

**Houston Grand Opera Announces Next Season's HGO Studio Artists**

*Six returning members and five new artists comprise the prestigious training program for 2022–23*

HOUSTON—April 26, 2022—After an international search, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is proud to announce the five new singers and six returning artists who will train with the HGO Studio for 2022–23. One of the most respected and highly competitive young artist programs in the world, the HGO Studio provides comprehensive career development to young singers and pianist/coaches who have demonstrated potential to make major contributions to the art form.

First-year HGO Studio artists include:

- **Meryl Dominguez**, soprano
- **Navasard Hakobyan**, baritone (first place at HGO's 2022 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias)
- **Michelle Papenfuss**, pianist/coach
- **Renée Richardson**, soprano
- **Erin Wagner**, mezzo-soprano

Returning HGO Studio artists include:

- **Ricardo Garcia**, tenor
- **Cory McGee**, bass
- **Bin Yu Sanford**, pianist/coach
- **Luke Sutliff**, baritone
- **Eric Taylor**, tenor
- **Emily Treigle**, mezzo-soprano

"It is thrilling to see the pure talent in this year's class of HGO Studio members. Their passion and energy are contagious," said **HGO Studio Director Brian Speck**. "The HGO Studio program gives the next generation of opera singers and coaches the tools they need to succeed in a highly competitive industry. This is *the* place for aspiring opera stars hoping to launch major careers on the stages of the world's great opera houses. And it is truly gratifying to know that by helping them build on their innate talents to achieve their dreams, we're helping to ensure the future of the entire art form."

The HGO Studio receives hundreds of applications from singers and pianists each year for this highly competitive program. For singers interested in HGO, the audition process culminates in the company's annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias, which was held on January 21, 2022.

The HGO Studio trains young artists in their chosen discipline of classical singing, piano, and coaching, and the artists commit to an intense, individualized study program while living in Houston from mid-August through May. 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 with the organization. Studio artists are cast in both major and supporting roles in mainstage productions,

giving them direct access to work with world-renowned artists, directors, and conductors. Studio artists also participate in recitals and perform in venues across the city and state for numerous events. Since its inception 45 years ago, the HGO Studio has grown into one of the most respected young artist programs in the world. 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.

2022–23 HGO Studio Artist Biographies:

### **FIRST YEAR ARTISTS:**

#### **MERYL DOMINGUEZ**

##### **Soprano**

A first-year HGO Studio artist, Cuban-American soprano Meryl Dominguez, originally from Brooklyn, most recently made her international debut as the title character in *Norma* with Musica Viva Hong Kong. During the 2022-23 season at HGO, she will perform in *Salome*. She was a resident artist at Philadelphia's Academy of Vocal Arts, where she performed roles such as Violetta (*La traviata*), Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*), Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*), Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*), Adina (*The Elixir of Love*), and Lucia (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), which she also performed with Knoxville Opera. As an apprentice artist at Santa Fe Opera, she sang the role of Naiade in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. She has Bachelor of Arts degrees in Dance and Voice Performance from Oberlin College and Conservatory. In addition to her operatic roles, she is an enthusiastic advocate for art song and new music.

#### **NAVASARD HAKOBYAN**

##### **Baritone**

A first-year HGO Studio artist, Armenian baritone Navasard Hakobyan won first place at HGO's 2022 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. During the 2022-23 season at HGO, his roles include Baron Douphol in *La traviata*, Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Second Nazarene in *Salome*. He 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, including 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 master's degree at Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan. He was named the 2019 winner of the President of the Republic of Armenia Youth Prize.

#### **MICHELLE PAPENFUSS**

##### **Pianist/coach**

First-year HGO Studio artist Michelle Papenfuss, originally from Fairfax, Virginia, is currently finishing her second season as a Cafritz Young Artist at the Washington National Opera (WNO) and will be a Young Artist at the 2022 Glimmerglass Festival. During her time at WNO, Papenfuss has served as assistant conductor for *Così fan tutte* and played for several new operas commissioned by the American Opera Initiative, including the workshop for Jeanine Testori's *Grounded*. At Glimmerglass, Papenfuss will serve as a coach for *Carmen*, *Taking Up Serpents*, and *Holy Ground*. In 2020, Papenfuss graduated from the University of Michigan with a master's degree in collaborative piano, where she studied with Martin Katz. She also holds a bachelor's degree (2016) and master's degree (2018) in piano performance from Brigham Young University, where she studied with Jeffrey Shumway and Scott Holden.

