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**THE VOICE OF BASS COLIN RAMSEY
Will enhance the 2016-2017 Season of OSJ
Exclusive interview by Iride Aparicio**

Photos Courtesy: OSJ



SAN JOSÉ, CA – Bass-Baritone COLIN RAMSEY will give the 2016-2017 Season of Opera San José a richer sound this year when his unique timbre of voice blends with the marvelous voices of the other singers. The new Principal Artist of the resident company, will debut in the role of Raimondo in GAETANO DONIZETTI's masterful Bell Canto Opera LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR at the California Theatre, on Saturday, September 10th.

Bass RAMSEY, has performed with many Operas, including the Seattle Opera, the Austin Lyric Opera, and Opera Santa Barbara, to name a few, and is a multiple award winner. He won the Encouragement Award in the Western Region, in 2011, a Grant from the Opera Buffs, and the Hugh Ross Award from the Manhattan School of Music (given to a graduating singer with unusual promise) on the same year. Recently he took the 3rd place in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in the Rocky Mountain Region.



In an exclusive interview with CULTURAL WORLD BILINGUAL we ask him:

When did you start singing?

C.R.: “I started singing in the sixth grade. I was interested in music, but I was not much of a choir person until I found out that the choir in my school went on field trips, so I joined the school choir. I did it casually for a couple of years and eventually I got a job singing at a local church, a big cathedral, singing in their choir.”

C.W.B. : What made you decide to sing Opera?

C.R.: “About my junior year in High School, everybody started thinking about college and (those students who were going to study music) started making recordings to send to the schools with their applications. I thought that if I wanted to study music I should do the same thing, so I decided to take a voice lesson, just casually, with a professional teacher who had a professional studio. After I sang for him he told me that singing was something that I may be able to do, and gave me a CD of CESARE SIEPI, the great Italian Bass singing arias, for me to listen. I put it in my CD player as I was driving home, and I pulled over on the side of the road because the voice blew me away. I had never heard something like him before. I was 17 years old. I was interested in music, I played in rock bands, was a drummer, and played guitar, but SIEPI's voice changed everything for me. Soon after that, I told my parents that I wanted to be an opera singer. They thought I was crazy, completely out of my mind.

I began sending my applications to conservatories and all of the conservatories I applied to gave me scholarships. I had no idea what was coming. In a way, I see that this was kind of destiny. Ever since then, I have been hooked on opera, and now I cannot imagine myself doing anything

else.”

C.W.B: Was learning to sing Opera difficult for you?

C.W “No. For me it was easy. When I started singing I had a very pleasant octave (eight notes) From middle C to the C under that, so I started with kind of nice pleasant Bass range.”

C.W.B: Did you always have a deep voice ?

C.R: “No. I was a treble (tenor range) in elementary school, but all of a sudden, my voice just dropped overnight. It was so funny because when I called my friends to invite them to play their mothers did not recognize my voice”

C.W.B. Being a bass, do you find difficult or easy to get singing roles?

C.R. For me it produces challenges because I am still very young to be singing (the traditional) Bass roles. When you are young, you are young so to me it is still a work in progress to be able to portray these older guys (he is representing) with any kind of convincing characterization. The timbre of my voice has let me to a more specific repertoire within the Bass voice, but these are roles like the Grand Inquisitor (“Don Carlo”) and Zoroaster (“The Magic Flute”) which are for big guys. I have never lacked for low notes, but my voice is more for what we call the “Basso Cantante” roles, such as Mozart’s “Figaro”, or “Don Giovanni” or Mephistopheles in Gounod’s *Faust*. I like those. I find the Verdi’s roles one dimensional. Verdi and Mozart write different for Bass characters. There is an expected beauty in Mozart’s Bass singers, when they sing, they sing with beauty and elegance instead of trying to make a lot of noise to drown out the orchestra.”

(Photo left shows Colin Ramsey in character in the Opera “The Consul” presented by the Seattle Opera in 2014) one of his many roles before Raimondo.

C.W.B. You are going to be debuting in the role of Raimondo in LUCIA, how do you describe the Opera?



C.R. "I personally love LUCIA. I think that it is an incredible piece. Our Director, BENJAMIN SPIERMAN, has said lots of things about this opera and I think that one of the things that really gets me is that it is a quintessential Opera. If you would talk to your friends that don't know anything about opera, about LUCIA, the love story, the madness, the suicide, all the melodrama you will realize that all that one expects in an Opera is there."

