

Singer's career hits high notes

Samantha Garvey



AMBUR BRAID'S singing career is growing by leaps and bounds. She was recently home to sing for Caledonia's graduating students.
HELENE CYR PHOTO

AMBUR BRAID sings in leading roles for the Canadian Opera Company (COC) to crowds of thousands.

But her most nerve-racking performance? Last month, the graduating class of 2012 at Caledonia Senior Secondary was treated to the massive power of Braid's voice.

"I thought I was going to combust," she said. "I thought, 'they're not going to be able to hear me,' and then I sing, and I'm 'oh this is really small in here,'" referring to the city's sportsplex.

Braid's visit was a return to her hometown, with her nephew in attendance at the prom performance.

She began singing lessons here at age nine with Sue Doughty. She also performed with local music group Kermode Choristers for three years.

After leaving Terrace at 16, Braid attended the Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. She then moved on to the COC's Ensemble Studio youth program, a group of only 12 or so selected each year to understudy or perform roles and work with experienced vocal coaches, teachers and conductors. This is her last year in the program.

"After this, I have to put my big-girl pants on," she said. She added that she is confident she will be returning to the same company, but it will be a different experience outside the program.

"Instead of getting paid to take classes, I'll have to pay for them," she said.

Her career has been getting bigger and better, and this final year has been no different. Upcoming this season she will be performing leading roles in Mozart and Strauss operas, and even coaching and singing with some of her idols: Kiri Te Kanawa, Malcolm Martineau and Richard Bonyngé.

But Braid's career is diverse. After last year's collaboration with Broken Social Scene, this year she found excellent reviews after sharing the stage with another rising Canadian indie band Austra at Operation 8: A Muse Ball, last fall. She said she expects to become involved in the next Operation event, coming this October.

"For some reason, I'm the go-to girl for collaborations," Braid said. "It's neat because it's a dance-pop scene. You're not speaking the same musical language."

In addition to successful performances of all types, Braid was 'Ms. Chatelaine' last month, and she is featured on the cover of the Royal Conservatory of Music vocal textbook.

Despite having a full schedule and then some, she still enjoys her downtime, the very little she has.

“In my spare time, I cook,” she said. “You’ll never find an opera singer that doesn’t love good food.”

Braid said she sometimes dances as a pre-performance warm-up.

“If I’m completely stressed out, some of the other girls will come into my dressing room and do a little dance for me.” And then, it’s back to work.

Braid said Canada had a lot to do with her success.

“In school we would all sing together,” she said. “Canada is producing excellent musicians and its because we have great music programs.”

“Never cut music programs!”

Braid will back in Toronto this fall as Adele, a leading role in *Die Fledermaus* (“The Bat”), by Johann Strauss II.