

Houston Grand Opera Announces Concert of Arias 2019 Semifinalists
The 31st Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers occurs February 1

Houston, January 17, 2019—Houston Grand Opera (HGO) has chosen the semifinalists for the 31st annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias, to be presented in the Wortham Theater Center on February 1, 2019, at 7 p.m. A limited number of general admission tickets for the performance are available for purchase [here](#). The program will also be streamed live on Facebook and YouTube for all to enjoy, inviting viewers to cast their votes for the Online Viewers' Choice Award.

This year's semifinalists are:

- Sopranos: **Anna Dugan, Kathryn Henry, Yunuet Laguna, Rebecca Pedersen, Alexandra Razskazoff, Elena Villalón**
- Mezzo-sopranos: **Katherine DeYoung, Mary Beth Nelson**
- Tenor: **Andres Acosta, Elliott Paige, Angel Romero**
- Bass-Baritone: **Nicholas Newton**
- Bass: **William Meinert, William Guanbo Su**

The competition and its final round, the Concert of Arias, are held annually to identify candidates for HGO's internationally acclaimed Studio program, which nurtures young artists who have the potential for major careers in opera. Past prize winners who are now artists on the international stage include Jamie Barton, Joyce DiDonato, Ana María Martínez, Ryan McKinny, and Tamara Wilson.

Now in its 31st year, the competition received 525 applications from singers around the world. Auditions were conducted in November and December 2018.

After careful consideration, 14 semifinalists were chosen to come to Houston for further rounds of the prestigious competition. The field of semifinalists will be narrowed to approximately eight finalists on the Sunday prior to the Concert of Arias. The selected finalists will have the opportunity to learn more about HGO and work with HGO music staff leading up to the Concert of Arias, in which they will perform two arias each, competing for up to \$10,000 in cash prizes. Finalists will be accompanied by Kirill Kuzmin, HGO assistant conductor.

The judging panel will be led by HGO Artistic and Music Director **Patrick Summers** and HGO Managing Director **Perryn Leech**, with guest judge **Lawrence Brownlee**. For the fifth year, world-renowned soprano and HGO Studio alumna **Ana María Martínez** will select a finalist to receive her encouragement award. Audience members also have the opportunity to participate in the evening's events when they cast their votes for the Audience Choice Award. Proceeds from Concert of Arias 2019 benefit the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and the Houston Grand Opera Studio.

This is the third year the Concert of Arias will be streamed live on Facebook, and the second for livestreaming on YouTube. The livestream will be hosted by HGO Studio Alumnae Andrea Carroll. She is currently performing in *The Pearl Fishers* as Leila and placed first in the 2012 Concert of Arias. Carroll will interview current and former HGO Studio artists during the

intermission while viewers cast their votes for an Online Viewers' Choice Award. The winner will be announced during the second portion of the program along with the other winners.

This year's Concert of Arias is chaired by **Elizabeth and Richard Husseini**. The evening begins with a champagne reception at 6 p.m. and the vocal competition commences at 7 p.m. Current HGO Studio artists will also perform. Following the concert, artists, patrons, and underwriters will be seated for a dinner post-concert.

Since its inception 42 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.

Biographies:

Andres Acosta

Tenor

Andres Acosta opened the 2018–19 season in the leading role of Timothy Laughlin in Minnesota Opera's *Fellow Travelers* by Gregory Spears. In concert, he debuted with the Cincinnati Symphony in its autumn pops concert, the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra in Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, and LOFTrecital for Bernstein's *Songfest*. Acosta joined Theater Latté Da's national tour of Peter Rothstein's *All is Calm*. In 2019, he reprises the role of Arcadio in *Florencia en el Amazonas* with Pensacola Opera. In the 2017–18 season, Acosta was an apprentice in San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera program, after which he joined the resident artist program at Minnesota Opera. Acosta is a recipient of Opera America's 2018 Career Blueprints. He received an encouragement award as a Central Region finalist for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2017.

Katherine DeYoung

Mezzo-soprano

Katherine DeYoung, originally from Traverse City, Michigan, is currently a member of the Michigan Opera Theatre Studio. Recently, she completed her master's degree at the University of Houston, where she performed Isabella in *L'italiana in Algeri*, Gertrude in *Roméo et Juliette*, and Elizabeth Proctor in *The Crucible*. Her favorite role is the title role in *Carmen*, which she performed with Opera in the Ozarks. This summer, she will return to Santa Fe Opera for a second year as a member of the apprentice singer program. This season with Michigan Opera Theatre, she will perform Sandman and cover Hansel in *Hänsel und Gretel* and sing the roles of Old Lady in *Candide*, Mae in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*; she will cover Olga in *Eugene Onegin*. DeYoung is a district winner of the 2018 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and is an alumna of Michigan State University.

