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Houston Grand Opera Announces Concert of Arias 2016 Winners

Five Singers Awarded Top Honors at 28th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition

Houston, February 5, 2016—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) announced today the winners of the Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers that took place on the evening of February 4 at the Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater.

1st Place prize of \$10,000 was awarded to **Madison Leonard**, soprano.

2nd Place prize of \$5,000 went to **Zoie Reams**, mezzo-soprano. This prize was dedicated to Donna Bruni, a long-time member of HGO's board of directors and supporter of the HGO Studio who passed away in December.

3rd Place prize of \$3,000 was won by **Alexandra Razskazoff**, soprano.

Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award of \$2,000 went to soprano **Yelena Dyachek**. This award was established last year by renowned soprano and HGO Studio alumna Ana María Martínez to identify a developing young singer with exceptional promise who would greatly benefit from this additional support of his or her continued training. Ms. Martínez won first prize in the competition in 1994.

Audience Choice Award of \$1000 was won by baritone **Sol Jin**.

Winners of the Concert of Arias, one of the most highly esteemed singing competitions in the United States, were chosen by a distinguished panel of judges that included HGO Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** and HGO Managing Director **Perryn Leech**. Serving as guest judges were two distinguished alumni of the HGO Studio, soprano **Heidi Stober** and baritone **Joshua Hopkins**, both of whom are now appearing on HGO's main stage in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Accompanied by HGO Head of Music Staff **Bradley Moore**, eight finalists participated in the competition.

“Thanks to the support of the Houston community, this competition is now in its 28th year, and the post-concert dinner has grown to be a sold-out annual event,” said Perryn Leech, managing director of HGO. Added Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, “Our audience loves to experience emerging operatic talent at such a high standard.”

Concert of Arias supporters raised over \$725,000. All proceeds benefit the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and Houston Grand Opera Studio's ongoing outreach efforts to identify, attract, and nurture young artists who have the potential for major careers in opera. Past prize-winners who are now leading international artists include Jamie Barton, Stephanie Blythe, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, and Ryan McKinny.

Chaired by **Cynthia and Anthony Petrello**, the Concert of Arias began with a champagne reception before 800 guests arrived in the Cullen Theater to enjoy the competition. As the judges made their decisions, guests enjoyed a performance by current HGO Studio members and were able to vote for their pick for the Audience Choice Award. Following the concert more than 550 artists, patrons, and underwriters were seated for the sold-out dinner in the Grand Foyer catered by Jackson and Company to celebrate the evening's honorees, **Pat and Daniel Breen**, for their many years of generous support of HGO and the Studio.

Thursday's concert was the final event in a months-long process that began when 475 singers and 24 pianists applied to compete. Auditions were conducted in New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and Houston. After careful deliberation, 14 singers were chosen to compete in the final round of the competition, from which eight finalists were selected to perform in the Concert of Arias. In the days leading up to the event, finalists were given the opportunity to learn more about HGO and work closely with HGO musical staff to refine their performances.

The Eleanor McCollum competition is a crucial recruitment tool for the Houston Grand Opera Studio, one of the most highly respected and prestigious young artist programs in the country. For more than 35 years, the HGO Studio has served young singers and pianist/coaches who have completed their academic training and are preparing to embark on full-fledged operatic careers. Each year after an exhaustive international search, a hand-selected group of the most exceptionally talented individuals are brought here to Houston to work on the main stage and in recital alongside the best in the business at Houston Grand Opera. During a residency of up to three years, each performer collaborates with an expert team while gaining invaluable experience at the highest professional level.

The evening's guests included Chairs Cynthia and Anthony Petrello, Honorees Pat and Daniel Breen, Anne and Dr. John Mendelsohn (HGO Board chair), Judith and Richard Agee, Denise and Philip Bahr, Tony Bradfield and Kevin Black, Zane Carruth, Anne and Albert Chao, Donna Josey Chapman, Bobbie-Vee and Jerry Cooney, Molly and Jim Crownover, Marianne and David Duthu, Jackson D. Hicks and Milton Townsend, Barbara and Gerald Hines, Elizabeth and Richard Hussein, Caroline and Perryn Leech (HGO managing director), Beth Madison, Frances Marzio, Gloria Portela and Dick Evans, Jill and Allyn Risley, Glen Rosenbaum, Dian and Harlan Stai, Susan and Dr. C. Richard Stasney, HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, John G. Turner and Jerry G. Fischer, and Marcia and Alfredo Vilas. The competition awards were presented by the Methodist Hospital System, the official health care provider for Houston Grand Opera.

1st place \$10,000

Madison Leonard

Soprano—United States

This spring, Madison Leonard will complete her master's degree at Northwestern University, where she appeared as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Geraldine in *A Hand of Bridge*, Ginevra in *Ariodante*, Kitty Hart in *Dead Man Walking*, and Madame Herz in *The Impresario*. With San Francisco Opera's Merola Program, she performed Monica in *The Medium* and Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* in the Grand Finale Concert. A finalist at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions for the Illinois district, Leonard received the 2015 Lynn Harvey Foundation Scholarship from the Musicians Club of Women, the Coates Scholarship from the North Shore Musicians Club, and first place in the Central region of the NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) competition. An alumna of Pepperdine University, where she sang Adina in *The Elixir of Love* and Despina in *Così fan tutte*, Leonard will cover Nannetta in *Falstaff* as an apprentice artist at Des Moines Metro Opera this summer.

2nd place \$5,000

Zoie Reams

Mezzo-soprano—United States

Zoie Reams, a student of Dennis Jesse, 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*.

3rd place winner \$3,000

Alexandra Razskazoff

Soprano—United States

Alexandra Razskazoff, from St. Paul, Minnesota, is a second-year graduate voice student at Juilliard. She received her bachelor's degree in music from the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore. While in Baltimore, she portrayed Abigail Williams in Ward's *The Crucible*, as well as Blanche de la Force from *Dialogues des Carmélites* and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* on the stage of the Modell Performing Arts Center at the Lyric. In summer 2015, Razskazoff worked as an apprentice with the Santa Fe Opera, where she covered roles in *Rigoletto* and in the world premiere of Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain*. This summer, she will return to Santa Fe, where she will cover the role of Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. This spring, Alexandra will portray the First Lady in Juilliard's production of *The Magic Flute*. She is the recipient of the Toulmin Scholarship at Juilliard.

Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award \$2,000

Yelena Dyachek

Soprano—Ukraine/United States

Yelena Dyachek is a student at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, where she has 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 performed Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* and Tatyana 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 Artist's Competition and the Pacific Musical Society Competition, and in March,

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.

Audience Choice Award \$1000

Sol Jin

Baritone—Korea

Sol Jin, one of 25 young singers called rising opera stars by *Opera News* last October, 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.

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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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