



**MOVING PEOPLE:** “Whether it’s from a distant state to a more present one, from contemplative sadness to inexplicable joy, or even from joy to sadness,” says Morrison (right, with colleague Lindsay Metzger), “I want people to be moved from one place to another and to know that experience was profound.”

# A Soprano's Lyric (and Lyrical) Debut

Whitney Morrison '15E (MM) takes the stage in Lyric Opera of Chicago's *Rigoletto*.

By Robin L. Flanigan

Soprano **Whitney Morrison** '15E (MM) makes her debut this fall at one of the most prominent houses in opera. Morrison will take the stage as Countess Ceprano in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of Verdi's *Rigoletto*.

Morrison was assigned the role by wowing audiences at the final auditions of Lyric's Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center, a leading training ground for rising stars in opera, where she has been a student since 2015.

"This is a truly fortunate position to be in," she says.

The production, which launches in October, is one of several operas in which Morrison has been cast since being selected for the audience-development program at the final auditions last fall, where she also received the Audience Favorite Award.

After *Rigoletto*, she will take the stage this fall as Gerhilde in Lyric's production of Wagner's *Die Walkure*. She's also slated to be an understudy for Liu in Puccini's *Turandot* and Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*.

Considered one of Verdi's masterpieces, *Rigoletto* revolves around licentious machinations in the court of the Duke of Mantua. As Countess Ceprano, Morrison plays a key figure in the drama. She describes the role as concise and uncomplicated, but she says one of the challenges is managing the mayhem around her during festive ball and court scenes.

As a high school student, Morrison saw a production of *Carmen* in the same Lyric auditorium, a memory that has added to her excitement about appearing on the opera house's noted stage. That excitement has been tempered a bit by the realization of the work that goes into such productions.

"I'm more sober-minded than I expected to be at this stage in the game," she says. "This is a premier program at a top-level house, a great opportunity, and now that I'm here, I simply approach each task as another day's work. At this point I'm focusing my energy into being as prepared as possible."

Morrison received a bachelor's degree in vocal performance and pedagogy at Oakwood University in Alabama before earning a master's degree in performance and literature from the Eastman School of Music.



**AUDIENCE ADMIRATION:** Morrison won the Audience Favorite Award at the final auditions last fall as part of Lyric Opera of Chicago's program for rising opera singers.

Her theory training at Eastman helped give her the tools to digest new musical scores quickly, something she had to do for a production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

"The boost in musicianship—that additional emphasis on form, being able to break down music into smaller parts, being able to overlook the long journey of where

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**—Whitney Morrison  
'15E (MM)**

it's going—has been very helpful," she says.

She continues with voice lessons and language classes, studying in part with the voice teacher she has had since late 2015, Julia Faulkner, director of vocal studies at the Ryan Opera Center. Also playing a role with the program is world-renowned soprano Renée Fleming '83E (MM), who serves as an advisor to the center.

Steven Daigle, artistic director of Eastman Opera Theatre, remembers Morrison as a passionate and studious singer. "I'm not surprised she is succeeding," he says.

Kathryn Cowdrick, a professor of voice at Eastman, recalls Morrison as having "a large, beautiful, warm voice, and very often this type of instrument takes more time to mature, to get control of technically and to come in to its bloom, sort of like a fine wine. She worked diligently to refine her foreign languages and was very dedicated to her faith and the music of African-American composers, which she generously shared in her recital work here."

Morrison, who grew up singing gospel music in church, has crafted a philosophy around her singing influenced by that faith.

"It is the idea that all of life is connected. Who you are, what you think, how you treat people, and how you move through the world influences what you do at a given moment," she says, "so that when you come to a performance moment, it will be full, honest, and genuine." No matter the role, she wants her listeners to be transported.

