

From Starting Quarterback To Female Filmmaker, 'As One' Narrates A Trans Story In Operatic Form

January 22, 2018

By [Keith Powers](#) 



“I realize this is a story that nobody should ever have told,” says Laura Kaminsky. “I didn’t know Mark. I didn’t know Kim. There’s no reason this should ever have happened.”

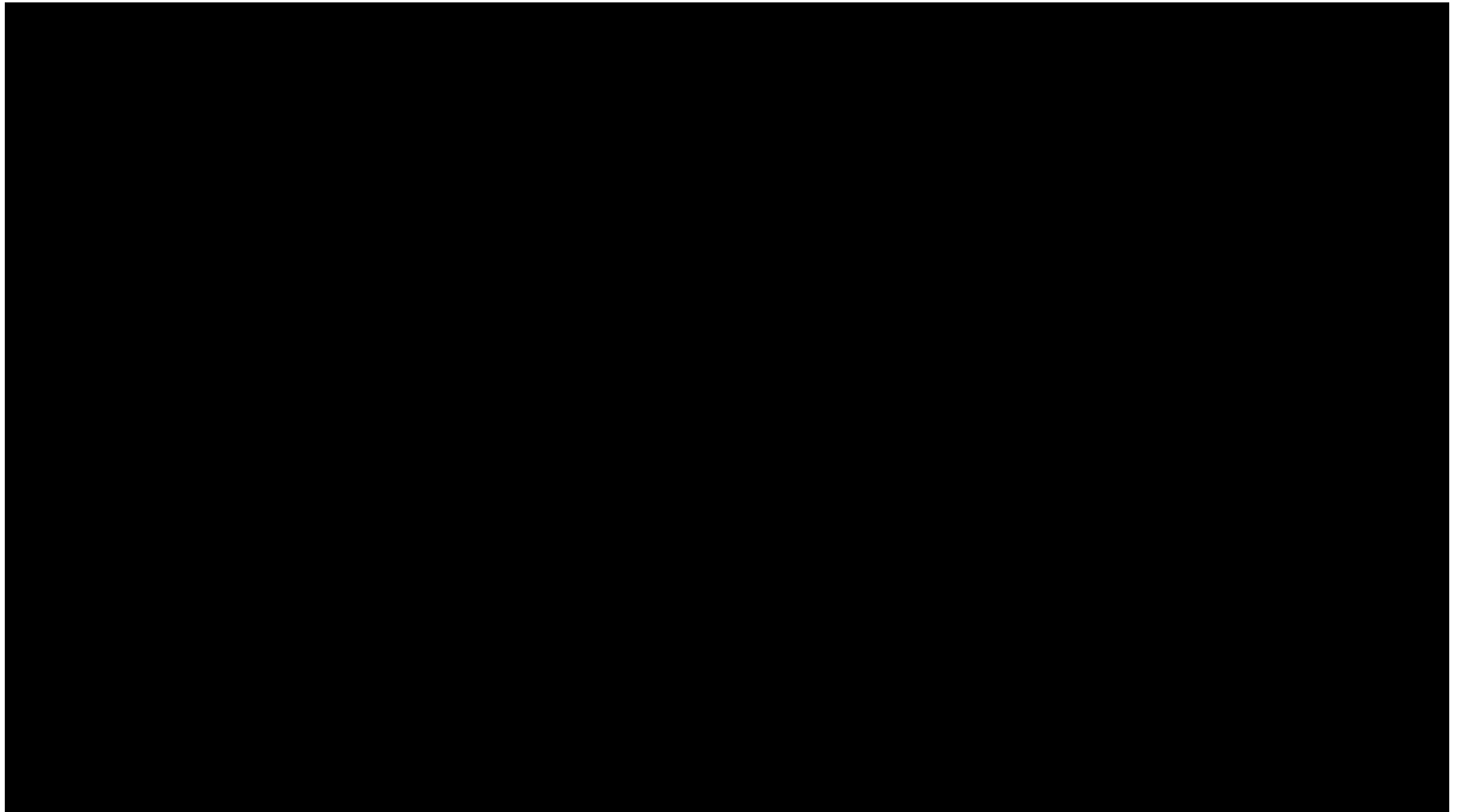
Kaminsky, the composer of “[As One](#),” easily the most successful opera written in our time, is referring to Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed, the co-librettists. The story of “As One,” and the story of the making of “As One,” are equally improbable: The opera itself, which stages at Longy School of Music’s Pickman Hall from Thursday, Jan. 25 to Sunday, Jan. 28, narrates the journey of a starting quarterback on the football team of a small Montana high school, who later becomes a decorated filmmaker — as a female.



The story of the making of "As One" involves Kaminsky's own determination to explore what she calls "the embodiment of opera."

"I had to tell this story," she says. "When my wife Rebecca and I wanted to get married in 2005, we had to do it in Vancouver. And after that, we followed the issue of same-sex marriage from state to state. When it came up in New Jersey, I thought it would be a typical political story. But there was a married couple there, with two kids, and the gist of that story was that the husband was in the process of transitioning to female. The family was fine with it, and they were going to stay together. But if he did that, they could not stay married."

"That was the story, at the core. How society imposes challenges on your relationship to your loved ones. That's what I mean by the embodiment of opera."



At the time, Kaminsky had no inkling how the opera would come about. “It just stayed with me,” she says. “It was a profound story.”

A few years later, she watched a documentary called “Prodigal Sons,” Kimberly Reed’s film about her transition. She wrote to Reed with her operatic idea. “She immediately got it. And then I met Mark — we were on a panel together. The three of us got together, and Kim told me the story of her life. The process has been life-changing for us,” she says. “Maybe less so for Mark, but certainly for Kim and for me.” (Campbell is one of the foremost opera librettists working today.)



