Houston Grand Opera Announces 2016–17 HGO Studio Artists

Houston, March 7, 2016—After an international search, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) has chosen three new singers and one new pianist/coach for the 2016–17 HGO Studio. The artists are Yelena Dyacheck, soprano, the Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award recipient at Concert of Arias 2016; Zoie Reams, mezzo-soprano, the second-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2016; Sol Jin, baritone, the Audience Choice Award winner at Concert of Arias 2016; and Peter Walsh, pianist/coach. 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. The HGO Studio received applications from 475 artists; of those, about 275 were heard in auditions in Houston, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Los Angeles. For singers, the audition process culminates in HGO’s annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, held this year on February 4.

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 main-stage 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, or conducting. The distinguished incoming Studio artists hail from the Ukraine and Korea as well as the United States.

“These amazing individuals will enhance the musical life of our company, the city of Houston, and the field of opera,” said HGO Studio Director Brian Speck. “We are excited to share and develop 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.
First-year HGO Studio artists are:
Yelena Dyachek—soprano, *Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award* recipient at Concert of Arias 2016
Peter Walsh—pianist/coach

Returning HGO Studio artists are:
Chris Bozeka—tenor
Mane Galoyan—soprano
Megan Mikailovna Samarin—mezzo-soprano
Yongzhao Yu—tenor
Ben Edquist—baritone
Federico De Michelis—bass-baritone
Kirill Kuzmin—pianist/coach
Geoffrey Loff—pianist/coach

2016–17 HGO Studio artist biographies:

Chris Bozeka
**Tenor—United States**

Chris Bozeka, now finishing his first season in the HGO Studio, won second prize in the 2015 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. He made his HGO debut in December as the Drunkard/the Lamplighter in *The Little Prince*; other roles this season include Don Curzio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, the Huntsman in *Rusalka*, and Male Emilia in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players*. He earned his master's degree at the University of Cincinnati College—Conservatory of Music, where he appeared as Nemorino in *The Elixir of Love*, Ernesto in *Don Pasquale*, and the Narrator in *Owen Wingrave*. He sang the role of Goro and a late-notice performance of Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly* with the Castleton Festival and last summer appeared as Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* with the San Francisco Opera Merola Program. This summer, he will make his Glimmerglass Opera debut as Pirelli in *Sweeney Todd*. Next season at HGO he will sing performances of Nemorino in *The Elixir of Love*, Ernie in the world premiere of *It's a Wonderful Life*, and Pedrillo in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.

Yelena Dyachek
**Soprano—Ukraine/U.S.**

Yelena Dyachek joins the HGO Studio for the 2016–17 season after winning the Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award in the 2016 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. As a student at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, she performed Vitellia in *La clemenza di Tito*, the title role in *Iphigénie en Tauride*, and Madama Cortese in *Il viaggio a Reims*. With the Aspen Opera Theater Center, she sang Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* and Tatjana in *Eugene Onegin*. While an undergraduate student at University of the Pacific Conservatory of Music, Dyachek appeared in a National Opera Association Award-winning production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as Mrs. Ford, Pamina in *The Magic Flute*, and Mrs. Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera*. She has won awards in the National Mondavi Young Artists Competition and the Pacific Musical Society Competition, and in March 2016, she will represent the Western region in the semifinals of the Metropolitan National Council Auditions. Upcoming performances include Frau Von Daubek in the concert premiere of Thomas Morse’s *Frau Schindler* and the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at
USC. Next season at HGO, she will sing the role of Dominique de Menil in the world premiere of *Some Light Emerges*, and First Secretary in *Nixon in China*.

**Federico De Michelis**  
**Bass-baritone—Argentina**

Buenos Aires native Federico De Michelis, now finishing his first season in the HGO Studio, won third prize in the 2015 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. His roles this season include performances of Angelotti in *Tosca*, Zaretsky in *Eugene Onegin*, the King in *The Little Prince*, Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Thomas Betterton in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd’s *Prince of Players*. He was previously 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 Rota’s *I due timidi*, Don Alfonso in *Cosi fan tutte*, Plutone in *Il ballo dell’ingrate*, and Tempo from *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria*. This summer, he will sing Colline in *La bohème* at the Aspen Music Festival, and next season at HGO he will sing performances of Dulcamara in *The Elixir of Love* and Fourth Angel in the world premiere of *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

