

Livia Obrůník Vénosová on Foerster's Eva

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How did you react when you got the offer to portray the role of Eva in the opera of the same name by Josef Bohuslav Foerster? It is a rather unknown opera on the Czech opera scene and was last performed in 1981.

Obrůník Vénosová: I am the type of singer who enjoys this. Something that hasn't been done too often or something that nobody wants to do, because the pay is too small, or it will not play very often. I think a singer comes across a role like Eva just once in her lifetime. I don't regret a single second I put into it and I am very grateful to the Liberec production team for offering this role to me and that I was able to study it.

Linda Keprtová with her captivating and thrilling direction drew the audience into the dramatic life of Eva, an orphan who longs for true love. Did it come as a surprise to you, how emotionally the story about the "unknown" developed?

Obrůník Vénosová: Every rehearsal, every performance of *Eva* left its mark on me. Eva connected with me, Eva engulfed me.

Did you succumb to Eva?

Obrůník Vénosová: Yes!

Who is Eva?

Obrůník Vénosová: Eva is proud, beautiful, hardworking and very in love. Very in love. She tries to live a good life, she is looking for her way in life. I really like her quote: "*Because of love I never sought. What wrongs and misery I must bear!*" ("*Wieviel Leid und Schmach erleb' ich ob der ungefragten Liebe!*"). It is love that finds us, even though we are not looking for it. And this love is sometimes so engrossing, strong and vicious, it hurts a person. It is a beautiful story and Eva is really loving, she follows her heart, she is rebellious. You could say that she sometimes pays for it, but she stays

true to herself.

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In Linda Keprtová's adaptation of Eva, soil is an important scenic element. Eva digs around in the soil all the time, she works with it. What does the soil symbolize in Eva?

Obručnick Vénosová: The soil in *Eva*, directed by Linda Keprtová, represents life. Soil contains life and Eva wants to create something beautiful from it, something of her own. It is actually her only prop, she works with it the most. Soil is the fundament of existence, the fundament of life. There is a lot of subtext. Maybe when a person sees it for the first time, not everything will be immediately obvious. But Eva simply tries to grow something beautiful in those flowerpots, but nothing grows out of that soil. Nothing. Linda Keprtová loves to use symbolism. Eva wants to grow something in the flowerpots and at the end of the third act, she pours out the soil to find nothing had grown.

How was it working with the production team of Eva? Did you get more and more excited by Foerster's music?

Obručnick Vénosová: I think all of us thought Foerster – a Czech opera, we'll learn it in no time. But it wasn't as easy as we thought it would be. It actually came together like some sort of mosaic, even the orchestra and piano rehearsals. But I think we were all successful in the end. But I also know that each of us did a fair share of work and we did not get anything for free, even though we thought we would come to a few rehearsals and manage the intonation and rhythm.

I think that Linda Keprtová, the director, did not want to give you anything without working for it. The way she penetrated Eva's character and the psychology of the opera...

Obručník Vénosová: She is a real thinker and she thought about this story for a long time and gave it her best. Maybe you find the soil weird and even Samko, just sitting there—How can he catch Mánko and Eva, when they are together and he is just sitting there? We asked all these questions and sometimes even tried convincing Linda, but she always persuaded us and showed us just how well she had everything thought-out. And she did persuade us. Well, it's rather logical. Eva enters, and it is like she opens the door for Samko, she opens the door by taking off his hat. "You harlot, who was just here, Meljaný's Mánek." And this is when the conflict starts. And can there be a conflict, if he sits through the entire scene, the entire opera on a chair?

You are a mother of two. The death of a child is a key theme in Eva. Do you think it is necessary to emotionally mature for the role of Eva?

Obručník Vénosová: In Pilsen, I used to sing in Giacomo Puccini's opera *Suor Angelica*. I didn't have any children at that time, I was carefree and I had to simulate the emotions of motherhood. Now, as the mother of two, I can put in much more true emotion, because I know what motherhood entails and what it costs a woman and what emotions she goes through when she has a child. What a gift it is and what happiness it brings. And I don't even want to imagine the happiness that is taken from a woman when she loses her child. I can just imagine it, but now I understand it better.