



Lucia di Lammermoor

May 16, 2023

CAST AND PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS (In alphabetical order)

Maria De Conzo is known for her flexibility in cross over work in opera and musical theatre, as well as her passion for contemporary works. Last summer, Maria was a Young Artist at Opera Saratoga, performing Beggar Woman in *Sweeney Todd*, Danny cvr. in *Sky on Swings* and Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and will return this season as Miss Shingle in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*. This season, Maria was an Apprentice Artist with Lyric Opera of Kansas City, where she covered Mrs. Massey in *The Shining* and performed Aunt Leeza in their commissioned children's opera, *Sketchbook for Ollie*. In 2022, Maria was a District Winner of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. Most recent credits include, Charlotte (*Werther*) Grandma Mills (*A House Without a Christmas Tree*) and Elizabeth (*Elizabeth Cree*). Maria looks forward to her upcoming engagement as a Mary Ragland Emerging Artist at Nashville Opera in Spring 2024.

Hailed by the LA Times for "capturing exquisite intricacies of sonorities," pianist **Gloria Engle** is on piano faculty at Virginia Tech. She has performed in recitals with principal musicians of the MET Opera Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, LA Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, and the Rochester Philharmonic as well as renowned artists such as cellist Steven Doane, Dr. Chien-Kwan Lin, Yu Tamaki Hoso, and Xavier Foley. Engle served as pianist for workshops/forums led by Sir Thomas Allen, Stephanie Blythe, Richard Croft, Renée Fleming, John Harbison, Jake Heggie, Frederika von State, and John Musto.

Prior to joining the faculty at Virginia Tech, Engle served on music staff at SongFest, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, the Eastman Opera Theater, and the International Horn Society. Her upcoming engagement includes collaboration with the Scottish National Ballet at the Spoleto Festival. Engle holds degrees from the University of Texas at Austin (BM), Rice University (MM), and the Eastman School of Music (DMA).

Christopher Blake Farley is a baritone from Morris, Alabama. Mr. Farley is the most recent winner of the Vann Vocal Institute Competition top prize and received an Encouragement award from the Laffont Competition hosted by the Metropolitan Opera in 2023. This season he performed as Giuseppe in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*, Gianni Schicchi in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, both with the University of Alabama Opera Theatre, and Gabriel von Eisenstein in Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* with Opera Huntsville. Additional roles include Danilo in *The Merry Widow* with Birmingham Music Club, Belcore in *The Elixir of Love* with Opera Huntsville, and the Pirate King in *The Pirates of Penzance* with Opera Birmingham. Mr. Farley performed an internationally televised recital at the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) alongside Dr. Sadie Goodman and organist/music director Derek Kluz for the network's Lenten Musical Meditations. Christopher holds degrees from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the Mannes School of Music at The New School and is currently pursuing the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Alabama.

Blake Friedman has been cited by the *New York Times* for the “plummy fullness and dusky hue” of his voice and by the *New York Classical Review* for his voice’s “buttery top.” His notable performances include his feature on the New York City Ballet 2021 Spring Gala Film directed by Academy Award Winning Director Sofia Coppola, his Carnegie Hall – Stern Auditorium debut singing Anatol in the quintet from Barber’s *Vanessa* conducted by Leonard Slatkin, his Chicago Opera Theater Debut singing the role of Marc in the World Premiere of *Freedom Ride* by Dan Shore, and his Chautauqua Opera debut singing the role of Almaviva in both *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini and *Ghosts of Versailles* by John Corigliano. Opera News praised his “romantic and funny” portrayal of Almaviva saying the canzonetta “*Se il mio nome proved a highlight.*” Other notable performances include his critically acclaimed portrayal of Irving Tashman in the New York City Premiere of *Morning Star* by Ricky Ian Gordon with On Site Opera and Iago in Rossini’s *Otello* with LoftOpera. Other companies Blake has performed with include Dallas Opera, St. Pete Opera, Bel Canto at Caramoor and Ash Lawn Opera. A champion of new American music, Blake served as the resident tenor for American Opera Projects *Composer’s and the Voice Symposium* from 2015-2018. He made his Prototype Opera Festival debut as Jimmy Smith in the reading of *Stinney: An American Execution* by Frances Pollock. On the concert stage, he has performed soloist engagements with New York Choral Society, New York City Ballet, Ensemble for the Romantic Century, Canterbury Choral Society of New York, Key Chorale, Choral Artists of Sarasota and York Symphony.

