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**NOAH STEWART - FROM HARLEM TO THE ROYAL OPERA**

Noah Stewart doesn't look like what many think of as a typical opera singer. He's young, tall, fit, and devilishly handsome. Even though you may not like opera, you'll never want him to stop singing once he starts. A remarkable tenor, his voice has been called "thrilling and impressive" by Metro Pulse. While opera is his bread and butter, he's just as comfortable singing spirituals and show tunes.

**TCP Magazine Feature Article - Interview by Leilani Carr**

Noah Stewart is part of a new generation of artists who are breaking tradition to bring great music to young classical and opera fans. His first album shot to #1 on the UK classical charts - a feat never before achieved for a black artist. His record label, Universal, calls him the "first modern opera star." Noah has performed in venues across America and in Europe, building a massive following along the way. His list of awards is impressive, including a first place award in The Mario Lanza Competition for Tenors. Not bad for a shy, introverted kid from Harlem!

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Noah Stewart while he was in Durham, North Carolina, where he was performing at the Music Night for the Coalition for Preserving Memory. "It's so important for me to stand up for things that are right in the world, and when I got the call, I said absolutely, I have to be there." Noah performed three songs that have a particular meaning for him, and he hopes, to the loved ones of those lost to genocide.

The first was one of his favorite spirituals, "Deep River." "Spirituals provided hope for getting through - day after day, week after week - horrible circumstances. The fact they could find positivity and light through spirituals is still amazing and inspiring to me."

The second was "Without A Song," from his debut album, "Noah." It's one of his favorite songs, he says, because of the message that the song delivers. "Everyone has a story. Everyone has a song. We're all connected, and we need each other. It's important to celebrate each other, and not condemn each other for being different."

The final song was "Nessun Dorma!" from Puccini's opera Turandot. While it is one of his favorite pieces, ("I grew up listening to Pavarotti sing "Nessun Dorma!" every day of my entire life,") he feels that the message of the piece will have particular meaning for attendees. "It's a very spiritual piece with a strong message of 'we will win this war over injustice.'"

Noah's passion for performing came when he was just a teenager attending the Harlem School of the Arts. Oddly enough, he was a shy kid who loved math and science. While his mother sang in the church choir, Noah would sit in the pews and just enjoy the music. When his school held auditions for the chorus, Noah was asked to try out to help fill a shortage of male voices. He was immediately accepted. His choir director quickly noticed Noah's ability and his excitement to "explore this other side of my brain" that wasn't math and science related. His first solo was "Your Feet Too Big" from Ain't Misbehavin'. "I was always somewhat of a class clown, but I remember hearing the audience and their laughter and me feeling so good at the end, because not only did I bring laughter to people, but I felt this energy that I'd never felt before."

Noah says that he feels lucky when he looks back on his school career. "There was always something going on. Different organizations would come to the school and ask our choir to participate. Every opportunity that came along, I raised my hand because I needed something to do. My mom was a single parent at the time, and we couldn't afford after-school programs. So, any time there was an audition for anything, I raised my hand."

While at the Harlem School of the Arts, Noah appeared on Sesame Street and in various commercials and television school specials. When he moved into high school at Fiorello LaGuardia High School of Performing Arts, that trend continued. Mariah Carey, Hootie and the Blowfish, and David Letterman came to the school to hold auditions. Noah performed with all of them.

Noah says that he was also lucky to be able to attend great theatre performances for free, thanks to his schooling in New York. "I would always raise my hand for things. When they were giving away free tickets to see Showboat, my hand was up. When they were giving away free tickets to the symphony, my hand was up. When they were giving away free tickets to the opera - no one wanted to go except me, and so I went to the opera all the time for free. I got to see these huge artists in their prime." His friends in school soon took to calling him "opera boy," which was fine with him. He says that he developed an appreciation for live performances. "You have to experience great artists in their own space. There's a certain energy that is pumped through."

Noah says that he chose opera as a career "because I saw the lack of men of color on the professional stage, and I want to be one of the pioneers of my generation to do this. I want to bring a new, fresh approach to classical music. I want to bring the accessibility of Broadway to classical. Classical music has a bad rap of being old and stuffy, and it doesn't have to be that way." He says that classical music was, and still is, the music of the people. "If you go back to the operas of the 50s and 60s...people were really crazy. It was almost like a rock concert."

Noah credits his success to his mentor, the great soprano Leontyne Price, who encouraged him to attend The Juilliard School, which he did after being awarded a full scholarship. After graduation, Noah turned down a place at the Manhattan School of Music, and instead decided on a solo career. He headed to San Francisco, but after many auditions, found himself out of work. To support himself, he worked as a waiter, and as a receptionist at Carnegie Hall, among other jobs. While his career was on hold, Noah says that the work helped him develop as a person, and also paid for dance, acting and voice coaching. After three years, he decided to get back to what he loved. He auditioned and was accepted into the San Francisco Opera, where he says his career got its official start.

Fast-forward seven years, and Noah Stewart is the talk of the opera community, with performances on three continents, three albums, and dozens of accolades. His success has prompted him to volunteer his time to speak to and perform for children. "If it wasn't for those individuals who came and sang and spoke, I wouldn't be here. And it's also inspiring to me to meet talented young people and to hear their experiences. It's vital - especially since art programs have been cut in so many schools. It's so gratifying to hear a kid say, 'I don't like opera, but I loved your album, or I loved your concert, and I want more.'"

Noah Stewart will be returning to North Carolina May 17 to perform at "Opera In The Pines" at the Koka Booth Amphitheatre in Cary. The program will include opera, crossover numbers, and show tunes. For more information visit [www.noahstewart.com](http://www.noahstewart.com) or [www.ncopera.org](http://www.ncopera.org).

