



„I Enjoy Transgressing Boundaries“

Nadja Michael likes her heroines to be something out of the ordinary, like Judith from „Bluebeard’s Castle“, and her directors to be of the creative persuasion, like Mariusz Treliński.

rp.pl: So, you hadn’t played „Judith“ from „Bluebeard’s Castle“ before?

Nadja Michael: Correct. This was my debut.

What moved you to accept the offer of the grand theatre of the State Opera?

I had already signed a contract for this role with the Metropolitan Opera. Then I received this offer from the director Waldemar Dąbrowski at the Warsaw Opera House. To my surprise and delight it turned out that it was for the same production that was being co-staged in Warsaw and New York. Through this I got the opportunity to work with this character for longer, and I believe it could only deepen and develop my vocal and dramatic interpretation thereof.

Is Judith an interesting heroine?

As a matter of fact she is, and moreover she is shrouded in fantastical music. Both Judith and Duke Bluebeard are sort of ‘unreal’ characters. They are full of secrets, mysticism, romantic gloominess and hyperbole. One must delve into them as characters, immerse oneself, as they are archetypes of our unconsciousness. Nothing is self-evident.

Is it true that you enjoy embodying strong female characters? After all, you have Lady Macbeth, Tosca, Salome and Medea in your repertoire. These women understand something about fighting for love, power and their rights.

Most sopranos in Opera comport themselves as such.

Not true. In Opera there are many delicate and helpless women, such as Mimi.

Can you really imagine that me, with my vocal faculty, singing the role of Mimi? Precisely. All the Adinas and Norinas out there are simply not for me. I like expressive characters, but above all else I pay attention to the musical score to understand how a particular role is written.

Would you also consider yourself a strong woman in your private life?

I’m unlikely to kill anybody. Quite the opposite – I have plenty of friends. But even when I regard a large crowd and seek some communication, I’m not „the poor little woman“ who is dependent on others – but rather appreciate development and freedom as much as connection. Back to Judith from „Bluebeard’s Castle“. There is this starkly mythical element about the story. We get to know Judith when the story is already at a dramatic high-point. We don’t know who she was before she was Bluebeard’s wife. I myself have to, through my portrayal, tell the story of her background and communicate this richness of character to the audience. But even for this we do not have much time, as Bartok’s Opera lasts barely a full hour. Aside from that, the Lady (in sonambulismo) and Medea in the entrance aria and in the great unravelling, as well as in the duets with Jason, are very delicate and fragile

Judith is also reminiscent of Wagnerian heroines and you have already sung „Kundry“ in „Parsifal“. Are the other works of this composer now on the way?

I approach such opportunities carefully, as I try to avoid roles, which, for various reasons, appear too difficult for my voice. Naturally though I dream of the Wagnerian Isolde and will add her to my repertoire in 2015. There is however something else which holds me back from Wagner. I love to play on the stage, to build up a character, and therefore my work with Krzysztof Warlikowski in Poppea / Monteverdi in Madrid brought me great joy. I search for heroines who inspire me. Whereas Wagner's women, much as Puccini's Turandot or Abigaille from „Nabucco“ by Verdi, are more static, vertical characters. By reason of the tessitura and length of the parts they compel one to a more static portrayal. Before I go ahead with demanding soprano roles, I take pleasure in the unconventionality which allows me take up other roles, such as, for example, in the bel-canto Opera of Mayr „Medea in Corinth“.

Medea, who I sang in the Munich State Opera, is a dramatic role, but requires bel-canto coloratura, and moreover is acutely psychologically complex.

You met Krzysztof Warlikowski in the theatre „La Monnaie“ in Brussels, during another „Medea“ – that of Cherubini – out of which arose a formidable performance. Do you enjoy demanding and ambitious directors?

As a matter of fact I do, both heroines who we developed together are diametrically opposed to each other. Our particular involvement allowed me to really put myself into the role. Krzysztof could sense what I was able to give, he very much put his trust in me, and I mine in him. I love to work with creative partners, with whom one can transgress certain mutual boundaries and with whom I can bypass some of the narrow perceptions of certain parts in Opera without pointless provocation, but rather through immersion in and the taking seriously of the characters at hand.

Is Mariusz Trelński also this sort of director?

Yes, although the beginning of our rehearsal cycle wasn't easy – admittedly because of me.

Because of a lung infection I came to Warsaw after a significant delay and couldn't really engage with the rehearsals so intensely in the beginning. Later it went much better, Mariusz Trelński has so much energy himself, that it can't help but infect those around him. I feel that, similarly to the situation in Brussels, a very special production, which touches on some very important human themes, which arise out of this. Although our „Medea“ in Brussels dealt with real life and „Bluebeard's Castle“ deals with our sub-consciousness, we have to find out for ourselves what and who Bartok's heroes are. And precisely this quest is what Mariusz Trelński expects from me.

You seem to move freely between epochs, from Monteverdi to Bartok. What sort of music do you enjoy the most?

That remains open, or better put: my voice remains open to different styles. Until recently I was of the opinion that I was unsuitable for the works of Monteverdi. My voice is for the specialists of older music simply too vigorous and colourful. But it turns out that I can in fact embrace this challenge.

I was for a long time averse to contract with more modern music, but then last October happened to play MONTEZUMA in Wolfgang Rihm's „Die Eroberung von Mexico“ (The Conquest of Mexico) at the Teatro Real Madrid and fell in love with this world of sound and musical cosmos of Rihm; and now with „Judith“ I have opened yet another door into a world previously unknown to me.

At first glance the music is very complex, and requires enormous concentration from those who would interpret it.

Wagner's dramas are also very complicated in their dramatic structure. In modern works the difficulties are more so of the intellectual nature than the musical construction. Likewise with Wolfgang Rihm, but at the same time his music contains an enormous emotional vitality. As I learned the piece note for note, I became convinced of how wonderful and beautiful it is. What a fine discovery. I hope that it's not the last such discovery that awaits me on the stage.

Interview by Jacek Marczyński, rp.pl, 12.13

