

**The life and career of
the South African dramatic soprano
Marita Napier**

by

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ABSTRACT

No formal or structured research on post-graduate level has been conducted on the life and career of the South African soprano Marita Napier.

Marita Napier donated the valuable items pertaining to her life and impressive record of achievements to the University of Pretoria. After thorough processing, research and analysis of the information on Napier's professional career, this donation is beneficial to researchers nationally and internationally. Because of the author's involvement with the Marita Napier Collection and with Marita Napier personally she started this dissertation on Napier's life and career. The author visited her several times during the final months of her illness and as a consequence received invaluable hints and illuminating information covering her professional career.

Following Chapter 1, which provides general information about the study, Chapter 2 presents information about Marita Napier's youth and early life (1939-1963). Napier's overseas singing career between 1964 and 1971 is discussed in Chapter 3 while her professional career overseas and in South Africa during the period 1972-1979 is focused on in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 describes her professional career overseas and in South Africa between 1980 and 1989, while Chapter 6 covers her professional career overseas and in South Africa during 1990-2002. Chapter 7 includes her achievements and contributions to the world of opera overseas and in South Africa. The final Chapter 8 is a summary of the conclusions drawn in this study and is followed by a source list and a discography. The dissertation concludes with an appendix consisting of a CD-ROM containing photographs of Napier's life and career arranged chronological between 1963 and 2002 as well as recordings of her singing.

The research question for this study focuses on the main stages of Marita Napier's life and career and her contribution to the world of opera from 1963 until 2002. The aim of the study was to chronologically present her life and career until she received the Heritage Charter in 2002 from the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in the recognition of her outstanding international singing career.

To achieve these aims all available sources were chronologically structured to provide, as accurately as possible, an exposition of her life and career. In addition to these sources interviews were held with Napier and various acquaintances. Every available publication pertaining to her life and professional career were duly scrutinized. This includes the curriculum vitas of Napier of all her appearances between 1968 and 1999 and of Robert Lombardo, Napier's agent in New York, from 1972 to 1988.

In evaluating Napier's contributions to the world of opera overseas and in South Africa, the author came to the conclusion that her greatest contributions were her exceptional interpretations of the music of Wagner and Strauss worldwide. Napier achieved great recognition and also gave exceptional interpretations of Lieder.

An equally great contribution was the presentation of Napier's master classes overseas. One of Napier's memorable contributions to opera in South Africa was the way in which she shared her wide experience while training potential opera singers.



KEYWORDS

Marita Napier

Recordings

Achievements

Contributions

Opera

Discography

Richard Wagner

Richard Strauss

Music education

Lieder



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late husband Prof. N.L. Roux who was my mentor, inspiration and love for 35 years.

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Soli Deo Gloria



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

It appears that, until now, no formal or structured research on post-graduate level has been conducted on the life and career of Marita Napier. This would therefore be a first and unique study about her life and impressive record of achievements.

Since the onset of her terminal illness Marita Napier sought a safe and accessible place for her many precious original opera scores, reviews, programmes, compact discs, records, awards, memorabilia, photographs, posters, cassettes, opera dresses and articles in periodicals and journals. It goes without saying that quite a few South African universities were interested.

In 2002 I wrote an article in the journal *Musicus* (published by the University of South Africa) to introduce the South African Music Collection of the University of Pretoria, which has been my responsibility since 1990, to a wider public. In the article it is explained that each one of the special collections is kept separately and made accessible on the Internet. It is also discussed that none of these collections may be incorporated in any other music library. Each collection has a unique shelf number distinguishing one collection from another. Restoration is done on an annual basis by specialists. The location in which the collections are stored is unique in the sense that each individual piece of sheet music is kept in an acid-free container. The windows of this particular facility at the Academic Information Service (the University Library) of the University of Pretoria are covered with a special coating reflecting 75% of the damaging ultraviolet rays of the sun.

My mentor, Prof. H.H. van der Mescht, some time ago took pains to convince Marita Napier to donate her valuable items pertaining to her life and impressive singing career to

the University of Pretoria. After comparing the proposal of Prof. Van der Mescht with similar possibilities existing at that stage at other South African universities, Marita Napier eventually decided that the University of Pretoria would be the beneficiary of her collection.

Marita Napier's decision came as an unexpected, though challenging, surprise. I immediately realized that this donation will not only benefit the University of Pretoria, but would, after further thorough processing, research and analysis of relevant information on Napier's professional career, be beneficial to researchers and scholars both nationally and internationally.

I visited her several times during the final months of her illness and as a consequence received invaluable hints and illuminating information covering her professional career. It became clear that Marita Napier, despite her achievements worldwide, was an extremely modest person.

Marita Napier had performed in 19 productions of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at Covent Garden, La Scala, the Metropolitan, San Francisco, Bayreuth, Vienna and all major opera houses in Europe. She received a Grammy Award for her Sieglinde in the Metropolitan recording of *Die Walküre*. Ms Napier is a world-renowned interpreter of Chrysothemis in *Elektra*, on occasion opposite Birgit Nilsson in the title role. One of her greatest achievements was performing at the Bayreuth Festival. She was voted "Voice of America" for her role as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in San Francisco in 1975. She holds the distinction of singing for one of the biggest television audiences in the world when she gave a concert in Beijing on the Met tour to China. She sang under conductors such as James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Wolfgang Sawallisch and Colin Davis.

I maintained regular contact with her to clarify critical issues and related questions pertaining to her professional career. I was also instrumental in the broadcasting of a review on Napier in the television art program "Kunskafee" (Art Café). Most recently I

was also requested to participate in a music programme on the radio, dedicated to Marita Napier.

Because of my involvement with the Marita Napier Collection and with Marita Napier personally I wanted to pursue a formal study (dissertation) on her life and career.

1.2 Research questions

The research question for this study is:

What are the main stages of Marita Napier's life and career and what is her contribution to the world of opera?

In order to answer this main research question, the following sub-questions had to be answered:

- What are the main stages of her youth and early life and career between 1939 (when she was born) and 1963 (until her last performance in South Africa before she went overseas)? (Chapter 2)
- What are the main stages of her professional career overseas between 1964 (after arriving in Detmold) and 1971 (before her appearances in America)? (Chapter 3)
- What are the main stages of her professional career overseas and in South Africa between 1972 (since performing also in America) and 2002 (until she received the *Heritage Charter*)? (Chapters 4, 5 and 6)
- What were her recordings, achievements and contributions to the world of opera, overseas and in South Africa? (Chapter 7)

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is:

- To chronologically present the life and career of Napier until 2002 when she received the *Heritage Charter* from the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in recognition of her outstanding international singing career.

1.4 Methodology

Since becoming aware that Napier, based in Cape Town, was terminally ill, a different strategy, or process, had to be followed in procuring relevant information. The first step was to become familiar with whatever was available regarding her career. This necessitated several visits at the end of 2003 and beginning of 2004 to her home in Cape Town during which photographs and song scores were assessed. Notes were taken while Napier provided comprehensive explanations.

This valuable information was processed and also made available on the Internet. Through the visits to Cape Town and frequent contact by telephone it was possible to obtain the total Napier Collection. This collection is currently held at the Section: South African Music Collection, Academic Information Service, University of Pretoria.

On her 65th birthday on 16 February 2004 I announced an exhibition on Napier on the Internet as well as in several newspapers. I exhibited her great successes in a thematic way, for example her debut in La Scala as Tove in the *Gurre-Lieder* in 1974. The original opera sheet music, photographs, reviews and programmes accompanied the exhibition. The exhibition drew unexpected interest and received media coverage in the Sunday newspaper *Rapport*. A television programme was made of the South African Music Collection with special emphasis on Napier's donation.

Towards the middle of March 2004, Marita Napier's health deteriorated further. Conversation by telephone became almost impossible because of her occasional shortness of breath. Another visit was made to Cape Town to discuss the whole concept of my proposed study with her. During this visit, which was also the last before she passed away, she handed me a signed letter stipulating her donation of the total collection, as

well as an audiocassette recording of her telling the story of her professional career. This audiocassette contains valuable information on Napier's rich experience, not documented before.

It is important to take note that Napier's marriage to Wolfram Assmann lasted for 21 years. Her busy opera schedule was a contributing factor to their divorce. Napier and the family never mentioned the marriage to me. I therefore decided not to include it in my discussion.

I presented Marita Napier with a chronological synopsis of her professional career from 1965 to 2002 based on previously obtained information to revise and amend where necessary. She completed this shortly before she passed away on 10 April 2004 in the Hospice St. Luke's, Cape Town. Through the above method of obtaining the information the primary research for this study had been completed.

1.5 Organization of the dissertation

Following Chapter 1, which provides general information about the study, Chapter 2 presents information about Marita Napier's youth and early life until her last performance in South Africa before she went overseas (1939-1963). Napier's singing career overseas between 1964 and 1971, after arriving in Detmold and before her appearances in America, is discussed in Chapter 3, while her professional career overseas and in South Africa during the period 1972 (after her debut in America) until her last performance of 1979 in the "Rosengarten Mozart Hall" is focussed on in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 describes her professional career overseas since her performance in the "Maggio Musicale" in Florence in 1980 until her last performance in 1989 in the City Hall of Johannesburg, while Chapter 6 defines her professional career overseas and in South Africa from 1990, when she decided to cut down on her performances and permanently moved back to South Africa, until 2002 when Napier received the *Heritage Charter (Herkoms Oorkonde)* from the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival. Chapter 7 includes her achievements and contributions to the world of opera overseas and in South Africa. The

final Chapter 8 is a summary of the conclusions drawn in this study which are followed by a source list.

1.6 Sources

It is significant to take note of the importance of the curricula vitae for this study that was compiled by Marita Napier of all her appearances between 1968 and 1999 and of Robert Lombardo, Napier's agent in New York, from 1972 to 1988.

Due to the fact that Marita Napier frequently travelled to opera houses worldwide, it was not always possible for her to find space in her luggage for all the newspapers, journals, books and programmes which commented on her singing. Consequently she sometimes removed the bibliographical information from such documentation in order to still be in a position to take with her some account or proof of her performances. In pure scientific terms it is, unfortunately, not possible to verify such sources according to the Harvard Reference Technique. These references, therefore, have been chronologically structured so as to provide, as accurately as possible, verification of her life and career (S-12). If the complete source of information was available, the Harvard Reference Technique was applied (S-1). To refer quickly to a specific performance it was important to collect all the programmes in a separate list.

1.7 Interviews with some relatives, friends and colleagues of Marita Napier

In order to obtain more background information for this study about Napier on and off the stage it was necessary to do interviews with relatives, friends and former colleagues of her.

Mr. Rouel Beukes, South African opera singer and friend of Marita Napier;

Ms. Anna Bender, South African pianist and former accompanist of Marita Napier;

Ms. Annemarie Blanckenberg, close friend of Marita Napier and former senior secretary of Arts Cape Opera;

Ms. Christine Brits, godchild and sister's child of Marita Napier;

Ms. Virginia Davids, Associate Professor in singing at the University of Cape Town and former performer and colleague of Marita Napier at Arts Cape Opera;

Mr. Wouter de Wet, opera critic for radio and newspapers;

Mr. Weiss Doubell, Director of the Pro Musica Theatre in Roodepoort and close friend of Marita Napier;

Ms. Suré Eloff, former student of Marita Napier who is living and performing in New York;

Prof. Angelo Gobbato, Head of the University of Cape Town Opera School and director of Arts Cape Opera;

Mr. Bernhard Gueller, former conductor at Arts Cape and friend of Marita Napier;

Mr. Neels Hansen, former director and costume designer of the Performing Arts Council Transvaal;

Prof. Sidwill Hartmann, associate professor in singing at the University of Cape Town Opera School; opera performer and friend of Marita Napier;

Mr. Willie Jacobs, eldest brother of Marita Napier;

Mr. Kamal Khan, conductor and friend of Marita Napier;

Mr. Robert Lombardo, agent and friend in the USA of Marita Napier;

Mr. Steven Losito, employee of Mr. Lombardo in New York, dresser at the Metropolitan Operahouse and friend of Marita Napier;

Mr. Albie Louw, South African composer and former opera singer;

Ms. Joubero Malherbe, South African author, critic and radio presenter;

Mr. Thys Odendaal, music critic of *Beeld*;

Ms. Ena Shaw, Marita Napier's sister;

Ms. Lize Thomas, Head of the Opera School at Tswane University of Technology and performer with Marita Napier at the Pro Musica Theatre in Roodepoort;

Mr. Petrus van Heerden, former opera singer in Europe; lecturer in singing at the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Cape Town Opera School and friend of Marita Napier;

Prof. Henning Viljoen, opera critic and friend of Marita Napier.

It is important to take note that the above people knew Napier very well and that I therefore used their quotations directly.

1.8 CD-ROM

The dissertation concludes with an appendix consisting of a CD-ROM containing photographs of Napier's life and career arranged chronologically between 1963 (before she went overseas) and 2002 (when she received the *Heritage Charter* from the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival) as well as recordings of her singing.

The aim of this CD-ROM is to clarify the text by supplying pictures of Napier's performances.

It is important to note that the original sound recording was not of a very good quality and that some disturbances occurred. The author nevertheless preferred the specific sound recording to avoid any possible copyright restrictions and to emphasise Napier's special friendship with the conductor of the Pro Musica Orchestra Mr. Weiss Doubell.

To stop the CD-ROM press the escape button.

1.9 Notes to the reader

Due to the fact that Marita Napier was such an internationally known opera singer it was preferable that the research report is presented in English. It is therefore important to note that all the Afrikaans and German scripts were translated by Ms. A. Pienaar, former Deputy Director of the Academic Information Service at the University of Pretoria and currently an official translator with a postgraduate translation diploma from the University of South Africa.

CHAPTER 2

MARITA NAPIER'S YOUTH AND EARLY LIFE, 1939-1963

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the relevant first years of Napier's life in order to try and place them in context with her later career in opera. Many interests and characteristics are established early in the life of a person, which have a direct influence on his or her career.

Her academic and cultural achievements, as well as the ways in which she spent her free time, both at school and thereafter, will be explored in order to elucidate her youth and early life. Napier's years as a teenager and early adult until 1963, when she went overseas to study singing at the Detmold Music Academy, will be described.

2.2 Marita Napier's youth

Marita Napier was born as Marita Jacobs on 16 February 1939 in Johannesburg where she also grew up. Napier herself described her childhood years as carefree and very happy (Duvenhage, 2000; Roux, 2003-2004). Marita was the third child in a family of four children. She had an older brother Willem and a sister Ena. Her brother André was born later. Ena Shaw (2004-2006), Marita's older sister, has the following views about their childhood years:

Willem, Marita and myself almost grew up as triplets. Willem and I were small for our age resulting in Marita catching up with us by her second year. André was a latecomer which meant that he was not closely involved with us.

When Marita turned six, we moved to Linden. We were registered at the Louw Geldenhuys Primary School and all three of us, without much ado, were placed in grade one. Willem was greatly offended since he was already in standard two and I was in grade two. As children we were not talkative (children should be seen and not heard) but Marita was notably the quietest.

Napier was not very talkative, a fact that was confirmed by a childhood friend of hers, Annemarie Blanckenberg (2004), who later said that it was a typical and widely known characteristic of Napier.

Philippa Breytenbach (1975c), a journalist, stated after an interview with Napier, that Marita Napier was quite a tomboy when she was small. Her greatest joy and interest as a little girl was to compete, together with her sister and brother, in gymnastics.

In 1947 she had already gained fame when, as a seven year old, she was nominated as South Africa's best-built child. Together with her brother, Napier demonstrated remarkable stunts. At home, she made music with Ena and Willie. They played the piano and sang. Marita, however, from early childhood, wanted to be a physiotherapist and nothing else.

Ms Ena Shaw (2004-2006) said that:

For a short while we took lessons in ballet and tap-dancing but we did not continue with this for very long. We then started with piano lessons. Willem started more or less two years ahead of us and taught us the basic principles (he was the most gifted pianist amongst the three of us). Therefore we had an advantage right from the start.

Marita and myself participated in basketball and athletics at primary school and we both played in the first team: Marita as wing and myself as goal thrower. She excelled in the 100 metres and putting the shot. The family also started playing tennis together but only Marita and myself persevered.

At primary school we sang in the school-choir and participated as soloists and in duets in various eisteddfods. The principal, Mr H.S. Sondorp, was closely involved with music and he often performed as accompanist. As soloist, Marita won a number of prizes, as well as a few singing with me in duets. At secondary school we did not receive the same amount of encouragement with the result that we concentrated more on the piano.

Marita, although not very talkative, had a strong personality, and was chosen as head-girl in standard five. At secondary school she excelled as student and in her matriculation year she received a book prize for history. She was also a prefect and took part in folk dancing.

The fact that Napier had a strong personality helped her tremendously in her professional career. She always said that to sing successfully as a professional, a lot of hard work is necessary, while 200% idealism and a will of iron is needed (Van Heerden, 2003-2004).

Shaw (2004-2006) continued:

During our teenage years we were influenced by Elvis Presley and the “Rock and Roll” genre, much to the dismay of the older members of the family. Marita and Willem excelled in this style of dancing and at parties they had people raving about their energy. As a group we also went to the Wembley Stadium for ice-skating. Marita was always very protective towards me since I was the smaller one and would cry very easily. On one occasion, our uncle Gert brought a pair of boxing gloves to our home to teach Willem and André how to spar. A friend of Willem sparred against me and soon had me in tears. Marita, without much ado, donned the gloves and gave him a bloody nose as a reward for his lack of chivalry.

Mr Weiss Doubell said that Napier’s love and concern for her family and friends continued to be a unique characteristic throughout her life (Doubell, 2004).

During an interview with Charné Meyer (1990) Marita Napier herself related that both her parents were very musical. Her father, Skat, was a keen violinist while her mother, Kietie, had a beautiful singing voice.

Ms Ena Shaw (2004-2006) contributed the following:

Despite the modern influence of the Rock and Role era we continued with our piano lessons. At our home on Friday nights, all our friends gathered around the piano and, accompanied by Willem, we had the most delightful singsongs. At this time Willem was concentrating more on jazz and started taking lessons with Jack Dowle.

Marita was in standard eight when she started taking singing lessons. Her first teacher was Rupert Stout, the organist and choirmaster at the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg. He tried to teach her to sing through her nose and said that the actress Jane Powell was the perfect role model for her. Marita was rather quickly disillusioned and stopped taking lessons for a year or so. Napier said that she listened to a gramophone recording by Jane Powell and immediately decided that she did not wish to sing like that!

In 1956, Napier received the following testimonial from the Principal, Mr Van Tonder, of the High School D.F. Malan in Crosby, Johannesburg:

She attended the school since 1952 and is a candidate for the matriculation examination this year. She has a pleasant personality and is friendly and helpful in her relations with her fellow scholars. She is always honest and genuine in her actions. She is of impeccable character and always strives to live according to her principles. She is also very interested in the religious side of life as proven by the fact that she was the ringleader of the Christian Students Association.

Her schoolwork was always done with the greatest of diligence, one of her traits. The past year she performed well by passing her examinations with a first class. The fact that she acted as prefect since 1955 is proof that she has earned the trust of her fellow scholars. She was always diligent in the completion of the duties given to her and showed that she possesses leadership qualities. Her interests were not only limited to her schoolwork, as she participated in various extramural activities of the school. She excelled in the areas of art needlework, athletics and tennis.

With her abilities, which are above average, I am convinced that she will make a success of her job.

Many of the attributes mentioned in this report, contributed towards her future career as professional singer in operas. Her leadership qualities, sense of duty, honesty, firmness of principle and above-average intelligence combined and contributed in a positive way to ensure her success in her chosen career as an opera singer.

Philippa Breytenbach (1975c) has the following information about Napier's youth:

After matriculation she applied at the hospital to become a student in physiotherapy only to be turned away because of her weak ankles. This was one of Marita's greatest disappointments. Her mother told Breytenbach that "She sat here on the steps of the backdoor and cried". She was consoled and other plans were made. With the encouragement of her family she continued her lessons in both piano and singing. It was Margaret Roux, one of the earlier singing teachers in Johannesburg and later Madame Cavalli, also from the Golden City, who shaped the voice of Marita Napier.

According to Ms Ena Shaw (2004-2006) Napier then began to participate in competitions and Eisteddfods at the Library Theatre and the Selborne Hall in Johannesburg.

In addition Shaw (2004-2006) posited:

At this stage she had matriculated and already worked for a few years as an office clerk. She was also keen to be a model and although she was not overweight, she had to lose quite a bit of weight for the camera. With typical perseverance she lived on an apple a day and reached her target weight within a short time. She however experienced the world of fashion as boring and superficial and soon lost interest.

Napier's only comment was always that office work was "terrible". She felt that "life had much more to offer than to sit in an office all day" (Badenhorst, 2002).

At this stage Napier started saving very purposefully in order to go and study overseas (Van Heerden, 2003-2004).

Ms Ena Shaw (2004-2006) concluded:

Marita and a few of her friends started a group and called themselves the "Rand Artists". Their purpose was to hold concerts in order to gain experience. Sometimes she occasionally participated in concerts for Allesandro Rofa. In one performance, she sang a duet from *La Bohème* with a tenor who must preferably remain anonymous. He said that he had a bad cold and was uncertain that he would be able to hold his note in the last scene. He asked her to stop singing if he pressed her hand as an indication that he would not be able to keep his note. At the end of the lovers' duet, he pressed her hand, she stopped singing and he kept on singing while keeping his note clearly and distinctly for the full count! She also performed as soloist for the Neerlandia Choir in *The Gypsy Princess* and other performances.

At this stage Marita still competed unceasingly in order to gain experience. Webster Booth and Ann Ziegler had recently retired in South Africa when Marita participated in the East Rand Eisteddfod where Ann Ziegler acted as adjudicator. Much to our joy Marita won the "Champion Solo" item. Then followed the leading roles in the operas *Xerxes* and the *Black Spider*.

With these triumphs it was clear that Napier was destined for a singing career. Napier related that in those days there was no one of the calibre of Joyce Barker, Nellie du Toit or Emma Renzi to give training in singing. This was largely in the hands of the choirmasters (Van Heerden, 2003-2006; Badenhorst, 2004).

2.3 Marita Napier's singing career before she left South Africa

Between 1956 and 1961 Marita Napier received the following certificates and awards for her achievements in singing (Napier, 2003b):

- The Afrikaans Arts Association, Certificate of Merit, under 20, 1956.
- The Afrikaans Arts Association, Second Prize, Lyric Soprano, 1956.
- Certificate of Merit, The National Eisteddfod of South Africa, Second Place, Ballad, Ladies 20 years and over, April 1958.
- Certificate of Merit, The National Eisteddfod of South Africa, First Place, Lady and Gentleman duet, March 1960.
- Certificate of Merit, The National Eisteddfod of South Africa, Second Place, Soprano Solo Coloratura, March 1960.
- Certificate of Merit, The National Eisteddfod of South Africa, Third Place, Open Solo, Ladies, Operatic, March 1960.
- Springs Musical Festival, Gold Diploma and Cup Winner, Women's Solo, Open, September 1960.
- Springs Musical Festival, Silver Diploma, Mixed Duets, September 1960.
- Certificate of Merit, The National Eisteddfod of South Africa, Second Place, Soprano Solo Dramatic, April 1961.

Being the *Cup Winner* at the 1960 Springs Musical Festival, many leading roles in operas and operettas were offered to Napier (Shaw, 2004-2006).

It is important to note that at this stage, Marita changed her surname to "Napier." During interviews (Botha, 1990; Roux, 2003-2004) she said she had performed at a concert together with two other artists, bearing the same surnames as her own, "Jacobs". She immediately decided that in order to avoid any future confusion she must preferably change her surname. She opened the telephone directory, looked at the various surnames and decided to choose the surname "Napier" as it was easily pronounced in all languages.

In 1963, while she was a member of the Neerlandia Choir, Napier sang the leading role in the operetta *The Gypsy Princess*. Both Anna de Vries and Gerard Brussaard had solo roles in the operetta. It was the first time that this amateur group performed an operetta in Afrikaans. They had, however, performed various operettas in the Netherlands. The première of the operetta took place in the Library Theatre in Johannesburg (1963a Sigeunerprinses).

In an undated, anonymous English newspaper the following article, together with a beautiful photograph of Napier is seen: *High notes in Händel Xerxes Trio*. There are three photographs with the report: one of Edna Meal, the mezzo soprano, one of Mavourneen Robertson, the soprano, and one of Marita Napier, the soprano. The following caption (1963b Xerxes Trio) appears with the photo:

They have leading roles in Music Theatre's production of the Händel opera, Xerxes, being presented at the Little Theatre between March 1 and 9.

Bruno Peyer was the conductor and Peter Hafter the producer. Eleanor de Kerow was responsible for the costumes and Pienaar du Toit for the décor. According to Ena Shaw, (2004-2006) Napier's sister, the opera was performed in 1963.

Marita Napier gained valuable experience in all the various performances in which she participated and it made her even more determined to go overseas for further studies. Napier, during interviews (Roux, 2003-2004; Badenhorst, 2004) said that, with the passing years, she became more aware of her unquestionable desire to leave South Africa and go and study somewhere overseas. According to Napier it could also have been for anything else than singing. That it was for singing was just fortuitous (Van Heerden, 2003-2006; Badenhorst, 2004).

For a long time Napier saved every penny to make it possible to go overseas for further studies (Van Heerden, 2003-2006). With the capable accompaniment of Anna Bender as pianist, she was lucky to win a bursary from the Ernest Oppenheimer Trust Fund that

enabled her to go to Detmold for further studies (Breytenbach, 1975c; Bender, 1994; Roux, 2004).

Napier was continuously looking for a suitable singing teacher. One evening she attended a concert in Johannesburg where Renée Webb was the singer. According to Napier her technique was incredible (Van Heerden, 2003-2006). After the concert she spoke to Renée Webb, who told her that she studied singing with Professor Theo Lindenbaum in Detmold, Germany. Napier immediately decided that he would be a suitable person to assist her with her further studies in singing. Determined as usual, she sent a recording of her singing to him, at which he accepted her as a student at the Detmold Music Academy.

2.4 Summary

From the notes by Marita Napier's sister, Ms Ena Shaw, it is clear that Napier was never talkative and that to some extent she disguised her iron will and strong personality. In her primary school days, however, it became clear that she was consistent, conscientious and had leadership abilities, as she was chosen as head girl of the school.

The exceptionally positive testimonial given by the principal in her matriculation year, proved that Napier's consistency, friendliness, cooperativeness, impeccable character and dedication were undeniably part of her personality. All of these contributed to her later successes as an international opera star.

Napier's interest in a variety of things, for example history, ballet, tennis, gymnastics, piano and singing, positively contributed to the making of an exceptional person. Although she considered physiotherapy as her first choice of career, she purposefully worked towards a potential career as singer overseas since her early adulthood. She started off by taking singing lessons while still at secondary school and changed her surname to Napier in order to eliminate future confusion. She persevered with her piano lessons as an important basis for her singing and participated in competitions and Eisteddfods. By singing as many roles as possible, it was her sole purpose to gain much

experience, both in South Africa and overseas. She even started a local opera group, the *Rand Artists*, in order to participate in many opera productions before she left for overseas.

CHAPTER 3

MARITA NAPIER'S SINGING CAREER OVERSEAS, 1964-1971

3.1 Detmold

After arriving in Detmold in 1964, Marita Napier completed the usual audition interview and was accepted as a student at the Hochschule (Academy). She then studied for two years under the guidance of Prof Theo Lindenbaum (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

Napier was an exceptionally dedicated and diligent student, characteristics that were developed early in her childhood and which she practiced throughout her professional career. During an interview with Una Niewoudt (1997) Napier said that she had to work hard both as a student and to balance her finances. In order to supplement her finances she worked in the mornings in a hotel and in the evenings dished up food for the students in the hostel. Three times a week she also worked in a jam factory.

In 1966 Marita Napier won her first overseas competition in *Die Neuen Stimmen* (The New Voices) in Gütersloh. She also won second place in a singing competition in Berlin (Van Heerden, 2003-2006). She decided to stay in Detmold for another year in order to gain more experience and further her studies. It is important to note that Detmold did not have a school for opera, but a conservatory for music. It was known as *Die Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie Detmold* (The Northwestern German academy for Music, Detmold) (*Giessener Musiktage für junge Solisten*, 1967).

On 3 December 1966, she performed as soloist in Johann Sebastian Bach's *Weihnachtsoratorium* (Christmas Cantata) that took place in the *Rudolf-Oetker-Halle*. She was mentioned as Marita Jacobs-Napier. Other artists were the alto Annelies Westen, the tenor Hans Ulrich Mielsch and the bass Ernst Sandleben. The *Weihnachtsoratorium* was conducted by Martin Stephani (*Rudolf Oetker-Halle*, 1966).

Marita Napier also performed in student productions in Detmold, among others in Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* and as Leonora in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

During a concert for young soloists performing with an orchestra, which was held in the university town of Giessen, Marita performed in the *Kongresshalle am Berliner Platz* on Friday 24 November 1967 as the only soloist. Napier was the only soprano at the concert and sang Leonora's aria, "Pace, mio Dio" from *La Forza del Destino*. The manager of the theatre at that time was Werner Hess and the producer was Professor Bruno Vondenhoff (*Giessener Musiktage für junge Solisten*, 1967).

3.2 Bielefeld

During an interview with Mr Petrus van Heerden, a friend of many years' standing and former colleague (Van Heerden, 2003-2006), Marita said that Leonie Rysanek had a voice crisis. Because Napier looked like Rysanek and also had the same voice type she was invited by the music directors of the opera houses to participate in three auditions for positions at operahouses. One was in Lübeck, one in Kassel and one in Bielefeld. Marita chose the one in Bielefeld because it was close to Detmold where Lindenbaum, her singing teacher, was living. At that stage she was very fortunate to get a professional contract and not a beginners' contract. It meant that it was not necessary for Napier to sing in all the roles at an operahouse that is necessitated by a beginners' contract. At that time Bernhard Conz was the musical director at Bielefeld.

The first opera in which Napier performed was Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in which she sang the role of Venus. According to various newspaper reports about the opera in Bielefeld at that time, it was a great success. Hans Wolfgang Hirschland was the producer. One report stated that "the Venus of Marita Napier lacked sensual atmosphere, but there were signs of a soprano with a voice as clear as a bell" (1968c Neue Westfälische).

In another article there were two beautiful photographs of Napier. The following report appeared in the newspaper with the caption “People of this day”. Wolfgang Hirschland was the producer of Richard Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. The report continues (1968c Neue Westfälische):

Hans Wolfgang Hirschland, the Head Producer of Bielefeld’s opera (unfortunately not for this coming season) produces the first Wagner performance of the new year: On Sunday 5 January we will become acquainted with his rendering of *Tannhäuser*. In the evening, Wolfgang Drees will be the conductor which will set a distinguishing example for our time; Franz Hosdenfeldt will show his new décor

The following information appeared under the photographs of Napier as Venus (1968d Neue Westfälische):

The friends of the opera were glad to be part of the première of the newly performed opera by Wagner, *Tannhäuser*. Our photographs were taken at the première on Thursday evening. On the left is Head Producer Hirschland with Venus, Marita Napier. In the middle is a scene from the Venus Mountain with Marita Napier and Tannhäuser McNeath. On the right is the conductor Drees.

The second opera in which Napier appeared in Bielefeld was Verdi’s *Nabucco* in which she sang the role of Abigaille. Marvelous photographs of her from the opera tell the story of her very successful role interpretation (Napier, 2003b). Doctor Hans Schnuur wrote in the local Bielefeld newspaper that Marita Napier interpreted her role superbly (1969h Schnuur):

Marita Napier, vocally outstanding as Abigaille, Patricia McGee, touchingly sincere as Fenena, and Elizabeth Promonti, through her high singing qualities, made her comeback as Rahel. In addition Peter Petrov appeared as the Baal Priest and Wolfram Assmann [Napier’s husband to be] as Abdallo.

The opera was produced by Bernhard Conz. The local newspaper in Bielefeld reported on the dress rehearsal of *Nabucco* with a photograph of the soloists listening attentively to Conz while he was explaining the practical aspects of the accompaniment to them. The subheading is as follows (1968a Neue Westfälische):

Yesterday, for the second time, we met the participants in the opera seminars. Like the first evening they continued with the development of an opera production. The theoretical comments were alternated by a view of the dress rehearsal. Bernhard Conz, musical director, together with his soloists arranged to use the opera Nabucco as an example to clarify the practical work. The ensemble of the soloists and the orchestra before the première, the participation of the musical leaders in the finalisation of the décor together with the work of the choir, completed the contents of the evening seminar. Our photograph shows General Music Director Conz and the dramatic adviser Kindermann, who led the discussions.

The next opera in which Napier appeared was her debut in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in which she sang the role of Brünnhilde. With the interpretation of this role she was destined to cause great excitement in the realm of opera and music across the world. After the première, Herbert Decker (1968) reported in a newspaper on the exceptional interpretation of Marita Napier as a dramatic soprano:

Befitting a genuine and true child of Wotan, Marita Napier builds the role of Brünnhilde up to a lyrical melody, to a jubilant Hojotoho, to resignation and humility, carrying the whole *Walküre* to a peak performance, when she suddenly, with great pride calls: "At my command the fire will start!" This exhibits every bit of the young and high dramatic quality of her voice.

Doctor Hans Schnuur (1968b) reported very positively on Napier's performance, especially on her beautiful voice and interpretative abilities:

The star of the evening was Marita Napier as Brünnhilde. Three years ago we heard the Detmold student once again under Stephani in the music association of Bielefeld – I can remember that it was a festival of voices. When Marita Jacobs-Napier (as she then called herself) returned after some time as Brünnhilde, one could not, from her role in this, make any predictions about her. But let there be no doubt now: this fine singer, with unheard of expressive qualities, sang a triumphant soprano role. She carried the third act to emotionally tense heights – and what a beautiful voice ... Unheard of!

With these exceptionally positive comments it was clear that Napier had excelled even at this early stage in her debut role as Brünnhilde and as interpreter of Richard Wagner.

3.3 Performing in and around Essen (1969 and 1970)

In 1969 Marita Napier started auditions in order to gain a contract with the larger opera house in Essen (Van Heerden, 2003-2006). Afterwards contracts followed at Hannover and Hamburg.

