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# HIGH NOTES

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ACADEMY OF VOCAL ARTS

2021/2022 SEASON

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Resident Artists from left to right: Top: Loella Grahn, Angel Raii Gomez; Middle: Monique Galvão, Shawn Roth; Bottom: Peter Barber, Griffen Hogan Tracy, Sahel Salam, Renée Richardson, Emily Margevich, Kevin Godínez, Cody Müller; Guests: Dr. Ruth Ryave, Val Starr, and Suzanne Root, Esq. in *La bohème*.

Photo credit: Don Valentino

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AVA  
ACADEMY OF  
VOCAL ARTS

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# ACADEMY OF VOCAL ARTS

The mission of the Academy of Vocal Arts is to be the world's premier institution for training young artists as international opera soloists. With its rigorous instruction and coaching, as well as performance opportunities in concerts, recitals, and fully-staged operas, the Academy trains the most promising young singers from around the world, while also contributing to the performing arts community in the greater Philadelphia region.

Founded in 1934, the Academy of Vocal Arts is the only tuition-free institution dedicated exclusively to the study of voice. When Resident Artists graduate from AVA, they are prepared to share their gifts with audiences around the world, fulfilling not only their own hopes and dreams, but those of AVA's wise and generous founder, Helen Corning Warden.

Gifted singers come to Philadelphia from all over the world to seek the exceptional guidance and training that the Academy of Vocal Arts offers. Admission to the tuition-free program is determined yearly by competitive auditions. While hundreds of hopeful singers apply, only 8-10 are accepted into the four-year program.

*Please note that all members listed below were present during the 2021-2022 season.*

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Audrey Saint-Gil, *Vocal Coach*  
Michael Lewis, *Vocal Coach*

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Lisa Lovelace, *Stage Movement and Dance*  
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Robert Rowland, *History of Opera*  
Dr. Julia Zavadsky, *Russian Diction Coach*  
Paul Curran, *Acting Instructor*

## DEPARTMENT OF VOICE SCIENCE

Robert Thayer Sataloff, M.D., D.M.A.,  
*Voice Science*

*+In memoriam*

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## WELCOME



Dear friends,

It is our pleasure to present *High Notes*, the annual report of the Academy of Vocal Arts. This report looks back at our fiscal year from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. In many ways, this past year represented a slow return to “normal” as we resumed our in-person performances. We started the season with *A Celebration of Opera!* concert series presented at the Perelman Theater in the Kimmel Center, The Haverford School, and at Central Bucks South. The semi-staged concert featured a wide array of repertoire ranging from short scenes to full acts of operas and provided a format that allowed proper social distancing of the orchestra. For some of our Resident Artists, this performance marked their very first performance with the AVA Opera Orchestra since coming to AVA! Our season then continued with *Eugene Onegin* and *La bohème*, various recitals and concerts, and our annual *Jubilate!* concert. While COVID still caused some disruptions along the way, everyone at AVA worked together to give our Resident Artists as many performance opportunities as possible. These performances are the hallmarks of our robust, tuition-free training program.



Our final program of the season, albeit a virtual presentation, featured our graduates this year. Aubry Ballarò, Renée Richardson, Alice Chung, Chelsea Laggan, Eric Delagrangé, Cody Müller, and Griffen Hogan Tracy all were presented with Artist Diplomas. It is always bittersweet to say goodbye, but we look forward to watching each of their careers blossom in the coming years and wish them much success.

We look forward to returning to three fully-staged operas with orchestra for the 2022-23 season—Verdi’s *La traviata*, Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale*, and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. These operas will allow each of our Resident Artists the opportunity to study roles with our acclaimed faculty that we hope one day will take them to the greatest stages in the world. This is only possible thanks to the incredible generosity of our board members, patrons, and donors. Thank you all for your loyalty and support of AVA. We look forward to seeing you many times this year!

Warmly,

**K. James McDowell**  
President and Artistic Director

**Scott Guzielek**  
Vice President and General Manager

## THE 2021-22 SEASON

The Opera Theatre season began with a black-tie Opening Night Celebration, which featured a performance of *A Celebration of Opera!* with Maestro Christofer Macatsoris and guests conducting the AVA Opera Orchestra at the Perelman Theater on the Kimmel Cultural Campus. Opening Night guests enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, dinner by Garces in the Hamilton Garden at the Kimmel Center, and a post-performance champagne toast to celebrate the singers. The beautiful evening was co-chaired by R. Randolph Apgar and Allen D. Black.

*A Celebration of Opera!* kicked off the new season with a concert of exciting opera scenes, featuring Act III of Verdi's

*Rigoletto*, Act II of Puccini's *La bohème*, and ensembles from Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Thomas' *Mignon*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. The singers were led by Maestro Christofer Macatsoris and guest conductors Audrey Saint-Gil, David Antony Lofton, Richard A. Raub, and Robert Kahn. The production was staged by AVA alumnus, tenor Richard Troxell and was generously sponsored by Victoria Eckert Zoellner. Performances took place at the Perelman Theater on the Kimmel Cultural Campus, the Zoellner Arts Center at Lehigh University, Central Bucks South High School, and Centennial Hall at the Haverford School.

