



Studio Buddies Newsletter

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Welcome

2008 has been another exciting year for the Houston Grand Opera Studio (HGOS) and its alumni. We are fortunate to continue the tradition of featuring Studio artists in productions, as well as welcoming back our distinguished alumni to the Wortham Center. We were sad to say goodbye to HGO Studio Director **Hector Vásquez** in Spring 2008, but were equally delighted to welcome **Laura Canning**, the new Studio Director for the 2008/09 season.

2008 in Review

Winter 2008

The 2007/08 season was an incredible one for recent HGO Studio alumna **Tamara Wilson (HGOS '05-'07)**. In her first year after the Studio, Tamara starred in two major roles in a world-class opera house! Following her portrayal of Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera*, Tamara was joined onstage in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Seraglio) by fellow HGO Studio alums **Nicholas Phan (HGOS '02-'05)** and **Heidi Stober (HGOS '04-'06)** in their hilarious depictions of Pedrillo and Blonde, respectively. Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute) gave us the chance to see current HGO Studio members **Maria "Masha" Markina**, **Jamie Barton**, **Albina Shagimuratova**, **Rebekah Camm**, **Beau Gibson**, and **Alicia Gianni**, as well as alumni **Jon Kolbet (HGOS '92-'94)** as the mischievous Monostatos and **Chen-Ye Yuan (HGOS '98-'01)** as the venerable Speaker of the Temple. The Magic Flute served to truly showcase the incredible talent of the HGO Studio as two members were in the top-billed featured roles. **Rebekah Camm** played the beautiful young Pamina, a role for which she received many accolades. Rebekah was also featured as the special guest in a September 2008 episode of NPR's "From the Top" in relation to this role. **Albina Shagimuratova** took on the formidable role of Queen of the Night. Former HGO Guild President and long-time

opera lover **Jess Carnes** said "It's the best Queen of the Night I've ever seen." Albina reprised this role at the Salzburg Music Festival in the summer of 2008 under the baton of legendary conductor Riccardo Muti to rave reviews. **Alicia Gianni** played a charming and adorable Papagena, showcasing the character's ethereal nature as well as kindly human aspects.

On February 8th, 2008, HGO held the the 19th Annual Concert of Arias, Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. From a field of more than 600 artists, HGO welcomed **Caitlin Lynch**, soprano, **Octavio Moreno**, baritone, and **Adam Cioffari**, bass-baritone, into the Houston Grand Opera Studio. Additionally, the HGO Studio also brought in two wonderful new pianist/coaches, **Stephen Hopkins** and **David Hanlon**. **Octavio Moreno** recently completed three years as a resident artist at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia where during 2008 he was featured in JUBILATE! A Concert of Sacred Music and Oratorio Masterpieces well as in Verdi's *La traviata*.

Spring 2008

HGO rounded out the season with two powerful tragedies, Puccini's *La bohème* and Britten's *Billy Budd*. For *La bohème* we welcomed home HGO Studio alumni **Joshua Hopkins (HGOS '03-'05)**, **Nikolay Didenko (HGOS '03-'05)**, and **Ana Maria Martinez (HGOS '94-'95)** who

were joined by current Studio members **Beau Gibson**, **Albina Shagimuratova**, and **Alicia Gianni**. It should be noted that this was Beau's first appearance as a clown at HGO (at least on stage). First-year Studio artist **Joseph Li** coached *La bohème* as well as the workshop for André Previn's *A Brief Encounter*, which will be premiered this season. HGO concluded the 2007/08 season with Benjamin Britten's interpretation of the Herman Melville novella *Billy Budd* starring HGO Studio alumnus **Daniel Belcher (HGOS '97-'99)** in the title role. Recent HGO Studio alumnus **Ryan McKinny (HGOS '05-'08)** returned to play Mr. Flint and was joined by current studio members **Beau Gibson**, **Liam Bonner**, and **James J. Kee**. *Billy Budd* was an exceptionally powerful opera with its tightly-knit all-male cast which gave an opportunity for every character to shine.

At the end of the season we were both sad and proud to say goodbye to **Liam Bonner**, baritone, **Rebekah Camm**, soprano, **Alicia Gianni**, soprano, **Grant Loehning**, pianist/coach, **Evan Rogister**, conducting fellow, and **Albina Shagimuratova**, soprano, as they completed their work with the HGO Studio and proceeded to launch their professional careers. The HGO Studio Buddies concluded the season with a pool party at **Jo Lyday's** home following the Art Car Parade where **Liam Bonner** sat on HGO's



▲ During a brief stop in Houston in November, Wynne Mattison got to spend some time with Albina Shagimuratova before heading to Palm Beach, Florida where she will be performing Gilda in *Rigoletto* in December.



