

Adventures in Italian Opera with Fred Plotkin and... Mirella Freni

Natasha Lardera (April 30, 2013)



The audience at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò who took part of Adventures in Italian Opera with Fred Plotkin was given a chance to witness something rare: Mirella Freni in person talking about her artistry and Freni on video or audio where all could partake in that same artistry.

Former President [Jimmy Carter](#) [2] embraced classical music and made it a prominent feature of White House. In a conversation with the host of Mad About Music, [Gilbert Kaplan](#) [3], back in 2012, Carter revealed “I would say that my favorite recording of all is about 17 or 18 arias on a CD called Aria: A Passion for Opera. And I listen to it over and over again. Some of the recordings to me are not very superb. Maria Callas has a recording on the same CD that I think - I think she’s off key. But, the best one I think is [Mirella Freni](#) [4] signing [La Rondine](#) [5] from Puccini. If anybody’s interested, it’s No. 16 on the CD. But that is to me overwhelming. No matter what I’m doing with music in the



background, when that particular recording comes on I just have to stop and do nothing but listen.”

Mirella Freni, one of the greatest sopranos of our time, and her voice have that effect on thousands of people all over the world and a few lucky ones were able to enjoy her presence at the sixth evening of the Adventures in Italian Opera with Fred Plotkin at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò hosted by one of America’s foremost experts on opera, Fred Plotkin.

“The night was memorable,” Fred Plotkin told *i-italy*, “because Freni is one of the greatest and most beloved singers of the past 60 years. She is also a woman who is lovely, genuine and unpretentious. My favorite part of the evening came when I watched her looking at her image on a large screen as she performed numerous roles. Her face would change and take on the character and emotions of the role she was observing. I decided, for the last 6 minutes of the program, to play the audio only of “Mi chiamano Mimì” from Puccini’s *La Bohème*. With her face to the public, the audience got to see this remarkable transformation as she shed 50 years and became the Mimì of her youth.”

Freni, the “Great diva,” is now retired and is busy with CUBEC Mirella Freni Belcanto Academy. The school was founded by Freni and Nicolai Ghiaurov (Freni’s spouse) in November 2002 because of the need to have a central institute to coach young opera singers and piano accompanists for lyric theater. “I am very happy with my decision and thus I have started my second life.” Her life devoted to the opera is the driving force behind this initiative thanks to her never-ceasing and assiduous work with young people during the many hours of lessons at Vignola and Modena.

The audience who took part of Adventures in Italian Opera with Fred Plotkin was given a chance to witness something rare: Freni in person talking about her artistry and Freni on video or audio where all could partake in that same artistry. What makes Freni a living legend is not the fact that she is just a good singer but she is a master at interpretation. “I never think, thought, about the voice but I focused on becoming the character,” she told the audience, “The most exciting part of my job was studying the part not by looking only at the music but at the words and actions of the opera. That way I was able to give something unique and different for each and every role.”

Thanks to Mr. Plotkin’s questions we were able to find out that playing a character that is going to die at the end of the opera makes no difference in the artist’s interpretation, that singing in another language is tough because you not only need to know the words but also their inflections and cadence and that when the audience is clapping vigorously while the singer needs to continue singing, he/she tries to stay in character and needs to remain focused (and patient!).

Mr. Plotkin and Mirella Freni have known each other intermittently through the years and their familiarity with each other was palpable and made the evening even more interesting and comfortable.

“I never approach these evenings as press interviews,” Mr. Plotkin added, “Rather, they are opportunities for me and for the visiting artist to teach the audience in the theater as well as those who watch the live streaming. I see these evenings as educational documents that young (and not so young) opera singers can benefit from. In addition, they educate audiences in the theater and at home. The conversation with Freni was a bit different because she told me she felt hesitant about her English after being away from America for so many years. I decided to use the evening to demonstrate and document her remarkable artistry in a way that those viewing can understand what made her great.”

This season of Adventures in Italian Opera with Fred Plotkin has ended on April 30th with the Metropolitan Opera’s Principal Conductor Fabio Luisi, one of the most prominent Italians in the opera world. In a few days, the 2013-2014 season will be announced, but you should hold Oct 1, Oct 24, Nov 13, Feb 27, Apr 4 and Apr 22.



plotkin-and-mirella-freni

Links

- [1] <http://ftp.ility.org/files/photoplotkin1367351759jpg>
- [2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Carter
- [3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert_Kaplan
- [4] <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Freni-Mirella.htm>
- [5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_rondine