

# Le CIGARE & VIN

S T Y L E

*"A drop of red wine is wholesome," says*

Andrea  
Kalivodová

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English  
Edition

**A fabled**  
*tower from*  
*the Treasury*



**ALL QUIET**  
*among the fjords*

Timelessness of straight pipes

CRUISERS OF RUSSIAN ROADS





**POSITIVE**

**is important**

**Although she herself says that her steps forward are rather slow, her transformation from a promising young opera singer into a sought-after star was very rapid. Andrea Kalivodová celebrated her thirtieth birthday only recently and can already be proud of many wonderful opera roles of which the most distinctive and best known is her presentation of the passionate Carmen. She performs on the foremost stages of the world with prominent artists including Leo Nucci, soloist of the New York Metropolitan Opera. Besides the State Opera Prague, she performs almost throughout the Czech Republic, in various places in Europe and, for instance, in Japan. We took advantage of a gap in her busy programme and visited the popular mezzo soprano to talk to her about opera and other topics.**

**When did you realise that you wanted to sing and when did you choose opera?**

I've wanted to sing since my childhood. When I was about three years old I began to perceive tones and music as such. It never occurred to me that I could do something else. I am actually a happy person, because my childhood dream came true and it gives me a pleasant living, which is a positive surprise from time to time. Opera came later, because at first I listened to Hana Zagorová [Czech pop singer — editorial note] who was popular at the time; and I had a different idea about my orientation. I did not even know opera and had no feeling

for it. I didn't know the theatre either. Then I lived with my parents in Brno, which has a conservatoire, but with no pop music department like there is in Prague. I was considering Prague, but my parents pleaded for Brno. In Brno, I came across a very good professor, Jarmila Janíčková, who guided me very naturally without overzealousness or emotion. This was a great help, and I am glad that I graduated in classical singing, because I can switch to a somewhat different genre which would naturally be impossible vice versa. I hold pop singers in high esteem and like them, but their work is much easier as they can use microphones and equipment — they are in a totally different world in all respects.

**How do you see the present state of Czech opera?**

I think that the situation is improving. I cannot imagine a time when all operas, from French to Russian ones, would be sung in Czech. It is wonderful that all operas are sung in the original as is the worldwide custom. I was lucky I never had to rehearse anything in Czech, for example Carmen, which was also performed in the translated version some time ago. Learning operas in the original gives singers excellent foundations. It is their lifelong work, and French, Italian and other languages must be polished up all the time for the roles to be sung and pronounced as best as possible. This is the first piece of good news. The second piece of good news is that there are many capable directors and conductors. Moreover, it is good that the time when, for example, The Cunning Little Vixen was very fat, is over and attention is being paid to the looks of singers. I believe that opera is developing correctly in our country. On the other hand, the old school had the great advantage of personalities such as Bohumil Gregor; the great masters who have, unfortunately, left us forever.

**Have your foreign colleagues asked for your help with the rehearsing of operas by Czech composers?**

Of course they have. Russian sopranos in particular often have a hard time with the Song to the Moon aria from the opera Rusalka, but they put new fervour in it. In London, I heard Karita Matilla from Finland singing Jenůfa, and I must say that she was perfect. Endeavour yields success. I gladly help with the Czech pronunciation. On the other hand, I was grateful to the new chief conductor of the State Opera for helping me throughout preparations for Carmen, starting with the spoken dialogues.

**You are a singer who tours international stages from Vienna to New York. How did this come about in your case?**

I was very lucky. Maybe I could have done more during my studies when I refused various offers. When I graduated, I was engaged by the State Opera so that people who wanted to work with me could hear my performances. For example, I sang with an orchestra and choir in the Viennese Konzerthaus's grand Welcome to the EU concert. This was extremely helpful, as very few Czech singers have performed in this concert hall. And I was lucky to win a contest and appear in





Yes, I feel strong affection for Carmen. She loves people as I do. Everybody regards her as a bitch, but this is not exactly true. This is my opinion — Carmen is a fair woman who goes ahead and sends somebody packing, which some women are incapable of doing, maybe all their life. They live with somebody who does not suit them and are unhappy. I wish that every woman could have a bit of Carmen in her life, and I think this would be a benefit. The courage, zest, determination, eagerness and enthusiasm which Carmen simply has are wonderful. Of course, we are living in another century, everything is different and nothing is simple, but Carmen has taught me a lot. Anyway, I can say that about every character.

