



Super soprano Diedre Lobo D'Cunha is profiled by Cyril D'Cunha

PROFILE

Scintillating Singing

In all probability, it may have something to do with the genes. I'm referring to the Bombay-born Goan soprano Deirdre Lobo D'Cunha, daughter of the illustrious opera singer Celia Lobo, often referred to as the 'diva' of sopranos in India, who was in Goa on a brief holiday recently. Now settled in the USA, with her husband Neville and her teen-aged son, Deirdre was just 12 when she last visited the State, but this time she spent quality time with her whole *khandan*, soon after celebrating her mother's golden wedding jubilee on June 25 in Bombay.

After dispensing with small talk, when we met for a brief chat at the Kala Academy, Panaji, Deirdre said her primary reason for visiting India was to wish her mother and dedicate a concert to her on this occasion. She made it doubly meaningful, not only by paying a tribute to her success as a singer, but also to rejoy memories of those that knew her, as well as introduce her to those that didn't, especially the new generation. She teamed up with her brother Ashley, who is a dance choreographer and head of a dance academy, at the NCPA experimental centre in Bombay. Also featuring in the concert were the 'Stop Gaps', Newman's Choir, Bombay Chamber Music group and a clarinetist.

An accomplished soprano herself, holding a Masters Music Degree from the University of Colorado in the USA, a Post Graduate Diploma from the John Hopkins's University, Baltimore, and a B. Music Degree from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Deirdre explained that she owed it to her mother for shaping her singing career. Though she did not learn much from her, besides the basic technique, she revealed that her break came when her mother arranged to send her to the Philippines for further studies at the US Conservatory of Music. Says Deirdre, "I strongly feel, that any student waiting to study abroad and cannot afford to do so, should think of going to the Philippines, where there are some fine music schools and the atmosphere there is also congenial."

As an accomplished artiste, what could she say are the essentials for being

a singer and particularly a soprano? Most important is the basic technique involved in singing, she replied. How to produce sound beautifully, effectively and in a healthy manner, and present the piece as intended by the composer, is in her line of teaching. Like Arias, for instance, where they have to be dramatized and conveyed to the audience, she elaborated. "Technique applies to any genre of music and I do not confine myself to teaching only classical music, but also jazz, pop and other type of rhythms. I have no qualms on that," she affirms.

Besides juggling with house work, she performs quite regularly in the USA, and as much as twice or thrice a month, she reveals. As a soloist, she does oratorical works with choirs, orchestra and Chamber Music groups. She prefers sacred and choral music rather than opera, as "this is my comfort zone," she says. She said she has performed in the UK and Europe. "I sing wherever I'm asked to for a fee, even at funerals and weddings. I also do cross-over music and Broadway, and in that sense I consider myself to be a versatile artiste. For me, singing is singing and enjoy sharing my God-given gift," she added.

As part of pedagogy, knowledge of singing in different languages, is essential, says Deirdre. On her part, she sings in Spanish, German, Italian, Czech, English and also Tagalog, a Philippine language which she speaks fluently. Included are sight-reading skills, and multiple styles of music like classical, contemporary, plainsong chant and hymns. There are no Indians that I know of who are soprano singers in my area in the USA, she says, but she knows of a Parsi girl who is based in San Francisco. "With the downslide in the US economy, the concert scene is not healthy at the moment, with opera houses closing down. We, however, keep going with chamber music and other music concerts. Prices of tickets have to be lowered if the classical scene is to continue," she averred.

As for her lack of knowledge of the Portuguese language, she was willing to learn other languages. "I was conducting a workshop recently at music teacher Juliana



D'Sa's house at Porvorim, where I heard a student sing a Portuguese song and I loved the sound. I immediately asked to be given a copy of the piece. I have a student in the USA who knows Brazilian Portuguese and I go through my diction with her help." She found many promising students in Goa and did not see any 'bad' ones. When asked why she had not done any concert in Goa, she replied that as she was here on a holiday, and it was not possible. However, she did teach at Juliana's for three days and at the Kala Academy for a day.

She teaches singing on Skype every week to batches of 12 from home in the USA and her plans were to come back to India four or five years' time. Meanwhile, she is thinking of building an infrastructure in Goa, Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai, a kind of programme or system, whereby she can follow-up on the progress in group settings via tele-seminars. She would need to set up offices, as part of a long-term plan of ten months stay in India, she said.