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Photo: Top (L-R) Soprano Allison Nicholas, Mezzo-soprano Danielle Lombardi, Tenor Omar Najmi, Baritone Ryan Bradford, Baritone Charles Eaton and Bass-baritone Nathan Van Arsdale.

## **Opera Colorado Announces Young Artists for 2016-2017 Season**

### **TOURING, EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS SCHEDULED THROUGHOUT THE STATE**

Denver, CO — September 23, 2016 — Opera Colorado announced the six singers chosen for its 2016-2017 Young Artist Residency, the hallmark of the company's Education & Community Engagement Programs. Soprano Allison Nicholas, mezzo-soprano Danielle Lombardi, tenor Omar Najmi, baritone Ryan Bradford, baritone Charles Eaton and bass-baritone Nathan Van Arsdale were chosen from amongst hundreds of applicants from across the country to participate in the eight-month-long residency. As part of the 2016-2017 residency the Young Artists will perform abridged operas on tour throughout the state, take on leading roles in a student matinee performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in the Spring of 2017 for 2,000 students and appear in supporting roles in Opera Colorado's mainstage productions.

Reflective of Opera Colorado's commitment to staging classic repertoire while also inspiring audiences and providing opportunities for emerging young talent, the 2016-2017 season will include a new production of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* set in Colorado's Rocky Mountains, a new chamber opera *As One*, and a traditional production of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in the spring of 2017.



“As one of Opera Colorado’s most rewarding and important initiatives, we are incredibly proud of our Young Artist Program. It continues to gain national attention as one of the country’s most effective and highly sought-after programs for aspiring artists,” noted General Director Greg Carpenter. “The Young Artists bring an infectious amount of enthusiasm, talent and dedication to everything they do, adding real vitality to the community.”

Through touring productions, field trips and in-school programs, Opera Colorado’s Education & Community Engagement Programs reach over 37,000 Coloradans of all ages each year, many of whom have never before experienced opera. Touring productions for the 2016-2017 season include Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*, a semi-staged production of Lori Laitman’s *The Scarlet Letter* and an all-new production of Donizetti’s *The Elixir of Love*. Abridged to one hour in length and performed in English with piano accompaniment, these productions offer an accessible experience to a broad audience. The Young Artists will perform these touring productions throughout the fall and spring, with a tour of performances throughout the Western Slope scheduled for spring of 2017.

“We receive hundreds of applications each year for the program; it is incredibly competitive. Under Opera Colorado’s new strategic plan, the Young Artists Program will gradually expand over the course of the next five years to eventually include ten Young Artists. This year starts the expansion of the program growing from five to six artists. Adding one additional artist this season made the selection process extra exciting,” stated Cherity Koepke, director of the program. “This year we will have two returning Young Artists and four new artists. We have high expectations for our Young Artists. The group that we have assembled for this season is talented and passionate about this art form. I have no doubt that they will embrace every opportunity during their demanding eight-month residency, not only meeting our expectations, but exceeding them.”



Returning mezzo-soprano Danielle Lombardi is sponsored by Dr. Stephen L. Dilts, and returning baritone Charles Eaton is sponsored by Marlis & Shirley Smith and Dirk & Joyce DeRoos. Soprano Allison Nicholas and tenor Omar Najmi are sponsored by Patrick Spieles and Carol McMurry.

### **ABOUT THE 2017 YOUNG ARTISTS**

#### **Allison Nicholas, soprano**

Originally from St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, Allison received her Master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music, where she also completed her Undergraduate degree. Previous credits include: Krystina (*Out of Darkness*), Sylviane (*The Merry Widow*), and Annina (*La Traviata*) with Pensacola Opera, and Papagena (*The Magic Flute*), with Sugar Creek Opera. Other credits include Despina (*Così fan Tutte*) with Oberlin in Italy, Genovieffa (*Suor Angelica*), and Barbarina (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) with Opera on the Avalon, and Sandmann (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Crobyle (*Thaïs*), and Helene (*Die Verschworenen*) with the Manhattan School of Music. This season as an Opera Colorado Young Artist, Allison will be singing the roles of Berta (*The Barber of Seville*), Adina (*The Elixir of Love*) and Hester Prynne (*The Scarlet Letter*) in the company's touring productions. In the spring she will cover Lucia and sing the role in the Student Matinee production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She is thrilled to undertake such a wide array of challenging roles with such a supportive and well regarded company. *Allison Nicholas is sponsored by Patrick Spieles and Carol McMurry.*

