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Soprano Melissa Shippen Burrows wins
Opera Birmingham's 33rd Annual Vocal Competition

Birmingham, Ala. – Soprano Melissa Shippen Burrows of Nashville, Tenn. was awarded first prize in the 33rd Annual **Opera Birmingham** Vocal Competition on Sunday evening, May 23, 2011. Melissa finished first among 74 contestants with performances of “Si, mi chiamano Mimi” from Puccini’s *La bohème* and “I want magic” from Previn’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She received the Martha Dick McClung Award of \$3,500 and will be presented in **Opera Birmingham**’s “Catch a Rising Star Recital” which will open the 2011-2012 performance season on November 6, 2011. Countertenor Ray Chenez of Tallahassee, Fla. received second prize with his offerings of “Chacun à son goût” from Strauss’ *Die Fledermaus* and “Furibondo spira il vento” from Handel’s *Partenope*. Mr. Chenez won the Birmingham Opera Guild Award in the amount of \$2,500. Third place was awarded to baritone Nicholas Pallesen of Woodbridge, Va. for his performances of “Largo al factotum” from Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and “O du mein holder Abendstern” from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* with a prize of \$2,000. Mr. Pallesen was also the recipient of the Audience Favorite Award of an additional \$1,000.

Mezzo-soprano Katherine Lerner of Brooklyn, N.Y. placed fourth with performances of “O mio Fernando” from Donizetti’s *La favorita* and “Habañera” from Bizet’s *Carmen*. Ms. Lerner received a prize of \$1,500. A fifth prize of \$1,000 was awarded to baritone Adam Cannedy of Brookline, Mass. for his performances of “Aleko’s cavatina” from Rachmaninoff’s *Aleko* and “Bella siccome un angelo” from Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale*.

In addition to receiving prize monies to help foster their careers, all finalists will be considered for performance opportunities with **Opera Birmingham** and other companies represented by the judges. Judging the 2011 Competition were Robert Gilder, Founder & Managing Director of Robert Gilder & Co., with offices in London, New York, Paris and the Balkans; John D. Jones, General Director of **Opera Birmingham**; and David O’Dell, General & Artistic Director of **Amarillo Opera**. The 2011 Competition was made possible by prize sponsors Nanci Chazen, The Birmingham Opera Guild, Michael J. and MaryAnne Freeman, Jane Paris and Dr. Chandler Smith, Sara Sistrunk, and Tallie Dillard.

Opera Birmingham, the only professional opera company in Northern and Central Alabama, has entertained audiences for over 55 years. Additional information may be found at www.operabirmingham.org. Follow **Opera Birmingham** on Facebook and You Tube by searching “Opera Birmingham” and on Twitter @operabham. **Opera Birmingham** is pleased to be a part of The Year of Alabama Music celebration.

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Melissa Shippen Burrows

