



Stephen Diaz, Counter-Tenor

Voice coaches in New Zealand and Britain are singing the praises of a budding Kiwi opera star.

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Stephen Diaz is being described as opera's find-of-the-century and likely to become a top international opera star.

The 21-year-old Auckland University student is attending the annual summer opera school in Wanganui, where his tutors say they are simply blown away by his voice. Diaz has a rare singing voice known as a "counter tenor" in opera.

His UK opera tutor Paul Farrington says counter tenors are a very rare breed in the first place.

"To find one with his facility, with his musicianship and intelligence and the sheer beauty of the instrument that's inside him, is just awesome," says Farrington.

Diaz began singing soprano in a church choir in South Africa when he was 12-years-old. His family came to New Zealand seven years ago and Diaz says he just kept on singing the high notes.

"I carried on singing soprano through my voice breaking and I joined the Auckland Youth Choir and that's when they told me I may be a counter tenor," says Diaz.

His voice range is not falsetto. It's a true octave, which is higher than a normal tenor.

Now his tutors say it is simply a matter of polishing a rare natural talent. Diaz says all the practice is challenging. "When you get something right, it's the greatest feeling."

It's also a great feeling for the New Zealand Opera School. Donald Trott, NZ Opera School Director, says Diaz is a rare gift.

"It's the first time we've had a counter tenor in the 16 years we've been running this school and it's been thrilling to hear his voice," says Trott.

The public also has a chance to hear an emerging opera star when Diaz features in a concert at the Wanganui Opera House later this week.