#### **Danielle Lombardi, mezzo-soprano**

Originally from Erie, Pennsylvania, Danielle received her Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance from Oberlin Conservatory and received her Master's from Rice University's The Shepherd School of Music. Her operatic roles include Annio in *La Clemenza di Tito*, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*, Mrs. Herring in *Albert Herring* and Ericlea in Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. In addition, during the summer of 2012 Danielle was a Gerdine Young Artist with the Opera Theater of St. Louis. Last season at Opera Colorado, Danielle was seen in *Carmen*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Aida* and *The Scarlet Letter*. Returning to Opera Colorado for a second season as a Young Artist, Danielle will sing Rosina in the touring production of *The Barber of Seville*, Gianetta in the touring production of *The Elixir of Love* and Mistress Hibbons in the touring production of *The Scarlet Letter*. She will also sing the roles of Wowkle in the mainstage production of *La Fanciulla del West* and Alisa in both the mainstage production and Student



Matinee of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Danielle is excited to be back with Opera Colorado and can't wait to delve into these complex characters and beautiful music! *Danielle Lombardi is sponsored by Dr. Stephen L. Dilts.*

**Omar Najmi**, tenor

Originally from Boston, MA, Omar has spent the past three seasons as an Emerging Artist with the Boston Lyric Opera. He earned his Bachelor's degree from Ithaca College and his Master's degree in Voice Performance from Boston University. His roles with Boston Lyric Opera include Vanya Kudrjas in *Katya Kabanova*, Rodolfo (cover) in *La Bohème*, Reverend Harrington in *Lizzie Borden*, Bruno/Arturo (cover) in *I Puritani*, Borsa/Duca (cover) in *Rigoletto*, and 1st Armored-Man/Tamino (cover) in *The Magic Flute*. An avid performer of contemporary music, Omar has appeared as El Gobernador in *La Reina* with the American Lyric Theater, Ricky (cover) in *The Long Walk* with Opera Saratoga, Bill in *Flight* and Laurie in *Little Women* – both with Opera Fayetteville. Recent credits include Aufidio in Mozart's *Lucio Silla*, with Odyssey Opera, and Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, with Opera NEO. His roles with Opera Colorado will include: Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*, Nemorino in *The Elixir of Love* and Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* (touring productions). He will also appear in the mainstage productions in the roles of: Joe in *La Fanciulla del West* and Edgardo in the Student Matinee of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Omar looks forward to spending next season as a Young Artist with Opera Colorado! *Omar Najmi is sponsored by Patrick Spieles and Carol McMurry.*

**Ryan Bradford**, baritone

Originally from Walnut Creek, CA, Ryan received his Bachelor's degree from DePaul University and his Master's degree in Vocal Performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in 2013. He recently appeared as Jake Wallace and Sid (*La Fanciulla del West*) at the Castleton Festival in Virginia. Recently he made his debut with Opera on the James as John Brooke in *Little Women*. Other past roles include Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) for both SFCM and the Santa Cruz Symphony, and Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) for Hidden Valley Opera. He was a young artist with Shreveport Opera singing the Baron in *La Traviata* and covering Dandini in *La Cenerentola*. For the 2015-2016 season he debuted with Opera Santa Barbara as a Mosher Studio Artist singing Masetto in *Don Giovanni*. In the summer of 2016, he will travel to Newfoundland to join Opera on the Avalon as a Young Artist and make his Canadian debut in the world premier opera, *Ours*. In the touring productions for the season, he will sing the roles of Belcore (*The Elixir of Love*), Governor Bellingham (*The Scarlet Letter*) and cover Figaro (*The Barber of Seville*). In the mainstage productions, he will sing the role of Happy (*La Fanciulla del*



*West*) and cover roles in *As One* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Ryan is thrilled to be joining Opera Colorado as a Young Artist.

**Charles Eaton**, baritone

Originally from Storrs, Connecticut, Charles received his Master of Music degree from the University of Minnesota in 2015. In 2013, Charles received his Bachelors of Music at the University of Connecticut, where operatic credits included Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Thomas Putnam, (*The Crucible*). In the summer of 2013, he performed the role of John Brooke (*Little Women*) with the Hartford Opera Theater. He also participated in a workshop for *The Shining* with Minnesota Opera, singing the role of Horace Derwent. Operatic credits with the University of Minnesota Opera Theatre included Masetto (*Don Giovanni*), the Forrester (*The Cunning Little Vixen*) and Il Conte (*Le Nozze di Figaro*). In the summer of 2014, Charles sang Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*) with La Musica Lirica, a program he returned to for a second season in 2015 to perform the role of Taddeo in *L'italiana in Algeri*. He is very excited to return to Opera Colorado for another season as a 2016-2017 Young Artist, where he will sing Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, Roger Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* and cover Belcore in *The Elixir of Love* (touring productions). He will also sing the role of Bello in *La Fanciulla del West* and sing Enrico in the Student Matinee performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. *Charles Eaton is sponsored by Marlis & Shirley Smith and Dirk & Joyce deRoos.*

