



BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Commencement

2024



RYAN SPEEDO GREEN, Doctor of Music

Citation by Ireri E. Chávez-Bárceñas, *Assistant Professor of Music*

Ryan Speedo Green, gifted bass-baritone, three-time Grammy Award winner, and acclaimed artist at the world's leading opera houses. You delight audiences with your rich, deep, and velvety voice. With fine artistry, you balance the vocal and dramatic demands of extraordinary works of art to convey joy, fear, hope, compassion, and willpower. Here at Bowdoin, you also inspire us with your powerful life story—an unlikely journey from juvenile detention and solitary confinement to the threshold of opera stardom.

Your story represents the transformative power of great mentors, like Bette Hughes, your fourth-grade teacher, and Robert Brown, your voice teacher, who lovingly taught you to have the confidence to be anything you wanted to be. At just fifteen, when you saw African American mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves starring as *Carmen* at the Metropolitan Opera, you became determined to sing on that stage one day.

In opera, you found purpose, passion, and a true sense of belonging, not without defying many misconceptions. Opera carries complex racial and class legacies, posing daunting challenges for singers of color. But through sheer will and perseverance, you are now taking on increasingly demanding roles, including Escamillo in *Carmen*, on the very stage you once dreamed of singing.

You are also giving voice to current and relevant stories that resonate with broader communities. Now full-house audiences, notably more diverse, go to the Met to see you playing the roles of Emile in *Champion* and Charles in *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* by Terence Blanchard, the first African American composer to be staged at the Met. Your own story of resilience and your powerful voice enhance the depth and resonance of characters like Charles—especially in moments like the “storm scene” when he, overcoming a life of trauma and hardship, passionately sings:

*There once was a storm when I was young.
But still I grow, still I remain.
My roots run deep. I draw my strength from underneath.
I bend, I don't break! I sway.*

Your artistry, courage, and the uplifting example of your personal journey continue to inspire and transform the opera world.

President Zaki, on behalf of the College, I am honored to present Ryan Speedo Green for the degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*.