

Royal Occasion Gala honours soprano Adrienne Pieczonka OPERA / Toronto opera diva ads honorary fellowship from Royal Conservatory of Music to her mantel

Chris Dupuis / Toronto / Wednesday, May 22, 2013

Talking to Adrienne Pieczonka, you'd never realize she's a star. Currently one of opera's hottest commodities, the renowned Canadian singer has set stages alight around the globe with her shimmering soprano. Despite her celebrity status, the plainspoken Burlington, Ontario, native remains the textbook definition of down to earth. Her accolades include Dora and Juno Awards, two honorary doctorates and the Order of Canada, as well as numerous international prizes. This week, her mantel gets a little more crowded as she adds an honorary fellowship from the Royal Conservatory of Music.

Chris Dupuis: How does it feel to be receiving this award?

Adrienne Pieczonka: Winning an award always comes as a bit of a shock, really, an unexpected and delightful one, of course. Honestly, I'm very humbled by each and every award I have. The RMC fellowship is special because it's an organization fostering arts education for all Canadians at many different levels. It's very inclusive and far-reaching. As an added bonus, I live just 10 minutes from there, so it's a short commute to the ceremony.

You've performed more than 40 roles to date in your career. What makes a "great part" in your mind?

Because I'm a soprano who often sings Verdi and Wagner, I frequently end up playing victims: women who are murdered or treated badly by another character or society. When I first sang the role of Floria in *Tosca* in 2008, it was so liberating to play a strong female character. She's the murderess in that story, taking vengeance for the brutal torture of her lover. It was really freeing to play a fiery character like that.

You made the decision to come out officially in your career in 2002. Did working in opera make that process easier or harder?

One might think the opera world is accepting of homosexuality, but it can be more conservative than one imagines. I don't think it's much different than the corporate world. It's no easier or harder, in my opinion. There are many gays and lesbians in the opera world, but each individual has to come out on their own terms, in their own time, and for their own reasons.

Your travel schedule can be pretty hectic, to put it mildly. How do you manage the demands of a partner and a child alongside that?

When my wife, Laura, and I were embarking on starting a family, we decided to move back to Toronto. Sometimes we wonder whether a European base would be easier since so much of my work is there, but we don't regret our decision. Canada recognizing same-sex marriage in 2005 was a huge factor. It was important for us to be able to marry so our family was recognized and accepted by law and society. Being a parent is a huge blessing. I was 42 when it happened, and I hadn't thought it was in the cards for me, but it's been thrilling. Of course, it can be exhausting and challenging, but it's also one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.



Soprano Adrienne Pieczonka
(Johannes Ifkovits)