

The world says you can't
soprano, piano

Timothy C. Takach / Caitlin Vincent

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Music by
Timothy C. Takach

Libretto by
Caitlin Vincent

The world says you can't

*Maria's aria from **Computing Venus***

Winner of the 2024 Domenic J. Pellicciotti Opera Composition Prize

■ Timothy C. Takach

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Inspired by captivating narrative, speculative fiction and making better humans through art, the music of **Timothy C. Takach** is a mainstay in the concert world. Applauded for his melodic lines and rich, intriguing harmonies, Takach has received commissions and premieres from GRAMMY Award-winning ensembles Roomful of Teeth and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the St. Olaf Band, Cantus, U.S. Army Field Band and Soldiers' Chorus, Lorelei Ensemble, VocalEssence, the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, and numerous other organizations. His compositions have been performed on A Prairie Home Companion, The Boston Pops holiday tour, nationwide on PBS, and at venues such as the Library of Congress, Kennedy Center and Royal Opera House Muscat.

He is a co-creator of the theatrical production of *All is Calm: the Christmas Truce of 1914*, by Peter Rothstein. The critically adored show has had over 130 performances since its premiere in 2006. Takach and librettist Caitlin Vincent won the 2024 Domenic Pellicciotti Opera Composition Prize, and their opera *Computing Venus* premiered at the Crane School of Music in 2024. In 2025 he collaborated with composer Jocelyn Hagen to compose the oratorio *Rose Ever Blooming* for the VOCES8 Foundation Choir and Orchestra. In 2018 his oratorio *We, the Unknown* premiered at the Folly Theatre in Kansas City featuring the Heartland Men's Chorus, and in 2019 "Su Rahva Koda (The House of Your Kindred)" was premiered by the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. 2019 also saw the premiere of *Helios*, Takach's 65' work for a cappella choir inspired by the solar system. His choral ballet *Unfashioned Creature*, an adaptation of Frankenstein, was created in collaboration with choreographer Penelope Frech and premiered in 2023 by the James Sewell Ballet. The Minneapolis Star Tribune named it "one of the 10 most memorable dance events in 2023."

He is a co-founder of the vocal ensemble Cantus and Graphite Publishing and has been a Co-Composer in Residence with Jocelyn Hagen for True Concord Voices and Orchestra since 2022.



Caitlin Vincent is an award-winning opera librettist whose writing has been praised as "nuanced and honest" (*DC Theatre Scene*), "intriguing" (*The Baltimore Sun*), and "luminous" (*The Huffington Post*). Vincent's works have been performed by Washington National Opera, SUNY Potsdam, the University of Connecticut, the Schubert Club of Minnesota, On Site Opera, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, Semperoper Dresden, Oxford Lieder Festival, Melbourne Fringe Festival, and Wigmore Hall, among others.

Recent accolades include the 2017/19 Sackler Music Composition Prize and 2025 Dominick Argento Chamber Opera Prize for the opera *Bessie and Ma* (2019) with composer Douglas Buchanan, the Domenic J. Pellicciotti Opera Composition Prize for the opera *Computing Venus* (2024) with composer Timothy C. Takach, and the NATS Art Song Composition Award for the song cycle *Love Songs from a Third-Floor Walk: Up* (2025) with composer Raphael Fusco.

Other works include *Leaving Gatsby* (2026), *Paw and Tail* (2025), *AHAB* (2020), and *Godiva* (2019) with composer Juliana Hall; *The Woman Behind the Sleigh* (2026) and *Night-Time in the Fourth Trimester* (2025) with composer Jodi Goble; *Beyond* (2024) and *Honeyed Voices* (2023) with composer Lisa Neher; and *Tienda* (2019) with composer Reinaldo Moya. In addition, Vincent has written two comic adaptations of Mozart operas: *The Figaro Project*, based on *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Who Killed Don Giovanni?*, based on *Don Giovanni*. In 2022, Vincent and composer Lori Laitman were commissioned to write "Thanks a Latte" as part of soprano Laura Strickling's 40@40 commissioning project. The song was featured on Strickling's 40@40 album with pianist Daniel Schlosberg, which was nominated for a 2024 GRAMMY Award.

A classically-trained ballet dancer and former professional soprano, Vincent is on faculty at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of *Digital Scenography in Opera in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge 2022) and *OPERA WARS: Inside the World of Opera and the Battles for its Future* (Scribner 2026).

The world says you can't (Maria's aria)

from *Computing Venus*

Libretto by Caitlin Vincent

Timothy C. Takach

Following the departure of her brightest astronomy students,
Maria Mitchell expresses her determination to continue her
work with those who remain.

$\text{♩} = 84$

rit [with growing determination]
mp

The

This system of music is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G4, and then a quarter rest. The piano accompaniment starts with a quarter note G3 in the bass and a quarter note G4 in the treble, moving to a half note G3-G4 in the second measure. The system concludes with a quarter note G4 in the vocal line and a quarter rest, with the word 'The' written below.

