

J'Nai Bridges
Mezzo-soprano

American mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges is one of the pre-eminent vocal talents of her generation, an artist directly involved in two Grammy award-winning musical projects and a leading figure in the conversation about inclusion and racial justice in the performing arts.

Through early operatic experience as Suzuki (Madama Butterfly) at San Diego Opera, Preziosilla (la Forza del Destino) at Opernhaus Zürich and Bersi (Andrea Chenier) at both San Francisco Opera and Bayerische Staatsoper, J’Nai Bridges was heralded a rising star and attracted widespread international attention. She went on to debut at Gran Teatro del Liceu as Federica (Luisa Miller) and, in the 2022/23 season, the Washington State native made her anticipated debut at Seattle Opera in concert performances of Samson et Delilah to unanimous critical acclaim. After her role debut as Carmen at San Francisco Opera in the 2018/19 season, Bizet’s heroine has become her most performed role leading subsequent productions at Arena di Verona, Dutch National Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Teatro Lirico di Cagliari and Lyric Opera of Chicago among others.

A committed performer of contemporary repertoire, J’Nai Bridges made an acclaimed debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Nefertiti in a sold-out run of Philip Glass’ Akhnaten, a role she had previously performed at Los Angeles Opera returning subsequently as Kasturbai in Satyagraha. She created the role of Josefa Segovia in the world-premiere of John Adams’ Girls of the Golden West at San Francisco Opera, reprising the role in her house debut at Dutch National Opera, she enjoyed great success as Sister Helen Préjean in Jake Heggie’s Dead Man Walking at Vancouver Opera and appeared in the world premiere of Bel Canto at Lyric Opera of Chicago, an opera by Jimmy López Bellido based on the novel by Ann Patchett.

In the current season, J’Nai Bridges returns to the Metropolitan Opera in John Adams’ El Niño, conducted by Marin Alsop and in a new production by Lileana Blain-Cruz, she creates the role of Lucinda in the world-premiere of Jake Heggie’s Intelligence at Houston Grand Opera conducted by Kwamé Ryan and makes her debut at Hamburgische Staatsoper as Carmen, conducted by Ariane Matiakh. In concert, Bridges makes her New York Philharmonic debut under Dima Slobodeniouk in a programme entitled ​‘Planets and Atmosphères’ and sings Tippett’s A Child of Our Time at Tanglewood Music Festival with Susanna Mälkki.

Acclaimed by The New York Times for her ​“plush-voiced mezzo-soprano”, J’Nai Bridges is an accomplished concert performer with a wide repertoire covering works by composers such as Mahler, Mozart, Beethoven, Ravel, Verdi, Mendelssohn and Bernstein. Recent highlights include Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex with Esa-Pekka Salonen and San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Beethoven’s Symphony No.9 with Gustavo Dudamel and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and with Stéphane Dénève and The Philadelphia Orchestra, Mendelssohn’s Elijah at Oregon Bach Festival under John Nelson, Bernstein’s Symphony No.1 ​“Jeremiah” with Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop, Ravel’s Shéhérazade with Salonen and NDR Elbphilharmonieorchester, Mahler’s Symphony No.2 with Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Jader Bignamini and her first performances of Verdi’s Messa da Requiem with the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

In 2022, J’Nai Bridges was announced as one of Kennedy Center’s NEXT50 cultural leaders and presented numerous works as a guest artist in The Kennedy Center’s 50th Anniversary season including performances with The National Philharmonic of the world premiere of Adolphus Hailstork’s A Knee on the Neck and the world premiere of Carlos Simon​’s Songs of Separation alongside Berio’s Folk Songs with National Symphony Orchestra under Gianandrea Noseda. Bridges joined Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel as part of the Power to the People! festival for performances of Lieberson’s Neruda Songs and Amarillo Symphony for the world premiere of Chris Rogerson’s Sacred Earth. Her recording of Richard Danielpour’s oratorio The Passion of Yeshua, performed with Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra from the National Library of Congress, won a Grammy in 2021. As part of their digital SOUND/STAGE series, J’Nai Bridges was part of a special programme together with pop artists Coldplay, Shakira, Usher and other contemporaries with Los Angeles Philharmonic under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel as part of the Global Citizen movement’s Global Goal campaign.

Thanks to her innovative programming and ease of connecting directly with the audience, J’Nai Bridges is hugely in demand as a recitalist and has recently presented two programmes widely across North America: ​‘Notes on Hope’ with percussionist Ulysses Owens Jr, showcasing composers ranging from Duparc and Satie to Duke Ellington and Florence Price and a collaboration with Catalyst Quartet performing a world premiere, Airs for Mother, by Jimmy López-Bellido alongside works by de Falla, John Carter and Carlos Simon. J’Nai has appeared in recital at Carnegie Hall, San Francisco Performances, 92NY, Princeton, The Cliburn and at Caramoor among many others.

A native of Tacoma, Washington, J’Nai Bridges studied at Curtis Institute of Music, Manhattan School of Music and was in Lyric Opera of Chicago’s young artist programme at the Ryan Center. She represented the United States at the prestigious BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, received the 2018 Sphinx Medal of Excellence Award, was first prize winner at both the 2015 Gerda Lissner Competition and 2016 Francisco Viñas International Competition to name just a few of her many competition successes and awards.