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## **Tenor Mario Frangoulis Finds His Niche**

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Recently at the last minute a colleague had to sub for another reviewer at a concert for an artist he knew nothing about. He went without knowing what to expect from tenor Mario Frangoulis, only to be most pleasantly surprised.

"I was treated to one of the more enjoyable concerts I'd attended in a long time," EDGE's Brian Callaghan wrote, "...He has a terrific voice, and looking like a Greek god doesn't hurt either. His stage persona is that of a gracious, shy and excited performer who is genuinely pleased to be singing before an audience."

Frangoulis, though, is no newbie to show business, having been performing professionally for 20 years either in musicals, concerts or on records. He is presently appearing with soprano Sarah Brightman on her latest concert tour, which is currently on a swing through Canada before arriving on the West Coast.

The handsome, 42 year old tenor no doubt turns heads when he's not onstage; but it's his voice - a resonant tenor - that has made him an international music star. Like his colleagues Andrea Bocelli and Josh Grobin, he's found a niche in the increasingly popular Classical Crossover genre. His CDs - "Sometimes I Dream" and "Follow Your Heart" have been international best-sellers; and his concert appearances have grown in size and stature.

EDGE spoke to Frangoulis when he was on the East Coast leg of the tour immediately after the Brightman concert took a critical drumming in Boston. (In fact, one local reviewer confused him with another tenor.) No matter, for the singer such notices are only par for the course.



#### Finding New Fans

EDGE: How did the Boston concert go?

Mario Frangoulis: Very well. We had a great audience reaction. I'm not sure the reviews were all that good - whatever, because we heard some mixed things. But you always do in these shows. We have a lot of variety in the show for a lot of different tastes. It depends on what the audience likes to hear and what we like to sing. I love this kind of spectacle, so I don't agree with every thing that was said. I like the show very much and like Sarah Brightman. She's a great colleague. And I thought we sang very well together and had a fantastic audience reaction. But I'm not the one to ask really.

EDGE: Do you regularly read reviews?

Mario Frangoulis: I do read reviews, but don't often pay attention to them. In general, there are factors that blur the opinion: whether someone is for or against a certain type of spectacle or not, or has pre-conceived ideas of what to expect. But I do read them.

EDGE: What about those in the audience who don't know what to expect because they've never seen you before and become a fan?

Mario Frangoulis: It's wonderful. No artist should ever take it for granted that he's known. It's always good to be discovered by those who have never heard you. I had some people come to Madison Square Garden recently and say that they didn't realize I had done so many things in my career because they had never heard of me. Performing with Sarah is a great opportunity for me, but it is also very taxing, you know - a lot of high notes and a lot of sustaining phrases; but I think it creates some sort of bridge between myself and people who have never heard of me. It's a good thing - music can bring people together.

EDGE: You have done a lot in your career. You've trained in London (Guildhall School of Music and Drama) and New York (Julliard School of Music), appeared in London's West End ('Les Miserables' and 'Phantom of the Opera') and La Scala (Tony in 'West Side Story.') And this was before you became a recording artist with an eclectic mix of musical choices. In fact, your musical interests are all over the place, but in a good way - how did this happen?

Mario Frangoulis: I use to listen to everything when I was a kid. I loved the idea of leaving Greece to study theater and to get into Hollywood movies and to sing on the world stage like Frank Sinatra or Liza Minnelli or Edith Piaf. How do I do that? First of all, I realized I had to study. I had to listen to a lot of things and, at one point, had to decide on what I wanted to do. And I just couldn't, ever 100% decide as to exactly as to what genre I should pursue. This is why my recording career is mostly classical crossover music like 'Sometimes I Dream' and 'Follow Your Heart.' I've had the operatic training, but don't sing opera. What I do is more like Andrea Bocelli or Josh Grobin - this genre of music. And it has been very successful for me.

I guess my vision is always to sing good songs, not silly songs. I love good lyrics coupled with great melodies; if that makes me slightly old-fashioned then I'm old fashioned. I love young people and I love young composers. I am working on a new album with is in the same genre of classical crossover music, but I hope will have more appeal to a younger audience and a broader audience. There are a lot of English lyrics - Don Black has written some amazing lyrics for me. And I hope to continue to work with Lara Fabian, who is a wonderful Canadian/Belgian soprano pop singer.



Returning to Musicals?

EDGE: With such strong musical theater credits, have thought of returning to the musical stage?

