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Houston Grand Opera Announces the highly anticipated 2019–20 HGO Studio Artists

Houston – March 12, 2019—After an international search, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is proud to announce the three new singers and one new pianists for the 2019–20 HGO Studio. One of the most respected and highly competitive young artist programs in the world, the HGO Studio provides comprehensive career development to young singers, pianist/coaches, and conductors who have demonstrated potential to make major contributions to the field of opera. Seven up-and-coming opera stars remain active in the HGO Studio as well for the 2019–20 season.

First-year HGO Studio artists are:

- **Alex Munger**, pianist/coach
- **Nicholas Newton**, bass-baritone, *Third-place prizewinner at Concert of Arias 2019*
- **William Guanbo Su**, bass, *second-place prizewinner at Concert of Arias 2019*
- **Elena Villalón**, soprano, *Audience Choice Award winner at Concert of Arias 2019*

Returning HGO Studio artists are:

- **Lindsay Kate Brown**, mezzo-soprano
- **Dorothy Gal**, soprano
- **Geoffrey Hahn**, baritone
- **Leia Lensing**, contralto
- **Kyle Naig**, pianist/coach
- **Daniel Noyola**, bass
- **Richard Trey Smagur**, tenor

The HGO Studio receives applications from over 500 singers and pianists each year. Of those applications, over 200 were heard at auditions held in New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and Houston. For singers, the audition process culminates in HGO’s annual Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, which was held on February 1, 2019.

During a residency of up to three years, HGO Studio artists receive specialized training in voice, movement, and languages and are afforded numerous performance opportunities. Studio artists are often cast in major and supporting roles in mainstage productions, giving them the opportunity to work with world-renowned artists, directors, and conductors. They also participate in recital series and perform in venues across the city and state for numerous events. The HGO Studio trains young artists in their chosen discipline of classical singing, piano, and coaching.

“Each year we are blown away by the number of applications and the high-level talent we see while selecting our

Studio members,” said HGO Studio Director Brian Speck. “The accomplished artists selected to join the HGO Studio are destined for major careers, and we are excited to be a part of developing their extraordinary talents through the HGO Studio program.”

Founded in 1977 by HGO’s then–General Director David Gockley and composer Carlisle Floyd, the HGO Studio was established to help young artists transition from their academic training to careers in opera. Members commit to an intense, individualized study program while living in Houston from mid-August through May.

2019–20 HGO Studio Artist Biographies

Lindsay Kate Brown (returning)

Mezzo-soprano

Lindsay Kate Brown won third prize in HGO’s 2018 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. She earned an artist diploma in opera studies at Rice University, where she portrayed the roles of Cecilia March in *Little Women*, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi*, and Cornelia in *Julius Caesar*. She received her graduate degree in opera at Binghamton University and her undergraduate degrees in vocal performance and music education at Mansfield University. She made her professional debut with Tri-Cities Opera in 2014. In 2015, she won an encouragement award in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. This past summer, she was a young artist at Des Moines Metro Opera, where she reprised the role of Ma Moss in Copland’s *The Tender Land* and covered the role of Ježibaba in Dvořák’s *Rusalka*. This summer, she will sing the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Wolf Trap Opera.

Dorothy Gal (returning)

Soprano

Dorothy Gal won second prize in HGO’s 2018 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias and will make her HGO mainstage debut as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* this spring. She participated in Marilyn Horne’s *The Song Continues* workshop at Carnegie Hall and was a vocal fellow at Ravinia’s Steans Music Institute. She has appeared on WQXR’s Young Artists Showcase, was a New Horizons Fellow at the Aspen Summer Music Festival, and is an alumna of Houston Grand Opera’s Young Artists Vocal Academy. Roles include Amy in *Little Women*, Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, Poussette in *Manon*, and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, the role in which she will make her HGO mainstage debut this spring. She portrayed Sandrina in *La finta giardiniera* at Rice University before returning to Des Moines Metro Opera to sing First Wood Sprite in the company’s mainstage production of *Rusalka* this past summer. Gal is a pianist and graduate of Mannes College.

