

Opera Star Netrebko Revisiting Mariinsky Theater

By [Galina Stolyarova](#)

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Anna Netrebko rehearsing as Adina last week at the Mariinsky Theater. **Valentin Baranovsky**

ST. PETERSBURG — Glamorous opera diva Anna Netrebko comes to her alma mater this week for two performances in the role of Adina in a new production of Gaetano Donizetti's "L'elisir d'amore" on Monday and Thursday.

Netrebko, who has already sung Adina to great international acclaim and recorded a DVD of the opera, partnered by the popular Mexican tenor Rolando Villazon, will be making her debut in the role on home soil. The new production of this comic melodrama — a favorite with opera houses across the globe — also marks the Mariinsky Theater's first-ever interpretation of the work.

The opera, set in a Tuscan village, revolves around a love triangle between a sheepish peasant, Nemorino; a flirtatious beauty, Adina; and Sergeant Belcore. The lively, light-hearted heroine appears to choose Belcore, which prompts Nemorino to seek the service of quack doctor

Dulcamara who concocts a love potion for the forlorn fellow. In the end, however, it is his uncle's large inheritance that wins Nemorino popularity with the village girls, and it is his decision to join the army that appeals to Adina, although everyone, Nemorino included, prefers to believe in the magic of the dubious concoction.

Staging the bel canto masterpiece will be renowned French director Laurent Pelly, one of the world's most successful directors both in drama theater and opera, whose work frequents some of the world's most prestigious stages, including Opera national de Paris, New York's Metropolitan Opera, the Lyon Opera and Milan's Teatro alla Scala. Pelly has won international critical praise for his "detailed, satirical, often surreal, exquisite in taste and wonderfully imaginative productions," in terms of both the concept and execution.

Netrebko's appearance is eagerly anticipated.

In January 2009, the singer — who in September of that year gave birth to her first child, son Tiago, fathered by Uruguayan bass-baritone Erwin Schrott — made a triumphant comeback on stage singing Lucia in John Doyle's production of Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor."

The role of Lucia in Doyle's ascetic and elegant production, which became a favorite with both critics and audiences after it premiered at the Scottish Opera in 2007, came naturally to Netrebko. The diva mesmerized audiences with her performance, demonstrating a fluid, soaring style in the upper range.

Netrebko came to St. Petersburg from her hometown of Krasnodar at the age of 16 to enroll at the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College and later the Conservatory, dreaming of becoming an operetta singer. A few visits to the Mariinsky convinced her that she was moving in the wrong direction. Netrebko joined the world-

famous company at the age of 22, simultaneously dropping out of the conservatory in her fourth year there.

There was little glamour in Netrebko's first years on the banks of the Neva River. She lived in a notoriously horrible dormitory belonging to the St. Petersburg Conservatory on Ulitsa Doblesti and worked as a floor cleaner at the Mariinsky Theater, where she dreamed of performing.

The turning point in Netrebko's career came after she was a tremendous success as Donna Anna in "Don Giovanni," directed by Nikolaus Harnoncourt, at the opening of the prestigious Salzburg Festival in summer 2002.

"Neither I nor anybody around me had envisaged a big success, apart from the director who had great faith in me as Donna Anna," Netrebko recalls. "Basically, I learned my lines and score and went on stage without particularly high expectations."

But the performance won her an array of flattering reviews, a list of plum contracts with the world's major operatic companies and a welcome place at every Salzburg Festival since.

"I adore Salzburg. It is galvanizing to be there during the festival," Netrebko said. "I am thrilled to be there. Every day the most distinguished musicians perform in front of the snobbiest, most sophisticated audiences, and you can just see all the snobbery melting down

or the opposite, manifesting itself in a revolt — sometimes both during the same show!”

Netrebko is excited by the Salzburg’s atmosphere, with “boos” and “bravos” overlapping in controversial productions.

The captivating soprano, a rare opera singer who is gifted with not only a stunning voice — pure in tone, rich in color and velvety in timbre — but also with charismatic artistic talent, obviously enjoys the effects that her performances have on people.

“Of course, it is exciting to feel power over the audience,” she admits, adding that at the peak of her operatic career she still dreams of being able to hold even more of the viewers’ attention. “I need to feel that I am professional and strong enough to make [the public] happy and desperate for the show to go on. When I am able to do such things, giving new energy to the people, I am happy.”

“L’elisir d’amore” will play at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg on Jan. 24, 25 and 27, and then on Feb. 8. www.mariinsky.ru

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