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Houston Grand Opera Announces 2017–18 HGO Studio Artists

Houston, March 17, 2017—After an international search, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) has chosen four new singers and two new pianist/coaches for the 2017–18 HGO Studio. The artists are **Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen**, countertenor, the first-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2017; **Thomas Glass**, baritone, third-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2017; **Jonathan Gmeinder**, pianist/coach; **Blair Salter**, pianist/coach; **Anthony Robin Schneider**, bass; and **Richard Smagur**, tenor. 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 457 singers and 23 pianists; 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 Concert of Arias, held this year on January 27.

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 Canada and Austria/New Zealand as well as the United States.

“These accomplished will enhance the musical life of our company, the city of Houston, and the field of opera,” said HGO Studio Director Brian Speck. “We believe they are destined for major careers, and 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:

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen—countertenor, *First-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2017*

Thomas Glass—baritone, *Third-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2017*

Jonathan Gmeinder—pianist/coach

Blair Salter—pianist/coach

Anthony Robin Schneider—bass

Richard Smagur—tenor

Returning HGO Studio artists are:

Yelena Dyachek—soprano, *Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award recipient at Concert of Arias 2016*

Mane Galoyan—soprano, *First-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2015*

Zoie Reams—mezzo-soprano, *Second-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2016*

Sol Jin—baritone, *Audience Choice Award winner at Concert of Arias 2016*

Peter Walsh—pianist/coach

Yongzhao Yu—tenor, *Audience Choice Award and Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award recipient at Concert of Arias 2015*

2017–18 HGO Studio artist biographies:

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen

Countertenor—United States

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, first prize winner in the 2017 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, was named a national finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions earlier this month. Last summer, he participated in the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera, and this summer, he will join Wolf Trap Opera for Philip Glass and Robert Moran's *The Juniper Tree*. He made his European professional operatic debut at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, Austria, singing the leading role of Timante in the modern premiere of Gluck's *Demofonte*; a recording of the work is forthcoming. His opera roles also include Nerone in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Raphael (The Angel) in Jonathan Dove's *Tobias and the Angel*, Cefalo in Cavalli's *Gli amori d'Apollonia e di Dafne*, and Cino in Vivaldi's *Teuzzone*. Nussbaum Cohen earned a bachelor of arts degree in history (2015) from Princeton University. In the upcoming season at HGO, he will be heard as Nireus in *Julius Caesar* and Second Maidservant in *Elektra*.

Yelena Dyachek

Soprano—Ukraine/United States

Second-year Studio artist Yelena Dyachek won the Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award in the 2016 Eleanor

McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, and shortly thereafter, she was named a Grand Prize Winner in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. This season at HGO, she sang First Secretary in *Nixon in China* and is portraying Dominique de Menil in the HGOco world premiere of *Some Light Emerges*. Previous roles include Frau Von Daubek in the concert premiere of Thomas Morse's *Frau Schindler*, the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Vitellia in *La clemenza di Tito*, the title role in *Iphigénie en Tauride*, and Madama Cortese in *Il viaggio a Reims* at USC's Thornton School of Music. With the Aspen Opera Center, she sang Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* (also with the Merola Opera Program) and Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*. This summer, she returns to the Aspen Opera Center as Vitellia. During the 2017–18 season at HGO, she will be heard as Annina in *La traviata*, Berta in *The Barber of Seville*, and Clotilde in *Norma*.

Mane Galoyan

Soprano—Armenia

Mane Galoyan will begin her third season as an HGO Studio artist in the fall. Her previous roles at HGO include Adina in student performances of *The Elixir of Love*, Kitchen Girl in *Rusalka*, and Forest Bird in *Siegfried* as well as two roles in world premieres: Margaret Hughes in Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players* and Lucy in David Hanlon and Stephanie Fleischmann's *After the Storm*. Major competition awards include first prize in HGO's Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, third place in the women's voice division of the prestigious International Tchaikovsky Competition, a 2014 prize in the Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition, and first prize in the Seventh Bibigul Tulegenova International Singing Competition in Kazakhstan. She participated in HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy in 2013. This past summer, she sang Smorfiosa in Gassmann's *L'opera seria* with Wolf Trap Opera. In 2017–18, she appears at HGO in selected performances as Violetta Valéry in *La traviata* and Confidante in *Elektra*.

