

For globe-trotting opera singer, the Northwest feels like home

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This weekend, Angela Meade will take a break from her globe-trotting lifestyle to make her fourth appearance at the Astoria Music Festival.

Moments before taking the stage at major venues in New York, London or Spain, opera singer Angela Meade sits in her dressing room and reflects on how far she has come in her career.

“Sometimes I still pinch myself and I think how did this happen?” she said.

Meade did not take the most conventional path to opera stardom. After graduating from high school in Centralia, Wash., in 1995, she found her voice in music classes at Centralia College, a community college where she intended to pursue medicine.

She finished her bachelor’s degree in music and vocal performance at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash. Following a brief stint in New York, she continued her music education in Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

She made her professional opera debut in 2008 at the famed Metropolitan Opera House, or the Met, in New York City.

Since then, Meade’s career has taken her to stages around the world.

“An airplane is really my home. It’s where I am more than anywhere,” she jokes.

Grand finale

This weekend, Meade will take a break from her globe-trotting lifestyle to make her fourth appearance at the Astoria Music Festival. She will perform in the grand finale opera Sunday as the title role of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots in Donizetti’s “Maria Stuarda.”

For those unfamiliar with opera or Meade’s talent, Astoria Music Festival artistic director Keith Clark compares her to a young Tiger Woods, the accomplished professional golfer.

“She is at the top of her game,” Clark said. “She is one of the stellar sopranos of her generation singing all over the world. Her career has just skyrocketed to the point where she has been wonderful in making time available to come to Astoria, when she could be singing anywhere in the world.”

Meade said she looks forward to her annual return to the Northwest. In August, she is performing at Opera in the Park during Portland Summerfest. While in Astoria, she plans to see her best friend who lives in Portland and her father, Rod Meade, who lives in Centralia and works as a research forester for Weyerhaeuser.

“I always love to come back here. I love this area,” Meade said. “I would live here full time if I could. It’s so relaxing and peaceful and people are so friendly. Doing what we do, it’s not feasible to live here at the moment, which is kind of sad.”

After her performance Sunday, Meade and her father will roadtrip down to Santa Fe, N.M., where her husband, John Matthew Myers, a professional tenor, is performing. Meade has hardly seen her husband since they married last month. The couple met in 2010 while performing at the Wexford Festival Opera in Ireland.

Musical family

Music has always been a part of Meade’s family. Her father played the steel guitar and her mother, Deborah Meade, grew up singing in a trio of girls that toured churches.

“She always wanted to be a professional singer, but her parents didn’t really think it was the good, religious, Christian thing to do,” Meade said of her mother. “She would always live vicariously through me.”

Meade’s mother died of breast cancer in July 2012.

“It was the most difficult thing I’ve ever been through, especially since I had a gig right after it,” Meade said. “I wanted in the worst way to stay home and grieve.”

Before her death, Deborah Meade was able to see her daughter’s career launch at the Met and watch her daughter become a mainstay in the opera community.

“It was really hard for me. I sing a lot of characters that kill themselves or are dying of something,” Meade said. “For a year afterward, I would be doing these death scenes and burst out in tears in the middle of rehearsal.”

Two months after her mother’s death, Meade recalls doing a production where she had to pray over a coffin. She could not handle the scene. The conductor came over and asked if she was OK.

“People thought I was crazy for a while,” she said. “I would burst into tears and walk off stage.”

In some ways, working through her grief become therapeutic. As time passed, Meade’s career continued to grow. She performs between 35 to 50 performances a year.

It all started while she took voice lessons at Centralia College and realized opera was what she wanted to do. Meade said she became obsessed and listened to opera CDs, watched live performances and read about opera stars in books. Soon those professionals became her colleagues and friends.

Last fall, Meade graced the cover of “Opera News,” the go-to magazine of the opera world.

As accolades pile up, Meade said, she never forgets her Northwest roots.

In those moments before a large performance, Meade thinks back to her start in Centralia and Tacoma and performances in Astoria. She knows she is doing what she loves and has made her mother and father proud.

“Eight years in, it’s still surreal,” Meade said. “I hope it always remains surreal.”

