



HOUSTON GRAND OPERA PRESENTS
Giving Voice 2021:
*A Celebration of Black Artists
in Opera and Song*

featuring

Lawrence Brownlee, Co-Host and Tenor
Nicole Heaston, Co-Host and Soprano ‡
Donnie Ray Albert, Baritone
Frederick Ballentine, Tenor
Blake Denson, Baritone †
Cory McGee, Bass †
Raven McMillon, Soprano †
Nicholas Newton, Bass-Baritone †
Zoie Reams, Mezzo-Soprano ‡
Karen Slack, Soprano
Kevin J. Miller, Piano

† Houston Grand Opera Studio Artist

‡ Former Houston Grand Opera Studio Artist

7:30 P.M. CT JANUARY 22, 2021

Available on demand through February 21, 2021

GV

Giving Voice

HGO DIGITAL

SARAH AND ERNEST BUTLER PERFORMANCE SERIES

Nicholas Newton, Reginald Smith Jr., J'Nai Bridges, Nicole Heaston, Russell Thomas, and Lawrence Brownlee in the first Giving Voice



“I feel it is important that the diversity regularly seen on HGO’s stage be reflected in the audience. I created Giving Voice to welcome Black and African American community members into a company, and an artform, that I love.”

—Co-host and tenor Lawrence Brownlee



Program

“Si può? Si può?” from Pagliacci Mr. Albert	Ruggero Leoncavallo (1857-1919)
“Un bel dì, vedremo” from Madama Butterfly Ms. Heaston	Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)
Così dunque tradisci ... Aspri rimorsi atroci Mr. McGee	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
“Caro elisir! sei mio!” from L’elisir d’amore Ms. Heaston and Mr. Brownlee	Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)
“Move out of your pond, Marian” from Marian’s Song Ms. Reams	Damien Sneed (b. 1979) Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton (b. 1985)
“È sogno? o realtà” from Falstaff Mr. Denson	Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)
“E lucevan le stelle” from Tosca Mr. Ballentine	Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)
“Mir ist die Ehre widerfahren” from Der Rosenkavalier Ms. McMillon and Ms. Reams	Richard Strauss (1864-1949)
“Amis, amis, secondez ma vengeance” from Guillaume Tell Mr. Brownlee	Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)
“La mamma morta” from Andrea Chénier Ms. Slack	Umberto Giordano (1867-1948)
Sinner, Please Don’t Let This Harvest Pass Mr. Brownlee	Trad., arr. Damien Sneed (b. 1979)
‘Roun’ About de Mountain Mr. Newton	Trad., arr. Roland Hayes (1887-1977)
Breathe Ms. Heaston	Adrienne Danrich (b. 1971) and Drew Hemenger (b. 1968)
Happy Days / Get Happy Mr. Brownlee and Mr. Ballentine	Milton Ager (1893-1979) / Harold Arlen (1905-1986)
“I Got Plenty of Nuttin’” from Porgy and Bess Mr. Albert, Mr. Denson, Mr. McGee, and Mr. Newton	George Gershwin (1898-1937)
This Little Light of Mine Full Ensemble	Trad., arr. Damien Sneed (b. 1979)



Credits

Lawrence Brownlee	<i>Creative Consultant</i>
Ben Doyle	<i>Video Director</i>
Daniel James	<i>Producer</i>
Lisa Swain	<i>Producer</i>
Ciara Ayala	<i>Assistant Producer</i>
Michael James Clark	<i>Lighting Designer</i>
Annie Wheeler	<i>Stage Manager</i>
Kristen Burke	<i>Production Manager</i>
Jeremy Johnson	<i>English Subtitles</i>
Dotti Staker	<i>Hair & Makeup</i>
Judy Malone-Stein	<i>Wardrobe</i>

The entire staff of HGO contributed to the success of this production. For a full listing of the company's staff, please visit HGO.org/about-us/people.

Performing artists, stage directors, and choreographers are represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists, the union for opera professionals in the United States.

Stage crew personnel provided by IATSE, Local #51.

Wardrobe personnel provided by Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Local #896.

