

cover story

Team Player: Baritone Lucas Meachem

Baritone Lucas Meachem didn't take the traditional path to his successful opera career. He transferred schools three different times during his undergraduate years. He landed his first professional gig after tagging along with a friend to two YAP auditions. And he decided to accept a fellowship with a prestigious opera company rather than finish his degree. Now, with upcoming engagements around the world, Meachem says he has no regrets. He took the best opportunities available to him—and the opportunities keep coming.
by Claudia Friedlander



photo by Natasha Sadikin

24

features

36 Carrying a Larger Footprint:

Q&A with Christopher Mattaliano
Portland Opera's general director
discusses the company's new summer
festival format and much more.
by Kathleen Buccleugh

42 So You Want to Teach Voice: How to Start Your Own Private Studio

From what to charge to how to find
students to how to get them to pay
and keep coming, established singers/
teachers share the ins and outs of
beginning a private studio.
by Joanie Brittingham

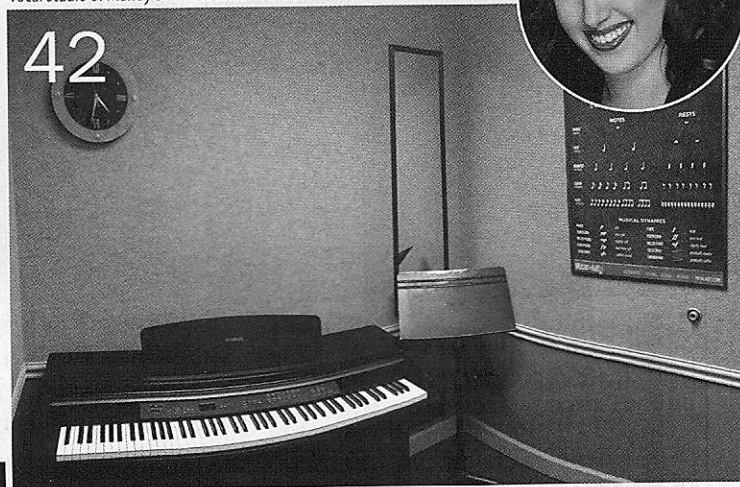
48 The Old and the New: Jason Tramm

Conductor Jason Tramm seems to be
everywhere all at once in his roles as
director of music at Ocean Grove Great
Auditorium, assistant professor at Seton
Hall University, and now artistic director
of MidAtlantic Opera. Learn more about
how Tramm juggles it all and his exciting
plans for his new opera company,
including a Young Artist Program
starting in fall 2016.
by Mark Watson

52 Practicing Efficiently

Take the practice skills you learned while
an undergrad to the next level to, in turn,
take your career to the next level.
by Laura Portune

Vocal studio of Mandy Brown located in the store Music & Arts.



48



Jason Tramm

photo by David Gary Gold



THE OLD & THE NEW

JASON TRAMM

BY MARK WATSON

Conductor Jason Tramm seems to be everywhere all at once in his roles as director of music at Ocean Grove Great Auditorium, assistant professor at Seton Hall University, and now artistic director of MidAtlantic Opera. Learn more about how Tramm juggles it all and his exciting plans for his new opera company, including a Young Artist Program starting in fall 2016.

Jason Tramm

photo by John Gladisch

Jason Tramm is the founder and artistic director of a new opera company, the MidAtlantic Opera. Previously Tramm served as artistic director and principal conductor of the New Jersey State Opera succeeding the late Alfredo Silipigni. For the past nine years he has held the post of director of music, in residence, at the historic Ocean Grove Great Auditorium. Tramm continues the 145-year-old tradition of great summer music making at Ocean Grove, which has featured many of the 20th century's most celebrated vocal artists. His 2009 PBS broadcast of *Verdi's Requiem: Live from Ocean Grove* merited a regional Emmy Award nomination.

Tramm also serves as the director of Choral Activities at Seton Hall University, where he leads the University Chorus, Chamber Choir, and University Orchestra and teaches voice and conducting. Maestro Tramm has led operatic and symphonic performances in Italy, Romania, Albania and, most recently, Hungary, where he recorded an album of rarely heard French operatic arias with the Szeged Symphony Orchestra.

Why did you start a new company?

The 2010 financial crisis demanded that organizations adapt quickly and reimagine their role and value in the community. After the New Jersey State Opera shut their doors, I wanted to experiment with a different art/business paradigm and decided to start something new. I named our new company MidAtlantic Opera because I want to bring performances to expanded communities and venues within the Mid-Atlantic region.

