

**EMILY BIRSAN**  
**SOPRANO**

American soprano Emily Birsan has been praised by the Chicago Tribune for her “*fineness of expression...*” and by the London Telegraph as singing with “*radiant delicacy.*” She is a critically acclaimed recitalist and well known for her prominent interpretations of concert and operatic repertoire.



In the 2018-2019 season, she went on for an ailing colleague at the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Violetta in *La Traviata* for which *SplashMags.com* acclaimed “This opera is about Violetta, and the Lyric has a superb one here.” Additionally, she performed Violetta with Nashville Opera, Handel’s *Messiah* with the Illinois Philharmonic, Jacksonville Symphony, and Louisiana Symphony, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with the Jacksonville Symphony, the title role in *Rusalka* with Madison Opera, Mahler’s 8<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* with Madison Symphony, and Sandman/Dew Fairy in *Hänsel und Gretel* with the Edinburgh International Festival. The 2019-2020 season includes appearances with the Peninsula Music Festival, Mozart’s *Requiem* with the Bach Society of St. Louis, Beethoven’s *Mass in C* with the Phoenix Symphony, Mahler’s *Symphony No. 4* with the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra, and Handel’s *Messiah* with the Boise Philharmonic and Tucson Symphony.

The 2017-2018 season for Birsan included joining the Liverpool Symphony for a concert of Gershwin tunes, Violetta in *La Traviata* with Indianapolis Opera, Handel’s *Messiah* with the Jacksonville Symphony, Mahler’s 4<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, and her debut with Welsh National Opera as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*. In the 2016-2017 season, she made role debuts as Juliette in Gounod’s *Romeo et Juliette* with Madison Opera, Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Boston Lyric Opera, and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with Florentine Opera. On the concert stage, she made her debut with Melbourne Symphony singing Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, a concert with the Chicago Philharmonic, and was featured with the BBC Symphony in London singing Bliss’ *Beatitudes*. Recently, Emily returned to the Lyric Opera of Chicago as the Italian Singer in *Capriccio*, Leila in *The Pearl Fishers* with Florida Grand Opera, and Anne Trulove in *A Rake’s Progress* with the Edinburgh International Festival, among others. Her critically acclaimed performances on the concert stage included Elgar with the Bergen Philharmonic in Norway, Verdi and Puccini with the Knoxville Symphony and, most recently, her Carnegie Hall debut with Mozart *Mass in C minor*. With the Chandos Record Label, Ms. Birsan has recorded Edward Elgar’s oratorio, *The Saga of St. Olaf*, with Sir Andrew Davis conducting and she also recorded with the BBC Symphony for Chandos.

An alumna of the Lyric Opera of Chicago’s Ryan Opera Center, Emily covered the roles of Violetta, Lucia, Adele, Musetta, and Armida, among others. She received critical praise as Servillia in *La Clemenza di Tito*, Xenia in *Boris Godunov* and the Sandman in *Hansel and Gretel*. She debuted Elliot Carter’s “*A Mirror on Which to Dwell*” at the Ravinia Festival, appeared in numerous recitals with WFMT Chicago and Lyric Opera’s Art Song Series, and sang with the Grant Park Music Festival in an Opera Scenes concert and Schubert’s *Mass in Eb*.

Ms. Birsan attended Lawrence Conservatory and UW-Madison School of Music, studying under soprano Julia Faulkner. At UW-Madison, she sang the roles of Maria Stuarda, Thaïs, and Alcina. Ms. Birsan was a Wisconsin District Metropolitan Opera National Council winner and Regional award winner in 2010.