The mysterious "Second Man" in the 2022 Cincinnati Opera world premiere of *Castor and Patience* by composer Gregory Spears and Pulitzer-prize winning poet laureate Tracy K. Smith (a work with "melodiously sweet, that you can find yourself moved nearly to tears by more or less random lines," according to Zachary Woolfe of the [New York Times](#)), **Earl Hazell**, bass and native New Yorker, has performed and covered a variety of roles with San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Cincinnati Opera, Tulsa Opera, Arizona Opera, and Utah Festival Opera. A singing actor with "a stentorian voice (Opera Today)," Earl has also performed internationally in opera houses throughout Europe, including the Semperoper of Dresden, the Mikhailovsky Theatre of St. Petersburg, and the Teatro dell' Opera of Rome. Last seen by Alabama audiences as Balthazar in the Paul Houghtaling directed *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the role of Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* marks his proud debut with Druid City Opera.

Stage director, choreographer, and bass-baritone **Paul Houghtaling** has worked extensively on the world's leading stages, including productions at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, Central City Opera, The Bard Music Festival, The Santa Fe Opera, and The Center for Contemporary Opera in New York.

Of his new production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, *The New York Times* wrote, "It was an exhilarating event. You couldn't monetize it. You couldn't commodify it. You could only experience it." Fall 2016 engagements included a return to Mobile Opera to direct a new production of Douglas Stuart Moore's *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and the world premiere of Amir Zehri's *Freedom and Fire! A Civil War Story* with the University of Alabama Opera Theatre. He made his debut at Red River Lyric Opera in July of 2017 directing Handel's *Alcina*, returned for *H.M.S. Pinafore* in 2018, and *La Cenerentola* in 2019. He made his directorial debut with Opera Mississippi in the Fall of 2018 in a new Gilbert & Sullivan review called *The Hilarious World of Gilbert & Sullivan* and directed and performed in opera and musical theater reviews for the company in 2019 and 2022. In October of 2018, he created an in-the-round production of *West Side Story* for the UA Opera Theatre which was extremely well received. The 2019-2020 season with UA included two world premieres, produced and directed by Paul: Joseph Landers' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, with the Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra, and Michael Ching's *RSBE: Remove Shoes Before Entering*, the latest in the composer's "New Works" genre, similar to his popular *Speed Dating Tonight*. The Landers was recorded for Alabama Public Television and was broadcast in September of 2020. Last season, Paul directed Handel's *Alcina* and Tobias Picker's *Thérèse Raquin* at Alabama, and he returned to Mobile Opera to direct *Tosca*. He directed *Tosca* again in May of 2022 for the first production of the newly-formed Druid City Opera, a professional company now in residence at UA, and will helm *Lucia di Lammermoor* in May of 2023 for that company.

In 2013, Paul made his debut with Opera on the James directing new productions of *Gianni Schicchi* and *Suor Angelica*. For Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre, Paul has directed *The Gondoliers* and *Così fan tutte*, which was described as "grand entertainment from beginning to end, staged brilliantly by Paul Houghtaling." In 2014, Paul returned to Natchez Opera to direct *H.M.S. Pinafore* and was invited back for *The Pirates of Penzance* in 2015. Other credits include *Candide* for Mobile Opera; Argento's *Postcard From Morocco* for Chamber Opera of Boston; *Don*

Giovanni for Ars Nova in Huntsville, Alabama; Telemann's *The Schoolmaster* for Anchorage Opera; *Shall We Dance* for the Abilene Philharmonic; *Let's Fall in Love* for the Tuscaloosa Symphony; and *Café d'amour* for the Alaska Dance Theater.

