

Vivica Genaux

The Baroque Princess who Comes from the Land of Ice

Tomorrow marks the Buenos Aires debut of mezzo soprano VIVICA GENAUX, major artist on the international scene, who specializes in music of the Baroque and Nineteenth Century *bel canto*.

The Alaska-born singer will be presented by the Mozarteum Argentino along with the Early Music Orchestra, Concerto Köln, at the Teatro Coliseo, and she gave this interview for PERFIL before her arrival in our city.

Margarita Pollini (MP): At what age did you start singing? Are there musicians in your family?

Vivica Genaux (VG): My family has recordings of me singing at age three, and my mother said that at about that same age I was sitting on her lap one day while she was singing a children's song to me, and I put my hands over her mouth and said beseechingly "Mummy, please don't sing, it hurts my ears!" I guess that was my way of telling her she was singing out of tune, but I was a pretty harsh critic!

I come from a family of music-lovers more than performers. One of my sisters was interested in dance, the second had an incredible facility for playing a variety of instruments but unfortunately always battled with a strong case of stage fright, my mother loved listening to opera on the radio, and my father instilled in me a love for Bruckner, Mahler, Bernstein, Mozart, etc., by playing a huge variety of classical music on his record player when it was my bedtime. I would fall asleep imagining all sorts of fantastic stories as I listened to the music.

I began playing violin when I was probably about seven years old, studied ballet, piano and took part in any kind of choir, orchestra, or dance group available. Although people usually don't associate Fairbanks, Alaska with great culture, we were very lucky to have a remarkable concert season. Because Russian airspace was closed, all European flights traveling to the Orient flew over the North Pole and had to stop in Anchorage to refuel. Both Anchorage and Fairbanks had very persuasive concert associations and most often were able to seduce artists into giving additional concerts in both Alaskan cities before continuing on with their tours. We had amazing performers coming through every year and probably, if I'd grown up in New York or Chicago, I wouldn't have gotten the exposure to the arts that I got growing up here in Alaska because I probably wouldn't have been able to afford tickets! Here in Alaska, the concert season was an incredibly important way of getting through the long, cold, dark winter. Going to a concert refueled your soul and your spirit, and I always dreamed of being the person up on stage who was able to give that kind of energy and light to an audience.

MP: How did opera reach your life?

VG: I actually didn't like opera very much when I was growing up, but when I started singing at the age of thirteen I was hooked. The feeling of singing an aria, using the whole body and mind to become a character, was just addictive to me. I think athletes probably get the same feeling when training for an event, it is almost a form of meditation and really unifies body and mind. When I began university, I had decided to study sciences because, although I always had a great love of singing and of music in general, it was a hobby. I expected to work in the sciences and continue having music as a hobby. When I got to university I found that I no longer had enough time to dedicate to the arts because of my course-work, and I became very depressed. It felt like a part of me had been amputated, and I really missed having music as a focal part of my life. I decided that if I missed singing so much, I had to make the commitment to study voice.

MP: You have a wonderful *coloratura*. Is this a natural gift, or you have worked hard to develop it?

VG: I have always had a natural facility for coloratura singing, and have tried over the years to improve on that gift. I have been studying with Claudia Pinza (daughter of Italian bass Ezio Pinza, actually born in Buenos Aires when her father was singing there!) since 1992, and together we have focused on the whole range of my voice, and keeping the coloratura on the breath in order for it to stay fluid and flexible. I love the expressivity in singing coloratura, and really enjoy my repertoire!

MP: For fun, Federica von Stade said that due to her masculine roles her children call her "father". Regarding this, do you also make fun?

VG: I have learned so much from my "boys"! Each role I sing adds a new facet to my own personality, and the male roles have given me a lot of strength, confidence and self-assurance. I play with that energy sometimes when I'm out in the real world, and amuse myself by using masculine physical language out in public. As a female, I always have the tendency of occupying as little physical space as possible, but the male side of me now has fun every now and then by spreading out and taking up space in buses, subways, sidewalks... I enjoy that feeling of being more physically present sometimes when I'm out in public.

MP: Which is the role you have enjoyed the most?

VG: That's a very difficult question to answer! I have many roles that are special to me: Isabella in Rossini's "L'Italiana in Algeri" for her strength and wit; Selim in Hasse's "Solimano" for the incredible variety of colors in the music and because he was my first Baroque role as well as my first experience singing Hasse; back to Rossini again for Angelina in "La Cenerentola" because of her strength of character and belief that if she just does her best every day fate or karma will reward her, something I have found to be true in my own life.

MP: Which roles have you planned for the near future?

VG: I have a very exciting season ahead of me, my first Rossini "Tancredi", two new Haydn roles in "L'isola disabitata" and "Il mondo della luna", a new CD of Vivaldi arias ("Pyrotechnics") with Fabio Biondi and Europa Galante coming out in the fall of '09, a debut at the BBC Proms performing with Mo. Gianandrea Nosedà, and collaborations with Mo. Harnoncourt, Mo. Jacobs, and Mo. Rousset. So much to look forward to!

MP: What are your expectations for this South American tour?

VG: The tour in South America will be somewhat challenging because of the number of concerts we're doing in such a short time, however I am so comfortable singing with Concerto Köln that I'm sure I will enjoy every performance. They have such a dynamic style and are so much fun to work with, I get a lot of energy every time I work with them. Even after ten years of collaboration, Concerto Köln remains one of my favorite Baroque orchestras, and I'm so proud to be making my Argentinean, Uruguayan, and Brazilian debuts with them!