

DEBORAH VOIGT OPERA DIVA

A diva at the top of the international opera world, Deborah Voigt stars at the Met this month in Strauss' "Die Frau ohne Schatten" (Woman Without a Shadow). "My part is tricky," Voigt says, "ranging from light, lyric to darker, dramatic sound with a two octave jump. And the set is precarious." Wearing special rubber shoes, she performs in a slippery mirrored box, which rises to the top of the Met.

Voigt first attracted international attention when she won first place in the Luciano Pavarotti Voice Competition in 1988, and the gold medal at Moscow's Tchaikovsky International Competition in 1990. Her career soared the following year, after she performed the title role in Strauss' Ariadne auf Naxos in Boston, and was soon invited to every principal opera house in the world.

Now in her twelfth season at the Met, she returns from a triumphant debut in the Vienna State Opera's Tristan und Isolde, which garnered a 23-minute standing ovation. A Wagnerian soprano of historic significance, Voigt was the first American to have a new production of this major work mounted for her by the prestigious VSO, a particular honor because it was her first time performing Isolde, a significant marker in a soprano's career. She dedicated her performances to her sister, Melinda, who died of mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer, a week before the opening. "The most difficult part," Voigt says, "was that I couldn't be there for my family."

"Traveling ten months a year makes it hard to maintain relationships," says Voigt, now divorced. Nevertheless, her Yorkshire terrier, Steinway, is always in her entourage. When not performing, Voigt retreats to her Florida home, the music of Norah Jones and the ocean, where the air is wet & "great for a singer."

"Opera is gracious to women as they mature," says Voigt, 43. "I'm still a baby by opera standards, just starting my prime." As a dramatic soprano, "it's not a benefit to be young. The voice darkens and grows," leading to roles like Wagner's Brünnhilde, which she will one day perform.

The only dramatic soprano role she feels is closed to her at present is Salome, and that's because of her weight. "Salome's a 16-year-old girl who dances and takes her clothes off," says Voigt, who is large, like many opera stars. Those who follow her know she lost 80 pounds a few years ago, but her weight continues to fluctuate. "Weight will always be a battle," says Voigt. "I'd like to wake up and be as thin as Julia Roberts, but then I don't think she could sing Wagner."