

Pembroke, Ontario native Joshua Hopkins has been busy since he was last in Ottawa, so ARTSFILE thought it was time for an update from the busy baritone. Here are his answers to emailed questions from Peter Robb.

Q. We haven't spoken since you appeared in *The Barber of Seville* with Opera Lyra two years ago. I'm sure you have been busy but can you give us a quick run down?

A. I have been rather busy. After singing Barber in Ottawa, I had the great pleasure of revisiting *The Little Prince* with Houston Grand Opera. The Pilot is a role I had performed with HGO when I was still in their young artist program in 2004. Directly after those performances, I sang one of my favourite roles also with HGO, *Il conte Almaviva* in *The Marriage of Figaro*, which I reprised in another production this past Fall with Washington National Opera. Last March I returned to Lyric Opera of Chicago to perform Mercutio in Bartlett Sher's production of *Roméo et Juliette* and this past summer I very happily returned to Santa Fe Opera to sing Olivier in Strauss's *Capriccio*, my sixth appearance with the company. I thought I'd have a bit more free time this season, but unprecedentedly I was asked to step in for two different roles! The first was as Valentin in *Faust* last Fall with Houston Grand Opera (a role I hadn't performed in eight years) and the second was what I'm currently working on in Amsterdam, *The New Prince*. So yes, my schedule has been very busy.

Q. Who are you in [The New Prince](#)?

A. I'm singing the role of Niccolò Machiavelli.

Q. What is the story?

A. Machiavelli mysteriously wakes up in 2032, 500 years after his book, *The Prince*, was published, to rework and add new chapters to his book for modern times. The opera shows a series of vignettes about personalities from past and more recent history, ranging from Alexander Hamilton to Dick Cheney, that Machiavelli uses to illustrate what he thinks a leader should be. (Editor's note: You can see a trailer for the opera [here](#).)

Q. The piece is written by a Muslim-American. What do you think of his work?

A. As I understand it, Dutch National Opera commissioned the work and with the subject matter in mind, chose [Mohammed Fairouz](#) because he is a prolific, young, up-and-coming composer who is highly active in politics.

I like the work very much. I felt an immediate emotional connection to the music when I first played through the score on the piano. It's very cinematic in scope. A lot of the writing gives me the opportunity to sing long, beautiful, legato lines, something I don't often get to do in my current operatic repertoire. It's challenging vocally, due to its often high tessitura, but this allows me to stretch my boundaries and I appreciate that the role is tonal and melodic. The opera opens with a fabulous, emotionally charged *scena* for Machiavelli, something I've never had the chance to do before.

Q. Many Canadian performers find more work in Europe than in North America. What is the life of an ex-pat like in a place like Amsterdam. Is it glamorous?

A. Truth is, I've mostly worked in North America and not so much in Europe. It's a huge pleasure to be in Amsterdam, although I haven't had the chance to really enjoy the city as I've been constantly in rehearsals. I wouldn't call what I do glamorous. The opportunity to travel can be wonderful, especially when I get a chance to spend time in a wonderful city. However, it's not easy to be away from home so much. I miss friends and family and important events. It's a gypsy lifestyle with a lot of hard work that can be extremely rewarding. On this particular engagement, one unusual treat is my wife and I have been staying in a 17th-Century canal house. Thankfully, the interior has been updated!

Q. You are in Holland at an "interesting" time. Is the country coming back together after the election that has just concluded. Does Europe's turmoil make you think more fondly about Canada?

A. Again, I've been in rehearsals so I haven't had a chance to witness any turmoil in the city if there has been some. The general vibe in Amsterdam is laid back ... 'Do what you want and you won't be judged.' I was very pleased with the results of the election and think the Dutch people definitely have their heads on straight. It was also so great to see such a large voter turn out, not unlike Canada's recent election. I always think fondly of Canada — it's an incredible, open-minded, inclusive country and I am extremely privileged to have grown up in the Ottawa Valley.

Q. The New Prince seems like the perfect opera for a Machiavellian time don't you think?

A. Yes, I think this is definitely what Mohammed and David Ignatius (the librettist) had in mind when the opera was initially conceived by them and our director, Lotte de Beer. However, I think they, like me, thought the current U.S. president would be Hillary Clinton. In fact, one of my arias is a touching ode to the former Secretary of State.

Q. When will you be back in this country on an opera stage?

A. No current contracts on the books, but you never know when something might pop up. I will be back in Toronto this December to sing Messiah with the TSO.

Q. Where is your home base these days? I recall it was Houston, Texas, certainly warmer than Pembroke ... in March.

Yes, I'm still in Houston. I really love the city as my home base and don't miss winter at all. It's especially great when I'm working at HGO because I get to spend a nice chunk of time at home. Also, I still work with my voice teacher, Stephen King, as much as possible. It's been amazing going on this vocal journey with him since I first moved to Houston 14 years ago.