▲ Asad Jafari with J.J. Kee and Beau Gibson at Wolf Trap Opera. J.J. and Beau are standing on telephone books, by the way.

award-winning art car entry and sang opera karaoke (slowest... largo... ever...).

Concluding the season was the Miller Outdoor Theater's presentation of Christopher Theofanidis's *The Refuge*, featuring **Albina Shagimuratova**, **Faith Sherman**, **Jamie Barton**, **Beau Gibson**, **Liam Bonner**, **Ryan McKinny**, and **Rebekah Camm** reprising her haunting role in the Central American movement. **David Hanlon** served as the principal coach for *The Refuge*.

Summer 2008

HGO Studio members and alumni keep themselves busy during the so-called "off-season" throughout the country and the world. This summer the HGO Studio seemed to collectively move eastward as thirteen of the young artists at the Wolf Trap Opera Company were HGO Studio members or alumni. Yes, you read correctly: THIRTEEN. Current HGO Guild President **Jennifer Sickler** referred to it as "HGO Studio East" while your author called it "HGO Studio-on-the-Potomac." **Ryan McKinny**, **Liam Bonner**, **Beau Gibson**, **Tamara Wilson**, **Marjorie Owens**, **Maria Markina**, **Rebekah Camm**, **James J. Kee**, **Jeremy Frank**, **Evan Rogister**, **Grant Loehnig**, **Eric Melear**, and **Joshua Winograde** all took part in the Wolf Trap Opera this past summer. It should be noted that **Joshua Winograde** (HGO-Studio '00-'03) served as Head of Wolf Trap Opera Studio and **Eric Melear** (HGOS '02-'04) was their Music Director. Ask Beau about his costume from *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

Incoming HGO Studio artist **Caitlin Lynch** was part of Glimmerglass Opera where she performed music from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. **Jamie Barton** returned to the Opera Theater of St. Louis where she played Suzuki in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and at the Aspen Opera Theater she reprised one of her favorite roles, The

Witch in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*. **Faith Sherman** went north to Chautauqua Opera where she was featured as Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, joined by **Derrick Parker** (HGOS '98-'00) as Don Alfonso. **Adam Cioffari** took part in San Francisco Opera's Merola Program, where he was featured as Masetto in *Don Giovanni* as well as singing in the Grand Finale Concert. **Stephen Hopkins** returned to the CoOPERative Program in Princeton, New Jersey as a staff accompanist/coach. HGO Music Director **Kathy Kelly** served as the Artistic Director for the Berkshire Opera where she also conducted Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* featuring **Ryan McKinny** as Figaro, **Liam Bonner** as Count Almaviva, and **Tamara Wilson** as the Countess. **Joseph Li** joined **Kathy Kelly** as the pianist/coach and assistant conductor. He also appeared as a recitalist for the Clark Museum's "Vocal Colors" series and the multi-genre "Secrets of the Sky and Sea" at the Colonial Theatre. **Heidi Stober** began a two-year contract as a resident artist at the Deutsche Oper, Berlin where she was joined by **Albina Shagimuratova** who opened as Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte*. **Fiona Murphy** sang Annio in *La Clemenza di Tito* at Lincoln Center, at the Santa Fe Opera **Heidi Stober** sang Tigrane in *Radamisto* and **Norman Reinhardt** (HGOS '03-'06) sang Fenton in *Falstaff*. **Laquita Mitchell** (HGOS '02-'05) sang in *Porgy and Bess* at the Opera Comique, Paris and visited with **Joyce DiDonato** (HGOS '96-'98) and **Ana Maria Martinez** while she was there.

Autumn 2008

The 2008/09 season kicked off with a bang with the *Cav/Pag* double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* with HGO Studio member **Maria Markina** playing Lola in *Cavalleria rusticana*. Sparks flew as Masha's outstanding portrayal of Lola's haughty

feistiness and confidence went up against legendary mezzo Dolora Zajick's tragic Santuzza. *Pagliacci* featured the return of alumni **Ana Maria Martinez** to HGO as Nedda/Colombina and **Scott Hendricks** (HGOS '97-'99) as Silvio. We were thrilled to see current HGO Studio member **Beau Gibson** in the major role of Beppe/Arlecchino (marking Beau's second portrayal of a clown... food for thought). First-year Studio artist **Stephen Hopkins** served as pianist/coach for *Cav/Pag*.