A *a tempo*

mf

world says you can't. But you can. The

mp *mf*

This system continues the vocal line with the lyrics 'world says you can't. But you can. The'. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the treble and a harmonic line in the bass. Dynamics include *mp* and *mf*. The system ends with a quarter note G4 in the vocal line and a quarter rest, with the word 'The' written below.

9 world says you shouldn't. But you _____ will.

This system begins with a measure rest (9) and continues the vocal line with the lyrics 'world says you shouldn't. But you _____ will.'. The piano accompaniment continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the treble and a harmonic line in the bass. The system ends with a quarter note G4 in the vocal line and a quarter rest, with the word 'will.' written below.



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12

p *mp*

You can. _____ And you will. With - out

15

mf

sor - rvs. Or self - pit - y. With - out sur - ren - der - ing _ to doubt.

mp *mf*

18

f

We all fail. _____ But we

f

21

learn. _____ We all

24

break. But we grow. We grow.

mf

This system contains measures 24, 25, and 26. The vocal line starts with a whole rest in measure 24, followed by a half note 'break.' in measure 25, and a half note 'But we grow.' in measure 25 and a half note 'We grow.' in measure 26. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present at the end of the system.

27

mf When forced back, *mp* We re - sist. We per - sist.

mp

This system contains measures 27, 28, 29, and 30. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 27, followed by a half note 'When forced back,' in measure 28, a half note 'We re - sist.' in measure 29, and a half note 'We per - sist.' in measure 30. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and chords or single notes in the left hand. Dynamic markings of *mf* and *mp* are used. The system ends with a 2/4 time signature.

31

B *f* We are wom - en ³ work - ing to -

f

This system contains measures 31, 32, and 33. Measure 31 is a key signature change to D major (two sharps) and a time signature change to 4/4. The vocal line starts with a whole rest in measure 31, followed by a half note 'We are wom - en' in measure 32 and a triplet of eighth notes 'work - ing to -' in measure 33. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. Dynamic markings of *f* are used. A section marker 'B' is placed above measure 31.

34

geth - er. *mf* And we

mf

This system contains measures 34, 35, and 36. The key signature changes to E major (three sharps) and the time signature changes to 5/4. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 34, followed by a half note 'geth - er.' in measure 35, and a half note 'And we' in measure 36. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present.

36

do the work that must be done. To - geth - er.

mf

This system contains measures 36 and 37. It features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 5/4. The lyrics are "do the work that must be done. To - geth - er." The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mf*.

38

Ve - nus in ret - ro - grade. We'll

This system contains measures 38 and 39. It features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 5/4. The lyrics are "Ve - nus in ret - ro - grade. We'll".

40

start with the sem - i - ma - jor ax - is.

This system contains measures 40 and 41. It features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 5/4. The lyrics are "start with the sem - i - ma - jor ax - is." The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mf*.

42

rit. = 108

mp

mf

This system contains measures 42, 43, and 44. It features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 6/4. The tempo marking is *rit.* = 108. The piano part includes dynamic markings of *mp* and *mf*.

Computing Venus

Inspired by the life of astronomer Maria Mitchell

Music by Timothy C. Takach • Libretto by Caitlin Vincent
Winner of the 2024 Domenic J. Pellicciotti Opera Composition Prize

“Does anyone suppose that any woman in all the ages has had a fair chance to show what she could do in science?”
– *Maria Mitchell*

Synopsis:

Computing Venus provides a glimpse into the life of astronomer Maria Mitchell, one of the earliest champions of women in STEM. The opera follows Mitchell’s efforts to cultivate the next generation of women astronomers, even as growing movements threatened to close the world of science to women forever.

Characters:

MARIA MITCHELL [soprano] – Noted astronomer and professor at Vassar College. Dedicated to the education of young women. Warm, witty, and lonely.

MARY [mezzo-soprano] – One of MARIA’s astronomy students at Vassar College. Serious and intelligent. Unhappy and unsupported at home.

SARAH [soprano] – One of MARIA’s astronomy students at Vassar College. Insecure and doubtful about her abilities. Prone to hypochondria when anxious.

IDA [mezzo-soprano] – One of MARIA’s astronomy students at Vassar College. Wealthy and slightly spoiled by indulgent parents.

EDWARD CLARKE [tenor] – A medical professor at Harvard College and author of *Sex in Education, or, A Fair Chance for the Girls*. A charismatic showman.

JOHN RAYMOND [baritone] – The President of Vassar College. Well-meaning but patronising.

ENSEMBLE [SATB] – with minor breakout roles including AGNES and other STUDENTS, MARIA’S MOTHER, the ASTRONOMER, and PARENTS #1, #2, and #3.