Our winter production of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* featured four performances in AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater. The production was fully staged by AVA alumnus, tenor Richard Troxell, and choreographed by Lisa Lovelace. The singers were accompanied by Music Director and Vocal Coach José Meléndez, and they received instruction from AVA's Russian Coach Julia Zavadsky. The production was sponsored by Walter and Alice Strine, Esqs.

Unfortunately, due to a rise in COVID cases, AVA's production of *Mignon* by Ambroise Thomas was canceled.

The annual Giargiari Bel Canto Competition took place at the Perelman Theater on the Kimmel Cultural Campus. The 2021 First Prize winner was mezzo-soprano Anne Marie Stanley, who impressed the judges with her rendition of "Se Romeo t'uccise un figlio" from Vincenzo Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. Baritone Kevin Godínez won Second Prize with "È sogno? O realtà..." (Ford's Monologue) from Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff*. Tenor Sahel Salem received the Audience Favorite Award for his performance of "Lamento di Federico" from Francesco Cilea's *L'arlesiana*, and mezzo-soprano Chelsea Laggan won the WRTI Listener's Choice award with "Mon coeur s'ouvre a ta voix" from *Samson et Dalilah* by Camille Saint-Saëns. Master Vocal Coach and Music



**From *A Celebration of Opera!*:**  
**Top:** Titus Muzi singing "Largo al factotum" from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* **Bottom:** Lydia Grindatto and Luke Norvell singing in Act III of *Rigoletto*

**From *Eugene Onegin*:**  
**Right:** Eric Delagrange as Zaretsky and Benjamin Dickerson as Eugene Onegin

Photo credit: Don Valentino



Director Danielle Orlando accompanied all participating Resident Artists.

AVA's recital series began in the fall with a New Artists Recital. The three new Resident Artists, Lydia Grindatto (soprano), Angel Gomez (tenor) and Luke Norvell (tenor), performed in AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater, accompanied by Music Director and Vocal Coach José Meléndez.

The Winter Recital, *Trailblazers of the Early 20th Century*, featured selections by Hüe, Tailleferre, Mompou, Bonds, Rangström, Ullmann, Burleigh, Hindemith, Viardot, and Still. Resident Artists performed in AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater and were accompanied by Vocal Coach and Music Director Michael Lewis.

The Spring Recital, entitled *Entre l'amour et la mort (between love and death)*, asked listeners to enter the world of Hector Berlioz, the 19th century French Romantic composer and conductor. The repertoire included



**From the Giargiari Bel Canto Competition:**

From left to right: Danielle Orlando, Walter Strine, Thomas Lausmann, Alice Strine, Michael Egel, Jane Shaulis, Anne Marie Stanley, Sahel Salam, Kevin Godnez, and Sam Cimino.

*Photo credit: Don Valentino*



**From La bohème:**

**Top:** Left to right: Peter Barber as Schaunard, Griffen Hogan Tracy as Colline, Cody Müller as Benoit, and Kevin Godínez as Marcello

**Bottom:** Renée Richardson as Mimi and Sahel Salam as Rodolfo

*Photo credit: Don Valentino*

selected excerpts from *Benvenuto Cellini*, *Lelio*, *Béatrice et Bénédict*, *L'enfance du Christ*, *Les Troyens*, and others. The recital was semi-staged and presented in French with English supertitles. Resident Artists were accompanied by Vocal Coach and Music Director Audrey Saint-Gil.

Performances of *Jubilate! A Concert of Sacred Music* took place at the Church of the Redeemer in Bryn Mawr and the Church of the Holy Trinity in Rittenhouse Square. The annual concert of sacred vocal music featured time honored favorites from different cultures, faiths, and periods, with AVA's Resident Artists performing selections by Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Puccini, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Guion, and Gounod, with Master Vocal Coach David Antony Lofton leading the AVA Opera Orchestra. The AVA orchestra was generously sponsored by the David A. and Helen P. Horn Charitable Trust.

*Viva la Voce!*, AVA's annual gala, was held in The Curtis' stunning Atrium across from Independence Square, Philadelphia. This event celebrated AVA's 87 successful years of opera training, and its proceeds helped support our renowned tuition-free program. Led by event chair Neal W. Krouse, the evening included an elegant dinner by Constellation, with arias and

ensembles performed by our talented Resident Artists. The AVA Board of Director's Outstanding Service Award was presented to Mrs. Kay Bossone, an incredible member of the AVA community. The popular live auction was led by guest auctioneer Alasdair Nichol, Chairman of Freeman's Auction House.

The season ended with a production of Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème*. The final performance scheduled to take place at Central Bucks South High School was cancelled due to COVID related concerns, but other performances still took place at Centennial Hall at the Haverford School and in AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater, with Maestro Christofer Macatsoris leading the AVA Opera Orchestra. The production was presented in Italian with English supertitles, was directed by Jeffrey Buchman, and generously sponsored by Judith Broudy.

Due to continued COVID related concerns, AVA's Class of 2022 closed the season with a virtual performance of their Farewell Recital, under the direction of Vocal Coach and Music Director José Meléndez. ■

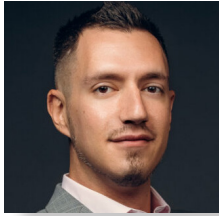
## CLASS OF 2022

AVA bid a fond farewell to eight Resident Artists this year. Due to a rise in COVID cases, the graduation recital took place virtually, allowing our patrons around the world to enjoy this recital from the comfort of their homes. We will miss these talented singers, and we look forward to following their promising careers around the world.



