



**THE DALLAS OPERA  
MEDIA RELEASE**

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Contact: Suzanne Calvin

214-443-1014/suzannec@dallasopera.org

**THE DALLAS OPERA GUILD  
20<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL VOCAL COMPETITION  
AWARDS \$18,000 IN CASH PRIZES!**

**22-YEAR-OLD UNT SOPRANO AMBER WELLBORN  
AWARDED TOP PRIZE OF \$8,000**

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**27-YEAR-OLD TENORS NATHANIEL PEAKE AND SCOTT QUINN  
TIE FOR SECOND PLACE, EACH TAKING HOME \$3,500**

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**BARITONE MICHAEL ANTHONY MCGEE CAPTURES  
“PEOPLE’S CHOICE AWARD” AND \$1,000 PRIZE**

DALLAS, APRIL 20, 2008 — The Dallas Opera Guild’s twentieth annual competition for young opera singers, **The Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition**, awarded eight outstanding Texas-based singers \$18,000 in prize monies in a ceremony conducted in Gooch Auditorium at UT Southwestern Medical Center, where the competition concluded late yesterday evening (Saturday, April 19, 2008).

Soprano **Amber Wellborn, 22**, a student at the University of North Texas now pursuing a degree in Vocal Performance, won First Place after she wowing judges and audience members alike with a finals round performance that consisted of selections from Lehár’s *The Merry Widow* (“Vilja’s Lied”) and Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* (“Come scoglio”). Ms. Wellborn was accompanied by her coach, Dr. Stephen Dubberly.

This impressive lyric soprano from Waco studies under the guidance of Dr. Linda Di Fiore, Regents Professor of Voice at the University of North Texas College of Music.

The young Texas native recently took First Place in the Texoma Regional NATS and was a Regional Finalist at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Awards (Southwest Region), among other honors.

She has also starred in several productions at UNT Opera, including her most

recent appearance in the title role of Puccini's *Suor Angelica* earlier this year.

"It felt wonderful," said Ms. Wellborn about winning the top prize, "I'm still just a little bit stunned."

The **Constance A. Klemow Founder's Award** for Second Place (on behalf of The Connie and Jerry Klemow Foundation) and \$3,500 each has been awarded to a pair of 27-year-old tenors who tied for the honor: **Nathaniel Peake**, a former member of the Houston Grand Opera Chorus from Humble, Texas, now pursuing a Masters of Music at Michigan State University (Cobb Fellowship); and Coppell resident and Stephen F. Austin State University alumnus **Scott Quinn**, who recently made his Dallas Opera debut as the Third Jew in *Salome* and has also appeared with Shreveport Opera (Singer of the Year) and The Living Opera (the Sheila Harms Memorial Fellow, 2007).

Mr. Peake gave a dazzling performance to kick-off the evening, with selections from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* ("Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön") and Verdi's "La donna è mobile" from *Rigoletto*.

"I just love doing these things because I learn so much about myself," explains Mr. Peake, who plans to use his prize money to pay for more music and language coaching.

Mr. Quinn triumphed at the end of the evening with "Ah! Lève-toi, soleil" from Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, followed by Lehár's "Dein ist mein ganzes Herz" from *Das Land des Lächelns*.

Twenty-six-year old baritone **Michael Anthony McGee** of Mesquite, now in the Seattle Opera Young Artist Program, won the hearts of the Gooch auditorium audience Saturday evening, which awarded him with the **2008 People's Choice Award** and a one thousand dollar cash prize.

"I love it – I think it's fantastic to get the votes of the people," enthused Mr. McGee, who performed powerful renditions of Aleko's Cavatina from Rachmaninoff's *Aleko* and "Ah! Per sempre" from Bellini's *I puritani*.

This year's \$1,000 "**Encouragement Award**" was presented to 22-year-old Austin soprano **Icy Simpson**, who, during the finals, sang selections from Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* and Andre Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The non-placing finalists were each presented with a check for \$250 by The Dallas Opera Guild.

"This was one of the most contentious discussions and deliberations we've ever had," admitted **Director of Artistic Administration Jonathan Pell** about judging this year's strong field of candidates.

The 2008 process began with the selection of 21 semifinalists, (two withdrew due to illnesses) from 72 applicants who submitted recordings, recommendations and proof of

Texas ties.

