



Studio Buddies Newsletter

Published semi-annually by the Houston Grand Opera Guild Studio Buddies

Winter 2007

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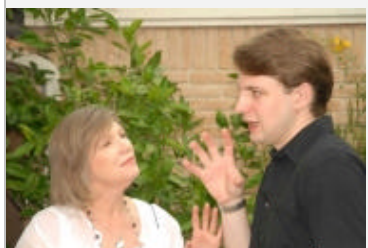
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Tamara Wilson, Joyce DiDonato & Catherine Cook backstage during HGO's *La Cenerentola*



18th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers



Imelda Gott & Liam Bonner at the Farewell Party (note Liam's hair and its utter perfection)

Welcome

Welcome to the Winter 2007 edition of the Houston Grand Opera Studio Buddies Newsletter! This year brought us visits from many of our distinguished Studio alumni, including Joyce DiDonato, Nikolay Didenko, Marie Lenormand, just to name a few. The reputation of the Studio continues to shine into the latter half of the 2007 as we saw the professional opera and role debut of Studio alumna Tamara Wilson as Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera*.

2007 in Review

Winter-Spring 2007

The year started off with a bang as **Beau Gibson**, tenor, in his first year as a Studio artist, jumped in at the last minute to perform the title role in *Faust* for a performance for an indisposed colleague. Mr. Gibson was joined by fellow Studio artist **Liam Bonner**, baritone, as Wagner and Studio alumna **Marie Lenormand**, mezzo-soprano, performing Siébel, opposite the ultimate Mephistopheles, **Samuel Ramey**. Houston Grand Opera welcomed back Studio alumna **Joyce DiDonato**, mezzo-soprano, as Angelina in *La Cenerentola*, joined by fellow Studio alumnus **Nikolai Didenko**, bass, as Alidoro and third-year Studio artist **Tamara Wilson**, soprano, as Clorinda.

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Ask first-year artist **Jamie Barton**. This January **Ms. Barton** participated in the Marilyn Horne Foundation *The Song Continues...* Masterclass series at Carnegie Hall and was subsequently invited to perform the opening recital for the Marilyn Horne Foundation *On Wings of Song* Recital series with HGO Studio Music Director **Kathy Kelly**.

At the 18th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, Studio alumna **Joyce DiDonato** served as a guest judge. First, Second, and Third place winners were **Faith Sherman**, mezzo-soprano, **James J. Kee**, baritone (also the Audience Choice Award), and **Jamie**

Barton, mezzo-soprano, respectively. All three winners are now members of the Houston Grand Opera Studio.

March saw a continuation of the sold-out Recitals at Rienzi series, recitals by Studio artists in the intimate and beautiful setting of the European Decorative Arts wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. First-year artists **Albina Shagimuratova**, soprano, **Maria (Masha) Markina**, mezzo-soprano, **Beau Gibson** and second-year artist **Ryan McKinny**, bass-baritone, performed works by Johannes Brahms with pianists **Kathy Kelly** (HGO Studio Music Director) and **Eric Melear** (HGO Studio 2002-04). In mid-March HGO put on its Studio Scenes program with performances at Ovarations. Also in March, **Evan Rogister** was invited to the Los Angeles Opera to consult on a WNET Public Television (producers of PBS's Great Performances) and EuroArts co-production of a television broadcast and DVD of Kurt Weill's *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*.

Verdi's *Aida* was the highlight of April with first-year Studio artist **Beau Gibson** as the Messenger and a truly haunting performance by second-year Studio artist **Tamara Wilson** as the High Priestess, with alternate-cast appearances by **Ryan McKinny** as Ramfis, and Studio alumnus **Chen-Ye Yuan**, baritone, singing Amonasro.

The Cunning Little Vixen by

Janáček was on the bill for May with **Hector Vásquez**, baritone and Studio Program Director, as the Forester. This production was truly a showcase for the Studio as all the singing members of the Studio were on stage. Later that month Houston Grand Opera presented two free performances of Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* at Houston's Miller Outdoor Theater conducted by first-year Studio artist **Evan Rogister**, conducting fellow. This was performed entirely by HGO Studio artists, with **Fiona Murphy** (Hänsel), **Rebekah Camm** (Gretel), **Jennifer Root** (Mother), **Ryan McKinny** (Father), **Albina Shagimuratova** (Sandman & Dew Fairy), and last, but certainly not least, **Liam Bonner** as the highlight of the show, the 15-foot Witch. The 2006/07 Season was wrapped up with the final Recital at Rienzi and the Buddies held their farewell party for Studio artists.

