

## Comments on Works by Karren L. Alenier

### ***Gertrude Stein Invents a Jump Early On***

“The poet Karren LaLonde Alenier and the composer William C. Banfield were smart to take their idea of a one-act opera about Gertrude Stein to Nancy Rhodes, the artistic director of the adventurous Encompass New Opera Theater and an avowed Steinian. Four years and five workshops later, this 70-minute work, "Gertrude Stein Invents a Jump Early On," had its premiere on Wednesday night at Symphony Space.

“Ms. Alenier's sometimes elegant writing starts to sound ponderously poetic and sentimental in the setting by Mr. Banfield, whose score is lightly jazzy and prone to lyrical outpourings. Moreover, his awkward text-setting sometimes makes the words unclear. Still, the conductor, John Yaffé, drew a lithe performance from the musicians, and the earnest singers looked endearing as these famous characters.”

excerpts from “When Opera Is an Opera Is an Opera Is an Opera,”  
a review by Anthony Tommasini  
published in *The New York Times* June 17, 2005

“For one week in June, 2005, Gertrude Stein was on Broadway, just as she always knew she would be and always thought she should be. Thanks to poet Karren Lalonde Alenier, Stein has been dusted off, reinvented, vivified and set to music. And Gertrude would not have chosen anyone else but a poet to do this magic trick for her, because it took a poet to stack the words like sculpture, and although writers try to see everything at once, a poet knows how to keep from visual clutter. The stage demands a poet's compression, containment and distillation if it is to share its space with music.”

excerpt from a review by Grace Cavalieri  
published in *The Montserrat Review*

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"'There was there there.' I felt your opera was story-driven and music supported. That your voices, especially 'Gertrude,' were very good. I felt your use of language was much better than most American opera I have seen but perhaps because Gertrude Stein permits the repetition that in other operas seems inane or because of your skill. I think that the presentation as excerpted would benefit from a narrator - but it was over too soon and I wanted more. So maybe that's more than you wanted to know...but I wish you all the best and hope to see a full version when you're ready to present it. Oh, and on the panel, I thought you seemed to have a great, realistic collaborative relationship with your composer."

Email message excerpt to Alenier from Howard L. Weinberg, documentary film and television producer, after the second workshop held at the Manhattan School of Music in the National Opera Association and Opera Index annual program, "New American Opera Previews: From Page to Stage."

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### ***Looking for Divine Transportation***

“The story simmers like stew,’ Karren Alenier writes in her poem ‘Ram Caught in Thicket.’ And these poems too are a rich, simmering stew made up of family, far places, and literary legends. *Looking for Divine Transportation* is a book vibrant with life.”

Linda Pastan, author of *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems 1968-1998*

“Karren Alenier’s poems are ruminations on the bonds of familial and universal kinship, to which she is heir and witness. As in her marvelous poem, ‘Ana Marraksia: I am from Marrakech,’ she pulls us up into the ‘worldtree’ of identities, rich in the wordfest of ceremony and communal voices, full of tonal beats, and grounded in counterpoint like jazz in the ‘blue phrase’ of regret and yearning.

James Ragan, author of *Lusions*

“‘The world is my neighborhood.’ With these words Alenier perfectly describes *Looking for Divine Transportation*. Her witty poems, populated with people telling their stories: Grandma Etta and Grandpa Sol; Abraham and Isaac; Adam and Eve; Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas; and the poet/traveler, herself, journey to Eden, Baltimore, Casablanca, Paris, the deep south. Although the book’s metaphor may be geographical, the vehicles of this transport aren’t planes or trains—but words—which spring from a divine, God-inspired, profound, passionate place—Alenier’s imagination.”

Jane Shore, author of *Music Minus One*