



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
OPERA THEATRE
SHOWCASES

Stars of Tomorrow

at Lexington Opera House March 24-26

The University of Kentucky Opera Theatre's spring 2023 production will be an "all-out gala concert, showcasing classic repertory from the opera stage performed by current students and alumni, accompanied by the University of Kentucky Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maestro John Nardolillo," said Everett McCorvey, UKOT director.

The UKOT "Stars of Tomorrow Opera Gala" will be presented at the Lexington Opera House on March 24, 25, and 26. When asked why he chose to stage the gala instead of a particular opera, he replied, "I wanted to collaborate with Kentucky Educational Television again, and we decided that this would be a great way to highlight the UKOT program through the Public Broadcasting Service network, as we did for the 25th anniversary of *It's a Grand Night for Singing* in 2017. That program won a PBS Regional Emmy Award, and we hope that lightning will strike twice!"

Tedrin Blair Lindsay, UKOT vocal coach and accompanist, elaborated on how you plan a complex musical event like an opera gala. "First, Dr. McCorvey, Maestro Nardolillo, and I held auditions for our singers. We brainstormed about which operatic excerpts we would love to see included, and then we said, 'Who do we have on board who can sing these wonderful pieces?' Several of our advanced students already had big, impressive arias ready to go, a big help. For example, our non-traditional student Philip Webb, who is getting his degree after a successful career, will sing the thrilling aria 'Dio, mi potevi scagliar' from Verdi's *Otello*, which requires a mature voice beyond the range of our younger students."

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Ballew mastering her craft

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News you can clap about

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Join Us for a Spring Opera Preview Luncheon

An exciting OperaLex tradition continues this spring with singers from the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre program!

Join Everett McCorvey for a SNEAK PEEK of the upcoming spring production and hear the students of UK Opera Theatre perform as you enjoy a delicious lunch with other music lovers and professionals from the Lexington community.

When: Thursday, March 9 from 11a.m. – 1 p.m.

Where: Helen King Alumni Building, 400 Rose St, Lexington, Kentucky, 40508

Reserved parking will be available. Event tickets are \$39 each. Spots are limited, so get your tickets early! To purchase, go to www.operalex.org.



'STARS OF TOMORROW'

From Page 1

The program is organized for easy flow and building to maximum impact in each half, with a variety of tempos, languages, styles, and combinations of singers. It includes solos, duets, and ensembles from *Carmen*, *La Traviata*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Gianni Schicchi*, and the outstanding (though rarely performed) African-American opera, *Treemonisha*, as well as many others. Lindsay said, "You can think of it as an operatic *Grand Night*."

McCorvey serves as executive producer. Stephen Wrentmore from UK's Department of Theatre and Dance is the stage director. Nick Helton will direct the filming of the event by KET. Nardolillo, music director and conductor of the UK Symphony Orchestra, is the production's music director.

Ticket prices range from \$17 to \$45, and may be purchased directly by calling the Lexington Center box office (859-233-3535, Tuesday – Friday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.) or through <http://www.lexingtonoperahouse.com> to avoid additional third-party fees.

Mary Powell

'Stars of Tomorrow' Cast of Singers

Aaron Eaves	Grace Wong
Alexandra Thibault	Hailey Wells
Alyssa Bunnell	Houston Tyrrell
Anazha Monique Santiago	Isabella Recktenwald
Andrea Salazar	Jeffrey Todd
Andrew Tran	Jessica Bayne
Austin Morgan	Jeremy Kelly
Briana Johnson	John Patrick Brown
Brianna Santiago-Kane	Katie Ivie
Cameron Howard	Kaylee Piatt
Catherine Thomsen	Leonardo Goulding
Chris Burchett	Maria Esch
Clinton Garrison	Mason O'Brien
Cory Evans	Marquita Richardson
Courtney Porter	Mykel Robinson-Collins
Dejah Watts	Natalie Monell
Dylon Crain	Nathaniel E. Thompson
Elijah Garrett	Pharel Silaban
Elyse Pilcher	Philip Webb
Emily Wrede	Robert Samuel Powless
Erica Gabriel	Sergio Enciso
Erin Hannon	Sierra Kidd
Fairynne Rogers	Thomas Swerczek
Grace Ashley	Wagner Pástor
Grace Platt	

Ballew: 'You Just Have to Take Time to Master the Craft'

The first time Denisha Ballew stepped onto the Metropolitan Opera stage, as a featured soloist in the Grammy award-winning production of *Porgy and Bess*, she admits to being awestruck. After all, she was on the very stage where prominent African-American singers Leontyne Price, Grace Bumbry, Shirley Verrett, George Shirley, and others had stood before her.

