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Eva Marton: At the Top

It is widespread knowledge that the opera world is extremely competitive in terms of initial arrival on the scene, continuance and eventual survival. There also comes a time when everyone assesses their position, value and bargaining power in the international scene. Beyond the first and most obvious factor of talent, that position is determined by the presence or absence of recording contracts, opening nights, new production and visibility in New York, London, Milan, Vienna, Paris and San Francisco. On that basis the Hungarian soprano Eva Marton has it all. In demand all over the world for the most prestigious engagements, with bookings into 1990, she is a poised, secure woman confident of her place and importance in the operatic hierarchy.

Interviewed before members of The New York Opera Club in their Celebrity Artist Series she impressed as a warm, attractive relaxed woman who knows what she wants and has every assurance that she will attain her goals and ambitions. Arriving late because of a Metropolitan Opera rehearsal for the telecast of *Lohengrin*, in which she appears as Elsa, she apolo-



Eva Marton

gized to the group for her tardiness and immediately began talking about her transition from the role of Ortrud to Elsa.

"Elsa is not a role of which I am particularly fond. She has to stand around for too much of the evening with her hands clasped together on her breasts. I will sing it for the last time on January 16, 1986 and then return to Ortrud which I will sing opposite Placido Domingo at Covent Garden. It is much more suited to my personality. For me, it has been a fascinating experience to re-study a role for the television cameras. On stage, my dramatic gestures are quite broad but, for television, I have had to change

and make them more intimate. It is a tragedy that televised opera came ten years too late for Tebaldi, Callas and Milanov. I admire all these wonderful sopranos but I never saw them on stage. I don't listen to their commercial recordings because they don't tell the truth about a voice but I do like their live recordings.

I have a very wide repertoire of roles and now I am moving into Wagner but I will never allow anyone to confine me to the Wagnerian roles. I love *Tosca*, *Ariadne*, *Manon Lescaut* and *Turandot*. At the beginning of my career, I sang a great deal of Mozart, including the Countess and Donna Anna but, at present, I do not sing

Eva Marton, continued

Mozart. I hope to return to these roles later in my career."

Questioned to comment further on the roles she sings, Miss Marton continued, "Everything I do leads to Electra and Isolde! To sing Brunnhilde in *Götterdämmerung* in San Francisco was a test but I enjoyed it and emerged with a big success. I owe thanks to Terry McEwen (general director) who was very supportive and encouraging to me for my first attempt in this role. It is a very long and difficult role. Hildegard Behrens will sing Brunnhilde first in the new production next season of *Die Walküre* and then I will do my Brunnhilde as well as Isolde at the Metropolitan.

I especially love to sing Puccini and after my Metropolitan stay I go to Boston for *Turandot* and *Tosca* in Florence in June. Next season at the Met is my Puccini year with both a new production of *Turandot* by Zeffirelli and the first of my Toscas there. Caballe was a grand diva Tosca but mine is much different. Incidentally, my husband, who is a surgeon, helped me a great deal with the killing of Scarpia in the second act. He explained that most Toscas do not hold the knife properly and do not stab Scarpia in a life-threatening way. So, with his direction, I try to be more convincing and aim straight for the jugular vein!

I have a strong personality and I interpret a character instinctively in terms of what I feel the composer intended. I have worked with many great directors and I listen to them and also the conductors, but I must do it my way. I don't

usually care what critics say but the greatest compliment in my career came from an Italian critic in Austria. He wrote a review for Italy saying that I sang Turandot the way Puccini would want it interpreted.

I have sung a great deal of Verdi in my career but not in this country. However, I will open the Metropolitan Opera next year in *Il Trovatore* with Pavarotti. I have been asked to sing Abigaille in *Nabucco* and it is the only role I have turned down. But I will be singing Lady Macbeth here opposite Renato Bruson.

Richard Strauss is obviously a very important composer for my voice. I made my Metropolitan Opera debut as Eva in *Die Meistersinger* in 1976 but I sang my first Chrysothemis there and really only came to the public's attention in 1981 when I sang the empress in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* opposite Birgit Nilsson, a wonderful colleague. I will sing the Kaiserin (Empress) once again at the Met and then I will switch to the Dyer's wife. Many singers try out their big roles in small houses, but I will sing my first Electra under Solti at Covent Garden and my first Salome will be at the Metropolitan. If you look at the roles I sing, you will understand why Rysanek and Nilsson have been my role models."

