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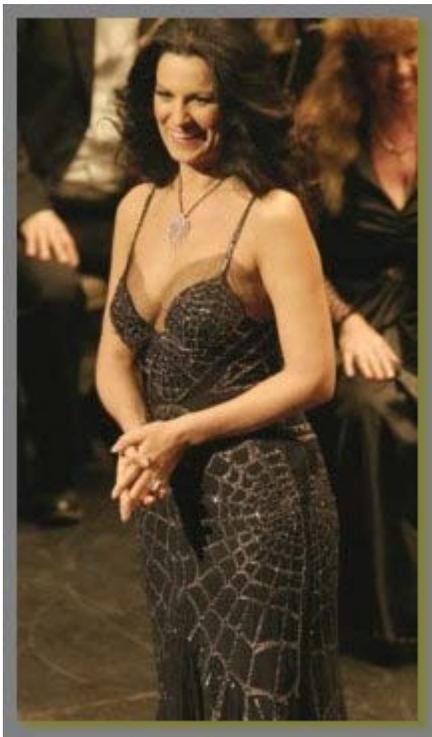


Photo: Robert Millard

Angela Gheorghiu: An Engaging Personality and a Warm, Resonant Voice Which, In Combination, Render Her Irresistible.

**ANGELA GHEORGHIU
IN CONCERT
LOS ANGELES OPERA
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By: Carol Jean Delmar
OperaOnline.us

A great deal has been written about Angela Gheorghiu as being a diva. Any woman who is an internationally renowned opera singer has to have a little bit of diva in her, I suppose. But the term also alludes to another word: “prima donna,” which implies that the opera singer is temperamental and arrogant. For the audience in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on St. Patrick’s Day, Angela Gheorghiu allowed her endearing side to shine through. She may have carried herself like a diva, but she was gracious, warm and maybe even a little insecure as to how she would be perceived. It didn’t take her long, however, to discover that the audience really adored her.

The Los Angeles Opera Orchestra, which was positioned onstage, was directed by conductor Eugene Kohn, who stood on a platform in front of a brass rail. He first raised his baton for the rousing “Rákóczy March” from Hector Berlioz’s “La damnation de Faust.” Kohn didn’t seem to have a handle on the orchestra though – a certain crispness and attention to tempo were lacking.

But the audience was really there to hear Angela Gheorghiu, and she didn’t disappoint. She sang stage right of the brass rail, and because she didn’t stand downstage of it, the audience in the front orchestra section -- from the stage left side of the hall to the center -- had an obstructed view of her, which was disturbing because she looked sexy and voluptuous in her three striking evening gowns.

Her position on the stage also made it difficult to discern who was leading whom. She was at times slightly in front of Kohn, whose back was to the audience. She certainly wasn’t looking at his baton (unless there was a monitor and hidden camera) and he wasn’t watching her either, so at times, the orchestra and singer simply weren’t in sync. He attempted to turn around to get a glimpse of her once in a while, but for the most part, it was like the blind leading the blind. Yet strangely enough, the result was quite favorable.

A little insecure, Gheorghiu sang the “Jewel Song” from Gounod’s “Faust” with some reserve, but when she sang “Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux” from Massenet’s “Le Cid,” we could instantly hear the reason for her success. Many singers have beautiful voices that they cast out into the hall with a sound that fails to pull the heartstrings; but when we listen to a Mimi, Manon or Violetta, the only singers that truly move us are those who have soul. Realizing that quality is sometimes achieved through the acting, but if the soul cannot be heard within the voice, the result remains incomplete. Gheorghiu is one of the few singers I have recently heard who has soul in both voice and body. She was a little tense for this one-night concert in LA and didn’t relax until the encores, but the voice was always full and dusky on the low tones, and round, well-placed and vibrant up high. Her “Adieu, notre petite table” from Massenet’s “Manon” was sung with grace, but she appeared physically uneasy with the habañera, “L’amour est un oiseau rebelle,” from Georges Bizet’s “Carmen.” Since she couldn’t act out the role of Carmen, she directed her character’s flirtatiousness toward the conductor.

After intermission, the focus was on Puccini. In a more sedate gown (She changed from red to white.), she sensitively recounted the simple joys of having had a humble life with

her lover, des Grieux, while singing “In quelle trine morbide” from Puccini’s “Manon Lescaut.” Then she wowed the audience with her high notes as she elaborated on the case for sentimental love while singing Magda’s “Chi il bel sogno di Doretta” from “La Rondine,” a role which she will perform next season with the San Francisco Opera.

She concluded the program in a dazzling black and brown sequined gown. Her “Pace, pace, mio Dio” from Verdi’s “La Forza del Destino” was sung with passionate depth, wonderful legato lines and expressive crescendos, decrescendos, *fórtés* and *pianíssimos*.

In her final aria, “Un bel dì vedremo” from Puccini’s “Madama Butterfly,” Gheorghiu, as Cio-Cio-San, dreamily described how she envisioned Lt. B.F. Pinkerton’s return to her would be. She attacked her first note, a high G flat, on center, and she sang the rest of the aria with a mix of delicacy and passion until her final B flat, thus prompting a standing ovation.

Five encores followed which enabled the audience to see her warm and generous side. She changed the pace of the evening with a charming rendition of Lerner and Loewe’s “I Could Have Danced All Night” and Agustín Lara’s popular folk song, “Granada,” which could have used more fire. Next, she sang a lovely “Valurile Dunarii” from George Grigoriu’s operetta “Muzica,” “O mio babbino caro” from “Gianni Schicchi,” with an impromptu piano accompaniment by Eugene Kohn, and she concluded the concert with Ernesto de Curtis’ romantic “Non ti scordar di me.”

It was a night of enjoyable familiar arias, with inserts of orchestral music that didn’t really glow. The orchestra’s role was to accompany Gheorghiu and fill in the gaps when she needed to catch her breath or change clothes. Neither in the overture to “Béatrice et Bénédict” nor in the overtures to “La Maschere” or “Les Vêpres Siciliennes” did Kohn inspire the orchestra to inspire us. As an onstage conductor, he should have been more charismatic.

Gheorghiu is a wonderful performer who knows how to reach her audience. She doesn’t have a large powerful voice, but she has an engaging personality and a warm, resonant voice which, in combination, render her irresistible.

Conductor, Eugene Kohn
Concertmaster, Stuart Canin