

For immediate release

Contact Glenn Petry (212) 625 2038  
[gpetry@21cmediagroup.com](mailto:gpetry@21cmediagroup.com)

## Schmidt Vocal Arts Prepares for Inaugural National Competition June 3–5 as 25th Anniversary Season Enters Final Stretch



(April 2022) — As it moves into the final stretch of its **25th anniversary season**, [Schmidt Vocal Arts](#) (SVA) is eagerly anticipating the final destination: from **June 3–5, 2022**, **Sarasota Opera** will host **over 30 singers** – the top three winners from each of 13 regional competitions and from an independent, virtual cohort are eligible – competing in the company’s William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre for the **first national award** in the **Schmidt Vocal Competition’s** history. Distinguished judges for the national competition will be bass-baritone **Eric Owens**, Sarasota Opera General Director **Richard Russell**, and soprano **Tamara Wilson**. There will also be an alumni concert on **June 4** that will feature SVA alumni Virginia Mims and Aaron Crouch with pianist Brent Funderburk.

**Linda McAlister**, who assumed the role of SVA’s Executive Director in 2019 after managing the competition since 2012, explains:

“After two years of online competitions, it is a breath of fresh air to hear these young singers live once again! We have had a great turnout at our live and online regional competitions and it will be exciting to see and hear these high school singers perform on the stage of the William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre – just as Bill would have liked it. Schmidt Vocal Arts and I look forward to highlighting the talent of our singers into the future with the continuation of our National Competition.”

Sarasota Opera General Director **Richard Russell** says:

“Introducing young people to the art of singing opera has been an important part of Sarasota Opera’s mission for almost 40 years. William E. Schmidt was a generous supporter of Sarasota Youth Opera, which is why we are especially delighted to partner with Schmidt Vocal Arts on this inaugural event.”

Funded by the **William E. Schmidt Foundation**, the **Schmidt Vocal Competition** is an annual event for U.S. high school students that sees 400+ singers compete each year – this season for more than \$625K in cash awards and scholarships – just at the critical point in their early careers when they begin to look toward training on a professional level. The final **regional competitions** in the 2021-22 season will be held in Tacoma, Chicago, and Boston. These and the other regional locations are selected with the goal of providing a central location for as many corners of the country as possible. Past competitors have been known to travel up to eight hours by car or take a short flight to get to the regional competitions, but SVA’s introduction of a **virtual cohort** – as well as the fact that the entire competition moved online last season because of the pandemic – has also opened up possibilities for singers from more rural areas, including some of the first singers from Alaska and Montana.

The milestone of SVA’s first national competition will take place over a long weekend, beginning with the Friday arrival of the semi-finalists in Sarasota and rehearsals with pianists. On Saturday are the semi-finals, heard by a panel of five judges. At an **alumni concert** that evening featuring SVA alumni Virginia Mims and Aaron Crouch with pianist Brent Funderburk, up to **sixteen finalists** will be announced for the finals on Sunday, and **four encouragement awards** (\$300) will be given to non-finalists, three of whom will also be invited to participate in a Sunday **master class** with soprano Judith Haddon, soprano Dr. Katherine Jolly, and tenor Stanford Olsen. Owens, Russell, and Wilson will judge the finals and decide upon the **First Place** (\$10,000), **Second Place** (\$7,500), **Third Place** (\$5,000), and **Finalist** (\$650) Awards. A **reception and awards ceremony** wraps up the weekend on Sunday evening. Information on some of the young contestants can be found [here](#).

SVA’s support and resources continue long after the competition. The award winners are eligible for need-based scholarships to support their continued study at the university level, and SVA continues to have relationships with many alumni throughout their careers, providing educational, mentoring, and networking opportunities as well as grants for summer study. SVA recently launched an **Undergraduate Awards** initiative, building on the programs designed for high school students to create opportunities for college-level singers as well. Also under the SVA umbrella are

the **Schmidt Vocal Institute** (SVI), a two-week summer intensive training program established by McAlister in 2016, and its **Vocal Artists Network**, a roster of vocalists and vocal pianists/coaches boasting celebrated performers who are also dedicated teachers. The network includes such luminaries as **Margo Garrett, Christine Goerke, Denyce Graves, Nathan Gunn, Craig Terry, Russell Thomas, Tamara Wilson**, and [many more](#), and from its ranks come competition judges, master clinicians, and guest faculty.

A video of alumni describing their experiences with the Schmidt Vocal Competition is available [here](#), and a promo video for SVI, which is hosted at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, is available [here](#).

