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I was immediately taken with the whole thing and switched from going to Broadway to going to the opera; I became something of a lunatic who went several times a week. I could only afford standing room. I made friends in my mind with my favorite divas. I tended to gravitate to Joan Sutherland, who is also a Grand Scena fan. I also became addicted to more dramatic singers with better act-

ing ability. I became a complete Maria Callas maniac; I stood in line for 3 days and nights to get to see her do *Tosca* — which I got to see twice. It was her final two performances at the Met and almost her final opera anywhere. She was burned; her voice had finally taken a powder.

What is it about opera that appeals to you so much?

If you ever went to something and were immediately grabbed

by it in a way like you were never grabbed by anything else before — there's not a completely coherent explanation for that. I could say that the art form has everything that I love: music that I'm very fascinated by; the human voice; that it's dramatic; that I found divas and divos, but particularly the divas, to be fascinating sort-of monsters. I could say that the art form is compelling because of its combination of music and drama.

But frankly, I don't know why it grabbed me. But it did, and did so immediately. It's like going to baseball games but never wanting to go to football games. It really got me and I loved it and still love it, although I find that exciting performances are fewer and farther between. The art form is more generic now, geared more toward product by the media studios.

Because of the need to make money?

Yes, the classical medium is in terrible, terrible shape; sales are at an all time low. So, the performances are geared for marketing and producing stars on the level of the three tenors. God forbid! It's not as much to do with immediacy of the live performance, even though the art form at this point tends toward much more involvement with stagecraft than it used to, when singers would walk to the footlights and put out an arm and

sing an aria. Ironically, it is really the truth that it's a live performance medium. We have all the stagecraft in people, not the fat people or the rest of it, and it is less exciting than when they walked out to the footlights, put out an arm and sang an aria.

It's partly because we are chronologically farther away from the original creation of the works; people are not as attuned to performing them as they were when people worked with the composers. People were writing operas of real importance only until the 1920s. After that it's been sparse. You had people that came from a tradition or line of experience that they don't anymore, in the way that Mary Martin or Ethel Merman worked with Broadway composers and really knew the requisites of the singing. Now, Broadway singers sound like radio singers and work with body mikes.

Do you feel that the parody you do is in response to this?

Yes. I do. It's a re-creation of something that I loved. While we really are funny and give the audience a lot to laugh at and laugh about, we are also serious, on a certain level, in restoring to opera the kind of live performance thrill we feel was lost with the naiveté of the age gone by.

That's why we see people who come to our show regularly like Jimmy Levine who runs the

Met, or Leontyne Price, or Joan Sutherland, divas from that era who think that our singing is really expressive and exciting. They also enjoy our spoof of what they do or used to do.

Some of the reviews I've seen place emphasis on the drag aspect rather than your music. How do you feel about this?

It's annoying. But there's nothing much you can do about it.

The most recent reviews don't talk about the drag as much as much as they give away the jokes and the staging gimmicks. Which is fine...whatever. For the big fans that are in music or our regular following in New York, the singing is very important. The singing is partly serious and partly vocal spoof; it's the references that it makes to the traditions that they recognize.

What prompted you to start doing opera in drag?

I had worked a lot in cabaret. I had characters that I did, and occasionally one of them would throw on a schmatta, but no makeup. I did a parody of a drugged-out jazz singer for instance, the kind that wore a big muu muu and glasses — the Ella Fitzgerald look with a Billie Holiday addiction.

All my characters sang and did music of various kinds, but I had seen Charles Ludlam. His



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