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**VIRGINIA OPERA ANNOUNCES
“STAYIN’ ALIVE: VIRGINIA OPERA’S ALTERNATE FALL”
A SEASON OF VIRTUAL AND LIMITED-ATTENDANCE
FALL PERFORMANCES TO ENGAGE AUDIENCES
THROUGHOUT THE COMMONWEALTH**

“Stayin’ Alive” digital (online) and (in-person) curbside pop-up performance events to feature quartet of Herndon Foundation Emerging Artists in nimble and expansive eight-week programmatic response to COVID-19

Hampton Roads, Richmond, Fairfax, VA (August 26, 2020)—Today, Virginia Opera, *The Official Opera Company of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, is pleased to announce “**Stayin’ Alive–Virginia Opera’s Alternate Fall,**” the Opera’s latest programmatic initiative to address audience engagement in light of ongoing limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. “**Stayin’ Alive**” will feature both digital and “analog” in-person performance opportunities, featuring the vocal skills of a quartet of the company’s esteemed **Herndon Foundation Emerging Artists Program** (*details/biographies below*). The artists will journey to Virginia for a full ten-week residency program, the first two of which will allow for artist quarantine prior to both rehearsals and performances including a special interactive, online, ticketed “**Artist Showcase**” on **September 16, 2020 at 7 p.m.** Designed overall to be a highly collaborative endeavor between artists, audience, and a VO artistic team and spearheaded by the company’s **Artistic Director, Maestro Adam Turner**, and **Assistant Conductor, Maestro Brandon Eldredge**, this virtual Artist Showcase event will include a musical program allowing audience members to vote for the very selections performed that evening. Tickets for the Artist Showcase will be available through the Virginia Opera website at vaopera.org for \$20.

In addition to the premier showcase event, the two-month schedule of VO digital programming will include recorded arias and duets, master classes, as well as live streaming opportunities. Importantly, the company is also planning to present replacement educational content online to address canceled fall in-school **VO Touring Program** initiatives and to share opportunities with the organization’s valued community partners in schools and other Commonwealth public-facing venues that provide safe and valuable community and family-based interaction. To this end the VO is pursuing a variety of new and trailblazing partnerships with fellow Virginia organizations that will be announced within the coming weeks, as well as exploring the VO’s facilitation of providing resources for **Community Curbside**

Concerts—an opportunity for those members of the public interested in hosting live performances in front of homes or businesses. Priced between \$500–\$5,000, the VO will provide singers, a piano, and marketing materials to promote these privately hosted events. Questions or details provided via email at info@vaopera.org.

Virginia Opera Artistic Director, Adam Turner: “As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our lives, our communities, and our art form, we have looked intently at the ways that we may safely and creatively maintain visibility, while also reinforcing our dedication to our valuable patrons and donors. Embarking on a host of new programming for the fall, we have dubbed our initiative “Stayin’ Alive,” and we are planning an exciting slate of opportunities to spark connection with opera lovers across the state – from the comfort of their living rooms, to their front porches and beyond. In the following eight weeks, with the amazing talents of our Herndon Foundation Emerging Artists leading the way, we will help to bridge some of the elements of these difficult and isolating times. We know that Stayin’ Alive will be an impactful and positive new adventure for the VO, and we understand that these analogue programs represent a bold adventure. With that said, we also want to reassure our audiences and patrons that we embark on these endeavors with the utmost commitment to safety. In providing all available resources to ensure a gratifying experience of in-person singing, we fully recognize the responsibility that comes with the promise of highest standards of safety. With these ambitious plans, the number of Curbside Concerts will be important, and yet limited—so for those interested in hosting, please be sure to let us know soon! We are so excited about seeing you throughout the fall in your community, perhaps even in your own backyard or the parking lot of a cherished local business!”

Virginia Opera’s President and CEO, Russell Allen: “These amazing plans are a welcome relief to the absence of the performing arts in our lives. We are thrilled to welcome a talented group of young artists who will be at the center of this program, a couple who have already made significant contributions to Virginia Opera’s 2019-2020 Season. With the safety of both artists and audiences at the forefront of our planning, we look forward to a variety of community collaborations to help recharge our artistic batteries.”

Stayin’ Alive Artist & Virginia Opera Artistic Team Biographies

Symone Harcum—Soprano—was the 2018 first place winner of the NSAL-DC Dorothy Lincoln-Smith Voice Competition and the Sylvia Green Voice Competition. Recent roles include Bea in Opera Maine’s production of *Three Decembers* and the role of Krystyna Zywułska in *Out of Darkness: Two Remain* under the direction of composer, Jake Heggie, and librettist, Gene Scheer, Gertrude in Humperdinck’s *Hansel und Gretel*, and La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi*. After receiving her Bachelor’s Degree in Music Education from Norfolk State University in 2012 and her Master’s of Music from Peabody Conservatory at John’s Hopkins University, she began study in the studio of Denyce Graves and Margaret Baroody. In 2019 and 2020 she joined the Des Moines Summer Festival as an apprentice artist. Last season at Virginia Opera Ms. Harcum sang the role of Clorinda in *La Cenerentola*, covered the title role and sang The High Priestess in *Aida*, and performed in the Fall Education and Outreach Tour.

Whitney Robinson—Mezzo-Soprano—is a native of Houston, Texas, and received her B.M. in vocal performance from the University of Houston and her M.M. from the New England Conservatory. Robinson studied under Bradley Williams at the New England Conservatory of Music as the Artist Diploma

Candidate. As a member of Virginia Opera's Herndon Foundation Emerging Artists Program for the 2019-2020 season, Ms. Robinson performed Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*, and she is thrilled to return as an Emerging Artist for the 2020-2021 season. She will be singing Ruth in *The Pirates of Penzance*, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi*, and Marcellina in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Ms. Robinson has also sung with esteemed companies such as Odyssey Opera, CLOC, Central City Opera and Opera Saratoga.