Geoffrey Hahn (returning)

Baritone

Geoffrey Hahn, a native of Santa Barbara, California, made his HGO mainstage debut as Schaunard in *La bohème* earlier this season after singing Fiorello in outdoor performances of *The Barber of Seville* last spring. Hahn earned his master of music degree at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music and graduated with a degree in sustainable development from the Columbia–Juilliard Exchange Program in New York City. Past roles include Sam in *Trouble in Tahiti*, Gideon March in *Little Women*, and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at Rice University; Billy in *Carousel* at Columbia

University; and Dancaïre in *Carmen* and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* with the Aspen Music Festival. He is a former Studio artist with Wolf Trap Opera, where he sang the role of Sciarrone in *Tosca* and covered the roles of Bastianello the Elder, Lino, Ippolito, and Frediano in *Bastianello*. He will return to Aspen this summer as Carl-Magnus Malcolm in *A Little Night Music*.

Leia Lensing (returning)

Contralto

Leia Lensing made her HGO mainstage debut as Mary in *The Flying Dutchman*. She won first prize and the Online Viewers' Choice Award in the 2018 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. She earned a master's degree at the University of Northern Iowa, where she performed Maurya in Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*. Participating in numerous opera productions throughout her undergraduate career, Lensing performed the roles of the Second Witch in *Dido and Aeneas*, Mama and Dragonfly in *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, and La Zia Principessa in *Suor Angelica*. In summer 2017, she was an apprentice artist with the Des Moines Metro Opera, where she covered the role of Madame Armfeldt in *A Little Night Music*. Last summer, she was a member of the Santa Fe Opera apprentice singer program, covering the roles of Pasqualita in *Doctor Atomic* and the Baroness in *Candide*.

Kyle Naig (returning)

Pianist/coach

Kyle Naig recently played productions of *Manon* and *The Barber of Seville* at Opera Santa Barbara, *As One* at Des Moines Metro Opera, *Scalia/Ginsburg* and *Porgy and Bess* at the Glimmerglass Festival, *Turandot* at Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre, and *Tosca* at Intermountain Opera Bozeman. Recent engagements include Scarlatti's *Il trionfo dell'onore* at Opera Memphis as well as returns to Opera Santa Barbara (*Trouble in Tahiti* and *Gallantry*) and Intermountain Opera Bozeman (*Falstaff*). During summer 2018, he returned to the Glimmerglass Festival (*Trouble in Tahiti*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *The Barber of Seville*). He is an alumnus of training programs at Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, and Lyric Opera of Kansas City and is a graduate of the University of Kansas. This season, he coached *Florenzia en el Amazonas* and *La bohème*; he will also coach *Don Giovanni* this spring. This summer, he returns to Des Moines Metro Opera to coach Berg's *Wozzeck*.

Daniel Noyola (returning)

Bass

Daniel Noyola made his HGO debut in performances of Colline in *La bohème* this season and will sing Masetto in *Don Giovanni* this spring. He was previously a resident artist at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia. He won first prize in the 2015 Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota; third place in the 2016 Meistersinger Vocal Competition in Graz, Austria; an encouragement award at the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions New England regionals; and awards with Opera Index, the Mario Lanza Competition, the Carlo Morelli National Singing Competition, and many others. His performance credits include the title roles in *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, Colas in *Bastien und Bastienne*, Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, and Leporello in *Don Giovanni*. He made his debut at Tri-Cities Opera as Mustafà in *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. This summer, he will join Wolf Trap Opera for productions of *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* and *L'île de Merlin*.

Richard Trey Smagur (returning)

Tenor

Richard Trey Smagur was a Grand Finals winner in the 2017 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. His roles at HGO include the Steersman in *The Flying Dutchman*, Parpignol in *La bohème*, Gastone de Letorières in *La traviata*, Young Servant in *Elektra*, and Count Almaviva in outdoor performances of *The Barber of Seville*. Previous roles include Tsarevich Gvidon in *The Golden Cockerel* at Santa Fe Opera and Tybalt in *Roméo et Juliette* at Wolf Trap Opera; he covered Des Grieux in *Manon* at Des Moines Metro Opera. In summer 2016, he was a fellow at Steans Music Institute at Ravinia Music Festival. Smagur has performed the title role in *Peter Grimes*, Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*, Don José in *Carmen*, Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, Ralph Rackstraw in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and the Prince in *Cendrillon*. This summer, he returns to Santa Fe Opera to sing the role of Števa in *Jenůfa*.