"The characters, at first glance, make them seem one-dimensional but they are very interesting people in very interesting situations, with conflicting desires and needs. It is a very well throughout piece (LUCIA's libretto was written in Italian by SALVADORE CAMMARANO) and the music is gorgeous. It is one of the most perfect bell canto operas, I think, because it has all these elements, this heavy melodrama and these beautiful melodies that seem to come out of nothing and go on forever. And all the characters have spectacular arias and fun music to sing. But it has its challenges."

C.W.B.: How do you describe your role?

C.R.: "Raimondo is kind of the family priest to Enrico (Lucia's brother) and Lucia, and I think that he is one of the most hypocritical characters in the piece because in one hand, he has been dealing with Lucia as a supporter, friend and father figure, to some degree, to unite her with Edgardo, and on the other hand, he lies to her by telling Lucia that he had sent her letters to Edgardo, knowing that Enrico (Lucia's brother) has closed all the roads and that her letters were intercepted. Then he tells Lucia that probably Edgardo (her fiancée) is never going to come back."

"Maybe, at the end, he's convinced himself that Lucia is better off going with Arturo. but actually, Raimondo, is the one who sets her off because at the end he comes to her as a confidant to tell her to abandon her true love and live the rest of your life in heaven because heaven will dry her tears. Meaning if you marry Arturo, you will have a miserable life, but when you die you will go to heaven and will be happy there."

C.W.B. "As an actor, how do you portray Raimondo's character?"

C.R.: "As an actor, I see a lot of melodrama in the way I have to portray him. As the one (The scoundrel) who is always vacillating between the needs of the house and the needs of Lucia, who he is protecting. In fights, however, he is the one who keeps interrupting Enrico (fighting with Lucia) who is enraged, and coming to him in a peaceful and static manner telling him to think of the problem rationally. So, (to portray him) as an actor, I have to think about staying grounded, actually trying not to move too much (on the stage) because here Raimondo is a presence that should be noticed by everybody at this moment. He had just discovered that Lucia had killed Arturo and that he is the one who has to relate (what he just saw) to the audience. It is truly horrifying for him to see this girl, that he was leading to a happier life, and thought would be safe

with Arturo and taken care of, covered in his blood. So in that scene, I have to think what I think he may be thinking, which is “I did this”. But the worst thing in the scene is when praying to God, he sings “May not be your wrath fall upon us,” which is terrible, because he is a man of God. So, in the scene, I want to portray this man as a man who went through a horrific experience and is struck with fear.”

C.W.B. As a singer, what are your challenges singing the role?

C.R.: “I am relatively young, to be singing this role as a Bass, and this is a deceptively challenging score. The opera has a large orchestra and it plays loudly, so there is always the question of I am making enough voice? This is one of my most basic concerns. It is also Bell Canto. My first aria, is a very cantabile and just beautiful. It is great to sing something like that. Its tempo is legato so it allows you to produce as many beautiful sounds as you can. It also allows the singer to be singing with an evenness of voice and with no strain at all. In the second aria, however, it really starts to flash, in the way that Donizetti expects of his singers. Here, one needs to think on ways you want to approach the top notes, and the accents needed to tell the story effectively. From the singer, it requires skills that take years to develop.”

“This Opera is impossible to sing if you don’t have the mastery in your passaggios (your transitions) because if you do not know how to sing those properly, it is very easy to tire your voice quickly. You (the singer) need to mark down where you can give a lot of voice, where you can hold back a little bit, and where you can save your voice because the orchestra is playing Forte (Loud) and the choir is singing Forte and nobody is going to be able to hear you anyway”

“In my role, much of what Raimondo does in interrupting scenes, but one cannot yell or scream when singing because it is horrible for your voice, so you need to present the aria in a way that is effective for the listener. In the aria where Raimondo tells all the swordsmen, “He who fights by the sword, dies by the sword” for instance, you have to sing it in a different style. The role is challenging.”

“This is the first time that I am doing a big bell canto role, so to me, it is also very exciting to do something like this, that requires, poise and elegance from the singer.”

Lucia di Lammermoor will play from September 10, 2016 to September 25, 2016 at the California Theatre 345 S. First St. in San Jose. For information and Tickets: call 408-437-4450 or order them online at www.operasj.org.