



# *The Lyric Letter*

**Volume 24, Issue 3, March/April 2024**

**PO Box 339, Englewood, CO 80151  
[www.DenverLyricOperaGuild.org](http://www.DenverLyricOperaGuild.org)**



## *Measure for Measure*

April brings the results of the Finals of our Competition for Colorado Singers. We will enjoy our winners in performance at Opera On Tuesday April 2. Please join us for one of the most popular events of the year!

What makes this event vital in the development of Colorado's young operatic aspirants? There's so MUCH to learn. So MUCH at stake. So MUCH cost involved.

Classical singing is a highly competitive field.

About 10% of undergraduates who are attracted to the career actually end up making a living at it. Piecing together an existence is required as one builds a resume, finds an agent, executes first contracts, learns to travel well, auditions again and again—often with an investment output cost, copes with loneliness on the road, finds friends and family who will unconditionally support them, faces more rejections than acceptances—all within a world of dwindling artistic

resources, post COVID. Many opera companies around the world are struggling—cutting back their seasons, paying less for singers' income and expenses—Yikes! What's a talented singer to do??

Grit, resilience, and experience are all required, but where does one get those? Events like the Competition for Colorado Singers! The information gleaned from observing others in the Master Class is invaluable! The confidential, personal evaluation provided by judges to every singer is like gold: unique—very hard to come by in any setting. Our judges are plucked from the middle of the industry, with plenty of advice to offer those ready to listen. Feedback from outside experts is vital to individual growth as an artist and successful performer. In addition, facing and mastering intense feelings during preparation for competition, waiting backstage, while on stage, and interacting with peers and professionals takes skill. With every experience comes more security and competency in the psychological realm. Musical and artistic choices are challenging, and input on repertoire, phrasing, knowledge of the character and context are required. Listening to other performers and their critiques is so helpful! Watching them: their attire, gestures, facial expression, makeup, carriage is a real learning experience. Preparing the whole package for professional presentation sometimes takes years. Persistence is required.

DLOG members: are you aware of the gentle, kind, supportive environment that is offered by Competition Committee members from the check-in through the announcement of winners? There are even homemade cookies and hugs if needed! At most competitions, the tone of the event is very dry, impersonal, business-like, and clipped. In attempting to remove any sense of bias or favoritism, all humanity is forgotten. No feedback is offered, only results. Participants are left quaking in anticipation and reeling from the results, without ever knowing what judges found lacking (or thrilling) about their presentation. Was it the choice of aria? Was it that one note I'd like to have back? Was my dress too short? What was it exactly? Singers never know. Our marvelous competition is different!

Going pro takes expertise of all kinds. Doing what you LOVE is priceless!

What a feeling! The joy of music making never fails! Creating a life is never easy. Finding fulfillment in feeding others with your remarkable sound is worth it! Telling timeless stories through opera fills the soul. What an art!

**Kathy Van Arsdale**  
**President DLOG 2023-24**

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## **Our Mission**

**Denver Lyric Opera Guild's mission is to support and encourage young opera singers through grants to University Opera Programs and Young Artist Programs; to provide continuing education for members' appreciation and knowledge of opera; and by sponsoring an annual Competition for Colorado Opera Singers.**

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## **2024 Competition for Colorado Singers Final Results!**



DLOG YouTube channel.

The 2024 Denver Lyric Opera Guild Competition for Colorado Singers results are in! Congratulations to all our incredible competitors. As always, the entire Competition will remain viewable online at any time on the

[Click here to watch this year's magnificent performances.](#)

## **First Place Galen & Ada Belle Spencer Foundation Award**

### ***Miguel Angel Ortega Bañales | Tenor***



The Mexican tenor and pianist, Miguel Ángel Ortega Bañales, discovered a strong passion for music in the choral and vocal acapella setting at the age of 20. Miguel A. Ortega is a graduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder studying with Matthew Chellis, where he has received a Teaching Assistantship appointment to earn a master's degree in vocal performance and pedagogy as well as choral conducting. Ortega obtained his bachelor's degree in music performance from Berea College, during which he held a position as vocal TA and served as a piano collaborator for the music department. Since August 2020, he has served as Assistant Conductor at Eklund Opera, University of Colorado Boulder. Recent appearances include productions with

Boulder Bach Festival and Central City Opera Touring Artists.

