

C Music TV talks exclusively to internationally renowned opera star Angela Gheorghiu

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Interview transcribed by Claire Thomas at C Music TV

C Music TV, Mark Forrest: Angela, welcome to C Music TV – it's great to see you on the channel. Can I take you back first of all to your early days in Romania, can you pinpoint the first moment when you were aware of music and its beauty and power?

AG: I have always had an awareness for the beauty and power of music, and I always say this. I started when I was very little - when I was in kindergarten - and my first feeling of the public was from my family and colleagues. The very first song I sang was Brahms Lieder and I sang in front of my colleagues with my huge voice. I never sang in a choir because my voice was too loud, so they put me in front from the very beginning and I also used to conduct! I always felt very different and I realised that Angela must follow her destiny. I was really supported by my family, colleagues and teachers all my life.

MF: Who do you think was the first person to identify that?

AG: I don't think it was anyone, because it was so clear. When I was a little girl and I started to sing with this unconventional voice, a voice in canto - a powerful voice - it was clear. Nobody told me 'You will become an artist', everybody told me 'You are(an artist)'.

MF: How important was it that you are from Romania and not Germany, not Italy or Spain? How do you think your country has shaped you?

AG: Very much, of course it's a matter of my destiny – it doesn't matter what country I am from. In Romania where there is a communist mentality everybody supports sport and music – more than normal countries. Of course, later I realised my country never helped me in a way, so I don't have

the support as I see an American, or a German or French or Russian or whatever. My country of course they are proud of me but they have no political or economic power to help me. So everything I ever did is just because of me.

MF: So you came for your big break to London?

AG: Yes, I was still a student and I really wanted to audition in Covent Garden, only Covent Garden. So I came to London with my very few English words and the audition was quite wonderful because the person I asked someone where the stage door of the Royal Opera House was the person who I had to sing to at the audition! That was Peter Katona who I asked on the street and when we saw each other it was just a flash! He is in fact the person who has supported me and trusted me from the beginning until today, so that's 20 years of complete trust.

MF: And how famous or successful were you at that point?

AG: I was famous all the time! For me to audition in Covent Garden was a natural step, I never thought that in another country I would have less success than in Romania. In Romania they love voices especially sopranos and I started when I was 17 with then on stage at La Traviata from when I was 18. You can see on YouTube or wherever that Angela started to sing Anna Bolena, Traviata, La Rondine, Butterfly – recording and filming - so I'd already seen microphones and cameras for a long time!

MF: And how did you select the roles that you were going to sing?

This is another point that I want you to know about me – of course I studied in the Academy of Music for 6 years - I was in a boarding school for 4 years. In the last year of my academy I sang La Bohème and that was my first entire role and I learned it by myself. From that moment everything I ever did in my 20 year career – I never had a teacher, coach or pianist, so everything I ever did it's my choice and I learned it only by myself.

MF: That's very unusual.

AG: Very.

Now, London is important for many reasons – you've told me about your first big break and your audition at Covent Garden. There was your first production of La Boheme where you met your husband Roberto (Alagna), and you're celebrating 20 years of that production and meeting him in 2012. How well do you first remember that meeting?

Like it was yesterday. My first meeting with Roberto here in Covent Garden was so strong and so real and so true! I met him during our first piano rehearsal, he was late and he heard me from behind the door and he'd never met so he thought I was something big. I met him on the first day of rehearsal I was wearing a really short kilt, I was very Scottish! He opened the door and from that moment it was really a coup de foudre, as we say in French. When we started our rehearsal we knew there was something between us. But I was married at that time with Andre and Roberto was married to Florence his wife, they'd just had a child so it was at that time we knew there was something strong - but we had to be apart. It was rather difficult for both of us at that time, but in our world this happened a lot – people falling in love with their partner. It's so easy – you're

touching each other, you're kissing, you're so emotional or sometimes you are alone – so this is quite common. You are vulnerable.

[How does it work with your busy, jet setting lifestyle? Presumably you have to work together? Or agree to never work together?](#)

Over the last 20 years I have said many times 'I'll never sing with you' or 'I'll always sing with you', generally he wants to sing with me. For me emotionally as a woman it's very tough to have these double emotions all the time. When I sing I wish for everybody to feel the real story when I perform. For more than 10 years Roberto and I did everything together, 24 hours a days - we made lots of recordings, films and performances and concerts. Everything was planned 80% together, so this time for us was great – it's like a legend. Also to be a soprano and tenor, the same age – big personalities it's not always easy. I had a lot of emotions at this time, it was like being Angela doubled and I had the same feeling that I had for my partner as for myself. So to carry this in a performance it's very hard because I am a very emotional person.

