

10 Questions for Wallis Giunta

Leslie Barcza

Have you seen this smile?

That's Wallis Giunta, who may have caught your eye in the in-flight magazine you'd casually leaf through if you were flying Porter airlines between New York and Toronto: as Giunta herself likely does. A graduate of the Canadian Opera Company ensemble studio (Toronto), currently a member of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program (NYC) you'll often find the talented mezzo-soprano performing in one city or the other.



Mezzo-soprano Wallis Giunta as she appears in re:porter, Porter Airlines magazine (photo: Michael Edwards; costume by Camille Assaf)

Giunta's first appearances caught the eye of the critics in her first NY Dorabella:

- *Opera News*
"The two standouts in the principal cast were Canadian mezzo soprano Wallis Giunta as Dorabella, and Californian bass-baritone Evan Hughes, as Don Alfonso. Giunta, a saucer-eyed, red-headed stunner, sang and cavorted with star-quality grace and point and offered delicious comic timing; if anyone is thinking of making 'Born Yesterday' into an opera, this is your girl."
- Anthony Tommasini (*NY Times*)
"Wallis Giunta, with her chocolaty and penetrating mezzo-soprano voice, is a more down-to-earth Dorabella"

Clearly she's off to a great start.

And there's more to come. 2:00 pm March 24th at Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto is Giunta's 'CANADIAN VOICES' recital. In April Giunta makes her mainstage debut at the Met as Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto*.

But first we get to see Giunta as Annio in *La Clemenza di Tito*, one of the moral pillars in a mad world of flattery, influence & manipulation, The production goes up next Sunday February 3rd. By the way, I can't tell you how thrilled I am by Giunta's take on the role ...see below.

I ask Giunta ten questions: five about herself and five about her portrayal of Annio.



Wallis Giunta, wearing McCaffrey Haute Couture (photo Miv Fournier)

1) Which of your parents do you resemble (what's your nationality / ethnic background)?

I am a good blend of both my parents, actually. I have a few features from each of them, and therefore don't look particularly like either one. Especially since they both have dark hair! From my Scottish/ Irish side, I got my red hair and freckles, and from my Italian side, my ability to tan, and maybe my voice?

2) What is the best thing / worst thing about being an opera singer?

The best thing about being an opera singer is that someone pays me to do what I would be doing for free anyway, because I love it so much. I suppose the worst thing could be, as a colleague recently told me, always asking for a table for one.

3) Who do you like to listen to or watch?

My favourite artists to listen to are mostly in the folk/alt-country realm. Top of the list would be Patty Griffin, and her first album, *Living with Ghosts*. I also LOVE Ray Lamontagne, who I just had the great honour to see live at Carnegie Hall with front row seats. Next, I could listen to Alison Krauss and her pure, golden voice all day.

[Link to a video of Allison Krauss singing *Jolene*]

I saw her, along with Ray, last year at the Bonnaroo festival (heaven). Another contender would be the one-man-band, didgeridoo sensation, Xavier Rudd. I have seen him many times, and his music makes me so happy.

For opera, I love to watch and listen to Giuseppe Giacomini! Over and over. The most epic tenor I have ever heard, and so totally underrated.

[Link to Giuseppe Giacomini singing "Ch'ella mi creda"]

4) What ability or skill do you wish you had, that you don't have?

In the realm of the possible, I wish I could speak all languages perfectly, and switch between them with ease. And if magic skills were an option, I would like invisibility. Hmm, both of these skills would make me an excellent spy...

5) When you're just relaxing and not working what is your favourite thing to do?

Riding my bike somewhere lovely, and reading in the sun!

Five more about playing Annio in the COC production of La Clemenza di Tito

1) How does portraying the trouser-role of Annio challenge you?

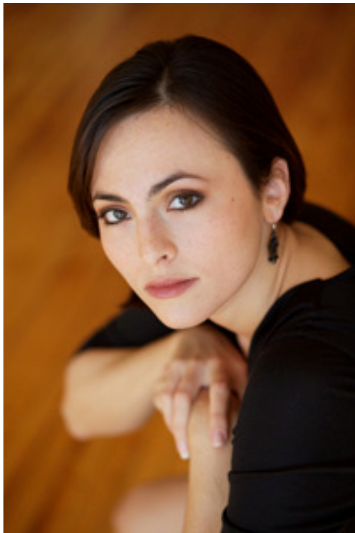
I think Annio is the oldest male character I have performed (and he's only about 20), so I have to work more on the male physicality here. When you're playing a pubescent boy, like Cherubino, you can get away with a bit less manly body language, because they're just so awkward at that age.

2) What do you love about Annio: both the role & your part in Christopher Alden's production?

On our first day of rehearsals, Christopher told me that my character would be based on Michael Cera's role in *Juno*. If you've seen that movie (which you should!), you'll know why I love this Annio so much.

[Link to video of the song "Anyone else but you" from the film *Juno*.]

Also, no matter what the take on it, he is a really good, caring, deep-feeling guy, and it breaks my heart how much he tries to help people in the opera, and sacrifice his own happiness for that of others.



Giunta's colleague and fellow trouser-wearer Isabel Leonard (photo: Jared Slater)

3) Do you have a favourite moment in Clemenza di Tito?

Yes. Isabel Leonard's *Deh Per Questo* is my favourite part of the show. She sings it so beautifully, with both strength and fragility. The power of the staging in its simplicity, and the desperation of her plea to Tito just floors me.

4) How do you relate to Annio as a modern woman?

Hmmm. The interesting thing about our production is that both of the pant role characters are dressed in a not-very-manly way. I think that allows the audience to feel more comfortable with the fact that they're aware we are not men. And then we can just get on with it. Ultimately, this piece comes down to power and how it corrupts. I think one's sex has no bearing on that, and I relate to it on a human level above anything to do with gender.

5) Is there an influential recording you'd care to name that you especially admire?

For this role, I didn't consult a particular recording, as I have often done with other pieces. I guess Mozart just makes sense to me now, having done so much of it. I get the music when I'm learning it, without having to hear it all in full.

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Yes: March means a concert in Toronto, April, Rigoletto in NYC. But first it's Annio in *La Clemenza di Tito* in Toronto. For ticket info [click here](#).