

# FINDING HER VOICE

*Miya Higashiyama, Class of 2013*

**MIYA HAD ALWAYS LOVED TO SING**, but when she took an Opera 101 class during Bear Creek's JanTerm, it opened up an entirely new world for her. Today, Miya is a junior at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, working toward a bachelor's of music and vocal performance degree, with a minor in German. She has sung various roles in PLU's opera productions. In addition, she is a member of Choir of the West and travels nationally and internationally with that ensemble. Miya's goal is to become a professional opera singer.

That goal came a little bit closer this past January, as Miya was one of just four people chosen through a highly competitive application process to participate in a Master Class with world-renowned opera star Joyce DiDonato at Carnegie Hall in New York. As the youngest participant, Miya was understandably nervous. However, she quickly took advantage of the opportunity to learn from the others who were further along their career paths.

Miya's four days in New York were filled with challenges—from her first taxi ride in Manhattan (not for the faint of heart), to the instruction she received in character development, vocal techniques, and musicality. Each afternoon, the Master Class students worked with Ms. DiDonato in front of a live audience onstage at Carnegie Hall. The classes were streamed live on medici.tv.

As she reflects back on that whirlwind trip, Miya comments, "Ms. DiDonato pushed me out of my

comfort zone and taught me to strive to be nothing short of the best singer, and person, I can possibly be." She is committed to using what she learned to take her singing to another level.

Miya credits Bear Creek for fostering her passion for performing and sharing music with others. Participating in the arts program at Bear Creek, particularly singing the lead role in the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*, her senior year, "clicked on a light in my head" that perhaps she could make a career out of her passion.

Music is just one of the ways that Miya makes her voice heard. In March, Miya spoke at TEDx Tacoma

in front of an audience of more than 600 people on the topic of sexual assault on college campuses. A survivor of an assault during her freshman year at PLU, Miya is determined to make a difference for other women who often stay silent in the face of sexual violence. She has formed a

group at PLU to raise awareness of the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses. The group has partnered with similar organizations at other schools and is working to urge universities to address the issue openly and create and follow policies to help victims and reduce future violence.

Miya feels fortunate that Bear Creek prepared her so well for college. "Bear Creek gave me the ability to think critically, to discuss worldviews and society, to confidently express myself before an audience, and to write clearly and strongly. Those are not necessarily common skills, and I'm grateful for them."

We look forward to hearing Miya express herself in many ways in the years to come.



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