

## She's Queen of the Night

It's "balls to the wall, give it all you got," says soprano Kathryn Blomshield Lewek '06E, '08E (MM) of the operatic role she relishes.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

IT'S BEEN THE SUBJECT OF CONVERSATION on *Gossip Girl*. It's accompanied TV ads hawking everything from smartphones to sexual stimulants. And for singers, it's known as one of the most difficult arias in all of opera: "Der Hölle Rache," which translates as "The Vengeance of Hell," in the second act of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

It marks the moment when the Queen of the Night, wrapped in fury, hands her daughter, Pamina, a knife, making her promise she'll use it to slaughter the Queen's rival, Sarastro.

Requiring extraordinary range and dazzling vocal runs, it's a feat of vocal athleticism that **Kathryn Blomshield Lewek '06E, '08E (MM)** is known to perform exceptionally well.

"I don't think it actually has the highest written notes ever in an aria, but it's right up there," she says from her home studio in Fairfield County, Conn.

Lewek, who's sung in a variety of operatic roles, oratorios, and requiems during her still infant career, has sung Queen of the Night all over the world, including on prestigious stages such as the Deutsche Oper Berlin and at Austria's Bregenz Festival. In December, she makes her debut at New York City's Metropolitan Opera in that role.

She says the role still gives her butterflies every time she performs it.

"Every night, it makes me nervous. Ev-

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**AIMING HIGH:** Lewek's ability to sing coloratura soprano is considered unusual in younger singers.

erybody always says to me, 'Oh my gosh, Katie, it's always just right on, and I don't know how you do that, and it's great every night.' But I'm still worrying every night that it's not going to come out."

Like most singers, she'll often try to vary her performances. But not in this role.

"It's one of those things where you have to just let your body take over and you have to do what you know how to do," she says. "If I'm doing another role, I try to make it different and exciting every night in a different way, and with Queen, you just have to sing it exactly how you know how to sing it."

Queen of the Night is a prime example of coloratura soprano—the highest soprano voice, embellished with vocal runs and trills. Lewek sang in a lower soprano range for much of her time as a student at Eastman, and called her high notes her "party trick notes."

"I would only ever sing them when I'd had a glass of wine," she says.

In 2009, she had something of an epiphany as a fellow at the vocal program at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, Calif. Under the tutelage of Marilyn Horne, she was encouraged to sing higher and higher.

"She just kind of wanted to see how high I could sing," Lewek recalls.

Eventually, Horne made a suggestion Lewek found surprising. "She said, 'You know, I think maybe you should work on some coloratura repertoire.' And I said, in my very respectful way that you would only say to someone who was such a huge star, 'Are you crazy?'"

But she listened to Horne and began studying coloratura soprano with her current vocal coach, soprano Diana Soviaro.

Robert McIver, professor of voice at Eastman and Lewek's primary instructor during all six years of her residence, says he's not surprised Lewek is singing coloratura soprano. "She developed a facility fairly early on in her study to be able to run her voice very quickly and well," he says. That said, he adds, "I think the shock was that at such an early age she would do Queen of the Night."

Indeed, at 30 years old, Lewek's vocal chords are barely fully developed. "It's like the soft spot on a baby's head," Lewek says of the vocal chords of most singers under 30. She remembers McIver's words to her: "He'd say, 'That sounds great, but remember, you're still a baby. You're totally going to change in the next 10 years.'"

"All voices mature at different physiological rates, but generally for a soprano, all of their physical equipment doesn't arrive until they're about 29 years old," says McIver, noting that in both men and women, in all ranges, vocal development lags behind general physical development.

"That doesn't mean they don't sing beautifully before that, but the process is certainly made easier when all of the physical aspects of the instrument are in place," he says, referring to the muscular development of the vocal chords.

"People say I have vocal chords of steel," Lewek says. "I don't know if that's right."

"You do get to know your own voice. That's a really important aspect of being a singer. To know your limits and also to push yourself at times. You have to push yourself to see what you're capable of." **R**



**GRAND OLD OPERA:** Lewek, who performed as Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* with the Nashville Opera in April, will debut at the Metropolitan Opera in the same role in December.