**RENÉE RICHARDSON****Soprano**

A first-year HGO Studio artist, Haitian-American soprano Renée Richardson hails from Springfield, Pennsylvania. During the 2022-23 season at HGO, she will perform the role of Annina in *La traviata*. This season she sings Mimì in Puccini's *La bohème* at the Academy of Vocal Arts, where she currently studies with Bill Schuman. Also at AVA, she has sung the Foreign Princess in Dvořák's *Rusalka*, the title role and Suor Dolcina in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, and Inès in Donizetti's *La favorite*. She holds a Professional Studies Diploma in Voice from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where her roles included Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Béatrice in Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict*, and the title roles in Puccini's *Suor Angelica* and Cherubini's *Medea*. Richardson has been seen in several Pensacola Opera productions including *Carmen*, *La bohème*, and *The Pirates of Penzance*. She was the recipient of an A. Grace Lee Mims Scholarship for Negro Spirituals and was the soprano soloist in Beethoven's Ninth with the Kennett Symphony. She was recently named a finalist in the Vincerò Worldwide Opera Competition in Naples, Italy.

**ERIN WAGNER****Mezzo-soprano**

A first-year HGO Studio artist, Erin Wagner is originally from El Paso. During the 2022-23 season at HGO, she will perform the roles of Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Page in *Salome*. She is a winner of the 2021 Naumburg Foundation International Vocal Competition and, with pianist and composer Shawn Chang, the 2021 Juilliard Vocal Arts Honors Recital. Wagner was a 2021 Renée Fleming Artist at Aspen Music Festival, where she performed the roles of Second Lady (*The Magic Flute*) and Unulfo (*Rodelina*); sang in scenes from *Così fan tutte*, *La clemenza di Tito*, and *Semele*; and premiered David Clay Mettens's *The Sustaining Air*. She worked with Fleming for Carnegie Hall's 2021 SongStudio and received second prize in the 2021 Saengerbund Awards. She has performed with Steve Blier and Bénédicte Jourdois at Caramoor and with Brian Zeger at Juilliard Songfest. Wagner received her Master of Music degree from The Juilliard School, where she studied with Darrell Babidge and was a Gluck Community Service Fellow. She completed her Bachelor of Music degree at the Manhattan School of Music, where she studied with Joan Patenaude-Yarnell.

**RETURNING:****RICARDO GARCIA****Tenor*****Dr. Ellen R. Gritz and Mr. Milton D. Rosenau Jr./Michele Beale and Dick Anderson Fellow***

A third-year HGO Studio artist from Castro Valley, California, Ricardo Garcia completed his Master of Music in Voice at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and holds a Bachelor of Music in Voice from the University of the Pacific. For HGO's 2021-22 season, Garcia's roles include El Remendado in *Carmen*, Papí/Jasper in alternate cast performances of *The Snowy Day*, First Commissioner in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, and Romeo in alternate cast and outdoor performances of *Romeo and Juliet*. HGO roles for 2022-23 include Alfredo Germont in alternate cast performances of *La traviata*, Schmidt in *Werther*, and Third Jew in *Salome*. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season he appeared in *Vinkensport* as Hans Sach's Trainer; *The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All*; and *Suite Española: Explorando Iberia*. He was a studio artist at Wolf Trap Opera, where he covered Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* and Giocondo in *La pietra del paragone*, and a voice fellow with Music Academy of the West, where he sang Jenik in *The Bartered Bride*. Recent roles include Lamplighter/Drunkard in *The Little Prince* and Fenton in *Falstaff*. In

summer 2021, he returned to Wolf Trap Opera as Valcour in *The Anonymous Lover* and sang the role of Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda* at the Aspen Music Festival. In summer 2022, he will perform the role of Fabrizio Naccarelli in *The Light in the Piazza* with Central City Opera.

### **CORY MCGEE**

**Bass**

#### ***Beth Madison Fellow***

A third-year HGO Studio artist from Stafford, Virginia, Cory McGee completed his Master of Music degree at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. He was the second prize winner in HGO's 2020 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. HGO roles for 2022-23 include Doctor Grenvil in *La traviata*, Johann in *Werther*, Jailer in *Tosca*, and Fifth Jew in *Salome*. During the 2021-22 HGO season, he performed the role of Billy in *The Snowy Day*, and during the 2020-21 HGO Digital season he appeared in *The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All* as Billy, and in *Giving Voice*. In summer 2019, he joined Santa Fe Opera as an apprentice artist, portraying the role of the Gardener in Ruder's *The Thirteenth Child*. In 2018 he was a studio artist with Wolf Trap Opera, where he played La Voce in Mozart's *Idomeneo* and Ranger Nat in David Hanlon's children's opera, *Listen, Wilhelmina!*, and was a soloist in "Bernstein at 100 – A Celebration." He returned to Santa Fe in summer 2021 as an apprentice artist for the second time, performing the role of Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and recently debuted the role of Colline in *La bohème* at Detroit Opera. He will return to Wolf Trap in summer 2022 to perform Caspar in *Der Freischütz*.