In Essen the first role in which Napier performed was that of Santuzza in the opera by Mascagni, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, produced by Paul Hager. Napier was outstanding in this role and left positive impressions. In a newspaper article (1969a *Cavalleria Rusticana*) published in Essen a critic wrote, “Marita Napier was a passionate Santuzza with convincing acting, but most of all, in the musical portrayal of her part, she left strong impressions behind.”

The next role was that of Martha in D’Albert’s *Tiefland* (Napier, 2003a). The *Essener Tagebuch* reported (1969c *Tiefland*) especially on the beautiful performance by Napier directed by Paul Hager:

The soloist carried her role with great quality. It is not often that the three main characters are filled with singers of this brilliance. Marita Napier was equal to her task in the demanding role of Martha and demonstrated her growth. The internalisation of her role, her acting abilities, her clear dramatic soprano voice and the culture of singing, came together in this role in a generous way – a beautiful performance.

It is interesting to note that Napier, even at this early age, distinguished herself as a dramatic soprano, although it is generally accepted that her voice only much later showed more dramatic than lyric aspects.

On 5 and 7 October 1969 Napier performed the role of Leonora in Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* produced by Janos Kulka in Wuppertal (Popelka, 1969) while she was still under contract with the opera house in Essen (Napier, 2003a).

During 1970 Marita was still working under contract at the opera house in Essen. She performed in more operas and gradually gained more experience. This year was significant as a very important and busy year in the career of Napier. She became increasingly known and the opera world became more and more aware of her successes. Judging by all the positive criticism and commentaries up to this date it became clear that Napier was busy developing into a successful opera star. In 1970 she also debuted in the role of Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. It was remarkable that Napier, with her first appearance in this role, already excited the audiences with her exceptional interpretation. The melodiousness and extensiveness of her voice was noticed and appreciated early in her career. A critic of the newspaper in Essen reported (1970c Ludwig), "Elsa, Marita Napier, also proves herself with her sweet sounding, however not exceptionally voluminous soprano, as a valuable asset."

In the same year, in Essen, Napier also made her debut in Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* in the title role of Ariadne. The musical director was Gustav König. After the première a critic reported the following (1970d Premieren Essen): "In the real opera as Ariadne, Marita Napier could reveal the greatness and beauty of her soprano voice, unfortunately next to a greatly indisposed Bacchus."

Following 1970 Napier sang Ariadne in the Vienna State Opera House, and in Munich, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, Covent Garden and the Opera House in Roodepoort (South Africa).

In 1970 Napier also sang the role of Lisa in Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame* in Hannover. Photographs taken by E. van Endt show Napier together with Boleslaw Pawlus in a serious mood (Napier, 2003b). The following report appeared in a newspaper (1970e Neueninstudierung der "Pique-Dame" hatte Première):

In the new production of *Pique-Dame*, which had its première in the Opera House on Sunday, the producer requested a dramatic Tchaikovsky. He supplied various lyrical images, with varying success. With Marita Napier, the producer has no psychological experiments in mind. Her vocal qualities in the higher forte as well as her inevitable destiny in opera were again proved by Napier.

Napier often said that she learnt a great deal from the producer Paul Hager. Hager especially taught her how to be a good actress, and how to create the necessary atmosphere on stage by using her acting and voice skills to obtain the dramatic effects in an opera (Van Heerden, 2003-2006; Napier, 2003-2004).

Also in 1970, Napier sang Brünnhilde in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in Hannover. In later years it was this opera that made her one of the first South African recipients of a Grammy award for serious music (Napier, 2003a; Napier, 2003b).

For the first time in 1970 Napier made her debut in an opera by Mozart. She performed in *Don Giovanni* in which she sang Donna Anna (Napier, 2003a). Napier often said that to sing Mozart was good medicine for the voice since it kept it clean (Van Heerden, 2003-2006; Napier, 2003-2004).

Friedrich Schnuur, a visiting professor from the Detmold Music Academy, after performing in a Beethoven Concerto in South Africa, said in an interview with Joe Sack (1970f) that Napier, a former student of the Detmold Music Academy, was achieving great success. He added that she was a very dedicated and diligent student and said:

Marita Napier Jacobs is attracting attention far beyond the local academic circles. A fine career is being predicted for her. She has a soprano voice of excellent quality, and has been working hard at her studies with Professor Lindenbaum, who has taught some of the top operatic and lieder singers in Europe.

On 3 July 1970, the following report appeared in *Die Transvaler* (1970a):

Marita Napier-Jacobs, South African soprano associated with the opera house in Essen, Germany, is coming to South Africa for a short visit on 15 July. She was married on Saturday in Essen to a German baritone, Wolfram Assmann, who is under contract with the opera house in Bielefeld. Ms Jacobs is coming to South Africa without her new husband since he has a series of other commitments. The South African soprano has been overseas for the past six years. She studied at the Academy in Detmold, Germany. After her studies, she entered into an agreement with the opera house in Bielefeld (it is here where she met her husband). After a year in Bielefeld she went back to Essen, where she still resides. Her contract at Essen has been extended for another year.

During 1970 Napier, for the first time, sang Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* in Hannover. Later, in 1975, she received an award as *Voice of America* for her outstanding interpretation of this role in the opera house of San Francisco. The producer was Heinrich Hollreiser (San Francisco Opera Magazine, 1975:58; Napier, 2003a).

Napier was also a member of the *Essener Bachchor* in Essen. On Sunday 1 November 1970, she performed as soloist in Brahms' *Ein Deutes Requiem*. It took place in the *Erlöserkirche* in Essen. The baritone who sang with her was Rolf-Dieter Krüll and the *Philharmonia Hungarica* was conducted by Gerhard Herwig (Essener Bachchor, 1970). In an anonymous newspaper cutting (Napier, 2003b) a critic reported the following:

The soprano Marita Napier from the Opera House, forced the baritone Rolf-Dieter Krüll to sing his solo with his well preserved voice and great register. Unbelievably caring and stirring, Marita Napier sang her solo "Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit". The audience listened with undivided attention.

3.4 Napier's debut in *Macbeth* and *Der Freischütz*

In 1971 Napier tackled new operas in Essen in which she performed quite often in later years. Except for Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* in which she again sang Leonora she made her debut performance in *Macbeth*, in which she appeared as Lady Macbeth (Napier, 2003b). Napier never regarded the role of Lady Macbeth as one of her favourites because she believed the role didn't suit her voice and in later years she preferred not to sing it (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

An undated newspaper reported that Napier excelled in the role of Agathe in *Der Freischütz* by Weber in Eutin. According to this article, she dominated the stage with her role as Agathe. Her clear intonation, coloratura, interpretation and acting in this role were outstanding. An anonymous critic in Eutin reported (1971):

Marita Napier convincingly proved herself as Agathe. The interpretation of her great scene "Wie nahe mir der Schlummer" and "Und ob die Wolke", while enshrouded in clouds, held the audience in suspense with her sincerity. In a

wonderful vibrating tone and clear intonation, the wounded coloratura proved her convincingly dynamic portrayal as characteristic of her performance.

A beautiful photograph of Napier as Agathe showed the seriousness and dedication with which she portrayed the role. Also on the photograph with her is Don Richardson who sang the role of Max (Napier, 2003b).

3.5 Summary

After Marita decided to go overseas for a career in singing, she diligently worked towards her goal. She saved money in order to be able to go overseas. Initially she gave herself two years to prove herself overseas and worked hard towards her ideal. In order to obtain money for her studies, she worked in a jam factory as well as in a hotel.

True to her dedication, diligence and purposefulness she performed every role to the best of her ability since it was important to her to become a successful opera star. She preferred to sing a year longer at the opera house in Essen, as this gave her the opportunity of being exposed to as many operas as possible. According to Napier this was an ideal situation to try out a new role in a small opera house as it could take anything from ten to fourteen performances before one really knew a role. She often said that only then could one start paying attention to the technical aspects of the role. Even in 1970, when she started becoming famous in Essen, Professor Schnuur from the Music Academy in Detmold said that Napier was still very dedicated and hard working. These were lifelong qualities of Napier.

In Verdi's operas *Nabucco* as Abigaille, in *Il Trovatore* as Leonora and in *La Forza del Destino* as Leonora, Napier performed outstandingly. Her excellent rendering of Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Essen paved the way to many future successful performances of the operas of Richard Strauss.

Since her first role in an opera by Wagner, namely that of Venus in *Tannhäuser*, followed by Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*, Elsa in *Lohengrin* and Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*, Napier excelled with each performance and became increasingly known and appreciated

for her interpretations of Wagner. Marita Napier's professional career overseas and in South Africa between 1972 and 1979 will be discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

PROFESSIONAL CAREER OVERSEAS AND IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1972-1979

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter attention was paid to Marita Napier, the person, the quiet little girl from Johannesburg with a strong personality and exceptional leadership qualities, who, from an early age, tried to do her best in everything she tackled. Early in her career she realized that the harder one works, the more one's talents are developed, and the more one has to offer when applying for a job at any of the opera houses. Without all of these positive attributes Marita Napier would possibly not have been able to achieve success so quickly in Germany.

During the years 1968-1971 Napier sang in many different performances of opera and lieder that expanded her experience tremendously. She was already associated with the opera houses in Bielefeld and Essen and had performed in other operas and concerts in Hannover, Wupperthal, Gütersloh and Berlin.

4.2 Eutiner summer festival (1972)

After the successful première of Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* (sung in German) in the Schlosspark during the "Eutiner Sommerspiele" on 17 July 1972, it was reported in the newspaper, *Lübecker Nachrichten* (Cassel, 1972), that "Marita Napier with her beautiful bel canto singing was an impressive and sparkling figure in the role of Leonora".

The *Lübecker Nachrichten* wrote the following after the performance of *La Forza del Destino*:

At the North German festival a special example was set by Eutin as cultural centre between Lübeck and Kiel. In a short six summer weeks, thousands undertook their annual journey to the festival city. The "Oper im Schlosspark" has

contributed to great business prosperity and no decline is seen. Here, in the centre of the “Touristikparks Ostholstein”, the opera is an obvious choice for anyone who is looking for an escape: it is very popular and one can hardly imagine another place in the country where one can enjoy art out of doors. Director Ulrich Wenk succeeded in attracting a variety of famous names for the various roles: Marita Napier, Hanna Schwarz and Roderick Ristow (from the Staatstheater in Hannover), Dorothee Fürstenberg and Wolfram Assmann.

4.3 American debut (1972)

Paul Hager, who was the producer of *Ariadne auf Naxos* in which Napier sang the role of Ariadne in Essen, was also the producer of the opera house in San Francisco. According to Napier, Hager played a significant role in the development of her career as it was he who informed the San Francisco opera house about her vocal qualities and accordingly they invited her for an audition, specifically in the role of Sieglinde in Wagner’s *Die Walküre*, which was to be part of their fiftieth year festivities in 1972 (Napier, 2003; Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

During an interview with Petrus van Heerden, Napier also emphasized that she had one special mentor in her career, the German producer Paul Hager. According to Napier, Hager’s main contribution was that he taught her how to create dramatic tension when on the stage. With her debut in San Francisco, Napier entered the era of a professional international opera singer while she was still under contract in Essen (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

According to the monthly journal (*Performing Arts*, 1972a) of the opera house in San Francisco, Napier’s name is mentioned as one of the performing artists. What is more important is the fact that with this performance, Napier made her American opera debut, a great achievement for any South African. She made this debut on Tuesday 26 September 1972 in Wagner’s *Das Rheingold* in the role of Freia. The conductor was Otmar Suitner and the producer Paul Hager.

On Tuesday 3 October 1972, Napier interpreted Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. The conductor was again Otmar Suitner and Paul Hager was the producer.

On Friday 13 October 1972 Napier sang the role of Gutrune in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Napier was introduced to the public in San Francisco with the following words (Performing Arts, 1972b):

Marita Napier, to be heard as Freia in *Das Rheingold*, Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* and Gutrune in *Götterdämmerung* is making her American debut during San Francisco's Fiftieth Season.

The well-known opera reviewer Robert Commanday wrote the following after the première of *Die Walküre* (Commanday, 1972a):

It was a wonder. It was not an evening of great moments, as sometimes happens, but [it] was one sustained great moment.

It was one of those rarest of occasions when all elements and artistries were fused to attain that ideal of total music-drama.

In renewing his production Paul Hager achieved the stature of artist as he delineated inner drama with subtly shifting points of light and a musical style of movement of concentrated meaning. The music inspired the idea, continuously, absorbingly, for Otmar Suitner was living the opera in his conducting.

Each singer in this united artistic family was integral and inseparable. Each conveyed in splendiddness the humanity in this most direct and personal of all Wagner's works. Vocal beauty of the purest kind came from the high lyric soaring of Marita Napier, most gripping at that incomparably ecstatic passage when Sieglinde is told she will bear Siegmund's child. Her sense of expression and other gestures, coupled with that gorgeous high soprano, embodied a memorable Sieglinde.

Napier was a triumphant Sieglinde and her exceptionally good acting as well as her outstanding singing proved her to be a splendid interpreter of Wagner's operas. Jess Thomas was also an excellent interpreter in the role of Siegmund. After the production of *Die Walküre* in the opera house in San Francisco, Alexander Fried, a reviewer, reported that (Fried, 1972):

Miss Napier, at first inflexible in her stage manner, sang with an affectingly genuine emotion. Her voice was fresh and sweeping. Her sense of tragedy was poignant.

Napier often said that it was a pity that she became so emotionally involved in her roles. She said that she believed that this definitely influenced her singing in a negative manner. The positive reviews proved the contrary (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

It is very important to take note that Napier's passion for singing already influenced her early life and career and will be visible throughout her performances until she sang her last opera in 1999.

Robert Commanday (1972b), the reviewer, reported the following after the première of *Götterdämmerung*: "Marita Napier gave an appealing interpretation of Guttrune as a relatively guileless instrument in Hager's scheme".

Seiji Ozawa, the conductor and musical director of the opera house in San Francisco during 1972, who heard Napier during her performances in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, asked her whether she had previously sung Mahler's Eighth Symphony. Napier later declared that the vocal part was unknown to her at that stage, but she nevertheless said yes. After that she had exactly four days in which to study it before the rehearsals started (Van Heerden, 2003-2006.)

Paul Hertelendy (1972) reported under the caption "Ozawa brilliant in season-opener":

In one of the most brilliant evenings of an already brilliant career, Maestro Seiji Ozawa led some 380 musicians and singers through Gustav Mahler's little performed Eighth Symphony at the Opera House last night to open the San Francisco Symphony's 61st season.

A gut reaction standing ovation from a full house, just as it did last night. To judge by the student audience's enthusiastic reception, here was indeed the greatest show on earth - and heaven, too, perhaps.

Marita Napier's Wagnerian soprano voice, as far-ranging as the North wind, cut through a heavy orchestral accompaniment to produce a veritable feast of lucid high notes.

It is interesting to note that in 1972 Napier was already regarded as a Wagnerian soprano par excellence. It is also remarkable that she achieved such great success with the performance of Gustav Mahler, since she had never sung it before. This is proof of Napier's exceptional musical abilities, beautiful voice and a commitment to make a success of everything she tackled.

Robert Commanday (1972c:61) reported the following on the same performance:

Marita Napier (remembered from her fine recent Sieglinde and Guttrune for the Opera) was a distinguished principal soprano. Her voice in the highest altitudes, beamed through the ensembles and in the "Magna Peccatrix" solos.

The Times (1972a) of 13 December had the following views:

Three *Ring* cycles in five weeks is something that only Bayreuth should undertake; but San Francisco, as part of its 50th anniversary season, decided to offer its patrons just that.

Among the newcomers was a handsome South African soprano, Marita Napier, who displayed a most promising lyric-dramatic soprano voice, and a stage personality as Guttrune (she sang Sieglinde in the other two cycles).

South Africa was very proud of Marita Napier's successes overseas. After her debut entry into the opera house in San Francisco the following article appeared in an Afrikaans South African newspaper (1972c Miller) bearing the caption "Local opera singer hits big-time". Miller (1972c) elucidated the above performance as follows:

The international circuit of opera, as it has become dubbed, is as ever exacting and all-embracing. And as voracious as the circuit may be in swallowing up new singers, it occasionally spawns a voice of promise. And when the voice happens to belong to a South African, local operaphiles sit up and take note.

The voice in question is that of Marita Napier, a handsome young South African girl, who has been living and training in Germany for the past seven years.

Based in Hannover, Marita ventured into big-time opera. But already she has appeared with major artists in San Francisco, which ranks third in the United States after the Metropolitan and Chicago opera houses.

To celebrate their 50 anniversary, San Francisco opera staged Wagner's *Ring* with Birgit Nilson, Jess Thomas and Thomas Stewart. Marita, apart from singing Freia and Guttrune, sang Sieglinde in at least two cycles. She was highly commended for her fine lyric-dramatic soprano voice and commanding stage personality.

Since then Miss Napier has been engaged on the concert circuit singing under the direction of men such as Ozawa, Sawallisch, Mehta and Frühbeck de Burgos.

An important Bayreuth debut is scheduled for August 1973, and thereafter Marita returns to San Francisco where she will sing Venus in *Tannhäuser* and Chrysothemis in *Elektra*, in the company of such luminaries as Leonie Rysanek and Regina Resnik.

In March 1974 La Scala is to stage a fresh *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the whole epic to be directed by Luchino Visconti. Miss Napier has already been engaged to sing eight performances of Sieglinde.

Marita Napier indeed had a triumphant 1972. Nevertheless, she regarded the fact that she sang the big roles for the first time in the great opera houses when she was relatively young, as a disadvantage. Napier said that it was more desirable to try out the great roles in a smaller opera house (Van Heerden, 2003-2006; Napier, 2003-2004).

4.4 Debuts in La Scala and Bayreuth (1973)

The General Music Director from Cologne was present when Marita Napier sang Mahler's Eighth Symphony in the opera house in San Francisco. He contacted Wolfgang Sawallisch and told him that he had heard that they were looking for a Sieglinde at La Scala and that he had one for them. This happened in 1973 while Napier was still under contract with Essen (Van Heerden, 2003-2006; Napier, 2003a.)

It is interesting to note that although it was thought by some of Napier's friends that Napier made her debut in La Scala as Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*, no proof of

this can be found. According to the curriculum vitae of Napier, compiled by the Robert Lombardo Association of New York, she first sang Sieglinde in 1974 in La Scala. According to Lombardo, Napier's agent at a later stage, she made her debut in La Scala as Tove in the *Gurre-Lieder* by Schoenberg, with Zubin Mehta as the conductor in 1973 (Lombardo, 1988). A poster confirms the Lombardo statement since it clearly stated that Napier sang in the Teatro alla Scala as Sieglinde in *La Walkiria* on Saturday 23 March 1974. Wolfgang Sawallisch was the conductor. (Napier, 2003b; Teatro alla Scala, 1974.)

Napier said that, with reference to her debut in La Scala, the person responsible for her costumes, asked her what it was like to sit in Maria Callas' dressing room for the first time. She wanted to know whether Napier was excited about the idea of sitting in Maria Callas' dressing room. Napier reflected on the question and decided that she did not feel any different. She, however, wondered whether she would not perhaps feel excited if one day she could sing in Covent Garden. When she had the privilege to do just that in 1974, she realized that nothing had changed. She said that to sing was a job to her like any other job and that she would do it with great discipline and commitment (Van Heerden, 2003-2006). Napier's international career expanded, even to Italy, while she was still under contract in Essen.

Another reason why 1973 was an important year for her was that she made a recording that year. This was done in the Royal Albert Hall in London together with the BBC Symphony orchestra conducted by Pierre Boulez. The recording was made of Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* with Napier in the role of Tove. The other singers were Yvonne Minton, Siegmund Nimsgern and Jess Thomas (Schoenberg, 1972).

Also during 1973, she performed in Verdi's *Requiem* in Lugo and Oviedo in Spain. The conductor was Frühbeck de Burgos (Napier, 2003a).

According to a programme of the San Francisco Symphony (1973), Napier sang Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*. The conductor was Seiji Ozawa. Ozawa himself introduced

Napier in this programme with the following words: “Critics noted the great power and clarity of Marita Napier’s voice when she performed in last season’s opening concerts.”

One of the most noted qualities of Napier’s voice was its unbelievable volume and power that enabled her to easily rise above the orchestra. This was a remarkable characteristic which represented the quality of her voice up to her performance as Elektra in Strauss’ *Elektra* in 1999.

According to the 1973 programme of the San Francisco opera house it is reported that Marita Napier would be singing there the roles of Venus in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and Chrysothemis in Strauss’ *Elektra*. After these performances Napier went to Hannover on contract in order to expand her repertoire further and also to gain greater exposure and experience in a smaller opera house. Napier was her own greatest critic and was only satisfied with the best as far as her performances were concerned. It was never acceptable for her to sing any role for the first time in a large opera house (Napier, 2003a; Van Heerden 2003-2006).

In Hannover she sang in many operas, also as Donna Anna in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. Napier never regarded Mozart’s works as her favourites but as she always said (Van Heerden, 2003-2006): “Mozart is like medicine for the voice, it keeps it clean.”

Wolfgang Sawallisch was the musical director of the Philharmonic State Orchestra of Hamburg from 1961 to 1973. At his retirement he decided to have, as his farewell concert, this orchestra together with four soloists, of which Napier was the soprano, performing Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 (1973 Anonymous).

Many other highlights were part of Napier’s 1973. A debut performance in Bayreuth was another milestone in her career. In *Der Ring des Nibelungen* Napier sang the part of Helmwig in *Die Walküre* with Horst Stein conducting. In *Götterdämmerung* she sang the role of the Third Norn. Again the conductor was Horst Stein (Bayreuther Festspiele, 1973).

The next recording was made in Turin. On 18 October 1973 Marita sang the role of Diemut in Strauss' *Feuersnot* conducted by Peter Maag (Strauss, 1973). This recording forms part of the Napier Music Collection (2003b). In 1973, the BBC made a recording of Marita Napier singing in the Royal Albert Hall in London. This was Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. The conductor was Seiji Ozawa with the New Philharmonia Orchestra (Philips, 6747119). (Napier, 2003a, 2003b; BBC, 1973.)

In Minneapolis she performed as Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, conducted by Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. In San Francisco she again sang Tove with the Symphony Orchestra of San Francisco, this time conducted by Seiji Ozawa (Napier, 2003a).

For the first time since 1970, Napier interpreted Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, this time in Amsterdam. She thereby expanded her experience as interpreter of this work of Richard Strauss until she ultimately sang the work in the Vienna State Opera in 1977 (Napier, 2003a). Napier's last production in a busy and highly successful year was in December in Madrid when she sang Beethoven's *Christus am Ölberg*. The orchestra was that of the National Orchestra of Spain (Orquestra Nacional, 1973).

4.5 Debuts in Covent Garden and Munich (1974)

Since 1974 Napier no longer had a fixed contract with the State Opera House of Hamburg and she now entered the international world of opera as a freelance singer (Van Heerden, 2003-2006). Napier was already at this stage in great demand and was well known for her excellent performances as exponent of the works of Wagner and Strauss. Her appearances since 1974 were characterised as those of a world traveller, performing in many parts of the world. Her diary, which she called her little bible, was fully booked three years ahead of time (Van Heerden, 2003). Ena Shaw, Marita Napier's sister, said that there were always three ready packed suitcases in Napier's house in Hamburg. This enabled her to return and exchange the suitcases almost immediately (Shaw, 2004). This remark by Napier's sister makes one think of Napier's own words when she said that she did not have a life but that she just led an existence. She added that she had been everywhere but

that she had really never seen anything. She would have liked to have returned to all these places, but as a tourist (Badenhorst, 2002).

A newspaper article (Anonymous, 1974) announced that the well-known tenor Placido Domingo enchanted audiences in Hamburg in the role of Riccardo in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. This article also stated that Marita Napier sang the role of Amelia. Her interpretation was described as "very lyrical, with fascinating and charming pianissimo effects". It was Napier's first performance of 1974. This was the first time that they performed together. Napier had great admiration for Domingo, both as an artist and person. She described him as a very professional artist and a very pleasant personality. During a video interview Napier described him as the "prince amongst singers" (Badenhorst, 2002).

In the February edition of the *San Francisco Symphony* the programme of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, it is stated that, with Seiji Ozawa as conductor, Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* would be performed. Marita Napier sang the role of Tove. (1974b Anonymous).

Napier again sang Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* in Minneapolis at the celebrations of the composer's hundredth birthday. The conductor was Stanislaw Skrowaczewski and the orchestra the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (1974b Anonymous).

A newspaper article in May reported the "Final salute to Schoenberg is impressive". The report (1974b Anonymous) continued: "Soprano Marita Napier's Tove was beautifully and movingly sung."

It is evident that Napier's interpretation of Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* was outstanding since she was invited to various parts of the world to perform the role. Further proof of her triumphant progress as Tove in those years was her interpretation of the role in the Albert Hall in London in July 1974 where once again she was commended (1974b Anonymous):

Because cast for a soprano, Tove's music rides the storm more easily. Mr Jess Thomas had a ravishing beloved in Marita Napier, who caught the essential note of high romantic tumult no matter whether in Fine-spun confidences or in thrilling intensity and strength in climaxes.

Jess Thomas, Felicity Palmer and Siegmund Nimsgern performed together with Napier in the Royal Albert Hall. Pierre Boulez conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra (British Broadcast Corporation, 1974).

Napier sang for the second time in La Scala in Milan in 1974 as Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*, conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch (Lombardo, 1972-1988; Teatro alla Scala, 1974). The public and critics worldwide held her performance in high regard. But it was especially in South Africa that they were very proud of Napier. Joe Sack reported from South Africa (1974d Sack) that it was an unbelievable honour for the South African to be singing in La Scala. In the report Sack also mentioned in the *Show Mail* (1974d) that Ms Gwen Clarke, who supported and trained Marita before she received the Ernest Oppenheimer bursary that enabled her to go overseas, described Napier as someone with an exceptional singing talent. She said that her lyrical dramatic soprano voice had a tremendous range and a beautiful quality. She also mentioned the fact that Napier was a gifted pianist before she decided to focus on singing. Clarke added that Napier had a special musical intelligence that adequately supported her naturally beautiful voice.

Beautiful pictures of Napier's performance in La Scala as Sieglinde in 1974 serve as further proof of her performance. The photographs were taken by Piccagliani in the Teatro alla Scala (Napier, 2003b).

According to Robert Lombardo (1972-1988) and her curriculum vitae (2003a), Napier performed for the first time in Geneva in the role of Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*.

Shortly after Napier's performance in Geneva she participated in a "Gala-Abend der Oper" in Essen where she sang as Amelia, in the duet from Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. Later on, in the same programme, she sang "Isoldes Liebestod" from

Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (Gala-Abend der Oper, 1974). A recording by Pro Musica in the City Opera House in Roodepoort done in 1994 of "Isoldes Liebestod", as sung by Napier, was played on the 17 April 2004 at her memorial service in St George's Cathedral in Cape Town, at the request of Napier herself. This is proof that Napier became emotionally intensely involved in her interpretation of Isolde and associated herself with the fate of the character.

After her performance in Essen she again sang during the Bayreuther Festspiele on 2 August 1974 in *Der Ring der Nibelungen* as the Third Norn in *Götterdämmerung* (Bayreuther Festspiele, 1974a). During the Festspiele she also performed in *Die Walküre* on 20 August in which she sang the role of Sieglinde. Gerd Brenneis was Siegmund and the conductor was Horst Stein. (Bayreuther Festspiele, 1974b.) Prof. Henning Viljoen wrote in *De Kat* (1989) that Napier's real breakthrough in the international opera world came after her debut as Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre* at the Bayreuth Festival in 1974. Napier and Gerd Brenneis were commended as the best and most credible Sieglinde and Siegmund of the last decade in Bayreuth.

With Napier's performance as Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* in the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1973 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Pierre Boulez as conductor, she made such an enormous impression on the musicians, that the director invited her to sing Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in 1974 in Covent Garden (Van Heerden, 2003-2006.) On 1 October 1974 Napier made her debut there as Sieglinde. Berit Lindholm sang the role of Brünnhilde, Pauline Tinsley was Helmwig and Richard Cassilly, Siegmund. A striking photograph of Napier shows her as Sieglinde in this debut performance under the baton of the conductor Colin Davis. (Royal Opera House Covent Garden, 1974; Napier, 2003b; 1974f Edwards.) Philip Hope-Wallace (1974) reported from London that there was an overwhelming applause for the superb performance of the singers in *Die Walküre*. He added that:

Marita Napier and Richard Cassilly were a more usual pair of Wagner siblings but the "Todesverkündigen" scene, right through to the end of the middle act, had a

great intensity of feeling. I have seldom, in all, known the audience more rapt and absorbed.

Sydney Edwards reported (1974f) that Colin Davis conducted an extremely well-sung performance while he said that Marita Napier's Sieglinde was excellent.

During Napier's debut performance in Covent Garden she was reminded of the person who had asked her whether she was excited at the thought of sitting in Callas' dressing room. She again realized that even singing in Covent Garden did not change anything: singing to her was just a job, and a demanding one at that (Badenhorst, 2002).

With Napier's performances in the opera houses of San Francisco, Bayreuth, La Scala and in Covent Garden she had now already performed leading roles in the biggest opera houses. In the short period between 1972 and 1974 Napier succeeded in being chosen to sing the principal roles in the most important opera houses. This was indeed a remarkable achievement, which at that stage, had not been equalled by any other South African (Breytenbach, 1975a). Singing in the Vienna State Opera House and the Metropolitan Opera House in New York was all she needed to complete the so-called "grand slam".

In the Frankfurt Rundfunk Marita Napier again performed in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* in which she sang the role of Tove with Erich Leinsdorf as conductor. The local newspaper (1974e Frankfurter Kulturspiegel) reported "that Marita Napier was a radiant Tove". Other soloists who sang with Napier were Gene Ferguson, Rose Wagemann, Robert Tear, Klaus Narr and Siegmund Nimsgern (1974c Hessischer Rundfunk).

She performed in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in Tanglewood with Seiji Ozawa as the conductor. During an interview Napier said that Ozawa was the ideal conductor for any singer, because he virtually breathed with the singer. During her performance a recording was made (see Beethoven in Discography).

Napier's last performance in 1974 was her debut in the State Opera House of Munich in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* in which she sang the role of Ariadne with Karl Böhm as the

conductor. According to Napier this was one of her favourite opera houses since she always sang well when singing there (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

4.6 Debut in the Vienna State Opera (1975)

During 1975 the Miami Civic Music Association invited Napier to deliver a Lieder Recital during their thirty-eighth season. She was accompanied on the piano by Theodore Saidenberg and the recital took place on 23 April 1975 in the Dade County Auditorium. During the recital she sang “Dich teure Halle” from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, “In questa Reggia” from Puccini’s *Turandot* and “Vissi d’arte” from Puccini’s *Tosca*. She also sang works by Schubert, Richard Strauss, Grieg and Verdi (Miami Civic Music Association, 1975).

This year was again a highlight in Napier’s career as she made her debut in the Vienna State Opera House in Wagner’s *Lohengrin* in which she sang the role of Elsa. Zubin Mehta was the conductor (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988). In the journal *Opera* (1975a) Niel Brummer reported that Napier was outstanding as Elsa. He added that the critics were full of praise for her performance and said that this was the reason that she was regarded as one of the best soprano interpreters of Wagner. Napier said that in the Vienna State Opera House much of one’s success depended on the audience sitting in the fourth gallery. If, for example, they did not like your headgear they would let the artist know (Badenhorst, 2002). With this achievement of singing in the Vienna State Opera House, she had nearly completed the so-called “grand slam” of opera. At that stage it was a great achievement for a South African, but also for any opera singer to have sung leading roles in La Scala, Covent Garden and the Vienna Opera House.

According to her curriculum vitae, after her appearance in Vienna, Napier performed in Berlin in Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer* as Senta. This was conducted by Roberto Peters (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988).

At the ninety-fifth season of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, Napier sang Mahler's Eighth Symphony on 1, 3 and 4 May 1975. She sang both the "Una poenitentium" (Gretchen) and "Mater gloriosa". The conductor was Walter Susskind and it took place in the Powell Symphony Hall (Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, 1975).

On 20 May 1975 Napier participated in the international music festival in Bordeaux together with Ortrun Wenkel, Werner Hollweg and Franz Mazura. She gave a recital of Beethoven lieder accompanied by orchestra and the conductor was Roberto Benzi (Orchestre De Bordeaux, 1975).

According to Hertzfeldt in *Orpheus* (1975; Napier, 2003a) Napier sang in Bayreuth in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in the role of Eva as well as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*. Horst Stein was the conductor in both cases (Bayreuther Festspiele, 1975). James King appeared in the role of Siegmund. The reviews on Napier's performances were very positive. *Die Festspielberichte* (1975d) stated the following:

Again Napier was outstanding in the role of Sieglinde and presented the audience with a superb emotionally laden performance and song, using her splendid voice to effortlessly rise above the orchestra.

4.7 Voice of America Award (1975)

A great achievement awaited Napier when she appeared in the title role of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* as Senta in the War Memorial opera house in San Francisco (San Francisco Opera Magazine, 1975). The producer was Jean Pierre Ponnelle and Kenneth Schermerhorn was the conductor. Napier attributed her success to Ponnelle's brilliant guidance. Ponnelle transformed the opera into a dream that Erik had and he described it in his own words as follows (Samson, 1975):

I wanted to tell the story on a different level than the primitive legend, so I decided to turn the entire opera into a dream of the Steersman. In that way, it can catalyze all frustrations and complexes as well as become theatrically more believable.

Consequently the director believes that the relationship between Erik, Senta and the Dutchman is infinitely more significant in this version and more closely approximates the romanticism of Wagner.

It also means that Senta becomes more of a myth, since she is only a part of the Steersman's dream. And when she herself dreams of the legendary Dutchman, the audience will be witnessing a dream within a dream.

This idea of Ponnelle to enact the opera as if in a dream evoked mixed feelings from the audiences. Some regarded this as a climax, others as an anti-climax. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of Ponnelle's dream, Blake Samson (1975) came to the conclusion that:

It is the hand of Jean Pierre Ponnelle that makes this Flying Dutchman so astonishingly psychological, dramatic, musical and visual. This is perhaps the best opera this season to introduce a newcomer to the grand illusion of the operatic stage.

