



PHOTO BY MARK CORNELISON

UK students and community members join forces to present *Grand Night*.

## From Billboard to Broadway, *Grand Night* Has It Covered

Now in its 31st year, *It's a Grand Night for Singing* offers a little something for everyone: highlights from newer Broadway offerings, as well as some of the great American standards. But that's not all. In addition to the first-class singing, there will be dancing, acting, elaborate costumes, and more, all designed to provide a "magical experience," said Everett McCorvey, director of the University of Kentucky Op-

era Theatre and producer of this beloved event.

"If you love Broadway or if you love musicals, you will love *Grand Night*," McCorvey said.

*Grand Night* is a town and gown celebration of song in which current UK students join forces with members of the community, including some students home from other universities for the summer.

"It's a true collaboration," McCorvey added.

"We go through a couple hundred titles and typically have around 30 titles that we perform. Then we couple that with what the students and community members audition with to see if that's something

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*It's a Grand Night for Singing* begins June 9 at the Singletary Center for the Arts on UK's campus. See page 2 for dates, times, and ticket prices.

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## GRAND NIGHT

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that we like. If so, we score it to an orchestra and try to help them get a really good performance of that particular piece.”

The cast of *Grand Night* is about 40 people strong. Auditions are held every year, with about 75-100 people vying for a spot. Typically, two-thirds are students, while one-third come from the community. (See page 3 for two former UK students and now community members who regularly participate.)

*Grand Night* wasn't always the high-impact production that has become a staple in the Lexington community. In fact, the first show was more like a choral concert than a musical revue. There were no costumes, no dancing, no special lighting – only singing, minus all the frills that now characterize *Grand Night*.

“*Grand Night* is a lot grander now,” McCorvey said.

Initially, *Grand Night* was created to give UK students a “high-energy, high-stakes experience in a short period of time. Because if they have the opportunity to go to New York, that’s what’s going to happen,” McCorvey said. True to form, rehearsals for *Grand Night* don’t start till the second week in May and run for only five weeks.

But the event was so popular in the community, that it grew into something so much more. To meet the demand, there are eight shows scheduled across two weekends.

The success of *Grand Night* these past 31 years can be attributed to the team that puts it together. They include: McCorvey, producer/music director; Peggy Stamps, director; Tedrin Blair Lindsay, associate music director; Rob Baldwin, conductor; Johnie Dean, music arranger; Nan McSwain, assistant music director; Bob Pickering, set designer; and Tanya Harper, lighting designer; Aaron Bowling, production technical director; Grady Bowman, choreographer; and Meghan Jennings-Posner, production stage manager.

**It's a Grand Night for Singing Dates:**  
 June 9 - 7:30 p.m.  
 June 10 - 2 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.  
 June 11 - 6 p.m.  
 June 16 - 7:30 p.m.  
 June 17 - 2 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.  
 June 18 - 2 p.m.

**Ticket Prices:**  
 Adults: \$59/\$50  
 Students: \$17  
 Seniors: \$55/\$45

*\*Tickets are available at [www.scfatickets.com](http://www.scfatickets.com). Note from Everett McCorvey: Be sure to get tickets from the Singletary Center and not from an outside scalper.*



**TAKE  
NOTE**

The OperaLex Hospitality Tent is back! Open 90 minutes before the curtain of each of the Grand Night performances. Stop by to enjoy some snacks and visit with other UK Opera Theatre patrons before the spectacular show.

## Answering the Call Year After Year

Whit Whitaker is a busy man. He's president of the Lexington-Fayette Chapter of the NAACP, a member of the Mayor's Commission on Racial Justice and Equality, and a community advocate and organizer, just for starters. But he somehow still finds time for his musical avocations, including performing in *It's a Grand Night for Singing*.

Whitaker, a University of Kentucky vocal music alum, is one of several community members – and former students - who regularly participate in the UK Opera Theatre's yearly production.

"I continue to participate and perform, when my schedule allows, because it is a wonderful experience to share the stage with so many talented students from UK," said Whitaker, a Detroit, Michigan, native who performed as a student in the first production of *Grand Night* in 1993. "I hope that I can provide the smallest bit of inspiration for the younger people so that they know that even with age, one can still perform at a high level and choose to unselfishly share their gifts with the varying communities of patrons who attend the town and gown affair."

