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# OPERA NEWS



Eva Marton Scales the Heights  
*La Gioconda/Un Ballo in Maschera*



# Having It All

Eva Marton, her feet planted firmly on the ground, is scaling the heights as a dramatic soprano

by Thomas P. Lanier

In her Central Park South apartment, Eva Marton scorns the age-old curiosity about age. "Why is it important?" The tone is even, softly modulated (a plummy mix of Hildegard Knef and Eva Gabor), but the glint in her eyes would etch the subtext on the hapless interrogator's brain—if it weren't for the slightest hint of a grin curling up a corner of her voluptuous lips. The faintest of smiles speaks of a woman inclined to the good fight. It tells of a warm, curious, good nature mixed with caution. It suggests protocol and the establishment of territory.

"First of all, it is unheard of to come in off the street and ask even a simple woman this question. Second, I am an artist, and there are certain things that belong to me alone. I am proud of my beautiful hair, my two great children, my wonderful husband and my work, but if I am an artist, then my age is *not* important for others. So we have killed this topic, all right?" Yet it's immediately resurrected by the large-boned, towering woman with the fierce blue-green eyes. "Excuse me, I go on the stage not with my birthday but with my *voice*, and I find any book stupid that mentions such questions. These journals are for housewives, hairdressers, cleaning women, not for readers of OPERA NEWS, I hope." She laughs with the victorious pleasure of finding a beachhead.

From here on, it's smooth sailing. She relaxes into the posh cushions of the oversized sofa and smilingly answers the less inflammatory line of questioning. "Since 1977 I have lived in Hamburg. Before that I was in Frankfurt for five years. I have a German passport. My son, Zoltán, named after his father, is sixteen. My daughter, Diana, is eight. My husband is a surgeon and works hard but sometimes

accompanies me on trips. He is not much older than I am, if that interests you, and I have a dog."

Is she ever homesick for her native Budapest? "I don't know what 'homesick' means in 1983. Homesick for the city, for the people, for the Danube—I don't know. I'm so busy, my life is so complete with my wonderful family and career that takes me to all the great opera houses of the world, I can say honestly no, I am not homesick, not at this time. Perhaps in the future, who knows? Some people may feel it is not nice for me to say this, but I find it is always nice to tell the truth."

The budding dramatic soprano began operatic life as a coloratura Queen of Shemakha in *Le Coq d'Or* at the Budapest Opera in 1968, though she considers her real debut Szokolay's *Hamlet*, in which she had a speaking role, the Queen. Her life in music began as a student of the piano. "My teacher was a pupil of Bartók, a wonderful woman, to whom I am ever grateful. I played the piano for three years, but I didn't have the patience, the nerves or the talent to make it my career. On the other side, she told me I had a marvelous voice, so I changed my studies to singing when I was fourteen. I sang folk songs and little operas for schoolchildren and sang in the Budapest Radio Chorus for two years. I sang in only one octave, not higher or lower. When I was older, I went to the Liszt Academy, where I learned Italian. I didn't learn German until I went to Germany.

"My family did not have much money after the war, so I didn't have the possibility to see an opera until I was maybe fifteen. The first opera that made a real impression on me was *Lohengrin*, which I saw a year or so later. But I listened to the radio and lots of records. At that time my inter-

ests went in all directions—singing, acting, dancing. I really didn't know which road I would take."

She chose the one that led to Frankfurt in 1972, after little more than three years with the Budapest Opera. "[Christoph von] Dohnanyi heard me as Freia in *Das Rheingold* in Hungarian and offered me guest appearances as Alice Ford in a new production of *Falstaff* in Frankfurt. That same year I had my first engagement with the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, where I sang in *Guglielmo Tell* under [Riccardo] Muti—not particularly bad or good, but it was an important experience to sing Italian opera in Italy."

