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Media Contacts:

[Rachelle Roe](#), 312.618.6655

THE DALLAS OPERA ANNOUNCES THE WINNERS OF ITS NATIONAL VOCAL COMPETITION

DALLAS—The Dallas Opera (TDO) is pleased to announce the winners of the 31st Dallas Opera National Vocal Competition, following their live performances tonight with The Dallas Opera Orchestra, led by The Mrs. Eugene McDermott Music Director Emmanuel Villaume.

First Place: Blake Denson, baritone

Second Place: Kathryn Henry, soprano

Third Place: Sylvia D'Eramo, soprano and Sun-Ly Pierce, mezzo-soprano

People's Choice Award (determined by audience vote): Blake Denson, baritone

All prizewinners receive cash prizes, as well as the opportunity to perform with a major orchestra and a world-class conductor.

The final round of competition was held earlier this evening, **Friday, October 29**, at the Winspear Opera House, with performances by eight finalists from across the U.S. and Mexico.

Winners were selected by a distinguished panel of judges, chaired by The Dallas Opera's Artistic Consultant David Lomelí and including Maestro Villaume; Afton Battle, General Director of Fort Worth Opera; Christina Scheppelmann, General Director of Seattle Opera; Jean Kellogg, Executive Director of the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera; and Brian Zeger, Artistic Director of the Marcus Vocal Arts Department at The Juilliard School.

The other finalists who participated in the final round were soprano **Chasiti Lashay**, tenor **Efraín**

Corralejo, bass-baritone **Evan Lazdowski**, and bass **Ricardo Ceballos de la Mora**.

This year's Dallas Opera National Vocal Competition, which was sponsored by The Dallas Opera Guild, was co-chaired by Dallas Opera Guild members Jana and Mac Irwin to honor the memories of Cecile Bonte and Connie Klemow, longtime leaders of The Dallas Opera Guild and enthusiastic supporters of The Dallas Opera's young artist development programs. The competition was open to applicants aged 18-34 from all U.S states and territories, including international students attending American colleges, universities, and music conservatories. Also eligible were active members of any young artist program associated with an American opera company. Preliminary and semi-final rounds were held privately.

Past prizewinners in The Dallas Opera National Vocal Competition have gone on to establish impressive careers—with many having been cast by The Dallas Opera—including sopranos Latonia Moore, who appears this season as Cio-Cio-San in *Madame Butterfly*, Kecia Ashford, Katherine Bongfeldt, and Mary Dunleavy; mezzo sopranos J'Nai Bridges, who was recently hailed by *BET* as "the Beyoncé of opera," Kelly Kimball, and Randalee Maddox; countertenors Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen and John Holiday; tenors Clifton Forbis, Jesús Garcia, Scott Quinn, and Scott Scully; baritones Thomas Cannon, Christopher Holmes, Weston Hurt, Steven LaBrie, and Erik Nelson Werner; and bass Matthew Treviño, among many others.

ABOUT THE WINNERS

BLAKE DENSON, originally from Paducah, Kentucky, was a Grand Finals winner in the 2020 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. A 2018 alumnus of Houston Grand Opera's Young Artist Vocal Academy, Denson is in his second season as a Houston Grand Opera Studio artist. During HGO's 2021/2022 season, he will portray Moralès/*Carmen* (while covering Escamillo), Daddy and Time/*The Snowy Day* (alternate cast performances), the Jailer/*Dialogues of the Carmelites*, and Gregorio/*Romeo and Juliet*. During the 2020/2021 HGO Digital season he appeared in *Giving Voice*, as Peter/*Hansel and Gretel*, and in *Suite Española: Explorando Iberia*. In the summer of 2019, Denson was a member of the Wolf Trap Opera Studio program, where he returned for the 2020 summer season. Although unable to appear onstage in *Eugene Onegin* at Wolf Trap due to the coronavirus pandemic, Denson did perform scenes recorded on video from that work, as well as from *La bohème* and *The Crucible*. Denson is an alumnus of the University of Kentucky School of Music and Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. At the start of the 2019/2020 season, Denson returned to Rice University, where he completed his final year in the master's program at the Shepherd School of Music. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Music Performance from the University of Kentucky.

