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Music Alumna Joining Lyric Opera's *The King and I*

April 8, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – [Nicole Besa \(Chamberlin\) '14](#) signs her emails with three identifying signatures – voice instructor, lead singer and model. In April she added a fourth to announce her appearance in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of [The King and I](#).

"Getting any level of work at the Lyric is big news," said Illinois Wesleyan Assistant Professor of Music William Hudson, who was one of Besa's voice instructors at IWU.

Besa agrees. "I am counting my lucky stars to be working with such an incredible company," she said. "The Lyric is among the most innovative opera houses in the country," she added, noting its American Musical Theater Initiative and "Chicago Voices" enterprise to support diverse musical traditions of Chicago.

"These are just two examples of how the Lyric is changing the game for opera, but also for the arts community as a whole," said Besa. "The company is a phenomenal model for how I want to run my own career as an artist."

In her young career, Besa has quickly learned it is as important to be an entrepreneur as it is to be a talented singer. "Most other jobs have a certain sense of structure and delegation of tasks, which are luxuries performing artists often don't get," she said. "Each of the decisions you make in your career, big or small, is simultaneously a personal decision, an artistic decision, and an executive decision. You have to find the balance between these three constituent parts to make it work."

Besa supports herself as a working artist in a variety of ways. She said winning national recognition in the Classical Singer Competition the same month she graduated from IWU helped jumpstart her career. That contest led to a place in the Tyrolean Opera Program in Austria in the summer of 2014.

A few months later Besa began singing with the Bluewater Kings Band, a cover band voted one of the country's best "party bands" by *The Knot*. Besa said her bandmates range from university jazz professors to classically trained musicians to mainstream commercial songwriters. "Some of them have even worked with the original artists we cover," she said. "There is so much to learn from those guys."

Besa also performs with the Chicago Cabaret Project, with performances incorporating cabaret, burlesque, cirque, vaudeville, magic and interactive theatre. "You get to take your personality and your performance to the edge," she said. "It's a really safe and encouraging atmosphere to be your boldest and bravest self."

Performing in the ensemble in *The King and I*, opening April 29 and running through May 22, will be the biggest stage of Besa's career thus far. "To explore this timeless musical with the brilliant creative teams of the Lyric has truly been something wonderful," she said. "Their utmost professionalism, kindness and unfeigned inquisitiveness in the development of this production really elevate the entire experience for me as one of the performers on the stage. Working here makes me want to keep being my very best."



Nicole Besa (Chamberlin) '14