During her five years under contract in Frankfurt, Miss Marton appeared in other cities, such as Marseilles, Brussels and Berlin, and sang Tatyana in a new *Eugene Onegin* at the Vienna State Opera. "Those were difficult but rewarding years, because I was able to build my entire repertory. In one insane year, for example, I learned eight operas, including *Aida*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *La Forza del Destino*, *Die Meistersinger*, all in the original language. I wanted to move on from Frankfurt, however, and was lucky that Dohnanyi became Intendant in Hamburg and brought me there on a per-evening contract which, *Gott sei Dank*, left me free for guest appearances.

"I sang both Venus and Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* in Bayreuth during the 1977 and '78 seasons. In '78 I also made my debut at La Scala in *Il Trovatore* with Zubin Mehta, and during the same time I sang in *Bluebeard's Castle* there, of which I'm very proud, because it was the first time in the theater's history that an opera by a Hungarian composer was presented there in the original language. The next year at La Scala I sang *Tosca* with Pavarotti and then later *Andrea Chénier* conducted

The soprano in the twenty-second in a series of photos for OPERA NEWS by Stan Fellerman

## “When I sing Wagner, Strauss or Verdi, I’m a ship on the waves...”

by [Giuseppe] Patané. What else? *Aida* at the Baths of Caracalla and *Tosca* at Puccini’s home, Torre del Lago.

“I haven’t even mentioned San Francisco, Chicago and Buenos Aires, where at the Colón I had possibly the greatest successes of my career in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, with Birgit Nilsson, and *Lohengrin*. The spring of last year I was in Tokyo, where under [Wolfgang] Sawallisch I sang my first *Fidelio*. As you see, it’s work, work, work—and also a bit of madness, when you think I sang my first Leonora [*Il Trovatore*] at La Scala and my first Chrysothemis at the Met, to say nothing of this season’s *Gioconda* here. Most singers do these roles for the first time in Düsseldorf or Kaiserslautern, but I haven’t had the opportunity. As *Fidelio* says, ‘Ich habe Mut und Kraft’ [I have courage and strength].”

Miss Marton, who had made a respectable Met debut as Eva in *Die Meistersinger* on November 3, 1976,



and returned in the 1978–79 season as Chrysothemis, was still virtually unknown to the Metropolitan’s audience when the curtain went up on *Die Frau ohne Schatten* on October 12, 1981. The heat of that evening’s ticket was generated by Birgit Nilsson, singing the Dyer’s Wife for her first time in the house. When the legendary Swede appeared for her first solo curtain call, the expected roar of the audience went up as the confetti showered down. Many suspenseful seconds later, Marton appeared before the gold curtain in the richly brocaded cape of the Empress,

and a star had been born.

Miss Marton wears her heart—one feels it is a big one—on her sleeve. Her thoughts are manifest, her emotions overt. During the curtain calls that followed Acts I and II, uncertainty clouded her polite, good-colleague smile, but the thunderclaps and cries of “Brava!” that greeted her first solo bow at the opera’s end brought tears to her eyes and radiance to her smile. She sank to her knees in ecstasy.

“One of the highlights of that evening was finally, after singing in *Frau* so many times with Nilsson, to have her autograph my score. For me, she is the best Dyer’s Wife—Birgit always fights with her own shadow. She is unique. There are not such animals anymore. We can only name a couple—for instance my predecessor Rysanek, for many, many years unique throughout the world in the role of the Empress. I find it beautiful that when one artist is about to relinquish a role there is someone there, prepared to assume it and carry on the tradition. This doesn’t happen often, it’s just chance—that’s why it’s so wonderful when it does.

“How can I fully explain what that evening meant? I knew exactly who had sung this role before. I knew exactly that my time had come. I knew exactly that I had to grab this chance. I knew exactly what I know and what I can do. What I didn’t know was how the public would accept me. I had no friends here, I couldn’t buy two or three hundred tickets to give a claque. This evening was important because it was a measure of how far I had come, how strong I am.

