



# SOUTH AFRICAN SONGBIRDS

*We spoke to three South African sopranos who are lighting up stages around the world with their voices.*





OPENING SPREAD: GOLDA SCHULTZ. TOP LEFT TO RIGHT: PRETTY YENDE, GOLDA SCHULTZ.

### PRETTY YENDE

Her life changed when she was 16 years old and heard the famous Lakmé duet in a British Airways advertisement. This heavenly music, which one of her teachers later identified as opera, made it clear to her what she was meant to do with her life.

“I wanted to be an accountant before I learned about opera,” says Yende, who grew up in Mpumalanga, South Africa. “I was interested in the world of business and money management and I guess all that passion has been reconnected with what I am doing now.”

Yende, whose encouragement from her grandmother had her singing in church as a child, studied at the South African College of Music (part of the University of Cape Town). But it was only once she started entering competitions, becoming the first person in history to win first prize in every category as she did in 2009 in the International Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition in Vienna, that the world began to take notice of this rising star.

Since then, she has performed leading roles with companies across the globe and learned fluent Italian while living in Milan. Besides winning first prize at both the Vincenzo Bellini International Competition in 2010 and the World Opera Competition in Moscow in 2011, she was also awarded the

Order of Ikhamanga by President Jacob Zuma in recognition of her remarkable achievements.

“Singing Lucia (from Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor) for the first time in the concert version was special for me,” says Yende, who will sing the role in a fully-staged production presented by Deutsche Oper in Berlin. “The incredible complexity of the character itself, as well as the technical demand, was worth it. I grew a lot as an artist as well as vocally, which is a dream come true for any singer.”

### GOLDA SCHULTZ

She fell in love with opera after listening to Maria Callas singing Norma Casta Diva. So she started taking singing lessons at the age of 19. “At first, I was doing it because a lot of people told me that I had a lot of talent,” says Schultz, who studied journalism and has a degree in radio broadcasting. “They thought that I should consider it as a profession. Then my own passion for the job took over.”

Still, there were challenges. The first time she performed in a concert at the music department of Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, Schultz had such horrible stage fright that she fainted straight after singing her aria! But encouragement from her teacher caused Schultz to push herself and overcome

ABOVE: SIPHAMANDLA YUKAPA AND LYNELLE KENNED.

her fears ... all the way to Juilliard, a prestigious school for performing arts in New York.

“Moving to New York was an amazing, scary experience,” Schultz admits. “It was the first time I was away from my family and I was homesick. It was also such a culture shock: huge buildings, lots of people and being surrounded by so many talented artists; not just musicians, but actors and dancers. It was intimidating, but I was in this place of inspiration with my colleagues and classmates.”

Indeed, Schultz found New York to be a city full of inspiration. She could go to the museums, to the Metropolitan Opera and to the ballet. She also watched plays and musicals on Broadway and went to concerts, plays, and dance productions at her school. It was “inspiration overload, which was just joyful and amazing.” Another special moment came on 26 July 2014. Not only did she get to sing Sophie von Faninal in Richard Strauss’s Der Rosenkavalier (a role and opera she loves), but she did so at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich.

“I felt so honoured and so proud to be standing on that stage with amazing internationally renowned cast members,” she says. “My parents came to Germany and were in the audience to watch me sing. When I took my bow, I looked to the area where my parents might be sitting in the darkness. And I just

burst into tears because I was so proud that I got to share this huge moment with my family.”

Schultz loves the fact that being in Europe means there are so many opera houses where one can perform. It’s a special experience to be an opera singer, have a steady income and know that you can take care of yourself. But what she loves most about Germany are the people (who take a while to get used to you, but like you when they do) and the beer (which is some of the best she’s ever had).

“There are a ton of opera companies and opera houses that I still want to see,” she says. “And there are so many roles. I don’t think you can narrow down the list; it’s endless! I love this job and I just want to see how far I can get. So it’s just one foot in front of the other every day.”

### LYNELLE KENNED

Growing up in a musical family, Kenned was exposed to some of the best classical music from an early age. Her parents noticed her musicality as a child and invested in piano, violin, and cello lessons from the age of six. But what made her decide to turn this into a career?

“Seeing a magnificent production of Cape Town Opera’s Show Boat at the Artscape Theatre in 2005 sealed the deal,”





ABOVE: GEORGE STEVENS, GOLDA SCHULTZ AND LYNELLE KENNED.

says Kenned. She sang in school and church choirs and matriculated from Stellenberg High in 2006, and was part of the SA Youth Choir and Stellenberg Girls' Choir – winners of Choir of the World in Wales in 2006.

After school Kenned joined the UCT Opera School, graduating cum laude in 2010. Since then, she's made the theatre her second home. Indeed, nine years after seeing the production that made her want to become a performer, she starred in the same show. It toured the UK for five weeks in 2015 and received a nomination for a UK Theatre Award.

"Show Boat is a dream musical on a grand scale," she says. "Just thinking back on it gives me goosebumps." Last year, Kenned also played Cherubino in Marriage of Figaro. She's especially fond of this performance because it marked her first professional role

straight out of opera school in 2011. And of course, nothing says opera like a Mozart classic!

But besides her performances in opera, Kenned is making a name for herself in South African musical theatre. This year alone, she's been the lead in West Side Story and Orpheus in Africa, a musical by David Kramer that returns to the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town from 22 September to 31 October 2015.

"One day, I will take Broadway and the West End by storm," she says. "But until then, any stage will do. The size of the stage or the audience doesn't make a difference to me; I perform as

if every time could be my last. Life on the stage is the air that I breathe." 🌍

By Eugene Yiga

*"No amount of rehearsing can prepare you for that first time you step out in full costume in front of the audience, accompanied by a full orchestra."*