



MADAME THEREMIN

A Chamber Opera in Two Acts

Composer: **Kennedy Verrett**

Librettist: **George M. Kopp**

Art by **Umar Rashid**, aka Frohawk Twofeathers



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An Afrofuturist Fantasy Based On Actual Events



Lavinia Williams

LAVINIA WILLIAMS (“Madame Theremin”), child of the Harlem Renaissance. Broke the color barrier to become a classical ballerina. Founded a school of dance in Haiti. Scandalously married....



Leon Theremin

LEON THEREMIN, Russian scientist. Inventor of an electronic musical instrument with a spectral sound – the theremin – played without physical contact. Ordered back to Stalin’s Soviet Union and sent to the gulag.

In the opera **MADAME THEREMIN**, Lavinia discovers a sanctuary of Afro-Caribbean culture, hidden underground since colonial times. Here she encounters...

MAMA AUGUSTINE, *vodou* priestess. Mama guides Lavinia on an electrifying spiritual journey through music, dance, and ancient ritual. Set on her new path, Lavinia is still unable to save her husband, a victim of “progress.”

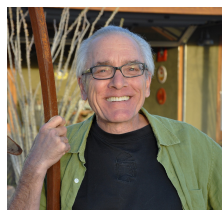




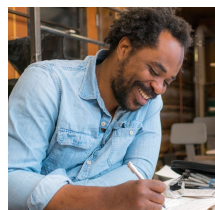
Kennedy Verrett is an innovative composer, as well as an orchestrator and arranger for film and television. He founded the Mad Composer Lab in Portland, OR, as a center for musical experimentation and education. He has been Artist-in-Residence at Portland's Headwaters Waterline Theater and Composer-in-Residence at the Lou Harrison House in Joshua Tree, California.



George M. Kopp, librettist, is a technology writer, music lover, former actor, and history buff. He believes that we often have more to learn from the overlooked and marginalized than from the lives of the very famous. Of *Madame Theremin* he says, "Lavinia Williams has long been a footnote in the story of Leon Theremin. It is time she took center stage."



The images of Los Angeles-based artist **Umar Rashid** (Frohawk Two Feathers) – seen in this EPK – are an integral visual element of *Madame Theremin*. He tells the reinvented histories of people of color, who are often omitted from the historical record. Frohawk shows in museums and galleries around the world, most recently in the Hammer Art Museum in Los Angeles.



A leading creative figure in the opera world, **Cori Ellison** is staff dramaturg at Santa Fe Opera, and has previously served in that role at Glyndebourne Festival Opera and New York City Opera. An internationally sought-after developmental dramaturg, Cori is a member of the Vocal Arts Faculty at The Juilliard School.



Like Leon Theremin himself, Parisian-born **Grégoire Blanc** played the cello before taking up the theremin. He is widely regarded as a virtuoso on the instrument, and his many videos on YouTube have been viewed millions of times. A technologist as well as a musician, Grégoire joins the *Madame Theremin* team as theremin advisor.





Length

Approximately 60 minutes

Vocal Forces

Leon Theremin (*Tenor*): Russian engineer, inventor of the theremin

Lavinia Williams (*Soprano*): African American dancer; married to Leon Theremin

Mama Augustine (*Mezzo Soprano*): Housekeeper at the Waldorf Astoria and *vodou* priestess

Elizaveta (*Contralto*): Soviet official in New York

Noble Washington (*Bass*): African American actor, singer, international star

Billington (*Baritone*): Manager, Waldorf Astoria Hotel

First Princetonian (*Baritone*): Partier at the Waldorf Astoria

Commandant (Double with Billington or First Princetonian): Gulag office

Chorus of (variously) Princetonians, Prisoners, Haitian workers, and musicians.
(The CHORUS may be simulated electronically if resources do not permit.)

Edmond (Non-singing role): Hotel maintenance worker

Nurse (Non-singing role): Gulag medical staff

Instrumental Forces: Thirteen Total

Winds

1 Player doubles Flute/Picc Clarinet, Alto Sax

1 Player Bassoon/Bassoon and Bass Clarinet

Trumpet

Strings

2 Violins, 1 Viola, 1 Cello, 1 Bass

(Strings double on Electric or Amplified)

Amplified Piano, Harp

Theremin

Percussion (2)

Tanbu, Bamboula, Timpani, Gran Cassa, Piatti,

Tam Tam, Suspended Cymbals, Assorted

Shakers, Djembe, Marimba, Vibraphone,

Chimes, Glockenspiel, Toms, Roto Toms, Metal

Trash Cans, Found and Repurposed Metals and

Bowed Wires

The creators of *Madame Theremin* encourage **companies of all sizes and resource levels** to explore producing the opera. **Technology and magic** are central to the story, and technological magic may be employed to enhance every level of production. We encourage workarounds where musical forces may be beyond the reach of a small opera company or university – and we stand ready to assist.

Like the marriage of Leon Theremin and Lavinia Williams, **Afrofuturism explores the intersection of African diaspora culture and technology**. The opera is a fantasy – mixing together **the real, the unreal, and the surreal**. Partly history, partly myth. “The beauty of music,” Sun Ra once said, “is that it can reach across the border of reality into myth.” Adventurous producers and ensembles can make their own magic with *Madame Theremin*.

Music spontaneous rapture
 Feet rushing with the wind on a new world
 Of sounds:
 Invisible worlds....vibrations...tone pictures...
 A new world for every self
 Seeking a better self and a better world.
 — Sun Ra





AUDIO

MUSIC FROM **MADAME THEREMIN**

- ▶ [Prologue Excerpt 1](#)
- ▶ [Prologue Excerpt 2](#)
- ▶ [Prologue Excerpt 3](#)
- ▶ [Firebird Theme](#)
- ▶ [Firebird Theme for solo theremin](#)
(Performed by Grégoire Blanc)
- ▶ [Gulag Theme](#)

MORE FROM **KENNEDY VERRETT**

From **“Songs for the Seasons”**

- ▶ [To See the Violets](#)
- ▶ [All Flowers](#)
- ▶ [String Adagio No. 6](#)
- ▶ [Antipiano VII – Crayons White](#)

(More music available at www.madcomposerlab.com)

VIDEO

- ▶ [Introduction to MADAME THEREMIN](#)
- ▶ [The Organism](#)
Played by Kennedy on a Hammond M3 (Baby B3)

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