

CSUN Music Student, a Finalist Among International Competition, Found His Voice Through Opera

Athena Beldja Sjoebloom, March 27, 2019



CSUN music student Matthew Soibelman, pictured here at the 2018 James Toland Vocal Arts Competition, found a love for opera that has led him to many successes.. Photo courtesy of Matthew Soibelman.

Suddenly, Matthew Soibelman had a deep voice — like, movie trailer voiceover deep — but he didn't know what to do with it.

Whilst at college, his voice was getting lower and lower, and friends were telling him he should go into broadcasting. He tried it out by hosting a weekly college radio show, but realized that long days spent alone in a radio booth wasn't for him. He wanted something more social.

Then Soibelman discovered his parents' old Sinatra vinyl. The music and singing style were captivating. Maybe singing jazz could be his thing.

It wasn't, according to the vocal teacher he hired from the LA Opera.

"For three or so weeks he humored the whole 'okay you can sing jazz' and then he just started throwing operatic stuff at me and I fell in love with it," said Soibelman. "Some sort of passion started welling up inside, and unlike the other hobbies I've had over the years, this one hasn't burned out."

Though he started his singing career fairly late, Soibelman has experienced great success at regional and national singing competitions over the past three years. He often competes against singers from prestigious graduate schools, as was the case in the American Vocal Arts 2019 International Opera Championship, where Soibelman finished as a finalist. Soibelman's unique voice has also landed him jobs at Disneyland and on blockbuster movies.

When Soibelman decided to pursue his newfound passion, he chose to pursue undergraduate studies at Pepperdine, but later transferred to CSUN after being drawn to the performance opportunities in its Music Department and the surrounding area. Another big pull was the department's vocal professors, he said.

“For undergraduate voice programs, the professor is always the most important part of the university search,” said Soibelman. “If you don’t get proper guidance it is incredibly difficult to undo poor vocal habits, let alone get into post-undergraduate programs.”

Early in the fall of 2018, Soibelman came across the American Vocal Arts 2019 International Opera Championship on a website for vocal competitions. Having participated in previous online competitions, he already had his audition recordings ready and figured he would give it a shot. It certainly paid off. After months of no communication from the competition, Soibelman had forgotten all about it when he one day in November received the email announcing him as one of the finalists. Placing as a finalist was certainly an exciting experience as he was up against contestants from prestigious international music schools.

“Overall, the competition was pretty fierce,” said Soibelman. “You see Manhattan School of Music, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and then somewhere in there, CSUN gets thrown in. It’s always nice to see that and represent the school.”

The International Opera Championship isn’t the first time he’s been recognized.

In 2018, Soibelman was honored as the first recipient of the Matsumoto-Stark Vocal Performance Scholarship by CSUN’s Department of Music, and he had previously won several competitions and scholarships nationwide. Despite his many successes, Soibelman still gets surprised when he beats singers from some of the nation’s best vocal graduate programs. Aside from school and competitions, Soibelman has also found the time to work on projects such as caroling with the Goode Time Carolers at Disneyland during the holidays. Thanks to industry connections, he also recorded vocals for the scores of major motion pictures *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *Transformers: The Last Knight*.

“It was a blast!” he said. “The contractor was looking for low voices and someone said, ‘Well hey, how about Matt?’ I managed to not screw it up in the studio, so I got it.”

Taking a break from competitions, Soibelman is now focusing his time on working on his senior recital and rehearsing for the two operas performed by the CSUN opera program this spring.

“It’s a very enjoyable and intense process,” said Soibelman about the opera rehearsals. “It’s fun, it’s difficult and it’s good preparation for the working world.”

After graduating this upcoming May, Soibelman plans to take some time off to focus on his personal vocal training before auditioning for graduate programs. His goal is to attain an Artist Diploma — similar to a Master’s degree but focused on performance rather than theory — before pursuing an operatic solo career.

Soibelman describes the road to an operatic career as long and winding, but with the many successes in a profession he just sort of fell into, he is more than ready to work his way there.

“It’s easy to start singing — everyone does it in the shower or in the car — but technique-wise, I don’t think it ever ends. It’s a never ending process. And I just like the thrill of it,” he said.