



September 30-October 7, 2010

VOL 30 NO 5

Opera Preview

Braving the high Cs

SOPRANO BRINGS HER SIGNATURE ROLE OF AIDA
TO HER HOMETOWN CROWD

By Glenn Sumi



To some, Verdi's *Aida* is the grandest of grand operas, the one with the famous Triumphant March, frequently staged with more than one zoo animal.

According to Michele Capalbo, though, the Canadian Opera Company's new production has eliminated most of the traditional trappings.

"If you're expecting the infamous Triumphant March, you will either be challenged or surprised or appalled or completely invigorated," says the Kitchener-born soprano, who shares the title role with Sondra Radvanovsky.

Capalbo's performed the part of the Ethiopian princess enslaved in Egypt around the world, sometimes in high-concept productions. One version required her to paint her face with gold and blue "racing stripes," the designer wanting to evoke the tradition of some African people painting their skin.

Tim Albery's COC production, she says, is set somewhere in the Middle East, likely in the 1970s.

"The set is simple, but the mechanics of the changes are very sophisticated," she says. "It provides the opportunity to really put the focus on the story, which is this terrific love triangle."

The role is famous for its dramatic complexity – *Aida* is torn between family, country and love – as well its treacherous high notes, which include a very exposed high C at the end of the aria *O patria mia*.

"That aria comes late and is the antithesis of *Ritorna vincitor* in the first act, which is thrusting and chesty and violent," says Capalbo, who's of Calabrian background. "The challenge is to have the dexterity and subtlety and lyricism to hit those floats at the end."

Although she's currently based in Manhattan, she hasn't seen the Elton John/Tim Rice Broadway musical based on the opera.

"I love that the original inspired this creative team, but I can honestly say I have no interest in it."

Nor is she rushing to see the live Met broadcasts in movie theatres.

"I'm all for expanding the audience, but I think opera is best experienced and served in a natural acoustic environment, a house made for opera singing."

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