

Lissner *Notes*

Celebrating the next generation of vocal artists

Issue No. 1 Spring 2026
The Official Newsletter Of The Gerda Lissner Foundation

WELCOME TO OUR INAUGURAL ISSUE

A Message from the President

Dear Classical Music Lovers,

The young singers who participated in our competitions this season displayed an incredibly impressive level of talent, passion, and commitment. We awarded over \$100,000 in prizes to 34 gifted artists chosen from nearly 400 applicants — and every decision was a difficult one.



What struck so many of us was how much these young artists have grown. The years since the pandemic have been uniquely challenging for emerging singers, and yet the resilience and artistic maturity we witnessed this year was nothing short of remarkable.

Nowhere was that growth more evident than at our annual Winners Concert at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, crowned by a luminous performance from our 2026 Honoree, acclaimed Mezzo-Soprano Stephanie Blythe, joined by legendary pianist Warren Jones. The audience response was overwhelming, and the consensus clear: this was one of the best Winners Concerts in our history.

Please enjoy scrolling through our first edition of **Lissner Notes**. Though I never had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Lissner, I feel sure she would be pleased to see her investment still so hard at work — nurturing the next generation of gifted young artists.

Until next time, thank you for being part of this community.

Warmly,

Midge Woolsey

President, The Gerda Lissner Foundation

The 2025/26 Season at a Glance

A season of extraordinary voices

34

Talented Artists Honored

~400

Applicants This Season

\$100K+

7

Read about our 14 Art Song Competition Winners

Read about our 20 International Vocal Competition Winners



Our competitions are held at the beautiful Kosciuszko Foundation. We're grateful to their team for their support!

Featured Event

The 2026 Annual Winners Concert Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall

Top Prize Winners from both the Art Song and International Vocal competitions came together on the Zankel Hall stage for an unforgettable evening of emerging talent – with a headline performance that brought the house to its feet.



Our headliner – 2026 Honoree **Stephanie Blythe**
with pianist **Warren Jones**



F. Paul Driscoll
delivered the Honoree Tribute

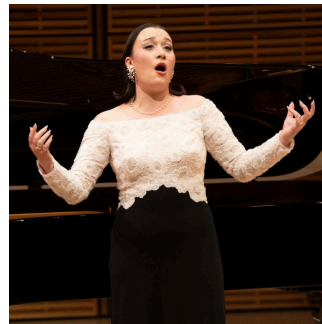
“Teaching at Bard has given me an even greater appreciation for the work your foundation does.”

— **STEPHANIE BLYTHE, MEZZO -SOPRANO**





Top Art Song Prize Winners
Finn Sagal, Magdalena Kuźma, Jennifer Robinson



Top International Vocal Competition Prize Winners
**Ben Reisinger, Korin Thomas-Smith
Titus Muzi III, Anna Thompson**



Francesco Barfoed (with Finn Sagal) introduced the Art Song segment and accompanied the three Art Song Competition Winners.



Arlene Shrut, the official pianist for both competitions, curated the program and accompanied the four International Vocal Competition Winners.

Read the Concert Program

Enjoy Our Concert Reviews: Oberon's Glade | Voce di Meche

2025-2026 Season Results | Two Competitions, *Thirty-Four Artists*



October 2025 Art Song Competition

Judges **Francesco Barfoed, Tyson Deaton, Midge Woolsey, Beth Roberts** and **Nathaniel LaNasa** chose fourteen young artists to receive prizes. The top three were featured at the Winners Concert.



March 2026 International Vocal Competition

Judges **F. Paul Driscoll, Ken Benson, Susan Quittmeyer, Midge Woolsey,** and **Laura Alley** (with pianist **Arlene Shrut**) chose twenty young singers to receive prizes. The top four were featured at the Winners Concert.

The high level of talent makes the selection process extremely difficult each year. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the distinguished judges who generously shared their time, wisdom and expertise throughout the season.



Partnerships **The Liederkranz Foundation**

The Gerda Lissner Foundation presents the annual Winners Concert in association with our friends at The Liederkranz Foundation. Their generous support helps underwrite our cash awards, reflecting our shared commitment to nurturing young singers at pivotal moments in their careers.

The GLF Recital Series **The Greene Space at NY Public Radio**

Each year the Foundation invites conservatories from around the country to pair established artists with emerging young artists in performance in The Greene Space at New York Public Radio. The performances are live-streamed and highlights are broadcast on WQXR's long running series, *The Young Artists Showcase*.

A joyful celebration of emerging artistry at its finest – exactly what our mission is all about.

On March 22nd, celebrated soprano **Elizabeth Futral** curated and hosted an afternoon of music featuring talented students of the Peabody Conservatory's Vocal Studies program, with music direction by **Laurie Rogers** and a guest appearance by Peabody alumna, **Cierra Byrd**. The full recording is available on our YouTube channel. The broadcast will be featured on WQXR's Young Artists Showcase this July. Stay tuned for the exact date.



[Read Peabody's Review](#)

Conservatories featured in the 2026-2027 Greene Space Recital Series: Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (November 2026) and Indiana University Jacobs School of Music (January 2027)



Community | An Afternoon with the Dutch Treat Club

In February, the Foundation sponsored an event for the venerable Dutch Treat Club – a weekly gathering of creative people featuring camaraderie, great conversation and entertainment. Foundation prize winners **Anna Kelly** and **Cole McIlquham** and pianist **Jerry Steichen** provided the music and **F. Paul Driscoll** – former editor in chief of Opera News – led a lively conversation about the vital role competition plays in a young singer's career.

Foundation News

Exciting News for Art Song

The Gerda Lissner Foundation is pleased to announce increased prize money for the Art Song Competition. Up to two top prizes of \$12,000 will be awarded, and all finalists will receive a \$2,000 grant.

New Leadership & a Well-Earned Farewell

In January, the Foundation welcomed new Board leadership — an important milestone as we strengthen our organization for the future.

[Read the January Press Release](#)

After a phenomenal 19 years of service – as Treasurer, Vice President and finally President for the last 6 years – **Michael Fornabaio** announced that he will step down from the Board at the end of June. The Board dedicated our Winners Concert to him in gratitude for his steadfast service and unflinching dedication to our mission.

Thank you, Michael!

What's Ahead | 2026-2027 Season Calendar

- **Aug 11, 2026** | [Art Song Competition application deadline](#)
- **Oct 13-16, 2026** | Art Song Competition – up to two prizes of \$12,000; finalist grants of \$2,000
- **Nov 2026** | The GLF Recital Series: Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music at The Greene Space (*date TBD*)
- **Dec 29, 2026** | International Vocal Competition application deadline
- **Jan 2027** | The GLF Recital Series: Indiana University Jacobs School of Music at The Greene Space (*date TBD*)
- **Mar 8-12, 2027** | International Vocal Competition
- **Apr 29, 2027** | Annual Winners Concert – Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall

[2026 Art Song Competition Application](#)

New This Season | We're on YouTube!

The Gerda Lissner Foundation has launched its very own YouTube channel (see link below) – a wonderful new way to experience the extraordinary young artists we support. We're just getting started, and there's so much more to come. Subscribe and stay close to the music.

Please share this newsletter with friends who love beautiful music. The more voices in our community, the richer the chorus.

THE GERDA LISSNER FOUNDATION

15 East 65th Street, New York, NY 10065

Email: mail@gerdalissner.org

Phone: 212-826-6100

Website: gerdalissner.org



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