**AUBRY BALLARÒ, SOPRANO**

Memorable AVA roles: Juliette, *Roméo et Juliette*; 1st Wood Sprite, *Rusalka*; Susanna, *Le nozze di Figaro*; Suor Genovieffa, *Suor Angelica*



**CODY MÜLLER BASS**

Memorable AVA roles: Bartolo, *Le nozze di Figaro*; Benoit/Alcindoro, *La bohème*



**ALICE CHUNG, MEZZO-SOPRANO**

Memorable AVA roles: Gertrude, *Roméo et Juliette*; Despina, *Così fan tutte*; Jezibaba, *Rusalka*; La Zia Principessa/La Badessa, *Suor Angelica*



**RENÉE RICHARDSON, SOPRANO**

Memorable AVA roles: Suor Dolcina/Suor Angelica, *Suor Angelica*; Foreign Princess, *Rusalka*; Inès, *La favorite*; Mimì, *La bohème*



**ERIC DELAGRANGÉ, BASS**

Memorable AVA roles: Balthazar, *La favorite*; Le Duc, *Roméo et Juliette*; Don Alfonso, *Così fan tutte*; Vodník, *Rusalka*; Colline, *La bohème*; Zaretski, *Eugene Onegin*



**ANNE MARIE STANLEY, MEZZO-SOPRANO**

Memorable AVA roles: Léonor, *La favorite*; Olga, *Eugene Onegin*



**CHELSEA LAGGAN, MEZZO-SOPRANO**

Memorable AVA roles: Olga, *Eugene Onegin*; Marcellina, *Le nozze di Figaro*; Stephano, *Roméo et Juliette*; Jezibaba, *Rusalka*; La Zia Principessa/La Badessa, *Suor Angelica*



**GRIFFEN HOGAN TRACY, BASS**

Memorable AVA roles: Colline, *La bohème*; Gremin, *Eugene Onegin*; Antonio, *Le nozze di Figaro*



Credit: Collage photos by Don Valentino and Paul Sirochman

## MEET THE NEW RESIDENT ARTISTS

AVA welcomes six new Resident Artists in the 22-23 season, all of whom excelled in a competitive year of auditions.



### JENNY ANNE FLORY, MEZZO-SOPRANO

**Hometown:** Dayton, VA

**Education:** James Madison University (B.M.) 2015; University of Maryland Opera Studio (M.M.) 2017

**Prior to AVA:** Metropolitan Opera Competition, South Carolina District Encouragement Award 2022; *Romeo, I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (Palm Beach Opera); *Second Lady, Die Zauberflöte* (Palm Beach Opera); *Sorella Infermiera, Suor Angelica* (Si Parla Si Canta)

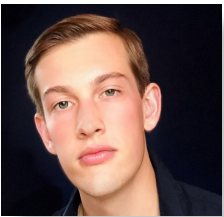


### ALLA YAROSH, MEZZO-SOPRANO

**Hometown:** Tal'ne, Cherkas'ka Oblast', Ukraine

**Education:** Queensland Conservatorium

**Prior to AVA:** Elizabeth Muir Postgraduate Prize (2022); John and Sue Thompson Vocal Accompaniment Scholarship in collaboration with pianist, Samuel Choi (2022); Linda Edith Allen Award (2021); Jim Massie Memorial Prize (2021); Olga Olsen, *Street Scene* (2021); title role in *Carmen* (Val Machin Opera Scenes, 2021); Ursule, *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (2020)



### MATTHEW GOODHEART, TENOR

**Hometown:** Binghamton, NY

**Education:** B.M. in Vocal Performance at Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM); Houston Grand Opera YAVA program (2022); Wolf Trap Opera Studio Artist (2022)

**Prior to AVA:** 1st Place Matinée Musicale Voice Competition (2021); 2nd Place MI Opera Vocal Competition; Opera Club of Syracuse Award from Civic Morning Musicals Foundation; Count Belfiore, *La Finta Giardiniera* (Binghamton University Opera Department); Tamino, *Die Zauberflöte* (CCM Opera d'arte)



### DYLAN GREGG, BASS-BARITONE

**Hometown:** Salisbury, MD

**Education:** B.M. in Vocal Performance at Boston University; M.M. in Vocal Performance at Rice University

**Prior to AVA:** The Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition 2022 – Encouragement Award; Leporello, *Don Giovanni* (Rice University); Claudio, *Agrippina* (Rice University); Judge Turpin (Cover), *Sweeney Todd* (Des Moines Metro Opera); Der Lautsprecher, *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (Rice University); Colline (cover), *La bohème* (Des Moines Metro Opera); First Apprentice (cover), *Wozzeck* (Des Moines Metro Opera); Barone Duphuol, *La traviata* (Boston University)

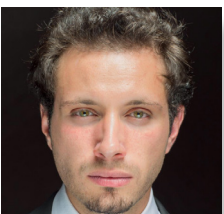


### YUE WU, BASS-BARITONE

**Hometown:** Tianjin, China

**Education:** B.M. in Vocal Performance, Tianjin Conservatory of Music; M.M. in Vocal Performance, Mannes School of Music

