

FLIGHT *of* FANTASY



CARL TANNER

BY BINAIFER DAVAR

Though he jets around the world, Carl Tanner always returns home to Arlington. His story is a flight of fantasy, which has taken him from stints as a truck driver and a gun-toting bounty hunter to a career as a world-renowned tenor.

His success is not merely a reflection of his passions and dreams, his drive and motivation, but also a result of hard work and perseverance that propelled him from apprenticing with the Santa Fe Opera to performing in Florence with Zubin Mehta, chief conductor of the Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

Gentle and soft-spoken, Carl is far from a gun-slinging bounty hunter or arrogant, name-dropping celebrity. He may be a celebrity personality, but he is disarmingly down-to-earth.

When I met Carl, he had just returned from performances in Florence and Hamburg. A few days later, he was off to California on a chartered jet for a surprise party where he sang "Happy Birthday" to his friend, figure skater Scott Hamilton.

Jackson Sheats, Carl's professor at the Shenandoah Conser-

vatory in Winchester, has been like a father and mentor to him, helping build his voice and discover his career. In his younger days, Carl says he could get discouraged and act on impulse. Sheats taught him to calculate and never take 'no' for an

answer, and today Carl is one of a handful of spinto-dramatic tenors in the world (Pavarotti was a spinto; Domingo's a dramatic).

"When I learn an opera," says Carl, "it's all I do." After accepting a role, he highlights each role in a different color. That way, he knows when he's singing, as well as what and when the next singer's part will be.

Unlike some opera singers, he translates the entire opera, verbatim. "Singers," he says, "need to know what they are singing

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He marks his part musically, by syllable and beat, creating a perfectly choreographed dance, where each movement perfectly matches each beat of music. "I have a keen ear, but when I was younger, I also had a lazy rhythm and learning style," he says.

Gerald Brown, Carl's New York-based coach of twenty years, taught him how to learn music correctly, properly and faster. First Carl speaks through the lyrics—whatever language they are in—to ensure that he pronounces the words correctly. Then he sings the role in rhythm. That way, he is less likely to make mistakes in a performance or recording session. Carl declines to learn his role by listening to recordings since such versions may reflect changes from the original score or cuts. But he does listen to recordings for the interpretations of other singers, often choosing a different approach. For example, whereas one tenor playing Don José in *Carmen* might sing, "Tais-toi, je t'avais dit de ne pas me parler!" sweetly to Carmen, Carl will deliver the same phrase angrily.

Voice teachers Bill Shuman in New York and Jackson Sheats in Virginia both work with Carl to ensure that he puts the opera into his own voice, without over- or under-singing it. He is neither pushing his voice beyond its capacity nor simply crooning.

As to how he was discovered, Carl relates it this way: Hearing opera coming from Bianchi & Margherita's in Manhattan, Carl wandered in. The bartender invited him to sing, and actor-director Robert Duvall, dining there, heard the aria from Puccini's *Tosca*. Duvall, who has a home in The Plains, delightfully offered to help his fellow Virginian. First he called film director Francis Ford Coppola only to learn that the role of the opera singer in *The Godfather III* had been filled. Then he arranged an audition with Santa Fe Opera director John Crosby. After reducing the audience to tears with his rendering of "O Holy Night," Carl was invited to apprentice, in a starring role, the



following summer. From the moment of that fateful meeting, Duvall has closely followed Carl's career.

Carl's "overnight success" has taken fifteen years of nurturing, hard work and perseverance. He has had the help of the top people in the business. His manager, Matthew Laifer, who took him to the major European opera houses, was an orthodox rabbi and cantor until Pavarotti suggested a career change. Now Laifer strategizes on roles and venues to move Carl's career forward. George Martynuk was Pavarotti's agent for ten years. Carl's "crossover publicist," Shorefire Media markets his Christmas album, *Hear the*

Angel Voices.

When not rehearsing, traveling, or performing, Carl returns home to Arlington for a vacation with his three dogs, a mutt and two Jack Russell terriers, or "terrors," as he calls them. Buddy, Spencer and Charlie stay in Northern Virginia with a housesitter while Carl clocks 140,000 miles of travel each year.

While Carl has a standing invitation to sing "O Holy Night" at the Vatican on Christmas Eve, this year, he will be singing closer to home, at the 5:30 p.m. service at Central United Methodist Church in Arlington. His 2009 schedule includes a concert with the Cleveland Pops Orchestra in April and a role in Verdi's *Otello* with Charlotte-based Opera Carolina in September.

Carl's goal is to walk away from the stage once he has arrived at the pinnacle of the opera world. According to a 2007 review in the Italian press, he is already being hailed as "the new Pavarotti."

For more information about Carl's performances and recordings, visit www.carltanner.com. *e*

FROM TOP: CARL PERFORMING IN *TURANDOT* IN DRESDEN; AND IN THE ROLE OF PINKERTON IN *MADAMA BUTTERFLY* IN MADRID, 2007