

# BLUE

BY JEANINE TESORI &  
TAZEWELL THOMPSON

AUGUST 26 & 28, 2022



## Audience Preview Guide

---

Wednesday, August 24, 2022 -

Student Night at the Opera

Friday, August 26, 2022

Sunday, August 28, 2022

Valentine Theatre

---

*Toledo* OPERA

# Table of Contents

Setting and Characters .....	pg. 2
Synopsis.....	pg. 3
Jeanine Tesori, the Composer.....	pg. 4
Tazewell Thompson, the Librettist .....	pg. 5
World Premiere - The Glimmerglass Festival.....	pg. 6
Original Stars - Kenneth Kellogg and Gordon Hawkins.....	pg. 7
Activities.....	pg. 8-9

## The Setting

The opera takes place in modern day New York

### Prologue

#### Act I

- Scene 1: The Mother's Harlem Kitchen
- Scene 2: A Hospital Room
- Scene 3: A Sports Bar
- Scene 4: The Family House

#### Act II

- Scene 1: A Church Office in Harlem
- Scene 2: The Mother's Bedroom
- Scene 3: A Church in Harlem

### Epilogue

The Family's Kitchen

## Characters

BLUE

Winner of the Music Critics Association of North America's 2020 Award for Best New Opera

Music by Jeanine Tesori

Libretto by Tazewell Thompson

The Mother

The Father

The Son

The Reverend

Friends and Congregants

## Synopsis

### Act I

The Mother calls her girlfriends together to her apartment in Harlem to tell them she is expecting a child. Their joy turns to concern when she tells them she is carrying a boy; they warn her that her son will not be welcomed in this country. When her hope and love – for the child she carries and for The Father, a policeman – will not be shaken, her girlfriends relent, blessing her and the child. The Father's police officer buddies, on the other hand, are immediately joyful – and a bit jealous – when they learn their fellow officer has fathered a son.

Sixteen years later, The Son, a student artist and activist, frequently finds himself at odds with the law for his involvement with non-violent political protests. The Father confronts The Son, who pushes back, accusing his police officer father of upholding an oppressive system. Despite The Son's bitter words, The Father tells him he will always love him and hold him close.

### INTERMISSION

### Act II

After The Son is shot by a police officer at a protest, the heartbroken Father meets with The Reverend, who attempts to comfort him and encourages him to forgive. The Father, adopting the attitude of The Son, lashes out angrily. As the funeral for The Son approaches, the girlfriends return to Harlem to support the grief-stricken Mother as she prepares to lay her son to rest.

At the funeral, Father and Mother pray with the congregation, asking God to welcome their son to Heaven. The Father briefly becomes lost in a fog of emotion, guilt, regret, and memory, then finds his way back to the community gathered around him in church.

In an epilogue, we see The Father, The Mother, and The Son, together, in a bittersweet moment around a kitchen table, sharing a meal, as The Son reconciles with his father and announces his plans for further artistic studies and one more peaceful protest.



Kenneth Kellogg in the world premiere of *Blue* at Glimmerglass Festival, Summer 2019.  
Photo Credit: Karli Cadel Photography

# Jeanine Tesori, composer

Jeanine Tesori is preeminent among women composers active in the realm of the Broadway musical, with a long list of awards and critical and popular successes to her name. Ms. Tesori has also taken up the more specifically classical genres of theatrical incidental music, in which she worked with acclaimed playwright Tony Kushner, and opera.



Jeanine Tesori

Ms. Tesori was born Jeanine Tesoriero in Port Washington, New York, on Long Island, on November 10, 1961. Her father was a physician, but her grandfather was a conductor and composer, and when she began taking piano lessons at age four, her family noticed that she could already play by ear. Tesori abandoned her classical training in favor of sports during her teens but often traveled into New York to hear musicals with friends, and as a pre-med student at Barnard College, she switched her major to music. Making a living as a Broadway pit musician in, among other shows, *Chess*, Tesori married Keith Levenson and used the name Jeanine Levenson for a time. The pair wrote a musical called *Galileo*, about the Italian scientist, that they tried to promote nationally. That marriage ended in divorce, as did a later marriage to conductor and arranger Michael Rafter.