Summer 2007

Summer 2007 saw five Studio artists working together at the Wolf Trap Opera Company as part of the Filene Young Artists program: **Rebekah Camm**, **Faith Sherman**, **Beau Gibson**, **Liam Bonner**, and **James J. Kee**. HGO Studio artists were in every production at Wolf Trap starting with *Die Zauberflöte* featuring **Rebekah Camm**, **Beau Gibson**, **Faith Sherman**, and **Liam Bonner** in principal roles, *Volpone* with **Faith Sherman** as Erminella, *L'Étoile* with **James J. Kee** as Tapioca, and ending with

Carmen with **Rebekah Camm**, **James J. Kee**, **Liam Bonner**, and **Beau Gibson**, and featuring Studio alumna **Denyce Graves** in the title role.

Alicia Gianni, soprano, spent the summer teaching at the University of Washington, and topped off her summer with a three-week visit to Florence to study Italian. Most recently **Ms. Gianni** won the district Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and will be attending the regionals in 2008! In June we were delighted to learn that **Albina Shagimuratova** was awarded the gold medal in the highly prestigious International Tchaikovsky Competition, held in Moscow. Soon after this **Ms. Shagimuratova** sang for the President of Kazakhstan.

Jamie Barton was a winner of the 2007 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She also participated in the Tanglewood Music Institute program. **Ms. Barton** made her professional operatic debut this year with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis as Annina in *La Traviata*.

During the summer, **Ryan McKinny** returned to the Aspen Music Festival to perform Schubert's *Winterreise* in recital accompanied on the piano by **Richard Bado**. He was also selected to represent the United States in the 2007 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, where he was a finalist in the Rosenblatt Recital Song Prize. He was also a Grand Finalist in the 2007 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. **Mr. McKinny** will leave the HGO Studio in January and has signed on with Columbia Artists Management, Inc. (CAMI) and will be managed by Betsy Crittenden and Robert Scott. We wish him great success in all his endeavors.

Fall 2007

The HGO Guild Studio Buddies kicked off the 2007/08 Season by bringing in breakfast for the Studio artists' first day at work. Be sure to ask **Jamie Barton** about the time she was

walking to her first day's work and a complete stranger walked up to her asked, "Excuse me, are you Jamie Barton?" First rule of being a Buddy: don't scare the newbies, they startle easily during their first few days. The following week was the Studio Buddies "Welcome Back" party. Studio artist **Rebekah Camm** was unable to attend as she was performing *Marzelline* in Beethoven's *Fidelio* with the Los Angeles Opera. Studio buddy **Asad Jafari** was also unable to attend because, at the time of the party, he was in the audience at the LA Opera watching **Rebekah Camm**!

In October, the HGO Guild Buddies took all the Studio artists for a 90-minute tour on the Houston Ship Channel and around the Port of Houston on the *M/V Sam Houston*. Before the tour started we were treated to a serenade by a full Mexican mariachi band performed by MECA. On the boat a delicious Mexican dinner was served and our Studio artists got to see one of the largest ports in the world. During the boat ride we were privy to a sight both awe-inspiring and somewhat terrifying: **Liam Bonner's** hair seems to defy all rules of physics and thermodynamics since it is always perfect. Even on the prow of the boat as the wind was blowing, Liam's hair did not move.

The first performance of the 2007/2008 season was a Recital at Rienzi, featuring **Maria Markina**, **Jamie Barton** and **Faith Sherman** and **Beau Gibson**. The following day was the HGO Guild's 17th Annual Awards Brunch where Buddy **Jo Lyday** was awarded the Guild's Volunteer of the Year and HGO Artistic Administrator **Diane Zola** (former Studio Director) received the coveted Bravo Award for professional excellence. Performing at the Awards Brunch were **Maria Markina**, **Ryan McKinny**, and **Richard Bado** the pianist.

Opening night for the season was October 19th with Verdi's

Un Ballo in Maschera featuring the professional debut of Studio alumna, **Tamara Wilson**, soprano, in the role of Amelia. This production also featured Studio alumnus **Nikolai Didenko** and current Studio artists including **Ryan McKinny** as Samuel, **Liam Bonner** as Silvano, and **Beau Gibson** as the Magistrate.

