

Preview

Mark S. Doss to sing Centennial celebration recital at The Music Settlement on December 9

by Mike Telin



Grammy Award-winning bass-baritone and Cleveland native [Mark S. Doss](#) will sing a recital on Sunday, December 9, 2012 at 3 pm in Glick Recital Hall at The Music Settlement. The performance is part of The Music Settlement's ongoing Centennial celebration and is presented in conjunction with the Singers' Club of Cleveland. Doss, who will be joined by pianist Jerry Maddox, will perform works by Adams, Bach, Barber, Boito, Copland, Glinka, Mussorgsky, Ravel, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner.

Mark S. Doss has sung 55 roles in more than 60 major opera houses around the world, the most notable being Milan's Teatro alla Scala, the Vienna State Opera, London's Covent Garden, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and San Francisco Opera. At the age of 28 he first sang on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. This past summer Doss premiered the role of Paul Rayment in Nicholas Lens' production of *Slow Man* at its world premiere as an opera at Poznan's Grand Theatre Opera House Wielki in Poznan, Poland.

Doss says he was first attracted to opera after watching Lawrence Tibbett performing the role of Escamillo in *Carmen*. "For some reason, sitting in front of the television, I was captivated by it," he told us via Skype from Turin, Italy where he was performing that same role at the Teatro Regio di Torino.

Mike Telin: It's a pleasure to speak with you and thanks for taking the time. You have a wonderful program and it's great to see that you'll be performing the Ravel "Quichotte" songs.

Mark S. Doss: The first time I did the Ravel was about ten years ago. I had been doing the Ibert *Don Quichotte* songs, but I always wanted to perform the Ravel. They are just gorgeous. I do tend to program them more now than the Ibert. The three contrast quite well, and it is a set that moves pretty fast.

MT: The Boito "Mefistofele" is also great!

MSD: Yes it is and the whistling aria is kind of a show piece that people enjoy. I wanted to perform that role more than anything. I covered it twice at City Opera but never got to sing it. I Finally got to perform it in Frankfurt, and since that is Goethe's hometown it was poignant too. There is also a commercial recording that was made of a performance, so it's quite nice to have that as well.

MT: You're also singing three of Leslie Adam's "Night Songs." Have you performed his music before?

MSD: I did a workshop with him when he was writing *Blake*, some years ago and it was a wonderful opportunity to get to know his music. When it was suggested to me that I might perform some of his works, I asked him to let me know what he has for low voice. He sent me a few sets and so this is a good time for me to actually do some of his songs.

MT: Have you worked with Jerry Maddox before?

MSD: Oh yes, we go way back. I think we first met at a Met competition in the late 80's. We have collaborated on a few recitals together in Cleveland and around the area as well as in Erie where I live part of the time.

MT: While growing up in Cleveland were you always involved in the arts?

MSD: I did the CYSP summer youth program, and that was the first time they had done it in Cleveland, and that was my first training in the arts. We received vocal and dramatic coaching as well as dance and movement training from people who came in from New York.

MT: But after graduating from East Tech you attended seminary at St. Joseph's College, in Indiana. When did you begin your voice training?

MSD: I started my formal training around age 21 when I went to seminary.

MT: And did you always have a lower voice?

MSD: For the most part I always had a lower voice although I was certainly singing a lot of the songs I had heard Mario Lanza sing. He was an inspiration of a sort. So I was probably singing higher than I should have been for a little while anyway.

MT: When did you begin to take opera seriously?

MSD: Seriously, I guess that would be in seminary. I walked in with a voice that well, I don't know if it was operatic, but it was certainly something different than what they had been seeing at St. Joseph's.

The first voice teacher that I had there was Marilyn Holt who was great, but she was not sure what to do with a voice of my type. So the chairman of the department brought her a few selections that he thought would be appropriate for me to work on like *Non piú andrai* from *Marriage of Figaro*, and the catalogue aria from *Don Giovanni*. At the time I

had no real capacity to sing those pieces but eventually I did sing both of them in performance. So in hindsight it was good.

It also took a while for me to get to sing in tune, and to get the Mario Lanza thing out of my head. And my next voice teacher during my sophomore year told me that I needed to get out of the tenor section in the chorus. So that was when I really looked at things seriously. That same year I also did the Met Competition and won the district and went to Chicago for the regional. During my Junior year I switched to a teacher at Valparaiso, which involved some commuting.

MT: That's fascinating. What degree did you end up getting?

MSD: I was a sociology major with a music minor. But since I had taken enough music courses, I have a double major. But I still thought that music was somewhat of a risky way to making a living. I thought that sociology would get me something steady, and I would be a singing social worker. I did take my graduate exams in sociology and they were OK, but I also did auditions for grad school in voice. [For many reasons I attended Indiana University.] So that was pretty much what got me started and told me that this was the path I should pursue.

MT: Opera singers are so interesting because they all come to it from so many diverse paths.

MSD: Yes, there are many paths. I was giving a talk at the University of Michigan with a young lady who was singing at La Scala and our stories were so different. She talked about doing the waitress thing with voice lessons on the side. But I never had to do that. I went from Indiana to Italy and did a seminar. then to the Chicago Lyric Opera program and from there I went to the Met and started as an understudy. My career took off after winning the Verdi competition, and I was one of the Met finalist winners.

The career has gone up and down, and certainly having performed the *Flying Dutchman* has been a big highlight. *Mefistofele* has been the other as I said. Another was in Cleveland in *Julius Caesar*.

MT: What advice do you give to young singers?

MSD: Usually [I tell them] that I did everything, although maybe sometimes too much and over extended myself. I have the master's degree, and I did think that is important, even though education doesn't necessarily [mean that you will become] a professional singer. But if you like teaching and other things that are academically connected, which I do, then it does give you confidence when you think that you don't want to be doing what you're doing on an opera stage. I also tell them about the apprentice programs.

I was just given some daunting statistics; each year there are 8,000 graduates from conservatories and 2,000 jobs. That just tells you that you have to be dedicated and motivated to do what God has given you the gifts to do.

MT: Final question; I understand that early on you wanted to be a baseball player?

MSD: That's right, those were my early days when I wanted to be a baseball-playing priest. Even at East Tech I was playing Junior Varsity baseball, but I was also playing tennis and I think the coach thought I might have more opportunities as a tennis player. I also played college tennis and still play as often as I can.

MT: Do you follow the ATP?

MSD: Oh yes. I was in Paris in 2005 and Rafael Nadal, Daniel Nestor and Kim Clijsters were just a few of the players I met. I even take lessons to try to hit around with these guys if possible and I hear that as long as you can hit the ball over the net they are OK with that.

Listen to Mark S. Doss sing the Toreador aria from *Carmen* [here](#).

Published on clevelandclassical.com December 4, 2012