**Besides the State Opera, you sing Carmen on other stages...**

I do sing her often. For example, I have just ended a big tour of North Bohemia — Ustí nad Labem, Teplice, Most. I study the biographies of great singers and have found it interesting that Emma Destin, for instance, saw opera singing as a mission. When she was prohibited from performing, she went to villages to sing in barns and the like. The present time is not simple and culture is expensive. A State Opera ticket costs one or two thousand crowns and so I actually sing for foreigners. I enjoy this, but I also want to sing for the ordinary Czechs, because I am Czech and proud of being a Czech. This was why I have taken stands which some people could regard as curious. But I know what I do and why I do it, and I always want everything to make sense. I see it as my duty to do something on top and thank heavens I am succeeding. I have a kind of world of my own and I am enjoying it very much. What is important to me can seem a bit ridiculous to some people, but this is what pleases me. I get pleasure from my non-conventional approach, because being oneself is grand.

**Is your presentation of Carmen somewhat different every time?**

I am sure it is a bit different, but I want the performance to be about life every time. The opera is stylisation, which is fine, but I want a story to be shown on the stage and the audience to feel it. I would not be satisfied if I did no more than slightly fit in with the style and was not in full play. Maybe I have an approach to the performance different from my colleagues. Carmen was "done" in the State Opera by the Russian singer Galia Ibragimova. I liked debating with her and appreciated her detached point of view, good humour

London. I am now also devoting time to a repertoire of songs, and so I travel quite a lot to perform song cycles. I have the honour of presenting the songs of Dvorak, Janáček, Martinu and especially the recently regrettably deceased Petr Eben. His songs allow me to lark about, they are easy to arrange at the piano, and are excellent voice hygiene for every singer. I am always saying that my best agent is my guardian angel who leads me so that I never have too little or too much work and can have a rest. It is a bit of a miracle that my career is developing naturally, spontaneously and, thank heavens, well — with constant discipline and work, of course.

**You are talking about your guardian angel, you have visited a fortune-teller... do you think there is something between heaven and earth?**

Certainly. I am a little magician. I try to be decent to people. Positive energy is most important and the reward is nigh.

**You spoke about singing operas in the original and you tour the world.**

**It seems that you know foreign languages...**

I believe that I am very good at German and get by in Italian. I regret that I am a bit afraid to speak English although I understand everything. The problem is that I started learning English too late. My sister has been learning English since she went to the third class, and it is my big advantage that she can come with me. She is very good at English and at communicating with people. Languages are very important. I weep for singers who have no idea what they are singing about. Recently, I was unexpectedly asked to substitute a singer and I asked a friend about the contents of the particular aria. I regard such consultation as very important. An aria needs more than mere singing; it must be presented by expression, by all means. It must have its life; the character that sings it must be on the stage and not Andrea Kalivodová. This is my objective and also my guiding principle, which attracted some of the people with whom I am co-operating.

**And yet it seems that you feel affection for the character of Carmen...**

and especially her sincerity. I am fond of her; it is good if everyone pulls together in the theatre. Naturally, one goes one's own way, but it is good to see how others work and to learn.

**The name Carmen is seemingly contained in the name of the Carmenère vine variety. You are known to be fond of red wine. Do you think that this is due to your Moravian origin?**

Do you know how many bottles of wine of this variety or with the name Carmen on the label I have received? A great many. My love of wine probably comes from my mother's ancestors, who were southerners. Secondly, red wine contains antioxidants and I believe that a drop of red wine is wholesome. My positive attitude to wine and good music certainly has its roots in Moravia, and belongs to life.

**The recent trend is to marry food and wine, and you like cooking. What style do you prefer?**



I am really fond of cooking and I think that I am very good at it, but it must be about relaxation. I can't imagine myself cooking hot meals three times a day. It is different when a woman is married and has three children. When I study a role or prepare myself for a concert I certainly have no nerves to cook.

