

# A MUSIC CENTER FINDS ITS VOICE

Strathmore Presents World and DC Premieres of *I Am Anne Hutchinson/I Am Harvey Milk*

By Chris Slattery



Matthew Murphy

A 20<sup>th</sup>-century gay rights activist. A 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan midwife. A Broadway legend. A Grammy and Tony-nominated composer. A Manhattan-based theater and opera director, and some of DC's biggest voices. This spring, Strathmore brings together some unlikely bedfellows for its production of *I Am Anne Hutchinson/I Am Harvey Milk*.

The two-night engagement of this innovative oratorio at the Music Center at Strathmore marks a new endeavor for the Montgomery County arts venue: to produce a blend of history and entertainment, cross-pollinate

genres, and celebrate the ongoing march toward human rights. *I Am Anne Hutchinson/I Am Harvey Milk* is a musical stage work that Andrew Lippa, the show's creator, describes as, "storytelling with a kick-ass orchestra! It's a piece of theater, an opera, and a concert."

Lippa stars in the show alongside Broadway superstar Kristin Chenoweth backed by locally sourced talent—the Alexandria Harmonizers and National Philharmonic. This event at Strathmore marks both the world premiere of *I Am Anne Hutchinson* and the DC premiere of *I Am Harvey Milk*.

**I AM ANNE  
HUTCHINSON/  
I AM HARVEY MILK**

Sat & Sun,  
April 23 & 24  
MUSIC CENTER

## A MUSIC CENTER FINDS ITS VOICE

Combined, the works create an emotional musical celebration of two American icons, one that brings together local talent and international superstars in a hybrid theater piece and choral concert. It features soaring melodies, beautiful lyrics, and an emotionally charged lesson in history and heroism.

Originally commissioned by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus for their 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the 2013 premiere of *I Am Harvey Milk* in California received a response that Lippa describes as "euphoric."

"The response to the piece was so beyond my reckoning or imagining," adds Lippa, already an acclaimed composer, lyricist, author, performer, and producer known for the musicals *Big Fish*, *The Addams Family*, and *The Wild Party*. "Then, several people involved in *Harvey Milk* said, 'How can we make this a full length piece?'"

**"At heart I'm a theatrical storyteller," says Lippa, "using music to tell stories. And at heart, this is a work of theater—an opera—with the obvious presentation of a concert."**

And that's where Anne Hutchinson—and Lippa's muse, star of stage and screen, Kristin Chenoweth—entered the picture. Lippa and Chenoweth have collaborated many times before, most recently for the

Disney Channel original movie *Descendants*, in which Chenoweth, as Maleficent, sings the Lippa-penned "Evil Like Me."

When it comes to common pairings in the world of theater, Harvey Milk and Anne Hutchinson don't even crack the top thousand. What on earth would a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan and a modern-day insurance-salesman-turned-LGBT-activist have in common? How would either of their harrowing fights against authority, public trials and tribulations, and ultimate martyrdoms make for a moving evening of song? And why would Strathmore step up to tackle something that has never been done before?

"This is what Strathmore believes the arts should do: change people," says Strathmore President Monica Jeffries Hazangeles. "At Strathmore we have long been dedicated to supporting inspired artists in creating new work, and a production like *I Am Anne Hutchinson / I Am Harvey Milk* is transformative for the audience and for the public discourse."

Using the arts to tell the stories of heroes like Hutchinson and Milk, she adds, guarantees their legacy in a forgetful world.

"When we heard Andrew speak about his discovery of Anne Hutchinson's story, and how he sees it intertwined with *I Am Harvey Milk*," Hazangeles said, "eyes widened, hearts opened, and goosebumps were raised!"



*I Am Harvey Milk* by Matthew Murphy. Next page: L-R: Andrew Lippa, Kristen Chenoweth



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“The decision to invest in producing this monumental work proclaims a true ‘coming of age’ for Strathmore after a decade of programming. We’ve become well-known in the Washington region for the quality of our spaces. Now, Strathmore will be recognized for our bold artistic voice as well,” says Strathmore CEO Eliot Pfanstiehl.

Most people know about Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man to hold public office in California. His life and legacy has been explored many times, most notably in the 2008 Gus Van Sant movie *Milk*, for which Sean Penn won the Academy Award. Hutchinson, despite a namesake river and parkway in New York, has remained a lesser-known civil rights hero.

