

The Sublime Sonya

by Phyllis Chesler



I am talking about the Bulgarian soprano, Sonya Yoncheva, whose performance I was privileged to enjoy yesterday via Zoom. There she was, wearing an impossibly filmy red gown, with diamonds flashing from her fingers, ears, and wrist, standing in the ornate Schussenried Cloister in southwest Germany. The impeccable Julien Quentin accompanied her on the Steinway.

Introduced by the great Christine Goerke, our leading Brunnhilde, Yoncheva was a force majeure as she launched into

Aida's first act aria "Ritorna vincitor!" Her voice was pure molten gold: Bright, burnished, liquid. I think her "take" on this aria is among the greatest ever. If only she could have sung this role on the Metropolitan stage, right here in New York City, together with Radames and Amneris and the full chorus. I even miss the camels.



Then on to Verdi (*Il Trovatore*), Puccini (*La Boheme*, *Madama Butterfly*), Dvorak (*Rusalka*) Purcell (*Dido and Aenas*), Massenet (*Thais* and *Manon*), Handel (*Rinaldo*), Bizet (*Carmen*), and Edith Piaf's *Hymne a l'amour*, a song I used to sing. Well, I also sang some of Mimi's arias from *La Boheme* but I knew early on that I could never, ever succeed in what is, essentially, an athlete's career. I had too many books to read and eventually to write.

But, after a long hard day of dealing with editing, rewriting, track changes, reading, interviewing—this was a bit of my old life, both in terms of singing but more so in terms of attending the opera, listening to it at home, watching videos, talking about opera on my good friend Lou Santacroce's NPR program "At The Opera." Those were the days of wine and roses...