

**Music Critics Association of North America awards
Breaking the Waves with inaugural Best New Opera award**

by Samantha Spaccasi

The Music Critics Association of North America presented composer Missy Mazzoli and librettist Royce Vavrek with its inaugural Best New Opera award for *Breaking the Waves*. Both will be honored on July 19 at the MCANA Annual Meeting in Santa Fe.

Other finalists included *Fellow Travelers* by composer Gregory Spears and librettist Greg Pierce, and *Anatomy Theater* by composer David Lang and librettist Mark Dion. The winner was chosen by an Awards Committee comprised of Heidi Waleson, George Loomis, Alex Ross, John Rockwell, and Arthur Kaptainis.

The award was created to “honor the musical and theatrical excellence in a fully-staged opera that received its world premiere in North America in the previous calendar year.” *Breaking the Waves* was premiered last September by Opera Philadelphia, in collaboration with Beth Morrison Projects — an organization that supports emerging artists in developing and staging new operas.

“We at MCANA view the launch of this new award as a way to commend the work of outstanding composers and librettists,” said MCANA president Barbara Jepson in a press release. “The award reflects the overall mission of MCANA to foster excellence and...communicate the incredible richness of musical life in the U.S. and Canada at a time when classical music coverage in traditional print media is shrinking.”

Breaking the Waves is based on the eponymous 1996 Academy Award-nominated film by Lars von Trier. Vavrek said, “Writing this has truly been a dream come true. It’s a libretto that erupted straight from my heart, based on a story that has clung to my imagination since seeing the film.”

“It’s thrilling to be recognized by five critics I read regularly and respect mightily, and moving to know that *Breaking the Waves* stood out in a year full of fantastic new operas,” said Mazzoli in the press release. Vavrek added that “collaborating with Missy has been one of the great joys of my life.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 26, 2017.

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