"Whether it's from a distant state to a more present one, from contemplative sadness to inexplicable joy, or even from joy to sadness," she says, "I want people to be moved from one place to another and to know that experience was profound." **R**

*Robin L. Flanigan is a Rochester-based freelance writer.*



## HOW TO

# What Goes into a Commencement Address?

**David Nash** '81M (MD), the founding dean of Thomas Jefferson University's Jefferson College of Population Health in Philadelphia, was asked to give the commencement address last spring at Salus University. The Philadelphia-based school specializes in degree programs for health care professions.

A board-certified internist, Nash is internationally recognized for his work in public accountability for outcomes, physician leadership development, and quality of care improvement.

### The Reaction

 It was a real honor to be asked to give a commencement address outside Jefferson, and at first, I was elated. Then I put down the invitation letter and thought, "Oh my gosh, what am I going to do here?" I give about 50

speeches a year around the country, but it's much, much harder to write a great 12-minute talk than to give an hour-long presentation in front of 10,000 people at a business conference.

### The Warning

 The president of Salus said, "Please, please keep it to 12 minutes." He must've said that to me five times. He's a Navy guy and was like, "I am not kidding." So I internalized that message. My speech was 11 minutes.

### The Preparation

 I'm super organized, so I started thinking about what I was going to say six or seven months ahead of time. My Sunday afternoons are largely spent working, so this became part of my workflow.

It was also a lot of looking into the mirror and doing my thing. My wife is used to it, so it didn't cause any domestic disturbance. She would say, "There you go again."

### The Advice

 I had a Wharton School professor in the summer of 1984 who said to me, "If you're ever in a jam with a speech, here's a bulletproof recipe: point with pride, view with alarm, and end with hope."

And that's exactly what I did because you know the soufflé is going to rise every time.

For "point with pride," I congratulated the graduates, spouses, parents, and children, described what I thought Salus meant to the health care system, and said I was proud of them for joining us in the healing professions.

## In the News

For “view with alarm,” I described what I see as the challenges the nation faces; for example, medical mistakes are the third leading cause of death in the United States.

“End with hope” was relatively straightforward. I told the graduates they were coming into the field at an amazing time, a time when we have procedures that seemed like science fiction a few years ago.

I wanted very much to give them hope for the future.

### The High Point



I assiduously tried to avoid any political criticism because I wanted the audience to focus on the message, not to be exposed to unnecessary controversy where none existed. But I did bring up that the current political situation is a war on poor people, and that got loud applause. And when you are standing up there, getting applause in the middle of the speech is a good thing.

### The Background



I tried to pass along what Rochester taught me, which is to always examine the evidence and to question the status quo—powerful lessons for sure.

I didn't talk about almost flunking out of anatomy. I'd been an economics major at Vassar College and wasn't really prepared for all the silly memorization. I got what was called a “blue note” at the time, sort of a warning that I was in academic purgatory.

### The Surprise



I had a little issue at the end. I started to tear up a bit, thinking about the future and thinking about my kids, so that was really hard. I had to use every trick in my public speaking book.

### The Last Word



I told the graduates to be true to what they care about, and all the other good things will follow. It's corny but totally true. I said to put the patient at the center of everything they do. It's so easy to say and so incredibly hard to do.

That's true for Rochester, true for Jefferson, and true for Salus. There will be days when they don't like every patient they're seeing, and there will be days when a patient will take their breath away.

I gave them three decades' worth of reflection. I'm sure they were rolling their eyes, but I think they appreciated it. 📍

—AS TOLD TO ROBIN L. FLANIGAN



ENCORE: Forster stars in the 18-episode return of a 1990s television classic.

## A New Sheriff for Twin Peaks

When the 1990s television drama series *Twin Peaks* returned on the air this summer for a limited series, fans discovered a new sheriff in the fictional town. Sheriff Harry S. Truman had fallen ill, and his brother, Frank—portrayed by **Robert Forster** '64—stepped in to fill his shoes.

According to the documentary *Secrets from Another Place: Creating Twin Peaks*, Forster was originally the first choice to play Harry, but turned the role down because of a prior commitment. The role went instead to Michael Ontkean, who has since retired from acting.