**Prior to AVA:** Finalist, National Opera Association Carolyn Bailey Argento Vocal Competition; Winner, Opera at Florham International Vocal Competition; Mandarino, *Turandot* (Tianjin Conservatory of Music); Bartolo, *Le nozze di Figaro* (Mannes School of Music); Charlie Soong, *Dr Sun-Yat Sen* (Mannes School of Music); Rotnyi/Zaretski, *Eugene Onegin* (Music Academy of the West)



### CUMHUR GÖRGÜN, BASS

**Hometown:** Istanbul, Turkey

**Education:** Yeditepe University Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation; Istanbul University State Conservatory Opera and Voice Program; Istanbul University State Conservatory M.A; Accademia del Belcanto "Rodolfo Celletti"

**Prior to AVA:** 13th Izmir National Young Soloist Competition – Necdet Aydın Special Stage Interpretation Award (2020); 14th Izmir National Young Soloist Competition – Edward Berkeley Special Award (2022); Fiorello and Uffiziale, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Oper im Berg Festival); Sancho (cover), *Don Quichotte* (Istanbul State Opera and Ballet); Antonio, *Le nozze di Figaro* (Wiener Konzerthaus); Schlendrian, *Coffee Cantata* (Süreyya Opera House)

## YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

**AVA Young Professionals is a community of young professionals under the age of 45 based in the Greater Philadelphia area who celebrate a mutual love of music through networking and social gatherings, exclusive receptions, and cultural events.** AVA Young Professionals receive invitations to all Young Professionals events, including exclusive cocktail parties, previews, receptions, opportunities to meet and mingle with AVA's Resident Artists, and get email updates and reminders about opera productions and additional events. Supporting AVA's Young Professionals shows our ongoing effort to introduce new, younger audiences to opera and to make this art form more accessible.

Special events for Young Professionals this year included a performance by Resident Artists at the home of AVA Board member Neal Krouse and a Young Professionals performance of *La bohème*, which offered discounted prices and an after-performance champagne reception with the Resident Artists. AVA Young Professionals members also attended AVA's *Viva la Voce!* Gala and a Champagne and dessert reception following AVA's Opening Night Celebration. ■

**Top:** AVA board member Dr. Dante Cerza addressing welcoming YP audience to *La bohème* **Bottom:** YPs enjoying a post performance reception.

*Photo credit: Camille Mola*



**The 2021-2022 Opera Outreach** program provided various virtual and in-person experiences for students from public, private, charter, and home school groups across the Greater Philadelphia region. After two and a half years without an in-person event, we welcomed over 450 eager students from 9 different schools to the Student Matinee Performance of Puccini's *La bohème* on Wednesday, May 11th at The Haverford School's Centennial Hall. Several previously participating schools and home school groups returned after the hiatus, and many of them took advantage of this free program for the first time. A comprehensive Study Guide was distributed electronically in advance of the event so that teachers and students could prepare for what they would see and hear together.

Following the performance, principal cast members stayed on stage for a Question & Answer Session to answer

## OPERA OUTREACH

questions asked by students and chosen by their teachers. The Resident Artists were asked specifically about what drew them to singing, what it takes to learn and memorize a role, singing in foreign languages, how they use their singing voices to show different emotions and dynamics, and what is required physically to perform in opera. The Residents Artists generously stayed in costume to meet with students, off-stage, for an up-close photo and autograph session. ■



*All photos courtesy of Rebecca Carr*



## NEW AVA BOARD MEMBERS



**DR. MARIA G. VOGIATZI PLESTIS** is a Pediatric Endocrinologist at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). She is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics and the Director of Adrenal and Puberty Center at CHOP. A native of Greece, Dr. Vogiatz obtained her medical degree at the Aristotelian University in Thessaloniki, Greece.



Grammy Award-winner **LATONIA MOORE** is a 2004 graduate of AVA and a native of Houston, Texas. Latonia first studied gospel and jazz, until Pattye Johnstone, one of her teachers at the University of North Texas convinced her to study classical music. She made her debut in 1998 at the Palm Beach Opera in West Palm Beach, and was engaged as a student in the same year at the Houston Ebony Opera. Honors and awards include the Maria Callas Award from Dallas Opera, a Richard Tucker Foundation grant, first prize in the Marseilles Competition, and first prize in the International Competition dell’Opera in Dresden. To see a list of Latonia’s roles and performances, please visit her website at [www.latoniamooresoprano.com](http://www.latoniamooresoprano.com).

## NEW AVA STAFF AND FACULTY

### DEAN OF STUDENTS/ARTISTIC ADMINISTRATOR

Trained as an opera stage director and theatrical designer that is noted for his “gorgeously constructed stage pictures,” **DR. JOSH MILLER’S** most recent directing credits include *Suor Angelica/Gianni Schicchi* at St. Petersburg Opera, Britten’s *Albert Herring* for Chicago Summer Opera and *Le nozze di Figaro* at the University of Texas. Josh is the winner of the 2021 American Prize in Professional Opera Directing (the Charles Nelson Reilly Prize) and Opera America’s Robert L. B. Tobin Director-Designer Award. He has served on the directing staff of The Glimmerglass Festival, Palm Beach Opera, Opera San Antonio, Virginia Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Wolf Trap Opera and Austin Opera. In 2018, Dr. Miller directed Leonard Bernstein’s *MASS* as a part of the Bernstein Centennial Celebration with the Austin Symphony, Ballet Austin, the African Children’s Chorus and Consiprare – over 175 performers on stage!



