



HoustonGrandOpera

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

PRESS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Melissa Arredondo

Melissa@elmorepr.com
713-524-0661

Judith Kurnick

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

Houston Grand Opera Announces Concert of Arias 2017 Winners

Five Singers Awarded Top Honors at 29th Eleanor McCollum Competition

Houston, January 27, 2017—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) announced today the winners of the 29th annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers that took place on the evening of January 27 at the Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater. For the first time, the Concert of Arias was streamed live on Facebook, and viewers were able to cast their votes for an Online Viewers' Choice Award. The winner was announced during the second portion of the program, along with the other winners.

1st Place prize of \$10,000 was awarded to **Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen**.

2nd Place prize of \$5,000 went to **Nicolette Book**.

3rd Place prize of \$3,000 was won by **Thomas Glass**.

The **Ana Maria Martinez Encouragement Award** of \$2,000 went to **Siphokazi Moltena**. This award was established in 2015 by renowned soprano and HGO Studio alumna Ana María Martínez to identify a developing young singer with exceptional promise who would greatly benefit from the additional support of his or her continued training. Ms. Martínez won first prize in the competition in 1994.

Audience Choice Award of \$1,000 was also won by **Siphokazi Moltena**.

Online Viewers' Choice Award of \$500 went to **Geoffrey Hahn**.

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**, with guest judge **Gayletha Nichols**, former director of the HGO Studio and currently the executive director of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

“With the wonderful support of the Houston community, this competition is now in its 29th year, and the post-concert dinner has grown to be a sold-out annual event,” said Perryn Leech, managing director of HGO. “Our audience shows great appreciation for such a high standard of emerging operatic talent,” added Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers.

Concert of Arias supporters raised more than \$600,000. 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, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, Ryan McKinny, and Tamara Wilson.

This year’s Concert of Arias, chaired by **Judy and Richard Agee**, honored **Beth Madison** for her many years of generous support of HGO and Studio events. The evening began with a champagne reception at 6 p.m. The vocal competition commenced at 7 p.m. in the Wortham Theater Center’s Cullen Theater and featured performances by current artists of the HGO Studio. Following the concert, approximately 520 artists, patrons, and underwriters were seated for a dinner catered by City Kitchen Catering in the Grand Foyer.

Friday’s concert was the final event in a months-long process that began when 457 singers and 23 pianists applied to compete. Auditions were conducted in New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and Houston. After careful deliberation, 17 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.

Since its inception 40 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 emphasizes practical experience within the professional opera world. This includes regular coaching sessions with industry professionals, roles in HGO mainstage productions, recital performances, and a variety of other concert engagements.

The evening’s guests included Chairs Judy and Richard Agee, Honoree Beth Madison, Molly and Jim Crownover (HGO Board chair), Natalie and Brett Agee, Robin Angly and Miles Smith, Marcia Backus, Janice Barrow, Alex and Astley Blair, Meg Boulware, Tony Bradfield and Kevin Black, Carrie and Sverre Brandsberg-Dahl, Pat Breen, Janet and John Carrig, Anne and Albert Chao, Donna Josey and Max Chapman, Bobbie-Vee and Jerry Cooney, Valerie and Tracy Dieterich, Diane Lokey Farb, Benjamin and Jennifer Fink, Liz Grimm, Dr. Ellen Gritz and Mickey Rosenau, Jackson Hicks and Milton Townsend, Elizabeth and Richard Hussein, Connie Kwan-Wong, Caroline and HGO Managing Director Perryn Leech, Frances Marzio, Barbara and Pat McElvey, Anne and Dr. John Mendelsohn, Susan and Ward Pennebaker, Cynthia and Anthony Petrello, Gloria Portela and Dick Evans, Jill and Allyn Risley, Glen Rosenbaum, Jack Roth, Dian and Harlan Stai, Susan and Dr. C. Richard Stasney, HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers and Beau Miller, Isabel and Ignacio Torras, Alastair Walton, and Lynn Wyatt. The competition awards were presented by the Methodist Hospital System, the official health care provider for Houston Grand Opera.

1st Place \$10,000

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen

Countertenor—United States

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen will represent the Eastern Region as a national semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in March. Last summer, he participated in the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera, and this summer, he will join Wolf Trap Opera for its production of 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. He resides in New York City.

2nd Place \$5,000

Nicolette Book

Soprano—United States

Nicolette Book is an artist diploma candidate and recipient of the Corbett Award at the University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music. At CCM, she was seen as Hanna Glawari in *The Merry Widow* and Mother in *Hänsel and Gretel* and will perform Elettra in *Idomeneo* this spring. She has participated in Houston Grand Opera's Young Artists Vocal Academy (2013), Wolf Trap Opera's Studio Artist Program (2014, 2015), and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis's Gerdine Young Artist Program (2016). She has been seen as Gossip #2 in *The Ghosts of Versailles* and the Cousin in *Madama Butterfly* at Wolf Trap Opera, and she will return to Opera Theatre of Saint Louis this summer. She has been a district winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions for two years and has won a regional encouragement award. She earned a bachelor's degree in music from Oakland University and a master's degree from CCM.

3rd Place \$3,000

Thomas Glass

Baritone—United States

Thomas Glass, born and raised in Edina, Minnesota, is a member of Minnesota Opera's Resident Artist Program this season, performing Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Gustave in the world premiere of William Bolcom and Mark Campbell's *Dinner at Eight*, and Schaunard in *La bohème*. He covers 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 Schaunard and Tarquinius in *The Rape of Lucretia*. 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 *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Peter in *Hänsel und Gretel*, and L'Humana Fragilità in Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*.

Ana Maria Martinez Encouragement Award \$2,000

Audience Choice Award \$1,000

Siphokazi Moltena

Mezzo-soprano—South Africa

Siphokazi Moltena, from Queenstown, South Africa, is in the final year of graduate study in voice at the University of Cape Town, where she studies with Kamal Khan. She has performed with Cape Town Opera as the Third Lady in *The Magic Flute* and as Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and last summer, she was an artist with the Crescendo

Summer Institute South Africa. Previous awards include fourth prize from the 2016 Amazwi Omzansi Africa National Singing Competition, a finalist prize from the 2015 Schock Foundation Singing Competition, and a semifinalist prize from the 2016 ATKV-Muziqanto National Vocal Competition. She holds a degree in music education from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

Online Viewers' Choice Award \$500

Geoffrey Hahn

Baritone—United States

A native of Santa Barbara, California, Geoffrey Hahn is in his second year of study for his master of music degree at Rice University under the tutelage of Dr. Stephen King. He graduated with a degree in sustainable development from the Columbia-Juilliard Exchange program in New York City. His most recent performances include Sam in *Trouble in Tahiti* and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Rice University, Billy in *Carousel* at Columbia University, and Dancaire in *Carmen* and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, both with the Aspen Music Festival and School. He spent last summer as a Studio artist with Wolf Trap Opera, where he covered the role of Delirio in the North American premiere of Gassmann's *L'opera seria*. He will return to Wolf Trap as a Studio artist in 2017.

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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 62 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 225,000 Houstonians to experience first-quality opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

Media Contact: Melissa Arredondo, melissa@elmorepr.com, (713) 524-0661

Director of Communications: Judith Kurnick, jkurnick@hgo.org (713) 546-0240

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