His work with the UA Opera Theatre has won prizes at the National Opera Association's Opera Production Competition (Amir Zaheri's *Freedom and Fire!*, world premiere, Fall 2016; Jeremy Gill's *Letters from Quebec to Providence in the Rain*, Fall 2017) and Collegiate Opera Scenes Competition, and that group's outreach work in conjunction with National Opera Week has caught the attention of Opera America. He is a Past President of the National Opera Association (NOA) having served in that office from 2018-2020.

Baritone **Jacob Lassetter** is excited to return to Druid City Opera to sing Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. With his powerful voice and commanding stage presence, he enjoys an exciting and vibrant career on both the operatic and concert stage. Critics have praised his dignified characterizations, his soaring high range, and his deep, rich tone quality.

This season Dr. Lassetter performed Tonio in *I Pagliacci* with Painted Sky Opera, Ford in *Falstaff* with Union Avenue Opera, Vodnik in *Rusalka* with Heartland Opera Theatre, Rambaldo in *La rondine* and Ali Ben Ali in *The Desert Song* with Winter Opera Saint Louis, Papa in *Goldie B. Locks* with Opera Edwardsville, *Messiah* with Greenville University, and Britten's *Cantata misericordium* with Webster University. 2021–2022 was a season of *Scarpia* for Dr. Lassetter, with performances at Druid City Opera, Mobile Opera, and Marble City Opera, as well as covering the role with Anchorage Opera. In 2021–2022 he also sang Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* with Painted Sky Opera, Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus* with Connecticut Lyric Opera, Schubert's *Mass in G* in Festus, Missouri, a season preview concert with Union Avenue Opera, and a solo recital at Webster University.

In the 2020–2021 season Dr. Lassetter sang benefit concerts for both Winter Opera Saint Louis and Union Avenue Opera. He was scheduled to sing the title role in *Der fliegende Holländer* with Mid-Ohio Civic Opera, as well as a return to Italy for performances of the title role in *Elijah*, Mozart's *Mass in C Minor*, and various other concerts. These engagements were all unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19. In the 2019–2020 season Dr. Lassetter sang Sonora in *La fanciulla del West* with Winter Opera Saint Louis, and both Schubert's *Winterreise* and Argento's *The Andrée Expedition* in recital. In the 2018–2019 season he sang Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus* with Winter Opera Saint Louis, *Carmina Burana* with the Washington University Symphony Orchestra, Verdi's *Requiem* and *A Symphony of Toys* with The Missouri Symphony, Dick Deadeye in *H.M.S. Pinafore* and Il Gran Sacerdote in *Nabucco* with Union Avenue Opera, and a series of three recitals with St. Louis Art Song.

In addition to his singing career, Dr. Lassetter serves as Professor of Voice, Director of Opera Studio, and Associate Chair for the Department of Music at Webster University in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Praised for their "rich sound" and "remarkable agility" (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*), mezzo-soprano **Cornelia Lotito** has performed with Opera Idaho, Pittsburgh Festival Opera, Indianapolis Opera, Knoxville Opera, Black Sheep Contemporary Ensemble, Marble City Opera, Light Opera of New Jersey, Opera Theatre of Montclair, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and several others. She is a past young artist with the Duir City Opera Workshop. A frequent vocal competitor, Mx. Lotito most recently won the Idaho-Montana District of the 2023 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, as well as the Indiana District in 2022. Previously, they won an Encouragement Award from the 2021 Tennessee District of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, as well as an encouragement award from the Gerda Lissner Foundation and several first place NATS awards. They were named a Contract Winner in Piccola Opera's 2021 Opera Idol Competition. They were a finalist in the 2021 Camerata Bardi International Vocal Competition, 2021 and 2022 SAS Performing Arts Vocal Competition, and 2021 Camille Coloratura Awards. They were a semi-finalist in the 2021 and 2022 Premiere Opera Foundation Vocal Competitions. They will spend the rest of the 2022-2023 season performing *La dama in Verdi's Macbeth*, and the 2nd Woodsprite in *Rusalka* and covering Ježibaba, all with Opera Idaho. Mx. Lotito will compete in the Rocky Mountain Region of the Met Opera's Laffont Competition in February 2023.

