

Jonathan Woody - Classical Music Matters

Bass-baritone Jonathan Woody has a career that has taken him across the globe this summer, from California to Norway and many places in-between. He exemplifies everything that's great about classical musicians – he's focused and knowledgeable, has a great sense of humor, is skilled in communicating his passion for music, and of course he has a beautiful voice. Originally from the Washington D.C area, Jonathan now lives in Brooklyn and sings with the Grammy-nominated Choir of Trinity Wall Street, and has appeared with many of this country's leading Baroque orchestras.

Jonathan will make his first appearance with CMSCVA on September 16 and 17, so we wanted to get his take the questions we're asking most of our 2017-18 performers.

Here's Jonathan's profile.





CMSCVA. Can you name the first piece of music, performance or person that inspired you to take up an instrument, or to become a professional musician?

JW. Handel's *Messiah* at age 12. I couldn't name the recording, and it was only Part the First, but Handel's indulgent harmonies and playful use of text hooked me in, and I've been trying to become a better Handel interpreter ever since.

CMSCVA. What is the most memorable chamber music experience you've ever had, and why?

JW. One that stands out in recent memory is a performance of Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* with seven other singers from the Choir of Trinity Wall Street. That work is really a triumph of Western civilization, making use of some of the simplest architectural forms in music and creating a grand masterpiece that rivals the great cathedrals of the world in complexity. To perform it well, one must simultaneously have a sense of the larger work and the minutiae of one's own part, while communicating and ceding focus to one's colleagues. It takes great concentration and has an immensely satisfying payoff.

CMSCVA. What's the most striking thing an audience member has ever said to you after a performance you played?

JW. The comment I get most often is "I can't believe that sound came out of your body!"

CMSCVA. What music are you listening to right now?

JW. Believe it or not, I almost never listen to (recorded) music. I've really grown to appreciate the value of silence.

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CMSCVA. What can you do as a performer to truly reach an audience member through performance? Or what do you think a listener should take away from a performance?

JW. As a vocalist, my primary concern is text, which is the unique aspect of music making that singers can offer. Can the text be understood? Does it have personal meaning for me? Is that as important as whether it touches a member of the audience? These are questions I have to ask myself when performing, and I know I've done a good job if audience members tell me that they were particularly moved by the words of something I've sung.

CMSCVA. What is the role of a "classical" musician today, and how do you think it's changed?

JW. I think of my role as similar to a museum curator or a historian. I preserve great works of art from previous generations. They aren't always perfect, as human beings haven't always been perfect, but I believe that they deserve to be maintained both because history matters and because the artworks are still just as full of emotion and passion as they were when they were created, and they can still move people in ways just as visceral.

CMSCVA. What's the biggest challenge you are dealing right now with as a classical musician (or a person whose profession is "musician")?

JW. Probably the fact that classical music is widely perceived as "elitist" and therefore under threat in our current discourse. I continually argue that because it's part of our shared history, classical music matters for everyone to learn, just like the works of Shakespeare or the sculptures of Michelangelo. On a related note, I think my visibility as a classical musician and person of color can serve as an example to young people who may think the field doesn't reflect or represent them.

