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## **Lisa Bielawa's *Vireo: The Spiritual Biography of a Witch's Accuser***

### **First Episodic Made-for-TV & Online Opera**

**Composed & Conceived by Lisa Bielawa | Directed by Charles Otte | Libretto by Erik Ehn**



**Orange Mountain Music to Release on CD and DVD on February 28, 2019**

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**“an opera unlike any you have seen before, in content and in form” – *Los Angeles Times***

***Read the Los Angeles Times's feature on Vireo***

***Read the San Francisco Chronicle's feature on Vireo***

**All Twelve Episodes Also Available Now for Binge-Watching at KCET.org/Vireo**

**New York, NY – *Vireo: The Spiritual Biography of a Witch's Accuser***, composed and conceived by **Lisa Bielawa** on a libretto by **Erik Ehn** and directed by **Charles Otte**, will be released as a double package on DVD and CD by **Orange Mountain Music** on **February 28, 2019**. The music is now available exclusively from Apple Music. *Vireo* is an opera in 12 episodes, created for television and online viewing. It was first broadcast on KCET's Emmy® award-winning arts and culture series **Artbound** in June 2017. Both Bielawa and Otte were nominated for 2018 Los Angeles Area Emmys, and the opera won the 2015 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Multimedia Award. ***Vireo Live***, a hybrid film-opera experience, is currently in development and will be workshopped in March 2020 at The New School's Philip Glass Institute, of which Lisa Bielawa was recently named inaugural Composer-in-Residence and Chief Curator.

*Vireo* removes the set limitations of a staged opera, visiting locations across the country – Alcatraz Prison, a monastery on the Hudson River, an abandoned train station in Oakland, the California Redwoods. An orchestra in the pit is replaced with world-class musicians on camera, inside the action. The eponymous heroine *Vireo*, played by **Rowen Sabala**, is a fourteen-year-old girl genius entangled in the historic obsession with female visionaries, as witch-hunters, early psychiatrists, and modern artists have defined them.

*Vireo* was shot on location from New York's Hudson River Valley to California's Redwood forests. Production began in February 2015 in the Los Angeles area at Santa Ana's Yost Theatre and proceeded through January of 2017 in iconic locations around the country, including the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Oakland Train Station and San Francisco's Alcatraz Island.

*Vireo* features the work of over 350 musicians including opera star **Deborah Voigt**, violinists **Jennifer Koh** and **Vijay Gupta**, cellist **Joshua Roman**, mezzo-sopranos **Laurie Rubin**, **Maria Lazarova** and **Kirsten Sollek**, baritone **Gregory Purnhagen**, tenor **Ryan Glover**, drummer **Matthias Bossi**, soprano **Emma MacKenzie** and in the title role of *Vireo*,

teenage soprano **Rowen Sabala**. Additionally, the opera features notable groups and organizations from across the country including **Kronos Quartet**, the **San Francisco Girls Chorus**, **Magik\*Magik Orchestra**, **American Contemporary Music Ensemble**, **Alarm Will Sound**, **PARTCH**, the **Orange County School of the Arts Middle School Choir**, and many, many more.

*Vireo* was an Artist Residency Project of **Grand Central Art Center** in Santa Ana, a unit of **Cal State Fullerton's College of the Arts** shepherded by Director and Chief Curator **John Spiak**, produced in partnership with KCET and Single Cel.

A comprehensive *Vireo* online content hub is available at [kcet.org/vireo](http://kcet.org/vireo), providing viewers of *Vireo* an immersive second screen experience. Featuring interviews with cast and crew, behind-the-scenes content and exclusive insights into the themes of the production, the online hub and social media video content is also available on the @KCET28 and @LinkTV Facebook page. To learn more, please visit [kcet.org/vireo](http://kcet.org/vireo) or [linktv.org/vireo](http://linktv.org/vireo) or on social media use #OperaVireo

For a complete list of **VIREO** performers, see: <http://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/production-notes-featured-performers>

### About Lisa Bielawa

Composer-vocalist Lisa Bielawa is a 2009 Rome Prize winner in Musical Composition. She takes inspiration for her work from literary sources and close artistic collaborations. Her music has been described as “ruminative, pointillistic and harmonically slightly tart,” by *The New York Times*, and “fluid and arresting ... at once dramatic and probing,” by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She is the recipient of the 2017 Music Award from the American Academy of Arts & Letters.

Lisa Bielawa's music is frequently performed throughout the US and abroad. Two of her works received their world premieres at the 2016 NY PHIL BIENNIAL: *My Outstretched Hand* by The Knights, San Francisco Girls Chorus, and Brooklyn Youth Chorus, which was recently given a second performance at The Kennedy Center; and *Vireo Caprice* by violinist Jennifer Koh at National Sawdust. The Seattle Chamber Music Society recently commissioned and premiered Bielawa's *Fictional Migrations*, which *The Seattle Times* called, “sophisticated, propulsive, complex, and often beautiful.” In December 2016, the Orlando Philharmonic performed the world premiere of Bielawa's *Drama/Self Pity* for orchestra and in January 2017, The Kennedy Center presented two of her works with Bielawa as soloist as part of their *KC Jukebox* series. Recent highlights also include Bielawa's performance of *Sanctuary Songs* with Jennifer Koh at National Sawdust; *Start* for piano and chamber orchestra by pianist Andrew Armstrong and the Orchestra of the League of Composers; *50 Measures for Aaron* by SOLI Chamber Ensemble; *One Atom of Faith* by violinist Rebecca Fischer; and *The Trojan Women* by the String Orchestra of New York City.

