

Such a great vocal journey

Classical Music

ROBERT CREW
ARTS WRITER

Jennie Such was about 15 and living in London, Ont. with her mother when a family friend suggested she try out for a musical theatre job at Huron Country Playhouse.

She got the job and played Louisa Von Trapp in *The Sound Of Music*, followed by roles in *Carousel* and *Brigadoon*.

"It gave me the bug to be on stage," says Such, now 32 and successfully building a career in opera and on the concert stage.

She and mezzo-soprano Vicki St. Pierre are front and centre in Talisker Players' final concert of the season on Wednesday. They and the Talisker instrumentalists will perform "Let Evening Come," described as "a meditation on lives lived by people both great and ordinary."

The concert's title comes from a piece by American composer William Bolcom, consisting of poems by Maya Angelou, Emily Dickinson and Jane Kenyon, set for soprano, viola and piano.

The piece was originally commissioned for Metropolitan Opera stars Tatiana Troyanos and Benita Valente but Troyanos died while the piece was being written. Bolcom reworked it, with the viola representing the late mezzo. "It is the most challenging of the three I sing, both rhythmically and vocally," says Such.

The other two are recently rediscovered Canadian works: *Maxwell*, *Larry Douglas*, by Victoria-based composer Stephen Brown and *Sayings* by Winnipeg's Chester Duncan. The former is a simple setting of a newspaper obituary



Soprano Jennie Such sings with the Talisker Players on June 2.

and "is really poignant," says Such. The later dwells on the life of composer Sophie Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté, using her own words.

Such comes from a musical family but is "the only black sheep who is doing it for real," although she has an uncle who is a music teacher in Northern Ontario. Such studied both piano and violin: "I was never very proficient at either!"

She sang in choirs and in school productions, but the choice of classical music was "a gradual metamorphosis," she says.

Such studied at the University of Western Ontario and went on to do postgraduate work at the prestigious Royal College of Music in London, England, finishing in 1998.

She worked in Vancouver for a while then joined the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble for a year in 2001-2002 before landed the role of Susanna in the Opera Ontario production of *The Marriage Of Figaro*.

"That opened some doors for me."

Recent trips have taken her to Korea, with the Opera Atelier production of *Don Giovanni* and to Germany, where she performed in *Judas Maccabaeus*. She was a recent soloist in the Aldeburgh Connection's Schubertiade, starred as Johanna in the Calgary Op-

era production of *Sweeney Todd* and performed in the Canadian Opera Company's *Peter Grimes*.

This fall, she rejoins the COC to perform Jaine/Ofwarren in the Canadian premiere of the Margaret Atwood novel-turned-opera, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The travelling appeals to her, although she admits, "it can be hard if you have someone at home that you miss." That would be Nick Coulter, now the percussionist in the musical *Hairspray*. The couple is getting married in January — in Cuba.

Such would love to do more Mozart — *The Magic Flute*'s Pamina is one role she has in mind. And she certainly doesn't mind challenges.

"I have always been attracted to the hardest things," she says, laughing, "and I think opera is one of the most difficult art forms. You have to sing well and you have to act well."

Judging by the critics, who praise her "melting beauty of tone" and her "glowing conviction," she does both.

Just the facts

What: The Talisker Players

Where: Trinity-St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W.

When: Wednesday, June 2 @ 8 p.m.

Tickets: \$10 - \$24 @ 416-466-1800