

Marcella Kochańska Sembrich Award Winner 201

Alexandra Nowakowski



Alexandra Nowakowski is a 22 year old soprano from Palatine, Illinois, and a recent graduate of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Though at the beginning of her professional career, Ms. Nowakowski has already distinguished herself in numerous competitions. In addition to being named the winner of the Marcella Kochańska Sembrich Vocal Competition by the American Council for Polish Culture, she received 2nd place in the Hal Leonard Vocal Competition, and an Encouragement Award at the District Metropolitan Opera Auditions in Iowa in 2014.

Ms. Nowakowski's father was born in Warsaw, and mother in Tarnów. Her parents immigrated to the United States in 1986 and settled in St. Louis, Missouri, where Alexandra was born. They kept close ties with the Polish community, and Alexandra speaks Polish fluently. When the family moved to Chicago, Alexandra attended the Fryderyk Chopin Polish School in Palatine, Illinois for ten years, and passed her Matura in 2009. As a child, Alexandra spent her summers in Poland visiting grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Her most favorite place is Zakopane. Alexandra is a talented artist who also enjoys areas outside of opera, especially cooking, reading, art, film, and the symphony.

At the University of Illinois, Alexandra was the recipient of numerous awards and scholarships, actively participating the choral groups and university opera workshops. During the 2013-2014 season, Alexandra made her operatic role debut as Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* with the Lyric Opera Studio Weimar, and participated in the Bay View Music Festival, where she sang in scenes from Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*. She later portrayed Diane in Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers* with the Illinois Opera Theatre, and made her professional operatic debut with the Baroque Artists of Champaign-Urbana as Dido in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Alexandra also made her concert debut this year as a co-winner of the Krannert Debut Artist in Champaign-Urbana. Alexandra will continue her operatic studies at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia as a resident artist for the 2014-15 season. www.alexandranowakowski.com

Pianist, Jianan Yu comes from Dalian, China, graduating from the Shenyang Conservatory of Music in 2010 and earning her M.M. from Syracuse University, NY. She received numerous awards and held many solo and chamber music recitals in China, United States and Canada, including the Hira Poncha Memorial Music Awards, National Scholarship of China, Gold Award of the 2009 Yamaha Asian Music Scholarship Competition, among others. Last season Ms. Yu performed Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto in B-flat Minor, Op.23* with the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra. Currently, Ms. Yu is a Doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

American Council
ACPO
for Polish Culture



"You are the Mimi"

Giacomo Puccini

Marcella Kochańska Sembrich Award Concert

Montante Cultural Center
Canisius College, Buffalo, NY

July 31, 2014

**Marcella Kochańska Sembrich
(1858-1935)**

Prakseda Marcelina Kochańska was born in Wisniewczyk, Austrian-Hungarian Galicia, now part of the Ukraine. Her family was very poor, but under her father's tutelage, she became an accomplished pianist, violinist, and singer. In Vienna, at the age of 17, when she performed in all three areas for Franz Liszt, he responded "My little angel, God has given you three pairs of wings with which to fly through the country of music...but sing, sing for the world, for you have the voice of an angel." At age 19, the young soprano debuted in Athens, singing Elvira in Bellini's *I Puritani*, and four additional operas, including Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. By the age of 22, dubbed the "Polish Patti", she created a sensation in London's Covent Garden where she remained a favorite. In 1883, Marcella Sembrich came to the United States to sing in the newly founded Metropolitan Opera company.

Paderewski's opera *Manru* is the only Polish opera performed by the Met with Sembrich singing the leading role in English in 1902. Sembrich had 37 roles at her command, singing more than 450 Met performances. Among her roles were Violetta in *La Traviata*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute*, Rosina in *Barber of Seville*, and Mimi in *La Boheme*. Puccini said to her "You are *the* Mimi."

Sembrich's Met career was celebrated with a farewell gala in 1909, during which she thrilled her fans by singing as well as playing the piano and violin. Sembrich concertized internationally until 1917, also teaching at the Julliard School of Music in New York and the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. She purchased a woodland retreat on Lake George, New York, and used it as a teaching studio between 1924 and 1934. Now, known as the Sembrich Museum, it holds memorabilia of Sembrich's travels and costumes, hosts concerts of renowned singers, and holds symposia for opera historians. www.thesembrich.org

Marcella's favorite activity was mountain climbing with her husband in the Alps. Sembrich maintained a life-long friendship with Paderewski, giving concerts together as he accompanied her singing in Warsaw. Throughout her life, she remained a great Polish patriot and humanitarian. During World War I, she was President of the American-Polish Relief Committee of New York, raising money, food, and clothes for her beloved Poland.

PROGRAM

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| Fryderyk Chopin
(1810-1849) | Op. 74 <i>No. 12 Moja Pieszczotka</i>
<i>No. 16 Piosenka Litewska</i> |
| Fryderyk Chopin– arr.
Pauline Viardot (1821-1910) | 12 Mazurkas Op. 50
<i>1. La Danse</i>
<i>2. Seize ans</i> |
| Francis Poulenc
(1899-1963) | Les chemins de l'amour
Huit chansons polonaises, FP 69
<i>Wianek</i>
<i>Odjazd</i>
<i>Polska młodzież</i>
<i>Ostatni mazur</i>
<i>Pożegnanie</i>
<i>Biała chorągiewka</i>
<i>Wisła</i>
<i>Jezioro</i> |
| | Intermission |
| Vincenzo Bellini
(1801-1835) | O rendetemi... Qui la voce... Vien diletto
<i>From I Puritani</i> |
| Charles Gounod
(1818-1893) | Ah! Je veux vivre
<i>From Roméo et Juliette</i> |
| Jules Massenet
(1842-1912) | Gavotte from Manon |
| Jerzy Peterburski
(1895-1979) | To Ostatnia Niedziela |

Alexandra Nowakowski, soprano
Jianan Yu, piano