The reaction on Napier in the role of Senta in Ponnelle's production was very favourable. Robert Commanday (1975) had the following views:

The Senta was cowed and dressed in quilted large skirts like the other Norwegian women but all white, setting apart this woman with her salvation-role obsession and fantasy love. Marita Napier sang as a soprano apart, the voice beaming with intensity and brilliant focus.

Harlow Robinson (1975) from *The Daily Californian* expanded on the above performance as follows:

Marita Napier as Senta, Daland's daughter, turned in the most inspired performance of the evening, dressed in what looked like a nun's white habit. The South African soprano had an especially true and fresh tone on the top, though her bottom range was somewhat lacking in resonance.

William Glackin reported (1975):

Marita Napier is a fine, strong, steady Senta, offering a rapt, spellbinding performance of the “ballad” and lining out the final notes of the opera with a gleaming intensity.

Napier was awarded the title “The Voice of America” in 1975 for her outstanding interpretation of this performance. It was the first time that this honour was bestowed upon a South African. Napier’s reaction on this award was, “Probably because I sang well” (Viljoen, 1989; Odendaal, 1999). It is evident from Napier’s remark that she was never talkative and preferred not to talk about herself.

South Africa was very proud of this exceptional achievement. On Friday, 21 November 1975, the following appeared in the “Ritsgids”, a supplement to *Die Transvaler* (Breytenbach, 1975a) together with a striking photograph of Napier, “Marita is now our best overseas”.

Napier herself made the following remark about her interpretation of Senta in San Francisco (Wagner, 1981a):

I think Senta is my favourite role. She is more dramatic than Elsa and Elisabeth who are rather passive figures. I have sung Venus and enjoyed that. Senta is not in love with the Dutchman but is looking for a way to express her death wish. She is probably a little crazy. I appeared in an interesting production by Jean Pierre Ponnelle in San Francisco in 1975. The opera was performed as a single Act and the whole action took place on the deck of a ship. The Steersman and Erik were sung by the same singer and events unfolded as the Steersman’s dream - he is in love with Senta and dreads losing her.

During 1975 Napier entered into a contract with the opera house in Hamburg. She sang in the following productions with Nello Santi as conductor: in Strauss’ *Ariadne auf Naxos* as Ariadne, in Verdi’s *La Forza del Destino* as Leonora, in *Un Ballo in Maschera* as Amelia, in *Aïda* as Aida, in Weber’s *Der Freischütz* as Agathe, in Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer* as Senta, and in Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* as Leonora (Napier, 2003a).

4.8 Napier on her first return visit to South Africa (1976)

In January 1976 Napier sang in the Grand Théâtre in Geneva in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in the role of Sieglinde with Peter Hofmann as Siegmund. After the performance a critic wrote that Napier was convincing in her role but that she sometimes forced her voice. Nevertheless he commended the strong quality of her voice that rose above the orchestra. The conductor was Berislav Klobucar (1976 Mit ziemlich viel Bewegung; Grand Théâtre de Genève, 1976).

Already at this early stage in Napier's life she was so well-known as an interpreter of Sieglinde and the works of Wagner that she sang again at the Bayreuth Festspiele in 1976 in the role of Sieglinde. The conductor was Horst Stein. Also during this festival she performed in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in which she sang the role of Eva. The conductor was Heinrich Hollreiser. (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988.)

At the 159th performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Napier sang the role of Leonore on 29 March 1976 with great success. The conductor was Reginald Goodall (Royal Opera House Covent Garden, 1976). Peter Stadlem (1976) used the caption "Beauty of tone of new Leonore" for his article. He continued:

The singing of the new Leonore, the Hamburg based South African, Marita Napier, combined strength and beauty of tone. This was shown not least in the scene's concluding "O Namenlose Freude" and there were none of those patches of mere dead loudness, such as had worried us in Act 1.

Philip Hope-Wallace (1976) reported the following on Napier's performance:

Chief interest attached to the new Leonore, the South African-born Marita Napier, a devoted artist, convincing enough in her boyish disguise, being short and sturdy, and singing with a good penetrating soprano, fresh and vigorous if not at first very certainly pitched. We remember her as a Sieglinde. Her Leonore will surely come more steadily into focus.

In April 1976 Napier returned to South Africa for the first time in order to make her debut in her home country as a world renowned and beloved opera singer of opera. Napier often said that she was glad that she could make her debut in South Africa in the role of Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, as this was the opera in which she had achieved her greatest successes overseas. It was for this role that she was awarded the title of "Voice of America" (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

Thys Odendaal reported (1976) that the previous Saturday evening was a big night in the Cape as well as for the Cape Performing Arts Board (Capab) because this was the first time that this company had performed a work of Wagner in the Nico Malan. He regarded this as a highlight not only for Cape Town, but also for South African opera history. Both the conductor, David Tidboald, and the producer, Fred Dalberg, were highly acclaimed for their outstanding work. Odendaal specifically explained why connoisseurs of the opera judged Napier, in the role of Senta, as one of the best in the world at the time. He regarded the fact that she made her debut in this role in South Africa as quite fitting, and added that Napier was, to him, the ideal Senta. Odendaal wrote:

Her voice falls easily on the ear. It is a big voice and even in forte it carries a warm, sweet sound. But Napier's additional gift, one that enables her to highlight every small detail of the development of Senta's character, is her flowing pianissimos.

Napier is a highly intelligent dramatic soprano, but also extremely sensitive who does not apply her voice for her own amusement in showmanship, but each nuance is transported to her audience as a precious gem. Her projection is pure and her interpretation convincing.

Napier is an exciting artist. I recall those last bell clear forte notes in the final act when she exclaimed that she would follow the Hollander until death – "Praise the angel and his commandments! Here I stand with you faithful until death!"

Bruce Heilbuth (1976) reported that Napier was excellent in *Der fliegende Holländer*. He added that she was certainly the best Senta in the world and that he regarded her as the natural successor of Birgit Nilsson as dramatic soprano. He stated further that she must be in great demand all over the world.

After the performance on 25 April Michael Brimer (1976) said the following:

The part of Senta was played by Marita Napier. This is her return visit to her own country. Miss Napier was magnificent, superb – any superlative one can think of. She provided an experience not to be forgotten. Such glorious sounds can rarely have been heard in the Nico Malan. Her “ O, prahle nicht! Was kann dein Leiden sein? Kennst jenes Unglückselgen Schicksal du?” sent shivers down the spine, while her final statement was really thrilling.

Napier herself was proud of the fact that she made her debut in South Africa in the role of Senta. In later years during an interview she said (Wagner, 1981a):

I think Senta is my favourite Wagner role. I sang Senta in 1976 in what was almost the first ever Wagner performance in Cape Town, at the Nico Malan Opera House.

After Napier’s triumphant debut in South Africa she returned to Germany in order to start rehearsals for Leonore in Beethoven’s *Fidelio* that was to take place in the State Opera House in Hamburg. She had sung this role previously in Covent Garden. She performed Senta in Hamburg on 28 May 1976 under the baton of Christof Perick (Hamburgische Staatsoper, 1976b).

She appeared in Wagner’s *Lohengrin* in which she sang Elsa during the Orange Festival in France, conducted by Marek Janowski as well as in the Nancy Opera House, conducted by Janos Kulka. The theatre in Orange was large and impressive, as seen on the photographs taken of Napier during a rehearsal in Orange. (Napier, 2003b.)

According to Napier’s curriculum vitae, no mention is made of a performance in 1976 in Basel in Schoenberg’s *Gurre-Lieder* in the role of Tove (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988). In the Napier Music Collection, there is, however, a programme that clearly indicates that Napier appeared in 1976 on 16/17 July in Schoenberg’s *Gurre-Lieder* in the *grossen Musiksaal des Stadtcasinos* in the role of Tove. Siegmund Nimsgern was the Bauer (Napier, 2003b; Musikgesellschaft Basel, 1976). A daily Basel newspaper (1976b) wrote a positive review with reference to Napier’s interpretation of Tove. The article

especially celebrated her excellent voice qualities as well as her dramatic talent and strong voice.

In September Napier again sang in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in the role of Sieglinde in Covent Garden (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988; Royal Opera House Covent Garden, 1976-77). Peter Hofmann was Siegmund. Stanley Sadie (1976) reported that Colin Davis was an excellent conductor from the viewpoint of the singers:

Softening the orchestra's textures for a singer's sake, helping articulate the shape of a monologue with his measured support.

The singer who needed it most, at least from the vantage point of "The Times" seat, was the Sieglinde, Marita Napier, whose middle and lower registers are steady, even and musical, but distinctly slender. Even with Mr Davis right between her and me, however, there was a good vibrant ring to her higher notes, and some warmth of phrasing to "Du bist der Lenz".

Elisabeth Forbes (1976) wrote that Colin Davis excelled as the conductor. He succeeded in gradually building up the tension right up to the final scene. She added:

As Sieglinde, Marita Napier, her vocal line a little unsteady at first, got really into her stride with "Du bist der Lenz" and produced some impassioned singing with thrilling notes at the top of her voice.

Back in Germany, on Saturday, 23 October 1976, Napier sang Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* in the City Hall of Freiburg together with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Stuttgart, conducted by Theodor Egel. Barbara Egel was the alto, Siegfried Jerusalem the tenor and Siegmund Nimsgern the bass (Stadthalle Freiburg, 1976). After the performance Hanns Reich (1976) reported that Marita Napier is a soprano with an exceptional beauty in her voice and added that she pronounced the lyrics distinctly.

According to her curriculum vitae, Napier performed in Strauss' *Elektra* in the role of Chrysothemis in Frankfurt, conducted by Karl Böhm (Napier, 2003a). Napier had already achieved many successes overseas in this role like the one in 1972 in the opera house in San Francisco.

Napier's last performance in 1976 was in Weber's *Der Freischütz* in the role of Agathe. This took place in the Grand Théâtre de Genève from 30 November to 11 December. Siegmund Nimsgern interpreted the role of Caspar, and the conductor was Jacques Delacôte (Grand Théâtre de Genève, 1976-1977). Nimsgern also had sung with Napier in Freiburg in Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* (Stadthalle Freiburg, 1976).

Lanfranco Rasponi (1977) reported from Geneva in *Opera News* that he was surprised to learn that all the tickets for *Der Freischütz* in the Grand Théâtre were sold out, as this opera in particular had never had such great interest outside of Germany. He attributed the sudden interest of the Swiss in opera having two possibilities. The one was the interest in Weber's music and the other one the exceptionally famous casting. Rasponi stated that he especially mentioned Napier for her interpretation of Agathe:

Vocally, the enchanting Weber melodies could not have been in better hands. What a beautiful artist Marita Napier is, with the lustrous quality of her voice and fine technique! "Leise, leise" proceeded ever so delicately and tenderly, with the murmurs of the trees seemingly close at hand, and then the swelling of the sound came, like a cascade, with no sign of strain and right on pitch.

4.9 Debut in *Turandot* (1977)

At this stage Marita Napier's career had already reached exceptional achievements and she still continued to work very hard at it to obtain even greater heights. Her main aim was always to sing in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Napier, however, used every opportunity to sing the leading roles in the smaller opera houses in order to gain experience and to pay attention to the technical aspects of her interpretations (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

In the "Ritsgids" (Breytenbach, 1977) an article appeared with regard to Napier's pending visit to the Transvaal and the Cape in 1978. It was mentioned that the South Africans were looking forward to her performances. Mention was also made of the fact that during the performance of *Elektra* she fell on the steps and was in plaster for weeks. After the removal of the plaster she again sang in Dortmund in the role of the Empress in Strauss'

Die Frau ohne Schatten. The Emperor was Robert Schunk, the conductor Marek Janowski and the producer was Paul Hager (1977a Städtische Bühnen Dortmund). Napier then sang Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* in Düsseldorf (Napier, 2003a). On 26 April 1977 Napier performed in Wagner's *Siegfried* as Brünnhilde in Marseille (Napier, 2003a). A photograph taken by Charles Sinclair in the Opera Villa de Marseille shows Napier with her hands triumphantly in the air while she greets the morning light with "Heil der Sonne", after she was woken up by Siegfried's kiss while lying asleep on the rocks. Jean Able (1977c) reported in the *Provençal* that Napier was very impressive in her role as Brünnhilde.

In Madrid Napier then sang Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 conducted by Odon Alonso (Orquesta Sinfonica Y Coro De Radiotelevision Española, 1977). Norma Lerer (contralto), Manuel Cid (tenor) and Franz Crass (bass) were the other soloists who performed with Napier at this concert. On this occasion Napier met the Spanish king, Juan Carlos, and his family. A touching photograph of Napier together with the royal family is preserved in the Napier Music Collection (Napier, 2003b). Napier performed in another two operas in Madrid: in Wagner's *Siegfried* as Brünnhilde and in Beethoven's *Fidelio* as Leonore (Napier, 2003a).

Napier then went to Vienna where she appeared in the State Opera House in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* as Ariadne. Karl Böhm was the conductor. She also performed Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* conducted by Christof Perick. She then sang Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. The conductor was Zubin Mehta (Napier, 2003a).

On 26 June 1977, shortly after her previous outstanding performance in the Vienna State Opera, Napier again sang Ariadne in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Florence. This took place during the Maggio Musicale and the conductor was again Karl Böhm (1977b *La maliziosa Zerbinetta strappa Arianna dal mito*).

During the Orange Festival in France, Napier sang in Mahler's Eighth Symphony. A photograph taken in the large open-air theatre where Napier was busy rehearsing, can be

found in the Napier Music Collection (Napier, 2003). In Geneva Napier again sang in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in the role of Sieglinde. The conductor was Armin Jordan (Napier, 2003a).

It is notable that during 1977 Napier mainly sang works of Wagner and Strauss while, to a lesser extent, she also gave some lieder performances.

An article by Bürck (1977) writing from Baden-Baden on 25 August 1977 stated that Napier was brilliant in Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* in a performance with the Bach choir of Freiburg. Other soloists who performed with Napier were concert singer Marga Höffgen (alto), Siegfried Jerusalem (tenor) and Karl Ridderbusch (bass). Bürck wrote (1977):

Also keep in mind Jerusalem's voice in the duet with the soloist soprano "Fac, ut portem Christi mortem," the only time when Napier, for the first time, sang alone and came to the fore with the most beautiful results; the blending of the voices in the duet was beautifully accomplished.

A highlight in Napier's career was her first performance in Puccini's *Turandot* as princess Turandot in Stuttgart on Friday, 14 October 1977. Napier herself said that this was her best performance of this role ever because her voice was still beautiful and young (Van Heerden, 2003-2006). Kurt Honolka (1977) reported from Stuttgart that this *Turandot* was a great musical achievement. The conductor was Janos Kulka. He added:

The producer of the "new" *Turandot* in the State Opera House of Stuttgart knew how to combine this winning team, now and for the future. Marita Napier in the title role, Carlo Bini as Prince Kalaf and Maria de Francesca as Liù, turned the performance into a musical event.

After the première, Gert-Wolfgang Baruch (1977) reported from Stuttgart:

Marita Napier began the narration of her grandmothers' death in a moving and arduous manner. The declamatory style unexpectedly builds up to the dramatic and emphatic end in a vocal line demonstrating a sudden explosive power of expression. The *Turandot* we see is not a funny, spoilt, conceited, sadistic ghost. Marita Napier's heroin is a warm blooded insulted woman, suffering from a

terrific trauma from which she wishes to free herself. The mystery scene is simultaneously a demonstration of rage, penetrated by hysterics, fear and satisfaction, sung by an organ brimming with energy of which the volume and metallic glitter were admirable. The duet with the victorious prince Kalaf in the third act also shows off his lyrical talents. Napier passes carefree over this duet. She exclusively relies on her superior control of her voice, both in the explosive lower intervals as well as in the inexhaustible reserves of her voice. It is within her power, without any effort, to show off her fantastic voice and she announces the marriage with a sound equal to that of booming trumpets.

Napier frequently referred, after her successful debut in *Turandot*, to her voice as the “steel voice” necessary for the interpretation of the role of *Turandot* (Botha, 1990).

During an interview with Joubero Malherbe (1995) Napier related that there are actually three types of *Turandots*. The first is the highly dramatic *Turandot* with a strong, high register, like Dimitrova; then the dramatic one like Eva Marton. Napier is seen as a lyrical *Turandot*, who is usually used when the tenor’s voice is not very strong.

After Napier’s successful performance in *Turandot* in Stuttgart she also performed in Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer* in which she sang the role of Senta in Stuttgart and in Frankfurt. She then went to Hamburg where she sang as the empress in Strauss’ *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Her second performance as princess *Turandot* took place in Orange in France under the guidance of Nello Santi. Napier often said that the open-air theatre was so big that she did not really enjoy performing there (Badenhorst, 2004). Photographs of Napier taken in this theatre show her with an enormous and imposing headgear (Napier, 2003a; Napier, 2003b).

Napier’s last performance in 1977 was in Vienna on 14 December in the State Opera House as Vitellia in Mozart’s *La Clemenza di Tito* produced by Julius Rudel. Werner Hollweg sang the role of Titus. Andrea Seebohm (1977) reported from Vienna that Napier as Vitellia came to her as a pleasant surprise. She added that Napier, shortly after the start of the performance, was able to tune her metal soprano voice into what was needed, which to her, was admirable. She admitted that Napier was not a natural singer of Mozart. She however declared that her voice and technique was extremely controlled.

4.10 Debut in the Transvaal (Gauteng) (1978)

Napier's first performance in 1978 was as princess Turandot in Puccini's *Turandot* in Stuttgart. She then sang Ariadne on 3 February in Covent Garden in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Colin Davis was the conductor (The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden 1977-78). Stanley Sadie reported from Covent Garden that (1978):

Ariadne was sung last night, in place of the indisposed Heather Harper, by Marita Napier. She provided some broad and impassioned singing in "Es gibt ein Reich", often subtly controlled; and rather tight, sharply focused sound, which she mostly produced, filled out and warmed in the love music.

Photographs of Napier as Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio* are proof of her performance in Berlin. She then sang as Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* and as Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin* in Stuttgart. The conductor was Horst Stein (Napier, 2003a).

Under contract with the opera house in Hamburg, Napier also sang in a number of operas. They included Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* as Ariadne, Wagner's *Die Walküre* as Sieglinde, Strauss' *Elektra* as Chrysothemis and Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* in the role of Senta. The conductor was Horst Stein (Napier, 2003a).

Philippa Breytenbach (1978) reported in *Die Transvaler* that "South Africa's first soprano would be here this weekend". Breytenbach continued:

Marita Napier, South Africa's foremost soprano overseas, would be coming to the Republic this weekend on her second official visit. She is coming for the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (Pact) to perform in Verdi's opera "Nabucco".

She added that opera enthusiasts were looking forward with great ardour to Napier's first visit to the Transvaal. Breytenbach concluded (1978): "Last year, in Capab's opera, Napier proved why she was presently regarded as South Africa's foremost opera singer."

Pieter Serfontein (1978) argued in *Die Burger* that “Napier was now regarded as one of the world’s most glittering soprano opera stars”. She was indeed one of the small group of “jet-set” singers, the selected group of opera stars that are invited to special gala performances by the managers of opera. Serfontein thanked Napier that she, due to her status as a star, placed South Africa on the world map of international opera.

Thys Odendaal (1978a) posited in *Beeld*, after he had seen Napier in the leading role of Abigaille in Verdi’s *Nabucco*, singing with Lawrence Folley and with Leo Quayle as conductor, that for a long time, he had been looking forward to Pact’s presentation of *Nabucco*. He gave the following reasons:

Because the Transvalers so rarely get the opportunity to listen to a work as it was originally created, and secondly, because Napier, the South African soprano, would make her debut in the Transvaal in the demanding role of Abigaille. Ms Napier’s high register is phenomenal to say the least. Her contemptuous “Prode Querier” towards Ismaele starts on B below middle C and extends to the B two octaves higher; in the trio it rises to C. It is an experience to listen to a soprano singing this with the greatest of ease.

He continued as follows:

Napier was scintillating-in both her singing and acting-in the recitative aria and cabaletta at the beginning of the second act. This robust recitative contains daunting two octave jumps from the top to middle C. Ms Napier sang these notes with great ease. Her voice is powerful, but she was also brilliantly moving in the most sensitive pianissimo phrases. Abigaille is a difficult role to sing, although the character is not depicted truthfully. Ms Napier succeeded in making the character to a greater extent more alive than what the librettist, Solera, was able to do. Her talent for acting is remarkable: the eyes, hands, body (how beautifully she moves!) and very presence is the kind of characteristics that one could expect from the present day opera star.

On Napier’s strong presence on the stage he gave the following account of Act 3, scene 2:

In the throne room of Babylon Abigaille confronts Nabucco. Here Napier is at her best - stark movements, sometimes raging and flashing eyes. Her voice fills the auditorium and her acting is so genuine and powerful that it seems as if the big

Folley simply crumbles away. Subtly she puts this display of power against an inherent sensitivity with her humiliation in the final act.

Odendaal (1978b) came to the conclusion that the presentation of this opera was of the highest caliber.

Napier's performance in the role of Abigaille was one of her many successful appearances when we compare the words of another critic, David Oberholzer (1978) with that of Odendaal. Oberholzer wrote in *The Pretoria News*:

Marita Napier mesmerizes with magic. She has schooled her voice to perform with glowing virtuosity. The dramatic qualities of her voice are reminiscent of Elena Suliotis (in her early twenties). Her pianissimo singing reminds of recent Monserrat Caballé. She manages to be the centre of the stage – a focal point even when she is in the background. This is due to a refined dramatic facility, acquired with the tireless talent that has perfected her voice.

Napier's interpretation of Abigaille in Verdi's *Nabucco* improved even further according to Thys Odendaal (1978) writing in *Beeld*, after her performance a week later in the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg. Odendaal wrote:

Marita Napier's portrayal of Abigaille in Pact's presentation of *Nabucco* on Saturday night carried the stamp of one of the greatest singers of our time. Merely judging by her voice alone, it is difficult to name any other soprano that could make Abigaille so completely alive – with acting that creates a two dimensional character with such a depth, and singing so movingly that I had to shake my head repeatedly in disbelief or amazement.

One wonders whether the Johannesburg audience on Saturday night was, despite its ardent enthusiasm, aware that they saw and heard an artist of supreme quality.

Odendaal also reported that “overseas critics already regarded Napier as the leading Turandot, Ariadne and Senta of our time”.

He said that:

She proved what is today expected of an opera star. She is an example of the contemporary “singing actress”. It was her first performance in her city of birth

and what a performance it was. Ms Napier inspired Lawrence Folley to a level that made him a Nabucco of a very high standard.

After her two successful performances as Abigaille in *Nabucco* in the Aula in Pretoria and in the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg, Napier performed in two operas in Berlin. She sang in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* the role of Ariadne and in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* the role of Senta.

Pieter Kooij (1978), reporter of *Die Burger*, wrote that Marita Napier, accompanied by the pianist Lamar Crowson, opened the new Conservatory in Stellenbosch on 20 May 1978. They gave a Lieder recital in the Endler Hall. The Oude Meester Foundation for the Performing Arts sponsored the performance in collaboration with Capab (Napier, 2003b; University of Stellenbosch, 1978). Pieter Kooij continued (1978a):

I can only shake my head in amazement over Ms Napier's choice of lieder: the most famous of Schubert's lieder and selection from lieder cycles! In the second song from Strauss' *Vier letzte Lieder* and the encore, one of Wagner's Wesendonk-Lieder, we heard Marita Napier singing as could be expected from such a singer of world renown.

Kooij summarized the performance as follows (1978a):

I must admit, in all honesty, that I enjoyed the performance tremendously. Even if Ms Napier sang scales up and down I would have listened with great delight. Such a wonderful voice like this I cannot resist!

Napier, who, for the first time in 1976 sang the role of Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio* in Covent Garden and during the same year in Hamburg and in 1977 in Madrid, now came to South Africa to sing in *Fidelio* for Capab in the Nico Malan Opera House. The producer was Angelo Gobbato and the conductor David Tidboald. The casting was as follows: Florestan was Jon Weaving, Marzelline was Virginia Oosthuizen, Don Pizarro was Hans van Heerden and Don Fernando was Lawrence Folley (Capab, 1978; Napier, 2003).

Antoinette Silvestri reported as follows in *The Argus* (1978):

These days all self-respecting opera houses have *Fidelio* in their quiver. On Saturday, Angelo Gobbato's Capab version of Beethoven's only opera was a compensation to one whose memories of the old Cape Town Alhambra version have dimmed, and justification for a period when only the obdurate optimist, the most sanguine soothsayer, could have predicted so fine a home for a prison as the Nico Malan [opera house].

Pieter Kooij (1978b) reported in *Die Burger* that Napier interpreted the title role brilliantly. He continued:

Her voice is very powerful and so well focused that it can continuously be heard above the orchestra. In the very successful first quartet she held back sufficiently as not to overwhelm her co-singers, but later on in the very dramatic aria "Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin" she completely swept me away. She did not achieve this only by the volume of her voice, but also by alternating with tenderness, for instance, with "ein Farbenbogen" in the final duet "O namenlose Freude" and later on in the finale when her voice rose so clearly and beautifully above the orchestra, she again proved why she was so much in demand on the international opera stages.

After singing in South Africa she went to the 23 *Festival international de Lausanne* in Switzerland to sing Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (XXIII Festival International De Lausanne, 1978). Napier then proceeded to Berlin where she performed in the title role of Puccini's *Tosca* on Sunday 27 August. The conductor was Otmar Suitner and the performance took place in the *Staatskapelle* in Berlin (Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, 1978).

4.11 Debut in the Teatro Colón (1978)

On 15 September 1978, Napier sang the role of Elisabeth in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in the *Teatro Colón* in Buenos Aires. The conductor was Pedro Ignacio Calderon and the producer was Roberto Oswald (Teatro Colon, 1978a; Marey, 1978). Napier herself said that, at that stage, it was the largest opera house in which she had ever sung. She added that some people afterwards remarked that her voice was beautiful and sweet (Van

Heerden, 2003-2006). A set of photographs of Napier with a variety of outfits and headdresses alternating from white to gold to silver and blue as well as a photograph of Napier together with the producer Roberto Oswald can be seen in the Napier Music Collection (Napier, 2003b). A critic (Teatro Colón, 1978b) writing about this performance said that “Marita Napier, as Elisabeth, who has a clear soprano voice at her disposal entreats one in the lyrical passages to come and fly with her. In the second act and in the “Gebet” of the final act she found heartwarming and tender notes.”

Fred Marey wrote (1978) that:

The two feminine parts were well cast, as there was a well focused contribution from Marita Napier as Elisabeth, with a finely graded vocalism in “Dich teure Halle” and the “Prayer”, as well as the other solo and ensemble parts in which she participates.

In the programme of the “Berliner Konzert Chor” performing on 18 November 1978, Marita Napier’s name appeared together with three other soloists. They performed Verdi’s *Requiem* together with the “Berliner Philharmonisches Orchester und Konzert-Chor” with Fritz Weisse as the conductor (Berliner Konzert Chor, 1978). After the concert *Der Tagespiegel* (1978a) had the following views:

One can definitely predict a brilliant career for the soprano Marita Napier; an extremely disciplined singer and also a singer who has both talent and a wonderful voice at her disposal. Almost effortlessly she seems to take the higher notes, clear and clean is the sound even together with the softest piano sounds, and she pronounces clearly. She understands how to differentiate and to render an interpretation full of feeling.

It seems that Napier was brilliant in the concert performance as an exceptional interpreter of Verdi. Her beautiful singing voice, which was able to jump effortlessly and powerfully over two octaves, from the top to middle C, rose above the orchestra and touched the audience with the most sensitive pianissimo phrases.

Napier's last performance in 1978 was scheduled as Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio* together with the "Tonhalle-Gesellschaft" in Zürich on 5 December (Konzerte der Tonhalle-Gesellschaft Zürich, 1978). Richard Cassilly was Florestan, Jonathan Prescott was Don Fernando, Theo Adam was Don Pizarro and Kathrin Graf was Marzeline. The *Tages-Anzeiger* (1978c) reported that Napier, recognized as an exponent of Wagner, experienced problems with her coloratura. The article added that Napier should also pay more attention to her acting. This was a strange remark since Napier was highly regarded for her exceptional acting abilities. Die *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* (1978b) applauded Napier's exceptional abilities to interpret the role of Leonore as well as the strong dramatic qualities of her voice.

4.12 Debut in the Arena di Verona (1979)

Marita Napier's first performance in 1979 was on Tuesday 2 January in the Württemberg State Theatre in Stuttgart as Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*. The conductor was Christof Perick (Württemberg Stadttheater, 1979). Napier then performed in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in the role of Elisabeth in Stuttgart (Napier, 2003a).

From Stuttgart Napier went to the State Opera House in Hamburg to perform as the Empress in Strauss' *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Describing Napier's performance, the *Hamburger Abendblatt* wrote that even after the second act there were already cheers of bravo and that at the end of the performance the applause was of a nature not often heard in the Hamburg State Opera House (1979a Beifallstürme für das neue Strauss-Ensemble).

Henning Viljoen, a South African opera critic, after having had the privilege of hearing Napier singing in two operas overseas, wrote the following in *Die Vaderland* (1979):

The admiration for the new Strauss ensemble is attributed this time firstly to Marita Napier: her beautiful voice which is supported easily and faultlessly to the extreme in high notes, not only has unusual steel power, but almost more energy as the big "super voice" of Danica Mastilovic.

Die Welt (1979b) reported that both Marita Napier and Danica Mastilovic use their lustrous voices with steel and glitter and that they both confidently rose above the mighty sounds of the orchestra.

The next opera in which Napier performed was Strauss' *Elektra* in which she sang the role of Chrysothemis in the State Opera House in Berlin. Henning Viljoen (1979) also attended this opera and reported the following:

The two performances in which I saw Ms Napier together with the current foremost singers like Birgit Nilsson, who is the most expensive prima donna in the world at 20000 DM per evening, René Kollo and Ute Vinzing, I once again realized that she can be regarded as one of the small group of top class singers in the world. This realization is manifested by the deafening applause that she received from very critical audiences and the high praise in the reviews. It was a magnificent moment to hear the applause for the South African singer after her performance in "Elektra". It is of the same kind that is given to the famous and legendary Birgit Nilsson and knows no ending. Marita Napier's Chrysothemis in no way stood back for the overwhelming interpretation of Nilsson's Elektra. No wonder that at the end she carried the audience away with the easy manner in which she soared above the grandiose voice of Nilsson and the sound of the large orchestra with her faultless brilliant high register.

Der Tagespiegel (1979g) added that Marita Napier was responsible for a vocal highlight in the duet that she sang with Nilsson in the final scene.

During this time Napier sang in the following operas in the State Opera House in Berlin: In Puccini's *Tosca*, Tosca; in Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Elsa; in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, Venus and in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Leonore (Napier, 2003a). Photographs of Marita taken during these performances are preserved in the Napier Music Collection.

From 30 January to 2 February 1979 Napier performed in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* in which she sang Senta in the *Teatro Liceo* in Barcelona. Rudolf Holtenau was the Holländer while Hans Franzen sang the role of Daland. The conductor was Matthias Aeschbacher (1979c Mund Diario).

Her next performances were in the Vienna State Opera House in Beethoven's *Fidelio* as Leonore, in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* as Venus, and in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* in the role of Ariadne (Napier, 2003a).

On Sunday 16 March, Napier sang as soloist in the *Concertgebouw* in Amsterdam together with the *Concertgebouworkest*, directed by Bernard Haitink. She sang Berg's *Jugendlieder* (1979d Preludium; Intrada, 1979).

From 31 March until 1 April Napier was back in Barcelona, performing with "L'Orquestra Ciutat de Barcelona" in the *Palau de la Musica Catalana*, singing poems written by Mathilde Wesendonck, composed by Wagner. The conductor was Antoni Ros Marbà (Orquestra Ciutat de Barcelona, 1979).

After singing the *Wesendoncklieder* in Barcelona, Napier went to Cologne where she performed in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* in the role of Leonore. She then sang Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra* in Frankfurt (Napier, 2003a).

A programme from the *Teatro Comunale di Firenze* is proof that Napier performed in Wagner's *Das Rheingold* in the role of Freia during the *42nd Maggio Musicale Fiorentino* (Musical Festival of the Month of May). The conductor was Zubin Mehta, and Simon Estes was in the role of Wotan (Teatro Comunale Di Firenzi, 1979,80).

Napier appeared for the first time in the Arena di Verona in Italy as princess Turandot in Puccini's *Turandot*. The conductor was Yuri Ahronovitch (1979h Arena di Verona; Napier, 2003b). According to Albertyn (1977) this Roman amphitheatre, the largest of its kind, was built in the 3rd century BC and is situated next to the Piazza Bra. This arena is the third largest remaining amphitheatre in the world, providing seating space for an audience of 22,000 and is now used for opera performances during the summer months. Napier related that two-thirds of the theatre was used for the audience who came to eyewitness the spectacular opera while the other third was used for the stage. At the

entrance, each member of the audience was provided with a candle and it was a beautiful sight to see (Napier, 2003-2004).

There is no proof in the documents of Napier or in her curriculum vitae by Lombardo that Napier performed in 1979 in *Turandot* in the open-air theatre in Orange, France. According to the curriculum vitae (Napier, 2003a) she only performed this role in Orange in 1977. However, in a programme of the productions that took place in Orange in 1979, a photograph of Napier can be seen while rehearsing *Turandot* on the stage of the open-air theatre in Orange (Theatre Antique National, 1979). According to this programme, one can then accept that Napier did perform the role of princess *Turandot* in Orange in 1979. The conductor was Jacques Bourgeois.

She left Orange in September for South Africa to perform in Verdi's *Nabucco* in which she sang the role of Abigaille, directed by Angelo Gobbato, which was to take place in the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town. After the performance Maureen Barnes (1979e) reported the following under the heading "Nabucco at its best":

With singers of the calibre of Marita Napier and Lawrence Folley in the cast, the convolutions of the plot are irrelevant. The magic of the music fills the theatre and captivates the ear.

The first night audience was spellbound by the crystal voice of Miss Napier, who gave a splendid performance as Abigaille. Apart from her marvellous singing, she made Abigaille so nasty you almost wanted her to get away with it.

