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Houston Grand Opera Announces 2018–19 HGO Studio Artists

Houston, March 5, 2018—After an international search, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) has chosen five new singers and one new pianist/coach for the 2018–19 HGO Studio. 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.

First-year HGO Studio artists are:

Lindsay Kate Brown, mezzo-soprano, *Third-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2018*

Dorothy Gal, soprano, *Second-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2018*

Geoffrey Hahn, baritone, *Finalist in Concert of Arias 2018*

Leia Lensing, contralto, *First-place prize winner at Concert of Arias 2018*

Kyle Naig, pianist/coach

Daniel Noyola, bass-baritone

Nardus Williams, soprano

Returning HGO Studio artists are:

Yelena Dyachek, soprano

Thomas Glass, baritone

Jonathan Gmeinder, pianist/coach

Blair Salter, pianist/coach

Richard Trey Smagur, tenor

The HGO Studio received applications from 506 singers and 19 pianists; of those, 284 were heard in auditions in New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and Houston. For singers, the audition process culminates in HGO's annual Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, held this year on February 1.

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 mainstage 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.

“These accomplished artists 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.

2018–19 HGO Studio artist biographies

Lindsay Kate Brown

Mezzo-soprano

Lindsay Kate Brown, winner of the third prize at HGO's 2018 Concert of Arias, is an artist diploma candidate in opera studies at Rice University. At Rice, she has portrayed the roles of Cecilia March in *Little Women*, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi* and Cornelia in *Julius Caesar*. She received her graduate degree in opera at Binghamton University and her undergraduate degrees in vocal performance and music education at Mansfield University. She made her professional debut with Tri-Cities Opera in 2014 and has also appeared as a concert soloist, performing the works of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Handel. In 2015, she won an encouragement award in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. This summer, she will be a young artist at Des Moines Metro Opera, where she will reprise the role of Ma Moss in Copland's *The Tender Land* and cover the role of Ježibaba in Dvořák's *Rusalka*.

Yelena Dyachek

Soprano

Second-year HGO Studio artist Yelena Dyachek won the Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award in the 2016 Concert of Arias, and was a 2016 Grand Finals winner in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. At HGO, she has sung Berta in *The Barber of Seville*, Annina in *La traviata*, First Secretary in *Nixon in China*, and Dominique de Menil in the HGOco world premiere of *Some Light Emerges*. Other roles include 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 (USC Thornton School of Music); and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* and Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin* (Aspen Opera Center). This spring, she will sing Clotilde in *Norma* at HGO before joining Wolf Trap Opera as Elettra in *Idomeneo*.

Dorothy Gal

Soprano

Dorothy Gal participated in Marilyn Horne's *The Song Continues* workshop at Carnegie Hall and was a vocal fellow at Ravinia's Steans Music Institute. Winner of the second prize in HGO's 2018 Concert of Arias, she has appeared on WQXR's Young Artists Showcase, was a New Horizons Fellow at the Aspen Summer Music Festival, and is an alumnus of Houston Grand Opera's Young Artists Vocal Academy. Operatic roles include Amy in *Little Women*, Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, Poussette in *Manon*, and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*. She portrays Sandrina in *La finta giardiniera* at Rice University before returning to Des Moines Metro Opera to sing First Wood Sprite in the company's mainstage production of *Rusalka* this summer. Gal is a pianist and graduate of Mannes College. She is a second-year graduate student of Dr. Stephen King and received the Renée Fleming and Cecilia Bartoli Endowed Scholarship in voice.

Thomas Glass

Baritone

First-year Studio artist Thomas Glass won third prize in HGO's 2017 Concert of Arias. Roles at HGO include Baron Douphol in *La traviata* and Fiorello in *The Barber of Seville*. 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 *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 Wolf Trap Opera, he sang Joseph in *The Ghosts of Versailles* and Bragherona in Gassmann's *L'opera seria*. Later this season, he will perform Officer Krupke in HGO's *West Side Story*. He returns to Wolf Trap Opera this summer as Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Jonathan Gmeinder

Pianist/coach

First-year HGO Studio artist Jonathan Gmeinder was a piano fellow at the Juilliard School and a coach at the Manhattan School of Music (MSM), where he earned his master's degree in vocal accompanying. Recent work includes *La fedeltà premiata* and *Agrippina* at the Juilliard School, and *La bohème* with Aspen Opera Center. At MSM, he assisted in preparing 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 *Albert Herring*, *The Fairy-Queen*, and *The Old Maid and the Thief*. This season at HGO, he coached *La traviata*, the world premiere of *The House without a Christmas Tree*, and *The Barber of Seville*. Later this season, he will also coach *Norma*.

Geoffrey Hahn

Baritone

A native of Santa Barbara, California, Geoffrey Hahn is in his third year of study pursuing his master of music degree under the tutelage of Dr. Stephen King. A finalist in HGO's 2018 Concert of Arias, he graduated with a degree in sustainable development from the Columbia–Juilliard Exchange Program in New York City. Hahn's most recent performances include Sam in *Trouble in Tabiti*, Gideon March in *Little Women*, 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 sang the role of Sciarrone in *Tosca* and covered the roles of Bastianello the Elder, Lino, Ippolito, and Frediano in *Bastianello*.