“During the last *Frau*, just before the curtain was about to rise on Act II, we were all in position. I was on the floor at the feet of Birgit, and suddenly she said, ‘You know, I’ve been thinking over what is a good part for you.’ Imagine, Birgit thinking what’s good for me! ‘Which one?’ I asked. ‘Turandot—I made my career with that one.’ ‘Thank you very much, Birgit, but do you think I can do it?’ ‘Sure!’ she answered, and the curtain went up.”

Favorite roles? “Oh, that’s hard to say. I have many parts I love and feel secure in, but if you mean key roles that open doors, I would have to say the Empress and *Tosca*. People often talk about how difficult certain roles are, but there are no easy roles. I’ll tell you my favorite role, but it’s still a dream. I want to sing *Ariadne*, but in

this way—I sing the Composer, and I throw the Prima Donna aside because she can’t read my notes. Then I as the Composer step forward and sing *Ariadne*. When a director comes along who sees this idea as fabulous, I am ready. I am absolutely mad about Strauss. Probably my two favorite operas are *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*. *Die Aegyptische Helena* is not on the same level as these or *Elektra*, but it’s still impressive. *Abdella* is also beautiful, and *Salome* excites me. I plan to sing it in concert, but I don’t think it’s for me onstage.”

Miss Marton is getting to know the U.S. and trying to learn English by taking lessons daily. “The people are really free. I think they have more possibilities to achieve success than in Europe. For a country that’s really so young, I find the amount of culture very impressive. All the arts are represented at their best. Naturally I couldn’t live in New York. I’m a country person, a peasant. I live twenty minutes outside Hamburg in a wonderful house with a garden, which I love to tend when I have the chance. I like to put on gym pants and run in the fields among the birds. Sometimes a worm crawls out from a plant, and I take it away, and that’s heavenly. Then comes a neighbor, ‘How are you, Frau Marton? Where have you been this time?’ Then I must tell everything. We drink beer out in the sun, the children play. We have a sauna, an indoor swimming pool so we can swim even in the winter, a bar, a big Dutch kitchen with beautiful old tiles, where I love to cook for guests. There are lovely chestnut trees in the garden. I feel complete when I’m home.

“In New York City I couldn’t do this—maybe on Long Island. I guess I could live anywhere as long as I had greenery, sunshine and animals. My God, how many crazy people are walking around the streets here! But I find this city fascinating, despite thoughts of how many toilets are flushing every minute in all these skyscrapers.

“All this doesn’t matter when I think how happy I am now, because I have reached the moment of which I dreamed for fifteen years—to have a real success at the Metropolitan. This was like something out of an old book or movie. Everyone was asking, ‘Who is this Marton?’ I had no advance publicity, there was no *Schweinerei* [dirty business], and I had only one record-

## ...but when I sing Fedora or other verismo roles, I am the waves."

ing out, *Violanta*. When the people here recognize something good, they enjoy it and scream like mad. This is more exciting than the Empire State Building or a \$20,000,000 penthouse—this is what New York, America, means to me. I have received letters from fans, 'Oh how we need you, please come back!' This is beautiful—that people take the time to sit down and communicate their feelings."

Communication is the word that gets right to the core of Marton's success. The voice is big, gleaming and firmly controlled. She probably has the meanest chest tones in the business, capable of generating the kind of excitement that has all but become taboo these days, yet the top is resilient and powerful. The acting is in the most appropriate traditional style, yet with many personal touches, ideal for the larger-than-life heroines she portrays. Miss Marton is statuesque and looks like a prima donna, but it is her openness, generosity and naturalness that establish immediate rapport.

"The first time I ever experienced such a great success was in 1977 in Marseilles. It was *Tosca*, and after the performance there were so many people crowding around that I couldn't leave the theater until the police came. I worked hard and honestly for many years to earn such acclaim. I said to myself during this high excitement, remain calm, stay as you were. And so I continue to work. With more than forty roles in my repertory in four languages, I sometimes think *genug* [enough], but then came Fedora, a wonderful part, and now *Gioconda*. I must start giving recitals, but when do I have time to learn all *that* repertory?"