Participants in the preliminary round were selected by **Mark Armstrong, Principal Pianist and Vocal Coach of Tulsa Opera** and frequent guest of The Dallas Opera; **Hank Hammett**, an acting coach for singers who has worked with the nation's leading opera companies; and baritone **Brian Schexnayder**, a native of Port Arthur, Texas, who has sung many times in leading roles at the Metropolitan Opera and other leading venues and today operates a vocal studio in Allen.

In addition to Mr. Pell, the judges for Saturday's competition phase were internationally renowned panelists **Jonathan Friend, Artistic Administrator at the Metropolitan Opera; Christopher Hahn, Artistic Director of Pittsburgh Opera; Christina Scheppelmann, Director of Artistic Operations, Washington National Opera; and Diane Zola, Artistic Administrator for Houston Grand Opera.**

The singers were accompanied, throughout both rounds of the competition, by pianists **Tara Emerson**, an accomplished opera and vocal coach who lends her expertise to competitions both here and abroad, **Jason Smith**, a vocal coach and accompanist at Southern Methodist University and **Dr. Stephen Dubberly** of the Opera Program at the University of North Texas.

The Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition, chaired by **Don Jones**, is designed to reward promising, young, mostly home-grown talents (all competitors must be Texans between the ages of 18 and 30), who aspire to professional singing careers.

The 2008 Competition honored The Dallas Opera's longtime Director of Artistic Administration, **Jonathan Pell** for his invaluable services to both the opera company and the Guild Vocal Competition, with which he has been closely involved since its inception.

Mr. Pell joined The Dallas Opera staff in 1985 and serves as Artistic Advisor and leader of the judge's panel for each annual competition.

Additionally, he sits on the Board of Directors of the Richard Tucker Music Foundation, where he is chairman of the National Auditions Committee. Mr. Pell has also served for the past decade on the board of the prestigious ARIA Awards and is in constant demand as an adjudicator for major vocal competitions including the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, the Luciano Pavarotti Competition and the Center for Contemporary Opera Competition.

The Dallas Opera Guild sought to honor Mr. Pell, on the twentieth anniversary of this competition, for his leadership and tireless dedication to assisting the careers of young Texas singers.

"I can't take credit for the success of these people," Mr. Pell remarked, "because they've done it for themselves. I can; however, feel very proud of having helped aspiring opera singers to realize their potential."

From awards totaling \$2,000 its first year, The Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition, **funded entirely by donations**, continues to provide much-needed financial assistance to gifted young artists.

Previous Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition winners have gone on to win the coveted Grand Prize of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, the Richard Tucker Competition, and places in some of the most prestigious opera company programs in the country.

**Dallas Opera Guild President Marilyn Halla**, remarking on this year's competitors, said, "We've heard lots of talented, gifted singers today – at least half of them could go on to do great things!"

Nearly two dozen past winners perform regularly in prestigious U.S. and European venues and another dozen grant winners have sung featured roles in Dallas Opera productions.

The Vocal Competition Advisory Board is chaired by **Jeanette Wharton**.

### **2008 Finalists, The Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition**

**Christian Bester, baritone, age 28**

**Michael Anthony McGee, baritone, age 26**

**Kevin Park, tenor, age 25**

**Nathaniel Peake, tenor, age 27**

**Scott Quinn, tenor, age 27**

**Soowon Seo, baritone, age 27**

**Icy Simpson, soprano, age 22**

**Amber Wellborn, soprano, age 22**

**Platinum Patrons (\$2,500 and above)** include **The Connie and Jerry Klemow Foundation (in memory of Jerry Klemow)** and **Michael Phillips**.

**Gold Patrons (\$1,000-\$2,499)** include **Patti and John Cody, Jr. (honoring Jonathan Pell)**; **Mrs. Jo Kurth Jagoda (honoring Jonathan Pell)**; **Angela D. Paulos (honoring Jonathan Pell)**; **Mr. and Mrs. Michael E. Phillips (honoring Jonathan Pell)**; **James R. Seitz, Jr.** and the **Sheila Harms Memorial Fund**.