### VOCAL COACH

**MICHAEL LEWIS** earned a Master of Music degree from Arizona State University in collaborative piano under the guidance of Russell Ryan. In Philadelphia, Michael regularly works on projects with Opera Philadelphia, various ensembles at University of Pennsylvania, and The Philadelphia Orchestra. In 2019, Michael founded Aural Compass Projects, a non-profit music organization dedicated to performing new and under-explored vocal works. Previous appointments include Vocal Coach and Assistant Music Director on productions at Opera Philadelphia, Cincinnati Opera, Arizona Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, Portland Opera, Opera Naples, Mill City Summer Opera, and Tri-Cities Opera.



- EILEEN BAIRD**
- GEORGE R. BRODIE**
- MARCIA COHEN**
- EDWARD FELDMAN**
- DONALD K. GORDON**
- KURT W. REISS**
- CONSTANCE BENOLIEL-ROCK**
- SAMUEL L. SINGER**
- JOHN J. STETZER, III**
- FREDERICK A. TUCKER**
- REBECCA WHITLOW**

## IN MEMORIAM

*Together we remember those who greatly supported AVA, its Resident Artists, and the future of opera.*

## AVAROUND THE WORLD

Talented singers throughout the world have sought out AVA since 1934, with eighty percent of our graduates maintaining successful performing career. AVA alumni regularly take the stages at the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, and other opera houses around the world. Here are some of the amazing places AVA alumni have recently performed in: San Francisco Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opéra national de Paris, Wolf Trap Opera, Teatro La Fenice, the Glimmerglass Festival, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, the Salzburg Festival, and The Israeli Opera. ■

### FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES AT THE MET

AVA Board Member and alumna, Latonia Moore, performed the role of Billie in Grammy Award-winning jazz musician and composer Terrence Blanchard's critically acclaimed opera, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. This was a historical occasion, as this was the MET's first performance of an opera by a Black composer. Board Member Randy Apgar was fortunate enough to attend the opening night of the performance and was impressed by both Ms. Moore's performance and the Met's production.



**Left:** Allen Black (left) and Randy Apgar (right) eagerly wait for the doors of the Metropolitan Opera to open for Opening Night with a performance of *Fire Shut Up In My Bones*

AVA patrons will travel far and wide to support alumni! In May, AVA provided a bus trip to hear AVA alumni Michael Fabiano ('09) and Vanessa Vasquez ('18). Both starred in Washington National Opera's recent production of *Carmen* at the Kennedy Center. Mr. Fabiano sang the role of Don José and Ms. Vasquez the role of Micaëla.



**Top:** Attendees of WNO bus trip with alumnus Michael Fabiano

**Right:** Drs. Steve and Ruth Ryave with alumna Vanessa Vasquez.



Plans are being made to see Angela Meade perform Elisabeth of Valois in Verdi's *Don Carlo* and Latonia Moore performing the title role of *Aida* at the Metropolitan Opera in late 2022!

### Opening Night at the Metropolitan Opera

by Randy Apgar, AVA Board Member

The Metropolitan Opera, on the occasion of its opening after nearly two years of silence due to COVID-19, was an exciting and spirited place to be: to be and to be seen. Standing on the Lincoln Center Plaza prior to the opening, the elegance and camaraderie, the selfies, and the videos typical of "opening night" were in full force, but this year there was also an excitement that stirred the air, a special

feeling of celebration, of accomplishment, and an anticipation of a night that would be like no other, and we were not disappointed.

The crowds were jovial and kind, and inside the Met, the excitement continued. People genuinely wanted to be together this evening, to witness a first in the Met's history: an opera, the first written by a black composer to be produced on the Met's stage in its

138-year history. Composed by Terence Blanchard, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* was about to begin. Black-tied gentlemen and elegant ladies dressed in gowns of every color of the rainbow slowly found their seats. The excitement only grew as the magnificent chandeliers of the Met slowly ascended to the ceiling indicating that the show was about to begin. And then, all at once, where there should have been silence, there rose a jubilant and thunderous roar of applauding and cheering that filled the house to capacity. It was a show of respect for Opera and for the Met. It was the pent-up need to once again have Opera back in our lives, and to do so with friends and family at our side.

The show was now about to begin. All stood for the National Anthem, and perhaps it was just my imagination, but as I looked around, I sensed the Anthem was being sung by everyone with a greater sense of pride, power, and determination, perhaps a reflection of accomplishing a need in Opera at the Met, for so long lost, but now had found its rightful place. We all seemed to be in celebration.

*Fire Shut Up In My Bones* recounts Charles M. Blow's upbringing in rural Louisiana as the youngest of five boys to a dirt-poor mother, the sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of an older cousin and the inner turmoil that ensues and trails him into adulthood. The actors and actresses in this Opera showed a personal and professional dedication to each of their roles so that we in the audience understood what life was like to so many at that time, and indeed, today.

In many ways, as quoted in the Washington Post, "*Fire* honors the contours and conventions of traditional Opera, but its finest moments spring from its divergences." One example, and there are many, is when the men of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, to which Charles has pledged in college, performs a traditional Step Show which triggered an extended standing ovation from the audience.

