

Cast Bios

Maya Anand, soprano, is from Saint Louis, Missouri. She is a junior at the University of Missouri, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Music and a Bachelor of Journalism. During her time at MU, she has been involved in University Singers, Ars Nova, and Show-Me Opera. Maya's recent performances include Flower Girl/Chorus Member in Landlocked Opera's production of *Le nozze di Figaro* and covering the role of Tytania in Show-Me Opera's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Maya currently studies voice with Christina Ray and has previously studied Indian classical voice, giving several concerts in her hometown and in cities across India. Maya is also a violinist and plays in the MU Philharmonic Orchestra.

Elise Cressey, soprano, is from Kansas City, Missouri and is a transfer student at the University of Missouri. She is pursuing a BA in music, as well as double majoring in Communications. She is studying voice with Christina Ray and has also performed in a variety of shows, including getting to work with Columbia's local opera company *Landlocked Opera*. Since attending Mizzou, she has participated in University Singers, the university's Bach Collegium Choir, Canticum Novum, and Show-Me Opera. She has competed in NATS throughout college, most recently competing at Mid-MO NATS receiving first place for solo repertoire.

Ja'wan Footman, bass, is a dynamic and exceptionally talented performer who has enchanted audiences with his remarkable skills and charismatic stage presence. Born on February 18, 2000, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, Ja'wan is the proud son of Virginia Charley and Derrick Footman. His journey in the world of performing arts has been nothing short of inspiring. Ja'wan's pursuit of excellence led him to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), where he dedicated himself to the art of music and voice performance. At FAMU, he earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Music with a specialization in Voice Performance. During his time at the university, Ja'wan had the privilege of participating in a wide range of operatic scenes, including renowned productions like *Carmen* and *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)*. He also took part in operatic scenes at Florida State University, further enriching his experience. One of Ja'wan's notable roles was as the Bass Section Leader for the Florida A&M University Concert Choir. His leadership played a pivotal role in guiding the choir to extraordinary achievements, including performances at the Florida Music Educators Association (FMEA), NFL events, and even a historic performance at Carnegie Hall. Ja'wan's commitment to his craft and his dedication to furthering his knowledge and skills have led him to attend prestigious events such as the Music and Medicine Symposium, and the Choral Music of African American Composers, Lectures, and Conductors Symposium. He also took part as a Soloist for CAPP (Coalition of African American in the Performing Arts) Workshop, where he served as the lead singer in a vocal master class. Ja'wan's exceptional talents have garnered recognition, including nominations for the Collegiate Honors Choir Performance at Carnegie Hall and a nomination to perform a solo at the Alabama HBCU ACDA. Currently, Ja'wan Footman continues his artistic journey at the University of Missouri, where he is studying under the guidance of Professor Steven Tharp and Dr. Brandon Boyd as he pursues his Master's in Voice Performance. Ja'wan had the honor in performing as King Balthazar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with the Columbia Civic Orchestra and Choral Arts Alliance of Missouri. His unwavering dedication, boundless talent, and passion for the arts continue to set him on a path toward a bright and promising future in the world of entertainment.

Sopranist **Lucas Gonzaga**, hailing from São Paulo, Brazil, is currently a graduate student and teaching assistant in the voice area at the University of Missouri. Holding a BA in Music Education, Gonzaga is pursuing a Master of Music in vocal performance under the guidance of Prof. Steven Tharp. He is a former harpist at the São Paulo State Youth Orchestra and a soprano in the Academic Choir of the São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra (OESP). One of the winners of the University of Missouri – School of Music's Emerging Artists Competition and Concerto Competition, in 2023, Gonzaga won 2nd place in the advanced treble voice category of NATS – central region, and performed Oberon, the king of the fairies in the Show-me Opera production of Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, under the direction of Prof. Christine Seitz.

Jack Grant, tenor, is in their fourth undergraduate year at the University of Missouri-Columbia studying Music. An active member in the Mizzou School of Music, Jack is the President for the Zeta chapter of the Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia fraternity, as well as the music director and conductor of the Canticum Novum chamber choir, a premier student-led undergraduate chamber ensemble in the state of Missouri. They are currently a member of the Mizzou University Singers, directed by Dr. Brandon Boyd. Since beginning college, Jack has transferred their passion for performing into their work for the Show-Me Opera program, performing in choruses for opera scenes and a full-length production of *Falstaff*. They also have held scene rolls as “Laurie” in *Little Women*, “Guglielmo” in *Così fan tutte*, “Eisenstein” in *Die Fledermaus*, and “Antonio” in a Full-length production of *Le nozze di Figaro*. Jack also works part-time with Hitt Street studios, working with local Columbia artists like *The Brink* and *Paintroom* (in which they played bass guitar), as well as well-known gospel artists such as Josh Runnels and grammy-winner Dorinda Clark-Cole. Jack intends on finishing their current degree before pursuing a master's degree in music education, and then teaching as a high school voice teacher in the public school system before pursuing a doctorate degree in choral conducting.

