

EULOGY
20 November 2023

TANIA
KROSS

JOHANNES
VERMEER
PRIJS 2023



Eulogy by Ed Spanjaard

An open-air theatre in the pouring rain. About eight years ago. All seats are taken. It's summertime, but the spectators try their utmost to stay as dry as possible under wafer-thin ponchos. Two girls in front of me take a selfie. The excitement makes them forget about the drizzly weather. It is all because of Tania Kross. She sings her favorite opera, 'Carmen'. Even though it's a short version and with only a few players, she gives herself completely and the audience is on fire.

About 25 years ago, you, Tania, introduced yourself as a prospective student with the 'Segeduille' from the same 'Carmen' in the opera class of the Utrecht Conservatory. The teacher of the course, whom I happened to speak to, told me how overwhelmed she was by your singing and playing. "What a natural talent! The whole classroom sizzled and crackled with her energy." That account made such an impression on me that I immediately memorised the name Tania Kross, which I had never heard or seen then.

In 2006, you had a leading role in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* with sets and costumes by David Hockney. They resembled a living etching, with many straight lines and primary colours. At the same time, they also served as the unparalleled background of that opera. Your role was that of Baba, the bearded woman at the carnival. Baba is a chatterbox, who comes up in a sedan chair, but later on smashes everything because her marriage is doomed to failure. Eventually, she is silenced by a cloth on her head.

The music is whimsical and very rhythmic, but it was amazing how comfortably you managed to portray and colour this character, including the not insignificant vocal antics. When that production was still fresh, in the English Glyndebourne of the late 1970s, I had seen it several times, conducted by Haitink, among others, but none of the Babas then knew how to come close to your rendition in terms of singing and acting. Perhaps that's also because of the way you stand: it looks like you're being carried by roots under the ground, completely natural. It gives your voice such freedom.

Back to the drama teacher from your early years in the Netherlands: Monique Wagemakers. She is one of our best opera directors and signed years later for the staging of the performance that required your greatest personal commitment: 'Katibu di Shon', 'Slave and Master', performed in 2013, exactly one and a half century after the abolition of slavery. It was your idea, your dream, to stage a real opera in Papiamentu for the first time. 'Katibu di Shon' is about the slave uprising in Curacao

and about the ability of music to bring people together. 'Testigu de mi amor' - 'Witness to my love'. In it, a young woman (you) starts a relationship with both Luis (who descends from enslaved ones) and Wilmu (who belongs to the family of the rulers). Your own ancestors were enslaved and, twist of fate, lived on the plantation of the ancestors of Carel de Haseth, author of the book/libretto.

That opera came along and fitted you like a glove. Not in the least because of the music of Randal Corsen, in which soul, swing and classical elements go together. It was a wonderful and smooth collaboration for me as a conductor, in which we got to know each other well. You are fully prepared, cheerful and above all: really interested in harmonious music making.

Your Katibu di Shon is almost unique in opera history. After all, people and themes of colour are scarce in the traditional opera repertoire, although I found an obscure opera by Antonio Salieri: his 38th. You know Salieri, the composer who supposedly poisoned Mozart. This opera premiered in 1804 at the Theater an der Wien and is set on - indeed - a Caribbean Island. Quite unbelievable, really, at that time, especially bearing in mind that - at the end of the day - they get married multiculturally!

Fortunately, the musical landscape has become much more colourful. In multiple ways. In my profession, conducting, for example, women finally count. That was not the case a while ago. Recently, two female conductors made their successful debut with Dutch National Opera, in the operas 'Rusalka' by Dvorak and 'Innocence' by Kaija Saariaho.

Back to you. In 2015 you were appointed member of the Academy of Arts. Two years later, I joined in. The Academy, voice and conscience of the arts, is closely associated with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). It provides a stage for debate about the value of art in society. A jacket that suits you, because you have a talent for breaking down boundaries and broadening accessibility. Like other musical members of the Academy - Typhoon, Kytelman - do in their field.

Tania, you simply can't be pigeonholed. Boxes are very Dutch. You, on the other hand, sing folk, pop, jazz but also, seemingly effortlessly, a dramatic aria by Verdi, by Princess Eboli from the opera 'Don Carlos'. Or you can come in at the last minute with songs by De Falla and Montsalvatge during the Flamenco Biennale in Amsterdam, a few years ago. You were asked one day in advance, and the performance was simply masterful!

In recent decades, you have already developed and made audible quite a few of your preferences and plans. Since you moved back to Curacao, your voice continues to ring out. New ambitions, new vistas.

I sincerely wish that, with this important award, you will achieve no less than an - apparently impossible - ideal. The large hospital in Curacao is nicknamed 'the Buckingham Palace of the Caribbean'. Perhaps you can add something to it. Something dedicated to music and opera. As a witness of love in body and heart: 'Testigu de ti amor di kurpa i di kurason'!

Ed Spanjaard
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