

OPERA CHARM

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Annalisa STROPPIA:

*"I learnt to give more importance to sharing, to doing things «together»,
as well as music & theater teach us!"*

Charming beginnings

JULIANA GRIGORYAN
ANIKI SHYAN

LEGENDS MARIANA MOLESKO

Conductors of the future
CLARA MARIA BAUER

HERA HYESANG PARK

DMITRY KORCHAK

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singing department after two years. Why? Because the atmosphere and the relationships I made in the acting class meant more to me. I, therefore, earned my degree as a theatre actor rather than an opera singer. Since you now need this quality to be a full artist, I view this choice as the most significant one I have ever made. Today's opera is frequently directed by drama or even film directors. Pathos, clichés, and archaic practices no longer go together in art. Even though it may seem quite challenging to opera singers, those things must be adjusted. I am quite appreciative that I am able to mix opera with acting, which is thought to be my strongest quality. This is appreciated by the critics and the public; they recognize my quality of interpreting very well.

Till now, you reached important international stages. Here we mention Teatro Lirico di Cagliari, Luzerner Theater, Wehr National Opera in Cardiff, Theater Freiburg, and others. On 19th December, you start rehearsals for *Salomé* at Teatro Alla Scala, where you will work with Zubin Mehta and Damiano Michieletto. It will also be your official debut there and in Italy in general. What does this moment signify for you and your career?

After a very trying time as an international student, in the United States, where I studied opera singing at the esteemed UCLA in Los Angeles, in the class of internationally renowned baritone Vladimir Chernov, after acceptance to the Juilliard School, Metropolitan Opera coaching program, and after being cast in some smaller opera productions across the

US, I was convinced that I had to stop paying for tuition and living expenses New York and Los Angeles and I had to become an opera singer and start earning from this job, singing especially in Western Europe. Although American student life is hectic, challenging, and difficult, without these experiences I would not be where I am today. The lead role of Don Giovanni at the Sommer Oper Bamberg in Germany, for young singers, smiled at me one day, after thousands of emails, offers, requests, and flying for auditions around Europe. I was extremely blessed to receive this offer. After I became 'The Youngest Czech Don Giovanni in History', a new installment of Landestheater Coburg saw the premiere and

made me an offer for a 4-year contract. What more could a 25-year-old Czech singer want for, after enduring the trying circumstances in the USA and finally achieving his lifelong dream? As a result, my career officially began at that point, and I have since been offered additional engagements. For instance, a young baritone performing with renowned philharmonics at one of the best opera houses in the world, the Semperoper Dresden, or at the State Opera Prague, the Prague National Theatre, but also having a larger repertoire than peers his own age. My Italian debut, directly at Teatro Alla Scala, and even before, my planned debut as Gamache (only one Czech singer cast) in the upcoming production of *Rusalka*, which

will be premiered in Milano for the very first time. I am extremely happy to be part of the famous production of *Salomé* already, with Mr. Zubin Mehta and Damiano Michieletto. This moment comes after Semperoper Dresden, my greatest successful achievement in my life, and as someone who sings at La Scala, I have to maintain the level of expectations. Everyone wants to be there. Not everyone has the opportunity to do this in life. There are maybe two young persons in their generation who have appeared there from Czech artists, Adam Plachetka and I?

You have worked with many conductors and directors and have performed with relevant names in opera. How do you find working with your stage partners in a production? For example, let's take your performances of *Eugene Onegin*, which you

Luzerner Theater (your already third production).

I am grateful for the opportunity to share the stage with such talented musicians. I guess it's also a really valuable experience and a great honor for young artists. Many of them, to name a few, I met at the Semperoper Dresden or in Prague, including Angela Gheorghiu, Roberto Scandizzo, Stephen Costello, Dmitry Popov, Krasimira Stoyanova, Steven Gould, and Georg Zappertfeld. Including also great renowned conductors such as Christian Thielemann, Allan Gilbert, Danicle Calligari, Stefano Ranzani, Giampaolo Bisanti, Antonio Fogliani or now Tomas Hanus or Zubin Mehta and numerous opera stage directors. You are one of

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them, which provides you not only a solid CV to continue with, but also power and confidence. And I still believe that a great star is a better and normal human being. For me, the most vital aspect of a stage relationship is a compelling and action-packed score, actual situation, or circumstances. Even now, I seldom encounter a colleague who is entirely linked to me and, most of the time, natural and believable. But, happily, the case of my third production of *Eugene Onegin* in Luzern has been set up for our performing. We are a bunch of hardworking young individuals, and even if the production's stage and costume design aren't particularly good, we make up for it with believable performance. That's a pretty excellent compromise! But, to be honest, I recall my first production at DJKT Pilsen Theatre when I was 25 years old, and later fell in love with my second, at Theater Freiburg. Of course, the more we practice our parts in different shows, the better we get and we feel more comfortable.