Underwriter



Video and Audio Production



Streaming Partner



*Produced in association
with Austin Opera*

Who's Who



**LAWRENCE BROWNLEE
(UNITED STATES)**

CO-HOST, TENOR

Lawrence Brownlee is a leading figure in opera, both as a singer on the world's top stages, and as a voice for activism and diversity in the industry. The winner of numerous awards and distinctions, including being named a 2021 honoree in the 16th Annual OPERA NEWS Awards and "Male Singer of the Year" at the 2017 International Opera Awards, Brownlee has been hailed as "an international star in the bel canto operatic repertory" (*The New York Times*). He is a regular guest at the world's most important opera houses and recital venues. In addition to hosting and headlining HGO's first *Giving Voice* concert in January 2020, Brownlee has performed lead roles in HGO's *La favorite* (2020), *The Pearl Fishers* (2019), *Abduction from the Seraglio* (2017), *Italian Girl in Algiers* (2012), *The Barber of Seville* (2011), and *La Cenerentola* (2007). In May 2020, Brownlee launched "The Sitdown with LB," a weekly Facebook Live series which explores the experience of being an African-American opera singer. Since April 2020 he has also hosted the video series "Coffee and a Song." Brownlee performed at the Metropolitan Opera's At-Home Gala in April 2020. Other highlights of Brownlee's 2020–21 season include a virtual concert with the Tallahassee Symphony, a broadcast of *Lawrence Brownlee and Friends* with Opera Philadelphia, a virtual recital with pianist Myra Huang for the Schubert Club International Artist Series, broadcasts and eventual live performances of his acclaimed solo recital program *Cycles of My Being*, a duo recital with Michael Spyres, and appearances with the Lincoln Center Song Series, Opéra Royal de Wallonie, Opernhaus Zurich, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, New National Theatre Tokyo, and San Francisco Opera. Brownlee's album *Amici e Rivali* with Michael Spyres and Maestro Corrado Rovaris, released in November on Warner Classics & Erato, is the first ever to exclusively feature Rossini's tenor duets. He serves as artistic advisor for Opera Philadelphia.



**NICOLE HEASTON
(UNITED STATES)**

CO-HOST, SOPRANO

HGO Studio alumna Nicole Heaston also performed in fall HGO Digital productions *Vinkensport* and *The Impresario*, and she will give a recital this spring for the HGO Digital Live from The Cullen series. Heaston has performed with opera companies throughout the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Dallas Opera, Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Semperoper Dresden, Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Dusseldorf, and the Glyndebourne Festival in England. Praised for her "warm supple soprano" (*Houston Chronicle*) and for her

"radiant" and "handsomely resonant voice" (*The New York Times*), Heaston regularly appears in her hometown, Houston. She was most recently seen at HGO singing in the first *Giving Voice* (2020) recital, making her role debut as Mimi in *La bohème* (2018); and performing Adina in *The Elixir of Love* (2016). Other HGO roles include Pamina in *The Magic Flute* (2015, 1997); Gilda in performances of *Rigoletto* (2001); Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* (1999); Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* (1998); the title role in the world premiere of *Jackie O* (1997); Mrs. Hayes in *Susannah* and St. Settlement in *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1996); and performances of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* (1995). Equally active as a concert and recital soloist, Heaston has performed with orchestras throughout the United States, including the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and National Symphony Orchestra for the Kennedy Center's 11th annual gala.



**DONNIE RAY ALBERT
(UNITED STATES)**

BARITONE

Donnie Ray Albert is a regular guest of opera companies and orchestras around the world. His many performances with HGO include the roles of Parson Alltalk in *Treemonisha* (1975), Porgy in *Porgy and Bess* (1976, 1987), Joe in *Show Boat* (1982), and Tonio in *Pagliacci* (2000). He had been cast in HGO's *Werther* for fall of 2020, but the production was canceled due to COVID-19. Albert has performed with the Metropolitan Opera as Germont; with Los Angeles Opera as Trinity Moses in *Mahagonny*, Simone in *A Florentine Tragedy*, and the Father in *Hansel and Gretel*; and made numerous appearances with Opera Pacific, Florentine Opera of Milwaukee, Dallas Opera, Arizona, and other companies across the U.S., Canada, Europe, and beyond. In fall 2020 he appeared in Michigan Opera Theatre's drive-in production, *Twilight: Gods*, and Fort Worth Opera's digital production, *Bernadette's Cozy Book Nook*. Other recent operatic engagements include a return to the Semperoper Dresden to sing the Four Villains and Germont; his debut with the Glyndebourne Festival as the Doctor in *Vanessa*; and his return to Copenhagen as Falstaff and to Austin Lyric Opera as Amonasro. Albert has performed the role of Rigoletto for Vancouver Opera; Amonasro in Riga, Latvia and Phoenix; Alfio for the Orlando Opera; Iago for the Kentucky Opera; Il Giuramento for the Washington Concert Opera; *Das Lied von der Erde* with Rhode Island Philharmonic; Elijah with the Southwest Florida Master Chorale; Germont with Kentucky Opera; Giorgio in *I Puritani* with Latvian Opera; and the Four Villains in a new production of *Les Contes d'Hoffman* with Prague's National Theater. He has performed across the world as a concert artist. A member of the faculty of the University of Texas in Austin, Albert may be heard on RCA's Grammy Award– and Grand Prix du Disque–winning recording of *Porgy and Bess*, NOW's recording of *The Horse I Ride Has Wings* with David Garvey

on piano, EMI's *Frühlingsbegräbnis* and *Eine Florentinesche Tragodie* by Zemlinsky conducted by James Conlon, and Simon Sargon's *A Clear Midnight* on the Gasparo label.