**Ben Edquist**  
**Baritone—United States**

Ben Edquist is completing his first season in the HGO Studio. He participated in HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy in 2013 and was a finalist in the 2015 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. This season his roles include Sir Walter Raleigh/Astronaut in the world premiere of *O Columbia*, the Captain in *Eugene Onegin*, Sciaronne in *Tosca*, performances of the Pilot in *The Little Prince*, the leading role of Edward Kynaston in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd’s *Prince of Players*, and Jigger Craigin in *Carousel*. He received his master of music degree from Rice University in May. His opera 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 also sung many musical theater roles with Light Opera Oklahoma and Brazosport Center Stages. Next season at HGO, he will sing performances of Belcore in *The Elixir of Love* and Wagner in *Faust*.

**Mane Galoyan**  
**Soprano—Armenia**

Now completing her first season in the HGO Studio, Mane Galoyan made her HGO debut as the Kitchen Girl in HGO’s *Rusalka*; other roles include the leading role of Margaret Hughes in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd’s *Prince of Players*, Forest Bird in *Siegfried*, and Lucy in the world premiere of David Hanlon and Stephanie Fleischmann’s *After the Storm*. Last summer, she won third place in the women’s voice division of the prestigious International Tchaikovsky Competition only months after winning first prize in HGO’s 2015 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. Other awards include a 2014 prize in the Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition, and first prize in the 7th Bibigul Tulegenova International Singing Competition in Kazakhstan. She participated in HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy in 2013. This summer, she will sing Smorfiosa in Gassmann’s *L’opera seria* with Wolf Trap Opera. Next season at HGO, she will sing performances of Adina in *The Elixir of Love* and First Angel in the world premiere of *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

**Sol Jin**  
**Baritone—Korea**

Sol Jin joins the HGO Studio for the 2016–17 season after winning the Audience Choice Award in the 2016 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. Named as one of 25 rising opera stars by *Opera News* last October, the baritone most recently performed at Carnegie Hall and with San Francisco Opera’s Merola Program as Germont in *La traviata*, the role with which he made his opera debut at Long Island Opera.
Company. He has also appeared as Rodrigo in Don Carlo and Prince Yeletsky in The Queen of Spades and covered the title role in Gianni Schicchi with the Merola Program; he performed the title role in Macbeth with the Manhattan School of Music. Other credits this season include the Count in The Marriage of Figaro with Long Island Opera Company. He studied at The Manhattan School of Music (master’s degree) and Yonsei University (bachelor’s degree). Among his awards, he received first prize in The Gerda Lissner Foundation International Vocal Competition and fourth prize in The Licia Albanese–Puccini Foundation Annual International Vocal Competition. He recently won first prize in the Eastern region of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and will proceed to the semi-final round at the Met this March.

Kirill Kuzmin  
Pianist/coach—Russia

Now finishing his first season in the HGO Studio, Moscow native Kirill Kuzmin began his piano training at the age of four. After graduation from the Moscow State Conservatory, he entered the Young Artists Program of the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia, and then worked for that company as a pianist and coach on numerous productions. In 2014 and 2015, he served as an apprentice coach with San Francisco Opera’s Merola Program. Most recently, he was a collaborative piano student at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Martin Katz. He has appeared in recital in many of the world’s most prestigious concert halls, including the Bolshoi Theatre Beethoven Hall and Carnegie Hall, where he collaborated on Marilyn Horne’s art song initiative, The Song Continues. This season at HGO his coaching assignments include Eugene Onegin (also Russian diction coach), The Little Prince, The Marriage of Figaro, Siegfried, and the world premiere of David Hanlon and Stephanie Fleischmann’s After the Storm.

Geoffrey Loff  
Pianist/coach—United States

Miami, Florida, native Geoffrey Loff, now completing his first season in the HGO Studio, is a répétiteur, collaborative and solo pianist, assistant conductor, and composer. He made his concert debut at age 13 and has performed as a soloist for The Chopin Foundation and the International Miami Piano Festival. As a collaborative pianist, he has been a frequent performer for The Mainly Mozart Festival and the Chopin Foundation. He was pianist and music director for Atlanta Opera’s outreach program, young artist and assistant conductor for Opera North, and resident artist for Minnesota Opera. This past summer, he was a staff pianist and assistant conductor with Skylark Opera and Mill City Opera. He holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Miami. His coaching assignments at HGO this season include Tosca, The Little Prince, The Marriage of Figaro, and Siegfried.

