

# International Women's Day Concert Extravaganza 3rd Annual Tribute to Women in the Arts

Friday, March 8, 2024  
7pm

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
611 Randolph St., Oak Park, IL



Featuring songs of celebrated African-American composer  
Florence Price and a new arrangement of  
Amanda McGroom's 'The Rose' by Elizabeth Doyle.

## SINGERS

Kimberly Jones  
Janet Mensen Reynolds  
Alison Meuth  
Christine Steyer



## PIANISTS

Jennifer McCabe  
Sarah Yoon-Mayer



EMCEE  
Ava Logan

ARTIST  
Tamera Gagne

POET  
Maureen Kwiat Meshenberg

GUEST VOCALIST  
Dayanara Fernandez

## Special Thanks

Kimberly Adami-Hasegawa, Kerri Burkhardt, Dave DeGooyer, DeeAnn Dorman,  
Juliana & Peter Engel Storms, Paul Geiger, Judy Grace, Claudia Hommel,  
Kimberly & Susan Huizinga, Cappy Kidd, Reverend Kathy Nolte, Diane Piette,  
Larry Ritsert, Katie Rub, Jeffrey Skender, Mila Tellez, Lynn Zamora

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Bellissima Opera Associate Artistic Director, Carl Ratner

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Show your support for International Women's Day #IWD2024 #InspireInclusion

International Women's Day Concert Extravaganza—3rd Annual Tribute to Women in the Arts  
March 8, 2024

Kimberly Jones, Janet Mensen Reynolds, Alison Meuth and Christine Steyer  
with Jennifer McCabe, Sarah Yoon-Mayer, Ava Logan,  
Maureen Kwiat Meshenberg and Dayanara Fernandez  
Backdrop images by Tamera Gagne

Welcome

“Inspire Inclusion”

Poem 1: We Belong To Each Other

Ava Logan, emcee

Maureen Kwiat Meshenberg

Part 1

*Liebeslieder & Neue Liebeslieder Waltzes (selections)* Johannes Brahms

Wie des Abends schöne Röte  
Wohl schön bewandt war es  
An jeder Hand die Finger  
Vögelein durchrauscht die Luft  
Rosen steckt mir an die Mutter  
Nicht wandle, Mein Licht  
Nagen am Herzen fühl  
Ihr schwarzen Augen  
Sieh, wie ist die Welle klar  
Alles, alles in den Wind  
Wahre, wahre deinen Sohn  
Nein, Geliebter, setze dich

Part 2

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt  
Die Mainacht  
Povera me  
Va! Laisse couler mes larmes, FROM *Werther*

Franz Schubert  
Fanny Hensel-Mendelssohn  
Pauline Viardot Garcia  
Jules Massenet

Part 3

*Four Songs*  
The Sun  
Night  
Hold Fast to Dreams  
The Moon Bridge

Florence Price, composer  
Paul Laurence Dunbar, lyrics  
Louise C. Wallace, lyrics  
Langston Hughes, lyrics  
Mary Rolofson Gamble, lyrics

...*Short Intermission*...

On Behalf of Bellissima Opera

Christine Steyer, Artistic Director

Part 4

Poem 2: No Apologies For Who You Are  
Guest vocalist Dayanara Fernandez  
Riding My Thumb to Mexico  
El Columpio

Maureen Kwiat Meshenberg  
With guitarist Israel Rosales  
Johnny Rodriguez, lyrics and music  
Carlos Montiel, lyrics and music

Part 5

Sleep Little Child  
Lullaby, FROM *The Consul*  
Summertime, FROM *Porgy and Bess*  
Courage Came

Lori Laitman  
Gian Carlo Menotti  
Ira and George Gershwin  
M. K. Meshenberg & Christine Steyer/David Shenton

Part 6

Poem 3: I Thought I Found You  
Quartet: *The Rose A World Premiere Arrangement*

Maureen Kwiat Meshenberg  
Amanda McGroom arr. Elizabeth Doyle

...*On-site reception to follow, all are invited*...

Soprano **Kimberly Jones** is an alum of the Ryan Opera Center with Lyric Opera of Chicago, where her performances included Margru in the world premiere of Anthony Davis' *Amistad* (released nationally on the New World recording label), Olga in *Fedora*, Princess Xenia in *Boris Godunov*, and Despina in *Così Fan Tutte*. She also portrayed Laetitia (*Old Maid and the Thief*) with the Ryan Opera Center, as well as Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) and Adele (*Die Fledermaus*) with the Grant Park Festival. Kimberly performed in Houston Grand Opera's productions of *The Magic Flute* (Papagena), *Boris Godunov* (Xenia), and *Porgy and Bess* (Clara). She has received the 3arts, George London, Sullivan, and Licia Albanese Encouragement grants, three MacAllister Awards, the Richard Gold Career Grant from Lyric Opera of Chicago, and a Luminarts prize. Kimberly also performed the Philip Glass *Symphony #5* in Leipzig, Germany, and with the Stuttgart and Danish Radio Symphonies. Other roles include *The Fairy Queen*, Dora in *The Invention of Morel*, and Grace Alumond in *Quamino's Map* with Chicago Opera Theater; *Fire Shut up in My Bones* with Lyric Opera; Galatea in *Acis and Galatea*, and Angelica in an operatic video of Handel's *Orlando* with Haymarket Opera.