Librettists Kimberly Reed and Mark Campbell with composer Laura Kaminsky. (Courtesy)

“As One” is built for success. And it has found it. The Longy presentation — a co-production with Boston Opera Collaborative — is the latest in almost two dozen stagings of the work, since its 2014 debut at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. That’s a phenomenal number of productions, considering new work is often staged once, at its premiere, and then often forgotten.

The opera calls for two singers: Hannah before, a baritone, and Hannah after, a mezzo. The instrumentation: simple string quartet. The set is actually a film, created by Reed. “As One” is mobile and flexible, to say the least. Companies all over the world have staged it.

It’s also timely. And it’s humorous, realistic and honest. “It has parts of masculinity and femininity,” says Greg Smucker, co-artistic director of Boston Opera Collaborative and stage director of this production. “It has impact. The opera explores something pretty foreign to most of us — that one’s gender identity can be different than the one assigned at birth. But sorting that out might be one of the oldest stories that we tell.

“There’s an electric energy and pulse, and humor in it. Laura’s music really doesn’t sound like anything else. And the libretto — you have two characters, presented as one. It’s a great dynamic of expression, and lots of room for interpretation.”



Kaminsky, Campbell and Reed will be in town for the premiere and for some of the educational events that are scheduled around the production. “This piece is important enough that it deserves to make its way out into the community,” says Judith Bose, who is an adjunct faculty in the teaching artists program at Longy. She is leading a two-semester program with Boston Opera Collaborative to produce a student version of “As One.”

“We admit that we are not experts in this,” Bose says, “but we can get the conversation going. We’re taking excerpts of ‘As One’ to five or six venues — high schools, a library, a shelter in Cambridge that has a program for the LGBTQ community — primarily for those who are not able to make it to one of the productions. The partnership between a conservatory and a professional opera company is unique.”

Kaminsky gently but insistently makes the point that “As One” does not describe some major breakthrough for Hannah, but instead describes a process of becoming.



“The story is trying to say that there is a spectrum,” she says, “and that we are fluid. Trying to be true to what you really are is the challenge. We don’t use the words ‘journey’ or ‘transgender’ at all. You might think that the male is in the first half, and the female in the second half. But they are always both there onstage.”

“[As One](#),” a joint production between Longy School of Music of Bard College and the Boston Opera Collaborative, gets four stagings from Thursday, Jan. 25 to Sunday, Jan. 28 at Longy’s Pickman Hall.

Keith Powers  Music Critic, The ARTery

Keith Powers is a classical music critic for The ARTery.

More...

1

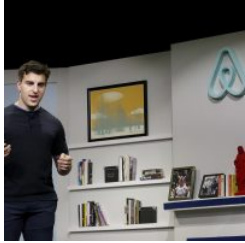
Join the discussion



View comment(s)



More from WBUR



Walsh Lays Out Curbs To Boston Short-Term Rentals

The proposed ordinance would restrict the number of nights a short-term rental can be offered on a service like Airbnb.

Bostonmix 1 hour ago

Despite Brady's Injury, Patriots Headed To Super Bowl

The New England Patriots are heading to the Super Bowl. They came from behind to beat the Jacksonville Jaguars 24-20 in Foxborough Sunday, and they won the AFC Championship.

 **WBUR News** 04:35 2 hours ago

Patriots Head To 10th Super Bowl Appearance

The New England Patriots have already played in more Super Bowls than any other team in the NFL. They'll extend that record in two weeks when they make their 10th...

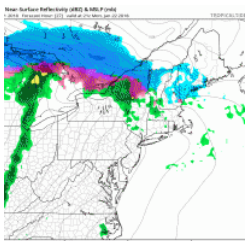
 **WBUR News** 03:56 3 hours ago



Government Shutdown? No Thanks, Say Bunker Hill Visitors

National parks across the country are closed. Here in Massachusetts, that includes the Bunker Hill Monument and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

 **WBUR News** 01:47 5 hours ago




Forecast: Heavy Rain Tuesday, Then Colder

Raw and damp weather Monday is followed by heavy rain Tuesday.

WBUR News 6 hours ago

Boston Playwright Melinda Lopez Finds Compassion For Herself After Her Mother's Death



"I want to be just like my mother and I want to be nothing like my mother. Both of those things are true," says Lopez, two years after writing the...

The ARtery 6 hours ago



#MeToo Is Clumsy, Crucial And Long Overdue

The movement provides a collective context for what happens in private, writes Helen Epstein, and validation for those of us trying to make sense of the sexual trauma we endured....

Cognoscenti 7 hours ago



Despite A Lack Of Gravity, TNT's 'The Alienist' Has Ambition And Pulp Watchability

The new psychological thriller and period drama has “more ambition than actual genre-shifting meaning, but that demonstrates just how far ambition can carry a series without the profundity to back...

The ARtery 7 hours ago



Brady Leads Patriots Back To Super Bowl, Top Jaguars 24-20

The Patriots erased a 10-point deficit in the 4th quarter to beat the Jaguars 24-20 at Gillette on Sunday, punching their ticket to another Super Bowl appearance.

WBUR News Jan 21, 2018



Vatican Reporter Discusses Cardinal O'Malley's Comments On Pope

John Allen, longtime Vatican reporter and editor of Crux, joined Weekend Edition to discuss Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley's comments on the Pope's criticism of sexual assault victims in Chile.

 **WBUR News** 05:29 Jan 21, 2018



Barr
Foundation

ARTery funding is provided by the [Barr Foundation](#) to inspire creativity.

© Copyright WBUR 2018