

Freedom Sings

Winter term comes alive with a former slave's emotional story

It makes sense that a deeply moving opera grounded in 19th-century abolitionism would have the imprint of Oberlin all over it. Composer Nieiro Okoye '92 wrote *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed that Line to Freedom* to illuminate the former slave's courageous story through the power of music and drama.

Co-produced by Oberlin Conservatory and Cleveland Opera Theater, *Harriet Tubman's* Midwest debut was fueled by the artistry of Oberlin students past and present, including soprano Amber Monroe '17 in the title role. It included four performances in northeast Ohio churches and a packed house at Finney Chapel that marked a string finale to the 2016 winter term.

As crowds swelled, critics raved: *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* called *Harriet Tubman* "an emotionally charged and musically sublime experience." Monroe, likewise, was praised for her "powerful and thrilling voice and her impressive acting ability."

"To be there on stage in Finney was somewhat of a surreal experience," says Okoye, director of music theory and composition at the State University of New York at New Paltz. "I remember being in Finney during my first couple of months at Oberlin, attending shows on the Artist Recital Series. Suddenly the tables have turned, and now I'm the one that's on stage. To have done this at Oberlin—my alma mater—is just an amazing experience."

KEVIN GULENKO