

TAKE FIVE

A Revealing Q and A
with...

Asitha Tennekoon



Asitha is performing in [The Overcoat: A Musical Tailoring](#) a [Canadian Stage](#) co-production with [Tapestry Opera](#) and [Vancouver Opera](#) at the [Bluma Appel Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts](#) March 23 - April 8

Since moving to Toronto in the fall of 2014, Sri Lankan tenor **Asitha Tennekoon** has firmly established himself as a versatile singer, performing in a wide range of repertoire. He won the Dora Award for Best Male Performance as Paul in Tapestry Opera's *Rocking Horse Winner* and earned glowing reviews as Gernando in Haydn's *L'Isola disabitata* with Voicebox: Opera in Concert. Asitha recently starred in Edith Smyth's *The Boatswain's Mate* with Opera 5, and in 2018 debuts as Polidoro in Scarlatti's *Erminia* with Opera Lafayette in Washington and New York. Asitha shared the stage with soprano Erin Wall in *Songmasters Recital Series* and has appeared as a soloist with Toronto Bach Festival, Theatre of Early Music, Ottawa Bach Choir and Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra.

1. When did you first think of yourself as an artist?

I was about 15 years old and had just sung 'Maria' from West Side Story at a national competition in Sri Lanka. I still remember how electrifying it felt giving my all on stage. The audience reaction was absolutely thrilling. That was a turning point for me. I may not have thought of it in terms of being an 'artist', but I think that's when I knew getting on stage and telling stories would be an essential part of my life.

2. Who helped you develop your voice as an artist?

It definitely takes a village. From the beginning I had some excellent teachers, Menaka de Fonseka Sahabandu in Sri Lanka, Dr. Brian Horne at Indiana University, Stephanie Bogle here in Toronto, who helped me understand that developing a healthy voice takes a lot of time and patience. I'm thankful to them for teaching me how to convey extreme emotions over several hours - with no microphones - without straining my voice. Once I've learnt the notes and words then of course I need to figure out who my character is and get to know them inside and out during the rehearsal process. Many of my acting coaches, including Tom Diamond and Leon Major have helped me develop the skills I need to bring some fascinating characters alive on stage.

3. What's something that's inspired you this week?

I've spent most of this week at the Bluma Appel Theatre in tech rehearsals for The Overcoat: A Musical Tailoring. There's no shortage of inspiration watching my colleagues rehearse on stage, but a large part of my motivation has come from the extraordinary amount of work put in by stage management, the wardrobe department, and the production team. This show is a spectacle. It's an enormous machine with lots of moving parts at any given moment on and off stage. It's astounding to observe this amazing team who have such a high level of commitment to ensuring every detail is perfect. Their day begins hours before I get to the theatre and continues long after I leave. To know there are so many people working hard, completely committed to one artistic goal, truly compels me to give my very best on stage.

4. What's your favourite restaurant in the city to visit?

How do I pick?! The quality and variety in cuisine is the best thing about Toronto! My favourites are always changing, but at the moment I have to say [Lahore Tikka House](#) on Gerrard has always exceeded expectations. [Tacos 101](#) at Church and Dundas is a must if you're looking for something quick yet wholly satisfying!

5. What do you want to see more of on Toronto stages?

In a general sense I want to see more authentic performances, especially on the operatic stage. So much of our effort as singers goes into the vocal aspect of our craft, and it's easy to forget that it's just one of the skills in our toolbox, which culminate in a compelling performance. In addition, one of the things that makes Toronto special for me is how multiethnic and multicultural it is. This is the first place I've lived where I haven't felt like an outsider. It's really encouraging when a city's cultural scene embraces and celebrates that sense of diversity and acceptance. I feel like we're moving in the right direction, where singers on stage more closely reflect the audience. It will be great to keep forging ahead with stories, even in traditional opera, that present a sense of relevance to today's Toronto.