### **BIN YU SANFORD**

**Pianist/coach**

#### ***Stephanie Larsen/Dr. and Mrs. Miguel Miro-Quesada/ Ms. Lynn Des Prez Fellow***

A third-year HGO Studio artist from Seoul, Bin Yu Sanford has established herself as a solo pianist, vocal coach, and chamber musician. For HGO's 2021-22 season, Yu Sanford's coaching roles include *The Snowy Day*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Turandot*. During the 2020-21 HGO Digital season, she served as coach for *The Impresario* and *The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All*. She also appeared with HGO Studio singers in recitals and other performances and served as coach for *My Favorite Things: Songs from The Sound of Music*. Yu Sanford earned her Doctor of Musical Arts in Solo Piano Performance and an Artist Diploma in Opera Coaching at the University of Cincinnati College - Conservatory of Music (CCM). Recently, she was selected as one of the vocal piano fellows at Music Academy of the West, where she worked on Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain*. From 2017 to 2020, Yu Sanford served as a graduate assistant in the opera department at CCM. She was the first prize winner of the Pennsylvania MTNA Young Artist Piano Competition. She will join Wolf Trap Opera in summer of 2022 as a Coaching Fellow.

### **LUKE SUTLIFF**

**Baritone**

#### ***Lynn Gissel/Brenda Harvey-Traylor Fellow***

A second-year HGO Studio artist from Littleton, Colorado, Luke Sutliff received his Master of Music degree from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. For HGO's 2021-22 season, his roles include El Dancairo in *Carmen*, M. Javelinot / Thierry in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, and Mercutio in alternate cast and outdoor performances of *Romeo and Juliet*. HGO roles for 2022-23 include Harvey in *The Wreckers*, Brühlmann in *Werther*, Sciarrone in *Tosca*, and A Cappadocian in *Salome*. At the Shepherd School, he appeared as Kaiser Overall in *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* and Johannes Zegner in *Proving Up*. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the Juilliard School, where he studied with the late Sanford Sylvan and made his Alice Tully Hall debut performing Fauré's *L'horizon chimérique*. Sutliff previously performed the

roles of Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Belcore in *The Elixir of Love* at the Chautauqua Institute. Sutliff joined Santa Fe Opera as an Apprentice Artist for summer 2021, covering the role of Jon Seward in *The Lord of Cries* and performing Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He will return to Santa Fe in 2022 to cover the role of Figaro in *The Barber of Seville* and perform El Dancairo in *Carmen*.

### **ERIC TAYLOR**

#### **Tenor**

***Jill and Allyn Risley/ Sharon Ley Lietzow and Robert F. Lietzow/ Drs. Rachel and Warren A. Ellsworth IV Fellow***

A second-year HGO Studio artist from Saint George, Utah, Eric Taylor completed his Master of Music degree at Rice University, where he performed the roles of Sam Polk in *Susannah* and Tito in *La clemenza di Tito*. He was named the second prize winner in HGO's 2021 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. For HGO's 2021-22 season, his roles include Chevalier in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, First Armored Man in *The Magic Flute*, and Benvolio in mainstage and outdoor performances of *Romeo and Juliet*. HGO roles for 2022-23 include Gastone in *La traviata*, Don Curzio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Narraboth in *Salome*. While pursuing his undergraduate degree in music at Westminster College, he performed several leading roles, including Nemorino in *The Elixir of Love* and Rodolfo in *La bohème*, in addition to appearing in *Carmina Burana* with Salt Lake City's Ballet West. Taylor has participated in Apprentice Artist programs with Santa Fe Opera, Central City Opera, and Utah Lyric Opera. He was named a semi-finalist at the Metropolitan Opera's National Council Auditions in 2017. He will return to the Santa Fe Opera in 2022 to perform the role of Melot in *Tristan and Isolde* and cover Don José in *Carmen*.

### **EMILY TREIGLE**

#### **Mezzo-soprano**

***Mr. and Mrs. James W. Crownover/Mr. Veer Vasishta Fellow***

A second-year HGO Studio artist from New Orleans, Emily Treigle was named a Grand Finals Winner in the 2021 Metropolitan Opera's Eric and Dominique Laffont Competition and was the third prize winner in HGO's 2021 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. For HGO's 2021-22 season, her roles include Mother Jeanne in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and Gertrude in *Romeo and Juliet*. HGO roles for 2022-23 include Flora Bervoix in *La traviata* and Käthchen in *Werther*. In 2021, she covered the title role of L'enfant in *L'enfant et les Sortilèges* at Rice. In 2019, Treigle trained with HGO's Young Artist Vocal Academy and participated in the Aspen Music Festival, where she portrayed Madame Armfeldt in *A Little Night Music*. Last summer, she returned to Wolf Trap Opera as a Studio Artist for the second time. Previous roles include Bradamante in *Alcina* and Mrs. Ott in *Susannah*, an opera made famous by her grandfather, world-renowned bass-baritone Norman Treigle. Treigle pursued her Master of Music degree at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, where she received her Bachelor of Music degree in 2020.

To learn more about the Houston Grand Opera Studio, visit [HGO.org/Studio](https://www.hgo.org/studio)

### **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 and producing 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 and Learning initiative 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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