

## **RAINA KABAIVANSKA \***

Bogdan Bogdanov

What she has achieved is undisputable and has often been discussed – by famous critics well-acquainted with her artistic career, outstanding musicians like Karajan, or celebrated peers like Pavarotti. But talking about her is quite an endeavour for yet another reason. She will not let us do just a routine talk. Like everyone having passed a schooling of hard work and reached such a peak, Raina Kabaivanska is a modest energetic person whose gaze is directed to the future. And on top of it, she is an intellectual person, too. To all other difficulties involved in talking about her, the outstanding combination adds up of mastered devotion, hard work, strong personality and mind. Particularly because these are qualities that supplement each other without being obstructive when one or another of them has to dominate.

Her personality draws its power from yet another source: the dynamic relation between professional devotion and realistic world attitude. Attached to the operatic stage, she constantly reminds us that opera depends on the much more complicated stage of living itself. This is also revealed in her understanding of art. Without being an opera fan myself, I can appreciate the authentic tint of her singing. And I am aware of her important place in the history of 20th century opera. What is more enchanting about her, however, is that she not only follows certain style and fights for its popularization, but also carries out a kind of programme, insisting that operatic art has to be alive. What does “alive” mean? It means happiness-giving. She sings and acts so as to make listeners and viewers happy. Which is not easy because these are all modern people. And one cannot sing or act the way singing and acting were at the beginning of the 20th century.

A split that stimulates the mind. Love for operatic art but also awareness that it is a language which gradually fades away. On the one hand, the understanding that this language is a difficult one and the singer has to be devoted to it by taking the way of a particular mission. Just like she has devoted herself to the mission of belcanto. On the other hand, the conviction that the essence of it is not hard work and formal achievement but the giving of happiness. Art makes sense if it makes people happy. Here are her ideas of opera as a living art in the language of my own understanding: art is the arena for meeting and exchanging energies; opera matters as far as it brings happiness, right now, in this very moment; pleasure lies in the opportunity of having the past as the backbone of the present happy and elevating experience; from its peak, life seems desperately uninteresting; what is essential are the moments of overcoming banality when the language of opera, having turned into particular music speech, feeds on the delight of those speaking it.

Hence, Raina’s skepticism about her own or anyone’s persona. Of course, there are people who are more valuable than others. She would never hesitate to support and love them. But what is precious are the moments of raising above commonplaceness in life. And these are moments that require togetherness. No one – alone or locked at home – can overcome commonplaceness. Opera however is an old means for achieving

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\* Raina Kabaivanska./ Compiled by: Georgi Tekev. Sofia: NBU, 2005

togetherness that overcomes commonplaceness and produces happiness. Raina has mastered this art and she wants to pass it to others, too. But all of this can also happen on the stage of life itself which is harder to master. One makes art at the table where one eats, or when s/he takes a walk, or when s/he simply converses with someone else, that is, when one relates and expresses one's moods with gestures. In all cases of communication, one is in a situation of togetherness apt to produce happiness. Opera is just an old and easier way of being in such a situation.

It seems to me that this is the key to the proper understanding of Raina Kabaivanska as artist and person. Hence the wide variety of her moods that correspond to the wide variety of her roles. She has many states of mind: she can be femininely coquettish and conversationally vibrant, but also moving straight forward to a clear aim; she can be pleasantly joking and compliable but also low-spirited and spectacularly displeased. When one talks to her, one has the feeling that she is constantly involved. She is one of those who love people for what they are, and not one of those who are unhappy with them for not being the way they should be. Hence, her gift for telling stories. Her accounts of the adventures of a house cat or the peculiarities of a hotel are wonderfully contrived and are just as memorable as her roles on the stage. She has the rare gift of getting rid of things by recreating and inserting them within the multiple dimensions of a given situation. And it doesn't really matter whether this is an impersonation on stage or in life.

That's how it is - our humble standpoints are always inbuilt in some kind of multidimensionality. This is the mark of life itself. How much easier opera is in this respect!, says Raina Kabaivanska. I do supply the possible morale: finally, anyone can find such a place and get rid of the hardships one encounters on the stage of life. But why go on in search of the essentials when anyway, Raina Kabaivanska will make a joke of this, question it and proceed with something else. Therefore, I'd rather give her a big embrace!