



# Studio Buddies Newsletter

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## Welcome

2008/09 season was another fun and exciting season for the Houston Grand Opera Studio (HGOS) and its alumni. We welcomed back numerous Studio alumni and featured current Studio artists in prominent roles. This season marked **Laura Canning**'s first full year as the Director of the Studio and it was a fantastic one! We were also delighted to welcome **Laura Mason** as the new Administrator for the Studio.

## 2009 in Review

### Winter 2008

Continuing its multi-year commitment to the operas of Benjamin Britten, HGO opened the Winter rep with Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This beautifully staged production featured a large ensemble cast including current and former Studio artists. Alumni included **Norman Reinhardt (HGOS '03-'06)** as Lysander, **Liam Bonner (HGOS '05-'08)** as Demetrius, **Marie Lenormand (HGOS '99-'02)** as Hermia, **Ryan McKinny (HGOS '05-'08)** as Theseus, and **Jon Kolbet (HGOS '92-'94)** as Snout. Current Studio artists included **Adam Cioffari** making his HGO debut as Snug the Joiner, **James J. Kee** as Starvling (and handler for the adorable Buddy the Dog), first-year Studio pianist/coach **David Hanlon** was the children's chorus pianist for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The second production of the Winter rep was *Chorus!* which featured solos from HGO Studio alumni **Ryan McKinny** in the roles of Sleep/ Police/ Sergeant/Khovansky/Pangloss, **Jon Kolbet** as Kuzka, and current Studio artists **Caitlin Lynch** as Cunegonde/ Jenny/Venus, and making his HGO main stage debut was **Octavio Moreno**. **Stephen Hopkins**, pianist/coach, served as coach for *Chorus!* and also performed as the orchestra keyboardist for the production.

On January 20th mezzo goddess **Jamie Barton** made her Carnegie Hall debut with her Marilyn Horne Foundation "On Wings of Song" Recital,

accompanied by **Kathy Kelly**, where she premiered a song cycle by Richard Hundley. Those of us who were unable to go to New York were treated with a special preview of her recital in Houston on January 10th which was followed by a reception hosted by her Buddies and the HGO Studio Buddies-at-Large.

The highlight of February was, of course, the Concert of Arias - the 20th Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. Showcasing the talent of Studio members, the concert showed all current Studio artists in a scene from Act II of *La Bohème*, with **Caitlin Lynch** (last year's first place winner) and **Octavio Moreno** (last year's third place winner) as Musetta and Marcello. Past competition winners **Liam Bonner**, **Ryan McKinny**, **Alicia Gianni**, and **Eric Perkins (HGOS '89-'92)** were at hand to present the awards. Other HGO Studio alumni at the event were **Suzanne Mentzer (HGOS '81-'82)**, **Tamara Wilson (HGOS '05-'07)**, **Richard Bado (HGOS '83-'85)**, **Peter Pasztor (HGOS '92-'95)**, **Bethany Self (HGOS '04-'06)**, and **Eric Melear (HGOS '02-'04)**.

The first Recitals at Rienzi for 2009 were held on February 20th and 21st at Rienzi, the European decorative arts wing of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. The recital featured works from Poulenc and Ravel to English humorous songwriters

Flanders and Swann. Earlier in February **Jamie Barton** performed her solo cabaret show at The Tasting Room, accompanied by **Joseph Li** with appearances from **David Hanlon** and **Paul Chuey**.

In early March **Faith Sherman** and **James J. Kee**, in collaboration with the University of Houston and the High School Voice Studio, presented an evening of Britten Folk Songs at the Organ Hall, University of Houston. On March 15th we were treated to HGO Studio Artist **Stephen Hopkins**, pianist coach, in recital at Dudley Hall, Moores Opera House at the University of Houston, performing in a program including Chopin, Debussy, Ravel and Rozsa. Stephen's Buddies and the Buddies-at-Large hosted a reception immediately following the fantastic performance. The Taste This! series of musical evenings at the Tasting Room wine bar consisted of pieces related to André Previn, in preparation for *Brief Encounter*, with **Faith Sherman**, **Octavio Moreno**, **Adam Cioffari**, and **Joseph Li**.

### Spring 2009

On a stormy night in April (both in and outside of the Wortham) the Spring rep opened with a bang with Verdi's tragic *Rigoletto* featuring HGO Studio alumnus **Scott Hendricks (HGOS '97-'99)** in the title role and recent alumna **Albina Shagimuratova (HGOS '06-'08)** as his daughter, Gilda, to



▲ Jamie Barton after her Carnegie Hall preview recital at the reception hosted by her Buddies and the HGO Studio Buddies-at-Large. With Jamie are (L-R), HGO Guild VP Studio Buddies Wynne Mattison, Laura Mason, David Hanlon, Faith Sherman, Michael Kelly



▲ Studio Buddies at the reception following Stephen Hopkins' recital at the University of Houston



▲ Studio alumna Albina Shagimuratova and Brian Charboneau

rave reviews from audience members and the press alike.