Likewise, Kelli Jo Summers, another UK vocal music alum and community participant in *Grand Night*, keeps a jam-packed schedule. The Lexington native is a teacher with the Lexington Theatre Company's artist development program and regularly performs with professional and community theater programs. Yet, she, too, looks forward to auditioning and participating in the "professional-grade show" every year.

"*Grand Night* is such a wonderful show that showcases current industry professionals, as well as current students and community members from around the Commonwealth," she said. "It's a show unlike any other and certainly a show that shouldn't be missed."

"I choose to do *Grand Night* year after year because it really prepares you for the professional world of performing," she continued. "You learn an entire two-hour show (music and choreography) and put it on its feet in five weeks. You have to be on your A game to keep up."

Both Summers and Whitaker credit the team behind *Grand Night* for its rousing success over the years.

"The team is full of industry professionals," Summers said. "I encourage everyone who is an aspiring performer or current performer to audition for *Grand Night*. It truly is the best – and my favorite – summer tradition to be a part of."

"The production team is a phenomenal group of artists, technicians and administrators whose main goal is to bring to life the truly magical experience," Whitaker said.

It is, he added, "Lexington, Kentucky's, own little piece of Broadway."



Photos provided.

Top: Whit Whitaker

Bottom: Kelli Jo Summers

# Chinese Pop Star Henry Huhtulag Found Confidence as Student at UK

Henry Huhtulag seems reluctant to call himself a pop star. After all, his band – Erguna Band – was already “famous” in China when he joined as lead singer in 2020, he said.

But the twenty-something singer does admit that “a lot of young people started following the band” after he joined. And Cynthia Lawrence, who taught Huhtulag while he studied vocal music at the University of Kentucky, is quick to confirm that he’s taking China by storm.

“He’s definitely a star. A phenomenon. There are thousands of people in his crowds. It’s just him and his band,” Lawrence said.

Huhtulag, from Inner Mongolia, an autonomous region of China, is known first and foremost by the song “Swan.” “Everybody knows it,” he said. Like all the music Huhtulag and Erguna Band perform, it is a fusion of Mongolian “folk and pop and rock.” They translate it to Chinese when touring in China. (Mongolia has its own language called Mongolian, which has several dialects.)

Huhtulag has a “high, sweet tenor voice” that Lawrence and a group from UK discovered during a recruiting trip to Inner Mongolia. He was only 16 at the time, and Lawrence and her colleagues quickly realized his potential. “He was quite the star that morning,” Lawrence said.

He was accepted into the UK vocal music program, in collaboration with Inner Mongolian University, and immediately showed an interest in musical theater. Right off the bat, Huhtulag and Lawrence also formed a strong bond.

“I have a special connection with Henry,” she said. “Every now and then he calls me when he has a problem and we talk through it.”

Huhtulag gives credit to Lawrence and the UK music program for helping him build confidence and “self-believing.”



Photos provided.



Henry Huhtulag

“I remember one thing very, very useful for me. Cynthia always tells us no matter if you become a singer or not in the future, she says I hope you can learn something about life in my lessons. She never gives us any pressure to be an opera singer or [says] you have to be like a tenor or whatever. She just gives us the lessons for everything. Lessons for life.”

Huhtulag graduated from UK in 2018 and, soon after, went back home to make his mark. He left with a strong foundation that also included opera.

“When we study voice at UK, we learn art songs – songs in various languages. We teach singing with technique and, of course, opera does come into that. But sometimes certain roles in opera are not appropriate for all voices. If their voices are more appropriate to music theater or pop music, then I teach that, too. Henry really enjoyed doing musical theater ... his has kind of a pop American music theater sound because his voice is so sweet,” Lawrence said.

For now, Huhtulag is living the life of a pop star, calling various hotel rooms home as he travels all over China.

“He’s living the dream, and I’m really, really happy for him,” Lawrence said.

# Pros’ Visits Help Students Make Real-World Connection

Every year for one week, voice students at the University of Kentucky get the opportunity to learn from the pros in a series of Master Classes. That’s just one of the many ways the UK School of Music prepares students for the next level, said Everett McCorvey, director of the UK Opera Theatre.

