

CIM Opera Theater presents *Don Giovanni*
(second of two articles)

by Mike Telin



On April 23 and 25 at 7:00 pm in the Mimi Ohio Theatre, Playhouse Square, CIM Opera Theatre will present Mozart's masterpiece *Don Giovanni*. The show is directed by JJ Hudson and conducted by

Harry Davidson. Tickets are available [online](#).

In this article Hudson introduces CIM alum Brian Myer who will sing the title role, and Andrew Hiers who plays the Commendatore. We also hear from cast members Kiana Lilly (Donna Anna) and Caroline Friend (Zerlina).

“We’re happy to have CIM alum Brian Myer as our Don Giovanni,” Hudson said. “He was a student of Dean Southern and graduated with his masters’ in 2014. Brian has been working professionally for eleven-plus years. He’s just a delight to work with, so it’s fun for his alma mater to host his debut in the role. There are probably many Giovannis still to come in his career.”

Hudson added that Myer has sung the role of Masetto many times. “Typically an excellent Masetto will graduate to the role of Giovanni, so I hope that we’re providing him with that springboard.”

Hudson said he first had the pleasure of working with bass-baritone Andrew Hiers in 2015 at Tri-Cities Opera in Binghamton, New York. “He was Don Basillio in Rossini’s *Barber of Seville*. I knew then that he was a special performer, so when we needed a Commendatore of commanding presence and voice Andrew immediately came to mind. I reached out to him and he was happy to join us.”



Kiana Lilly (Donna Anna) is a first year graduate student from New York City. She earned her undergraduate degree at CIM as well. This production marks her fourth role for CIM Opera Theater.

MT: Thanks so much for taking the time to talk. How is everything going?

KL: We have a final run-through of act two tomorrow and we will have staged the entire show, which is super exciting.

MT: Have you performed other Mozart roles?

KL: This is actually my first ever Mozart role. I have sung a few arias of his but this is my first full role.

MT: Are you enjoying it?

KL: Yes. I think Mozart's music is amazing. It's really hard technically, but it's gorgeous music.

MT: Your character: who is Donna Anna?

KL: I feel like I was thinking about Donna Anna one way when I was learning the role but another way now that I've worked on the staging with JJ. She's often portrayed as a sad person who is dependent on Don Ottavio. But JJ has really made her a woman of strength and dignity and emotional depth. A lot of times she's seen as a victim, but here she's really saying, "see the strength that I'm possessing," and I feel that's really great.

She is sad and mourning the loss of her father, but that's not her whole character and that's what I'm loving about fleshing her out.

MT: What is Donna Anna's relationship with Zerlina and Donna Elvira?

KL: She really only interacts with Zerlina in the sextet near the end when we're all realizing that Leporello is an idiot who's helping another idiot.

I think Donna Anna has a bit more of a relationship with Donna Elvira. In the beginning, we're strangers, but we realized that an enemy of my enemy is my friend. So we become besties with the main goal of bringing down Don Giovanni.

MT: What is your favorite aspect of your character?

KL: Her emotional complexity — she's not one dimensional. She's brave, vulnerable, and commanding and I think that gives her depth as a woman. In opera, you often expect the woman to be passive or forgiving, but I feel she's very determined. She's going to find the man who killed my father with or without Don Ottavio, and I love that about her.

MT: Do you have a favorite aria?

KL: My favorite aria is "Non mi dir."

MT: What a thrill it must be to be part of the ensembles.

KL: They are just fabulous — The sextet is so much fun. Mozart was so young when he wrote this opera and it's amazing how relevant the storyline is today. But I can't imagine a young Mozart sitting in his room, writing this music — I wonder if he knew how good this music was.

MT: And with the orchestra it will be even better.

KL: I'm excited to work with maestro Davidson and the CIM orchestra. I feel like your musicianship goes to another level when you're so engulfed in that magical sound.



Caroline Friend (Zerlina) is a first-year graduate student from Pittsburgh. She took her undergraduate degree at CIM as well. This production marks her sixth role for CIM Opera Theater.

MT: Are you having fun with the opera?

CF: I love Mozart opera, it's hard not to fall in love with his music.

MT: Who is Zerlina?

CF: She's a character who has been interpreted in many different ways, so the challenge has been to figure out how to define her for this production.

I would define her as a young peasant girl who is in love with Masetto. She has this very youthful outlook on life, but she learns to be cunning. She gains independence and self-control in a way that makes Masetto become softer and sweeter to her.

Zerlina did not have this much agency in the original play, but in Da Ponte's libretto, he gives her more power, and she acts as a foil for Don Giovanni in a unique way. It takes a journey for her, but her character develops as the opera continues.

MT: Have you enjoyed figuring all of this out?

CF: Yes, I have. I've watched different interpretations because some mezzos and some sopranos have portrayed Zerlina as kittenish and very innocent.

I'm sure she wishes that she wasn't a peasant and had a more suitable lifestyle like the one Don Giovanni offers her. Of course she's going to be tempted by that, but ultimately she finds out that Don Giovanni shouldn't be trusted.

MT: What has been your favorite part of the role?

CF: Honestly, interacting with Masetto and Don Giovanni. Early on when we were staging we didn't have Brian Myer with us, but now that we do have him we can connect emotionally as actors.

MT: Do you have a favorite aria?

CF: I love "Batti, Batti" because I really get to play with the tension that she has with Masetto. There's some comedy in it and there's also some sincerity in it too. It's just a fun aria to sing.

MT: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

CF: I love our cast and I'm really really blessed to be working with them. I'm going to remember this opera for a long time because when I was in high school, as a career project we had to do a job shadow and I followed mezzo-soprano Antonia Botti-Lodovico, who played Zerlina at a Pittsburgh Opera production of *Don Giovanni*. She really inspired me and she went to CIM, so it's kind of a beautiful circle moment. I always think about her when I'm preparing Zerlina, and I actually carry a lot of her interpretation with me.

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