

did not. This episode was just one of innumerable attempts in their fight for enfranchisement. The more I pondered suff bird Leda Richberg-Hornsby, the more convinced I was that her adventure would make a great opera. All the components were right: a sympathetic heroine, a close-minded society, a wonderful cause and a nearly tragic ending.

Around the same time that I started to think about a Suff Bird opera, Musicians of Ma'alwyck played for Hilary Tann's composition class at Union College, a regular collaboration that we have performed for many years. In 2016 one student composer named **Max Caplan** caught my attention. His work already had a distinct musical voice, and a maturity and sophistication that belied his youth. As I listened to his other pieces on the program (and his rather incredible piano playing too), I was struck by his ability to assimilate other musical styles yet maintain his own identity. His music made a deep impression on me.

The more I thought about the "Leda" project over the next few weeks, the more I thought about Max. Somehow the two seemed intertwined. I reached out to him to see if he might consider this project. His enthusiastic affirmative response and eagerness to start delighted me. By the end of the summer of 2016 he had completed substantial research on Leda Richberg-Hornsby and the other women involved in the attempted fly-over. Though not initially the plan, Max quickly drafted the "story" and began to actually write a libretto. If I had any doubts, they were dispelled when we premiered the first scenes of *Aleda* during the summer of 2017. His music and his words dramatically captured the essence of the suff bird narrative. The audience response confirmed it. Watching Max create *Aleda* was a rather marvelous journey.

The performances were co-produced by Siena College's Creative Arts Department. Krysta Dennis was stage director; Tim Reno, music director and a team of technical expertise from Obadiah Savage and Michael Lounello. The cast consisted of Tess McCarthy in the title role, Jean Leonard as Ida Blair, Erica Sparrow as Mary Otis Wilcox and Byron Nilsson as the NY Sun Reporter. We also had a "mob" of eight and an eight-piece chamber orchestra. Perhaps one of the "coolest" aspects of this production was our performance venue at CLYNK, which is a recycling facility in the Glenville Industrial Park. Suggested by Glenville Town

Supervisor Chris Koetzle as a possible site, the building was a perfect fit: a WW2 tank repair facility, with just the right industrial look and feel. The CLYNK staff were simply incredible and as I wrote in the program at the time: *their own enthusiasm for "Aleda" manifested itself in so many positive ways. Molly Renaud and Micah Kimble lent their time and energy consistently since our first meeting, offering assistance, ideas and even designing the creative use of the recycling bales to form a theatrical setting.*



The performance was attended by nearly 600 guests, including the former CEO of CLYNK Clayton Kyle, many local and state officials, and the great niece of Leda, Marinda Weaver. The production even garnered a note from Ruth Bader Ginsburg (she was invited to be a guest of honor) and a fly-over in a vintage airplane by prominent lawyer and avid aviatrix Faith Gay.



Below are composer Max Caplan's notes about *Aleda* and its creation.

When Woodrow Wilson attended the first electric lighting of the Statue of Liberty on December 2nd, 1916, he had just been re-elected president and the United States was on the brink of World War I. The lighting ceremony was a chance for Wilson to celebrate his electoral victory and to deliver his country's message of democracy to the world. It was also a pivotal time in the women's suffrage movement. Women now had the vote in twelve states, mostly in the West, and were poised to win New York in 1917. Given Wilson's notoriously poor record on women's suffrage, it is ironic that his re-election was made possible, despite losses in New York and other key Eastern states, only by victory in these Western suffrage states.

Aleda tells the true story of an attempt by female pilot Leda Richberg-Hornsby and the National American Woman Suffrage Association to fly an airplane over New York Harbor during the lighting ceremony in order to "bomb" Wilson's yacht with petitions from women voters. The elaborate plan ended in fiasco as gale-force winds necessitated a crash landing in a Staten Island swamp (luckily no one was hurt). Yet the attempt stands as a testimony to the courage and inventiveness, not to mention dramatic flare, of these women in their struggle for the ballot.

For the libretto, newspaper articles provided a rich source of material. A New York Sun piece, wryly entitled "Wind Brings Down Suff Bird Women," offered a first-hand account of the incident, while suggesting the sarcastic character of the Reporter. Contemporary interviews with Leda yielded insight into her personality, her daredevil courage and humor. Other sources filled in details of the lighting ceremony.

The score contains a number of references to musical traditions of the period: syncopated rhythms of ragtime in the overture, vamping techniques of vaudeville in the "banter" scene between Leda and the Reporter. Bombastic march music satirically depicts Wilson and the parade; carnival music evokes the boardwalk atmosphere of Midland Beach, where the airplane took off. The work also quotes the 1871 suffrage hymn, "Daughters of Freedom."

The opera does not intend, however, to recreate history, either dramatically or musically, but to rework it in such a way as to emphasize its enduring relevance. Just as the music reinterprets tradition, so the story assumes contemporary

significance. Aleda is not about the past but the present.

The name "Aleda" (from which "Leda" derives) is Latin for "winged one." "Suff" was contemporary slang for "suffragist," while a "birdwoman" was a female aviator.

So while today's Musical Treasure Chest does not contain any musical selections per se, I hope that you have enjoyed the re-telling of the *Aleda* story. You can hear excerpts from it on the live stream on June 13th at 3pm, as well as music by other important female composers.