

# Martha Eason is thriving on stage in Germany

Martha Eason's career has taken her from our region to Germany. A coloratura soprano, she's a member of the ensemble of the Oldenburgisches Staatstheater and lives in Oldenburg, Germany.

While she has a thriving opera career, she didn't decide she wanted to sing on stage until college at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

"I first decided that I wanted to major in music while studying at U.Va., since double majoring was a possibility. As part of my major I had the opportunity to take the courses I was really interested in. At the same time I created my own second interdisciplinary major, which is now happily a department at U.Va., arts administration. I was able to take my passion for music and learn music history, theory and performance and how music is created in the real world. I've always been interested in the crossroads between art and commerce.

"Singing on stage took a little longer for me to figure out. I had always been a choral singer, and I never felt the anxiety and nerves when I was on stage with a bunch of friends. However, when I started performing solo with my a cappella group the Virginia Belles and also the few operas I had the chance to perform in early on, I found ways to deal with the fright and found a lot of enjoyment.

"After I finished my bachelors at U.Va., I took a year off to work for the musicologist Marita McClymonds and to apply for conservatory for my graduate degree. That year I also had the opportunity to perform with Charlottesville Opera and really get to know a bit more what the job would be like," Eason says.

After she left U.Va., she studied under Costanza Cuccaro at the Jacobs School at Indiana University.

"I had a really wonderful time at IU and had the opportunity to learn a lot and perform several roles on the big stage. One of my favorites was Rosina in "Il Barbiere di Siviglia." I was also given the opportunity to represent the school at a recital at the Kennedy Center, which was a really fun experience. In my last year there I was awarded the Georgina Joshi International fellowship to take my studies to Berlin, Germany. I quickly fell in love with Berlin and moved back to pursue my career in opera," she says.

Her first paying job as an opera singer didn't come until she was in her mid-20s. It was at Opera North singing Blondchen in Mozart's "Die Entführung aus dem Serail."

"I would have to say my all time favorite roles have been singing Zerbinetta in Richard Strauss' 'Ariadne auf Naxos' in Berlin with some of my best friends or Marie in Donizetti's 'La Fille du Regiment.' However, I just had my role debut as Gretel in Humperdink's 'Hänsel und Gretel,' and it was really so, so enjoyable.

"I've had quite a few favorite costumes. The most hilarious costumes I have had have been when playing Berta in 'Il Barbiere di Siviglia.' I've been in two wonderful and wacky productions of this opera, the first at the Komische Oper Berlin directed by Kirill Serebrennikov in which I ran around in a full body fat suit. The second was at Oper Leipzig where I had to dress up as a giant snail and crawl onto stage on all fours. Claus Guth was the director for this production, and each of the characters is a different insect - very funny and cute," she says.

This season Eason is singing several concerts, a recital, the role of Eurydice in Offenbach's "Orpheus in der Unterwelt," Gretel in Humperdink's "Hänsel und Gretel," Gilda in Verdi's "Rigoletto" and Kitty in Jake Heggie's "Dead Man Walking." She is also singing this season with Oper Leipzig and the Gewandhausorchester as Berta in "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" and as Blondchen in Mozart's "Die Entführung aus dem Serail" at Theater Münster.

She practices almost every day. "For me there are two parts to my practice. The first part is singing which I try to do daily with one day off a week. I have set exercises that I do, and I have a journal that I keep while in the practice room. The second part of my practice is mental practice and this takes the most effort for me. This is when I just sit and stare at a score, at the rhythms, the notes, the words, working out translations ... just basically doing the work. I find I only have about two hours of this kind of focus a day, so it's also good to know when to throw in the towel and get some exercise or go for a beer," she says.

Rehearsals are from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and then 6-10 p.m., if she isn't performing in the evening. Many times she rehearses one opera in the morning and performs another in the evening. She still takes voice lessons and has also taken other lessons that pertain to



Martha Eason in "Last Savage" (photo by Scott Scheetz)

her job, such as diction for acting and several German language courses.

"I think one of the biggest reasons I'm drawn to opera is the mixture of music and acting. I can't say that I prefer one or the other; in fact I think they really should be symbiotic. They really go together and support each other. I have struggled with my acting in the past. I still struggle with it, but

as I get older and learn more it has gotten much easier.

"I feel very lucky that I am currently kept busy with just opera to make my living. It has certainly not always been that way," Eason says.