The inevitable question arises. "Of course it's difficult to mix career and family, but in my case it's not so terrible. I'm lucky to have a husband who takes a great interest in my work, and fabulous children. They come with me when it's possible, like summers in Salzburg. When I was in Rome, the children came and saw the fantastic sights I knew only from books at their age. I took my family with me to Manila, where we were the guests of President and Mrs. Marcos. How many children can have these experiences? My children are really quite normal, not theatrical, but Zoltán plays the drums in a band, and Diana wants piano lessons. They read a great deal. I'm proud of them, and they behave so well

I can take them into any society."

Born Eva Heinrich, the young woman while still in music school changed her name to her husband's, despite her mother's opposition. What if there were a divorce? "Never!" asserted the determined daughter, who told her teacher the next day she would pursue a career as Eva Marton. She is satisfied that she did.

"Until now I haven't really had the chance to work with many of the leading stage directors. I haven't had many new productions. Most of the time I have stepped into a production with few rehearsals. I seldom have had the opportunity really to try out a part—almost always developed my characterization right on the stage. An excellent director in Germany, however, said what I do onstage is good, because it is organic with my singing.

"In 1977 in Bayreuth, I did have the chance to work with Götz Friedrich. I also worked with him on *Tosca* in Munich and a wonderful *Manon Lescaut* in Hamburg. He showed me what to do, what not to do and how one can think deeply into a role. Other than him, there has been no one else so far. I don't like directors who tell you exactly on which beat to move a certain finger. Naturally there has to be an overall concept, and the blocking should remain the same, so you and your colleagues work together smoothly. But I need the freedom to improvise, to do little things differently from time to time. It's the only way to grow."

For Miss Marton, the roles that are especially difficult are Strauss' Helena and the *Fidelio* Leonore. "When I sing *Fidelio*, it means 200 percent concentration. I have to give the very last of myself. I didn't use to have this same feeling when I sang *Tosca* or *Manon Lescaut* or the Empress, but now, since the Met *Frau*, I feel this pressure for all my roles. I sing as if each performance may be the last. A dreadful thought, but such is the life of an artist—a short life, and one cannot do too much during its span, so all of us hope it won't be forgotten.

"I believe very strongly in singing any given role in a block of five or six performances, then a pause, and then move on to another role. This business of one evening *Aida*, the next *Elsa*, is very bad. Naturally, when I was engaged by a certain theater as an ensemble artist in the beginning of my career, that was the practice, but you

cannot give your best. For several years I sang so many Donna Annas and Countesses, and Mozart is especially hard to mix with other repertory, so I don't want to sing these parts any more—maybe in the future, not now."

What goes through a singer's mind during a demonstration that lasts several minutes, as she had after "Suicidio!" at her first *Gioconda* last fall? "I fell, *vrmmmm*, like a tree. I tried to think of my next phrase, but my mind went absolutely blank. When this applause was over, my next line was right there, *Gott sei Dank!* That was the first time I sang *Gioconda*. It is no news what Boito himself thought of this miserable text, so what should I say about it? Right from the beginning I saw the big difficulty would be how to make this part believable. If I can't believe it, how can I present it to the audience? So I tried to find something in it that is relevant, and what I came up with is the anguish of loving a man more than he loves you. I am not speaking from my own experience, because Zoltán, who was the first man in my life, and I are very much in love, and have been from the start."

There is a momentary interruption from Dr. Marton himself, recounting their meeting during his internship. "She came in complaining of a stomach ache," he remembers. "It was two in the morning, and I was half asleep, but one look and I instantly woke up. Later that morning, around eight, I went to her house. Her father reluctantly let me in. Here was this barefoot girl, a mass of red hair covering her pillow, dressed in a flimsy nightgown, I told her she had an intestinal virus, not appendicitis. Then I asked for a date."

