



Dear 2019 VM-er,

Greetings! My name is Dr. Brittany Benningfield, and on behalf of the Vocal Music Faculty of The Kentucky Center Governor's School for the Arts (GSA), I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your selection for our 2019 program! You are one of only 33 singers chosen from the many who auditioned from around our state. We, the faculty, are truly excited about the opportunity to work with you and we hope that you will come to us both excited and eager to participate in three rigorous (*but very fun-filled*) weeks of musical activity. **Once you have read this letter, please email me at the address listed below to let me know!**

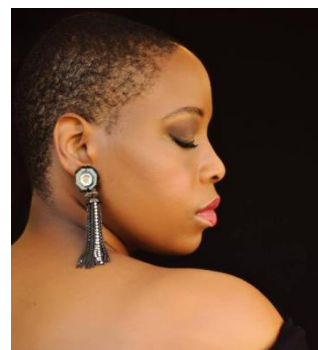
As my first order of business, I would like to introduce the members of our 2019 Vocal Music Faculty with whom you will work this summer:

Soprano **Shareese Johnson** returns to the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts for her 4th year! Ms. Johnson received her BM from Converse College, her MM from Indiana University and is presently a PhD student at the University of Kentucky!

The 2015 Winner of the Kentucky District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Ms. Johnson has a very wide operatic repertory that includes *Donna Anna* in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, *Angelica* in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, both *Bess* and *Serena* in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and *Senta* in Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

Ms. Johnson is also a noted Oratorio soloist, having sung the soprano solos in works such as Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* (K. 427), Britten's *World of the Spirit* and Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* Op. 45. As a recitalist, Ms. Johnson has been featured on numerous important recital series in the region! She has been a soloist on the always eagerly-anticipated Wagner Society of Cincinnati's "New Voices: A Singer Showcase" as well as on the 10th Annual Christmas Showcase of Louisville's WUOL 90.5 FM (which was broadcast throughout the Kentuckiana region)!

Ms. Johnson, a featured soloist of the Black Classical Artists of Louisville and a member of the Voice Faculty of Berea College, was also the winner of the 2018 Todd Duncan Award in the 45th National Association of Teachers of Singing Artist Award Competition!





An arts educator for over twenty years, **Barry Lawrence** has taught on the Voice Faculty of both Bellarmine University and Benedictine University. A native of Louisville, Mr. Lawrence has received critical acclaim for his beautiful, powerful and resonant voice. Mr. Lawrence's musical studies were conducted at the University of Louisville and Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music where he studied with the internationally-renowned Bass, Nicola Rossi-Lemeni, and the famed Soprano, Virginia Zeani. Mr.

Lawrence has performed principal roles in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Menotti's *Amahl and The Night Visitors* and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*.

Mr. Lawrence's international exposure came in performances of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* which he performed throughout Europe and Asia. Mr. Lawrence has, additionally, appeared in concert with the American Spiritual Ensemble and the Black Classical Artists of Louisville with whom he has performed at the *Piccolo Spoleto* Festival in Charleston, SC. Mr. Lawrence, a winner in the *Francesco Paolo Neglia* Competition, the *Marseille Opera Competition* and the *Rome Baroque Music Competition*, has been a three-time, first-place winner of the *Kentucky District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions*.

Returning for his 22nd year as a faculty member of the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts, Mr. Lawrence will present the *Love Project*, a collaborative work with song, dance, and drama, in October 2019. He has his own private voice studio, *Ars Vocalis*, where he continues to share his love of vocal music.

Eleanor McClellan, a native of Florence Alabama, received a BS in Music Education from the University of North Alabama and a MM in Vocal Performance from the University of Louisville. Ms. McClellan has completed course work towards the DMA in Vocal Performance at the University of Cincinnati-College Conservatory of Music in Ohio and has studied at the Institute for Advanced Vocal Study in Paris, France, and the *Accademia Internazionale delle Arti* in Rome, Italy.

Ms. McClellan, a soprano, has taught on the music faculties of Bellarmine University, the University of Dayton, Central State University, Wilberforce University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi State University and the *Accademia Internazionale delle Arti* in Rome, Italy. Currently, she teaches in the Department of Music at the University of North Alabama.



