



**Washington National Opera**  
The Kennedy Center

Timothy O'Leary  
General Director

Francesca Zambello  
Artistic Director

Press Release

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## **Washington National Opera announces the 2019–2020 Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists**

**Program includes mentorship by new  
Artist-in-Residence Leah Crocetto, as well as Laura Brooks Rice,  
Neil Shicoff, Pierre Vallet, Kathleen Kelly, Joan Dornemann,  
and others**

**Season highlights include  
Young Artist Performance of *The Magic Flute*  
World premiere productions as part of the American Opera Initiative  
Recitals and concerts at venues around Washington, D.C.  
Free concerts at the Kennedy Center, master classes, and more**

(WASHINGTON)—Washington National Opera (WNO) announces the roster of emerging artists engaged for the 18th season of its Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, beginning August 26, 2019. Under the leadership of program director Robert Ainsley, the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program continues to offer extraordinary performance opportunities on the WNO mainstage and around Washington D.C., an annual recital and masterclass series, and provides intensive training and mentorship with a faculty of leading master teachers and coaches, led by returning Artist-in-Residence Leah Crocetto, the acclaimed soprano known to D.C. audiences as the title role in *Aida* during the 2016–2017 WNO season. The new class of Young Artists will star in a special performance of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, participate in several world premiere productions as part of WNO's American Opera Initiative Festival in January 2020, and appear in recitals and concerts across the Washington, D.C. region.

“It’s a joy to be associated with the WNO Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists, who represent the future of our art form,” says WNO General Director Timothy O’Leary. “These artists serve as an integral part of the WNO season, and they also very much represent WNO’s ‘home team,’ beloved

~ more ~

by the Washington community. Whether performing for our audiences at the Kennedy Center Opera House, for thousands of public school students from throughout the D.C. metro area, for fans at Nationals Park, or for world leaders and dignitaries in embassies throughout town, these artists are constantly cultivating their craft while they are with us, and making our community more beautiful by doing so.”

The 2019–2020 Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists roster includes 11 singers and two pianists/coaches:

- Joshua Blue**, Aurora, Illinois (tenor, second season)
- Amanda Bottoms**, Buffalo, New York (mezzo-soprano, first season)
- Joshua Conyers**, The Bronx, New York (baritone, second season)
- Marlen Nahhas**, Houston, Texas (soprano, second season)
- Alexandra Nowakowski**, Chicago, Illinois (soprano, second season)
- William Meinert**, Herndon, Virginia (bass, first season)
- Samson McCrady**, Tucson, Arizona (baritone, second season)
- Thomas Morris**, Atlanta, Georgia (pianist/coach, second season)
- Matthew Pearce**, (tenor, first season)
- Alexandria Shiner**, Waterford, Michigan (soprano, third season)
- Rehanna Thelwell**, (mezzo-soprano, first season)
- Samuel Weiser**, Princeton Junction, New Jersey (bass, second season)
- William Woodard**, Bloomington-Normal, Illinois (piano, first season)

“The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists are one of the central components of WNO’s mission,” said Artistic Director Francesca Zambello. “In response to the changing face of the international opera business, we are committed to giving these special artists the skills they need to forge unique, personal careers that reflect these changes. With many of the traditional channels for advancement fast disappearing, we are focused on training the whole artist and the whole person, offering financial, career, and nutrition counseling in addition to traditional voice lessons, languages, and dramatic training. We want our artists to be great singing actors, but also to realize their responsibility to give back to their communities, to cross bridges and divides, and to promote understanding and acceptance between people of differing opinions and backgrounds—only in this way can they be true ‘artistic citizens’ of the modern world.”

Complete biographies of the 2019–2020 Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists appear below.

**A world-class coaching roster led by Leah Crocetto**

Leading the coaching roster for the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program’s 2019–2020 season is Artist-in-Residence Leah Crocetto, the celebrated American soprano who played the title role of Aida in WNO’s 2016–2017 season, and who will be seen in next season’s production of *Otello*. She will work with the Young Artists by leading individual coaching sessions and observing and advising them in their roles and covers on the mainstage.

“What an auspicious opportunity to be able to work with the ultra-talented Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists of the WNO as their resident artist!” said Leah Crocetto. “Coming from a young artist program myself, I’m really happy to be able to share my experience with these artists and hopefully have them glean something from me that will help them move forward in their careers. As a woman, I want to help change the narrative in the arts. I want all young singers, but especially young women, to be able to view themselves as artists with integrity and strength and what a great place to continue this goal. It’s a complete joy and honor.”