Leia Lensing

Contralto

Winner of the first prize and Online Viewers' Choice award at HGO's 2018 Concert of Arias, Leia Lensing is a second-year master's student at the University of Northern Iowa, studying under Dr. Jean McDonald. Participating in numerous opera productions as an active chorus member throughout her undergraduate career, Lensing also performed the roles of the Second Witch in *Dido and Aeneas*, Mama and Dragonfly in *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, and La Zia Principessa in *Suor Angelica*. This past summer, she was an apprentice artist with the Des Moines Metro Opera where she covered the role of Madame Armfeldt in *A Little Night Music*. In October, she performed the role of the strong Irish matriarch Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*. This summer, she will be a member of the Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Singer Program, covering the roles of Pasqualita in *Doctor Atomic* and the Baroness in *Candide*.

Kyle Naig

Pianist/coach

Kyle Naig is a pianist and coach from Des Moines, Iowa. Recently, he has played productions of *Manon* and *The Barber of Seville* at Opera Santa Barbara, *As One* at Des Moines Metro Opera, *Scalia/Ginsburg* and *Porgy and Bess* at the Glimmerglass Festival, *Turandot* at Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre, and *Tosca* at Intermountain Opera Bozeman. His upcoming engagements include a production of Alessandro Scarlatti's *Il trionfo dell'onore* during the Midtown Opera Festival at Opera Memphis as well as returns to Opera Santa Barbara (*Trouble in Tahiti* and *Gallantry*), Intermountain Opera Bozeman (*Falstaff*), and the Glimmerglass Festival (*Trouble in Tahiti*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *The Barber of Seville*). He is an alumnus of training programs at Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, and Lyric Opera of Kansas City and is a graduate of the University of Kansas.

Daniel Noyola

Bass-baritone

Daniel Noyola is a resident artist at the Academy of Vocal Arts (AVA) in Philadelphia. The native of San Luis Potosí, Mexico, won first prize in Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota (2015); third place in the Meistersinger Vocal Competition (2016) in Graz, Austria; an encouragement award at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions New England regionals (2015); and awards with Opera Index, the Mario Lanza Competition, the Carlo Morelli National Singing Competition, and many others. His performance credits include the title roles in *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, Colas in *Bastien und Bastienne*, Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, and Leporello in *Don Giovanni*. He recently made his debut at Tri-Cities Opera as Mustafà in *The Italian Girl in Algiers*.

Blair Salter

Pianist/coach

First-year HGO Studio artist Blair Salter has participated in San Francisco Opera's Merola Program and the Glimmerglass Festival and has served as a guest coach for Michigan Opera Theatre in Detroit. Recent operatic engagements include *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 recently completed her doctoral degree at the University of Michigan under the tutelage of Martin

Katz. This season at HGO, she coached *La traviata* and *The Barber of Seville*, for which she also played the fortepiano continuo. In the spring, she will coach *West Side Story*. This summer, she joins Wolf Trap Opera as a coaching fellow.

Richard Trey Smagur

Tenor

First-year HGO Studio artist Richard Trey Smagur participated in HGO's 2012 Young Artists Vocal Academy. He was a Grand Finals winner in the Metropolitan Opera's 2017 National Council Auditions. At HGO this season, he sang Gastone de Letorières in *La traviata* and Young Servant in *Elektra*. Previous roles include Tsarevich Gvidon in *The Golden Cockerel* at Santa Fe Opera and Tamino in *The Magic Flute* with OK Mozart. 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*. This summer, he joins Wolf Trap Opera as Tybalt in *Roméo et Juliette* and makes his Aspen Music Festival concert debut.

Nardus Williams

Soprano

Nardus Williams is currently studying at the Royal College of Music International Opera School. She recently gave her debut recital at Wigmore Hall; other recent performances include *Messiah* with the Orchestra of St. John's under John Lubbock at King's Place and St. John's Smith Square and *Nitocris* in Handel's *Belshazzar* under Nicholas Kraemer. Last summer, she performed Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* at Opera Holland Park. Upcoming performances include a principal role in the world premiere of Giorgio Battistelli's *Lazarus* with Birmingham Opera Company, directed by Graham Vick, and covering the role of Countess Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* at English National Opera. Williams won both first prize and the audience prize at the 2016 Maureen Lehane Vocal Awards. She is a Kiri Te Kanawa Scholarship recipient.

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About Houston Grand Opera

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. HGO was the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year at the 2017 International Opera Awards. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art to serve an ever-evolving audience, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (65 world premieres to date) and in training and nurturing promising young artists and administrators. The company 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's pioneering community engagement initiative, HGOco, has served as a model for other arts organizations.

The NEXUS Initiative is HGO's multi-year ticket underwriting program that allows Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy opera without the barrier of price. Since 2007, NEXUS has enabled more than 250,000 Houstonians to experience superlative opera through discounted single tickets and subscriptions, subsidized student performances, and free productions.

HGO has toured extensively and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and three Emmy awards. It is the only opera company to win all three honors.

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