

A Queen and a Nightingale

Julia Novikova is the Queen of the Night in Peter von Winter's *Das Labyrinth oder Der Kampf mit den Elementen*

Is it by chance that the Russian soprano Julia Novikova sang Igor Stravinsky's Nightingale at last summer's Festival? The bird, which, in the story by Hans Christian Andersen, is able to banish Death when the life of the Emperor is in danger by the beauty of its voice. A voice like a bell, delicate, finely woven soprano notes and the highest peaks of coloratura are Julia Novikova's speciality. Her art has made this singer, who was born in St Petersburg, one of the most sought-after of all coloratura sopranos.

Novikova's interest in music began as a small child when she absolutely loved singing. Her parents recognized their daughter's musical talent and did everything to encourage her. She began to learn the piano at five and when she was older she joined the St Petersburg Children's Choir of TV and Radio. Her ascent to becoming a professional singer happened quite naturally, "I used to go to the theatre very often with my parents and I loved it." She studied at the Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory in her home city St Petersburg and during her training there she was able to acquire valuable experience performing in the Opera Studio. She informs me, "The Studio is actually a proper opera house with its own orchestra and chorus. If one was part of it one had an opportunity to sing a lot, including major roles." Roles she was able to have a go at included Mozart's Susanna, but also Verdi's *Traviata*. After finishing her studies she made her operatic debut in 2006 at the Mariinsky Theatre as Flora in Benjamin Britten's *Turn of the Screw* with conductor Valery Gergiev. Then she was off to Dortmund,

Bonn and Frankfurt. There was one event that turned out to be crucial for her career – in 2009 she entered Plácido Domingo's Operalia, the World Opera Competition in Budapest and won both the first prize awarded by the jury and the audience prize. When Domingo sang in a TV production of *Rigoletto* performed in the actual settings of the opera in Mantua it was Novikova who sang Gilda.

Novikova returns to Salzburg to sing the Queen of the Night: not the "starblazing Queen" of Mozart's *Magic Flute* but in the sequel originally premiered in 1798, *Das Labyrinth oder Der Kampf mit den Elementen* written by the German composer Peter von Winter for Emanuel Schikaneder, the librettist of *Die Zauberflöte*. She is thus following in the footsteps of Josepha Hofer. Hofer was Mozart's first Queen of the Night and sang the role also in the sequel. A challenge for Novikova, who has studied the part in this very rarely performed opera and is aware that an aria awaits her, "encompassing a pretty wide range for the voice."

Mozart's Queen of the Night is in any case one of the parts she is most famous for. It was in this role that she made her debut in 2009 at the Staatsoper in Vienna. As a member of the company in Vienna she sang Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Fiakermilli in *Arabella*, Adina in *L'elisir d'amore* and Oscar in *Masked Ball*. Her contract in Vienna recently came to an end and she is currently engaged as a resident singer at the Komische Oper in Berlin. "All the same I would love to return to Vienna as a guest singer," says Julia Novikova.

Stefan Musil



Julia Novikova
© Julian Hargreaves