The Young Artists will work with other gifted voice teachers, vocal coaches, drama and movement experts, and career development mentors throughout the season. The faculty roster for the 2019–2020 season includes:

**Leah Crocetto:** Artist-in-Residence

**Ken Weiss:** Principal coach

**Laura Brooks Rice:** Principal voice teacher

**Neil Shicoff:** Principal voice teacher

**Rita Sloan:** Piano teacher

**Joan Dornemann, Dennis Giauque, Kathleen Kelly:** Visiting master coaches

**Pierre Vallet:** French repertoire coach

**Erie Mills:** English diction coach, visiting master teacher

**Vera Danchenko-Stern:** Russian coach

**Maddalena Borea:** Italian instructor

**Ole Hass:** German instructor

**Karma Camp:** Movement instructor, stage director

**Amanda Consol:** Dramatic instructor, scenes director

**Ana De Archuleta:** Career counselor

**Tiffany Soricelli:** Finance counselor

**Jane Frances Jacubczak:** Nutrition counselor

### **Performance opportunities at the Kennedy Center and beyond**

An essential component of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program is the opportunity to perform at the Kennedy Center, as well as in various community concerts, recitals, masterclasses, and events throughout the Washington, D.C. area and beyond.

Young Artists gain significant performance experience on the stages of the Kennedy Center. A highlight of the program is the annual Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Performance, featuring Young Artists performing leading roles as part of the WNO season in the Kennedy Center Opera House. In 2019–2020, WNO presents a special Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Performance during the run of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, on Friday, November 22, 2019. The Young Artists will also perform in the WNO annual Look-In education and family performances on Thursday, November 14, 2019. Complete casting will be announced soon.

The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program also engages Young Artists to perform supporting roles in WNO productions. As members of the cast, Young Artists participate in all scheduled rehearsals and receive direction and guidance from the opera’s key artists. In WNO’s 2019–2020 season, Young Artists will perform and cover supporting roles in *The Magic Flute*, *Samson and Delilah*, *Blue*, and *Porgy and Bess*.

During the 16-day opening festival of the Kennedy Center’s new REACH expansion in September, the Young Artists will participate in a variety of free public performances, rehearsals, and events to celebrate these new venues. A highlight of this festival will be the opening outdoor performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with the National Symphony Orchestra, featuring four Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists in the solo roles on September 7, 2019.

This season brings an exciting opportunity for the Young Artists to work directly with world renowned WNO Artistic Director, Francesca Zambello, on a production of Gian Carlo Menotti’s first full-length opera *The Consul*. After an intensive rehearsal period, Young Artists will perform an open dress rehearsal at the Kennedy Center’s REACH on February 1, 2020, culminating in a performance at the United States Supreme Court on February 13, 2020. There will be two

subsequent performances, in collaboration with George Mason University at the Hylton Performing Arts Center in Manassas, Virginia, on Sunday, February 16, 2020, and in the Bettie Rubenstein Grand Salon of the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum on Sunday April 26, 2020. More information on this and other events will be announced in the coming months.

The 2019–2020 season will provide the Young Artists with extraordinary opportunities to work with living composers and librettists on several world premiere productions under the auspices of WNO’s American Opera Initiative Festival. The popular *Three 20-Minute Operas*, featuring the work of three new composer-librettist teams (Michael Lanci and Kim Davies, Carlos Simon and Sandra Seaton, and Liliya Ugay and Sokunthary Svay), will be presented at two performances on January 10, 2020, with the WNO Orchestra conducted by Anne Manson. Manson serves as one of three mentors to the American Opera Initiative, alongside composer Laura Kaminsky and librettist Kelley Rourke. Complete casting and creative teams for these new works will be announced soon.

Following the success of last year’s recital series, each member of the program will again be featured on one of three intimate recitals throughout the year. These recitals feature song and concert repertoire that explores and responds to the current exhibitions and collections on show at three important Washington D.C. galleries and museums: The Kreeger Museum, on November 1, 2019; the National Gallery of Art, on January 17, 2020; and The Phillips Collection, on March 8, 2020. This season will also feature two master classes at the REACH with internationally acclaimed soprano Renée Fleming on September 6, 2019, and with mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves on May 12, 2020.

The Young Artists will continue to perform in free performances on the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage to highlight upcoming WNO productions, preview the productions of the coming season, and for other special performances. Millennium Stage appearances are scheduled for Monday, October 21, 2019; Thursday, December 12, 2019; Sunday, April 23, 2020; Sunday March 1, 2020; and Thursday, May 7, 2020. These appearances are streamed live on the Kennedy Center’s [website](#) and archived for future viewing.

The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists will also have a vibrant presence around Washington in the coming season, including an appearance in the Waterford Concert Series at The Waterford Old

School Auditorium in Waterford, VA, on Sunday, September 22, 2019, and the Metropolitan Club on April 2, 2020.

