

## Classical music changed my life

I am Natasha Novitskaia and I am an American mezzo-soprano, born in St.-Petersburg Russia.

I grew up in St.-Petersburg, the very heart of the cultural capital of Russia, and was exposed to classical music and art from an early age. My mom, a pianist with a music degree, and a professor of chemistry, would take me to Mariinsky and Mikhailovsky opera theaters, and to Philharmonic Halls. I began to study piano when I was six years old and continued studying at a music school. We often had parties in my home where our opera singer friends would come and perform, and I would accompany them on piano. When I finished my piano studies, I realized that singing is really what I want to do in life. I started to sing when I was 14 years old, but my family wanted me to pursue another profession. My other passion was literature, and I began reading books at the age of four years old. I got a Master's degree in Russian literature and language, but my dream of singing opera never left me.

I was most fortunate to meet my first teacher Ellen Faull when I was living on the West coast. She helped me tremendously, but when I moved to NYC, I was not so fortunate with teachers. I was singing the wrong repertoire, and identified as the wrong *fâch*; lyric spinto soprano instead of dramatic mezzo-soprano. Because of my struggles, I would like to advise any young singers who do not feel vocally right working with their teacher, to talk to them about it. If you are struggling with your technique and your teacher's method doesn't work for you, you can always leave. Never let a teacher manipulate you into studying with them, and always have the courage to speak for yourself, analyze, improve, build your network of friends and professionals you trust, and never stop searching. To become a professional singer, it takes a lot of work and dedication. It is not just a job, but a life task. Before investing the money and time into a classical singing career, every singer should ask "Am I ready for this? Is this what I really want to do in my life?"

When I found the right teacher for me, and began singing in the right vocal *fâch*, my technical singing foundation became solid, and I received contracts and interest from people in the industry. I have a feedback that my voice sounds the best in music by Verdi and Verismo repertoire, French opera, Wagner, and of course, music written by Russian composers. I am glad I trusted myself and found courage to search for my true voice. I am thankful to have found my own unique voice, am thankful to the professionals who helped me along the way, and to this country that I love and respect.

Besides being a singer, I am always trying to learn new things. I love history, art, languages, and traveling so that I may learn about different cultures and different ways of life. My years at a

University taught me to be more analytical and to have a logical approach when overcoming problems in my professional field and my private life. I feel accomplished as a human being, and have always treated others equally with respect and dignity. I am also thankful to have such wonderful friends and family.

I was very poor when I was young, and struggled alone with my baby. There were times I had nothing to eat for days and had no money to buy food. There was a time when I was on the street with my child in the middle of cold Russian winter and I had no place to go. Even in my darkest days I had believed that things could change. The most important thing for human beings is to not succumb to darkness and envy, and to not lose hope. I believe that we all have tremendous power to change our lives, to become better people and save the light inside us that is guiding us through the most difficult times. Classical music was always this light for me, and I can say that it is what saved me.