## About William E. Schmidt

William E. Schmidt was a decorated military pilot, successful businessman, and lifelong, generous supporter of the arts and charitable organizations in the communities where he lived. Born in Irvine, Kentucky in 1933, he came from a family that loved music and believed in the power of education. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from DePauw University, and his master's degree in business administration from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

After the death of his mother, and with close counsel of his sister, Anna Lee Schmidt Hamilton – a versatile singer who did postgraduate study at Indiana University and Germany's Heidelberg Conservatory of Music before teaching, conducting, and performing variously at Butler University, the Indianapolis Opera Company, and the Indiana Opera Theatre – he founded the Schmidt Vocal Competition, first held at the University of Indianapolis in 1997. With these contests, as well as with his meaningful support of other scholarship programs at numerous universities, schools, and community organizations, he provided a remarkable legacy of dedication to the arts and youth that his foundation continues to build upon today.

In his later life, Schmidt moved to Sarasota, Florida, where he became a substantial behind-the-scenes supporter of several key community projects, including the Sarasota Opera. He died in 2014 after a lengthy battle with Parkinson's disease, but his love for and commitment to the arts and the community live on in his family, friends, and colleagues. The William E. Schmidt Foundation captures his entrepreneurial and hard-working spirit in the initiatives and projects it selects to fund — always grounded in innovation and led by those committed to a worthy mission.

## About Schmidt Vocal Arts

Funded by the William E. Schmidt Foundation, Schmidt Vocal Arts is committed to fostering a passion for classical singing and creating opportunities for young singers. Led by Executive Director Linda McAlister, Schmidt Vocal Arts boasts many accomplished alumni who have gone on to pursue music degrees and enjoy successful careers in the arts. The Schmidt Vocal Competitions – the oldest of the Foundation's programs – have touched the lives of over 5,000 developing singers, awarding a total of \$1.6 million in cash awards and scholarships since debuting in 1997.

Through their national competitions, education programs, and summer intensive, SVA has continued to provide developing musicians with enriching opportunities and experiences amid the global pandemic. In March of 2020, they quickly transitioned their nationwide singing competition to all-remote and added engaging programming such as webinars and virtual master classes with opera stars including Christine Goerke and Russell Thomas. Based on feedback from alumni in college, SVA also established an online Undergraduate Vocal Competition with four \$5,000 awards, reaching hundreds of additional singers. From the onset of the pandemic through the end of the current season, SVA will have given over \$1M in awards and scholarships to support young singers.

Other Schmidt Vocal Arts programs include the Schmidt Vocal Institute, a two-week intensive summer residential program where singers learn from world-renowned artists, participate in workshops and master classes, and perform with other talented musicians; Schmidt Vocal Education, offering regional and online programs for singers and teachers to learn, challenge themselves, and participate in performance experiences; and Schmidt Vocal Scholarships, a program that provides need-based support for talented singers continuing their professional vocal education.

## About Sarasota Opera

Sarasota Opera recently completed its 63rd Season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast. The company was launched in 1960 in the historic 320-seat Asolo Theater on the grounds of Sarasota's Ringling Museum of Art. In 1984 the company moved into the former A.B. Edwards Theater—now the Sarasota Opera House. Since then, the company has gained an international reputation as one of the leading regional opera companies in the U.S. through initiatives such as the Masterworks Revival Series and the Verdi Cycle. The company's Sarasota Youth Opera is the most comprehensive Youth Program in the U.S. The Sarasota Opera House, called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by *Musical America*, underwent a \$20 million renovation in 2007, when the auditorium was named the William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre, in recognition of his leadership gift. Since 1983, the company has been under the artistic leadership of Victor DeRenzi and administrative leadership of General Director Richard Russell since 2012. Sarasota Opera is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts. Programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

High-resolution photos and logos are available [here](#).

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[schmidtvocalarts.org/about-sva/](http://schmidtvocalarts.org/about-sva/)

[www.facebook.com/SchmidtVocal](https://www.facebook.com/SchmidtVocal)

[www.instagram.com/schmidtvocal/](https://www.instagram.com/schmidtvocal/)

[Schmidt Vocal Arts – YouTube Channel](#)

## Schmidt Vocal Arts Inaugural National Competition 2022

**June 4 at 10:00am**

**Sarasota Opera (William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre)**

Semi-Final Competition

<https://tickets.sarasotaopera.org/5549/5550>

**June 4 at 7:30pm**

**Sarasota Opera (William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre)**

Alumni Concert

<https://tickets.sarasotaopera.org/5549/5568>

**June 5 at 10:30am**

**Sarasota Opera (William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre)**

Master Class

<https://tickets.sarasotaopera.org/5549/5569>

**June 5 at 1:00pm**

**Sarasota Opera (William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre)**

Final Round / Awards Ceremony

<https://tickets.sarasotaopera.org/5549/5569>

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