From Cape Town, Napier flew to San Francisco to perform in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* the role of Senta on Saturday 13 October 1979 under the baton of Christof Perick. The producer was Jean-Pierre Ponelle. Napier often said that Ponelle was one of her favourite producers and that she enjoyed working with him. Simon Estes sang the role of the Dutchman (Napier, 2003a; Barnes, 1979e).

In his review in the *San Francisco Examiner*, Michael Walsh (1979) said the following:

Flying Dutchman is a fine ship of ghouls; Ponelle offers San Francisco a brilliantly imaginative evening of musical theatre; Napier, after some pitch problems in the early going, sang true, with a sweet, pure sound.

From 27 November until 3 December 1979 Napier performed Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin* in the *Gran Teatro del Liceo* in Barcelona. The conductor was Matthias Aeschbacher (Gran Teatro del Liceo, 1979). The local newspaper reported on the "Excelente Lohengrin" (Napier, 2003a).

According to Napier herself and Lombardo's curriculum vitae, Wagner's *Tannhäuser* was the last opera she performed in this year. She sang the role of Elisabeth and it took place in the Frankfurt Opera House (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo 1972-1988).

Her last performance in 1979, of which proof can be found, was on Monday 10 December in the Mannheimer Concert that took place in the "Rosengarten Mozart Hall" together with the State Orchestra of "Rheinland-Pfalz" (Rhineland-Palatinate). During this concert Napier sang in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (Rosengarten Mozartsaal, 1979).

4.13 Summary

With Marita Napier's entry into the international opera world, she quickly achieved success and was rated as one of the small group of top singers in the world. She was in great demand as interpreter of Wagner's operas in the following roles: Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*, Sieglinde and Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*, Venus and Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, Elsa in *Lohengrin*, and Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*.

Napier also achieved great success with the operas of Richard Strauss, especially in the role of Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, as the Empress in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and as Chrysothemis in *Elektra*. Napier also, for the first time, performed in Stuttgart in Puccini's *Turandot* for which she received excellent reviews and standing ovations.

Singing in Beethoven's *Fidelio* she also achieved great successes in Covent Garden, Hamburg and Madrid. She was also acclaimed for her remarkable acting in Verdi's *Nabucco* in the role of Abigaille, in *Il Trovatore* in the role of Leonora, in *La Forza del Destino* in the role of Leonora, and in *Un Ballo in Maschera* in the role of Amelia.

With her debut performances in leading roles in Covent Garden, La Scala, Verona and the Vienna State Opera, Napier had already reached the zenith of her career, and she now only had to gain a contract in a leading role at the Metropolitan Opera House to accomplish the so-called "grand slam" of opera.

Napier's international career for the period 1980-1989 will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

PROFESSIONAL CAREER OVERSEAS AND IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1980-1989

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the professional career of Marita Napier between the years 1972-1979 was discussed. Napier's ascent to fame happened unbelievably quickly. She had now already performed leading roles in the largest opera houses and distinguished herself as an exponent of lieder. Her interpretation of Mahler's Eighth Symphony in the San Francisco Opera House in 1972 was brilliant. After their performance in Bayreuth in 1974, Napier and Gerd Brenneis were nominated as the most credible Sieglinde and Siegmund of the last decade. With her outstanding interpretation of Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in the San Francisco Opera House in 1975 she was rewarded the title Voice of America.

From 1980 onwards Napier continued her impressive career in the international opera world and eventually established herself as one of the most successful singers of opera in the world.

5.2 Recording of *Das Rheingold* (1980)

On 22 February 1980 Napier sang Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre* during the Maggio Musicale in Florence, Italy. The conductor was Zubin Mehta. Siegmund Nimsgern interpreted Wotan and Gwyneth Jones Brünnhilde. (La Nazione, 1980.)

Napier then performed for Radio France in Paris in Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo 1972-1988). She returned to Florence to interpret Freia in Wagner's *Das Rheingold* from 26 February to 1 March 1980. It took place in the Teatro Comunale and the conductor was Zubin Mehta (Teatro Comunale di Firenze, 1979-1980).

After a performance in Florence she sang Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*, Leonore in *Fidelio*, and Leonore in *Il Trovatore* in Berlin.

In Frankfurt Napier performed Venus in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. She then repeated the same roles in Cologne.

On 17 May 1980, Thomas Beaujean (1980) reported on a concert in the city of Aachen where Napier interpreted Verdi's *Requiem* beautifully. He described his admiration for her exceptional breath control and the beauty of her voice. The conductor at this concert was Gabriel Chmura.

In Vienna Napier sang in various roles under contract with the State Opera House with Karl Böhm as conductor. They were Ariadne in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra*, Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, and Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin* (Napier, 2003a).

Marita Napier often said that singing Mozart was not one of her strong points, but that she believed in singing the occasional Mozart opera as it was like medicine for her voice and kept it clean (Van Heerden, 2003b). Therefore from 11 to 17 September 1980 she sang in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* the role of Donna Anna in the *Teatro Municipal* in Rio de Janeiro (Teatro Municipal Do Rio de Janeiro, 1980).

After this, Napier sang Amelia in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* in Stuttgart. She then went to München to sing Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin* (Napier, 2003a). Napier's next performance was Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in the *Teatro del Liceo* (Gran Teatro Del Liceo, 1979-80) in Barcelona. Napier subsequently left for Seattle to sing Chrysothemis in *Elektra*. (Napier, 2003a.)

On Friday 28 November 1980 Napier performed Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* conducted by Werner Kloor in the *Pfalzbau-Konzertsaal* in Ludwigshafen. Other artists who

performed with Napier were Alfreda Hodgson, Armin Ude and Wolfgang Lenz (Pfalzbau Konzertsaal, 1980).

From 8 to 11 December a recording was made of Napier singing Freia in *Das Rheingold* in the *Staatskapelle in Dresden* under the baton of Marek Janowski (Wagner, 1980). Other singers on this recording were Yvonne Minton as Fricka, Theo Adam as Wotan, Siegmund Nimsgern as Alberich and Lucia Popp as Woglinde. *Wagner News* (1980) reported that “Marita Napier makes the thankless role of Freia more interesting than usual, her soprano fairly ringing out.”

5.3 More performances (1981)

In 1981 Napier’s first performance took place in Paris, France between 16 and 19 January. She sang Leonore in *Fidelio*, with Siegmund Nimsgern in the role of Florestan. Napier shared the role of Leonore with Hildegard Behrens and was also an understudy for Jessye Norman who was the original first choice for the role (1981 Petit).

By this time Napier had been a world-renowned and famous opera star for a number of years and had sung in most of the large opera houses. It is striking that she and Robert Lombardo, her agent in America from 1972 to 1988, failed to include in each curriculum vitae the operas and music concerts in which Napier participated in the smaller opera houses, especially from 1980. Due to the fact that Napier, throughout the years, tried to preserve reviews, photographs, programmes, articles and letters relating to her participation in operas and concerts it was possible to fill in the existing gaps. The real number of performances of such a famous dramatic soprano like Napier, who was in great demand throughout the world, will unfortunately have to be left unanswered. It is nevertheless significant that Napier, during an interview in 1981 with the *Wagner News* (1981a) said the following: “I have cut down considerably on the number of performances I do although the next twelve months are still very full.” With Napier’s dedication and passion for her singing career, it must have been a difficult decision to cut back on her performances.

An example of a music concert in which Napier performed as the only soloist, which is not indicated in her own or Lombardo's curriculum vitae, is the one in Berlin on 25 January 1981 (Symphonisches Orchester Berlin, 1981). During the "Abonnementskonzert der Reihe P" with Theodore Bloomfield as conductor, Napier sang arias from Wagner's operas *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Fünf Gedichte von Mathilde Wesendonck*. Napier was, however, already in Berlin to perform Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* on 24 January 1981 as well as Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra* when she participated in the concert. Walther Kaempfer (1981) reported the following on Napier's performance in *Tannhäuser* in Berlin:

Positive things can be said about the casting. Judging from outward appearances, Marita Napier is definitely not predestined to be the shy, chaste, loving Elisabeth, daughter of a king; but her refined soprano voice shone powerfully in the great hall when she announced, in delicate timbre, the approaching death in the prayer in the third act. In a more highly dramatic tone Napier could use her voice even more successfully.

Gerd Brenneis sang the role of Tannhäuser and Heinrich Hollreiser was the conductor.

From 14 to 22 February Napier sang in Marseille in Wagner's *Le Vaisseau Fantôme (Der fliegende Holländer)* the role of Senta (Ville de Marseille Opera, 1981). José van Dam interpreted the role of the Holländer. Edmée Santy reported from Marseille that Van Dam and Napier impressed with their superb acting. The article stated that Napier, as an internationally famous Senta, made a triumphant debut in Marseille. She is lauded for her sensitive and very musical approach as well as her interpretation of the role (Santy, 1981). After this performance Napier sang Lady Macbeth in Toronto in Verdi's *Macbeth* (Napier, 2003a).

On 23 April 1981 Napier performed Leonore in *Fidelio* in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town. David Tidboald was the conductor and Angelo Gobbato the producer (Capab Opera, 1981a). Gé Korsten was Florestan. Deon Irish (1981) reported the following from Cape Town:

The overriding impression gained by a view of Capab's current production of *Fidelio* is that of a successful marriage of the world of politics and art. Marita Napier as Fidelio/Leonore, sang with confidence and artistry and was magnificent in the justly famous "Abscheulicher" scena.

During an interview with Aviva Pelham, Gé Korsten said that it was a privilege for him to have sung the role of Florestan with Napier. She was very professional, and knew her role so well that it was a pleasure for everyone concerned. She was a levelheaded person without any frills and nonsense. But what impressed him most was her beautiful voice with the prettiest by far high notes. He added that he was also impressed by her voice as a dramatic soprano, as most of the dramatic sopranos have a sharp high tone while Napier's had a full round sound (Botha, 1990).

On 14 May 1981 Capab repeated the performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio* in the Alhambra Theatre in Durban as part of the Republic Festival in Natal. The cast was the same as that for the performance in the Nico Malan Opera House on 23 April 1981 (Napac/Capab, 1981).

A performance not noted in either Napier's or Lombardo's curriculum vitae, was Napier's interpretation of Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra* in Madrid in the Teatro de la Zarzuela on 22 June 1981 (1981b; El Pais, 1981). Janice Yoes sang the role of Elektra, the producer was Siegwulf Turek and the conductor was A. Ros Marbà.

In her next appearance Napier performed Elsa in *Lohengrin* in the State Opera in Vienna (Napier, 2003a). Then followed Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in Stuttgart (Napier, 2003a).

Between 10 and 13 September 1981 Napier performed Chrysothemis in *Elektra* in the Basler Theatre in Basel. Pauline Tinsley was Elektra, the conductor was Armin Jordan and the producer was Harri Rodmann (Basler Theater, 1981; 1981c). The local newspaper in Basel reported the following "[T]he Chrysothemis of Marita Napier was better in the beginning than at the end as she forced her voice and it fell a little short."

Napier then sang Agathe in Weber's *Der Freischütz* as well as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in Frankfurt (Napier, 2003a).

Napier's last performance in 1981 was on 12 December in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town in the role of Leonora in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*. Lawrence Folley sang Don Carlo while Sidwill Hartman performed the role of Trabuco. Other members of the cast were Evelyn Dalberg and Dawie Couzyn. Franco Ferraris was the conductor and Angelo Gobbato the producer. Christine Reynolds was the choir mistress (Capab Opera, 1981b; Napier, 2003a).

5.4 Debut in the Dallas Opera (1982)

On Friday 5 February 1982 Napier presented Chrysothemis in *Elektra* in the National Theatre in München for the Bayerische Staatsoper (1982). Ingrid Bjoner sang the role of Elektra and the conductor was Wolfgang Sawallisch.

Later, on 17 March 1982, Napier performed together with Siegfried Nimsgern and the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in the Victoria Hall, Geneva under the baton of Gerhard Samuel. During the concert she sang works by Alexandre Zemlinsky. (Concert Symphonique de la Ville de Genève, 1982.)

This year was again a very important year for Napier as she made her debut in Dallas as Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (Napier, 2003a). After this debut performance she interpreted Ariadne in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Berlin (Napier, 2003a). Napier then sang Chrysothemis in *Elektra* in Madrid and in Linz (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988.) For the first time since 1969, when Napier made her debut in Essen as Santuzza in Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, she again sang the role in Frankfurt (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988).

After Napier's performance in Frankfurt she returned to Cape Town where, from 30 April 1982, she performed Brünnhilde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. The conductor was Gabor

Ötvös and Alfred Wopmann was the producer. The well-known Leonie Rysanek sang Sieglinde and Alberto Remedios, Siegmund. Rudolf Holtenau performed Wotan and Evelyn Dalberg was Fricka (Capab Opera, 1982a). Pieter Kooij (1982e) reported in *Die Burger* that Napier's performance in the third act rose to great heights and she sang as could be expected from an international opera star (1982e). Kooij continued: "here her voice had the right quality for a successful interpretation of Brünnhilde; powerful and with great impact but without any sharpness in quality".

Wagner News (1982) enlarged on the above appearance as follows:

Vocally, this *Walküre* was a joy. The revelation of this performance was Marita Napier. I have not seen a finer Walküre Brünnhilde. She took majestic command of the stage with her intelligent acting that was always perfectly judged. As the laughing warrior maid eager to do Wotan's will she sang the battle cries with steely brilliance yet her lyrical outpourings in her distress in Act 3 were truly moving. The voice was never forced but under control. Its warmth and lightness are rare qualities in a Brünnhilde today and she can produce quite delicate shades in her voice without becoming inaudible.

Deon Irish (1982c) reported the following in *The Cape Times*: "Napier sang a Brünnhilde of radical fervour, entirely convincing as the loving but head-strong maiden-warrior."

In another edition of *The Cape Times*, Antoinette Silvestri (1982g) wrote:

Marita Napier's simply superb vocal ability overcame the visual drawback of a stature not commonly associated with Brünnhilde and she dominated the scene in Brünnhilde's great moments. The only flaw in production was the preparation for her entry in Act Two.

While still in Cape Town and directly after *Die Walküre*, Napier performed Santuzza in Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* on 17 May 1982. The conductor was David Tidboald and the producer Angelo Gobbato. Pieter Kooij (1982f) reported as follows:

The three singers who performed in *Cavalleria Rusticana* were Marita Napier as Santuzza, Evelyn Dalberg as Mamma Lucia and Andrea Catzel as Lola. Napier's singing in the high register is outstanding, but some single lower notes had a

slight disturbing disproportion. Her solo in the Easter choir was very striking and here she rose beautifully above the choir and orchestra. Also in the dramatic scenes (especially where she pleads with Turiddu to come back to her) she was exciting and moving. Unfortunately her costume and disheveled hair were a visual mistake. No wonder Turiddu succumbed to the seductive Lola!

Antoinette Silvestri (1982) had the following views:

Marita Napier was Santuzza in *Cavalleria*. And although she warmed up after the crowd had disappeared into the church, we knew we were listening to a voice of star quality.

Marita Napier performed Senta on 23 September 1982 in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* conducted by Armin Jordan in the Basler Theater in Basel (Basler Theater, 1982). Jürg Erni (1982b) reported as follows:

Marita Napier not only interprets a Senta who perishes because of the dimensions of her feelings, but she interprets this role in a dominant male company with a voice in which she expresses herself in various bandwidths which is seldom heard; from *mezza voce* to a dramatic climax in the duet with the Holländer. A voice that knows how to present itself, how to reserve itself and then when it is expected, takes it to the climax. She interprets her famous Senta ballad with the same enchantment, which she takes later on at her liberation, to radiant heights.

On 19 November 1982 Napier repeated the role of Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in Frankfurt. The conductor was Uwe Mund. However, no evidence is found of this performance in Napier's own or Lombardo's curriculum vitae. In the *Wagner News* Dick Bawden (1983) reported the following on Napier's performance as Senta: "Senta reached a glowing intensity as Marita Napier fully convinced us of Senta's determination to redeem him. She also reached her best form for the Act 2 duet."

Napier's next performance was Abigaille in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town on 8 December 1982 in Verdi's *Nabucco*. Lawrence Folley sang Nabucco and Sidwill Hartman, Ismaele. Baldo Podic was the conductor and the producer was Angelo Gobbato (Capab Opera, 1982b). Neville Cohn (1982) wrote:

Abigaille is not anyone's idea of an amiable maiden aunt. Bitterness, murderous jealousy, frustration and rage are her usual states. Dramatically Marita Napier had the full measure of the role; the sheer nastiness of Abigaille came across forcefully. Vocally, Miss Napier seemed not to be on her usual form with some blurred phrasing and a suggestion of edginess and strain.

The opinion of Deon Irish (1982d) was:

As the villainess, Abigaille, Marita Napier was not entirely convincing in the first Act; but the great aria commencing Act 2 showed her at her best, dramatically and musically, with a splendid display of vocal control – particularly in the subtle use of dynamic variation. I can't say that the death scene was entirely convincing.

It is very significant that two reviewers can deliver two such diverging commentaries on the same performance.

Napier's last documented performance in 1982 was her debut performance as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in Warsaw, Poland on 18 December 1982. The conductor was Robert Satanowski and the producer Erhard Fischer. The performance took place in the Teatr Wielki. Jerszy Ostapiuk performed Daland and Roman Wegrzyn, Eryk (Teatr Wielki, 1982).

5.5 Napier in Wagner and Strauss roles (1983)

Marita Napier's first performance in 1983 was Senta in Basel in *Der fliegende Holländer* (Napier, 2003a). After this followed Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in the *Gran Théâtre Del Liceo* in Barcelona. (*Gran Théâtre Del Liceo*, 1983.) The rest of the cast was Peter Hoffmann as Siegmund, Helga Dernesch as Fricka, Norman Bailey as Wotan and Berit Linholm as Brünnhilde. It was a Vienna production by Emil Praetorius and the conductor was Uwe Mund (1983c Montage). Marcelo Cervellô reported from Barcelona:

Marita Napier sang Sieglinde. This South African soprano occasionally gives impression of a slight exaggeration in the intimacy of her delivery, but when singing in the high register shows that she can sing such wonderful passages as "Oh hehrstes Wunder," which she rendered with great enthusiasm.

Napier was known as “the singing actress”. Her superb acting combined with her remarkable voice was a winning combination that made her in demand at all the opera houses. It is interesting to note that Cervellô classified this as exaggerated acting. He nevertheless gave credit for her voice in the high register.

The *Avui* (1983a) reported that Napier was the perfect Sieglinde – lyrical, feminine, and with great dramatic force.

Marita Napier’s next performance was in South Africa in the City Theatre in Roodepoort on 12 February. During this recital she sang works of Mahler, Brahms, Rachmaninoff and Strauss. Brenda Rein accompanied Napier on the piano (Roodepoort Civic Theatre, 1983a). After this performance she stayed in the Transvaal as she was going to sing Lady Macbeth for the Performing Arts Council of Transvaal (Pact) during their twentieth anniversary in Verdi’s *Macbeth*, the opera he based on William Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*. It took place between 14 and 25 March. The conductor was John Mitchell and the producer Ande Anderson. Other members of the cast were Lawrence Folley as Macbeth and Rouel Beukes as Banquo, a general in King Duncan’s army (Pact Opera, 1983). Julius Eichbaum (1983) wrote that:

Pact’s new production of Verdi’s *Macbeth* was notable for two things – firstly, the production marked the return of Marita Napier to her native Transvaal, having only once before sung in her home province, a serious omission on Pact’s part, and now happily rectified.

After her superb performances in Cape Town in recent years one hopes that Pact will henceforth afford us the opportunity of hearing this remarkable dramatic heroine on a more regular basis. Her debut as Isolde planned for Pretoria in 1985 is an event eagerly looked forward to.

On 30 April 1983 Napier performed Turandot in the Grosses Haus of the Württembergische Stadttheater Stuttgart in Puccini’s *Turandot* (Napier, 2003a). Janos Kulka was the conductor and Ernst Poettgen was the producer (Württemberg Stadttheater, 1983).

Geth-Wolfgang Baruch (1983f) reported the following in a local Stuttgart newspaper of which the name and date were cut off:

Marita Napier is a Turandot of consecrated strength. Misconceptions and demonic desires change her into the murderer of men. She goes through the motions like a statue, untouched by the releasing powers of love. This Turandot not even deserves a little compassion, but deserves a great respect for the qualities of her voice.

The *Opera Enthusiast* (1984) wrote the following on the performance in Stuttgart:

Marita Napier's interpretation was entirely consistent in a noticeably 20th century manner. Her Turandot was cruel, a contemptuous sneer to the executioners to dispatch the Prince of Persia. Her cruelty hardly exceeded that of a crowd screaming for blood and nearly trampling the elderly Timur in its eagerness to get it. In the ceremonial scene of Act 2 with the courtiers now toying before her, she entered imperiously but a momentary flicker of vulnerability crossed her face before a superior sneer was adopted to disguise any inner feeling – a mask again allowed to fall as Calaf boldly and correctly answered the first two riddles. Drawing herself together with immense strength of character this Turandot determined to overcome the upstart. Delivering the third riddle with every ounce of venom at her command, she hovered over him with such a hideous expression of contempt, it was enough to cause the Prince to fall, almost cowering, to the ground. Only presence of mind prevented the utter confusion this hypnotic creature presumably was able to induce in lesser suitors. Having turned away with a horrible expression of triumph believing herself the victor, Calaf's correct response sent a shudder of shock and confusion through her. In a terrible state, almost mentally groveling before her father, she begged to be released from her vow. She accepted Calaf's counter riddle with obvious relief at a chance to regain her power over him.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that this soprano is also a superlative Brünnhilde. The ability to display deep insight into a complex character is needed for these quite different roles. The psychological development of Wagner's heroine needs to be sustained over a long period; Turandot's dramatic and radically shifting emotions must be presented in a very short space of time. The artist also has to deal with a cruelly high tessitura encountering her first, awkwardly placed aria (she sings nothing until the second scene of Act 2). In Stuttgart these difficulties were swept aside in spine-tingling fashion.

It is very interesting to note that Napier's scintillating interpretation as Brünnhilde is compared to her excellent performance as Turandot. Both roles require masterful acting

with precise insight in the characters. The important contribution Paul Hager made in Napier's learning process in the early seventies, namely to create a dramatic effect on the stage by acting, without singing, came to the fore during these interpretations.

While Napier was still in Stuttgart she performed Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* in the *Grosses Haus* (Napier, 2003a).

On 28 May a full-page photograph of Napier in the role of Lady Macbeth from Verdi's *Macbeth* appeared in *L'Opera De Montréal*, a local newspaper in Montreal, Canada (1983e Arts et Spectacles). Napier performed in this opera until 22 June with Jean-Paul Jeanotte as director of the *Grosses Haus*, Josef Svoboda as the producer and Cal Stewart Kellogg as the conductor (Place des Arts, 1983).

Napier repeated the role of Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in the Opera House in Frankfurt (Napier, 2003a).

The next opera in which Napier performed was *Tannhäuser* in the roles of Venus and Elisabeth from 11 June in the *Teatro Municipal*, Santiago de Chile. Richard Cassily performed as Tannhäuser, the conductor was Franz Paul Decker and Roberto Oswald was the producer (Temporada de Opera, 1983). During an interview with the press in Santiago during these performances Napier told them that to perform in operas by Wagner and Strauss really gave her satisfaction. During this interview she was also praised for her exceptional interpretations of Venus and Elisabeth (El Mercurio, 1983).

On Wednesday 31 August 1983, Napier performed as leading soloist and soprano with Stella Beder, Sjoerd Beute and Andreas Haller together with the Johannesburg Bach Choir and orchestra in the City Hall of Johannesburg in a performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in D major. Weiss Doubell, the conductor of the City Theatre in Roodepoort wrote the following (Roodepoort Civic Theatre, 1983b):

It is with some regret that an interval has been included in this performance. While the Missa Solemnis is not very long, it is physically and mentally taxing for the performers. Because of the intensity of the music it is possible that the audience might also appreciate a break although there is no convenient half-way mark.

On 5 October Napier sang in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town in Verdi's *Macbeth* in the role of Lady Macbeth under the direction of Berislav Klobucar and Christopher Dowdeswell (Napier, 2003a). The producer was Ande Anderson and Christine Reynolds was the choir mistress. Lawrence Folley sang Macbeth, Andreas Haller was Banquo and Sidwill Hartman was Malcolm (Capab Opera, 1983). In the programme Gerald Zwirn wrote on the survival of the history of *Macbeth* where he stated the following:

The last 25 years have seen a revival of interest in Verdi's early operas, and *Macbeth* is happily among them. To this we are indebted to such superb singing actresses as Maria Callas, Birgit Nilsson and Leonie Rysanek. South Africa can also pride itself in having produced two Lady Macbeths of international fame: Emma Renzi and Marita Napier.

Marita Napier made her debut in the state of Oklahoma in Tulsa on 5 November 1983 in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, in which she sang Senta. Simon Estes was the Dutchman and John Gilmore was the Steersman. Kerstin Meyer was Mary, Senta's nurse. Franz-Paul Decker was the conductor and Bodo Igesz the producer (Tulsa Opera, 1983). During one of the rehearsals John Toms conducted an interview with Napier in which she said that she preferred smaller secondary roles because she can then relax and enjoy them. As an example she used the role of Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra*. Napier added that she preferred singing the high notes this role required. She also said that she had just returned from Cape Town where she performed as Lady Macbeth. Unfortunately, she contracted measles in Cape Town and had to call off her singing after two performances. This was a financial loss for her as she had completed four weeks of rehearsals. According to Napier she was considering the possibility of connecting herself permanently to an opera house as she was so seldom at home. For instance, she did not expect to be home before the middle of January 1984. The possibility of a permanent

position at that stage could not be a reality as her programme was already fully booked to the end of 1987 (Toms, 1983). The front page of a local newspaper in Tulsa printed a full-page photograph of Estes, the Dutchman, and Napier, his beloved Senta. The *Tulsa Tribune* (1983h), another local newspaper in Tulsa, printed a full-length photograph of William Neill as Erik together with Napier. John Toms (1983) reported the following:

Marita Napier as Senta captured the audience with an evenness and purity of sound not always common to dramatic sopranos. Napier's vocal powers allowed her to scale the heights of the spectacular role with engaging ease and thrilling tone. Perhaps the addition of a half dozen vibrations to a few climactic notes would have aided the pitch, but there was never reason to cringe. As one enthralled and entranced by a legend, her limited action added little, yet neither did it retract.

McCoy (1983) had the following views:

The impressive, centre-of-the note, stabbing high attacks of Hamburg's dramatic soprano. Marita Napier as Senta, her expressive range and interpretive skill became the key to drawing the audience in Wagner's love-death syndrome. By the time she, spurned by the Dutchman who doubts her, leaps into the sea as he sails away, one for the moment sees their release in death as inevitable.

Napier's penultimate performance in 1983 was in Marseilles as Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. Leonie Rysanek appeared as Ortrud (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988). With reference to this opera in Marseilles between 14 and 17 December 1983, *The Wagner News* (1984) reported the following:

Marita Napier's Elsa was not the witless milksop sometimes portrayed. Innocent and guileless, yes, but spirited and defiant in her exchanges with Ortrud, until the seed of doubt betrayed her happiness. Hers was a vocally powerful and intensely musical assumption of the role. Unfortunately there was not a second opportunity to hear her as she succumbed to the flu before the last night. Despite this disappointment the British contingent in the audience was delighted to find the replacement was Anne Evans who arrived that very morning.

The *Wagner News* (1984) reported that Leonie Rysanek was not at her best at the opening performance as she too suffered from flu. She recovered quickly and then was again at her best.

The last performance of 1983 was on 21 December in Naples in a Symphony Concert where Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 was performed in the *Teatro di San Carlo* under the baton of Daniel Oren. Other soloists taking part in this concert were Eva Randova, Gerd Brenneis, Robert Schunk and Siegfried Vogel (Napier, 2003a; Teatro di San Carlo, 1983/4).

5.6 Invitation to the Metropolitan Opera House (1984)

In an interview with Marita Napier's parents conducted by Linda van den Bergh (1984) on 28 January 1984, van den Bergh said that Napier's parents were very proud of her and her overseas achievements. One of the main reasons was the fact that she made history early in 1984 by being the first South African singer to be invited to make her debut in April 1987 in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. This was indeed a great achievement for a South African and also a first for South Africa in this world famous opera house.

On 11 February Napier sang in Alexander Zemlinsky's *Lyrische Symphonie op. 18* in the *Opera de Nice*. The conductor was Berislav Klobucar (A l'Orchestre Philharmonique, 1984). Napier repeated the same programme in Rome between 18 and 21 February in the *Roma Auditorium* accompanied by the pianist Lazar Berman and Gianluigi Gelmetti as the conductor (Roma Auditorium, 1984).

Napier made her Seattle opera debut between 17 and 24 March in the Seattle Opera House as Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra*. Janice Yoes and Anna Levitska interpreted Elektra. The conductor was Stefan Minde and the producer Siegwulf Turek (Napier, 2003a; Seattle Opera, 1984). George Gelles (1984) reported that:

Chrysothemis, the weak sister, unexpectedly emerged as the most plausible member of this family portrait. Marita Napier's sympathetic performance was surely sung and aptly acted.

Campbell (1984) reviewed from Seattle:

Elektra is essentially an opera for women's voices. Yoes' Elektra was first-rate, her best singing in Seattle to date. Marita Napier's Chrysothemis served as the counterpoint she should in vocal timbre and manner.

Barbara Coffin who sang the role of the Third Maidservant presented Napier with a beautifully illustrated book with pen sketches that depicted the performances of *Elektra* in Seattle 1984 (Napier, 2003b).

Napier then left for Berlin to interpret Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. From Berlin she went to Madrid to sing Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio* in the *Teatro de la Zarzuela* between 9 and 21 May. Hermann Winkler sang as Florestan, the conductor was Miguel Angel Gomez and the producer was José Luis Alonso (Teatro de la Zarzuela, 1984). A photograph of Napier and Winkler appeared in the local newspaper and in an article Enrique Franco reported that Napier's interpretation of the role of Leonore was excellent and that she was brilliant as a dramatic soprano (El Pais, 1984). Napier then left for the North of Spain to the harbour city of San Sebastian where she once again sang Leonore in *Fidelio* (Napier, 2003a).

Napier related that she preferred to try out a new role in the then Eastern block countries as their rehearsals were very thorough. The pay was not that good but the experience obtained was enough reward. In these cases a singer had enough opportunity to learn a new role thoroughly (Napier, 2003 to 2004c). After performing in San Sebastian, Napier went to Warsaw, the capital city of Poland, to perform Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* as well as Turandot in Puccini's *Turandot*. Napier said that the pay was very poor in Ostmark and that one had to spend half of what one earned in the relevant country. The other half was in Westmark and that one could take out of the country. She often found it

difficult to spend the money in the relevant country because of the limited choices. She mainly bought books and music (Napier, 2003-2004).

After singing in Warsaw she went to Cologne where she participated in the production of a compact disc of Kurt Weill's *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* (Weill, 1984). The production of the recording took place under the leadership of the Kölner Rundfunkorchester with Jan Latham-König as the conductor. Barry McDaniel sang as the Zar, Carla Pohl was Angèle and Napier interpreted Die falsche Angèle. Napier then went back to Berlin where she performed, for the second time in 1984, as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. Napier said that there were two opera houses for which any singer was "careful". The critics from Berlin and Vienna were very difficult to please and also very vicious and prejudiced (Napier, 2003-2004).

On 23 November Napier made her debut for the Grand Opera in the Jones Hall in Houston as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. Napier performed as understudy for Stephanie Sundine (Houston Grand Opera, 1984). James Morris was the Dutchman, Kurt Rydl was Daland and Robert Schunk was Erik. Ann Holmes (1984) reported the following:

Napier's enormous force built gradually through her obsessive interpretation of the ship captain's daughter drawn by some occult magnetism to the pale man of the legend, the Flying Dutchman. Though seemingly destined to marry Erik, the hunter who loves her, Senta broods over the picture of the ill-fated Dutchman while her friends spin and sew. In Senta's Ballad, Napier ranged magically across the spectrum, from shimmering pianissimos to bold superstitions, as she told the tale. She became a riveting presence.

On 17 November 1984 Napier performed in Rossini's *Stabat Mater* in the Grosser Saal of the Alte Oper Frankfurt. Siegfried Vogel took the role of the bass and Enoch Zu Guttenberg was the conductor (Napier, 2003a; Alte Oper Frankfurt, 1984).

From 8 December Napier performed Elsa in *Lohengrin* for the Opera Municipal de Marseille. Léonie Rysanek was Ortrud, Janos Furst was the conductor and Jacques Karpo

was the producer (Opera Ville de Marseille, 1984). While she was still busy in Marseille, she went to Warsaw to perform the title role in the première of Puccini's *Turandot* on 15 and 16 December. Robert Satanowski was the conductor (Teatr Wielki, 1984-1985).

5.7 *Tristan und Isolde* and *Turandot* for Pact (1985)

The year 1985 once again started as a very busy year for Napier as she returned to Warsaw to continue her performances in *Turandot* on the 28 January. Franco Bonanome took the role of Calaf and the conductor was Robert Satanowski (Teatr Wielki, 1984-1985). Napier then went to Berlin where she performed in two operas: as Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, and as Ariadne in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Napier, 2003a). Napier remained in Germany as her next role as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* was in Essen (Napier, 2003a).

One of Napier's greatest achievements on the opera stage was her performance in the Pact production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in Pretoria. During an interview with Thys Odendaal (1985g) she remarked that she was pleased with her performance as Isolde and added that Wolfgang Wagner, the grandson of the composer, who attended the première, also commended her on her performance. Napier was elated by the fact that Wagner invited her to Bayreuth in order to study the role of Isolde in greater depth. Napier was not a stranger to Bayreuth because she achieved some of her greatest successes there (Napier, 2003a).

The première took place on 11 March 1985 in the State Theatre in Pretoria. It is interesting to note that these performances are not entered into the curriculum vitae of either Napier or Lombardo. An exceptional photograph of Napier, dressed as Isolde, together with Mimi Coertse, Joyce Barker, Emma Renzi and Nellie du Toit was taken at the première on 11 March (Napier, 2003b). Gerd Brenneis took the role of Tristan, Reinhild Runkel was Brangäne and Wicus Slabbert was Kurwenal. The conductor was Gabor Ötvös and the producer was Michael Rennison (Pact Opera, 1985a). In the journal *Opera* (1985d) it was reported that:

The production of *Tristan und Isolde* by Pact Opera on March 11 was the company's first Wagner opera in 15 years and the first by this composer in the superbly equipped State Theatre. It was attended by Wolfgang Wagner as the guest of honour of both Pact and the Richard Wagner Society of South Africa, and distinguished by the debut of Marita Napier as Isolde. Not only did she look well in the role but she brought to it that rare combination of lyricism, dramatic intensity and excellent musicianship. Her performance was notable for its light and shade, with clear, ringing top notes and finely moulded pianissimo phrases.