**Silver Patrons** for this year's vocal competition (**\$500-\$999**) include **Helen Boehning (in memory of Gregory Lewis Boehning, Katherine Boehning Jackson, Robert Erik Boehning, Pat Blankenship and Nora Sands)**; **John and Arlene Dayton (honoring Jonathan Pell)**; **Ketty Fitzgerald (honoring Jonathan Pell)**; **William J. Hendrix (in memory of Pat Blankenship)**; **Mr. and Mrs. Greg McConeghy (in memory of Hazel Wade Hendrix)**; **Jane and David McGinnis (honoring Jonathan Pell and in memory of**

*Marion Greenham, mother of Jane McGinnis); Dr. and Mrs. Jed Rosenthal (honoring Jonathan Pell) and Jean and George Wagner (in memory of Frank and Mary Iaconetti).*

Underwriters for this year's Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition included:

**The Sheila Harms Fund (*Piano Rental and Accompanists*)**  
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**Phillip H. Luna (*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Caterers*)**  
**Dr. and Mrs. Kern Wildenthal (*U.T. Southwestern*)**

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### *Select Stars of Earlier Competitions*

First place winner **Takesha Meshé Kizart** (soprano, **2006**) signed with artistic manager **Tim Menah** of Askonas Holt, Ltd. in London and recently appeared in the title role of *Tosca* for The Dallas Opera's 2008 School Performances. A former vocal performance honors student at UNT, she has won numerous competitions throughout the world, including national semi-finalist for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Marian Anderson Historical Society, Mario Lanza Institute Vocal Scholarship Competition, Opera Index, and the Voci Verdiane International Competition in Busseto, Italy, where she became the first African-American to ever win the Grand Prize.

**Cody Fosdick** (tenor), our **2006** second place winner, is attending the Academy of Vocal Arts following graduate work at Indiana University's School of Music, where he performed extensively in operatic productions.

Third place winner **Steven LaBrie** (baritone) barely met the age requirement to enter our **2006** competition, then walked away with both the People's Choice Award and a special Mozart Aria award given by TDO's former **General Director Karen Stone** in honor of the composer's 250th birthday. He is a second-year artist at AVA, where he has performed roles in *Il barbiere de Siviglia* and *Eugene Onegin*, in addition to his role as Antonio in *Le Nozze de Figaro* with The Living Opera.

**John Boer** (baritone) is currently a resident artist with the Palm Beach Opera Company. He was a second place winner in the Southwest Regional Finals of the Metropolitan Opera's National Council audition, a previous fellow of the Tanglewood Music Festival, and was in the Santa Fe Opera Young Artist Program and participated in the Santa Fe Opera's Spring Tour of 2007.

Baritone **Weston Hurt**, winner of both our **2005** Vocal Competition and the People's Choice Award, has performed throughout the United States and Latin America and will make his formal debut with The Dallas Opera in next season's production of *La bohème*. He debuted with the New York City Opera in 2006, and has also sung with the Opera Orchestra of New York, and the National Symphony at Wolf Trap. His 2007 engagements included the Arizona Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, and the role of Baldassare in *L'Arlesiana* with the Opera Orchestra of New York. A graduate of the Juillard Opera Center, he has won numerous awards, including Opera Index, Inc., Palm Beach Opera Competition, two career grants from the Santa Fe Opera, and was a finalist for the Sara Tucker Career Grant. He is also a gifted recitalist and concert singer.

Second place winner **Phandulwazi Maseti** (tenor, **2005**), a graduate student at Southern Methodist University, was selected to join the newly-formed Emerging Artists Program, a partnership between The

Dallas Opera and SMU's Meadows School of the Arts. The group formed the hub of The Dallas Opera's 2006 Spring Touring Program, performing for audiences throughout North Texas.

**Christina Major** (soprano), our **2005** third place winner, has performed widely throughout the United States, and made her international debut in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay as soloist with the Dallas Symphony in Brahms' *Requiem*. Critic Scott Cantrell said she "soared on high, but she also brought rare depth of tone in lower-lying phrases." She debuted with the Fort Worth Opera in 2006 as Mimi in *La bohème* opposite **Stephen Costello** (another AVA artist), whom we recently saw in TDO's *Maria Stuarda*. *The Fort Worth Weekly* said the pair "brought back memories of the earlier singers."

Winner of the **2003** People's Choice Award, **Erik Nelson Werner** (baritone) has sung with the Dallas Opera, Fort Worth Opera, New York City Opera and Opera Orchestra of New York, and has sung extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe. He will sing at Carnegie Hall in February 2007, and has won numerous awards throughout the years, including the Brahms Competition in Graz, Austria, and the Geneva International Music Competition. A finalist in the International Songs Competition in London, critics wrote, "Erik is the possessor of one of the most beautiful male voices I have heard for a long time, and to this natural gift he adds intelligence, sensitivity, a maturity beyond his years...he has a rich, even bass-baritone voice and surely a distinguished operatic career ahead."