I cook all sorts of things, but mostly fish and sea food, crabs, shrimp and the like. I love cooking risottos and paellas. I also cook various soups — tomato, vegetable and other soups. I also like to invite friends for a chat over food and wine. I simply want to be in the middle of things. This is also connected with food and with wine.

**Can we say that the foundations of your cooking come from your family?**

Both my parents are excellent cooks. Daddy in addition gives food an aesthetic touch.

**Do you have favourite restaurants?**

I very much like the atmosphere at La Bodeguita del Medio. I also like to go to Zahrada v Opeře and Krásný Ztráty, which is where I have meetings, and the like. My favourites include the Marco Polo and SOHO+ restaurants and Café Louvre. The atmosphere is most important in restaurants. Many restaurants cook well, but a calm environment can not be found everywhere.

**Hard work must be followed by a rest. Where do you feel best when resting?**

I feel very good in the south. Recently I went to Sardinia where people are jovial. I like smiling at people and the local cordiality is very close to me. It makes me feel at home. Then I like Austria, Vienna, as well as Prague. I am constantly realising how splendid the city is. London addresses me with its cosmopolitan character. On the other hand, I am not the type to go north, to Norway or to Sweden.

**Does the sea play a role in your affection for the south?**

I love the sea, in Spain and maybe also Croatia, but I like Sardinia in particular.

**You are a Moravian native, but you have been living in Prague for eleven years. How long did it take you to assert yourself?**

The beginnings in Prague were wonderful and humorous. I changed several lodgings and student hostels and so on. I think that it was a bit of a miracle

and luck again that everything came at the right time and fitted in well. Everything depends on strong will, good mood and optimism. And, what is most important, one must have a dream and never give it up. I am a sunshine child, I am always in a good mood, decide what to do and do it whatever sacrifice it involves. Many people work hard but are not doing well. Others work hard and are doing well. I believe that it is a matter of energy. I believe that when one opens oneself to luck, it will come. Sometimes people are unnecessarily taciturn, they have barriers, blocks, envy others, and wonder why they have no success — no wonder, the negative energy impedes everything. But when you take things easy, are fair and know your target, you are rewarded. And helping others on the way is a matter of course.

**Not long ago you were in the news as a promising mezzo soprano, now as a success. How long does it take for an opera singer to mature, to rise to the pinnacle?**

Their whole lives — but I think that opera singers are really at their best at the age of about thirty eight. They are sufficiently experienced and know how sell their art. It is most important to continue singing and learning all the time, to improve everything and play with it. My objective is not being at the absolute top, but to get pleasure out of my work, to do it at full stretch and be happy. I am going slowly step by step. I am meticulous, which sometimes harms those around me. I have no goal, but it is my dream to sing grand mezzo soprano roles such as Carmen, Ježibaba, Amneris (which I am learning now), and in the future Delilah and Ulrika. Naturally, I want to be held in high esteem, and for the State Opera to respect that it has a singer who fights for the opera and the theatre. Trips abroad are only the icing on the cake — if I get another invitation to the Viennese Konzerthaus or the New York Metropolitan Opera, I shall accept it gladly and humbly, and shall be happy.

**I want to ask in conclusion whether you have an attitude to pipes or cigars...**

I can't bear cigarettes, and I can't be near a smoker, because I have an allergy, my eyes water. I like pipes very much, and don't mind cigars as much as cigarettes. Cigars and pipes are stylish and belong to a particular atmosphere. I would not want to sit in the company of a gentleman who puffs on a pipe for two hours, though. That,

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Graduated from the Conservatoire of Music in Brno and the Academy of Music and Drama, Department of Music in Prague. During her study stay in Vienna at Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, she also attended international master classes.

Andrea Kalivodová has been cooperating with the State Opera Prague since 2002, and as its soloist since 2003. She is a guest performer at the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre, the opera in Ústí nad Labem, and the State Theatre in Košice. She has performed at many important events and regularly gives concerts throughout the world.

*Topical information is available on her website [www.kalivodova.cz](http://www.kalivodova.cz)*

too, would be unpleasant, but pipes do have a certain charm.

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