Of course, I was most interested in the performance of Latonia Moore, one of AVA's most prominent graduates. Again, as quoted in the Washington Post, "Latonia brought equal measure of grace and force to the role of Billie and provided emotional center of gravity that kept the family—and the Opera—well anchored". And as referenced in the Met's Playbill, "Charles's mother Billie . . . has music that must express her great love for her family while simultaneously showing her inability to express that affection. In this, her music recalls the most complex and nuanced characters in the operatic repertory."

I feel these quotes about Latonia speak so highly of her as a person, and also of AVA, and the demands for perfection that are put upon each of our graduates when they are Resident Artists. I remember Maestro Macatsoris saying many times, and I paraphrase, that an artist must "feel" the role that he or she is playing. She or he must "be" that person on stage in order

to convince the audience that what they are hearing and seeing comes from deep inside. Latonia, like so many of our AVA graduates on the great Opera stages of the world today, knows exactly how to interpret sincerely a role that is convincing, real, and targets the emotions of all of us. Brava Latonia, and the cast of *Fire*! ■



Photo courtesy of Randy Appar

## REFLECTIONS ON THE LOST PRODUCTION OF *MIGNON*

BY STEPHEN J. EDWARDS-TRYGAR

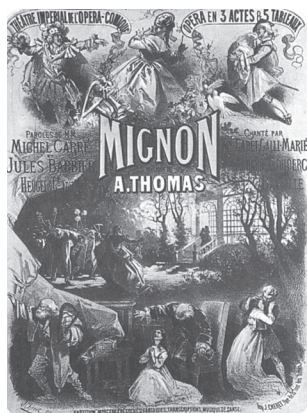


*“It’s almost like Cinderella; in the beginning, she had nothing, but by the end she finds the people that love her.”*

The first notes heard in AVA’s 2021/22 season was a truly momentous occasion. For our audience, it was the first time music had been heard in these halls since March, 2020. For our Resident Artists, however, it marked the first time that many of them had sung on any stage in over a year and a half. It was a promising new beginning, and it was met with tangible excitement and deafening applause. It was an inspiring evening, and it rekindled many people’s love for the art of opera.

The season’s triumphant beginnings were soon met by some troubled waters. New variants of the COVID-19 virus were beginning to spread, and despite AVA’s greatest efforts to keep Resident Artists, faculty, and staff safe, it was hit by an outbreak just after returning from the winter holiday. The outbreak threw a wrench in the opera season that had been planned out many months prior, and unfortunately, the much-anticipated production of Ambroise Thomas’ *Mignon* was cancelled. Rehearsals of Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* were auspiciously underway prior to the holiday, and the decision to move it into *Mignon*’s place was made with hopeful, yet heavy, hearts.

Thomas’ *Mignon* is not as widely recognized today in the U.S. as his operatic adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Yet, *Mignon*’s history



Jules Chéret’s poster for the 1899 premiere of *Mignon*.

is surprisingly rich. *Mignon* premiered on November 17, 1866 at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. The opera’s original French libretto is by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, an extraordinary duo who wrote some of the most recognizable French operas, including Gounod’s *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*, and Offenbach’s *Le contes d’Hoffmann*; in a separate collaboration, Carré co-wrote the libretto for Bizet’s *Les pêcheurs de perles*. It was a resounding success, and the piece was performed more than 100 times by the following July. It was when the opera was adapted and translated into German for performances in Berlin a few years later that the opera began to see some major criticism.

The libretto is based on *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in which Mignon plays a major part in the story but is not the central character. Audiences in Berlin were quite displeased with the alterations to Goethe’s original. As a result, Thomas composed a shorter finale with a tragic ending, which better aligned with Goethe’s tragedy but remained true to their adaptation. Back in France, opera’s success grew and would continue to do so for many years to come. By May 13, 1894, *Mignon* received its 1,000th performance at the Opéra-Comique.

Sometime after the chaos in Germany, Thomas

was asked to revise the work for its premiere in London. The performance was given in Italian with recitatives instead of the original spoken dialogue. More importantly, Mignon was to be sung by a soprano instead of Thomas' original mezzo-soprano. From this point forward, versions of the opera performed outside of France continued to piece together the parts of *Mignon* they wanted to mount, but fast-forwarding to Philadelphia in 2022, the Academy of Vocal Arts attempted to mount a production with Thomas' original mezzo-soprano in the role of Mignon.

Beginning her second year here at the Academy of Vocal Arts, Monique Galvão began preparing the role of Mignon as part of our *A Celebration of Opera!* concert series, which kicked off the 2021-22 season. Her studies of the role continued throughout the Fall semester, but she was never able to realize the role on our stage. She was gracious enough to sit down with me to talk about the role of Mignon and her preparations to perform it.

**STEPHEN EDWARDS-TRYGAR:** Once AVA announced that we would be staging a production of *Mignon*, I was immediately fascinated because this is not an opera that you see regularly performed! Therefore, I'm curious. Who is Mignon?

