

Biography Milka Ternina

Milka Ternina was born on 19 December 1863 in Dolnji Sip in North Croatia, some 40 kilometres from Zagreb. She was to become the first international Croatian soprano. Following the death of her father when she was 6, she was cared for by her aunt and uncle Laura and Janko Jurković. Janko Jurković was a writer and the couple were part of intellectual life in Zagreb. Later Laura Jurković was to accompany Milka on her opera engagements around the world. She took special care of her costumes and it was Laura who bequeathed the costumes and other memorabilia to the Zagreb City Museum after Ternina's death.

Ternina studied singing at the Vienna Conservatory with Professor Joseph Gänsbacher and was awarded the first prize when she graduated in 1883. Her first public appearance was in 1882 in Zagreb when she sang Amelia in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* with the great Italian tenor Giovanni de Negri, also at the beginning of his career, as Riccardo. Ternina began her career with a one year engagement in Leipzig. From 1884 - 1886 she was a member of the Graz Opera and began to sing the Wagner roles which with she to become so associated including Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*. Then she moved to the City Theatre in Bremen where she first sang Brünnhilde in a complete *Ring* cycle in 1886. She sang Elisabeth in a season in Bremen and both the Court Opera in Berlin and the Royal Opera in Munich were keen to engage her. She chose Munich and only six months after joining the company was appointed to the rank of Royal Chamber Singer by the Bavarian Prince Regent. Ternina was to sing many roles in Munich over the next few years including Isolde, Elisabeth and Sieglinde. In 1895 Prince Leopold of Bavaria conferred the Ludwig medal on Ternina and it was through his recommendation that she was invited to sing at a concert in Moscow for the inauguration of Tsar Nicholas II. Following the concert the Tsar gave her a fabulous star brooch of diamonds and rubies.

Ternina was in great demand, particularly in Wagner roles. She first sang in London in a concert in 1896 and appeared at the Royal Opera House 98 times between 1898 and 1906, making her debut as Isolde in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* on 3 June 1898. Her roles included Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Brünnhilde and Sieglinde in Wagner's *Ring*, and Elsa and Otrud in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. Ternina sang the title role in Puccini's *Tosca* in the opera's first performance at the Royal Opera House on 12 July 1900; Puccini was in the audience and took a curtain call with Ternina. Puccini was delighted with her interpretation saying she was *the ideal Tosca* and she went on to sing the role at its first performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York on 3 December 1903 with Enrico Caruso as Cavaradossi.

More controversially Ternina sang Kundry at the first performances of Wagner's *Parsifal* in New York on 24 December 1903. Cosima Wagner had heard Ternina sing in London in 1898 and invited her to sing Kundry at Bayreuth in 1899. Cosima considered that *Parsifal* had been written for her and could therefore only be performed at Bayreuth. She was furious when it was produced in New York.

Whilst Ternina was in London in 1900 she asked the British artist Percy Anderson to design costumes for all her roles. Costumes were then made for her in Anderson's workrooms in Covent Garden including her costumes for *Tosca*.

Ternina's last performance at the Royal Opera House was as Elisabeth in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* on 28 May 1906 and she retired from the stage in 1907. She lived in the *Villa Ternina* in Berchtesgaden until she sold it and returned to Zagreb in 1913. Many years later during World War II, the house achieved notoriety when Adolf Hitler stayed there. Ternina died in Zagreb on 18 May 1941.

The Exhibition

Royal Opera House Collections are delighted to be collaborating with the Zagreb City Museum on this exhibition on Milka Ternina in the centenary year of her last performance at the Royal Opera House. The highlight of the exhibition is the costumes designed for Ternina by Percy Anderson in 1900 and made at his workrooms in Covent Garden. They include the stunning red silk cloak decorated with a gold lamé border which she wore in Act I of Puccini's *Tosca* and the elegant black empire line dress and jewellery she wore in Act II. The brown satin dress, cloak and crown she wore as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* can also be seen. Made by M. Nettleship of 58 Wigmore Street, this costume is richly decorated with embroidery, appliqués taken from old vestments, and flowers of metal thread, small pearls and glass beads. It was conserved and restored by Zagreb

City Museum's Senior Textile Conservator Dora Kušan. The final costume on display is Ternina's costume for Isolde in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The dress is of beige silk, decorated with an embroidered border of plant motifs in silk and gold threads. The accompanying magnificent purple silk cloak has a broader border also embroidered in silk and gold threads. It took Senior Textile Conservator Dora Kušan and an assistant over 2000 hours to conserve this costume, a project completed earlier this year.

The exhibition is a unique opportunity to view all four costumes in London for the first time since Ternina wore them on stage at the Royal Opera House between 1900 and 1906. The exhibition also includes photographs of Ternina in the costumes and an overview of her life and career.

There are photographs of her in her many roles as well as wearing the star brooch of diamonds and rubies given to her by Tsar Nicholas II after she sang in Moscow at a concert to mark his inauguration. Props including the goblet she used as Isolde and a horn she used as Kundry can also be seen. Autographed photographs from Puccini, Caruso, and Lilli Lehmann, medals, silver wreaths presented by admirers and a colourful banner made from ribbons from the bouquets of her many admirers in Munich are among the objects illustrating her life as the first international Croatian soprano.

Zagreb City Museum was founded in 1907 and is the largest municipal museum in Croatia. It is housed in a seventeenth century building once a convent of the Poor Clares. Recently subject to extensive restoration and renovation, the current permanent display was devised by curator Nada Premerl and tells the history of the city in a chronological fashion from prehistoric times until the present, utilising the archaeological remains under the museum as well as its extensive collection to illustrate how the identity and culture of the present city have come about. The Museum was nominated for the Best Museums award following the reopening in 1998. Some Milka Ternina material can be seen in the permanent display. For this exhibition in London however, all four costumes as well as a range of other objects not normally on display have been selected by Nada Premerl. Nada and her assistant Marina Perina have worked closely with Francesca Franchi, Head of Royal Opera House Collections and Cristina Franchi, Exhibitions Manager, to devise an exhibition especially for the Ground Floor Foyers and Floral Hall at the Royal Opera House. The exhibition opens in London on 18 September and runs until mid January 2007. It can be visited free during the Royal Opera House's normal daytime opening Monday to Saturdays 10am until 3.30pm. It can also be seen by ticket holders to performances. Free Exhibition leaflets will be available in the foyers and a detailed catalogue will be available from the Royal Opera House Shop.

It is hoped that the exhibition, like its subject Milka Ternina, will also tour to Berlin, Bayreuth and the Metropolitan Opera House New York.