In October, Studio artists and their community partners performed the relevant movements from *The Refuge* for community centers around Houston. Studio artists soprano **Alicia Gianni**, **Faith Sherman**, **Jamie Barton** and **James J. Kee** performed in *Taste This!*, consisting of flights of wine paired with a cabaret of songs at the Tasting Room in Houston. Second-year Studio artists **Albina Shagimuratova**, **Maria Markina**, **Beau Gibson**, and third-year artist **Ryan McKinny** performed with Da Camera of Houston.

November saw the opening of the delightful *La Fille du Régiment* by Donizetti with Studio appearances by **Liam Bonner** and **James J. Kee** making his Houston Grand Opera debut as the Corporal. It was also the first professional opera that first-year artist **Joseph Li** has coached & helped in rehearsals. Second-year pianist & coach **Grant Loehnig** made his Houston Grand Opera stage debut as the Piano Teacher, a part with no speaking or singing but nevertheless **Mr. Loehnig** received thunderous applause for his hilarious portrayal of the lasciviously tipsy Piano Teacher intermittently flirting with and then succumbing to the wiles of the Majordomo of the Marquise.

On November 10th, Houston Grand Opera performed the World Premiere of *The Refuge* by Theofanidis/Lax to sold-out crowds. *The Refuge* featured Studio artists **Rebekah Camm**, **Albina Shagimuratova**, **Beau Gibson**, **Liam Bonner**, **Ryan McKinny**, and making their Houston Grand Opera debuts were first-year mezzo-soprani **Jamie Barton** and **Faith Sherman**.



Hector Vásquez, Albina Shagimuratova & Fred Gott at the Farewell Party



Rebekah Camm & Asad Jafari backstage at LA Opera



Jo Lyday & Jamie Barton at the HGO Guild Awards Brunch

Studio Snippets

Hector Vásquez, on working with all the Studio artists for *The Cunning Little Vixen*, "A big highlight for this year was the experience of singing with these artists, who are so talented. I was really nervous to do it. I have such respect for them as artists and felt I had to measure up."

Rebekah Camm is a force to be reckoned with in *Trivial Pursuit* since she has a ridiculous amount of random facts in her head.

Alicia Gianni would one day love to be on the Food Network with her own show called *The Singing Contessa*.

Jamie Barton used to teach wood carving at Boy Scout camp during the summers.

Masha Markina is a huge film buff, especially because a lot of her classmates were studying cinema in college. She is a big fan of Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar.

Beau Gibson's favorite color is orange.

Liam Bonner has had eight years of Irish Step Dancing.

Ryan McKinny loves to golf and go sailing.

Joseph Li has never chewed a piece of gum in his life, and is an expert foosball player.

Grant Loehnig's first paid music gig was when he was 8, singing with his sister at an event emceed by Miss Missouri. "I thought I was pretty hot stuff," he says.



November was concluded with a Recital at Rienzi entitled "Waiting..." featuring all of the singers and pianist/coaches from the Studio, and joined by **Kathy Kelly** on the piano.

The year drew to a close with

Studio Alumni News

Tamara Wilson (2005-07), has recently signed with Betsy Crittenden at Columbia Artists Management, Inc. (CAMI) and will be appearing as First Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* in Houston in the Spring. In 2009, Ms. Wilson will be appearing in the title role in *Aïda* with Opera Australia in Sydney.

Fiona Murphy (2004-07), has performed numerous concerts in England and her native Ireland, including selections from Mozart, Verdi, and Bellini at The Great Hall, Downshire Estate outside of Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Durufle's *Requie*, Colin Mawby's *A Song of Hope* (World Premiere), and Gareth Valentine's *Requiem* as part of the Concert for World Aids Day at Cadogan Hall in London. This Fall Ms. Murphy was with the English National Opera in London performing the role of Mercedes in Sally Potter's production of *Carmen* and covering the role of *Carmen*, played by Alice Coote. When Ms. Coote fell ill, Ms. Murphy had to step up to the plate and she sang the lead role of *Carmen* for three performances at the Coliseum, and was very warmly received.

