From Homeless to the High Notes, and Now a Home Run

Opera singer Breanna Sinclairé becomes the first transgender woman to sing the national anthem at a professional sporting event.

BY BRIAN SCHAEFER (/AUTHORS/BRIAN-SCHAEFER)

JUNE 17 2015 11:43 AM EDT

Photo by Kent Taylor

Breanna Sinclairé is not much of a sports fan but tonight she’s attending her first Oakland A’s game, and, at least at the beginning, all eyes will be on her. Sinclairé, a San Francisco-based opera singer, will ring in the game by singing the "Star-Spangled Banner" in her powerful soprano, becoming the
first transgender woman to sing the national anthem at a professional sporting event, according to
the singer. “We wanted to promote the theme of inclusion throughout the night, and the anthem is
an important part of that,” the team told Out in a statement.

“It’s nerve-wracking,” Sinclairé admits, noting that it is by far the largest crowd she has performed
in front of — not even counting the vast TV audience. “But I love what I do and I’ve been trained to
do this. It’s a blessing.” The honor is also something of a peak ascent for the 25-year-old, who has
traversed a number of dark valleys on her journey to becoming a professional singer.

In Baltimore, where she grew up, Sinclairé’s grandmother introduced her to classical music and the
“She’d play them when she’d babysit,” says Sinclairé. Her first experience singing was with her
Baptist church’s choir, where she was handed solo after solo. Despite her physical development as a
boy, her voice never really changed, remaining clear and angelically high. With her grandmother’s
help, she studied with vocal coaches and enrolled at the Baltimore School of the Arts.

As she embraced her voice, she struggled with her gender identity. It wasn’t until she moved out of
Baltimore that she began to embrace that too. “When I left my family, I discovered myself,” she
says. At a small conservative Christian college in Canada, Breanna the woman began to emerge but
was not embraced by her peers. Unable to continue her journey there, Sinclairé soon left. Disowned
by her family, she spent several months homeless in New York City. But music was her North Star,
and where, in her senior year, she began to transition. The process is arduous for any person, but for
Sinclairé, transitioning played particular and unpredictable havoc on her voice. “With hormone
therapy, I had to adjust,” she says. “Your body goes through drastic changes. My voice teacher said,
‘you have to plow through it.’ If I didn’t keep practicing, I wouldn’t be able to sing today.”

The classical opera repertory is filled with strong woman thrust into tragic circumstances, and many
have inspired Sinclairé — among them, Delilah, Mignon and Carmen. “I like Carmen because she
had struggles but she also had confidence,” Sinclairé says. “She was sassy, and that’s the person I
wanted to be, that sassy, confident woman.” Opera heroines aside, the conservatories where
Sinclairé studied have been a mixed bag in terms of supporting her. She says she received negative
feedback when she first expressed her desire to transition and sing soprano roles as an
undergraduate and that much of her time at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she
received her masters in 2014, was challenging. “I felt out of place,” she says. But some teachers,
particularly Ruby Pleasure at the SF conservatory, became her champions and music got her
through the tough times. “My education was my protection, my music was my protection,” she says.
“Every time I performed, all my struggles dissipated. I know it sounds clichéd but I was passionate
about it.”

Yet as Sinclairé concentrated on perfecting the voice she wanted, she also worked for the body she
wanted. Two years ago, she hosted a benefit concert she called “Opera’s Greatest Tits” to raise
money for the next step in her physical transformation (she successfully raised $8500 for the
event’s, um, titular procedure). A few months ago, she completed sexual reassignment surgery,
which she says has helped her confidence performing female roles. “I feel very complete,” she says.
“Psychologically and emotionally, I’m singing in front of people as my complete self.”

From Thursday through Saturday, Sinclairé will also perform in the 14
Annual Fresh Meat Festival (http://freshmeatproductions.org/), celebrating transgender and queer performers. There she’ll
sing arias from Camille Saint-Saens’ Samson et Dalilah and Gaspare Spontini’s La Vestale, as well as the
19th century spiritual Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child by the pioneering African-
American singer and composer H.T. Burleigh.

“Breanna impresses me not only as a brilliant singer and performer, but also for her huge heart and
commitment to community and trans activism,” says Sean Dorsey, the festival’s artistic director.
“The whole Fresh Meat vision is that until all of us are free, none of us are free. It’s all about building
alliances and solidarity and community. And that’s what Breanna’s all about.” Additional Fresh
Meat artists include North American Same-Sex Ballroom champions Robbie Tristan and Ernesto,
singer-songwriter Shawna Virago, storytellers and comics Manish Vaidya and Natasha Muse, and
performances by Dorsey’s dance company.
Following Fresh Meat, Sinclairé will make a guest appearance with the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus (https://www.sfgmc.org/), June 26-27, and then concentrate on future performances. She is strategizing her path to Europe, where she plans to audition for companies and further her studies in London or Germany (she became fluent in German during graduate school.) While on the continent, she also plans to stop by the revered opera house La Scala, where one day she hopes to sing. In the meantime, a grassy outdoor stage and thousands of spectators in baseball caps await.

The Fresh Meat Festival runs June 18-20 at Z Space in San Francisco. More information and tickets, visit FreshMeatProductions.org (http://freshmeatproductions.org/).

Tags: MUSIC (/ENTERTAINMENT/MUSIC)
READER COMMENTS (7)

Syldon Nedd  Director of Operations  Self-Employed
A proud moment in this movement.
Congrats.
Reply  Like  1  Follow Post  June 20 at 8:34pm

Greg Greening  Follow  Top Commenter
Why do we have to know about his/her gender orientation?? I just want to hear the song. Stop making everything political!
Reply  Like  1  Follow Post  June 18 at 9:05pm

César Ramírez
I understand your point Greg, however this is the RIGHT place to talk about this kind of information, since these people can help others to open up and be whatever they want without fear, or at least knowing there are more like them and continue with their journey.
Reply  Like  2  June 19 at 8:05pm

The Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts
Way to go Breanna Elyce Sinclairé BFA 2011 Alum
Reply  Like  1  Follow Post  June 17 at 7:15pm

Lex Moran-Solero  Top Commenter
Wonderful!
Reply  Like  1  Follow Post  June 17 at 7:00pm

Angela Cooper  Follow  Top Commenter  Pittsford (town), New York  223 followers
Fantastic!
Reply  Like  1  Follow Post  June 17 at 12:47pm

Nigel McDowell  Top Commenter  Works at Red Apple Farm
super im really happy for her u go girl and do great with national anthem!
Reply  Like  1  Follow Post  June 17 at 3:25pm

LATEST NEWS

WATCH: Alyssa, Detox & Laganja Get Diva Makeovers on Skin Wars
Tips for Staying Cool (and Fragrant) This Summer
Super im really happy for her u go girl and do great with national anthem!

Safari Power Saver
Click to Start Flash Plug-in

Well, RuPaul Told Me to F—the Myself (And It Was AMAZING)
Kendall Jenner Headlines Another Calvin Klein Campaign

Puerto Rico’s Same-Sex Marriage Ban Ruled Unconstitutional

WATCH: Kentucky Gay Couple Denied Marriage License, Get It All On Film

Munich Unveils Same-Sex Traffic Lights

Adrian Anchondo’s Rihanna Parody ‘Snitch That’s My Hermione’ Will Make You Drop Everything to Wax Your Wand

Putin’s Party Unveils ‘Straight Pride’ Flag