Interview with the Opera Singer

KRISTIN K. VOGEL

United States / Austria

Kristin K. Vogel – Soprano

is a soprano whose voice bridges the realms of opera, operetta, and musical theater with a striking blend of power and emotional depth. A lirico spinto with a youthful dramatic intensity, she masterfully navigates roles from Puccini to Wagner, embodying the strength and vulnerability of the heroines she portrays. With performances spanning from the grand stages of Tacoma Opera to intimate and modern interpretations in Vienna, she continuously expands her artistic scope. Whether captivating audiences as Tosca, Mimi, or Cio-Cio-San, or lending her voice to symphonic masterworks, Kristin Vogel's artistry is a synthesis of tradition and contemporary expression. Her versatility, honed through a rich career across the United States and Europe, reflects a relentless pursuit of vocal and dramatic excellence.

Interview

Your repertoire spans from Puccini's deeply emotional heroines to the dramatic intensity of Wagner—how do you approach such diverse roles vocally and emotionally?

"I always start from the text and the character. I want to move the audience to see through the eyes of the role I am embodying and to identify with someone who may be very different from them. I believe art can help us become better people and improve our world through activating our empathy and imagination. When I find the emotional truth behind the words and music, my technique will carry my voice to communicate it."

As a lirico spinto soprano, your voice carries both lyrical beauty and dramatic weight. How did you discover this vocal identity, and how has it evolved over time?

"It took a lot of time and hard work! Because my voice is flexible and suitable for multiple fachs, finding my true vocal identity involved a lot of trial and error. Teachers and coaches helped direct me, but what really made a di was paying attention to how audiences responded to me. For example, when I was singing Pamina I got a lot of feedback that I was "too strong" – this didn't mean I couldn't sing the role! And, in fact, when I sang in a production where the director wanted a strong Pamina I was very successful. But I started noticing how people perceived me and my voice, and they tended to like me in more dramatic repertoire and characters that showed powerful emotion."

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You have performed in both traditional opera productions and more modern, experimental works. How do you adapt your artistry to different theatrical styles?

"Again, it all comes back to the text and the character, as well as the vision of the director and conductor. Sometimes my collaborators will have different ideas than mine, and I embrace that. Modern or less well-known pieces allow me to explore and experiment with the emotion in my sound, and what I discover can inform my performance in more traditional interpretations as well. Art lives and breathes, so my approach to repertoire evolves over time with my understanding of myself and my instrument."

Opera is a profoundly physical art form. How do your experiences in ballet, aerial, and burlesque training influence your stage presence?

"My early (and continuing) dance training helps me feel myself fully in my body when I sing. I also lift weights, hike, and ski – I find being physically strong helps me to be able to communicate what I want to with my voice even if I'm lying down, moving quickly, stage-fighting, or otherwise using my body in a way that makes singing more difficult. Burlesquing requires me to get way outside of my comfort zone and be vulnerable, and has thus helped me to learn to bare my soul to the

audience even under layers and layers of costuming."

Many of your roles involve characters who experience deep love, loss, and transformation. Is there a particular role that has affected you personally?

"Part of my role preparation is finding points of connection between my personal experience and the character's journey, but of course I naturally identify with some roles more than others. Mimì in La Boheme affects me in a very powerful way: the way she loves and hopes is so generous, and she wants to stay with Rodolfo, with her love, even though she knows it is not the healthiest choice for her. This touches me in an incredibly personal and profound way. Realizing that love is not enough to save you or your relationship is an essential but crushing part of life."

EE PHOTO NINJA

You have performed in various languages, from Italian and German to French and English. How does language shape your interpretation of a role?

"Different languages feel different in my mouth, and I use consonants and vowels to communicate emphasis and emotion according to the style of each language. This is why it is important to me that I actually understand the language of the piece I am performing and the way it works, not only in my arias."

With engagements in both the U.S. and Europe, do you find differences in audience expectations and opera culture between these regions?

