



## Maria Gortsevskaya From St. Petersburg into the world

The Russian mezzo soprano met Bernd Hoppe in Berlin

Despite the grotesque, dazzlingly distorted mask in Achim Freyer's production and setting of Tchaikovsky's *Eugen Onegin* at the Berlin State Opera, Maria Gortsevskaya succeeded impressively in letting the youth and coquetry of the character shine through behind it. At our meeting after the fourth performance of this production, the Russian singer appeared markedly relaxed, yet on this evening she felt for the first time that this unusually obstinate version nevertheless makes sense and works.

“When we began with the rehearsal work, I didn't at all like it in the beginning. I didn't know what the director wanted from me, and I also didn't understand why one had to direct this opera in this way. Only tonight have I quite suddenly gotten the feeling that we singers succeeded in making contact with our partners and with the audience. I believe the audience felt that as well.”

For her, what's special about Achim Freyer is his calm—“a quality that distinguishes him from nearly all other directors. He doesn't hurry; with him there's no rush. He always thinks like a graphic artist; he stages images. In the beginning they're sketches or studies and by the end the finished picture emerges from it. It's a very unusual yet highly interesting style.”

She views Olga in Freyer's conception as “a being who despite all the tragic events strives towards joy, just as Tolstoy wrote about Natasha Rostova, ‘when youth's natural joy shines forth through everything.’ When Lenski accuses Olga of not loving him she is honestly astonished and tells him that he's strange. Yet it can of course not be the case that she doesn't feel guilty after the deadly duel. Olga is not a superficial nitwit.”

The singer, who grew up with classical productions at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, has already gained considerable experience with the current director's theater—the extreme (meant positively!) with Calixto Bieito's *The Rake's Progress* in La Coruña and afterwards in Bologna, where she sang Baba the Turk. “After an audition (with a Vivaldi aria!), Alberto Zedda invited me to Pesaro for the Rossini Opera Festival and to La Coruña for the Mozart Festival. There I met Bieito, who as a director completely trusted me; his concept for how this woman should look even fit me. He considered my look, my temperament and my figure. It is such productions that give me satisfaction—I almost want to call it ecstasy—onstage. I hate performances where the singers sing the arias on the ramp and then leave. That's not opera and has nothing to do with theater. I view my task as an artist thus: Whatever we're playing, even if it's stupid idiots—we're the characters' judges or lawyers and have to find an opportunity to pardon them.” Maria Gortsevskaya has since worked closely with the Catalan director and will also participate in his new production of Gluck's *Armida* this season at the Berlin Comic Opera.

For several years, Maria Gortsevskaya has performed regularly at the Rossini Festival in Pesaro. In 2005 it was first the Marchesa in Emilio Sagi's production of *Il viaggio a Reims* at the Giovane Festival, that commendable series in which emerging young singers are employed. One year later, she was already participating in the regular evening program and sang an energetic Goddess Guistizia in Mozart's *Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebotes* and a charming Clarina in Rossini's *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*. In the spectacularly cast new production of *Otello* in 2007 (with Juan Diego Flórez as Rodrigo and her fellow Russian Olga Peretyatko as Desdemona, among others), she attracted attention among audiences with her sonorous mezzo as Emilia. In November 2008, this production, which was recorded for CD release by the Dynamic label, went to Japan on tour, and Maria Gortsevskaya again participated.

The singer has a very close relationship to bel canto and views Lucia Valentini Terrani and Marilyn Horne as her models. She first heard Rossini's music on a CD with Cecilia Bartoli which she purchased in Japan, yet at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, where she had made her debut at age nineteen as Fyodor in *Boris Godunov* and afterwards sang primarily Russian repertoire, there was hardly a tradition for this style. “I heard Bartoli and tried to imitate her singing. I quickly determined that it presented absolutely no trouble for me. I sang Cenerentola for my teacher—she was at a loss. I therefore traveled to Belgium to participate in the Verviers International Competition, sang Mozart and Rossini—and won first prize! That was in 1995.”

The Baroque is Maria Gortsevskaya's other favored style of music, above all Handel and Vivaldi. And her favorite opera is Giuseppe Sarti's *Armida e Rinaldo*, which she sang in the Hermitage Theater in St. Petersburg, where the work was premiered. The composer, born in Faenza in 1729, was director of the St. Petersburg's imperial chapel and Italian opera starting in 1784. The singer is crazy about this music—and an enterprising record company definitely ought to release the existing recording of this performance on CD!

Maria Gortsevskaya considered two great conductors her mentors. The first is Valery Gergiev, whom she thanks for the chance to become an opera singer and for being engaged to sing at the famous Mariinsky immediately following her studies in St. Petersburg. She will be ever grateful to him for having brought her with him on tours that included New York's Met, Covent Garden in London and many European cities. The other is Alberto Zedda, whom she met in Pesaro and to whom she owes her engagements at the Rossini Festival. “I also had the

great fortune to work with the wonderful musician and conductor Daniel Barenboim. I admire his great ability, his energy and his indescribable human qualities. I hope we'll get to work together again."

Maria Gortsevskaia is a very lively young woman, sparkling with elan, temperament and humor. Yet she also possesses markedly serious traits and is passionately engaged in other arts. "I really enjoy going to museums and have many favorite paintings. Van Gogh, Chagall and Magritte are among my favorite painters. I naturally took advantage of my performances in Amsterdam and Madrid for extensive visits to the Van Gogh Museum and the Prado. Sometimes I stand in front of these paintings without thinking, and I notice how my batteries are recharged with new energy."

We may expect much more from Maria Gortsevskaia. At the beginning of the new year, the audience at the Opéra de Lyon has the opportunity to experience the singer as Blanche in Prokofiev's *The Gambler*. Unfortunately, the stage dimensions there do not allow for transferring Dmitri Tcherniakov's production from the Berlin State Opera, which she very much regrets. And afterwards she'll be in Berlin once again, where the rehearsals for Gluck's *Armida* commence at the Comic Opera. Bieito will most definitely offer an unusual interpretation of the tragedy—and Gortsevskaia in the furious role of La Haine (Hate) guarantees a thrilling interpretation.

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