A performer with a wide repertory ranging from Purcell through Pinkham, Bach through Britten and Vivaldi through Verdi, Ms. McClellan has appeared on stage and in recital on three continents. Regionally renowned for her performances of song repertory by women composers, Ms. McClellan has had the pleasure of presenting 'Women's Works' at numerous conferences, including the Virginia Humanities Festival and the International Women in French Conference.

A member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, the Walk With Me Foundation, and a charter member of the Black Classical Artists of Louisville, Ms. McClellan currently serves as the Director of Music at the Edgemont United Methodist Church in Florence, Alabama.



Dr. Alexander T. Simpson Jr., a native of Charleston, SC, is GSA's Choral Director. He returns to GSA for his 31st year as a member of the Vocal Music Faculty. A conductor and a pianist, Dr. Simpson received degrees from Dartmouth College, Converse College and the University of Kentucky.

An Associate Professor of Music at Bellarmine University, where I founded the Bellarmine University Opera Theatre, Dr. Simpson directs the university's Handbell Ensembles has served for many years as the university's Director of Choral Activities.

Dr. Simpson is Founder and Artistic Director of the Black Classical Artists of Louisville, a musical ensemble which specializes in the performance of music by African-American classical composers. With the BCAL, Dr. Simpson has performed throughout the Kentuckiana region and has been presented in concerts at the world-renowned *Piccolo Spoleto* Festival (Charleston, SC). Dr. Simpson is the Special Event Coordinator of the Kentuckiana Branch of the National Association of Negro Musicians (KANM), an organization for which he has also served as President. For KANM's parent organization, the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM), Dr. Simpson has also served as the Assistant Director of the organization's Southern Region.

As an operatic coach/accompanist, Dr. Simpson has accompanied for numerous opera companies in the region and on the east coast. Additionally, he is the Music Director of Louisville's St. Martha Catholic Church and has conducted major liturgical events for the Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville.

P. S.

After you have read this letter, please consider joining our already-created '[GSA 2019 – Vocal Music](#)' FACEBOOK GROUP! Dr. Simpson manages the FACEBOOK GROUP PAGE (he is listed as "A. T. Simpson Jr" on FACEBOOK) and this would be a great opportunity for those of you who are on FACEBOOK to meet and be greeted by the GSA Vocal Music Faculty and Staff.

You will need to send Dr. Simpson a 'Friend Request' and he will put you into the FACEBOOK GROUP!

Amanda Balltrip, soprano, returns for her 2nd summer as Vocal Music faculty member and is an alumna of the 2001 GSA Musical Theatre Discipline! Ms. Balltrip received her BM and her MM in Vocal Performance from the University of Kentucky.

An accomplished vocalist who was the 2008 winner of the Kentucky District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Ms. Balltrip's operatic repertory includes Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (Despina), Gounod's *Faust* (Marguerite), Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* (Gretel), Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* (Rosalinde) and Puccini's *La Bohème* (Musetta).



A member of and soloist with the acclaimed National Chorale, Ms. Balltrip maintains a wide Oratorio repertory which contains works such as Handel's Messiah, Bach's *Magnificat* BWV 243, Mozart's Requiem K. 626, Mendelssohn's Elijah and Orff's *Carmina Burana*.

In addition to her performance schedule, Ms. Balltrip is passionate about her teaching! Currently, she is the Director of Music Education at the McNeil Music Center in Somerset, KY, and she loves the goal of "lifting up Music Education in the Cumberland Lake area."



I am **Dr. Brittany Benningfield**, and I'm happy to return to GSA for my 5th year as Vocal Music Faculty member, and first year as chair of the VM discipline! As a graduate of the Vocal Music Discipline in 2001, I've served GSA as a Discipline Assistant (2004, 2005, and 2008), a Residential Assistant (2006), and as a participant in alumni masterclasses and concerts all the years in between.

I currently serve as Lecturer in Voice at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, where I teach voice for students majoring in both vocal performance and musical theatre, as well as beginning aural skills and diction. I received my undergraduate degree in Music Education from Campbellsville University, and received the Master's and Doctoral Degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Kentucky. I've performed several operatic roles, including three of Mozart's most well-known leading ladies: La Contessa in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*.

My professional performances include programs with Cincinnati Opera, Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra, Southern Illinois Chamber Music Society, and Southern Illinois University choir and orchestral programs. I most recently covered famed soprano Christine Brewer in Southeast Missouri State University and SIU's co-production of Verdi's "Requiem."