## **Second Place Kenneth King Foundation Award**

### ***Claudia Díaz | Soprano***

Puerto Rican soprano Claudia de Lourdes Díaz, originally from San Juan, but raised in the city of Caguas, graduated in 2020 from the Conservatory of Music



of Puerto Rico with honors and a bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance. Ms. Díaz participated three consecutive years in the then-known Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, winning the Margarita Castro Alberty Award, the Puerto Rico District Prize, and the Fundación Daisy Ruíz Awards. Alongside her participation in the mentioned competition, she was selected for the Vozarteum Opera Festival in 2019; traveling from San Diego, California to Baja California, Mexico, performing in various venues with a range of diverse repertoire. Afterward, Ms. Díaz was accepted to Houston's Grand Opera, Young Artists Vocal Academy and over the course of the 2021 summer, she acquired a

scholarship and placement in the Bologna International Opera Academy working with extraordinary faculty such as Danielle Orlando, Luis Ledesma, Leone Magiera, Stefano Vizzioli, and Nicoletta Conti. De Lourdes has been working closely for the past two years, with the distinguished Wagnerian Soprano, Heidi Melton. Currently, Ms. Díaz is part of Melton's Studio at the Lamont School of Music, University of Denver pursuing a Master of Music in Vocal Performance.

## Third Place Myrle F. Hoffman Memorial Award

### **Randy Ho | Tenor**

Currently, Randy Ho is an Artist in Residence at Opera Colorado. Performing a diverse range of characters, including Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) and Philistine Messenger (*Samson et Delilah*), Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*), and Ramiro (*Cenerentola*). During the 2022-2023 season, as a Jan Miller Studio Artist at Pensacola Opera, Randy performed in their productions of *La Bohème* and *Carousel*, following his professional debut with Opera Saratoga as Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*). In the upcoming summer season, Randy will be covering the role of Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore* and participating in the world premiere of Gregory Spears' opera, *The Righteous*, and *La traviata* at Santa Fe Opera.

Randy has gained recognition through his involvement in esteemed programs



and competitions such as Carnegie Hall's Song Studio. A finalist in the Premiere Opera Foundation Voice Competition and recently a Regional Finalist for the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. Additionally, Randy has showcased his vocal prowess as a concert soloist with prominent ensembles, including The National Repertory Orchestra, Pensacola Choral Society, and The Denver Spirituals Project.

## Fourth Place Gary & Gayle Landis Award

**Saane Halaholo | Soprano**



Tongan-American and California native Saane Aziza Halaholo is already gaining recognition as a promising, young lyric soprano. Her 2023-2024 season includes covering Cio-Cio San in Cincinnati Opera's new co-production of *Madame Butterfly*, joining Opera Colorado as an Artist-in-Residence to cover Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* as well as perform Giannetta and Clorinda in touring productions of *The Elixir of Love* and *Cinderella*, and participating in the Glimmerglass Festival as a Young Artist to cover Giunone in *La Calisto* and perform Edith in *Pirates of Penzance*. Ms. Halaholo's training includes prestigious institutions such as Wolf Trap Opera, where she was a three-time Studio



Artist, the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music where she earned her Artist Diploma and Master of Music degrees, and the Bob Cole Conservatory at California State University, Long Beach, where she earned her Bachelor of Music.

## Fifth Place Shirley & Marlis Smith Memorial Award

### *Eric McConnell | Bass-Baritone*



Denver native bass-baritone Eric McConnell is quickly garnering acclaim in American opera and musical theatre communities for his distinctive dramatic voice and theatrical interpretations of both comic and tragic characters. He began his 2023-2024 season with the Missouri Symphony and Landlocked Opera singing the title role in their joint production of *Le nozze di Figaro* this September. He then travelled to the DC metro area for a role and company debut as Escamillo in *Carmen* with Bel Cantanti Opera. In 2024 he returned to Opera Fort Collins to reprise the title role in *Le nozze di Figaro* before making his role and company debut with Shreveport Opera

singing Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*. Spring 2024 will bring him back to his musical theatre roots in a crossover production of *Beauty and the Beast* with Opera San Luis Obispo as Gaston. He then debuts at the Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theatre, playing the roles of the fiendish dentist Orin Scrivello in *Little Shop of Horrors* and the shabby uncle Betto di Signa in a double bill of *Gianni Schicchi* and Buoso's *Ghost*. His season concludes with his third appearance at Union Avenue Opera in St. Louis, where he will portray the Wolf in *Into the Woods*.

