



HIS FAVORITE ROLE *is* FAMILY

Brandon Jovanovich knows what it is to transform himself. Every night, the tenor becomes someone else on an opera stage somewhere around the world. Tonight, it may be in London as he performs the role of Sergei in “Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District.” Later in the season, he becomes Siegmund in “Die Walküre” at the Lyric Opera in Chicago.



Hearing him sing, one would think that being on the opera stage must have been a lifelong goal. But this native of Billings, Montana, who now lives with his family in Sycamore, did not grow up thinking he would be an opera singer. After graduating with a degree in theater and a minor in music from Northern Arizona University, he headed to New York with his wife, Cara. After working in some operettas and musical theater there, he was accepted into the Sante Fe Young Artist Program. "That is where I really started moving into the opera world," he says. "It was a slow and steady slog, but I'm still here!"

Each opera presents its own challenges in terms of character, language and style. With every production, Jovanovich enters into a relationship with a new cast, director,, and conductor. Opera entails working through not just the vocal aspect of a character, but also the staging and movement. Creating such a performance is physically demanding and emotionally draws in the audience. Because opera singers such as Jovanovich are often in "pay for play" contracts, which means they are only paid if they sing, they are particularly mindful of their health and voice. Jovanovich is careful with the cold, eats well, and works out, maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Reflecting on his own beginnings, he credits private teachers with helping him with language and style. One teacher in particular stands out as someone who

helped him not only musically, but also as a mentor: Neil Goren coached him with many aspects of his voice over a number of years. Goren never charged him, on the condition that he could pay him when he made it to the Metropolitan Opera. As Jovanovich says, "I am lucky that I eventually made it there and did indeed pay him back and then some." Today, Jovanovich gives back just as his mentor did, whether within opera companies or to the students who work with his wife Cara at her voice studio. He has also been a part of a master class at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, sharing his craft with others.

Jovanovich travels eight to 11 months a year; his travels take him from London to Zurich and beyond. But whether he is performing or not, he and Cara always make sure he has time for his favorite role — that of father to their three children.

After traveling together when the children were younger, the Jovanovichs knew they wanted to lay down roots. They knew that his work would always be in a large city, so they focused on communities that were in close proximity to cities such as Chicago and New York, with a nearby airport. After looking for a while, they were drawn to a property in Sycamore. It included a barn, stables, and a 1857 one-room schoolhouse, and it gave them the ability to make it their own.

Today, returning from an overseas run in Vienna or Brussels, you may find

Jovanovich fixing the chicken coop at their farm, building bee boxes for their hives, or working on a four-wheeler. It is a much-needed respite from the stage.

As Cara says, "He loves to tinker and work when he's home. It is his fill-up."

When he travels, the family Facetimes with each other. His wife and children join him when possible, and recently traveled to London. When the Jovanoviches are the road, they require their children to lead a normal life. That includes chores — just as they would have at home.

All three children have been attending rehearsals, lighting sessions, and performances since they were infants. They have become knowledgeable about opera in their own right, and while Brendan and Cara's two sons sing in choirs, it remains to be seen whether they will follow in their father's footsteps.

When you meet Jovanovich, you are struck by the humble attitude he has toward his amazing talent. The Grammy-nominated artist and his wife have clearly created a home filled with a love of family and music. He is as much at home singing at the Met as he is working on a project on their farm. As he puts it, "I guess I've never thought of myself as a 'divo' or as being special. I haven't let the career lead my life. I just happen to be able to sing and act, but it is my job. My life is my family." ■