Mario Frangoulis: Not really. Unless it's a vehicle to something else. I don't want to go back into the same shows again, like 'Phantom' or 'Les Miserables.' It was great when I did them when I was just out of drama school and they helped me see the bigger picture and to see what it takes to be on stage with great performers. I was able to share my passion with these amazing people in the theater world. But I'm not interested in going back and doing the same, old shows. A new musical is something I would serious consider. I've been talking about doing a musical on the life of Mario Lanza at some point in 2009 because it is the 50 anniversary of his death, unfortunately. Lanza was a classical crossover tenor - he was considered an opera singer and opened the

door to many opera singers who came later. Jose Carreras and Placido Domingo were greatly influenced by Lanza in his movie about Caruso, 'The Great Caruso.' It was the greatest success of his career. I think this is what we are hoping with the theater version that it could be a vehicle for me.

EDGE: At one point did you decide that you weren't going to pursue opera as your primary musical interest?

Mario Frangoulis: I didn't really decide. I still sing arias when I attend classical concerts in Europe and Russia. I've sung a lot of opera in Russia. But I think I would be limiting myself. I wouldn't have the opportunity to reach as many people. So I keep my opportunities open and would grab an offer if I could. If, say, an Alfredo in 'La Traviata' turned up. I am certainly trained for that; however my recording career has taken me in so many different directions. I have a brand new record coming up with sss and Justin Haywood from the Moody Blues singing many songs that are not in the genre of the classical crossover, but very different. Songs like 'Caruso' and 'Nights in White Satin' that I perform with Justin and Lara Fabian. I love all styles of music and I think opera would require me to be very strict with my musical choices and not have the freedom I have now.

EDGE: You have said one of your favorite experiences was performing with Placido Domingo. Could you talk about that?

Mario Frangoulis: Domingo is such a great artist and I have so much respect for him. He embraced me from the beginning and invited me to perform in concerts with him. We sang 'Granada' together. He's a real gentleman - an amazing professional who was so generous onstage. He's very engaging. When he's onstage, the audience can't see anyone else. He's generates such electricity. I watched him onstage a few times and he's amazing.



And Vegas?

EDGE: You mentioned Sinatra earlier. He had some of his biggest successes in Vegas. Have you any interest in doing a show there?

Mario Frangoulis: (Laughs) Yes I have, but I think it's unreal for me right now. I am in a very different place. I love the idea of Vegas - that all the stars have played there and making a lot of money; but I don't see myself as this kind of entertainer. I want to make a few records first and if the road takes me to Vegas for a few performances, why not? If I went right now, I would be considered a light entertainer and that's not me. I have a lot of things to do... maybe Vegas.

EDGE: And what about acting, either singing or not, in movies or television?

Mario Frangoulis: I did 'De-Lovely' with Kevin Kline (as Cole Porter) where I sang 'So In Love' with Lara Fabian. It was just a cameo role, but I loved doing it. It was so natural to do. I loved the experience - there are a lot of people looking after you and you can do it again if it's not right. But I'm more of a theater person because theater is more immediate and you can only have one chance. Every performance is new - you have to recreate yourself every moment. The movies are timeless. It's one way of freezing a moment in the history of time.

EDGE: How do you handle the hype that comes with celebrity. For instance I read a review recently that called you "the tenor for the 21st century."

Mario Frangoulis: That's too much -- what does it mean? The tenor of the 21st century. I do think I belong in the new generation of performers who want to reach out to younger audiences, which is one of my goals. And that I am able to perform with such great artists is amazing. But I think my role is to do more than just perform. I like being able to give what I've gained from my experience to younger artists either through programs or scholarships is very gratifying.

For instance this year I was named the ambassador to the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans which gives scholarships to young people who come out of very adverse situations - such as dealing with alcoholic or drug addicts parents or homelessness. Without the scholarships, they wouldn't be able to pursue their academic career. Part of what I do is to reach out to these people and really help as much as I can. One of the things I enjoyed when I was in Omaha performing with the Omaha Symphony was that I went to the schools to visit the children themselves who were interested in music. I just started talking with them, not knowing what to expect. What I told them was to never stop dreaming and whatever the situation, you can achieve a goal. It might take the help of an organization like the Horatio Alger Association to do it, but it can be done.

EDGE: What's are your goals for the next few years?

Mario Frangoulis: To keep my voice in shape and be able to complete the next record I have in mind. I hope to play some roles either in the theater and the opera. A lot of interesting things are happening these days. At Madison Square Garden a lot of great people came up to me - producer Phil Ramone, the director of 'Carlotto's Way' - with hopes to work with me at some point. It's all very exciting, but right now I love being able to perform in concert. I love to be able to sing my favorite music and share my passion. So onwards and upwards to more passionate songs and more great work.

EDGE: And, lastly, how do you keep your voice in shape?

Mario Frangoulis: I try not to do a lot of the wrong stuff. I sleep early. I eat well. I practice a lot. I work a lot on my voice. I do my exercises every day, make sure I do a good warm-up everyday. Don't drink a lot of cold drinks and always have my humidifier with me wherever I go.