**FREDERICK BALLENTINE
(UNITED STATES)**

TENOR

Frederick Ballentine appeared as Wiley Stonecrop in the HGO Digital production *The Impresario* this fall. His originally

scheduled engagements for the 2020–21 season include his first performances of Rodolfo in *La bohème* with Opera Memphis and Florentine Opera, Dr. Richardson in *Breaking the Waves* with Los Angeles Opera, Miles Zegner in *Proving Up* with Lyric Opera of Chicago's Lyric Unlimited program, and Don José in HGO's *Carmen*. Recent engagements include the tenor's debut with the English National Opera, De Nederlandse Opera, and Metropolitan Opera as Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess*, a return to Los Angeles Opera as Monostatos in *The Magic Flute*, and his debut with the New Jersey Symphony for Handel's *Messiah*. He made his role debut as Don José in *Carmen* with Annapolis Opera and reprised the same with Seattle Opera, where he also performed the title role in *Charlie Parker's Yardbird*.



**RAVEN MCMILLON
(UNITED STATES)**

Brenda Harvey-Traylor Fellow
SOPRANO

First-year HGO Studio artist Raven McMillon was featured in HGO Digital productions *The*

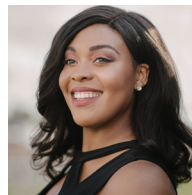
Impresario (as Rona Richards) and *The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All*, and she will appear as Gretel in HGO Digital's *Hansel and Gretel* this spring. She received her bachelor of fine arts in vocal performance at Carnegie Mellon University and completed her graduate degree at the University of Cincinnati College - Conservatory of Music (CCM). Her opera credits include Adele in *Die Fledermaus*; the title role in *Goldie B. Locks and the Three Singing Bears*; Linfea in *La Calisto*; and Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro*. In addition to her opera credits, McMillon has also workshopped new roles such as Mary in Chiao's *The Secret Codes of Mary Bowser* and Lucy in *Picker's Awakenings*. Her recent roles included La Princesse in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte* at CCM in the summer of 2020, which were canceled due to COVID-19.



**NICHOLAS NEWTON
(UNITED STATES)**

Nancy Haywood/Kathy Moore and Steve Homer/Jill and Allyn Risley Fellow
BASS-BARITONE

Second-year HGO Studio artist Nicholas Newton also was featured in HGO Digital production *The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All*. The third prize winner in HGO's 2019 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias and an alumnus of HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy (2016), he previously played Monterone in *Rigoletto* and was cast as Second Soldier in *Salome* (canceled). His 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 the Aspen Music Festival. Newton was a 2019 national semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the first-place winner in the 2018 Virginia & Susan Hawk Competition. In summer 2019, he sang Monterone in *Rigoletto* with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. In the summer of 2020, he had been set to return to Wolf Trap Opera as Colline in *La bohème*, but that production was canceled due to COVID-19.



**ZOIE REAMS
(UNITED STATES)**

MEZZO-SOPRANO

HGO Studio alumna Zoie Reams has been lauded by *Opera News* for her "velvety mezzo." Her performances with HGO include the role of Marian Anderson in *Marian's Song* (2020), Maddelena in *Rigoletto* (2019), and Rosalia in *West Side Story* (2018). For HGO Digital, she also will reprise the role of Marian Anderson in *Marian's Song* this spring. During the 2020–21 season she sings in a special holiday concert at Minnesota Opera, and returns to Des Moines Metro Opera as the Beggar Woman in *Sweeney Todd* and Juno in Rameau's *Platée*. Last season, Reams sang Jan Arnold in Joby Talbot's *Everest* and Georgia Davenport in the world premiere of Dan Shore's *Freedom Ride* at Chicago Opera Theater. Operatic highlights of recent seasons include making her house debut at Lyric Opera of Chicago as Flora in *La Traviata*, performing at Opera Columbus as Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*, singing the title role in *Carmen* at Opera Louisiane, and making her house and role debut at Des Moines Metro Opera as Margret in *Wozzeck*. Reams has appeared extensively in concert, including performing Handel's *Messiah* with the Washington National Cathedral Choir and Baroque Orchestra last season. Reams was the second-place winner at HGO's Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias (2016), first-place winner of the Emerging Artist division of the *Classical Singer* Competition (2015), and second place winner of the Gulf Coast Region of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions (2016).

