



THE INAUGURAL DUNCAN WILLIAMS VOICE COMPETITION

Hosted by J'Nai Bridges (BM '09)

The Duncan Williams Voice Competition was made possible
by the Sphinx Organization's Sphinx Venture Fund.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2023 | 7:30 PM
NEIDORFF-KARPATI HALL

THE INAUGURAL **DUNCAN WILLIAMS VOICE COMPETITION**

The Duncan Williams Voice Competition for Black and Latinx singers, presented by New York City Opera in partnership with Manhattan School of Music, celebrates newcomers with exceptional singing talent who are poised for promising careers. Open to singers in two divisions—Developing Artists (ages 18 to 25) and Emerging Artists (ages 26 and over)—the competition aims to eliminate barriers for Black and Latinx singers. The awards include cash prizes, performance contracts with New York City Opera, and mentorship.

The competition is named for baritone Todd Duncan and soprano Camilla Williams, the first African-American singers to sing with a major U.S. opera company when they made their debuts with New York City Opera.

We would like to thank New Camerata Opera and Opera Hispánica, who have agreed to consider finalists for roles in future productions:

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PROGRAM

Developing Artists

AMBROISE THOMAS
(1811–1896)

“Je suis Titania” from *Mignon*
Eva Rae Martinez, soprano

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
(1685–1759)

“Piangerò la sorte mia” from *Giulio Cesare*
Jillian Tate, soprano

RICHARD STRAUSS
(1864–1949)

“Mir ist die Ehre widerfahren” from *Der Rosenkavalier*
Amia Langer, soprano

GIUSEPPE VERDI
(1813–1901)

“O figli, o figli miei. . . Ah! la paterna mano” from *Macbeth*
Benjamin Ruiz, tenor

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
(1841–1901)

"Song to the Moon" from *Rusalka*
Maia Aramburú, soprano

GIUSEPPE VERDI

"Caro nome che il mio cor" from *Rigoletto*
Jazmine Christina Saunders, soprano

JULES MASSENET
(1842–1912)

“Il est doux, il est bon” from *Hérodiade*

Elizabeth Hanje, soprano

GIACOMO PUCCINI
(1858–1924)

"Che gelida manina" from *La bohème*

Daniel Luis Espinal, tenor

Intermission

Emerging Artists

RICHARD WAGNER
(1813–1883)

“Dich, teure Halle, grüss ich wieder” from *Tannhäuser*

Ardeen Pierre, soprano

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF
(1873–1943)

"Ves' tabar spit" (Aleko's Cavatina) from *Aleko*

Joseph Parrish, baritone

GIACOMO PUCCINI

"Recondita armonia" from *Tosca*

Lwazi Hlati, tenor

GAETANO DONIZETTI
(1797–1848)

“Regnava nel silenzio” from *Lucia di Lammermoor*

Kresley Figueroa, soprano

W. A. MOZART
(1756–1791)

“Hai già vinta la causa!” from *Le nozze di Figaro*

Brandon Bell, baritone

GIOACHINO ROSSINI
(1792–1868)

"Largo al factotum" from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*

José Luis Maldonado, baritone

GIACOMO PUCCINI “Avete Torto!” from *Gianni Schicchi*
César Andrés Parreño, tenor

GIACOMO PUCCINI “Te Deum” from *Tosca*
Gerardo de la Torre, baritone

CHARLES GOUNOD
(1818–1893) “Avant de quitter ces lieux” from *Faust*
Lawrence Mitchell-Matthews, baritone

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS
(1835–1921) “Amour! viens aider ma faiblesse!”
from *Samson et Dalila*
Cierra Byrd, mezzo-soprano

JULES MASSENET “Vision fugitive” from *Hérodiade*
Daniel Rich, baritone

THE JUDGES

Denyce Graves

Denyce Graves has graced nearly all the world's major opera house stages and concert halls during her three-decade-long career. Signature opera roles include Carmen, Dalila, and Margaret Garner. Ms. Graves launched the Denyce Graves Foundation in 2021. Connecting past to present, the foundation is establishing the legacy of previously unacknowledged artists, allowing their hidden voices to finally be heard and their stories told, while setting the stage for the next generation of history-making opera stars.

