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Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera

Gordon Gietz on His Metropolitan Opera Debut As a Lifesize Nose

3/5/10 at 4:30 PM 1 Comment

Tonight, young tenor Gordon Gietz makes his Metropolitan Opera debut in William Kentridge's highly anticipated new production of Shostakovich's *The Nose*, based on the satiric Gogol story about Kovalyov, a civil servant in St. Petersburg who wakes up one day to find that not only is his nose missing, but it has acquired a higher social rank than his own. Except Gietz isn't playing Kovalyov (that would be Brazilian baritone Paulo Szot) — he's playing the Nose itself. It's an unorthodox major opera debut to be sure, a fact that's not lost on the

lighthearted Gietz. He spoke to Vulture about taking on the role, interacting with the actual nose in the production, and growing up in Canada.

Did you ever in your wildest dreams imagine that you would be playing a nose in your Met debut?

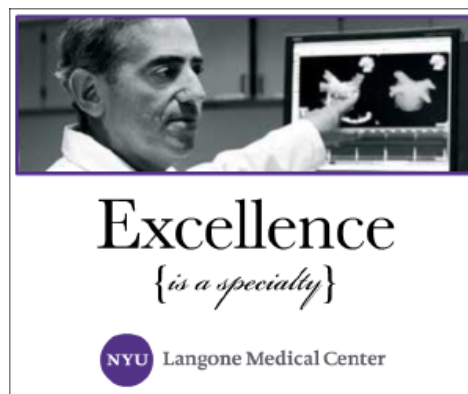
No, no, but it's been a long time coming. I've been wanting to work at the Met for years and years, and they were always looking around for the right project, and we had a couple things — years ago there was a project that looked really promising, and then we got a phone call: "There was a fire in the warehouse and the set burned down." So, I'm thinking, *I'm probably never going to sing at the Met!* But this came up, and it was such an interesting show, and the part of the Nose is one of those great parts like Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* — everyone talks about you constantly, but the opera is not resting on your shoulders. Or on your nose, for that matter.

Do you know why they had you in mind for this role?

Well they know I do a lot of unusual music, and I'm known for being able to learn difficult scores. It's also extremely high, so they wanted a voice that was a full tenor, lyric voice without compromising the top notes. I guess if he had a nasal voice I'd be actually perfect!

What were your thoughts when you first read *The Nose*?

Well, my first thought was how are they going to put it onstage, because I read the story, not the play, first. You have to accept the absurdity of it — that Kovalyov knows it's his nose, even though by all appearances I'm a state official. I think they've managed to do that in the production, with



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some scenes of me dressed exactly like Kovalyov, and then other places where there's a massive nose running all over the place. I love that absurdist element.

I saw a gigantic actual nose in the Met's carpentry shop. Do you ever get to wear it?

I never get to wear it, unfortunately. I feel a bit ripped off about that. They've got a whole troupe of actors and acrobats and such who get to run around wearing it — about four different people get to wear it. And there are various different noses: a full nose, a half-nose, a collapsible nose because he gets trampled at one point. I kept begging, "Please, can I wear the nose at this point?" I just don't have the pull. But I absolutely hung out with the nose. We've gone out for drinks. He's very talkative.

The opera's sung in Russian, have you taken it upon yourself to learn any fun Russian phrases?

Well, you know, the Russian singers are very serious — and, actually, they've mostly wanted to be learning English. One of the Russians the other day came up to me and said (affects strong Russian accent), "Wassup, buttercup?! Mike has been teaching me English expressions!"

You seem like a very proud Canadian. Why were you not singing at the Olympics?

Well, I was tied up with *The Nose!* Canada is actually a very small country as far as the operatic presence; there's maybe seven companies of any size. I was lucky, because Calgary-Alberta had a company. If I had grown up in New York, I don't think I'd be a singer today; here, you're fighting in such a talent pool. In Calgary and Montreal, if there was something to sing, I was given it, so I could work my way up in a different size pond. And now here I am in the ocean.

By: [Rebecca Milzoff](#)

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For the true origination, source, and aetiology of Kentridge's forthcoming direction of Shostakovich "The Nose" at Met Opera NYC 2010, (among much other work), see Jennifer Arlene Stone "Freud Futures" on "Kentridge" App on iTunes

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BY [JAVARI](#) on 03/06/2010 at 1:25am

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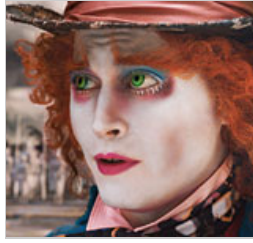
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