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FUNNY SIDE UP

Kevin Glavin
finds success in opera
as a basso buffo.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

All Kevin Glavin ever wanted to do was to make people laugh. So, he became an opera singer.

Glavin, 56, of Ross, has achieved international success as a basso buffo, a bass singer of comic roles in opera. In particular, he's known for playing Bartolo in *The Barber of Seville*, a role that he's performed two or three times per year since 1988. In fact, he just wrapped up a performance of the role with the Pittsburgh Opera in April.

"I can't tell you how many times I've performed in the role of Bartolo," Glavin says with a laugh. "But I can tell you it's a lot."

Glavin's first exposure to opera came while he was a student at North Hills High School. A soloist in the high school choir, he was encouraged by legendary choir teacher Frank Cummings to pursue private lessons to deepen his talent. He eventually began studying with Claudia Pinza, a leading soprano at the Metropolitan Opera whose father was the famous opera singer Ezio Pinzo in the 1930s.

"I was about 18 years old at the time, and all of a sudden my voice changed overnight. I had been a tenor, and all of a sudden I had

no height,” he says. “Claudia told me, ‘You are a baritone—you are an opera singer.’”

Glavin protested at first. After all, he had always imagined himself on stage smoking a cigar and having a drink, like a member of the Rat Pack.

“I never wanted to sing opera,” he says with a laugh. “I loved to sing, and I loved to make people laugh. I told her I was a comedian, not an opera singer.”

Still, he heeded her advice. After graduating from North Hills High School in 1978, Glavin attended the University of Pittsburgh “for about nine weeks” before finding dinner theater work with Winnie Flynn, where he could sing and make people laugh. He then joined the chorus of the Pittsburgh Opera, and was called to audition for Argentinian Tito Capobianco, the opera’s artistic director at the time.

“He was very serious about opera, which made me a nervous wreck, because I was definitely not serious about opera,” says Glavin, laughing. “After I auditioned, I couldn’t understand a word he was saying, so I asked his accompanist to translate. The guy told me that Tito was offering me a few small roles, so I quit the other show.”

Glavin, who counts Jackie Gleason, Chris Farley and John Candy as comedic inspiration, made his first appearance with the Pittsburgh Opera in 1985 in the role of The Jailor in *Tosca*. Since then, he’s performed with the Pittsburgh Opera 41 times, including roles as Sulpice in *Daughter of the Regiment*, Benoit and Alcindoro in *La Bohème*, Sacristan in *Tosca*, Bartolo in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Pistola in *Falstaff*, among many others.

In 1988, Glavin entered the Pavarotti International Vocal Competition and won, besting 3,000 other competitors. The award led to the major role of Dr. Dulcamara in *The Elixir of Love*, which he performed alongside Luciano Pavarotti at the Opera Company of Philadelphia.

“Winning that award opened up many doors, and led to much bigger roles,” says Glavin, who sings in French, Italian and German. “It was life changing.”

Glavin went on to perform in countless operas all over the country and around the world. He performed as Brighella in the American premiere of Wagner’s *Das Liebesverbot* at the Glimmerglass Festival in New York and has played Bartolo with the

San Francisco Opera, Seattle Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Washington Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Vancouver Opera, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, and Teatro Teresa Carreño in Caracas, Venezuela.

He’s played Don Magnifico with the San Francisco Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Baltimore Opera, L’Opéra de Montréal, and Teatro Municipal de Santiago and the title role in *Don Pasquale* at the Glimmerglass Festival, Opera Philadelphia, and L’Opéra de Montréal. He’s frequently seen at New York City Opera, where he has sung in *Don Pasquale*, *L’italiana in Algeri* and *The Barber of Seville*.

He also performed in *Live from Kennedy Center*, a holiday concert for the troops conducted by Marvin Hamlisch. His Metropolitan Opera debut came in 2013 with Shostakovich’s *The Nose*.

Glavin, a recipient of a Mildred Miller Award for Artistic Achievement, will head to Phoenicia, New York, this summer to perform as a gangster in *Kiss Me Kate* and then to Hawaii to perform *La Bohème* in the fall.

“I’m only in the second act [of *Kiss Me Kate*], so we’re going to have a lot of fun in Hawaii,” he says with a chuckle.

For Glavin, who says he has an “old-school style” because he studied with an “old-school singer,” opera was an anomaly. While growing up in West View, his father was a union leader in Pittsburgh, and none of his other family members had any initial interest in the genre. Still, he says, once he started finding success as an opera singer, they supported him immediately.

“To them, it was like coffee,” he jokes. “They acquired a taste for it.”

When he’s not performing, Glavin spends time with his family, including wife Nancy, whom he dubs “The Saint,” and sons Kevin and Sean. He’s also a newly minted grandfather to granddaughter Aria.

Despite his international fame and travel schedule, he says he’s never wanted to live anywhere but Pittsburgh.

“I’ve been lucky in that I haven’t had to do a lot of auditioning, so I’ve never had any reason to leave Pittsburgh,” he says. “Why would I? It’s a great city.” ■

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