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Opera Colorado Presents its First Digital Performance Series: *An Afternoon of American Song*

Free performances of musical theater, cabaret, opera, and art song available in weekly installments starting August 3, 2020

Denver, CO (August 3, 2020)—Opera Colorado is proud to present a series of digital performances by our 2019-20 Artists in Residence, *An Afternoon of American Song*. Now in its fifth year, this program was originally slated for a live performance in March, but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Six pre-recorded video sets will be released on a weekly basis on operacolorado.org/aoas, to Opera Colorado's email list, and through our social media channels. Audience members can follow and promote the series with the hashtag #ThisIsAmericanSong. A program book and performer bios can be found on operacolorado.org/aoas.

The theme of this year's program is "Strands," and it explores how each and every life weaves together to create the fabric of our world. The program is comprised of six sets featuring repertoire by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, Jeff Blumenkrantz, Stephen Sondheim, and others. Initial rehearsals and coaching were conducted remotely, with artists and staff sheltering at home throughout the metro area. During production at the Opera Center, measures were put in place to keep everyone involved safe, including limiting the number of people present and ensuring social distancing.

"An Afternoon of American Song has become one of our most treasured programs outside of the opera house. When we realized that we couldn't have a live performance, we immediately set about finding a different way to present it," says Cherity Koepke, director of *An Afternoon of American Song*. "For me, it's a sign that there are ways to produce great art even when faced with major challenges. Though the experience will be different than in years' past, we hope that it's just as compelling and enjoyable and provides a few moments of joy during a very unsettled time."

An Afternoon of American Song is sponsored by Pamela Beardsley, Penelope Lewis, and Carol Whitley.

About Opera Colorado's Artists in Residence Program

The Opera Colorado Artist in Residence Program is vital to the company's mission of bringing opera to thousands of people across the Rocky Mountain region. Each season, the Artists in Residence perform in schools, community centers, and other venues across the state; take on select mainstage roles for Opera Colorado; and are the featured performers in the annual Student Matinee. Their eight-month residency in Denver also includes training and coaching from artistic staff and guest artists.

The Artist in Residence Program is sponsored by Ken and Donna Barrow, with additional support from Patrick Spieles.

Performer Biographies

Members of the 2019-20 Opera Colorado Artists in Residence



Laura Soto-Bayomi (soprano) is establishing herself as a passionate and versatile performer, equally at home on the concert and operatic stages. A native of Secaucus, NJ, Ms. Soto-Bayomi has performed with Amore Opera in NYC, and was the soprano soloist in Mozart's Requiem with the Brearley Singers at Riverside Church. During the summer of 2018, Ms. Soto-Bayomi performed the role of Magda in Kristine McIntyre's production of *La Rondine* with Oberlin in Italy's Arezzo Opera Festival. Ms. Soto-Bayomi has enjoyed summers as a Young Artist with the Chautauqua Opera Company (2015-17), performing the roles of Norina in *Don Pasquale*, Peep-Bo in *The Mikado*, Soprano 1 in Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*, and also sang in art song recitals and musical theatre cabarets. Other roles include Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*), Zweite Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*), Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*) and Climene (*L'Egisto*). Ms. Soto-Bayomi was a New England District Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Vocal Competition ('15) and a NJ State Opera Competition Finalist ('14). Ms. Soto-Bayomi holds degrees from New England Conservatory (BM) and Bard College Conservatory's Graduate Vocal Arts Program (MM) where she was a student of Patricia Misslin. *Sponsored by Laurence & Cynthia Chan and Agatha Kessler & Curtis Fentress.*



Kira Dills-DeSurra (mezzo-soprano) is a vibrant American mezzo-soprano whose magnetic stage presence has an effortless charm and truth. During the 2019-20 Season, she returned to Opera Colorado as an Artist in Residence to cover the role of Rosina (*The Barber of Seville*). She also performed Hansel (*Hansel and Gretel*) and Carmen (*Carmen*) in Opera Colorado's touring productions. In the 2018-19 Season, she debuted with Opera Colorado as Flora (*La Traviata*), Gertrude Stein in Tom Cipulo's *After Life*, and sang a performance of Cherubino in Mozart's timeless masterpiece *The Marriage of Figaro*. She was also featured as Stéphano (*Romeo and Juliet*) and Hansel (*Hansel and Gretel*) in Opera Colorado's touring productions. Kira has been an Apprentice Artist with Central City Opera for two summers singing Zweite Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Mercédès (*Carmen*). She hails from Petaluma, California and earned her Artist Diploma and Master of Music from Roosevelt University: Chicago College of Performing Arts and her Bachelor of Music from the University of Southern California. *Sponsored by Gayle & Gary Landis.*