**Exchange with Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre continues**

Next season will mark the tenth year of a professional exchange between members of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and participants in the Bolshoi Theatre Young Artists Opera Program in Moscow. Four Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists traveled to Moscow between June 10-28, 2019, taking part in all activities of the Bolshoi Young Artists Program and performing in two joint concerts in the Beethoven Hall of the Bolshoi Theater. In return, WNO will host four artists from The Bolshoi Theater for a two-week residency from March 15-30, 2020. The Bolshoi artists will participate in all DCYAP activities culminating in a joint concert at the Russian Embassy on Friday, March 27. This ongoing partnership with the Bolshoi program, generously supported by Susan Carmel and the Carmel Foundation, presents an extraordinary opportunity for the young artists to share their ideas, culture, and technical expertise with their peers from overseas and to connect with foreign artistic agents for future career opportunities.

## **Biographies of the 2019–2020 Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists**



British-American tenor **Joshua Blue** from Aurora, Illinois, returns to WNO's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season. Blue will perform the roles of Tamino in the Young Artist production of *The Magic Flute*, Man 1 in *Blue*, and Philistine Messenger in *Samson and Delilah*. During the 2018–19 season, Blue sang the roles of Alfredo Germont in Verdi's *La traviata*, Hippo/Holy Man/Dog/Water Seller in Tesori's *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*, and Monsieur Triquet in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Blue also participated in the 2018–19 American Opera Initiative 20-minute program as David in *Pepito* and performed as a soloist in WNO's "A Concert of Comic Masterpieces." In collaboration with Gianandrea Noseda and the National Symphony Orchestra, Blue sang extracts from *La bohème* in February 2019. He heads to Wolf Trap Opera this summer as Harlekin in *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*. In 2018, Blue was an

Apprentice Singer with Santa Fe Opera's summer festival. He also made his debut at Carnegie Hall in Handel's *Messiah* with the Oratorio Society of New York, sang in Moravec's *Sanctuary Road* at Merkin Concert Hall with New York Festival of Song, and performed with Austin Opera as Scaramuccio in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*. During the summer of 2017, he was a Gaddes Festival Artist with the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, where he sang in the American Premier of Philip Glass' *The Trial* and portrayed Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* as a vocal fellow with the Music Academy of the West. Recently, Blue was honored with the Ellen Lopin Blair award for first place at the 2017 Oratorio Society of New York solo competition and received the Emerging Artist Award from the 2017 Opera Index competition in New York City. He was a semi-finalist in the 2018 Metropolitan National Opera Council Auditions, singing on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera in April. Blue earned his Bachelor's degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in 2016 and his Master's degree from Juilliard as a student of Robert C. White, Jr.



American mezzo-soprano **Amanda Lynn Bottoms** joins the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season where she will be performing the roles of Second Lady in the Young Artist production of *The Magic Flute*, Woman 2 in *Blue*, and Strawberry Woman in *Porgy and Bess*. Hailed by the *New York Times* and *Opera News* as "commanding with captivating texture" and "a standout," Bottoms is a recent graduate of the Curtiss Institute of Music. Her mainstage work included a debut as Mrs. Lovett in Emma Griffins' new production of *Sweeney Todd*, originating the role of Frances in the world premiere of *The Flood* with Opera Columbus, Mercedes in *Carmen* with the Buffalo Philharmonic, and performances as Paquette in *Candide* with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra. This season Bottoms was a finalist in numerous competitions including the Zachary Foundation Competition, George London Competition, Gerda Lissner Lied/Song

Competition, and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Regionals. Most notably, participated in the Belvedere Competition in Villach, Austria and continued on as a finalist in Plácido Domingo's Operalia Competition, hosted in Prague, Czechia. The 2019–2020 season will begin with Bottoms' debut in Opera Philadelphia's O19 Festival, performing the role of Smeraldina in Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*. Concert work for the 2018–2019 season included dual performances with the UCLA Symphony, first performing Richard Danielpour's newest work *The Passion of Yeshua*, and Mahler's *Symphony No. 2*. In two lauded returns to Carnegie Hall, Bottoms was featured in the Juilliard School's Bernstein centennial performance of *Songfest* conducted by Marin Alsop and the world premiere of The Brothers Balliett's *Fifty Trillion Molecular Geniuses* with Maestro Mark Shapiro and the Cecilia Chorus of New York. Bottoms's prior seasons have been highlighted by debuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Curtis Symphony Orchestra at the Philadelphia Academy of Music, Wolf Trap Opera, and Washington Performing Arts Society solo recital series. She also performed the roles of Baba in *The Medium* and Olga in

*Eugene Onegin* with Curtis Opera, sang the debut of De Falla's *El Amor Brujo* with the Lansing Symphony, and enjoyed performances in Japan as Anita in Bernstein's *West Side Story* with the NHK Symphony Orchestra and maestro Paavo Järvi. Past seasons at the Chautauqua Institute have seen Bottoms as the titular character in Bizet's *Carmen*, Handel's *Ariodante*, Dritte Dame in *Die Zauberflöte*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* with Maestro Rossen Milanov, as well as in concerts with Craig Rutenberg and Mikael Eliassen. Bottoms received her Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance from the State University of New York at Fredonia, her Master's from The Juilliard School where she was a recipient of the Kovner Fellowship, and a Performance Certificate from the Curtis Institute of Music. She is a proud student of Laurie L. Tramuta (Fredonia) and Marlena Kleinman Malas (Juilliard/Curtis).



