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OPERA NEWS



An illustration of three opera stars in a grand hall. In the center is a woman with short dark hair, wearing a black dress. To her right is a woman with blonde hair styled up, wearing a white dress with a red floral pattern and a red necklace. To the left, the back of a man's head and shoulder in a dark suit is visible. The background features a large chandelier and red curtains.

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This year's honorees are (from left, opposite page) José van Dam, Anna Netrebko, Joseph Calleja, Waltraud Meier and Elīna Garanča.

Awards

The editors of OPERA NEWS pay tribute to five of opera's brightest stars.

ILLUSTRATION BY NIGEL BUCHANAN



|| **MEZZO-SOPRANO** ||

Elina Garanča

Elina Garanča has already secured her place in opera history, and she may just be



As Charlotte
in *Werther*
at Wiener
Staatsoper,
2013



As Carmen
at the Met,
2010

© PAUL SCHIRNHOFFER/DG (PORTRAIT); © MICHAEL FOEHN/
WIENER STAATSOOPER (WERTHER); © JOHAN ELLBERS (CARMEN)



getting started.

**GARANČA'S
TALENTS WOULD
MAKE HER
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CENTURY.**

For New York audiences, the emergence of Elina Garanča's Carmen from the cigarette factory in the 2009 Met premiere of Richard Eyre's production signaled a star approaching her zenith. With a chilling nihilism at her Gypsy's core, Garanča sang the habanera while washing her legs and slurping juice from an overripe orange before tossing out a "Prends garde à toi!" that seemed the vocal equivalent of an assassin's flicking open a switchblade. It's nearly impossible for a singer today to take on the role and not come out on the losing side of memory. Yet with her glamour, impeccable musicianship and an instrument of uncommon loveliness—plummy and plush in the middle, with a dazzling, silvery thrust at its top—Garanča proved to be the most compelling exponent of the role that New York audiences had heard in nearly two decades.

Not yet forty and now in the second decade of her career, the Latvian mezzo has established herself as one of the most gratifying performers on the opera stage today, leaving an indelible stamp on characters ranging from Carmen and Charlotte to Sesto in *Clemenza*, bel canto heroines such as Angelina, Rosina and Giovanna Seymour to Strauss's Octavian. Garanča's talents would make her a star in any century, yet her voice and movie-star good looks seem tailor-made for our *Live in HD* era. But perhaps the mezzo's greatest strength is her ability to render a cantabile line of such overwhelming beauty as to make time stop.

Look no further than the DVD documenting her Cenerentola

to get a sense of how completely realized her performances are. With other mezzos in the title role, the opera can seem a two-and-three-quarter-hour warm-up to "Nacqui all'affano." While Garanča's rendition of the final aria is as poised and virtuosic as that of any singer, her traversal of the entire role is remarkable; from first note to last, she gives a performance that is deeply affecting and yet somehow seems to fly by in an instant.

Garanča's Sesto, seen at the Met in 2012, is likewise perfectly measured, so astounding in its instrumental purity that the mezzo achieves an eerie symbiosis with the basset clarinet in "Parto, parto." Equally impressive is the DVD documenting the Wiener Staatsoper's *Anna Bolena*. Watch how Garanča creates a Giovanni Seymour so riveting and gorgeously sung that she seems just as entitled to the throne as Anna Netrebko's queen. In terms of sheer refulgence of tone, the powerhouse high C that she and Netrebko brandish in unison at the end of "Va', infelice, e teco reca" simply has to be called a draw.

Throughout her career, Garanča has shown herself to be a performer who uses all of her vocal and dramatic resources in service of the subtlest gesture, so it's not happenstance that the French repertoire has become central to her career. Roles such as Dalila, Anita in *La Navarraise*, Léonore in *La Favorite* and Didon in *Troyens* seem to be Garanča's destiny. When great artists peak, new summits have a way of revealing themselves. Elina Garanča has already secured her place in opera history, and she may just be getting started.

—Adam Wasserman