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April 2017

The Metropolitan Opera
National Council Auditions

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Karen Mohr, Editor

Introducing the 2017 National Winners



Kyle van Schoonhoven, Vanessa Vasquez, Samantha Hankey, Kirsten MacKinnon, Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, Richard Smagur (Photo by Marty Sohl/Metropolitan Opera)

On the afternoon of Sunday, March 19, nine singers performed in the Grand National Finals concert at the Metropolitan Opera in the final phase of the 64th annual auditions. 1988 National Winner Renee Fleming hosted the proceedings, with Nicola Luisotti conducting the Met Opera Orchestra. Guest artists Jamie Barton, Amber Wagner, and Michael Fabiano, all 2007 winners who were featured in the documentary *The Audition*, offered arias by Cilea, Strauss, and Verdi while the judges deliberated. The winners are:

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, 23, countertenor, Brooklyn, New York
Samantha Hankey, 24, mezzo-soprano, Marshfield, Massachusetts
Kristen MacKinnon, 26, soprano, Vancouver, Canada
Kyle van Schoonhoven, tenor, 28, Lockport, New York
Richard Smagur, tenor, 26, Clarkesville, Georgia
Vanessa Vasquez, soprano, 26, Scottsdale, Arizona

Each winner received \$15,000 and a major boost to their careers. *The New York Times* singled out Mr. Cohen as a “complete artist,” and praised Ms. Hankey’s “mellow mezzo-soprano;” Mr. van Schoonhoven’s “steady, (*continued, page 2*)

Winner Update: Regional Finalist Omar Najmi

One of this year’s Opera Colorado Young Artists, 29 year-old tenor Omar Najmi competed in the Metropolitan Opera Auditions for the first time this year. Out of almost 50 singers who entered the Colorado-Wyoming district auditions, he was one of only four chosen to advance to the Rocky Mountain Regional Finals and to receive an Encouragement Award. “It was incredibly exciting to get the judges’ feedback” said Omar in an interview with KGNU Radio’s Chris Mohr. Judge Sheri Greenawald, Director of the San Francisco Opera Center, had heard Omar during an audition for the Merola program. He found it very beneficial to sing for her again and to discuss new repertoire at length. MONC National Director Gayletha Nichols also gave him valuable input.

Omar has always enjoyed a breadth of musical projects. He began in musical theater as an undergraduate, and is also involved in the video game music community. He performed with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra at Red Rocks as part of the Video Games Live tour. He is currently composing an opera inspired by discussions with his pianist husband. This “genre-specific” theater piece exploits “the things the piano



does well” rather than using an orchestral reduction.

Hear Omar in the Opera Colorado Young Artists Farewell Recital on May 21 at 2pm in the Studio Loft at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House. operacolorado.org

2017-2018 ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL AUDITIONS

Arizona District

Saturday, November 4
11:00am
Musical Instrument
Museum Music Theater
Phoenix

Utah District

Saturday, November 11
11:00am
Libby Gardner Concert Hall
University of Utah
Salt Lake City

New Mexico District

Saturday, January 6
12:00 noon
Keller Hall
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque

Colorado-Wyoming District

Saturday, January 27
9:30am

Rocky Mountain Regional Finals

Sunday, January 28
1:30pm
Robert and Judi
Newman Center for the
Performing Arts
University of Denver

Grand National Finals

Sunday, April 29
3:00pm
Metropolitan
Opera House
New York, NY

(continued from page 1) burnished sound;" and Ms. MacKinnon's "liveliness." Ms. Vasquez "impressed" in "Un bel di" from *Madama Butterfly* and "Sempre libera" from *La Traviata*; and Richard Smagur "offered old-fashioned poise."

All six singers have exciting plans in the immediate future.

Days after her win, Vanessa Vasquez was offered a contract with Columbia Artists.

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen will join the Houston Grand Opera Studio as the first countertenor in the program's history.

Samantha Hankey will sing the title role in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* with San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program.

Kristen MacKinnon's upcoming performances include Micaëla in *Carmen* with Opera Philadelphia and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* with the Glyndebourne Festival.

Richard Smagur will be an apprentice artist at the Santa Fe Opera this summer, singing Tsarevich Gvidon in Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*.

Kyle van Schoonhoven is currently an Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera and will make his debut with the company as the Young Servant in *Elektra* in the fall. The budding heldentenor will also cover leading roles, including Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Aegisth in *Elektra*, Froh in *Das Rheingold*, and Siegmund in *Die Walküre*.

Congratulations to all who participated in this year's auditions!

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The RISING STARS SOCIETY helps guarantee our expenses and singer awards of \$33,000 per year. If you have not already made a pledge to the Society and were inspired by our singers this year, please fill out this form and return it with your donation. We have over 30 Rising Stars Society members at this time; 25 more members will take us to our membership goal.

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I pledge \$500 per year for 5 years for a total of \$2,500.

Realizing Dreams:

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You may also send this form with your check (payable to MONC-RMR) or credit card information to: Steve Dilts, 16684 Antero Street, Broomfield, CO 80023.

The Metropolitan Opera
National Council Auditions
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Karen Mohr
6226 West Jefferson Avenue
Denver, CO 80235

Save the Date!
**Rocky Mountain Regional
Finals**
Sunday, January 28 2018
1:30pm
**Robert & Judi Newman
Center for the
Performing Arts
University of Denver**

Metropolitan Opera 2017-2018 HD Calendar

Bellini: *Norma*

Saturday, October 7, 2017, 10:55am

Mozart: *The Magic Flute*

Saturday, October 14, 2017, 10:55am

Ades: *The Exterminating Angel*

Saturday, November 18, 2017, 10:55am

Puccini: *Tosca*

Saturday, January 27, 2018, 10:55am

Donizetti: *The Elixir of Love*

Saturday, February 10, 2018, 10:00am

Puccini: *La Bohème*

Saturday, February 24, 2018, 10:30am

Rossini: *Semiramide*

Saturday, March 10, 2018, 10:55am

Mozart: *Così fan tutte*

Saturday, March 31, 2018, 10:55am

Verdi: *Luisa Miller*

Saturday, April 14, 2018, 10:55am

Massenet: *Cendrillon*

Saturday, April 28, 2018, 10:55am

Encore screenings will be shown Wednesdays at 6:30pm the following week.

See www.metopera.org for cast information and to find local theaters.