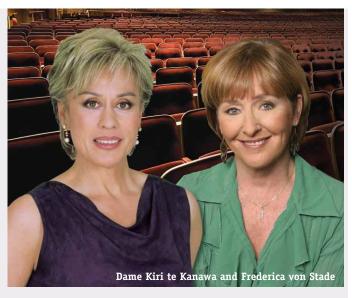


by Nancy C. Hermann

IT IS A DREAM-COME-TRUE interview for any opera fan. Revered soprano Dame Kiri te Kanawa takes my call at her home in New Zealand and, fortuitous for me, American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade is her current houseguest. As I introduce myself, I hear exquisite singing in the background. "I'll just get Flicka," te Kanawa tells me, and I am struck by the overwhelming richness of this moment.

Talking via speakerphone, the two internationally famous voices laugh and recall their careers with candor while I decorously attempt to focus on the conversation. This, after all, is the Kiri te Kanawa whose voice captivated an era, who sang at Charles and Diana's wedding, whom **Leonard Bernstein** chose as his Maria for the operatic version of West Side Story, and her friend, "Flicka," one of opera's most beloved artists.

Von Stade, I learn, is taking a short break abroad after wrapping her performance as Mrs. De Rocher, the condemned man's mother in Jake Heggie's Dead Man Walking. It is one of many parts that have been written expressly for her. At home in the world's grandest concert halls and opera houses, von Stade, who as a young teen wanted to be a Broadway star, boasts an immense repertoire and the respect of music lovers across many genres. Not long ago, she and opera god Samuel Ramey sang together again in a heralded Kennedy Center concert, the same year she and Josh Groban were guest artists at te Kanawa's Hollywood



Bowl Hall of Fame induction.

Friends since they met in a production of Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro decades ago in Santa Fe, te Kanawa and von Stade confirm that one piece they'll be doing together in Tulsa will be "Via resti servita" from Figaro. Te Kanawa will sing her iconic "O Mio Babbino Caro" by Puccini, and Liszt's "Oh! Quand je dors," among other solos and duets. Von Stade will perform Poulenc's "Voyage a Paris" as well as Piaf and Gugliemi's "La Vie en Rose," along with music by Rodgers and Hammerstein, Sondheim, Heggie, and more.

Having composer Jake Heggie accompany you will be a bonus.

FVS: Yes, we're doing a lot of his music. KTK: Flicka has worked with him so much, so we thought it was a great idea if he did that concert with us.

How did you come across Heggie's work?

FVS: I've known him for years. He used to do press at San Francisco Opera, and then everyone started talking about his music. He showed it around and he was asked to write Dead Man Walking with Terrence McNally. They took a huge chance on him and it worked out well.

KTK: I met him in Los Angeles — at least 20 years ago. He was page-turning for one of my concerts.

Frederica, you just finished a production of Dead Man Walking.

FVS: Yes! Jake had a triumph. And he had a triumph in Dallas with Moby-Dick as well. He's just fantastic and Dead Man Walking is being done everywhere. He's a delight, and we're doing a whole section in the concert of his songs. He's written a duet for us.

Is that "The Years Roll By," which will premiere in Tulsa?

FVS and KTK: Yes!

Is it more difficult than you would have imagined, putting together a program that showcases you both?

FVS: Very easy. We both have lots and lots of music. It's great fun doing it, so that's the spirit of it.

What do you like about each other? [both laughing] KTK: Don't ask! That one's really personal.

Are there pieces of music that when you revisit them, give you a sense of "coming home"?

KTK: I think all of it gives us a sense of coming home, really. Each of us has had such a joyous career. Hard work. We remember how much work that was. None of this has ever come easy, but the joy of having achieved what we did — it's such a pleasure looking back now.

FVS: The songs, the repertoire, have become old friends. We just love hearing them again. We've sung some of these songs for 40 years, and you never tire of them.

Q+A Dame Viri le Hanawa and Frederica von Flade

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When have you said to yourself, "I wish I could take this feeling with me for the rest of my life"?

KTK: I think it happens all the time. On stage, we are working, but if we're thinking about a feeling that we'd like to take with us, we'd like to take the memory of having our cup of tea or cup of coffee on the terrace overlooking the water this morning and saying goodbye to this beautiful area. It's a memory we take with us. It's very precious, because it only happens for a day.

