

SCHOOL OF MUSIC ALUMNI NEWS

A CALL TO ACTION

Letter from the Alumni Board President

Each and every one of us has a sense of tremendous accomplishment and pride in having earned a degree from one of the very top schools of music in the world. And if music is your profession, the value of your music degree is one of your most important assets. As the IU School of Music continues to enhance its position as one of the premier institutions for the study of musicology and performance, the value of that degree continues to grow.

The alumni board of directors is fully committed to connecting the School of Music with its graduates, as well as providing activities and opportunities for alumni to connect with one another. From our annual graduation luncheon and other local events to cocktail receptions and alumni performances around the globe, we continue to gain momentum toward reaching our goal of keeping connected with every one of our graduates throughout their lives and careers.

Many exciting alumni-based initiatives are underway to support both the school and its graduates in numerous ways, including the unveiling of a new alumni-dedicated Web page, the development of e-mail-based newsletters and other communications vehicles, and increasing and promoting activities and performances for our graduates locally and worldwide.

No matter how hard we strive to move these initiatives forward, they depend on the support of each of our alumni. You can help by becoming one of the growing number of “Action Alumni”—by joining or renewing your IUAA membership; speaking out for the School of Music at every opportunity; making sure that IU is included in your professional or performance biography; linking potential corporate or individual donors to the school’s development office; sending your best students to the school; and keeping in touch with us about your own achievements and activities.

Thank you for doing your part, and we look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions.

—Wil Greckel, Ph.D.’69

A DATE WITH DESTINY

BY RYAN PIUREK

Alumna Angela Brown seizes dream opportunity to become opera’s newest diva

“At last an Aida.”

—*New York Times*
reviewer Anne
Midgette after
Angela Brown’s
long-awaited
Metropolitan Opera
debut in October



Marty Sohl, Metropolitan Opera

At last, indeed.

It's been quite a ride for Angela Brown, opera's newest diva. But to truly appreciate what the Indiana University School of Music voice alumna recently accomplished in New York City, one has to understand just how far she has come.

Her career began as a young girl in Indianapolis, where she sang gospel music in her grandfather's Baptist church and in talent and variety shows held at places like the Indianapolis Civic Theatre. She continued to develop her voice in classes with Ginger Beazley at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, where she hoped to become a singing evangelist.

"I wanted to be anything but an opera singer," Brown told CBS News in a recent interview, one of several high-profile media appearances. Beazley had other intentions for her student, though.

"She (Beazley) says, 'you know, you sing gospel music beautifully, but when you sing classical music, you are head and shoulders above everybody else,'" Brown told the CBS reporter.

Beazley guided Brown to Bloomington and the internationally-renowned soprano Virginia Zeani, whose students have gone on to perform all over the world. In the 1997 Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions alone, 16 of the finalists were Zeani's students.

It was clear Brown had the talent, but she'd also need patience and perseverance. Three times in the regional Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions, Brown came up just short. Then, on her fourth and final try, at age 33, she adopted a cavalier attitude toward the whole, nerve-racking process.

"I was just like 'whatever,'" Brown said. "I'd tried out three other times. I'd get to the regionals and always get stopped. I was over it. I told myself, 'The only thing they can tell me is no.' I didn't have any expectations."

What Brown did have was Zeani's voice in her head, telling her to keep trying, and that her time would soon arrive. "Miss Zeani told me to follow my destiny, that everybody's destiny is different," Brown said. "She also taught me to persevere, to always present yourself well and to be a good finisher."

It would turn out to be Brown's first Big Apple breakthrough. But the 1997 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions winner would have to wait another seven years for her career to really take off.

Not that there weren't successes in between.

In the years after winning the Met Opera auditions, Brown emerged as a leading Verdi soprano, moving audiences and critics alike with a rare combination of vocal power and finesse. She performed with several leading U.S. opera companies and

major metropolitan orchestras. She also recorded a solo CD of arias, art songs, and African American spirituals with pianist and IU School of Music Dean Emeritus Charles Webb; a CD of selections from *Porgy and Bess* with Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra; and a CD of African American spirituals with piano and guitar that was released the day of her Met opera debut.

In 2003, Brown showcased another of her many talents—that of last-minute rescuer. She made two critically-acclaimed, eleventh-hour role debuts with the Opera Company of Philadelphia. First, she stepped into the title role in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which she had covered for the Metropolitan Opera. Next, she took over the role of Leonora in *Il trovatore*, which she had covered in San Francisco.

Brown's last-minute saves in Philadelphia served notice that she was on her way to major stardom. Her performance as Ariadne earned her a rave review in *Opera Now*, which wrote that "(Brown) has a powerhouse of an instrument, shimmering with colour and imaginatively used, and she knows how to take centre-stage."

Brown made her debut at New York City's legendary Carnegie Hall in June, as Cassandra in the U.S. premiere of *Agamemnon*, an opera by Russian composer Sergey Taneyev. Conducted by

Peter Tiboris of the Manhattan Philharmonic, the opera boasted a world-class cast of performers that included Academy Award-winner Olympia Dukakis.

Then, at long last, Brown returned to the Met, taking the stage as Aida, the beautiful Ethiopian princess of Verdi's classic opera. Finally given the opportunity that she had dreamed about for years, she did not disappoint. Critics and audiences were wowed by her passionate performance and quickly anointed her opera's next big star. As one audience member told CBS News, "the future of opera" had arrived.

Last summer, as she awaited her Met Opera debut, Brown compared herself to one of the race car drivers who descend on her hometown each year for the Indianapolis 500.

"I feel like I've been doing a lot of practice laps for a lot of years," Brown said with an opera-sized laugh. "But now the engines are revved and I'm ready to go."

Now that she's burst out of the starting gate and has the attention of the opera world, Brown is primed to embrace the limelight.

"It helps to be a beast of the stage," she said before her Met Opera debut. "That's my job. People don't go to opera expecting to see an average Joe. Now when you're out of the limelight it helps to be real and sincere. But when you're on that stage, you'd better bring it."

"A singer of this great talent only comes along once in a generation."

—IU professor of music and renowned conductor David Effron