Andrey Nemzer Wins at the Met

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Andrey Nemzer, an adjunct professor with the Mary Pappert School of Music, was selected as one of five winners in the Metropolitan Opera’s 2012 National Council Auditions, considered to be one of the most prestigious singing competitions in North America.

Nemzer, a countertenor, was selected from a pool of nine finalists, each having the opportunity to perform arias with The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. As a winner, he received a $15,000 cash prize in addition to the opportunity to perform in front of an audience that included influential opera executives, artist managers and music critics.

The National Council Auditions are designed to discover exceptional young talent, to provide a venue for young opera singers at all different levels to be heard and to assist with their development and to search for new talent for The Metropolitan Opera and the Met’s Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.

“It’s like having your star player win the M.V.P. award in the NCAA Tournament,” said Dr. Edward Kocher, dean of the Mary Pappert School of Music. “We are thrilled that Andrey’s talents were recognized by the distinguished Metropolitan Opera at this renowned competition.”

Nearly 1,500 singers between the ages of 20 and 30 participated in this year’s auditions, which are held annually throughout the United States and Canada and are sponsored by the Metropolitan Opera National Council. Many of the world’s foremost singers, including Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, Thomas Hampson, Samuel Ramey and Dolora Zajick, have received awards from the National Council.

Nemzer became an adult countertenor nearly by accident. While visiting his friend, Preston Showman (an organist at Third Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh’s Shadyside neighborhood), Nemzer tried out a score of Handel pieces which turned out to be too low for his tenor voice. Just for fun, Nemzer transposed the songs into the alto range and was surprised to discover that they sounded good. He tried another song, Pie Jesu from Maurice Duruflé’s Requiem, which also suited his voice.

The Pittsburgh Tribune Review quoted Nemzer, saying, “My friend said it sounded fabulous. I thought about it for a couple days and decided to try it. So, this fun became the victory at the Metropolitan Opera. I cannot believe it myself. Something happened at that time, like God directed me.”

Nemzer, 30, began his career as a singer at age six when he was accepted into the Moscow Choir College in his home town of Moscow, Russia. During the 11 years he studied there, Nemzer toured as a soloist under the direction of Viktor Popov, the People’s Artist of Russia. He had his first introduction to opera at age 20 when he sang in the Russian premieres of Lulu written by Alban Berg and Andre Gretry’s Peter the Great with the Helikon Opera Theatre.

No stranger to competition, Nemzer was the winner at the all-Russian vocal student competition Bella Voce in 2002 and was the Best Competition Soloist at the international choral competition The Singing World in 2009. In addition, he was awarded a prize at The Pittsburgh Baroque Competition in 2010 and won The Mildred Miller International Voice Competition in 2011, for which he was awarded his residency at the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh. Nemzer also won this year’s Gerda Lissner Foundation Competition.

Nemzer is grateful for his experiences here in the United States, particularly in the Mary Pappert School of Music. “I’d like to thank everyone who helped me to attend Duquesne University, most of all Claudia Pinza, my teacher, who helped me through the admissions and application process,” He said. “And Dean Edward Kocher, Guenko Guechev, Xiu-Ru Liu and Troy Centofanto for all their support. Their trust in me is very precious.”
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–Dr. Edward Kocher, Dean of the Mary Pappert School of Music.

Taylor Brown (M.M. Performance, 2009, A.D., Performance, 2011) started off his career as a freelance musician in the Western Pennsylvania area. He spent time playing with the symphonies of Youngstown, OH; Canton, OH; Wheeling, WV and Charleston, WV. He also appeared in a string orchestra alongside the group Earth, Wind & Fire as well as in a brief tour of the Northern United States and Canada with Barry Manilow.

In late summer, Brown accepted an appointment as principal double bass with the Chattanooga Symphony and Opera (CSO). In addition, he plays with the CSO string quintet, a group that serves as an outreach vehicle for the Symphony. “Our job is to go to schools and introduce the instruments to kids from kindergarten to fifth grade,” he said. “We play themed pieces as a group, talk about our instruments and demonstrate the special techniques we use in the music.”

Brown enjoys his new position with the CSO and is looking forward to expanding his career in the future.