

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**PRESS CONTACT:**

Leigh Harmon/Otto & Friends  
leigh@ottoandfriends.com

## **THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING ANNOUNCES THE 2020 JONATHAN LARSON GRANT RECIPIENTS**

**New York, NY (February 19, 2020)** — The American Theatre Wing is pleased to announce that the 2020 Jonathan Larson® Grant recipients are **The Bengsons** (Music and Lyrics), **Anna K. Jacobs** (Music and Lyrics), **Rona Siddiqui** (Music and Lyrics) and **Benjamin Velez** (Music and Lyrics). Each recipient will receive an unrestricted grant of \$10,000 as well as additional support in the form of residencies, concerts and recording grants. The grants will be presented to each recipient by the American Theatre Wing at a private event in New York City on Monday, March 23 that will feature special performances of their work.

“Each year our panel of judges takes on the difficult task of choosing, from among hundreds of applicants, the artists who best embody Jonathan’s creative spirit and have the potential to take musical theatre to new heights,” said American Theatre Wing President & CEO Heather Hitchens. “Over the years, Larson Grant winners have gone on to garner 41 Tony Nominations, 6 Tony Awards®, 10 Obie Awards®, 6 Grammys, and 2 Oscars so we make this announcement with particular pride and excitement each year knowing the impact that Jonathan Larson and his legacy grant recipients will have on our industry.”

To continue the Tony Award-winning composer’s dream of infusing musical theatre with a contemporary, joyful, urban vitality, the Jonathan Larson Grants honor emerging composers, lyricists and book writers. Dedicated to celebrating excellence and supporting theatre, the American Theatre Wing awards the Larson Grants to artists to recognize and showcase their work with no strings attached - except to put it to the best use possible to help further their creative endeavors.

This year, all four 2020 Jonathan Larson Grants recipients will receive a \$2,500 Saw Island Foundation Recording Grant. In addition, the Wing has partnered with The American Music Theatre Project at Northwestern University and the Adelphi University Performing Arts Center each providing opportunities such as residencies and concerts featuring the recipients’ work.

Recipients were selected by an expert panel consisting of Composer/Lyricist/Playwright **César Alvarez** (*2016 Larson Grant recipient*), Playwright/Composer/Lyricist **Michael R. Jackson** (*A Strange Loop; 2017 Larson Grant recipient*), Composer/Lyricist for theatre and film **Steven Lutvak** (*A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder*; two-time Larson Recipient 1999 and 2005), President and CEO of MANM Productions **Terry Nardozi**, CEO of the Princess Grace Foundation **Brisa Trinchero**, Producer **Lia Vollack** (*Almost Famous, MJ The Musical*), CEO of Zuckerberg Media and Producer/Investor **Randi Zuckerberg** (*The Inheritance; Hadestown; Oklahoma!*).

Since the program’s launch in 1997:

- More than 150 artists have been served.
- Over \$730,000 in direct support has been distributed.
- Recipients have written nearly 600 new musicals and over 12,000 new songs.
- Recipients have won a Pulitzer, Oscars, Grammys, Emmys, Oliviers, Tonys and Obies.

Previous grant recipients include Matthew Sklar and Chad Beguelin (*The Prom*, *Elf*), Shaina Taub (*The Devil Wears Prada*), Benj Pasek & Justin Paul (*Dear Evan Hansen*, *La La Land*), Laurence O'Keefe (*Legally Blonde: The Musical*), Joe Iconis (*Be More Chill*), Dave Malloy (*Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*), Amanda Green (*Hands on a Hardbody*), Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey (*Next to Normal*), and many more.

For more information about this grant program and how to apply, please visit <https://americantheatrewing.org/program/jonathan-larson-grants/>.

---

## ABOUT THE 2020 JONATHAN LARSON GRANT RECIPIENTS

**The Bengsons**, Abigail and Shaun, are a married composing and performing duo. Their theater work includes *Hundred Days* (La Jolla Playhouse, New York Theatre Workshop, The Public Theater, Know Theater, Z Space, US Tour), *The Lucky Ones* (Ars Nova), *Sundown*, *Yellow Moon* (Ars Nova/WP), *Anything That Gives Off Light* (Edinburgh Theatre Festival, US Tour), *Hurricane Diane* (New York Theatre Workshop, Two River Theatre), *You'll Still Call Me By Name* (New York Live Arts, Jacob's Pillow), *The Place We Built* (The Flea), and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Classic Stage Company). Their music has been featured on "So You Think You Can Dance" (FOX) and in several short films and dance pieces. They have received the Richard Rogers Award and nominations for the Drama Desk, Drama League, and Lucile Lortel awards. <http://bengsons.com/>

