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**Kara Shay Thomson** of Loveland is soloist with the May Festival on Saturday.

## Loveland singer to solo in festival

By **Janelle Gelfand**

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You might say that Kara Shay Thomson is the diva next door. The Loveland resident spends nearly six months on the road, pursuing a career on opera and concert stages all over the country. But when she's not singing arias, she's the mom of a 7-year-old daughter, Emma, and a floral designer for Adrian Durban Florist.

She was born in Cincinnati, but the "preacher's kid" lived throughout the Midwest. Her husband's job brought her back to the Cincinnati area eight years ago, and she couldn't be happier.

Thomson is soloist with the Cincinnati May Festival on Saturday at Music Hall, the second of five festival concerts, and will also give a pre-concert recital. She spoke backstage this week between rehearsals.

**Question:** Do your Loveland neighbors know that you're an opera singer?

**Answer:** Yes, and they're super supportive of it. Sometimes they're surprised to see me in full makeup and hair, and not the pony-tail and tennis shoes, waiting at the bus stop. That's what's different about May Festival – because I'm home and also working.

**Q:** What were some singing highlights this year?

**A:** I worked in Kentucky this year for the first time, singing Santuzza (in "Cavalleria Rusticana") in Louisville. Then I did a "Tosca" in Virginia. I've sung that the most of any role I've done. In February, I made my New York City Opera debut. I sang Schoenberg's "Erwartung," a 33-minute, one-woman show. It was the most amazing experience.

**Q:** When you're not performing, what's a typical day?

**A:** I work part time at Adrian Durban Florist when I'm home. I love the artistic side of it. They've become a source of friends for me, and they come to all my performances. I try to do stuff with my husband and my daughter.

Being an opera singer can be lonely. You don't have a lot of relationships at home that you've fostered, because you're always on the road. People ask you to go do lunch, and then suddenly you have an audition and have to cancel. Life changes very quickly.

**Q:** What do you enjoy most about living in Cincinnati?

**A:** I like the friendliness. I love Loveland, because it has a small-town feel but you're still associated with all the communities. There's a lot of history here that people don't realize. And I've gotten to love things like goetta casserole, and things that I've never eaten before I moved here. I don't know if I'm totally sold on goetta – but I love my neighborhood and my neighbors.

**Q:** What's it like to sing with May Festival music director James Conlon?

**A:** I think he's so passionate, and I love being on the "face" side of him. I can see him creating and visualizing (the music) in his face. The audience doesn't see that. That's what people miss – and what I get to see. That's the one jewel that the singer gets, or the orchestral member or the chorus member. That is our special part of the concert.