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## **Schmidt Vocal Arts Announces Winners of its Fifth Annual National Vocal Competition:**

**Cooper Bott, baritone, First Place**  
**Eva Capron, soprano, Second Place**  
**James Williams, bass-baritone, Third Place**



2026 SVA National Competition Winners: Second place, Eva Capron (L); First place Cooper Bott (Center); and Third place James Williams (R). Photo: Jati Lindsay

**Final Round Judges: soprano Latonia Moore, mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke,  
and Christopher Cano of Washington National Opera**

**[Sarasota, FL, June 1, 2026]**—[Schmidt Vocal Arts](#) (SVA), the premier national organization supporting early-career classical singers, announces the winners of its Fifth Annual National Vocal Competition for high school singers. The event, held at the Sarasota

Opera House on May 30 and 31 in Sarasota, Florida, brought together 51 of the nation's most promising young singers from 19 states for a culminating weekend of performance, skill building, and a chance to earn cash prizes.

**The three top prizes were awarded to:**

Cooper Bott, baritone, from Marengo, Iowa	First Place: \$10,000
Eva Capron, soprano, from New York, NY	Second Place: \$7,500
James Williams, bass-baritone from Pearland, TX	Third Place: \$5,000

A distinguished panel of adjudicators from the opera field—soprano Latonia Moore; mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, Co-Director of the Lehrer Vocal Institute at the Music Academy of the West; and Christopher Cano, Director of Washington National Opera's Cafritz Young Artist Program—judged the final round of the competition. Together, the judges brought their world-class performance experience and deep artistic insight to the competition, offering finalists not only evaluation, but meaningful encouragement at a critical stage in their artistic and personal development.

"Five years into the Schmidt Vocal Competition National Finals, it is incredibly exciting to see how far this program has come—and even more inspiring to witness the extraordinary young singers it continues to elevate," said Linda McAlister, Executive Director of Schmidt Vocal Arts. "This year's winners and finalists impressed us with their remarkable talent, dedication, and heart. We are very proud to celebrate them and to be part of their growth at such an important stage in their lives."

**Seven encouragement awards of \$500 each were given to:**

Isaac Ahn, baritone, Fort Lee, NJ  
Jane Hasty, soprano, Burbank, CA  
Brooks Liang, baritone, Campbell, CA  
Abigail Scheer, soprano, Paducah, KY  
Ruth Anne Sowa, soprano, Medford, MA  
Ryhanna Tarte, soprano, Boynton Beach, FL  
Zachary Whelan, tenor, New York, NY

New this year, the "Bill Schmidt Community Champion Award"—a \$500 award recognizing a singer who uplifts others and creates a welcoming community—was presented to mezzo-soprano Quinn Anne Fotos, from Lakewood, WA.

All finalists in the 2026 Schmidt National Vocal Competition receive a **\$1,000 award**.

The **2026 Finalists** were:

Isaac	Ahn	baritone	Hackley School	Fort Lee	NJ
Cooper	Bott	baritone	Williamsburg Jr.-Sr. High School	Marengo	IA
Eva	Capron	soprano	Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts	New York	NY
Mallory	Goddard	soprano	Martin County High School	Stuart	FL
Madeline	Hansen	soprano	Lambert High School	Suwanee	GA
Jane	Hasty	soprano	Los Angeles County High School for the Arts	Burbank	CA
Cailey	Jones	soprano	Baltimore School for the Arts	Baltimore	MD
Gabriel	Magallón	baritone	Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts	Houston	TX
Gabe	Ponichter	tenor	The Dalton School	New York	NY
Thomas	Prince	tenor	Detroit School of Arts	Detroit	MI
Casey	Schopflocher	countertenor	Special Music School	New York	NY
Laura Maria	Suarez	soprano	New World School of the Arts	Miami	FL
Malia	Suggs	soprano	New Orleans Center for Creative Arts & Patrick F Taylor Science and Technology Academy	Gretna	LA
Ryhanna	Tarte	soprano	West Boca Community High School	Boynton Beach	FL
Emmanuel	Tsao	bass-baritone	Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts	New York	NY
James	Williams	bass-baritone	Shadow Creek High School	Pearland	TX

“I’ve been fortunate enough to spend my life surrounded by wonderful singers, and I can tell you that what stays with me is perspective and promise,” said renowned soprano and SVA Board Member Christine Goerke. “I heard beautiful singing this weekend that made me giggle with glee and brought tears to my eyes. More importantly, I heard young artists with something to say. I heard courage. I heard imagination. I heard purpose.”