Persisting with her compositional activity as she scrambled to make a living, Tesori scored dance music for the 1995 revival of the musical *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. She achieved a breakthrough with her off-Broadway musical *Violet* (1997), which earned good reviews and led to more opportunities, not only in musical theater (arranger



credits for a Broadway revival of *The Sound of Music* in 1998 and *Swing* the following year) but for the chance to write music for a Lincoln Center production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.



That score won a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Music in a Play in 1999, the first in a long series of honors for Ms. Tesori that has included five Tony Award® nominations.

Tesori's musicals have included *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2000), *Shrek the Musical* (2008), *Fun Home* (2011, based on the memoir of cartoonist Alison Bechdel), and *Soft Power* (2018, with a book by playwright David Henry Hwang).

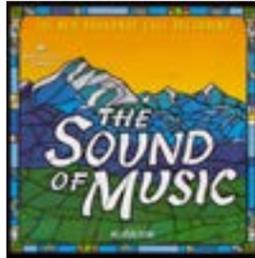


She has written incidental music for several Kushner plays, including *Caroline, or Change* (2004), and the playwright's translation of Bertolt Brecht's

*Mother Courage and Her Children* (2006). Ms. Tesori's film music credits include songs for *Shrek the Third*, *The Little Mermaid: Ariel's Beginning*, and *Mulan II*. She made her first venture into opera with *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* (2011), with a libretto by Kushner; the opera had its premiere at upstate New York's prestigious Glimmerglass



Festival. Tesori returned to opera in 2019 with *Blue*, utilizing a libretto by Tazewell Thompson that addressed the issue of raising a young black man in the realities of 21st century America well in advance of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020.



# Tazewell Thompson, librettist

Tazewell Thompson is an internationally acclaimed director for opera and theater, an award-winning playwright, librettist, teacher and actor; he is the newly appointed director of opera studies at Manhattan School of Music.



His opera *Blue* with composer Jeanine Tesori, won the 2020 MCANNA Award for Best New Opera in North America. The New York Times listed *Blue* as Best in Classical Music for 2019. He has more than 150 directing credits, including 30 world and American premieres, in major opera houses and theaters across the USA, France, Spain, Italy, Africa, Japan

and Canada, including Glimmerglass, New York City Opera, Teatro Real, La Scala, L'Opera Bastille, Cape Town, Tokyo, Vancouver and San Francisco Opera. Mr. Thompson's award-winning play, *Constant Star*, has had 16 national productions, garnering 9 Barrymore Awards, 5 NAACP Awards, and 3 Carbonell Awards; *Mary T & Lizzy K*, commissioned and produced at Arena Stage, is the recipient of The Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award; author of *Jam & Spice: The Music of Kurt Weill*; an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*; and a contributing writer to *Our War*, short plays for Washington DC. His a cappella musical *Jubilee: Fisk Jubilee Singers* had its world premiere in spring of 2019 and played to SRO audiences at Arena Stage. Mr. Thompson has play commissions from Lincoln Center Theatre, South Coast Rep, and People's Light & Theatre Company. His production of *Porgy and Bess*, broadcast Live from Lincoln Center, received EMMY Award nominations for Best Director, and Best Production: Classical Music. He holds the record for directing three productions: *Appomattox/Philip Glass*, *Lost in the Stars/ Kurt Weill*, and his American premiere production from Glimmerglass Festival of *Cato in Utica/ Vivaldi* all in the same season in three different theaters at The Kennedy Center. He was chosen to rewrite the libretto and direct the premiere staging of Aaron Copland's *The Second Hurricane* as part of a New York State-wide celebration of Mr. Copland's 85th birthday. A select list of operas directed: *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, *Death in Venice*, *Xerxes*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Tender Land*, *Street Scene*, *Pearl Fishers*, *Norma*, *Margaret Garner*,

*A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Patience*, *Freedom Ride*. He is commissioned by Seattle Opera to write a song cycle and his opera *Blue* is rescheduled for future productions at Washington National Opera, Chicago Lyric, Minnesota Opera and Mostly Mozart Festival. At schools and conservatories, directed productions and held master classes at NYU, Juilliard, Yale, Dartmouth, Columbia, Tulane, Indiana/ Bloomington, and Kansas/ Lawrence. Chair of Theater Department: St. Ann's School and Columbia Prep.