**Janet Mensen Reynolds** is enjoying "retirement" after 26 years in the Lyric Opera of Chicago chorus. While in the chorus, she sang numerous small roles and understudied many maids, moms, and Walkürries. Janet made her concert debut at Carnegie Hall in 2013. She has a private voice studio of 25 students, a dog-walking business, and is a frequent soloist with local orchestras and chorale groups. Janet and her daughter perform a concert each year entitled "Our Favorite Things", where they sing favorite songs and duets and pick a different charity to which they donate the proceeds. She loves spending time with her three dogs and husband. She would like to dedicate this concert to the memory of her mom, Nancy Mensen.

Mezzo Soprano **Alison Meuth** lives in Peoria, where she teaches voice at Bradley University as well as conducts the Peoria Area Civic Chorale Youth Chorus. Alison spends most of her time music directing musical theater and sacred music as well as leading her passion project, an afterschool arts program for youth living in poverty. Alison continues to sing opera and oratorio throughout the midwest. Her favorite roles have been Liu in *Turandot*, the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and the title roles in *Tosca* and *Suor Angelica*. She has soloed with various orchestras, opera companies, and chamber ensembles around the country. Alison is honored to be included in this year's concert celebrating National Women's Day.

**Christine Steyer** is the 2020 Honored Artist of The American Prize for outstanding contributions to the arts. The soprano has received acclaim for her portrayals of Madame Butterfly and Violetta, and has sung in 40 productions at Lyric Opera of Chicago. She shared the stage with Lawrence Brownlee, members of the Chicago Symphony and Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestra, and was featured on WFMT's program Music Notes: Music of Healing and Peace. Steyer is an avid recitalist and producer, showcasing unique works by women poets and composers. In 2021, she premiered the role of the Rio de Janeiro Health Care Worker in *On Call: COVID-19* and in 2022 premiered the role of Flanna in *Future Perfect*. Steyer served as librettist for these award-winning operas. She has brought music to 24,000 youths in underserved areas with Bellissima Opera's In the Classroom. She is Co-Founder of the vocal alliance Working In Concert, and Artistic Director of its Bellissima Opera initiative. She is on the music faculty at Concordia University and teaches music at Ascension Catholic School in Oak Park. She is thrilled to share her deep love of music with a new generation of young people.

Currently a collaborative pianist at North Park and DePaul Universities, **Jennifer McCabe** has been described as "the new Gerald Moore". Jennifer has performed with the Kennedy Center, Northwestern University, Music Institute of Chicago, NATS, Bellissima Opera, and Sinfonietta Bel Canto, and was the vocal coach, pianist, and conductor for North Park's 2023 opera production of "Buried Alive", which was awarded second place by the National Opera Association. She has played in master classes for Renee Fleming, Katelyn Lee, Ramsey Lewis, Elizabeth Futral, and Jane Bunnell, and was pianist/coach for the Merit School of Music's ground-breaking "Renee Fleming Voice Initiative", working with teens for their first virtual master class. As a result of her dedication to arts education, Jennifer was the recipient of "Best of Chicago 2019" for Harmony Piano Studio and a Sycamore High School Music Boosters Legacy Award Recipient in 2020. A graduate of Northern Illinois University with a BA in piano, she also completed additional graduate studies at NIU and MTSU in piano performance and education.

**Sarah Yun Mayer** has been an active pianist/accompanist for the past twenty years since she came to the U.S. in 2000. Her education includes a B.A. in Piano Performance at Judson University and M.M. in Piano Performance/Pedagogy at Northern Illinois University. Sarah is currently employed as a piano accompanist for community choirs including Chicago Korean American Community Choir, Glee Club Choir, Chicago Christian Women's Choir as well as at churches in the suburbs of Chicago including West Alliance Church (Warrenville) and Hanmee Presbyterian Church (Itasca). Currently, she is a leader of the JUA Piano Ensemble and works as an accompanist for District 205 school choirs as well as for several performing soloists including a vocal recital in 2023 at Carnegie Hall in New York.

