

My earliest memory of performing in front of people was doing scenes from Disney's *Lion King* to friends and family at home, aged six. I'm not sure if I was any good, but at least I had the confidence to 'fake it till you make it'.

What I love most about performing on stage is the honesty, the immediacy, the feeling of losing yourself and giving something your all without holding back. I find few things in life exhilarating, which is why it's so addictive! It leaves you breathless and with butterflies, like falling in love.

The Performer's Diploma in Opera from the UCT Opera School is such a comprehensive course, and gives you the best training and experience in South Africa, I believe, to get on stage as soon as possible and start honing your craft. I was beyond blessed to study with Professor Virginia Davids as my voice teacher, while learning performance and interpretation →

West Side beauty

Growing up, **Lynelle Kenned** dreamed of becoming a doctor. Luckily for us, she took her talents to the stage, and can be seen performing in *West Side Story* this month. **Eugene Yiga** just met a girl called Maria...

from greats like Angelo Gobbato, Jacky Folley and Aviva Pelham.

What I love most about opera singing is that it's like Olympics for the voice. I admire the years of sacrifice, hard work, and dedication that goes into becoming a professional. It's raw, honest, and beautiful. And more relevant and accessible than many people realise.

Being a finalist on the *Top Billing Presenter Search* was the most exciting, fascinating, and daunting job interview of my entire life, and an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. We were auditioning in front of the entire country, and being put through our paces over the course of almost three months. But we learned from the best.

My theatre background prepared me in the best possible way. Like TV, the stage requires you to think on your feet, and be creative and entertaining; I just needed minor tweaking to know the technical differences. After *Top Billing*, I had earned my colours as a presenter and was ready when *Pasella* came my way.

***Pasella* made me fall in love with South Africa all over again.** Besides celebrity interviews, cooking and décor, we also go off the beaten track, exploring rural parts of the country that never make it into the news, as seen through the eyes of the locals. I could travel and live from a backpack my entire life and never get enough of it – as long as I could have a luxurious bubble bath every now and then!

In *West Side Story*, I play the role of Maria. Having just arrived as an immigrant in America, Maria's life seems full of promise when she falls



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in love at first sight with the dreamy Tony. She is naive and radiant in her innocent beauty, but their happiness isn't meant to last.

I think at the age of 16, I was pretty much Maria. I had the same notions about love and life, and stars in my eyes. I'm much more realistic nowadays, but sometimes I still find myself hoping and believing the best in people and situations.

In preparation for the role of Maria, I've taken up dance classes for the first time in my entire life, something I've had on my bucket list for ages. I've also started working with an accent coach to perfect Maria's accent. Mostly, I visualise what kind of atmosphere I want to create in the different scenes, even before memorising the script.

This show appeals to me because it's an incredible story, told through the most beautiful music and dynamic dancing. My favourite scene is when Tony and Maria meet for the first time. Everybody else disappears for the young lovers at their 'love at first sight' moment. It seems I'm a romantic after all.

After *West Side Story*, the rest of my year is looking pretty full, with *Orpheus in Africa* doing its second run after *West Side Story* wraps up. I'll be doing some more TV presenting, music concerts, MC-ing, corporate gigs, and voice-over work in the gaps. And I must remember to schedule vacation in 2016!

Lynelle Kennedy will perform in *West Side Story* at the Artscape Opera House until 23 August, and in *Orpheus in Africa* at The Fugard Theatre from 22 September. Book at Computicket. ■