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## Opera Columbus' Cooper-Bing Competition Unveils Finalists for the 41<sup>st</sup> Season

*Five Emerging Artists Compete to Win \$10,000 in this Internationally Renowned Vocal Competition*

Columbus, OH - Opera Columbus' prestigious Cooper-Bing Competition—hailed as the “Olympics of Opera”—is celebrating its 41st season with the announcement of five standout finalists and an esteemed panel of judges. Hosted by Classical 101/WOSU's Christopher Purdy, this internationally recognized event shines a spotlight on rising opera talent, providing a powerful platform for emerging artists to launch their careers. This season, the finalists will take the stage at the historic Southern Theatre in Columbus, competing for the grand prize of \$10,000 and a place among opera's next generation of stars.

This year's competition attracted 284 young artist applicants, including the largest proportion of international applicants to date. Participants joined us from the United States, South Korea, Colombia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, with repertoire submissions in Russian, Spanish, German, Czech, Italian, English, and French. “This season is a testament to the dedication and persistence required to refine one's craft in opera and performance. The caliber of talent continues to rise each year, making this progress all the more inspiring,” says Rachel Will, Opera Columbus' Cooper-Bing Associate Producer. “We're proud that Columbus has become a true launching pad for the careers of these promising young artists.” General Director & CEO Julia Noulon-Mérat adds, “The steady growth of this program has been incredibly meaningful for us and truly highlights the opportunity to uplift young and emerging artists around the world.”

Five finalists who will compete in Columbus include:

Caroline Bergan, soprano (Born in Florida, raised in France and Norway)

Edward Graves, tenor (Oxon Hill, Maryland)

Yeonjae (Chloé) Kim, mezzo-soprano (Seoul, South Korea)

Cecelia McKinley, contralto (Sterling, VA)

Page Michels, soprano (Lake Oswego, Oregon)

Awards levels include:

First Place - \$10,000

Second Place - \$5,000

Third Place - \$2,500

Fourth Place - \$1,500

Fifth Place - \$1,000

Merle McInturff Audience Choice Award - \$300

In addition, Opera Columbus is thrilled to announce the inaugural *Cooper-Bing Spirit Award*, which will be presented to Dr. Chad Payton in recognition of his extraordinary and unwavering dedication to the opera

community. This prestigious award honors individuals whose profound contributions have shaped the future of the art form and left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape.

Dr. Payton, a longtime judge of the Cooper-Bing Competition and a passionate advocate for emerging talent, has been instrumental in nurturing the next generation of opera artists. His tireless commitment to mentorship, leadership, and the advancement of young singers has expanded opportunities and inspired countless individuals to pursue their dreams. We are incredibly proud to celebrate Dr. Payton's exceptional legacy of artistic excellence, and we look forward to honoring his lasting impact on both the opera community and audiences alike. His dedication embodies the very spirit of the Cooper-Bing Spirit Award, and we are excited to recognize him for his remarkable achievements.

Adjudicating this year's finals are Antoine T. Clark (Artistic and Music Director at Worthington Chamber Orchestra), Richard Gammon (Director of the Opera Maine Studio Artist Program), and Chandler Johnson (Director of the Apprentice Program for Singers at The Santa Fe Opera). We are thrilled to have Christopher Purdy (Classical 101/WOSU) return as the master of ceremonies for this year's competition.

The 2024-2025 Preliminary Judges included, Dr. Chad Payton (Capital University Conservatory of Music), Dr. Daniel Stein (Ohio University Opera Theatre), Dr. Dione Bennett (Ohio Christian University), Dr. Jason Hiester (Ohio Wesleyan University School of Music)

The Cooper-Bing Competition finals will take place on Sunday, May 18<sup>th</sup> at 3:00pm at the Southern Theatre. Tickets are \$15, and there will be a champagne toast reception on stage with the artists immediately following the competition. Visit [operacolumbus.org](http://operacolumbus.org) for more information.

