

NIKA LEONI

Soprano | Composer | Producer

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Russian-born soprano Nika Leoni has been praised for "**a lyrical beauty, an engaging silver quality to her voice,**" and "**an exquisite skill in expressing the gamut of human emotions.**" Her performances, marked with a "**charming and inviting stage presence**" as well as "**a beautiful sense of poetry and elegance,**" have been enthusiastically received by American and European audiences, and she delivers equally impressive performances of opera roles, orchestral and chamber concerts, and art song programs. Nika made her operatic debut in the Czech Republic at the Silesian State Theater in Opava with the role of Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*. The regional newspaper *Ostravske Noviny* described her debut performance as "**...a strong and convincing character portrayal combined with skillful technique.**" Her success led to other engagements in Europe. Shortly after her performance in Opava, she was invited to sing the same role on the stage of Usti nad Labem City Theater in the Czech Republic. Later, she returned to the Czech Republic as Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*) at the Silesian State Theater. While in Europe, Nika sang Micaela (*Carmen*) with the Opera on Tour Company in Germany and participated in an Opera Gala concert tour with orchestra that included appearances at the Gasteig Philharmonie in Munich and the Berlin Philharmonie.

In New York, Nika performed in concert at various venues, including the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, as well as appeared on opera stage at Lake George Opera, Opera Domani, Opera Company of Brooklyn, Brooklyn Repertory Opera, Empire Opera, Classical Presentations, and other. Operatic repertoire includes the roles of Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Mimi (*La Bohème*), Anna (*Le Villi*), Giulietta (*I Capuleti ed i Montecchi*), Manon (*Manon*), Thaïs (*Thaïs*), Susanna (*Les Nozze di Figaro*), Despina (*Così fan tutte*), Norina (*Don Pasquale*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Sophie (*Werther*), Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*), and Angelica (*Orlando*). Concert highlights include the performances of songs by D. Shostakovich in a world premiere arrangement with One World Symphony in New York, as well as R. Glière's *Concerto for Voice and Orchestra* in Richmond, VA.

Artistic Director **Marc Verzatt** characterized Nika as a "**dramatically intuitive and creative**" artist who is "**extremely quick to characterize, has excellent stage presence as well as performing instincts on the highest level**" and possesses "**a voice which she uses with intelligence, musicality, and an understanding of communication to an audience.**" Her performance of Despina in Opera Domani's *Così fan tutte*, was noted by the conductor and the present *Music For Life International* Director **P. George Mathew** as a performance "**that simultaneously crackled with earthy wit and glowed with musical and vocal finesse.**" He praised Nika as "**a rarely encountered singer who, simply by her very presence, inspires the singers around her to sparkle in their very different roles,**" who possesses "**instinctive understanding of the subtlety of [character] within the opera's complex musical and dramatic texture**" and "**carries within her a very deep-seated personal and almost mystical joy in operatic performance as well as a solid vocal technique and the musical grounding with which to deliver it.**"

Nika Leoni's versatility as a concert artist is known and appreciated by various audiences in the U.S., as well as Europe. Her performance of Glière's *Concerto for Voice and Orchestra* with the Richmond Youth Chamber Collegium won her an invitation to present it in Poland where she appeared with Wałbrzych Filharmonia Sudecka, whose Artistic Director **Józef Wilkomirski** described Nika as "**an extraordinary performer demonstrating her exquisite voice and truly expressive musicality.**"

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Nika's debut as a dramatic actress/singer in a Broadway-style musical play *Pushkin's Little Tragedies* (premiered at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York) was named a "noteworthy performance" by critics who praised her as "ravishing" (*Backstage*), "a beautiful and charming opera singer with a beautiful soprano voice, ... [whose] portrayal of Laura [in the Act I play *The Stone Guest*] was remarkably appealing." (*Russian Bazaar*, New York).

Nika Leoni's artistry was recognized by several prestigious vocal competitions. She was a Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in San Francisco and has received First Prizes and Awards from the East Bay Opera League Competition, the NATS Competition, Contemporary American Art Song Competition, and Santa Clara Art Song Festival.

Nika has trained and collaborated with with a number of accomplished artists, including singers *Galina Vishnevskaya, Elly Ameling, Maria Spaccagna*, and *Franco Iglesias*, conductors *John Axelrod, Daniel Beckwith, Georg Tintner, Josef Wallnig, Paul Mauffray*, and *Michael Stuart Holmes*, composers *Lorenzo Martinez Palomo* and *Albert Markov*, and directors and musical coaches *Yelena Kurdina, Marc Verzatt, Nico Castel, Rudolph Jansen, Daniel Helfgot*, and others.

Nika's unique exquisite programs of **Russian Romantic Songs** have been praised by the audiences in the U.S. as well as in Germany, Italy, Austria, and the United Kingdom. Her first CD of Russian Romances and Traditional Songs titled *Dark Eyes* was released on Larion Records™ in 2009, and is now available in stores worldwide.

In New York, Nika founded a performance company Classical Presentations that created a number of versatile productions, including *Albert Markov's* new opera for children *Queen Esther*, in which she also sang the title role. *Queen Esther* had its world premiere in New York in 2010 with encore performances in 2011. Mr. Goller of New York's *Forum* wrote of Nika's performance as a "beautiful portrayal of Esther sung with a warmly tender, silken voice." Other productions by Classical Presentations include an interactive educational musical play for children *One Day at an Opera Theater*, an eclectic Tango-Jazz-Classical fusion *Russian Soul in the Early Fall*, and a musical for children *Central Park*. Currently, Nika is the Founding Director of Make Music St. Louis, Inc., an organization bringing the worldwide music festival "Make Music Day" to St. Louis, MO, USA. This festival involves musicians of all levels who perform on June 21st every year at various venues connecting to a city-wide range of audiences.

As a composer with the primary focus on vocal, concert, and theater music (opera and dance), Nika also enjoys writing in other styles and genres. Her recent commissions included the music score for an independent full feature film, for which she also wrote, recorded, and produced the feature song, and a song composed for the 35-th Anniversary of the Italian-American School in New York that was designated as the *School Anthem* and was premiered at the school's Anniversary Celebration Gala before the Consul General of Italy and the Ambassador of Italy to the U.S., as well as New York Governor Cuomo and other notable celebrity guests. Nika's song cycle *Six Love Songs by Sara Teasdale* was one of the final selections to be featured in 2016 Calliope's Call concert series, as well in 2017 KC-VITAs Summer Series. Nika's new opera soliloquy *Euridice* received rave

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reviews calling her **"an exceptionally talented composer and singer, with triumphant femininity manifest in her music as well as her appearance, and definitely worthy of our very special attention;"** and her music **"dramatically beautiful while conveying confusion, love and finally acceptance."** In 2016, Nika was invited to perform *Euridice* at the "Ladies First" concert at the National Opera Center in New York. Nika is currently finishing a one-act opera for children based on her original story. More information, music, and reviews can be found on Nika's website: www.nikaleoni.com.