## EMILY BIRSAN

### SOPRANO

#### OPERA

Sandman/Dew Fairy	<i>Hänsel und Gretel</i>	Edinburgh International Festival	2019
Rusalka	<i>Rusalka</i>	Madison Opera	2019
Violetta	<i>La Traviata</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2019
Donna Anna	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Jacksonville Symphony	2019
Violetta	<i>La Traviata</i>	Nashville Opera	2018
Donna Anna	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Welsh National Opera	2018
Violetta	<i>La Traviata</i>	Indianapolis Opera	2017
Susanna	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Boston Lyric Opera	2017
Donna Anna	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Florentine Opera	2017
Juliette	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i>	Madison Opera	2016
Mimi	<i>La bohème</i>	Bangor Symphony Orchestra	2016
Lauretta	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Chicago Opera Theater	2016
Musetta	<i>La bohème</i>	Madison Opera; Boston Lyric Opera	2015; '15
Anne Trulove	<i>The Rake's Progress</i>	Edinburgh International Festival	2015
Violetta (c)	<i>La Traviata</i>	Fort Worth Opera; Lyric Opera of Chicago	2015; '13
Leïla	<i>Les pêcheurs de perles</i>	Florida Grand Opera	2015
Italian Singer	<i>Capriccio</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2014
Bubikopf/Clever One	<i>Emperor of Atlantis/Clever One</i>	Chicago Opera Theater	2014
Servilia	<i>La Clemenza di Tito</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2014
1 <sup>st</sup> Flower Maiden	<i>Parsifal</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2014
1 <sup>st</sup> Wood Nymph(c)	<i>Rusalka</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2014
Adele (c)	<i>Die Fledermaus</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2013
Page	<i>Rigoletto</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2013
Musetta (c)	<i>La bohème</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2013
Sandman, Gretel (c)	<i>Hänsel und Gretel</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2012
Norina (c)	<i>Don Pasquale</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2012
Sophie (c)	<i>Werther</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2012
Trainbearer	<i>Elektra</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2012
Norina	<i>Don Pasquale</i>	Ryan Opera Center Workshop	2012
Armida (c)	<i>Rinaldo</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2012
Papagena (c)	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2011
Xenia	<i>Boris Godunov</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2011
Lucia (c)	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	Lyric Opera of Chicago	2011
Mme. Silberklang	<i>Der Schauspieldirektor</i>	Grant Park Music Festival	2011
Fiordiligi	<i>Così fan tutte</i>	Ryan Opera Center Workshop	2011
Countess (c)	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Des Moines Metro Opera	2010
Barbarina	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Madison Opera	2010

#### CONCERT AND RECITAL

Soloist	Handel: <i>Messiah</i>	Tucson; Boise; Jacksonville; Illinois Phil; Louisiana Symphony	2019; '18
Soloist	Mahler: <i>4<sup>th</sup> Symphony</i>	Illinois Philharmonic; Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra	2019; '18
Soloist	Beethoven: <i>Mass in C</i>	Phoenix Symphony	2019
Soloist	Mozart <i>Requiem</i>	Bach Society of St. Louis; Madison Symphony Orchestra	2019; '14
Soloist	Mahler: <i>8<sup>th</sup> Symphony</i>	Madison Symphony	2019
Soloist	Gershwin concert	Liverpool Symphony	2017
Soloist	Bliss: <i>The Beatitudes</i>	BBC Orchestra with Sir Andrew Davis	2017
Soloist	Beethoven: <i>Missa solemnis</i>	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra	2016
Soloist	<i>Opera in the Park</i>	Madison Opera	2016
Soloist	Mozart <i>C Minor Mass</i>	Bard Festival Chorale at Carnegie Hall	2016
Soloist	Brahms <i>Requiem</i>	Dubuque Symphony Orchestra	2016
Soloist	Schubert <i>The Shepherd on the Rock</i>	Knoxville Symphony Orchestra	2014
Soloist	Elgar <i>The Saga of St. Olaf</i>	Bergen Philharmonic, Norway	2014
Soloist	Schubert Mass in Eb	Grant Park Symphony	2013
Soloist	"A Mirror..." Elliot Carter	Ravinia Festival	2013