Originally from the Bronx, New York, baritone **Joshua Conyers** returns to Washington National Opera's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season to sing the roles of First Priest in *The Magic Flute*, Man 3 in *Blue*, as well as Jim and Jake (cover) in *Porgy and Bess*. During the 2018–2019 season he performed the roles of Giorgio Germont in *La traviata*, British Major in *Silent Night*, Donkey in *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*, and Zaretsky in *Eugene Onegin*. As a participant in the 2018–2019 season's American Opera Initiative 20-minute program, Conyers performed as Jason in *75 Miles* and as a soloist in WNO's "A Concert of Comic Masterpieces." He joined Wolf Trap Opera in the summer of 2018 to perform Monterone and cover the title role in *Rigoletto*, as well as Le comte de Pâris in *Roméo et Juliette*. He returned to Wolf Trap Opera in 2019 for *Le vin herbé* in February, as well as for the roles of Musiklehrer in *Ariadne*

*auf Naxos* and Ramiro in *L'heure espagnole*. Additionally, he was the baritone soloist in a recorded performance of Bernstein's *Songfest* with the National Orchestral Institute and made his Kennedy Center debut as the baritone soloist in Maurice Duruflé's Requiem with Manhattan Concert Productions. Conyers made his Carnegie Hall debut as the baritone soloist in Mozart's *Regina Cœli*, K. 276, Mark Hayes's *Te Deum*, Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*, and Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy* with the New England Symphonic Ensemble. In 2017 and 2018 Conyers was an artist in residence with the Benenson Young Artist Program at Palm Beach where he performed the roles of Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly* (covering Sharpless), Marullo in *Rigoletto* (covering the title role), Sciarrone in *Tosca* (covering Scarpia), and covering the Conte in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Conyers joined The Glimmerglass Festival in the summer of 2017 to cover the roles of Porgy in *Porgy and Bess* and Eustachio in Donizetti's rarely performed *L'assedio di Calais*. He has appeared with esteemed companies such as Santa Fe Opera, Utah Festival Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Piedmont Opera, Vashon Opera, and Indiana University Opera and Ballet Theater. Conyers's additional roles include the title role of *Falstaff*, Marcello in *La bohème*, Scarpia in *Tosca*, Moralès in *Carmen*, and the Mandarin in *Turandot*.



A native of Tucson, Arizona, baritone **Samson McCrady** returns to the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season. This year, he will perform the role of Papageno in the Young Artist production of *The Magic Flute*. During the 2018–2019 season, his roles included Elk/Camel/Butcher in Tesori's *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*, Wagner in Gounod's *Faust*, and Sciarrone in Puccini's *Tosca*. McCrady also performed the role of the Nurse in the American Opera Initiative 20-minute commission *Relapse*, and as a soloist in WNO's "A Concert of Comic Masterpieces." In the summer of 2019, he was seen as Pa Zegner in Mazzoli and Vavrek's *Proving Up* at the Aspen Music Festival. While at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, he performed the title role in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, the King of Scotland in Handel's *Ariodante*, and Jesus in a staged version of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. He has also performed

The Mandarin in a semi-staged version of Puccini's *Turandot* (Kentucky Symphony Orchestra), Alidoro in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* (Queen City Opera), Edward G. Robinson in Robert Xavier-Rodriguez's *Frida* (Cincinnati Opera), and Geronimo in Cimara's *Il matrimonio segreto* (Cincinnati Chamber Opera).



McGrady received a B.M. from Roberts Wesleyan College and completed his M.M. at University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music.