In addition to our Vocal Music Faculty, we are extremely lucky to have an incredibly gifted 2019 staff! One of the members of this staff with whom you will all quickly become familiar is our Discipline Assistant, **Trey Darnell**, who joins us for the 1st time in this crucial role!

Trey, a baritone, is a 2015 Vocal Music Alum! He's from Lawrenceburg KY, where he graduated from Anderson County High School. Trey currently attends the University of Kentucky, pursuing a double major in Arts Administration and Vocal Performance. He is so excited to meet you all this summer, and help you out however he can!



In addition to Trey, our Vocal Music Staff will include six wonderful accompanists with whom you will all have opportunities to interact:

Angela Eaton
Coordinator of Applied Music
Transylvania University



John Combs
(GSA Instrumental Music Alumnus, 2010)
MM Student in Collaborative Piano and Theory
University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music



Johann Belofte
Asst. Prof of Music, Centre College



Jerram John
GSA Instrumental Music Alum '09
MM Student in Cello Performance
Peabody Institute



Phillip Morgan
GSA Vocal Music Alum '04
Music Director
Central Presbyterian Church (Louisville)
GSA Ladies Ensemble Conductor
2013 – 2016



Nathaniel Mo
BM in Piano Performance
University of Louisville



Your three weeks at GSA will be very rigorous and challenging! The daily schedule will contain a wide variety of activities including (*but not limited to*):

- 1) Private voice lessons (you will be assigned a teacher when you arrive)
- 2) Rehearsals (for both choral and smaller ensembles)
- 3) A Vocal Music Alumni Masterclass and recital presented by Dr. Angelique Clay (VM alum of the first ever GSA class!) where you will meet alumni from previous years and hear their wonderful, post-GSA vocal development
- 4) Vocal Masterclasses in which YOU will get the opportunity to meet and to sing for guest instructors from:
 - The Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (Cincinnati, OH)
 - DePauw University (Greencastle, IN)
 - The North Carolina School for the Arts (Winston Salem, NC)
 - The University of Kentucky (Lexington, KY)
 - The University of Louisville (Louisville, KY)
 - Northern Kentucky University (Highland Heights, KY)

- 5) Music Theory classes
 - 6) Sight-Singing classes
 - 7) Diction classes
 - 8) Several performance opportunities
- . . . and *much, much* more!

The best advice I can offer you to help you prepare for this experience is to **ARRIVE RESTED!** We plunge into a full schedule of activities on our first day, so make sure that the last couple of days before you leave home are filled with as much relaxation as you can stand!

Two IMPORTANT things for which you should be prepared on Monday, June 24th are:

1. The Sing-Off
2. Your Music Theory Placement examination

Both of these events are very friendly, even though they can *sound* intimidating. In one of our first sessions, after all of the introductions are out of the way, we hold a “Sing-Off” where you’ll re-sing your audition selection for us. **THIS IS IN NO WAY ANOTHER AUDITION!** We do this so that all of the Voice Faculty members and your student colleagues will have the pleasure of hearing your voice! You are at GS because you are talented and have loads of potential, and while Dr. Simpson and I have had the wonderful opportunity to meet and hear all of you, Ms. Balltrip, Mr. Lawrence, Ms. Johnson and Ms. McClellan are still eagerly awaiting having the distinct pleasure of hearing all of you for the first time!

THE PIECE YOU WILL SING FOR THE SING-OFF IS THE SAME PIECE YOU SANG FOR THE AUDITION! PLEASE COME TO GSA WITH THAT PIECE OF MUSIC IN YOUR LUGGAGE.

EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY:

- 1) **PLEASE SEND A COPY OF THIS SELECTION TO ME BY JUNE 8TH** so that I will be able to pass it on to the pianists who will play this session! You *may* snail mail the music to me, but I *prefer* that you scan it as a PDF file and send it to me via e-mail. PLEASE BE SURE to scan your selection as one PDF file, not as individual PDF file for each page.

IF YOU CHOOSE TO SCAN YOUR SELECTION AND E-MAIL IT, please send it to me at **brittcbenningfield@gmail.com**

If you decide to mail it, please send it to the following address (please note that you DO NOT have to send the original score--in this instance, you may send a printed copy):

Dr. Brittany Benningfield, GSA VM Chair
674 Goodin-Williams Rd
Hodgenville, KY 42748

IF YOU CHOOSE TO MAIL THIS VIA THE USPS, IT IS VITAL that you postmark this by **June 4th**, so that it will arrive BEFORE I leave home. If it arrives after I leave my house, it will not get to me before I head to Lexington.