“The Master Classes are so special because it gives students an idea of what’s happening on the national platform and what the expectations are on the national platform,” McCorvey said.

The list represented a “very high level of people” – all names recognizable in any opera circle around the world. They included: Reginald Smith Jr., Patricia Andress, Charis Humphries, Joanna Mongiardo, Karen Slack, Morris Robinson, Martin Neron, Kenneth Overton, and Ronan Tynan.

“These are people currently in the profession making they’re living performing,” McCorvey said.

Each master clinician taught individual, one-hour private voice lessons six to eight hours a day during the week, offering pointers on such things as how to interpret a piece or how to use your body to sing better. They also offered one or two classes on a variety of real-world topics. This was in addition to the students’ regular course work.

“The beauty of this is that they are contemporary opera singers, but they have established themselves as internationally regarded singers and are singing all over the world,” McCorvey said. “They are approachable, and they are willing to share, in the young person’s language, their expertise on how to sing classical music.”



Reginald Smith Jr.



Patricia Andress



Charis Humphries



Joanna Mongiardo



Karen Slack



Morris Robinson



Ronan Tynan



Martin Neron



Kenneth Overton

## Message from the President: Bonnie Mays

JOIN OperaLex, JOIN OperaLex!!! OperaLex is an independent, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to promote the enhancement of opera in our community, primarily through support of the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre Program. The



funds raised by OperaLex support scholarships, production costs, student travel for auditions and performances, and other things. The students in the UKOT program are of the highest talent and alumni from our program perform on opera stages around the world. We could not do this without the support of our sponsors and supporters through our membership program. I encourage you to visit our website, operalex.org, and become a member of OperaLex. There are membership levels to fit every budget. There is no better way to support our students than to become a member of OperaLex.

Thank you to the 88 people who attended our Spring Preview Luncheon and enjoyed the tasty meal and the students who performed excerpts from the "Stars of Tomorrow Opera Gala" program. The gala was a fabulous event held at the Lexington Opera House in March with nearly 50 UKOT students sharing their singing talents on stage, accompanied by the wonderful UK Symphony Orchestra.

I invite everyone to come by our OperaLex Hospitality Tent before each of this year's *Grand Night* performances. It will be a wonderful time to visit with each of you up close and personal. Please tell your friends to come by before each of the shows.

**Become a Member**  
Giving levels are designed to fit every budget!

You will NOT want to miss this. Please watch our website for tickets and other information.

Thank you again for being a part of our OperaLex community. We could not do what we do without your support. See you at the show.



Lastly, I want you to save the date November 18. This is the date for *ENCORE!*, and I am thrilled that we will be on the UK campus in the beautiful ballroom of the Gatton Student Center.

## Opera Omaha Fellowship 'Right Direction' for UK Doctoral Student

University of Kentucky doctor of musical arts student Jazmin Salaberrios has accepted a Holland Community Opera Fellowship with Opera Omaha. The fellowship brings "community-minded, entrepreneurial artist to live and work" in Nebraska's largest city.

"This opportunity is the perfect step in the direction I want to go in as an artist," said Salaberrios, from Dover, Delaware. "I believe it is imperative for the world to see how vital the arts are for every community, and Opera Omaha's fellowship is doing just that."

Fellows in the program serve as ambassadors for Opera Omaha by developing relationships with community leaders. Together, they design and implement unique projects that combine artistry and musicianship



Jazmin Salaberrios

with leadership, advocacy, and citizenship, Salaberrios said. In short, "I'll get the platform to make a difference in the communities in need."

"The arts play a pivotal role in shaping our communities and the quality of life in our citizens," she said. "As fellows we are bringing opera into new environments."

As a former elementary music teacher, Salaberrios said she was already aware that the "power of music is limitless and can be a remedy for many, if not all, of the disparities we see in the world." She will continue to act on that knowledge in her new role.

The fellowship lasts for one year; however, it can be renewed if Opera Omaha and Salaberrios agree to an second-year extension.