Finding Hutchinson’s voice was a process that started when Lippa read an anthology about little-known American stories. After the well-educated, highly regarded, and deeply principled colonial midwife and religious leader caught his imagination, Lippa was not about to let her go. Not wanting another composer to tell Hutchinson’s story, Lippa determined her tale of social justice would make the perfect companion piece to *I Am Harvey Milk*.

He did it using the story of Hutchinson’s breakaway from the Puritan patriarchy that tried to deny her the right to teach other women about religion and to deny women the right to learn.

“She, like Harvey Milk, was a firebrand,” says Lippa. “She was of the society—an intelligent woman who could read, back when the only book you had was the Bible—the Bible held power—and she had the desire to teach other women, to empower them.”

Lippa quickly realized that the unsung hero Hutchinson was, in many ways, the forebear to Harvey Milk, just as Milk has been to many others. “They both stood up to authority. Neither was political. They emerged into the fight because they believed so strongly in their mission.”

Which is something Rolando Sanz could identify with. Sanz, artistic director of Strathmore affiliate Young Artists of America originally pitched the idea of the Hutchinson/Milk project to Strathmore. The Rockville native’s multifaceted career as an opera singer, stage performer, and teacher laid the groundwork for his role as executive producer of *I Am Anne Hutchinson / I Am Harvey Milk*.



Sanz knew of Lippa’s desire to show that “great art can be made anywhere, not just on Broadway,” and he saw this piece as a perfect way to showcase local musicians in an artistic event of historic significance.

“Our dream was to do this in DC,” says the show’s Manhattan-based director and Baltimore native, Noah Himmelstein. Himmelstein, who collaborated closely with Lippa and Chenoweth, likens directing to “naming things, forming layers, creating a thousand details—and then wanting the audience to think only: *I was moved.*”

Himmelstein deftly draws parallels between the seemingly separate Hutchinson and Milk. Milk, he says, “was a secular Jew but deeply spiritual, a Republican insurance salesman who started going to the theater and found ‘religion’ through the arts.”

Himmelstein sees Hutchinson as a colonial-era Malala Yousafzai: “Teaching women in secret was a dangerous thing to do,” he observes, “yes, these two American icons come from very different backgrounds, but we are creating a space where they live together, and that’s what the stage can do.”

Sanz agrees and takes it a step further to a vision of modern-day artists harnessing the power of music to speak for the voiceless.

“Both pieces speak to anyone who’s ever been marginalized,” says Sanz. “We’re not just singing about gay people, we’re singing about people and oppression, what human beings are capable of doing to one another—and how we can be transcendent.”

# Backstage Pass:

# I AM ANNE HUTCHINSON/ I AM HARVEY MILK

*The spotlight is on Strathmore as an amazing new concept opera makes its world/DC area debut.*

Come, be inspired by a new dimension of Strathmore's arts programming—make sure you don't miss the world premiere of *I Am Anne Hutchinson*, and the DC premiere of *I Am Harvey Milk*.

*I Am Anne Hutchinson/I Am Harvey Milk* is the emotionally charged musical celebration of two American icons, one that brings together local talent and international superstars in a hybrid theater piece and choral concert featuring soaring melodies, inspirational lyrics, and a profound lesson in history and heroism.

Meet the artists that have come together to create this historic production:



## KRISTIN CHENOWETH

She's wickedly talented—an Emmy and Tony Award winner who's turned in unforgettable performances in movies, on television, on stage, and in the recording studio. And just as Oklahoma native Chenoweth originated the role of Glinda the Good

Witch on Broadway in *Wicked*, she's getting ready to make her mark again when *I Am Anne Hutchinson/I Am Harvey Milk* debuts at Strathmore this April. Chenoweth needs no introduction, whether she's captured your heart as April Rhodes on *Glee*, in her Tony-winning turn as Sally Brown in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, or as Maleficent in Disney's *Descendants*: she is an enormous personality contained in a tiny, beautiful package; with a goose bump-inducing voice that's unique yet deeply comforting. Off stage, she's a dynamic supporter of the arts, raising money and awareness to make the life-changing world of theater

accessible to all. Chenoweth is equal parts super-woman and girl-next-door, and she calls on both qualities to bring this early American heroine to the stage.