Thomas Cilluffo (tenor) received his MM in Voice Performance in April of 2017 from the University of Michigan where he studied under the legendary tenor, George Shirley. Tom grew up in Traverse City in northern Michigan where he developed his love for music and theater, but he also has many other passions. He is an avid craftsman and enjoys making jewelry, woodworking, and blacksmithing. For the past seven years, Tom has held a “second job” making fine custom conducting batons for orchestral and choral conductors all over the world. He’s even been known to make a magic wand or two! Other than making loud noises while singing opera, he also plays the Highland Bagpipes, making him a favorite of the neighbors... Before coming to Opera Colorado, Tom was the tenor resident artist with Portland Opera in Portland, Oregon where he sang Contino Belfiore in *La Finta Giardiniera*, Borsa in *Rigoletto*, and the Sergeant of Police in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Other credits include Spoletta in Portland Summerfest’s *Tosca*, Adolfo Pirelli in Pittsburgh Festival Opera’s *Sweeney Todd*, Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), and Roméo (*Roméo et Juliette*). *Sponsored by David & Elizabeth Budd and Martha & Will Tracey.*



Isaiah Feken (baritone) will return for his second season as an Opera Colorado Artist in Residence in 2020-21. Last season, he performed in the mainstage production (Police Sergeant) and student matinee performance (Figaro) of *The Barber of Seville*. Originally from Tulsa, Oklahoma, Isaiah received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Tulsa and his master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Georgia. Performances with UGA Opera Theatre include Malatesta (*Don Pasquale*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Count Almaviva (*The Marriage of Figaro*), and the title role in *Don Giovanni*. Other credits include *Falstaff* (Ford) with the Crested Butte Music Festival, as well as *Kiss Me, Kate!* (Fred Graham) and the world premiere of *A New Kind of Fallout* (Harry Stritch) with Pittsburgh Festival Opera. As an Artist in Residence for Opera Colorado’s 2020-21 Season, he will perform in the touring productions of *The Barber of Seville* (Figaro), in the mainstage production (Remendado) and student matinee performance (Escamillo) of *Carmen*, and in the mainstage production of *The Shining* (Horace Derwent). *Sponsored by Donald K. Braden and Ken & Barbara Laff.*



Eric McConnell (bass-baritone) has trained as a young artist with Central City Opera, Opera Saratoga, Seagle Music Colony, and the Aspen Opera Center. McConnell made his debut with Opera Colorado in 2018 as Dr. Grenvil in *La Traviata*. With the company’s touring productions, he performed Sandman in *Hansel and Gretel* and Friar Laurence in *Romeo & Juliet*. Other past roles for McConnell include Blitch (*Susannah*), Bartolo/Basilio (*The Barber of Seville*), Frank (*Die Fledermaus*), and Sarastro (*The Magic Flute*). Additional career highlights include singing Elisha Fitzgibbon in the orchestral premiere of Evan Mack’s *Roscoe* with the Albany Symphony Orchestra, in a performance featuring renowned soprano Deborah Voigt. McConnell holds degrees from Northwestern University and the University of Miami. *Sponsored by Joyce de Roos and Marlis Smith.*



Tyler Tucker (piano) recently finished a degree in opera coaching at Florida State University, where he was principal pianist for *Candide*, *La Traviata*, *Prince of Players*, and *Alcina*, for which he also served as continuo harpsichordist. He also conducted Menotti's *The Medium* and played the U.S. premiere of Michael Williams's *The Prodigal Child* with Florida State Opera. Before returning to FSU, Tucker was a staff pianist and coach at the University of Houston for three years. In 2018, he served as rehearsal pianist for Opéra Louisiane's production of *Hansel and Gretel* and also as pianist for Spotlight on Opera's production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. Originally from Big Spring, Texas, he holds degrees in voice performance from both the University of Houston and Florida State University. *Sponsored by Dr. Stephen L. Dilts.*

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ABOUT OPERA COLORADO

Opera Colorado has served as a cornerstone of Denver's cultural community since 1981. In addition to its mainstage performances at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House each season, the company affirms its commitment to the future of the art form by annually presenting new works; with its nationally recognized Artist in Residence Program that trains the next generation of opera performers; and by each year reaching more than 45,000 students and adults through its many education and community engagement programs throughout the Rocky Mountain region. For more information, visit operacolorado.org.