[Does that mean that you do better performances when you perform with someone else?](#)

No not at all. To tell you the truth the performances I sang with Roberto were unbelievable- something happened in the air. Anyone who has ever seen us perform together will tell you the same, you can't explain it – it's absolutely true. He's a fantastic tenor with a great personality so of course the performances are wonderful, but at the same time I'm an artist, I am Angela. It doesn't matter who my partner is. If I have a good partner and he is feeling good then we'll have a good performance – if you have a good cast it will be perfect. You must recognise that to sing in Covent Garden rather than in Sofia – sorry no offence- it's not the same! Absolutely not!

[Let's talk about Maria Callas, I have your new CD 'Homage to Maria Callas' here. In her day she was known as the biggest diva of her time. You now have that reputation. Is that a good reputation to have, do you enjoy having that reputation?](#)

I enjoy it, I know it. I don't want to pretend. I have two ears and two eyes. This is the real Angela – I am always trying to be original, that's why I decide not to have a teacher or to have an adviser. I never ask anybody about anything, ever! Not for my life, nor for my career. Why? Because I really trust my instinct, I really believe in instinct and I really believe in originality. Also I have the courage to say so no and to cancel sometimes if I am not well and I am responsible. I don't want to make people in front of me suffer.

[MF: How much of this self-awareness and self-assurance do you think you share with Maria Callas?](#)

I don't really want to make the comparison between me and Maria Callas just to make people talk or to get a reaction. The idea was to make a duet with Maria so EMI had this idea- Maria Callas is my colleague on EMI Classics and on this CD we have almost the same repertoire. It was actually a coincidence, I already had this repertoire and everything I've ever chosen to sing has been my decision.

I think this recording is very respectful. I have discovered our personalities are very similar – her character, her force, her charisma. I think we must respect the human voice as the most difficult and perfect and wonderful instrument in the world. The voice is inside our body. But if something bad

happens inside our body we cannot be the artist that everybody wants and expects. There was a time when Maria decided in Rome when she sang Norma that her voice wasn't good and I think it's so good to be conscious of that. I think people should be responsible about their performance and not be judged as a bad person. That's something I really respect about her and also she was always aware about her presence and she was always very careful and I like this school, I am in this school. People think if I ask something that means I am difficult but when I ask something, it's because I want a good performance. It's a show; everyone pays for their ticket to see a show. We have lights, we have the stage and we have the public. Everyone involved wants to have a wonderful performance and a success. I don't believe in people who say 'I am singing for me, so the success doesn't matter'. Excuse me, why? It's a contradiction. Of course we are going on stage to please people and to make people dream, to forget about their problems. I play someone else; I play a different character all the time because I sing a lot of roles. Why? This is to make people dream, to have magic, this is a performance, a show. My first food as an artist is the applause. I like that.

[Are you able to find time in your life to stop being Angela the opera singer and be private?](#)

I do everything you do; I have a body, I need to wash. Of course I always try to be normal; I think an artist who has an international career cannot be a normal person, impossible! We don't have our family with us, I'm not home, all my colleagues are always crying – I want to be home, where are my children, my husband, my wife...This is not a normal life, not a normal person who is judged like you or everyone who sees my now. They see me with completely different eyes. A normal person cannot be on stage – you are judged on everything. I try to be normal, but I am not!

[But you love all that don't you? You enjoy it?](#)

Yes I enjoy it; I accept that I'm a public person. I accept cameras and people stopping me on the street to take a photo – that's something that normal people don't have. I like the things people say to me about my singing, a lot of people say to me 'Your music saved me'. At the same time of course I feel like I'm the worst person in the world, I'm alone and I don't have my family or friends with me.

[What advice would you give to young people who would like to have a career like yours?](#)

They need to give everything and to be person who gives and never asks for anything in return. I remember when I started I never thought I would be famous or have money or houses. I do have houses now but I am a never there, I am always in airplanes or hotels or concert halls. This is stronger than me, this is my destiny. You must be in love with music and in love with your destiny and to accept everything good and bad.

[What do you think of C Music TV and the way it mixes opera and film music?](#)

I think C Music TV is doing a wonderful job, I really agree with this type of mixing good music. Bravo.