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HoustonGrandOpera



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 12, 2009

Press Contacts: Christopher Novosad, 713-546-0278, cnovosad@houstongrandopera.org
Bonnie Murray, 713-546-0251, bmurray@houstongrandopera.org

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF THE 20TH ANNUAL ELEANOR MCCOLLUM COMPETITION FOR YOUNG SINGERS Ten finalists perform at annual Concert of Arias

Houston, TX – Houston Grand Opera (HGO) held its annual *Concert of Arias*, the final round of the twentieth annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, on February 8, 2009 at the Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. The event was chaired by **Beverly and Staman Ogilvie** and honored **Sandy and Lee Godfrey** for their many contributions to the Houston Grand Opera Studio. The major underwriters of this year's event were **BBVA Compass** and **Jennifer and Doug Bosch / Inn at Dos Brisas**. Ten finalists competed for cash prizes. To celebrate the twentieth anniversary year, past winners Liam Bonner, Ryan McKinny, Alicia Gianni, and Eric Perkins presented the awards. Guest judge **Laura Claycomb**, in Houston to perform in HGO's production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, joined HGO General Director **Anthony Freud** and HGO Music Director **Patrick Summers** in selecting the following winners from among 18 finalists.

The winners are:

- First place: soprano **Rachel Willis-Sorensen** (who performed "Crudele?...Non mi dir, bell'idol mio" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and "Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heifs" from Lehár's *Giuditta*)
- Second place: mezzo-soprano **Catherine Martin** (who sang "Podrugi mili'ye" from Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* and "Give him this orchid" from Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*)
- Third place: baritone **Michael Sumuel** (who performed "Madamina, il catalogo è questo" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and "O du mein holder Abendstern" from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*)
- Audience Choice Award winner: (Tie) tenor **Nathaniel Peake** (who performed "Salut! Demeure chaste et pure" from Gounod's *Faust* and "Lonely House" from Weill's *Street Scene*) and soprano **Jung Nan Yoon** (who performed "Si, mi chiamano Mimi" from Puccini's *La bohème* and "Follie, follie!...Sempre libera" from Verdi's *La traviata*)

This year, HGO's Eleanor McCollum Competition received more than 500 applications from young singers from around the world. After two rounds of auditions in four cities across the U.S., this year under the watch of Houston Grand Opera head of Music Staff Kathleen Kelly and Studio Director Laura Canning, approximately 18 semi-finalists were flown in for a week of auditions, interviews and coachings. The group was then narrowed down to ten finalists including mezzo-soprano **Lindsay Ammann**, baritone **Aleksey Bogdanov**, tenor **Samuel Reed Levine**, bass-baritone **Damien Pass** and soprano **Jennifer Zetlan**, in addition to Willis-Sorensen, Martin, Sumuel, Peake and Yoon. In addition to the judged awards, the audience also has the opportunity to partake in the evening's events by casting votes for their favorite singer to receive the Audience Choice Award. For the final round of the competition, contestants were accompanied by HGO head of music staff **Kathleen Kelly**.

Last year's third- and first-place winners, soprano **Caitlin Lynch** and baritone **Octavio Moreno** performed a selection from the second act of Puccini's *La Bohème*, accompanied by pianist **Joseph Li**. They were joined by other Studio members – mezzo-soprano **Jamie Barton**, mezzo-soprano **Faith Sherman**, baritone **James J. Kee**, bass-baritone **Adam Cioffari**, pianist/coaches **Stephen Hopkins** and **David Hanlon**. The evening also featured a video retrospective for the competition's 20th anniversary and a tribute to its namesake, **Eleanor McCollum**.

All proceeds from the event benefit The Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and HGO 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, Denyce Graves, Eric Halfvarson, Richard Paul Fink, Bruce Ford, Susanne Mentzer, Ana María Martínez, and Raymond Very.

Catherine Martin, mezzo-soprano

San Antonio native Catherine McKay Martin appeared as Koukouli in Chabrier's *L'Étoile* at Wolf Trap Opera. She holds a bachelor's degree in music from the University of North Texas, and is a candidate for a master's degree from the University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music. Ms. Martin was selected as a featured soloist for the 2008 Cincinnati Grandin Music Festival, where she performed Poulenc's *Quatre poèmes de Max Jacob*. Upcoming appearances include *Mistress Quickly* in the CCM Spring production of Verdi's *Falstaff* and the mezzo-soprano solo in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Asheville Symphony Orchestra. She participated in the 2009 *Marilyn Horne Foundation: The Song Continues* master class at Carnegie Hall. This summer she will be a studio artist at Chataqua Opera.

Nathaniel Peake, tenor

A native of Humble, TX, Nathaniel Peake was a 2008 participant in San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program, where he will return this summer in the title role of Mascagni's *L'amico Fritz*. He is an alumnus of the University of Michigan, where he was the first vocalist to receive the Cobb Fellowship. During his time there, he performed the roles of Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), Pang (*Turandot*), Arcadio in Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas*, and the title role of *Candide*. Mr. Peake recently received awards from the Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition, National Society of Arts and Letters Vocal Competition, Lois Alba Aria Competition, and the Sun Valley Opera Vocal Competition, among others. This spring Mr. Peake will perform the role of Tybalt in Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* in Syracuse, NY.

Michael Sumuel, baritone

Michael Sumuel is a candidate for a master's degree in opera at Rice University, where he will appear later this year as

Leporello in *Don Giovanni*. He earned a bachelor's degree in music from Columbus State University in Georgia and was a multiple winner of state and regional competitions of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. Roles in his repertoire include Figaro (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Mago Cristiano (Handel's *Rinaldo*), Dulcamara (*L'elisir d'amore*), and the title role of Puccini's Gianni Schicchi. His concert credits include Fauré's Requiem and Handel's *Messiah*. He will participate in the 2009 Merola Opera Program.

Rachel Willis-Sørensen, soprano

Rachel Willis-Sørensen is a graduate student at the Brigham Young University School of Music (BYU), where she earned a bachelor's degree in vocal performance. Last year Ms. Sørensen sang Kate Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*) with Utah Opera and the High Priestess (*Aida*) at Utah Festival Opera. She was a national semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Roles at Brigham Young University have included Countess Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and Musetta (*La bohème*). The soprano won first place at Musicfest Northwest in 2005 where she appeared in concert with the Spokane Symphony. She won the 2007 Nancy Peery Marriot BYU Singer of the Year award and recorded an album for Sofie's Daughters at BYU.

Jung Nan Yoon, soprano

Soprano Jung Nan Yoon was born in South Korea and received her Bachelor of Arts at Korea National University. She made her operatic debut at the Seoul Art Center Opera Theater as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*. She has also performed the roles of Countess Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* at Seoul Art Center and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* at Opera Gala. Yoon is a candidate for an Artist Diploma at Indiana University. Performances at IU include the title role of *Madama Butterfly*, Mimi in *La bohème*, Violetta in *La traviata* and Handel's *Messiah*. She has won numerous awards, including the Bain Scholarship Competition in 2007, the National Society of Arts and Letters "Donald Felton Memorial Award" in 2007 and the Granprix in the Um Jung Haeng Voice Competition. Earlier this year she placed second in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions for the Tri-State region.

Presenters

Estate of Eleanor Searle McCollum



Post-Concert Dinner Underwriter

Jennifer and Doug Bosch /



Champagne Reception Underwriter

Vinson & Elkins

Stars

**Sandy and Lee Godfrey
Beverly and Staman Ogilvie
Dian and Harlan Stai**



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 38 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 and on the WFMT Radio Network, the European Broadcasting Union, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.