
Houston Grand Opera Announces Winners of 24th Eleanor McCollum Competition Three Singers Triumph at Annual “Concert of Arias”

Houston, TX. – February 3, 2012: Houston Grand Opera today announced the winners of the annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers.

1st Place prize of \$10,000 and the **Audience Choice Award** \$1,000: soprano **Andrea Carroll**, who sang “Son pochi fiori” from Mascagni’s *L’amico Fritz* and “Je marche...Obéissons” from Massenet’s *Manon*.

2nd Place prize of \$5,000: soprano **Natalya Romaniw**, who sang singing “Temerari!...Come scoglio” from Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* and “Oh Dieu!...Je ris de me voir si belle” from Gounod’s *Faust*.

3rd Place prize of \$3,000: bass **Peixin Chen**, who sang “O tu, Palermo, terra adorata” from Verdi’s *Sicilian Vespers* and “Miei rampolli femminini” from Rossini’s *La Cenerentola*.

Accompanied by HGO’s Associate Music Director Eric Melear, nine finalists competed; the three winners were chosen by a distinguished panel of judges that included HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech and the renowned American tenor, Anthony Dean Griffey.

Thursday evening’s concert was the final event in a months-long process that began in September when 611 young singers applied to compete in the annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. About half of those applicants were selected to audition in the late fall in Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Cincinnati. Of those, fifteen singers were chosen to compete in the semi-finals held here in Houston starting on Saturday, January 28, and nine singers advanced to the final round – the annual Concert of Arias.

Mr. Summers said, “Mr. SummersHouston Grand Opera is committed to fostering the growth of opera in America by nurturing promising young singers – the opera professionals of tomorrow. The development of new talent is the essence of creativity, and one of the key roles of HGO is to identify that talent and give these young singers a head-start in the competitive world of professional music.”

He added, “HGO Studio immerses each of the young artists in a learning environment that places emphasis on practical experience. This includes vocal pedagogy with coaching sessions, supporting and/or understudy roles in main stage productions, and a variety of concert engagements.”

Now in its twenty-fourth year, *Concert of Arias* is one of the most prestigious singing competitions in the United States. Since its inception, over 400 singers have participated in the competition. Many, including Joyce DiDonato, Richard Paul Fink and Ana María Martínez, have gone on to pursue successful careers in the United States and internationally.

Chaired by Jackson Hicks, the evening was a record smashing event with over 600 people attending the special fund-raising dinner that followed the competition. Mr. Summers said, “The event holds a special place in my heart, and I’ve been thrilled to watch it get more successful every year. The Cullen Theater was bursting with friends of the Studio, and no one can deny this year’s success is due chiefly to our Chair, the legendary Jackson Hicks.”

The evening commenced with a champagne reception in the Grand Foyer, underwritten by Jerry and Laura Lasco of Lasco Enterprises. Guests included HGO Board Chair Beth Madison, Honorees Bobbie-Vee and Jerry Cooney, Marianne and David Duthu, Dian and Harlan Stai, Janice Barrow, Margaret Alkek Williams and Jim Daniel, John Turner and Jerry Fischer, Cynthia and Anthony Petrello, and Donna and Bob Bruni.

Mr. Leech paid special tribute to Honorees Bobbie-Vee and Jerry Cooney, saying, “Their long history of contribution to HGO including production support for classic repertory, funding for the CD recording of the mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, as well as support for our special events is second to none. “In fact, it simply isn’t a special event unless the Cooneys are there!”

The Audience Choice award was underwritten by Vinson & Elkins. HGO Board member and Vinson & Elkins partner Mark Spradling was on hand to present the award to Andrea Carroll.

During the night, prize winners from last year, Mark Diamond and Lauren Snouffer, who are now part of the HGO Studio treated the audience to a special performance of the duet, “Dunque io son” from *The Barber of Seville*.

All proceeds from *Concert of Arias 2012* directly benefit The Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and Houston Grand Opera Studio’s ongoing efforts to identify, attract and nurture the best vocal talent in the United States.

1st place + Audience Choice award \$10,000 and \$1000

Andrea Carroll, soprano

Andrea Carroll of Bethesda, Md., is in her final year of undergraduate studies at the Manhattan School of Music, where she studies with Mark Oswald. This season, she won a 2012 award from the Sullivan Foundation and performed Despina in *Così fan tutte* and Countess Ludmilla in Schubert’s *Die Verschworenen* at Manhattan School of Music. Last summer, she was a member of Glimmerglass Festival’s Young Artist Program, where she sang Rose Segal and covered Elaine O’Neill in John Musto’s *Later the Same Evening*. A 2011 Sarah Tucker Study Grant finalist from the Richard Tucker Foundation, Carroll won second prize in the Gerda Lissner Foundation competition, was a finalist in the Liederkrantz Foundation competition and semifinalist in the Loren L. Zachary foundation competition, and garnered a Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions encouragement award in the Middle Atlantic region. Future engagements include her professional debut performing Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* with Fort Worth Opera and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* with Wolf Trap Opera as a Filene Young Artist.

2nd place \$5,000

Natalya Romaniw, soprano

Natalya Romaniw was born in Swansea, South Wales, and finished her opera studies this year at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD) under John Llewelyn Evans. Recent awards include the Clonter Opera Prize in 2010 and the Guildhall Gold Medal in 2011. In 2009, Romaniw represented Wales in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition and was a finalist in the song category. She sang Anne Trulove in *The Rake’s Progress* for Welsh National Youth Opera, Georgette in *La rondine* and Giulia in Rossini’s *La scala di seta* for British Youth

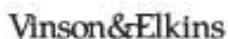
Opera, First Nymph in *Rusalka* and the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Clonter Opera, and the title roles in *La spinaalba* and *Iolanta* as well as Blanche in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* at GSMD. Future engagements include Giunia in *Lucio Silla* for the Classical Opera Company and covering the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro* for Glyndebourne Festival 2012. She will join the Jette Parker Young Artists Program at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, this September.

3rd place \$3,000

Peixin Chen, bass

Chinese bass Peixin Chen graduated from Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, where he made his operatic debut in 2006 as Publio in *La clemenza di Tito* conducted by Lu Jia and also performed the role of Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*. Since making his debut with the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing in 2008 as the King in Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys* under the baton of Michel Plasson, he has sung the roles of the Emperor in Tan Dun's *Tea* and Colline and Benoît in *La bohème*; in the 2010 season he appeared as Baron Douphol in *La traviata* under the baton of Lorin Maazel and as Zuniga in Francesca Zambello's production of *Carmen*. He recently appeared as Don Basilio in *The Barber of Seville* with the Merola Program of San Francisco Opera and Angelotti in Giancarlo del Monaco's new production of *Tosca* with the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Beijing. He sang Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola* with the NCPA last month.

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has swiftly grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. The company has a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 43 world premieres and six American premieres since 1973. In addition to producing and performing world-class opera, 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.



Special thanks to Houston Grand Opera Guild for their support of Concert of Arias, including counting Audience Choice votes. We extend our deepest gratitude to those who responded after our printing deadline.