The Wagner News (1985) reported the following:

Gerd Brenneis was a most reliable foil for Marita Napier, singing her first Isolde. There was nothing tentative. She is an intelligent and sensitive artist and achieved an amazing contrast between Isolde's despairing fury in the first half of Act I and the tenderness she displays thereafter. Her youthful impatience as she awaited Tristan's arrival in Act II, accompanied by a little dance as she waved her white scarf, was full of joy, itself in stark contrast to the agony of reaching Tristan at his dying moment in Act III. As the supine knight stretched out his hand towards her face she raised his other hand to her cheek with a terrible tenderness, and her singing at this point was charged with such emotion, it was of an unbearable intensity. The Liebestod was sung as if from the depths of her being. Vocally she sounded somewhere between a Flagstad and a Nilsson but I doubt if either lady ever delivered a more moving conclusion to this work.

Henning Viljoen (1985c) commented on Napier's Isolde:

Marita Napier's debut performance was a tour de force that today undoubtedly places her amongst the firsts of Isoldes in the world. Her youthful radiance in voice and acting makes it a credible young female Isolde.

The strong lyrical element of the role of Isolde, not only bestows a freshness to the role, but it also exposes the esoteric beauty of the music that sometimes is ploughed under in the more dramatic approaches.

Stefans Grové (1985a) was of the following view:

In her interpretation of the role of Isolde, Marita Napier's name must now be added to the list of unforgettable interpreters. She succeeded with equal success to project on both the levels of the big gesture and the most intimate. Her unusual musicality and natural feeling for the various nuances of the role, led her in an interpretation that left no aspect undeveloped.

In *Die Volksblad* there was an article (1985f) that stated:

Napier and Brenneis were very convincing. Her low register amazingly prevailed over the heaviest of music and as always her high notes were breathtaking. In the Third Act (after three hours of singing) her Liebestod was triumphant and touching.

Thys Odendaal (1985h) reported:

In Marita Napier one finds an Isolde that tugs one at the heart. This singer's anticipation in the technical almost inhuman role (Is this in itself a further Wagner symbolism?) where she, very much like a long-distance runner, must give an autogenous pace to lead up to, hours later, through Brangäne and Tristan, the Liebestod, is a brilliant achievement. The application of her voice, adorned in dramatic and lyrical moments will for a long time be remembered. This is a dream debut.

Julius Eichbaum (1985b) said:

There can be little doubt that Marita Napier will ultimately enjoy great success internationally in this demanding role. Her debut performance was a stunning revelation for Transvaal audiences more accustomed to hearing her in the dramatic Italian roles such as Lady Macbeth and Abigaille for which her voice was not ideally suited. Without doubt, Miss Napier's true artistic strength lies in the lyric-dramatic German roles and her portrayal of Isolde was wonderfully lyrical yet she also managed to imbue the part with the correct degree of dramatic intensity. The role of Isolde is one of the most lyrical of all Wagner's roles and one which requires exceptional vocal technique on the part of the singer and the opening night was characterized by many superbly sung phrases on the part of Miss Napier.

After Napier performed in *Tristan und Isolde* in Pretoria she went to Nice where she was soprano soloist in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 under the baton of Berislav Klobucar (Napier, 2003a). From Nice she left for Marseilles where she performed in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in the role of Elisabeth (Napier, 2003a). After performing in Marseilles she came back to South Africa to sing the Mahler's Symphony No. 2 in Durban with the Durban Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Tidboald.

From Durban Napier went to Bloemfontein where she sang Abigaille in Verdi's *Nabucco* during the inaugural production of the Sand du Plessis Theatre between 1 and 9 August 1985 (Napier, 2003a; Pacofs, 1985). Other performers were Hans van Heerden as Nabucco and Rouel Beukes as Zaccaria. The conductor was Gerhard Geist and the producer, by courtesy of Pact, was Neels Hansen. Dawn Barkhuizen (1985) reported the following:

Internationally acclaimed soprano Marita Napier is in town rehearsing for her debut performance in the Free State – that of Abigaille in *Nabucco*, the production which will open in the Sand du Plessis Theatre on August 1. Usually, according to the globetrotting Johannesburg-born star who is now based in Europe and well known on the international opera circuit, a soprano has three hours before the show begins to rehearse a role.

However, for her part in *Nabucco* (a role with which she is particularly familiar), Miss Napier has allowed herself three weeks to prepare. It is going to be a super-duper, extra-special performance, she said.

The journal *Opera* (1985) reported that:

Marita Napier (Abigaille) gave a truly remarkable performance on the opening night. The monologue at the start of Act 2 afforded her the opportunity to display the full range of her vocal and dramatic powers.

Andreas Haller (1985e) said from Bloemfontein:

Marita Napier herself has a broad vibrato, but she continuously keeps it beautifully in place. Yes, and that pure high register of hers. When I sat listening how apparently easily and how effortlessly and without a sign of any piercing screaming she rises above the orchestra to fill the hall with her well-rounded sounds all over, then I could understand why she is so highly acclaimed with so many of the world's great opera houses.

Julius Eichbaum (1985a) commented on Napier's performance in *Scenaria*:

Marita Napier as Abigaille sang with total assurance and chilling accuracy and the second act monologue was one of the highlights of an evening in which excellent singing abounded.

The role of Abigaille is not, perhaps, the most rewarding of Verdi's soprano roles but Napier brought out many and exciting fresh nuances. Although her voice is predominantly lyrical in character, she also managed to inject considerable fiery passion and dramatic intensity into her overall portrayal.

After her last performance as Abigaille on 9 August in Bloemfontein, Napier left for Pretoria to perform, for the first time in South Africa, in the title role of Puccini's *Turandot* in the State Theatre between 17 and 27 August. This production was repeated in the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg from 3 to 9 September. The producer was Neels Hansen and the conductor Alain Lombard. Other artists were Mimi Coertse as Liù, Lando Bartolini as prince Calaf and Rouel Beukes as Timur (Pact Opera, 1985c). In *Scenaria* of 1990 (Eichbaum, 1990d) a coloured photograph appeared of Napier as princess Turandot. A full-page coloured photograph was on the cover of *Lantern* (De Kock, 1992).

Thys Odendaal (1985) had the following views:

Marita Napier's Turandot was a wonderful experience and certainly must be recorded as the greatest interpretation done by her in the Italian milieu. One can only take delight in the apparent ease of her manipulation of the high tessitura, but the exceptional quality of her voice bestows an extra dimension on her Turandot. She coloured the character with an inwardness that very much stands out among the current general approach. Turandot is not only the so-called ice-princess, but also a woman who is bound by tradition to avert Love. Napier bared a deep longing, so superbly integrated with the overarching approach of the whole musical presentation; perhaps it was just so that the tenderness that runs throughout the production was built around the touching views construed by Napier.

Napier was already a very well known and beloved interpreter of *Turandot* in Europe. She brought some of her internationally obtained experience along and ploughed it into *Turandot* in order to make a success of Pact's first production of this opera. Her exceptional dramatic abilities, integrated with her particular sensitive and emotional immersion and interpretation of each character, strongly supported by the outstanding lyrical quality of her voice made her one of the greatest interpreters of *Turandot* in the world.

Riek van Rensburg (1985b) reported the following:

How fortunate Transvaal audiences are to experience Marita Napier in one of her great roles. Hers is a profoundly thought out *Turandot*, an icy princess who dominated the stage with imperious command, authority and consummate integrity in the two final acts. Her interpretation of the title role is extraordinarily vital and fiery, impulsive, poetic and totally compelling.

Her strong personality and aristocratic poise was amply confirmed in the “In questia Reggia” which, incidently, drew from her a wealth of luminous and beautifully sculptured singing.

She was sharply incisive in her many dramatic outbursts but she also had the ability to soften and sweeten the voice for lyrical passages. Her flexible, poetic phrasing was a constant joy and was once again alive and responsive to the text.

A photograph of Napier, taken with the well-known dress designer Peter Soldatos, who designed a costume in royal blue and silver for Napier to wear at a Puccini Gala Concert held in aid of the State Theatre Opera Foundation in the State Theatre on 22 August, serves as proof of Napier’s participation in this successful performance. Other artists who took part in this Gala Concert were Mimi Coertse, Lando Bartolini and Yoko Watanabe. The conductor was Alain Lombard (Pact Opera, 1985c).

After her successful performances in Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria, Napier left for Brussels where she performed as Chrysothemis in Strauss’ *Elektra*. She then went to Vienna State Opera where she performed in Mozart’s *La Clemenza di Tito* in the role of Vitellia (Napier, 2003a).

A great honour was bestowed upon Marita Napier in 1985 when she was awarded the Nederburg Opera Prize for Transvaal for her interpretation of Isolde in Pact’s production of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* as well as for her singing the title role of Puccini’s *Turandot* (Napier, 2003b).

5.8 Debut in the Metropolitan Opera House (1986)

Napier's first performance in 1986 was in Linz in the *Konzert zum Jahresanfang* in the Brucknerhaus in the Brucknerhalle together with the Bruckner Orchestra of Linz, conducted by Manfred Mayrhofer. She sang Strauss' *Vier letzte Lieder* (Gerbel, 1986). The *Salzburger Nachrichten* (1986) reported the following on this concert:

The compact, solid and flexible soprano did the interpretation with so much care and phrasing that a cultivated rendering was delivered. The voice was embedded so homogenously within the orchestra that it was almost concealed. The audience could however thank Marita Napier for a solid performance.

The flexibility of Napier's voice, her interpretation of the role and her exceptional phrasing impressed everyone at the concert. Napier then left for Stuttgart to perform in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Unfortunately it is not mentioned in Napier's curriculum vitae whether it was as Brünnhilde or Sieglinde that she sang in this particular opera (Napier, 2003a).

From 29 March 1986 Napier performed Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in a Capab production in Cape Town (Napier, 2003a). The producer was Günther Schneider-Siemssen and the conductor was Christopher Dowdeswell. Karl Dumphart and Andreas Haller shared the role of Daland, Nicola Cencherle and Ronald Theys shared the role of the Steersman, Sally Presant was Mary, Rudolf Holtenau was the Flying Dutchman and Alois Aichhorn took the role of Erik (Capab Opera, 1986).

Julius Eichbaum (1986) wrote in *Scenaria*:

Marita Napier as Senta gave the most impressive performance this reviewer has yet heard from her in this country. Undoubtedly she is one of – if not the – finest Senta on the international opera circuit today, and it was indeed a pleasure for local audiences to be able to hear her in this role which has earned her many accolades from critics and public alike in the major opera houses of Europe and America.

She began Senta's famous Ballad with an effortlessly floated-pianissimo which immediately demonstrated the faultless breath control which was the hallmark of this exceptionally fine and memorable performance.

In her duet with Holtenau she was radiantly expressive and her warmth of tone did much to make this a truly touching and effective portrayal of a young girl caught in the full flood of a passionate love.

Bruce Heilbuth (1986) contributed on the above performance from Cape Town:

The honours in this visually riveting presentation were shared by the South African soprano Marita Napier, as the sea captain's daughter, Senta, and the visiting Augsburg producer/designer, Professor Gunther Schneider-Siemssen.

Miss Napier's singing, particularly in the glorious second act Spinning Chorus, fully justified her worldwide reputation. She is the archetypal Wagnerian soprano, with a voice of such voluptuous power and durability that not even the German maestro's music in full flood can drown it.

Yet that voice can spin subtlety and sweet softness, too, again most evidently in the Spinning Chorus, in which she was beautifully supported by the female choir and the Capab orchestra.

It was indeed a privilege for the lovers of opera in South Africa to hear Napier again, precisely ten years after she had made her debut in South Africa, as Senta in the Nico Malan Opera House in 1976. Her wonderful dramatic soprano voice continued to enchant connoisseurs and lovers of opera.

From Cape Town Napier left for Berlin where she performed as Chrysothemis in *Elektra* on 20 April (Napier, 2003a). Ute Vinzing took the role of Elektra and the conductor was Wolfgang Rennert. Proof of Napier's participation on that specific evening in the *Deutsche Oper Berlin* is the receipt from her chauffeur dated Sunday 20 April 1986 with *Deutsche Oper Berlin-Charlottenburg, Bismarckstrasse, Hochparkett links*, printed on it (Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, 1986).

Up to now in 1986 Napier was only involved with operas composed by Wagner and Strauss. After her previous performance in Strauss' *Elektra* she participated in Wagner's

Tannhäuser in Genova, Italy, in the *Teatro Margherita* as Venus from 11 to 20 May. Jeanine Altmeyer was Elisabeth and Richard Versalle and Spas Wenkoff shared the role of Tannhäuser. The conductor was Milan Horvat (Napier, 2003a; Opera di Genova, 1986; *Grand Théâtre de Genève*, 1986.)

On 26 May 1986 Napier performed together with the Niedersachsen State Orchestra Hannover during the celebrations related to the 350th year of the existence of the orchestra in Frankfurt in a performance of Anton Bruckner *Te Deum* under the baton of Georg Alexander Albrecht (Napier, 2003a; 1986 Niedersächsische Staatsorchester Hannover, 1985/6). Napier remained in Germany for her next performance in Hannover as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* (Napier, 2003a).

Marita Napier's dedication and hard work to further her career as an opera singer had gone with many sacrifices and months of being away from her house in Germany. On Monday 22 September 1986 she was rewarded for all her hard work when she became the first South African singer to sing in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. She performed as Helmwig in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Peter Hofmann sang the role of Siegmund, Jeanine Altmeyer was Sieglinde and Simon Estes was Wotan. The conductor was James Levine and the producer was Otto Schenk (Metropolitan Opera, 1986a; Metropolitan Opera, 1986/7b). With this performance Napier could now write the "grand slam" of opera houses behind her name. In order to complete this it meant that she had to have had contracts with the following opera houses: the Metropolitan in New York, Vienna, La Scala in Milan, and Covent Garden in London. This very special achievement of Napier's makes one involuntarily think of the various interviews with Napier (Napier 2003-2004; Van Heerden, 2003-2006a) in which she repeatedly said how hard she had to work to obtain contracts with the most important opera houses in the world: San Francisco in 1972, La Scala in 1973, Bayreuth in 1973, Covent Garden in 1974, Munich in 1974, Vienna in 1975 and at last the Metropolitan in 1986. Napier of course also appeared in the greatest opera festivals in the world: those in Bayreuth, Aix-en-Provence, Orange, Verona, Maggio Musicale Florence, Wiener Festwoche, Tanglewood and Ravinia. She had also performed in most of the other famous opera houses, for instance

in Hamburg, Berlin, the Liceo (Barcelona), the Teatro Colón (Buenos Aires), and San Francisco. Napier said that she always aspired towards the next highlight as she over and over again realised that nothing really changed after she had reached another milestone. She came to the conclusion that to be an opera singer was just a lot of hard work and that it was a job like any other job.

Henning Viljoen (1989) wrote the following in *De Kat*:

Nevertheless the famous star remains a shy person: she does not like to talk about herself, her art or her achievements. Once one breaks through the initial introverted trench one discovers a warm and profound person. Marita Napier tackles her life's work with commitment and seriousness.

Steven Losito (2005), an employee of Robert Lombardo, Napier's agent in America, and part-time dresser for the male choir in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, said the following about his acquaintance with Marita Napier:

My introduction to Marita Napier was actually on the telephone. At the time, I was employed by her agent in New York City, Robert Lombardo. She called to prepare for her upcoming Metropolitan Opera debut in the 1986 to 1987 season.

As Marita's arrival time came closer, she really started to look forward to it.

At the time of her arrival, I also happened to be working part-time at the Met as a dresser assigned to the Chorus Men's Department. I was present when, during the final dress rehearsal of the new Zeffereilli production of *Turandot*, Eva Marton, who was singing the lead, had to bow out. Her cover was Marita, so on she went. Only problem they didn't have enough time to fit her in the costume, so basically she arrived on stage in her street attire with the all too famous Turandot headdress on top.

In those moments I got to hear the voice – this sweet, yet powerful sound, pouring over the stage. That was Marita. I found it incredible that someone that smoked could produce such power. That day, I fell in love with the voice, though I had already been captured by the person way before that.

Napier left New York for Marseille in France to perform in the title role in Janacek's *Jenufa* between 7 and 16 December. Leonie Rysanek performed as Kostelnicka

Buryjovka. The conductor was Janos Furst and the producer was Evald Schorm (Ville de Marseille Opera, 1986-1987). Julius Eichbaum (1987a) reported the following on Napier's interpretation of Jenufa:

Marita Napier triumphs in *Jenufa* in Marseilles! Audiences at a recent production of *Jenufa* at the Marseille Opéra reacted with enthusiasm both to the opera and the music and in particular to the singing and interpretation of Marita Napier in the title role.

Georges Gallician (1986) reviewed from Marseilles:

Jenufa demands an interpretation both passionate, fragile and vibrant. Marita Napier explored the artistic dimensions of the role with all its subtleties and breadth of scope, the voice always expressive and appropriate to the individualism of interpretation both in music and character which is typical of Janacek whose actors in a drama must use every vocal resource and are often confronted with the greatest vocal difficulties.

Simone Serret (1986) reported from Marseilles:

Diva Marita Napier was a *Jenufa* whose ardour and sensuality was well expressed in her superb, fiery, full-bodied soprano voice. Diva Marita Napier was a *Jenufa* whose ardour and sensuality was well expressed in her superb, fiery, full-bodied soprano voice.

Many coloured photographs taken during the performances in Marseilles are preserved in the Napier Music Collection (2003b). Napier's contribution to international opera is also situated in the fact that she could achieve success in the lesser-known operas like *Jenufa* and that she interpreted them with such surrender. The fact that she was already world famous and as such performed with the world's most well-known singers and conductors, contributed to the greater publicity these operas received. Napier's last performance in 1986 was in Covent Garden when she sang the title role in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Napier, 2003a).

5.9 *Turandot* (1987)

Marita Napier's first performance in 1987 was as Chrysothemis in Salzburg in Strauss' *Elektra* in the *Salzburger Landestheater*. Janet Hardy sang Elektra and the conductor was Hans Graf (*Salzburger Landestheater*, 1987). Ernst Scherzer (1987) reported the following from Salzburg:

Marita Napier in the role of Chrysothemis, supported by the sympathetic guidance of the conductor, succeeded in making the diction of her relative soft soprano voice audible throughout the performance.

It is clear that Scherzer did not know Napier's vocal ability; she never had a "soft soprano voice".

Marita Napier was now in demand to perform in opera houses throughout the world. According to Napier and Lombardo's curriculum vitae (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1972-1988) she went from Salzburg to the island of Sardinia to perform in the city of Cagliari in the *Teatro Lirico* during the Puccini Festival of *Turandot*. The conductor was Carlo Franci and the producer Flavio Trevisan (*Stagione Lirica Estiva*, 1987). A spectacular photograph of Napier, dressed in a heavily draped dress consisting of various fabrics and an overlarge headdress containing many jewels, is evidence of the pomp and ceremony of this specific *Turandot* (1987a).

Napier's second performance in the Metropolitan Opera House was confirmed with a telex that read as follows:

Ravinia Festival confirms Tove/*Gurre-Lieder*, 1 performance 26 June 87, rehearsals begin 22 June. They offer 3000 dollars plus airfare, but we are still talking on fee. Met confirms interest in you for Gerhilde on *Walküre* recording, last 2 weeks April 87. Exact third act dates yet to be decided.

This recording of Napier together with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra conducted by James Levine in the Metropolitan Opera House with Napier in the role of Gerhilde in

Wagner's *Die Walküre* was for the first time released in 1988 by Polydor International in Hamburg and after that again in 1989 and 1991 by Deutsche Grammophon in Hamburg (Napier, 2003b; Wagner, 1991; Metropolitan Opera, 1995).

From New York Napier returned to South Africa to once again perform Isolde for Pact Opera in *Tristan und Isolde* under the baton of Gabor Ötvös. Napier then returned to Germany. By special request however she returned to South Africa for the inauguration concert of the National Orchestra in the State Theatre on 24 May. At this concert she sang works by Handel and Wagner together with the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Janos Acs in the State Theatre (National Symphony Orchestra, 1987).

Riek van Rensburg (1987) wrote as follows:

In an undoubted highlight of the inaugural concert, Marita Napier brought her magnificent commitment and artistry to bear in her spine-chilling rendition of the "Liebestod" from Wagner's opera, *Tristan und Isolde*. Musical and intellectual integrity suffused the interpretation. A particular joy was the consistent and legendary finesse in the colouring of the words. Phrases were delivered with perfect shapeliness from which the correct expression flowered as if by nature. Unlike many a Wagnerian soprano, she was never content merely to declaim; she unfolded the warm singing melody in every bar.

Eichbaum (1987b) reported that Marita Napier, specially flown in from Germany for the occasion, gave a brilliant account of Isolde's Liebestod – a role she sang on the operatic stage for the first time in 1985 for Pact.

From South Africa Napier returned to Illinois in America where she performed in the Ravinia Festival in a Gala opening concert on 26 June as Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*. The Symphony Orchestra of Chicago was conducted by James Levine (Ravinia Festival 1987; Ravinia, 1987).

From Chicago Napier returned to South Africa to perform for Napac as Turandot. The first production by Napac was in the Natal Playhouse on 16 August 1987 (Napier, 2003a; Napac Opera, 1987). The conductor was David Tidboald and the producer Enayat Rezai.

Giorgio Tieppo was Calaf while Eugenie Chopin-Couzyn and Riekie Venter shared the role of Liù (Napac Opera, 1987).

During an interview with Aviva Pelham, David Tidboald said that what impressed him about Marita Napier was her wonderful topnotes and that she was one of the best interpreters of Turandot in the world. He added that before it was decided to produce *Turandot*, it was necessary to first find a Turandot as only a few successful Turandots existed in the world (Botha, 1990).

Henning Viljoen (1987a) reported the following in *Die Vaderland*:

This production of *Turandot* represents the best production I have as yet experienced by Napac. With Marita Napier at her best, an exciting Calaf and a scintillating choir, all the main ingredients to realize an outstanding *Turandot*, able to hold its own on many international stages, were present. *Turandot* is, however, an opera whose success depends on the interpretation of the title role.

With her breathtaking interpretation Marita Napier proved why she can today be regarded, together with Eva Marton and Ghena Dimitrova, as one of the best Turandots in the world. She not only impressed with her brilliant high register, but also by her outstanding piano singing. The way in which she employs various nuances in her interpretation of the cold “ice-princess” gave new dimensions to the role as she also allows the frailty of the character to flourish. On the whole she gave a masterful interpretation.

Henning Viljoen (1987b) also reviewed in *Scenaria*:

After experiencing Marita Napier’s *Turandot*, one realizes why some German critics claim her as Birgit Nilsson’s successor. She not only impressed with her remarkable high register which did not show any signs of tiring, but also with her breathtakingly beautiful piano singing. A distinctive performance by a great opera diva!

Enayet Rezi, the producer of *Turandot* for Napac, during an interview with Aviva Pelham (Botha, 1990) said that Marita Napier was in possession of all the characteristics of one of the best Turandots in the world. He added that it was a delight to work with her as she learnt easily and was prepared to give her best at all times. She never stopped looking for

perfection. During the interview he said that he once wanted to congratulate her after her performance as Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Vienna. There were so many people that wanted her autograph that he could not get close to her.

Napier continued with her triumphant procession as one of the three best interpreters of princess Turandot in the world with her performance in Cape Town between 14 and 29 October in the Nico Malan Opera House when she performed in *Turandot* for Capab. The conductor was Riccardo Capasso and Neels Hansen was, with the permission of Pact, the producer as well as the costume designer (Capab Opera, 1987). Mimi Coertse and Andrea Catzel shared the role of Liù, while Giorgio Teppo and Sidwill Hartman performed the role of prince Calaf (Capab Opera, 1987). Pieter Kooij (1987) reported the following:

Marita Napier was brilliant in the title role. In louder parts her voice was very exciting, especially when she, with apparent ease rose above the strong orchestral sounds. The train of her costume was carried by six girls and was draped over the length of the high set of stairs. That she was able to move with great confidence up and down the steps with this long train (and at the same time able to sing with such surrender) was really amazing.

Florence Short (1987) described the performance by saying that “Marita Napier sings as superbly as ever and she was most justly rewarded on opening night with a standing ovation.”

Deon Irish (1987) wrote on the above performance as follows:

One can only describe Napier’s account of the title role as a helluva performance. Her soprano is authoritative, manifesting spot-on intonation, bias trimmed projection and effortless breath control – even in the most awkward positions. Her opening “In questa Reggia” set a standard of excellence for the role which she didn’t allow to slip.

During interviews (Badenhorst, 2002; Van Heerden, 2003b) Napier said that the biggest drawback in her career as a singer was the fact that one always lived in the future. One never really enjoys to the full that with which one is currently busy as one is already thinking of the future. Her words were very typical of what she was feeling: “you feel

that you never really arrive, you always live into the future. Today you sing in La Scala but you are already thinking about your next performance in Covent Garden” (Badenhorst, 2002).

Because of the mindset of singers Napier was convinced that singers were not very happy people (Van Heerden, 2003b; Napier, 2003-2004; Badenhorst, 2002). As an example of this Fiona Chisholm (1987) reported on the evening of the opening night of *Turandot* in the Nico Malan Opera House, the following: “no work permit, so Napier will miss the Met.”

Chisholm continued:

Anti-South African pressure may have cost Marita Napier her chance to sing in the repeat season of Franco Zeffirelli’s phantasmagoric production of *Turandot* opposite Placido Domingo at the Met in New York on November 5. This, she feels, is because she will be appearing in the production of *Turandot* at the Nico.

“It’s a strange situation,” she said. “The Met keeps sending me letters as though I am going to be performing, yet there is still no sign of my work permit. Without it, I can’t sing there. I can only presume it is because of anti-South African pressure. I have a home in the States and I have often worked there, but this is the first time I have had trouble.”

“I have been invited three times to the Met but have never made it. This would have been my debut” (in the role of *Turandot*).

Napier is familiar with the Zeffirelli extravaganza from rehearsals for its opening in March when it was the hottest theatre ticket in New York.

“Zeffirelli creates beautiful pictures but he doesn’t give personal direction. It is a pleasure to be singing *Turandot* in Cape Town where I can concentrate on the things which are important, such as the music and the voice.”

Although Marita will be disappointed not to get that work permit, she is very philosophical: “I’ve come to terms with myself. If I don’t get the permit I’ll go back to continue my career in Europe. Or better still, come home. I’ve bought a house in Cape Town and I’d love to return to live here.”

In an interview with *Die Burger* (1987b) Napier said that her programme was fully booked. She said that she performed in nineteen operas in 1986 in Europe and America and twenty-seven in 1987.

Napier had already made her debut in the Metropolitan in New York on 22 September 1986 in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in which she sang Helmwige (Metropolitan Opera 1986-1987b). She would have performed there in November 1987 as she had completed a number of rehearsals with Placido Domingo in Franco Zeffirelli's production of *Turandot*. No written proof was found that the work permit arrived in time for Napier to perform in the Met. It is significant that an official Metropolitan employee opera ticket was issued to Napier on 2 November 1987 with an official photograph and signature of Napier on it and the date of expiry indicated as July 1989. Her specific particulars were given as "principal artist" in the "artistic" department. This *Turandot* production actually took place the following year on 2 March 1988 when Napier made her debut as Turandot in the Met (Metropolitan Opera, 1988a).

Napier left Cape Town for Berlin and then Munich for her last performances in 1987 as Chrysothemis in *Elektra* (Napier, 2003a; Lombardo, 1988).

5.10 *Turandot* debut in the Metropolitan Opera House (1988)

According to the curricula vitae by Napier and of Lombardo (2003a; Lombardo, 1988) her first performance in 1988 was in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York as Helmwige in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. The conductor was James Levine. On 2 and 5 March 1988 Marita Napier performed in the Metropolitan Opera House in Puccini's *Turandot* in the title role. The conductor was Nello Santi and the producer Franco Zeffirelli. Ermanno Mauro interpreted the role of Calaf and Leona Mitchell took the role of Liù (Metropolitan Opera, 1988a; Metropolitan Opera, 1988b). In an interview conducted with Napier shortly before she performed as Turandot in the Nico Malan Theatre in 1987 she referred to Franco Zeffirelli's approach to the rehearsals of *Turandot* at the Met. Napier (Chisholm, 1987) said the following:

The end result which, depending on the point of view, had a cast of 286 singers and supernumeraries; and the headgear alone used 20kg of pearls, golf balls, chandelier crystals, ping-pong balls, espresso coffee filters and rosary beads.

“It was the most incredible spectacle,” said Napier, “but hell to sing. We didn’t stand on the floor but were perched on little bridges and the palace scenes had no ceilings so the voices went up and simply disappeared. The headgear was so ornate that when you moved your head, you bumped into something, or someone.

Much of the scenery was shipped from Italy in 11 cargo containers each 11 m long and the cost of the production was said to be about \$1,5m.

The costumes were fantastic and some were bought in China and Japan. They even flew in a woman from Peking to teach us to move correctly. But the day we put on our costumes we found them so cumbersome that once we got down on our knees, we couldn’t get up again!

In the letters column of *Scenaria* (Eichbaum, 1988b) there is a letter from Penny Scantlebury of London in reaction to Napier’s performance in the Met. She wrote: “No doubt you will run a review of Marita’s recent *Turandot* at the Met. I attended all three performances. How can one fail to admire an artist who puts so much into her art?”

Napier however said that she was very disappointed in Franco Zeffirelli as a producer. The reason being that he meant little to the singers. His biggest aim is to create beautiful little pictures on the stage, regardless of the practical feasibility thereof for the singers (Chisholm, 1987; Badenhorst, 2002).

On 5 April Napier performed in the National Theatre in Munich during the Münchner Opernfestspiele in Strauss’ *Elektra* in which she interpreted Chrysothemis. The conductor was Ferdinand Leitner and Wolfgang Sawallisch was the director of the State Opera House at the time of the production. Hildegard Behrens sang *Elektra* (Bayerische Staatsoper, 1988).

Michael Müller (1988a) reported from Munich on the respectable Chrysothemis of Marita Napier as well as her precise interpretation. Müller (1988b) said the next day, “Marita Napier impresses in Chrysothemis with a voluminous radiant tone.”

Marita Napier again gave a brilliant performance as exponent of Strauss with which she had impressed opera enthusiasts throughout the world with her voluminous and beautiful voice that can rise with such ease above the sounds of the orchestra.

Julius Eichbaum (1988c) gave the following views:

Weeks before the festival it was announced that Marita Napier would replace Cheryl Studer in the role of Chrysothemis. It would be unfair to both singers if I were to compare Miss Napier as Chrysothemis to Carla Pohl's recent performances in Pretoria which is, I am sure, what many readers would be interested in knowing about. Suffice to say Pohl and Napier are very different from one another in their approach to this highly taxing role. It cannot be easy for any Chrysothemis to stand in the shadow of an Elektra of the caliber of Hildegard Behrens.

One sensed that Napier was holding back somewhat. But once she was in her stride, her performance really took off. Lyrical tenderness and passionate outpouring alternated, all in the most convincing manner. To say Miss Napier was an adequate foil to Behrens is really to say it all. She evoked the correct degree of sympathy Strauss intended when he so skillfully introduced the character to lend a softer counterbalance to the harshness of Elektra.

Seeing Napier again in the international arena one could clearly see why she is the most sought after of South African singers in the world today. Here was a performance of integrity, intelligence and solid musicianship.

Between 16 and 22 June Napier performed in the Rudolf-Oetker-Halle in Bielefeld as Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde*. The conductor was Rainer Koch and William Johns sang the role of Tristan (Rudolf-Oetker Halle Bielefeld, 1988; Bühnen der Stadt Bielefeld, 1988).

Wolfgang Drees (1988b) reported the following from Bielefeld:

Marita Napier, as Isolde, knows how to transform the versatile character of the role vocally by using various nuances. Her soprano voice flowed clearly and enchanted the ears of the audience.

On 11 July 1988 Napier again sang in South Africa in the Roodepoort City Theatre: Napier sang Leonore in *Fidelio*. George Kok sang Florestan, Hans van Heerden was

Pizarro and Sally du Randt (in later years one of Napier's students) Marzelline. Weiss Doubell was the conductor and Evelyn Dalberg the producer. Thys Odendaal (1988c) gave his views:

Marita Napier as Leonore sounded somewhat reluctant in the beginning, but already from the first trio her voice and acting grew in stature. It was then clear why this soprano is held in such high repute internationally. She understands the intrinsic characteristics of the character thoroughly, and because of that her vocal interpretation is dynamically varied, gradually stronger inculcated with the momentum of the given. In Leonore's character Beethoven found his liberation. Napier determined through her singing and strong, subtle acting, the radiant and light-hearted joy, even by the short-lived playful coloratura, but she also exploited the depths through the arioso of despair.

During an interview with Joubero Malherbe (1995), George Kok said the following regarding Marita Napier:

In the leading role of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, a role for which she is well known especially in Europe, I was so spurred on that I experienced one of those rare moments on stage. This was during the love duet in the dungeon when Florestan realised that his wife is coming to save him. We sang "O namenlose Freude" and do you know, that night at the Roodepoort's City Theatre it was as if we were both whisked away. The audience, yes even the orchestra did not exist for us, only the nameless joy of singing together.

All of us who were there experienced it.

Henning Viljoen (1988b) reported:

Marita Napier gave an impressive interpretation as Leonore. She lends greater dramatic and musical appeal to the character by putting the accent on the female lyrical component, rather than that of the traditional matronly interpretation of the role. With her soulful musical feeling and phrasing she exploits new musical dimensions in the role, which go missing in the traditional exaggerated approach.