Ana de Archuleta

As founder of ADA Artist Management, Ana de Archuleta's focus has been to identify exciting new talent and nurture the careers of the finest performers from a variety of genres, including emerging and internationally renowned artists. She is also a board member of the new Olga Iglesias Project, helping and promoting the native lyric artists of Puerto Rico, and serves as Director of Artistic Operations for National Sawdust.

Maggey Oplinger

Maggey Oplinger joined the Florentine as General Director and CEO in 2019. Under her tenure, the company presents timeless works within the context of the Milwaukee community, approaching opera as a powerhouse for different voices and stories. The Florentine brings opera to 15,000 students and the city through great performance experiences, connection, community, and unsung voices at center stage.

Damien Sneed

Pianist, organist, composer, conductor, producer, arranger, and arts educator Damien Sneed has worked with musical legends Aretha Franklin, Jessye Norman, Wynton Marsalis, Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Lawrence Brownlee, and more. A 2014 Sphinx Medal of Excellence recipient, Sneed is an MSM Jazz Arts faculty member and Artist-in-Residence at Berklee College of Music. For the 2018–19 season, he served as music director, composer-in-residence, and cover conductor for Houston Grand Opera, who commissioned him to compose the chamber opera *Marian's Song*. Other commissions include the original score for *Testament* for Alvin Ailey Dance Theater and the operas *The Tongue & The Lash* (2021) and the upcoming *Treemonisha* (May 20–June 24, 2023), his reimaged adaptation of Scott Joplin's work, for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

Gil Rose

One of today's most trailblazing conductors, Gil Rose is equally at home performing core repertoire, new music, and lesser-known historic works. He is the founder of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project Opera, praised by the New York Times as "one of the East Coast's most interesting opera companies." In its 25th season, BMOP and Odyssey will co-produce *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line to Freedom*, the second opera in the series *As Told By: History, Race, and Justice* on the Opera Stage, a 5-year initiative highlighting Black composers and vital figures of Black liberation and thought.

THE FINALISTS

Developing Artists (Ages 18 to 25)

Maia Aramburú, soprano
Lima, Peru

Daniel Luis Espinal, tenor
Sarasota, Florida

Elizabeth Hanje, soprano
Birmingham, Alabama

Amia Langer, soprano
Fanwood, New Jersey

Eva Rae Martinez, soprano
Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Benjamin Ruiz, tenor
Harlingen, Texas

Jazmine Christina Saunders,
soprano
Rochester, New York

Jillian Tate, soprano
Fairfax, Virginia

Emerging Artists (Ages 26 and over)

Brandon Bell, baritone
Suffolk, Virginia

Cierra Byrd, mezzo-soprano
Akron, Ohio

Kresley Figueroa, soprano
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Lwazi Hlati, tenor
Johannesburg, South Africa

José Luis Maldonado, baritone
Los Angeles, California

Lawrence Mitchell-Matthews,
baritone
Detroit, Michigan

Joseph Parrish, baritone
Baltimore, Maryland

César Andrés Parreño, tenor
Guayaquil, Ecuador

Ardeen Pierre, soprano
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Daniel Rich, baritone
Baltimore, Maryland

Gerardo de la Torre, baritone
Monterrey, Mexico

MSM ORCHESTRA

Constantine Orbelian, Conductor

VIOLIN 1

Youjin Choi,
concertmaster
Seoul, South Korea

Yunjung Ko
Seoul, South Korea

Jimi Kim
Daegu, South Korea

Qianru Elaine He
Guangzhou, China

Noel Doblas
Plentzia, Spain

Katherine Woo
San Jose, California

Coco Sun
New York, New York

Jasmine Lin
Etobicoke, Canada

Javed Wong
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Yihan Zhu
Shanghai, China