NO MATTER WHICH MANNER YOU CHOOSE, **PLEASE MAKE SURE** that you do not accidentally chop of sections of the music (we get lots of copies, alas, with no left hand music for the pianist!).

- 2) While it is *very important* to send the music to me, it is also *very important* for you to **review** and **sing through** the music in the days before you arrive. We want you to be able to present yourself and your voice at their best when you are vocally introduced to your colleagues, and one way to make sure of that is to make sure that you have re-familiarized yourself with your audition selection.

The Music Theory examination is **just** for placement purposes (since we offer different levels of both Theory and Sight-Singing classes). In order to appropriately assist your development in this area, we will need to know your strengths and weaknesses and this test will assist us in determining the level at which your studies should begin. There is no studying that you need to do to prepare for this exam. We simply wish to ascertain what you already know.

There are no musical supplies that you are required to bring to GSA. There are, however, some things which will be very handy to have ***if you already own them***:

- 1) If you possess a copy of either the 24 Italian Songs and Arias or the 26 Italian Songs and Arias, please bring it/them with you, since some of the music you may be assigned may come out of one of these collections. In general, if there are any collections of classical songs you would like to bring, please feel free.
- 2) If you possess a portable recording device, such as a handheld voice recorder, please bring it with you! You will be highly encouraged to record all of your voice lessons and if you have your own recording and playback equipment, it will be very easy for you to study your lesson recordings!
- 3) GSA Singer's Survival Kit:
 - a) one permanent, personalized water bottle
 - b) comfortable walking shoes and socks
 - c) a journal to record your memories.
 - d) a notebook/binder and lots of pencils!
- 4) Please be sure to bring at least one outfit that would be "appropriate" for a vocal concert, as well as one that is appropriate for an opera production! We are VERY excited to take you all to Cincinnati Opera's production of Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette*, and we want you to be dressed for the occasion! You may choose to have the same outfit for all events (if you're the kind of person that can keep clothes clean!), or you can bring different outfits for the events. We may have several public performances during GSA 2019 and will have, *as well*, other opportunities to sing for guests for whom we would like to **look** as well as **sound** GREAT. For a couple of these events, we will dress rather informally, but for others:

a) We request that young ladies be prepared to wear a dress (or a skirt and blouse) with dress shoes (of reasonable height). Additionally, ladies, for the sake of uniformity, please note that dresses/skirts should end **JUST ABOVE** the knee! As a woman, I know it can be difficult to find a dress these days that hits that mark. Please please please do your best to find one of this length. Dresses and/or skirts that are “significantly above the knees” **will not be allowed for these concert events. I repeat – WILL NOT BE ALLOWED.** I’ve attached a picture that shows what length the dress should be, just so there is no confusion on what “above the knee” looks like.



For the opera performance, ladies may wear pants and a nice top. **NO JEANS and NO SNEAKERS!**

b) For our gentlemen, we suggest a suit, but a sport coat with dress pants is also a perfectly good combination. Additionally, gentlemen, please note that we **REQUIRE** a tie, a belt and dress shoes for some events. If you’re not sure if your tie matches your suit/jacket/belt/shoes, ask someone!!

For the opera performance, gentlemen may wear pants and a button up, tie and jacket are not required. However, **NO JEANS and NO SNEAKERS!**

If you are in doubt as to appropriateness of your choices, please consult your parents, your high school Choral Director or please feel free, as well, to call the GSA office at (502) 566-5192 or text me directly at (270) 763-3709.

As an alum, I know what this program means to its students. It completely changed my life in three weeks, and can do the same for you! Plan to come with a positive attitude, plenty of energy, a willingness to learn, and a healthy sense of humor. We love to have fun with music, laugh a lot and work hard at GSA! Should you have any questions, please feel free to call the GSA office where there is a very helpful staff ready to answer any and all questions! Also, you and your parents should always feel

free to contact me directly (at the e-mail address and phone number, both listed earlier in this letter)! I look forward to seeing and especially hearing you soon! Remember to email me (brittcbenningfield@gmail.com) once you've read this letter!

Sincerely,

Dr. Brittany Benningfield
2018 Vocal Music Chairperson
The Kentucky Center Governor's School for the Arts

See you Soon!