

Tenor David Cangelosi's Towering Role as Mime

On May 28, 2016, the Boston Wagner Society will present Act 1 of Siegfried in concert, with piano accompaniment. This special recital will take place at 3 p.m. at Old South Church, Copley Square, Boston. Singers are Daniel Brenna as Siegfried, David Cangelosi as Mime, and Alan Held as the Wanderer (Wotan), with Jeffrey Brody at the piano.

Below is an interview with our Mime, the wonderful international tenor David Cangelosi.

- We anticipate with great pleasure your upcoming role as Mime at our May 28 concert of Act 1 of *Siegfried*. You have sung the role of Mime numerous times, at the Metropolitan Opera, in San Francisco, and many other places. And now you are about to sing it again for Washington National Opera in the spring. Is there anything about this role that attracts you both as a singer and an actor?

The role of Mime (*Siegfried*) is one of the most towering in all of opera. The answer to your question is actually IN your question! This role allows the singer to *act*, and the actor to *sing*. This is an unusual two-way street that is fulfilling in each direction. I have worked for 20 years to knit these two elements into a cohesive whole. I hope it comes through as such!

- You are an excellent comedian and very dynamic on the stage. Do you prefer comic roles? Or are you comfortable with both comedy and tragedy?

I actually prefer the darker, more sinister roles. My mind wanders to a production of *Boris Godunov* when I sang the role of Shuisky. He is a king-maker, to be sure; but he undermines Boris every step of the way. (Delicious stuff!) *Comedy* is fun, *romance* is sweet, but a *sinister* role is eternal. It's effective theatrically, and leaves a deep (if unsympathetic) imprint. I love to darken and deaden my eyes, probably because that is the exact opposite of my real-life persona.

- How do you prepare yourself emotionally to convey the comic or tragic elements of a role?

I sit quietly before any given performance for a few crucial minutes and say to myself: "What is it you want to do tonight? Who is it that you want to be?" Then I just step into the painting/mural that I have created in my own mind, but always with the audience's fulfillment being paramount.

- You have sung a huge number of roles all over the world, which is quite remarkable. As a "character singer," most of these have been secondary roles, though definitely not less important. Do you feel that, with Wagner especially, your Fach garners less attention than, say, a Heldentenor or a Heldenbariton?

Of course there is less attention to my Fach, which is all the more reason to redefine it to all of my esteemed singing colleagues, directors, and producers. Every *fan* wants a piece of a Heldentenor or Heldenbariton. Every *performer* wants some of the fairy dust that falls from their framework. But if you can garner attention as a character singer/character actor, then you have not only strengthened your *own*

standing, but you have likely strengthened the same for the primary characters with whom you interact. I used to teach very young acting students in college to earn extra money, and I used to tell them that their number 1 job was “to make the other ‘guy’ look good.” (I’ve been trying to do the same thing for my colleagues for the last 35 years!)

- Speaking of Wagner, do you find that you have to have a concentration, voice, and tessitura that are different from, say, Italian opera?

Wagner is the most all-encompassing composer in the history of humankind. It takes every fiber of your talent to execute his music and libretti with distinction. I work non-stop to imbue every word, every line, even every *REST* with deeper intent. When I finish with a performance, or even a rehearsal of Mime (*Siegfried*), for example, I am usually exhausted both physically and mentally, and I should be! Great artists, such as Hildegard Behrens, were able to dispatch both great Wagnerian opera and great—but more general—Italian opera with equal prominence. I only wish someone could say that about me someday. That would make me very happy.

- With Mime, do you sing in a more nasal and whiny tone to get into character, as opposed to singing Loge or Zorn, for instance?

Absolutely not! That is one of the ways I have set myself apart from many of my counterparts historically. Some producers actually want a whiny singer in an effort to fulfill their very simplistic conception of a character. The dirty little secret, however, is that they actually want their primary principal artists to sound better by comparison. None of them will admit this, but you asked; and now you’ve gotten more of an answer than you expected. The plain fact of the matter is that I did this once, for something very high profile. I did myself no favors, and have regretted it ever since. I was trying to play “Please the teacher,” and I reversed course immediately and tried to never do it again once I heard it. I sing like myself and I try to sing beautifully, or I prefer to not sing at all. That does *not* mean I sing without character, but “character” doesn’t mean constantly whining, barking, or providing nasality. Those sounds have their dramatic place, but in my world, they had better be the exception and not the rule!

- Unlike most singers, you have a wonderful blog on your website (davidcangelosi.com). I really enjoy reading it. You are funny and informative. Why don’t more singers take the step you have taken, which would be so valuable to opera lovers?

My website represents the organized musings of an opera professional. I write to express myself, or to get things off my chest. I sometimes write reviews of performances I have seen, tell an anecdote from my childhood, or follow a particular thought process from a production that I am working on. It’s my hope that someday there will be enough blog entries for a book. I am only sorry that I started so late in life. I have been given journals to write in over the years, but I hate doing it by hand; that is why I started so late. When my website was upgraded a few years ago, I decided to hop on the “blogging bandwagon,” since it was easy to write

via laptop and post to my own site. To be fair, a lot of my colleagues do the same. I just happen to do it better!! (Ha-ha.)

- If you published your collection of blog entries as a book, what title would you give the book?

I would call it *Opera Light: Organized Musings of an Opera Professional*.

Here is the reasoning behind the title, and it is threefold:

1. First off, it takes the familiar term “light opera” and turns it upside down (or the other way around, so to speak).

2. The idea behind my blog entries is also to shed “light” on the subject matter from several angles. (In this case you would pronounce the title “OPERA” Light)

3. My blog is mostly a lighthearted look at the subject, and thus the idea is to take up the marketing moniker of “light,” such as Crisco-Light, Pepsi-Light, etc. It’s the idea of taking the rather “weighty” subject of opera and making it just a bit “lighter.”

- Can you name five of your all-time favorite roles in opera?

That’s an easy one, but I will not include the aforementioned Mime and will in fact open the question to roles I don’t even sing, except for one below.

1. Salome (*Salome*)

2. Parsifal (*Parsifal*)

3. Ping (*Turandot*)

4. Prunier (*La Rondine*)

5. Grand Inquisitor (*Don Carlos*)

- It is great to see you come back to Boston, since this is where you studied music and sung with the Boston Lyric Opera and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Do you have any fondness for the city, and what places will you visit while you are here for the May 28 concert?

Since the once legendary Locke-Ober Restaurant at Winter Place closed a few years ago, I guess I will have to find a new place for lunch! I used to love its elder-world, historic, old-school feel. After being around for some 130 plus years, I never really envisioned that it would disappear. I thought that there would always exist a clientele who wanted to step back in time, eat classic French cuisine, take a peek at John F. Kennedy’s private booth, marvel at their reflection in polished silver, and have gracious waiters tend to their dining experience. So, if you have any suggestions, I am all ears!!