"There are absolutely different expectations, but I try not to think too much about them. If there is a cultural difference in understanding of specific words or gestures (in a show like Die Fledermaus, for example) I will try to use these to communicate better, but I am always focusing on what the character wants to say and on trying to bring the audience into the world that is unfolding in my mind and on stage."

Your career includes significant orchestral concert work in addition to staged opera performances. How does your approach differ when performing in a concert setting versus a fully staged production?

"Singing in concert format means you don't have sets, costumes, or movement to help tell the story; it must be completely clear from the voice and face. This challenges me to refine my performance to the most specific expressions and small movements, and to put all of my emotion into my voice."

What are the biggest challenges facing opera singers today, and how do you navigate them in your career?

"Unfortunately the biggest challenges artists face today are related to money and job security. Many opera companies in the US perform only a few operas a year and want to have different singers for each show, so a singer must travel to sing consistently. The pay is also at or below minimum wage for non-union opera companies, so most singers have to have second jobs teaching or doing something unrelated to singing. This makes it incredibly difficult to focus on one's craft and can be exhausting for the voice. I have been fortunate to be able to work remotely in a non-singing job that is flexible and pays a living wage, but I had to work 60 hours a week as an executive in a business environment before I was able to achieve that, and my singing definitely took a back seat during that time."

How do you prepare for emotionally and vocally demanding roles such as Tosca or Cio-Cio-San while maintaining vocal health?

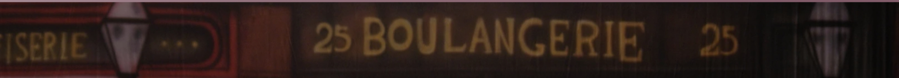
"I explore the deepest emotions while I prepare a role, long before I start rehearsals with a company. This is essential, as I frequently get to a place of weeping or anger that is so strong I cannot sing. But once I find that place, where it is in my expression and how it moves in my body, I can add those colors vocally and I can get to that depth again without compromising the voice."

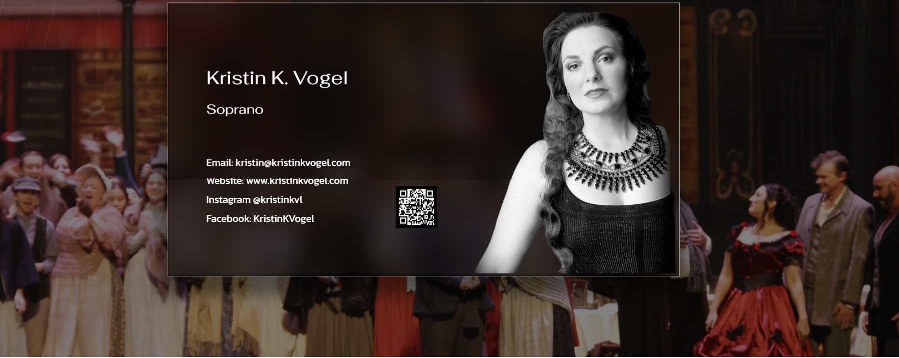
If you could portray any role—regardless of vocal fach or tradition—what would it be and why?

"That is a very difficult question... I have always wanted to perform Violetta, a character I actually could sing. Like Mimì, she is strong and generous in her love, and yet she sacrifices herself FOR love. In a totally gender-swapped production I would love to sing Figaro in any of the Beaumarchais operas – I just love his carpe diem attitude, his cleverness, and being a match-maker is fun!"

Looking ahead, what artistic projects or roles excite you the most in the coming years?

"I am extremely excited to be singing Tosca again in 2026. She is one of my signature heroines, and I will be singing with one of my favorite collaborators, conductor Jonathan Pasternack, leading a full Puccini orchestra in a large hall – it will be glorious! The other project thrilling me right now is an album of Verismo arias I am recording this fall with Maestro Jonathan and the Bratislava Symphony Orchestra, to be released on the ARIA Classics Label – I can't wait!!!"





Kristin K. Vogel

Soprano

Email: kristin@kristinkvogel.com
Website: www.kristinkvogel.com
Instagram @kristinkvl
Facebook: KristinKVogel

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