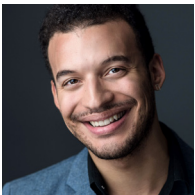


**BLAKE DENSON
(UNITED STATES)**

*Elizabeth Grimm and Jack Roth/
Carolyn Levy/Gloria Portela and Dick
Evans Fellow*

BARITONE

First-year HGO Studio artist Blake Denson also will appear in HGO Digital productions *Suite Española*, *Hansel and Gretel* (Peter), and *Marian's Song* (Billy King) this season. He was a Grand Finals winner in the 2020 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and is a 2018 alumnus of HGO's Young Artists Vocal Academy (YAVA). He obtained his bachelor of music in voice degree from the University of Kentucky School of Music and recently completed his master's degree at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. Denson was a Studio Artist at Wolf Trap Opera in 2018 and was set to return to Wolf Trap Opera for a second season in the summer of 2020 to perform the Commander and cover the title role in *Eugene Onegin*, as well as cover the role of Marcello in *La bohème*, but those productions were canceled due to COVID-19.



**CORY MCGEE
(UNITED STATES)**

Beth Madison Fellow

BASS

First-year HGO Studio artist Cory McGee also was featured in HGO Digital production *The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All*. The second prize winner in HGO's 2020 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias, he recently completed his master of music degree at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. In summer 2019, he joined Santa Fe Opera as an apprentice artist, portraying the role of the Gardener in Ruder's *The Thirteenth Child*. In 2018 he was a studio artist with Wolf Trap Opera, where he played La Voce in Mozart's *Idomeneo* and Ranger Nat in David Hanlon's children's opera, *Listen, Wilhelmina!*, and was a soloist in "Bernstein at 100 – A Celebration." Recent engagements include the title role in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Pandolfe in Massenet's *Cendrillon* (Oberlin Opera Theater) and Leporello in *Don Giovanni* (Oberlin in Italy).



**KAREN SLACK
(UNITED STATES)**

SOPRANO

Hailed for possessing a voice of extraordinary beauty, a seamless legato, and great dramatic depth, Karen Slack also was featured in HGO Digital production *The Making of The Snowy Day, an Opera for All*. She has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, and San Francisco Opera. In recent seasons she has sung the roles of Alice Ford in *Falstaff*, Leonora in *Il trovatore* and the title role of *Tosca* with Arizona Opera; the title role in *Aida* at Austin Opera; Emelda Griffith in *Champion* with New Orleans

Opera; Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with Nashville Opera; Violetta in *La traviata* with Sacramento Opera; and Sister Rose in *Dead Man Walking* with both Minnesota Opera and Vancouver Opera. Slack made her Scottish Opera debut as Anna in Puccini's *Le villi*. During the 2019–20 season, she returned to The Metropolitan Opera as Serena in *Porgy and Bess*, performed a series of recitals throughout the U.S., and had a featured role as the Opera Diva in Tyler Perry's movie and soundtrack, *For Colored Girls*. Equally at home on the concert stage, Slack has performed Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Mahler's 2nd Symphony, and the Verdi Requiem with numerous orchestras throughout the U.S. She has appeared with the Melbourne Symphony, Sydney Symphony, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, and most recently, with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic in celebration of the 80th birthday of Yuri Temirkanov. She made her Carnegie Hall debut as Agnes Sorel in Tchaikovsky's *Maid of Orleans* and will return in spring 2021 with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra for a digital performance of Beethoven's *Egmont*. Additional engagements for the 2020–21 season include a digital presentation of Poulenc's *La voix humaine* with Madison and Austin Opera, presented at Austin Opera as part of their new Blue Starlite Drive-In Series; An Evening of Wagner and Strauss with Omaha Opera in partnership with Omaha Symphony; and the world premiere of a work by Adolphus Hailstork at Spivey Hall in Atlanta. Her performance of Verdi's Requiem with Highlander Concert Series at the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas has been postponed due to COVID-19. Slack is co-director of opera at the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada and artistic advisor for Portland Opera.



**KEVIN J. MILLER
(UNITED STATES)**

PIANO

American pianist and collaborator Kevin J. Miller is acclaimed for his dynamically artful performances. He is an assistant conductor with HGO. Recent engagements include a recital with international tenor Joseph Calleja and Nadine Sierra at the Supreme Court of the United States, as well as an appearance with Calleja on NPR's Tiny Desk Concert series. Miller prepared soprano Jessye Norman for performances of Laura Karpman's production of *Ask Your Mama*, which was performed at Carnegie Hall. He has collaborated with the internationally acclaimed countertenor, David Daniels, in a recital at the Glimmerglass Festival. He can be heard on the recording *Been in da Storm So Long*, which features baritone Kenneth Overton. Miller has a Bachelor of Music degree in Piano from the Mannes College of Music, and a Master of Music degree and Artist Diploma in Collaborative Piano from the University of Michigan School of Music. He has participated in some of the country's most prestigious festivals and young artist apprenticeships, including The Tanglewood Institute of Music, Aspen Summer Music Festival, The Cleveland Art Song Festival, San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program, Washington National Opera's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, and the Glimmerglass Festival.