His national theatre directing credits include nearly every major theatre across the country including: the Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival, Roundabout Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Arena Stage, the Goodman, Seattle Rep, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Cleveland Play House, Hartford Stage, Second Stage, Guthrie, Indiana Rep, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Huntington Theatre, Delaware Theatre Company, Syracuse Stage, Playmakers Rep, City Theatre, Virginia Stage, and the Old Globe.

He is a member of SDC, SAG, AFTRA, AEA, AGMA and CAE.

# World Premiere of *Blue*

## The Glimmerglass Festival, Summer 2019

*Blue* made its world premiere at The Glimmerglass Festival in the summer of 2019. This new work was a co-production with Washington National Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. The Glimmerglass Festival commissioned the work in 2015 to address contemporary issues around race.

Composer Jeanine Tesori, whose 2011 opera *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* had previously been commissioned by Glimmerglass, was asked to write the music. When playwright Tazewell Thompson, a director of several productions at Glimmerglass, was asked to suggest a librettist, he proposed writing one himself; inspired by sources such as James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, and Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*, he drafted the libretto in six months. When Tesori asked whether The Father character could be a police officer instead of a jazz saxophone player, Mr. Thompson initially resisted but later decided to pursue the idea.

*Blue* won the Music Critics Association of North America 2020 Award for Best New Opera.

### The Original Cast

Kenneth Kellogg, The Father  
 Briana Hunter, The Mother  
 Aaron Crouch, The Son  
 Gordon Hawkins, The Reverend  
 Ariana Wehr, Girlfriend 1/Nurse/Congregant 1  
 Brea Renetta Marshall, Girlfriend 2/Congregant 2  
 Mia Athey, Girlfriend 3/Congregant 3  
 Camron Gray, Policeman 1/Congregant 1  
 Edward Graves, Policeman 2/Congregant 2  
 Nicholas Davis, Policeman 3/Congregant 3

### The Original Artistic Team

John DeMain, Conductor  
 Michelle Rofrano†, Assistant Conductor  
 Tazewell Thompson, Director  
 Ellen Jackson, Assistant Director  
 Kevin Miller, Principal Coach/Pianist  
 Anna Betka, Assistant Coach  
 Kathryn LaBouff, Diction Coach  
 Donald Eastman, Set Designer  
 Jessica Jahn, Costume Designer  
 Robert Wierzel, Lighting Designer  
 Samantha M. Wootten, Hair & Makeup Designer  
 Cassie Williams, Associate Hair & Makeup Designer

Of the new work, director and librettist Tazewell Thompson said at the time, "The times are fraught. Lit by lightning and divisiveness. Love, family, friends

and the church are there when we need them. And we need them now. We need a song to soothe our sorrows as we confront painful, personal truths. We need music in our lives and our children near to help us repair heartache; music to ultimately lift us and celebrate the bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood togetherness."

*Inside Blue*, a documentary about the opera, was streamed on WQXR in August and September 2020. *Blue* was received positively by critics, with the Wall Street Journal calling it "wrenching and remarkably original" and the New York Times praising "one of the most elegant librettos [this reviewer has] heard in a long time."

The world premiere of *Blue* at The Glimmerglass Festival was made possible by funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, OPERA America's Opera Fund, New Music USA, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, The Amphion Foundation, and with major production support from Betsy and Ed Cohen, Eugene and Jean Stark, and Jacqueline B. Mars.



