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George and Nora London Foundation Presents Blake Denson, Baritone, in Recital on Sunday, April 28, 2024, To Conclude Its 2023-24 Season at The Morgan Library and Museum

Denson Performs Song Cycles by Francesco Santoliquido and Ralph Vaughan Williams, and “Steal Away”



Blake Denson, at right in his 2022 George London Award-winning performance (photo at right by Jennifer Taylor)

Rising young baritone Blake Denson, a 2022 George London Award winner, will perform a recital with pianist Kevin Miller on Sunday, April 28, 2024, at 4 pm to round out the George and Nora London Foundation for Singers season of events at The Morgan Library and Museum. The program features the four-song cycle *I canti della sera* (*The Songs of the Evening*) by Francesco Santoliquido written c. 1910; the nine-song *Songs of Travel* by Ralph Vaughan Williams written c. 1904 to texts by Robert Louis Stevenson; and Shawn E. Okpebholo’s arrangement of the spiritual “Steal Away.”

When Blake Denson stepped on the London Foundation Competition stage for his 2022 award-winning performance, Seen and Heard International described it thus: “The last singer to perform was Blake Denson, who in just the few words he spoke gave an indication of the commanding resonance and size of his voice. He gave an impressive account of Rodrigo’s final aria, ‘Carlos, écoute,’ from Verdi’s *Don Carlo*.”

Denson made his Santa Fe Opera debut in summer 2023 in productions of *Tosca* and Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, his performance as Plutone in the latter described by The Wall Street Journal as "a standout." In the fall, Denson returned to Houston Grand Opera, where he made his role debut as Ford in *Falstaff*, about which the Houston Press said, "Baritone Blake Denson...possesses a sonorous virile voice, and shows it off gallantly.... We can understand why he won the Grand Finalist award at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2020." This spring he joins the Metropolitan Opera roster for the first time, in two productions: *Madama Butterfly* as Prince Yamadori and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* as Pastor/Kaboom. In December, Denson was heard in concert alongside Lisette Oropesa at New Orleans Opera.

George London and the George and Nora London Foundation for Singers

George London (1920-1985) was one of the greatest opera stars of the 20th century, who blazed a trail for American singers on the international stage and created some of the most indelible interpretations of prominent bass-baritone roles. In his later years, he devoted much of his time and energy to the support and nurturing of young singers, in partnership with his wife, Nora. Since 1971, the foundation's annual competition has given more than 300 awards, and a total of more than \$2 million, to an outstanding roster of young American and Canadian opera singers who have gone on to international stardom – the list of past winners includes Joyce DiDonato, Renée Fleming, Christine Goerke, Ryan Speedo Green, Catherine Malfitano, James Morris, Eric Owens, Matthew Polenzani, Sondra Radvanovsky, Neil Shicoff, Dawn Upshaw, and Willard White.

In addition to the annual competition, the George and Nora London Foundation also presents a recital series to give grantees exposure and experience, and, in many cases, a New York recital debut. The foundation also awards scholarships to promising high school students attending the pre-college program of The Juilliard School, a program now in its 12th year.

www.georgeandnorahouston.org

Blake Denson, a native of Paducah, KY, is praised for his "captivating dramatic interpretations" with "a striking upper register" and "a sound that boomed to the back of the house" (OperaWire). In the 2022-23 season, Denson made his German debut in *La fanciulla del West* with the Bayerische Staatsoper singing the role of Larkens; performed at Staatsoper Hamburg, making his house debut in a new production of *Carmen* singing the role of Morales; and made his debut with English National Opera as Donner in a new production of *Das Rheingold*. He also sang the role of Schaunard in Washington National Opera's production of *La bohème*, and sang Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* with the Paducah Symphony.

Mr. Denson was a winner of a 2022 Sara Tucker Study Grant from the Richard Tucker Foundation, the 2022 Zenith Competition, and the 2020 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Other competition wins include multiple awards in both the International Concours Tenor Viñas Competition and the Dallas Opera National Vocal Competition. His roles and appearances in his first years in Houston Grand Opera included Peter in *Hansel und Gretel*, Soloist in *Giving Voice*, Soloist in *Suite Español*, and Daddy/Tim in the world premiere of *The Snowy Day*. Blake Denson is an alumnus of Wolf Trap Opera, the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, and the University of Kentucky.

www.blakeadenson.com

Sunday, April 28, 2024, at 4:00 pm
The Morgan Library & Museum
George and Nora London Foundation Recital
BLAKE DENSON, Baritone
Kevin Miller, piano

FRANCESCO SANTOLIVUO *I canti della sera (The Songs of the Evening)*
"L'assiolo canta" ("The Horned Owl Sings")
"Alba di luna sul bosco" ("Moonrise Over the Woods")
"Tristezza crepuscolare" ("Twilight Gloom")
"L'incontro" ("The Encounter")

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS *Songs of Travel*
"The Vagabond"
"Let Beauty Awake"
"The Roadside Fire"
"Youth and Love"
"In Dreams"
"The Infinite Shining Heavens"
"Whither Must I Wander"
"Bright Is the Ring of Words"
"I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope"

TRADITIONAL, ARR. SHAWN E. OKPEBHOLO "Steal Away"

Tickets: \$55

Tickets and information: www.georgeandnoralondon.org/recitals

March 20, 2024