Bielawa's music can be found outside the concert hall as well, with two major works written for performance in public spaces. *Chance Encounter*, a piece comprising songs and arias constructed of speech overheard in transient public spaces, was premiered by soprano Susan Narucki and The Knights in Lower Manhattan's Seward Park. *Airfield Broadcasts* is a 60-minute work for hundreds of musicians, which was premiered on the tarmac of the former Tempelhof Airport in Berlin in May 2013 and at Crissy Field in San Francisco in October 2013.

Born in San Francisco into a musical family, Lisa Bielawa played the violin and piano, sang, and wrote music from early childhood. She moved to New York two weeks after receiving her B.A. in Literature in 1990 from Yale University, and became an active participant in New York musical life. She began touring as the vocalist with the Philip Glass Ensemble in 1992, and has also premiered and toured works by John Zorn, Anthony Braxton, and Michael Gordon. In 1997 she co-founded the MATA Festival, which celebrates the work of young composers. Bielawa served as Artistic Director of the acclaimed San Francisco Girls Chorus from 2013-2018 and recently completed her residency at Grand Central Art Center in Santa Ana, California. Her discography includes albums on the Tzadik, TROY, Innova, BMOP/ sound, Orange Mountain Music and Sono Luminus labels. In 2016, Bielawa was awarded grants from New York Foundation for the Arts, the MAP Fund, and New Music USA. She was named a William Randolph Hearst Visiting Artist Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society for 2018.

### About Charles Otte

Producer, director, and designer Charles Otte is currently a senior show producer with Universal Studios. Originally a theatre director, Otte attended graduate school in film production at the University of Southern California where he received the John Huston award for directing excellence. He has worked with a diverse clientele including Universal Studios Hollywood, Monty Python Productions, A&E Television, HDTV, the Sundance Institute, Roger Corman Films, BRC Imagination Arts, ShoConcepts, Lincoln Center, BAM, the Martha Graham Dance Company, the Guthrie Theatre, KCET, Thinkwell, and others.

In New York City, Otte was an assistant to theatre visionary Robert Wilson before he started his own company, Project III Ensemble Theatre, at the Ohio Theatre in Soho. The *Village Voice* said of Otte's work, “The beauty and ingenuity of his visuals are rarely matched on any budget.” Otte also directed Oscar-nominated composer, Philip Glass' multi-media opera *La Belle et La Bête*, which received its premiere at The Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. He was recently Directing Associate for the world tour of the Robert Wilson/Philip Glass opera, *Einstein on the Beach*.

Otte's commercial work extends to theme parks, museums, and fine arts installations. He was creative director for *The Star of Destiny* for the State History Museum in Austin, Texas, and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois. His theatre productions have received multiple LA Weekly and Ovation nominations, and in 2002 Otte received the TEA Award for Outstanding Achievement for *The Star of Destiny*. In 2006 he received the TEA Award as a creative director for the Lincoln Museum, and in 2007 he received the LA Weekly award for best comedy direction for *Travesties*.

#### **About Erik Ehn**

Erik Ehn's work includes *The Saint Plays*, *No Time Like the Present*, *Wolf at the Door*, *Tailings*, *Beginner*, *Vireo* (w/composer Lisa Bielawa), and *Clover* (dir, Glory Kadigan). The *Soulographie* project, a series of 17 plays on U.S. history from the point of view of its genocides, was produced at La MaMa, NY, November 2012. *Soulographie* scripts include *Maria Kizito*, *Heavenly Shades of Night are Falling*, *Yermedea*, and *Drunk Still Drinking*. Founder and Co-Artistic Director, Tenderloin Opera Company. Graduate, New Dramatists. Currently a student at the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley California, pursuing a Masters of Theological Studies.

#### **ABOUT KCET**

On-air, online and in the community, KCET plays a vital role in the cultural and educational enrichment of Southern and Central California. KCET offers a wide range of award-winning local programming as well as the finest public television programs from around the world. Throughout its 54-year history, KCET has won hundreds of major awards for its local and regional news and public affairs programming, its national drama and documentary productions, its quality educational family and children's programs, its outreach and community services and its website, [kcet.org](http://kcet.org). KCET is a donor-supported community institution. For additional information about KCET productions, web-exclusive content, programming schedules and community events, please visit [kcet.org](http://kcet.org). Select original programming from KCET is also available for streaming on Apple TV, YouTube, Amazon and Roku platforms. For more information please visit <http://www.kcet.org/apps>. KCET is a content channel of the Public Media Group of Southern California.

#### **About Grand Central Art Center**

Celebrating its 20th Anniversary in 2019, Grand Central Art Center (GCAC), a unit of California State University at Fullerton College of the Arts, is dedicated to the investigation and promotion of contemporary art and visual culture: regionally, nationally, and internationally through unique collaborations among artists, students, and the community. GCAC is the result of a unique partnership between the California State University at Fullerton and the City of Santa Ana. Located ten miles south of the main campus in the heart of downtown Santa Ana, the art center is a mixed residential, commercial and educational complex. The art center is a 45,000 square-foot, full city-block long and half-city block deep, three-level structure that houses: live/studio spaces for visual arts graduate students, the Grand Central Main Gallery, Project Room, Education/Teaching Gallery, and artist-in-residence program.

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