

Singer Jorge Garza: Out in the opera

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In the late 1800s, famed gay writer Oscar Wilde wrote his only novel, "The Picture of Dorian Gray."

The cautionary, supernatural tale tells the story of a young man who is sucked into a life of sin and excess when a male companion paints a mysterious portrait of him.

The Center City Opera Theater captures the drama and intrigue of Wilde's novel in the operatic adaptation of "The Picture of Dorian Gray," presented June 6-12 at the Kimmel Center's Perelman Theater, 260 S. Broad St.

PGN recently caught up with the out lead of this world premiere, Jorge Garza.

"This is the first time I've had such an all-encompassing role," he said. "It's very important in the scope of my career."

WILDE SINGER: Jorge Garza portrays Dorian Gray in the Center City Opera Theater's adaptation of Oscar Wilde's only novel, "The Picture of Dorian Gray," presented June 6-12 at Kimmel Center's Perelman Theater, 260 S. Broad St.

Looking back at that career, it's clear that Garza's vitae is nothing short of prestigious.

moved to the United States with his parents as a baby.

The dapper singer was born in Mexico and

Garza said his interest in opera was first sparked in high school.

"I think lots of opera singers in America are exposed to musical theater and choirs while they're in school," he said. "For me, it carried over into college and I realized that I had an aptitude for singing."

He attended Julliard School of Music and later the Manhattan School of Music. After graduating, Garza participated in numerous young artists programs at esteemed companies like Santa Fe Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Wolftrap Opera and Los Angeles Opera.

His résumé includes performances with the Gotham Chamber Opera, the Center for Contemporary Opera and New York's Symphony Space.

Garza modestly admitted that Center City Opera Theater artistic director Andrew Kurtz offered him the lead role in "The Picture of Dorian Gray" immediately after he auditioned.

"Even though this company is not quite as large as some of the others I've worked with, the actual work is, for me, very important. It requires a lot of focus and attention. I've had to build up a lot of stamina to perform such a huge role and to sustain the character and the emotion from beginning to end."

Garza plays Dorian, a dark character that contrasts sharply with the singer's warm disposition.

"He's a young, naïve and petulant man," Garza described. "He's physically beautiful, but throughout the opera, we see an arch in his character and we see how susceptible to influence he is. He's very infatuated by beauty."

Garza explained that his character meets an influential man who insists on painting his portrait.

Strangely, Dorian simultaneously stops aging and suffering consequences for any of his actions. Rather, the portrait ages and grows darker as he slips further into depravity.

"It's a wonderful story and it represents a lot of questions about morality," Garza said.

He added that the audience will enjoy the music just as much as the story.

"The music of Lowell Liebermann [the composer] is beautifully accessible and luscious and melodic. People can really relate to this score."

The singer explained that the story also contains interesting same-sex relationships rarely seen on the opera stage.

"There are definitely homoerotic overtones," he said. "Wilde was a well-known homosexual in his day, and there are relationships both between women and men that opera audiences may be surprised by."

Garza said his sexual orientation has never mattered on stage.

"It's never really been an issue. And if I'm doing my job with skill at a high level, I'll portray any character's sexuality," he said. "Dorian has love interests that are both male and female; my job is to make that believable."

As for Garza's love interest, the singer is in a bicoastal relationship.

"My boyfriend is a dentist in Portland," he said. "As is the case with a lot of musicians, my career involves a lot of travel. And my personal life mirrors that, so we get to see each other all the time."

After his run at Center City Opera Theater, Garza said he'll be performing at the Caramoor Music Festival, a four-week opera event in Katonah, N.Y., this summer.