



Simon interviewing Anikó Tóth, singer

Simon: I'm here with Anikó Tóth, is that correct?

Anikó: Anikó Tóth.

Simon: Tóth, okay, thank you, who is a professional opera singer amongst other things. And, tell me about your background because your nationality is

Anikó: A mix, right.

Simon: A mix.

Anikó: So, I grew up I was born and raised in the States to Hungarian parents who were refugees from Hungary, and so I grew up essentially bicultural in Los Angeles, and my first language was Hungarian.

Simon: Right.

Anikó: So, I do continue to speak Hungarian, albeit perhaps with a 1956 flavour, or flair, because my parents were refugees from the 50s.

Simon: Yeah.

Anikó: So, I still have cousins that I, we kind of laugh at the way that I say things that is a little bit different from how they have now obviously continued to evolve linguistically.

Simon: Yeah. So, and before we started recording we were chatting and you were saying about the household you grew up in and the music that you grew up with. Tell me a bit about that.

Anikó: Yeah. So, I guess in a way it's, it was like breathing, Singing was like breathing in our household and it was the way that we always connected. We sang and we've always sung stuff in harmony from being kids, we were in the local Kordály choir and so that was a way we connected to the Hungarian community as well. And you know, every Christmas whenever we were able to get together we still continued to sing things in harmony and you know choral things from Kordály too, Palestrina and other composers that ..

Simon: And, and that is a very strong cultural, I don't know what you would call it, thing, isn't it? I mean, you know you don't hear, it's almost a Hollywood idea the family that sings together, you know you don't imagine instead of sitting around watching er you know 'A Picture Perfect Life' or whatever it's called, 'It's a Wonderful Life ...'

Anikó: Yeah, yeah.

Simon: ... you would sit around singing Hungarian folk songs.

Anikó: Yeah, essentially and I guess people kind of used to tease us that we were a little bit like the Von Trapps.



Simon: Right, yeah.

Anikó: From 'The Sound of Music.'

Simon: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so that's really interesting. So, then you, so you grew up in this really musical environment and then you decided to study not music when you went to university, you studied something else.

Anikó: Yeah, I started off in music and actually I got really into dance and theatre and so I switched over to a World Arts and Cultures degree at UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles. I continued my singing. I continued studying privately and I was in the university choir and continued performing. But, I was interested in so many different things, you know, theatrically I loved musical theatre, particularly West Side Story I loved and, but I was also interested in opera, you know Mozart's 'Marriage of Figaro' and things like that. I just really enjoyed a real mix and so I enjoyed trying out.

Simon: Yeah.

Anikó: I kind of wasn't ready to commit to one thing so I actually funnily enough I had a seven-year university trajectory.

Simon: Okay....

Anikó: Because I kept changing my mind.

Simon: You kept changing courses. Yeah.

Anikó: I did, I did and that's why I always say to young people, you know, you can take your time, or take your time before you make decisions.

Simon: And so then at what point did you, because you became a professional singer, didn't you?

Anikó: Yeah, I mean I did a lot of different things. I have done a lot of professional singing, but again it's a little bit, it's been a little bit more of a portfolio career.

Simon: Okay.

Anikó: I actually also did additional things like massage therapy which I can do on the side, I can do that flexibly. I was very interested in that particularly because I had, ironically it came out of it because I had quite a bad car accident.

Simon: Oh.

Anikó: And so, I got into that.

Simon: Right.

Anikó: But I can still do music and study at the same time. That was in California still. But the way that I continued is I decided after my degree to go to Hungary, and that's where I



did a post-grad in more in, and started to focus a bit more on the classical singing and that's where I met Steve, my husband.

Simon: So, so you met Steve in Hungary, and from there you went where?

Anikó: We stayed in Hungary for a good year as well and then we were looking to continue our studies and so we had opportunities in the U.K. to do that in terms of music and in terms of, er Steve really was keen to do composition and I was keen to continue singing.

Simon: Right. And so you ended up singing on some of Steve's projects?

Anikó: That's right. We actually did, started our jazz duo actually and did ...

Simon: Oh.

Anikó: ... in Budapest as well and so we were able to do that. And that was a real learning curve for me actually being from a classical background.

Simon: Yeah, I'll bet.

Anikó: Even though the vocal technique is quite similar because you are using a little bit of a tilted larynx for both techniques but it was really interesting for me to go by ear much more than by sheet music.