Richard Masters is a soloist, opera coach, chamber musician and orchestral pianist based in Blacksburg, VA, where he is an associate professor of piano and collaborative piano on the music faculty at Virginia Tech's School of Performing Arts.

Significant collaborations include concerts with Grammy-winning baritone Donnie Ray Albert, flutist and composer Valerie Coleman, Colombian mezzo-soprano Marta Senn, and the late Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano Barbara Conrad. He has also appeared with former Boston Symphony principal trombonist Norman Bolter, former Juilliard String Quartet violinist Earl Carlyss, saxophonist Harvey Pittel, and under the baton of the late Lorin Maazel. Masters has performed solo, chamber and vocal recitals throughout the U.S. and in Europe. Other recent appearances include performances at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's "Music at the Gardner" series, the San Francisco Conservatory, the Schola Cantorum in Paris, the Percy Grainger Home and Museum in White Plains, and the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda, California.

The *Chicago Tribune* critic Howard Reich selected Masters's recording of American art songs on the Albany label as one of "the best classical recordings of 2020," writing "Richard Masters summon[s] practically orchestral color at the piano." Masters's recording of music by Australian composer Percy Grainger and his British contemporaries is available on Heritage Records, as is a disc of clarinet and piano music by John Ireland and Sergei Prokofiev. A disc of music for clarinet and piano by Ernest Bloch also appeared on the Heritage label in fall of 2021.

Dr. Masters is a Yamaha Artist. He holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music (DMA), the Juilliard School (MM), and the University of Colorado at Boulder (BM). He lives in Blacksburg with his husband Matthew, their daughter Alice, and a pug named Coleslaw. For more information, please visit www.richard-masters.com.

Philip McCown is excited to join Druid City Opera as Assistant Chorus Master. He is an active singer and conductor in Alabama and Atlanta. Philip is primarily a vocalist and has performed with The Atlanta Opera, Opera Huntsville, Opera Birmingham, Indiana University Opera and Ballet Theater, The University of Alabama Opera Theater, and Auburn University Opera Workshop. He is equally at home on the podium and has prepared choirs for master works such as: Handel's Messiah, Verdi's Requiem, and Vivaldi's Gloria. In the summer of 2018, Philip spent the summer at the Delaware Choral Academy in Aix-en-Provence, France learning from conductors Dr. Paul Head, Dr. Duane Cottrell, Dr. Rick Bjella, and Dr. Andrew Kreckmann. He has also served as Director of the Schola Cantorum at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Auburn, AL and Assistant Conductor for the Auburn University Men's Chorus. Philip is an incoming DMA student at The University of Alabama studying voice with Dr. David Tayloe, opera with Dr. Paul Houghtaling, and choral conducting with Dr. Morgan Luttig.

Soprano **Zoe Rose Pallas** received her master's degree in May of 2022 from the University of Alabama. Under the tutelage of Paul Houghtaling, she was most recently seen with the UA Opera Theatre as the title character in Tobias Picker's *Thérèse Raquin*, Alcina in *Alcina*, and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. Other recent performances include the James Toland Vocal Arts competition in San Francisco, in which she won the Bell Encouragement Award, as well as a finalist award in the Montgomery Symphony's Vann Vocal Institute. 2022 engagements included a young artist residency at Red River Lyric Opera, where she sang Armida in Handel's *Rinaldo* in tandem with the American Baroque Opera Company, and Suor Genovieffa in Music on Site's production of *Suor Angelica*.

Other awards include second place at the national level of the Music Teachers National Association competition in the Young Artist division. She received her undergraduate degree at Florida State University in 2020, where she studied with Dr. Wanda Brister, and was last seen as Young Alyce in Cipullo's *Glory Denied*.

Laura Pritchard, mezzo-soprano, joined the School of Music faculty in the Fall of 2022 as Instructor of Voice and Associate Director of Opera. She works actively as a soloist, teacher, and director. Laura has received national recognition by The American Prize as a Semi-Finalist in the Art Song & Oratorio division and recognition by the Alabama Chapter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing as a First-Place winner in the Advanced Classical Voice division.

