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EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

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Dinner at Eight*
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YANNICK

{YANNICK}

NÉZET-SÉGUIN, MAESTRO

The Met's
Music Director
Designate

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**THE
LUMINOUS
SOPRANO:
MARINA
REBEKA**

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Soprano **MARINA REBEKA**, who shines in whatever role she sings, returns to the Met this spring as Donna Elvira.

by Adam Wasserman.

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Photographed by
Dario Acosta

Grooming by
Affan Graber Malik
for Tom Ford Beauty

—
Versatile diva
Marina Rebeka

—
Jill Stuart
black sheer
sleeve gown;
Stuart Weitzman
silver shoes;
stylist's own
long crystal
earrings



Photographs by
DARIO ACOSTA
Fashion Styling by
RITA LIEFHEBBER
Hair & Makeup by
AFFAN GRABER MALIK

Luminous

Halston white
and black gown;
ABS Allen Schwartz
diamond earrings;
Carolee crystal
bracelet.

(Opposite)
Jill Stuart black
sheer sleeve gown;
Stuart Weitzman
silver shoes;
stylist's own long
crystal earrings

Luminous

Soprano Marina Rebeka
brings light to all her music.
BY ADAM WASSERMAN



LAST NOVEMBER, Marina Rebeka sat down for tea at a restaurant across the street from the Metropolitan Opera, where she was then singing Mathilde in musically electrifying performances of *Guillaume Tell*, and promptly announced that she was dumping the role from her repertoire.

“I have to be honest—I don’t like the way that my voice sounds in the role,” the Riga native said in lightly accented English. Critics and audiences alike had deemed her soprano a near-ideal instrument to sing the heroine in the first Met showing of Rossini’s grand opera in eighty-five years—but Rebeka seemed more than happy to bid adieu to the Hapsburg princess. “I have to cut the edges off the frequencies to fit into all the coloratura, and I can’t use the whole range of what I have. The role doesn’t allow the voice to really show all the colors. It doesn’t give me the possibility to expand.”



As Violetta at Covent Garden, 2015

Since she made her Met debut as Donna Anna in the 2011 premiere of Michael Grandage’s *Don Giovanni* staging, New York audiences have had several opportunities to hear the full range of her soprano in action. Expansive and thrillingly precise in the fleetest coloratura, Rebeka’s voice can cut like a scimitar through the often smudged runs of Violetta’s “Sempre libera” or an aria such as Anna’s “Or sai chi l’onore,” or caress and prod the gentle chromaticisms of Mathilde’s “Sombre forêt” and Norma’s “Casta diva.” Yet what’s perhaps most remarkable about her dramatic-coloratura instrument is the way its pointed, steely attack can bloom into a gleaming column of sound.

Next month, Rebeka returns to the Met for *Giovanni*, but she’ll be making her role debut as Elvira, a character to which she feels more temperamentally suited. “Anna has fantastic music, but she is a big *punto interrogativo*,” the soprano says. “She feels one way, she says another, and she acts in the third way. It’s much easier to be a woman in the role

of Elvira. She is leading the action. Because of her, all this happened—because she finally started saying to people what she thinks.”

Rebeka is affable but not easygoing in person; no one could accuse her of having a shortage of opinions. Having sung Violetta in almost every major international opera house, the soprano gushes that she’ll never be bored with *Traviata*, yet she practically detonates at the platitude that Violetta requires three distinct voice types. “This is stupid!” she fumes, “because this idea is accusing Verdi of being a stupid composer. Verdi was extremely intelligent—his wife was Strepioni, who was a fantastic singer. He wrote this role for one voice, with many, many shades. Because of the way the character is written with words, it’s so clear what he wanted. The most important thing is *not* the beauty of the high notes. Every high note expresses a different emotion. If it’s despair, or hate, it can never be just beautiful. If you do it beautiful, you’re fake.”

BORN TO A FAMILY of amateur musicians in Riga, Rebeka first experienced opera at thirteen when her grandfather—a choral conductor who had once been exiled to Siberia by Stalin—took her to a performance of *Norma*. Though the soprano received much of her training in Italy, it’s evident that a rigorous musical education behind the Iron Curtain also had its merits. “The subjects which we had are here sometimes not even taught to singers—like polyphony, for example. ‘Would you write a fugue for me?’ *Proposta, risposta*—what’s the index between them? It’s mathematics. It was crazy. But when you see it, you see the music from a completely different perspective.”

Last summer, Rebeka was a last-minute substitute for Sonya Yoncheva in a concert performance of *Thaïs* that featured Plácido Domingo’s Athanaël. The soprano learned the role in less than a week, but the shortened time frame didn’t dampen her enthusiasm for an opera that she now counts among her favorites. “It’s really my role,” she says. “The arch of the personality is so incredible. And the colors—I would say it’s singing of soul, because you need to have not just a beautiful voice, but you have to have a voice that expresses your feelings, your nature, your desires.”

Rebeka is perhaps even more passionate about the role of Norma, which she first sang in Trieste in January 2016. “[Norma] is bel canto role that requires a dramatic personality and dramatic sound sometimes, and color—but not necessarily weight, because the places where she really goes down, she’s alone. It’s the inner expression, which can be interpreted in many different ways. You have to know how to speak in this language to really realize what the music wants to do. What do you want to say through this music? It’s all extremely important, because I don’t have an aim to be liked, or to be famous. My aim is to be understood through the music. I’m just the interpreter, you know?” ■

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Michael Kors
cream off-
shoulder sweater;
Aqua drop
earrings; Aqua
pearl bracelet