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### **About Caroline Bergan, soprano**

Norwegian-French soprano Caroline Bergan made her debut with the Cleveland Orchestra in their production of The Cunning Little Vixen. Ms. Bergan's roles includes Amelia (*Amelia al ballo*), Countess (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Morgana (*Alcina*), Belinda (*Dido and Aeneas*), and Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*). International credits include Suor Genovieffa (*Suor Angelica*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), and Miss Jessel (*The Turn of the Screw*). Bergan is a past winner of the Mirabell Schloss Competition in Salzburg, Austria and the recipient of the Anna Sosenko Artist Trust Fund Award. Ms. Bergan has sung in masterclasses for Renée Fleming, Renata Scotto, Julia Faulkner, Warren Jones, and Bo Skovhus. As a soloist she has performed Poulenc's *Gloria*, Hendrik Andriessen's *Miroir de Peine*, and Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle*. Ms. Bergan was a finalist in Cleveland's Art Song Festival. In an effort to promote diversity in repertoire selection, Bergan is publishing a diction book to make Norwegian classical music more accessible.

### **About Edward Graves, tenor**

Tenor Edward Graves is a recent graduate of the Adler Fellowship at San Francisco Opera. Last season, he made company and role debuts of The Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* at Opera San José, Alfredo in *La traviata* at Opera Tampa, and Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* at Sacramento Philharmonic & Opera. His 2024/25 season includes additional debuts as Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Opera in Williamsburg, Rodolfo in *La Bohème* at Opera Baltimore and Opera Delaware, an Artist-in-Residence at Towson University, 1st Armed Man in *The Magic Flute--Holiday Presentation* at The Metropolitan Opera, and Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* at Anchorage Opera.

**About Yeonjae (Chloé) Kim, mezzo-soprano**

Mezzo-soprano Hailed from South Korea, mezzo-soprano Yeonjae Chloé Kim began her studies at Korea National University of Arts, graduating in 2017 with full merit-based scholarships. She moved to Vienna to pursue her Master's degree, completing it in 2019 with distinction. Her German-language thesis on the Korean opera "Ich komme zu dir" is officially archived at Vienna City Hall. In 2022, she relocated to Germany to pursue the Konzertexamen (Artist Diploma) in Hamburg. Her 2024 graduation recital at the Laeiszhalle filled over 85% of the hall and earned the jury's unanimous highest score—Auszeichnung. Kim has been awarded in numerous competitions, including First Prize at the Elise Meyer Wettbewerb and Third Prize at the Mozart-Preis der Absalom-Stiftung. She was also a finalist in major young artist programs in Stuttgart, Paris, and Chicago. With sincerity and quiet determination, she looks forward to growing her artistry in the United States and nurturing her dream of becoming a dedicated operatic performer there.

**About Cecelia McKinley, contralto**

Having recently finished her tenure as a Cafritz Artist with Washington National Opera, contralto Cecelia McKinley's 2024-2025 season includes Blitzstein's *Cradle Will Rock* with InSeries Opera, as well as a return to WNO as *Schwertleite* in their *Gods & Mortals: A Celebration of Wagner* concert. This Summer, Cecelia will be in her home state of Virginia as a Wolf Trap Opera Filene Artist, singing *Madame de Croissy* in Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Earlier this year she was also a District Winner in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, and took Third Place in the Rocky Mountain Region. Her favorite recent projects include the world premiere of *FOREVER* with the American Opera Initiative, *Fileno* in Handel's *Clori, Tirsi, e Fileno* with Ars Lyrica Houston, and Beethoven's 9th Symphony with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra. Other credits include the Merola Opera Program and Dolara Zajick's Institute for Young Dramatic Voices. Additionally, Cecelia is a grant recipient from the Olga Forrai Foundation, and a proud Ambassador Artist of the Denyce Graves Foundation.

