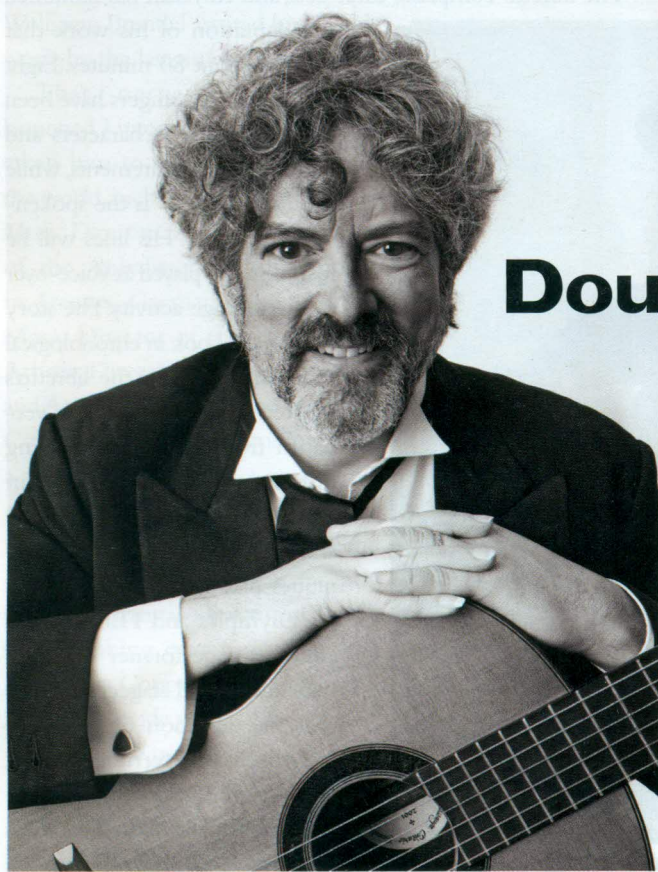


Artists on Stage

Doug MacNaughton defies categorization. The header on his website has him as “Baritone and Guitarist,” but his biography shows he is comfortable singing opera, operetta, music theatre, concert music, as well as writing poetry, producing videos and arranging for guitar and voice. He manages all this while also traveling to perform in Canada, the U.S. and Europe, and raising two children, now teenagers, with his wife, Lee Milliken, Production Manager for the Canadian Opera Company. “I’ve always been eclectic in my approach and done a wider range of styles than many singers, including some pretty hard-core contemporary music,



Doug MacNaughton

musical theatre and concerts of Frank Zappa’s music,” he says. “It’s simply part of my personality to be interested in different styles and different forms. When I was a kid I listened to every kind of music.”

He grew up in Brandon, MB, a community with a strong school music program and a great church choir. This background gave him the experience to audition as a voice major at Brandon University. In the summer of 1982, he was accepted into the Banff School of Fine Arts, but then that fall dropped out of university at 20 to sing with an Edmonton Opera school tour of *HMS Pinafore* that ran for almost nine months. “That’s when I was hooked.”

Since 1986, MacNaughton has worked with vocal coach Don Tarnawski, “one of those rare coaches who insists on getting your best possible performance every session. He is never satisfied with

second best—even if the words, pitches and rhythms are all correct, he will work a phrase over and over until it is as expressive and as beautiful as possible.” Other vocal mentors include Earl Davey, Ernie and Sandy Atkinson, Gary Relyea and Mary Morrison. MacNaughton’s recent performing calendar is testament to his versatility. In opera, 2013 roles include Luther, Crespel and Schlemil in Edmonton Opera’s *Les contes d’Hoffmann*, as well as Thierry and Monsieur Javelinot in the Canadian Opera Company’s *Dialogues des Carmélites*. This spring, he released a CD, *Guitaras*, on which he’s both singer and guitarist in a program of songs (most commissioned by MacNaughton himself) by Canadian composers John Beckwith, Leslie Uyeda, William Beauvais and John Rutter. This fall, he heads into new musical territory as Donner in Pacific Opera Victoria’s staging of Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*.

With age has come a subtle darkening and enlargement of his voice. “There’s a natural progression from ‘Oh, you’re too young to do those kind of roles!’ to ‘We’d like you to play the father.’” In

2008, he says, two offers within a month underlined the change. Opera Hamilton called about Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* “to which I replied, ‘I’d love to do another Papageno.’ Pause. ‘Well, actually, we already have a Papageno, we want you to play The Speaker.’ A couple of weeks later, it was Victoria. “‘We’d like to hire you for *Così fan tutte*,’ to which I replied, ‘Oh, I’d love to play Guglielmo, I haven’t done that role yet.’” Pause. ‘Well, actually, we’d like you to play Don Alfonso.’ I guess I now read as mature enough to play a different set of parts.” He particularly enjoys comic characters, a number of which remain a good fit—the Sacristan in *Tosca*, Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, Bartolo in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and the title role in *Gianni Schicchi*, for examples. He’d also like to revisit Berg’s *Wozzeck*, a role he sang in Banff in 1995 and understudied at the COC in 2006. “He’s a fascinating character to return to. Besides, I still haven’t paid off all the coachings it took me to learn the role the first time.”

MacNaughton admires singers who maintain the beauty of their voices at an age where other performers choose to stop singing. “I want to be singing well when I’ve turned 60, to work on my voice so I can still perform Bach, art song, guitar songs and operatic roles in the same season.” He also believes one of the greatest roles for every singer today is to be an ambassador for opera. That means “expressing gratitude to patrons, both the audience and those who support the financial burden of producing opera, expressing enthusiasm for the art form wherever possible and helping every company you work for with ideas for raising funds and participating in fund-raising events. It means exploring new ways for opera to work, and consolidating ways that have worked in the past. It means keeping the torch going, and passing it on.” —Dawn Martens