

Mary Jane Rose Johnson Pampa High School Class of 1968



The American soprano, Mary Jane Johnson, is considered one of the foremost interpreters of the dramatic repertory. Her career highlights include the role of Emilia Martv in Janacek's *The Makropoulos Case* which she sang at the January, 1996 Metropolitan Opera, *Lady Macbeth* in Verdi's *Macbeth* as well as the role of Katarina Ismailova in Shostakovitch's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* at the Opera Bastille, Minne in Puccini's *LaFanciulla del West* and Strauss' *Salome* at the Teatro alia Scala in Milan.

Ms. Johnson's interpretation of Nfinnie in *La Fanclulta del West* has been heard on the world's most important stages including the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago, in Japan on tour with La Scala, and with the Santa Fe Opera Festival. The artist is also known for her interpretation of other dramatic roles which were the core of her last and current seasons - *Salome* with La Scala and the title role of Puccini's *Turandot* with the Welsh National Opera, Edmonton and Winnipeg opera theaters. She reprises the role of the Chinese Princess in the 1996-1997 season in Canada and in Australia.

Other companies in which Ms. Johnson has appeared include the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, the Teatro Communal in Santiago, Chile, San Francisco, Netherlands, Washington, Pittsburgh, and Montreal Operas as well as the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Houston Grand Opera. The various roles she has performed in these distinguished theaters include *Tosca*, *Areiadne auf Naxos*, *Maschera*, *Desdemona* in *Otello*, *Senta* in *Der Fliegende Hollander* and the Empress in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* among many others.

Important highlights of Ms. Johnson's career on the concert stage include performances of *Fidello* with Maestro Lofin Maazel and the Pittsburgh Symphony, both in Pittsburgh and at Carnegie Hall and *Freia* in *Das Rheingold* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Sir Georg Solti. Other distinguished orchestral appearances include concerts in Naples with the RAI Orchestra, and in San Francisco with San Francisco Symphony. Ms. Johnson has been equally successful on the recital stage. In fact, she has appeared extensively and to great acclaim in the most distinguished recital halls of North America.

Ms. Johnson was the first winner of the Pavarotti competition and appeared with the great tenor in a televised performance of Musetta in Puccini's *La Boheme* with the opera company of Philadelphia. Other important highlights of her appearances on television include the nationally televised Pavarotti Plus Gala, live from Lincoln Center and CBS "Sunday This Morning" with Charles Kuralt. Ms. Johnson has received encouragement and praise from a variety of sources. Lee Shaenen of the Chicago Lyric Opera School said, "You are too advanced for our lyric school. You should be singing in an opera house in Europe." Theodore Uppman of the Metropolitan Opera wrote, "She does not really have any idea how truly talented she is."

When asked about her voice range, she said, "When I was in high school, I sang first alto, but my voice has matured, and I am now classed as a spinto - dramatic coloratura soprano. My voice is just now beginning to achieve its full range." Radiating poise and self-confidence, she said of her career, "When I graduated from high school, I never dreamed of going into opera. Since I had made all-state choir for two consecutive years, I decided my voice was good enough to enable me to major in music education at Texas Tech. As my voice began to develop, my instructors encouraged me to pursue a career in opera." She continued, "Rosemary Lawler was my very first voice teacher. Gene Kenney at Texas Tech and Hugh Sanders and Jerry Doan of West Texas were especially helpful to me." In addition to voice, she has studied Italian, German, French and Spanish.

A native of Pampa, Texas, Miss Johnson was born March 23, 1950. Her parents were the late Mr. and Mrs. Rex Rose of 505 N. Gray in Pampa. While in high school, Ms. Johnson sang the female lead in "Brigadoon" the all-school musical. Always popular with her peers and active in extra curricular activities, she was elected to the varsity cheerleader squad and chosen to reign as basketball queen.

After graduating from Pampa High School in 1968, Ms. Johnson earned a B.M.E. degree from Texas Tech University in 1972 and an M.M. degree from West Texas State University in 1978. She met her husband, David, while they were both students at Texas Tech. They married between her junior and senior years, and currently live in Amarillo, Texas with their two children.

Commenting on the fact that a career is not always compatible with marriage, she said, "David has always encouraged and supported me, and I have done the same for him. We each want the other to take advantage of every opportunity when the time is right." Ms. Johnson said that she had observed many girls who are ambivalent about their aims. "They seem to be seeking both a career and a husband at the same time, and this can be very frustrating. I was lucky to have developed a happy and secure family relationship first. This emotional satisfaction frees me to concentrate on my work with complete peace of mind."