Laura has performed numerous roles including Florence Pike in *Albert Herring*, Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*, Carmen in *Carmen*, Giannetta in *The Elixir of Love*, Seconda Sorella Cercatrice in *Suor Angelica*, and Zita in *Gianni Schicchi*. Most recently, she has been seen as Sally in *A Hand of Bridge*, The Bride in *Adamo's Avow*, Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*, and Third Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* with The University of Alabama Opera Theatre. Since her professional debut in 2013, Dr. Pritchard has performed on stages including Asheville Lyric Opera and Opera Birmingham. In 2019, Laura made her international debut in *The Crucible* with Berlin Opera Academy. Along with the operatic stage, Dr. Pritchard is a sought after soloist on the concert stage. She has performed as the alto soloist in various concert settings including Manassas Chorale and Orchestra's performance of Handel's Messiah, Prentice Concert Chorale and Orchestra's

performances of Judas Maccabaeus and Messiah, and Johnson City Symphony Orchestra's performance of Beethoven's Choral Fantasy. In addition to performing, Laura is passionate about stage direction. In March 2022, she was a stage director for UA Opera Theatre's production of *Scenic Ventures: Secrets and Rumors*. Dr. Pritchard spent the summer of 2022 in Wichita Falls, Texas where she was the Associate Director and Stage Manager for Red River Lyric Opera's production of *Le nozze di Figaro*.

As an avid researcher in opera and pedagogy, Laura presented her research *Broadening Our Scope in 2021: A Collection of Scenes from the Operas of Carlisle Floyd* at the National Opera Association annual conference. In 2022, she presented again with her dissertation research titled *Operatic Adaptations of Émile Zola's Thérèse Raquin: A Comparative Study and Analysis* at both the conferences of the National Opera Association and the Association Internationale Zola et Naturalisme (AIZEN). In June of 2022, Laura was invited to present her research titled *Neurodegenerative Diseases and the Singer: An Introductory Study of Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, and Huntington's Disease including Music Therapy Protocols for the singing teacher* at The Voice Foundation's Annual Symposium and plans to take her research there soon. Dr. Pritchard received her Master of Music degree in Voice Performance from Shenandoah Conservatory and her Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Alabama where she was a student of Dr. Susan Williams. She has taught previously at Judson College in Marion, Alabama.

Thomas L. Rowell, tenor, is the Coordinator of Graduate Studies in Music, Coordinator of Vocal Studies, and directs USA Opera Theatre. He teaches studio voice, vocal diction, vocal pedagogy, opera history, and song literature. Dr. Rowell maintains a very active performing schedule as a recitalist, soloist and roles with regional opera companies. He has appeared as tenor soloist with Nashville Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony, Mobile Symphony, Northwest Florida Symphony, Johnson City Symphony Orchestra, Mobile Pops, Baldwin Pops, University of South Alabama Symphony Band and Wind Ensemble, University of Alabama Orchestra, Bluffton University Orchestra, and Choral Society of Pensacola.

Rowell has performed over thirty operatic roles with regional opera companies such as Mobile Opera, Pensacola Opera, and First Coast Opera (St. Augustine). His roles include Judge Danforth in *The Crucible*, Arturo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Don Basilio/Don Curzio in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Ruiz in *Il Trovatore*, Gastone in *La Traviata*, Monostatos in *Die Zauberflöte*, Incredible in *Andrea Chenier*, Der Steuermann in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, both Pong and Pang in *Turandot*, Nick in *La Fanciulla del West*, Ko Ko in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, Goro in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Schmidt in Massenet's *Werther*, the roles of Edmondo, the Dancing Master, and the Lamplighter in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, Beppe in *I Pagliacci*, Frick/Prosper in Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*, Mr. Scratch in *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, the roles of Rinnuccio, Gherardo, Maestro Spinelloccio, and Maestro Amantio di Nicolao in Gianni Schicchi, Father Grenville in Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Tinca in *Il Tabarro*, Prunier in Puccini's *La Rondine*, and he originated the role of John C. Calhoun in George Mabry's chamber opera *An Elegant Obsession*. Internationally, Dr. Rowell has performed in both Europe and Asia in operatic roles and as soloist. This season, he will perform the role of the narrator in Johann Sebastian Bach's *Schweigst stille, plaudert nicht* ("Coffee Cantata") in a virtual production with Mobile Opera and will direct USA Opera Theatre's production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*.