"You know the saying, 'We are living our ancestors' wildest dreams.' That was it. That was the moment," said Ballew, who graduated with a bachelor's in vocal performance from the University of Kentucky in 2008.

The year of Ballew's Met debut was 2019, just seven years after she moved to New York City, where she now lives. Prior to that, she performed in such prominent productions as the first National Broadway Tour production of "The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*," where she sang the role of Serena. She sang with New York City Encores in the production of "Cabin in the Sky," which was one of the first all-black musicals on Broadway, and also performed with Harlem Opera Theatre.

"After pounding the pavement here in New York since 2012, and to make my debut seven years later, is pretty huge," she said.

Being cast in *Porgy and Bess*, while pivotal to her career, was only the beginning of a "very busy year" for Ballew. She was cast in nine other productions in 2019, including *Turandot*, *Tosca*, *Eugene Onegin*, and Verdi's *Requiem*.



"As a performer period, but especially as an opera singer, you have to be versatile and open to trying different genres of music and also different forms of artistry and communication."

Denisha Ballew

But the 2020-21 season was perhaps her most special, however, primarily because she was cast in the widely acclaimed *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. "I wasn't originally cast in the show at all – but the Lord works in

mysterious ways. Two weeks before the show opened, the conductor asked if I was open to being in *Fire* and auditioning for the role of Verna. I'm so silly, I just kind of fell to the ground. I was like, absolutely."

Ballew, from Richmond, Kentucky, was first exposed to opera at the age of 16, when her beloved school choir director, Mary Lois Kearns, "recognized something different in my singing," she said. The teacher began giving Ballew voice lessons after school, and soon she began dreaming of being an opera singer.

Ballew found her way to UK and studied first under Dennis Bender and then Angelique Clay Everett. Upon graduation, she sang locally in Kentucky and Tennessee before moving to New York City to move her career to the next level.

In addition to opera, Ballew crosses over into musical theater and performs concerts. "Really cool" was performing with the Glenn Gould Foundation when it honored opera singer Jessye Norman in a concert in Toronto. "I got to meet her a year before she passed."

Still ahead for Ballew? She would like to be in a Broadway production and would love to do film and television. "As a performer period, but especially as an opera singer, you have to be versatile and open to trying different genres of music and also different forms of artistry and communication. I think with the classical technique, you can pretty much do anything, I feel, in the arts. You just have to take the time to master the craft."

Applause!

NEWS TO CLAP ABOUT



Erica Gabriel

Gabriel Hitting the Road

Erica Gabriel, a third-year student pursuing a doctorate of musical arts at the University of Kentucky, has been busy performing with orchestras across the country. Recently she performed the holiday pops with Kalamazoo Symphony orchestra and a classical holiday concert with the Buffalo Philharmonic. She also made her debut with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra and performed with the Jacksonville Symphony, the Savannah Philharmonic, and the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra.

In addition, Gabriel was cast in Ravinia's production of Bernstein's "Mass" with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Marin Alsop, which aired on PBS as a part of its "Great Performances" series. She has also toured with the American Spiritual Ensemble, under the direction of UK Opera Theatre's Everett McCorvey.

Gabriel, from Southfield, Michigan, received her bachelor's degree from Oakwood University and holds a master's from the University of Michigan.



Reshma Shetty

Shetty in Starring Role

Reshma Shetty, who received her master's in voice performance from UK in 2002, had a starring role in a Hallmark holiday movie, "Jolly Good Christmas," set in London. She played Anji, a native Londoner, who meets David, a recently supplanted New Yorker who hires her to help him find the perfect gift for his new girlfriend. From that point, chaos ensues.

Shetty, a native of England who moved to Virginia at the age of 16, is no stranger to the small screen. Her previous work led to her success as she starred in the USA Network's series "Royal Pains," which aired for eight seasons. She also starred as a series regular in the CBS drama, "Pure Genius," and had roles in "Monarch" on Fox, "Blindspot" on NBC, Netflix's "She-Ra Princess of Power," "Instinct" on CBS, "Happyish" on Showtime, and "30 Rock" on NBC, among others.