**About Page Michels, soprano**

Praised by Opera News for her "opulent timbre and highly nuanced dynamic palette," American soprano Page Michels is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma in Opera Studies at The Juilliard School. This season, she debuted at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, performing Tom Cipullo's song cycle *Late Summer*. She also portrayed Miss Jessel in Juilliard's production of Britten's *Turn of the Screw*, and served as a soprano soloist in Händel's *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day* with the Juilliard415 orchestra. She is the 2025 Laffont NW Region Encouragement winner and the 2024 4th prize winner of the Pasadena Vocal Competition. Ms. Michels was a 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 young artist with Florida Grand Opera, a Brown Loranger Fellow at SongFest in 2022, and a 2021 Fleming Artist at the Aspen Music Festival. She holds a Master of Music from Rice University and a Bachelor of Music from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

**About Christopher Purdy**

Christopher Purdy is Classical 101's early morning host, 7-10 a.m. weekdays. He is host and producer of Front Row Center – Classical 101's weekly celebration of Opera and more – as well as Music in Mid-Ohio, Concerts at Ohio State, and the Columbus Symphony broadcast series. He is the regular pre-concert speaker for Columbus Symphony performances in the Ohio Theater.

Christopher remains a New Englander at heart, with strong ties to Manhattan where he lived for many years. But he has strong Columbus ties: his late father-in-law, Wayne Rittenhouse, was the football coach

of Central and Northland High Schools in Columbus. Christopher met his wife, Linda Rittenhouse, while they were both working at a food kitchen in New York City. They married in 1989; their daughter Kerry Megan was born in 1990. The family moved to Columbus in 1991. They are still adjusting to the Midwestern lifestyle. A city boy, Purdy maintains that he would be happy to cement over his entire yard spare me the lawn mower and the weeds!"

His favorite composers are Monteverdi and Bruckner. An accidental encounter with a beat-up recording of Mozart's "Don Giovanni" at the age of eight changed Purdy's direction from law school or the priesthood to one of classical music and public broadcasting. He was so captivated by the cover art, that he took the recording home, popped it on his battery-operated kiddy record player and his life changed forever. He still has the recording.

### **About Dr. Chad Payton**

Dr. Chad R. Payton serves as Associate Dean for Student Success, Associate Professor of Voice, and Voice Area Head at Capital University, where he teaches voice and vocal pedagogy. He made his Carnegie Hall and Kennedy Center debuts in Michael Ching's opera, *Corps of Discovery: A Musical Journey*. Internationally, he sang his Brazilian debut in Carmina Burana, and Italian debut with his professional ensemble, Payton and the Pipes, which also presented at numerous conferences throughout the United States. Dr. Payton teaches at a private studio in New York City and teaches on the voice faculty at Seagle Festival. Those artists have placed in various levels of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and are singing with major opera companies and young artist programs throughout the United States.

### **About Antoine T. Clark**

Compelling interpretations, inventive performances, and an energetic stage presence are the hallmarks of American conductor Antoine T. Clark. He is the founding Artistic and Music Director of the Worthington Chamber Orchestra in Ohio (formerly McConnell Arts Center Chamber Orchestra, established in 2013) and a passionate advocate for expanding access to classical music and fostering community engagement. Mr. Clark is the recipient of the Columbus Symphony 2024 Music Educator Award. In 2022, he served as Cincinnati Symphony's MAC Music Innovator. The program, which highlights leading African American classical musicians who embody artistry, innovation, and commitment to education and community engagement, saw Clark leading chamber music and orchestral performances in schools and throughout the community during his residency.

### **About Richard Gammon**

Richard Gammon (he/him), a Filipino American stage director, directed Gluck's *L'île de Merlin* and Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* with Wolf Trap Opera; Gianni Schicchi and Michael Ching's *Buoso's Ghost* at Detroit Opera (formerly known as Michigan Opera Theatre); the world premieres of *Family Style*, *Black Coffee*, and *Kandake* as part of the OTSL New Works Collective 2025 with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; Jack Perla's *An American Dream* with Hawai'i Opera Theatre; *Madama Butterfly* and *An American Dream* with Virginia Opera; *Albert Herring* and Derrick Wang's *Scalia/Ginsburg* with the Princeton Festival; *An American Dream* with Opera Santa Barbara; *La Cenerentola* with Opera Columbus; the American premiere of Scarlatti's *Erminia* at the Kennedy Center with Opera Lafayette; Ricky Ian Gordon's *Rappahannock County*, Gareth Williams' *Rocking Horse Winner*, Laura Kaminsky's *As One*, and Philip Glass' *The Fall of the House of Usher* with the Opera Maine Studio; Edwin Penhorwood *Too Many*