In addition to his teaching and performing, Dr. Rowell has served as choral clinician and conductor of Mobile County Honor Choir, Alabama Independent Schools Association State Honor Choir, Mobile Opera Chorus, and Bella Voce of Mobile, Mobile's premiere women's chorus. Dr. Rowell is active in the Alabama Chapter of National Association of Teachers of Singing, having served as Registrar and Chapter President, and has served as Registrar for the Southeastern Region of NATS.

Scott Santoro joined the School of Music faculty in the fall of 2022 as Instructor of Music, vocal coach, and a member of the music staff for the UA Opera Theatre. He received both his DMA and MM in Piano Performance from The University of Alabama where he studied under Dr. Kevin Chance, and did secondary studies in voice collaboration, diction, and repertoire. Dr. Santoro's doctoral research focused on particular muscles in the shoulders, back, and core. His thesis was titled "Understanding the Muscles of the Shoulders, Back, and Core: Injury Prevention for Pianists." Dr. Santoro was awarded graduate assistantships in both his degrees at The University of Alabama. His assistantship included serving as the collaborative pianist and assistant conductor for The University of Alabama Opera Theatre while also assisting, coaching, and performing with the department's voice students.

During his time at The University of Alabama, Dr. Santoro has been involved in various productions through The University of Alabama Opera Theatre. Recent highlights include being the collaborative pianist for UA Opera Theatre's *Thérèse Raquin* (2022, National Opera Association – NOA – First Place winner in Division II, Opera Production Competition), serving as the Music Director for "In Too Deep," a UA Opera Theatre scenes program (2021), as well as serving as the collaborative pianist for the productions of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (2016-2022), *Die Zauberflöte* (2021), and the world premieres of Michael Ching's *Remove Shoes Before Entering* (2020) and Joseph Landers' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (2019). In the Fall of 2022, Dr. Santoro served as conductor and music director of the Opera Theatre's production of *The Gondoliers*. Other performances outside of The University of Alabama Opera Theatre include performances with both the Huxford Symphony Orchestra and the Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra.

Dr. Santoro won various awards throughout his time at The University of Alabama. In 2020, Dr. Santoro was awarded the Clara Wells Fellowship in the Collegiate Division. Dr. Santoro was also the winner of AMTA at the district level in both 2021 and 2019. He was also the pianist for UA Opera Theatre's *Letters to Quebec from Providence in the Rain* (2017), which was awarded second place in the National Opera Association's production competition.

Before attending The University of Alabama, Dr. Scott Santoro attended Albion College where he received the Bachelor of Music degree and several performance honors under the tutelage of Dr. David Abbott. Dr. Santoro's interest in piano pedagogy was nurtured at Albion as he was awarded a grant to study piano pedagogy in Albion College's scholarship program, The Foundation for Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (FURSCA).

Kirk Severtson is a vocal coach and opera conductor in the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance's (SMTD) Voice Department, where he also serves as Coordinator of Opera Activities.

Previously, from 2001–19, he taught at SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music, where as Professor of Music he served as musical director of the Crane Opera Ensemble, coached singers and pianists, and taught classes in art song repertoire and accompanying. At SUNY Potsdam, numerous performances of the Crane Opera Ensemble under his musical direction garnered first-place awards from the National Opera Association and The American Prize, as well as honors from the Kennedy Center's American College Theatre Festival. His professional operatic activity has included serving on the music staff for numerous recent productions at The Dallas Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Atlanta Opera, and Opera Saratoga, among others.