You will play the title role of Bohuš in *Harnoss* again at the National Theatre in Prague. We know that you have been a regular guest of the National Theatre and the Prague State Opera since 2016. You have already performed the role of Bohuš in Antonín Dvořák opera *Jakubín* in your first production in Liberec 2018. Here comes an exciting story, then you shared the stage with your father, who is also a baritone. You played as son and father in the story of two cousins who are rivals. How was that experience for both of you?

You know, it's not always the case for an artist, to start a career overseas and then be needed and called back home. It occurred to me, and even though I did not anticipate it to happen so soon, it happened right to the Prague National Theatre / State Opera, when I was 25 years old. I've gotten offers to work with all of our Czech operas and philharmonics. Especially when I am representing my nation and at prestigious institutions like the Semperoper Dresden. So I did a lot of parts in Prague, and I got a lot of amazing opportunities to try out for extremely challenging roles in German and Czech operas. Last time, I performed the *Bad Actor* in a little-known opera called *Fine Flag* to help the State Opera Prague receive a wider candidacy for our most coveted artistic prize, Thalia. I'm looking forward to performing the character of Bohuš in my second production, there at the National Theatre in Prague, which is a historically significant structure and where all of our musical history in the Czech Republic lies its roots. The parable, tune *Jakubín* was written by Antonín Dvořák, and both the melody and the history are astounding. It is unnecessary

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to mention that Dvořák is a genius or, that his works are wonderful or that the general audience adores him everywhere around the world. Sharing the scene with my father brings us both great joy. It is still uncommon to see parents and children onstage together. This makes me happy; and we had a good time as well. Both dramatic sections are sung by two competitors, cousins. We enjoy every performance, even if it is occasionally amusing to us. They invited us back for another show in Opava, my hometown, in the theater where my father began his career. Unfortunately, I have my debut at the Teatro Alla Scala at that time. He will be without his son as his cousin during the combat scenario this time.

Did your father's link to opera influence your career choice?

He's always been a fantastic counsellor, mentor, and listener, and I feel he's always been a great supporter. I want to sing for myself, since I do my work independently and without him. I was always my greatest motivation and constantly assisted me before important events. I'm talking about when I initially started singing. He was taking me to his lessons at the National Theatre in Prague, with his professor, the highly popular baritone Václav Zedek. His uncle Vilem also performed at Scala, so I consider my father's influence to be very crucial in my early days. We no longer always have the same ideas, and we occasionally dispute in amusing ways. Let's say I have my own opinions now!

You recently launched your debut CD - *Spanish Songs*. Do you have a preference for which you like better, singing opera or singing recital material?

Well, I discovered some slightly different music to record than duets or opera arias. Spanish songs are particular, and using a guitar, we created an idea. What more could one ask for? It was a joint CD debut with my girlfriend, as well. Anyway, these two fields are utterly distinct from one another. I would specifically mention performing songs in a recital. I believe it was the ideal school for me, because I gained a lot of experience from performing at German Opera Festivals. Your interpretation and voice must be taken on faith. Being considerably more emotionally charged and intensely focused, which is not always simple. I adore singing recitals, especially when they feature German melodies. It's the same as singing well and having success with Italian repertoire in Italy, if you grew up performing in German theaters with German repertoire or songs. I, however, am an opera singer who places a greater emphasis on the parts. But I'm glad I frequently blend the two. I sang a lot of Mahler, Korngold, and Strauss pieces on

television, radio, and in wonderful recitals and concerts. I am quite happy about that because not many vocalists concentrate on that. There are very few Czech singers in our country, and they promote songs and concerts there. This type of music is less common, which is unfortunate.

Tell us more about the CD and the works recorded.

As I've already indicated, the CD of Spanish songs is a collaboration between my girlfriend, Tatiána Hajazová, a young lyric soprano, and the incredibly great guitarist, Rastislav Šumaga. We received financial assistance from a Slovak foundation to produce this CD, and a friend who recently opened his own studio, Sloh Sound Studio, lent us a workspace. I'm pleased that this CD was advertised on Slovak television, radio, and some web opera site media in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Our debut concert was a success, and I'm thrilled that we were able to find this contemporary stylization for younger audiences. You can listen to very well-known composers on this CD and other ones that are also available on Spotify.

You have a complex artistic personality. If you had to look back, which moments have marked your career and development?

The first support and interactions with Sommer Oper Bamberg. Till Fabian Wiese's director, who gave me the opportunity to pursue a career as a professional singer abroad, Maestro Vladimir Chernov, who opened my eyes while I was a student at UCLA, and perhaps having the good fortune of having my family support my desire to



pursue a career in the arts as a child. I should also mention my strong attitude not to give it up, even if I wavered sometimes. Everything is really significant. Undoubtedly a great deal of luck. My inherent sense for guiding me forward and helping me make the right judgments is the last thing that has never let me down. The most crucial element, though, is to live my life completely independently in every way.

