

WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE



Abigail Kelly Is Bringing Opera to the Masses

Having performed in South Africa, Germany, Hungary, Montserrat, Poland and The Cayman Islands, Abigail Kelly's operatic roles include Ninetta in Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra*, Susanna in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and Cobweb in Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Worked with the English Touring Opera she's performed as Bridesmaid in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Despina in *Così fan Tutti*, both by Mozart, Fido in Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan* and Naiad in *Rusalka* by Dvořák.

Just rewards for the Birmingham-born singer who aim to bring opera to the masses.

A competent piano player, from the age of 4, and violinist, by 11, the former King Edwards Grammar School for Girls pupil originally set out to teach Genetic Research Science, but the yearning for music was too great to resist - her rise to prominence proving the epitome of belief, dedication and the incredible support of family, friends and her peers.

Abigail was singing arias since she was a child, before developing the genre whilst training at Birmingham City University's Conservatoire - where she gained a first class honours degree - before gaining her Post Graduate diploma at the then-called Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now called the Royal Scottish Conservatoire).

Whilst at the Conservatoire she was awarded a course scholarship, the Robert Gahan prize for achievement by a singer and the BMus prize.

She worked with the Birmingham Operatic Company, before going on to the English Touring Opera Company; "With my interest in opera from such an early age, I want to introduce it to children - no matter what their background is - and show them just how engaging, diverse and uplifting it is," the ever-vibrant Miss Kelly said.

"I know that it's not for everybody, but I always recommend

that you try it, more than the one time. Opera, for me, always has that extra 'funk' which makes it so different to any other type of music."

Abigail has performed in many operas written for younger audiences and often in particular for young people with special educational needs - making many recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra.

In 2014 she performed at the House of Commons alongside Dr. Shirley Thompson at a 'Birmingham Day' event attended by MPs and other civic and business leaders including David Urquhart - The Bishop of Birmingham and Sir Peter Bazalgette - Chairman of Arts Council.

With such a close relationship with the Diocese of Birmingham, she has sung for Bishop John Sentamu on a number of occasions including the confirmation service of his election as Archbishop of York at St Mary-Le-Bow Church in London and at the Walk of Witness service commemorating the 200th Abolition of the Slave Trade in London's Kennington Park.

Proud of her city, she has also performed at Birmingham's first commemoration of Emancipation Day and at the 2012 Birmingham Symphony Hall celebrations of Jamaica's 50th anniversary of independence.

Today, she's getting her teeth into operatic works which tackle challenging subject matters such as 'women's abuse,' 'dementia' and 'female trafficking' - "I love

the challenge of opera music," she says. "There's no subject that cannot be tackled and that, for me, is fulfilling."

Some of her performances in new works include Queen Nanny of the Maroons in Shirley Thompson's *Sacred Mountain*, which premiered at the Tête à Tête Opera Festival in 2015, and in 2016 she played the role at the Edna Manley School for the Performing Arts, in Jamaica.

Also Stephen Oliver's *The Waiter's Revenge*, with the Birmingham Opera Company, a performance of Michael Stimpson's *The Sharecroppers Son*, a song cycle celebrating the life of American athlete Jesse Owens and premiered Bob Chilcott's Christmas cantata *And Peace On Earth* at Birmingham Symphony Hall with The City of Birmingham Choir.

"I just love to be occupied - with different types of operatic works."

Abigail Kelly PGDip. (Opera) BMus(Hons.) will be performing a piece on Bessie Coleman - the first Black woman to earn a pilot's license and stage a public flight in America - in London, very soon, to add to her performing in a production of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* at the Barbican.

"Opera is a fantastic vehicle for the full breadth of human emotion," Abigail acknowledges. "You can reach the highest that no other arts can. It can be fascinatingly interesting, so I recommend you give it a go."