**Dr. Ava Logan** is an award-winning singer-actress. A graduate of Yale and the University of Pennsylvania, Ava is a veterinarian by day and a jazz singer at night! Internationally, the classically trained but versatile vocalist has performed jazz, pop, and rhythm and blues on tours in Minsk, Belarus, and Moscow, Perm, and Rostov, Russia, as well as in Paris, Rome, and Accra, Ghana. Nationally, she has performed in venues and festivals in Florida, California, and across the US. She has portrayed her idols Ella Fitzgerald and Nancy Wilson at the Black Ensemble Theater in Chicago, and also produced and performed in her own "one woman" shows at the Skokie Theater. She appeared on CBS TV in "Someone You Should Know", and her first CD, "So Many Stars", has received national airplay and rave reviews. She is the 2022 recipient of the African American Arts Alliance of Chicago's Black Excellence Award for Outstanding Achievement in Music – Jazz. Ava is a proud member of Working In Concert's Cabaret Connexion and the award-winning Black Voices in Cabaret, as well as Chicago Cabaret Professionals.

**Maureen Kwiat Meshenberg** is an author, prolific writer, poet, and writing workshop facilitator. Maureen's poetry comes to her through life's experiences and through her intrinsic love for nature and humanity. Her first published book, *Seasons of The Soul: Transitions and Shifts of Life* (2014), is a collection of poetry centered around the four seasons as well as the seasons of personal life journeys. Maureen was published in four anthologies from 2014-17, including *Journey of the Heart: An Anthology of Spiritual Poetry by Women*. Her second book, *Our Surrender Pause: 30 Poems in 30 Days* (2020) was written during the pandemic. Her newest book, *Love Yourself Fiercely: Through the Beauty and Ache in Life* (2023) is composed of three sections, Grief and Loss, Emotional and Physical Changes, and Empowering yourself to love yourself and the world fiercely. She also worked closely with Christine Steyer for the *Future Perfect* opera project, creating writing prompts with inner-city youth where their writing became part of the opera.

**Dayanara Fernandez (aka Daya Dorado)** has self-proclaimed her music "Mexi-Country", which encompasses the beauty and triviality of her borderland experience. Raised in Texas in a Mexican household, her take on country music is a fusion of those two cultures. Awarded Rissi Palmer's Color Me Country Artist Grant, along with the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures Artist Grant, Daya is proudly one of the few Latinas currently in country music. Her accordion playing is symbolic of her Norteño Mexican roots. Daya is currently in production of her first Country album.

**Tamera Hermosillo-Gagne**, a dedicated Apache/Latina artist based in Berwyn, finds fulfillment in both art and education. Currently, she serves as an Art instructor at Ascension School in Oak Park, where she shares her love for the arts with a diverse group of students. With a Bachelor of Science in Art Education, Tamera brings a unique blend of artistic flair and teaching expertise to her role. Tamera's artistic journey encompasses meaningful contributions as a teaching artist for non-profit art organizations, active participation in artist residencies, and collaborative exhibition curation. Tamera explores digital photography, ceramics, textiles, and more, and her creative endeavors have been recognized in esteemed publications and showcased in both local and international exhibitions.

**Elizabeth Doyle**, singer-pianist-composer, has written extensively for musical theater and cabaret, including "Sleepy Hollow" (presented at the Disney ASCAP Workshop in California), "Burnham's Dream" (Theater Wit) and "Duo" (Steppenwolf). She had chamber works performed at the Paradiso in Amsterdam which were heard on Dutch radio. Her cabaret performing career has taken her to France, Germany and throughout the US. Last year's IWD concert premiered her quartet, "Will They Remember Life Was Beautiful?"—an homage written to those young lives lost to gun violence, and marked her further foray into writing art songs and modern classical choral work.

# Bellissima Opera

An initiative of Working In Concert

Resonating our hopes for  
our community and our world

BellissimaOpera.com



Founder &  
Artistic Director  
Christine Steyer



Associate  
Artistic Director  
Dr. Carl Ratner

## 2024 Events

- April 1: Open Bellissima auditions by video submission
- July 20-21: Opera Double-Bill
- September: Spoon River Concert
- Bellissima Opera Outreach will perform for 1,000 students

## 2025 & Beyond...

- March: 4th Annual IWD Concert Extravaganza
- Further development of *Outside the Ring* opera
- An all-Spanish Bellissima Opera Outreach program
- Development of an *Environmental Mini Opera* for young people



Bellissima Outreach at  
Lane Tech College Prep  
on January 22, 2024.

Singers Sonia Oyola and  
Christine Steyer (both  
Lane Alumni) were joined  
by cellist Brian Hoffman  
and pianist Michael Finlay.

The musicians  
performed nine diverse  
selections including  
Mozart, Viardot, Saint-  
Saëns, Mancini and  
Shenton.



