



VERSATILE VIXEN: Nassif earned rave reviews for her portrayal of Violetta in *La Traviata*.

Your repertoire is pretty eclectic musically. Is that just you or is that a trend that opera singers are being asked to do more different kinds of things? One point I want to make about the role of Carmen is that it's generally sung by mezzo-sopranos. I am not a mezzo-soprano, so I understand that there are people that may question why a soprano who sings Violetta is going to sing Carmen, which is associated with this dark, rich mezzo sound, but there are sopranos that have sung it and to great acclaim. I'm not trying to be a mezzo. I'm not trying to be a soprano. I just want to be Carmen...Some companies, some agents, some audience members want every singer to kind of fit into a little box, like 'You sing this rep and that's it...that's what your voice is

supposed to sing.' Well, some voices don't do that. I'm not going to say I wish my voice did that, because I'm having so much fun being able to interpret so many different characters and step outside that line in a healthy way. I think as long as your temperament can suit the temperament of the character and your voice can manage the vocalism in a healthy manner, I don't see why you can't.

There's seems to be a trend, too, toward singers who fit the part visually. Maybe modern audiences are less willing to suspend their disbelief? My look definitely suits Carmen. People will say 'That's why she's singing it.' I hope they won't say that's the only reason that I'm doing this. My advisor, people that

know my voice intimately — while they're all excited that my personality and my aesthetic look matches this character — I think they're all also excited that my voice does because you want it all to match...I do think that nowadays the trend is setting itself that you've got to look a certain way, you've got to dress a certain way. But, I know people that are short, but on stage they look incredibly tall because they just fill those shoes, they stand up there and they make magic happen. What's most important is that you say something, whether or not aesthetically you fit the part.

Do you have time for a social life? I do! This summer I caught up with a lot of friends. That was really nice. I went out dancing with this guy that I know, but there's not enough time for that, and you can't be out at the really smoky bars and screaming your heads off all night. And that's what I usually end up doing if I go out. You're trying to yell over the music and you don't realize how much damage you're doing. Singers have to be so careful. Your instrument is right here [gestures to her throat], it's not like you've got it in a hard case that's going to protect it.

Do you have a regimen that you do before a performance, certain things that you eat or drink? I try not to drink milk or anything right before a show. But I figure, before rehearsals and stuff sometimes I eat some crazy things and I'm all right. I think a lot of times it's all in our heads. Of course, on the day of a performance nerves will get to you. I usually try to have maybe a steak or something — red meat — I need good energy right before I go on. So I'll have something for dinner like a steak on the day of a show — a couple hours before. Maybe carbs the day before.

Are you the workout type? I don't work out much...I'm not going to lie, so this show is really going to kick me in the butt, I know it. 'Cause I've got to be moving so much, but I love it because I'll probably be in the best shape of my life after this show. When I was in Colorado, I was working in a summer program out there in Central City and they had me housed in this house that was like the furthest house from the rehearsal and performance space and I was going up and down this hill that was such a pain, but I look so good at the end of the summer. I came home and my brother picked me up and was like, 'Holy light, Batman!' You know, like, 'What happened?' [Laughs] 'Cause I'm a big girl. I look strong and, yeah, so this will be fun. I'll get whipped into shape.

Is there time for boyfriends? There's time, but there aren't any boyfriends. [Laughs]. That's a tough one. I know myself and I know when I get into a relationship, I want to give all

of myself to a relationship, and I want a family so badly and I know one day when the time is right and when I've found the right man that's what I'm going to have. But right now it hasn't happened yet and that's OK because I'm able to focus on this and I'll know when the time is right, the right man will come along. I'm fine with being alone. I've got plenty of men in my life! I've got Don José, I've got Escamillo!

Your friends that aren't necessarily into opera, what do they think about what you do. Do they get it? They love it. I mean, they know me...I am just crazy. And to see me up on stage...I don't think it's very different than seeing me in real life. I think it's really fun for them to see me 'acting' because I try not to act, I just try to be on stage. I just try to be whoever the character is, but bring a little bit of me into all of it. I think that's the most natural way to approach it. There's nothing like opera that brings costumes, sets, acting, the orchestra, the music...everything altogether. They just get to see you action. And I don't think that a lot of them realized what I did. They think it's all like fun and games, since I'm not sitting at a cubicle, I don't have that 9-to-5. But then also my weekends aren't free!

Opera companies and all kinds of arts organizations really have to work at getting younger people interested in the arts. It seems many of them are trying to add a little hip factor or do whatever they need to do to keep it fresh. How do you think they can accomplish that? You know, I was reading in one of the Virginia Opera fliers about a survey they'd done of their audiences, and one of the things it said was that they don't like modernized operas. They want tradition. But sometimes the younger audiences, they don't relate to the traditional settings. That's not to say that they should be changed. I think maybe if they were educated about it earlier...One way that they're doing it is just sort of relating it to modern life. Now a lot of people are saying, well, wasn't Beyonce in *Carmen*? And I was like, yeah, that was called *Carmen a Hipopera* or something like that. [Laughs] So things like that also I think make younger people sit up and take notice. When we were doing *La Traviata* we were talking about *Pretty Woman* and how it was loosely based on the opera and he took her to the opera and it was that particular opera that he took her to, so I think that there are many ways to expose the non-operagoer to opera. But you don't want to force feed it to anybody, because I don't think this is something you can force on anybody. They need to happen upon it and just suddenly realize that it made them feel something that they didn't expect. I think it's great when you catch people by surprise. ●