**William Meinert**, bass, joins the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season where he can be seen as Sarastro in the Young Artist production of *The Magic Flute*. Praised for his “beautifully polished bass” (*Dallas News*) and his “charismatic [and] exhilarating comic flair” (*Boston Musical Intelligencer*), Meinert was the 1st Place Prizewinner in the 2018–2019 Houston Grand Opera Eleanor McCollum Competition. The rest of his season included performances of Commendatore in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* with Baltimore Concert Opera, Commentator in Derrick Wang’s opera *Scalia/Ginsburg* with Opera North, Vodník in Dvořák’s *Rusalka* with Madison Opera, Le Duc in Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* with Pensacola Opera, and Escamillo in Bizet’s *Carmen* with Commonwealth Lyric Theater. This past summer, Meinert joined Santa Fe Opera as an Apprentice Artist, covering Hjarne and Corbin in the world premiere of *The Thirteenth Child* by Poul Ruders. During the 2017–2018 season, Meinert was the baritone soloist in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 with Baltimore Youth Orchestra and the bass II soloist in Monteverdi’s *Vespers of 1610* with American Bach Soloists. He also sang Uberto in Pergolesi’s *La Serva Padrona* with Commonwealth Lyric Theater, as well as Dulcamara in Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore* and Le philosophe in Massenet’s *Chérubin* at The Peabody Institute. Highlights of previous seasons include Varlaam (*Boris Godunov*) with Commonwealth Lyric Theater, Carceriere (*Tosca*) and Hortensius (*La fille du régiment*) with Opera North, Basilio (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) with Loudoun Lyric Opera, Aeolus and Cold Genius (*King Arthur*) with American Bach Soloists Academy, Don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*) with Old Towne Opera, and Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*) with Metro Opera Workshop of Detroit. Additional performances include Figaro (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Colline (*La bohème*), Father Peter (*Hansel and Gretel*) and both Sarastro and Sprecher (*Die Zauberflöte*). Meinert has also been a Resident Young Artist with Opera North in 2016 and an Apprentice Artist with Des Moines Metro Opera in 2017 and 2018. He has studied privately with Russell Penney and with Dolora Zajick at her Institute for Young Dramatic Voice.



Atlanta-native pianist and vocal coach **Thomas Morris** returns to the WNO’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season acting as Assistant Conductor for *The Magic Flute*. He spent the summer of 2018 as an apprentice coach at the Merola Opera Program, and joined the music staff of Wolf Trap Opera in the summer of 2019 as pianist for *Ariadne auf Naxos*. He has worked as a staff pianist and coach at the Manhattan School of Music, Indiana University, the Harrower Summer Opera Workshop, and the Castleton Festival. He has spent three summers at the Aspen Music Festival and School in the collaborative piano and opera coaching programs. Morris received his undergraduate degree from Indiana University where he studied piano as well as composition. As part of this degree, he spent a semester in Vienna, Austria, where he studied German language, opera, and Lieder. Morris received his

Master’s at the Manhattan School of Music studying under Warren Jones, and is a current student of Rita Sloan.



A native of Houston, Texas, Lebanese-Mexican soprano **Marlen Nahhas** returns to the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season, performing as Pamina in the Young Artist production of *The Magic Flute*. During the 2018–2019 season, she performed as Violetta in *La traviata*, the Flamingo/Brother 2/Horse/Silk Merchant 1 in *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*, and Queer Kid/Passenger/Holiness Congregation Member in *Taking Up Serpents*. She sang extracts of *La bohème* with Gianandrea Noseda and the National Symphony Orchestra in February 2019, performed for the Czech Prime Minister in March 2019, and appeared as a soloist in WNO’s “A Concert of Comic Masterpieces” in May 2019. Rounding out the 2017–2018 season, Nahhas performed Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City as a member of the Resident Artist Program. Nahhas sang with the San Francisco

Opera’s prestigious Merola Opera Program in the Schwabacher Concert Series in the summer of 2018 where she sang Georgetta in *Il tabarro*, as well as a scene from *Don Giovanni* as Donna Elvira. Previous credits include covering the title role in *Tosca* and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* with Central City Opera, the title role in *Madama Butterfly* with the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, and Antonia in *Les contes d’Hoffmann*. She has also performed with Utah Festival Opera, where she won first place in the Michael Ballam International Opera Competition. Nahhas is also a three-time District Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and was a semi-finalist for the 2018 competition, singing on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera. Nahhas received her M.M. in Vocal Performance from Indiana University.



Native to Chicago, Illinois, Polish-American soprano **Alexandra Nowakowski** returns to Washington National Opera’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season where she will perform the roles of Papagena and Queen of the Night (Young Artist production) in *The Magic Flute*. During the 2018–2019 season she sang the roles of The Unicorn/Weaver (*The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*), and performed as a soloist in WNO’s “A Concert of Comic Masterpieces.” As a participant in the American Opera Initiative 20-minute program, Nowakowski performed as Avery in *75 Miles*, Camila in *Pepita*, and Jessie in *Relapse*. She joined the Apollo Orchestra in music by Richard Strauss in February 2019, and Wolf Trap Opera as Zerbinetta for the summer of 2019. During the summer of 2018, she sang Gilda at the Verbier Festival, and in 2019 she will be the Soprano soloist in the Mozart *Requiem* with the Columbus

