

## ARTIST OF THE MONTH

# MICHAEL SPYRES

With 43 operatic roles in four languages already under his belt, the young American tenor Michael Spyres is not an artist who enjoys resting on his laurels. 'My biggest challenge,' he says, 'is to slow myself down and realise that I can't fit everything in the universe into my mortal existence!'

Born into a musical family in Mansfield, Missouri, Spyres grew up performing from a very early age, and credits his parents as 'my band, choir, and drama teachers'. Rather poignantly, they named him after an uncle who died at the age of 37 from a rare form of throat cancer. 'I grew up with the story of how Michael wanted to become an opera singer but never really got there,' he explains, 'so I always felt like it was my destiny to fulfil his wish.'

During his years of training, initially in the US and later at the Vienna Conservatory, Spyres cites his choir teacher Dr Guy Webb and voice teacher Dr Robert Mirshak as key influences: 'Both were wonderful singers in their own right, but they taught me such invaluable lessons in how to think about singing and how to become a well-rounded individual. They showed me how important concentration is in all aspects of life and for that I am eternally grateful.'

Another defining experience for Spyres came during his years as a member of the Deutsche Oper Berlin, when he was called to step into the role of Tamino (in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) at extremely short notice: 'I literally met the conductor and the Queen of Night on stage. It was a very surreal experience because so many subjects explored by the role of Tamino (self-doubt, maturity, confusion) were my problems in that moment ... truly life imitating art! Tamino is one of my favourite roles because it is the manifestation of a human

on a journey to maturity and the road to enlightenment, which is something I feel we are all striving for in one way or another.'

As evidenced by his recent solo recital disc, *A Fool For Love* (reviewed in the February issue of *Opera Now*), Spyres's repertoire is very wide-ranging, however he feels a particularly strong affinity for the music of Mozart and Rossini: 'These two men force you to have a balance of musical expression, self-control and technique that results in truly high art.' Psychological depth is also important in the roles that he takes on, with favourite characters being those which 'take me on a journey where I learn from them along the way: Albert Herring, Tom Rakewell, Tamino, and Nemorino'.

The 2012-13 and 2013-14 seasons include several important company debuts for Spyres, with the Rossini Festival in Pesaro, London's Royal Opera House and the Lyric Opera of Chicago all coming up. But while these may bring him fame and fortune, Spyres's own sights are set on higher ideals: 'I just want to keep becoming a better artist who reaches wider audiences, so that I can bring about change in a positive way,' he explains. 'I feel that it is our duty in this profession to bring about critical thinking and a higher level of consciousness, which ultimately results in a better future for all of humanity.'

Michael Spyres's forthcoming appearances include Masaniello in Auber's *La Muette de Portici* at the Opéra Comique, Paris (5 to 15 April) and Baldassare in a new production of *Ciro in Babilonia* at this year's Rossini Opera Festival, Pesaro (10 to 22 August). His first solo album, *A Fool For Love*, is now also available on the Delos label (DE3414).

## COMPETITION WATCH

*Opera Now's* round-up of recent competition results and forthcoming finals

### Royal Over-Seas League

The Singers Section Final of this year's Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition has been won by the South African baritone **Njabulo Madlala**. He will go on to compete in the Competition's overall Final at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall on Tuesday 8 May. Now in its 60<sup>th</sup> year, the Competition is open to citizens of the UK, Commonwealth and former Commonwealth countries under the age of 30. Previous winners include Susan Chilcott (1986), Jonathan Lemalu (2000) and Lucy Crowe (2002). [www.roslarts.co.uk](http://www.roslarts.co.uk)

### International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition

Qualifying rounds for the 30<sup>th</sup> International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition will take place in 37 cities around the world during April, from San Francisco to Tokyo. Over 100 of the best applicants then travel to Vienna during the summer for

this year's Final on 8 July. Singers born in 1980 or later are invited to apply. Soprano Angela Meade, who recently received the Met's Seventh Beverly Sills Artist Award worth \$50,000 (see page 10), was the Competition's Opera Prize winner in 2007. [www.belvedere-competition.com](http://www.belvedere-competition.com)

### Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award

Three conductors have been selected from over 90 applicants to take part in the final of this year's Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award: 20-year-old Jamie Phillips (UK), 33-year-old Christian Baldini (Argentina) and 26-year-old Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla (Lithuania). The final will take place on 28 and 29 April during an Award Concert Weekend featuring three concerts conducted by the finalists, each with a different orchestra. Further programme details to follow. [www.salzburgerfestspiele.at](http://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at)