## Sixth Place Carole Johnson Award

### *Jenna Clark | Mezzo Soprano*



Jenna Clark, mezzo-soprano is a versatile and compelling artist based in Denver, CO. Ms. Clark graduated from the University of Denver with a dual concentration Masters degree in Vocal Performance & Choral Conducting and is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma at the University of Colorado - Boulder. In the 2023-2024 season, Ms. Clark will be sang the alto solos in Mozart's *Requiem* and Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* as a part of the Crested Butte Music Festival (August 2023). She also performed the role of Mistress Quickly in Verdi's *Falstaff* at CU-Boulder

(October 2023), joined the Colorado Bach Ensemble in their annual performance of Handel's *Messiah* (December 2023), performed the role of Cherubino in Opera Fort Collins' production of *Le nozze di Figaro* (February 2024), and will join the chorus of *La Bohème* under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin as a part of the 2024 Bravo Vail! Festival (July 2024).

## Seventh Place Marcia Ragonetti Award

### *Mackenzie Laun | Soprano*



Mackenzie Laun, Soprano, is a Denver native. She holds her Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Northern Colorado, and is currently pursuing her Masters of Music Education with an emphasis in conducting from Colorado State University. She spent nine years as a public high school choir teacher in Jeffco, but now enjoys the life of a stay-at-home mom and freelance singer. Mackenzie sings professionally all over Denver with groups like St. Martin's Chamber Choir, Anima Chamber Ensemble, and Elus Vocal Ensemble. Some of her favorite past engagements include soprano soloist for Mozart's *Requiem* with St. Martin's Chamber Choir, soprano soloist for Bach's *Magnificat* with Colorado Christian University, Pousette in Massenet's *Manon* with Boulder

Opera, and Lisette in Puccini's *La Rondine* at UNC



## **Certificate of Merit**

*Jackie Writz in Honor  
of Marlis & Shirley Smith Award*

**Alice Del Simone, Soprano**



## **Certificate of Merit**

*Julie Johnston  
in Honor of Harry Williams Award*

**Kerby Baier, Soprano**



## **Certificate of Merit**

*Pam & Mike Mignoli  
In Honor of Dori Kavorkian Award*

**Elijah English, Counter Tenor**



**Honorable Mention - Sponsored by Tom & Mary  
Conroy**

**Sabina Balsamo, Soprano**



**Mykayla Fitzpatrick, Soprano**



**Kacie Kenton, Soprano**



**Oliver Poveda Zavala, Bass**



**Adam Hirama Wells, Baritone**



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## **2024 Competition Photos by Katia Gelman**

For the 2024 Competition Finals, DLOG contracted photographer Katia Gelman for additional photography of our competitors and judges. All photos are also available on the DLOG website in the Gallery section.

[Click here to visit the DLOG Gallery any time.](#)



Front Row Left to Right: Jason Ferrante (Judge), Kacie Kenton, Kerby Baier, Mykayla Fitzpatrick, Randy Ho, Jenna Clark, Alice Del Simone, Sabina Balsimo  
Back Row Left to Right: Christian Pursell (Judge), Sarah Cambidge (Judge), Claudia Díaz, Mackenzie Laun, Miguel Angel Ortega Bañales, Saane Halaholo, Eric McConnell, Elijah English, Adam Hiram Wells, Oliver Poveda Zavala





2024 Competition First Place Winner: Miguel Angel Ortega Bañales, Tenor



The 2024 Top Three, Left to Right: Claudia Díaz (2nd), Randy Ho (3rd), Miguel Angel Ortega Bañales (1st)



Front Row Left to Right: Kacie Kenton, Mykayla Fitzpatrick, Sabina Balsimo  
Back Row Left to Right: Adam Hiram Wells, Oliver Poveda Zavala





Front Row Left to Right: Claudia Díaz, Kerby Baier, Jenna Clark, Randy Ho  
Back Row Left to Right: Mackenzie Laun, Saane Halaholo, Elijah English, Eric  
McConnell, Miguel Angel Ortega Bañales, Alice Del Simone

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## **DLOG Directory**

To access Denver Lyric Opera Guild's current online directory, simply go the DLOG website at: [denverlyricoperaguild.org/directory](https://denverlyricoperaguild.org/directory).

