

Bad romance? **Singer relationships**



Opera stars Anna Netrebko and Erwin Schrott, who separated in 2013. Image © ITAR-TASS Photo Agency_Alamy

Music may be the food of love, but can a marriage of two singers stand the test of time? Tenor Christopher Gillett, himself married to another singer, has some hard-won tips for musos considering marriage.



Who in their right mind would hook up with an opera singer?

By turns over-confident and massively insecure – paranoid about their health, loud noise, air-conditioning, other people's perfume, cheese, agents, conductors, heat, cold, gluten, lillies, directors, coffee, planes, trains, money, reflux, handshakes and chocolate – singers can't be easy to live with. They're just so... singery.

Yes, OK. WE are so singery.

Knowing all this, you'd think the last person a singer would want to marry would be another singer. Yet, despite the innumerable people like me who said they'd never, ever do it, many of us do.

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On the upside, if you're married to a singer with the same list of insecurities – someone who understands the beast you are trying to tame – the chances are that they feel an empathy with those insecurities. Another singer knows that leaving home for months on end isn't necessarily your ideal, but it's something you feel compelled to do. They also know it isn't a rollicking picnic. They know how lonely and soul-destroying it can be. They recognise the thrill of being offered a job as opposed to the often-numbing reality of fulfilling the contract.

However, in spite of these advantages, so many singer marriages fail – especially, it would seem, the high-profile ones. The obvious conclusion is that the better your career progression, the worse the prospects for your relationship. And, I'm sorry to say, that conclusion is a fair one; not usually because anyone consciously makes a choice between one and the other, but because the task of being a successful opera singer on the road is simply too overwhelming. Career envy can play its part too, but I've rarely found that to be the real problem.

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The latest high-profile casualties are [Ailyn Pérez and Stephen Costello \(/uk/features/news/classic-fm-live-opera-stars\)](#). Less than three years ago, they were plugging [their album of love duets \(/uk/store/products/00825646334858\)](#) and [talking about the challenges of being married singers \(http://www.vanityfair.com/unchanged/2012/06/stephen-costello-ailyn-perez-opera-duets\)](#), and now they're getting divorced. So too have other high-profile singer couples like [Angela Gheorghiu \(/uk/learn/artists/angela-gheorghiu\)](#) and [Roberto Alagna \(/uk/learn/artists/roberto-alagna\)](#), [Anna Netrebko \(/uk/learn/artists/anna-netrebko\)](#) and Erwin Schrott. And I think there's a good chance that it was the Colonel Being-a-singer who did it, in the opera house, with the candlestick.

So, as someone who has been happily married to another singer for almost 20 years, here are my top tips for making it work:

- Never make a CD of love duets together. The kiss of death.
- Take that even further – avoid working together at all. It's much easier to support each other from the outside. You each have your own crap to deal with when you're working. It's unfair to expect your partner to be burdened with your business when he or she has their own to manage. The best job we ever had was in Los Angeles. Lucy, my wife, was singing Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* and at exactly the same time, I was singing Arnalta in *The Coronation of Poppea*. We got to live together and to be both working, but in different shows. The fact that she was playing a boy while I played a woman was also an intriguing twist. But it was luck rather than design that dropped these dream jobs in our laps.
- Don't think of working away from home as time you should spend pining miserably for your spouse. Instead, think of it as a time when you can enjoy some solitude (which we all need). And, at the risk of sounding a bit psycho-babbly, nurture the things that will make you a better person when you come home. Personally, I read and write so much more when I'm on the road. Enjoy the city you're in and share your enjoyment. Don't be a martyr to misery in the mistaken belief that this will make your other half feel better.
- Try to get as much boring stuff done as you can while you're apart. Use the time to do your taxes, defrag your hard drive, learn your next role, etc. etc.. That way, when you come home, you don't have to slouch off to your desk or the piano to spend yet more time away from your significant other.
- Ask yourself if you REALLY want to do that job in deepest nowhere for the sake of a full diary. Might it not be better to turn it down and spend some time with your spouse? Who needs a few more thousand in the bank when your marriage might be at stake?
- Expect the first 48 hours back to home to be difficult. Each of you has established a different rhythm to life. It's unfair to come home and expect it to be all champagne and roses. Life goes on, whether you're at home or not, and you need time to readjust. If you can't even remember which kitchen

drawer holds the cutlery, how can you be expected to remember the more delicate nuances of life as a couple?

- If you have children... well, that's a whole other ballgame and I'm out of room.

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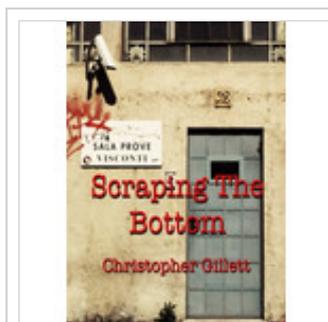
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