Thomas Glass

Baritone—United States

Thomas Glass, born and raised in Edina, Minnesota, is a first-year HGO Studio artist for the 2017–18 season. He won the third place prize at the 2017 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. Last season, he was a member of Minnesota Opera's Resident Artist Program, performing Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Gustave in the world premiere of Bolcom and Campbell's *Dinner at Eight*, and Schaunard in *La bohème*, and covering Mercutio in *Romeo*, Donner in *Das Rheingold*, and Dan Packard in *Dinner at Eight*. For the Wolf Trap Opera Studio, he sang Joseph in *The Ghosts of Versailles* in 2015 and returned in 2016 as Bragherona in Gassmann's *L'opera seria*, also covering the roles of Tarquinius in *The Rape of Lucretia* and Schaunard. He received his master of music degree in voice performance from Rice University, where he sang Snug in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, Peter in *Hansel and Gretel*, and L'Humana Fragilità in Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*. He joins San Francisco Opera's Merola Program this summer. His role assignments at HGO for the 2017–18 season include Baron Douphol in *La traviata*, Fiorello in *The Barber of Seville*, and Chino in *West Side Story*.

Jonathan Gmeinder

Pianist/coach—United States

Jonathan Gmeinder, a New York–based pianist and coach, is a piano fellow for the Vocal Arts Department at the Juilliard School and a coach at the Manhattan School of Music (MSM). He recently graduated with a master of music degree in vocal accompanying under the tutelage of Warren Jones at the MSM. Recent work in opera includes Haydn's *La fedeltà premiata* and Handel's *Agrippina* at the Juilliard School, and *La bohème* with Aspen Opera Center.

At MSM he was involved in the preparation of the American Musical Theater Ensemble's productions of *A Little Night Music* and *Defying Gravity: a Steven Schwarz Musical Review*. As an undergraduate at Lawrence University, he was assistant conductor for many operas, including *Albert Herring*, *The Fairy-Queen*, and *The Old Maid and the Thief*. Besides his 2017–18 coaching assignments at HGO, he will perform in HGO Studio recitals and other events.

Sol Jin

Baritone—Korea

Named as one of 25 rising stars by *Opera News*, Sol Jin will begin his second season in the HGO Studio this fall. He won the Audience Choice Award in the 2016 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias; shortly thereafter, he was named a Grand Prize Winner in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. He has appeared in concert 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 covered the title role in Ernest Bloch's *Macbeth* with the Manhattan School of Music. Other credits include the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro* with Long Island Opera Company. He recently performed at Carnegie Hall and with San Francisco Opera's Merola Program as Giorgio Germont in scenes from *La traviata*, a role he sang for his debut at Long Island Opera Company. He will sing Germont again this summer with Aspen Opera Center and in the fall at HGO in selected performances. Also during the 2017–18 season at HGO, he will appear as the Sergeant in *The Barber of Seville*.

Zoie Reams

Mezzo-soprano—United States

Zoie Reams, second prize winner in HGO's 2016 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, will begin her second season in the HGO Studio this fall. Earlier this season, she sang the alto Winged Angel in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life*, Third Secretary in *Nixon in China*, and is portraying Cece in the HGOco world premiere of *Some Light Emerges*. She won first place in the Emerging Artist category of the 2015 *Classical Singer* competition and won second place in the Gulf Coast Region in the 2016 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Past roles include Béatrice in *Béatrice et Bénédicte*, Mrs. Lovett in *Sweeney Todd*, and Katisha in *The Mikado*. Last summer, she performed Tituba in *The Crucible* with Glimmerglass Festival Opera, and this summer she will sing Clarice in Rossini's *La pietra del paragone* with Wolf Trap Opera. Next season at HGO, her roles include Flora Bervoix in *La traviata*, Third Maidservant in *Elektra*, and Rosalia in *West Side Story*.

