## The world is her STAGE

Manisha Lakhe in conversation with soprano Margarita de Arellano, whose rendition of *La Tarantula* has left the writer in awe

Inger, love, hatred, anguish, yearning, fear - her voice expresses passions that are so huge, they can only be operatic. And this soprano brings it all to Mumbai. Margarita de Arellano, the Cuban-born American soprano who has amazed audiences across Europe and America, holds a Master's degree from The Juilliard School in New York. Her operatic repertoire covers many of the leading soprano roles in operas by Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi and she has performed at the best opera houses around the world. Excerpts from an interview:

This is your first trip to India, and you already have fans here. Tell us what you are going to perform.

I will perform a group of Richard Strauss Lieder (songs in German) written from 1880; Charles Gounod's Aria (1818-1893) from his opera Faust: The Jewel Song/ Marguerite's scene will be performed in its entirety and my brilliant pianist, Maciej Pikulski, will accompany them as if an orchestra would be present. I am also paying homage to the Spanish Madrigals and Goya's La Maja. And, there's more.

How different is it singing in traditional opera houses, as in Munich and Paris, compared to modern ones in Miami? How does the history of the place affect your performance, if at all? La Bastille, in Paris is modern; the Munich opera house is typically European, as are the venues in Vienna, Stuttgart and Barcelona. But, it is the piece and its interpretation, instigated by the director, which makes the difference. American opera



Margarita de Arellano performing La Boheme in Seattle

houses have experimented with rather strange productions which the European houses refer to as 'Regie-theatre'. I'd rather stick with the story of the opera, and add nuances that bring a fresh approach to the work.

So much has been said about your title role of *Lulu* in David Alden's production. Tell us about your experience.

Lulu was indeed a great experience in my artistic life. But, as great as it was, it also locked me into a sort of 'Lulu Trap'. I could not sing anything else for a long while. I performed the three-act Cerha version from the Berg manuscript about 24 times with only one or two days of rest between performances. I had to learn the orchestra part and study the full partiture. It was a double task for me not only to sing and act, but, very keenly listen as if I was my own conductor in order

to come in properly and not make mistakes. It was an allconsuming masterpiece, and though I am grateful, I do not wish to repeat this experience again!

Tell us something about the people who have shaped you as a singer and performer.

My father was a frustrated tenor and took me to his rehearsals at a very early age. I studied formally with his voice teacher in Miami from the age of 16. My high school music teacher, Roscoe Speed, was an incredible asset to my talent development back then. He passed away some 10 years ago... and I will never forget him. With his guidance I auditioned for many institutions

and was accepted with a scholarship at the University of Miami and later graduated from the Juilliard Conservatory of Music with a Master's degree. Zubin Mehta, a proud Indian who eats the spiciest food, is someone I cherish working with and absolutely love! He has brought me to great musical expansion and horizons.

What are the roles you would love to perform and with whom?

I would love to perform Verdi,
Donizetti and Richard Strauss
Operas; but of course I welcome
all operas that come my way.
I also enjoyed performing the
role of Roxanna in Szymanowski's
King Roger at the Bastille last
year (Paris National Opera).

(Margarita de Arellano performs with Maciej Pikulski at the Experimental Theatre on 25th June. For more details, see Page 22 of the Programme Guide)