WELCOMING LGBTQ YOUTH TO THE OPERA

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.

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 Yavrek (both commissioned and premiered by OPERA THEATRE OF SAINT LOUIS); Harvey Milk by Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie, Three December 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 operayoutloud.org. Send suggestions to JLainehowell@pboopera.org.

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 Allicock (Young Emile Griffith) and mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves (Emelda Griffith).