HGO welcomed back HGO Studio alumna and mezzo goddess **Joyce DiDonato** as Beatrice in Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict* playing opposite fellow alum **Norman Reinhardt** as the charming (and acrobatic) Benedict. Also featured were recent HGO Studio alumni **Ryan McKinny** (HGOS '05-'08) as Don Pedro and **Liam Bonner** (HGOS '05-'08) as the sweetly in-love Claudio, all looking very handsome in military uniforms. So excited was Liam about his costume that he even let wigmaster **Dotti Staker** hide his perfect hair under a wig. Young Studio member **David Hanlon**, pianist/coach, served as the diction coach pianist for *Beatrice and Benedict*. The alternate cast performances of this opera, nicknamed *Beatrice and Beau* by Studio head **Laura Canning**, featured current HGO Studio members **Faith Sherman** as Beatrice, **Beau Gibson** as Benedict, **Caitlin Lynch** as Hero, and **Jamie Barton** as Ursula.

On December 7th, 2008, we held the annual Buddies Christmas party at the lovely home of **Jennifer Sickler**, HGO Guild President. Food was plentiful and delicious and the conversation was lively!

On December 12th and 13th the Studio held its annual Showcase (formerly known as "Studio Scenes") with the theme of "Masquerade". The Showcase featured scenes from operas ranging from *The Rape of Lucretia* to *Don Pasquale*, from *Carmen* to *Dead Man Walking*, and the



▲ Kathy Moore, Heidi Stober, Norman Reinhardt and Steve Homer in *Santa Fe*



▲ Rebekah Camm & Asad Jafari backstage at LA Opera (again)



▲ Joyce DiDonato and Carol Fletcher taken at the Lyric Opera of Chicago in March 2008, following *The Barber of Seville* starring Joyce as Rosina.

Studio Snippets

Alumnus Derrick Parker and his wife Heather welcomed their first child, Grace Elizabeth Parker, on October 4th, weighing 7 lbs 8 oz in Pennsylvania.

Liam Bonner was featured in the September 2008 issue of Opera News:

<http://www.metoperafamily.org/operanews/issue/article.aspx?id=4984&issueID=325>

Heidi Stober was featured in the January 2008 issue of Opera News:

<http://www.metoperafamily.org/operanews/issue/article.aspx?id=3657&issueID=178>

Laura Canning met her future husband Mike on a blind date at a Glyndebourne Opera production of *Così fan tutte*

Beau Gibson has a three-pound chihuahua named Dignan who sings along when Beau sings (Dignan is a male soprano).

J.J. Kee has a pet hedgehog and two sugar gliders. The sugar gliders don't sing but their rapid chattering serves as inspiration for J.J. to sing "A un dottor della mia sorte."

Laura Canning carried an 8-foot pole with prop fish on a train from Cardiff to Liverpool for that evening's performance of *La bohème* (see photo to the right)

finale was a hilarious rendition of the Momus scene from *La bohème* with **Caitlyn Lynch** as Musetta and **J.J. Kee** as Marcello. On the second night of the Showcase we were surprised by a visit from baritone **Richard Paul Fink (HGOS '84-'87)**, fresh from his success as

Edward Teller in San Francisco Opera's world premiere production of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic*, directed by Peter Sellars.

On December 14th we said goodbye to young tenor **Beau Gibson** who left the Studio to go to Los Angeles where he will be

reprising his Armored Man in *Die Zauberflöte*, joining fellow studio alumni **Tamara Wilson** and **Albina Shagimuratova**, and later he will perform the role of Froh in *Das Rheingold* (suspended on wires, no less).

Upcoming Highlights

Jamie Barton is making her Carnegie Hall debut in January 2009. But fear not, for those of us who can't make it to New York, we will have a chance to see a preview of this recital on January 10th where she will be accompanied by **Kathy Kelly**. This recital is being sponsored by St. Phillip Presbyterian Church in cooperation with Grace Song, Inc., Keith Weber, Artistic Director. The reception will be sponsored by HGO Studio Buddies Program and the St. Philip's Choir.

HGO Studio alumni returning to Houston Grand Opera this Winter and Spring include **Albina Shagimuratova** for *Rigoletto*, after performing this role for the Palm Beach Opera alongside former Studio artist **Chen-Ye Yuan**.