Sandra Bouissou
Palo Alto, California

VIOLIN 2

Bin Gui, principal
Qingdao, China

Xinyi Wang
Suzhou, China

Joo Eun Lee
Towson, Maryland

Tara Pagano-Toub
New York, New York

Yoojin Lee
Guri-si, South Korea

Yaewon Choi
Seoul, South Korea

Hanlon Mcgarity
Bellingham, Washington

Chrystelle Catalano
Padova, Italy

Minjoo Moon
New York, New York

Amelia Bailey
Round Hill, Virginia

VIOLA

Kunbo Xu, principal
Changsha, China

Se Lyin Hong
Seoul, South Korea

Avery Avanti
New York, New York

Candy Yang
New York, New York

Ariana Mascari
Chicago, Illinois

Oryann Tsaig
Kadima, Israel

Yen-Hsin Chiang
New Taipei City, Taiwan

CELLO

Jessamyn Fry
San Francisco, California

Rachel Lulseged
Richardson, Texas

Nina Pitts
Houston, Texas

Yeonsue Cho
Ulsan, South Korea

Scott Lavine
Greenville, North Carolina

Seonghui Lee
Bucheon-Si, South Korea

Miles Goosby
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Jakub Wycislik
Ruda Slaska, Katowice, Poland

DOUBLE BASS

Parry Leong
McKinney, Texas

Antonio Suarez
Yonkers, New York

Jonas Hensell
Hamburg, Germany

Mark Lillie
Boulder, Colorado

FLUTE

Ryan Norville
Fort Myers, Florida

Kyungmin Eom
Busan, South Korea

OBOE

Ellen Gruber
Cortlandt Manor, New York

Soo Min Ha
Seoul, South Korea

Seo Young Hong
Planedome, New York

Hajin Kil
Seoul, South Korea

Sophia Lee
Great Neck, New York

CLARINET

Bum Namkoong
Incheon, South Korea

Ki-Deok Park
Chicago, Illinois

Spencer Reese
Dallas, Texas

Tsun Yin Tse
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

BASSOON**Jensen Bocco***Winter Springs, Florida***Nicholas Fitch***Kerrville, Texas***Nina Laube***Chicago, Illinois***Gloria Sun***Beijing, China***HORN****Marlena DeStefano***Pompano Beach, Florida***Keegan Mccardell***Ellicott City, Maryland***Pei-Yu Lo***Changhua City, Taiwan***TRUMPET****Nathan McKinstry***State College, Pennsylvania***Lindsay Ross***Footbill Ranch, California***TROMBONE****Sterling Davis***Columbus, Ohio***Sarah Rathbun***Wellington, New Zealand***Jordan Davenport***Highland Village, Texas***TUBA****Zachary Solano***Ledgewood, New Jersey***TIMPANI****Hwaneek Pak***Columbia, Maryland***PERCUSSION****Tarun Bellur***Plano, Texas***William Richards***Wheaton, Illinois***Christian Santos***Dumont, New Jersey***Gabriel Levy***Toronto, Canada***Evan Silberstein***Sparta New Jersey***HARP****Esther Chung***Seoul, South Korea***Christina Kant***Edmonton, Canada***PIANO****Yihao Zhou***Beijing, China*

OUR SUPPORTERS

A special thanks to our donors, supporters, and friends who contributed to the Duncan Williams Voice Competition:

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ABOUT TODD DUNCAN

Kentucky native Todd Duncan (1903–1998) received a BA in music from Butler University in Indianapolis, followed by an MA from Teachers College, Columbia University. Duncan was George Gershwin’s choice to be the first performer of the role of Porgy in *Porgy and Bess* in 1935, which became one of his signature roles. During the Washington run of *Porgy and Bess* at the National Theatre in 1936 he led the cast to protest the theatre’s segregation policy, stating that he “would never play in a theater that barred him from purchasing tickets to certain seats because of his race.” Eventually, the management gave in to their demands and allowed the first integrated performance at the National Theatre. Duncan was also the first performer in the role of Stephen Kumalo in Kurt Weill’s *Lost in the Stars*.

In 1945, he became the first African American to sing with a major opera company when he performed the role of Tonio in Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* with New York City Opera. In the same year, he sang the role of Escamillo, the bullfighter, in Bizet’s *Carmen*. In 1954, Duncan was the first to record *Unchained Melody*, a popular song with music by Alex North and lyrics by Hy Zaret, which went on to become one of the most recorded songs of the 20th century. The recording was made for the soundtrack of the obscure prison film *Unchained*, in which Duncan also played a minor character.

Duncan felt a deep connection to spirituals, which he described as being “so deep inside of me, it’s difficult for me to find words that are meaningful.”

