

**Houston Grand Opera Announces 2022 Concert of Arias Winners**  
*Singers Awarded Top Honors of 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition*

HOUSTON – January 22, 2022 – Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is proud to announce the winners for this year’s Concert of Arias, the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, held last evening at the Wortham Theater Center and livestreamed for audiences at home on HGO Digital and HGO’s Facebook and YouTube channels. The evening’s livestream host was HGO Studio alumnus **Norman Reinhardt**. Reinhardt kept the online viewers apprised of all the action happening behind-the-scenes.

The 2022 Concert of Arias winners include:

- **1<sup>st</sup> Place prize** of \$10,000 was awarded to Navasard Hakobyan, baritone
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Place prize** of \$5,000 went to Amanda Batista, soprano
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Place prize** of \$3,000 was won by Jongwon Han, bass-baritone
- The **Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award** of \$2,000 went to Olivia Smith, soprano
- The **Audience Choice Award** went to Jongwon Han, bass-baritone
- The **Online Viewers’ Choice Award** went to Olivia Smith, soprano

Winners were chosen by the distinguished judges for this year’s competition, which included guest judge and soprano **Christine Goerke**, HGO General Director and CEO **Khori Dastoor**, HGO Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers**, and HGO Artistic Advisor and soprano **Ana María Martínez**.

The highly anticipated competition is held annually to identify candidates for HGO’s internationally acclaimed young artist training program, the HGO Studio. The live event is the final stage of the competition, which brings young singers from all over the world to Houston. Each finalist performed two arias from the opera repertoire for the panel of esteemed judges.

“HGO’s 34<sup>th</sup> Concert of Arias was an awe-inspiring evening, full of beautiful music and spirited competition. The rising stars who took the Wortham stage hold the keys to the future of this artform, and I’m happy to share that the future is looking bright indeed,” said Khori Dastoor, HGO General Director and CEO. “It was a thrill to host the event for both in-theater and at-home audiences. The Wortham was positively buzzing with excitement. These young artists left everything out on the stage. We were all blown away.”

In order to safely present the competition from the Wortham Theater Center, HGO followed strict protocols put in place by the company’s Health Advisory Committee. The committee, whose members include professionals from Houston Methodist, have worked to develop procedures to protect the safety of artists, staff, and technicians.

“Each year that we host this competition and concert, our finalists amaze us with the sheer range of their musical gifts, voice types, expressivity, and approach to this art form. Yet they always share a few essential qualities: tenacity, courage, and a tireless will to succeed on the operatic stage,” said HGO Studio Director **Brian Speck**. “It is incredible to behold. And now we get to welcome these gifted singers into the HGO community, watch them grow, and celebrate their impressive work and talent.”

After careful consideration of 768 candidates, HGO narrowed the applicants to 18 semifinalists before selecting the nine talented finalists for the final round of the competition. Following all safety protocols, the selected finalists had the opportunity to learn more about HGO and work with company music staff leading up to the Concert of Arias.

The full list of finalists included Amanda Batista, Tatiana Carlos, Meryl Dominguez, Navasard Hakobyan, Jongwon Han, Jonas Jud, Shannon Keegan, Evan Lazdowski, and Olivia Smith.

This year’s Concert of Arias was graciously chaired by **Drs. Liz Grimm and Jack Roth**. The event raised over \$550,000 to benefit the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and the Houston Grand Opera Studio.

Since its inception 44 years ago, the HGO Studio has grown into one of the most respected young artist programs in the world. Each of the 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.

### **2022 Concert of Arias Winner Biographies:**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Place**

##### **Navasard Hakobyan, baritone**

Armenian baritone **Navasard Hakobyan** has been a member of the young artist program of the National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Yerevan, Armenia since 2018. His roles in the 2020-21 season included Silvio in *Pagliacci*, Giorgio Germont in *La traviata*, and Belcore in a new production of *The Elixir of Love*. He has won numerous international competitions, recently winning first prize in the Premiere Opera Foundation International Vocal Competition and third prize in the José Carreras Grand Prix in Moscow, Russia. Hakobyan received his academic degree at Yerevan State Conservatory after Komitas. He was named the 2019 winner of the President of the Republic of Armenia Youth Prize.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

##### **Amanda Batista, soprano**

**Amanda Batista** is a Cuban-Puerto Rican American soprano in the second year of her Master of Music degree in the Marcus Institute for Vocal Arts at The Juilliard School, studying under Darrell Babidge, where she is a proud recipient of a Kovner Fellowship. This season, Batista will make her Alice Tully Hall debut singing Ben Moore’s *So Free Am I* as a part of Songfest, in collaboration with pianist Brian Zeger. Batista was an Encouragement Award Winner in the 2021 New York district of the Laffont Competition at the Metropolitan Opera. She will make her role debut as Frau Fluth in Nicolai’s *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* in April of 2022 with Juilliard Opera at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater. Batista will join the Merola Opera Program in the summer of 2022. She holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

#### **Jongwon Han, bass-baritone**

Born in Seoul, South Korea, bass-baritone **Jongwon Han** was a Grand Finalist and Pamela Craven Award Winner in the 2021 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the 2021 Stephen De Maio Memorial Award Winner from the Gerda Lissner Foundation. This season, he performs Haydn's *Theresienmesse* and Mozart's *Sparrow Mass* as bass soloist with New Choral Society in New York. Han will join Santa Fe Opera as an Apprentice Artist in 2022, covering the role of Bartolo in *The Barber of Seville*. He received his Bachelor of Music degree from the Seoul National University and is currently pursuing his master's degree at the Mannes School of Music.

#### **The Ana María Martínez Encouragement Award**

##### **Olivia Smith, soprano**

Canadian soprano **Olivia Smith** hails from Penticton, British Columbia and is currently in her final year of her undergraduate degree at the Curtis Institute of Music, where she is a student of Julia Faulkner. This season, she will be covering the role of Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with the Curtis Opera Theatre. Other roles in Smith's repertoire include Berta in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Cathleen in Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*, First Witch in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and Mrs. Gobineau in Menotti's *The Medium*—all with the Curtis Opera Theater. In February 2019, she was awarded the Henry and Dianna Asher Family Charitable Fund encouragement grant with the George London Competition. She was a 2021 participant in Houston Grand Opera's Young Artists Vocal Academy.

#### **Audience Choice Award**

##### **Jongwon Han, bass-baritone**

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#### **Online Viewers' Choice Award**

##### **Olivia Smith, soprano**

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To learn more about the evening, visit [HGO.org/COA](https://HGO.org/COA).

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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 in the 2019 International Opera Awards, and the only American company to be nominated twice. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art, to serve the Houston community, and to be a global leader in the future of opera, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (72 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 multiyear 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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**Media Contact:** Delicia Harvey, Elmore PR, 713-524-0661, [delicia@elmorepr.com](mailto:delicia@elmorepr.com)

**Media Contact:** Natalie Barron, Houston Grand Opera, 713-546-0240; [nbarron@hgo.org](mailto:nbarron@hgo.org)

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