Henning Viljoen (1988a) said in *Scenaria*:

It is an opera which lends itself very well to a localized socio-political interpretation. For example, it could very well have been placed in the Polsmoor

Goal with Florestan personified as Mandela, Leonore as Winnie Mandela and a vast choice of other characters from the police and/or political arena who could have been used to personify Pizzaro; one will however run into difficulty in personifying the Messiah-like carrier of freedom Don Fernando, locally.

With this fitting comparison of Henning Viljoen and the liberation thoughts in mind one involuntarily thinks about Napier's reason for leaving South Africa and that she did not feel at home in the country with its race differences. This was something she could not identify with (Badenhorst, 2002; Napier, 2003-2004).

Marita Napier's next performance in 1988 was on 31 July in Puccini's *Turandot* in which she alternated the title role with Dawn Symes who sang on 11 and 13 August. It took place in the Teatro All'Aperto in Florence in Italy. The conductor was Giuliano Carella and the producer was Giancarlo Cobelli. Luis Lima sang Calaf and Alessandra Pacetti the role of Liù (Napier, 2003; Festival Pucciniano, 1988).

After Florence, Napier stayed in Italy to perform in Venice as Leonore in *Fidelio*. From Italy Napier left for America to sing in Boston together with the Symphony Orchestra of Boston for the making of a recording of Strauss' *Elektra*. Subsequently she sang in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* as the Third Norn on 21 October 1988. James Levine was the conductor and Otto Schenk was the producer. Hildegard Behrens sang the role of Brünnhilde, Hanna Schwarz was the Second Norn, Toni Krämer, Siegfried, Christa Ludwig, Waltraute, Diane Kesling, Wellgunde, and Meredith Parsons interpreted Flosshilde (Metropolitan Opera, 1988a; Wagner, 1991).

On 24 December Napier performed for the last time during this busy year in the Metropolitan Opera House in Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*. The conductor was Christof Perick and the producer was Nathaniel Merrill. Napier interpreted the role of Gertrude, Timothe Noble the role of Peter, Judith Blegen, Gretel, and Frederica von Stade the role of Hänsel. This performance of *Hänsel und Gretel* was

broadcasted alive on the Texaco-Metropolitan Opera Radio Network (Metropolitan Opera, 1988c).

A very informative report appeared in *Scenaria* of June 1988 (Eichbaum, 1988a) with the caption “Scenaria Opera Poll, 1988”. Julius Eichbaum reported the following:

Opera lovers from all over the country responded with enthusiasm to the first South African Opera Poll conducted by *Scenaria*. It also inspired a “Mimi Coertse fan club” to send in an abundance of ballot forms in three different handwritings in order to ensure that their favourite singer would be the winner. Such an obvious act to influence the outcome of the poll would have invalidated the whole undertaking, these forms were only taken into account after the final results in order to show the devotion of this “fan club”.

The results are:

Favourite female singer:

1. Maria Callas
2. Monserrat Caballé
3. Gundula Janowitz
4. Joan Sutherland
5. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf
6. Kiri Te Kanawa
7. Jessye Norman
8. Renata Tebaldi
9. Janet Baker
- Victoria de los Angeles
- Edita Gruberová
- Marita Napier
- Leontyne Price
- Leonie Rysanek

Favourite SA female singer

1. Marita Napier
2. Mimi Coertse
3. Nellie du Toit
4. Emma Renzi
5. Riekie Venter
6. Andrea Catzel

7. Evelyn Dalberg
8. Rina Hugo
9. Aviva Pelham
10. Marilyn Bennett
11. Carla Pohl

The favourite male singer was Placido Domingo and the favourite SA male singer was Lawrence Folley.

5.11 Grammy Award (1989)

Marita Napier's first performance in 1989 was in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in the role of Gertrude in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*. She performed in 1989 in the Metropolitan Opera House in Schoenberg's *Erwartung* with James Levine as the conductor (Napier, 2003a). According to Mary Hamilton (1990) this opera of Schoenberg's was a one-act tour-de-force for a powerful singing actress. At this stage Napier was already well known for her strong and powerful range of voice.

Between 28 March and 5 April Napier made her debut as Ortrud in the State Theatre in Pretoria for Pact Opera in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. The conductor was Alexander Sander and the producer Michael Rennison. Roland Bracht sang the role of king Hendrik, Hans van Heerden Friedrich von Telramud, Carla Pohl the role of Elsa von Brabant and Walter Donati, *Lohengrin* (Napier, 2003a; Pact Opera, 1988; 1989e).

Up to now Napier had only sung the role of Elsa in *Lohengrin* because it required a lyrical voice, but as her voice now began to adopt a richer colour she became more suitable for the more dramatic role of Ortrud which required a richer and more dramatic voice combined with greater characterisation.

Adrienne Hall (1988a) reported:

Marita Napier's characterization of Ortrud was powerful and vocally sublime, particularly in the upper register. She admirably conveyed Ortrud's malevolence and duplicity, her ability to be both haughty and supplicating.

Thys Odendaal (1989a) gave his views:

With Marita Napier as Ortrud the two South African sopranos, for the first time on stage together, took over the opera. In Napier one finds a single predictable weak point in her lower register, sometimes inaudible in ensemble works. But her enveloping characterization in singing and acting of the demonic role is a study in present day opera art. It is, in short, a triumph. That this soprano can give such a lot of dimension to this character, is remarkable. Her high register serves as a trumpet of power and destruction, the middle register illustrates insult, jealousy and brooding intended misfortune. Every word in this amazing rendition has a meaning, with an uninterrupted inevitable self-destructive power larger than Ortrud herself.

The scene between Napier and Pohl in the second act was magnificently planned and produced as well as in the way in which they could distinguish and act out the enormous contrast between them. Napier and Hans van Heerden in the role of Telramund were also touching. Napier in the first act, without even actually singing a note, except right at the end, is an unforgettable illustration of genuine stage presence.

Henning Viljoen (1989b) argued:

Although Marita Napier made her debut in the role of Ortrud, her interpretation gave evidence of authority. Completely seasoned in the Wagner idiom, her personification of a calculating sly Ortrud was characterised by brilliant text interpretation, experienced acting and a voice that is able to flourish from a whisper to a fully dramatic richness.

It is significant that Dick Turpin (1989a) mentioned Napier's very full schedule in his article on *Lohengrin*. According to Turpin, Napier's programme was unbelievably full. He reported that he himself felt guilty about the fact that he was convinced that his own programme was very busy. He wrote:

I find it too tiring to even contemplate what I see as Ms Napier's over-full future, but suffice to say that immediately (and I mean "immediately") after the last performance of *Lohengrin*, she flies back to the Met in New York.

Turpin (1989b) reported the following on 31 March:

There were admirable and successful efforts to enhance the roles of Marita Napier and Hans van Heerden with dramatic intensity and a forceful theatrical expression. Both these singers wholeheartedly flung themselves into the drama of the legend and perhaps it could be said that, from the audience reaction, it was to Napier, Van Heerden and the chorus to whom the evening belonged.

Soprano Marita Napier's singing of Ortrud was full, rounded and enchanting, and right up to the stature of her acting in the role. Her diction (and incidently her German accent) was superb.

Napier received a massive ovation, not only because she is a local girl who made good, but because she thoroughly and absolutely deserved it.

The *Pretoria News* (Reviews, 1989) reported on Friday 14 April:

Of the principals, Marita Napier was the only one in consistently stupendous form. She is an artist of exceptional creative sensibility. Her acting abilities, so marvelously integrated with the music and drama, made her impersonation of Ortrud a veritable tour de force. She minutely observed every accent and dynamic and the sudden shafts of illumination she brought to passages in her altercation with Elsa and Telramund and her singular gift for tonal inflection allied to clear diction, were but an indication of her instinctive response to the music. Suffice to say that vocally she gave a virtuoso realisation of the printed page and that this virtuosity was solely put at the service of the composer.

Michael Traub (1989) had the following views:

Of all the cast, the one who really relishes her words is Marita Napier, who sings Ortrud. She is also the only singer to use a truly broad spectrum of dynamics, while at the same time varying her timbre as aspects of the role demand.

Anita de Kock conducted an interview with Napier during the production of *Lohengrin*. It is really significant to read how Napier regarded and experienced her role as Ortrud and how in her own opinion she felt about her position in *Lohengrin*. It is also interesting to read how Napier, at this stage planned her opera career for the near future.

Anita de Kock (1989; Eichbaum, 1989a) reported:

Lohengrin is no stranger to Marita, as she performed the role of Elsa times without number. “Ortrud was a natural development. I don’t think I am right any more for the role of Elsa. As a matter of fact, I have never been mad about the role of Elsa.”

On the character of Ortrud she was much more positive and said that Ortrud suited her better. “Ortrud is as it were the pivot of the opera. If she did not start with her nonsense then nothing should have happened. She is the catalyst in the opera. She is totally megalomaniac and will do everything in her power to get her tribe back into power.”

Although Marita excelled in both Italian as well as in German repertoire, she enjoyed the German roles more as they are more dramatic and it is expected from her to act.

“I like the dramatic aspect in a opera. I like to act. I think that the day I stop singing I would like to become an actress on the stage.”

When one watches Marita Napier on the stage, one is touched by the intense emotion with which she portrays her character. Is emotion important to her?

“Yes, but I think that sometimes I give too much. Perhaps I would be singing better if I were not so involved with the character.”

The dramatic side comes from her training and performances in Germany where she said that the producer presently was the king.

“In Germany you cannot come by with just having a good voice. One must also be able to characterize.”

Marita Napier can without doubt be regarded as one of the greatest talents that South Africa has yet produced and her achievements internationally are unequalled, nevertheless she has a burning ambition to come home.

“I feel burnt out. I do between 40 and 50 performances per year and travel from one place to the other. I would like to come back and stay for once in my little house in the Cape. I have never been there for one whole day.”

With everything that you have achieved in your career, what remains for you?

“I do not know and this is at present a problem to me. There are still a few roles like Elektra that I would like to sing. Presently I am contemplating to do more concert work in 1990. It is something that I have neglected in the recent past.”

Anita de Kock concluded her interview with the following stirring words:

[I]n Marita Napier the opera world has one of its greatest artists, somebody who, if it were possible, should never stop singing.

Henning Viljoen (1993) reported in *Musicus* that a whole number of interesting laser disc reproductions with South African singers like Marita Napier and Carla Pohl who achieved success on the international opera stages, had appeared in recent times on the shelves of our music stores. A new laser disc reproduction of Napier in Kurt Weill's *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* was issued in 1993 in Cologne by Capriccio, the number being 60 007-1 (Weill, 1989). The casting was as follows: Barry MacDaniel (Zar), Carla Pohl (Angèle), Marita Napier (Valse Angèle). The conductor was Latham-König with the Cologne Radio Orchestra and Choir.

Henning Viljoen (1993) commented the following on the laser disc:

After having had the privilege to listen to Carla Pohl and Marita Napier together in *Lohengrin* singing the roles of Elsa and Ortrud in Pact's production of *Lohengrin*, it was somewhat strange to hear them together in the roles of Angèle and Valse Angèle in this peculiar one act comic opera composed by Kurt Weill. This reproduction is eminently of value for the collectors of reproductions of Weill, but it also a precious musical document of two great South African artists of whom there is entirely reproduced far too little on laser disc – it is only a pity that one could not listen to them in more grateful roles.

A great honour was bestowed upon Napier on 20 October 1989 when she received the AA Life's Vita Opera Award for her outstanding interpretation of Ortrud in *Lohengrin*. The inscription on this award states the following (Napier, 2003b):

Your interpretation revealed your potent powers as a singing actress, the voice alternately threatening and seductive with thrilling top-notes and pointed diction.

After her performance in the State Theatre in Pretoria, Napier left for New York to perform in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* under the baton of James Levine (Napier, 2003a).

After her performance in the Metropolitan Napier went with the Metropolitan Opera on a three months long tour to the East. The touring opera group travelled to Hong Kong, Taipeh, Seoul, Beijing, Shanghai, Singapore, Jakarta, Fiji, Bangkok and Tokyo and gave concerts in every city. Marita Napier made history during this tour when she became the first singer to sing for the largest television audience in the world (500 million viewers) during a concert in Beijing (Napier, 2003a; Badenhorst, 2002). Thys Odendaal (1989c) reported the following:

Marita Napier as soloist recently performed for the Metropolitan Opera in China and put up a world record as the singer who can boast the largest television audience yet in history, an achievement that will probably find its way to the *Guinness Book of Records*.

This was the first group of foreigners that visited Communist China after the student revolution that plunged the country into chaos. “I was the soloist in a concert in Beijing. It was viewed by approximately 500 million television viewers.”

During a concert, *A Night at the Opera*, that took place in Beijing on 17 August at the Midsummer Night Concert in Suntory Hall, Napier sang “In questa Reggia” from Puccini’s *Turandot* as well as “Dich, teure Halle, grüss ich wieder” from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. Other artists from the Metropolitan Opera that also performed at this concert were Dominic Cossa, Richard Kness, Adria Firestone, Frederic Kalt, Richard Vernon, Nigi Sato and Betsy Norden. At a concert on 18 August also in the Suntory Hall and titled *A Night on Broadway*, Marita Napier sang “Summertime” from *Porgy and Bess* and “Climb every Mountain” from *The Sound of Music* (Midsummer Night Concert in Suntory Hall, 1989).

In 1989 another great honour was bestowed upon Napier when she became the first South African to receive the much sought after Grammy Award for serious music in New York. She received the award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in the category “Best Opera Recording”, for her interpretation as vocalist in the role of Sieglinde on the Deutsche Grammophon recording of Wagner’s *Die Walküre* with James Levine conducting the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra (Napier, 2003b).

The *Citizen* (1989d) reported the following:

Miss Napier recently won the prestigious and most sought after recording award in the United States, the Grammy Award, for her part in a recording of Wagner's *Die Walküre*.

After receiving this award in New York, Napier again returned to South Africa and performed on 11 October in the City Hall of Johannesburg as well as on 15 October in the State Theatre in Pretoria in a presentation of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* together with the SABC orchestra and the Bach choir. Napier sang among others with Rouel Beukes and the conductor was Reinhard Schwarz (National Orchestra, 1989a; Napier, 2003a).

Napier remained in the Transvaal as the City Theatre of Roodepoort, together with a combined orchestra of Pro Musica and Pacofs, presented *A Celebrity Concert* with Napier and George Kok on 29 October in the Johannesburg City Hall. The conductor was Weiss Doubell (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1989; Napier, 2003a).

Coenraad Visser (1989) reported the following:

Napier is the ideal Wagner soprano. She has a rich middle and a heavenly upper register. But above all, she has an inborn feel for this music, making sense of every word and musical phrase. It was astonishing to listen to the way she grades her voice, in softer passages just a shade above the orchestra, almost part of it, and in louder passages ringing out triumphantly. Her performance of Brünnhilde's immolation from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* was the definitive one.

Julius Eichbaum (1989b) gave his opinion:

In the Immolation Scene, the finale of *Götterdämmerung*, Marita Napier really came into her own. Her rich, sonorous voice soared easily above the orchestral line, even when the orchestral writing was at his most solid. Although a concert performance, her economic use of gesture lent poignancy and drama to a remarkably virile and musically intense performance. Undoubtedly, Miss Napier is today this country's reigning international soprano and this performance left one in no doubt as to why this is so.

Napier's next concert in the Transvaal followed shortly after the one in Johannesburg. On 12 November 1989 she sang together with the National Orchestra, Mahler's Symphony No. 2 ("Resurrection") in the State Theatre in Pretoria and on 15 November in the City Hall of Johannesburg. The conductor was Gabor Ötvös. The mezzo-soprano Angelica Novak, originally from Austria, also performed in this programme together with the SABC Orchestra and the Johannesburg Bach Choir (National Orchestra, 1989b).

5.12 Summary

The period from 1980 to 1989 is regarded as the busiest time in Napier's international career as an opera singer. During this period her international career as one of the world's top singers in the opera world reached unknown heights.

Napier built upon her former achievements between 1972 and 1979 and established herself as an exponent of Wagner and Strauss. Her initial successes as Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin* in the Opera House in Munich in 1980 ended triumphantly as Ortrud in the same opera in the State Theatre in 1989 when she won the Vita Opera prize. Her successful renderings of Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra* in Seattle, Berlin, Brussels, Salzburg and Vienna between 1980 and 1987 established her as one of the most magnificent interpreters of this role in the history of opera.

Napier also completed the "grand slam" of opera houses with her debut performance in the Metropolitan Opera House in 1986 in Wagner's *Die Walküre*, while in 1989 she received, for the same opera, a Grammy Award for her interpretation of Sieglinde on the Deutsche laser disc recording made in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

Napier also made further opera history when she sang in Beijing for the largest television audience ever in the world. This was when she travelled to the East together with the Metropolitan Company's artists.

In 1987 and again in 1988 she made an unforgettable contribution in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with her excellent debut performances as Isolde.

From her first appearance as princess Turandot in Stuttgart in 1977 until her performance in this role in 1988 in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York she established herself as one of the greatest interpreters of *Turandot* in the history of opera.

Napier was an outstanding interpreter of Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* since 1975 in the San Francisco Opera House. She was awarded the *Voice of America* for her performance in this role. Napier performed in many successful appearances in the eighties as Senta. In Frankfurt, Vienna, Barcelona, Marseilles, Stuttgart, Dallas, Basel, Tulsa, Berlin, Warsaw, Essen, Cape Town and Hanover she proved to the world why she was so sought after as one of the most magnificent interpreters of this role.

In Chapter 6 Napier's career between 1990 and 2002 will be described.

CHAPTER 6

PROFESSIONAL CAREER OVERSEAS AND IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1990-2002

6.1 Introduction

Until the end of 1989 Marita Napier had an unbelievably full programme and she travelled all over the world in order to satisfy the great demand for her as an international dramatic soprano.

During an interview with *Die Burger* (1987b) Napier said that her programme for the following year was already fully booked. In 1986 she had performed in nineteen operas in Europe and America and in 1987 in twenty-seven. During the interview Napier also said the following:

I miss my country, my family, my friends. A person needs to belong somewhere. Sometimes I wake up and then for a moment I don't know where I am. Then I remember: it is *Turandot*, it is Cape Town.

For one month in a year I am at my house in Germany, just outside of Hamburg. Then I plant flowers, but I am never there when they come up. At the end it is the small things, the uncertainties, your own inner journeys that cause the joy of singing not to balance out any more.

I experienced a lot. It is a wonderful feeling. I can now, for the first time, say that I am at peace with myself. The chasing after dreams has now subsided and the need to come home becomes stronger.

Napier told Anita de Kock (1989; 1987b) in Cape Town:

I feel burnt out. I do between 40 and 50 performances a year and travel from one place to the other. I would like to come back and stay in my little house in the Cape. I have not been there for longer than a day.

Napier continued (2003 to 2004) that on a cold day she had to walk from her flat to the Metropolitan Opera house and for the umpteenth time she had to face the black melted

ice. That day she decided that she no longer felt like doing this as she had to make a long detour to reach her destination.

As from 1990 Marita Napier made the decision to cut down on her performances worldwide so that she could return and settle in Cape Town in order to start living again (Napier, 2003-2004; Badenhorst, 2002; De Wet, 2004.)

Napier told Charné Meyer (1990):

I now realise that I must be satisfied with what I have. Unfortunately it came very late for me, but now that I have found it, I am also prepared to come home. I know it is not going to be easy, especially not here. But I am young enough to start a second career. For the first time in my life I am satisfied.

I have two options to choose from. I can either give singing classes for young singers, or I can start an interior decoration business with someone else in the Cape. I can also design furniture. I am extremely excited.

Napier realised that it would be a great adjustment for her and that it was not going to be easy to decline big contracts from world famous opera houses. It was indeed well known that she was one of the most famous Turandots, Isoldes, Sentas, Sieglindes, Leonores and Ariadnes in the international opera world at that stage. She was, however, convinced that it was the right thing for her to do and that it would bring changes to her life that would of necessity bring new challenges her way.

6.2 Napier's contracts world wide (1990)

The first performance in which Napier participated in 1990 was in Dortmund in Germany where she sang Wagner's composition of the poems of Mathilde Wesendonck, the *Wesendonck-Lieder* (Napier, 2003a).

On 16 May 1990 Napier performed for Pacofs in the Sand du Plessis Theatre in Bloemfontein at the opening as Leonore in *Fidelio*. Anina Wasserman interpreted

Marzelline, Jacobus Bouwer, Don Fernando, Hans van Heerden, Pizarro and George Kok, Florestan. The conductor was Gerhard Geist (Napier, 2003a; Eichbaum, 1990c).

Eichbaum (1990c) reported the following:

Another singer whose greatness is sadly overlooked these days by other Arts Councils, Marita Napier, was superbly matched alongside Kok's Florestan as Leonore.

She gave a vocally ravishing performance full of dramatic intensity and splendid lyricism both of which qualities emerged spectacularly in the aria "Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin". She and Kok proved to be the perfect foil for one another in the radiant duet "O namenlose Freude!", a duet which is fraught with vocal pitfalls for both protagonists and which seldom comes across in the opera house in a truly satisfying manner. Yet, both managed on this occasion to imbue the piece with that rare degree of radiant joy whilst at the same time effortlessly encompassing the enormous vocal demands Beethoven makes on both singers.

The success that Napier and George Kok achieved with *Fidelio* in the Sand du Plessis Theatre reminds one of the successful performances of Marita Napier and Kok in the same opera in the City Theatre in Roodepoort on 11 July 1988, which was discussed in Chapter 5.

After Bloemfontein Napier made her debut in the Western Transvaal town of Potchefstroom when she performed during a *Liederabend* (Napier, 2003a).

From Potchefstroom Marita Napier returned to Pretoria where she performed for Pact Music in the Opera State Theatre on Sunday 27 May. Albie Van Schalkwyk accompanied her on the piano. During the concert she sang compositions by Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss (Pact Opera, 1990; Napier, 2003a).

Napier's next performance in 1990 was on 10 June in the City Theatre of Roodepoort in which she sang with the Pro Musica Orchestra under the baton of Weiss Doubell in *A Celebrity Beethoven Concert* together with Sue Southern, George Kok and Anton Diakov (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1990a; Napier, 2003a).

From Pretoria Napier left for Germany. Years before, Napier had already signed a contract to sing as a member of the Metropolitan Company of New York in the Minoritenkirche in Regensburg together with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Regensburg. During this concert Napier sang highlights from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In addition to the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York, the opera companies of La Scala and the Grünen Hügel participated in this concert (1990b Schirmbeck). Martin Fraas (1990) reported:

With her interpretation of Sieglinde and Brünnhilde, Marita Napier proved the aesthetic completeness of her singing. She controlled all the challenges of Wagner music: with a loud and clear touch she created pathos, and with genuine vocal colouring and clear diction she contributed to the greatest possible understanding of the text while her limitless voice enabled her to express herself from the lowest to the highest notes in all nuances possible.

Napier again proved herself an exceptional exponent of Wagner. Her colourful vocalising, clear diction as well as her exceptional understanding of the text and the voice possibilities impressed the musicians.

Albert Lehner (1990a), a reporter, reviewed from the city Regensburg about the concert in the *Minoriten Kirche*, that it was an experience to be able to listen to the most imposing high dramatic soprano of recent times at the Wagner concert. Her unbelievably powerful voice impressed the audience exceedingly. The writer briefly referred to Napier's imposing career and in his final remarks mentioned that during the past fifteen years in Bayreuth, she had already proved to both the lovers of opera and musicians, that she was one of the best interpreters of Sieglinde and Eva.

According to Gerhard Dietel (1990) Napier's singing in Wagner's *Die Walküre* in the role of Brünnhilde, in the final hymn during this concert in Regensburg, was the highlight of the evening.

From Regensburg in Germany, Napier returned to South Africa to perform Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* in the City Theatre in Roodepoort between 23 August and 1

September. Weiss Doubell was the musical director and conductor while Michael Williams was the producer. Other members of the cast were George Kok in the role of Bacchus, Sally du Randt, Najade, Carina Cronje, Zerbinetta, Hanli Stapela was the Composer and Peter Haffter was the Court Master (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1990b).

The critic Riek van Rensburg (1990) wrote on 28 August:

But, yes, there was the singing of all-round distinction. Marita Napier, a consummate singing actress, put over Ariadne's nobility and singleness of affection strongly. And she had the ability to encompass the long, curving lines of her music with ease, certainly with expressive fervour.

She sang her great lament in an opulent thrilling voice – in toto, a performance of subtlety employing every shade of tone.

Mary Rörich (1990c) gave the following opinion:

Marita Napier's Ariadne and George Kok's Bacchus provide the most memorable music-making of the opera. Napier has both the focus and weight in every register, as well as the sense of line, to make Ariadne's role a luscious musical experience. She characterises what can only too easily become a very static affair with understanding and rich nuance.

Thys Odendaal (1990) wrote in *Beeld*:

Marita Napier's Ariadne is of the highest quality. She underplays the Prima Donna with the correct balance in order to keep the swarming characters around her at a safe distance. From this an Ariadne develops in the Opera that is coloured radiantly lyrical and dramatic-forte with a tragic dignity and long floating pianissimos in lonely isolation.

Daan du Toit reviewed in *Die Transvaler* (1990):

One can sing a hymn of praise over Marita Napier and George Kok's singing and interpretation of Ariadne and Bacchus respectively. Here was singing and acting of the highest quality that will be remembered for a long time to come.

Dick Turpin (1990) reported in *The Star Tonight*:

It is in the glorious final duet that Marita Napier and George Kok both give such a wonderful account of their talent. Marita Napier has sung the roles in Covent Garden and Vienna and gives a fine demonstration of her authority. This was a strong and firm Ariadne, rather than an Ariadne of sweet tenderness.

Michael Traub (1990) gave his opinion in *The Citizen*:

Marita Napier gives one of her best performances as the Prima Donna/Ariadne, singing with supreme assurance and often ravishing tone. Her noble stage manner, mobile face and artistic gestures are all equally compelling, a triumph indeed.

Marita Napier and George Kok inspired one another to, once again as in *Fidelio* in 1988 in the same opera house, excel as an outstanding singing pair. Napier's achievements as Ariadne were already established in 1980 in the State Opera in Vienna under the guidance of Karl Böhm and in 1982 in Covent Garden. With her outstanding interpretation of Ariadne that perfectly suited her lyric-dramatic voice, she again proved herself to be an outstanding interpreter of the works of Strauss.

After Napier performed in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, she presented a *Celebrity Concert* on 16 September in the City Theatre of Roodepoort. The conductor was Weiss Doubell (Napier, 2003a; Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1990c). During this concert Napier sang in Mahler's *Symphony No. 4* and Strauss' *Four Last Songs* (Napier, 2003a; Strauss, 1950; Napier, 2003b).

Daan du Toit (1990) had the following views in *Die Transvaler*:

Napier was an excellent choice!

Again Weiss Doubell's commendable enterprising spirit produced an exceptional concert. Mahler's *Symphony no 4* and Strauss' *Vier Letzte Lieder* were presented. The soprano Marita Napier was an excellent choice to perform in these taxing works of which *Vier Letzte Lieder* are always a tour-de-force.

The unusual song at the end that gives an image of the heavenly life through the eyes of a child, was executed by Marita Napier with beautiful immersion and childlike simplicity.

It was however in Strauss' taxing *Vier Letzte Lieder* that Napier's exceptional interpretation abilities and good voice control were triumphant. Every song was interpreted full of atmosphere, with intense immersion and good voice usage.

It is significant that Napier always received good reviews for her lieder concerts when she interpreted Mahler and Strauss. Her exceptional control of her voice and interpretation abilities suited her slender voice very well and through this she made a great contribution to the advancement of the compositions of the composers.

Napier remained true to her intentions to scale down on her overseas performances. Her next performances were on 11 and 15 October in the City Hall of Johannesburg and the State Theatre in Pretoria respectively. She performed together with the SABC, the Bach Choir of Johannesburg and the National Orchestra in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. The conductor was Reinhard Schwarz. Other participants were the mezzo-soprano Angelica Novak, the tenor Gerhard le Roux and the bass Rouel Beukes (National Orchestra, 1990a).

On 12 and 15 November Napier performed in the State Theatre in Pretoria and in the City Hall of Johannesburg respectively together with the National Orchestra and the Bach Choir of Johannesburg in the Mahler's *Second Symphony*, the "Resurrection" (National Orchestra, 1990b).

On 18 November *Passages* was televised for the SATV. It was a unique dramatisation of a boy's search for love through *Passages* of music's great love stories, a combination of opera, drama and ballet. Many of South Africa's leading artists starred in *Passages*, namely Marita Napier, Natalie Gamsu, Grethe Fox, Aviva Pelham, Gerhard le Roux, Mimi Coertse and many more. Napier sang the role of the voluptuous Salomé. *Passages* was another lavish production from Tonight and Artes Award winner producer and

director Billy Kennedy. Leo Quayle conducted the National Orchestra (South African Broadcasting Corporation, 1990; Eichbaum, 1990b).

Between 27 November and 1 December Napier sang Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* combined with a play by Mario Schiess in the City Theatre in Roodepoort. Other members of the cast were Jana Cilliers, Jonathan Rands and Helena Hetteema. The producer and dramatist was Mario Schiess and the conductor was Weiss Doubell. (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1990d.)

Marita Napier's last performance in 1990 was again in the City Theatre in Roodepoort in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* in the role of the Mother and the Witch. Napier again distinguished herself as a highly talented dramatic soprano but also as a remarkably talented actress. Her interpretation of the Witch impressed the audience and reviewers favourably while her singing and interpretation of the Mother was also impressive. The rest of the cast were Hans van Heerden as the Father, Lize Thomas as Hänsel and Anina Wasserman as Gretel. (Eichbaum, 1990a; Napier, 2003a.)

Weiss Doubell (2004) said that Napier enjoyed the role of the Witch so much that during one performance, when she had to give the bowl a slight kick, she kicked it right off the stage into the orchestra. This is proof that Napier really became intensely involved with her role, a characteristic that is a prerequisite for outstanding acting.

Julius Eichbaum (1990a) reported the following in *Scenaria*:

As the Witch, Marita Napier really entered into the spirit of the occasion and revealed to local audiences that, apart from being a fine dramatic soprano, she also possesses a rare degree of humour and comic timing. She also sang the role of the Mother in this production and again her dramatic skill lent a new and fresh dimension to the role.

6.3 Awards for Napier's contribution to opera (1991)

Marita Napier's first performance in 1991 was between 4 to 13 January in the USA in the Music Hall at Fair Park in Dallas during the Dallas Opera 1990-1991 Season. She performed Gertrude in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* (Napier, 2003a; Dallas Opera, 1991.) Other members of the cast were Edward Crafts (Peter), Jeanne Ommerlé (Gretel), Katherine Ciesinski (Hänsel) and Evelyn Lear in the role of the Witch. The conductor was Reinhard Peters and the producer John Copley. John Ardoin (1991), the music critic of the *Dallas Morning News*, reported the following: "Marita Napier, in her company debut, was a lively, full-voiced Gertrude".

The critic Robert Perry (1991) reported that Marita Napier was going to be a guest artist for Pact in 1991. She was going to perform Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. Perry continues:

A dramatic soprano of world acclaim, SA artist Marita Napier brings her renowned Senta to the Transvaal stage for the first time. A regular guest with Pact, last heard as Ortrud in *Lohengrin*.

Marita Napier performed Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* between 24 April and 4 May in the State Theatre in Pretoria. The conductor was Gabor Ötvös while Roberto Oswald was the producer and lighting designer. Other members of the cast were Peter Meven (Daland), Gerhard le Roux (Steersman) and Wicus Slabbert in the role of the Holländer (Pact Opera, 1991).

Riek van Rensburg (1991) reported the following:

Marita Napier was in prime vocal state, a powerhouse of unlimited reserve. She was scrupulously musical, obeying note values, accentuations and dynamic markings. She traced Senta's fate with unerring musical and dramatic accuracy.

She blazed with clarion brilliance in the role's upper reaches and moved and acted with dignity. In her Ballad her "jugendlich-dramatische" soprano especially

soared with full-bodied high notes. There was many an interval of serene vocalisation, stamina and an eerie core of fatalism.

Stefans Grové (1991) gave his views in *Rapport*:

Marita Napier as Senta is the ideal dramatic soprano for a Wagner interpretation and her acting personality is adequately supplemented by the many nuances of her voice. Exceptionally praiseworthy was the slow moving tempo of the ballad in the second act, which so often is reduced to caricature when the tempo is too quick.

Julius Eichbaum (1991a; Eichbaum, 1991b) wrote about the performance as follows:

After performing in the role of Senta in most of the big opera houses in the world, Marita Napier brings a richness of experience to this Pact production. Her interpretation spans the credibility chasm in Wagner's creation in which he describes Senta as a sixteen-year old girl.

Napier also succeeds in circumventing the current view of Senta as a highly emotional character. One can almost say a hysterical woman. She is a Senta of dignified behaviour that knows exactly what she is doing and her desire to become involved with the Holländer is not only crazy infatuation.

Napier performed Senta's well-known second act ballad throughout with easy controlled pianissimos and sheer beauty, building up intensity to a moving climax.

Dawie Couzyn (1991) posited in *Applous*:

With singers of world calibre the result is one of the most outstanding performances I have ever seen.

Marita Napier as Senta delivers in this demanding role, singing and acting that are deeply moving.

Her voice control is phenomenal: from the softest, most tender pianissimos in the higher registers to an explosion of power and volume and finally, floating, high climax notes solid and steadfast in their fortissimos established on faultless technique.

Henning Viljoen (1991) reported the following in the leading heading in the *Vrye Weekblad*:

Bayreuth cannot do this better. To be able to listen to two such masterful artists as Wicus Slabbert and Marita Napier together in Pact's production of *Der fliegende Holländer* in the State Theatre is an experience long to be remembered.

Viljoen continued as follows:

The achievement of the interpretations of especially Marita Napier and Wicus Slabbert can be summarised, in the language of sport, as world records. It was indeed a big occasion to listen to these two artists at the zenith of their careers singing together in roles for which they received only the highest acclaim overseas.

Marita Napier's interpretation of Senta was an embodiment that will today not be equaled dramatically or musically on the stage or any recording. Never have I experienced Senta's ballad with so much power of conviction as in the way in which Napier loaded every verse with more and more dramatic intensity. The difficult Senta/Holländer duet is a musical highlight that I will remember for a long time to come.