**MONIQUE GALVÃO:** For the concerts, we sang the Finale, which is when Mi-

gnon finds out who her father is. Vague memories return to her as she holds a bracelet and begins reading a prayerbook. Suddenly, she remembers her childhood before she was kidnapped. Throughout the whole opera, she doesn't know who she is except that she was taken from a land where the smell of orange blossoms permeates the air, and the sky is the most beautiful shade of blue. She falls in love with Wilhelm after he swoops in and saves her, and this wandering minstrel, Lothario, goes from father figure to biological father when she finally remembers. It's almost like Cinderella; in the beginning, she had nothing, but by the end she finds the people that love her.

**SE:** How did the role of Mignon continue to unfold for you as you began to prepare the rest of the opera?

**MG:** So, to preface, we chose to utilize the happy ending of the opera as Thomas originally intended, which our audiences got to see in the concerts. It was interesting to begin preparing the role at the very end then seeing where she starts from at the beginning. The thing I find most fascinating about her is that despite the amount of trauma she has endured throughout her life, she is a very honorable character. She talks a lot about God, which is intriguing because she could have turned out very differently. There are aspects of her morality that are still very childish. She gets jealous quickly and

wants everything to burn down. Yet, she never wishes ill on anybody. She's immature but still has a moral compass. She has no expectations and just lives through life until Wilhelm lays down a path for her to follow.

**SE:** It's interesting that you talk about her immaturity and childish behavior because in Goethe's original novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, she is a child and has a more platonic relationship with Wilhelm rather than a romantic one. Were there any plans to address both sides of Mignon's character?

**MG:** In my rehearsals with Richard Raub, we discussed how the role of Philine, the other romantic interest in the opera, could be that pivotal element between the stories. Because of Mignon's traumatic past and these new, foreign feelings of love, could Philine be a hallucination or even a dream? Could Philine be Mignon's expectation of womanhood or even the woman she desires to be? Further discussion on this approach would have had to take place with the eventual director of the opera, but based on her trauma, her surroundings, and the fact that she never really had a mother, this physical manifestation of everything Mignon wished she could be is not a stretch. While it's unfortunate I was not able to explore that interpretation deeper, I hope that one day I get to realize it. ■



**Top of Page 12:** From left to right: Peter Barber as Lothario, Monique Galvão as Mignon, and Zachary Rioux as Wilhelm Meister  
**Bottom of Page 13:** Monique Galvão as Mignon and Zachary Rioux as Wilhelm Meister

Photo credit: Don Valentino

# SUPPORTING AVA



Photo credit: Don Valentino

### AVA'S 2022-2023 ANNUAL FUND

The Annual Fund provides AVA with the working capital to support the daily functions of the institution and helps us meet the expenses of our operating budget. A gift to AVA through the Annual Fund makes an immediate and powerful impact.

### FELLOWSHIPS

AVA is the only tuition-free school in the world devoted exclusively to operatic training. While the program has always been tuition-free, AVA now also offers fellowships to assist Resident Artists with the costs of living in Philadelphia during their training at AVA. Resident Artist fellowships can be endowed or funded on an annual basis.

### COMPREHENSIVE SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships provide both a monthly fellowship to assist with living expenses and tuition support for one Resident Artist annually. They may be endowed in perpetuity with a contribution of \$350,000 or more.



**Above:** Alumnus Richard Troxell serenading *Viva la Voce!* 2022 honoree Kay Bossone  
Photo credit: Don Valentino

**Middle:** Mackie and Charlotte MacLean with Chelsea Laggan at the Angels and Benefactors Party

**Right:** Romeo and Emmy Abella with Zachary Rioux at the 2021 Opening Night  
Photo credit: Don Valentino

Support from donors like you is critical to the continued success of the Academy of Vocal Arts' mission. A gift to the Academy is a wonderful way to invest in the future of the operatic art form and the gifted singers who are its future. Your contribution also helps to underwrite the costs of producing AVA's highly acclaimed operas and concerts.

There are several ways that you can make an impact by supporting the AVA Resident Artists and the future of opera.

### THE HELEN CORNING WARDEN SOCIETY—PLANNED GIVING

The Helen Corning Warden Society recognizes the patrons who have made a bequest or other deferred planned gift arrangement for AVA in their estate planning. Gifts can be made in a variety of ways and allow donors to make meaningful gifts that they might not otherwise be able to commit to currently. In addition to bequests, AVA accepts charitable remainder trusts, charitable lead trusts, charitable gift annuities, life insurance, and retirement plan designations. The AVA Development department will work with you to identify the best Planned Giving option for your needs.

### CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

Many visibility opportunities are available to corporations through AVA opera and concert sponsorships, and through sponsorship of the annual gala, *Viva la Voce!* The AVA Development department can tailor your sponsorship package to meet the unique philanthropic and marketing objectives of your business.



Angel Raii Gomez raising a glass at the 2021 AVA Holiday Party  
Photo Credit: Don Valentino

### MATCHING GIFTS

Your employer may match your gift to AVA, either entirely or in some portion. In some instances, this may double or even triple the benefit of your gift to the Academy of Vocal Arts and its Resident Artists! Please check with your employer's benefits office to determine their matching gift requirements.

### THE UNITED WAY

AVA's Opera Outreach program is eligible to receive individual contributions made through the United Way Specific Care Program. All you need to do is complete the top portion of your United Way form, and then find the line for SPECIFIC CARE and enter AVA's code #3164, the amount of your gift, and the eligible agency name: Academy of Vocal Arts Opera Outreach.

