



■ *Angela Gheorghiu*

involved. In his acknowledgements Tolansky thanks the Romanian PR manager Sorana Savu ‘for conducting in-depth conversations from which substantial portions of this book have been furnished’. Between the chapters are glowing encomia from numerous colleagues, a couple of them (Carol Neblett, Paul Findlay) no longer with us.

The bulk of the book concentrates on Gheorghiu’s early years, the beginnings of her career and what one might think of as its full flowering. When covering recent years, and specifically those following her divorce from Roberto Alagna in 2013, the narrative tends to tail off into briefer generalities—though she is keen to advertise her new relationship with the Romanian dentist Mihai Ciortea, who makes the final contribution (‘Whenever I listen to her singing or watch her live onstage, I feel as if she is floating above us all, as if she is somehow elevated, levitating’).

Gheorghiu’s childhood and youth were anything but lavish, but her family were better off than many Romanians: her father had a secure job with the railway and (unusually in a Communist country) they owned their six-roomed house. Her

talent was spotted early but, while paying tribute to her teacher Mia Barbu at the High School of Art in Bucharest, Gheorghiu insists that interpretatively she has relied on her own instincts (‘I would do the study of the actual text and score as I always did it, by myself [...] I was my own singing teacher, coach, pianist, everything’).

She describes how hers developed into an exceptional talent in Bucharest and how through the Vienna Belvedere Competition and Covent Garden (Peter Katona makes two contributions) she became an international star. On a more personal level, she gives accounts of her meeting with and marriage to her first husband, Andrei Gheorghiu (she was born Angela Burlacu), her subsequent meeting with and marriage to her second husband, Roberto Alagna, and (more laconically) her two divorces. She describes her closeness to her sister Elena as children and as students, though she is understandably reticent about Elena’s death in 1996.

There are longer sections on some of Gheorghiu’s central roles—Mimi, Violetta, Tosca, Butterfly (which she has not sung on stage), Adriana—but no explanation of why her repertoire has remained relatively small. Some of the notorious ‘incidents’ are recounted, obviously from her point of view, which naturally makes her behaviour seem eminently reasonable.

One account, however, does not: at a charity event at St James’s Palace, the concert she was taking part in started an unscheduled 45 minutes late without anyone informing her about the delay. ‘Then I decided that, from the moment when they would say they were ready for me, I will stay in my dressing room for 15 to 20 minutes. After 20 minutes I got out onstage.’

There will doubtless be subsequent books on Gheorghiu, without her involvement or imprimatur. Until then, this provides a lot of worthwhile material, straight from the diva’s mouth.

GEORGE HALL