



Jordan Shanahan, Dramatic Baritone

Kalaheo High School Class of 1995

Born and raised in Kailua where his mother and grandmother still live, Jordan Shanahan's voice broke early at age 11. Because his voice didn't sync with his peers, he stopped singing.

He did not sing again until, intending to audition for the orchestra in Ron Bright's production of *South Pacific* at Castle High School, he was asked instead to audition for a singing role. He won the male lead.

How does one progress from playing the trombone in Kalaheo High School's band, the Hawaii Youth Symphony, and the UH Manoa Orchestra to performing as one of the best baritones on the stage today? In recent interviews, Jordan addressed this question and many others.

"It's a lot of study."

At UH Manoa, Jordan took the advice of a lecturer to focus on singing studies instead of trombone and composition. Thereafter, he was invited to sing in Hawaii Opera Theatre's chorus and local musicals where he had a great time. This led to paid jobs in musicals and corporate gigs.

His training continued on the Mainland. He graduated from the Orlando Opera, the Santa Fe Opera and the Lyric Opera Chicago where he was singing alongside leading performers with his "eyes on the stars and trying not to screw anything up." His success in competitions also led to studying abroad.

"You can bump into something that can absolutely change the trajectory of your life."

In the early days while singing in *Tosca*, Australian tenor Robert McFarlane offered him a full scholarship to study Opera Performance at Temple University in Pennsylvania. It was, Jordan says, "one of those small conversations that changes the course of your life." He moved to Philadelphia in 1998.



"At a very basic level, we have to be storytellers."

Since his debut at age 24, Jordan has sung 93 opera roles—73 of them up-front roles—in a wide variety of classical and contemporary operas.

He has sung at all of the major opera houses in Europe and others around the world including Metropolitan Opera.

Jordan is described as a complex informed singer who, for the purpose of storytelling, researches everything about the musical-historical background of the works he performs.

"During COVID, there have been home courses to improve myself."

Since the pandemic, many engagements have been postponed or canceled. He has sung only twice—two performances as Jago (Iago) in *Otello*.

With time on his hands and in addition to recent fatherhood, his home-school projects have been improving spoken language skills, translation work, and lieder projects. A project of Hawaiian songs is still in the works.

When the pandemic abates, his performance schedule is full speed ahead.

"I miss my hometown like you can't believe!"

Often referred to as the Hawaiian baritone, Jordan is proud to have been born in Hawaii but says that is unrelated to his professional life.

He moved to Europe in 2013 and lives in Bern, Switzerland, with his wife — also a singer — and their son. While he misses Hawaii, living in Europe affords the convenience to quickly travel to many performance locations.

During his last trip home to Kailua in December 2019, the Kalaheo High School Foundation presented Jordan with an Alumni Honor Award for his outstanding professional achievements.



Jordan Shanahan as Jago in Verdi's "Otello" at the Theater Bern, October 2020 (photo Annette Boutellier)

"Be prepared, show up, and do your best."

Jordan frequently credits others in the profession for helping him learn the craft. Opera demands training in both singing and acting; it also requires learning German, Italian, and other languages.

The vocal training requires discipline, rote, and strict attention to the metronome! Interestingly, the breathing techniques he learned for the trombone are similar to "playing" one's vocal instrument. For both novice and experienced singers, the challenge is the same. Be prepared, show up, and do your best.