

Offstage with Noemi Kiss

Get to know another side of the principal artists with Offstage, which poses 20 questions to the featured singer. This month, we talk to Noemi Kiss, the fiery soprano singing the role of Dido in Manitoba Opera's coproduction of *Dido & Aeneas* in February. Ms. Kiss hails from Székesfehérvár, Hungary and has sung on stages as far flung as Iceland and Israel. Here, she reveals her love of Whitney Houston, Sting, and living in the moment.

1. Who would you rather be stranded on a desert island with – Lady Gaga or Albert Einstein?

I'm not sure, probably both of them would be pretty interesting to spend some time with, but I'm not attached to either.

2. What are the three most-played songs on your iPod?

This might be embarrassing, but I don't have an iPod. I do listen to a lot of CDs in my car and the most favourite songs are sung by Eva Cassidy and Agi Szaloki, who is a Hungarian folk singer. I also love Nikola Parov's songs.

3. Are you a cat person or a dog person?

I used to think that I was a dog person until my partner's daughter brought home seven kittens that were abandoned on the road. They were tiny and helpless and we started to feed them and fostered them until an agency found homes for them. I fell in love with each one of them and ended up keeping one, so I guess I've become a cat person.

4. What is your favourite song to sing on karaoke night?

Ooh, Whitney Houston, of course. "One Moment In Time" and "Greatest Love Of All" and stuff like that.

5. What was the last movie you saw in a theatre?

Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*.

6. *What's your go-to junk food when watching TV?*

I've got lots of those. Since I've been living in Canada it's peanut butter and honey on graham wafers – terrible! Also dark chocolate and yes, corn or rice chips sometimes. Does this make me bad?

7. *In which other time and place would you like to live and why?*

I'd love to go to the moon or Mars but I don't think I'd like to go back to the past. I've been traveling so much in this life that staying in one spot and being in the present moment is hard enough for me. But with all of its challenges, this is where I'd like to be.

8. *What would be on the menu of your last meal?*

My last meal would be my mom's chicken soup, which is rich and full of vegetables. She used to make it every Sunday and whenever we were sick.

9. *What's your favourite reality TV show?*

I don't watch a lot of TV. When I'm in Hungary, I sometimes watch the current reality show with my family and get into it totally. It's almost scary, but we have a lot of fun. When I'm in Canada I have so much to do around the place that excites me that I think it's a total waste of time.

10. *What's the name of last book that you recommended to someone?*

The Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins.

11. *Which would you rather drive – a Smart Car or a Mustang convertible?*

Definitely a Mustang.

12. *Who inspires you?*

Oh so many people, it would be impossible to say all the names. My little nieces, my brothers, my partner, my teachers Nancy Argenta and Ingrid Attrot, my friends in Hungary that continue to love me even though I left them and many others – Everybody that touches my heart in some way and makes my life richer and fuller.

13. *What's the best advice you've ever received?*

Stay in the present moment. Live and love as if it was the last day of your life. It is what it is. Find the goodness and joy where you are and what you do right now. Sing like you, not like somebody else.

14. *What do you do to for fitness?*

I like hiking in BC and I walk a lot. I love swimming and running. Well, to say that I LOVE running would be a lie, but I like how I feel after I've run. What I love is spin racing, or what do you call it in English, when you sit on this bike in the Gym and there's a superwoman in front of you yelling and telling you that you can do it, and you bike for an hour and you sweat like a pig and burn millions of calories and the music is so bad that it's really good.

15. *Which celebrity would you like to have dinner with?*

I've always wanted to meet Sting. Terrible that it'll never happen.

16. *What's the scariest thing you've ever done?*

I once fell into the lake when I stepped on the ice in winter. I knew I shouldn't step on it because it was way too thin but it attracted me very much. So I started to walk on it and within seconds I was in ice cold water. Luckily I was saved, but it was an alarming experience.

17. *If you weren't a singer, how would you make a living?*

I never thought I could do anything else other than teach or sing. I think I'd be a pretty good farmer, working in the garden and growing food, making cheese and stuff. I could open a Hungarian restaurant in the Kootenays. And I'd love to work with children as well.

18. *Where would you like to spend your next vacation?*

Somewhere in South East Asia would be wonderful, but it's not going to happen for a while. Too much traveling between the old country and Canada.

19. *Who was your favourite rock band/pop group when you were a teenager?*

Oh, the North American audience won't recognize any of these bands. I grew up in socialist Hungary, and there were a few rock bands that were pretty influential in my musical education. I adored LGT (this is a Hungarian rock band that actually made it to the US) and a bunch of others. We didn't listen to a lot of stuff from the Western world when I was a kid, because it was all considered "bad capitalist influence" and was prohibited. Still, I loved the ABBA, Boney M and, of course, the Beatles.

20. *What's your perfect day?*

In Canada, it's being at home, having my first cup of coffee, going for a walk, being with my family, and sharing the chores around the place. Just tending to the animals and chopping firewood and whatever else the day brings. There are so many things that can make a day perfect. Being in nature is one of them for me. When I'm in Hungary, I love to be with my nieces and my brothers. Singing can make the day perfect as well, when it's shared with others.