Patricia Andress

Andress Teaching, Singing

Patricia Andress, who came to UK in 1999 to work on her doctorate in vocal arts, has performed in Germany since 2007, and recently began freelancing again as a singer and teacher. One "fun project" she sang for was German Hörspiel, which was nationally broadcast live in Germany.

"Until recently, I've had the great privilege of being 'fest' in the ensemble of Theater Bremen. There I was cast in many great roles ... Now I'm freelancing again, which affords a wonderful freedom to teach, as well as sing," she said.

Among her roles at Theater Bremen were Norma, Violetta, Tosca, Donna Anna and Elvira, Elizabeth, Rusalka, Amelia, and many more – all as primary soprano. Prior to moving to Germany, Andress lived in New York City, working in a church choir and as a ringer in hired choruses, where she had "fantastic experiences" with conductors such as Lorin Maazel and Essa Peka Solonen. She also won some competitions and "took every audition I could – even crashing some auditions." Eventually, Andress auditioned for an agency and got the job at Theater Bremen in Germany.

Encore!

2022 a Success, 2023 Plans Underway

This year's *Encore!*, a night of celebration, entertainment, and fundraising for the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre program, was deemed a huge success by OperaLex President Bonnie Mays. That success was measured in terms of feedback – "everyone was raving about it" – and in fundraising; the annual gala raised more money than any previous individual gala, she said.

"It was an elegant evening and experience that Lexingtonians can't find anywhere else in our region with that level of entertainment," Mays added, noting that UKOT students performed a variety of opera and Broadway selections.

Honored that evening were former UK President Lee Todd and his wife, Patsy, for their support of the arts in general and UKOT specifically. They received the Champion of Voice award.

Planning for this year's *Encore!*, set for Nov. 18 at the Gatton Student Center Ballroom, is already underway, Mays said. It will be presented in a similar format, with dinner, entertainment, dancing, and a silent auction.



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Top: Everett McCorvey and Alicia Helm McCorvey. Middle: Miles Osland and his Little Big Band. Bottom: Voice students Katie Copeland, Grace Ashely, and Jazmin Salaberrios. (Photos by Ron Morrow, TOPS Magazine.)

Message from the President: Bonnie Mays

On behalf of the OperaLex Board of Directors, I want to wish you a happy and prosperous 2023! Many, many thanks to our donors, our sponsors, our OperaLex members, and to Everett McCorvey and the students and faculty of the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre for enriching our lives with great musical performances. In keeping with our mission of OperaLex to enhance the love and appreciation of opera in our community, our students have given us much to celebrate in this new year.



In October 2022, OperaLex sponsored our first live *Encore!* since the pandemic. It was a beautiful gala evening, where the attendees enjoyed a cocktail reception, delicious dinner, silent auction, entertainment by our students and dancing to a live jazz band. A successful October culminated a week later with the announcement of our Pappy bourbon raffle winner. I am very excited to announce that *Encore!* 2023 will be held on UK's campus in the ballroom of the new Gatton Student Center. Please mark your calendar and save the date, Nov. 18, to join us for an evening of eloquent entertainment. Please watch our website, Operalex.org, for more details.

We are excited about our spring opera production and encourage you to attend the preview luncheon to be held March 9 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at The Margaret King Alumni House on the campus of the University of Kentucky. Enjoy a delicious lunch while you hear Dr. McCorvey talk about the upcoming production and hear a preview from the students. See page 2 for more details. Parking will be available.

So many events are on our calendar for the next four months, in addition to the spring opera and *It's a Grand Night for Singing*. You will not want to miss any of the exciting performances. The best way to get all the information is to become a member of OperaLex. Membership levels begin at \$25 a year for students and seniors all the way to a \$10,000 level. Our continued growth and support of these talented students depends on your membership. We need your support! Please go to our website and join OperaLex today!



I am so happy to announce the appointment of Kelsey Loeslie as the new managing director of OperaLex. Kelsey is an alumnus of the UK Opera Theatre program and has been involved with OperaLex on many levels supporting the faculty, staff, and students. Kelsey will be managing our communications and marketing as well as donor relations. We welcome Kelsey!