The production also featured current Studio members **Maria Markina** as Maddalena, **Jamie Barton** as Giovanna, **Adam Cioffari** as Count Ceprano/Usher, **Octavio Moreno** as Marullo, and **Faith Sherman** as Countess Ceprano/Page. **Stephen Hopkins**, first year pianist/coach served as a coach for this production. *Rigoletto* was also presented as free performances at the Miller Outdoor Theater and the title role was performed by former HGO Studio Director **Hector Vásquez**. However, on the second evening Mr. Vásquez was unable to sing due to illness so while he performed his actions on stage, Studio artist **Octavio Moreno** sang the role from the wings.

The final opera for the season was the world premiere of André Previn's *Brief Encounter*, based on David Lean's film adaptation of a play by Noël Coward. Second-year Studio artist **Joseph Li** served as the Principal coach for the

workshops for this work as well as the Principal coach for the production with assistance from **David Hanlon**. HGO Studio Alumni featured in this new work were **Rebekah Camm (HGOS '05-'08)** as Dolly Messiter and **Alicia Gianni (HGOS '06-'08)** as Beryl. Current Studio members on stage for *Brief Encounter* were **James J. Kee** as Dr. Graves, **Jamie Barton** as Mary Norton, **Faith Sherman** as Ms. Rolandson, and **Adam Cioffari** as Stanley. Another HGO Studio connection is that Kim Josephson who played the heartbreaking role of Fred Jesson in *Brief Encounter* is the father of **Kiri Dyan Deonarine**, soprano, who is joining the Studio this Fall.

The month of May also featured recitals by **Maria Markina**, accompanied by HGO Studio alumnus **Grant Loehnig (HGOS '06-'08)**, where she performed works by Tchaikovsky, Bolcom, Satie and Shostakovich, and **Octavio Moreno**, accompanied by **Kathy Kelly**, at Cullen Hall, University of St Thomas, both recitals featured

receptions sponsored by their Buddies and the Buddies-at-Large. The season concluded with the last of the Recitals at Rienzi series for this season on May 19th and 20th with outgoing Studio members **Jamie Barton, Faith Sherman, Maria Markina, and James J. Kee**, accompanied by **Kathy Kelly, Joseph Li, and David Hanlon**.

We are both sad and happy when members of the Studio finish their training with HGO Studio because while we are said that they are leaving, they are starting another exciting chapter of their careers. This year we say goodbye to **Caitlin Lynch, Jamie Barton, Maria Markina, Faith Sherman, and James J. Kee**, and we wish them all the success in the future. This Fall we will be welcoming seven new members to the Studio, **Kiri Dyan Deonarine**, soprano, **Rachel Willis-Sørensen**, soprano, **Catherine Martin**, mezzo-soprano, **Nathaniel Peake**, tenor, **Brendan Tuohy**, tenor, **Michael Sumuel**, baritone, and **Stephanie Rhodes**, pianist/coach.

**March featured a trip to the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo.**



▲ Adam Cioffari and buddy Asad Jafari at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Adam is astride a real live longhorn bull! Yee-Ha.



▲ J.J. Kee about to sample his deep-fried Snickers bar as Michael Kelly and Faith Sherman look on. J.J.'s exact quote about the experience was, "Horribly delicious!"



▲ Urban cowboy Octavio Moreno came dressed up with his own cowboy hat



▲ Jessica Redman with uber-organizers Tony Montemarano and Wynne Mattison

## Upcoming Highlights

**Jamie Barton** will be spending the summer at Wolf Trap Opera performing in a "Road Trip Recital" with **Steve Blier** and performing the role of Penelope in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*. Following this she will be going to the Aspen Music Festival where she will be doing a duo recital and Berstein's *Arias and Barcarolles* with HGO Studio alumnus **Ryan McKinney**. In the Fall Jamie will be making her Met debut as Second Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* followed by Emilia in *Otello* with the Canadian Opera Company, and then she will be returning to Carnegie Hall for a recital with **Kathy Kelly** as part of the "Great Singers III: Evenings of Song" recital series.

**Maria "Masha" Markina** will be going home to Moscow in preparation for her three-year contract with the Hamburg Staatsoper starting in August, but will find a bit of time for some much needed "R&R" before then when her Buddy **Alice Gates** visits with Masha, husband Alexey and daughter Varvara for a 10 day driving trip through Russia in early June. She needs to learn eleven different roles for Hamburg so she is going to have a busy summer and busy upcoming season! Masha will be returning to Houston next season to perform the role of Pauline in *Queen of Spades*, which is one of her favorite operas.