Their eyes lock, and they smile. The soprano resumes: "Anyway, what I was saying is that usually the woman's needs are greater. In the case of *Gioconda*, she is pretty, sexy, and Enzo loves her—to a certain extent, but she is not the partner for a Grimaldo. My model for this role, in fact for most of my Italian parts, is Anna Magnani. Naturally *Gioconda* is not at *Tosca*'s level—she's only a street singer, simple and sympathetic. It's a role you build act by act. By the last act she is almost a *Tosca*, but there are moments throughout that call for full expression and temperamental outbursts.

"I love Puccini and verismo. Italian opera is just as dear to me as German. When I sing Wagner, Strauss or Verdi,

*continued on page 46*

# CALENDAR

## SAN ANTONIO GRAND OPERA (Theater for the Performing Arts)

Feb. 25 *Don Pasquale* (Donizetti). Russell; Flagello, Palacio, Otey; L. Smith, Igesz. Also 27

## OPERA/COLUMBUS (Ohio Theatre)

Mar. 3 *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Donizetti). Harman-Gulick; Fowler, Long, Markuson; Schaenen, Liotta. Also 5

## PALM BEACH OPERA (West Palm Beach Auditorium)

Mar. 4 *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Donizetti). Devia; Bartolini, Cowan, Nabokov; Csonka, Gratale, Sormani/Malabar. Also 6, 8

## LONG BEACH GRAND OPERA (Center Theater)

Mar. 5 *Death in Venice* (Britten). Remo, Hedlund; Manahan, C. Alden, Eastman/Dill, Eisenberg. Also 10, 12

## PORTLAND OPERA ASSOCIATION (Civic Auditorium)

Mar. 5 *La Fanciulla del West* (Puccini). Zschau; Poppov, Ludgin; Minde, Bakman, Kaufman. Also 9, 12

## TULSA OPERA (Chapman Music Hall)

Mar. 5 *Der Rosenkavalier* (Strauss). G. Jones, Niska, Wise; Rintzler, Clatworthy; Somogi, Frisell. Also 10, 12

## FLORIDA LYRIC OPERA (Centro Asturiano, Tampa)

Mar. 8 *La Bohème* (Puccini). Bew, Stevens; R. Ellis, BerGeest, Nison; Bracali, Laurenti/Maresca, Pascual. Also 9, 11, 12

## BATON ROUGE OPERA (Baton Rouge Centroplex Theatre)

Mar. 9 *Savitrì* (Holst). Hodes; Densen, J. Harris. *Dido and Aeneas* (Purcell). Hodes, Casella; Karousatos; Holt, Dorr, Dorr. Also 11

## FLORENTINE OPERA (Uihlein Hall, Milwaukee Perf. Arts Center)

Mar. 10 *Fidelio* (Beethoven). Alcorn, Wilcox; Busse, Justus, J. West; Peters, Hicks, Joy/Malabar. Also 12, 13

## NEW ORLEANS OPERA (Theatre for Performing Arts)

Mar. 10 *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner). Meier, Howard; Wenkoff, Braun, Hines; Klobucar, Hebert, Oswald. Also 12

## PROVIDENCE OPERA THEATRE (Ocean State Perf. Arts Center)

Mar. 11m *Tosca* (Puccini). Sundine; Striny, Willoughby; DeRenzi, Brovsky. Also 12

## AUGUSTA OPERA ASSOCIATION (Miller Theatre, Augusta, Ga.)

Mar. 11 *La Bohème* (Puccini). Lamy, Capone; Farina, McFarland, Owen; Flint, Getke. Also 12

## FORT WORTH OPERA ASSOCIATION (Convention Center Theatre)

Mar. 11 *Don Giovanni* (Mozart). Vaness, Christos, Langton; Devlin, Atherton, Malas; Kruger, Eddleman, Kruger/Mess. Also 13

## INDIANAPOLIS OPERA COMPANY (Murat Theatre)

Mar. 11 *The Elixir of Love* (Donizetti). Knighton; Kays, Orth, Kline; Caraher, Driver. Also 13

## MINNESOTA OPERA COMPANY (Orpheum Theatre, Minneapolis)

Mar. 11 *A Death in the Family* (Mayer). Brandt; McKeel, Dressen; Brunelle, Balk, Water/Bakkom. Also 12

## VIRGINIA OPERA ASSOCIATION (Norfolk Center Theater)

Mar. 11 *L'Elisir d'Amore* (Donizetti). Ommerle; B. Reed, Messing, Randolph; H. Evans, Joy. Also 13m, 16, 18, 20m

### Marton, continued from page 11

I'm a ship on the waves of the music and the conductor, but when I sing Fedora or other verismo roles, I am the waves."