Anna Dugan

Soprano

Anna Dugan's previous roles include the Marquise de Merteuil in Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons*, which was recorded commercially for the first time by Albany Records; Violetta in *La traviata* with Aspen Opera Center; and the soprano soloist in Dvořák's *Te Deum* and *Stabat Mater*. Dugan was a national semifinalist in the 2017 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and has received prizes from the Gerda Lissner International Voice Competition, the George London Competition, and the Gerda Lissner Lieder/Song Competition. She is a recipient of the Richard F. Gold Career Grant from the Shoshana Foundation. She holds degrees from Columbia University and Manhattan School of Music.

Kathryn Henry

Soprano

Kathryn Henry, a Wisconsin native, recently received her master of music degree from the Juilliard School as a Toulman Scholar. Her opera credits include Arminda in *La finta giardiniera*, Governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, First Lady in *The Magic Flute*, the title role in *Suor Angelica*, Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, and L'écureuil in *L'enfant et les sortilèges*. She has appeared as a guest soloist with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra. In recital, she has performed alongside pianists Brian Zeger, Craig Rutenburg, and Mikael Eliassen. She has been a finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers (2018). She has won awards in the Opera Index Vocal Competition and the UW-Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra Concerto and Aria Competition, as well as first prize in the Upper College Women category at the national level of the NATS Student Auditions.

Yunuet Laguna

Soprano

Yunuet Laguna, from Zacatecas, Mexico, is completing her degree in vocal performance at the National Conservatory of Music (CNMM) in Mexico City. Other training includes the Irma González Master Course, led by professors of the School of Music from Arizona State University. In 2015, she was a semifinalist in the Carlo Morelli Vocal Competition and in 2018 was named a finalist in the Sinaloa International Vocal Competition, where she earned the San Miguel Institute of Bel Canto McClain Prize. She is a winner of the inaugural San Miguel, Mexico, district in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and will represent the Gulf region at the regional auditions in New Orleans in 2019. Laguna has been a soloist with the CNMM Orquesta, Toluca Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Mexiquense Symphonic Orquesta, and most recently was the soprano soloist for Mozart's Requiem with the San Miguel Allende Opera Chorus.

William Meinert

Bass

This season, William Meinert performs the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* with Baltimore Concert Opera, Commentator in Derrick Wang's opera *Scalia/Ginsburg* with Opera North, Vodník in Dvořák's *Rusalka* with Madison Opera, and Le Duc in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* with Pensacola Opera. During the 2017–18 season, he was the baritone soloist in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with Baltimore Youth Orchestra, the bass II soloist in Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* with American Bach Soloists, as well as Uberto in Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* with Commonwealth Lyric Theater, Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*, and Le philosophe in Massenet's *Chérubin* at Peabody Institute. Meinert has studied privately with Russell Penney, with Dolora Zajick at her Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, and currently studies with William Sharp at Peabody Institute.

Mary Beth Nelson

Mezzo-soprano

Mary Beth Nelson is a native of Orange County, California, and a former member of the HGO Chorus. At the Glimmerglass Festival, she sang the role of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in *Scalia/Ginsburg*. In previous seasons, she was a Studio artist with the Tri-Cities Opera and Florida Grand Opera. In November 2017 she made her FGO house debut as Alisa in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Most recently, she debuted with Opera Las Vegas as Angelina in *La Cenerentola*. This season she debuts with Bronx Opera in Menotti's *The Consul* as the Secretary. She currently resides in Manhattan and studies voice with Laura Brooks Rice.

Nicholas Newton

Bass-baritone

A San Diego native, Nicholas Newton has pursued his passion for singing through gospel, jazz, musical theater, and now operatic performance. Notable performances include the roles of Count Ceprano in *Rigoletto* and Capulet (cover) in *Roméo et Juliette* with Wolf Trap Opera, Achilla in *Julius Caesar* at Rice University, and L'arbre and Le fauteuil in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* at Aspen Music Festival under the baton of Robert Spano. Newton was a winner at the 2018 San Diego District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the first place winner of the 2018 Virginia & Susan Hawk Competition; he has won top prize in voice three years in a

row at the Musical Merit Foundation Scholarship Auditions. An alumnus of HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy, he will perform the role of Blicht in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* at Rice University in March, under the baton of Patrick Summers.

