

Dear 2023 VM-er,

Greetings! My name is Dr. Brittany Benningfield, and on behalf of the Vocal Music Faculty of Governor's School for the Arts (GSA), I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your selection for our 2023 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 2023 Vocal Music Faculty with whom you will work this summer:



***Amanda Balltrip***, soprano, returns for her 6th summer as Vocal Music faculty member and is an alumna of the 2001 GSA Musical Theatre Discipline! Ms. Balltrip received her BM and 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*.

Ms. Balltrip teaches at the University of the Cumberland in Williamsburg, KY, at her private studio in Somerset, KY, and is the founder/president of Academy of Allied Musicians, a new non-profit entity that provides music instruction regardless of socio-economic barriers in the Lake Cumberland area. In addition to GSA this summer, she can be heard as a soloist at the Master Musicians Festival in Somerset, KY.

***Thomas Frost*** joins us for his first year as Choral Director! Mr. Frost received his Bachelor of Science in Music at Tennessee State University and his Master of Music with dual concentration in Vocal Performance and Choral Conducting at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Frost's passion for vocal music education was realized during his time at SIU where he taught several music courses and lead the choral program through the pandemic of 2020. Frost made his conducting debut with Nashville in Harmony, an LGBTQIA+ auditioned community ensemble based in Nashville, Tennessee, in winter of 2019. As a performing member of the Paducah Singers, he pioneered artistic directorship of the Paducah Singers Choral Scholars youth outreach program. Frost is continuing his



career in higher education as the Instructor of Music at Dyersburg State Community College, where he instituted the Associate of Science, Music Emphasis degree that will accept its first students in August 2023.



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 30th year as a faculty member of the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts, Mr. Lawrence has his own private voice studio, *Ars Vocalis*, where he continues to share his love of vocal music.

**Angelique Clay**, a coloratura soprano, joins us as VM's guest artist teacher for her second year! Dr. Clay is a graduate of the first GSA Class (1987) and has taught at GSA for over six years. She is Assistant Professor of Voice at the University of Kentucky School of Music, a position she has held since 2007.

A 1995 graduate of Oakwood College, she earned a Master's degree in 1996 and a D.M.A. in 1999 at the University of Kentucky. While a student at UK, Clay won first place in the district Metropolitan Opera auditions in 1997. In 1998 she was featured in a program series called "In Performance at the Governor's Mansion," that showcased former students of the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts. Clay is a member of the American Spiritual Ensemble, a group that seeks to preserve the legacy of the American Spiritual. Founded in 1995 by Everett McCorvey, the group has enjoyed phenomenal success in its programs at opera houses and concert halls in the U.S., South America, Europe, and Japan.



Clay has performed extensively on her own as a recitalist and soloist, having sung in both opera and oratorio productions. She was Fiordligi in *Così fan Tutti*; Rosalinda in *Die Fledermaus*; Susannah in

Floyd's American drama, *Susannah*; the mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*; and Lily and Bess in *Porgy and Bess*. She has been a soloist in productions of the *Messiah*, *Elijah*, and the *Lord Nelson Mass*.



I am **Dr. Brittany Benningfield**, and I'm happy to return to GSA for my 9<sup>th</sup> year as Vocal Music Faculty member, and sixth 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 live in Lexington, KY where I run my own business: Brittany Benningfield Voice Studio and work as an adjunct voice professor at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. Before moving back to Lexington I served 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 and cheer on any UK sports team possible!



In addition to our Vocal Music Faculty, one of the members of this staff with whom you will all quickly become familiar is our Discipline Assistant Matthew Houston. Matthew Houston, of Sadieville, KY graduated with highest honors from the University of Louisville where he received a double Bachelor's in Music Education and Vocal Performance. This is his third summer at GSA where he has been a student, residential advisor, and now discipline assistant. He enjoys travel and has had the pleasure of touring internationally in Asia, Europe, and Africa with the renowned University of Louisville Cardinal Singers. He was recently selected to be a Voces8 U.S. Scholar for the 2023-2024 season. In 2022, attended the Aspen Music festival for the Seraphic Fire Professional Choral Institute. Locally, he enjoys singing with the Louisville Chamber Choir, and is a cantor and section leader at St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church. In 2021, he was elected president of the University of Louisville chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. He

has won multiple NATS competitions for both regional and state conferences including in 2022, 2019, and 2018. He has a passion for choral, consort, and early music performance styles and hopes to one day use his performance experience to teach.

Our Vocal Music Staff also includes wonderful pianists with whom you will all have opportunities to interact:

Mason Rice  
Doug Schultz  
Kaleb Hilton  
Sam Garr  
Angela Eaton

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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)  
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 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 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, Samar and Mr. Lawrence 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 30<sup>TH</sup>** so that I will be able to pass it on to the pianists who will play this session!

**Send it to [brittcbenningfield@gmail.com](mailto:brittcbenningfield@gmail.com)**

PLEASE BE SURE to scan your selection as one PDF file, not as individual PDF file for each page. **PLEASE MAKE SURE** that you do not accidentally chop off 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 2023 VM Facebook Group (search for “GSA 2023 – Vocal Music SESSION TWO”) 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, the FB group page will

go live the week GSA begins, so 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 2023– Vocal Music page. Your parents can search for “GSA 2023 – Vocal Music Parents and Friends SESSION TWO”

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 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.



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](mailto:brittcbenningfield@gmail.com)). I am happy to help you find something that expresses who you are as a person within the classical performance format.

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, 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 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](mailto:brittcbenningfield@gmail.com)) once you've read this letter!**

Sincerely,  
Dr. Brittany Benningfield  
2023 Vocal Music Chairperson  
Governor's School for the Arts

*See you Soon!*