

ARTS



Opera for today

Athenian opera star Rodula Gaitanou is set to direct an 18th century opera as part of Hobart Baroque

PHOTO: SIMON CORDER.

PENNI PAPPAS

Hobart Baroque is a brand new event celebrating the music of the 17th and 18th centuries and will open on April 12 with *L'isola disabitata* (the uninhabited island), directed by Athenian Rodula Gaitanou.

"Haydn's *L'isola disabitata* is a little gem," begins Rodula, "a chamber opera for four performers with an exciting story and well drawn characters, a witty text and some glorious tunes."

"*L'isola disabitata* is, as the name suggests, an environmental piece and I think what we've created with my colleagues, the designer Jamie Vartan and the lighting designer Simon Corder, is quite special."

Gaitanou was born in Athens and grew up in a musical family. She trained as a violinist at the Mousikoi Orizontes Conservatory, gained a degree in Musicology at Paris-Sorbonne University, and went on to a Masters in Musical Dramaturgy and Opera Staging at Paris 8 University, Saint-Denis.

While in Paris she attended the celebrated Laboratoire d'Etude du Mouvement of the International Theatre School Jacques Lecoq, and worked as an intern at the Opera National de Paris and Theatre du Chatelet. Rodula joined the ROH Jette Parker Young Artists Programme in September 2010 and made her ROH directing debut with Haydn's *L'isola disabitata* in the Linbury Studio Theatre, returning to the ROH as Revival Director for Richard Eyre's *La Traviata* in 2011.

"I had a very significant experience as a child," Rodula tells *Neos Kosmos*, "my dad was for some years the Artistic Director of the Greek National Opera and both me and my sister would go to the theatre with him every single evening."

"We saw so many shows and were exposed to so many pieces, we also took part in a handful - I did my stage debut as a child in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Looking back at it, gosh it was intense, a life immersed in opera but in my eyes as a child this was such a familiar art form."

When asked what opera means to her, Rodula answers emphatically: "Opera is my passion, my work, my hobby; I get the goosebumps in rehearsals every day, I am in constant awe of the art form. It is the ultimate way to tell a story, emotional, direct, physical yet abstract."

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The acclaimed direction by Rodula of the rare work of Joseph Haydn first premiered in 1776 at Prince Esterhazy's palace at Esterhaza, Hungary. The production is an intimate chamber opera composed for four young singers and an orchestra of twenty players, to be conducted by Oliver Gooch.

"I am very lucky to be working with Oliver Gooch who is the conductor and a star cast - Anna Devin, Madeleine Pierard,

Ed Lyon and Changham Lim. They are all very powerful performers and they embody the concept passionately," says Rodula, adding her excitement that this trip, her first to Australia, will involve working in Theatre Royal, one of the oldest theatres in the Southern Hemisphere.

it easier to cope with.

"I have the chance to work with wonderful artists and people. The one that truly stands out for me is Antonio Pappano. He is a truly exceptional artist with a fantastic working ethos. I have learnt so much from working with him and observing him;

Rodula explains.

"It's well loved and it's becoming more popular, I'd say. Greece is a small country and for its size we don't do badly."

Rodula tells me there is one major national opera company, few producing houses and several smaller companies in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra, and Larissa.

"It's quite remarkable that despite the crisis the Greek National Opera is running one of its most successful seasons as far as the audience response is concerned. Opera is also getting out there with projects designed to present opera to new audiences in schools, markets, in the streets and on the buses," she says.

L'isola disabitata, by London's Royal Opera House, is at the Theatre Royal, Hobart on Friday 12 April, Sunday 16 April, Thursday 18 April and Saturday 20 April. Hobart Baroque is on from Friday 12 April until Saturday 20 April with events celebrating the music of the 17th and 18th centuries. For tickets and event information visit www.hobartbaroque.com.au

A trained violinist, Rodula also plays double bass and sings as well, but really made her mark in the opera world as a director. She bases herself in London, UK, but travels all over in pursuit of her work. Working on opera productions for different companies means a different city for Rodula to live in but says it's part and parcel of her work's lifestyle. Close relationships and friendships forged with colleagues make

his musicianship and his unique sense of drama are a true inspiration to me," she says.

Coming from an operatic Greek family, I am curious to discover how important and popular opera and classical music are in Greece.

"Greeks have been enamoured with opera for almost two centuries now. There is quite a remarkable repertoire of operatic works by Greek composers,"