

ROBERT ELLSWORTH FENG

Librettist

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Robert Ellsworth Feng is a Chinese-American bass and librettist from Kailua, HI who creates impactful and entertaining works that have been described as “relatable and fresh.” His comedies are noted for being “quick-witted and layered”, and his horror as “hauntingly engaging.” Robert’s political satire micro-opera ***Chew On This*** premiered in June 2024, (with composer Yunfei Li) commissioned by Lyric Opera of Kansas City and No Divide KC for their Come As You Are (CAYA) Festival, described as “truly an operette for our times” (*S. Fairbank*). This opera is part of a trilogy of one-acts about Asians in America titled **Silk Roads**.

Robert began writing libretti while attending the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University, where he collaborated with several composers to premiere their works, including Terrence J. Martin’s song cycle ***Projections*** for bass voice and piano, and Nick Bentz’s monodrama ***Mikylvxka Hllupo*** for bass voice and Pierrot Ensemble.

Feng’s first opera (with composer Nick Bentz) ***Having Guests for Dinner*** is a 1-act horror/comedy. It premiered virtually with New Opera West in 2020 and has since been performed live with them as well as Hartford Opera Theater and Hillman Opera at SUNY Fredonia in 2024 where a 90 min version was commissioned by Kor Productions. It will be performed at Central Washington University in October 2024 for their chamber opera showcase. Feng and Bentz’s second opera ***Salmo***, a grand space opera in prologue and four acts, will be workshopped by Brown University for their 2026/27 Academic Year.

Feng has also collaborated with prolific NYC based composer Felix Jarrar on the art song ***When They Killed Us, Did You Say They Killed Americans?*** about the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings and rise in anti-Asian hate crimes during the Covid Pandemic, and the supernatural horror opera ***You Do Not Recognize the Bodies in the Water***, which was workshopped at OPERA America in 2022. Upcoming projects include the Sci-Fi operetta ***Pathfinder***, to be set to music by Jane Kozhevnikova respectively, ***Annihilation***: A nuclear oratorio for the end of days to be set to music by Scott Wheeler, and ***The Ming and I***, commissioned by Boston Opera Collective for their 2026 Opera Bites Showcase to be set to music by Ben Yee-Paulson.

Robert holds degrees from Peabody Conservatory and Manhattan School of Music and is a recipient of the Peabody Career Development Award. Feng was a Librettist Fellow for Lyric Opera of KC and No Divide KC’s CAYA Festival Fellowship, and is an alum of Really Spicy Opera’s Aria Institute for Composers & Librettists: Sci-Fi Edition, and Librettist Workshop. This June, Robert joins the Alliance for New Music-Theatre’s Composer-Librettist Studio in Washington, D.C.