Miss Marton has one of the most prominent recording schedules of any soprano before the public today and her next CBS release will be Giordano's *Fedora* to be followed by a recording of the same composer's *Andrea Chenier* this summer, both with Jose

Carreras. Future recording projects in the planning or discussion stage include *La fanciulla del West*, *La Gioconda*, *Norma*, and a Ring cycle under Haitink. "Norma I will only sing for the recording as I simply do not have the time to learn the role for the stage."

Now a resident of Hamburg, Miss Marton is quick to emphasize that any success she has achieved was possible through the support she received from her husband, Dr. Zoltan Marton. "I married the very first man in my life and we have a long happy marriage, with two wonderful children, Zoltan, Jr. who is 18 and Diana who is ten."

With a secure family life as the focus to a career that has her singing exactly what she wishes opposite Domingo, Pavarotti, Hofmann, Carreras and Bruson in the elite opera houses of the world, is it any wonder that Eva Marton impresses one as a supremely confident woman. She has reached the top and has it all. The problem now is to stay there and all the evidence indicates that she will be a reigning diva for some time to come.

Opera Reviews: Metropolitan Opera

Because of its pervasive gloom and darkness, Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* remains an unknown quantity to many music lovers. Composed in 1857 after the great trio of *Rigoletto*, *Trovatore*, *Traviata* and immediately before *Ballo in Maschera*, it has failed to achieve the popularity of any of

tive. Indeed, the music at most times is in the background, most discreetly at times, evocatively but seldom taking off on a purely melodic flight. In toto, it is compelling and effective but unfortunately does not hold one's attention firmly

throughout. The Chamber Opera Theatre is again to be congratulated for presenting us with a real novelty in a well thought out production and performance. The scenery, costumes and orchestra were all commendable however, except for Philip

Cokprinos' outstanding voice as Leporello and the Commandre, the singers for all their obvious effort were not up to the task.

Roger Gross

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Records

Eva Marton is the soprano on two new releases which illustrate her immense versatility and also the manner in which she is extending her repertoire by trying new roles. On Wagner's *Die Walküre*, Act I (CBS IM 39745) she sings Sieglinde opposite Peter Hofmann and Martti Tavela recorded last year with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta. Brünnhilde is more surely her true role but she gives a majestic and impassioned performance with first rate collaboration from her fellow artists. All in all, in Strauss recording (CBS IM 42019), she sings the final scene from *Salome*, the Four Last Songs and "Malven", the recently discovered final composition of Strauss found in Maria Jeritz's estate.

The song is of negligible value and Miss Marton's powerful soprano is too robust and extended to allow her to explore all the delicate nuances of the Four Last Songs. She is much more at home soaring richly over the thick orchestral textures of *Salome*.

Andrew Davis has a deserved reputation as a Strauss conductor which he further evidences in leading his Toronto Symphony in the "Dance of the Seven Veils" and an orchestral fragment from *Die Liebe der Danae*.

On their Rodolphe label, Harmonia Mundi has just released two tributes to legendary sopranos, the French Regine Crespin (RP 12445/46) and the Italian Magda Oliviero (RP 12438/39) featuring excerpts from their performances covering a span of 19 years and 35 years respectively. Franco Corelli joins Crespin in a duet from *Ballo* and Oliviero in a duet from Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur* in which she also sings a duet with Gigli. Miss Crespin was a French soprano who was superb in Wagner. Her *Fidelio* under Klemperer and *Parsifal* under Knappertsbusch while Oliviero triumphs as the quintessential verismo Italian soprano in a wide range of operatic styles including Massenet, Wagner, Giordano, Boito, Verdi and Puccini. Both albums are fascinating examples of the elusive art of the prima donna, caught in all the tension, excitement and dramatic truth of live performances.

A welcome new release is Bizet's *Le Jolie Fille de Perth* first performed in 1867, four years after *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* and eight years before *Carmen*. The libretto is based on a novel by Sir Walter Scott

and involves a love story with the usual complications but a happy ending. It is not a major work but well crafted and capable of giving considerable pleasure. Though Gounod was supposed to be its model, the spirit of the opera reminds me of *La sonnambula* and *L'Elisir d'Amore* which is praise enough. Fortunately, the premier release (Angel DSC 3989) features a French conductor, Georges Pretre, the Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique, Choeurs de Radio-France and a cast of singers either French or well-trained in the French idiom. The increasingly prominent June Anderson sings the title role and her bright, well-focused agile soprano, a difficult voice to record, is captured with unusual warmth here and Alfredo Kraus, as Henry, gives his standard poised and elegant vocal performance. In supporting roles are such outstanding artists as Gino Quilico (Duke), José Van Dam (Ralph), Margarita Zimmermann (Mab) and Gabriel Bacquier as Simon. They might not assume these small roles on stage, but they add prestige to an excellent and well recommended recording.