What is your attraction to opera?

Opera is the most collaborative art form. Every single part of the puzzle is important. I have a love of people, I am a natural collaborator . . . and I originally started off as a comprimario tenor. When I was a doctoral student, I was mentored by a wonderful conductor, Alfredo Silipigni, founder of the New Jersey State Opera, who hired me as his chorus master and assistant conductor. I watched the musical and psychological process he used to get the very best from the singers.

As a conductor you have to have an opinion on the phrasing, the harmony, and everything that goes into your interpretation—but then you have to listen to what singers have to say. When I work with really good colleagues, they bring so much into their roles. We can shed light on each other during the musical process.

What are some of your plans?

We plan to increase our budget and the number of productions—and to keep finding young singers who deserve to be at that regional level going toward international careers. Running an opera company at the beginning of its life cycle means I must balance risk.

Eventually, I very much would love to create new operas, bring some new composers to light, and explore the boundaries of what opera can be.

What about outreach programs or touring?

We are going to launch a Young Artist Program in the fall of 2016 to give talented young professional singers a

chance to hone their skill on the stage. The location we are exploring will hopefully be between Philadelphia and New York to give singers throughout the Mid-Atlantic region easy access to this program. The formation of this program will be an important part of the season plans for 2016-17.

What is your audition process?

I hold agent auditions in New York—we have had at least 8 to 10 agents' rosters of people who came in. But before I even begin the audition process, I have already started looking in the field. I know many of the finest coaches in New York, and they refer me to singers. These coaches hear auditions every day. I also scout constantly. So I do my homework in advance.

I am up late, I'm up early, I go to performances to see who is on the rise. And then I always run auditions,

because I miss people or I want to hear people again. It is amazing what a change in teacher or coach can do for an artist.

When you are deciding whom to engage, what are you listening and looking for?

You look for something interesting, something unique. You look for something that is innately expressive. Of course the technique has to be ingrained. But you look for a singer with communicative powers and with a special vocal instrument.

By special, what do you mean?

Depends on the artist. Every artist is different, and I learned this with Silipigni—you look for knowledge of style, but you look for someone who communicates that style and gives you the depth of the character they are

pursuing. Someone who has that extra communicative ability, who bleeds the music in everything they do.

So when you hear a singer, do you tend to make a decision early on as you hear them sing or do you change your mind as the aria progresses?

Usually I can tell in the first 10 bars. You see it from every ounce of what they do. It is not, "I am singing an aria." It is, "I am the character. I inhabit this world." Some do, some don't. I learned that from Silipigni, by sitting with him at auditions, by watching him coach great singers and discussing what it means to have an Italianate sound.

How do YouTube clips and singers' websites factor in when you are choosing a singer?

They are tools. But I always have to hear the singer in person. Voices

TOI! Taos Opera Institute

An integrated and intensive training program focused on YOU!

June 2016

www.TaosOI.org



Artistic Director
Mary Jane Johnson



Program Director
Linda Poetschke

“If the artist can’t handle the role vocally, it doesn’t matter what they look like because the whole world of that composer’s music falls apart. So for me, the voice must come first.”

change. And I want to see how the voice projects in a hall.

When you hear singers, is there any common denominator of something that is missing from many of them?

If the technique is not good, it is like a cake that is half baked. You shouldn’t be auditioning for people until your technique is solid. Technique is the tool to get you to the next level of artistry.

Artistry is the combination of technique and expression. And if either of those two is out of balance, the artist isn’t complete. I often hear incomplete artists. I see something I really like, but one side of the yin and yang is out of balance.

Which one will be the more lacking, the interpretation or the technique?

Depends on the artist. Sometimes it’s style. Sometimes it is truly not what a true legato is, how to make a pure line. That was something Silipigni was adamant about. I think a lot of this is ingrained by our mentors and teachers: a singer has to be with people who have been on those major stages, who have played those roles, who have been through the process.

A lot of times I hear hollow performances—all the notes are right, but there is so much more to give. Coaching and studying with old-school mentors is so important, but many of the great proponents of this art are no

longer with us now. I say, if you are a young person, be around older singers. The only way you can become steeped in the old-school traditions is to seek these folks out and treasure their advice.

One coach asked me to discuss singers singing music that is too big for them.