Kennedy Kinnick, mezzo-soprano, is from Raymore, Missouri and is a sophomore at the University of Missouri. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance. She currently studies voice with Christina Ray. Roles Kennedy has performed include; Cornelia in *Giulio Cesare*, Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and most recently she performed in a featured role in Landlocked Opera's production of *Le Nozze di Figaro*. She is thrilled to be involved in tonight's performance!

Wendy Kleintank, concertmaster, is a junior at the University of Missouri and was raised in North Manchester, Indiana. Wendy is triple-majoring, pursuing a BM in Voice and Violin Performance and a BS in Health Science to go into physical therapy for musician-related injuries. Wendy is a member of Show-Me Opera led by Christine Seitz and the University Philharmonic Orchestra led by Dr. John McKeever. She currently studies voice under Christine Seitz and violin under Eva Szekely. Wendy has received an honorable mention from the MMTA State Competition on voice, an honorable mention from the Odyssey Aria and Concerto Competition, and a first-place award, twice, from the MMTA State Competition on violin. In the summer of 2021, Wendy auditioned and was accepted into the National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America and had the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall. She was also asked to perform *A Family Portrait* with the Manchester Choir at Carnegie Hall in the Spring of 2022. She has performed as solo soprano in the Farnham and Byas' Playhouse production of

Handel's *Messiah*, as well as performed arias in the Show-Me Opera Scenes including performances as Linda from Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix*, Olympia from Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Giulietta from Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and she also had the opportunity to perform the role of Tytania in Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the University of Missouri Show-Me Opera in the Spring of 2023. Recently, Wendy was asked to play alongside the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York City at Carnegie Hall and was asked to play for a masterclass at Carnegie Hall, led by musicians from the Berlin Philharmoniker Orchestra.

Vaysia Knust, Soprano, is currently a Junior at the University of Missouri and hails from Kansas City, MO. Ms. Knust is pursuing a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance where she studies under the direction of Christine Seitz, previously studying with Lori Pinnell and Sarah Haskins. Ms. Knust is a member of the University of Missouri's University Singers, Show-Me Opera, and Hitt Street Harmony. Most recently she performed in Show-Me Opera's 'Opera Scenes' where she played the role of Blonde in Mozart's *Die Entführung*. Previously Ms. Knust has performed the role of Mustardseed in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and she sang the role of Sophie in Massenet's *Werther* in the Staged Arias program. Currently, Ms. Knust is preparing her junior recital and getting ready for her cover role in Landlocked Opera's *L'elisir d'amore* by Donizetti.

Nathan Le, Vietnamese-American tenor, is from Kansas City, Missouri and is currently a senior at the University of Missouri-Columbia where he is pursuing a BM in Vocal Performance. He has performed operatic roles such as Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Kaspar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Basilio in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Bardolfo in *Falstaff*, and chorus in *The Pirates of Penzance*. He has also performed musical theatre roles such as Angel in *RENT*, The Baker in *Into the Woods*, Charlie Brown in *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, and Skipper in *Madagascar: A Musical Adventure*. Apart from his theatrical singing, Nathan is a heavy advocate for Asian art song, particularly from Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. He currently studies with Christina Ray and will pursue a MM in Vocal Performance at the University of Wisconsin-Madison under Dr. Sarah Brailey.

Haley Mesz, soprano, is from Lee's Summit, Missouri and is currently a senior at the University of Missouri-Columbia pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Music and a Bachelor of Science in Finance & Banking. She is studying voice with Christine Seitz and has been singing with the Show-Me Opera, performing the role of Helena in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, covering the role of Marcellina in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, singing soprano in the chorus of Verdi's *Falstaff*, performing scenes as the roles of Julietta in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Marzelline in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Vitellia in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*, Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Romilda in Handel's *Serse*, and soprano in the chorus of *Iolanthe* by Gilbert and Sullivan. In high school, Haley performed in a few shows including portraying the role of Urleen in *Footloose* and Miss Phillips in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Along with that, Haley sang soprano in the Kansas City All-District Choir three years in a row. She also had the chance to intern and sing soprano in the Collegiate Choral Scholars Choir at the Kantorei Summer Choir Institute of Kansas City. Haley has competed in the local NATS competition, receiving honorable mention, and has been involved in ensembles here at Mizzou including University Singers, University Concert Chorale, undergraduate led Canticum Novum Chamber Ensemble, where she

serves as the ensemble's secretary, and has been a part of Dr. R. Paul Crabb's Bach Collegium Choir.