Alex Munger (incoming)

Pianist/Coach

Alex Munger is a collaborative pianist from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This past year he was a staff pianist at the University of Illinois, where he helped prepare *La bohème* and *The Rape of Lucretia*, among other duties. In 2018, Munger was a fellowship pianist with the Aspen Opera Center, where he worked on *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; he will return to Aspen in 2019. He received his master of music degree in vocal coaching and accompanying from the University of Illinois, where he was the recipient of the Nancy Kennedy Wustman Award in Vocal Accompanying and worked on productions of *Don Giovanni* and *Hansel and Gretel*. Previous engagements include the Bay View Music Festival (*Carmen*), where he will return in 2019 as a faculty pianist for its two-week opera and art song program.

Nicholas Newton (incoming)

Bass-baritone

Nicholas Newton won third prize at Concert of Arias 2019. A San Diego native, Newton has pursued his passion for singing through gospel, jazz, musical theater, and now operatic performance. Notable performances include the roles of Count Ceprano in *Rigoletto* and Capulet (cover) in *Roméo et Juliette* with Wolf Trap Opera, Achilla in *Julius Caesar* at Rice University, and L'arbre and Le fauteuil in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* at Aspen Music Festival under the baton of Robert Spano. Newton was a winner at the 2018 San Diego District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the first place winner of the 2018 Virginia & Susan Hawk Competition; he has won top prize in voice three years in a row at the Musical Merit Foundation Scholarship Auditions. An alumnus of HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy, he will perform the role of Blich in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* at Rice University in March, under the baton of Patrick Summers. Newton will make his debut at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis this summer as Monterone in *Rigoletto*.

William Guanbo Su (incoming)

Bass

Second-place prizewinner at Concert of Arias 2019 and a native of China, William Guanbo Su is pursuing his master's degree at the Juilliard School under the guidance of Cynthia Hoffmann. In 2018, he was a member of Gerdine Young Artist program at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and he has also been a voice fellow at the Aspen Music Festival and School, where he played as the principal role of Don Basilio in *The Barber of Seville*. Other opera roles include Pluton in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, Herr Reich in Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Seneca in Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*. He has also concentrated on German lieder at the Franz Schubert Institute in Vienna, where he was coached by Emmy Ameling, Helmut Deutsch, Robert Holl, and others. In 2017, he made his Carnegie Hall solo debut with the Cecilia Chorus of New York and won first prize in the Gerda Lissner Lieder Competition the same year.

Elena Villalón (incoming)

Soprano

Voted Audience Choice Award winner at Concert of Arias 2019 and originally from Austin, Texas, soprano Elena Villalón is finishing her undergraduate degree at the University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music (CCM) under the tutelage of William McGraw. She was recently named a winner of the Indiana District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She has been a vocal fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center and is an alumna of HGO’s 2018 Young Artists Vocal Academy. Upcoming performances include Adele in *Die Fledermaus* at CCM, Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro* for her debut at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as a Gerdine Young Artist, and a return to the Tanglewood Music Center as a soprano fellow. Previous appearances at CCM include Lucy in *The Telephone* and Miss Wordsworth in *Albert Herring*. She is the Nippert Scholar at CCM and has won first prize in the 2018 Three Arts Competition, 2018 Dayton Opera Guild Competition, and the 2017 CCM Undergraduate Voice Competition.

To learn more about the HGO Studio, visit hgo.org/studio.

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About Houston Grand Opera

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. HGO is the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year for the 2019 International Opera Awards. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art to serve an ever-evolving audience, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (65 world premieres to date) and in training and nurturing promising young artists and administrators. The company contributes to the cultural enrichment of Houston and the nation through a diverse and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO’s pioneering community engagement initiative, HGOco, has served as a model for other arts organizations.

The NEXUS Initiative is HGO’s multiyear ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007, NEXUS has enabled more than 250,000 Houstonians to experience superlative opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

HGO has toured extensively and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and three Emmy awards. It is the only opera company to win all three honors.

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