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Bloor St. baritone Phillip Addis — hear him while he's home

Peripatetic singer gives a rare homecoming show, though he's about to change homes



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Entertainment
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In a world of opportunities, Phillip Addis doesn't get many chances to sing in his hometown. On the verge of his 33rd birthday, the Canadian baritone finally has an opportunity to perform on an operatic mainstage in Toronto.

On Saturday, the curtain at the Elgin Theatre rises on Opera Atelier's first production of Mozart's ever-popular comic opera, *The Marriage of Figaro* — performed in English rather than in the original Italian.

Besides a number of familiar names in the cast — baritone Olivier Laquerre in the title role, soprano Carla Huhtanen as love interest Susanna, and soprano Peggy Kriha Dye as the Countess — are a couple of fresh faces, including mezzo Wallis Giunta, on loan from the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio to play Cherubino, and Addis, who sings the role of the Count.

Ironically, Addis and family are moving from their home in the Ossington Ave. and Bloor St. neighbourhood shortly after *Figaro* wraps up on May 1. Their belongings go to a new house in Stratford, while singer, wife Emily Hamper and young son Sebastian cross the Atlantic to Paris for his next operatic gig.

"Access to an airport is all I need, so I may as well have a bit of peace and quiet," says Addis of the impending move. It also helps that homeownership comes at a fraction of what it would cost in Toronto.

Airports are something that the baritone has become familiar with since winning the Montreal Symphony Orchestra's Standard Life music competition in 2004.

Following an apprenticeship with the Atelier Lyrique at Opéra de Montréal, Addis has enjoyed steady work in Canada, the United States and, increasingly, in Europe.

None of this was on Addis's radar while he was growing up.

"As a teenager, I was listening to Rush and was so into 1970s progressive rock — Pink Floyd and stuff," the affable singer explains over a pre-rehearsal lunch. "I literally plugged my ears and left the room if my Mom had on opera on PBS." Even so, he dutifully sang in choirs, including the Toronto Children's Chorus, when his family moved to the city. He began his Bachelor's degree at Queens University in Kingston as a tuba player, but admits that his heart wasn't really in it.

All it took was one voice lesson with a member of the music faculty to change the course of his life. "I was pretty convinced right off the bat that this was something that excited me." For the third year of his four-year Bachelor program, he switched to voice, but also kept up playing tuba with the Queens Symphony, "because there was no one else to do it," Addis says with a smile.

The baritone polished up his vocal technique in the two-year opera program at University of Toronto. One of his coaches there was Hamper, whom he would marry a few years later. She is his multi-faceted muse. In public, Hamper is Addis's recital accompanist. In private, "She coaches me and prepares me for all my roles." Addis admits that the arrangement is much like the relationship between baritone Russell Braun and wife Carolyn Maule. "What they make together is pretty beautiful."



Addis plays the Count in Opera Atelier's *The Marriage of Figaro*. BRUCE ZINGER PHOTO

Addis describes his next big gig, at Paris's Opéra Comique in June — singing Pélleas in Claude Debussy's opera *Pélleas et Mélisande*, under renowned conductor John Eliot Gardiner — as "a dream come true." He adds: "I'd love to sing it once a year until . . . Well, until I can't." It happens to be a role Addis first tackled as unofficial understudy to Braun for a Vancouver Opera concert performance in 2003.

After Paris, Addis gets a few weeks off to unpack moving boxes in Stratford, before flying to Antwerp, Belgium, for an August production of *L'amour de loin* (Love From Afar), by contemporary Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho.

In other words, Torontonians need to catch Addis while they can.