

Dana Buresova: Marenka? My old friend...

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(shortened version)

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World opera literature is full of characters whom you usually cannot meet in the street and if you had had an opportunity to invite them home, you would hesitate in fact. But a young pretty girl in the right age for a marriage – that is something else. Yes, we speak about brides. There is plenty of girls willing to marry in operas, but before they finally fall into arms of the right man they have to face various meshes. Elvira in *The Puritans* escapes within an ace her getting mad, Pamina in *The Magic Flute* is made by her own mother to a shameful murder, Konstanze is kidnapped by pirates and sold to serail. Czech opera has her own speciality: a bride sold by her bridegroom – Smetana's *Marenka*.

On May 20, 2011 her happiness will be traded in London Barbican Hall, where *The Bartered Bride* will be performed as a concert by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Jiri Belohlavek and moreover with Czech and Slovak opera singers. As a main character will sing Dana Buresova, the soloist of the National Theatre Prague, holder of the Thalia Prize in 2008. She was sold as *Marenka* on the stage many times, only in the National Theatre in three various productions. A theme for an interview is therefore put up.



When and where did you sing Marenka for the first time?

It was in 1992 in Pilsen Theatre, at the time of my studies. That time I had no idea that I and *Marenka* would become „old friends“ for long years.

Why do you like the part?

First of all it is an excellent written part. It has a whole range of phraseology, it is interesting both from dramatic and vocal view, its story is a real one. Therefore it is close to the audience. Who has not been in love? Who has never had doubts about his love? Who had not have to struggle for it a bit? In *Marenka* everybody can find a bit of himself. She is nice, elfish and serious, she can help herself in life... In fact, I can imagine well her being my friend.

I also like *Marenka* because she is a counterbalance to other parts that I perform most often. In *Rusalka*, *Carmen* or *Jenufa* I mostly wail on the stage. With a kind of hyperbole, in those operas my female characters are for the tenors to bother them. *Rusalka*, *Micaela*, *Jenufa*, they are all rather waiting passively for the fate to bring them hot times. *Marenka* is different. She is also suffering torments for her tenor, she also has a reason to despair for her love, but Smetana created her as an active character. She is not waiting in a corner. When she wants Jenik, she makes her best to get him, and she uses pronouncedly feminine weapons.



The Bartered Bride – The National Theatre Prague

How has your approach to the part changed during those years? Has your voice developed somehow and therefore also the way how you sing Marenka?

As to my voice, through the years perhaps I can control it better which allows me to work with wider expression and dynamic range. The new that appeared in it has also naturally become part of the Bartered Bride without any kind of my theory-making. Simply, I let Marenka to „take out“ of it what it needs.

In other aspects I developed the way of interpreting the character of Marenka with greater intentions. My first Marenka was cheerful and slightly wrong-headed. Of course. I also - like her - had my wedding in front of me. But contrary to her, also other life experiences. And which of them were projected into Marenka? I try to make her more beyond the situation and kind-hearted.

Would you give her advice based on what you know about men now?

Better not. If Marenka knows about men what I know today, the whole opera would be one act shorter.

Shorter? Why not longer?

Not at all, shorter. I would tell her: „ Girl, take it easy and don't rush that much. Just smile at Jeník and praise him and he will do everything himself.“

Are you personally like Marenka in some respects?

Perhaps we could be alike in solving some situations rather vigorously. Well, to perform here and there a little bit of a row every wife with a husband and three children is able. If only because of self-preservation.



The Bartered Bride – The National Theatre Prague

You have performed Marenka not only on Czech stages, but also abroad, namely in Baltimore in the USA. What was that American Bartered Bride like?

As to directing it was rather classic, near to our approach. It was very successful with the audience although it does not belong to the best known operas in America. I was only the second Marenka in Baltimore, after Mrs. Jarmila Novotna.

And how was the music carried out?

Neither the sound differed significantly from our traditional one, because the conductor was Oliver Dohnanyi and he convinced the orchestra about his own idea.



The Bartered Bride – Baltimore

Up to now you have performed in more or less traditionally produced performances of the Bartered Bride. Do not you feel like having a bit of dramatic experiment, like it becomes common in the opera houses?

Not in the Bartered Bride, or more exactly, no forced modernization. I think neither a supermarket nor a heap of toxic waste is a right place for Marenka. But directors are creative. What we do not have now, we can have in future...

You will sing the Bartered Bride as a concert in London. Have you got any other experience with performing opera as a concert?

I have already sung Rusalka at a concert.

Operas are composed for the stage. What do you think is right to introduce an opera at a concert?

It is the beauty of music itself. Both type of performance have their pros, because each of them lets music to exceed in another way. The theatre stage production has many means, the concert stage a few. The advantage of the theatre stage is that it is a colourful area bringing the story to the spectator offering him a clearer image and that way it enables to draw him easily into the musical world of the opera.

On the other hand on the concert stage only we singers with our voices and the orchestra stand. Thanks to that we can concentrate the audience's attention on the music itself and arouse an intensive immediate experience by music and singing. I as an interpreter have to convince the audience even without a red skirt that the Bartered Bride is a beautiful opera, touching and joyful and Marenka is a character from life.

The conductor of the London concert performance is Mr. Jiri Belohlavek. It is not your first cooperation...

Yes, we have already cooperated with Dvorak's Rusalka. Bizet's Carmen, Smetana's The Devil's Wall and recently Bohuslav Martinu's The Miracles of Mary. Mr. Belohlavek is for me always inspirative and leading personality. A meeting of a singer and conductor always means a new creative process and in the parts that a singer has already experienced in a certain way it is especially inspirative and important. Besides, Mr. Belohlavek has done a great job for promotion of Czech music in the world and that is also why I am looking forward to London – certainly I am going to meet a well informed audience.