Rach Misner, mezzo-soprano, is from Chesterfield, Missouri, and is currently in their fifth year at the University of Missouri. They are pursuing a B.M. in Vocal Performance, and will be graduating at the end of this semester. They are a proud student of Professor Steven Tharp. Rach has participated in the Show-Me Opera program since their freshman year, and has also been a member of many other ensembles at Mizzou, including University Singers, Concert Chorale, Hitt Street Harmony, Bach Choir, Ars Nova, and Canticum Novum. During the summer of 2022, they had the opportunity to travel to New York to participate in the NYU Summer Study in Musical Theater, working with artists and teachers such as Justin John Moniz, Rona Siddiqui, and Natalie Weiss. In 2023, Rach had the honor of being a Young Artist with Landlocked Opera Inc. Through Landlocked, they covered the role of Jane in the world premiere of *The Murderess*, and also covered Cherubino and performed as one of the Due Donne in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Through Show-Me-Opera, Rach has performed in five Fall Opera Scenes programs. They were also a member of the chorus in *Pirates of Penzance*, and have had the opportunity to perform roles such as Meg Page in *Falstaff*, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Along with preparing and performing the role of Ariodante this semester, Rach is also auditioning for graduate schools in the hopes of pursuing their Master's Degree in Vocal Performance. They will also be performing their Senior Recital in April of this year, and co-organizing and performing in a Korean Art Song recital in early May. They are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to perform in their final opera production at Mizzou, alongside friends who inspire them, and under the guidance of Professor Seitz.

carris o'bleness, bass-baritone, comes from Kansas City, Missouri and has been participating in vocal music since their junior year of high school. Now a fifth-year student under Professor Christine Seitz, they are working toward a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies with focus areas in foreign language, linguistics, & musicology. For Landlocked Opera, carris most recently covered the role of Antonio in the 60's-inspired production of *Le nozze di Figaro*. With Show-Me Opera, they have also covered the role of Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro*, as well as Nick Bottom in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Alongside operatic singing, they have performed with the MU University Singers, Hitt Street Harmony, Ars Nova, and many other choral ensembles. carris is a proud Sinfonian & alumnus of the Zeta chapter of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia. carris recently won second place in the upper undergraduate lower voice Classical category at the 2023 Central Region NATS Competition.

Jessica Scearce, Stage Manager, is a soprano from Gower, Missouri. She is currently a senior at the University of Missouri, where she is pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Hospitality Management, as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music. She is studying with Professor Christine Seitz and has been a member of the Show-Me Opera for four years. This semester she has taken on the role of Stage Manager for the Show-Me Opera's production of *Ariodante* by Handel. Last semester, she played the role of Rosalinde from Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* as well as the role of Mother in Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. She has also sung the role of Peter Quince in Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and she has performed in the chorus of Verdi's *Falstaff* as well as Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* during the Show-Me Opera's annual

productions. During the opera scenes programs, she has sung the roles of Romilda in Handel's *Serse*, as well as Vitellia in Mozart's *La Clemenza de Tito*.

Carter Thieman, bass, is from St. Charles, Missouri and is currently a freshman at the University of Missouri. He is pursuing a degree in Music Education, Voice, along with a minor in French. He studies voice with Steven Tharp, is a member of the Show Me Opera under the direction of Christine Seitz, and a member of the University Singers under the direction of Brandon Boyd. He also is a member of ensembles both based in Columbia and in St. Louis. He also enjoys collaborating with his peers by playing the piano for their private lessons. He has performed the roles Corny Collins in *Hairspray* and Herald in *The Boar's Head*. He placed as a finalist in the Classical and Musical Theater Categories in the 2023 NATS competition.

Sam Varnon, tenor, is from Cape Girardeau, Missouri. He is a senior at the University of Missouri, where he is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Music and studies voice with Christine Seitz. As a member of Show-Me Opera, he covered the role of Lysander in last year's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and he sang the role of Don Curzio in the 2022 production of *Le nozze di Figaro*. He has also sung the roles of Blind in *Die Fledermaus*, Jacquino in *Fidelio*, Hawthorne in *Love in a Village*, Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Colin in *L'amant anonyme* in opera scenes programs. Sam is a member of the MU University Singers under the direction of Dr. Brandon A. Boyd and serves as University Singers President and Tenor II Section Leader. He has previously sung in Hitt Street Harmony, Canticum Novum, and University Glee Club. As a sophomore, Sam received the MU School of Music Sophomore Award of Merit. Additionally, in 2021, he won the Missouri Music Teachers Association voice competition in the undergraduate lower division, and he was a semifinalist in the Central Region National Association of Teachers of Singing competition in the lower classical division. In the summer of 2022, Sam spent two weeks singing in New York as a selected participant in the NYU Classical Voice Intensive.