

*grazia* voice and sensitive musicality, but his professionalism and reliability.

“When he [first] sang for me the voice wasn’t quite finished,” said Domoney, who invited him to audition after hearing him as Paris in a 2015 GGS production of *La belle Hélène*. “But he was on time, he came prepared, he had that wonderful Anglican choral foundation, and he sent me a lovely note afterwards. His thoughtfulness and maturity really stood out. All the reports I’ve gotten back say he’s collegial and easy to work with. And he’s continued to develop his instrument.”

As an example of Tennekoon’s work ethic, Domoney points to him taking on the challenge of the Francis Lopez operetta *Le chanteur de Mexico* for Opéra-Bouffe de Québec in Sept. 2018. To prepare for the lead role of Vincent, Tennekoon invested sweat equity in improving his French diction in a few short weeks. “He worked so hard because he wanted to make a good impression on the Québec City audience. I was so impressed,” Domoney said.

While Bach and early music might be Tennekoon’s favourite repertoire, his upcoming schedule is a testament to his

curiosity and willingness to stretch. After *Champion*, upcoming engagements include *Evangelist* in the St. John Passion with the Ottawa Choral Society in March; covering the title role in Edmonton Opera’s *Le comte Ory* in April; and, in May, the British villain, Peyton, in the world premiere of Dean Burry’s *Shanawdithit*, the new Tapestry Opera and Opera on the Avalon co-production about the last of the Beothuks, with Marion Newman in the title role.

As a minority in classical music, Tennekoon welcomes the increase in opportunities to play characters from diverse backgrounds—for Luis, Opéra de Montréal was specifically looking for a tenor of colour—as well as the move toward more deliberately inclusive casting for traditional roles like Ottavio and Nemorino. But in a field where *Elektra* is still considered ‘modern,’ Tennekoon admits that change can be too slow and cautious.

“I would love to see a world where opera is at the forefront of the conversation around diversity, representation and inclusion,” he said. “Opera should be leading, not following behind. It’s not just about fighting against the status quo; it’s about changing it.”  
—Natasha Gauthier

### **Krista de Silva had a great uncle with**

a beautiful heldentenor voice whose operatic career was cut short by imprisonment during WWII. Despite this genetic link to opera, she didn’t grow up listening to classical music. Her close-knit family in Fort McMurray, Alberta, listened to R&B, jazz, reggae, and popular music recordings at dinner every night. “My dad played the guitar,” recalls de Silva. “He and I sang mostly Beatles tunes. My mother’s brother was a huge

part of my musical knowledge; he had a very large collec-

tion of recordings in every genre of music and educated my brother and me about musicals, gospel and jazz.” De Silva had the added bonus of cultural exposure through extensive travel with her family visiting relatives in Italy, the Seychelles, England, Australia, and Austria as well as taking in other locales like Hawaii, Mexico, and China along the way.

When de Silva was ten years old, she entered herself in a music festival in Fort McMurray, and then started singing lessons at 13. She took a break from music and pursued a degree in Kinesiology at the University of Calgary, and after a brief stint playing volleyball at a small college in the United States, returned to Calgary to finish her degree. While there,

## **Krista de Silva**



she studied voice independently with Winston Noren who assigned de Silva her first opera aria, Violetta’s “Addio del passato.” “After that taste of opera, I just kept adding more arias,” she laughs.

De Silva decided to pack up her life and move east, first to Winnipeg for a year at University of Manitoba where she sang as a soprano. Then, at McGill in Thérèse Sévadjian’s studio, she “switched to mezzo. It took me 6 months to come to terms

# Artists on Stage

with that. I did my 5 years at McGill as a mezzo. I can sing very low and the top is easy for me. During that time, I was often questioned about switching to soprano.”

When finally accepted into Santa Barbara’s prestigious Music Academy of the West (“after auditioning three times!”), the program’s vocal guru, Marilyn Horne, told her, “Honey, you’re not a mezzo.” De Silva then decided to look “around for someone to help with what type of soprano I was.” That person turned out to be the highly in-demand US vocal pedagogue W. Stephen Smith, who counts Joyce DiDonato among his students. He decided that “Violetta...fit me well. Since then, I have worked on soprano rep...my voice has more colours and brightness than ever before. Everybody has an opinion about my voice type. Because, really it’s about the listener, what do they hear? I was told by an ENT, that my [vocal] cords are not definitive and that I can choose which way I want to go.”

De Silva has a strong sense of career calling. “I am an opera singer because it was meant to be. I’ve had a lot of teachers and every single person has given me something that I’ve used to make up the quilted blanket of my singing self.” Carol Andersen, her high school teacher in Fort McMurray, hugely influenced her strong emotional interpretation of music. Noren

expanded her lyric Italian repertoire; Smith brought out her authentic, naked voice; Neil Semer in New York helped her understand how to coordinate heart, mind, and body, and Darrell Babidge at Brigham Young University worked with her on breath support and keeping her voice fresh. Add to that impressive list Wendy Nielsen—“because she is Wendy” quips de Silva—and it is easy to see how these gifted teachers individually contributed to her overall success.

De Silva is gearing up for the title role in Opéra de Montréal’s *Carmen* in May 2019—thus far, her favourite role. Not only does she have the dark, sultry beauty of a *Carmen*, she also sees shades of her younger self in the role. “*Carmen* is bold, energetic; full of vigor and spunk, confident, passionate, upbeat, grounded, dynamic and natural. She is all consuming.”

“This past year, I’ve been connecting the mind and body, by identifying, releasing and healing the inner self. And just being! This allows my real voice to resonate wherever I go. When I sing, I want people to feel my presence. So, I will keep working on that throughout my career, giving more depth of meaning to the ‘words that are coming out of my mouth.’ This in turn, produces more colours and hopefully a more impactful performance.” —*Dawn Martens* **OC**

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