

Gabriela Lena Frank Composer-in-Residence

2019–20 Season



Currently serving as composer-in-residence with The Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin and included in the *Washington Post's* list of the 35 most significant women composers in history (August 2017), composer/pianist Gabriela Lena Frank has always placed identity at the center of her music. Born in Berkeley, California, in September 1972 to a mother of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, she explores her multicultural heritage through her compositions.

Ms. Frank writes: “There’s usually a story line behind my music; a scenario or character.” While the enjoyment of her works can be obtained solely from her music, the composer’s program notes enhance the listener’s experience, for they describe how a piano part mimics a marimba or panpipes, or how a movement is based on a particular type of folk song where the singer is mockingly crying. A brief glance at her titles evokes specific imagery: *La Centinela y La Paloma* (The Keeper of the Dove), written for Dawn Upshaw and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; *Concertino Cusqueño* (Concertino in the Cusco Style), written for The Philadelphia Orchestra; and *Will-o’-the-Wisp*, written for the Cleveland Orchestra. Her compositions also reflect her virtuosity as a pianist—when not composing, she is a sought-after performer, specializing in contemporary repertoire.

Winner of a Latin Grammy Award and nominated for Grammys as both composer and pianist, Ms. Frank also holds a Guggenheim Fellowship and a USA Artist Fellowship, given each year to 50 of the country’s finest artists. Her work has been described as “crafted with unself-conscious mastery” (*The Washington Post*), “brilliantly effective” (*The New York Times*), “a knockout” (*Chicago Tribune*), and “glorious” (*Los Angeles Times*). Before her current residency with The Philadelphia Orchestra, for which she will compose the 40-minute *Picaflor* (Hummingbird) for the 2020–21 season, she completed her four-year tenure as composer-in-residence with the Detroit Symphony in 2017, as well as a second residency with the Houston Symphony, for which she composed the *Conquest Requiem*, a large-scale choral/orchestral work in Spanish, Latin, and Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. In the 2021–22 season, San Diego Opera will premiere her first opera, *The Last Dream of Frida*, utilizing words by her frequent collaborator, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Nilo Cruz.

Ms. Frank is the subject of several PBS documentaries including the Emmy Award-nominated *Música Mestiza*, regarding a workshop she led at her alma mater, the University of Michigan, composing for a virtuoso septet of a classical string quartet plus a trio of Andean panpipe players met during her travels in highland Ecuador.

In 2017 Ms. Frank founded the award-winning Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music in Boonville, a small rural town in the vineyard-rich Anderson Valley of northern California, where she lives with her husband, Jeremy, on their two mountain farms. The Academy offers mentorship with master performers as well as readings-to-premieres residencies to emerging composers from diverse aesthetics and cultural backgrounds. With a strong Alumni Support Initiative, the Academy collaborates with leading performing institutions to offer professional commissions to alumni of its programs.

Civic outreach is an essential part of Ms. Frank's work. She has volunteered extensively in hospitals and prisons, with her current focus on developing the music school program at Anderson Valley High School, a rural public school of modest means with a large Latino population in Boonville.

Ms. Frank attended Rice University, where she earned bachelor's and master's degrees. She studied composition with Sam Jones and piano with Jeanne Kierman Fischer. At the University of Michigan, where she received a Doctor of Musical Arts in composition, she studied with William Albright, William Bolcom, Leslie Bassett, and Michael Daugherty, and piano with Logan Skelton. With a second home in her native Berkeley, CA, Ms. Frank has travelled extensively in Andean South America. She is a member of G. Schirmer's prestigious roster of artists, exclusively managed and published.

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Photo by Mariah Tauger