



Anastasiia Sidorova as Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* PHOTO: KARLI CADEL

## The Right Moment

ANASTASIIA SIDOROVA SET HER SIGHTS ON THE STAGE AS A CHILD IN RUSSIA. HER DEBUT CAME AT CURTIS.

BY DAVE ALLEN

“Everything in my life seems to happen at the right time.”

It wasn’t mere serendipity that brought Anastasiia Sidorova to Curtis, much less to the United States. She has applied such determination and unwavering commitment to the greatest challenges in her life and career—choosing to study music in a conservatory setting, and moving from her native Russia to pursue it—that each step, and each success, has had the feeling of inevitability.

Then, when you consider that in her first-ever opera—a small role in Tchaikovsky’s *Iolanta*, with the Curtis Opera Theatre in 2014—she ended up singing in her native language, Anastasiia’s life, and her nascent career, begin to seem charmed indeed.

That initial stage appearance, years in the making, has given way to a pursuit of opera on all fronts, many of which have come as a surprise to this young mezzo-soprano. A native of Saint Petersburg, Anastasiia first came to Curtis for Summerfest during the summer of 2013, and then entered Curtis in 2014 at age 19 as a student in the undergraduate voice program.

Among the surprises: She’s been prompted to re-examine her vocal range. “I thought I was this dark alto-mezzo,” she says, and that sound captivated Mikael Eliassen, artistic director of the Curtis Opera Theatre and Hirsig Family Dean of Vocal Studies, during her audition.

He heard potential for a different, higher *fach* in it as well. “For my role in *La scala di seta*, I said to him, ‘it’s too high! I can’t do it!’” she recalls. He was adamant, though, and Anastasiia persevered in her second role at Curtis. “He loves to stretch your possibilities,” she says of Mr. Eliassen, and thanks to his continued encouragement and guidance by her private teacher, adjunct voice faculty Julia Faulkner, she’s now regularly performing music in the high-mezzo range.

Her emergence has come about gradually, with smaller roles at Curtis paving the way for a breakthrough as Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* last spring. “At first, it was just a simple character to me—just young and cute,” she says. She dug deeper into Cherubino to find strong emotions, playing this headstrong teenage boy with ardent, big-hearted three-dimensionality, and she now sees much of her operatic future coming in other “trouser roles.”

### FORTHRIGHT APPROACH

Music has always stirred strong feelings in Anastasiia, and while she admits her indifference to all non-musical subjects during her youth, early experiences of attending performances at the famed Mariinsky Theatre and of singing patriotic songs for national celebrations made indelible impressions on her. Before starting high school, she decided to enter Rimsky-Korsakov Musical College—she says she didn’t ask her parents for permission,



Anastasiia Sidorova holds the Casiana Hilton Annual Fellowship.



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instead simply declaring that this was her plan—and she has taken a similarly forthright approach to her progress at Curtis. “I don’t just want to study acting out of a book in a classroom—I’d rather just do it!” she says. “It’s so much more useful to do it in the context of real opera directing.”

“She’s already such a responsible professional and an unbelievably hard worker,” says soprano Kirsten MacKinnon, a recent Curtis graduate with a blossoming career of her own who has been a mentor to Anastasiia. “We’ve had so many conversations about acting and preparation, and that’s really exciting to hear, especially in younger singers.”

Much of Anastasiia’s stage experience has come under Jordan Fein, who has directed numerous Curtis Opera Theatre productions over the past three years, including Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia* last fall. Fein noted that she made remarkable progress as an artist in the year between *The Rake’s Progress* in 2015, when she portrayed Mother Goose, and *Figaro* in 2016, when her Cherubino made a strong impression on cast, audience, and director alike. “She’s so clear about what she can bring to a role,” Mr. Fein says. “I can give her a note, and she’ll do something that’s exactly the thing I said, but on her own terms.”

During her third year at Curtis, Anastasiia’s musical and professional growth has been spurred further through participating in Opera Philadelphia’s Emerging Artists Program. As she has covered roles and taken part in rehearsals, she is looking ahead to the world of professional opera that awaits her. “Anastasiia has taken full advantage of everything that’s available to her,” says Mr. Eliassen, who recommended her for the program. Since coming to Curtis, he adds, “she has continued on her path in a wonderful way.”

That path has continued to hold surprises, like last year’s collaboration between Curtis Opera Theatre and the Curtis Symphony Orchestra for Berio’s *Sinfonia*. In its boundary-pushing strangeness and complexity, that experience was something she says she never could have imagined doing before coming to Curtis: “After the performance, I had this combination of relief and excitement—like, ‘I *did* this!’”

This unexpected affinity for contemporary music has extended into her work with Opera Philadelphia. During a coaching session last fall, her reading of a song by Missy Mazzoli revealed increasingly profound levels of expression; later, she touched on previously-unheard places in her range—up to a high B-flat—in a duet from an opera by Lembit Beecher.

Near the end of the Beecher scene, performed with baritone Johnathan McCullough, she repeatedly tackled thorny melismas that wind through an unusual series of chords. After the session, she said she had spent time practicing it over Thanksgiving break, playing through the chords and figuring out how her melodies line up with them. “The journey is very complicated, but very interesting,” she says of that climactic section of music.

The same could be said of her path in music thus far. Whatever opportunities come her way, at Curtis and afterward, they’ll find her prepared and, as usual, at just the right moment. ♦

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Opposite, clockwise from top left:

Anastasiia as Mother Goose in *The Rake’s Progress*, with Roy Hage PHOTO: KARLI CADEL

As the White Cat in a concert performance of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, with Kendra Broom and Patrick Wilhelm PHOTO: DAVID DeBALKO

As Bianca in *The Rape of Lucretia* PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

In a concert performance of *Iolanta* PHOTO: KARLI CADEL

As Lucilla in *La scala di seta*, with Johnathan McCullough PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

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## WHY CHOOSE CURTIS?

—Anastasiia Sidorova

More Reasons at [www.curtis.edu/WhyChooseCurtis](http://www.curtis.edu/WhyChooseCurtis)

“During high school, I was always at my teacher’s side, asking ‘What do I do next?’ All of a sudden, after entering Curtis, I was left alone, in a way, to figure out how to make music on my own. In between my lessons, there’s no one to say ‘this is right, this is wrong.’ Ultimately, here you learn how to figure things out for yourself. At the same time, everyone at Curtis wants you to improve, and you end up feeding off of each other.”

