



Photo by Sheldon Birnie

Lukas Sawatsky, who is just finishing Grade 11 at River East Collegiate, is an up-and-coming baritone singer who has already received a number of awards and scholarships.

## Passionate baritone pursuing dream

BY SHELDON BIRNIE  
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### RIVER EAST

The sky's the limit for one young baritone singer from northeast Winnipeg.

Lukas Sawatsky, who is just completing Grade 11 at River East Collegiate, recently took home the Winnipeg Male Chorus Scholarship from the Winnipeg Music Festival, and the Brandon Festival of the Arts Scholarship in the junior vocal category of the Associated Manitoba Arts Festivals.

"It's a hard study for sure, but I love singing, and I love singing to people," Sawatsky said. "Having bursaries and scholarships and trophies is conducive to carrying on."

The awards are only the latest additions to an impressive resume for the young singer. A member of the First Mennonite Church Choir and the Winnipeg Philharmonic Choir, Sawatsky also takes advantage of the opportunities to sing with the various school choirs at REC.

"It's wonderful," he said. "The community is incredible and the music is wonderful. I love it."

Sawatsky developed his love of classical singing at an early age. His father sang at university, and his mother made sure her children had the opportunity to see opera regularly. But it was his older sister Marianne, who graduates from REC this year, who got him hooked.

"It was my sister who first got into the Winnipeg Children's Choir," Sawatsky recalled. "I wanted to do all the things she wanted to do, but I was too young, then. So the next year I joined."

The siblings have recently had the opportunity to sing some duets. At the Winnipeg Music Festival in 2015, the Sawatskys won the Gordon Hignell Memorial Trophy.

Sawatsky credits his success to having good teachers encourage him along the way, including Judy Urbonas at the Winnipeg Children's Choir, Yuri Klatz at the First Mennonite Church Choir and the Winnipeg Philharmonic, and Jeff Kula at River East.

"You have to have a teacher if you want to keep going," he said.

A love of performance is what keeps Sawatsky pursuing his passion for music.

"Every performance is different," he said. "You have to approach it your own way, then as a result, for me at least, I feel a lot of satisfaction in making it my own."

Sawatsky prepares for each piece in a similar manner. First, he approaches a classic recording of the song for reference. From there, Sawatsky works on tone, diction, and sustaining lines.

"Once that's done, then you have to start interpreting it," he said. "It's not enough that you're good at singing. You need to be good at communicating the feeling to the audiences."

Currently, Sawatsky is preparing for a busy year with the Winnipeg Philharmonic Choir, who will be performing Taneyev *John of Damascus* on Nov. 11 at St. Boniface Cathedral and then Verdi's *Requiem* in March 15 and 16, 2019, at Centennial Concert Hall.

"That's a huge one," Sawatsky said. "(Verdi) actually composed it for one and a half orchestras. There'll be a lot of preparation, but it's going to be a lot of fun."