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Houston Grand Opera Announces Winners of the 23rd Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers

HOUSTON, TX – The freezing weather did not stop the show or keep Houston opera fans away from last night’s annual *Concert of Arias*; in fact, there was record attendance at the successful event. Eight finalists competed and two baritones, a soprano and a bass were named winners in the final round of the twenty-third annual **Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers** at the Wortham Center in downtown Houston.

Guest judge **Frederica von Stade** joined HGO General Director **Anthony Freud** and HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers** in selecting the winners of the competition following their performances in the *Concert of Arias*.

- First place: baritone **Mark Diamond**, who performed “Hai già vinta la causa” from Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* and “Mein Sehnen, mein Wähnen” from Korngold’s *Die tote Stadt*.
- Second place: baritone **Thomas Florio**, who performed “Within this frail crucible of light” from Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia* and “Papagena! Papagena!” from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*.
- Third place: soprano **Lauren Snouffer**, who performed “Da tempeste il legno infranto” from Handel’s *Julius Caesar* and “Deh vieni, non tardar” from Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*.

The audience cast their ballots at intermission for the Audience Choice Award, selecting bass **Adam Lau**, who performed “When my cue comes, call me” from Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and “La calunnia” from Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*.

The event was chaired by **Marianne and David Duthu** and honored **Dr. and Mrs. C. Richard Stasney** for their many contributions and years of support to Houston Grand Opera.

This year, HGO’s Eleanor McCollum Competition received more than 700 applications from young singers from around the world. After two rounds of auditions in four cities across the U.S., under the watch of Houston Grand Opera head of Music Staff **Francis Greep** and Program Director **Laura Canning**, twenty semi-finalists were flown in for a weekend of further auditions. The group was then narrowed down to eight finalists including soprano **Jessica Stavros**, tenor **Mark van**

Arsdale, bass-baritone **Noel Bouley** and mezzo-soprano **Nicole Rodin** in addition to award-winners **Lauren Snouffer**, **Mark Diamond**, **Thomas Florio**, and **Adam Lau**. For the final round of the competition at the *Concert of Arias*, contestants were accompanied by Francis Greep.

All proceeds from the event benefit The Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and Houston Grand Opera Studio's ongoing outreach efforts to identify, attract and nurture the best vocal talent in the United States. Distinguished Studio alumni who now enjoy major careers include Joyce DiDonato, Albina Shagimuratova, Ana María Martínez, Denyce Graves, Eric Halfvarson, Richard Paul Fink, Bruce Ford, and Susanne Mentzer..

Concert of Arias is a beloved artistic and social tradition. A champagne reception underwritten by **Pommery Champagne** and **The Tasting Room** was held before the performance and a celebration dinner, prepared by **Jackson and Company**, followed in the Wortham Center's Grand Foyer for the artists, patrons, and underwriters.

Guests at the event included: HGO Board Chair Glen Rosebaum, HGO Board Chair-Elect Beth Madison and Ralph Burch, John Turner and Jerry Fischer, Dian and Harlan Stai, Anne and John Mendelsohn, Cynthia and Anthony Petrello, Jana and Scotty Arnoldy, Lynn Wyatt, Momentum Jaguar's Jimmy Olguin, Jeff and Mindy Hildebrand, Mariquita Masterson, Jeff and Wendy Hines, Terrylin Neale and Dick Dalton, Concert of Arias Chairs: Marianne and David Duthu and Honorees: Susan and Dr. C. Richard Stasney.

Founded in 1955, Houston Grand Opera is an internationally-renowned opera company with a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 41 world premieres and six American premieres since 1973. HGO contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse, innovative and balanced program of performances, events, community and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and it is the only opera company to have won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards. HGO's performances are broadcast nationally on the WFMT Radio Network, and internationally via the European Broadcast Union.

Winners' Bios

Mark Diamond, baritone

Baritone Mark Diamond, a native of Augusta, Georgia, is a candidate for a master's degree from University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). The baritone is the recipient of a 2010 Richard F. Gold Career Grant from the Shoshana Foundation. Mr. Diamond recently made his Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra debut singing the baritone solo in Handel's *Messiah* and performed the Fauré *Requiem* with Wesley Chancel Choir and Orchestra. His operatic credits include Bob in Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief* and Damis in Mechem's *Tartuffe* at Capitol City Opera, Count Almaviva in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, Dr. Gregg in Moore's *Gallantry* with Georgia Southern Opera and Top in Copland's *The Tender Land* at Glimmerglass. This coming summer he will participate in the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera, where he will perform the title role of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*.

Thomas Florio, baritone

Baritone Thomas Florio appears on the Grammy-nominated recording of Mark Campbell's *Volpone*, which was released on Wolf Trap label in 2009. He won the 2010 National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Artist Award competition, and will perform debut recitals at Carnegie Hall and the NATS National Convention in conjunction with that award. An alumnus of the 2010 Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera, he appeared there as Dr. Dulcamara in Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*. Also in 2010, he made his Cincinnati Symphony debut as the bass soloist in Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and *Vesprae solennes de confessore*. Mr. Florio's other concert credits include Handel's *Messiah* with the Lafayette Symphony. Mr. Florio holds a bachelor's degree from James Madison University, and a master's degree in music from Indiana University.

Adam Lau, bass

Bass Adam Lau recently earned a master's degree from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. His recent credits include Figaro in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Symphony and Opera Academy of the Pacific, the Bartender in Bolcom's *A Wedding* at Music Academy of the West and Dr. Bartolo in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Leporello in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and King Louis XVI in Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles* at the Aspen Music Festival. He made his San Francisco Opera debut in 2008 as a Baobab and a Hunter in Portman's *The Little Prince*. This year he will make his role debut as Timur in Puccini's *Turandot* at West Bay Opera, and will sing Don Basilio in *The Barber of Seville* with the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera.

Lauren Snouffer, soprano

Soprano Lauren Snouffer is a candidate for a graduate degree from the Juilliard School of Music in New York. She is featured as a soloist on the Grammy-nominated recording of Tarik O'Regan's *Threshold of Night* (Harmonia Mundi), and on a recent recording of Christopher Berg's *Four songs on Poems of Vladimir Nabokov*. She made her Alice Tully Hall debut last season in a concert of baroque music led by William Christie. Her recent performance credits include Phénice and La Gloire in Lully's *Armide* at the Théâtre des Gennevilliers in Paris with Mercury Baroque and Tirsi in the Handel cantata *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno* under the baton of Nicholas McGegan. Upcoming performances include Kurtág's *Messages of the Late R.V. Troussova* in Alice Tully Hall with the new music ensemble AXIOM and Ruth Baldwin in John Musto's *Later the Same Evening* with Glimmerglass Opera this coming August.

Presenters

Marianne and David Duthu

Nancy and Rich Kinder

Estate of Eleanor Seale McCollum

Stars

Bobbie-Vee and Jerry Cooney
Beth Madison / Madison Benefits Group
Andrew Schirrmeister

Dian and Harlan Stai
Susan and Dr. C. Richard Stasney

Champagne Reception Underwriter



Directors



Vinson & Elkins

Dinner Wine Underwriter

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