She continued, “Schmidt Vocal Arts gives these singers something incredibly valuable: the opportunity to be heard, to be supported, and to be taken seriously at a pivotal moment in their journeys. Every artist can look back and point to the people who believed in them before they truly believed in themselves. That kind of encouragement can change someone’s life, and I’m so grateful to be even the smallest part of that journey.”

Presented by Schmidt Vocal Arts, the National Finals are the culmination of the Schmidt Vocal Competition season, which identifies and supports talented high school singers through regional competitions across the country. This year, a total of 58 high school singers from 19 states across the country—the three top winners from each of the 18

regional competitions, plus four ‘wild card’ singers—qualified for the semifinals on May 30. Fifty-one singers performed, and the 16 finalists were selected to advance to the final round on May 31 by the semi-final jury of soprano Dr. Alison Acord, Professor of Voice at Miami University; baritone Dr. Marc Callahan, Associate Professor and Director of Opera at Chapman University; mezzo-soprano Dr. Alexis Davis-Hazell at University of Alabama; tenor Anthony Dean Griffey Professor of Voice at Eastman School of Music; and coach/pianist Kathleen Kelly, Associate Professor of Vocal Coaching at Baylor University.

In addition to the finalists, these five judges also selected three semi-finalists—mezzo-soprano Zadia Danon from Brooklyn, NY; soprano Abigail Scheer from Paducah, KY; and baritone Lev Sakae Taira from La Cañada, CA—to participate in a master class (public coaching) on Sunday morning, led by Mr. Griffey, Dr. Davis-Hazell, and Ms. Kelly.

“It is a joy to see what these young singers are already capable of, and to imagine where their talent and hard work may take them,” said Chester A. Schmidt III, Chairman of the Board of the William E. Schmidt Foundation. “The Schmidt Foundation invests in young artists because we believe they deserve encouragement, opportunity, and people who take their potential seriously. As we celebrate the fifth year of the Schmidt Vocal Competition National Finals in Sarasota, we are proud to continue supporting young singers as they build confidence, develop their artistry, and find their way forward.”

All Schmidt Vocal Arts programs are funded by the **William E. Schmidt Foundation**. Since debuting in 1997, the Schmidt Vocal Competitions have touched the lives of more than 6,500 developing singers, this year awarding a total of \$650,000 in cash prizes and scholarships in pursuit of Schmidt Vocal Arts’ mission to foster a passion in young artists for classical singing and create opportunities to propel them on their journey toward a career in the arts.

**Cooper Bott** is a baritone from Marengo, Iowa; 2025-26 marks his second year competing at Schmidt Vocal Arts High School National Competition. He studies with Thaddeus Ennen and will pursue a degree in vocal performance at Northwestern University in the fall. Cooper's love for singing and performing has been a constant in his life.

Soprano **Eva Capron** is a senior at LaGuardia High School in New York, NY, and will attend the Curtis Institute of Music in the fall, where she will continue to study Vocal Performance. She also attends the Juilliard Pre-College program, studying under Lorraine Nubar.

Described as an “emerging vocal virtuoso,” bass-baritone **James Williams** has a passion for conveying stories through the art of singing. He is a recipient of the Bay Area Chorus MaryEllen Oliver Vocal Performance Scholarship, and was a four-year All-Stater recognized by the Texas Music Educators Association. He was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Bauer Family High School Voice Studio, studying under Hector Vasquez. James will attend The Juilliard School in the fall as the proud recipient of a full merit Kovner Fellowship and a student of Kevin Short, to pursue a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Arts degree.

## **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 6,500 developing high school and undergraduate singers, awarding more than \$5 million in cash awards and scholarships since its debut in 1997. Other Schmidt Vocal Arts programs include:

- 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 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 the 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.

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