Joshua Hopkins (2003-05), started the year in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* and Falla's *La Vida Breve* with Opera Carolina. In February he sang Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* with the Houston Symphony. Mr. Hopkins then went to L'Opéra de Montréal to sing Masetto in *Don Giovanni* followed by Momus in Rameau's *Platée* with the Santa Fe Opera. In September Mr. Hopkins performed *Peer Gynt* with the Cleveland Orchestra. In July of this year Mr. Hopkins was honored as the recipient of the Sylvia Gelber Foundation Award from

all the Studio singing artists in *Studio Scenes* December 7th, where the artists performed scenes from *Das Rheingold*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, directed by **Sandra Bernhard** and with

musical direction from **Kathy Kelly**, assisted by Studio piano/coaching artists **Grant Loehnig** and **Joseph Li**. The Studio repeated the *Scenes* program in San Antonio on December 11th.

the Canada Arts Council. Additionally, Mr. Hopkins received a grant from the Canada Arts Council to study Marcello from *La Bohème* and Britten's *Billy Budd* in London this Fall. In personal news, Mr. Hopkins and his wife celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary in Paris and we wish him the heartiest of congratulations and look forward to his return to Houston this spring.

Angela Niederloh (2001-04), a native of Portland, Oregon, is performing on the same stage as her mother did – Ms. Niederloh's mother was a member of the Portland Opera Chorus for 20 years. Local newswriters have used the phrase 'Cinderella story' to describe this innovative young singer who has undertaken initiatives to make opera more accessible. At the Portland Opera earlier this year she sang in a production of *Die Zauberflöte*, and this November she performed the lead role of Angelina in *La Cenerentola*, realizing a true Cinderella story.

Nicholas Phan (2002-05), Lindoro in *L'italiana in Algeri* (Caen), (Lille), and Lurcanio in *Ariodante* (Frankfurt).

Barbara Quintiliani (2000-02), Marguerite in *Faust* (New Orleans).

Scott Scully (1999-02), Raoul de St Briocche in *The Merry Widow* (Dallas), and Don José in *Carmen* (Edmonton).

Ana María Martínez (1994-95), had another exciting her as the opera world saw her performing *Fiordiligi* in *Così fan tutte* (Miami), and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* (Covent Garden, London, Opéra National de Paris, and Houston). 2007 also saw Ms. Martinez performing in four concerts with Plácido

Domingo at the Teatro Real in Madrid, Wiesbaden, Germany, Ravinia Festival in Chicago, and at the Salzburg Festival, in an all Zarzuela concert for TV entitled, "Amor, Vida de Mi Vida." This year Ms. Martínez received the best birthday gift of all. On March 11th Ms. Martínez and her husband Chad Shelton (1997-2000) welcomed their son Lucas Alexander Martínez Shelton into the world, weighing in at 6 lb. 14 oz. Our congratulations and well wishes go out to them.

Laquita Mitchell (2002-05), Musetta in *La Bohème* (Los Angeles), Clara in *Porgy and Bess* (Los Angeles), and Micaëla in *Carmen* (Costa Mesa) other news, Ms. Mitchell was married in April to Captain David Patton. Studio alums **Norman Reinhardt** and **Jeremy Frank** performed, and the reception was held at Buddies **Bill and Lucila Haase's** house. Other Buddies participating in the wedding included **Janeé Sims, Adelma Graham, Jo Lyday, Roxanne Cargill**, and **Peter Weston**.

Chen-Ye Yuan (1998-01), Chou En-Lai in *Nixon in China* (Cincinnati), Captain Anckarström in *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Boston), and Amonasro in *Aïda* (Houston)).

Nikolay Didenko (2003-05), Samuel in *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Houston Grand Opera), Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* (Bilbao), Alidoro in *La Cenerentola* (Houston), and was featured as the guest soloist at the Alte Oper (Frankfurt), the Rheingau Musikfestival, and at the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall (Moscow).

Jon Kolbet (1992-94), Monostatos in *Die Zauberflöte* (Eugene, Oregon), and the Schoolmaster and Mosquito in Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Houston).

Aaron Judisch (2001-03), von Asterberg in *The Student Prince*, Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Prinz Sternschnuppe in *Frau Luna*, Albert in *Werther*, Alvaro in *Florencia en el Amazonas*, and Príncipe Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly* (all in Heidelberg).

Oren Gradus (1999-02), Colline in *La Bohème* (Los Angeles), The Old Hebrew in *Samson et Dalila* (San Francisco Opera), Leporello in *Don Giovanni* (San Francisco Opera), and Timur in *Turandot* (Metropolitan Opera), Sir Giorgio in *I puritani* (Metropolitan Opera).

Nicole Heaston (1995-97), Musetta in *La Bohème* (alternating with Laquita Mitchell) (Los Angeles), Sabina in *Adriano in Siria* (Jesi), and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* (Metropolitan Opera).