Elliott Paige

Tenor

Elliott Paige, a native of Hampton, Virginia, most recently performed as an apprentice artist with the Santa Fe Opera. In 2019, he will participate in the premiere performances of *Today It Rains* with Opera Parallèle and American Opera Projects and will return to the Santa Fe Opera, where he will sing Parpignol in *La bohème* and cover Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*. Other recent credits include singing as an apprentice artist with Palm Beach Opera, where he covered Governor/Ragotski in *Candide* and Spoletta in *Tosca*. As a young artist with Glimmerglass Opera, he performed Giacomo in the American premiere of the Donizetti rarity *L'assedio di Calais* (The Siege of Calais), and as a Gerdine Young Artist with Opera Theater of St. Louis, he premiered the role of Bombur Yarmbazal in *Shalimar the Clown*. As a Manhattan School student, he performed Duncan in Bloch's *Macbeth*, and Orlando in Haydn's *Orlando Paladino*.

Rebecca Pedersen

Soprano

Rebecca Pedersen has performed as a soloist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the New York City Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, and the Utah Symphony. She has won honors in a number of competitions, including the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, first prize in the Licia Albanese–Puccini Competition, winner of the Utah Symphony Salute to Youth Competition, third prize in the Gerda Lissner Competition, and grant winner in the George London Competition. Pedersen made her professional opera debut in Utah Opera's 2016 production of *Aida* and is currently completing a master of music degree at the Juilliard School. She is an alumna of HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy.

Alexandra Razskazoff

Soprano

Alexandra Razskazoff, the third prize winner in Concert of Arias 2016 and an alumna of HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy, recently completed a year as a resident artist at the Academy of Vocal Arts (AVA), where she portrayed Violetta Valéry in *La traviata* and other roles. While a 2016–17 resident artist with Minnesota Opera, she sang Wellgunde in *Das Rheingold* and Musetta in *La bohème*. She participated in the Merola Opera Program (2017) and was an apprentice at Santa Fe Opera (2015–16). Other credits include First Lady in *The Magic Flute* and Countess Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Juilliard School, where she earned a master's degree; and Blanche de la Force in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Abigail Williams in *The Crucible*, and L'écureuil in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* at the Peabody Conservatory, where she earned her bachelor's degree. Last fall, Razskazoff took first prize in AVA's Giargiari Bel Canto Voice Competition and second prize in the Mario Lanza Competition.

Angel Romero

Tenor

Angel Romero's recent opera performances include Tamino in Yale University's production of *The Magic Flute*, and Monostatos in *The Magic Flute* and Ruiz in *Il trovatore* as a young apprentice artist for the Central City Opera. On the concert stage, he recently was the tenor soloist in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Yale Philharmonia under the baton of Marin Alsop. In the summer of 2019, Romero will join the Santa Fe Opera as a young artist. He is currently finishing his master's degree in music at Yale University under the tutelage of Richard and Doris Cross.

William Guanbo Su

Bass

A native of China, now based in New York City, William Guanbo Su is pursuing his master's degree at the Juilliard School under the guidance of Cynthia Hoffmann. In 2018, he was a member of Gerdine Young Artist program at at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and

he has also been a voice fellow at the Aspen Music Festival and School, where he played as the principal role of Don Basilio in *The Barber of Seville*. Other opera roles include Pluton in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, Herr Reich in Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Seneca in Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*. He has also concentrated on German lieder at the Franz Schubert Institute in Vienna, where he was coached by Emmy Ameling, Helmut Deutsch, Robert Holl, and others. In 2017, he made his Carnegie Hall solo debut with the Cecilia Chorus of New York and won first prize in the Gerda Lissner Lieder Competition the same year.

Elena Villalón

Soprano

Originally from Austin, Texas, soprano Elena Villalón is finishing her undergraduate degree at the University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music (CCM) under the tutelage of William McGraw. She was recently named a winner of the Indiana District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She has been a vocal fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center and is an alumna of HGO's 2018 Young Artists Vocal Academy. Upcoming performances include Adele in *Die Fledermaus* at CCM, Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as a Gerdine Young Artist, and a return to the Tanglewood Music Center as a soprano fellow. Previous appearances at CCM include Lucy in *The Telephone* and Miss Wordsworth in *Albert Herring*. She is the Nippert Scholar at CCM and has won first prize in the 2018 Three Arts Competition, 2018 Dayton Opera Guild Competition, and the 2017 CCM Undergraduate Voice Competition.

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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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