

Celebrated soprano Mariana Nicolesco is a very special personality in art and in life. At her debut in America the New York Times wrote: "Miss Nicolesco is the kind of artist able to generate a real passion among the opera lovers, if not real battles. Her eventual flaws will always be considered as more interesting than the virtues of other sopranos." And an American television channel stated «If Mariana Nicolesco did not exist, she should have been invented. She is absolutely fascinating and unique». Recently, her merits were recognized by the state, as she was granted the Romania Star National Order in the rank of High Cross by the president. Mariana Nicolesco is answering Bucharest Herald's questions.

BH : You had your debut at Teatro alla Scala in Milan in La Vera Storia by Luciano Berio. What do you think now about that event?

MARIANA NICOLESCO : The great city of Milan welcomed me in glory since my first appearance there, and that was in the Rossini International Voice Competition, organized by Italian Radiotelevision, RAI, a competition that I won. I did not think then that I will ever sing at La Scala, the supreme temple of voice, and that, despite my American triumphs. Yet, it happened that I am the soprano who sang in the most premiere absolute in the history of the great theater. About my debut at La Scala, I can say that it was obviously an incredible challenge, not only because it was a debut and a world premiere, but also considering the unpredictable reaction of the public listening to contemporary music. I told Berio from the beginning that I will sing his music not in a "modernist" way, which for me does not exist, but in the way I sing Puccini, for example. I obtained a triumph. A famous newspaper commented: "A fact rather unique than rare: Mariana Nicolesco got ovations in a contemporary opera at La Scala". And another one: «Mariana Nicolesco, bravissima in una parte vocalmente assassina». Not necessary to translate.

BH : You sang in Milan, Munich, Vienna, Paris, Chicago, New York, London, Rome, Hamburg, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Moscow, Barcelona, Rome, Dresden, Tokyo, Berlin, at the Salzburg or Pesaro Festivals. Which of your performances represent for you landmarks of your career?

MARIANA NICOLESCO: Hard to answer! However, my Beatrice di Tenda by Bellini, at the very beginning of my career at Teatro La Fenice in Venice was an event commented all over Italy and Europe. The same, I think, happened at my appearance in La Traviata in Florence, with the great tenor Alfredo Kraus; a performance considered «historical» today.

BH: Violetta in Verdi's La Traviata is certainly a glorious landmark of your artistry, as well as Donna Elvira in Mozart's Don Giovanni, to quote only two of the many roles you interpreted. Which of them are your favourites? And what composer?

MARIANA NICOLESCO: I sang the role of Violetta over 200 times, as well as that of Donna Elvira. But I have to say that I sang with a great joy and with a great success many other Verdi operas, such as Rigoletto, Simon Boccanegra, Il Trovatore, Otello, Luisa Miller and the Mozart dramatic repertoire as well: not only the part of Donna Elvira, but also Lucio Cinna in Lucio Silla, Vitellia in La Clemenza di Tito, Elettra in Idomeneo. Or Puccini's La Bohème or Turandot. Not to

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Friday, 05 December 2008 02:55 - Last Updated Saturday, 06 December 2008 03:36

mention my belcanto great roles, Donizetti's Queens for instance, Anna Bolena, Maria Stuarda and Elisabetta I in Roberto Devereux.

Each one was, at the given moment, the most important thing in the world for me, and that was the case with all my interpretations: Pre-Classic, Baroque, Pre-Romantic, Romantic or contemporary music.

BH: If I am not mistaken, you appeared for the first time in front of the Romanian public in June 1991, after a fabulous international career. How did you feel to finally perform at home?

MARIANA NICOLESCO :It was an incandescent encounter. I was extremely moved by the sensational welcome of the public. Only one concert was scheduled at the Romanian Athenaeum, but there were 10,000 requests for tickets. Therefore I decided to do the best I could in order to answer to such a great and warm attention, and I sang three concerts in a row in a general enthusiasm, impossible to forget. I remember also that I had to bring from Milan and Munich different scores which were missing in Romania, and I can't forget the words of many young artists: "Please don't abandon us, please help us." They badly needed guidance, a competent support to find a way to art, to the great performance. I decided then to do for them the best I could.

BH : You created in 1995 the Hariclea Darclée International Voice Competition...

MARIANA NICOLESCO: With a double intention: to state that we have here a long and glorious tradition in the art of singing, Hariclea Darclée being the emblematic figure, and to give young talents the possibility to learn, to grow in the spirit of the great art, to get the general attention and to start eventually distinguished careers. Over 1,500 competitors from 45 countries and 5 continents attended since the Braila contest and the Master Classes I offer with no charge in the years between an edition of the competition and the next. So, in Braila, our first Mozart Generation was born, with Don Giovanni and Idomeneo. Also in Braila, we performed fragments from all Verdi's operas. There, we established high standards in belcanto with Donizetti's Tudor cycle of the Queens Anna Bolena, Maria Stuarda and Elisabetta I in Roberto Devereux. And, this year, we successfully marked the Puccini International Year with his famous Trittico: Il Tabarro, Suor Angelica and Gianni Schicchi. Dozens of laureates of our competition, Romanians and foreigners, appear nowadays in prestigious opera theaters all over Europe and not only.

BH: You are a Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy, an UNESCO Artist for Peace, Doctor Honoris Causa of many universities and academies. You have got the Order of Arts et Lettres in France, the Order of Commander of Italy, the motherland of opera and of the art of singing. And this week you received the highest decoration of our country, that of High Cross of the National Order of the Star of Romania...

MARIANA NICOLESCO: Like everybody, I am happy to be honored at such a high level. But I also think that all that empowers me in my battle for the preservation of the great traditions of the art of singing and for the triumph of the new generation of lyric vocations.

BH: The Darclée competition is not the only great music event that you created in Romania...

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MARIANA NICOLESCO: The Festival and National Song Competition that I established in Brasov is obviously a major event, revealing every year, since 2003, the extraordinary treasure, longtime forgotten, of 10,000 songs (lied) of our national heritage, in the context of the European culture. Over 400 young Romanian artists already took part in those events, and many became remarkable in this subtle, refined and rigorous style.

BH: Do you have a message for the readers of Bucharest Herald?

MARIANA NICOLESCO: I wish them a Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year and I tell them my motto: health, love and glory!