Green was recruited from the Governor’s School for the Arts in Norfolk, Va., by Joanna Levy, an associate professor in Hartt’s Vocal Performance Department and chair of the department at that time. She remembers an early conversation with him about his unusual name.

“We noticed that while we were calling him ‘Ryan,’ the other students were calling him ‘Speedo,’” recalls Levy. “When he told me he planned to perform under the name Ryan Speedo Green, I wasn’t sure that the opera world was ready for that. I suggested to him that Ryan Green was a wonderful name.

“He said, ‘No. My name is Ryan Speedo Green.’ Here he was, talking to his college professor, and he already knew he was going to make it on his own terms.

“And of course, he was totally correct,” she adds with a smile.

Green received a full, four-year scholarship to Hartt in 2004. Here, he was nurtured by the entire vocal faculty in everything from developing his voice to developing good study habits. He then went on to earn a Master of Music in performance from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Fla.

Now approaching 30, Green has an impressive stage presence, standing six feet five and weighing around 300 pounds. He is in his final year of the three-year Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera, for which he was competitively chosen in 2011.

Green was also one of five winners at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2011. The competition, which began early in January that year with some 1,200 entrants performing at venues around the country, has been likened to the American Idol of opera. Writer Daniel Bergner documented the competition with a focus on Green for The New York Times Magazine’s May 22, 2011, issue in an article called “Sing for Your Life.”

This past April, Green received a 2014 Leonore Annenberg Fellowship Fund for the Performing and Visual Arts grant that will provide $50,000 a year for two years to support the development of his voice. Opera singers spend years training their voices, learning to sing in foreign languages, developing a stage presence, acting, and more. Levy likens the training in terms of length, expense, and rigor to that of a neurosurgeon.

Green made his Met debut in the 2012–13 season singing the Mandarin in Turandot and the Second Knight in a new production of Parsifal. He returned in the 2013–14 season to sing the Bonze in Madama Butterfly and the Jailer in Tosca. For the 2014–15 season, Green will become a full company member of the revered Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna State Opera).

Green’s rise from a childhood spent in a trailer park and low-income housing in southeastern Virginia to the Metropolitan Opera stage is unusual, to say the least. He very nearly slipped through Fortune’s fingers, but a class trip while attending the Governor’s School for the Arts helped him find his destiny.

On that trip to New York City, Green attended his first opera, Carmen. When he heard the toreador’s aria, sung by black opera singer Denyce Graves, and the audience’s response, he was hooked. Afterwards he told the choral director at Governor’s, the late Robert Brown, that he was going to sing on that stage someday.

And so he did.

To hear Green singing in the George London Competition earlier this year, go to hartford.edu/ryan-speedo-green.