

The background of the image is a painting by Pauline Viardot. It depicts a harbor scene with several sailboats on the water. In the background, there is a large, dark building, possibly a church or a castle, with a prominent spire. The sky is a mix of red and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The water is a light blue. The overall style is impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a focus on color and light.

# EVOCAATION: Pauline Viardot - The Legacy

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This powerful and emotive contemporary cinematic telling of the story of Pauline Viardot unlocks heightened contemporary themes of race, creativity, gender roles and polyamory that traverse the operatic traditions of two centuries and creates an opportunity for a one of a kind cinematic exploration of performance, music, choreography and design.

The controversial role of this iconic 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘Spanish born and Moorish looking’ mezzo soprano opera singer and composer is imagined for performance by Pretty Yende, acclaimed South African opera star at La Scala and at the Metropolitan Opera .

In ancient Homeric tales the hypnotic voices of quasi-human females dangerously lured men to their fate. Recent 21<sup>st</sup> century authoritarian tirades raised against ‘troublesome women’ continues to confirm the centuries old tradition of public demonisation that has persisted towards and against women with ‘strong voices.’

When 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist writer Georges Sand, who famously dressed as a man in Parisian society met Pauline Viardot, Sand was inspired to create an enthusiastic, outspoken heroine with a powerful voice to grace the pages of her popular novel *Consuelo*. Here was a heroine who could both gain a respected position in society, enjoy lasting personal happiness, maintain social and financial independence yet simultaneously lay legitimate claim to emotional and sexual fulfilment and the right to speak out with a magnificent voice that men would love and respond to. Needless to say the novel both scandalised (male) and enchanted (female) Parisian society of the time. *Consuelo* stands as a permanent record of Pauline Viardot's impact as a woman on the role of women and the potential of their voice in society.

It was Cultural historian Betsey Prioleau who notably lists Pauline Viardot, 19th-century opera star with a hypnotic voice, whose lovers included Hector Berlioz and Ivan Turgenev, along with many others, as her Parisian ‘favourite,’ above strong and accomplished Parisian contenders that included seductive, provocative Georges Sand, emotional powerhouse Edith Piaf etc, in her historic analytic tome, **Seductress: Women Who Ravished the World**.

EVOCATION, the title of one of songstress Pauline Viardot’s compositions is the title of this ravishing cinematic exploration visualised within a decidedly contemporary thematic framing. A strong and provocative narrative structure that traverses the trauma of her youth, her young marriage, the triumph of her career on stage and the adoration of admirers from Ivan Turgenev, Hector Berlioz, Georges Sand and beyond fearlessly delivers a powerful emotional

blend that harnesses cinematic innovation and re imagines operatic tradition to deliver a moving testament to one woman’s courage, talent and willingness to entertain fascinate and outrage society with her passionate desire to live life to the fullest possible extent.

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century till today the Prima Donna in opera like any woman of independent voice has become the symbol of female independence and success and thus become a site for social control and containment. The prima donna stereotype, opera plot and music, and literature all most often presented the vilified image of the fallen and lost woman as a warning of the disaster awaiting women who overstepped the social boundaries established in the western patriarchal image of ideal womanhood. A woman’s mobility was ever a destabilising threat to the perceived socio-cultural stability of the status quo.

Pauline Viardot navigated this centuries-old tradition which demonized publicly vocal women and created a new image of the woman-artist, subtly subverting norms for female social behaviour. An accomplished actress among other things, Viardot successfully performed the roles of social woman, was inspiration of a literary heroine, was prima donna, a very public friend to some powerful and creative male friends who were all in awe of her intellect and talent, a prolific composer whose home became a place for her husband and close friends such as Ivan Turgenev and Hector Berlioz to cohabit in, whilst she developed and authored hundreds of musical compositions, many of which are re emerging and being played now as part of the ‘recent’ 21<sup>st</sup> century rush to re-discover Pauline Viardot.

By crafting her own image rather than allowing society to stigmatize or vilify her, Pauline’s success was chronicled in contemporary literature written by women who viewed prima donnas as spokespersons for the female plight. Much of this literature explores women's hopelessness and despair in the face of highly restrictive social codes. Her successful negotiation of these roles allowed her to carve out a unique position in her contemporary society, a position that allowed her to teach at the Paris Conservatory, support the careers of budding male musicians, garner the respect of royalty, publish and perform her own musical compositions, and live a long, fulfilling life- carving out a model for feminist self fulfilment that still applies two centuries later.