Symphony. Nowakowski is a graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts where her roles included Zerbinetta/Najade, Pamina, Lucia, Gilda, Sophie (*Werther*), Zerlina, and Musetta. She has been a soloist with The Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Stéphane Denève and with the Bach Society Houston for the Bach B Minor Mass. She has been the recipient of first place prizes from the Gerda Lissner Foundation Competition, the Violetta DuPont Competition, the American Council for Polish Culture’s Marcella Sembrich Voice Competition, the DC Vocal Arts competition. She also received second prize from the Gerda Lissner Lieder/Song Competition, and an Encouragement Award from the Metropolitan Opera National Council. Nowakowski holds a Bachelor’s degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Tenor **Matthew Pearce** joins the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season where he will be performing as Monostatos in the Young Artist production of *The Magic Flute* and First Philistine in *Samson and Delilah*. Pearce is a recent Master’s graduate of The Juilliard School hailing from the small town of Union, Kentucky. Praised for his “Confidence,” “Brightness” and “High level of Control” (*OperaWire*), Pearce has been a frequenter of the opera and concert stage performing in a wide variety of repertoire. Most recently, Pearce performed in the World Premiere of David Lang’s new opera *The Prisoner of the State* in David Geffen Hall with the New York Philharmonic. While at Juilliard Pearce had the opportunity to perform roles in *L’enfant et les sortilèges* (La théière), and in *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (Spärlich). Outside of opera, he performed “Toys in a Field: Songs from Dien Cai Dau” a new work with the Juilliard Orchestra and *Poem in October* by John Corigliano with

AXIOM. Beyond his school performances, Pearce performed in two New York Festival of Song concerts under the direction of the legendary Steven Blier and made his David Geffen Hall debut performing as a featured soloist in the New York premiere of the Easter Oratorio, *Thy will be Done* with the National Chorale. Pearce also appeared as Don José in *La tragedie de Carmen* with City Lyric Opera in New York City. Pearce was a student of the Aspen Music Festival and School where he appeared in *L’enfant et les sortilèges* (Le petit vieillard) and in *La Traviata* (Gastone). He also attended the Chautauqua Institution where he was Don José in their production of *Carmen*. He will return to Chautauqua this summer where he will perform Tebaldo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. At Juilliard, Pearce studied under the tutelage of Marlena Malas. Before that, Pearce attended the University of Kentucky where he studied under Dr. Everett McCorvey.



A native of Waterford, Michigan, soprano **Alexandria Shiner** returns to WNO’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program in the 2019–2020 season, presenting First Lady in *The Magic Flute*. This past season, she performed the roles of Annina in *La traviata* and Kayla in *Taking Up Serpents*. She also sang as a soloist in “A Concert of Comic Masterpieces.” Her performances in WNO’s 2017–2018 season included the title role in *Alcina* and Berta in *The Barber of Seville*. She reprised the role of Berta in summer 2018 at the Glimmerglass Festival, and headed to Wolf Trap Opera in summer 2019 to undertake her first Ariadne. She makes her Metropolitan Opera debut in the 2020–2021 season. In 2019, Shiner was a recipient of a grant from the Tucker Foundation.

She has also performed the roles of Donna Elvira, Magda Sorel, and the Queen of the Night, and has performed with Knoxville Opera, Marble City Opera, and Opera Naples. In 2014, by invitation of Manhattan Concert Productions, she performed on the Fourth Annual Collegiate Honors Recital in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. She received an Encouragement Award in the 2017 Middle East Tennessee District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and she placed second in the Young Artist category of the 2016 Orpheus National Music Competition for Vocalists. In July 2016, she competed as the Mid-South Regional Winner in the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Artist Awards in Chicago. Shiner received her Master of Music from University of Tennessee, Knoxville and her Bachelor of Music from Western Michigan University. She also attended the American Institute of Musical Studies (AIMS) in Graz, Austria in 2013.