A strong proponent of new works, he was the founding music director for the Domenic J. Pellicciotti Opera Composition Prize, which commissions and fosters new operas focused on social themes relevant to diversity and inclusion; he was music director and conductor for the most recent four-year cycle, which culminated in a November 2018 premiere of Tom Cipullo's work *MAYO*. He also served on the music staff for three notable world premieres in Dallas: *GREAT SCOTT* by Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally, and *BECOMING SANTA CLAUS* by Mark Adamo, and *EVEREST* by Joby Talbot and Gene Scheer, and has led or participated in numerous workshops and premieres of new works. Other professional activities include conducting at the Hawaii Performing Arts Festival and coaching at the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival, Opera Viva (Verona, Italy), the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, Opera North (NH), the Opera Theater of Lucca (Italy), the Cincinnati Opera outreach program, the Rising Star Singers festival, Dorian Opera Theater, and as a Vocal Chamber Music Fellow at the Aspen Music Festival.

A versatile collaborative artist, he appears frequently as pianist and harpsichordist in song and chamber music recitals, and was principal keyboardist with the Orchestra of Northern New York for many years. At the Crane School of Music, he served six years as chair of the Music Performance Department as well as a one-year external interim chair for the Department of Theory, History, and Composition. He also serves as the Executive Director of the National Opera Association, the national service organization for college, university, and conservatory programs and faculty that produce opera and teach/train the next generation of young artists.

Dr. Severtson holds degrees from the University of Cincinnati (D.M.A. and M.M., both in piano performance) and Luther College (B.A. with majors in music, math, and computer science), which awarded him the Weston H. Noble Award in 2022.

Brian Skoog is known for his "vocal power" (San Diego Story) and "fine lyric tenor" (Toledo Blade). His current season includes performances as Tempo in Handel's *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* with Opera Neo in San Diego, Jake in Matthew Aucoin's *Second Nature* with Opera Fayetteville, and Mozart in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mozart and Salieri* with The Cleveland Opera. In concert, Skoog gives performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Michael Haydn's

Requiem, Mozart's *Requiem*, and Handel's *Messiah*. Recent seasons include appearances with Central City Opera, The Cleveland Opera, Dayton Opera, Nashville Opera, Pensacola Opera, Toledo Opera, and Utah Festival Opera. A champion of living composers, Skoog was recently the tenor soloist for the world premiere of Margaret Brouwer's environmental oratorio *Voice of the Lake*. His performance of "The Lake" was included on a critically-acclaimed album of Brouwer's compositions released on the Naxos label. Mr. Skoog is a graduate of the University of Alabama. For more information, visit www.brianskoog.com.

Aaron Smith began his musical career as a classical violinist, where he encountered and fell in love with operatic style. He has performed the roles Remendado in *Carmen* with Utah Lyric Opera, Tonio in *La Fille du regiment* at ASU, and both Mr. Earlanston in *A Little Night Music* and The Wigmaker in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Arizona Opera. Recently he took on the role of Tom Rakewell in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. Aaron also enjoys performing concert works and was privileged to appear as the soloist in Joseph Julian Gonzalez's work *Misa Azteca*. This summer, Aaron will perform the role of Normanno in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Druid City Opera and then go to Brevard Summer Music Festival to perform Alfredo in *La traviata* and cover the Tenor Soloist in Verdi's *Requiem*. When not singing, Aaron performs as an improv violinist and studio musician.

Born and raised in Houston, Texas, Bass-baritone **Joshua Thomas** started singing in his home church of Petra AME and instantly fell in love with music. He completed his Undergraduate Studies in Vocal Performance at Louisiana State University under the studies of Dr. Brandon Hendrickson. Currently, he is in the tail end of his 2nd year of his Master of Music at the University of Michigan studying under Professor Stephen West. Upcoming performances include Commendatore in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Le Baili in Massenet's *Werther* at the University of Michigan, in addition to a return to Des Moines Metro Opera as an Apprentice Artist for this coming summer.