In the end, Mr. Jiří Rajniš, what do you consider to be the most charming feature of the opera?

Opera is among the most challenging artistic disciplines ever. There, we can find everything dramatized: stories, music, singing, acting, dancing, and designs. Because the painting is so intricate, there are numerous endearing characteristics. Opera is fascinating because it primarily tells true stories: genuine, intense feelings of joy or misery. But what is the opera's most endearing quality? Is, of course, the singing and music. I, therefore, value opera more than all other forms of art. Thank God the music and singing cannot be changed. Although some opera directors seem to destroy the art, they are unable to destroy the music and singing. But perhaps later, on that.

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In the following interview, we introduce you to baritone **JIRÍ RANIS**, one of the most visible singers, representatives of the Czech Republic.

He had an interesting conversation with **MARIA-ISABELA NICA**, during which he told us about his passion for music and how he came to follow this career. But also about work and dedication he inherited from his parents. He also speaks about his debut album, *Spanish songs*, and how it was to share the stage with his father. As you'll see in the next paragraphs, he revealed to us many fascinating things.

Jiří Rajniš belongs to the youngest and most talented generation of operatic singers from the Czech Republic. He studied first drama-acting at the *Prague Conservatory* and afterwards opera singing at the prestigious *UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music* in the class of Vladimir Chernov in Los Angeles. In the meantime was taken to "The coaching program" by Metropolitan Opera's accompanists and covered before in Martina Arroyo Foundation. He has been a member of Junges Ensemble at the *Semperoper Dresden* (2017-2019). Jiří Rajniš's international career started at *Summer Oper Bamberg* 2013 as "Younger Czech Don Giovanni almost". After that, he went immediately to the first fixed German engagement at Landestheater Coburg, where he spent four seasons (2013-2017) and sang wider range of the opera, operetta and musical repertoire. For example Herr Fluth, Shaunard/Marcello, Peter Rosenbinder, Count Almaviva, Freddy in *My Fair Lady*, The Death in Saxifrage, Frédéric in *Lohé*, Hrabě in *The Cunning Little Wren* and many German Liederbände. He is a regular guest at Welsh National Opera in Cardiff and Theater Freiburg, Immending Opera Festival. Jiří is very active in concerting activities with famous festivals and Philharmonies in the Czech Republic such as Czech Philharmonic, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Festival Český Krumlov, Smetanova lázeňská. He became the absolute winner of the "Prague Singer 2008 Competition" and also in the Antonín Dvořák's International Competition in Karlovy Vary 2008. Recently, he became a finalist of 7th *Otto Eckmann International Singing Competition* in Vienna. He also performs with his newly formed band "Neapolitan Quarter" in the performance of famous Neapolitan songs in a special modern stylization. Very closely cooperates with the Czech Television and Czech Radio. He has made recently his Debut CD - *"Spanish Songs"*.

Mr. Jiří Rajniš, meeting you through this interview is a real pleasure. You are an active presence in the international opera scene, and here I mention the numerous performances, which we will discuss in a moment. First, we would like to know how you chose the stage?

Thank you very much for the chance you offered me to be interviewed by OPERA Charm Magazine. The pleasure is also on my side. I wouldn't be able to claim that I chose the stage, but I was sort of born on the stage. It has been somehow given to me, and I cannot imagine a different life. We all have a great privilege in art, and I am so appreciative that God has placed me on stage so naturally. But my parents are the key reason why I selected the stage! I come from a musical household. Both my mother and father began their careers as opera singers at the same theater. They performed in many productions of opera, operetta, and musicals. I was born in a small city called Opava (their first fixed engagement). In a sense, everything started there. As a child, I used to spend a lot of time at the theater with my parents, attending numerous rehearsals and performances. I acted out my father's roles in productions, such as Rigoletto, Nabucco, Conte di Luna, and so on. I also played for my grandma in her living room, matching and styling outfits and using her furniture and other items to create decorations. I fell in love with the theater, very quickly. I like stage design, as well as costume design. I've been obsessed with opera since I was 4 years old. For instance, I know every role my father has performed since I was a young child. Now that I do his tasks as a professional, learning and remembering them is quite simple for me, and I have his scores, already marked.

You studied first drama-acting and afterward opera singing. Today you combine both very beautifully on stage in the roles you play. Why are you in love, particularly with theatre and opera?

Certainly, I had other ambitions after finishing elementary school, such as becoming a pilot or a soccer player or attending high school. I would say that I was a typical young boy, yet throughout those years, opera, theater, and music were all around me. I had the thought, as I was completing the seventh grade of elementary school, that I might try acting first and, perhaps, a little later, I should try to follow in my parents' footsteps and pursue a career as an opera singer, while also enrolling in classes at the Prague Conservatory. My father actually came up with this idea, because he was the expert and understood that I should have waited, since I was only 14 or 15 years old. I was, therefore, successfully admitted into the Drama-Acting class and decided not to transfer to the

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