

DAGMAR KOLLER

“AUSTRIA’S AMBASSADOR TO THE WORLD”

She is recognized as the leading German language musical star of her time. She attended ballet school at the age of six. Later, she studied at the Vienna Academy of Music and Performing Arts. She began her career at the Vienna, Volksoper and quickly became known beyond the borders of Austria. From July to November 1964, she traveled with a tour of Wiener Blut, with a Viennese production company in the US and Canada. In the operetta, The Land of Smiles (1964 in Berlin) by Franz Lehár, they enjoyed great success. Later, she appeared in numerous musicals, such as My Fair Lady, West Side Story and Sweet Charity. She married to Austrian journalist and politician, Helmut Zilk, in 1978, and became the first lady of Vienna, while he served as Mayor. During this time she maintained her active career as a musical star. As First Lady of Vienna, she received such International celebrities as Prince Charles and Diana, Frank Sinatra, Liza Minnelli, Plácido Domingo and American First Lady, Nancy Reagan. They were living their dream until Helmut Zilk's death in 2008. Nowadays, among other things, she is the publisher of the magazine "Enjoy Vienna", published by the Press and Information Services of the City of Vienna.

THIS YEAR IN APRIL, DAGMAR KOLLER RECEIVED, FOR HER SERVICES TO THE REPUBLIC, THE GRAND DECORATION OF HONOR FROM THE HANDS OF FEDERAL CHANCELLOR, WERNER FAYMANN. SHE RECEIVED THE DECORATIONS ON A PROPOSAL FROM VOLKSOPER DIRECTOR, ROBERT MEYER. “DAGMAR KOLLER, WITH HER GREAT TALENT AND HER ALWAYS RADIANT WARMTH, IS AUSTRIA’S AMBASSADOR TO THE WORLD” SAID FAYMANN AT THE AWARD CEREMONY, AT THE FEDERAL CHANCELLERY. KOLLER IS NOT ONLY KNOWN AS AN ARTIST, BUT ALSO FOR WELL-KNOWN FOR HER TOLERANCE AND OPENNESS.



Recently you have been given an honor from the Federal Chancellor who apostrophes you as the “Ambassador of Austria” worldwide. How did you feel when you received this honor?

It is such an incredible feeling! I was so excited that I even trembled with excitement of mixed happiness. It happened to me all of a sudden and I consider this honor as a most beautiful appreciation. I have worked in many places such as Japan, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United States of America, Germany and Luxembourg, then I returned to Vienna in the second part of the 70s. Wherever I travelled, I always represented my Mother Country. For instance in the United States, I was asked at a concert held in Cincinnati, where I came from, but they could not locate Austria in their minds. Then, I started to sing the Blue Danube Waltz, which was recognized immediately and then my home land could then be linked somewhere.

How did your career begin?

My career started as a ballet-dancer, I was dancing between the age of 16 and 20. I can thank my dance teacher, at that time, a lot, who was extremely strict with me and was paying attention to me with an eternal belief in my talent. The significant point and great publicity came when I played together with Josef Meinrad - who was already famous – in the Man of La Mancha, in Vienna in 1968. This – in retrospect – was the most beautiful moment of my career. I learned a lot from Josef. He was not only my partner, but my mentor too. In my early youth I went to the United States, where I gained great success as well. I was accompanied by the famous Strauss Orchestra on the tour throughout the States. We gave huge concerts every night. I personalized the “Woman of Vienna” in the eyes of the New York audience. My success has made me happy and this has given me the basis for a great leap forward.

Did you always know that you were born for the stage?

I am one of the few actresses who have spent almost their whole professional life on stage. In the beginning, I was looking for the most suitable genre for me. In the early years of my career I worked in more musicals, such as the Sweet Charity in Germany. I also undertook some roles in opera movies; I felt that these two genres could not be carried out simultaneously with the same dedication. Therefore, I had to decide to choose between film making and fast



fame or remaining on stage. I committed myself to the latter, due to my love for the public. As Plácido Domingo told me once: “The audience decides on whether the actor, singer is likeable even before stepping on stage, the first impression and vibes are the most important phenomenon. You ought to be charismatic.”

What is the key of your success, in your point of view?

My recipe for success is that I always thought of what should be the next activity, I would love to do and be active. I have never stood still. Returning to Europe I continued working in Berlin. An agent picked up on me, at that time and thanks to this, I could have the possibility to



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travel around the world with the famous singer, Giuseppe di Stefano. It is true that a great deal of good fortune was a must for these opportunities, but investing an enormous amount of work was inevitable and it must have been coupled with resignation. Self-discipline and diligence were typical aspects of my entire life. I have never had “Star allure”. I tried to cooperate with every single colleague of mine disregarding his/her position as a singer, technician or dresser. We could count on each other mutually. It was always important for me to go prepared for the walk-through, for which, I would have liked to express my respect towards my partners, as well. When I came back from the United States, I gained tremendous experience. I had to learn how to handle this situation, as displays of professional jealousy are bound to happen in such circumstances. My husband whom I had gotten to know then helped me a lot with this issue. As a German teacher, he often chiseled my manner of speech providing me with much advice. By the way, I am a stage fright type and at first this made me more anxious but then I took advantage out of it.

From where could you trace your talent?

My grandfather was fond of singing, however, he worked as a headmaster. His son, my father, loved the opera and was euphonic, but finally he became an academic painter, a professor of painting. He has even taught me how to paint, but I was more interested in dance and singing. As I had the voice for it, at first I studied singing in Vienna, then in Italy for a couple of months because the really good opera technique is known solely there.

Many travels and working abroad generate a lot of acquaintances, can you name a few?

Yes, I am in good friendship with numerous famous people. For example with Richard Burton whose dressing room was given to me when I played on Broadway in the United States. Moreover, I had been working together with his wife, at that time, in the movie of A Little Night Music (Das Lachen einer Sommernacht). It was an extraordinary beautiful but hard job. It has been a real challenge! Moreover, I had a great friendship with Larry Hagman whose wife I knew as well. Their match was a wonderful marriage of two great people. I could mention Jack Lemmon too with whom I loved to work. As I always flutter, he made me relax telling me the following: “Dagmar, don’t be stressed by the presence of the cameras. When feeling the camera on your face, think of that... this is a magic.” Despite I was in fever since all the actresses were immaculate beauties and I was not very photogenic. I have never undertaken any single cosmetic intervention at all, as I didn’t want to lose the character of my face.

Vienna is one of the cultural capitals. How could it become one?

A lot of people around here are coming from the West and East. This diversity maintains the atmosphere and creates development. However, in order to manage this, it is very important to have a “with each other” instead of an “against each other” type of attitude. The cultural community has always been solid, many writers, poets, artists and philosophers were educated here by the city. Even the two World Wars have shaped people in a smarter way. I do believe that the current young generation will get the point that it is possible to live a full happy life, with less. We ought not to think of the money round the clock as not this but liberty is what brings happiness.

What else would you like to get out of life?

I was raised in happy but humble circumstances. I have always had dreams in which I believed and managed to realize them. I have given concerts at many places and I have been receiving many invitations to Embassy Events lately, for instance, I have visited Lisbon. My latest wish is to make a trip to Tibet for health. I would like to go to and spend a long time in India as well, where I have never been.

