



510 Preston Street  
Houston, Texas 77002-1504  
Tel: 713-546-0200  
Fax: 713-228-4355  
HGO.org

**Patrick Summers**

Artistic & Music Director  
*Margaret Alkek Williams Chair*

**Perryn Leech**

Managing Director

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**Media Contact:**

**Christine Cantrell**

christine@elmorepr.com  
713-524-0661

**Judith Kurnick**

HGO Director of Communications  
jkurnick@hgo.org  
713-546-0240

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## Houston Grand Opera Announces Concert of Arias 2015 Semifinalists

*Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, February 5, 2015*

Houston, January 13, 2015—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) today announced the semifinalists for the 27<sup>th</sup> annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias, to be presented in the Cullen Theater at the Wortham Theater Center on Thursday, February 5, at 7 p.m. This year's semifinalists are:

Sopranos: Natalie Erskine, Mane Galoyan

Mezzo-sopranos: Raehann Bryce-Davis

Tenors: Todd Barnhill, Chris Bozeka, Yongzhao Yu

Baritones: Alex DeSocio, Ben Edquist, Johnathan McCullough

Bass-baritones: Federico de Michelis, Charles Zachary Owens

Bass: Önay Köse

The competition and Concert of Arias are held each year to identify potential candidates for HGO's internationally known Studio program, which nurtures young artists who have the potential for major careers in opera. Among past prize-winners who are now leading international artists are Jamie Barton, Stephanie Blythe, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, and Ryan McKinny.

Now in its 27<sup>th</sup> year, the competition received nearly 500 applications from singers and 22 applications from pianists from around the globe. Auditions were conducted in New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, San Francisco, and Houston. After careful consideration, 12 semifinalists have been chosen for a chance to compete in the final round of the prestigious competition. The field of semifinalists will be narrowed down to around eight finalists on the Sunday prior to the Concert of Arias. The selected finalists then have the

opportunity to find out more about HGO and work with HGO musical staff leading up to the concert. Each will perform two arias and compete for \$25,000 in cash prizes.

The judging panel will be led by HGO Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** and HGO Managing Director **Perryn Leech**. Serving as guest judge is Atlanta Symphony Music Director **Robert Spano**. Finalists will be accompanied by HGO Head of Music Staff **Bradley Moore**. The audience also has the opportunity to participate in the evening's events when they choose their favorite singer for the Audience Choice Award. All proceeds from Concert of Arias 2015 benefit The Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and Houston Grand Opera Studio.

This year's Concert of Arias, chaired by **Jana and John Scott Arnoldy**, honors **Mariquita Masterson** for her many years of generous support and her warm hospitality as a frequent host of HGO and Studio events. The evening begins with a champagne reception at 6:00 p.m. The vocal competition will commence at 7:00 p.m. in the Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater and will also feature a performance by current artists of the HGO Studio. Following the concert, artists, patrons, and underwriters will be seated for dinner catered by Jackson and Company in the Grand Foyer.

Since its inception more than 30 years ago, the HGO Studio has grown to be one of the most respected young artist programs in the country. Each of the young artists in the HGO Studio has access to a learning environment that places emphasis on practical experience within the professional opera world. This includes coaching sessions with industry professionals, small supporting and/or study roles in HGO main-stage productions, as well as a variety of concert engagements.

### **Biographies:**

#### **Todd Barnhill**

Tenor—United States

American tenor Todd Barnhill, a native of Tabor City, North Carolina, was recently a Gerdine Young Artist with the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, where he covered Monostatos in *The Magic Flute*. In the summer of 2015, he will return to St. Louis to cover Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* and will also perform the roles of the Notary and a Student in *La rondine*. He was formerly a young artist with the Chautauqua Opera Company, where he covered the role of Dr. Caius in *Falstaff* and also sang Nadir in *Les pêcheurs de perles* in a scenes program. He received his bachelor's degree in music from East Carolina University, where he performed the roles of Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* and Reverend Harrington in *Lizzie Borden*. Barnhill is a graduate student at the University of Tennessee—Knoxville, where he performed Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* and Ferrando with the University of Tennessee Opera Theatre. This spring he will perform Tamino in *The Magic Flute* with UTOT.

#### **Chris Bozeka**

Tenor—United States

Chris Bozeka is pursuing a master's degree at the University of Cincinnati College—Conservatory of Music (CCM), where he has appeared as Nemorino in *The Elixir of Love*, Ernesto in *Don Pasquale*, and the Narrator in *Owen Wingrave*. Bozeka was a winner at the 2014 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions—Ohio District. Last summer, he appeared in the Castleton Festival, alternating as B. F. Pinkerton and Goro in *Madame Butterfly* and appearing as a featured soloist in U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's *Law and Opera* lecture. Bozeka was seen previously at the Castleton Festival under the baton of Lorin Maazel as Joe in *La fanciulla del West*, Cassio in *Otello*, and as a featured soloist alongside Neil Schicoff in *A Salute to Britten and Tchaikovsky*. He has also sung Joe with the Orquesta Sinfonica de Galicia, Sam Polk in *Susannah*

with Undercroft Opera, and Marco in *The Gondoliers* at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, where he earned his bachelor's degree.

