

Dear **Vocal Music** Students,

Greetings! My name is Dr. Brittany Benningfield, and on behalf of the Vocal Music Faculty of The Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts (GSA), I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your selection for our 2022 program! You are one of only 31 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 at the end of this letter to let me know!**

As my first order of business, I would like to introduce the members of our 2022 Vocal Music Faculty with whom you will work this summer:

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 **Academia 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 *Academia 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., GSA’s Choral Director, is thrilled to return for his 34th year as a member of the GSA 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 he founded the Bellarmine University Opera Theatre, Dr. Simpson directs the university’s Handbell Ensembles and 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 (including, of course, the Kentucky Opera) and on the east coast. Additionally, he is the Music Director of Louisville’s St. Martha Catholic Church and continues to conduct major liturgical events for the Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville.

Amanda Balltrip, soprano, returns for her 5th 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 8th year as Vocal Music Faculty member, and fourth year as chair of the VM discipline! As a graduate of the **2001 GSA Vocal Music Discipline** (Happy 20th anniversary to me!), 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 recently moved back to Lexington, KY after serving as Voice Area Coordinator and Lecturer of Voice at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, where I taught voice for graduate vocal performance students and undergraduate students majoring in vocal performance, musical theatre, and music education. Outside of applied voice, I taught beginning aural skills, diction, vocal pedagogy, and directed the 2021 SIU Lyric Opera Ensemble's production of Sir Lennox Berkeley's "The Dinner Engagement." 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**, **Black Classical Artists of Louisville**, **Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra**, **Southern Illinois Chamber Music Society**, and **Southern Illinois University** choir and orchestral programs. I won the **Central Region National Association of Teachers of Singing Artist Awards** (NATSAA) competition, and was 1 of 14 semifinalists at the National NATSAA competition, where I won the **Baird-Lunkley Award**. In 2021 I won the Chicago semifinal round of the **Music International Grand Prix** competition, leading to my first time as a finalist in an international competition. In 2018, I covered famed soprano Christine Brewer in Southeast Missouri State University and SIU's co-production of Verdi's "Requiem." When I'm not teaching or performing, I love to sing karaoke!

One of the members of the Vocal Music staff with whom you will all quickly become familiar is our Discipline Assistant, **Trey Darnell**, who joins us for the 3rd time in this crucial role!

Trey Darnell is Lawrenceburg, Kentucky native and is a **2015 GSA Vocal Music Alum!** Trey is currently attending the **University of Kentucky** where he is pursuing a B.M. in Vocal Performance, and currently studies with Dr. Dennis Bender and Dr. Tedrin Lindsay. Trey is currently an ensemble member of the **UK Chorale**, **UK Men's Chorus**, and the **First United Methodist Church** (Downtown) choral scholars program.



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



Mason Rice
Southern Illinois University



Kaleb Hilton
Ryle High School Choir

Johann Van Niekerk
Centre College



Kinly Bertram
Elizabethtown, KY



To start off, 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 your lovely voice faculty, 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 higher ed institutions, including:
 - The Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music** (*Cincinnati, OH*)
 - Murray State University** (*Murray, KY*)
 - Indiana University** (*Bloomington, IN*)
 - 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!

Three IMPORTANT things for which you should be prepared are:

1. **The Sing-Off**
2. **Your Music Theory Placement examination**
3. **Joining our FACEBOOK GROUP**

The first event is very friendly, even though it 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 GSA 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 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 PDF COPY OF THIS SELECTION TO ME BY JUNE 5TH** so that I will be able to pass it on to the pianists who will play this session! PLEASE BE SURE to scan your selection as one PDF file, not as individual PDF file for each page.

Please send it to me at brittcbenningfield@gmail.com .

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.

We know that Facebook has fallen out of vogue with the youth of today; however, the lovely ability to make groups on FB and to share information through the platform is invaluable for how we communicate during GSA. Since we all live on our devices and smartphones, the **GSA 2022 VM Facebook Group** (search for “GSA 2022 – Vocal Music”) will be how we update you with information when we’re not all together as large singing family. If you already have a FB page, go ahead and search for the group, which will be listed as private, and request to join. If you do not have a FB page, please consider asking your parents if it’s okay that you join for GSA purposes. Speaking of parents, there will also be a **GSA VM PARENTS** page that is just for them. Since they aren’t students, they will not be members of the GSA 2022 – Vocal Music page. Your parents can search for “GSA 2022 – Vocal Music Parents and Friends.”

Regarding masks – We ask that you bring enough face masks for 3 weeks at GSA. These do not need to be special “singer” masks – the blue cloth kind, like you get at the hospital, are actually really great and work wonderfully. Please bring more than one with you to studio every day, *just in case you lose one while walking around campus.*

Spending Money: Though housing, meals, room, and board are covered by GSA, you might want a little extra money for GSA merch on-campus or souvenirs during field trips.

Some other 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) We know you’ll be able to use smart devices this year, and if those have a voice recording app, be ready to use those! If you do not have a voice recording app downloaded, there are several that are free and very, very good. You can also bring a handheld voice recorder if you like. You are encouraged to bring iPads/Tablets/Laptops with you to class and lessons. **DO NOT RELY ON HAVING YOUR PHONE WITH YOU.** Phones are strictly to be used only on the residential side of campus. 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 notebook/binder and lots of pencils!
- 4) Please be sure to bring **at least one outfit** that would be “appropriate” for a vocal concert. When you have the opportunity to sing for others, including our masterclass clinicians, you will want to **look** as well as **sound** GREAT.

a) Standard clothing for female-identifying individuals is a dress (or a skirt and blouse) with dress shoes (of reasonable height), or dress pants/slacks with a nice top. 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 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.



b) Standard clothing for male-identifying individuals is a suit, but a sport coat with dress pants is also a perfectly good combination. Additionally, 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!!

c) If you identify as non-binary and are not sure what to wear, feel free to reach out to me (brittcbenningfield@gmail.com). I am happy to help you find something that expresses who you are as a person within the classical performance format.

NOTES – If you are in doubt as to appropriateness of your choices, please consult your parents, your high school Choral Director, or please feel free to text me directly at **(270) 763-3709**.

If you are unable to purchase any items above due to financial reasons, please send GSA your detailed request **IMMEDIATELY** to gsainfo@kentuckyperformingarts.org . We’re happy to help!

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, flexibility, 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 contact the GSA office, where there is a very helpful staff! 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
2022 Vocal Music Chairperson
Governor's School for the Arts, A Program of Kentucky
Performing Arts

See you Soon!