**EMILY BIRSAN**  
**SOPRANO**  
**CRITICAL ACCLAIM**

**Rusalka – Madison Opera**

"The production's "poor, pale Rusalka" was soprano Emily Birsan in a captivating role debut. The famous "Song to the Moon" revealed the soprano's lovely lyric instrument and aptitude for intelligent phrasing straightaway; but it was in her anguished narrative "Ó marno, ó marno!" in Act II that she really came into her own with a laser-like ping at the top of the range and specifically pointed use of text. Her bittersweet blessing of her dead lover in Act III was shattering. The entire final scene was devastating, as tenor John Lindsay launched into the Prince's ascending phrase "Líbej mne, líbej, mír mi přež" and joined Birsan in one of the most exquisite duets in the repertory." -Opera News

"But the stage belonged to the women. Emily Birsan. . . as Rusalka was a study in subtle shadings of her expressive soprano voice . . . She is a powerful singer and convincing actress who was engaging to watch and to hear." -Well Tempered Ear

"An immediate point of interest in this Madison Opera production is the casting in the title role of Emily Birsan, a local vocal talent now making a very big career for herself. Her soprano voice is clear and handsomely toned...and her acting is superb." -Isthmus.com

**La Traviata – Lyric Opera of Chicago**

"the Lyric provided a seamless production with Emily Birsan as Violetta, stepping in for the ailing Ms. Shagmiratova. And Ms. Birsan, an alumna of the Lyric's Ryan Opera Center, was so very, very good, I hope Ms. Shagmiratova allows herself a full recovery before attempting to return to the stage so Ms. Birsan can be seen in this role. She is absolutely mesmerizing as Violetta. . . it's Emily Birsan's fragile sweetness and fluid voice that centers the entire thing from the very first scene. This opera is about Violetta, and the Lyric has a superb one here." -SplashMags.com

"Birsan turned in an impressive performance as the doomed courtesan, one that will likely become even more assured should she be required to sing additional dates over the rest of the run." -Chicago Classical Review

"Emily Birsan, who stole the audience's heart. Her sweet tone and breathtaking pianissimo perfectly captured the character of Violetta, the young courtesan suffering from tuberculosis. Equally impressive was her acting; at one point, following her brilliant caballeta in Act I, she took a longer pause than I have ever heard in a recording, and in that brief moment I saw in her face and body language precisely what she was going through emotionally. It was one of those rare moments in opera when acting equaled singing." -Opera Sense

**Donna Anna – Don Giovanni – Welsh National Opera**

"Mozart gives some of his most inward and tender music to Donna Elvira and Donna Anna, and the latter's accompanied recitatives, sung with force and focus by Emily Birsan, were taut and keening." -Bachtrack

"American soprano Emily Birsan playing the part of Donna Anna . . . possesses a pleasing controlled voice. . . Emily Birsan manages to maintain the dignity and elegance of Donna Anna throughout." -Get the Chance

"Emily Birsan's soaring soprano is heard to advantage as Anna. . . Birsan's voice is exquisite and fully deserved the calls of 'Brava 'on the opening night." -The Reviews Hub

"Making her debut, we had an elegant and vocally scintillating Donna Anna from Emily Birsan" -Art Scene in Wales

**The Beatitudes (Bliss) – BBC Symphony Orchestra**

"The soprano Emily Birsan was silvery clear" -The Times

"Soloists Ben Johnson and Emily Birsan impressed, not least in their bright-timbre but in the apparent ease with which they dispatched their unforgiving vocal lines: "O blessed Jesu" is littered with ungrateful leaps which both singers took in their stride." -BachTrack.com

"The two soloists – Emily Birsan and Ben Johnson – were well cast . . . Birsan's sweet top register provided the notes of the pastoral lark." -MusicOMH.com

"The American soprano Emily Birsan is not as yet well-known this side of the Atlantic, but I'm sure we shall be hearing more of her lovely voice in the future."  
-Seen and Heard International

"Emily Birsan responded with keen sensitivity and perception to some of Bliss's most radiant settings for soprano"  
-ClassicalSource.com