**Nathan Van Arsdale**, bass baritone

Colorado has always been a home to Nathan, who was born in Colorado Springs. He holds a Masters of Music from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He has performed in a wide array of settings domestically and internationally, notably: at the White House; the Lincoln Center in the world premiere of opera, *Holodomor: Red Earth Hunger*, by Virko Baley and at the Kennedy Center. In Las Vegas, Nathan has enjoyed performing with non-profit and for-profit musical organizations, such as, Opera Las Vegas, Sin City Opera, La Voce Totale, and The Venetian. This past winter, Nathan was honored as the featured soloist and visual artist for the Nevada School of the Arts Winter Concert, "Winter Landscapes." Nathan has performed with and coordinated the annual Palm Springs Opera Guild Opera Outreach for the last five years, which introduces opera to over 20,000 students in the Palm Springs Unified School District. This season he will sing the roles of Bartolo (*The Barber of Seville*), Dulcamara, (*The Elixir of Love*) and cover Roger Chillingworth in the company's touring productions. In the mainstage productions, Nathan will sing the roles of Billy Jackrabbit (*La Fanciulla del West*) and Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor* – Student Matinee). He is looking forward to the joys and challenges of working with such a prestigious company!



## ABOUT EXECUTIVE/ARTISTIC TEAM

### **Cherity Koepke, Director of Education and Community Engagement and Young Artists Program Director**

Ms. Koepke was drawn to music at an early age. A lyric soprano, she began singing at the age of 15 and has performed such roles as Eponine and Fantine (*Les Misérables*), Guinevere (*Camelot*), Maria (*The Sound of Music*) and The Baker's Wife (*Into the Woods*). In 2004, Ms. Koepke won the prestigious Thespian Tribute award for her performance of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. She attended the University of New Mexico, where she earned a double Masters in Vocal Performance and Child Psychology & Behavioral Studies. Ms. Koepke also minored in theater, receiving additional training in directing and improvisation. In 2001, Ms. Koepke began working as a behavior specialist with the Albuquerque Public School System where she incorporated her training in music and theater into her student's curriculum. She continued to study theatre, becoming a Shakespearian trained actress through the Addison program in Houston, TX. She has performed such roles as Katherine (*Taming of the Shrew*), Ophelia (*Hamlet*) and Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*). Well-versed in both performing and directing the classics, Ms. Koepke has directed productions such as, *Inherit the Wind*, *The Tempest*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pirates of Penzance* and *A Lion in Winter*. Her operatic work began in 2002 with the Santa Fe Opera as an artist-in-residence where she performed various roles throughout New Mexico including Norma (*Norma*), Liu (*Turandot*), Musetta (*La Bohème*) and Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*). Originally from Albuquerque, New Mexico, Ms. Koepke came to Opera Colorado in 2007, where she directs the Opera Colorado Young Artist Residency Program and leads the Education & Community Engagement department. In addition to abridging and designing productions for the company's Opera on Tour program, she has directed Opera Colorado's touring productions of *Cinderella*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Barber of Seville* and *Carmen*. In 2012, Koepke directed the student matinee production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House. In February of 2015, Koepke directed the world premiere concert reading of Lori Laitman's *The Scarlet Letter*.

### **Greg Carpenter, General Director**

The fourth General Director in Opera Colorado's 31-year history, Greg Carpenter guides both the artistic and administrative operations of the company. His role as General Director began in 2007, prior to which he served as Opera Colorado's Director of Development from 2004 – 2007, overseeing all fundraising and Board of Directors activities. Prior to joining Opera Colorado, he worked for four years for the National Symphony Orchestra at the John F. Kennedy Center for