Denyce Graves (1988-90), Baba the Turk in *Rake's Progress* (San Francisco Opera), Carmen in *Carmen* (Wolf Trap, Athens), Dalila in *Samson et Dalila* (Miami, San Diego), and Judit in *A kékszakállú herceg vára* (*Bluebeard's Castle*) (Dallas).

Joyce DiDonato, mezzo-soprano (HGO Studio 1996-98) experienced a year of tremendous triumphs in 2007. In April Ms. DiDonato was honored with the Metropolitan Opera's Beverly Sills Artist Award. In August 2006 Ms. DiDonato was married to her "real-life Lindoro," conductor Leonardo Vordoni. Ms. DiDonato and her husband were finally able to take their honeymoon this past summer and they visited South Africa where Ms. DiDonato was able to indulge in her newly acquired passion for photography.

Ms. DiDonato started 2007 with the title role in *La Cenerentola* at Houston Grand Opera followed by a triumphant run as Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at the Met. She made role debuts as Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* in San Francisco and the title role in Handel's *Alcina* with Alan Curtis and Il

Complesso Barocco, which included recordings and concerts at the MITO Festival in Milan and Poissy, Paris. This was followed by the title role in *Ariodante*, Grand Théâtre de Genève, and Ms. DiDonato can currently be seen reprising her role as Angelina in *La Cenerentola* in Barcelona.

Recently Ms. DiDonato was asked to fill in for Susan Graham who had fallen ill and was unable to sing at the Richard Tucker Music Foundation Annual Gala in New York. Ms. DiDonato also gave recitals at La Scala, Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, and the BBC Proms, just to name a few.

Ms. DiDonato released two CDs this year, *¡Pasión!*, a recital of 20th century works on Spanish themes, and Handel's *Floridante*, with Il Complesso Barocco, under the baton of Alan Curtis.



Beverly Sills, Joyce DiDonato & Agnes Varis

Studio Artists on what they've enjoyed in the Buddies Program

Albina Shagimuratova likes the Buddies program since it provides a lot of support for singers who come from other countries with completely different cultures.

Jamie Barton really enjoyed the boat tour and drinking margaritas on the bayou!

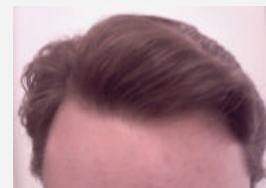
Masha Markina is a big reader and her buddy, Alice Gates, introduced her to works of Oscar Wilde that she didn't know existed before.

Liam Bonner enjoyed drag racing down Main St for last season's Buddy Welcome Party Treasure Hunt.

Ryan McKinny and his wife Tonya fondly remember the baby shower Bill and Lucilla Haase hosted for them. It was a generous way to be welcomed into the Houston Grand Opera family.

Joseph Li is a big admirer of Art Pryde's "Hall of Baseball". He says, "It is a thing of beauty and wonder. I highly encourage all studio baseball fans to spend a day (or several) browsing his collection."

Faith Sherman says, "The Buddies program is amazing. To have a group of people around whose main purpose is to make our lives easier and to be nice to us...I can't even say how great that is. We're so used to fending for ourselves that it's overwhelming (in a good way) to hear things like 'You should never ever take a taxi to the airport!!! Never!! Call me and I'll take you. And if I can't take you, one of the other Buddies will!' The Buddies are so loving, generous, and attentive, and they make us feel like superstars all the time. They're our Houston family."



In Memoriam

Houston Grand Opera lost a beloved member of its family this year. Jean Mallandaine passed away after a long illness on November 14, 2007, aged 73. Houston Grand Opera welcomed Ms. Mallandaine into its family in 1977 when she came as Head of Musical Studies for the new Studio program, originally only for a two-year appointment. She held this position for five years and also served as Head of HGO's Musical Staff in 1992. From 1982 to 1992 she held the title of Artistic Supervisor. She will be missed.

Dear readers,

We hope you've enjoyed this issue of the Houston Grand Opera Studio Buddies Newsletter. If we have made any omission or errors, please accept our apologies.

If you have news to report about yourself or about a Studio member, alumnus/alumna, staff member, or Buddy, or if you have any comments or suggestions, please email:

HGO Guild Studio Buddies Trustee, Wynne Mattison: theatrenthusiast@icqmail.com

Thank you and see you in the Spring!

Asad S. Jafari

HGO Guild Buddies Volunteer & Newsletter Editor