

THE NATIVE AMONG STRANGERS

// Yulia Lezhneva in The Philharmony

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Dmitriy Renanskiy recounts

Last December the record of The H-minor Mass of Bach conducted by Mark Minkovsky was released under the prominent French label Naïve. In the West it has become a regular (though an excellent) interpretation of The Mass, in this country the album has not yet been noticed. Whereas it has been a milestone in the history of our country's Vocal School – Minkovsky engaged an eighteen year old soprano Yulia Lezhneva to sing a solo part. It looks like Gergiev taking a young German bass in The Mariinsky Theatre to sing in "The Life For the Tzar" – although the case of a Russian woman singer recording Bach's music under the conductor's baton of the Grand Antique Lover, seems even more exotic. World's vocal market has not valued our home voices so far: their repertoire possibilities being limited with Russian Opera and Late Romanticism leave everything composed earlier or later far beyond style and technique availability for them. But Lezhneva, a nineteen year old singer, rapidly makes her career and name singing voice-breaking Baroque arias and even more difficult Rossini's music, which have never been sung in our Opera realm.

Therefore a year and a half ago Lezhneva looked like an alien from a very far terrain at the Elena Obraztsova International Contest of which the girl gained the Grand Pris and became famous, (and, on the whole, that was not an exaggeration: Lezhneva was born in Sakhalin). She hardly opened her mouth to make everybody listen in amazement, both the public and the opera voices connoisseurs of the jury. Unbelievably light, supple and vivid voice with a coloratura mezzo soprano potential, with almost incorporeal and unearthly timbre was ideal for spiritual music. For all these Lezhneva has been hurriedly reputed "the second Cecilia Bartoli". This, of course, is an exaggeration, but it only emphasizes the extraordinary vocal gift of the girl. Nevertheless, we can compare Lezhneva with three great Russian singers of the last century. Her voice of three octaves and the commitment to Rossini's music resemble Zara Dolukhanova, the incorporeal sound of an angel is associated with Viktoria Ivanova and the European awareness of style reminds of Nina Dorliak. There were neither positions nor repertoire for all three of them in the united Soviet family of the cast iron throats, and they had to change the opera stage for concerts.

It seems that Lezhneva will be all right on both stages. Last year she worked with Alberto Dzedda, the world's best expert on the Early Romantic Opera and participated in the respectable Rossini Music Competition in Pesaro singing backup for Juan Diego Flores, the best today's tenor. And now she comes to the Maly Zal of the Philharmony in a recital of Antonio Vivaldi's and Riccardo Broschi's music. The latter was the brother of Farinelli, the most famous castrate of the world's history. Next May Lezhneva will sing an opera of Vivaldi in the company of the most refined Baroque divas with Il Giardino Armonico (the same pyrotechnical string musicians who accompanied Bartoli's record of "Vivaldi Album") in London's Barbican Hall. She is going to become more famous in the West than in her native country. That means things are likely to be as usual and always. Certainly, minus the talent and the voice.