

Biographies

Hailed by the Los Angeles Times as “Impressive,” South African baritone, **Dr. CHRISTIAN BESTER**, made his professional debut as Schaunard in *La Bohème* for Pro Musica Theater in South Africa and his European debut as Zaremba in *Polin Blut* at the Americke Jaro Festival in the Czech Republic. Additional critically acclaimed roles include Max Detweiler (Tulsa Opera), Pa Zengner (Painted Sky Opera), Major General, Gianni Schicchi, Don Giovanni, Count Almaviva, Belcore, Enrico, Marcello, Germont, Aeneas, Guglielmo, Escamillo, Prince Moritz Popolescu, Basil (Der Graf von Luxemburg), and Dr. Malatesta. Orchestral engagements include the Fort Worth Symphony, KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra, Manitowoc Symphony, Lone Star Wind Orchestra, Allen Philharmonic, and Dallas Symphony Orchestra League. As a Professional Fellow, Dr. Bester participated in Songfest, one of the United States of America’s premier festivals dedicated solely to art songs, working with titans in the art song field, such as Graham Johnson, Libby Larson, and Martin Katz. His research interests focus on marginalized social groups and exposing Afrikaans Art Song Literature to a wider audience. Several peer-reviewed articles have been published in the NATS Journal of Singing and the Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa. *Afrikaans Art Song Literature: Translation and Pronunciation Guide*, co-authored with Dr. Forbay, was published by Oxford University Press in 2025. Dr. Bester served as the Artistic Director for Voces Intimae: The Art of Song, a nonprofit organization that brings Art Songs to the Dallas/Fort Worth community. He is a sought-after recitalist, presenter, and clinician with regular presentations, performances, and masterclasses throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Dr. Bester currently serves as Assistant Professor of Voice at the Greenwood School of Music at Oklahoma State University.

Dr. BRONWEN FORBAY, hailed by *Opera Magazine* for her “powerful, radiant, timbrally beautiful” soprano, is a Durban-born South African Fulbright Scholar acclaimed across three continents in opera, concert, and recital. Operatic highlights include Queen of the Night (*The Magic Flute*), Orasia (*Orpheus*, U.S. premiere), Adina (*L’Elisir d’amore*), Velmyra (*Wading Home*), Violetta (*La Traviata*), and Lucia (*Lucia di Lammermoor*). On the concert stage, she has performed major works by Bach, Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven, as well as contemporary pieces like Miller’s *ReWind Cantata* and Mnomiya’s *Inggai sivele we-Africa*.

A passionate recitalist, presenter, and clinician, Forbay has performed in South Africa, the U.S., and Europe, including Paris's Les Arts Georges V and Los Angeles with pianist Dr. Stephen Pierce. She has received numerous honors, including the Standard Bank Young Artist Award (2007) and first prize in the UNISA Southern African Voice Competition (2005). She was selected for the NATS Intern Program in 2013 and served on faculty at the Schmidt Vocal Arts Summer Institute in 2025.

Recent engagements include solo appearances with the Johannesburg and KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestras, a recital with organist Dr. Charles Tompkins, and Contessa Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) with the Greenville Symphony.

Dr. Forbay is an Associate Professor of Voice at Furman University and has taught at institutions in both South Africa and the U.S. She holds degrees from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Manhattan School of Music, SMU, and CCM, and is the first South African woman to earn a DMA in Voice Performance. A committed scholar and leader, she has coauthored articles in the NATS Journal of singing as well as the “first of its kind” resource *Afrikaans Art Song Literature: A Translation and Pronunciation Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2025), all with Dr. Christian Bester. She has presented widely at NATS, CMS, and ICVT, co-founded the South Africa Chapter of NATS (2022) and served as President of Furman's BFSA (2024–2025).

Dr. VIVIAN HAMILTON is a collaborative artist in the Furman University Music Department. She previously served as a Lecturer of Music and Director of Belle Voci at Furman University, and as the Minister of Music and Worship at First Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. Dr. Hamilton has been a singer in the Robert Shaw Institute Festival Singers, where she had the opportunity to work with Robert Shaw, and studied conducting with Dan Lewis and Edvard Tchivzhel. She has worked with choirs at Simmons College, Emerson College, the University of South Carolina, Northeastern University, and Clemson University. For twelve years, she conducted the Greater Anderson Musical Arts Consortium Chorale and is a former president of the South Carolina American Choral Directors Association. Her choral conducting experience also includes work at Baptist and Methodist churches in Massachusetts and South Carolina, and in the public schools of Boston and upstate South Carolina.

Formerly the Principal Keyboardist for the Greenville Symphony Orchestra, playing celeste, piano, and harpsichord, Dr. Hamilton received her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in choral conducting from the University of South Carolina, her Master's degree in piano performance from New England Conservatory of Music, and her Bachelor's degree in Music Education from Furman University.