Blair Salter

Pianist/coach—Canada

Incoming HGO Studio artist Blair Salter, a collaborative pianist and music director, has worked with opera companies and young artist programs throughout the United States and Canada. She has participated in San Francisco Opera's Merola Program as an apprentice coach and the Glimmerglass Festival as a 2015 Young Artist. She currently serves as a guest coach for Michigan Opera Theatre in Detroit. Recent operatic engagements include serving as vocal coach for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *L'heure espagnole*, and *Gianni Schicchi* with University of Michigan Opera. She was previously a fellow at the Fall Island Vocal Arts Seminar and a vocal coach with the CoOPERative Program. She is completing her doctorate at the University of Michigan, where she studies with Martin Katz. During the upcoming season at HGO, she will coach selected operas and perform with other HGO Studio artists in recitals and various performances.

Anthony Robin Schneider**Bass—Austria/New Zealand**

Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation Scholarship recipient Anthony Robin Schneider will begin his first season in the HGO Studio this fall. The trilingual singer (English, French, and German) is preparing to graduate from the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, where he has performed Sarastro in *The Magic Flute*, Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*, Archibaldo in *L'amore dei tre re*, the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*, Méphistophélès in *Faust*, Colline in *La bohème*, and Le Comte Des Grieux in *Manon*. Other recent highlights include singing part of Handel's *Messiah* with the Philadelphia Orchestra, reaching the semifinals of the 2016 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and taking part in masterclasses with Joyce DiDonato at Carnegie Hall. This summer, he will join Wolf Trap Opera as a Filene Young Artist, performing Fabrizio in Rossini's *La pietra del paragone* and the Sacristan in *Tosca*. At HGO next season, he will be heard as Dr. Grenville in *La traviata*, Curio in *Julius Caesar*, Tutor/Old Servant in *Elektra*, and Basilio in *The Barber of Seville*.

Richard Smagur**Tenor**

Richard Smagur, of Clarkesville, Georgia, was named a national finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions earlier this month. He will be seen this summer as Tsarevich Gvidon in *The Golden Cockerel* at Santa Fe Opera. He has appeared professionally as Tamino in *The Magic Flute* with OK Mozart and covered Des Grieux in *Manon* at Des Moines Metro Opera. In concert, he has performed in *Elijah* with the Tucson Desert Song Festival and as a tenor soloist with the Cincinnati Boy Choir. Last summer, he was a fellow at Steans Music Institute at Ravinia Music Festival. He participated in HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy in 2012. Smagur's roles during his college training include 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*. He will sing Gastone de Letorières in *La traviata* and Young Servant in *Elektra* during the 2017–18 season at HGO.

Peter Walsh**Pianist/coach—United States**

Peter Walsh will begin his second season in the HGO Studio this fall. For two seasons, he was a Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist at L.A. Opera, where he 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 *The Barber of Seville* at L.A. Opera. Walsh has performed multiple times in Carnegie Hall under the auspices of the Marilyn Horne Legacy at Carnegie Hall. He has been awarded top prizes in the MTAC State Solo Competition and the MTNA Young Artists' National Competition. Next season, he will coach selected operas and appear in recitals and other performances.

Yongzhao Yu**Tenor—China**

Yongzhao Yu, who won the Audience Choice Award and the Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award in HGO's 2015 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, will begin his third season in the HGO Studio this fall. Earlier this season, he performed the tenor Winged Angel in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a*

Wonderful Life. 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. His awards include first prize in Opera Concorso. Last summer he performed Rodolfo in *La bohème* with Wolf Trap Opera. This summer he will sing Alfredo in *La traviata* with Aspen Opera Center, a role he will repeat in selected performances at HGO in the fall. He will also be heard at HGO as Flavio in *Norma*.

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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 63 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 create, participate in, and observe 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 225,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

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