



## Lee Bynum, PhD



Lee Bynum (they/them) is an internationally recognized arts leader, composer, librettist, dramaturg, and advocate whose twenty-year career bridges visionary creative practice, strategic nonprofit leadership, and transformative work in equity and education. As a nonbinary artist and senior executive, Lee brings a rare combination of experience across classical music, musical theatre, philanthropy, higher education, and global cultural exchange. Their work is united by a steadfast commitment to ensuring that women and nonbinary creators are not only visible in the field—but empowered, supported, and celebrated at every level.

Lee has held leadership positions at some of the country's most significant arts institutions, including Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Minnesota Opera, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. As the inaugural Vice President of Impact at Minnesota Opera, they launched and led the first department in the classical music field dedicated entirely to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA). Their work transformed the company's artistic, educational, and institutional profile. During their tenure, the company prioritized diverse composition, creative, and production teams—with multiple mainstage productions composed, conducted, and directed by women, queer, and underrepresented individuals.

Lee also designed new educational initiatives centered on degendering vocal pedagogy, built in partnership with nonbinary and women pedagogues. Youth programs such as the Youth Opera Circle and Youth Opera Studio prioritized the leadership of girls and nonbinary youth, creating more equitable pipelines into an art form that had historically excluded them. In parallel with this work, Lee began co-hosting *The Score*, a groundbreaking podcast on race, gender, and identity in the arts, which continues to reach thousands of regular listeners and has been recognized by *The New York Times* for its impact. They also



launched MNIatures, a series of eight digital micro-operas commissioned from underrepresented creators, informed by the company's pioneering diversity charter.

Lee later served as Chief Education Officer at Lincoln Center, engineering innovative initiatives in digital arts education, equitable arts pipelines in partnership with NYC public schools, and international convenings on IDEA and the arts. They led the creation of equitable arts education initiatives in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education, the Mayor's Office, and major arts organizations including the New York Philharmonic, Alvin Ailey, Juilliard, LaGuardia High School, Dance Lab New York, Step into the Light, and Dance Lab New York. They also led Middle School Arts Audition Bootcamp, a program with a 97 percent success rate in preparing under-resourced middle schoolers for arts high school auditions, and Young Artists Pipeline, which extended those efforts to national partners and new donors. Lee co-hosted *Art Class*—a global podcast exploring social justice and cultural innovation with guests that included GRAMMY-nominated rapper Big Freedia, winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race* Bob the Drag Queen, and cultural critic Hilton Als—and launched cutting-edge initiatives in VR, AI, and motion capture.

Previously, as Associate Director at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Lee supported initiatives that broadened the aperture around who participates in the arts and higher education. Their portfolio included the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF), whose 6,000+ alumni are among the most diverse and accomplished in the U.S. academy. They partnered with visionary organizations such as Community MusicWorks, Howard University, Spelman College, and the League of American Orchestras to advance major equity interventions in both performing arts and museum leadership. They were also deeply involved in the foundation's work in visual culture, facilitating new research and exhibitions that explored gender, race, and representation in American art and public life.

A passionate educator and public intellectual, Lee has held teaching appointments at Columbia University and Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Their scholarship spans public history, education, and performance, with special attention to the role of artists in shaping democratic life. Lee's creative practice as a composer, lyricist, librettist, dramaturg, and curator of new work has been supported by the Metropolitan Opera, Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, American Opera Projects, the Flint Institute for Music, National Queer Theater, National Black Theatre, Detroit Opera, and the Museum of Art and Design. Their works have been performed across the U.S., U.K., and



China. They are currently collaborating with composer Nkeiru Okoye on *Dear Olly*, a new opera commissioned by Opera North and set to tour the U.K. in 2026 and 2027.

They are Chair of the Board of the American Composers Forum, where they have guided a comprehensive restructuring of the organization and brought together its publishing, advocacy, and performance wings under a unified strategic framework. They are also a longtime board member and IDEA consultant for Luna Composition Lab, the mentorship program founded by composers Missy Mazzoli and Ellen Reid that has launched dozens of girls and nonbinary composers into major conservatories and professional commissions. With the Dream Unfinished Orchestra, they have commissioned well-received new work from Jessie Montgomery, Courtney Bryan, Brittany J. Green, and Joel Bentley Thompson. Through this work, Lee has helped shape the next generation of musical storytellers. They also served on the boards of the Black Feminist Project, TakeRoot Justice, Opera-oriented Project Sponsorships-Minnesota, and Diaspora Community Services, and as founding artistic director of the Harmony Theatre Company. Lee has undergraduate and graduate degrees from Columbia University.

As a nonbinary artist-educator, Lee's leadership is deeply personal. They know firsthand how exclusion and erasure operate in musical institutions, and they have built a career on ensuring that others do not have to face the same barriers. Their approach to leadership is rooted in radical transparency, collaborative strategy, and joyful, community-centered action. They believe in honoring the traditions of the field while radically reimagining its future.

Lee is uniquely positioned to lead Maestra Music into its next chapter. They bring the lived experience of a nonbinary artist, the strategic acumen of a seasoned executive, and the deep cultural fluency of someone who has worked across disciplines, institutions, and borders. Their work aligns directly with Maestra's mission to provide visibility, support, and community for women and nonbinary musical theatre professionals—and their career is a testament to what is possible when we build structures designed for equity, access, and artistic brilliance.

*Lee will be speaking in Oklahoma during the MOMENTUM convening on June 27, 2026.*

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