**Joseph Li** will be working as a guest opera coach for the Aspen Music Festival and School from June through August. Joseph returns to HGO in the fall to coach *Lohengrin* and in the Spring of 2010 Joseph will be on a concert tour of China, Malaysia, and Singapore, performing a mix of opera, jazz, musical theater, and other genres of music. He hopes to be able to squeeze in a visit to his hometown of Seattle at some point.

**Stephen Hopkins** will be working on the music staff for Des Moines Metro Opera as the pianist/coach for *Tosca* as well as *Gianni Schicchi*. After that he will spend three weeks at home on Long Island, followed by a trip to Spain during which he and his fiancée Amaia will be married in Bermeo, Basque Country on August 15th, 2009.

**Octavio Moreno** will be representing Mexico in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition 2009 in Cardiff, Wales. Following the competition Octavio will be returning home to Hermosillo, Mexico for some well-earned rest while also learning Elixir of Love for the Fall.

**Christa Cooper and Brian & Jessica Charboneau, with the help of Adelma Graham, Vita Taksa, and Pat Guittard, hosted a Couple's Shower that was held on May 3rd for Stephen Hopkins and Amaia Urriaga at Wynne Mattison's home.**



▲ Stephen and Amaia with their awesome buddies (L-R) Christa Cooper, Jessica Redman, and Brian Charboneau



▲ Stephen and Amaia with Adelma Graham



▲ Bestest hostess in the world, Wynne Mattison, with Maria Markina's daughter Varvara in full Opera League gear

**Adam Cioffari** will be singing in Aspen Opera Theater's production of *La Bohème*, singing the role of Colline.

**Caitlin Lynch** will be singing the role of Alice Ford in *Falstaff* with Cleveland Opera in June followed by a concert in August for the Motor City Lyric Opera in Detroit. Next year Caitlin will be living in Cincinnati and will be singing with Arizona Opera, Opera New Jersey, and Glimmerglass Opera.

**David Hanlon** will be working at CoOPREative program in Princeton with **Kathy Kelly** for the month of July. He will also appear at New York's Le Poisson Rouge in August to play Ted Hearne's *Katrina Ballads* which will be celebrating its CD release.

**James J. Kee** was married to his beautiful fiancée Alexis Barthelemy, Artistic Administrator of the Washington Master Chorale, on June 2nd at the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. He will be singing in the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence this summer and will then proceed to Deutsche Oper Berlin where he will be for the next year.

## HGO Studio Alumni

Composer **Michael Ching (HGOS '80-'81)**, the Artistic and General Director with Opera Memphis, recently conducted his opera *Buoso's Ghost* at Lake George Opera. His new version of Scott Joplin's only opera, *Treemonisha*, played in Memphis in January 2009 and he conducted *Carmen* at Hawaii Opera and *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Opera New Jersey.

**Joyce DiDonato (HGOS '96-'98)** was profiled in a feature in the New York Times on May 1st. The article described her career going from Prairie Village, Kansas to sold-out solo concerts at Carnegie Hall conducted by James Levine.

**Kelly Kuo (HGOS '99-'01)** has had quite a busy year already. In December 2008 he conducted performances of *Porgy and Bess* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, in February he conducted the world premiere of *Trial by Jury/Rumpelstiltskin* with Lyric Opera of San Diego, in March he conducted *Così fan tutte* with Madison Opera and he was the cover conductor for *Folk Music I and II* with Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, and in May he conducted *Peter and the Wolf* with Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra with Madcap Puppet Theater. This summer he is serving as pianist/coach for Seattle Opera's *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, and *Siegfried*.

**Eric Halfvarson (HGOS '77-'78)** and **Beau Gibson (HGOS '06-'08)** performed in Los Angeles Opera's production of *Das Rheingold* in February, in the roles of Fafner and Froh respectively. **Beau Gibson** also reprised his role as Armored Man in Los Angeles Opera's *Die Zauberflöte* alongside fellow HGO Studio alumna **Albina Shagimuratova** as Queen of the Night.

**Laquita Mitchell-Patton (HGOS '02-'05)** is performing the lead role in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* at the San Francisco Opera. After having performed the role of Clara in this opera several times, most recently with the Chicago Lyric, Laquita is performing her first Bess in this production. In other good news, Laquita's husband recently returned home safely after a 14 month tour in Iraq.

**Fiona Murphy (HGOS '04-'07)** was engaged by Welsh National Opera to perform the role of Cherubino in their new production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* for the first six performances, replacing a sick colleague. She jumped in at the last minute, starting rehearsals only a week before going on stage, and received great reviews from The Times and The Opera Critic!

**Marjorie Owens (HGOS '02-'06)** received the George London/Leonie Rysanek Award of \$10,000 in the 2009 George London Foundation Awards Competition. She also won second place in the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation International Vocal Competition 2009.