Zoie Reams  
Mezzo-soprano—United States

Zoie Reams, a student of Dennis Jesse, joins the HGO Studio for the 2016–17 season after winning second prize in the 2016 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. She is a second-year graduate student at Louisiana State University. She is a Turner-Fischer scholar and has performed as an apprentice with Minnesota Opera. She won first place in the Emerging Artist category of the 2015 Classical Singer competition and received an Encouragement Award at the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Past roles include Béatrice in Béatrice et Bénédict, Mrs. Lovett in Sweeney Todd, and Katisha in The Mikado. She was a young artist with the Glimmerglass Festival in the summer of 2015 and sang in master classes for Deborah Voigt, Frederica von Stade, and Eric Owens. This coming summer, she will return to make her Glimmerglass debut as Tituba in Ward’s The Crucible, and next season with HGO she will sing Cece in the world premiere of Some Light Emerges, Second Angel in the world premiere of It’s a Wonderful Life, and Third Secretary in Nixon in China.
Megan Mikailovna Samarin
Mezzo-soprano—United States

Megan Mikailovna Samarin, completing her second season in the HGO Studio, was a finalist in HGO’s 2014 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias and is an alumna of HGO’s Young Artists Vocal Academy. Her roles at HGO include Johanna in Sweeney Todd, Second Lady in The Magic Flute, Olga in Eugene Onegin, Lady Columbia in HGOco’s world premiere of O Columbia, Third Wood Nymph in Rusalka, and Lady Meresvale/Mistress Revels in the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd’s Prince of Players. She has performed Marzia in Vivaldi’s Cato in Utica at Glimmerglass Opera; La Marchande in Les mamelles de Tirésias as a Wolf Trap Opera Studio Artist; Madame Larina in Eugene Onegin, Cherubino in John Davies’s The Three Little Pigs, Cis in Albert Herring, Third Graduate in Street Scene, and Ethel in 42nd Street with the Seagle Music Colony; Soeur Mathilde in Dialogues of the Carmelites at the Janiec Opera Company; Hansel in Hansel and Gretel with the New York Lyric Opera Theater; and Flower Girl in The Marriage of Figaro with Opera on the Avalon. Next season at HGO, she will sing Second Secretary in Nixon in China and Sièbel in Faust.

Peter Walsh
Pianist/coach—United States

Peter Walsh joins the HGO Studio for the 2016–17 season after two seasons as a Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist at L.A. Opera, where he has played for productions of La traviata, Florencia en el Amazonas, The Marriage of Figaro, Gianni Schicchi, and Moby-Dick and performed as a fortepiano soloist in The Magic Flute under the baton of James Conlon. He has performed as orchestral pianist in concert with Renée Fleming and Andrea Bocelli, and was recitative accompanist for Paisiello’s Il barbiere di Siviglia at L.A. Opera. Other engagements include a recent season at Wolf Trap Opera and an upcoming season at the Ravinia Steans Music Institute. Walsh has performed multiple times in Carnegie Hall under the auspices of the Marilyn Horne Legacy at Carnegie Hall. He has collaborated extensively with baritone Rod Gilfry and has performed with Gilfry and mezzo-soprano Dolora Zajick at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. He has been awarded top prizes in the MTAC State Solo Competition and the MTNA Young Artists’ National Competition.

Yongzhao Yu
Tenor—China

Yongzhao Yu, now completing his first year in the HGO Studio, won the Audience Choice Award and the Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award in HGO’s 2015 Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias. He earned degrees from the Shandong University of Arts and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and was a studio artist with the Zhou Xiaoyan Opera Center. He has performed Flavio in Norma with the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, Naulz in Visitors on the Icy Mountain with the Shanghai Grand Theater, and Alfredo in La traviata in the concert hall of the Shanghai Oriental Art Center. He has performed in a concert in the Grand Theatre of the Suzhou Culture and Arts Center and in an Eternal Verdi concert in Shanghai in honor of the bicentenary of Verdi’s birth. He has won awards in the Shanghai division of the 15th National Youth Singer TV Competition, the Beijing International Music Competition, and Opera Concorso (first prize). Next season at HGO he will sing Third Angel in the world premiere of It’s a Wonderful Life.

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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 58 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 honors.

Through HGOco, Houston Grand Opera creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to observe, participate in, and create art. 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 200,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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