

# André Courville.

The bass-baritone's **Cajun** background helps make him *parfait* in **French** rep.

► **ANDRÉ COURVILLE** began to sing the “Air du tambour-major,” from Thomas’s *Caïd*, at Los Angeles’s Loren L. Zachary Society Competition last May, and suddenly there was no doubt who was going to take home the \$12,500 top prize. It was one of those jaw-dropping moments when you sense a singer stepping into his own brilliant future. Courville’s *basso cantante* has both smooth richness and bite, and the Thomas aria was an inspired choice. “It has a fun melody, fast runs at the end, high notes and legato line,” says the twenty-nine-year-old Courville. “It has everything. I didn’t see it as a competition, though. I always have the same objective—to reach the audience and make them feel something. It’s a performance for me, whether or not I’m competing for a prize or a job.” This May, he is bass soloist in Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, with the Cecilia Chorus of New York at Carnegie Hall.

Courville’s facility with the *Caïd* aria is easier to understand when you hear his backstory. He is from Cecilia, a small town in southwest Louisiana, near Lafayette. “I grew up on the banks of the bayou,” he says. “I’m Cajun. We all spoke French.” He was a prodigy who began

piano and organ studies at eight, became his church’s organist at twelve and was directing the choir not long after that. After hearing a Russian touring company perform *Lucia di Lammermoor*, he began voice lessons as well. He studied at Loyola University. His progress was slow and steady; after he left Loyola, he took a break from singing, and his voice grew exponentially. “When I went back to it, this booming voice came out,” he says. When he was twenty-seven, he felt ready to audition for Philadelphia’s Academy of Vocal Arts. “No stress, no pressure. I had kind of percolated a bit, and when I auditioned for AVA, I didn’t have any bad vocal habits. I think so many singers force themselves to grow vocally, try to force that maturation process.” He’s in his third year at AVA, a student of William Schuman.

Courville’s dream role was always the Gounod *Méphistophélès*, which he recently sang at AVA. “Norman Treigle went to Loyola,” he says, “and we’re compared a lot, because we’re the same size—slender—with big bass voices. Every time I sing in New Orleans, these old ladies come up and tell me I look like Norman Treigle!” ■

GROOMING BY AFFAN GRABER MALIK