A native of Tyler, Texas, soprano **SYLVIA D'ERAMO** is a second-year member of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program and makes her Met debut this season as

Countess Ceprano/*Rigoletto*. In the summer of 2021, she sang her first Mimi/*La bohème* at Switzerland's Verbier Festival. During the 2019/2020 season she joined LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program, where she sang Fosforo/Landi's *La Morte d'Orfeo*. She also made her company and role debut as Musetta/*La bohème* at Lyric Opera of Kansas City. D'Eramo was a 2018 and 2019 apprentice artist at The Santa Fe Opera, appearing as Barena/*Jenůfa* and the Cousin/*Madama Butterfly*. She has also been heard at Yale Opera as Gretel/*Hansel and Gretel* and Pamina/*The Magic Flute*. Her credits in concert repertoire include Verdi's *Requiem* (the Marvin Concert Series in Tyler) and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Marin Alsop conducting (Yale Philharmonia). D'Eramo has recorded the demanding role of Abigail Williams/*The Crucible* for Albany Records. She was a semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, a winner in the Lois Alba Aria Competition, the recipient of a Career Grant from the Giulio Gari Foundation, and of an Encouragement Award from the Jensen Foundation.

A 2021 apprentice artist at The Santa Fe Opera, soprano **KATHRYN HENRY**—with one week's notice—stepped into the role of Lucy Harker in the world premiere of John Corigliano and Mark Adamo's *The Lord of Cries* earning critical acclaim. She appeared in 2020 as Micaëla/*Carmen* at Milwaukee's Florentine Opera, where she returns this season in the title role of Pauline Viardot's *Cendrillon*. While studying as a Toulmin Foundation Scholar at The Juilliard School, Henry appeared there as Arminda/*La finta giardiniera* and performed in Juilliard's celebrations of the 80th birthdays of William Bolcom and John Corigliano with the New York Festival of Song. As a Baumgartner Studio Artist with the Florentine Opera, she portrayed Barbarina/*The Marriage of Figaro*. She has also participated in the Wolf Trap Opera young artist program and the Ravinia Festival's Steans Music Institute. Henry was a finalist in the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Houston Grand Opera's 2018 Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, and the 2021 National Opera Association Carolyn Bailey and Dominick Argento Vocal Competition. Concert credits include performances with the National Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra. In recital, the soprano has performed alongside pianists Brian Zeger, Craig Rutenburg, and Mikael Eliassen. In 2017 Henry was invited to Japan as a guest singer in the Kyoto International Student Music Festival.

Originally from Clinton, New York, Chinese American mezzo-soprano **SUN-LY PIERCE** is a second-year Houston Grand Opera Studio artist and first-prize winner in HGO's 2020 Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. For HGO's 2021/2022 season she will portray Mercédès/*Carmen*, Sister Mathilde/*Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Second Lady/*The Magic Flute*, and Stephano/*Romeo and Juliet*. Last season with HGO, she appeared as Liesl/"My Favorite Things: Songs from *The Sound of Music*" and as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* (HGO Digital). Pierce, who completed the graduate vocal arts program at the Bard College Conservatory of Music, holds a Bachelor's Degree in Vocal Performance from the Eastman School of Music. As a winner of the Marilyn Horne Song Competition, Pierce was set to perform on an international recital tour with pianist Chien-Lin Lu featuring the premiere of a new song cycle by two-time Grammy Award-winning composer Jennifer Higdon, which was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. In the fall of 2019, Pierce joined the Broad Street Orchestra as Dorinda/Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. A winner of the 2019 Marilyn Horne Song Competition, she returned to the Music Academy of the West as a Vocal Fellow in 2021.

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## **ABOUT THE DALLAS OPERA**

One of the leading opera companies in the country, The Dallas Opera has an extraordinary legacy of world-class productions and thrilling premieres featuring the greatest operatic artists of our time. Inaugurated in 1957 with a concert featuring the incomparable Maria Callas, TDO is known for the

notable U.S. debuts of a host of legendary artists including Plácido Domingo, Dame Joan Sutherland, Jon Vickers, Franco Zeffirelli, and Sir David McVicar. The company has long been an industry leader and innovator through groundbreaking initiatives including the Hart Institute for Women Conductors, TDO Network, free public simulcasts, acclaimed art song recitals, the national vocal competition, special concerts, and outstanding family and award-winning education programs. TDO's home is the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House, a jewel in the Dallas Arts District. As one of the largest performing arts employers in North Texas, TDO is proudly committed to diversity, both onstage and off, and is a major contributor to the economic vitality and international cultural reputation of this region.

### SEASON SPONSOR

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