That is a chronic problem. What someone can sing in an audition is very different from what someone can sing over an orchestra. I hear voices that audition with me for Verdi, but if you put them in front of a large orchestra, they will disappear. They will be “pedal to the metal” the whole time, which is very unhealthy for the voice and will

THE PACKARD HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH
The Complete Works

NOW AVAILABLE

Gellert Songs

Edited by Darrell M. Berg
978-1-933280-36-3 (140 pp.) \$20

Cramer and Sturm Songs

Edited by Anja Morgenstern
978-1-933280-35-6 (208 pp.) \$25

Miscellaneous Songs

Edited by Christoph Wolff
978-1-933280-78-3 (304 pp.) \$35

The Polyhymnia Portfolio

Edited by Christoph Wolff
978-1-938325-23-6 (220 pp.) \$55

Please see website for a complete list of available and forthcoming volumes.

Phone orders: (800) 243-0193

Web orders: www.cpebach.org

strip the velvet off the voice. You are much better going with repertoire that is suited to your instrument.

How does a singer know if a piece is suited or unsuited for him or her?

That's where the role of the teachers and coaches is crucial. The right coach or teacher makes or breaks a singer constantly. In judging competitions, you see that there are a lot of teachers who produce results. There are certain teachers who just "know," who place their students in the position to move to the next level in auditions or competitions. Competitions give singers a chance to break into the professional opera world.

My best advice for aspiring singers is to find those teachers and do whatever you can to study with them. The competition circuit is important to gain that edge, but it is not about winning. It's about expression. Finding the right mentor is everything—and sometimes a mentor who is perfect for one person may not be right for someone else. I feel for young singers. The right mentor is one of the most difficult and important people to find.

What about physical appearance?

Well, we are a very visual society these days. To me, the voice comes first; I am old fashioned that way. I don't want to see a Turandot who looks like a Barbie model who can't sing the role. And so often that happens.

I have gone to major houses and been very disappointed with the quality of sound that comes out of a singer. If the artist can't handle the role vocally, it doesn't matter what they look like because the whole world of that composer's music falls apart. So for me, the voice must come first.

So what projects do you have in the immediate future?

My 2015–2016 season is taking shape around a trilogy of projects that address themes of voice and vision—truly music for peace. I've been inspired by my colleagues and our work on the board of an interfaith dialogue organization. The more frequently we learn of acts of violence and terrorism throughout the world, the more I realize how important and powerful it is to use the beauty of the arts—and especially music—to foster communications.

One of the most natural ways for people across cross-cultural boundaries to communicate is through the arts. I'll be exploring this theme in three events, culminating with "Prayer for Peace," a concert at Carnegie Hall featuring soloists, the MidAtlantic Opera Orchestra, and Seton Hall University Chorus. I am especially excited that we will have our dress rehearsal at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark where, as part of our outreach program, we will invite students from inner city schools. For many of them, this will be their first exposure to live classical music.

The repertoire will present music from composers of various faiths that was born out of strife, all making a universal statement for peace and understanding.

After that, I am looking forward to the MidAtlantic Opera's next fully staged production of *Madame Butterfly* taking place in the spring of 2016. An exciting year indeed!

Mark Watson has performed roles with the Opera Orchestra of New York, Baltimore Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Connecticut Opera, and other regional companies. He is a frequent soloist in orchestra pops concerts and has sung in Israel, in Italy, and on national television in Japan. Upcoming engagements include concerts in Nassau, Bahamas, and Pescara, Italy. Last January, he made his fourth appearance at Carnegie Hall. In 2014, Watson was presented as an Artist of the Year at the Max M. Fisher Music Center in Detroit. There he premiered David DiChiera's hauntingly beautiful "A Letter to Sarah" for baritone, voice, and trumpet. Watson completed his studies on full scholarship in the post-graduate opera program at the Juilliard School. CS

KabukiGlasses™

Upgrade Your Seat!



The Ultimate Binoculars, Made with Japan's Craftsmen



\$ 300 Made in Japan

Design Pat. D703,254 / Patent Pending

Hands Free & No Shake

Auto Focus Instantly

Ultra Bright Lens & Prisms

Light!
3.3oz
92g

4x 13mm Ideal for Theatres

KabukiGlasses™, now available at the following stores



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA SHOP
shop.sfopera.com

Met Opera Shop

metoperashop.org



B&H
PHOTO - VIDEO - PRO AUDIO
bhphotovideo.com



Ultra Bright Lens!





www.kabukiglasses.com

SANTEPLUS, Inc. (Kobe, Japan)

SANTEPLUS