

LEILI TAMMEL, Meeli Lass’ singing teacher and vocal coach:

I have followed Meeli’s character and development for many years. I was a lecturer at the Tallinn Conservatoire (although, admittedly, with no real experience in teaching at the time). Meeli came to study with me. Even then, she was exceptionally musical, and I hardly interfered with her technique at all, as she was already top of her class.

Before long, she was singing the role of Mimì in Puccini’s *La Bohème*. The guest conductor, Cillario, called her “a little Callas”. She had a unique, enchanting voice – something every singer should have, like a fingerprint.

I left Estonia in the year 2000, and since my own career had been fairly long (starting in 1973), I took the opportunity to start teaching the so called amateurs, including choir singers of all ages who wanted to improve their techniques. That was really the moment when I began to explore various techniques in depth. Through coaching, I realised that my own technique did not suit everyone, and that vocal technique should be universal – in the sense that it supports all singers. We must give assistance to those who do not necessarily aspire to become professional singers, and when obvious progress is made, we can move on to the next “test subject”, and so on.

I was away from Estonia for 17 years, which is a long time, and all I knew about Meeli was that she was devoting herself to her large family.

Occasionally, she was still invited to perform, and it was then that she began to seek my help again, so as to adjust her technique. In recent years we have once again been working on her technique, and being really quick to grasp the essentials, she has now reached the level which should have been our starting point when she first took up studies under my guidance.
Mea maxima culpa!

Even now, she is capable of surprising the audience with her musicality, her expressiveness, and the natural charm of her voice.



Meeli Lass

(soprano)

My Arias



MEELI LASS: My mother says that I started carrying a tune and singing before I even began to speak. Singing has accompanied me throughout my entire life, and only now am I beginning to understand better how therapeutic it truly is. Perhaps it is thanks to singing that I have managed to make it through the more difficult periods of my life more or less painlessly.

As a child, I was incredibly resourceful and downright plucky – I wanted to have music lessons with the renowned singing teacher Ave Kumpas, just like a classmate of mine did, and one day I simply tagged along with him and his mother, and that was that. Many of the most exciting moments of my childhood were spent in the Estonian Television Company building recording children’s programmes or performing concerts with the Ellerhein girls’ choir. At school I had a wonderful music teacher, Lydia Rahula, and I desperately yearned to be like her. Inspired by that yearning, I went on to study choral conducting, but already in my first year my vocal coach managed to talk me into taking up singing studies as well. Four years later, I graduated as a choral conductor – and a singer.

In 1989, I became the first Estonian musician to be accepted into the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna (*Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien*). Unfortunately, due to the economic situation at the time and visa problems, I was unable to take up my place there. I entered the theatre world in much the same way – first as a dresser, a year later as an opera chorus singer, and then as a soloist. The Estonian National Opera was my second home for nearly 26 years, with only short breaks in between. During that time, I also continued my training at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts, as well as in Florence. In 2014, I decided to become a freelancer. I sometimes laugh that in my youth I worked with almost every professional music ensemble in Tallinn – except the male choir.

Singing transports me into other dimensions; I forget all everyday worries and troubles. The human voice is a marvellous instrument for the soul to express itself, to become both audible and visible. I am endlessly grateful to the Creator for this gift.

I have been dreaming of making a record, but I have very little managerial talent. Now, when this wonderful opportunity arose and Aular offered it to me (or rather, “sweet talked” me into doing it), I just had to seize it. The album consists mostly of arias by my favourite composer, Puccini. I am deeply captivated and inspired by his musical language and expressiveness. Besides, Mimì was my first major role in opera when I was 21. Gounod’s aria of Marguerite was one of the first pieces I ever studied, and Tosti’s *Ridonami la calma* touches me to the core. I cannot find words to explain it. This is how it is.

I wanted to make this album above all as a keepsake for my five daughters and my grandchildren. And, of course, as a thank you to my teacher, Leili Tammel, who has always stood by me, supported me, taught me, comforted me and inspired me through all times. If this album manages to touch at least one more soul, it will have fulfilled its purpose. I am grateful.



HELIN KAPTEN is an experienced pianist and teacher who has worked at the Estonian National Opera, the Vaasa Opera, the Jyväskylä Conservatoire Opera Studio, contributed to the PromFest opera projects, and collaborated with numerous vocal teachers and conductors both in Estonia and abroad. She has served as a musical coach and stage partner to many well known Estonian singers (including Mati Palm, Ain Anger, Aile Asszonyi, Meeli Lass, Rauno Elp, Mart Madiste, Eda Zahharova, Ksenia Rossar, Elina Nechayeva, and others).

She has performed widely as a *Lied*-pianist and accompanist with various soloists in Estonia, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United States, Canada, Lithuania, Italy, China, and elsewhere, and has given numerous masterclasses in opera and vocal chamber music both in Estonia and internationally.

Helin Kapten is currently employed by the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, working as Professor of Vocal Chamber Music and Accompaniment, as well as Head of the Study Programme in the Department of Composition and Interpretational Music.

