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60th ANNIVERSARY
SEASON
2014-15

PRESS RELEASE

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Houston Grand Opera Announces

Concert of Arias 2015 Finalists

Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, February 5, 2015

Houston, TX – February 2, 2015: Houston Grand Opera announced today the finalists for the 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 finalists are:

Soprano: Mane Galoyan

Mezzo-soprano: Raehann Bryce-Davis

Tenors: Chris Bozeka, Yongzhao Yu

Baritones: Alex DeSocio, Ben Edquist, Johnathan McCullough

Bass-baritone: Federico De Michelis

The Concert of Arias is the final round in the Eleanor McCollum Competition For Young Singers, 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, Ryan McKinny, and HGO Chorus Master Richard Bado.

Now in its 27th 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, the field of 12 semifinalists has been narrowed to eight finalists. The selected finalists now have the opportunity to find out more about HGO and work with HGO musical staff in these final days leading up to the concert on Thursday, February 5. Each will perform two arias and compete for \$25,000 in cash prizes.

Three of the competition's finalists, Mane Galoyan, Ben Edquist, and Johnathan McCullough, were previous participants in HGO's Young Artist Vocal Academy (YAVA). Established in 2011 to work specifically with undergraduate-level singers, YAVA is a week-long course in which participants receive individual training in the form of daily voice lessons and coachings.

The judging panel for the competition includes 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 highly 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, and a variety of concert engagements.

Biographies:

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 Palais des Festivals (Cannes). This season she is a Florida Grand Opera Young Artist and Merola Opera Program participant. 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 Candelas in *El amor brujo* at the Manhattan School of Music. Composer Kyle Werner's *Psalm 42* was written for her voice. 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 Sofia 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 Moralès 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, Dolby!*, and Nathan Detroit in *Guys 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.

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 in Great Britain within the framework of the young talent support program of the All Armenia Fund.

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.

Yongzhao Yu

Tenor—China

In 2012, Yongzhao Yu began work on a master's degree in the opera department of the 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 15th 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 56 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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