On tap: Grand Night, Susannah

Plans are already underway for the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre's season finale *It's a Grand Night for Singing*. The high-energy, high-impact musical revue is set for June 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, and 18 at the Singletary Center for the Arts on UK's campus. There will be eight performances altogether, with two on both Saturdays.

Grand Night, as always, will feature singing, dancing, and acting – similar to what you'd see on a Broadway show. This will be the 31st year for the production.

Also in the planning stages is UKOT's fall production

of *Susannah* by Carlisle Floyd. The opera in two acts focuses on 18-year-old Susannah Polk, an innocent girl who is targeted as a sinner in a small mountain town.

This will be the second time UKOT has presented the opera. The first time was in 1997, when UKOT Director Everett McCorvey first came to UK. Current associate professor Angelique Clay Everett had the starring role as Susannah. "It's very exciting to present it again," McCorvey said. *Susannah* will be presented October 6, 7, and 8 at the Lexington Opera House.

TalkingwithTedrin

Tedrin's Recording Corner #46

By Tedrin Blair Lindsay

Over the years I have enjoyed fostering the iconoclastic impression that I dislike Joan Sutherland, one of the greatest operatic sopranos of all time, and truth be told, her tendency to sing all vowels the same has detracted from my appreciation of the diva in her most celebrated *bel canto* coloratura repertoire, especially compared to such singers as Beverly Sills, Maria Callas, or Montserrat Caballé. However, I would like to balance my long-overstated disdain by drawing your attention to three recordings in which I think Sutherland was at her most glorious.

I find the lovely syrupy sweetness of Jules Massenet's music somewhat cloying in his more bourgeois opera plots, such as his most popular pieces *Manon and Werther*, but when applied to epic historical subjects like *Thaïs* and *Esclarmonde*, that same sweetness humanizes the story rather than sentimentalizing it. Sutherland brings all that sumptuous coloratura and those gleaming high notes to bear in her interpretation of the title role in *Esclarmonde*. Partnered with the rich-hued tenor Giacomo Aragall and the sturdy baritone Louis Quilico, Sutherland is simply thrilling in this majestic part. Her husband Richard Bonyngé is the conductor of the National Philharmonic Orchestra on this recording from 1976, now released on Decca 478-3049. I can't understand the unjust neglect of this opera which has remained on the fringes of the repertoire – perhaps it takes a Sutherland to be able to sing it!

I also love her performance in another French Romantic opera obsessed with an exotic locale, Leo Delibes' *Lakmé*, the plot of which is a cross between *Madama Butterfly* and *Norma* set in colonial India. The opera boasts two pieces much more renowned than itself, both of which Sutherland serves with rarefied beauty and exquisite technique: the famous "Bell Song" aria and the even more famous "Flower Duet," which British Airlines poached for a theme song decades ago. Alain Vanzo and Gabriel Bacquier are her tenor and baritone colleagues on this recording, with the redoubtable Jane Berbié as her Mallika in the duet. Richard Bonyngé is again the conductor, this time leading the forces of the Opéra de Monte Carlo in 1968 (released on London 425-485-2). This is another opera that deserves to be performed more often.



Sutherland's work in Italian opera was almost exclusively confined to the *bel canto* operas of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi (in my opinion her greatest role was Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, the recording of which I have praised in a previous column), apart from her controversial assumption of the title role in Puccini's *Turandot*. However, I absolutely adore her performance in the *verismo* potboiler *L'Oracolo* by Franco Leoni, in which she sings the role of Ah-Joe, the luckless heroine of a thwarted-love story set in San Francisco's Chinatown. The main role of Cim-Fen, the villain in this turgid melodrama, was a favorite of the legendary baritone Tito Gobbi, whose mastery of the part is recorded for posterity with Sutherland on this Decca recording from 1977, released now on Musical Heritage Society 514617X. Tenor Ryland Davies and bass Richard Van Allan add luster to this fantastic opera, again far too infrequently heard. Bonyngé was as always in the pit (he and Sutherland came as a team), this time again with the National Philharmonic Orchestra.

I hope these recommendations will intrigue and delight you as much as I hope this column will redeem me for years of maligning Dame Joan as the easy mark of a jest. She was in fact, as her legions of rabid fans called her, La Stupenda.



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