

Christopher Browner '12,  
associate editor of the  
Metropolitan Opera, in the  
opera house's main lobby.



## A Q&A with **Christopher Browner '12**, Metropolitan Opera Associate Editor

By Linda Hedman Beyus

### How did you get interested in opera?

When I was in middle school, I wanted to learn to play piano, and before my parents would dive in and invest in lessons, we went to the music store in Watertown and got a book of sheet music—we had a small keyboard at home. One of the pieces in it was Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, K.525, 1st Movement," and my dad said, "You know this piece, it's in the movie *Amadeus*." I had seen the movie a few years earlier and vaguely remembered it.

So we went and got *Amadeus*, and I watched the whole movie again, and the next day I watched it again. I started to fast forward through the movie to watch the opera sequences, then I would rewind and watch them over and over.

I watched a few opera DVDs that we got from the library, and one of the first was Ingmar Bergman's *The Magic Flute*—a film classic, but a little bizarre to a 13-year-old. Each year when the Met season came out, there was a full-page ad in *The New York Times*. My dad said, "Do you know any of the operas they're doing?" I said, they're doing *The Magic Flute*, so he said, "Let's go." It was November 17, 2007, and I still remember the seat.

As the orchestra was tuning, and the chandeliers were rising

up to the ceiling—we were in the balcony—so as they were rising right in front of our faces, I grabbed my dad's hand, and my heart was beating out of my chest because I was so excited. I was 13 and in eighth grade, and I was nervous, wondering if I'd be able to follow it.

So very quickly, within that first year, the 2008 Met season, I saw probably five operas. It just hooked me right away.

When I was at Taft, because we had long winter and spring breaks, I was able to go to New York. The Met Opera rush line was in person then, so I would see 10 to 15 operas during the school year. Sometimes my dad would come with me, and we would stand in rush lines for six hours for that night's show.

### At Taft were you involved in music?

I wanted to do a lot of different arts at Taft, so I was in Chamber Ensemble and played viola. I was in three musicals, I did a lot of theater, and I took AP Music Theory. I thought I was going to become an opera stage director, so as a senior I did a directing and design independent tutorial and an independent study project, where I directed a play.

Also, while I was at Taft, the Met did live Sirius XM broadcasts on weeknights, and during intermissions, they had trivia questions they posed for listeners, and you

emailed in your answers, so I would do that. I got to know the Met radio announcers because here was this 15-year-old kid who was doing his math homework and writing in trivia answers. They're also the ones who did the Met Opera Quiz live on Saturday afternoons during the broadcasts, with three panelists, and they invited me to be on the Opera Quiz later, once I was in college.

### How did you become more involved with the Met?

In 2010 or so, blogging was starting to take off, and some friends encouraged me to start a blog, so I started *The Bent Nail Teen Opera Blog*.

When I got to Columbia, I became the opera critic for the *Columbia Daily Spectator*. I was getting to see about 25 to 30 operas a year.

I was a music major, and on the side I was directing operas with student groups, and for a few summers I worked as a technical apprentice at the Santa Fe Opera. I also studied Italian and studied abroad and saw a lot of opera in Europe.

### What kind of impact would you like to make at the Met—how would you like to make your mark?

I'd like to do what I can to continue to uphold a sterling image of the Met to the public. A lot of what I do is to share this interest that I have with the public in a way that is digestible and interesting when we write

program notes, interviews, features, all of this content that we publish in programs—our readership is a broad audience.

There are people who have never been to the opera before, and there are people who go to the opera even more than I do (whether you believe it or not). We need to communicate to both those groups of people and everyone in between.

The goal is to find a way to communicate to the audience and to really be a crusader or a cheerleader for the art form in general. There are a lot of people who would really enjoy opera, but they just don't know that they might, so they avoid it, and think that it is women in Viking horns or screaming—there are all these caricatures of it, which it really isn't.

### What's your favorite part of working at the Met?

My favorite part is working at the Met! One of the things that is fortunate about my job as associate editor is that because we're doing the *Playbill*, I have to talk to a lot of different departments. I end up liaising with most of the building. And while I'm not working in the production side and not creating the art itself, I feel like I'm at the center of everything going on. So that's really thrilling, I'm in it every day—it's pretty great.

It's funny because people ask me what my hobbies are, and basically now my profession is my hobby. I like it so much that my job does not feel like work. I'm very fortunate and grateful for the opportunity I have. ■



Browner backstage with a colleague before his "Met debut" as a supernumerary in a performance of Verdi's *Aida* earlier this year.