

ISOLA JONES

ARTS / ENTERTAINMENT / SPORTS

People can go their entire lives and not find their passion but Isola Jones was lucky to find hers at an early age. At just four years old, before she could even read or write, she was already singing in Latin in her Catholic school choir in Chicago. Then at the age of eleven Isola saw legendary soprano Leontyne Price on television, “I asked my mother if she would get me a recording and she did. I was running in the house singing in Italian, I didn’t know what I was singing about, that was really the inspiration to the specific kind of music to sing because I just loved all the high notes and all the beauty of music.”

Isola would go on to attend Northwestern University and after graduation she pursued her love of music with the Chicago Symphony Chorus. One day, a guest soloist with the Symphony became ill and Isola was asked to step in for her. That opportunity would open the door for her professional debut as the mezzo-soprano soloist in Verdi’s Requiem. But the night would be life changing on another level. As Isola stepped onto the stage, she turned to her right and saw her idol Leontyne Price and just steps to her left, Luciano Pavarotti. “When the music started I wasn’t nervous I was on cloud nine.”

And that feeling would continue throughout Isola’s career, a feeling this singer attributes to her faith, “God has a wonderful sense of humor, He’s really funny and He just lets you kind of figure things out for yourself, He wants you to choose Him, He always wants us to choose him. So when you do it all works out.”

That inspiring outlook has carried her through every moment in her life including getting to the famed Metropolitan Opera just two years after her professional debut in Chicago. She played the role of Olga in Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin and in between acts Isola says the impact of her debut hit her, “I’m looking at myself in the mirror and I’m literally shaking and I’m thinking do I really want a career doing this.” The moment of doubt passed and never returned again. Isola would go on to sing more than five hundred performances as a leading artist at the MET. “I got over my nerves and discovered that I was really quite at home on stage.”

With her soaring voice and exotic looks, Isola quickly became sought after all around the world. But the one role she is perhaps best known for is that of Carmen, the fiery gypsy who is murdered by her lover. “You have to admire

her courage and that I think is the heart of the fascination of the role is the woman’s absolute and total courage.” Bringing characters to life isn’t the only upside to her illustrious career, Isola also has shared the stage with some of the greats like tenor, Plácido Domingo “They are very generous, they are not petty... what I learned was that the very, very great people bring you up to their level they don’t try to pull you down.”

In 1998, Isola decided to take the lessons she learned on stage and pass them on as a voice instructor at South Mountain Community College. “In my years of teaching I have learned more about singing than I ever did from a teacher.”

But Isola hasn’t completely abandoned her career; she collaborated with ASU professor and composer James DeMars on an opera based on the legend of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It premiered in 2007 and has since been performed all over the United States.

Now in her sixties Isola isn’t slowing down. She looks forward to more years of performing and teaching. When asked to reflect on the magnitude of her career, she barely hesitates. “I think I can honestly say that in any kind of success I have had in the past has been a direct response in appealing to God’s help I couldn’t have done it on my own, at all. I continue to rely on his guidance making decisions because when I haven’t, oh the mistakes I’ve made oh terrible, terrible choices. So I have come to the realization that my judgment in some cases is not really good, so I hand it over to God.”



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