New Jersey native mezzo-soprano **Rehanna Thelwell** joins the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist program for the 2019–2020 season appearing as Third Lady in *The Magic Flute*, Woman 3 in *Blue*, and Annie in *Porgy and Bess*. Applauded for her “superb and expressive power” by the South Florida Classical Review, her collaborations have been described as a “tour de force” by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. For her most recent performances, Thelwell returned to Alaska to perform concert works with the Performing Arts Society. In October of 2018, Thelwell made her Carnegie Hall debut among the Exigence Vocal Ensemble led by Dr. Eugene Roger. In 2018, she joined Opera Theater of Saint Louis for their annual Opera Tastings and later became a part of Opera on the Go and the OTSL Artist in Residence program. As a 2018 Gerdine Young Artist with Opera Theater of St. Louis she covered the role of Addie in Blitzstein’s *Regina* and enjoyed collaborative work with the creative minds of Patricia Racette, Ron Daniels, and Stephen Lord. Earlier in 2018, Thelwell had the immense pleasure of performing as Maria alongside Talise Trevigne and Morris Robinson in The University Musical Society’s *Porgy and Bess*. At the end of her Specialist Degree, she had the unique opportunity to work with composer William Bolcom for his newest opera, *Dinner at Eight*, and performed as the alto soloist with the University of Michigan’s Symphony Orchestra for their performance of Mahler’s Symphony No. 2. During summer 2018, Thelwell returned to the Miami Music Festival Wagner Institute in their production of the *Götterdämmerung* prologue as the 2nd Norn. Previously, Thelwell had the privilege of sharing the stage with soprano Christine Georke and bass-baritone Alan Held for their rendition of “The Ride of the Valkyries”. Thelwell also took part of OperaMODO’s 2016–2017 season as Mistress Quickly in Verdi’s *Falstaff* and Florence Pike in Britten’s *Albert Herring*. During that time, Thelwell was invited to sing with the Kenai Peninsula Orchestra for their performance of Prokofiev’s *Alexander Nevsky* in Anchorage, Alaska. Thelwell was actively involved with the University of Michigan Opera Theatre and Northern Arizona University Opera Theatre where she performed the roles of Ulrica in *Un ballo in maschera*, La Principessa in *Suor Angelica*, Cornelia in *Giulio Cesare*, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi* and Ježibaba in *Rusalka*. Thelwell also had the opportunity to premiere the San Francisco opera workshop production of Bright Sheng’s *Dream of the Red Chamber* as Lady Wang. Thelwell began her professional music studies in 2009 at Northern Arizona University under the instruction of Deborah Raymond. She holds both a Master’s and Specialist degree from the University of Michigan where she was a student of Nadine Washington and Daniel Washington. She has also had the pleasure of working with Kathleen Kelly, Timothy Cheek, Martin Katz, Jerry Blackstone, Eugene Rogers, and Kenneth Kiesler. Thelwell will return to Opera Theatre of Saint Louis for their 2019 season as Giovanna in *Rigoletto* and Ruby in their newly commissioned opera, *Fire Shut Up in my Bones*.



Originally from Princeton Junction, New Jersey, bass **Samuel Weiser** returns to the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season to perform Second Armed Guard in *The Magic Flute*, Sprecher in the Young Artist production of *The Magic Flute*, and Second Philistine in *Samson and Delilah*. During WNO’s 2018–2019 season he performed the Marquis d’Obigny in Verdi’s *La traviata*, Innkeeper/Ox/Shepherd in Jeanine Tesori’s *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*, Captain in Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*, and Jailer in Puccini’s *Tosca*. He was also a soloist for WNO’s “A Concert of Comic Masterpieces.” As a participant in the American Opera Initiative 20-minute program, Weiser performed the title role in *Pepito*. During the summer of 2018 he was an Apprentice Artist with Central City Opera, covering Ferrando in Verdi’s *Il trovatore*, and Der Sprecher in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*. He was seen as Daland in Miami Music Festival’s *Der fliegende Holländer* in the summer of 2019. During the 2017–2018 season with Chicago Opera Theater (COT), Weiser appeared as George Gissing and Solomon Weil in the critically acclaimed world premiere of Mark Campbell’s and Kevin Puts’ *Elizabeth Cree*. During the 2016–2017 season, Weiser was a Gerdine Young Artist with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and was a recipient of a Richard

Gaddes Career Grant during his second season with OTSL. Weiser was chosen as a first place winner of the Saint Louis District in the 2018 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the 2016 Monastero's Bel Canto Contest. A graduate of Roosevelt University (M.M. Voice Performance '16), Weiser currently studies with Laura Brooks Rice, Neil Shicoff, and baritone Bruce Hall.



New York based pianist/vocal coach **William Woodard** is excited to join the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program for the 2019–2020 season. Woodard recently graduated from the Manhattan School of Music where he studied under the tutelage of Warren Jones with the Jensen Scholarship for Opera Accompanying. Previously, Woodard attended Vanderbilt University where he was a Cornelius Vanderbilt Scholar and studied under Amy Dorfman. While at Vanderbilt, Woodard worked with the Vanderbilt Opera Theatre as a coach and rehearsal pianist on projects such as Mark Adamo's *Little Women* and Michael Ching's *Speed Dating Tonight!* He also played on Nashville Public Radio's Live in Studio C Broadcast and performed Mozart's Piano Concerto K.415 with the Vanderbilt University Orchestra as a winner of the annual concerto competition. At the Manhattan School, Woodard worked with the Opera

Theatre department on Rota's *I due timidi*, Puccini's *Suor Angelica* and Britten's *Albert Herring*. He performed in masterclasses for teachers such as Martin Katz, Kathleen Kelly, Sir Thomas Allen, Jennifer Larmore and Diana Soviero. Woodard has also participated in music festivals such as the Aspen Music Festival, SongFest, Bowdoin International Chamber Music Festival and AIMS in Graz where he was awarded the Outstanding Lieder Pianist Prize. This past summer, he was a guest artist with the Missouri River Arts Festival where he put on a concert of Opera Highlights and songs from the American Songbook with singers from the Aspen Music Festival and string players from the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. He made his Carnegie Hall debut this winter while participating in Renée Fleming's SongStudio at Carnegie Hall. Most recently, the KOE Trio, which began playing together at Manhattan School of Music, was selected to perform in Tara Helen O'Connor's masterclass through the The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. This summer, Woodard is excited to be joining the Merola Opera Program as an apprentice coach.

