

A woman with her hair in braids, wearing a bright pink, strapless, form-fitting dress, is shown from the waist up. She is looking upwards and to the right, with her mouth open as if singing. The background is a textured, deep blue. The text 'NASHVILLE OPERA' is positioned in the upper right, with a large white circle to the left of the word 'OPERA'.

NASHVILLE OPERA

HBCU
FELLOWSHIP
PROGRAM

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



PROVIDING GREATER ACCESS TO A CAREER IN THE ARTS

Now entering its 5th year, The HBCU Fellowship Program advances one of Nashville Opera’s strategic plan goals, to showcase diverse voices by creating educational programs that enhance access. CEO & Artistic Director John Hoomes says, “We recognize that the opera world has work to do to address discrimination and inequity in our art form, both on and off the stage, and this program is moving the needle toward greater diversity in our industry.”

Originating in 2020, Nashville Opera deepened its existing partnership with two local Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) – Fisk University and Tennessee State University – by collaborating on this innovative project. Guided by advisors at each university, we leveraged Nashville Opera’s resources to help close gaps in curricula.

Students receive conservatory-level masterclasses and mentorship through roundtable discussions and coaching with highly respected teaching artists, most of whom are Black. The program includes workshops on financial literacy, public speaking, audition readiness, and professional presentation.

The goal: a holistic education that prepares participants to choose from a variety of career paths – artistic or administrative.

With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, Opera America, South Arts, and the Mellon Foundation, the program increases access, promotes inclusion, and expands career pathways for developing Black and Brown artists. Dozens of Fisk and TSU students have participated in Nashville Opera’s HBCU Fellowship Program since its inception. It is the first program of its kind and can be replicated in any community across America where professional opera companies and HBCUs coexist.

100% of students agree or strongly agreed that they have:

- a better understanding of the preparation needed to be successful
- expanded interest in opera and western classical vocal music
- improved their creative expression
- increased their singing ability
- knowledge of different careers within performing arts organizations
- greater comfort preparing for an audition

PARTICIPANT PROFILE: ALYSHA NESBITT

Alysha Nesbitt was a member of the first HBCU Fellowship cohort during the 2020.21 academic year. As a student at Tennessee State University, she studied with TSU’s fellowship program coordinator Patrick Dailey.

After graduation, Alysha went on to become a Nashville Opera Mary Ragland Emerging Artist in the 2023 season, starring as Little Red in the Education Tour presentation of *LITTLE RED’S MOST UNUSUAL DAY* and singing the featured role of Kate in the April 2023 mainstage production of Gilbert & Sullivan’s *THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE*.

Most recently, she debuted as Marian Anderson in Nashville Opera’s newest engagement program - *WHEN MARIAN SANG: A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF MARIAN ANDERSON*.

“Being part of the Nashville Opera HBCU Fellowship laid the cornerstone for the flourishing career I am proud to be cultivating today. My favorite part was the masterclass series! All of the insightful feedback and meticulous critiques provided us with the tools that we needed as students to further spark our intellects, get with our coaches, and begin working to unlock the full potential of our gifts!”

- Alysha Nesbitt, Tennessee State University Alumna
2023 Nashville Opera Mary Ragland Emerging Artist





EACH STUDENT RECEIVES:

- Complimentary tickets to all Nashville Opera mainstage performances
- Opportunities to sit in on rehearsals for all mainstage productions
- A minimum of two singing masterclasses, with each student having at least one opportunity to participate with a song of their choosing
- Two private coaching sessions with Nashville Opera Chorusmaster and Director of Engagement, Stephen Carey
- Complimentary ticket to the Friends of Nashville Opera's annual gala, La Bella Notte
- A variety of workshops, including financial wellness, public speaking, careers in the arts, audition preparation, and diction
- Opportunities to engage with the Nashville Opera Mary Ragland Emerging Artists
- Professional headshots
- Professional video recording for their portfolio

STUDENTS SAY:

"I am participating in a Musical Theater Intensive program in London and am utilizing many of the skills I learned through Nashville Opera's Fellowship Program. It gave me the confidence to continue to pursue a career on stage."

- Harlequine Clay, Fisk University Alumna

"The Fellowship program provided me with invaluable experience, allowing me to deeply connect with and embody a diverse range of characters. I learned how to engage an audience on an emotional level, mastering various vocal techniques that enhanced my performance. Additionally, the program taught me how to navigate the industry as an artist and performer, offering essential networking skills. Most importantly, this experience significantly boosted my confidence as a singer, making me more assured in my abilities and future endeavors."

- Ashur Hailey, Tennessee State University Alumna

"I feel like my performance and preparation have improved significantly because I was exposed to many things like the diction class and the masterclasses to help me."

- Anna Sims, Fisk University Rising Sophomore

"I'm seeing students like Harlequine, Cortney, Anastasia, and Eren moving on to experiences abroad or excellent grad programs at schools like Boston University and Longy School of Music at Bard College, due in part to their experiences at Nashville Opera."

- Gwendolyn Brown, Professor of Voice at Fisk University

TEACHERS SAY:

100% of voice teachers have seen:

- improvements in their students' preparation/presentation.
- personal development in their students.
- increased confidence, better time management, clearer understanding of career choice and the requirements and demands of singers
- improved technique, performance, and preparation.

100% of voice teachers said they would recommend other opera companies partner on a fellowship like the Nashville Opera HBCU Fellowship Program.

FELLOWSHIP ALUMNI

20.21 COHORT

- Isaiah Batey
- Alysha Hinton Nesbitt
- David Huery
- Zion Johnson
- Shawna Lewis
- Will Manning
- Khalil McCarthy
- Anatasia Rainbow
- Elaishe Stone
- Cortney Towns
- Katelynn Virgus
- Kendall Warner
- Alexandria Williams

21.22 COHORT

- Eren Brooks
- Harlequine Clay
- Ashur Hailey
- Telyn Hayes
- Shawna Lewis
- Ruby Morton
- Kedrick Noel

22.23 COHORT

- Eren Brooks
- Harlequine Clay
- Ashur Hailey
- Alanna Lee
- Trinity Palms

23.24 COHORT

- Nathalie Best
- Brooklyn Cook
- Laila Cooper
- Keearah Kyles-Flewellen
- Kaylin Lawing
- Alanna Lee
- Trinity Palms
- Anna Sims
- Daisha Venson

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