

# The Magic Flute's Jeni Bern chats to the Edinburgh Reporter



Bethan-Langford-Second-Lady-Jeni-Bern-First-Lady-and-Sioned-Gwen-Davies-Third-Lady-in-The-Magic-Flute.-Scottish-Opera-2019.-Credit-James-Glossop

Opera fans in the capital are in for a treat next month when Sir Thomas Allen's five-star production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Magic Flute* comes to the Festival Theatre.

Set in a spectacular world inspired by the Victorian futurism of HG Wells and Jules Verne, Mozart's most inventive opera, features a handsome prince, a damsel in distress, sorcerers, priests, a bumbling bird-catcher, and a queen of the night with her three ladies.

Among the cast is Glasgow born Jeni Bern who spent two years at Edinburgh's Napier University.

Jeni is a light lyric soprano of exceptional versatility who combines her superb musicianship with excellent acting skills and a vibrant personality and she will be singing 'First

Lady.'

Earlier this week, Jeni kindly took time from her busy schedule to chat with the Edinburgh Reporter.

Jeni told us: "The show started at Glasgow last Saturday and it was a fantastic night. I had the best time and I'm sure that this will be a fun tour with such a great cast.

"I have a small part as First Lady so my character doesn't even have a name which is quite bizarre and I will be part of a trio of 'hench' women for the Queen of the Night who is played by the superb Julia Stikovetsky.

"My fellow ladies are Bethan Langford (Second Lady) and Sioned Gwen Davis (Third Lady) who are brilliant. We are very much a group or unit and we are choreographed together so I don't have any solos but we have amazing costumes and who wouldn't want to dress up like that. I won't spoil the ending but we do get our comeuppance.

"Honestly it's not like going to work or rather it's like going to work for a laugh.

"I'm really looking forward to coming to the Festival Theatre in Edinburgh next month. There will be a dementia friendly show and whilst I won't be involved that day, I think it is a tremendous initiative by Scottish Opera.

"Edinburgh is such a lovely city and I stayed in a flat in Thistle Street when I was at university."

Jeni is a graduate of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) and the Opera School of the Royal College of Music and has won many major awards and prizes, including a Wingate Scholarship and the prestigious President Emerita Award.

Her recent highlights include Lilli Vanessi/Katherine in Kiss Me Kate, directed by Jo Davies; Susie Trevor in Lady, Be Good

at the Teatro de la Zarzuela, directed by Emilio Sagi and Fiordiligi in Phelim McDermott's production of *Così fan tutte* for English National Opera.

As an accomplished oratorio and concert artist, Jeni is in demand with leading conductors and choral societies throughout the UK and Europe.

Radio appearances included BBC Radio 2's iconic Friday Night is Music Night and her CD *Let the Bright Seraphim* with Baroque trumpeter Crispian Steele-Perkins (Carlton Classics) received considerable critical acclaim.

So what genre of music does Jeni like and who were the influences?

She continued: "I have 'odd tastes' in music. When I tell people what I do they assume that we all waft around all day listening to opera, but I like folk, jazz, big bands and rock, particularly Queen.

"I particularly like all the greats including Maria Callas. I think I'm drawn to strong women and was lucky enough to see Joyce DiDonato live.

"With regard to influences in my career, I would include my singing teacher Patricia MacMahon whom I am still in touch with and would also like to mention Roddy Williams OBE who is one of the nicest men in the business."

"Also it's great to work with living legend Tom (Sir Thomas Allen) who is so down to earth.

"Occasionally I have crossed over to the dark side as my friend and Broadway Diva Kim Chriswell describes musicals and that was tremendous fun but very hard work. You have to have huge respect for people who do eight shows a week and it is very hard graft.

"Some people tend to look down on the other side, but I

consider them equal with no one genre better than the other.

"I'm still very busy and consider myself a jack of all trades as I teach and next year I will be appearing in Street Scene in Monte Carlo which is a half way house between an opera and a musical.

"I realise I am very fortunate to have had such a varied career over the past 25-30 years. Who was it that said that finding something you love means you will never work a day in your life?"

The Dementia Friendly performance of The Magic Flute in Edinburgh. The specially abridged performance is carefully designed to make the theatrical experience more accessible to people living with dementia. Sound and lighting levels are adjusted for the comfort of the audience.

Performances at Edinburgh Festival Theatre 13-29 Nicholson Street from Wednesday 5 June – Saturday 15 June.

The Dementia Friendly performance will be on Friday 7 June at 3pm.