

Linda Watson Pays Tribute to Rotary

By Sophie Braccini



Linda Watson addresses the crowd of Rotarians, standing to her right David Englehart and to her left Paul Fillingner

Photo Sophie Braccini

It's not every Friday morning that Lamorinda Sunrise Rotarians receive such a treat: this month Linda Watson, an international diva and one of the most powerful Wagnerian sopranos of our time, came to the group's breakfast meeting at Postino to talk about her career.

In the audience, her twin brother Dave beamed with pride. Dave is the owner of Professional Automotive Services in Lafayette. They were raised in Orinda with three other brothers and sisters; on that early morning, three generations of Watsons came to hear Linda speak.

Watson started singing in a church choir at age four and studied the piano. She is blessed with a dramatic voice that carries deep emotion and a lot of power; this type of voice is not suited for Mozart or the "bel canto," but rather for roles that demand maturity as well as strength. In fact, Watson started singing opera at age thirty-six.

"I stopped singing many times in my twenties," explains Watson, "and then I was granted a scholarship from the California Rotary Foundation to go study in Vienna." All the Rotarians in the

audience felt the pride of having contributed, themselves or their predecessors, to the blossoming of this unique artist.

Watson's debut was in 1998. She has sung numerous times at Bayreuth, the Wagner International Festival, which has been sold out since its creation in 1876 and for which tickets must be bought up to ten years in advance. She is primarily a Wagner interpreter. Brünnhilde is one of her favorite roles. The character is present three times in Wagner's Ring Cycle, which is comprised of different operas, and Watson may be on stage for five hours in a row. She has sung in Bonn, Munich, Hamburg, Florence, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Washington, Seattle and Tokyo.

Watson plans to sing for at least another ten years. Then she will settle down and teach full time. "I have started giving master classes in major cities around the world," she says, "but I travel too much to be able to do more than that right now." The traveling that's part of the management of her career keeps her away from her Californian roots most of the time. "I miss my country, my

family," she says, "I love when I come back here and retrieve the smell of the trees here in Lamorinda."

Talking with such openness to the audience, it is obvious that Watson is not a capricious and inapproachable diva. "It's insecurity that drives some singers to overprotect themselves," she explains, "our world is very difficult, on stage you are naked; off stage, you need to protect yourself. Some fans are great but you can encounter some pretty disturbed personalities as well."

Watson attributes her simplicity to her inner strength. "I owe it to my family," she says, "the way I was raised, my faith in God." She remembers a phrase her father used to tell the kids when they were going out on dates in high school: "Remember who you are and what you represent." Watson still does.