#### **Susanna – Le nozze di Figaro – Boston Lyric Opera**

"...Emily Birsan space to step up as a brilliant Susanna, nearly nudging Figaro out as main character and primary mover of the comic drama. Both leads showed fine, well-matched voices and lithe Mozartean instincts"  
-The Boston Musical Intelligencer

"The spry-voiced soprano Emily Birsan was a delightful and streetwise Susanna, and her skeptical look of disgust toward the slimier male characters brought the house down in laughter more than once. Even where the surtitles failed, as they did on a few occasions, all that needed to be communicated was written on her face." -Boston Globe

"Soprano Emily Birsan sang the part of Susanna to perfection. A fine musician, her intonation was dead on throughout the evening, and her silvery tone proved ideal for the role. Her rendition of "Deh vieni non tardar," Susanna's final aria, was nothing short of ethereal."  
-Edge Media Network

#### **Donna Anna – Don Giovanni – Florentine Opera**

"Soprano Emily Birsan's combined a silvery sound and easy, nimble, vocal technique with an earnest, dignified character, creating an elegant Donna Anna."  
-Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

#### **Beethoven – Missa solemnis – Melbourne Symphony Orchestra**

"The ensemble of the four – soprano Emily Birsan. . . – was exemplary, and their solo passages eloquent – and audible. It was a rare privilege to hear all soloists, but I shall never forget . . . or the limber power and sensitivity of Emily Birsan's soprano as it lofted over the walls of sound from chorus and orchestra."  
-Australian Book Review

"The stage was graced with a quartet of first-rate soloists: soprano Emily Birsan was expressive and technically sure, always concerned with balance"  
-Performing Arts Hub

#### **Juliette- Roméo et Juliette – Madison Opera**

"Soprano Emily Birsan possibly achieved the finest work yet seen from this young singer. Her voice was bright and glittering in the coloratura of "Je veux vivre" and she displayed surprising body in her middle register for the potion aria. Juliette's developmental arc from buoyant teen to tragic heroine was capitably rendered. The pair blended delightfully in the score's unusual bounty of four extended duets."  
-Opera News

"Romeo may get top billing in the title, but Madison Opera's latest production is all about the girl. . . Emily Birsan's Juliet is a lusty, energetic teenager, giddy in love and intensely passionate. With her nurse (Allisanne Apple) she's confident and headstrong. On stage, she draws the light. And on Gounod's waltzes and arias, Birsan's coloratura soprano sparkles brighter than the "inconstant moon" hanging over Juliet's balcony. . . Birsan's performance of "Amour, ranime mon courage" in Act IV is electrifying, as much a highlight as the sweet, bubbly (and more familiar) Act I waltz, "Je veux vivre."  
-The Cap Times

#### **Mimi – La bohème – Bangor Symphony Orchestra**

"Birsan's Mimi was a woman with a tenacious soul but delicate constitution too fragile for bohemian poverty. The soprano's beautifully balanced voice so charmed theatergoers that some wept at Mimi's demise."  
-Bangor Daily News

"In her first appearance as Mimi, Emily Birsan gave a sympathetic portrayal of the dying seamstress, singing with confidence and beautiful style."  
-The Ellsworth American

#### **Lauretta – Gianni Schicchi – Chicago Opera Theater**

"Emily Birsan peeled her way through Lauretta's music prettily, and looked like a vintage Barbie fresh from the box."  
-Opera News

"... Emily Birsan's stunning rendition of "O mio babbino caro," easily the most delightful beautiful moment of the entire production."  
-stageandcinema.com

"The other standout, vocally speaking, was soprano Emily Birsan, a Lyric Ryan Opera Center alumna, who chirped the opera's greatest hit, Lauretta's aria "O mio babbino caro" ("Oh, hear me, dearest daddy," in the awkward translation employed here) very prettily."

