

## NIGHT OUT

# From gridiron hero to grand opera

By: [Emily Cary](#) 02/27/11 8:05 PM  
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How do you morph from star running fullback to opera singer? Keith Miller's magical transformation began with "Phantom of the Opera."

He had never studied music, never sung in public and was enjoying being a University of Colorado football star when he invited a date to the musical. Sitting in the audience, he fell in love with the art form. Back on campus, he tried to sing along with the recording, but the music written for a tenor was not compatible with what he would later discover was his bass-baritone range.



Still, he persisted. After starting in the Fiesta Bowl and the Cotton Bowl and carrying the Olympic torch for the 1996 Atlanta Games, Miller began a pro career playing for the European and Arena Football leagues. All the while he was teased by his teammates as he sang at the top of his voice in the dressing room. By this time, he was listening to and singing along to bass Samuel Ramey.

When a stranger dropped by, heard him and suggested he begin studying voice seriously, he switched career goals. Miller applied himself earnestly to learning to read music. Soon the true deep voice within him emerged and he sang several roles with Portland Opera before heading to New York. Recoach Bill Schumann was impressed and helped him enter Philadelphia's Academy of Vocal Arts.

Miller made his Met debut as the Bonze in "Madama Butterfly," the very role he sings in his Washington National Opera debut this month. Since that start, he has sung in more than 165 Met performances, including "Tosca," "Eugene Onegin," "Macbeth," "Turandot," "Salome" and "Aida," in which he played the king.



"I train for singing just as I trained for football," he said. "Others have become so interested in my techniques that I started a company training people for opera by using air to help improve the voice. When the body is put into duress, you must concentrate on breathing. An opera singer always needs to avoid tension in the voice. The way you handle air is the key."

For eight seasons, he has been director of the Crested Butte Music Festival near his home in Colorado and recently started the young artist program, a vocal training program for children between ages 7 and 12.

"I want to inspire youngsters to love music with our program of rhythm, solfege, acting and moving and to help those 13 to 18 get to the next level," he said. "I became interested in music programs for children by working with the Met's children's chorus. I was shocked to learn that they are let go when their voice breaks. My program helps youngsters to develop the new, emerging voice so they can sing all their lives."

Read more at the Washington Examiner:

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/entertainment/music/2011/02/gridiron-hero-grand-opera#ixzz1FGkyV1qS>

