

JOSIP (JOSEF) GOSTIČ

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Josip (Josef) Gostič, great leading singer of the National Opera at the Croatian National Theatre and of the Vienna State Opera (Staatsoper), was born in Stara Loka, Slovenia. At the age of eight, he moved to Homec, a town near Ljubljana, where his father was an organist in the parish church. Having finished the Organist School in Ljubljana, he also worked for two years as an organist in Homec. In 1921 he enrolled in the State Conservatory of Ljubljana and became a member of the Slovenian National Theatre Opera Choir, where he occasionally played minor roles. His debut as Lensky in P. I. Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* on the 5th of September 1929 unfolded the huge potential of the young tenor. He displayed all the qualities of a first-class opera singer: a nice, well-balanced voice of a sufficient range, perfect musicality, exquisite interpretation skills, solid musical education, a good figure and impressive acting endowments. He graduated with honours in 1930. As a soloist of the Ljubljana Opera, he sang over 40 operetta and opera roles, ranging from Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* and Eisenstein in *The Bat (Die Fledermaus)* to Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, Massenet's Werther and Des Grieux in *Manon* and Riccardo in *A Masked Ball (Un Ballo in Maschera)*. Sometimes he had as many as a hundred appearances in a season. He also had private tutoring with Maria Rado-Danielli in Vienna and attained a masterful singing technique. In 1937 he became member, and soon afterwards the unique and unmatched leading singer of the Opera of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. Ever since his first guest performance as Janko in *The Bartered Bride* in 1932 until his last performance of Manrico in *The Troubadour* on the 12th of October 1963, he had been the absolute favorite of the Zagreb audience, who simply adored him, as exemplified on the 30th anniversary of his artistic work, when he appeared as Umberto in Giordano's *Andréa Chénier* on the 6th of June 1959. Indeed, it was in Zagreb where Gostič's artistic personality fully evolved. As a member of the Croatian National Theatre Opera, he sang 54 roles in about one thousand performances. In 1942 he started singing as a guest performer in the Vienna Staatsoper his first roles being Cani in *Pagliacci*, Wagner's Lohengrin and Bacchus in *Ariadne on Naxos* by Richard Strauss. In 1951 he became full member of the Vienna Staatsoper, where he played 16 roles in 260 appearances over ten seasons.

Following the motto to *sing what best fits your age*, Gostič developed into the dramatic tenor, yet managing to preserve bright timbre and softness of *mezzavoice*, which added dramatic force but also human kindness to his creations of Wagner's Parsifal, Porin in the opera of the same name by Croatian composer Vatroslav Lisinski (1819 - 1854), Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, Herman in *Queen of Spades*, Don Jose in *Carmen*, Radames in *Aida*, Manrico, Don Carlos, Florestan in *Fidelio*, and specifically in his rendition of Verdi's Otello. This, along with his great musicianship, made him one of the most complete musical and scenic personalities and a valuable partner to great conductors and singers alike. Gostič also appeared in the opening nights of several Croatian operas and was an unsurpassed interpreter of a cult figure of the Croatian opera - Mičo in *Ero s onoga svijeta (Ero the Joke)* by Jakov Gotovac (1895 - 1982).

Gostič's international fame began as early as 1951, when he appeared in the premiere of *Lohengrin* in the Vienna Staatsoper under the baton of Clemens Krauss in Rudolf Harmann's production. His rendition of Lohengrin was compared with the immortal one of Leo Slezak and brought him to the peak of his career - the leading role of Midas in the world premiere of *The Love of Danae*, the last opera by Richard Strauss, at the Salzburg Festival on the 14th of August 1952. He also sang Midas at the premiere of the opera in Vienna, the Milan Scala, as well as in the guest performance of the Vienna State Opera Ensemble in the Grand Opera of Paris. In the Vienna State Opera he also appeared as Don José, Cavaradossi, Florestan, Manrico, Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Radames, Otello, Herman, Riccardo, André Chénier, First Man in Armor in *The Magic Flute*, Dick Johnson at the very successful premiere of Puccini's *The Girl of the Golden West* and a splendid Bacchus in the opening night of *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

Having become a reputable artist in Europe, he made guest appearances in other countries, most frequently in the role of Lohengrin in Spain and Italy. His rendition of Lohengrin, a harmonic amalgam of the divine and human, was enthusiastically acclaimed by the audience of the Teatro del Liceo in Barcelona, where he received the highest recognition for the interpretation of the role. In 1957 he interpreted the role of Siegfried in the *Götterdämmerung* in Wolfgang Wagner's production in Venice. In 1958 he appeared at the premiere of *Boris Godunov* at Covent Garden, London. He also gave his guest performances in Prague, Dresden, Berlin, Hamburg, Athens and other European cities. In 1961 he gave his 115th appearance as Pierre Bezuhov at the Zagreb premiere of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. Gostič was also well-known for his reputable appearances in Verdi's and Mozart's *Requiem* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* as well as in Mahler's *The Song of the Earth*.