Above:  
Bellissima Opera Outreach in the school

Right:  
Last year's IWD 2023 Concert



## Working In Concert is *In the Classroom*



Clockwise: Cynthia Clarey, Patricia Tyson, Jessie Bolger, Kevin Wood, Madeline Morgan, Roxane Assaf, Sean Harris Lou Ella Rose, Carla Gordon... and more!

Working In Concert seeks to use the power of song and face-to-face stories to transform our lives. Our newest project Diverse Voices In Schools will use the intimacy of cabaret to create essential conversations in the classroom. Themes include civil liberties, women's rights, and the fight against racism. The music ranges from classical and opera to world music, blues, musical theatre and jazz.

**Help us to bring these programs** to a school near you. Let's inspire youth to see themselves as makers of history and social change. Dr. Roosevelt Griffin of VanderCook College of Music is leading the project. We begin Sunday, March 10, with a one-day workshop to help performers adapt their concerts for grades 7-12. Visit [workinginconcert.org/diverse\\_voices](http://workinginconcert.org/diverse_voices).

# CHICAGO Cabaret Week



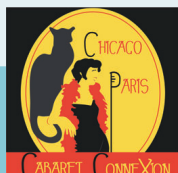
THE THIRD ANNUAL CITYWIDE FESTIVAL  
IS MAY 10-19, 2024  
DETAILS COMING SOON  
[CHICAGOCABARETWEK.ORG](http://CHICAGOCABARETWEK.ORG)

## Chicago Paris Cabaret Connexion

**Our sixth  
international exchange  
comes to Chicago,  
October 28-November 4, 2024**

Join master teachers and coaches among: Anne & Mark Burnell, Natalie Douglas, Anne Fromm, Carla Gordon, Isabelle Georges, Claudia Hommel, Elisabeth Howard, Tássia Minuzzo, Steve Normandin, Jean-Claude Orfali and Paulus, Howard Pfeifer, Spider Saloff, Wilfried Touati.  
Workshops, Performances and Round Tables.

In Paris with some of our 2023 participants



Chicago Paris Cabaret Connexion — Advance together the art of cabaret  
[cabaretconnexion.org](http://cabaretconnexion.org)



LEARN MORE



*Our school provides the opportunity for serious musical study and growth in a nurturing environment*

- Individual instruction - Traditional and Suzuki
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- DePaul Youth Orchestra/Chamber Music Program
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With annual support from Chicago and the State of Illinois






**Facilitating performing arts  
up close and personal**

Explore our initiatives:

- Cabaret Connections
- Bellissima Opera & Song
- In the Classroom

**BELLISSIMA OPERA**, led by Christine Steyer, creates innovative professional concert events and operas, from our award winning Tales of Transcendence opera series to our annual International Women's Day concerts celebrating women in the arts. In 2024, our annual opera production offers a double-bill from speed-dating to boxing. With Bellissima voice and our cabaret connections, we'll pay tribute in song at the Hyde Park home of *Spoon River Anthology's* Edgar Lee Master.



**BLACK VOICES IN CABARET**

Winner of the 2021 The American Prize for virtual performance is 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 provide opportunities to perform for new audiences.

**CHICAGO CABARET WEEK**

We are in coalition with Chicago Cabaret Professionals, Act of Kindness Cabaret, and The Cabaret Project to coordinate the third annual Chicago Cabaret week May 10-19, 2024. The citywide cabaret festival is supported by the tourism bureau, Choose Chicago, featuring more than a dozen, then use and shows, from Songbook to burlesque, international flavors and more.



**CHICAGO PARIS CABARET CONNEXION**

Advancing together the intimate art of cabaret, this ongoing international performer exchange hosts multi-day conferences of workshops, round tables, and concerts. Chicago host the sixth connexion October 28-November 4, 2024.

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



**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 community. Our newest school program for 2024-25 Diverse Voices In Schools, engages students in critical discussions about the world we live in and can change.




Supported in part by the Illinois Arts Council Agency, Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and individuals like YOU.

SAVE THE DATES

## An operatic double-header July 20-21

*Speed Dating Tonight!* by Michael Ching paired with excerpts from *Outside the Ring*, librettist Christine Steyer and composer David Shenton's new opera from their award-winning **Transcendence Series**.



**A Comic Opera in One Act**  
by Michael Ching

Ten hopefuls try their luck at a speed dating event.

Some sparks will fly and some will fall as our daters sing songs of self that range from the heartwarming to the downright neurotic.

## 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*

## SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

A unique musical performance of Masters' iconic work in his Hyde Park Home.

Saturday, September 14, 2024

Music by Lita Grier  
Carl Ratner, curator  
Dana Brown, pianist and music director  
Michelle Areyzaga, soprano  
Paul Geiger, narrating as Edgar Lee Masters  
Additional performers TBA