the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. His work there included Special Projects Manager for the President of the National Symphony Orchestra from 2000 – 2001 and Manager of Development from 2001 – 2004. Carpenter’s extensive experience working in the arts also includes two years as the Artist and Event Services Manager for the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland and Special Projects Coordinator for the University of Maryland School of Music. From 1986 – 1998, Greg Carpenter performed as a professional opera singer. His work as an opera singer included both lead and supporting roles at Glimmerglass Opera, Central City Opera, Sarasota Opera, Opera Theatre of Northern Virginia, Cleveland Opera and Lyric Opera Cleveland. Carpenter has served on the Board of Directors for OPERA America, the national service organization for the opera industry. For the 2008 National Performing Arts Convention held in Denver, he served as Chairman of the Fundraising Committee. In 2009 Carpenter received a Livingston Fellowship Award in Leadership from the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation. He also regularly serves as a judge for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and has served as a judge for the Fritz and Lavinia Jensen Foundation Competition. Greg Carpenter received a Bachelor of Music degree in vocal performance from Wittenberg University, a Master of Music degree in vocal performance from Michigan State University, and he completed post-graduate studies at the University of Maryland School of Music.

### **Ari Pelto, Music Director**

Ari Pelto, music director of Opera Colorado, is widely known for performances, which have been called poetic, earthy, vigorous and highly individual. He is in demand in opera houses and with symphony orchestras throughout the United States. At age of 24 Pelto was appointed Assistant Conductor at the Spoleto Festival and has gone on to conduct on stages worldwide. His international appearances include symphonic performances with the Bochumer Philharmoniker, productions of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Falstaff* at New National Theatre of Tokyo, and *Faust* at the Teatro Nacional Sucre in Quito, Ecuador. In 2004 he made his highly-praised debut with New York City Opera conducting *La Traviata*, after which he became a regular guest conductor, returning for productions of *Madama Butterfly*, *La Boheme*, and *Carmen*. In 2015, Pelto was named Opera Colorado’s first ever Music Director, where he has conducted acclaimed performances of *Don Giovanni*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Aida* and the recent world premiere of Lori Laitman’s long-awaited work, *The Scarlet Letter*, a recording of which will be released in fall 2017 on the Naxos label. In upcoming seasons at Opera Colorado Pelto will lead productions of *La Fanciulla del West*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and more. Highlights of his 2015/16 season included *Aida* at Utah Symphony and Opera, for which the *Salt Lake Tribune*



raved “Whether in the grandeur of the triumphal scene or the exquisite beauty of the Nile scene, one couldn't have asked for a more inspiring performance of Verdi's score,” a double bill of *La Voix Humaine* starring Patricia Racette and *Gianni Schicchi* at Chicago Opera Theater, and return appearances at Atlanta Ballet and at Opera Memphis. He conducted a variety of symphonic programs with orchestras in the US, including Omaha Symphony and the NYU Symphony. After earning his Bachelor of Music in violin performance at Oberlin Conservatory, he studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Rubin Academy in Jerusalem and with Imre Pallo at Indiana University.

### **About Opera Colorado's Education & Community Engagement Programs**

Opera Colorado offers Education & Community Engagement Programs to students and adults across the Rocky Mountain region. The programs are designed to entertain as well as educate, providing teachers with resources for training and curriculum that align with Colorado Academic Standards. In addition to field trips to the Ellie Caulkins Opera House for backstage workshops, student dress rehearsals and matinees, Opera Colorado Teaching Artists travel across the state presenting abridged touring productions, recitals and popular in-school programs. For more information on the Education & Community Engagement Programs visit [www.operacolorado.org/education](http://www.operacolorado.org/education).

### **About Opera Colorado**

Great cities need great art, and for more than three decades, Opera Colorado has brought world-class performing arts to Colorado audiences. Today Opera Colorado serves as a cornerstone of Denver's cultural community, bringing grand opera to the Ellie Caulkins Opera House, its Denver home since its opening in 2005. Alongside standard repertoire in the grand opera tradition Opera Colorado presents new works or rarely performed productions each season. The company reaches more than 37,000 students and adults through its many education and community engagement programs throughout the Rocky Mountain region. Opera Colorado's Young Artists, singers at the beginning stages of their careers, perform during their eight-month residency with the company in schools and community centers across the State – including an annual tour on the Western Slope. Recognized nationally for its excellence, the Young Artists program provides training for the next generation of American opera singers. The 2016-2017 Season productions at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House will feature Puccini's *La Fanciulla de West* in November 2016 and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in May 2017, and





Laura Kaminsky's *As One* at the Performing Arts Complex at PCS in March 2017.

[www.operacolorado.org](http://www.operacolorado.org)

*Music Director Ari Pelto is sponsored by Mike and Julie Bock. Season sponsors for the 2016-2017 Season include the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), Marriott The Residence Inn, Kevin Taylor's at the Opera House, Rassman Design and media partner Out Front Magazine.*

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