

Laurie Rubin

Critically acclaimed author, songwriter, and singer

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About Laurie Rubin

Mezzo-Soprano and author Laurie Rubin has performed the title role in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Karen in Gordon Beeferman's *The Rat Land* with New York City Opera, Penelope in Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses* at the Greenwich Music Festival, and is currently playing the role of the witch/voice in Lisa Bielawa's ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Multimedia Award winning episodic opera, "Vireo." She has given recitals at The John F. Kennedy Center and the White House in Washington DC. Carnegie Hall, and Wigmore Hall in London.

In 2013, Ms. Rubin embarked on a national tour performing a concert pairing musical selections with excerpts from her memoir published by (Seven Stories Press) which details her story of growing up blind, coupled with the growing pains of adolescence and her unique career ascendance in the world of classical music and opera. As lyricist, Rubin has collaborated with composers Bruce Adolphe and Jennifer Taira in new classical music, pop, and musical theater repertoire. She took part in the competitive Lucas Artist Residency Program's Composer's and Musician's Fellowship at the Montalvo Arts Center. In November 2014, the new musical, "Peace On Your Wings," for which Rubin served as lyricist and co-bookwriter had its world premiere on Oahu, and subsequently toured the neighbor islands and Los Angeles for its West Coast premiere to enthusiastic audience response and critical acclaim.

Rubin is a sought after speaker for a diverse array of audiences and events, including educational events for middle and high school aged youth, conventions for women leaders, and disability advocacy groups, giving presentations on a variety of topics, including overcoming the effects of bullying, and carving a successful path and defying stereotypes associated with a disability. Her recent presentation for over 800 6th graders in Highland Park was featured in the Chicago Tribune on September 10th 2015. Rubin will be performing and speaking at the Ted Med Conference in November of this year about conquering fears.

Ms. Rubin is also co-founder and associate artistic director of Ohana Arts, a performing arts festival and school on Oahu.

Select Keynotes

- **TED Med Talk**

First sings Rossini's Aria "Non Piu Mesta" For most people the top three fears are blindness, public speaking, and death. I'm facing two of those right now, and it isn't so bad. I think most of us are afraid of the unknown. But, our fears can be conquered, or at least reduced, when we force ourselves to know the things we thought we were afraid of. I've been singing Cinderella's aria, "Non Piu Mesta," since I was 18. In fact, one of my biggest operatic dreams came true in my senior year of college when I got to play the title role in this opera during my last semester at Oberlin. In Rossini's version of Cinderella, people feared and misunderstood her because she was different. Like me.. And also like me, she needed that special someone who could look past stereotypes and preconceived limitations, and see the real her. I'll never forget one rehearsal, when we'd just finished the scene where Cinderella's stepfather tells her she cannot go to the ball, and spent an entire aria making

fun of her. Then, Allidoro, the character who takes the place of the fairy godmother, tells Cinderella that he is part of the prince's court, and that she can indeed go to the ball. As the baritone who played Allidoro sang to me,, offering me a beautiful ball gown, I started sobbing. I couldn't help it. I was so overcome with emotion because I realized how similar my story was to Cinderella's. In high school, people were scared of interacting with me because I was blind. But, at Oberlin, I was playing the title role – and I was being celebrated for it. Exactly the way that Cinderella was celebrated by the prince after the isolation she felt with others. What I love about this aria is that it is about forgiveness. Cinderella embraces everyone who treated her cruelly. I can completely relate. My life has included several very painful experiences of bullying that left long lasting scars. Readers often ask me, "What would you say if you confronted one of the people who bullied you, now that you're a well adjusted adult?" All I can find inside my heart is empathy and understanding. So many bullies are bullied themselves. They lash out because of fear. How can I hold a frightened child responsible for their fear? Perhaps the biggest fear I deal with now is not my own but other people's fears about me. That fear has stopped people from being my friend, or from having me sing on their stage. On first meeting, many people tell me that they assume that my life must be riddled with fear. To them, blindness means darkness, and because so many people are afraid of the dark, I must be afraid too. What they don't realize is that I've adapted to being blind since I was a baby, so I have an advantage over the person who is stuck in a black-out. In fact, I find myself chuckling silently at the person desperately clinging to their flashlight for dear life in the dark. The dark doesn't pose any problems for me. I can put on my make-up, navigate around a house, make jewelry, and even cook with no problem during a power failure. Blindness offers other advantages, too. Ever since I was a child, I've been a bit of a daredevil. I used to go skiing with my family, and I soon found myself skiing the expert runs, black diamonds. In fact, I think that being blind made me less fearful because I wasn't faced with the daunting view of what was below me. This is also what makes me perfectly at ease on a roller coaster. The thrill of it is merely the sensation, not the heart-stopping visual of seeing the several story drop we're about to take. When my family went river rafting, I wanted to sit on the front of the raft where our guide told us we'd get the wildest ride through a rapid. I've only become more aware of the potential risks because of age and wisdom – it turns out that I am mortal, after all. Every day, I'm told how brave I am for going out into the world, and facing the unknown as a blind person. I don't see this as "brave." It's just my normal day-to-day. Yes, I do have fears just like the next person. But I probably spend more time trying to assuage fears others have about being around me, than I spend overcoming my own. Looking back, I think I'm on this earth to educate others about difference – to encourage them not to run from what they fear, but instead question their assumptions, defy expectations, and explore the glorious unknown. That's what I've been doing all of my life. Confronting what I'm afraid of, and letting go of those fears, gives me more room to be myself. What an adventure it's been.