### **ABOUT THE DOMINGO-CAFRITZ YOUNG ARTIST PROGRAM**

Founded by Plácido Domingo, and soon to begin its 18th season, the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program guides young singers and pianists/coaches on the verge of international careers. The program provides intensive study with renowned vocal and dramatic coaches and offers voice lessons, language classes, career guidance, and master classes with Washington National Opera staff and guest artists. The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists also have the opportunity to perform and cover roles in WNO productions, and to create new roles in WNO's new works program, the American Opera Initiative.

In addition to many performances on the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage, the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists have performed at the White House, Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Opéra de Monte-Carlo, the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia, the United States Senate, the Supreme Court, the Music Center at Strathmore, the Smithsonian Institution, the Mexican Cultural Institute, with the Baltimore and Charleston Symphony Orchestras, and at numerous embassies. They have also appeared in concert with Maestro Domingo at the Reignwood Theatre in Beijing.

Each season, the Young Artists sing a fully staged performance with orchestra in the Kennedy Center Opera House as part of the WNO season. Past productions have included *La traviata*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Madama Butterfly* conducted by Maestro Domingo; *Così fan tutte*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute*, and *La bohème* conducted by Philippe Auguin; and *Carmen*, conducted by Evan Rogister. In the 2019–2020 season, the Domingo Cafritz Young Artists will perform in a Young Artist Performance of *The Magic Flute* on Friday, November 22, 2019.

Graduates of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program have gone on to successful careers including performances at the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, LA Opera, New York City Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, Santa Fe Opera, National Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, Bayreuth Festival, the Glyndebourne Festival, Vienna State Opera, Berlin State Opera, Teatro Real in Madrid, and Opéra de Monte-Carlo.

Auditions for places in the program's 2020–2021 season will be held in a series of national auditions throughout the fall of 2019 in Washington, Houston, New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia. More details will be announced in the coming months.

## **ABOUT WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA**

Washington National Opera (WNO) is one of the leading opera companies in the United States. Under the leadership of General Director Timothy O'Leary and world-renowned Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, the company presents a diverse repertory of grand opera across three main venues of the Kennedy Center. From classic operas to more contemporary pieces each season, WNO's artistic output also includes several commissioned American works and a variety of special concerts, youth operas, and events.

Recent celebrated productions have included the world premiere of Philip Glass's reconceived *Appomattox*, presented in conjunction with cultural events throughout Washington, D.C.; the powerful performances of Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars*; and the massive feat of WNO's first-complete *Ring* cycle, which was helmed by Zambello and played to sold-out houses following international acclaim.

Founded in 1956 and an artistic affiliate of the Kennedy Center since 2011, WNO has a storied legacy of more than 100 new productions, plus world premieres, international tours, live recordings and radio broadcasts, as well as innovative education and community-engagement programs. Throughout its history, WNO has been led by titans in the opera field, including the legendary Plácido Domingo who headed the company for 15 years, as well as luminaries such as Music Director Heinz Fricke and Director of Artistic Operations Christina Scheppelmann.

Among the company's most successful programs is the American Opera Initiative (AOI), a commissioning program that develops new one-act works for WNO's annual festival. By mentoring emerging composers and librettists, the Initiative works to expand the American operatic repertory and enhance its relevance to our time. Since its inception, AOI has commissioned 28 chamber opera world premieres, with some going on to future productions around the country.

With a commitment toward youth, WNO contributes to the future of opera through two signature artist-development programs. The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, now in its 17th season, is one of the nation's most competitive professional training programs, providing two years of intensive study to a highly selective cadre of young singers and collaborative pianists. Alumni of the program have won major competitions and gone on to successful careers at major opera houses worldwide. The WNO Opera Institute nurtures the ambitions of high-school-age singers from across the nation during an intensive three-week summer program held at American University in Washington.

The most popular of WNO's community-engagement programs is *Opera in the Outfield*<sup>®</sup>, a free Kennedy Center Opera House production broadcast on the high-definition scoreboard at Nationals Park. The company's other education programs include the Kids Create Opera program at local elementary schools, Look-In performances for students in grades 3–8, and the Student Dress Rehearsal Program for middle and high school students. The company also offers free Opera Insights programs before every performance in the Opera House.

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