### **Raehann Bryce-Davis**

Mezzo-soprano—United States

This spring, Raehann Bryce-Davis begins a European tour of *Porgy and Bess* singing the role of Lily at companies including Grand Théâtre de Genève, Amsterdam RAI, and Chassé Theater. This season she is a Florida Grand Opera Young Artist and Merola Opera Young Artist. Opera credits include Mama McCourt in *The Ballad of Baby Doe* with Chautauqua Opera, Albine in *Thaïs* at Florida Grand Opera, the Owl in the American premiere of Unsuk Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi* at the Aspen Music Festival, the Nurse in *Decoration* by Mikael Karlsson with American Opera Projects, Countess in *The Queen of Spades* with Russian Opera Workshop at the Academy of Vocal Arts, and Marcellina in *The Marriage of Figaro* with Opera on the Avalon. Composer Kyle Werner's *Psalm 42* was written for her voice and premiered in 2013. She is the founder of JamRock Spirituals, a project promoting Jamaican Spirituals in North America and Europe.

### **Federico De Michelis**

Bass-baritone—Argentina

Born in Buenos Aires, Federico De Michelis was a member of the Opera Studio of Teatro Argentino de La Plata, where he performed Antonio in *Il viaggio a Reims*, El Hombre Mayor in Gerardo Gandini's contemporary opera *Ciudad Ausente*, Johann in *Werther*, Narrator from Nino Rota's *I due timidi*, Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, Plutone in *Il ballo dell'ingrate*, and Tempo from *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. Since 2012, he has been training at the Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía in Madrid, Spain, studying with Ryland Davies, Tom Krause, and Manuel Cid and performing in some of the most important concert halls in Spain. His repertoire includes Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola*, Tom and Sam in *A Masked Ball*, and Dr. Grenvil in *La traviata*. During summer 2014 he made his debut with the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra conducted by Paul Weigold. He is expected to make his debut at Teatro Real, Madrid, early in 2016.

### **Alex DeSocio**

Baritone—United States

Kansan Alex DeSocio performed Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Figaro in *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Il Marito in Menotti's *Amelia al ballo*, Michele in *Il tabarro*, Man with the Shoe Sample Kit in *Postcard from Morocco*, and Pip in *Miss Havisham's Fire* during his academic career at Northwestern University and the University of Maryland. Professional experience includes Silvio in *Pagliacci* with the In Series, L'Horloge Comtoise in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* and Ben Budge in *The Beggar's Opera* conducted by Lorin Maazel at the Castleton Festival, and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* and Carl-Magnus Malcolm in *A Little Night Music* with Pine Mountain Music Festival. DeSocio has been an Opera Colorado Young Artist and a member of the Merola Opera Program. He is a resident artist with Pittsburgh Opera, where he has performed Second Priest in *The Magic Flute* and will sing Morales in *Carmen* and Alwan in *Sumeida's Song* this spring. He returns to Merola this summer as Malatesta in *Don Pasquale*.

### **Ben Edquist**

Baritone—United States

Ben Edquist, originally from Lake Jackson, Texas, participated in HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy in 2013. He will receive his master of music degree from Rice University this May. His most notable operatic roles include Sid in *Albert Herring*, Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Charlie in Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers*, and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*. He has performed many musical theater roles with Light Opera Oklahoma and Brazosport Center Stages including Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, Roy in *The Light in the Piazza*, Barnaby Tucker in *Hello, Dolly!*, and Nathan Detroit in *Gypsy and Dolls*. Edquist was a young artist with the Glimmerglass Festival this past summer where he performed the role of Jigger Craigin in *Carousel* and will be returning this summer to sing the role of Papageno in *The Magic Flute*. He is the winner of the 2014 Lotte Lenya Competition.

**Natalie Erskine**

Soprano—United States

Natalie Erskine is a post-graduate student at University of Southern California Thornton School of Music. She received her bachelor of music degree in vocal performance and flute performance at University of California, Santa Cruz, and her master of music degree in vocal arts at USC Thornton. She has performed the roles of Lady Billows in *Albert Herring*, Cecilia March in Mark Adamo's *Little Women*, Juno in Lee Hoiby's *The Tempest*, Madame de Croissy in *The Dialogues of Carmélites*, and Ottavia in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. She will perform the title role in *Iphigénie en Tauride* with USC in the spring of 2015. She is a 2015 recipient of a Metropolitan Opera National Council Encouragement Award and is studying with Cynthia Munzer.

**Mane Galoyan**

Soprano—Armenia

Mane Galoyan participated in HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy last May. She has won a number of prestigious awards, most recently a 2014 prize in the Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition in Dusseldorf, Germany; first prize in the International Singing Competition by Bibigul Tulegenova in Kazakhstan; and fourth prize in the Sixth International Competition of Young Opera Singers in Ningbo, China, after which she was invited back to China to participate in Christmas concerts given by the competition laureates. Other prestigious honors include the gold medal at the Seventh Open Youth Delphic Games in Kazakhstan, the President of Armenia Youth Prize, and second prize in the International Opera Singers Competition in St. Petersburg. She has toured in the United States with the YerazArt program and Great Britain within the framework of the young talent support program of the All Armenia Fund.

