

Q&A with Keith Colclough

Keith Colclough, bass baritone, is a 2008 Pepperdine alumnus in music performance. While an undergraduate at Seaver College, he was actively involved in both the music and theatre departments playing leading roles in several operas and musicals. Keith has been awarded vocal scholarships from the Orange County Performing Arts Center, Sigma Alpha Iota Pasadena Alumni Chapter and the Village Voices Chorale. He is a member of Pi Kappa Lambda, musical honor society. Keith, a Claremont, California, native, brings us up to date on his further studies and career.

Q. How do you pronounce your last name?

Keith: "Col" as in coal and "Clo" as in clover. In the international phonetic alphabet it is KOLKLO

Q. Catch us up with what you've been doing academically or professionally since you graduated from Seaver College in 2008.

Keith: After graduating in 2008 I studied a year in Mannheim Germany on a student Fulbright. While there I studied German and took voice lessons with really one of the great teachers of our time, Rudolf Piernay. I also took classes, in German, at the Mannheim Musik Hochschule, such as acting, Italian, vocal pedagogy, and foundation of speech. The opera program at the school in Mannheim is really neat. In the one production I did, *Die Lustige Weiber von Windsor*, out of a double-cast of some 24 singers in principal roles, only one of the students was a native German, and she was half Korean. The most common nationalities were Korean, Chinese, and Serbian but some 12 or so countries were represented.

The last year I began my work on my master's at the University of Redlands working with Paul Sahuc, but will transfer to UCSB next year on a Chancellor's Fellowship to work on a three-year MM/DMA and continue working with that same teacher.

Q. Is this your first participation in SongFest? Why did you want to attend?

Keith: This is my second time participating in Songfest. I did once before in 2007 and it really was a life-changing and transforming experience for two main reasons. It was transforming because exposure to such varied and wonderful repertoire inexorably changes a young singer's perspective, taste, and knowledge. It is also a time to charge your batteries of passion for the rest of the year. When you are in academia and constantly jumping through hoops you sometimes forget sometimes why you are devoting your life to an art form that can at times seem frivolous.

Participating in Songfest changed my life because some of the connections I made there really enabled my Fulbright and strengthened my application. The faculty who attend are very respected and renowned performers and pedagogues, and they are all incredibly gracious.

Q. How is the study and performance of art song different from opera, or any other vocal performance or singing that you've done?

Keith: I would say that Art song is more about vocal inflection and interpretation than about quality of voice. Both are important in either endeavor, but in an opera singers are more concerned about carrying over the orchestra and relating with the people other people on stage. Most of the audience is so far away that only broad strokes are visible or audible.

In recital, generally speaking, the aural texture is thinner if performed only with piano, though of course many great composer such as Mahler or Strauss composed absolutely stunning art songs for orchestra and voice. Still, the setting is much more intimate whether in the size of the venue or merely the nature of the performance. The singer and pianist have no costumes, sets, or lighting to create atmosphere and

drama but must rely solely on the music and upon the singers acting, which is general more subtle than on in an operatic performance. In short, imagination plays a much greater role in art song.

Q. Do you have any favorite composers or poets you like to interpret? If so, who are they and why do they inspire you?

Keith: I think that I would have to go with Mahler or Schubert. Mahler because of his wonderful use of an expanded harmonic vocabulary and my propensity towards some of the text he set, particularly by Rückert. Schubert I love because he is in many ways the godfather of *lieder*. He has such a vast compositional output and requires such subtlety to perform effectively. I adore Tchaikovsky's vocal music but Russian is so hard to learn.

I also love musical theatre because it is immediately accessible to both myself and audiences in the U.S. and because it is usually more fun...but don't tell anyone I said that.

Q. What's next for Keith Colclough? What can we hope to see you doing (and having us write about) in the future?

Keith: I am planning to begin auditioning for some regional opera houses in the area and continue branching out in summer programs. Recitals and gigs are always a plus but my main focus for the next two to three years is to really learn French and Italian and hopefully a little Russian. Likewise, as a lyric bass, I have a long time before my voice really matures and hopefully can have a long career once it does, so I can really take my time and make sure I am as polished as possible when I really put myself out into the professional world. We are very fortunate to live in a time when there are scholarships available to support young singers at an age when they are developing as artists, but not yet employable on a professional/international stage.

Q. Besides eating, studying, and sleeping, what else do you like doing when you're not making music?

Keith: I like hiking, reading whether it be poetry or some other subject, and cooking. I also like lifting weights and am a pretty avid Lakers fan. People of course are very important though being a singer often requires an unfortunate amount of time away from the people you love.

Q. Do you ever wish God had made you a tenor?

Haha! In the past, certainly. Now, not as often. There is such good repertoire for both tenors *and* baritones that there are several pieces of music that make me wish I were a different voice type. The baritone aria from Queen of Spades is one. Likewise, growing up singing hymns in church, or listening to the radio, or singing musical theatre, as a bass almost everything is too high for you. I always wondered how people sang for so long because singing as a teenager was always an uncomfortable event. Granted, a lot of that was due to my vocal technique, but when most music is written in a key that the average person can sing in and your voice is below average (only in pitch I hope), everything is high!

However, entering the world of singing professionally, I am very glad I am a bass. We have some great "rep" as well but perhaps more importantly, there are not very many of us. If there are 80 sopranos in an audition, there will be six basses at the most, and there are usually just as many roles for basses. Simply, the odds are much more in your favor and you just have to do your best to exploit that.