**Jennifer Root (HGOS '03-'07)** performed in a recital in San Antonio, at the University of Texas at San Antonio on March 16th. Scott Scully (HGOS '99-'02) recently accepted his first Met contract. He will be singing in *Carmen* and *House of the Dead* and will be covering in *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Turandot*.

**Albina Shagimuratova (HGOS '06-'08)** was featured on the cover of OPERA UK - Festivals 2009 edition, in her lime green costume as Queen of the Night, with Michael Schade, from Salzburg Festspiele. Albina recently had the title of "People's Artist of Republic of Tatarstan" bestowed upon her by the President of Republic Tatarstan M. Shaymiev. Look for Albina as she reprises her Queen of the Night at the Met and Dusseldorf next season.

For additional information about HGO Studio Alumni, please visit <http://www.hgoguild.org/Studio/> for a detailed listing of alumni activities.

## Studio Artist Features

**Kate Pogue (HGOS '80-'81)**, was a member of the HGO Studio as a Librettist. She studied theatre and was lucky enough to be in the first company of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, a program the Studio, where they set up a graduate program with the University of Minnesota called the McKnight Scholars and those chosen worked for a graduate degree at the University and as apprentices in the professional company where she worked with Tyrone Guthrie learning the British approach to classical acting. Later Kate's interest turned to teaching and writing. When a composer friend, Sterling Tinsley, asked if she'd write a libretto for an opera he'd conceived, Kate discovered that writing for opera combined all her interests -- music, singing, theatre, and writing. Just at that moment **Carlisle Floyd** came to Houston and helped start the Studio and she wanted to become skilled at the craft of libretto writing, and suddenly there was Carlisle. Kate worked with Carlisle the year in the Studio and for six years afterward. Carlisle recommended Kate as a librettist for Henry Mollicone's *The Starbird* which resulted in that work (now an American classic observing its thirtieth anniversary) and a work for Minnesota Opera called *Masque of Evil*. While at Houston Community College Kate helped found **Opera To**

**Go** and after presenting an adaptation she did of *Hansel and Gretel*, the company produced ten other children's operas before being invited to become the outreach program for Houston Grand Opera. Her operas for Opera to Go include the adaptations of *Hansel and Gretel* and *The Magic Flute* plus (with Sterling Tinsley) *St. George and the Dragon*, *Daniel and the Dream Catcher*, *The Adventures of Young Peer Gynt*, *Puppy and the Big Guy*; and (with Mary Carol Warwick) *Texas!*, *The King Stag*, *Cinderella in Spain*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and *The Velvetine Rabbit*. Kate says, "I loved being in the Studio and feel that the learning experience with Carlisle and the contacts I made have been invaluable in my later life."

**Adam Cioffari, Baritone, Current Studio Artist** is an opera nerd – and I say this with great affection and envious admiration. Being new to opera I've often called one of my Studio friends to ask a question about opera and after answering they invariably say "You should probably ask Cioff. He'll definitely know the answer!" and he always does.

Adam's interest in opera started when he was 9 and his family (his father is a composer and his mother is a bassoonist, and both are music professors) was involved in a regional production of *La Bohème* and Adam went to the first

rehearsal. He remembers being enthralled by the antics of the zany Bohemians, the vivacious, oversexed woman in the red dress (Musetta), and the gorgeous melodies and orchestration, and finally being profoundly saddened when I realized the heroine died at the end. Adam returned for every rehearsal, with score in hand, and every performance. Later Adam received a great recording of *La Bohème* which incidentally featured Giorgio Tozzi as Colline, who was later Adam's first college voice teacher. Eventually Adam sought out other operas including *Gianni Schicchi*, *Carmen*, *Tosca*, and *Pagliacci*, he read everything he could about opera history, synopses, artist biographies, etc. Then he discovered the Saturday Met broadcasts further expanding his exposure to the repertoire and great singers of the day. A few years later Adam made his first trip to the Met to see *La Bohème*, *Aida*, and *Tosca*, still three of his favorite works. Since then he's returned to the Met dozens of times.

Adam has always loved singing, but it's his long fascination with all things operatic that led him down this path. While Adam is a great singer, he is also a huge opera fan and our favorite opera nerd.



▲ Brenda Harvey Traylor and Evan Rogister (HGOS '06-'08) after Evan conducted *Bluebeard's Castle* with the Seattle Opera.



▲ Joseph Li with his buddies Suzanne and Art Pryde and fiancée Kathryn Long at Astros Opening Day 2009.



▲ Stephen Hopkins and fiancée Amaia Urriaga at the *Rigoletto* closing night party with Studio alum Beau Gibson and Adam Cioffari in the background and a very bad person in a sombrero giving tequila shots



▲ The latest models from *Modern Bride* magazine

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](mailto:theatrenthusiast@yahoo.com)

Thank you and see you next season!

Asad S. Jafari

HGO Guild Studio Buddy & Newsletter Editor