**Marjorie Owens**, winner of the **2002** competition and the People's Choice Award, was a winner of the 2006 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She recently joined the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Lyric Opera Center for Young Artists, after having spent three years with the Houston Grand Opera Studio. She has performed with the Fort Worth Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Wolf Trap Opera in Washington, D.C., and the Aspen Opera Theater. *The New York Times* included Marjorie in their compilation of "the upcoming Great Big American Voices."

**Angela Neiderloh** (mezzo soprano), second place winner of the **2002** competition, spent three years in the Houston Grand Opera Studio, and has sung with the San Francisco Opera Center, Wolf Trap Opera, and the Houston Grand Opera. Her concert credits include solos with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Aspen Festival Orchestra, and the Columbia Symphony, among others. *The New York Times* has praised her as "an engaging coloratura mezzo-soprano."

**Jennifer Black** (soprano), winner of our **2001** Vocal Competition and the People's Choice Award, has participated in the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. In 2006, she made her debut with the New York City Opera, the Santa Fe Opera, and sang at Carnegie Hall. She was previously a National Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and was described by *The New York Times* as "a sensitive, rich-voiced soprano."

Tenor **Scott Scully**, winner of the **2000 People's Choice Award**, has sung with Opera Ontario (Canada), San Francisco Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Arizona Opera and recently made his Dallas Opera debut in *Lohengrin*. He was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio and the San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program. Very active in concert, he has sung *Carmina Burana* with the Pittsburg Symphony Orchestra and Atlanta Ballet, *Falstaff* and *Billy Budd* with the Cleveland Orchestra, and has collaborated with a list of illustrious conductors. In addition to the Dallas Opera Guild award, he received the Pavarotti award from the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, among others.

**Jesus Garcia** (tenor) competed in The Dallas Opera Guild's Vocal Competition in 1996, 1997, and **1999**, winning second place that year. Long a favorite of Guild members, Jesus studied at the University of North Texas before attending the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia. Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2001 who starred as Rodolfo in Baz Luhrman's *La bohème* on Broadway, Jesus has also sung the Berlioz *Requiem* at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., the role of Prince Ramiro in *La Cenerentola* with the Washington National Opera at Kennedy Center, as well as in School matinee performances for The Dallas Opera. Mr. Garcia has performed at the Spoleto Festival, Houston Grand Opera, and Bordeaux Opera (France), among other venues.

**1998** first prize winner **Latonia Moore** (soprano), who also captured the inaugural People's Choice Award that year, brought the audience to their feet in her memorable 2004 Dallas Opera debut as Micaela in Bizet's *Carmen*, earning the Maria Callas Award for The Dallas Opera debut of the year. She "triumphed as a radiant-voiced Micaela" recreating that role for her debut with the New York City Opera. *The New York Times* wrote of "her radiant, warm sound and lovely phrasing," saying, "What she has already is special: a distinctive, poignant sound that makes an audience sit up." She recently made her Carnegie Hall debut in the title role of *L'Arlesiana* for Opera Orchestra of New York.

**Clifton Forbis** (tenor), winner of our second annual Vocal Competition in **1990**, has forged a dynamic international career. He recently sang the title role of Samson in *Samson et Dalila* at San Francisco Opera and Siegmund in the Canadian Opera Company's 2006 production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to open their new Four Seasons Opera House. He also performed Act I of *Die Walküre* in January 2006 with the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center. Mr. Forbis has sung Otello at La Scala and in numerous productions at the Metropolitan Opera and other important theaters around the world and will bring his interpretation of the role to the opening of the new **Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House at the Dallas Center for the Performing Arts** in October of 2009.

### **Ticket Information for the 2008-2009 Dallas Opera Season**

**Season subscribers are urged to renew today.**

**Single tickets \$15 to \$199, if purchased in advance.**

**Single tickets go on sale to the general public in September.**

**For more information or to renew your subscription, contact**

**The Dallas Opera Ticket Services Office at (214) 443-1000 or visit TDO's web site at [dallasopera.org](http://dallasopera.org).**

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