For the first time since Marita Napier performed in the role of Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in 1980 in Rio de Janeiro, she again sang this role in the City Theatre in Roodepoort, in cooperation with Pact Opera, from 21 June to 3 July. Other members of the cast were Hans van Heerden (Leporello), Charl van Heyningen (Don Giovanni), Gerhard le Roux (Don Ottavio) and Eugenie Chopin as Donna Elvira (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1991a).

Eichbaum (1991c) had the following views:

The role of Donna Anna, in particular, is fraught with pitfalls and presents every opera management with casting problems. Much of the role calls for a soprano with considerable dramatic qualities, yet, in the end, in the aria "Non mi dir" Mozart inserts some cruelly difficult coloratura passages. Marita Napier brought her wealth of experience to bear on the role and managed to avoid most of the pitfalls in this aria. If she failed to fit into the mould of a true coloratura in this one aria the dramatic quality of her voice was undoubtedly a major asset elsewhere such as in "Or sai chi l'onore" which she sang with brilliant attack and thrilling passion.

Although Napier never really preferred roles from the works of Mozart as she believed that they did not really suit her voice very well, she did, because of her wide experience, musicality, her beautiful voice with exceptional dramatic qualities and commitment, make a great success of her interpretation of Donna Anna.

On 3 November 1991 Marita Napier performed for Pro Musica in an *Opera Gala* (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1991b) in the City Theatre in Roodepoort together with other well-known singers like Mimi Coertse, George Kok and Hans van Heerden, under the baton of Weiss Doubell. All the artists made their services available free for this fundraising concert. Together with Coertse Napier sang arias from *Fidelio* and *Hänsel und Gretel*, while Napier sang “In questa reggia” from *Turandot* and “Abscheulicher! Komm Hoffnung” from *Fidelio*. Together with George Kok she sang “O namenlose Freude” from *Fidelio* (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1991b).

During this year Napier also performed in a *Gala Concert* in the State Theatre in Pretoria as well as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town (Napier, 2003a).

Barely a week after Napier received a medal of honour for music from the South African Academy for Science and Arts, and amidst great commendations from audiences and critics throughout the country, she was appointed as the winner of the 1990 Nederburg Prize for Opera in Transvaal for her exceptional interpretations of Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* and the Witch and Mother in *Hänsel und Gretel*. During the handing-over ceremony when she received the Honourary Medal for Music on 13 August, Mr Eghard van der Hoven (South African Academy for Science and Arts, 1991; Napier, 2003b) expressed the following words of honour:

The South African Academy for Science and Arts has high appreciation for ms Napier, not only for her capable artistry and for the high status that she occupies on the international stage, but also, and most of all, for the important contribution she made to the development and quality of opera in South Africa.

It is therefore a great honour for the Academy to present Ms. Napier with this Honourary Medal for Music.

According to *The Citizen* (1991), Napier had last won the Nederburg Award for Opera in 1985.

6.4 Head of Pact's Opera Training Centre (1992)

Marita Napier's performances in 1992 were further cut down as in this year she participated in only three operas and one concert. This decision was also due to the fact that from 1992 she became head of Pact's Opera Training Centre. According to Mr Neels Hansen, former producer of the State Theatre in Pretoria, Napier held this position for one year before she moved to Cape Town (Hansen, 2005).

Eichbaum (1992a) wrote in *Scenaria*:

The South African International opera star Marita Napier has signed an associate contract with Capab Opera whilst still maintaining links with opera houses abroad. Napier is engaged to sing in two major operas per year.

Whilst in South Africa Napier will give master classes and will also collaborate closely with Pact Opera in Pretoria where she heads the new Opera Studio. Napier has still many engagements in Europe.

It is therefore quite clear that Napier still had a very busy life but as head of the Opera Training Centre she was beginning to plough back her wide experience amongst her countrymen. She was still under contract at various opera houses and performed twice in operas in Cape Town while at the same time she presented master classes as head of Pact's Opera Training Centre in Pretoria. She still performed frequently overseas. In 1992 she performed in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Napier also presented an *Opera Gala* for Pact in the State Theatre in Pretoria (Napier, 2003a; Napier, 2003b).

Eichbaum (1992a) reported the following about Napier's latest position:

The Opera Training Centre will offer South Africa's first professional opera studio, providing working facilities within the environment of an opera house. Young artists will be given the opportunity of working in the State Theatre on a variety of levels, whilst attending a regular curriculum devoted to the different aspects of opera as performance career.

The Pact Opera Training Centre will offer two year working periods to a group of eight singers selected annually through auditions.

A stipendium will be paid to them throughout this period. After completion Pact will reserve the right to offer a contract with the company should it so wish. Singers who have completed the two year period will also become eligible for the State Theatre Opera Foundation Award, the largest bursary in South Africa awarded to a young singer.

A general outline of what the Opera Training Centre will offer includes musical preparation and interpretation, movement, acting, classical dancing, German, French, Italian, make-up and other relevant classes.

With her many years of international exposure Napier was the most appropriate candidate for the post. This enabled her to fulfill her wish to plough her knowledge back into the education and training of young upcoming opera singers. True to her nature she would approach this position with great seriousness and commitment.

Marita Napier's first performance in 1992 was between 5 and 19 February for Capab Opera in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* when she sang Isolde. The producer was Angelo Gobbato and the conductor was Reinhard Schwarz. The rest of the cast consisted of Craig Downes (the Seaman), Sally Presant (Brangäne), Hans van Heerden (Kurnewal), Heikki Siukola and Robert Bruins (Tristan) and De Wet van Rooyen (Melot) (Capab Opera, 1992a).

Riek van Rensburg (1992) wrote in an international journal of which the title page was torn off:

Still, the principles on the whole subtly realised the undercurrents of emotions, projecting them with clarity and reasonable dramatic expertise if not within a particularly coherent texture, galvanised thereto primarily by Marita Napier's stirring and searing stage presence.

Musically, however, this was peerless Wagner singing and playing. Even more than in Pretoria in 1985, when she made her debut in the role, Marita Napier proved herself a consummate singing-actress. From one performance to the next she was in radiantly warm and resonant voice, triumphantly rising above the orchestral floods, capping it with an especially gleaming vocal and dramatic interpretation. She captivated by the sheer beauty of sound she produced. The many effects, the gentle upward sweeps of tone, lovely mezza voce qualities and the subtle colourings all suggested a voice deployed to rare, fine musical ends. The subtly varied shades of tone and Napier's feel for the very texture of the words and the line itself – a very tellingly assured treatment of Wagner's curving melodic line – made her Liebestod the vocal and emotional highlight it should be.

Julius Eichbaum's views after the opening night were (1992b):

The production lacked dramatic intensity or build up; only Marita Napier as Isolde – left, one suspects very much to her own devices by Matheson – managed to inject anything like a convincing portrayal into the overall scheme of things.

In the second act Love Duet, Siukola was brilliantly matched to Marita Napier's Isolde, both singers seeming to enjoy considerable rapport with one another on both a vocal and spiritually level.

But, in the final analysis, this restaging was head and shoulders a triumph of the first magnitude for Marita Napier in the role of Isolde.

Making her debut as Isolde in Pact's production of *Tristan und Isolde* in the State Theatre in Pretoria in 1985, she impressed all who heard her. The intervening years and performances of the role in several major opera houses overseas, has seen the emergence of a greater degree of security in this most demanding role and an overall approach to the character which is even more beautifully nuanced and moving.

The contrasting moods – anger and rage in the first act, divine ecstasy and nobility in the second and sheer radiance in the finale – were brilliantly wrought. Miss Napier is now at the peak of her vocal powers and Pact would do well to plan a repeat of their 1985 *Tristan* and even repeat their *Elektra* (this time with Napier in the title role) before it is too late.

Thys Odendaal (2005) referred to the death of David Matheson on 17 May 2005 in Cape Town. Matheson was especially known for his productions of musical plays, operas and operettas. Odendaal said that Matheson, during an interview with him, said that 1992 was a great opera year for him. He added that his nerves were cut to pieces when he managed

the repeat production of Günther Schneider-Siemssen's fairy tale production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with Marita Napier.

Marita Napier again was outstanding as Isolde in 1992 and proved to opera lovers that she was one of the greatest interpreters of Wagner. Her interpretation of Isolde had, since her triumphant debut performance on 11 March 1985 in the State Theatre, developed to such an extent that she had become one of the most important interpreters of Isolde in the world.

Later in this year, from 23 October to 9 November, she performed in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town in a Capab/Pact production as Leonore in Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. Other members of the cast were Virginia Davids who acted as understudy for Napier in November, John Eagar and Nigel Fair (Ferrando), Christina Farr (Inez), Mauro Augustini and Victor Torres (Count di Luna) and Sidwill Hartman (Manrico) (Capab Opera, 1992b).

Between 9 and 11 December Napier performed Gertrud the Mother in Frankfurt in the Rundfunkkonzerte of the Alte Oper in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*. The conductor was Horst Stein and the orchestra the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Frankfurt. The cast also included Eike Wilm Schutte (Peter), Dagmar Pecková (Hänsel), Christiane Oelze (Gretel) and Helga Dernesch (the Knusperhexe) (Hessischer Rundfunk, 1992/93).

6.5 Napier in South Africa (1993)

Henning Viljoen (1995) wrote in *Musicus* that the 1975 recording of Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* and *Four Orchestral Songs* by Pierre Boulez was now reproduced and that it had been reissued on compact disc as part of the Boulez series. He commented further on the recording when he wrote that Napier, with her slender quality of tone, lends a vulnerability to her interpretation that is extremely successful in the realisation of the Tove character. Other participants were Jess Thomas (Waldemar), Yvonne Minton (Waldtaube), Siegmund Nimgern (Bauer), Kenneth Bowen (Klauss-Narr) and Gunther

Reich (Sprecher). Pierre Boulez was the conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Sony issued this recording with the number of SM2K 48459 (Schoenberg, 1972).

On 16 and 17 January 1993 Marita Napier performed in the State Theatre in Pretoria and in the City Hall of Johannesburg respectively as Mary Dee, the wife of Shanty, in the *Liverpool Oratorio*, written in the classical idiom by Paul McCartney (of Beatle fame) and Carl Davis. The work is of a biographical nature and depicts the life story of the character Shanty (sung by Sidwill Hartman) from his birth during the war years in Liverpool, his school years, teenage years, the death of his father, his marriage, up until the birth of his first child that brought about a change to his life. The Philharmonic Orchestra of Transvaal presented the Africa première of the *Liverpool Oratorio*. The conductor was Michael Hankinson. Other participants were Patricia Boylan (Miss Inkley, leading mourner and nurse), Rouel Beukes (the principal, pastor and Mr Dingle), the Drakensberg Boys Choir and the Transvaal Philharmonic Choir. The concert-master was Denise Sutton (Pact Opera, 1993a).

Mary Rörich (1993) reported:

The African Première of Paul McCartney's *Liverpool Oratorio* by Pact Music and the Transvaal Philharmonic Orchestra may well prove to be the crowd-drawer of the year, but whether its vast performance requirements can be justified on aesthetic grounds alone is a moot point. Marita Napier SA's premier soprano, was stunning.

Daan du Toit (1993) gave the following views about the performance: "Sidwill Hartman presented some outstanding singing in the role of Shanty. Marita Napier, as his wife Mary Dee, supported him adequately."

After a successful performance by Napier in Pretoria and Johannesburg, she was given a certificate of appreciation for her contributions to the work of the St. Francis Hospice Association on 31 January 1993 (Napier, 2003b; Saint Francis Hospice Association, 1993). It was then realised that Napier, despite her fame as international opera star and successes as a world famous dramatic soprano, was fighting a lonely struggle against

cancer, an illness of which very few people were aware. Even Napier's sister, Ms Ena Shaw, who was probably the person closest to her and also her confidante, knew very little of Napier's health problem (Shaw, 2004-2006). Napier had exceptional powers of perseverance, as had been seen in the testimonial given to her by her headmaster Mr J. C. van Tonder (1956) at the end of her matriculation year. She also never allowed circumstances to get her down. Mr Petrus van Heerden (2003a), a well-known opera singer and very good friend of Napier, said during an interview that once when he was visiting her in Orange, France, and while she was busy with a performance of *Turandot*, he noticed that she was recuperating from chemotherapy.

Despite the existing shadow of Napier's illness, Hester Ballot (1993) reported in the *Volksblad* that Marita Napier performed in a symphony concert in the Sand du Plessis Theatre as soloist together with the orchestra of Sucofs under the baton of Christopher Dowdeswell. Marita Napier sang arias by Strauss, Mozart and Wagner. Ballot continued:

Marita Napier, diva par excellence, carried her audience away to the worn out but complacent, satisfied twilight of our earthly life. Richard Strauss' *Vier Letzte Lieder*, composed during the year before his death, is gripping music and Napier understands this with her deepest being. She ended "September" (European autumn) with breathtaking images of sound in the words "müdgewordenen Augen zu". In "Beim Schlafengehen", Napier causes one's emotions to spill over completely. She floats slowly, continuously through incredibly long lines of verse, and follows it up with a mighty crescendo on liberated wings. The first verse of "Frühling", characterised by extreme entangled whirlpool chromatics, is intoned faultlessly. Napier, a dramatic soprano with an amazing vocal projection and lovely quality of voice, becomes blurred as an individual when she sings. Her art comes completely to the fore. The silence following the final line "ist dies etwa der Tod" was unfortunately disturbed too soon by the applause.

Wagner's "Prelude" and "Liebestod" from *Tristan und Isolde* were movingly presented by both the orchestra and the soprano. Napier ended with an intense dramatic sound painting of the sorrow, glorification and transfiguration of the eternal lovers. A suitable climax for a pleasant symphony concert.

Napier's choice of music, long before her death, to be played during her memorial service in the St Georges Cathedral in Cape Town on 17 April 2004, was the specific recording

of “Liebestod” from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* that was recorded on 2 December 1997 in the City Theatre in Roodepoort (Napier, 2003b).

From Bloemfontein Napier returned to the Metropolitan Opera House in New York where she was under contract to perform in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Unfortunately Napier did not mention the specific opera. The conductor was James Levine (Napier, 2003a). Back in South Africa, Napier performed Senta in Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer* for Capab Opera under the guidance of Angelo Gobbato as director. Christine Crouse was the producer and Reinhard Schwarz the conductor (Capab Opera, 1993). Other members of the cast were Don Garrard (Daland), Craig Downes (as the Steersman), John Eager (as the fliegende Holländer), and Sidwill Hartman (Erik).

Between 11 and 25 June 1993 Napier performed for Pact Opera in the State Theatre in Pretoria in Mozart’s *Idomeneo*. Napier sang the role of Elettra, the daughter of Agamemnon. Other participants were Douglas Ahlstedt as Idomeneo, Michelle Breedt in the role of Idamante, Hanli Stapela performed Ilia, Jannie Moolman was Arbace, André Howard the High Priest of Neptune and Rouel Beukes the voice of Neptunus. The conductor was Dietfried Bernet and the producer was George Kok. The orchestra was the Transvaal Philharmonic Orchestra. It is interesting to note that Napier’s name on the programme indicated that she was still the Head of the Opera Training Centre at Pact Opera (Pact Opera, 1993b).

Julius Eichbaum (1993a) reported the following:

Although she gave a spirited and intensely dramatic account of the role of Elettra – undoubtedly the most demanding and difficult of all Mozart’s dramatic female roles – Marita Napier often sounded uncomfortable, particularly in the middle register which lacked the vocal agility this music demands.

Although, on the surface, an ideal role for a young dramatic soprano, the role of Elettra is certainly a problematic one since it demands the paradoxical blending of vocal youthfulness and agility with the considerable technical expertise that one only acquires with the passing of time. Napier, at this stage of her career,

undoubtedly possesses the requisite experience and dramatic insight, but she now lacks the youthful agility the role calls for.

If Marita Napier's performance of Elettra on the opening night of *Idomeneo* left something to be desired, her second performance on Monday, 14 June was something of a tour de force.

Gone was the uncertainty of pitch and the ungainly lack of vocal suppleness. Her performance had grown in stature and now was confronted with an Elettra that was both vocally and dramatically convincing in every sense of the word. Her rendition of Elettra's final aria in Act 3, "D'Oreste, d'Ajace", was spellbinding in its intensity and passion and left this reviewer pondering, yet again, the unfairness of opening night reviews.

True to Napier's characteristics, although not an exceptional interpreter of Mozart, she immersed herself in the role of Elettra with commitment and hard work and given her amazing vocal projection she presented a very successful performance.

Napier remained in the Transvaal for her next performance of Floria Tosca in Puccini's *Tosca* between 21 and 28 August in the City Theatre of Roodepoort. Weiss Doubell conducted the Roodepoort Pro Musica Orchestra and the producer was Johan Spies. Other members of the cast were Bob Borowsky (Sacristan), Luigi Frattola (Mario Cavaradossi), Hans van Heerden (Baron Scarpia) and Christie Pienaar (Spoletta) (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1993a).

Coenraad Visser (1993a) gave his views in an unknown international journal:

Dramatically Marita Napier is an exceptional Tosca, flirtatious and jealous in the first act, anguished and courageous in the second, and lovingly tender in the third. Vocally Napier has returned to her stupendous form of old. Even if her voice remains less firm than the ideal, her pointed diction and finely shaded singing made the most of the composer's writing.

Dick Turpin (1993b) commented on the above performance as follows:

The splendid impact of the production is immeasurably enhanced by the consistent vocal quality of the principals. Marita Napier's strong superbly trained and effortlessly produced voice fits naturally into the dramatically demanding role

of Tosca and she attains moments of thrilling interpretation in a part she has sung many times overseas.

Michael Traub (1993) concluded:

Here Marita Napier's Tosca is a creature of volatile moods, exhibiting extreme swings of emotion. Marita Napier seems to have acquired control over the beat in her voice. It is still a very large instrument, grand and impassioned, but also capable of minute shades of expression.

The dress that Napier wore in this production of *Tosca* is exhibited in the Napier Music Collection at the University of Pretoria. The compact disc recording, known as *An Opera Gala* with "Vissi d'arte", sung by Napier and conducted by Weiss Doubell in cooperation with the City Theatre of Roodepoort and recorded during this production, is also kept in this collection (Napier, 2003b.) This recording was played in two programmes. A radio programme was presented by Joubero Malherbe – "Joubero Malherbe in gesprek met Eridine Roux oor die gevierde sopraan Marita Napier" – on Radio Sonder Grense in April 2004, a week after Napier's death (Malherbe, 2004a). The other was during a programme on the television channel Kyknet (Badenhorst, 2004) about the SA Music Collection at the University of Pretoria.

On 10 October 1993 Napier performed in the City Theatre in Roodepoort in co-operation with Pact Opera in a Symphony Concert under the guidance of Weiss Doubell. She repeated this concert on 12 October in the State Theatre in Pretoria. During this concert Napier sang, amongst others, Henry Górecki's Symphony No. 3 (*Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*) Op. 36 (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1993b).

After this Napier left for Cape Town to perform Abigaille in Verdi's *Nabucco* (Napier, 2003a).

The next opera in which Napier performed after her role as Abigaille was for Pact Opera in the State Theatre in Pretoria in the role of Santuzza in Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* on 3 November 1993 (Napier, 2003a).

Julius Eichbaum (1993b) argued:

In *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Marita Napier managed to inject an element of passion into her performance as Santuzza. Although the role no longer falls entirely comfortably within her vocal range, one remained conscious of the fact that this has always been one of her truly great roles and she imparted a strong degree of sensitivity and feeling in her performance.

After her performance as Santuzza in the State Theatre in Pretoria, she remained in the Transvaal to sing between 24 November and 4 December in the City Theatre in Roodepoort in co-operation with Pact Opera Leonore in *Fidelio* (Napier, 2003a; Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1993c). Hans van Heerden was the director and Weiss Doubell conducted the Roodepoort Pro Musica Orchestra. George Kok sang Florestan, Pauline du Plessis, Marzeline and Hans van Heerden, Don Pizarro.

Julius Eichbaum (1994a) reported in *Scenaria*:

The role of *Fidelio*/Leonore is one ideally suited to the talents of Marita Napier and she gave a truly outstanding performance. Also particularly beguiling was Miss Napier's fervently sung recitative and aria "Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin?" in which she skillfully explored a wide variety of emotions and vocal colouring.

This successful opera performance with Napier as an exceptional interpreter of Leonore in *Fidelio* reminds one of the previous successes Napier had as Leonore with George Kok as Florestan on 11 July in 1988 in the City Theatre in Roodepoort and on 16 May 1990 in the Sand du Plessis Theatre in Bloemfontein.

6.6 Napier's final *Fidelio* (1994)

Napier cut down considerably on her performances for this year. The first official performance of Napier in 1994 was as adjudicator during the Annual International Singing Competition at the University of South Africa in Pretoria (Napier, 2003a).

Between 14 and 25 April she performed her final performance of Leonore in *Fidelio* for Capab Opera in Cape Town in the Nico Malan Opera House. The director was Angelo Gobbato, the conductor Reinhard Schwarz and the producer Christine Crouse. Craig Downes interpreted the role of Jacquino, Aviva Pelham was Marzeline and Moises Parker was Florestan (Capab Opera, 1994a).

Napier's next performance in an opera performance was in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town between 17 September and 7 October. Napier again distinguished herself as one of the greatest interpreters of *Turandot* in the world. The director and producer was Angelo Gobbato and Gérard Korsten was the conductor. Other members of the cast were Virginia Davids as Liù and Sidwill Hartman as Calaf (Capab, 1994b). The original production rehearsal schedule of this *Turandot* production can be found in the Napier Music Collection at the University of Pretoria (Napier, 2003b).

Deon Irish (1994) reported after the opening night:

Napier's voice is ideally suited to the dramatically and vocally taxing high tessitura of the princess, imperious in its declamatory style and powerful enough to soar over combined forces of orchestra, chorus and fellow soloists. She is dramatically authentic and her stagecraft showed not least in her coping with seemingly kilometers of heavy train.

Julius Eichbaum (1994b) wrote on Napier's performance as follows:

Turandot has always been one of Marita Napier's star roles. She has sung it with distinction at several international opera houses and Transvaal opera audiences still recall her magnificent performances in 1985 under the baton of Alain Lombard.

Her Cape Town performance on opening night, revealed that she still is capable of delivering an electrifying performance in this most dramatic Puccini role. Her stage presence was mesmerizing and, as the "Ice Princess", she was able to command the attention of the audience in a manner which was literally spell-binding. "In questa Reggia" was delivered with chilling accuracy and dramatic force yet, in the closing scene in which she announces that her suitor's name is Love, she imbued her performance with an almost magical quality of warmth and radiance.

Thys Odendaal (1994) wrote on Monday 24 October 1994 an article in the *Kalender* supplement to *Beeld* under the heading: “This fairy-tale opera is great fun.” In this article Odendaal commented on Humperdinck’s *Hänsel und Gretel* in which Marita Napier performed the Witch between 19 October and 29 October. Other members of the cast were Anina Wasserman (Gretel), Lize Thomas (Hänsel), Sally du Randt (the Mother) and Hans van Heerden (the Father). The conductor was Weiss Doubell and the producer was Hans van Heerden (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1994).

Odendaal (1994) concluded:

And then there is the Witch of Marita Napier! Well, she enjoyed this role very much and she coloured the character so boundlessly, hysterical in voice and acting that one could genuinely chuckle over all her antics. As a highly dramatic soprano – with a recent outstanding performance of *Turandot* in Cape Town behind her – farcicality is rare. Full of mischief and very gingerly her Witch was pure exuberance.

Marita Napier said during an interview that she really enjoyed the role of the Witch after singing as princess Turandot in the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town. Since she had performed the role of the Witch many times before, she knew the role well and she could really immerse herself in it (Napier, 2003-2004). Lize Thomas (2004) who sang Hänsel, said during an interview in Stellenbosch that it was really a great privilege for her to be able to sing with Napier on the same stage. She spoke of her great admiration for Napier who, according to her, was one of the greatest dramatic sopranos that our country has ever produced. She especially emphasized that Napier was outstanding in the role of the Mother as well as in the role of the Witch in 1990 in the City Theatre in Roodepoort, and now again in 1994. Thomas added that the cast had a great admiration for Napier as a person and artist.

6.7 Napier cuts down on her performances (1995)

In March 1995 her longstanding dream, to lead a normal life, came true when she moved into her house in Higgovale in Cape Town. She made use of the opportunity to practically

apply her three-year degree that she completed at the New York School of Interior Design while she was singing at the Metropolitan. An article appeared in *Rooi Rose* (Van der Merwe, 1995) in which Napier's artistic touch with regard to interior decoration was emphasized. Her house was beautifully furnished with furniture that she had collected from all over the world. This ranged from English armchairs, Italian cast iron chandeliers, Eastern porcelain, an Italian terracotta table lamp with a fruit motif, art works from the Caribbean Islands as well as a chandelier with its true to life bunches of grapes from Italy, to a wall painting of a Tuscan landscape that created a three dimensional fantasy in her bathroom. Napier's artistic touch could also be seen in her own furniture designs. Former singer Carina Cronjé said during an interview (2004) that she came to know Napier quite well in Cape Town. During one of the operas in which both of them performed, Napier noticed a tortoiseshell table and liked it so much that she immediately gave a carpenter instructions to make a similar one for her. Later on Napier herself designed a glass table with sand blasted legs for her dining room (Van der Merwe, 1995). During my visits to Napier in Sea Point, her flat was always exquisitely furnished, which bore witness to her good taste as well as an artistic hand that arranged every item with great care. Even the walls of her flat were painted exceptionally artistically, something she often did herself. Many paintings on the walls were evidence that she was also a great collector of art works. She herself painted.

It is thus clear that Napier stayed permanently in Cape Town during 1995 and she started dedicating her time to the things that she longed to do but never got the opportunity of doing during her singing career, and that was so often mentioned during interviews.

Marita Napier did however perform twice this year in Gauteng (Transvaal) in the City Theatre in Roodepoort under the baton of Weiss Doubell. During the concert she sang Gorecki's Symphony No. 3 (*Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*) Op. 36 (Napier, 2003a).

From Wednesday 28 June 1995 Napier performed the Queen in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town in *Queen at the Opera*. Capab Musicals and The Playhouse Company in association with Production Projects presented this performance (Napier,

2003a; Capab Musicals and The Playhouse Company, 1995). Geoffrey Sutherland (Capab Musicals and The Playhouse Company, 1995) wrote the following about the 1990 performance of *Queen at the Opera*:

Staged as an enormous live rock video, this tribute to the phenomenal British rock group Queen marks a highly novel – and apposite – departure from previous Napac musical compilations which have included such orthodox presentations as “A Tribute to Andrew Lloyd Webber”, “A Handful of Rice”, “Judy”, and several others.

Queen at the Opera is an adults-oriented show which visualizes 18 of the groups’ most famous hits in a continuous 65-minute kaleidoscope of live audio visual images.

During an interview with Napier (2003-2004) she remarked that she enjoyed the performance in *Queen* very much because it was so different from the opera performances in which she had performed over the years.

Between 20 October and 4 November Napier performed *Giulietta* in the State Theatre in Pretoria in Jacques Offenbach’s *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*. The rest of the cast was Hans van Heerden as Lindorf, Jannie Moolman as Nathanael, Rouel Beukes as Coppelius and Hanli Stapela as Olympia. The conductor was Eve Queler and the producer was Neels Hansen (Napier, 2003a; Pact Opera, 1995).

Michael Traub (1995) wrote:

Marita Napier makes an imposing and imperious *Giulietta*, the Venetian courtesan who steals Hoffmann’s reflection. The Wagnerian overtones to her singing are of a piece with her conception of the role.

Julius Eichbaum (1995) gave his opinion:

Marita Napier, looking resplendent in a scarlet gown, used her dramatic vocal ability to telling effect as the courtesan *Giulietta*, in a performance that was also most notable for Napier’s commanding stage presence and acting ability. The

look of sheer scorn on her face as she gazed down on the hapless Hoffmann was quite masterful, finally revealing Giulietta in the final moments of the scene in her true colours.

Thys Odendaal (1995) summarized Napier's performance:

After a voice-shaking start in the "Barcarolle" Marita Napier as Giulietta commanded the third act in both voice and sensual acting, to such an extent that she more or less forced the rest of the cast to climactic and exciting singing.

Marita Napier's last performance in 1995 was on Sunday 9 December in the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden where she performed as soloist for Capab Opera in collaboration with the Philharmonia Choir of Cape Town, in a production called *Great Opera Choruses under the Stars*. The conductor was David Tidboald, Vetta Wise the Chorus Master and Mario Filippi was the Concert Master. Other participants were Petrus van Heerden and John Eagar (Capab Opera, 1995).

6.8 Napier's final *Turandot* (1996)

On 1 April 1996 Marita Napier performed for Capab Opera in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town together with Simon Estes and the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra in *A Celebrity Concert* under the baton of Willie Anthony Waters (Capab Opera, 1996a).

Napier's last performance as *Turandot* was in 1996 again in the Nico Malan Opera House between 6 and 21 November. *Turandot* is an opera that had, over the years, made her one of the world's greatest interpreters of *Turandot*. The conductor was Bruno Aprea and the producers were Michael Williams and Angelo Gobbato. Other members of the cast were Virginia Davids (Liù), Moises Parker (Calaf) and John Eagar (Timur) (Capab Opera, 1996b).

6.9 *Sacred Bones* (1997)

During 1997 Marita Napier participated in only one opera between 14 and 28 June in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town. It was *Sacred Bones*, which was the world première and brand new composition by Roelof Temmingh and Michael Williams (librettist). The composition of *Sacred Bones* was sponsored by the Arts and Culture Trust of the President under the guidance of Angelo Gobbato as the Director of Cape Town Opera. The Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by David Tidboald and the producer was Fred Abrahamse. Marita Napier took the role of a tough cynical farmer's wife, Bessie Lutter. A woman, changed by the country in which she lives, and beaten, but not defeated. Bessie Lutter is the spark that ignites the tragedy. Other members of the cast were John Eagar, Isabelle van Zyl, Gordon Christie and Fikile Mvinjelwa (Cape Town Opera, 1997).

Peter Klatzow (1997) wrote the following in *Scenaria*:

Given the present cultural climate, it would seem to be foolhardy to write a brand new opera. You need a blind faith in the genre itself to start with, and this must be backed up with the assurance that you are not going to invest months of creative time in a project which may not reach the boards.

So it is deeply heartening that Roelof Temmingh and Michael Williams have brought to life not only a splendid contribution to opera itself, but also one ideally conceived to address South African audiences. It is a musical with overtones of murder.

[M]arita Napier does wonders with a part that is not (for her!) exceptionally demanding.

Carl Fourie (1997) had the following views:

Marita Napier's Bessie is a truly rich character. She has a wickedly wry sense of humour, yet deals with great personal trials; she is strong, yet vulnerable to alcohol abuse; she is realistic, yet romantic at heart. Napier's portrayal is laudable.

The original handwritten composition of *Sacred Bones* as used by Napier is preserved in the Napier Music Collection (2003b). A compact disc recording of the live opera made on 25 June 1997 in the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town and sponsored by the Oude Meester Foundation for the Performing Arts with the number CD GSE 1552 is also preserved in this collection (Temmingh, 1997).

On 21 April 1997 Angelo Gobbato announced in Cape Town that Capab Opera would no longer be known as such but that the name had changed to Cape Town Opera or Kaapstadse Opera. Professor Gobbato (Cape Town Opera, 1997) said:

Cape Town Opera, formerly known as Capab Opera, will continue to present world-class performances from the opera and music theatre repertoire, and will be actively involved in the community through its choral training programme, touring productions and school presentations.

Deon Irish (1997) made some interesting comments with reference to the opera *Sacred Bones*:

Napier's portrayal of the tough Bessie Lutter was less than convincing, not because of any failure on her part so much as the improbability of a deal of the character and the quite hopeless wig that made her resemble Annelise Rothenberg on Safari. Come on, chaps, this is a hardbitten "woman" of the bushveld, not a Sandton bushveld weekender.

During an interview with Sonja Loots (1997) Michael Williams said that the role of a woman suffering under the harsh African climate, but stubbornly refusing to give up, was specifically written for Napier. He added that "Napier is one hundred percent professional. In addition it helped quite a lot that she brought her own ideas along to the rehearsals and actively contributed to the production."

Napier's last performance during 1997 was at a *Celebrity Opera Gala* in the City Theatre in Roodepoort between 28 November and 2 December. During this performance Napier sang with Hans van Heerden and the Resident Orchestra of the Roodepoort City Theatre

and City Opera under the baton of Weiss Doubell (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1997).

During an interview with Una Nieuwoudt (1997) Napier said that she gave rounding off lessons in the technique of singing at the University of Cape Town and Capab's Opera School during 1997. She enjoyed it very much and always spoke of the students as her children. She said that she would still like to sing but that she would acquiesce if it did not happen any longer. She was resigned to the fact that she had had her career. Nevertheless, in an interview with Sonja Loots (1997) she said that for a singer like she was, who had always been in the limelight, it was more difficult to stop working. You are scared that the people are going to forget about you. But Napier also said that it would be a relief when she stopped singing as she became more and more tense before a performance. Napier added that "you always sing against your own reputation."

It is noticeable that although Napier was busy lecturing singing at the University of Cape Town she did not perform during 1998.

6.10 *Elektra* (1999)

Marita Napier's first performance in 1999 was in the City Theatre in Roodepoort on Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 February in a *Birthday Concert* under the baton of Weiss Doubell. During this event the birthdays of Pro Musica on 11 February, Roodepoort City Theatre on 14 February, and Marita Napier on 16 February were celebrated.

The death of Richard Wagner on 13 February was also commemorated. In honour of Wagner Napier specially sang from his compositions, namely the *Wesendonck Lieder*, and arias from *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried* and *Tristan und Isolde* (Pro Musica Opera/Roodepoort City Opera, 1999). On Thursday 11 February Thys Odendaal (1999) reported that Marita Napier would be celebrating her sixtieth birthday on the following Tuesday. He added:

It is to the honour of the City Theatre in Roodepoort and Weiss Doubell that she will be heard this weekend as soloist in a Wagner concert. This honour is very well earned.