Spirituals are a part of whatever I am. When I sing them my being sings them, not my throat... It is very difficult for me to put into words something that is at the bottom of my very being.

ABOUT CAMILLA WILLIAMS

Camilla Williams (1919–2012) trained at Virginia State College, now Virginia State University, and received her Bachelor’s degree in music education. After college, she left her job as a third-grade teacher to study music in Philadelphia with the prestigious voice instructor Marion Szekely Freschl. She earned a Marian Anderson Award in 1943.

Beginning in 1944, Williams performed on the coast-to-coast RCA radio network. In 1946 she was the first African American to receive a regular contract with a major American opera company, making her debut with New York City Opera in the title role in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. A critic for the *New York Times* hailed her performance as “an instant and pronounced success.” During her

time at New York City Opera, she performed Nedda in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Mimi in Puccini's *La bohème*, Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*, Micaela in Bizet's *Carmen*, and the title role in Verdi's *Aida*.

Williams sang throughout the United States and Europe with various other opera companies. In 1951 she sang Bess in the landmark first complete recording of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, alongside bass-baritone Lawrence Winters and conductor Lehman Engel. Though she enjoyed the recording experience, she believed strongly that the work needed to be restaged to portray contemporary African American life more accurately, resulting in her decision not to perform the work on stage.

In 1954 she became the first African American to sing a significant role with the Vienna State Opera, performing her signature role in *Madama Butterfly*. In August 1963, as part of the civil rights March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, she sang *The Star-Spangled Banner* at the White House, and then, when scheduled performer Marian Anderson was delayed trying to get through the gathered throng, sang the anthem again before 250,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial, before Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

A noted concert artist, Williams toured throughout the United States and Latin America, in 14 African countries, and in numerous countries in Asia: Formosa, South Korea, China, Japan, Laos, South Vietnam, the Philippines, New Zealand, and Australia. In addition, she was a soloist with the Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Leopold Stokowski. In 1950 she recorded Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with Stokowski and the New York Philharmonic.

In 1977, Williams was the first African-American Professor of Voice to be appointed to the faculty of what is now known as Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, and in 1984 she became the first African-American instructor at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China. In 1997 Camilla Williams became Professor *Emerita* of Voice at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music but continued to teach privately.

ABOUT NEW YORK CITY OPERA

Since its founding in 1943 by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia as “The People’s Opera,” New York City Opera (NYCO) has been a critical part of the city’s cultural life. During its history, New York City Opera launched the careers of dozens of major artists and presented engaging productions of both mainstream and unusual operas alongside commissions and regional premieres.

The first major opera company to feature African-American singers in leading roles—Todd Duncan as Tonio in *Pagliacci* in 1945 and Camilla Williams in the title role in *Madama Butterfly* in 1946—New York City Opera was also the first to produce a new work by an African-American composer (William Grant Still’s *Troubled Island* in 1949) and the first to have an African-American conductor lead its orchestra (Everett Lee in 1955).

New York City Opera has maintained a distinct identity, adhering to its unique mission: affordable ticket prices, a devotion to American works, English-language performances, the promotion of up-and-coming American singers, and seasons of accessible, vibrant, and compelling productions intended to introduce new audiences to the art form. Stars who launched their careers at New York City Opera include Catherine Malfitano, Sherrill Milnes, Samuel Ramey, Beverly Sills, Tatiana Troyanos, Carol Vaness, and Shirley Verrett, among dozens of other great artists.

A revitalized City Opera reopened in January 2016 with *Tosca*, the opera that originally launched the company in 1944. Outstanding productions since then include the world premieres of Iain Bell and Mark Campbell’s *Stonewall*, which NYCO commissioned and developed, and Ted Rosenthal’s jazz opera *Dear Erich* (its first co-production with National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene); legendary director Harold Prince’s new production of Bernstein’s *Candide*; Daniel Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas*, inspired by the work of Gabriel García Márquez, as the first in its Ópera en Español series. Subsequent Ópera en Español productions include the New York premiere of the world’s first mariachi opera, José “Pepe” Martínez’s *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, Literes’s *Los Elementos*, and Piazzolla’s *María de Buenos Aires*. In addition to the world premiere of *Stonewall*, productions of Eötvös’s *Angels in America*, Charles Wuorinen’s *Brokeback Mountain*, and the Laura Kaminsky-Mark Campbell-Kimberly Reed opera *As One* were presented as part of City Opera’s Pride Initiative.

ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Founded as a community music school by Janet Daniels Schenck in 1918, today MSM is recognized for its more than 1,000 superbly talented undergraduate and graduate students who come from more than 50 countries and nearly all 50 states; its innovative curricula and world-renowned artist-teacher faculty that includes musicians from the New York Philharmonic, the Met Orchestra, and the top ranks of the jazz and Broadway communities; and a distinguished community of accomplished, award-winning alumni working at the highest levels of the musical, educational, cultural, and professional worlds.

The School is dedicated to the personal, artistic, and intellectual development of aspiring musicians, from its Precollege students through those pursuing doctoral studies. Offering classical, jazz, and musical theatre training, MSM grants a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. True to MSM's origins as a music school for children, the Precollege Division is a highly competitive and professionally oriented Saturday music program, dedicated to the musical and personal growth of talented young musicians ages 5 to 18. The School also serves some 2,000 New York City schoolchildren through its Arts-in-Education Program, and another 2,000 students through its critically acclaimed Distance Learning Program.

MSM's Cultural Inclusion Initiative

The mission of the Cultural Inclusion Initiative is to foster diversity, equity, and inclusive practices throughout Manhattan School of Music. The Cultural Inclusion Initiative provides support and opportunities for each of us in the MSM Community to

- develop a greater understanding about our own worldview and how it influences our actions
- consider how we are positioned in relation to others and recognize differences based on our respective worldviews
- seek out opportunities for greater openness to new and unfamiliar ideas and behaviors, to diverse cultures and cultural backgrounds, and to all identities
- take risks in our learning by developing greater openness and to learn more about ourselves and those in our Community
- take action to promote equity on and off campus

THE DUNCAN WILLIAMS VOICE COMPETITION

Alexa Smith (MM '10), Founding Artistic Director

Alexa Smith (she/her) is the Associate Vice President for Strategic Innovation and Special Initiatives at Manhattan School of Music where she oversees special projects for the Office of the President including MSM's Cultural Inclusion Initiative.

She is a recent alumna of the SphinxLEAD Program, a two-year professional empowerment program designed to evolve the landscape of arts leadership.

She holds degrees in voice from Manhattan School of Music and Roosevelt University and an MBA from Boston University. She has completed Inclusive Leader training with Jennifer Brown Consulting.

Previously, she was Director of Marketing at New York City Opera where she oversaw marketing and planning operations and created events for the Pride Series (Wuorinen's *Brokeback Mountain* and Iain Bell and Mark Campbell's World Premiere of *Stonewall*) and Opéra en Español series. She created partnerships with the LGBT Community Center, the Mexican Consulate and Mexican Cultural Institute NY, the Stonewall at 50 Consortium, and the Ucross Foundation, and a special feature on Bravo's *Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen*.

She serves as a Board member of New Camerata Opera, a member of the Artist Advisory Committee for Opera on Tap and Harlem Chamber Players, and an Ambassador for Tuwapende Watoto School and Vocational Center in Tanzania. She can be heard frequently on the Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts as a panelist on the Opera Quiz Show and other segments.

In March 2023, Alexa Smith will become the inaugural Senior Director of Anti-racism, Equity, and Belonging at the Public Theater.

Chira Bell, Coordinator and Marketing Manager

Chira Bell (they/them) is the personal assistant to opera diva J'Nai Bridges and a financial aid counselor at Manhattan School of Music. A 2022 graduate of Manhattan School of Music, they received their Bachelor of Music degree in classical voice. As a student at Manhattan School of Music, Chira served in many community leadership roles, including two-term presidencies of both the Student Government Association and Queer People for the Betterment of Society, as well as working with the Black Student Union and founding multiple community groups. They are also in active leadership roles with ClassiX Arts and Virginia Governor's School of the Performing and Visual Arts and Humanities.

Land Acknowledgment

We want to acknowledge that we gather as Manhattan School of Music on the traditional land of the Lenape and Wappinger past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.

Manhattan School of Music's public programs are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



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