

ARIADNE

AUF NAXOS

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARJORIE OWENS, ARIADNE IN BLO'S PRODUCTION OF *ARIADNE AUF NAXOS*

Soprano Marjorie Owens has recently completed her last season as a member of the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Ryan Opera Center. After receiving her Bachelors of Music from Baylor University, she was accepted into the Houston Grand Opera Young Artist Studio where she studied for four seasons. Over the summer, Ms. Owens sang the roles of Giulietta in Verdi's *Un Giorno di Regno* and Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Wolf Trap, both to great critical and public acclaim.

BLO: When did you first fall in love with opera?

MO: I attended a Governor's Magnet School for the Arts as well as my normal high school. The Vocal Division turned into an Opera Division when they hired a new teacher, Alan Fischer. My first report was on Maria Callas and when I heard her sing Italian opera—that was it. I was bitten by the opera bug.

BLO: Could you ever see yourself doing anything else?

MO: No way. I love opera way too much. Though, if there was no such thing, I possibly could've been a veterinarian or part of ASPCA. I'm a huge dog lover, especially dachshunds! It's an obsession.

BLO: Having performed in a number of other operas, what do you enjoy most about this one?

MO: Ariadne has such achingly beautiful passages. Strauss' music is nothing but pleasure to sing!

BLO: How would you describe Strauss' musical style? How does it meld with your voice?

MO: Strauss' music has gorgeous long flowing lines and is, by nature, incredibly expansive. I love how it reflects the emotion within the text perfectly. It can be gorgeous, as in the case of *Ariadne*, or frightening and exciting, like *Elektra* or *Salome*!

BLO: How is singing in German, in comparison to singing in French, Italian or English?

MO: It all comes down to the composer's ability to set the text to music in a way that emulates the ebbs and flows of the spoken language.

BLO: Which language do you find the most challenging?

MO: Perhaps Czech would be the most difficult for me. I had a crash course in how to read it once and am still recovering. I'm pretty sure some of the words don't contain vowels.

BLO: Which language is your favorite?

MO: Russian. Hands down. Russian opera has so many haunting folk melodies weaved in it and the language lends itself so easily to music. I love singing it!

BLO: How does the convoluted plot of this opera influence your performance?

MO: The plot as far as the Prima Donna/Ariadne is concerned is interesting. It allows me to show different levels of the character. I'm essentially an opera singer playing an opera singer playing a Greek heroine. It's great fun to be such a caricature lashing out at everyone in the beginning and then settling down into such a regal, earnest character for the opera.

BLO: How do you prepare vocally for such a demanding role?

MO: It's all about composure for me. Some of these climactic moments make me so excited and I have to express that without losing control.

BLO: After singing Ariadne to critical acclaim this past summer, how do you feel about performing the role again for BLO?

MO: I'm so excited that I get to perform this role with the BLO! I love Boston. I lived here as a child and have family here, so it's a very special place for me. I'm always thrilled to sing Strauss but more so, knowing that I get to sing it here!

BLO: Does each new opportunity to perform the roles encourage you to change or revamp your interpretation? How do you keep the role fresh?

MO: Every performance is always different. That's the beauty of live theater. The outward circumstances—such as different productions, casts, conductors, and directors—all lend themselves to exciting variations of the same character.

BLO: Can you relate at all to the character of Ariadne? How do you see her?

MO: She's a woman in love, abandoned, yet still faithful. She's a very human character, despairing of ever being reunited with her lover. I relate to her in that she's incredibly in love and it changed her life forever. She's not willing to settle for anything other than the perfection she had.

BLO: Luminaries over the years have taken on this role and made it their own. Who is your inspiration for this role?

MO: Leonie Rysanek and Jessye Norman are my two favorites. I used to watch Norman perform this opera on laserdisc in my college library. It took my breath away.

BLO: How will performing Ariadne be different than your past main stage roles?

MO: This is the only Strauss role I've performed. I can't wait to add more. Strauss' Ariadne strikes a chord in me that my past roles have not.

BLO: What would you like the audience to take away from your performance?

MO: I hope they thoroughly enjoy themselves and get swept away by the masterpiece that is *Ariadne auf Naxos*!

BLO: Do you have any pre-performance rituals?

MO: I always make sure to get plenty of sleep, stay hydrated, and allow enough time to warm up slowly.

BLO: How do you relax and unwind between performances?

MO: I play with my two miniature dachshunds, Koa and Nani! I also enjoy beating my fiancé, Quinn Kelsey, at Puzzlefighter on Xbox :)

BLO: What do you hope to take away from this performing experience?

MO: I always hope to grow as a musician and actor with every performance! Also, I love any chance of getting to sing Strauss. It's kind of its own reward.