

## CHRYSTAL E. WILLIAMS, mezzo-soprano

### Biography



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Mezzo-soprano Chrystal E. Williams has been described by critics as “strong and so assured”, “lithely negotiating the coloratura demands before descending into a robust low register”, and “poised, polished, in complete command of the vocal calisthenics”. She is a winner of Astral’s 2014 National Auditions.

Ms. Williams makes her Metropolitan Opera debut in the fall of 2019, as Maketaten in Philip Glass’s *Akhmaten*. The 2019-2020 season also includes the role of Stewardess in Minnesota Opera’s production of Jonathan Dove’s *Flight*, performances with New York’s On Site Opera, performances as soloist in Bernstein’s *Songfest* with the Seattle Symphony, a Southern-U.S. tour as soloist in George Crumb’s *The River of Life* with Orchestra 2001, and recitals in Michigan, Idaho, and Pennsylvania.

Beyond the opera stage, Ms. Williams is a passionate advocate of music as a means to foster unity, understanding, and peace. The upcoming season sees the launch of “Forrópera”, which she co-created with duo partner, Brazilian accordionist Felipe Hostins. Forró, meaning “for all”, combines elements of classical music with traditional Brazilian folk music. The Chrystal E. Williams Scholarship was founded by Ms. Williams in 2004, to help students wishing to pursue a career in the performing arts, and is funded in part by her concert, “An Evening with Chrystal E.,” held annually in Norfolk, Virginia.

Recently, Ms. Williams returned to the Birmingham Opera Company (U.K.) in a critically acclaimed performance in the role of Katerina in Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and sang under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. She also revisited the role of Rebecca in *Charlie Parker’s YARDBIRD* for Atlanta Opera, a role she created

for Opera Philadelphia and has also revisited with Arizona Opera, at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, and in a co-production with Hackney Empire and English National Opera. She reprises the role in February 2020 for Seattle Opera.

Ms. Williams has sung Charlotte in *Werther* with both Opera Delaware and Baltimore Concert Opera. For the Birmingham Opera Company, she has sung Dido in *Dido and Aeneas* and Hannah in Michael Tippett’s *The Ice Break*, under the direction of Graham Vick. She debuted with the Washington National Opera as Elizabeth Keckley/Coretta Scott King in Philip Glass’ *Appomattox*, created the role of Yvette in the world premiere of Eric Sawyer’s *The Garden of Martyrs*, debuted as Linda in Kurt Weill’s *Lost in the Stars* with the Glimmerglass Festival, and portrayed Mary in Ricky Ian Gordon’s *Morning Star* with On Site Opera. She has also sung Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Sarasota Opera, Publia in Rossini’s *Aureliano in Palmira* at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, Hänsel in *Hänsel und Gretel* with Knoxville Opera, and Olga in *Eugene Onegin* with the Northern Lights Music Festival.

As a concert soloist, Ms. Williams has appeared with the Cairo Symphony, the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra (Sweden), Springfield Symphony, North Carolina Philharmonic, Boston Modern Orchestra Projects, and the Lancaster Symphony Orchestra, and made her Philadelphia Orchestra debut under Yannick Nézet-Séguin, in Bach’s *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich, BWV 150*.

The First Prize and Audience Choice Award winner at the 2014 Wilhelm Stenhammar International Music Competition in Sweden, Ms. Williams has also received awards from the Giargiari Bel Canto Competition, the Liederkrantz Foundation, Inc., and the New England Region Finals of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, among others.

Chrystal E. Williams is an alumna of the Academy of Vocal Arts. She also holds a Master of Music degree in Opera Performance from the Yale School of Music, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Voice Performance from Carnegie Mellon University.

*For presenters, please include “Chrystal E. Williams appears courtesy of Astral Artists.”*

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## CHRYSTAL E. WILLIAMS, mezzo-soprano

### Critical Acclaim



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"...at [Chrystal E. Williams'] Astral Artists recital debut, she told us who she is. No less impressive with her rich, variegated sound, Williams on this outing took some chances....[she] searched for meaning through the use of her finely calibrated technique, finding pain in various grades....Williams is adept at bending her sound and expressive tools to suit the material—a breathiness for a split second here, a quick ornament there. What's just as impressive, though, is the way she does so while putting forth a strong sense of personality. When you think of what makes singers memorable, it's this idea of personalizing the material. Williams has it..." —*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Chrystal E. Williams made a most impressive Sarasota debut as Rosina. The young mezzo-soprano possesses a creamy instrument with fine flexibility, throwing off a confident 'Una voce poco fa.' She also handled the comedy with flair and sailed through the coloratura flights with style and assurance." —*South Florida Classical Review*

"superb cast... Rosina, played by Chrystal E. Williams, was so strong and so assured—vocally and dramatically—she pretty much stole the show. Williams...is a mezzo soprano who seems destined for great things...the timbre of her voice has an energy and brightness that carried her easily through the coloratura fanfare of 'Una voce poco fa,' and everything else Rossini tossed in her path. That made her a spitfire Rosina with a twinkle in her eyes and the kind of sparkle her suitor...would pursue to the ends of Andalusia." —*Your Observer*