Nicholas Martorano—Baritone—As a member of Virginia Opera's 2020-2021 Herndon Foundation Emerging Artists Program, baritone Nicholas Martorano will be singing Marco in *Gianni Schicchi*, covering Count Almaviva and singing in the chorus for *Le nozze di Figaro*, and covering the Pirate King and Samuel as well as singing in the chorus for *The Pirates of Penzance*. He also sang the Pirate King in the Education and Outreach Tour of *The Pirates of Penzance* with Virginia Opera last season. Last fall Mr. Martorano sang in Santa Fe Opera's workshop of *M. Butterfly* in collaboration with American Lyric Theater and joined Opera on the James as one of the Tyler Young Artists. Past roles include: Hortensius in *La Fille du Régiment*, Apollo in *The Cows of Apollo*, Publio in *La clemenza di Tito*, and Sid in *Albert Herring*. Mr. Martorano graduated from the University of Southern California and Carnegie Mellon University.

Eric J. McConnell—Bass-Baritone— Denver native Eric J. McConnell is quickly garnering acclaim in the American opera community for his distinctive dramatic voice and theatrical performances. He debuts as an Emerging Artist with Virginia Opera in its 2020-2021 season, where he will perform Simone in *Gianni Schicchi*, Bartolo in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and the Sergeant of Police in *The Pirates of Penzance*. Other roles performed include the Sodbuster (Missy Mazzoli's *Proving Up*), Figaro/Antonio (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Bartolo/Basilio (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Olin Blicht (Susannah), Dr. Grenvil (*La traviata*), Frank (*Die Fledermaus*), Sacristan/Angelotti (*Tosca*), Grandpa Moss (*The Tender Land*), and Elisha Fitzgibbon in the orchestral premiere of Evan Mack's *Roscoe*, a performance featuring Deborah Voigt. He has trained as a young artist with Opera Colorado, Central City Opera, Opera Saratoga, the Aspen Opera Center, and Seagle Music Colony, and holds degrees from Northwestern University and the University of Miami.

Virginia Opera Artistic Director Adam Turner is quickly gaining momentum as a conductor to watch on international opera stages. Currently in his third season as Artistic Director of Virginia Opera (following four seasons as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor), Maestro Turner garners critical acclaim for the breadth of his repertoire, artistic vision, and polished technique. Of his recent performance of *Street Scene* with Virginia Opera, *Opera News* hailed the "sensitive conducting" of Adam Turner "who demonstrated an affinity for a score as stylistically diverse as the characters in the plot." This season at Virginia Opera, Maestro Turner will conduct performances of a double-bill featuring Poulenc's *La voix humaine* and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *The Pirates of Penzance*.

The forthcoming season represents the second VO season for **Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master Brandon Eldredge**, who has built a broad knowledge and experience as a conductor, pianist, and operatic coach working across the United States, Germany, and Sweden. Joining Virginia Opera for their 45th season, Eldredge previously served as Assistant Conductor for Opera Saratoga's 2018 productions of *The Merry Widow* and *The Consul*; he was re-engaged to assistant conduct *Hänsel und Gretel* and conduct Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mozart and Salieri* for their 2019 season.

The Virginia Opera 2020–2021 Season

Previously this summer, the VO announced company's revised main stage opera schedule for the 2020-2021 "Love is a Battlefield" season due to ongoing effects and circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. The VO season will begin February 5, 2021 with an attenuated three-production statewide

schedule continuing until April 25, 2021. The new line-up includes *La Voix Humaine* – Francis Poulenc, and *Gianni Schicchi* – Giacomo Puccini (Norfolk - FEB 5, 7 & 9, 2021 | Fairfax - FEB 13 & 14, 2021 | Richmond - FEB 19 & 21, 2021); *The Marriage of Figaro (Le nozze di Figaro)* – W.A. Mozart (Norfolk - MAR 12, 14 & 16, 2021 | Fairfax - MAR 20 & 21, 2021 | Richmond - MAR 26 & 28, 2021); *The Pirates of Penzance* – W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan (Norfolk – APR 16, 18 & 20, 2021 | Richmond - APR 23 & 25, 2021).

Subscription Information

Subscription tickets for all 3 productions are on sale now for performances in Norfolk and Richmond starting as low as \$56.25. Subscriptions for performances at George Mason University’s Center for the Arts will go on sale later this fall. Subscription tickets and ticket information at:

The Edythe C. and Stanley L.
Harrison Opera House
Norfolk, VA
866.673.7282
vaopera.org

George Mason
University’s
Center for the Arts
Fairfax, VA
703.993.2787
cfa.gmu.edu

The Carpenter Theatre at
Dominion Energy Center
Richmond, VA
866.673.7282
vaopera.org

About Virginia Opera

Virginia Opera Association, Inc., was founded in 1974, is known and respected nationwide for the identification and presentation of the finest young artists, for the musical and dramatic integrity of its productions, and for the ingenuity and variety of its education and outreach programs. Mainstage performances in three markets across the Commonwealth reach nearly 50,000 attendees annually. In March of 1994, by unanimous vote of the Virginia General Assembly, Virginia Opera was named “The Official Opera Company of the Commonwealth of Virginia” in recognition of the organization’s contribution to the state as well as to the world of opera. For tickets and information visit vaopera.org or call 866.673.7282.

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