**Önay Köse**

Bass—Turkey

From Ankara, Önay Köse earned a master of music degree and is a first-year artist diploma student at The Juilliard School. In 2011 and 2012, he attended the Mozarteum International Summer Academy and participated in master classes with Edda Moser, Gerd Uecker, Siegfried Jerusalem, Hermann Keckeis, Tom Krause, and Ruggero Raimondi. In 2013, he attended Georg Solti Accademia where he participated in master classes given by Dennis O'Neill, Daniela Dessì, Luciana Serra, and Richard Bonyngé. At Juilliard he has appeared as Pantalone in *Le donne curiose*, Priest/Badger in *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Bartolo in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Prince Gremin in *Eugene Onegin*. This season, he can be seen as Bartolo in *The Marriage of Figaro* with Juilliard Opera, the Cappadocian in *Salome* with Opera San Antonio, and as the bass soloist in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with New York Youth Symphony at Carnegie Hall. Köse is a recipient of the Ahmet Ertegun Scholarship.

**Johnathan McCullough**

Baritone—United States

Originally from Los Angeles, Johnathan McCullough was a 2012 participant in HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy. He performed the role of a Nobleman in L.A. Opera's 2010 and 2012 Cathedral Project production of *The Festival Play of Daniel* conducted by James Conlon. At the Curtis Institute of Music, where he is currently studying, he has sung Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, Belcore in *The Elixir of Love*, Apollo in *Apollo e Dafne*, Gendarme in *Les mammelles de Tiresias*, Ibn Hakia in *Iolanta*, Blansac in *La scala di seta*, Marco in *Gianni Schicchi*, Le Geolier in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, and Reverend Monroe and Pangle in the workshop production of Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain*. For Aspen Opera Theater, he sang Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Maximilian in *Candide*, and A-Rab in *West Side Story*. In March he will sing Harlekin in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Curtis/Opera Philadelphia; this summer he will be a Gerdine Young Artist at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

**Charles Zachary Owen**

Bass-baritone—United States

Charles Zachary Owen, from Stillman Valley, Illinois, participated in the Studio Artist and Young Artist programs for Opera North in 2009 and 2010. He performed the roles of both Commendatore and Masetto in that company's Young Artist production of *Don Giovanni* before entering the University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music (CCM). Roles at CCM include Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress*, Frank Maurant in *Street Scene*, Spencer Coyle in *Owen Wingrave*, and the title role in *Don Pasquale*. He covered the roles of the Pirate King and the Sergeant in *The Pirates of Penzance* with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, where he made his house debut singing Matouš in Smetana's *The Kiss*. Other roles include Dulcamara in *The Elixir of Love* and the Second Armed Man in *The Magic Flute* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Don Fernando in *Fidelio* and Ashby in *La fanciulla del West* with Kentucky Opera.

### **Yongzhao Yu**

Tenor—China

In 2012, Yongzhao Yu began work on a master's degree in the opera department of [Shanghai Conservatory of Music](#). He performed Alfredo in *La traviata* and in February 2012, he participated in a special Valentine's Day concert opera performance in the concert hall of the Shanghai Oriental Art Center. He was selected for membership in the Shanghai International Vocal Music Master Class in the summer of 2012. He performed in a special concert titled "Greetings of Love" in the Grand Theatre of the Suzhou Culture and Arts Center in March 2013, followed in May by an "Eternal Verdi" concert in Shanghai in honor of the bicentenary of Verdi's birth. His awards include third prize in bel canto in the Shanghai division of the 15<sup>th</sup> National Youth Singer TV Competition, second prize in the men's division of the Beijing International Music Competition, and first prize in the Opera Concorso.

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### **About Houston Grand Opera**

Since its inception in 1955, Houston Grand Opera has grown from a small regional organization into an internationally renowned opera company. HGO enjoys a reputation for commissioning and producing new works, including 55 world premieres and seven 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 and innovative program of performances, community events, and education projects that reaches the widest possible public. HGO has toured extensively, including trips to Europe and Asia, and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and two Emmy awards—the only opera company to have won all three awards.

Through HGOco, Houston Grand Opera creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. Its *Song of Houston* project is an ongoing initiative to create and share work based on stories that define the unique character of our city and its diverse cultures. Since 2007, HGOco has commissioned 16 new works along with countless innovative community projects, reaching more than one million people in the greater Houston metropolitan area. The NEXUS Initiative is HGO's multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy world-class opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007 NEXUS has enabled more than 175,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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**Media Contact:** Christine Cantrell, [Christine@elmorepr.com](mailto:Christine@elmorepr.com), (713) 524-0661 **Director of Communications:** Judith Kurnick, [jkurnick@hgo.org](mailto:jkurnick@hgo.org) (713) 546-0240

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