Historical Context:

Born into a Quaker household in Nantucket in 1818, Mitchell grew up observing the stars with her father and excelled in astronomy and advanced mathematics from a young age. At 29, Mitchell made history when she discovered a comet, subsequently known as Miss Mitchell’s Comet, while mapping the stars from the roof of her house. Mitchell was awarded a gold medal by the King of Denmark for her discovery and quickly became the most famous woman in America. A year later, she was hired as the official ‘computer of Venus’ for the United States, one of only 11 professional mathematician astronomers—and the only woman—working in such a capacity in the country. From 1865 on, Mitchell served as the first female professor of astronomy at the newly-founded Vassar College and focused her efforts on cultivating the next generation of woman astronomers.

As a young woman, Mitchell benefited from a largely supportive environment for women in science. In the early decades of the 19th century, the study of science and mathematics was thought to be a womanly activity, consistent with domestic duties and lady-like behaviour. By the 1860s and 1870s, however, women in science saw the tide turn against them, spurred by the publication of Edward Clarke’s 1873 book, *Sex in Education, Or, A Fair Chance for the Girls*. Clarke, then a professor at Harvard Medical School, claimed that higher education had a detrimental physiological effect on women, making them sterile, sexually deviant, and hermaphrodites. As a high-profile, unmarried female professor at Vassar, Mitchell was indirectly targeted by Clarke’s claims and became the living embodiment of the fate facing young women who were ‘too’ educated.

As the backlash against educating women gained speed, Mitchell took an active role in attempting to counteract the movement, presenting a series of public speeches and co-founding the Association for the Advancement of Women. Despite her efforts, Mitchell saw public opinion irrevocably shift against the younger generation of women. Students at Vassar were barred from taking her courses by concerned parents, and only a few of her former protégés managed to find employment as astronomers. In the late 1880s, Mitchell retired from her post at Vassar and died shortly afterwards at the age of 70.

Despite her personal accomplishments, Mitchell saw her advancements undermined as the world of science and astronomy became closed to women. More than a century after Mitchell’s death, women still struggle to access STEM fields and achieve the same recognition and acknowledgement as their male peers. As recently as 2005, Lawrence Summers, then President of Harvard College, stated publicly that women were innately unsuited to the sciences.

Directing note:

In the staging of this opera, it is critical that Maria never physically acts on any romantic feelings towards Mary. This would introduce a problematic power dynamic in their relationship and undermine Maria’s efforts to foster the next generation of women astronomers.

Selected vocal works by Timothy C. Takach:

Mixed Voices

A Worshipper and a Man		SATB a cappella
And I Saw		SATB div. a cappella
The Darkling Thrush	(earthsongs)	SATB, SAT soli, a cappella
Even in My Time		3-part mixed, piano
Fragile		SATB, hand drum
Joseph		SATB a cappella
MOMENTS IN FILM: A Mural of Change		SATB, piano
MOMENTS IN FILM: Insidious		SATB, piano
MOMENTS IN FILM: Flying Solo		SATB, piano
Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers	(Graphite Publishing)	SSATBB a cappella
One Boy Told Me		SATB, piano
Ragnarök		SATB div. a cappella
Su Rahva Koda (The House of Your Kindred)		SSAATTBB a cappella
This Amazing Life		SA(T)B, piano

Treble Voices

And I Saw		SSAA div. a cappella
Bahihii Waaliidkay Dhaqay		2-part, piano
Cassiopcia		SSA a cappella
Duende		SSAA, floor toms
How to Triumph Like a Girl	(Graphite Publishing)	SSA, piano
There is No Rose	(Lorelei Ensemble)	SSAA, SS soli, a cappella
She Tore a Map	(Graphite Publishing)	SA, piano

TB Voices

Empty		TB (opt. div), piano, opt. djembe
Goodbye, Then		TBB choir, Bb clarinet, piano
Kin		TB, piano
Mad		TB, piano
Original Harmony	(Colla Voce)	TTBB a cappella
Rough Beast		TTBB, percussion
Salve Regina	(Graphite Publishing)	TBB semi-chorus, TTBB a cappella

Large Works

At Home (ca. 15')		SATB, flute, clarinet
Born For This (ca. 16')		SATB and piano, chamber ensemble, or concert band
Changed by Beauty (ca. 18')		SATB, cello
Helios (ca. 65')		SATB a cappella
Rose Ever Blooming (ca. 55') composed with Jocelyn Hagen		SATB, orchestra
The Longest Nights (ca. 21')		SATB, piano or string quartet
This is How You Love (ca. 35') composed with Jocelyn Hagen		SATB div. a cappella
True North (ca. 16')		SATB, chamber orchestra
Unfashioned Creature (ca. 41'), a ballet		SATB, cello, percussion, dancers
We, the Unknown (ca. 40')		TTBB, soloists, chamber orchestra