Forster, who has been appearing in films since the late 1960s, has been especially busy since his Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor for his role in the 1997 Quentin Tarantino film *Jackie Brown*. In recent years, he has appeared in episodes of such television series as *Breaking Bad*, *Last Man Standing*, and *Desperate Housewives*, and films *Me, Myself & Irene*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *London Has Fallen*.

Born and raised in Rochester, Forster appeared in a College production of *Bye-Bye Birdie* in 1962.

## Food Banker with a Business Sense

**Natasha Ribeiro Thompson** '96, '09S (MBA), president and CEO of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, accepted the 2017 Food Bank of the Year award on behalf of the organization in June. The award is given by the Feeding America Network, a national umbrella organization of food banks and pantries. The network cited the Elmira, New York,

organization—which serves about 16,000 people across six counties—for the success of its mobile food pantry program and its research to increase the capacity of its 165 member pantries and meal sites.

Thompson served previously as the food bank president and CEO of the Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester.

## Film Follows the First Class in a ‘Billionaire’s Bet’

**Jintian (Jay) Li** '12 appeared in the documentary *A Billionaire's Bet: The Best & Brightest*, which aired on CNBC in June. The film followed the first class of Schwarzman Scholars, participants in an international fellowship program established by Stephen Schwarzman, chairman and CEO of the Blackstone Group, “to prepare the next generation of global

leaders.” The scholarship entailed a one-year master's degree at Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University in Beijing, starting in 2016.

Li is among the 20 percent of the scholars who are from China. After graduating from Rochester, Li worked to help raise the National Basketball Association's international presence.

YELLOWJACKET MILESTONES

# A Timeline: Rochester's Individual National Champions

When Kylee Bartlett '19 won two national titles earlier this year—the indoor pentathlon championship in March and the outdoor heptathlon championship in May—the rising junior from Williamstown, New York, joined not only an elite group of women athletes in the country, but she also joined the history of Rochester's individual national title holders.

Bartlett was the second Rochester athlete to win a national title in the heptathlon and the third in the history of Rochester athletics to win multiple individual national titles.

Here's a look at the company she keeps.



**David Moller '75**  
*Ellicott City, Maryland*  
Moller won the three-mile title at the 1974 outdoor meet and the 1974 three-mile run in cross country.



**Anthony Palumbo '74, '84 (PhD)**  
*Rochester*  
Also at the 1974 outdoor meet, Palumbo won the triple jump title.



**Bob Swartout '83, '92S (MBA)**  
*Rochester*  
Paired for doubles for the first time at the start of the season, Swartout and Gaeta won the 1983 doubles championship in tennis.

**Alex Gaeta '83, '91 (PhD)**  
*New York City*

**Renee Schmitt Somerville '87**  
*Winston-Salem, North Carolina*  
In addition to winning the 1985 heptathlon title, Schmitt Somerville helped lead the volleyball team to its first NCAA playoff appearance.



1974

1983

1985

2017

2006

1988/  
1989

1987

1986



**Kylee Bartlett '19**  
*Williamstown, New York*  
Becoming only the third woman in NCAA Division III history to win two multi-event titles in the same academic year, Bartlett won the indoor pentathlon and the outdoor heptathlon in 2017.



**Stephen Goodridge '08, '09 (MS)**  
*Winston-Salem, North Carolina*  
Dividing the last day of competition so that he could also take his optics final, Goodridge won the 2006 individual golf championship.



**Josefa Benzoni '88, '92W (MA)**  
*Rochester*  
Benzoni won three national championships in track and field, winning the indoor 1,500 meters in 1988 and 1989, as well as the 3,000 meters in 1989.



**Tom Tuori '87**  
*Rochester*  
Tuori won the 1,500-meter race in 1987 after finishing second as a sophomore and junior.



**Michelle Mazurik Maybaum '86**  
*Carlsbad, California*  
Mazurik Maybaum won the 55-meter dash title in 1986, one year after finishing third.