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What do you say, Adrienne Pieczonka?

The Canadian Opera Company soprano talks about tabloid operas, weird voice-protection techniques and getting away with (onstage) murder.

1. Before *Lisbeth Salander*, there was *Floria Tosca*.

A florid melodrama set against a backdrop of civil unrest, Puccini's popular opera features a dark-haired firebrand of a heroine who is swept up in the moral and political corruption of 19th-century Rome. Floria Tosca is a revered and robust singer, not a sinewy Swedish hacker, but like the girl with the dragon tattoo, she's driven to extreme measures in the face of sexual violence. Adrienne Pieczonka, who's performed the role several times before, says she's thrilled to play such a strong, powerful woman—a rare thing for a soprano singer. "The roles I play are often victims," she explains, "very demure, gentle souls. I'm either being murdered or committing suicide. This is different. Basically, she's being raped, and she's defending herself. She's not taking it—she's strong enough to react, in the last moment, and stab this very strong, big, powerful man who's the chief of police. This one, she's got fire to her."

2. Europe may have the best opera halls, but when it comes to raising a family, Toronto's tops.

Pieczonka is a native of Burlington, Ont., and she got her formal training in Canada. Understandably, after she completed her studies here in Canada, the rising soprano followed her "fate" to Vienna—a city with a rich classical tradition that is, historically speaking, one of the world's opera hotbeds. She lived there for a half-dozen years, then moved to London, England. While singing in Toronto in 2004, she met mezzo-soprano Laura Tucker, the woman who's now her wife. They started a relationship and decided to have a child. Soon after Tucker became pregnant, they agreed it was time to move back to Canada for good. "We enjoyed England. But they didn't have same-sex marriage—I think they had civil unions—and I didn't feel we had the roots, the support system," says Pieczonka. "We had some good friends, but not an 'it takes a village' kind of thing." They bought a house in the Annex, got hitched and had a daughter, Grace, in October of 2005.

3. She's not averse to looking Lynchian if it'll help protect her voice.

All those long-haul flights back to Europe—where the singer still primarily works—can be absolute hell on a girl's oh-so-delicate voice. To counteract the desert-dry air and pressure changes that come with being cooped up inside an airplane, Pieczonka has a few tricks. For regular use, she's a fan of saline nasal sprays, but when she's stuck in the air for hours on end, she pulls out the big guns. "I have this thing that's called a personal nebulizer. It's a mask, with a tiny little battery-powered humidifier. You fill it with a little water and it just creates steam. I look like something from *Blue Velvet*! I get the weirdest looks, and the flight attendants rush up and say, 'What is that?'"

4. *Anna Nicole*, the opera? Bring it on!

The past couple of years have seen a surge of pop-opera crossovers and contemporary operas with a decidedly populist bent, from Rufus Wainwright's *Prima Donna* to last year's Anna Nicole Smith-inspired production to *Rob Ford: The Opera*, which premieres this week in Toronto. Though she still favours Verdi and Mozart, Pieczonka is a staunch supporter of opera's new wave. "Bring it on! I didn't go see *Prima Donna*. I read mixed things about it, but I admire him for being able to write an opera—I certainly couldn't," she says. "There was a buzz about it, and I suppose a lot of people went because he was Rufus Wainwright. Things like *Anna Nicole* in London, they're provocative! Do an opera about the Kardashians! Why not? Probably someone will. It's...maybe not edgy, but it's topical. I'm old-fashioned and may tend to love those classical takes on things, but I'm all for things that bring in a new audience."