



KATIE DERHAM MEETS...

Diana Damrau

SOPRANO

It's tricky to find a man who can keep up with my life

Completely dedicated to her art, Diana Damrau's chosen career is keeping her busy as **Katie Derham** finds out when she meets the flamenco-dancing German soprano

On Christmas Day last year, replete with turkey and eyeing the family sized tin of chocolates, you may have been flicking through the TV channels. And you may have come across a broadcast of the Royal Opera House's *Hansel and Gretel*. There, prancing about as Gretel, complete with rather fetching plaits, was Diana Damrau, wowing the audience with her lyrical, soaring voice. This is just one of many roles in recent years with which she's enchanted her audiences, sealing her reputation as 'the real deal': a multi-award-winning soprano whose career is going from strength to strength. Meeting her at a swanky London hotel, I am delighted to find that this glorious talent, far from being a diva, is a warm, chatty, down-to-earth type, who looks younger than her 38 years and has dashed to our rendezvous straight from a flamenco class – after all, what else would a world-class opera star be doing on her day off?! For all the fun, though, this is a musician who takes her work phenomenally seriously. So, when did her love affair with classical music begin?

Diana Damrau One night, when I was about 12, my parents went out for dinner. I was home alone, watching TV, and found the Zeffirelli movie of *La traviata*. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. It was breathtaking. Voluptuous. The story, the singing, the voices! I prayed to God, 'please let me have that talent'. I remember singing and dancing as a three-year old to *Peer Gynt*, and I sang in a choir, but this was different. I was immediately hooked on opera, and I wanted to explore what my voice could do. I asked my Aunt Krista – who sang – when you can start training the voice, and she said to wait until I was 15. She said that so many young girls ruin their voices – you can buy

a new violin, but not a new voice! I eventually began studying with a Romanian soprano called Carmen Hanganu.

Katie Derham Did you immediately want to make singing your life?

DD I was never obsessed about being a star – in fact I wondered what that life would be like. My teacher told me it wouldn't be all happiness. You need discipline, she said, you must be healthy, you have to prove yourself in every performance. She said there would be difficult moments – you have to cut out your personal life from your professional life and family will be tricky. And she was right: I'm single again at the moment, and I haven't had kids – yet! It's tricky to find a man who'll accept the challenge of keeping up with my life. But it's the best profession in the world and I love my work; I'm continually learning, exploring and improving all the time.

KD What is it that you love so much?

DD It's the communicating, the acting, taking the audience on a journey through so many emotions – especially in Lieder recitals. We singers have to go deep inside ourselves, find bottled-up emotions, and then let them explode! I think you could say that singing is my religion.

KD Where is home?

DD I grew up in Augsburg, about 100km from Munich, but my base now is in Geneva – I'm trying to improve my French! I love to have nature near to me, the lakes, the mountains, but I'm not there much. Most opera productions take at least five weeks; I've just come straight from New York to London, so by the time I get home I'll have been away for two and a half months this time.

KD As well as performing opera, you've also recorded a new CD, *Coloraturas...*



ARTIST IN BRIEF

DIANA DAMRAU

■ **Born** 31 May 1971, Augsburg, Germany

■ **Education** Studied at the Musikhochschule Würzburg with Carmen Hanganu; after graduating she worked in Salzburg with Hanna Ludwig

■ **Early success** Engagements in Würzburg, the Nationaltheater Mannheim and Oper Frankfurt

■ **Career** Performances at the Vienna State Opera, the Metropolitan Opera New York, Covent Garden, La Scala and the Salzburg Festival

■ **Fact** She made Metropolitan Opera history by appearing as both Pamina and the Queen of the Night in the same run, but different performances, of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*

My life is on the stage... I love the atmosphere of the opera house – the energy, the sound

HEAR HER ON...



Coloraturas

Opera Arias

Diana Damrau (sop), Munich Radio Orchestra/Dan Ettinger
Diana performs 19th and 20th century repertoire ranging from Rossini to Bernstein
Virgin Classics 519 3132

DD The recording process is so different from live performance – you have to be so many different characters. You're closer to the orchestra, so everything's more intimate. And because it's going to be a document, you really want it to be right. It's a challenge – you have to be ready to sing different repertoire for at least four hours a day, with retake after retake. It's interesting, but tough! You also get to work with great musicians: everyone really concentrates and gives of their best. But my life is on the stage. Opera – it's a live art. I love watching it myself, I love the atmosphere of the opera house; the energy, the sound – you can't really capture that on a recording.

KD Are there any singers you particularly admire?

DD Everyone is unique. I have a huge CD collection, it's like a store! For every new piece of repertoire I learn, I listen to many different people. Every voice, body and career is special. But Jonas Kaufmann – I've known him for years and years, he's an amazing artist, he can do anything. As a German singer you're often put in a box – people assume you're going to sing Wagner or Mozart – but if you learn your languages you can do anything.

KD What's next?

DD Oh, I have so many dreams! I've actually got three contracts to sing Violetta in *La traviata* – I can't say



Diana was
inspired as a girl
by *La traviata*;
now she is set
to play the main
role of Violetta

where, it's a secret, but it's great! It's the peak of opera roles. You need to be a splendid actress, and you need three voices: you have to be light, then dramatic, then lyrical. Violetta is a courtesan, a complex character, so there are many challenges; you have to dig very deep. I wanted to wait before I sang this role so that I could grow and mature as an artist – I didn't want to touch this masterpiece too early. A soprano's voice is at its peak in her late-thirties through to mid-forties, the voice blossoms, so I figure now I'm ready to take this role on. But there is so much out there to do! I'm also looking forward to the day when I'm older, so that I can play the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*. ■