Interested in Licensing?

Looking to program that perfect opera for piano and six singers? Contact Working In Concert Executive Director Claudia Hommel. Claudia@WorkingInConcert.org

Creating “On Call”

“On Call” provided a meaningful and safe place for artists to engage in their craft during the COVID crisis. Each artist recorded their parts at home: Illinois, New York, Tennessee, Michigan & Indiana! The segments were then assembled to create the look of a live “Zoom” meeting.

Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence

Bellissima Opera "With our voices, we put on stage what we wish to see in our communities and in our world."

ON CALL: COVID-19 is the first opera by Christine Steyer and David Shenton for the Tales of Transcendence—new operas celebrating those transcending human divide.

The second opera, FUTURE PERFECT—a modern fairy tale co-created with 1,300 Chicago-area Youths, premieres in Chicago, June 2022. Directed by Nick Sandys.

Upcoming operas in the Tales are RECONCILIATION—examining restorative justice in today's world, and OUTSIDE THE RING—Joe Louis & Max Schmeling boxing rivalry turned friendship.

Connect with Bellissima Opera!



FUTURE PERFECT

a new opera

Co-created with 1300 Chicago-area youths

from Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence

Join the adventures of the curious Miranette who leaves a forbidding society. Along her way, she meets a colorful cast of characters who all become engulfed in a web of quantum entanglement—a state where anything is possible.

Christine Steyer librettist Nick Sandys director
David Shenton composer

Premieres in Chicago in June 2022

WorkingInConcert.org/futureperfect



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Christine Steyer, Bellissima Opera Artistic Director
christine@workinginconcert.org (773) 531-7927

OUTSIDE the RING

a new opera

from Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence

The Joe Louis & Max Schmeling boxing rivalry that defined two nations on the precipice of WWII and their unlikely friendship that defined two men.




Christine Steyer librettist David Shenton composer
WorkingInConcert.org/outsidethering

Reconciliation

a new opera

from Bellissima Opera's Tales of Transcendence



A miraculous act of forgiveness at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa inspires a work examining the power of restorative justice in our society.

Christine Steyer librettist David Shenton composer
WorkingInConcert.org/reconciliation

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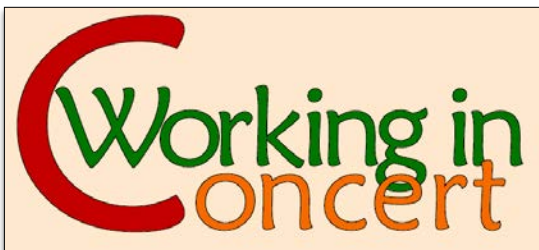
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Jim Parks
Carl Ratner
Erin Shields
Lydia Stux
Barbara Smith

And to the journalists and media platforms dedicated to reporting the events of the COVID pandemic, particularly PBS, Amanpour and Company, Ed Yong, Sebastião Salgado and The Atlantic.



A performing arts collaborative of classical and cabaret artists
— delivering songs and stories up close and personal

Our shared initiatives:

- Bellissima Opera
- Black Voices in Cabaret
- Chicago Cabaret Week
- Chicago Paris Cabaret Connexion
- SongShop Live
- In the Classroom

BELLISSIMA OPERA, led by Christine Steyer, creates innovative professional concert events and operas. Our Tales of Transcendence opera series began in 2021 with the award-winning online opera, *On Call: COVID-19*, and continues with the premiere live performance of *Future Perfect* in June 2022. Our annual International Women's Day concert will be held live and streaming March 8.



BLACK VOICES IN CABARET

A forum for education, entertainment, and mutual support of Black artists. Starting in Chicago where American cabaret had its first roots, we highlight emerging and established African-American cabaret performers, embrace their many genres, and encourage opportunities to perform for new audiences.

CHICAGO CABARET WEEK

Working In Concert joins with Chicago Cabaret Professionals, Acts Of Kindness Cabaret and The Cabaret Project to launch the first annual citywide cabaret festival. The inaugural week in May 2022 applauds the more than 100 years of Chicago cabaret, its diverse arts and artists, and their future.



CHICAGO PARIS CABARET CONNEXION

An international singer exchange which aims to advance together the art of cabaret. Having held multi-day conferences of workshops, round tables and concerts—2017 in Paris, 2018 in Chicago, 2019 in Sète, Montpellier and Paris—we look forward to holding the next international conference in Chicago, May 2022.

SONGSHOP LIVE gathers professional singers and advanced amateurs to hone their performance skills. Led by Claudia Hommel, our ongoing, award-winning song interpretation workshop is held at the DePaul University School of Music and other city locations. SongShop Live brings concerts to a growing audience.



OPERA IN THE CLASSROOM



Our school programs are grounded in the drama of opera and the intimacy of cabaret—infused with language, poetry, social history, and sense of place. We engage students with songs to reach across borders of time, place, and culture.

CABARET IN THE CLASSROOM