Gordon Hawkins in the world premiere of *Blue* at Glimmerglass Festival, Summer 2019.  
 Photo Credit: Karli Cadel Photography

# Original Stars of *Blue*

## Kenneth Kellogg

Kenneth Kellogg's recent career highlights include his debut at San Francisco Opera as Basilio (Il Barbiere di Siviglia) and Dr Bartolo (Le Nozze di Figaro) at Maryland Lyric Opera following his role debut there as Grand Inquisitor/Philip II (c) (Don Carlo). He appeared as Commendatore (Don Giovanni) at Seattle Opera and returned for the role of The Father (*Blue*), and brought the roles of Rocco (Fidelio) at North Carolina



Opera, Raimondo (Lucia di Lammermoor) at Madison Opera into his repertoire. He travelled to Kraków, Poland for highly lauded performances of Rossini's Sigismondo in the two roles of Ulderico and Zenovito with Capella Cracoviensis. Mr. Kellogg created the role of The Father (*Blue*), written by Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson, for Glimmerglass Festival's world premiere, which brought him great acclaim. He recently appeared in the role at Detroit Opera and at Pittsburgh Opera and appeared on the recording made by Washington National Opera; he soon travels to Amsterdam in The Netherlands for the European premiere of *Blue*. Born and raised in Washington, D.C, Mr. Kellogg began his formal musical training at the Duke Ellington School of the Performing and Visual Arts. He continued his studies at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, and he is an Alumnus of the Adler Fellowship at San Francisco Opera and the Domingo-Cafritz Emerging Artist Program at Washington National Opera. Future engagements include the roles of Ramfis and Il Re (*Aida*), and Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*).

## Gordon Hawkins

A dramatic baritone with an international reputation as a "Rigoletto specialist," Mr. Hawkins has delighted audiences as the tragic Verdi underdog in more than 200 performances, most recently with the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Vancouver Opera, Washington National Opera, Arizona Opera, and Opera Colorado. He is now earning critical acclaim as a Wagner specialist: "Alberich was superbly realized by baritone Gordon Hawkins, in his [Los Angeles Opera] debut. Despite wearing a grotesque puppet head and clunky boots that hobbled his movements, Hawkins delivered a sterling vocal characterization of the power-mad Nibelung." (*Opera News*). He has been engaged as Alberich in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at esteemed international companies including: San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, Washington National Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro de la Maestranza de Sevilla, and the BBC Orchestra at Royal Albert Hall in London.



Most recently, Mr. Hawkins performed the role of the Reverend in the World Premiere of Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's *Blue* at the Glimmerglass Festival, *The Warden* (Dead Man Walking) with Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the title role of Porgy and Bess with Harrisburg Symphony. Mr. Hawkins' upcoming engagements include *Champion* at Boston Lyric Opera, the role of Reverend (*Blue*) at Toledo Opera and Washington National Opera, *Scarpia* (Tosca) at Portland Opera, and a World Premiere for the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2023. In recent seasons, Mr. Hawkins performed the role of Amonasro (*Aida*) with Washington National Opera and Seattle Opera, and *Scarpia* (Tosca) with Arizona Opera. Mr. Hawkins' career is shaped by performances of opera's most popular baritone roles at leading companies throughout the world.

# Post-Opera Activities

## Personal Response

1. What surprised you the most about Tesori's opera, *Blue*?

2. What struck you as the most important theme in the opera?

# Post-Opera Activities

## Critical Response

Create Your Own Review of *Blue*

Write a review of *Blue*. Use the following chart to organize your thoughts. You can be critical, describing what you liked and what you thought needed improvement. In your review mention the plot, the music, the singing and acting, and visual elements such as the scenery and costumes.

Notes for review of <i>Blue</i>	
<b>Music</b>	
<b>Plot</b>	
<b>Vocal Artists</b> (quality of voice and acting)	
<b>Scenery and Costumes</b>	
<b>Overall Rating</b> from 1 (low) to 5 (high)	