

Something to Say—and Sing

MATTHEW ROSE (OPERA '03) JOURNEYS BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND REINVENTION

BY MATTHEW BARKER

“Playing, singing, is not merely a matter of demonstrating expertise, of eliciting through superior showmanship and virtuosity the admiration, even adulation, of an audience. Make no mistake about it, the industry wants you to think that that’s the case. The recording industry, the managers, the business people—they’re out there looking for the flash in the pan at which they can throw \$20 million in merchandising and try to sell a lot of CDs. But the real question is, if you get to be one of those people, what are you going to say? Do you have something to say?” – Robert Levin



Matthew Rose PHOTO: CLIVE BARDA

The 2009 Curtis commencement speech by pianist and scholar Robert Levin, which has circulated the globe via the Internet, has left numerous musicians reexamining their place—and the place of classical music—in the twenty-first century. Invariably some musicians will disappoint, when measured against Dr. Levin’s challenge. But through a recent series of e-conversations I could plainly see what both critics and audiences have noted in recent years: that Curtis alumnus Matthew Rose (Opera ’03) indeed has much to say.

Due to his hectic schedule, Mr. Rose and I spoke “through the ether” as he puts it, from Norway and from his home in Sussex, England. Even through cyberspace it was clear this was a musician with a sense of purpose. Says Mr. Rose, “I think that in this day and age when there are so many different ways of being a performer, one has to be open to many different ways of performing, so that means being able to access a huge array of skills. I am not saying that one has to be a complete expert in each field, but one has to have a certain amount of knowledge and understanding of the style and techniques of each. Hopefully then you can use the expertise and trust of the conductors and musicians around you to do a good job.”

This straightforward approach appears to be paying off in spades for the thirty-one-year old bass-baritone. The Grammy Award-winning singer has compiled an impressive résumé that ranges from Baroque to contemporary. His operatic engagements include La Scala, the Glyndebourne Festival, the Opera Company of Philadelphia, Houston Grand Opera, and

the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, among others, with renowned conductors such as Michael Tilson Thomas, Colin Davis, and Charles Dutoit.

This past autumn offered several major appearances for Mr. Rose, with a string of performances of both *The Seasons* and *The Creation* with John Eliot Gardiner at Carnegie Hall and in Vienna’s Musik-verein, along with arguably the most widely publicized musical event of the year: the inaugural concerts of Gustavo Dudamel at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Mr. Rose is impressed by the fundamental approach “the Dude” (as the orchestra has dubbed its new music director) uses when working with musicians. “Gustavo Dudamel is a force of nature, and with his magnetism and joy for life and music, he brings a very positive feeling to everything around him ... Other conductors are not as positive and can get the best out of people by cajoling and bullying them into playing well. I prefer the more positive approach myself and know that I can do my best when I am feeling good about myself and what I am bringing to the performance, not that I don’t mind being corrected or led down a certain way of thinking.”

The latter idea should still be fresh in his memory, seeing as it has only been six years since Mr. Rose was a student of Marlena Kleinman Malas and Mikael Eliassen, a period he still cherishes. “We were very lucky in the opera department in that we were always treated as though we were professional singers ... Curtis is very much a school of ‘learning by doing,’ and I am so grateful that I was allowed to ‘do’ so much when I was there. I went from Curtis



Matthew Rose as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Benjamin Britten
PHOTO: TAYLOR HOOPER

to the Royal Opera House as a young artist and very much felt that I was ready to do my job when I got there.”

Perhaps more at the heart of Mr. Rose’s success is his ineffably infectious charm and personality, as witnessed first-hand by Curtis opera student Kevin Ray, a chorus member to Mr. Rose’s Leporello this past summer in Santa Fe Opera’s production of *Don Giovanni*. Mr. Ray recalls being impressed with Mr. Rose’s vocal prowess, but it was the alumnus’s charisma that demanded admiration. “He’s like a stage animal,” Mr. Ray said. “He can do whatever he wants and has complete control over his character. He has the audience in the palm of his hand.”

This infectious positivity, combined with fearsome vigilance and dedication, has allowed this young man from Sussex to make his mark in a world where a classical singer is in the minority. “We obviously do what we do because we believe that our music has a place in modern society,” says Mr. Rose. “We all know the way our music can massively affect the human spirit, and we must realize that if we do not continue

to perform these great works then they will die and just be manuscripts sitting in libraries around the world. We have to fight for our place and try as individuals to persuade people of the validity of what we do as performers and the greatness of the works we perform...

“It is not going to be easy,” he continues, “but we must keep music alive. Do we do this by continuing as we are or do we have to keep reinventing ourselves and the way we perform? I think these are questions we should all ask ourselves. And let us hope that the audiences come along on the journey with us.” ♦

Matthew Rose’s upcoming engagements include return appearances at Covent Garden and Glyndebourne, as well as his Metropolitan Opera debut in November 2011.

For more information visit www.askonasholt.co.uk/artists/singers/bass/matthew-rose.

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WHAT’S ON MATTHEW ROSE’S IPOD?

Matthew Rose professes to love a wide variety of music, but what is currently at the top of his playlist?

“I am a bit obsessed with *The Seasons* by Haydn, which I have been performing lots ... cannot get enough of that. I’m also loving the new Simon Rattle cycle of the Brahms symphonies with the Berlin Philharmonic, and Lorraine Hunt Lieberson singing Handel arias. I have to say that the iPod comes in handy when wanting to familiarize yourself with music that you will be performing in the future. It is the greatest invention for the classical musician since the metronome!” ♦