HGO Studio Alumni

The Houston Grand Opera Studio is arguably the finest young artist training program in the country and as a result most HGO Studio alumni have gone on to have highly successful professional careers. Their performances are too many to mention individually, so your author has compiled a list of their roles and locations over the past year and put them into a convenient table for your review as an appendix to this newsletter, which is posted at <http://www.hgoquild.org/Studio/>.

Travelling Buddies

Here in the HGO Studio Buddies program we truly heart our artists and we often go to see them across the world wherever they are performing. Last May **Wynne Mattison** met up with **Laura Canning** in London for an initial meeting to discuss this season's Buddies program, at a cute café across the street from the British Museum. Also in London at the same time were **Fred and Imelda Gott** to see their former artist **Fiona Murphy** performing for ENO. This summer **Jennifer Sickler** and **Asad Jafari** went to Wolf Trap Opera and **Christa Cooper** met up with **Joshua Hopkins** in Central City where he was singing Junius in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. **Kathy Moore** and **Steve Homer** met up with **Heidi Stober** and **Norman Reinhardt**, where they were performing in Santa Fe. In September **Asad Jafari** flew to see **Rebekah Camm** perform with the LA Opera in the Woody Allen directed *Gianni Schicchi*. Recently **Bill and Lucila Haase** had a mini-reunion in Chicago with HGO Studio alumni **Craig Terry (HGOS '00-'02)** and **Laquita Mitchell**.



☞ Hellos and Goodbyes

Welcome to Laura Canning

Houston Grand Opera was very fortunate this year to welcome Laura Canning as the new Director of the HGO Studio. Laura was born in Portsmouth, England and at the tender age of two she and her family moved to Hong Kong, returning to England a few years later and settling in Reading. This is where she was introduced to music and began as a singer and playing the contrabassoon. At the age of 16 Laura went to Austria on a school trip and upon visiting the Vienna Opera House she decided that she wanted to work in opera.

Laura went off to Cambridge to study languages and music where she found that she had particularly strong management and organizational skills which helped her in her work in theater as a producer, stage manager, and front house manager. It is here where Laura went to her first opera, *Così fan tutte*.

After university, Laura received a baptism of fire in the opera world working with two management companies where she worked with singers and opera companies and learned the rep. Then Laura joined the permanent staff of Glyndebourne for two years as the Assistant to the Director of Artistic Administration after which she was appointed to the role of Artists Administrator

at the Welsh National Opera by Anthony Freud, a position she held for ten years.

Laura was married to her husband **Mike Deacon** December 29th, 2001 at Cardiff Castle in a *Così* themed wedding featuring a performance of the *Così* trio, and the Welsh National Opera costume department and props department made her dress, jewelry, and veil! Laura has two handsome sons, **William**, age 5, and **Christopher**, age 3, who keep her non-work time quite occupied.

Here are a few quotes from Studio artists about Laura:

"It is great to work in an environment as encouraging and conducive to learning as the HGO Studio, and I cannot imagine what it would be like without Laura Canning, who absolutely radiates positive energy and is on top of every single thing concerning the Studio."

"[Laura is] the most supportive boss that a young singer can hope to have. I feel that I am in the best possible hands with her."

Farewell to Rubena Buerger

We were very sad to say goodbye to Rubena Buerger, the Program Coordinator for the HGO Studio. Rubena is a 13 year veteran of the Houston Grand Opera and has held a

number of different positions there including being the Marketing Coordinator for HGO for 3 ½ years and Program Coordinator for the HGO Studio since 2002.

Because of her hard work and amazing efforts with the HGO Studio, the HGO Guild awarded Rubena its most recent Bravo award in September 2008 - this award recognizes professional excellence and dedication to sustaining the very high standard of the progressive opera company that HGO is.

One of Rubena's co-workers said, "It is a miracle to see how many things Rubena accomplishes every day and and it never seems to be an inconvenience to her, so selfless is her attitude. Every single thing that I have gone to her with has been turned around so fast!"

We wish Rubena all the luck in the world in her future pursuits and we will miss her greatly!



▲ Christa Cooper with Joshua Hopkins at Central City where he was performing in *The Rape of Lucretia*.



▲ Diane Zola and Rubena Buerger after Rubena received the HGO Guild's Bravo Award

Whose feet could these be? ▼



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:

Studio Buddies Trustee, Wynne Mattison: theatrenthusiast@yahoo.com

Thank you and see you in the Spring!

Asad S. Jafari

HGO Guild Buddy & Newsletter Editor