Sopranos with Cedar Rapids Opera; Susannah with Charlottesville Opera; and Andy Monroe's *The Life and Times of Joe Jefferson* Benjamin Blow at NYC's Theatre 315 with the National Asian Artists Project. At the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival he directed *Much Ado About Nothing* after having previously directed a touring production of *The Tempest*; and for Cleveland Play House's film *The CARE Monologue Project* Richard directed monologues written by Rajiv Joseph, Lloyd Suh, Karen Zacarias, Tanya Saracho, and Matthew Lopez. He directed the world premiere of Jorge Sosa's electronic opera *The Lake* at ArtSounds in Kansas City; *Trouble in Tahiti* with Paul Watkins at the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival; Hloby's *Bon Appetit!* And *The Scarf* with South Bend Lyric Opera, the workshop of J Ashley Miller's pop opera *Echosis* with Atemporchestra; and was Associate Director for *The Grapes of Wrath* at Detroit Opera and *Porgy and Bess* with Greensboro Opera.

### **About Chandler Johnson**

Chandler Johnson has extensive professional experience on and off the operatic stage. He joined the artistic staff of The Santa Fe Opera in 2021 as the Artistic Associate, and now he serves as the Director of the Apprentice Program for Singers at The Santa Fe Opera. Previously, Chandler was the Associate Manager of Artistic Programs at the Los Angeles Opera, and was one of the first Artistic Fellows chosen by the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as part of their Clayco Future Leaders Fellowship Program. He served as an artistic intern with Stratagem Artists and was selected to participate in the M3 seminar hosted by L2 Artists aimed to develop candidates from diverse backgrounds for artist management and arts administration. On stage, Chandler has performed with companies including Opera Santa Barbara, The Glimmerglass Festival, Chautauqua Opera, St. Petersburg Opera, Opera Columbus, and Cincinnati Opera. Chandler holds both a Bachelor's of Music and a Master's of Music in Vocal Performance, from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

### **About the Cooper-Bing Competition**

Opera Columbus launched the first Cooper-Bing Competition in 1983 under the leadership of Irma M. Cooper, two years after the company was founded. The vocal competition aims to celebrate and support young operatic talent by providing exposure and constructive feedback from esteemed professionals within the opera industry. The competition has helped to launch the careers of world-renowned opera singers such as Denyce Graves, Dina Kuznetsova, Richard Paul Fink, Lucas Meachem, Nicole Heaston, Richard Zeller, Susan Foster, and Alyson Cambridge. The competition has been hosted in several of Columbus' performance venues, including the Palace Theatre, the Ohio Theatre, Mees Hall at Capital University's Conservatory of Music, Weigel Hall Auditorium at The Ohio State University, and the Southern Theatre. Annual donations for the competition made by Arthur and Hetty Bing ensure the sustainability of the program.

### **About Opera Columbus**

Under the vision of General Director + CEO, Julia Noulin-Mérat, Opera Columbus is redefining and reimagining the concept of regional opera with world-class productions that celebrate extraordinary talent and artistic partnerships, engaging a new, diverse audience for this most magnificent of artforms. From groundbreaking collaborations to innovative and breathtaking productions, Opera Columbus is passionate about creating artistic moments for each and every patron. Opera Columbus's slogan, "Make

It Yours,” demonstrates the company’s commitment to inclusivity, and invites everyone in the community to join with us.

For more information, visit [www.OperaColumbus.org](http://www.OperaColumbus.org)

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