TalkingwithTedrin

# Tedrin's Recording Corner #47

By Tedrin Blair Lindsay

As we were preparing the *Stars of Tomorrow Opera Gala*, I got interested in the history of such events. My research revealed that there are usually two reasons for an opera gala: either to celebrate an operatic institution on a significant milestone, or to celebrate a personage of operatic legend. Furthermore, there are generally two formats a gala might take. It is usually structured like a concert of operatic excerpts, but the European model often offers three acts from different operas showcasing numerous company stars.

During the last two decades of the 20th century, the Metropolitan Opera staged three colossal galas, all of which are available on DVD and are worth savoring multiple times. The first, on Saturday, 22 October 1983, commemorated to the day the centennial of the first performance at the Met with a spectacular parade of ALL the era's greatest opera stars and conductors, and occupied both matinee and evening performances into the not-so-wee hours of the next morning! For me the vocal highlights in this overwhelming treasure trove are (from the matinee) Anna Tomowa-Sintow singing the most stunning "Ernani involami" by Verdi I've ever heard, and (from the evening) the love duet from *Madama Butterfly* sung to moving perfection by Leona Mitchell and Giuliano Ciannella. Other memorable features are the Met chorus in a rarely heard Mascagni barn-burner, the Met ballet doing the downright sexual "Bacchanale" from *Samson et Dalila*, and Leonard Bernstein in old age conducting Beethoven's "Leonore Overture No. 3." There are also a couple of laughable moments — Kiri Te Kanawa forgetting her place in a Mozart aria, the whole company sounding slightly ridiculous singing the doggerel refrain of "Happy Birthday To You" after twelve hours of the most sublime masterworks of opera. Anyway, it's fabulous!

Then on 23 September 1991, the Met staged a European style gala to mark its 25th anniversary at Lincoln Center. This long evening featured Act 3 of *Rigoletto* with Luciano Pavarotti, Cheryl Studer, and Leo Nucci, Act 3 of *Otello* with Placido Domingo, Mirella Freni, and Justino Diaz, and then, brilliantly, Act 2 of *Die Fledermaus* with a bunch of Met luminaries, brilliant because that scene famously allows an extended concert in the middle of Prince Orlofsky's party, so the Met foisted star upon star into the interpolated concert

which itself lasted well over an hour, and which brought Pavarotti, Domingo, and Freni back for more, as well as Kathleen Battle, Frederick Von Stade, Thomas Hampson, Aprile Mollo, and June Anderson among others. Faring not so well were the offerings by Sherrill Milnes and Samuel Ramey, who opted for show tunes rather than operatic arias, again too casual for the event in my estimation.

Presiding over the lion's share of the Centennial gala and over all of the Lincoln Center gala was the company's artistic director James Levine. This third gala, again lasting a matinee and long evening on 27 April 1996, marked that maestro's 25th anniversary at the institution and was a tour-de-force conducted solely by him. It is the grandest and best of the three — I could literally, easily write a long paragraph about each piece in this sumptuous evening. However, the two standouts for me were two American sopranos, Ruth Ann Swenson who found the most astonishing colors and details in "Juliet's Waltz" by Gounod, by far the greatest ever recorded, and Dawn Upshaw rendering the most exquisite "Deh vieni, non tardar" from *Le Nozze di Figaro*. But most amazing of all was James Levine himself, communing with his singers and orchestra — I weep watching him conduct "Brünnhilde's Immolation" from *Götterdämmerung*, ten hours into the event of waving that baton and leading those enormous forces, and he was still obviously transported by the music. It is the most incredible display of stamina and musicianship I have ever witnessed. And because of this DVD I have been able to witness it many, many times. You will want to as well.

(It is also a cautionary tale to watch the Levine Gala because of his tarnished legacy in the wake of the Me Too! movement. Seeing this great artist celebrated at the loftiest pinnacle of his fabled career knowing the fallout to come twenty years hence is a harrowing and sobering reminder that we live our lives in the context of a real society, and our behavior counts for everything.)

The Metropolitan Opera Centennial Gala – Deutsche Grammophon 00440 073 4538

The Metropolitan Opera Gala 1991 – Deutsche Grammophon 00440 073 4582

Levine's 25th Anniversary Metropolitan Opera Gala – Deutsche Grammophon B0004602-09



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