



Opera's 'dream couple' in domestic violence claim: Soprano Angel Gheorghiu says tenor husband subjected her to years of beatings

She says Robert Alagna was violent in front of family and left her unable to sing

By Jessica Duchon, July 2nd 2013

The world's most celebrated female opera singer, Angela Gheorghiu, has been the victim of domestic violence in her marriage to the tenor Roberto Alagna, she has claimed.

In an interview with The Independent, the soprano alleged that Alagna would assault her in front of her family and his. The startling revelation will stun opera-goers around the world, as the pair - who recently divorced - were seen for years as opera's glamour couple.

Alagna is internationally famous in his own right as one of the world's leading tenors. Gheorghiu, hugely popular in Britain, is set to star in a production of Puccini's *La Rondine* at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden on Friday.

When Gheorghiu married the French-Sicilian tenor Alagna in 1996, their romance was the hottest topic in the opera world. They sang together across the globe, as well as making many recordings. It was a stormy partnership from the start, with tales of high-profile tantrums and cancellations rife. But romanticism for a long time eclipsed all else: Gheorghiu and Alagna were dubbed the Posh and Becks of opera.

All that is now over. Earlier this year Gheorghiu went to Romania to get a divorce. "I was very kind with Roberto on this matter, because otherwise in France [where he lives] it would be a big problem for him," she said. "In Romania I wanted it to be in the quickest way possible: you sign a few papers and it was ciao, arrivederci. Because I really wanted not to continue to have a relationship with this kind of person.

"There are things in life you accept from your man, but I did not want to continue to live with the idea that your man is violent. Basta! I said everything, I did everything, until the last moment: I said to myself it is not true, I cannot accept it. OK, now I accept – so, basta. A person like that will never, ever change."

She continued: "He was actually violent - and in front of my family, and his family also. I lived through that. It's the most black page of my life. I said for years that I cannot believe it, it will be fine – you say that all the time. But it's like a malady. Even if you are the most

angry person, to stand and give a clap on your wife, it's impossible – and to do this in front of your father and your brother and they say not a word? This is my life.”

She added: “At first, when you are young and more energetic, you feel very bad. Crying and singing, singing and crying: maybe I cry more than I sing. And it was possible for me to sing. One day I said: I cannot sing. I was so tired – from screaming and crying, I was kaput completely. The first solution for me was not to sing together any more.”

When they initially became a couple, she says, after the death from cancer of Alagna's first wife, she saw only what she wanted to see. “People of course told me, even colleagues around me, ‘Be careful’. But I really wanted to be with Roberto. I divorced my first husband for him. When you are in love, you are completely blind. And you don't know, and you don't want to know.”

She added: “I am different now. The day I accept that I must divorce Roberto, I was sure that the real me would be out. I cannot pretend. I was pretending too much and I suffered too much. Basta. Now it's time to be really honest.”

When contacted by The Independent Marinella Alagna, Roberto Alagna's sister and agent, declined to comment on the allegations, adding: “We do not have time for idiocy such as this.”

FACT FILE

Angela Gheorghiu, 47, from Adjud, Romania

Soprano

Education: National University of Music Bucharest

Professional debut: Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera, 1990

International debut: Royal Opera House, 1992

Awards include: Female Artist of the Year at the Classic Brit Awards, 2001, 2010; Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres; Star of Romania

Roberto Alagna, 50, from Seine-Saint-Denis, France

Tenor

Education: Largely self-taught, started singing in cabarets

Professional debut: Glyndebourne Opera touring company in 1988 after winning the Luciano Pavarotti Voice Competition.

Awards include: Laurence Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera, 1995; Knight of the French Legion of Honour, 2008