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Kathryn Dunmore, SPECIAL TO THE BURLINGTON POST



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Burlington is home to another Juno Award as opera singer Adrienne Pieczonka won the 2010 Juno Award for Best Classical Album of the Year: Vocal or Choral Performance for her recording of Puccini arias.

Currently in Florence, Italy rehearsing for her debut in the role of Die Kaiserin in Strauss' Die Frau ohne Schatten at the Maggio Musicale, conducted by Zubin Mehta, Pieczonka said the Juno is a great honour.

"I am so thrilled to win a Juno," she said. "It means a great deal to me and I regret I wasn't able to attend the ceremony. It's a real nod or acknowledgement from the industry that all my hard work is appreciated and has paid off. This is a great feeling."

Pieczonka, 47, joined the operatic world somewhat late in life but knew she wanted to be on stage from an

early age. While attending St. Raphael's elementary school then Nelson High School, she got involved in as many stage productions as she could.

"I loved all kinds of music — pop, rock, musical theatre, etc. I was involved in school choirs, plays and musicals so I really wanted to be on the stage from an early age; I guess you could call me a ham. I knew by the time I was 16 or 17 that I wanted to take my singing seriously. I came to opera late — I saw my first opera when I was 14 in Hamilton and actually wasn't all that taken by it; but it slowly grew on me."

'Try my luck in Europe'

After completing an undergraduate at the University of Western Ontario, she attended a grad program specializing in opera at the University of Toronto. "We learned many aspects of opera — acting, stage movement, language diction, makeup. I got to appear in several operas and I really got hooked during these years. It was very clear to me that I wanted a career in opera. It seemed like a logical choice to try my luck in Europe, which is the home of opera." After school, she left Canada for Europe and only returned in 2005.

In May, she will go to Berlin to reprise the role of Tosca and then she goes to Vienna for performances of the title role in Arabella and the farewell gala to honour Ioan Holender, intendant of the Vienna State Opera. "In the fall, I will make my debut at the opera in Paris and I'll be in Vienna for Christmas," she noted. "This is the reality of a professional opera singer. There is a lot of travel involved and it's not always glamorous."

As for performances back home, local audiences will have to wait until next year to view their home grown operatic star. "I'll be appearing in May 2011 with the COC (Canadian Opera Company) in Toronto, in a wonderful opera called Ariadne auf Naxos. I will also sing a solo recital in the spring in Toronto. I would love to perform in Burlington — I feel it's rather overdue. I've been hearing all about the new centre for the performing arts and I think this is terrific for the city."

As for the album that won her the Juno Award, Pieczonka said it's the only one of her albums that she can really listen to. "I think the operas of Puccini go right to the heart; he was a master of beautiful melody and so I think this particular CD is very easy on the ears. My last CD was a collection of German arias by Strauss and Wagner and though I love this music dearly, it's perhaps not as popular or to everyone's tastes as much as Puccini's music. I had a ball recording the Puccini disc and I even listen to it now and again, which is rare for me. I don't often listen to my own singing and I find that other singers share this habit with me. But the Puccini melodies are just so rich and velvety that I can't resist!

"In terms of a followup CD, there has been talk of recording a CD of Verdi arias. This would be a dream come true, so fingers crossed this will happen and I'll get to release my third solo aria album."