The final opera during Napier's singing career was a concert version of Strauss's *Elektra* in which she performed the title role on 27 November 1999 in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town. With this presentation the Cape Town Opera in association with Artscape and the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Bernhard Gueller paid homage to the international diva Marita Napier (Cape Town Opera, 1999). Other members of the cast were Maria Jooste (the Overseer), Carla Pohl (Chrysothemis), Sally Presant (Klytemnestra) and Petrus van Heerden (Aegisth).

Mary-Ann van Rensburg (1999) wrote in *Rapport* on 21 November that Napier would be singing the role of Elektra for the first time on 27 November. She quoted Napier:

On the one hand I am sorry that it is a concert performance, but I am also grateful, because it is easier with less movement. Then all the attention can be given to the singing. Also easier that I can hold on to the book, she said laughing, because it is a very difficult role.

Fiona Chisholm (1999) reported on 25 November under the heading "Biggest orchestra ever for *Elektra*". The orchestra was going to consist of 115 members, that is 30 more than that of the normal size of an orchestra. There was going to be subtitles to make the story, which was going to be sung in German, more accessible to the public. Chisholm asked the conductor Bernhard Gueller why they decided on *Elektra*:

It marks the 50th anniversary of the death of the composer Richard Strauss, who died in September 1949 and it is a compelling opera to showcase the voice of Marita Napier, who celebrated a major birthday this year (The Big Six).

Marita is an exponent of the music of Wagner and Richard Strauss and has sung leading roles in a single season in at least four of the world's most important opera houses. But never before has she tackled the title role of Elektra.

Now she will make her debut in this brilliant piece of music which will be heard in Cape Town for the first time, played by the biggest orchestra we've had on the Nico Malan's stage.

Beverley Brommert (1999) reported on 22 November that she requested Napier to comment on her role as Elektra. Napier made the following comments:

I must be totally mad! At an age when most people are looking at quiet little retirement homes, here I am undertaking a part that makes Turandot seem like a warming-up exercise.

According to Brommert (1999) Marita Napier admitted that her heartbeat increased during the rehearsals of this opera. She ascribed it to the following:

[I]t's the music itself, it is so intense, so radical, that it gets your adrenalin going.

Strauss himself felt it was a kind of nec plus ultra (ultimate) – it had nowhere to go after this, so he did a complete U-turn and went off in the opposite direction.

This one is absolute hell to interpret, but it's incredibly exciting and rewarding.

For the present, it's rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse, morning, noon and night! After all this, when it's over, we'll die! she chuckles. It's usually like that after a lot of preparation, you feel there's a great black hole in your life where rehearsal used to be. Like post-natal blues.

According to Napier (Brommert, 1999) she especially liked the works of Strauss because of “the skill with which the score is crafted. I like what I call peppermint chords. They are so harsh initially that they sting you, then they suddenly turn sweet. And they seem so right.”

Napier, however, felt sad about the fact that it could possibly be the orchestra's last performance. She said “if it is their last performance, it will add to the poignancy of the evening”.

Pieter Kooij (1999) reported the following in *Die Burger* under the heading “Standing ovation for the performance of the year” after the opening evening of *Elektra*:

This concert performance of *Elektra* is undoubtedly the most important musical event of the year. One wonders whether the Greek audiences who listened more

than 400 years before Christ to Sophocles' drama Elektra, also gave a standing ovation like the Cape audience Saturday evening did for Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannstal's more modern version.

Marita Napier sang the very taxing title role with great distinction. Her voice almost cut like a knife through the great sounds of the orchestra and in addition one could follow her impeccable German quite clearly.

The final part with the return of Orestes and the wonderful recognition scene as well as the revenge on the murderers and Elektra's triumphant final dance and death can symbolically be seen as the end of Napier's triumphant opera career in which she as well as the Symphony Orchestra of Cape Town delivered their swan song. After this performance Napier's remarkable voice, which bewitched so many opera stages worldwide was forever silent on the opera stage.

6.11 Gala Concert (2000)

Marita Napier's name appears on the programme of the *Cape Town Opera Spring Concert Gala* that took place on 11 October 2000. Napier performed together with other soloists like Rouel Beukes, George Stevens, Kobie van Rensburg, Marcus Desando and Maria Slavkova in this concert that was presented in the Nico Malan Opera House in Cape Town (Cape Town Opera, 2000).

6.12 Opera Gala (2001)

Lin Sampson (2001) wrote an article on Napier on 15 July 2001 with striking photographs of Napier as Turandot in 1987 in Cape Town as well as from her last performance as Turandot in 1996. A dynamic colour photograph of Napier appeared on the front page from the same *Turandot* with the heading "Marita Napier Divining the Diva". There was also a photograph of Napier taken during the interview. She mentioned an Opera Gala that took place in June 2001 in the Nico Malan Opera House. During this concert Napier sang the "Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Sampson continued:

As her big voice, with its vocal ability and incredible carrying power cut (the ability to carry over immense orchestrations), carried through the atmosphere there wasn't a dry eye in the house. It was no secret to fans and friends that Napier is fighting cancer, facing as she herself once said, "the challenge of a lifetime" beside which the arduous Wagnerian roles seem like putty sticks.

"I was so nervous," she tells me "that I had to stand with my feet apart so that people wouldn't notice how much I was shaking."

I catch Marita Napier later in the week, on the day before she leaves for London where she is to undergo a new willowbark cancer treatment.

It is significant that the last aria that Napier sang at a public appearance was the "Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. This was the aria Napier chose to be sung at her memorial service that took place on 17 April 2004 in St George's Cathedral in Cape Town.

6.13 Klein Karoo National Arts Festival Award (2002)

During this year Napier received an award from the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, titled the *Heritage Charter (Herkoms Oorkonde)*, in recognition for her international singing career of high stature. This award was close to Napier's heart because she felt that it was proof that her people had not forgotten her as she was no longer singing (Napier, 2003b).

6.14 Summary

During Marita Napier's last year as opera singer she mainly performed in South Africa. She was very happy about her decision to return home. She was still internationally very well known, had sung in all the greatest opera houses and had received many awards for her achievements in singing.

Napier was ready to start a second career in South Africa. She was appointed as Head of Pact's Opera Training Centre in Pretoria and later on she also lectured singing at the

Cape Town Opera School. She was able to fulfill her second love, that of interior decorating, in her own homes as well as in the houses of others. She also designed furniture. Napier often said that she wanted to begin to live again. Staying in South Africa brought a new turn to her life in which she could find fulfillment as she had often said that opera is not a life. It is only an existence. She said that although she had performed in many places the world over, she never really saw anything. She would have liked to travel overseas again, only this time as a tourist.

From 1990 to 2000, Marita Napier performed in both operas and concerts all over South Africa. South African opera houses were privileged to have someone of the stature of Napier in their midst. She justly had South African audiences excited over her outstanding interpretations of Leonore in *Fidelio* in 1990 and 1994; with Abigaille in *Nabucco* in 1993; with Turandot in *Turandot* in 1990, 1994 and in 1996; with Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1990; with Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in 1991 and 1993; with Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1993; with Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* in 1992; as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* in 1991; as well as in the role of Gertrud and the comic role of the Witch in *Hänsel und Gretel* in 1990, 1991 and 1994. The last role Napier performed was Elektra in *Elektra* in 1999 at the celebration of her sixtieth birthday. This opera heralded the end of Napier's triumphant opera career since it was known that she was suffering from cancer.

Napier's lieder performances were widely known, sought after and very successful. Her other performances included Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* and his *Missa Solemnis* in 1990, Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* in 1990, Mahler's *Fourth Symphony* in 1990, and Gorecki's *Lyrische Symphonie* in 1995, and they were all concert highlights during this period.

Napier's recordings, highlights of her career and her contributions to opera, overseas and in South Africa, will be discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7

MARITA NAPIER'S RECORDINGS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORLD OF OPERA, OVERSEAS AND IN SOUTH AFRICA

7.1 Introduction

In writing this chapter, I shall discuss Marita Napier's recordings, achievements and contributions to opera and concerts in South Africa and overseas, from her first performance in Germany in 1968 up to her last opera performance in 1999 and her last award in 2002.

7.2 Chronological list of recordings (Discography)

The following recordings are in the Napier Music Collection at the University of Pretoria:

Schoenberg, Arnold. 1972. *Gurre-Lieder*. Marita Napier, Yvonne Minton, Jess Thomas, Siegmund Nimsgern, Kenneth Bowen, Günther Reich. BBC Symphony Orchestra. Conducted by Pierre Boulez. Sony Classical Sm2K 48 459. Cover notes by Susanne Rode-Breymann.

Strauss, Richard. 1973. *Feuersnot*. Karl Josef Hering, George Pappas, Marita Napier, Nucci Condò, Mihoko Aoyama, Elvira Spica, Siegmund Nimsgern. Bayerisches Staatsorchester. Torino performance of 18 October 1973. Conducted by Peter Maag. IGI 301.

Beethoven, Ludwig van. 1974. *Symphony Nr. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125*. Marita Napier (soprano), Anna Reynolds (alt), Helge Brilioth (tenor), Karl Ridderbusch (bass). New Philharmonia Orchestra. Conducted by Seiji Ozawa. Phillips 6747 119. Cover notes by Bernard Jacobson.

Wagner, Richard. 1980. *Das Rheingold*. Theo Adam, Karl-Heinz Stryczek, Eberhard Büchner, Peter Schreier, Siegmund Nimsgern, Christian Vogel, Roland Bracht, Matti Salminen, Yvonne Minton, Marita Napier, Ortrun Wenkel, Lucia Popp, Uta Priew, Hanna Schwarz. Staatskapelle Dresden. Conducted by Marek Janowski. Eurodisc 301 137-445. Cover notes by Helmut Kühn.

Weill, Kurt. 1984. *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*. Barry McDaniel, Marita Napier, Carla Pohl, Thomas Lehrberger, Ulla Tocha, Heinz Kruse, Hilke Helling, Mario Brell, Hans Franzen. Kölner Rundfunkorchester. Conducted by Jan Latham-König. Capriccio 60 007-1. Cover notes by Josef Heinzelmann.

Strauss, Richard. 1989. *Elektra*. Christa Ludwig, Hildegard Behrens, Nadine Secunde, Ragnar Ulfung, Jorma Hynninen, Brian Matthews, Emily Rawlins, Dominique Labelle, Diane Kesling, Cynthia Haymon, Marita Napier, Brad Cresswell. Boston Symphony Orchestra. Conducted by Seiji Ozawa. Phillips Digital Classics compact disc 422 574-2. Cover notes by William Mann.

Wagner, Richard. 1991. *The Compact Ring*. James Morris, Jessye Norman, Hildegard Behrens, Reiner Goldberg, Kathleen Battle, Christa Ludwig, Siegfried Jerusalem, Marita Napier. Metropolitan Orchestra. Conducted by James Levine. Deutsche Grammophon GH 437 825-2.

Metropolitan Opera. 1995. *Maestro of the Met: James Levine and friends*. Cecilia Bartoli, Hildegard Behrens, Montserrat Caballé, Mirella Freni, Plácido Domingo, Thomas Hampson, Kurt Moll, James Morris, Jessye Norman, Anne Sofie von Otter, Luciano Pavarotti, Cheryl Studer, Kiri Te Kanawa, Dawn Upshaw and Marita Napier. The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus. Conducted by James Levine. Deutsche Grammophon D 203410 (449 230-2). Cover notes by Rebecca Winslow.

Temmingh, Roelof. 1997. *Sacred Bones*. John Eagar, Fikile Mvinjelwa, Gordon Christi, Isabelle van Zyl, Marita Napier. Members of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra.

Conducted by David Tidboald. Oude Meester Foundation for the Performing Arts CD GSE 1552. Cover notes by Peter Klatzow.

Roodepoort City Opera. 1998. *An Opera Gala*. Marita Napier and Hans van Heerden. Pro Musica Orchestra. Conducted by Weiss Doubell. Produced by Roodepoort City Opera.

Strauss, Richard. 1999. *Elektra*. Marita Napier, Carla Pohl, Sally Present. Conducted by Bernhard Gueller. Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra. Compact Disc recording produced by the Nico Malan Opera House on 27 November.

7.3 Marita Napier's achievements in the world of opera, overseas and in South Africa

These achievements are listed as follows:

1972: Debut in the Opera House, San Francisco, where she sang Freia in *Das Rheingold*, Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* and Guttrune in *Götterdämmerung*, conducted by Otmar Suitner (San Francisco Opera, 1972).

1972: Performance in San Francisco Opera House in Mahler's Eighth Symphony conducted by Seiji Ozawa (Hertelendy, 1972).

1973: Debut in La Scala, Milan as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch (Teatro alla Scala, 1973).

1973: Debut in Bayreuth in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* conducted by Horst Stein (Bayreuther Festspiele, 1973).

1974: Debut in Covent Garden as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* conducted by Colin Davis (Royal Opera House Covent Garden, 1974).

1974: Debut in the Munich Opera House as Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* conducted by Karl Böhm (Van Heerden, 2003-2006).

1975: Debut in the State Opera in Vienna as Elsa in *Lohengrin* conducted by Zubin Mehta (1975c *Der Kurier*).

1975: Awarded *Voice of America* for Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in the Opera House in San Francisco conducted by Heinrich Hollreiser (*San Francisco Opera Magazine*, 1975).

1978: Debut in Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* conducted by Pedro Ignacio Calderon (Temporada, 1978).

1979: Debut in the open-air theatre in Verona, Italy, as Turandot in *Turandot* conducted by Yuri Ahronovitch (Napier, 2003b).

1982: Debut in the Opera House in Dallas as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* (Napier, 2003b).

1985: Received Nederburg Opera Prize for her interpretation of Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* and as Turandot in *Turandot* (Nederburg Opera Prize, 1985; Eichbaum, 1985).

1986: Debut in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York as Helmwig in *Die Walküre* conducted by James Levine (Metropolitan Opera, 1986a).

1988: Debut in *Turandot* as Turandot in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, produced by Franco Zeffirelli and conducted by Nello Santi (Metropolitan Opera, 1988a).

1989: Tour with the Metropolitan Opera House Company to the East and performed in Beijing in front of the largest television audience in the world, 500 million people (Midsummer Night Concert in Suntory Hall, 1989).

1989: Became the first South African soprano to receive a Grammy award for serious music for her role as Gerhilde in the Deutsche Grammophon compact disc recording of *Die Walküre* in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York (Napier, 2003b; Deutsche Grammophon compact disc recording, 1989).

1989: Received Nederburg Opera Prize for her interpretation of Ortrud in *Lohengrin* for Pact conducted by Gabor Ötvös in the State Theatre in Pretoria (Nederburg Opera Prize, 1989; Napier 2003b).

1989: Received Vita Opera Prize for her interpretation of Ortrud in *Lohengrin* for Pact conducted by Gabor Ötvös in the State Theatre in Pretoria (Napier 2003b; Vita Opera Prize, 1989).

1990: Received the Vita Opera Prize for her interpretation of Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* in the City Theatre in Roodepoort (AA Life Vita Opera Award, 1990; Napier 2003b).

1991: Received the Honorary Medal for Music on 13 August in the State Theatre in Pretoria from the South African Academy for Science and Arts (Academy of Science and Arts, 1991; Napier 2003b).

2002: Received award from Klein Karoo National Arts Festival for her contribution to opera in South Africa (Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, 2002; Napier 2003b).

7.4 Marita Napier's contributions, overseas and in South Africa

Napier's contribution to opera, music education, lieder and her other appearances will be discussed separately.

7.4.1 Napier's contribution to opera

Marita Napier is widely known as an exponent of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss. Her biggest contributions to opera overseas as well as in South Africa were therefore inevitably in the operas of Wagner and Strauss. When studying her professional career, it is interesting to note that Napier was eminently an interpreter of Richard Wagner. From 1968 to the end of 2000, Napier took part in 107 performances of Wagner. It must be remembered that Napier did not always note her appearances, which means that the number could be much higher. Napier was also known as an exponent of Richard Strauss. She performed in fewer opera productions of Strauss, 43 between 1968 and 2000.

7.4.1.1 Wagner

Napier made her successful debut in Bayreuth in 1973 as Helwige in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Napier's biggest international breakthrough in the world of opera came on 20 August in 1974 in Bayreuth as Sieglinde together with Gerd Brenneis as Siegmund in *Die Walküre*. The German media lauded them as the most credible Sieglinde and Siegmund of the last decade in Bayreuth (Bayreuther Festspiele, 1974b). It is therefore not strange that Napier justly became the first South African to receive the sought after Grammy award for serious music in New York in 1989 for her interpretation of Gerhilde in *Die Walküre* in the category "Best Opera Recording" in the Deutsche Grammophon compact disc recording conducted by James Levine (Napier 2003b). With this award one of Napier's biggest contributions to the international opera arena was acknowledged.

She again proved herself as an exponent of Richard Wagner when she made her debut on 1 October 1974 in the Royal Opera House Covent Garden as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* (Royal Opera House Covent Garden, 1974). Napier was also a brilliant Brünnhilde and established herself as one of the top Brünnhildes in the opera world. In 1977 she sang Brünnhilde in Marseille in Wagner's *Siegfried*. Napier brought her international knowledge and experience to South Africa in 1982 when she gave a radiant performance as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* in Cape Town. Here she sang with Leonie Rysanek who

interpreted Sieglinde (1982c Irish.) With these two sought after international opera stars on the same stage they showed to South African audiences what could today be expected of an opera star. During 1975 Napier made her debut in the State Opera in Vienna in Wagner's *Lohengrin* as Elsa and once again excelled herself as an exponent of Wagner (Lombardo, 1988). In 1989 she made her debut in *Lohengrin* as Ortrud for Pact and achieved unbelievable success. Her interpretation was regarded as a triumph that spoke of authority, a salted interpreter of Wagner who had already made her mark as an exponent of Wagner worldwide (1989b Viljoen).

Later on in 1975 Napier was awarded the Voice of America for her masterful performance as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in San Francisco (Commandy, 1975). Napier once again was outstanding as an exponent of Wagner and Napier declared unequivocally that she regarded Senta as her most favourite role (Wagner, 1981a).

In 1976 Napier returned to South Africa for the first time in order to make her debut in the role of Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*. In doing so she brought her rich experience as one of the most sought after Sentas in the international opera arena to South Africa. David Tidboald related during an interview that it was an unbelievable honour for South Africans to be able to hear Napier in the role of Senta. He said that during their first meeting everyone was already rehearsing *Der fliegende Holländer* in the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town, when they heard from behind the curtain the beautiful voice of Napier. Every one on the stage started clapping hands while Fred Dalberg, the producer, brought Napier in and introduced her to everybody. According to Tidboald this was one of the greatest ovations that Napier has ever received from the stage in his presence (Botha, 1990). Marita Napier's great contributions to opera internationally made her a very popular choice for her interpretation in the role of Senta.

Napier made her debut in the role of Elisabeth in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in the largest opera house she had performed in, that of the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires (Teatro Colón, 1978a).

Napier once again distinguished herself in 1985 with her outstanding performance for Pact as Isolde in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Wolfgang Wagner, grandson of the composer was present at this performance as the guest of the Richard Wagner Society. Critics from all over the world reported that Napier, with this splendid performance as Isolde, placed herself among the foremost Isoldes in the world (1985c Viljoen; 1985h Odendaal). With her debut as Isolde, Napier made a great contribution to the interpretation of this opera, known as one of the longest and most strenuous of operas.

Another enormous achievement was her completion of the opera “grand slam” when she made her opera debut in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1986 with her interpretation of Helmwig in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. She became the first South African opera singer privileged to sing there. This was proof that Napier was South Africa's first top singer who had established herself as one of the top international dramatic sopranos in the world (1985g Odendaal).

Gé Korsten, the South African tenor, remarked that Napier was very professional, had one of the most beautiful dramatic soprano voices, was always very well prepared, had lots of experience as an opera star, and brought all this with her to South Africa (Botha, 1990).

7.4.1.2 Strauss

Napier also made a great contribution to opera in the San Francisco Opera House when she very successfully sang Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra* in 1973 and with this also established herself as an exponent of Strauss (San Francisco Opera, 1973). Napier had a successful performance in 1979 in the Opera House in Berlin as Chrysothemis in Strauss' *Elektra* when she sang together with the legendary Birgit Nilsson in the role of Elektra. Napier, as well as Nilsson, were rewarded with ear-deafening applause. Henning Viljoen, who attended the performance, reported that he once again realised that Napier could be counted as one of a small number of top singers in the world (Viljoen, 1979). The last opera in which Napier appeared was on 27 November 1999 in the Nico Malan Opera

House in Cape Town in Strauss' *Elektra*. This appearance was also in celebration of her sixtieth birthday. It was a concert performance that paid tribute to Napier (Cape Town Opera, 1999). Bernhard Gueller, the conductor of this *Elektra* sang the praises of Napier's great contributions to opera as she was brilliant in her debut performance as Elektra and established herself as one of the greatest interpreters of this role. Gueller wrote the following: "Although Marita has sung in the opera *Elektra* many times, this was her first time as Elektra and she excelled" (Gueller, 2005).

One of Napier's most sought after roles with which she gained great fame both overseas and later in South Africa (also as an exponent of Strauss) was Ariadne in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*. She made her debut in 1974 in the Opera House in Munich and later achieved great success in this role in the State Opera in Vienna, Berlin and Covent Garden. Robert Lombardo wrote that Napier's professional and specific ability to prepare herself for the role and the very high standards she set for herself, always impressed him and many other colleagues in the international opera world. The high standards she set for herself during the interpretation of this role, established her as one of the most sought after Ariadnes overseas and later in South Africa. Lombardo especially emphasized the fact that it was a tremendous pleasure to be able to see and listen to Napier's exceptional acting abilities and voice in this role in the large opera houses overseas (Lombardo, 2005b).

7.4.1.3 Other composers

Between 1968 and 1996 Napier performed in 23 performances of Puccini, 20 of Verdi and in 19 of Beethoven. To a lesser extent she also contributed to the interpretation of operas and lieder of Hindemith, Humperdinck, Janáček, Mahler, Mascagni, Mozart, Offenbach, Rossini, Tchaikovsky and Weber.

After Napier's triumphant performances as Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* in Minneapolis, San Francisco and later in the Royal Albert Hall in London under the baton of Pierre Boulez, she was invited to sing in Covent Garden.

Her debut as Leonore in *Fidelio* took place in 1976 in Covent Garden and once again she established herself as one of the greatest interpreters of Leonore as well as of Beethoven (Stadlem, 1976). Her performances as Leonore in South Africa made her one of the greatest interpreters of this role in South Africa. She sang the role in many opera houses in this country.

In 1977 Marita Napier made her debut as Turandot in Puccini's *Turandot*, a performance that heralded the beginning of her triumphal progress as one of the most famous interpreters of Turandot (Honolka, 1977). In 1987 Napier made her debut as princess Turandot in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York and proved to the world that she had also reached the highest praise in this role. This unbelievable knowledge as the Ice Princess and magnificent contribution to Puccini's music was brought to South Africa in 1985 when she performed for the first time in this role in South Africa for Pact. During an interview, Enayat Rezai, the producer of *Turandot* in 1987 for Napac in Natal and also for Capab, said that Napier had the characteristics of one of the greatest Turandots in the world because of her unbelievable top notes. She worked very hard and quickly knows her role very well. What really impressed him was the fact that Napier sang in all the greatest opera houses with such great success that it eventually made her one of the greatest Turandots of all times (Botha, 1990). David Tidboald said that Napier was one of the best Turandots of all times and it was therefore decided to also present this opera in South Africa. Tidboald emphasized that one does not produce *Turandot* before one has a Turandot (Botha, 1990).

In 1978 Napier, for the first time, brought her interpretation of Abigaille in Verdi's *Nabucco* to Pretoria for Pact. It was a phenomenal performance employing a brilliant high register. Napier delivered opera of the highest calibre (Odendaal, 1978.) Napier's example as outstanding international artist with acting of a supreme standard was once again astonishing to the audience, to opera musicians, as well as to local artists. A remarkable characteristic of Napier's enthusiasm, commitment, professionalism and specific artistry was the fact that in many operas she motivated her colleagues to levels of the highest format (Odendaal, 1978).

Napier was a much sought after choice to participate in the greatest opera festivals in the world, that of Bayreuth, Aix-en-Provence, Orange, Verona, Maggio Musicale Florence, Wiener Festwoche, Tanglewood and Ravinia (Napier, 2003b; Viljoen, 1989). Robert Lombardo (2005a) wrote that he remembered very well Napier's bond with James Levine (one of the top conductors in the world) during her many years' relationship with the Metropolitan as well as during the Ravinia Festival and with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He added that Levine admired her style, sound and dedication. These were definite characteristics that contributed to the fact that Napier, as a South African, could achieve the highest level in the opera world.

During an interview with Joubero Malherbe on 12 April 2004 (Malherbe, 2004b) she described Napier's biggest contribution to the world of opera in South Africa and overseas as the fact that Napier introduced and bewitched the audiences with the more difficult and lesser known operas with her beautiful voice. In 1986 Napier sang the title role with great success in a reasonably unknown opera composed by Janáček, *Jenufa*, in Marseilles together with Leonie Rysanek (Eichbaum, 1987a).

Marita Napier also made a great contribution to the development and quality of opera in South Africa because she interpreted her roles so outstandingly with her authentic dramatic qualities and amazing vocal projection. By her example, she set an unbelievably high standard in South Africa. Both the producers and conductors attested with gratefulness that Napier brought her ideas to the productions and contributed actively to the success of the productions.

7.4.2 Napier's contribution to music education

Apart from her contributions to the international and later national opera world Napier also made a very specific contribution to the educational situation in South Africa when she became intensely involved giving singing classes to potential singers. In 1992 she occupied the position as head of Pact's Opera Training Centre (Eichbaum, 1992a). Later on she also made a great contribution to training in the Cape when she gave lessons in the

technique of singing at the University of Cape Town and Capab's Opera School. One of Napier's top students, Suré Eloff (2004-2006) currently a singer in New York, described Napier's contribution as a singing educator to her students in South Africa, in the following words:

Love, remember we're always travelling, but we never arrive. To some, this might seem like an unusual philosophy, but to her students, this was – and still is – invaluable advice. A way for us to remind ourselves that, as musicians, there is always something left to be learned and experienced. And that you're only as good as your last performance.

Marita Napier (2003b) made another contribution to the educational situation when she presented the following masters classes to potential and existing opera and lieder singers:

- Santiago de Chile: *The importance of text relating to German opera*
- Buenos Aires: *The importance of the dotted notes and the difference between Verdi and Wagner*
- Detmold: 26 months course on: *The reparation of damaged voices in young singers*
- Graz: *Strauss as Lieder composer*
- New York: *The dangers of a teacher-pupil relationship*
- Berlin: *Is there a difference in German and Italian singing, or is it mainly a language difference?*

7.4.3 Napier's contribution to lieder

Apart from being an opera singer, Napier was also known worldwide for her interpretation of lieder in concerts. Her particular contribution to this form of art overseas made her a popular choice for lieder evenings overseas and in South Africa. During 1978 Napier delivered, during the inauguration of the Endler Hall in Stellenbosch, a wonderful lieder performance when she sang a selection of Schubert lieder. She also sang Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* in Roodepoort. Her exceptional interpretation of Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* was well-known in La Scala in 1973, Minneapolis in 1974, the Royal Albert Hall in 1974, San Francisco in the same year, and the Ravinia Festival in 1987. Napier performed Strauss's *Four Last Songs* in 1986 in Linz and in 1989 in Bloemfontein. In

1979 she interpreted Wagner's *Wesendoncklieder* in Barcelona and in 1990 in Dortmund. Musicians and critics were in rapture and Napier was lauded as the greatest South African international singer (Kooij, 1978a).

7.4.4 Napier's other appearances

Napier was well-known for her interpretation of Verdi's *Requiem* after her successful appearances in Lugo and in Oviedo in 1972. With her performance in 1978 in Berlin where she sang Verdi's *Requiem* accompanied by the Berlin Orchestra and Concert Choir, her "wunderbare Stimme" as well as her exceptional talent and interpretation abilities were emphasized (1978a *Verdis Requiem ein tiefes Erlebnis*).

Other appearances to be mentioned is her Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in 1972 in Hamburg, 1974 in Tanglewood, 1983 in Naples, 1985 in Nice and 1990 in Roodepoort. During the same year she also performed in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in Regensburg.

In 1995 she sang in Gorecki's *Lyrische Symphonie* in Roodepoort.

Napier was also well-known for her interpretation of Mahler's Symphonies No. 4 and No. 8. Napier's exceptional performance in 1972 of the Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the conductor Seiji Ozawa in San Francisco and in 1977 during the Orange Festival, was a proof of her exceptional musical abilities.

7.5 Summary

Marita Napier undoubtedly made an enormous contribution to opera and lieder overseas and in South Africa. Her interpretations of Wagner and Strauss were excellent, while she also made a great contribution in works by Beethoven, Humperdinck, Janáček, Mahler, Mascagni, Mozart, Offenbach, Puccini, Rossini, Schoenberg, Tchaikovsky, Verdi and Weber. Her many outstanding achievements as opera artist all over the world confirms her great contribution to opera overseas and in South Africa while her contribution as a

singing educator combined with her presentations of master classes overseas, are of a priceless value for existing and future singers.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

After covering Napier's extensive career the following conclusions are made.

8.2 Napier's career as an opera singer

Chapters 2 and 3 covered the main stages of her youth and early life and career between 1939 and 1971. Napier excelled with each performance and became increasingly known and appreciated for her interpretations of Wagner.

The period from 1972 and 1979 was covered in Chapter 4. In this period Napier made her American debut in 1972, Bayreuth and La Scala debuts in 1973, Covent Garden and Munich debuts in 1974, Vienna State Opera debut in 1975, received the Voice of America Award in 1975, made her Teatro Colón debut in 1978 and Verona debut in 1979. Napier reached the zenith of her career.

Chapter 5 discussed her performances between 1980 and 1989. During this period Napier's international career as one of the world's top opera singers reached special heights. She made her debut performance in the Metropolitan Opera House in 1986, received a Grammy Award in 1989 and Vita Opera Prize the same year. Napier also established herself during this time as one of the greatest interpreters of the compositions of Richard Strauss and Richard Wagner.

Chapter 6 covered the period between 1990 and 2002, during which Napier mainly performed in South Africa in both operas and concerts. Her master classes, lieder and other appearances were well received and valued.

8.3 Her recordings, achievements and contributions to the world of opera, overseas and in South Africa

It was noted in Chapter 7 that the majority of Napier's recordings were made from the works of Richard Wagner. It was also pointed out that Napier made her debut in all the greatest opera houses in the world. Napier's successful performances on all the continents of the world is clear proof that she, at that stage, was one of the greatest sopranos that South Africa ever delivered.

This achievement was highlighted by her "grand slam" of performances in all the largest opera houses in the world as well as the Voice of America award in 1975. Napier was the first South African to receive a Grammy for serious music and this crowns her successful opera career.

Napier was, however, also honoured in her own country for her outstanding opera career. Two Nederburg Prizes and two Vita Awards came her way as well as the Honorary Medal for Music from the South African Academy for Science and Arts.

8.4 Answering the main research question

The research question for this study was: What are the main stages of Napier's life and career and what is her contribution to the world of opera?

In evaluating Napier's contributions to the world of opera overseas and in South Africa, it is clear that her greatest contributions were her exceptional interpretations of the music of Wagner and Strauss worldwide. Her greatest achievements were as Sieglinde and Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*, as Elsa and Ortrud in *Lohengrin*, as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, as Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* and as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*, all works by Wagner.

Napier also achieved great recognition with the works of Strauss, especially as Chrysothemis and Elektra in *Elektra*, and as Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

Other meritorious contributions by Napier to the world of opera were her performances of Leonore in *Fidelio*, Abigaille in *Nabucco*, and in Puccini's *Turandot*.

Composers whose works benefited by Napier's exceptional performances were Humperdinck, Janáček, Mahler, Mascagni, Mozart, Offenbach, Rossini, Roelof Temmingh and Weber.

Napier also contributed to the development and quality of opera in South Africa. She interpreted her roles with her dramatic qualities, vocal projection and example, setting a very high standard for opera in South Africa. Both producers and conductors showed their gratitude for the way that Napier brought her ideas to the performances.

Napier undeniably gave exceptional interpretations of lieder internationally. Her knowledge with regard to this genre of art was ploughed back into South Africa with successful performances of Lieder countrywide.

An equally great contribution was the presentation of Napier's master classes overseas in cities like Berlin, Buenos Aires, Detmold, Graz and New York. During these classes she passed on her experiences, both on and off the stage, to potential and existing opera singers. One of Napier's greatest contributions to opera in South Africa was the way in which she shared her wide experience while training potential opera singers.

8.5 Recommendations for further study

This study brought to the fore a number of branches waiting for further research:

- The results of Napier's teaching classes
- Napier's influence on the image of South Africa overseas

- Napier's interpretation of the roles in operas by Wagner and Strauss.

8.6 Final word

Suré Eloff (2005), an erstwhile student of Napier in Cape Town and currently a singer resident in New York, came to the following conclusion:

She was a formidable person, both on and off the stage, but also had a wonderful sense of humour that was never far behind. Though she is gone now, for those of us who had the great fortune of knowing her, she will always be part of our lives.

Napier (Sampson, 2001; Napier, 2003-2004) summarised her own life in the following words:

My whole life has been involved with singing. It has been my great passion. I suppose you could say that I gave up my whole life for it.

However, I cannot imagine people living today without a passion. That is why there are all these alternative things like aromatherapy and reflexology and cult thinking. People are searching for something to give meaning to their lives. Whatever happens to me – and my doctor advised no long-term plans – I at least know that I have lived with a single passion that I have pursued to the very best of my ability.

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APPENDIX

PHOTOGRAPHS AND SOUND RECORDINGS ABOUT THE LIFE AND CAREER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DRAMATIC SOPRANO MARITA NAPIER

See enclosed CD-ROM in back pocket containing photographs of Napier's life and career between 1963 and 2002 as well as recordings of her singing.

To stop the CD-ROM press the escape button.

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Roodepoort City Opera. 1998. *An Opera Gala*. Pro Musica Orchestra. Conducted by Weiss Doubell. Produced by Roodepoort City Opera. CD Printing by Siegfried Pretsch.

The following arias are on the CD-ROM:

1. "Voi lo sapete" from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1997).
2. "Vissi d'arte" from Puccini's *Tosca* (1993).
3. "Isoldes Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1997).