FVS: Every performance has something special about it. There is a certain sense of privilege of performing — hearing a great orchestra, being with great colleagues; hearing magnificent voices. Even when I am not in form, I am still thrilled about what we have. What our work is. What we go to work in the morning and hear and do.

What does the average music fan not understand about what it takes for you to deliver a beautiful performance?

KTK: Hard work. [laughing]
FVS: And time. Time, time. time.
KTK: When someone is putting in a hard day's work, for instance, a man digging a big hole in the ground for a large container, or something, he knows when he is going to come to the end of it. For us, we don't know, because there's tomorrow and we think we should have done better. We have to make our own standards again and again.

As you move into the next stages of your career, do you feel any sense of loss with respect to the relationship you have with your voice?

KTK: It's a funny one, that one.
FVS: Even when your voice is not what you want it to be, it's still an old friend and it's given us so much. I'm probably leaving the stage a little earlier than Kiri, but even with that, I'm still using it in working with kids. So there's something we're doing, whether it's fundraising or something else. You don't kind of close up shop. And so far, I don't know the relief of not having to keep it in shape, because

we are always testing our voice and fiddling with it. It's just different.

KTK: Another thing is that we have to keep up a certain standard for the young people we are working with. They have to see that at this age we can still produce something they can't, even at our age. ... We are still trying to encourage them to work hard and maybe make it.

Did becoming mothers add a dimension to you as artists that you would not otherwise have had?

FVS: Oh, I think so. It takes a part of your heart.

KTK: There are other needs, other than your own needs.

FVS: All of a sudden you've become second, and I found that a terrific relief.

Are there any voices belonging to current or upcoming singers that have impressed you?

FVS: I'm deeply impressed with Joyce DiDonato. a mezzo-soprano who I think is one of the great voices and great talents of this generation and sings beautifully and innovatively and marvelously. I hear a lot of great young voices. Just sensational. **KTK:** I have two New Zealanders at the moment. We are concentrating on the higher end, higher quality of New Zealanders coming through, but I have worked at the Met for the last four seasons and I will continue to do this season. and into Christmas as well. I'm involved in the Solti Te Kanawa Accademia in Italy, a three-week course there. I've chosen a Canadian girl [to study at the academy] who I saw in Chicago [Ravinia Festival]. I thought, "Oh, I think she looks very much like Flicka." Cute as button. Her name is Wallis Giunta. As cute as cute can be.

FVS: I find it very exciting hearing these young singers. There's a certain thrill to it. I find them very beautifully prepared — on top of things and very professional.

So, overall, the level of training is quite good?

KTK: The only problem I find is that they are forced to be slim, and unfortunately you can only sing so much on a

slim body. I think you have to have a fighting weight. And I don't mean overweight; I just mean a fighting weight.

Kiri, in Tulsa you'll be singing Luther Vandross' "Dance With My Father."

KTK: I just like it. I don't sing it like he does so beautifully. I wouldn't try to copy him, so I do it my way.

And "I Cain't Say No" for Frederica?

FVS: It kind of represents, for me, someone who I adored, who didn't actually sing it, and that's Ethel Merman. I get the biggest kick out of singing it.

KTK: Once Flicka was coming to New Zealand and by chance I was asked if I could sing at a fundraising concert. I said I really didn't have time to do it because my friend Frederica von Stade was coming to stay for a very short time, and they said, "Oh, oh, that would be great!" I said, "No, no I can't ask her," but I did. So that song goes back, of course — she couldn't say no. And we raised a lot of money!

Why "Send in the Clowns"?

FVS: I think "Send in the Clowns" is probably Sondheim's greatest song.

KTK: The best, ves.

FVS: And certainly [from] one of his greatest shows. I have always loved it: the image of somebody trusting a beautiful melody, with a beautiful intention.

KTK: It's not easy to sing the first phrase. It's a bit troublesome. You can go right out of tune with it.

Is there anything else you want to include about this upcoming concert?

KTK: It's just that we love to perform together. Any excuse. Really any excuse. **FVS:** And we love having Jake along. He's just the best.

Dame Kiri te Kanawa and Frederica von Stade

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