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Today, at the age of 30, he will participate in the prestigious festival dedicated to Mozart in Salzburg, Austria.

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A CHAT WITH CHARLES DEKEYSER

BORN IN GHENT, THE YOUNG BASS SINGER CHARLES DEKEYSER ALREADY HAS A BUSY CAREER.
A CHAT WITH WHO WILL BE SINGING MOZART'S REQUIEM DURING MOZART WEEK
IN JANUARY 2017 IN SALZBURG, AUSTRIA.



Where does your passion for music and singing come from? At what point did you decide to make it your career?

I began singing for health reasons. I started, among other ways, with breathing/voice lessons with Martine Reyners in Brussels. They were exercises to relax, to tap into one's energy, to express oneself better, etc. The three key words were: analyse, build and harmonise, all by voice. That was when I discovered I had a voice, and I sang my first opera aria at the age of 19. I did that for some years; then I enrolled at a conservatory. Today I am completely healed; my health is perfect. It was natural, therefore, that I decided to make it my job, just because it was good for my health and it made me feel good. I've never thought about doing anything else. And then I also discovered that I loved being on stage, acting, etc. and that music made me happy.

Can you tell us about participating in the prestigious Queen Elisabeth Competition where you were a semi-finalist in the singing category?

I studied at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel with the Belgian baritone José van Dam. Together we decided to take part in the competition, and then I wanted to do so as a Belgian. Competitions are not really my thing. I prefer doing concerts for the beauty of the music, to touch and to communicate with the audience. By contrast, we can see a competition like a big audition, giving you the chance to make yourself known and to meet a lot of people. In a competition, we often think that the best one is the one who wins, but that's not always true. Sometimes you will never hear about the winner again, but the one who was eliminated in the first round will have a great career. It's a bit like a lottery sometimes; it depends on many criteria. Me, for example, in that contest, I sang very late at night, at 10.30 pm. I didn't have a lot of energy when I went on stage after a day full of adrenaline and stress. I'm still happy to have participated and to have experienced it, even though I don't think I will participate in a competition again.

How are you preparing for Mozart Week? Is this your first time?

I've already participated in other festivals like the one in Verbier, Switzerland two years ago and the one in Aix-en-Provence, France. But it's the first time in Salzburg. I will work with Les Musiciens du Louvre and its conductor Marc Minkowski with whom I have already worked a lot before. He was the one who suggested I participate. We will do Mozart's Requiem. I already did it in Spain and in Belgian. I think it's wonderful. I also remember the film Amadeus well when Mozart, on his deathbed, writes Requiem, which he will never finish. It is Süssmayr, another composer, who finishes it for him. I love this work. Since I'm already familiar with it, I don't have to study much before the performance. But I'll start with coaching sessions about one month before.

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What is the best memory of your career as of today? Which character have you most liked singing?

What I love about this job is being able to travel. I also love the fact that every concert, every production is different. It all depends on the role, on the people you work with (conductor, directors, singers, etc.). A role that I really enjoy right now as a young bass (knowing that 30 years old is still young for a bass) is Christ in St Matthew Passion by Bach. I truly feel that at my age and with my skills, it is the perfect role. I also love doing recitals, singing/piano concertos or oratorios, where there is no staging or costumes. There are singers who prefer doing operas and dressing up. I like this too, but I also like being myself in front of the

audience. For example, I've done productions at the Zurich opera (Charles D was a member of the International Opera Studio Opernhaus for one year until June 2016). I played several roles in Purcell's King Arthur, and to do so I had six or seven different costumes, including one in gold with glitter. I had a beard, long hair and a pillow as a big belly! I felt really different from the Charles I am, but I also find it nice to dress up from time to time.

Which works would you like to add to your repertoire and why?

I'm a big fan of Bach, but at the same time I also love the great romantics like Verdi and Wagner. But as a young bass, it's a bit too soon for me to play a role in these operas. I must still wait... 10, 15, 20 years before being able to sing them. Of the romantics, I also love Mahler and Schubert. Actually, I like oratorio as much as I like romanticism. Moreover, I would also like to create my own shows and not just be a singer in a theatre. In this job, sometimes there is a lack of creativity for me, because we sings works that have existed for hundreds of years and which many people have performed before us.

Do you like watches? If so, do you have a preferred brand, model?

In fact, I'm passionate about watches (laughs). During my year in Zurich, my favourite street was Bahnhofstrasse, where all the major watch shops are; it's a slice of paradise! I really like the Omega Speedmaster Professional with chronograph, because it has a history. My grandfather had one, and he gave it to me when he died. Unfortunately, it was stolen from me a few years ago. I love its history, the fact that it went to the moon, that it accompanied the Apollo space missions, etc. There is a connection with my grandfather, yes, but it also has its own history. Today I have a different model of the watch, the one with the moon phase. I love watches for their aesthetic look, for their small architecture, their design, the mechanics. I also love the fact that they can be passed on from generation to generation. And for a man, it's sort of the only piece of jewellery we can wear.

Thank you very much to Charles Dekeyser for accepting this interview.