

Aida Garifullina interview

Born in the Russian city of Kazan in 1987, Aida Garifullina has, over the past 14 years, become one of the world's most celebrated sopranos. Since graduating from the Vienna University of Music and Performing Arts in 2011, she has sung with such opera greats as Plácido Domingo and Andrea Bocelli and made headlines in 2018 when she performed 'Angels' alongside Robbie Williams at the FIFA World Cup's opening ceremony in Moscow. This March, she's taking to the stage of London's Cadogan Hall for her first-ever headline UK show.

So, this will be your first headline show in Britain. What can audiences expect on the night of 24 March?

They can expect the sound of music, the sound of my soprano voice, the sound of a beautiful orchestra, and the most famous and popular opera arias... the magic of classical music!

Is it important for you to open this music up to people who have never been to a classical concert before?

This is one of my missions, showing people that classical music and opera is not boring, it's really for everyone, and it's something timeless, like the paintings and masterpieces of the Impressionists or the painters from the Renaissance. It's something that will live forever. Pop music comes and goes, but classical music still lives.

It must be a great feeling to hear feedback from people who have been introduced to classical music through your work.

Absolutely, it's a big honour and makes me so happy. It's amazing when people come to my concerts and I can see their faces, how they cry, how they smile, how they just blossom. I feel like classical music changes people from the inside, and that's what we need.

You performed 'Vale Decem' and 'Abigail's Song' at Doctor Who At The Proms last year. Were you a Doctor Who fan beforehand?

Not at all, to be honest! [Laughs] I started watching Doctor Who after the invitation. It's just magic, you know – I believe in the power of the universe.

You're based in London now. Do you feel British at all?

I love London and I feel like I'm slowly becoming a Londoner. I performed at the BBC Proms a few years ago and I was honored to sing the British National Anthem. Everyone who was sitting on the grass in Hyde Park was singing Rule Britannia with me! It was a dream come true.

How do you protect your voice before a concert? You must be terrified of catching a cold.

I'm always terrified, yes! Every time it's cold I just wrap myself in layers and layers, and I never eat or drink anything cold. I'm always so surprised when singers drink cold water or ice water. For some, it helps, but not for me. So yeah, I have to take a lot of care of myself. I do sports because it helps with stamina. Sometimes, if I have to do a lot of active stuff on stage, I will prepare myself and my body in advance. I always hear it in my voice when my body is fit, or if I haven't trained for a while. It's lots of hard work and discipline being an opera singer.

It sounds pretty intense. How do you relax after a performance?

Walking in parks, going to museums, anywhere I can completely switch my mind. It needs to be around art, though. Art just takes me to a different level, and gives me energy, because I can feel the energy from the paintings. Reading is the other thing that calms me down. But on the night of the concert, I can never sleep because the adrenaline just doesn't go away very quickly. I still haven't found the key to how to switch my brain off on the night after a performance.

Do you still get nervous before a show?

I've had to learn how to control my nerves, and acting has helped. I've been doing some courses for advanced actors at RADA in London and it's helped me a lot. I'm a perfectionist and have high standards, and I try to reach them.

You performed 'Angels' with Robbie Williams in Moscow seven years ago. Are there any other pop stars you'd like to collaborate with?

Someone like Eminem and also Sting, maybe on his song 'Desert Rose' which is beautiful and has a very oriental sound. Or he could write something new, I don't know!

Apart from this headline show you're also performing alongside Andrea Bocelli as a guest soprano at the O2 later this year.

Yes, there will be two concerts. I'm so excited to perform at this incredible, huge venue. Andrea and I have been friends for 14 years, and I've toured with him in America at Madison Square Garden in New York and the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. I always have a beautiful time sharing the stage with Andrea. He's an incredible singer, there's something magical in his voice.