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Schmidt Vocal Arts (SVA) Names Award-Winners of Inaugural High School National Competition, Launched to Celebrate SVA's 25th Anniversary



Award-winners Benjamin Riverón, Nicole DiPasquale & Dalila Lugo (photo: Lori Sax)

(June 2022)—[Schmidt Vocal Arts \(SVA\)](#) is delighted to announce that soprano **Nicole DiPasquale** (18) has won the top prize of \$10,000 in the **first national edition** of the **Schmidt**

Vocal Competition. Hailing from Tampa, Florida, DiPasquale has just graduated with a Cambridge international diploma from Bell Creek Academy High School. Second prize of \$7,500 went to soprano **Dalila Lugo** (17) of Miami, Florida, and third prize of \$5,000 to tenor **Benjamin Riverón** (17) of San Antonio, Texas. These winners were selected from more than 300 U.S. high-school students who took part in regional competitions over the course of the 2021-22 season, 13 of them then going on to compete in the final round. That took place this past weekend in Sarasota, Florida, where SVA's distinguished judges were Sarasota Opera General Director **Richard Russell** and star sopranos **Amanda Majeski** and **Tamara Wilson**. Marking the first time an SVA competition has conferred a national award, the inaugural **High School Nationals** were launched this year to celebrate the organization's milestone **25th anniversary**.

Tamara Wilson said:

"They got up there, and they were pros. There was a *very* high level of singing. SVA is such a wonderful foundation. We need young people to be supported – not just through education, but also by financial means. Now that education is so much more expensive, it's important to get that support, and SVA does an amazing job with that."

Amanda Majeski commented:

"To watch these young people sing made my heart sing too. The future of opera is bright with these wonderful young singers; it made me so excited and eager to see where they will go and where their passion will take them."



Semi-finalists Gretha Fergus of Wallingford, PA; Jana Harmon of Richmond, VA; Saige Hoffman of Miami, FL; Benjamin Riverón of San Antonio, TX; & Luke Randazzo of Cincinnati, OH (photo: Lori Sax)

Funded by the **William E. Schmidt Foundation**, the **Schmidt Vocal Competition** is an annual event for U.S. high-school students who compete – this season for more than **\$625K in cash awards and scholarships** – at the critical point in their early careers when they start looking towards professional training. Designed to be accessible to singers from as many corners of the country as possible, this season’s final regional competitions were held in Tacoma, Chicago and Boston, while the introduction of a new **virtual cohort** attracted singers from rural areas of Alaska, Montana and beyond. Held this past weekend in **Sarasota Opera’s** William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre, the semi-final round hosted 31 singers, representing the top three winners from each of 13 regional competitions and from the virtual cohort.

SVA’s support and resources continue long after the competition. The award-winners are eligible for need-based scholarships and grants to support their continued study at the university level, and SVA maintains relationships with many alumni throughout their careers, providing educational, mentoring and networking opportunities as well as grants for summer study. The [SVA network](#) includes such luminaries as **Margo Garrett, Christine Goerke, Denyce Graves, Nathan Gunn, Craig Terry** and **Russell Thomas**, and from its ranks come competition judges, master-class teachers and guest faculty.

About Nicole DiPasquale, First Place

Soprano Nicole DiPasquale (18) studies voice with Jon Bassett in Tampa, Florida. She has also received training at Italy’s AAMS International Summer Music Institute, at San Francisco Conservatory’s Gilbert and Sullivan Scenes Workshop and at numerous master classes presented by notable universities. Singing both opera and musical theater, she has performed as a guest vocalist with the Florida College Chorus, Bassett Music Studio, Tampa City Ballet and Sun City Orchestra. She frequently competes in local, state, regional and national competitions, winning First Place (2021), Third Place (2019) and Most Promising Sophomore in SVA’s High School Regional Competitions in Florida. In addition to her musical accomplishments, DiPasquale studies ballet. Having just graduated from high school with a Cambridge AICE Diploma, she plans to study voice at the Boston Conservatory.

About Dalila Lugo, Second Place

Born in Miami, Florida, Dalila Lugo (17) attends Miami’s New World School of the Arts, a performing arts school, where she pursues her vocal studies. She started her classical vocal training at the age of six, studying with Manny Perez and Cuban-American coloratura soprano Eglise Gutiérrez. For the past two years, she has also taken acting and musical theater lessons at Florida’s Sociedad Actoral Hispanoamericana. Her performing experiences include starring as Maria in *West Side Story* at the age of 14 and appearing as a vocal ensemble member in both *Cendrillon* and *Tosca*. By continuing to work hard at opera and musical theater, Lugo hopes to grow as a performing artist and as a person.

About Benjamin Riverón, Third Place

Hailing from San Antonio, Texas, Benjamin Riverón (17) has just completed high school and the Pre-College program at New York's Juilliard School, where he majored in voice. He first developed a passion for music at the age of four, when he began playing piano. After starting his vocal training at 13, he entered Juilliard's Pre-College program the following year. He has performed in Juilliard's Pre-College Opera Scenes and at Carnegie Hall, France's Nice Classics Live festival and Opera Hispánica events in both New York City and San Antonio. A National YoungArts finalist, he has also won several SVA competitions. Riverón looks forward to attending Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music this fall.

About Schmidt Vocal Arts

Funded by the William E. Schmidt Foundation, Schmidt Vocal Arts is committed to fostering a passion for classical singing and to 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 more than 5,000 developing singers, awarding a total of \$1.6 million in cash awards and scholarships since its debut in 1997.

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. 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.

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