

MAYA SAPONE

By Giorgio Di Marzo

For the interviews by GIORGIOSTUDIO we have met today Maya Sapone, a young soprano of Italian father and Thai mother. A videointerview with a very special end, in which Maya shows her improvisation skills, is available on our website.

Let's start with our usual, first question: what is art?

I consider Art as one of the most incredible activity of mankind. Art is an unborn impulse which makes us open our eyes and our minds towards imagination. Art is a force that pushes us towards creativity, fantasy, invention and acts according to our emotional level. An artist feels the desire of communicating, expressing his or her emotions, his or her vision of the world through the gifts or abilities given by Mother Nature. Therefore, Art manifests itself through various forms such as painting, drawing, architecture, poetry, theatre, music. My art is expressed thanks to the gift of singing, however I consider art not just an impulse but also an attitude of seeing and feeling things from a different angle and capturing little, invisible and apparently unnoticeable signs of life and the surroundings.

Since you have mentioned singing as an expression of art, tell us how your passion for singing and opera started about.

I do not recall exactly when it started, I think I always had it and surely I always wanted to express my feelings through singing. As a child I enjoyed making and imitating all sort of sounds. Being born in Gabon and having lived in Africa most of my childhood, I only came across western classical music at the age of 14. Before then music, rhythms and melodies I grew up with came from the African tribes and Middle-East cultures. As far as the passion for opera is concerned, it happened in Italy after watching and listening to a soprano singing on TV. However, I became more interested in the study of the vocal technique during my years in school. I remember auditioning for the school choir with a song by Madonna, *La Isla Bonita*, as I completely ignored the classical repertoire. Eventually, I was chosen to sing as a soloist for many

years. Nevertheless I started serious vocal training after my High School diploma.

What was your first engagement as an opera singer and what your most recent one?

My first engagement was when I was living in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1998 and was asked to perform the role of *Cherubino* in the *Marriage of Figaro* at the Kenya National Theatre. The most recent one was again few months ago in Kenya where I toured for 4 weeks under the invitation of the Italian Cultural Institute of Nairobi. The name of the project was *The Colours of the Voice* and the aim of the tour was to spread the vocal repertoire in Africa as well as bringing in the idea of classical music as something accessible to everyone. The aim of the concerts was also to introduce the voice as an extraordinary and versatile instrument for communication. The repertoire chosen ranged from baroque to contemporary music so that I displayed several ways of interpreting different styles, therefore using different colours of the voice. Other than performing, I also gave *Masterclasses* in singing at local schools and participated as a guest artist to improvisation workshops with local musicians. During these encounters, we all sat in a circle and started making music without a theme or a scheme, just pure music from the inside: a dialogue amongst people from different cultural backgrounds in one language, the universal language of music. It has been an utterly enjoyable and rich experience where I could see how, in some cultures, improvisation is an important moment for social gathering and dialoguing making music.

You have just spoken about improvisation: could you explain what is it about?

"To improvise" comes from the Latin word *Improvisus* which means unforeseen, unanticipated. Improvising is the art of composing, reciting, making music or singing extemporaneously, without a time, without a rule. To me, improvising is to create music spontaneously, translating feelings and thoughts into musical language without any construction but following the instincts and opening a communication channel with the external world. I do so through singing and the use of the body language.

What opera arias do you prefer singing?

I am a very versatile singer and I adore showing this ability! I like all sorts of genres from renaissance to contemporary music. Being a light lyric soprano I am suitable for the baroque and the classic repertoire but I also love all the Italian composers such as Bellini, Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, Puccini and Mascagni. My favourite arias are generally from the operas by Donizetti, Rossini and Mozart. I also enjoy singing contemporary opera, in particular the ones by Gian Carlo Menotti.

What kind of music do you listen to in your spare time?

I normally listen to all kind of music as I enjoy enriching my musical knowledge with many ideas and inspirations for my vocal improvisations. However, I prefer listening to rock music and pop. I must say that when I was a teenager I was a big heavy-metal and hard-rock fan. I loved the music by Metallica, Iron Maiden, Megadeath, Aerosmith, Guns 'N' Roses, Bon Jovi, Nirvana. Now I am much calmer also because, by performing mainly classical music, my ears are no longer used to the harsh and distorted sound of electric guitars, but I still love it and if I have the chance to attend a rock concert I will not miss it!

For further information: www.mayasapone.com