- The Chicago Tribune

### **Anne Trulove – The Rake's Progress – Edinburgh International Festival**

"American soprano Emily Birsan as Anne, dressed in a black tulle skirt with a black and cream brocade bodice, radiated warmth with her lovely lyrical voice, particularly so in her prayerful "I go to him". Her final parting from the babbling Tom was desperately poignant as her father, a strong voiced supportive Peter Rose, led her slowly away."

-BachTrack.com

"Emily Birsan, the newest name to British audiences (but known to Andrew Davis through Chicago Lyric Opera and), sounded fantastic as Anne. There is brightness and dazzling purity there, exemplified in a fantastic climactic aria at the end of Act 1, but there is also intelligence in her scene with Baba and a beautiful, heartfelt lullaby with Tom."

-Seen and Heard International

"American soprano Emily Birsan was an ardent, luminous Anne Trulove"

-The Guardian

### **Musetta – La bohème**

#### **Madison Opera**

"Emily Birsan was not just a vocal knock-out as Musetta, but brought a depth to the role not always encountered. It is one thing for a soprano to show her tender side as Mimi embarks on her deathbed scene, but even in Act II with the great "Musetta's Waltz" number, we find Birsan--again with the deft and inventive hand of Lefkovich--bringing more than just a vocal characterization. She begins the famous number in a kind of halting half-waltz with her sugar daddy, Alcindoro, and then in mid-aria works the crowd of gawking onlookers in Carmen-esque "Habanera" fashion. A great touch."

-Madison Magazine

"Musetta, with her shimmying skirts and big smile, is easily the highlight of the show, played by Emily Birsan. Birsan is a soprano on the rise that Madison can lay some claim to launching, since she picked up a master of music degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2010. She makes for a lusty, free-spirited Musetta, and she brings the house down with a glorious rendition of the familiar "Quando men vo," also known as Musetta's waltz."

-The Cap Times

#### **Boston Lyric Opera**

"As the flummoxer-in-chief, the café singer Musetta, soprano Emily Birsan drew all eyes to her with a slinky, hair-tossing performance and seductive singing. . ."

- Boston Classical Review

"As the coquettish Musetta, soprano Emily Birsan was a delight. Her spirited rendition of "Musetta's Waltz," the best-known number from the opera, was a highlight of the performance. . ."

-Edge Media Network

"A solid cast sang affectingly on Friday. . . Emily Birsan capably sang the role of Musetta" -Boston Globe

"Soprano Emily Birsan brought a light, lilting soprano to the role of Musetta, spinning a lightning-quick vibrato with the same kind of agile effortlessness with which her character ensnares romantic prey. . . Birsan was not without subtlety; she too possesses remarkable control over her instrument, and gave a multicolored delivery of "Quando m'en vo", cooing the nightclub-act take on the aria with all the soft-but-unambiguous sultriness of a seasoned chanteuse. Birsan avoided falling into the trap of one-dimensionality inherent to a comic secondary lead; in the fourth act, she demonstrated range with a fervent and desperate prayer for Mimi's delivery from imminent death. The audience was able to see the human being beneath Musetta's vampy antics as Birsan sang with a warmth and vulnerability only hinted at in the preceding acts. Coupled with Kaduce's three-dimensional, emotionally mature Mimi, Birsan brought great poignancy to the scene as a whole, her prayer lending new weight to the moment when Mimi exhorts Marcello to forgive Musetta's dalliances and reconcile with her for good."

-Boston Musical Intelligencer

### **Soloist – Knoxville Symphony Orchestra**

"While one was immediately drawn to Birsan's poise and effortless delivery, that respect leapt even higher as she dramatically carried the song's narrative along, supported by clean, sophisticated tone and miraculously crisp diction. . . An even greater thrill, though, came from Birsan in the Verdi arias, a performance that revealed surprising reserves of power, depth and warmth in her lower range, and a thrilling goose-bump raising ability in her substantial upper range. This is a singer that will soon be snapped up hungrily by the international operatic world, if there is any justice at all."