Like any ascending star, Miss Marton is no innocent. She is aware of the tradition that preceded her, and of the Flagstads, Milanovs, Callases and Tebaldis before that. "Altogether these singers had more style and gave more than singers in 1983, but today there are other requirements, such as believability." She knows all about today's necessary evils of publicity, recordings, TV.

And she knows that the opera business today favors the young singer over the more mature artist, whose life experiences have enabled her to do full justice to the great roles. This creates a well-organized professional level of competence that stifles individual expression and spontaneity. She also recognizes the necessity of discretion: "I may not criticize anyone.

"Someone in the administration of the Met, I won't say who, asked, 'What would you like to sing here?' My answer was, 'Everything—but slowly.' This reminds me of one of my favorite jokes. There were two bulls standing in the hills looking down on a valley where there were many cows grazing. The young one said, 'Oh, I have to go down there right now. I need one of those beautiful cows.' The old bull gave him advice: 'Go slow and have them all.' This is my philosophy when it comes to my repertory, my career and my life." □

### Young Artists, continued from page 44

Regional Auditions, thought he sounded like a nascent heldentenor and brought him back to the Met on salary to attempt the conversion. There was nothing he could do to earn his money at that time, according to Ingpen, except coach and watch rehearsals. This season, Jenkins is singing the title role in *Parsifal* and roles in *Arabella*, *Idomeneo* and *Macbeth*. He too spent the summer in Bayreuth, on YADP money, having a look at *Parsifal*.

Ingpen has the gambler's instinct, refined by years as an artist manager and administrator in Europe. "I've always been interested in spotting young talent," she says. "It's a game—to see where they go." She remembers picking out a distinctive voice at a Covent Garden rehearsal. The voice belonged to young Joan Sutherland, and Ingpen managed the soprano for six years. She compares the Young Artist program to the old European-style training of house affiliation, in which a singer would stay at one house for six months, have two months' vacation and four months of guest engagements. She doubts that the Met's program could be duplicated easily, however—only a company with a permanent coaching staff has the resources to support it.

Even considering the fact that regular staff members do the bulk of the work, the program is expensive, with direct costs budgeted this year at roughly \$300,000. Major donors have included Warner Communications, whose gift also underwrites the National

Council Auditions final concert. The development department has given the program major play in its endowment drive, and the income from two recent major gifts—from the William Randolph Hearst Foundation and the Equitable Life Assurance Society—is earmarked for young artists. "People enjoy investing in the future," says Met development director Marilyn Shapiro.

Three years into the program, it's hard to say how the investment will pay off. The singers may not remain loyal, or they may not develop into voices that will work in the Met's vast space. Ingpen is already beginning a bit of informal triage, designating some participants who "won't work here a great deal." She insists that support, financial and personal, doesn't make the artists lazy—"They are all ambitious." But there are no guarantees that an early career managed by the Met will produce tomorrow's great artists.

Ingpen and Stayer refuse to forecast. Their "unstructured" program has no five-year plan; "just a three-year plan, maybe four," "nice packages" of house roles for individual singers as far ahead as the '84-85 season. Forecasting is for the Met's development office. For Ingpen and Stayer there is the pleasure of planning—about a role, a language, a weight problem—with the singers they've picked, a sharp lookout for new possibilities and belief that with good preparation, the future will take care of itself. "We're helping to bring up a generation of singers," says Ingpen. And that's as far as she'll go. □