Simon: Yeah, sure. That would be, I mean that's the thing that most musicians who come from a non-classical background who aren't trained find improvisation perfectly normal and natural and people from a classical background often really struggle with that and so you've, you've sort of met that head on by going into jazz.

Anikó: I did. Luckily because of my dance background I could feel the rhythms so, and also growing up in the States ...

Simon: Yeah. You can't really miss it ...

Anikó: You can't really miss it.

Simon: No.

Anikó: There is so much influence from the African American culture. Obviously, jazz is an African American art form but also the dance forms that you have in the States. The sense of rhythm is very much part of culture.

Simon: And musical theatre of course with you know, Europe. Exposed to musical theatre you can't really ignore it. So, and you also and you perform in a solo capacity? What do you...

Anikó: Yes.

Simon: You were telling me earlier about a piece that you're doing in Leeds this year in April. Tell me about that.

Anikó: That's right. That was a really personal piece because it was a, something where I was working out my own personal grief actually and it's a contemporary electro acoustic piece and it's based on the sounds and the noises that the voice can make. It was an exploration of the voice initially but also emotionally the sounds that the voice makes that are extra linguistic, so outside of language. Sort of, we begin actually with a vocal fry with (*phonetic ahhh*), that's the first noise that you hear ..

Simon: Yeah, yeah.

Anikó: That's a little hint of what that's like but it's a very, very contemporary piece working with a composer called Nikos Stavropoulos and it is based on Hungarian and Greek folk traditions. Yeah, and so I'm a soloist on that but it is working with a recorded sound of my own voice as well.

Simon: Right, so that's happening in Leeds in April.

Anikó: Yes, and that piece is called Elegeia.

Simon: Right. We can post a link to that performance for anyone who happens to be in Leeds that weekend, or that week. How many shows are you doing?

Anikó: I think it is just the one...

Simon: Okay.

Anikó: Actually, yeah.

Simon: Right. And what other plans have you got? What else are you working on at the moment?

Anikó: We're working on continuing to do some jazz, and I've got some of my own material that I'm working on, some new songs.

Simon: And what sort of category or genre would they fall into?

Anikó: See, this is what's interesting is this category, I'm actually a massive Joni Mitchell fan so I actually, a lot of my stuff is a little bit more on the Laurel Canyon...

Simon: Oh, okay.

Anikó: ... Americana..

Simon: Yeah, yeah.

Anikó: ... side of things. I do also write very regular pop stuff.

Simon: Okay.

Anikó: That sort of comes out of me as part of my expression, but even some musical theater stuff, but the pieces that I'm working on at the moment are a little bit more, leaning toward that Laurel Canyon sound.

Simon: And will you be doing an album of that?

Anikó: That's the idea.

Simon: That's the idea, right. So, Steve's going to have his rock album.

Anikó: Yes.

Simon: And you're going to have your Laurel Canyon album.

Anikó: Yes.

Simon: So, anything else that you're up to? What else are you doing?

Anikó: Yes. I work as a vocal coach.

Simon: Aha.

Anikó: I teach online mostly.

Simon: Right.

Anikó: But I do have some clients in France now which is a lot of fun and I am enjoying that a lot. I've started a chorale locally.

Simon: Okay.

Anikó: Which is also a little bit more on the community end. It's just about getting people to express themselves and to feel safe to make noises, really with their voice because the voice itself is probably the most flexible instrument that you can possibly find, so it's really about connecting people as well. Connecting the community that I'm in.

Simon: So, is there one sort of contact point where people can get hold of you for either the therapy that you talked about or the singing lessons or the chorale?

Anikó: Yeah. Therapy I gave up a while ago.

Simon: Oh, right. Okay, beg your pardon.

Anikó: Because I had bad wrists from it, unfortunately. But it did influence the way that I teach voice because I am so aware of the different musculature and the different postural elements that are required for singing.

Simon: Right.

Anikó: And it made me hyper aware of the fact that the body is so sensitive to change in particular for singing as an instrument. So, yes, people can find me on kokovocals.com or [@kokovocals](https://www.instagram.com/kokovocals) ...

Simon: Okay, we'll get those ...

Anikó: On most social media.



Simon: On the web pages as well, that's great. Fantastic. Thank you very much.

Anikó: Thank you very much.