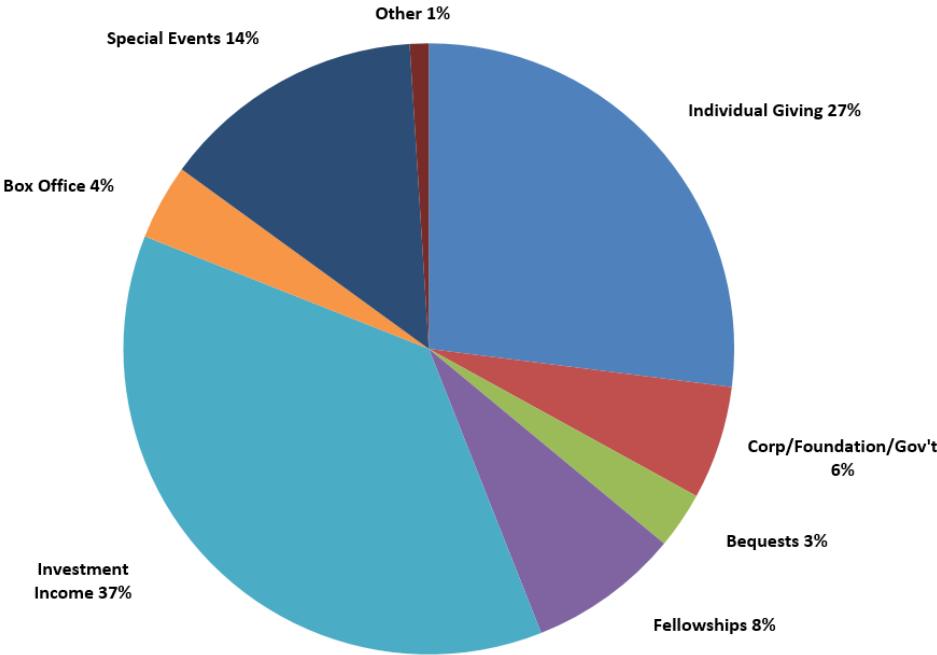


# FINANCIALS

## OPERATING INCOME

**\$4,158,400**

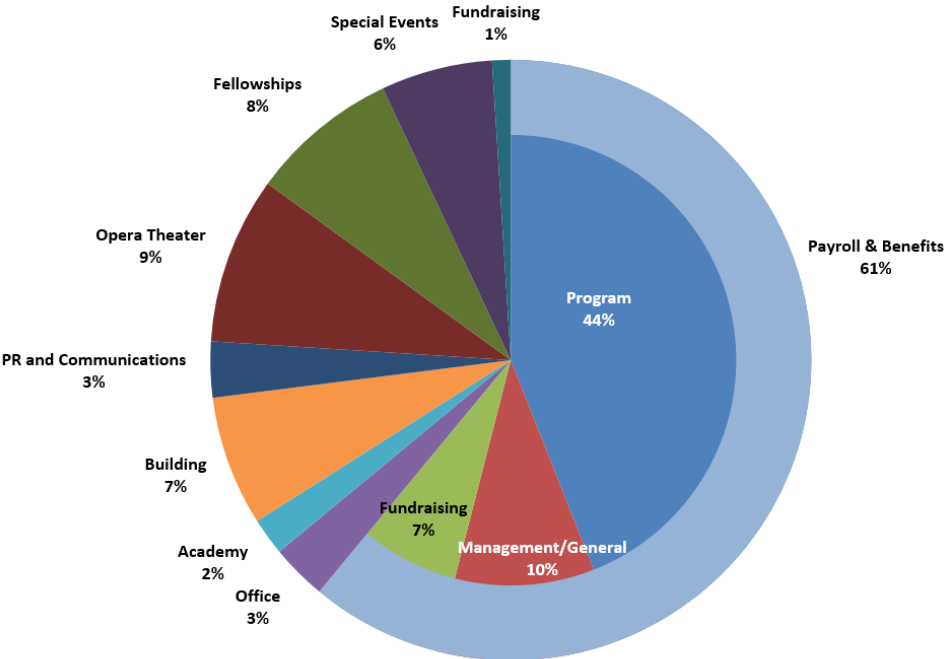
Operating income consists of revenue from a variety of sources. Like many schools, the largest single revenue source for AVA is the investment income from its endowment. Unlike other schools or conservatories, AVA receives no income from tuition, and therefore must rely on support from our loyal patrons. Individual, corporate, and foundation contributions, ticket sales, and special events, including the annual Gala, provide most of the remainder of our budget. In recent years, planned gifts and bequests have been providing ever more important revenue support. Thank you to all who share our love for opera and want to help us train the voices for opera's future!



## UNRESTRICTED OPERATING EXPENSES

**\$4,087,796**

The two largest expenditures in AVA's budget, program payroll and benefits, along with opera theatre expenses, are directly related to the training program. Due to the current pandemic, only two opera productions with orchestra are included in the opera theatre expenses this year. Other costs are associated with recitals, concerts, and piano productions.



## A SPECIAL THANK YOU

We would like to extend our thanks to all our donors and contributors. No matter the size of the donation, you are doing your part to ensure the future of opera by donating to the Academy of Vocal Arts and supporting talented Resident Artists. We would like to extend a special thank you to our generous 2021-2022 season sponsors.

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