

## ■ FACE OF THE COVER



# ZHANNA ALKHAZOVA



**Z**hanna Alkazhova originally from Moscow, today is a young opera singer based out of New York City. She started singing at the age of 5 when she joined a Russian children's group. After she graduated from Clark University and then Boston University with a Master's Degree in Vocal Performance, she went on to perform in opera houses around the United States. She has sung with Opera Boston, New Rochelle Opera, Opera Providence, Opera New Jersey, Des Moines Opera and others. Winner of several regional and international competitions, she recently won the Barry Alexander Competition and made her Carnegie Hall debut in Fall of 2014.

### **WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE THE POWER OF YOUR VOICE?**

I have been performing since I was 5 years old. I cannot remember a time when I was not either performing or participating in some artistic endeavor. I first started singing in a popular children's group in Moscow; with them I traveled all over Russia and we even had our own TV show. Meanwhile I was taking piano lessons and later as a teenager I started taking my first serious voice lessons. I could say that my voice brought me to this incredible art form. The big moment came when I saw my first opera Aida, I knew I had found my true passion!

### **ZHANNA, TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY. I KNOW THAT YOU HAVE A VERY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MOTHER.**

Yes, that is true, we have a very tight knit family. We have faced many challenges together, which only brought us closer. I could say

that today's relationship between my mom, my sister and I resemble more of a deep friendship. We fully support each other and it is a wonderful feeling to know that you have people in your life who love you unconditionally. Their support and encouragement mean everything to me. My mom is a kind, generous, very energetic woman. She devoted her life to myself and my sister and we will always be grateful for the many sacrifices she has made in order for us to live and thrive in this country. I am thankful to her for allowing me to choose my own path in life and supporting my decisions.

### **WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE YOUR SINGING CAREER TO HAVE A FAMILY?**

I try to think positively and I believe that I can combine career and family and be successful in both avenues. I believe where there is a will, there is a way!

### **I AM CERTAIN OUR CITY GIRLS WOULD LOVE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR UPCOMING PROJECTS...**

My immediate upcoming plans have to do with two different productions of Carmen, where I will be singing the role of Micaela. This is not my first time performing the role, and I am very much looking forward to singing it! I think everyone knows about the main heroine - Carmen, but I guarantee you, the music and character of Micaela is not any less enveloping than the beautiful Carmen. Of course, I may be slightly biased! Then there are plans to record a CD of Russian folk music. This fall I was invited to take part in the Talents of the World Festival in Moscow, Russia. So after 20 years, I will travel to my home country to perform a series of solo recitals with my pianist Alden Gatt.

### **ZHANNA CONSIDERING HOW MANY TALENTED PEOPLE THERE ARE IN NEW YORK, HOW CHALANGING IS IT TO BECOME AN OPERA SINGER?**

It is not easy, particularly for young singers. Many different factors contribute to a successful career – luck and determination being a huge part of the puzzle. Having a strong support system is also essential. I have been lucky to have had the best teachers. Maria Spacagna, who was one of my first serious teachers after undergrad to this day remains my friend and mentor and Diana Soviero, who accepted me into her NYC studio are two opera Divas who I look up to and have been essential in my development as an opera singer.

There is no one right or wrong path to success and there are many incredibly talented and dedicated musicians out there. The repertoire that I sing takes longer to "grow into". I have only this year begun singing spinto repertoire and had the great honor to perform the role of Tosca by Puccini.

### **ZHANNA, CONSIDERING HOW MANY TALENTED PEOPLE THERE ARE IN NEW YORK, HOW CHALLENGING IS IT TO BREAK INTO THE CLASSICAL SINGING INDUSTRY?**

It is not easy, particularly for young singers. Many different factors contribute to a successful career – luck and determination being a huge part of the puzzle. There is no one right or wrong path to success and there are many incredibly talented

and dedicated musicians out there. The repertoire which I sing takes longer to "grow into". I have only this year begun singing "spinto" repertoire and had the incredible opportunity to make my debut in the Title Role in Puccini's Tosca.

### **IT IS CONSIDERED THAT THE GREAT ANNA NETREBKOHAS HELPED OPEN A NEW PAGE IN THE OPERA INDUSTRY. DO YOU SHARE THIS OPINION?**

In part, yes. I love Anna Netrebko, she was one of the first to get recognition not only for her incredible talent but also for her physical beauty. The times have changed and our industry, similar to most other classical art forms is trying to stay current with the times. In the golden age of opera – the voice was everything, but standards change and although the voice is still the priority, it is not enough on its own. In today's world a singer has to have it all – the talent and the looks.

In my opinion, which I know most opera lovers share, the voice is of course the most important aspect of opera. We, as singers spend our entire singing careers, first learning and then perfecting our vocal technique so that one day we may have the honor of using our voice to tell a story through music to an audience. Every performance is special and when after a performance you know that you have done everything you could, there is no other feeling like that!

Opera is a beautiful art form. The best comparison I can think of is good wine. It takes some time to get used to, but once you learn to appreciate it, it is definitely a lifelong affair.

### **ZHANNA, DO YOU ALSO GIVE RECITALS, PERFORM OTHER MUSICAL GENRES?**

I enjoy singing recitals. Whenever I get the opportunity, I always jump at the chance to sing chamber music. I do not get to do it often, but working in an intimate setting with a chamber orchestra is a real treat for me. A few years ago I was introduced to Russian folk music, which was an entirely new genre for me. I spent a lot of time listening to old recordings of Russian gypsy and folk singers, learning the style and grew to really appreciate this style. Whenever I perform recitals for Russian audiences now, I always make sure to include some

## ■ FACE OF THE COVER

Russian folk music and I must say these tunes truly resonate with people. Although I am not a specialist, I enjoy singing musical theater. I feel as long as it is sung from the heart, people respond positively. Of course the music of Gershwin is always a crowd favorite and I absolutely love singing it.

### **WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES?**

I have thus far been incredibly lucky in that I meet the most generous and kind artists. We are all here to do the best job we can and present the best performance possible to the audience. We realize the challenges and difficulties of our profession and try to support one another. If there are any disagreements, which can sometimes arise in the course of a production, I am a very non-confrontational person, so I try to always look for common ground and be the best professional, colleague and artist I can.

### **LOOKING GOOD, AT YOUR AGE I AM SURE IS NOT AN ISSUE, BUT STILL CAN YOU SHARE WITH OUR READERS ANY BEAUTY SECRETS?**

I do not have any special beauty secrets. I believe that who you are as a person defines your beauty. The kind of inner beauty I am referring to has nothing to do with a new hair cut or beautiful make up, which are all wonderful tools of expressing self. The way I see it - a woman who is kind, smart, strong and generous is without a question a beautiful woman. Kindness and wisdom are the greatest beauty "weapons".

If considering my day to day life, I try to lead a pretty healthy lifestyle. A great night of sleep (, although regrettably I do not often have time for it) and drinking lots of water are probably one of my best beauty secrets. I believe in the rule of everything in moderation. A happy woman is a beautiful woman.

### **AND, ACCORDING TO OUR TRADITION, WE ASK YOU FOR YOUR WISHES TO OUR CITY GIRLS...**

Dear City Girls, I am wishing you all happiness, kindness, travels, opportunities to enjoy wonderful concerts with live music and above all - fulfilled dreams. Happy Spring and thank you for having me!