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Hitting A High Note

Ja-Naé Duane isn't your typical opera diva. She also brings entrepreneurs together.

BY JENNIFER MAGID

Ja-Naé Duane credits her career as an opera singer to some unusual advice she got in school. “My voice teacher, who was also my music teacher in junior high and high school, told me, ‘You know Ja-Naé, you really have a big mouth. You could do opera,’” Duane, 27, jokes. “I never listened to opera. I never necessarily liked opera. My Italian teacher in high school took me to see my first opera, and I fell asleep. I thought it was boring.”

But Duane realized that she could bring something to the opera world. “I wondered why they were just standing there singing, and not acting,” Duane says. She resolved to enhance her theatrical skills in addition to her singing. “It’s about being a singing actress and bringing emotion to stage and opera,” she explains.

Duane graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a master’s degree in opera theater. She has performed in Europe, in New York, and at the White

House. “It incorporates any aspect of art into one form,” Duane says of opera. “And yes, there are times when I can wear horns!” Today, her attitude toward opera is markedly different from how she felt during her first opera-going experience in high school. She feels everyone can gain something from seeing an opera. “Every story line I’ve run across is something someone can relate to,” Duane says.

In addition to being a performer, Duane is also the founder and Web master of Wild Women Entrepreneurs (Wild WE, online at www.thewildwe.com), an online community that helps female entrepreneurs in a variety of fields to meet, share, and receive advice from one another.

“I wanted to teach people and give back everything I’ve learned, and show them if you want to achieve something, you can—and this is how you do it,” Duane says of her Web site. Wild WE has resulted in an unexpected benefit for Duane. “Little did I know it would end up being an asset to my opera career,” she says. “I had no idea I was creating an audience for myself. I end up selling out houses!” 