Rene Vazquez, tenor, recently completed his Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance at The University of Alabama where he was a student of David Tayloe. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Music at Lamar University in Beaumont, TX where he studied with Jammieca D. Mott. He has performed the roles of Nuradin in *Der Betrogene Kadi*, Roberto in *Le Villi*, Donald in *Gallantry*, Tree Frog in *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, and Pluto in *Orpheus in the Underworld*. He has performed the roles of Oronte in *Alcina* as well as Camille Raquin in the Alabama premiere of Tobias Picker's *Thérèse Raquin* with The University of Alabama Opera Theatre, a production which won first place in the National Opera Association's (NOA) Opera Production Competition. He is a two-time alumnus of The Druid City Opera Workshop.

Susan Williams, soprano, has performed nationally and internationally in a wide range of leading opera roles and as a vocal soloist. During a sabbatical research trip in 2022, she guest lectured at The Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. As part of a 2022 concert tour in Brasilia, Brazil, she performed at Casa Thomas Jefferson, and performed and gave masterclasses at the Universidade de Brasilia, and Escola de Música. In 2019, she performed with the President's Orchestra of Tajikistan through the Pitch Pipe Foundation and gave masterclasses in Kathmandu, Nepal at the invitation of the U.S. Embassy to teach masterclasses and participate in panel discussions at various academic and cultural institutions in the city. In March of 2019, she made her third visit to Havana, Cuba where she performed at the Sala de conciertos Ignacio Cervantes, lectured, and taught master classes with students at the Instituto Superior de Arte. Twice she has toured in Kolkata, India as part of a series of concerts sponsored by Kolkata Classics.

In 2018, she performed with Mississippi Opera in their review of the music of Gilbert & Sullivan. With the Duke Symphony Orchestra, she has sung Despina in *Così fan tutte*, Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Sophie in excerpts from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. For Opera Birmingham, she sang the Erste Knabe in *Die Zauberflöte* and the title role in over 30 performances of Barab's *Little Red Riding Hood*. She toured northeast Ohio with Lyric Opera Cleveland's *Overtures* and with Cleveland Opera as Adina in *The Elixir of Love*. In Florida, she was soprano soloist in Mozart's *Requiem* with the Master Chorale of South Florida, Mahler's *Fourth Symphony* with the Frost Symphony Orchestra, and Brahms's *Liebesslieder Waltzes* for Miami's Mainly Mozart Festival.

Under the baton of Franz Welser-Möst, she performed in The Cleveland Orchestra's production of *Le nozze di Figaro*. As a soloist with the Tuscaloosa Symphony, she has performed Bach's Cantata *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*, BWV 51, the Schubert *Mass in G* and Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She has also been a soloist with the Akron Symphony, the Cleveland Pops Orchestra, the Cleveland Bach Consort, the Huxford Symphony, and the Johnson City Symphony. In Graz, Austria, she sang the soprano solos in Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and was a finalist in the Meistersinger Competition at the American Institute of Musical Studies.

Baritone **Christopher Withrow** has been praised for "bringing masculine gravity both in voice and performance" to the stage. His "powerful stage presence" and "moving performance" has been seen throughout the United States with Opera Fairbanks, Townsend Opera Players, Northstar Opera Company, Modesto Symphony Orchestra, The University of Nevada, Las Vegas Opera Theater, Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra, The University of Alabama Opera Theatre, and other organizations. A native of Redding, California, Mr. Withrow has been seen in the title role in Gianni Schicchi, Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Gabriel von Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*, and James Agee in the world premiere of Joseph Lander's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Concert works to his credit include Johannes Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Dona Nobis Pacem*, Gabriel Faure's *Requiem*, W. A. Mozart's *Vesperae Solennes De Confessore*, J. S. Bach's *Coffee Cantata*, Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, Felix Mendelssohn's *Psalm 42*, and Robert Cohen's *Alzheimer's Stories*. Mr. Withrow holds a Bachelor of Music from California State University, Stanislaus, a Master of Music from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a Doctor of Musical Arts from The University of Alabama. Mr. Withrow was the 2019 Vann Vocal Institute winner as well as the recipient of a major scholarship from the McConnell Foundation.