## ANDREW LIPKA

*Big Fish, The Addams Family, The Wild Party*—Lipka is a Broadway legend. While he has had most of his successes on Broadway, Lipka strongly believes that theater can't be limited to a particular city and that great art happens everywhere.

A music teacher before he began his ascent to stardom in the world of musical theater, Lipka continues to use the arts to educate and inspire. With *I Am Anne Hutchinson/I Am Harvey Milk*, the composer-performer links two chapters in American history into a new concept opera that highlights the ideals of freedom and justice, and the perils and rewards of speaking up for the oppressed. Lipka created *I Am Harvey Milk* for the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. Now he has fashioned *I Am Anne Hutchinson* with the vision of his muse, Chenoweth, in the title role, bringing the two works together in a theatrical oratorio that is *sui generis*. Not unlike the man himself.

## I AM ANNE HUTCHINSON/I AM HARVEY MILK

A new concept opera  
starring Kristin Chenoweth & Andrew Lipka  
with the National Philharmonic, Alexandria Harmonizers  
& Colin Wheeler

Sat, April 23, 8pm & Sun, April 24, 4pm

MUSIC CENTER

TICKETS \$49-\$99 (STARS \$44.10-\$89.10)

## I AM ANNE HUTCHINSON/I AM HARVEY MILK



### COLIN WHEELER

As Gavroche, he sang about “what little people can do”—but young actor Wheeler brings big talent to the stage. The fifth grader from Cleveland, Ohio was chosen to play young Harvey Milk on the Strathmore stage out of a national casting call. He will create

the role of Samuel Hutchinson as well as debut as Young Harvey Milk in this production.

### JOEL FRAM

Music director Fram is an in-demand arranger, conductor, and producer. He’s best known in London’s West End for *Wicked*; for Broadway shows including *Scandalous*, *Wicked*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, *The Music Man*, and *James Joyce’s The Dead*; and as musical director and conductor for two Andrew Lippa musicals, *john & jen* and *The Little Princess*, as well as the Lincoln Center performance of *I Am Harvey Milk*. A teacher who’s lectured at Yale, NYU, and other prestigious universities worldwide, Fram’s award-winning “New Voices” concert spotlights up-and-coming theater writers—and he’s worked closely with legends Stephen Sondheim, Patti LuPone, Bernadette Peters, Neil Patrick Harris, Angela Lansbury, and more.

### NOAH HIMMELSTEIN

Stage director Himmelstein has been part of *I Am Harvey Milk* since its inception, collaborating with Lippa and directing the work at its 2013 debut in San Francisco, at Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles, and Lincoln Center in New York. The Baltimore native, now based in Manhattan, has directed plays on stages as diverse as the Everyman Theatre in Baltimore and Denmark’s Fredericia Teater, as well as Goodspeed Opera House, Circle in the Square, Weston Playhouse, The Living Theatre, American Opera Projects, and more. His dream has been to bring *I Am Anne Hutchinson / I Am Harvey Milk* to the DC area: mission accomplished.

### ALEXANDRIA HARMONIZERS

Ever since their founding in 1948, the Alexandria Harmonizers have been pushing the limits of what a barbershop chorus can achieve. Specializing in four-part harmony—one of music’s most challenging and rewarding disciplines—the Harmonizers have performed upon the world’s most distinguished



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stages, including the White House, Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, and even before the Great Wall of China. From its humble beginnings as a “men’s harmony club,” this remarkable group has grown into a world-class chorus, with 80 to 100 men onstage and a stellar collection of medals from the most prestigious international competitions. At their heart, however, the Alexandria Harmonizers remain dedicated to artistic excellence, community outreach, and musical education.

### NATIONAL PHILHARMONIC

The National Philharmonic is the largest and most active locally based professional ensemble founded in Montgomery County, performing more than 190 concerts in Strathmore’s Concert Hall since 2005, and showcasing world-renowned guest artists in symphonic masterpieces conducted by Maestro Piotr Gajewski and monumental choral masterworks under Chorale Artistic Director Stan Engebretson. Created by a merger between the National Chamber Orchestra and Masterworks Chorus in 2003, the National Philharmonic combines a volunteer chorus of 100 with a full orchestra, and is renowned for its appeal to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the community as well as its commitment to creating significant educational opportunities.

Learn more at [STRATHMORE.ORG/IAM](http://STRATHMORE.ORG/IAM)