-Arts Knoxville



### **The Clever One – The Clever One – Chicago Opera Theater**

"Best of all was soprano Birsan, whose exquisitely floated tones above the staff provided the most beautiful vocal moments of the evening in her enchanting portrayal of the title role."  
- Opera News

"Yet soprano Emily Birsan in the title role of the unnamed "Clever One" brought terrific vocal gleam and the kind of superbly expressive singing that has been largely absent at COT in recent seasons. Mitisek's static treatment of her character as robotic archetype offered few dramatic opportunities yet Birsan's lovely singing of her lullaby to the narcotized king was the high point of a rather uneven evening."  
-Chicago Classical Review

### **Soloist - The Gershwin Legacy- Madison Symphony Orchestra**

"Soprano Emily Birsan was here just four weeks ago as soloist in the Mozart Requiem, and is showing every indication of being a bona fide darling diva in the making. With crystal clear diction and just the right dash of sass Birsan delighted in the clever "By Strauss," and later unleashed her full upper range in a truly dazzling "Glitter and Be Gay" from Bernstein's Candide."  
-Madison Magazine

"Drawing on theatrical instincts as well as a voice that always makes my day (or evening), Birsan makes truly musical high points out of her solos. She is cute in a parody song about Johann Strauss (even waltzing briefly with the conductor). She is dazzling in "Glitter and Be Gay" from Bernstein's Candide, an aria really written for her. Also, in a duet from West Side Story with Olivo, she was quite touching."  
-Madison Isthmus

### **Soloist – The Saga of St. Olaf – Bergen Philharmonic**

"The American soprano Emily Birsan sang with radiant delicacy."  
-The Telegraph

### **Servilia - La Clemenza di Tito- Lyric Opera of Chicago**

"Emily Birsan's Servilia revealed a fresh lyric soprano of fine quality that pealed above the ensembles very prettily."  
- Opera News

"The rest of the cast was first rate. . . Emily Birsan, a current Ryan Opera Center member, sang with apt youthful purity as Servilia, Annio's beloved, blending smoothly with Hall's lovely mezzo."  
-Chicago Classical Review

"Emily Birsan's cameo aria as the steadfast Servilia was completely charming; indeed she and Cecelia Hall (who portrayed Servilia's sweetheart Annio (in the opera's second trouser role) reminded one of the young couple in "The Magic Flute" — princess Pamina and prince Tamino, whose ravishingly innocent music Davis and his orchestra were most certainly channeling."  
- Chicago on the Aisle

### **Rising Stars Concert – Lyric Opera of Chicago**

"Emily Birsan is now in her third and final year with the Ryan ensemble and is going out into the professional world a seasoned young pro; witness how smoothly she wrapped her lovely lyric soprano around the tricky intervals and wide range of Anne Trulove's aria from Stravinsky's "The Rake's Progress."  
- The Chicago Tribune

### **Carter "A Mirror on Which to Dwell" with Ensemble Dal Niente - Ravinia Festival**

"So, too, did Birsan trace the jagged intervals of Carter's six settings of Elizabeth Bishop poems with amazing clarity of diction, accuracy of intonation and fineness of expression, this despite the welter of splintery, mandarin instrumental detail that surrounded her."  
- John von Rhein, Chicago Tribune

### **Sandman - Hansel and Gretel - Lyric Opera of Chicago**

"Soprano Emily Birsan (dressed in black and maneuvering a wispy puppet) is the heavenly-sounding Sandman."  
- Chicago-on-the-aisle

### **Violetta aria and duet - Rising Stars Concert - Lyric Opera Chicago**

"Likewise, Emily Birsan was compelling as Violetta in two excerpts from La traviata's second-act duet with Germont (here sung by Joseph Lim) and, later in the program, the familiar "Sempre libera" from the first act (with John Irvin offstage as Alfredo). Birsan's voice and stage presence fit the role, and in the second-act duet, she gradually opened her sound to match Violetta's—a clearly audible dramatic turn.  
- Seen and Heard International