Dr. Damjana Bratuž

LECTURE:
ITALIAN OPERA AND ITS SINGERS

Una carrellata personale / A personal overview

Monday, November 7, 2016 | 8:00 p.m.
Rm. B037, MacLaurin Building, B-Wing
University of Victoria

This presentation was created for the Course Italian Opera: Words and Music offered at Western University during the Winter Term of 2016 to students both of the Department of Italian Studies and of the Faculty of Music.

Dr. Bratuž surveys her own experience with the world of opera singers, from the 1935 itinerant operatic staging by Il carro di Tespi in Italy during the fascist regime, to her first encounter with foreign artists in Europe, to her discovery of North America’s great voices and the rebirth of the Italian Bel Canto style.

Born into a family known for fine singing, as a youngster Damjana Bratuž showed promise as a coloratura soprano (as well as a ballet dancer). The war and its consequences prevented her to develop those gifts, but during her doctoral studies in Piano Literature and Performance at Indiana University she took voice lessons as an elective. Later, as a Music Professor of Piano and Piano Literature at Western [1967-1993], she delighted in teaching also courses in Italian Diction and Vocal Literature – together with those in Chamber Music, Style & Interpretation, Semiotics of Music, and other original courses she initiated.
Biography

Damjana Bratuž visited the University of Victoria during her 1981 Bartók Centenary Tour, at the time she became one of the three musicians in Canada – with Zoltán Székely and Arpad Joó – who were honoured by the Hungarian cultural authorities for her “creative activity which has greatly contributed to the appreciation [connaissance] of Bartók’s œuvre.”

Professor Emeritus Damjana Bratuž is regarded as a pioneer in multidisciplinary musical research. Her Doctoral degree from Indiana University was in Piano Literature and Performance, with a Minor in Radio and Television.

Already in the late 1960s The Washington Post praised one of her piano recitals as « the kind of program that both enlightens and edifies the listener... academia and imagination were responsible for her unique and revealing listing... ».

As a lecturer, Dr. Bratuž has been known to explore the convergence of the arts and literature to aid the comprehension of the expressive content and of the construction of musical compositions. In her public presentations she began to intertwine images, sound, and text long before the recent technological advances have permitted her a welcome simplification of the process.

A grant from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a period of research in Semiotics at the University of Bologna enabled her to follow Umberto Eco’s seminars, and established Dr. Bratuž’s expertise in the semiotics of performance. At Western University, during the last two years of her tenure, she conducted a course in Musical Semiotics for the Centre of Theory and Criticism.

Since 1996 she has contributed to the International Project of Musical Signification with presentations given in Finland, Bologna, Aix-en-Provence, Paris, Rome and Vilnius. She has continued to participate in other international conferences and papers, and to give seminars, lecture-recitals, and master classes in Europe, North America and New Zealand.

Although the majority of her topics involve the music of Béla Bartók, in recent years the titles of her presentations have included: Luciano Berio: On Sound Becoming Sense; Symbolic Gestures in the Performance of Clementi’s ‘Didone abbandonata’ (University of Toronto); On the Embodiment of Form: Polychronic Movement in Flaubert and Debussy (Aix-en-Provence); The Feminine Side of the Musical Mind (University of Groningen, Holland), and most recently, On the Creation of One’s Own Precursors, for the conference ‘Minimalism Unbounded!’ (Turku and Helsinki).

Dr. Bratuž has been invited repeatedly to Finland for recitals and seminars, including the remarkable series of twelve seminars Musical Performance and the Dialogic Imagination (2000). In 2015, distinguished musicologist Susanna Välimäki, has interviewed her about her life and her teaching for the Finnish National Radio.

In the field of pedagogy, Dr. Bratuž has led and shaped the talent of music students and teachers in opposition to the prevailing training for early display and competition, toward a larger cultural contribution, one in which emergent artists could be supported in their communities by cultivated and well-informed interlocutors. She created special university courses, held summer sessions for teachers at several universities, adjudicated in national and international competitions, sharing her original approach and ideas both with the international academic world and with the general public.

David Stabler, music critic of The Oregonian whose series Lost in the Music of 2003 was shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize, has published two Tributes to Dr. Bratuž, An die Musik (1993) and Teaching to Our Imaginations, not to Our Limitations (2009). Both are available on www.damjanabratuz.ca.