"Chrystal Williams's mezzo sounded fiery and gorgeous" —*Opera News*

"Chrystal E. Williams, the young mezzo who plays the first Mrs. Parker, is the night's real discovery, a vocal powerhouse with superior acting ability." —*The Stage (U.K.)*

"Indeed, 'The Violin Aria' sung by Nicklausse in the Antonia act is indisputably great music. As sung by the magnetic Chrystal E. Williams, the tune is deeply poetic and the accompaniment is full of pared-down string counterpoint, taking the opera to a loftier place." —*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Chrystal E. Williams [gave] a recital of such artistic scope as to belie its mere one-hour duration. Williams...responded with great plasticity – of sound, stylistic treatment, of emotion. She is a singer of rare power and clarity....Williams beautifully controlled the balance between delicacy and digging deep down for drama. Parts of [Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été*] leave singers exposed, and Williams made easy work of both moments that required coming in out of nowhere, as well as sneaking in with velvety sound. There is a certain raw, unguarded color some singers find in Falla's *Siete canciones populares Españolas*, and Williams inched right up to it....the real stunner was John Musto's *Shadow of the Blues*... It was here – in the reassurance of Williams' sensitive inflections – that you could hear America in all of its complexity and contradiction." —*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Mezzo-soprano Chrystal E. Williams sang and acted the sultry Dulcinée to perfection...she has a tremendous amount of range as an artist. But the most amazing thing about Williams, besides the fact that she can sing virtually any role, is her physicality. She knows how to use her body as an instrument as well as she uses her voice, and she has an effortless grace whenever she is on stage that makes her a pleasure to watch." —*bachtrack.com*

"Some performers can cut loose best in the singing. Chrystal E. Williams pulls off the raunchy Broadway-style number 'Who'll Buy' with such gutsiness infused with grace that she's downright honey-luscious as she basks in the radiance of her own sexuality and vocal heat. As a result, Williams new-mints this kind of song and uplifts its sentiments..." —*dctheatrescene.com*

"Mezzo-soprano Chrystal E. Williams' Rosina...set us back on our heels with the sweet and cautionary 'Una voce poco fa.' Lithely negotiating the coloratura demands before descending into a robust low register, Williams let us know that she was far more than a pretty face." —*Herald Tribune*

"I was thrilled to see mezzo-soprano Chrystal E. Williams singing the leading role the night I was in attendance. I have enjoyed her performances with AVA for years now.... she was utterly breathtaking as Rosina—poised, polished, in complete command of the vocal calisthenics the role demanded. Judging from the applause each time she sang, she was a crowd favorite early on, and deservedly so. More so than any other performer that evening, you could tell that Ms. Williams is but a hair's breadth away from a glittering professional opera career. She is a joy to listen to and watch—the complete package—whom I have no doubt will be gracing the great stages of the world upon the conclusion of her studies with AVA. She defines 'di qualità.'" —*Gale Martin, operatoonity.com*

"the thrilling mezzo-soprano Chrystal E. Williams" —*WhatsOnStage*

"Chausson's *Chanson perpétuelle* was beautifully suited to the voice of mezzo Chrystal E. Williams, an ideal blend of velvety and clarity.... her specificity of tone, text and emotion carried." —*Peter Dobrin, Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Chrystal E Williams' heartfelt Act 2 monologue (in Michael Tippett's *The Icebreak*) may in its quiet way have been the evening's musical high point." —*Birmingham Post*

"Mezzo-soprano Chrystal E. Williams had only Act I to develop the character of Cheverus' Caribbean servant Yvette, and make her mark on the opera, but she did a memorable job, bringing a resonant, rich-hued sound to bear on her few pages of singing." —*MassLive.com*

"mezzo-soprano Chrystal E. Williams sang with palpable emotion as Yvette, Cheverus' housekeeper..." —*Boston Classical Review*

"Chrystal E. Williams deftly assumes the role of Yvette, Cheverus' housekeeper from Guadeloupe who seems to inject French, or Island French, into her communication with him and with the outer world and gives it her mezzo-soprano all. It is very nice interpretive work." —*Berkshire Bright Review*

"Chrystal Williams' mezzo is perfectly suited to Olga's knowing exuberance and Williams shows what a consummate singing-actor she is." —*ConcertoNet.com*

"Chrystal E. Williams lights up the room...she holds the audience rapt with her aria"—*The Guardian (U.K.)*

"Chrystal E. Williams was a sultry Dulcinée with a voice that was powerful over a wide range." —*theoperacritic.com*

"sung with bright intensity by Chrystal E. Williams" —*Broad Street Review*

"young Hansel, strongly sung by Chrystal E. Williams...mastered the movements and stride of a boy, not once giving herself away." —*Knoxville News Sentinel*