

For Immediate Release

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THE DALLAS OPERA ANNOUNCES THE WINNERS OF ITS LONE STAR VOCAL COMPETITION

DALLAS, March 7, 2025—The Dallas Opera (TDO) is pleased to announce the winners of the 2025 Dallas Opera Lone Star Vocal Competition, following their live performances tonight at the Winspear Opera House. The event was hosted by soprano Sylvia D’Eramo, who stars in TDO’s current production of *La bohème*.

First Place: Kayla Nanto, Mezzo-Soprano

Kayla Nanto is automatically advanced to the final round of the 2026 National Vocal Competition.

Second Place: Michael Pandolfo, Baritone

Third Place: Ani Kushyan, Mezzo-Soprano

Jonathan Pell People’s Choice Award (determined by audience vote): Kayla Nanto, Mezzo-Soprano

The 2025 Lone Star Vocal Competition took place earlier this evening, **Friday, March 7, 2025**, at the Winspear Opera House, with performances by nine finalists.

A distinguished panel of judges, chaired by TDO’s Artistic Consultant, **David Lomelí**, selected the winners. The panel included **Annie Burridge**, General Director & CEO of Austin Opera; **Kristian Roberts**, TDO Director of Education; and **Emmanuel Villaume**, the Mrs. Eugene McDermott Music Director of The Dallas Opera. Jonathan Pell, TDO’s former Artistic Director, withdrew from the panel due to illness.

The nine finalists were soprano **Amelia Burshe**, bass-baritone **Sam Dhobhany**, mezzo-soprano **Stephanie Doche**, mezzo-soprano **Joanne Evans**, mezzo-soprano **Ani Kushyan**, mezzo-soprano **Kayla Nanto**, baritone **Michael Pandolfo**, soprano **Ardeen Pierre**, and soprano **Laura Corina Sanders**. Each finalist sang two arias, with piano accompaniment by Mikhail Berestnev and Christopher Devlin. Repertoire

included works by Donizetti, Gounod, Handel, Offenbach, Verdi, Gershwin, Rossini, Strauss, Wagner, and others.

Finalists in the 33rd Vocal Competition were selected from a record-breaking 119 applicants—the highest number of entries for TDO’s Texas-based competition since the event was divided into state-wide and national contests in 2020. The Lone Star Vocal Competition is open to applicants based in Texas, including students from other U.S. states or international countries attending Texas colleges, universities, and music conservatories.

ABOUT THE VOCAL COMPETITION

Since its inception by the Dallas Opera Guild more than 30 years ago, TDO’s annual Vocal Competition has awarded more than 100 young artists. Many of those winners have gone on to perform with some of the world’s most notable opera companies. More than three dozen have also returned to The Dallas Opera in mainstage principal roles. This includes the 2025 competition host, Sylvia D’Eramo, who was a winner in TDO’s 2022 National Vocal Competition and who currently stars as Mimì in the company’s production of *La bohème*.

All winners receive cash prizes, and the first-place winner automatically advances to the final round of the 2026 National Vocal Competition. The cash prizes were \$1,000 for the People’s Choice Award, donated by Neil Oxford, in memory of Francine Burrows Werbin; \$1,500 for third place, donated by Patsy and Bob Brooks; \$3,000 for second place, donated by The Bessylee Penland Fund; and \$5,000 for first place, donated by The Jennings Family.

ABOUT THE WINNERS

Kayla Nanto, Mezzo-Soprano

From: Loveland, CO

Career highlights: Kayla Nanto is a dynamic and versatile mezzo-soprano based in Dallas. This season, she joins Opera Montana as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* and returns to Santa Fe Opera for her second year as an apprentice singer. At Santa Fe Opera, Nanto previously covered Deirdre in *The Righteous* and Third Noble Orphan in *Der Rosenkavalier*. She has also trained with Pensacola Opera as a Jan Miller Studio Artist and worked with Teatro Nuovo as a Resident Artist. Recent engagements include Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus* and Nettie Fowler in *Carousel* (Pensacola Opera); Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* (Opera in the Heights); the title role in a workshop of *Zheng* (Opera San Jose); the title role in *Carmen* (Painted Sky Opera); and Flora in *La traviata* (Fort Worth Opera). Nanto is a two-time district winner of the Metropolitan Opera’s Laffont Competition and holds degrees from University of North Texas and University of Northern Colorado.

Michael Pandolfo, Baritone

From: Fort Worth, TX

Career highlights: Hailed for his “show stopping” and “well-schooled” voice, Texas native Michael Pandolfo has performed at several prestigious opera houses and training programs. He has been a Santa Fe Opera apprentice singer and a Studio Artist with Florida Grand Opera. His recent credits include Young Raymond/The Nominee in *The Manchurian Candidate* at Austin Opera, Fiorello in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Des Moines Metro Opera (where he also covered the title role in *Pelléas et Mélisande*), and Belcore in *L’elisir d’amore* at Gulfshore Opera. Work at other companies includes Santa Fe Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, Opera Tampa, Florida Grand Opera, and Dayton Opera. Guest performances include University of Texas at Arlington, University of Cincinnati, and University of Kentucky. Pandolfo graduated from the University of Kentucky in 2018 with his bachelor of music in vocal performance, and in 2021 he graduated from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music with his master’s degree in music.

Ani Kushyan, Mezzo-Soprano

From: Tbilisi, Georgia

Career highlights: Amongst other awards, Georgian-Armenian mezzo-soprano Ani Kushyan is a 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition Georgia District winner. Kushyan has studied in conservatories and music academies in Armenia, Georgia, Latvia, and Germany. Currently, she is a second-year Houston Grand Opera Sarah and Ernest Butler Studio Artist. This season at HGO, she performs the role of Shepherd in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. Previous HGO roles include Flower Maiden/Second Esquire in Wagner’s *Parsifal* and Sister Sophia in *The Sound of Music*. In October 2023, Kushyan made her Carnegie Hall debut in a concert dedicated to composer Sergei Rachmaninoff’s 150th anniversary, and in summer 2024 she performed as a mezzo-soprano soloist in Houston Ballet’s *Mayerling* production. Previously, Kushyan was a member of the Armenian National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet’s young artists program from 2021 to 2023, making her company debut in composer Armen Tigranian’s opera *Anoush*. An active concert performer, she has appeared in Germany, USA, Italy, Latvia, Georgia, and Armenia.

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 and appearances 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, free and low-cost digital streaming, 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 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.

For more details, visit dallasopera.org

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