Please note this is a password protected area of the site so as to only be accessed by DLOG members. Please do not share the password or use the directory for any business or marketing purposes. The password is "Opera!". That's capital O, "Opera" followed by an exclamation point.

To inform us of corrections to the directory, please email

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## Opera Around Colorado



### Opera on Tap - The Bard at the Bar Featuring Shakesbeer!

Sat April 6, Brewability, Englewood

"If music be the food of love, play on!" -Twelfth Night, William Shakespeare

Across the centuries, William Shakespeare has inspired composers to write captivating music, from opera to art song and more. Entranced by that whole package, we're partnering with The Wit's Shakesbeer in April to bring you a night of comic and tragic words and song, all to celebrate Will's 460th birthday!

[Tickets Here](#)



### RESCHEDULED: Opera Teasers

April 12, Wellshire Event Center, Denver

Join the Central City Opera Guild for the annual Opera Teaser! This special evening features cocktails, dinner and a preview of the 2024 Festival Season, featuring selections from *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Girl of the Golden West* and *Street Scene*, performed by CCO Touring Artists.

[Reserve Tickets Here!](#)



**BOULDER**OPERA

### Operatizers: Tastes of Opera

April 18, 20, 21, Dairy Arts Center, Boulder

Experience the rich tapestry of North American operatic storytelling with our program of short operas. Delve into the uncertainty of dating, the complexities of unhappily married couples, the turmoil of a conflicted bride, and the intricate dynamics of romantic relationships. Join us at Boulder Opera Company as we bring these captivating tales to life through music, drama, and emotion.

[Info Here](#)



### ***Glory Denied***

Sun Apr 21, Arnold Hall (Air Force Academy), Colorado Springs

In Tom Cipullo's *Glory Denied*, we delve into the powerful and true story of America's longest-held prisoner of war, Colonel Jim Thompson. Enduring a nine-year ordeal in the jungles of Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, Thompson

finds the strength to survive within the cherished memories of his family. However, upon Jim's liberation, he returns to find his world completely changed.



To get on base: A driver's license or Photo ID is required for those 18 or older to enter. Please leave extra time to get through base security. A pre-program by the USAFA Cadet Chorale will begin at 2:30 p.m.

This production is co-produced by the Chamber Orchestra of the Springs, Opera Theatre of the Rockies, Art Song Colorado, and the Air Force Academy.



We look forward to your presence at this impactful event. Your attendance will add to the collective appreciation of the powerful and true prisoner of war story portrayed in *Glory Denied*. Thank you for joining us in recognizing the enduring spirit and resilience depicted in this remarkable production.

[Reserve Tickets Here](#)

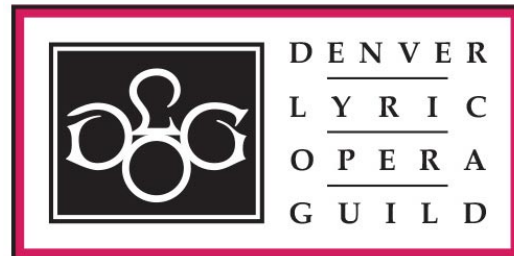


**SAINT-SAËNS'S: *SAMSON AND DELILAH***

May 4, 7, 10, 12, Ellie Caulkins Opera House

Opera Colorado closes the season with Saint-Saëns's operatic take on the biblical story of Samson and Delilah. Samson is a man of super-human strength. He has one true weakness, and it's the sultry Delilah's job to discover it and ensure victory for her people. Indulge in a performance of stunning visuals, epic dance, and some of opera's most gorgeously evocative music culminating in a finale that literally brings the house down..

[Click for Details](#)



DENVER LYRIC OPERA  
GUILD

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