**Anna K. Jacobs** is a composer, lyricist, librettist, and educator. Her work includes the stage musicals, POP! (Yale Rep, Pittsburgh City Theatre, Studio Theatre; book & lyrics by Maggie-Kate Coleman), TEETH (NAMT, O'Neill; co-book & lyrics by Michael R. Jackson), ANYTOWN (George Street Playhouse; book by Jim Jack), HARMONY, KANSAS (Diversionary Theatre; book & lyrics by Bill Nelson), ECHO (The Gallery Players, Musical Theatre Factory), and STELLA AND THE MOON MAN (Sydney Theatre Company/Theatre of Image; written by Richard Tulloch, co-composed by Adrian Kelly), and the movie musical, KAYA: TASTE OF PARADISE (NY Film Academy; directed by Paul Warner). Currently, she and playwright Anna Ziegler are collaborating on a new musical for Barbara Whitman Productions and Grove Entertainment. She is the recipient of the 2018 Eric Salzman Award for New Music Theater Composition and 2016 Billie Burke Ziegfeld Award. She holds an MFA in Musical Theatre Writing from NYU-Tisch, and is a former Sundance Fellow and Dramatists Guild Fellow. <http://www.annakjacobs.com/>

**Rona Siddiqui** is a composer/lyricist based in NYC. She recently won the prestigious Billie Burke Ziegfeld award. Her show *Salaam Medina: Tales of a Halfghan*, an autobiographical comedy about growing up bi-ethnic in America, had a reading at Playwrights Horizons Nov 2019 (dir. by Raja Feather Kelly). Other musicals include *One Good Day*, *The Tin*, and *Treasure in NYC*. She is the recipient of the ASCAP Foundation Mary Rodgers/Lorenz Hart Award, and the

ASCAP Foundation/Max Dreyfus Scholarship. She has written pieces for Wicked's 16th anniversary commemoration *Flying Free*, 24 Hour Musicals, Prospect Theater Company, The Civilians, the NYC Gay Men's Chorus, and 52nd St Project, and has performed concerts of her work at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and 54 Below. Original scores she has written include *The Vagina Monologues*, *Middletown* and *The Good Person of Szechuan*. <http://ronasiddiqui.com>

**Benjamin Velez** is a composer/lyricist and Columbia graduate (114th Varsity Show). Proud member of the BMI workshop (2012 Harrington Award). His work has been at MTF, Ars Nova, NAMT, NEO, the Civilians, 4@15, and Joe's Pub. He was a Sundance Artist at the UCROSS Foundation, and his musical "Afterland" was developed at YIMT and the York Theater. He developed "Starblasters" at Dixon Place and will workshop it at Manhattan School of Music in Spring 2020. His musical "Borderline" won the 2018 Weston Playhouse New Musical Award and was workshopped at the 2019 O'Neill Musical Theater Conference. He was a 2018-2019 DGF Fellow and the 2019 Fred Ebb Award Winner. His musical "Kiss My Aztec", written with John Leguizamo, Tony Taccone, and David Kamp, had its world premiere at Berkeley Rep (2019), followed by a run at the La Jolla Playhouse (Fall 2019). <https://www.benjaminvelez.com/>

## **ABOUT THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING**

On the eve of America's entry into World War I, seven suffragists - all women of the theatre - came together to form The Stage Women's War Relief. Through their work supporting the troops and raising funds for American soldiers, they became one of the most significant active relief organizations in the world. In 1940, amidst another World War gaining traction, Antoinette Perry picked up where the Stage Women's War Relief left off, renaming the effort the American Theatre Wing. The organization went on to establish the Stage Door Canteen which served soldiers through theatrical entertainment. They donated \$75,000 dollars to the USO to inaugurate drama as legitimate entertainment for troops overseas while sparking excitement for theatre back home.

Over a century later, the Wing continues to nurture an American theatre that is as vital, multi-faceted, and diverse as the American people by focusing on developing the next generation of artists, and advancing the future of American theatre by celebrating excellence and nurturing the next generation on the stage, behind the scenes, and in the audience.

The American Theatre Wing's programs span the nation, providing theatre education opportunities for underserved students through the *Andrew Lloyd Webber Initiative*, giving high school songwriters the opportunity to professionally record their original songs through the *Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge*, developing the next generation of theatre professionals through the *SpringboardNYC* and *Theatre Intern Network* programs, incubating innovative theatre across the country through the *National Theatre Company Grants*, fostering the songs of American Theatre through the *Jonathan Larson® Grants*, and illuminating the creative process through the Emmy-nominated "*Working in the Theatre*" documentary series. In addition to founding the Tony Awards® - co-presented with The Broadway League - the American Theatre Wing co-presents the Obie Awards®, Off-Broadway's highest honor, with The Village Voice.

Visit [AmericanTheatreWing.org](http://AmericanTheatreWing.org) to gain insight into the American theatre artistic process and to learn more about the extensive programming and grant opportunities for students, aspiring & working professionals and audiences.

For up-to-date news and information, please follow the Wing on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

###