

A decorative graphic at the top of the page features a treble clef on the left, with several musical notes floating around it. The word "who" is written in a cursive font above the word "INSPIRES" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below "INSPIRES", the word "you?" is written in a cursive font. The entire graphic is set against a background of faint, overlapping circular lines.

# who INSPIRES you?

## True Commitment and Perseverance

BY MICHELLE LATOUR

*Soprano Deborah Raymond reflects on her personal sources of inspiration over her international career and how she finds continued inspiration through her teaching at Northern Arizona University.*

“Deborah Raymond’s voice culminates in a rapturous top. One has seldom experienced such a sensitive princess since Maria Cebotari,” wrote *Opernwelt* regarding Raymond’s performance of *Salome* in Dresden. I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Raymond, who has enjoyed an international singing career and is currently an associate professor of voice at Northern Arizona University.

When asked if any great artists or performances inspired her career, Raymond shares that her relationship with Strauss’ opera *Salome* greatly shaped her as a singer and inspired her throughout her career. “We never know what would have happened ‘if,’ but if I had not had that first break as *Salome* in Dresden, the chances are great that I wouldn’t have had a career,” she says.

Up until she landed this role with the Semperoper Dresden, Raymond had auditioned extensively in New York and Germany as a light lyric soprano. “I got nowhere,” she says. “One day, both my husband and my voice teacher suggested that I try *Salome*. Ironically, they both offered this advice on the same day, but without even speaking to each other. It was a key that unlocked many possibilities, and my voice and personality immediately identified with this role and Strauss’ music.”

Before securing the role, she had to audition on three separate occasions. “After two unsuccessful auditions for productions in other theaters, I went to Dresden,” she says. “I had to fly back and forth from Amsterdam, where I lived, before I convinced them that I was their *Salome*. The third audition consisted of an hour rehearsal with Joachim Herz—who both inspired me immeasurably and drove me crazy during the eight-week rehearsal period—followed by an audition on the stage, singing the entire role.”

Other great singers—most notably Hildegard Behrens and Leonie Rysanek—further inspired Raymond through their portrayals of *Salome*. “When I was cast for the first time as *Salome*, I listened to Hildegard Behrens’ recording, which was a huge inspiration,” Raymond remembers. “I felt she was embodying the role, even though this was only an audio recording. Then, when I was a member of the chorus in the Bayreuth Festival, standing on stage with her in *Götterdämmerung* left my jaw dropped in sheer admiration.”

Later, while covering the role of *Salome* with San Francisco Opera, Raymond watched Leonie Rysanek sing the role of Herodias. “Even though *Salome* is the name of the opera, I was in awe of Leonie, whose aura filled the entire stage whenever she was present,” she says. “Also, as a formidable *Salome* herself, she gave me many useful tips for getting through tough

spots in this most difficult role. I had already sung the role in Germany, but we can always use tips from great artists who have been there.”

So, who initially inspired Raymond to follow a career in music? Like many singers, she credits her early encouragement and inspiration to her parents, her church choir experience, and her high school choir director.

“My mother started encouraging me to sing at age three when she dressed me in jammies and I sang ‘Away in the Manger’ for our church’s Christmas Eve service. Like many of my colleagues, I was involved in church and high school choirs. When I was 16, my high school choir teacher—E. Jane Ruby, who has just celebrated her 96<sup>th</sup> birthday—asked me if I had any desire to take private voice lessons. It sounded like fun, and I thought, ‘Why not?’ This was a pivotal moment in my life. It led to two recitals in four languages during my high school senior year, and I also won the only competition I have ever won in my life—the Southeast Iowa Symphony soloist competition. I remain eternally grateful to Jane for recognizing something she thought was unique.

And then it was Raymond’s parents’ support that carried her on. “Once I decided to pursue music as a career, my parents encouraged me, while reminding me to be realistic,” she says. “They knew very little about opera or the music