EVOCATION proudly delivers that message of fulfilment in this creative celebration of Pauline Viardot’s revolutionary artistic life on film.





## Starring **Pretty Yende** in the title role of Pauline Viardot

A 2011 graduate of the Young Artists Accademia of the Teatro alla Scala, Pretty Yende made her debut with the company in 2010 as Berenice in Rossini's *L'Occasione fa il Ladro*. In 2010, she became the first artist in the history of the Belvedere competition to win top prize in every category, and went on to win First Prize in the Operalia Competition in 2011.

Pretty has been seen at nearly all of the major theaters of the world, including the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Opéra National de Paris, Metropolitan Opera, Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Staatsoper Berlin, Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, Opernhaus Zürich and Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona.

On the concert stage, Ms. Yende's solo recital career has taken her to Oper Frankfurt, the Opernhaus Zürich, Smetana Hall in Prague, the Barbican in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, as well as the Würth Philharmonic Orchestra, the Opéra Royal de Wallonie-Liège, and at venues in Bratislava and Grafenegg.

Ms. Yende began the 2018/19 season with her return to Barcelona as Elvira in *I Puritani*. She returned to The Metropolitan Opera as Marie in *La fille du régiment*, and sang her first Leïla in *Les Pêcheurs de perles*. Shortly thereafter, she appeared at the Opéra national de Paris as Norina in *Don Pasquale*, portrayed her first Amina in *La sonnambula* at Opernhaus Zürich, and returned to the Bayerische Staatsoper to sing the title role of Lucia di Lammermoor and as Adina in *L'elisir d'amore*.

Recent highlights include her acclaimed Metropolitan Opera debut, stepping in as the Countess Adele in *Le Comte Ory*; her role and house debut as Marie in *La fille du régiment* at the Teatro de la Maestranza in Seville; debuts at Opéra national de Paris as Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, the Gran Teatre del Liceu as Norina in *Don Pasquale*, with the Los Angeles Opera as Micaëla in *Carmen*, at Staatsoper Hamburg as Fiorilla in *Il Turco in Italia*, and her debut at the Theater an der Wien as Countess Adèle. Additional highlights include Rosina, Adina, the title role of Lucia di Lammermoor, Juliette in *Roméo et Juliette*, Elvira in *I Puritani*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* at the Met; Adina at the Royal Opera House; Lucia at the Opéra national de Paris and Deutsche Oper Berlin; Adina at the Staatsoper Berlin; Pamina at the Grand Théâtre de Genève; Elvira at Opernhaus Zürich; Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* at Los Angeles Opera; Countess Adèle and Musetta in *La Bohème* at Teatro alla Scala; her role debut as Teresa in *Benvenuto Cellini* in Paris; and Lucia di Lammermoor in concert at the Cape Town Opera.

In 2016, Pretty released her debut album "*A Journey*" for Sony Classical, and appeared as the musical guest on several television shows including "*The Late Show*" with Steven Colbert, "*The Wendy Williams Show*," and "*Good Morning America*." She released her second solo album titled "*Dreams*" one year later on Sony Classical, with Opera Now raving: "South African Yende has a delicious instrument, with a youthful quiver of passion to it, and a wonderfully secure technique."

## Operatic Consultant: **Fredericka von Stade**

Frederica's interest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century world of opera led her to the discovery of Pauline Viardot, and she has become a leading expert on that Diva's life, career and repertoire. In 2006, she was a special advisor to Janet Flannery's TV documentary Pauline Viardot: the Forgotten Diva.

The mezzo soprano Frederica von Stade has enjoyed one of the longest and most distinguished careers in American operatic history. She made her first of what would eventually be 300 appearances at the Metropolitan Opera in New York as one of the three boys in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Her career soared from then on. Interestingly she sang her first Cherubino in Mozart's *Le Nozze de Figaro* – a role she would become famous for, in a production in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which was also notable as the American debut of the New Zealander Kiri te Kanawa, who was to become a close, life long friend.

Frederica's repertoire grew enormously as her career progressed, spanning the Baroque period, the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the bel canto tradition of

the 19th century, with a love of Rossini's works. She sang in every opera house in the world, with all the great singers and conductors of the international opera world.

The mezzo-soprano is well known to audiences around the world through her numerous featured appearances on television including several PBS specials and “Live from Lincoln Center” telecasts. Fredericka has made over sixty recordings with every major label, including complete operas, aria albums, symphonic works, solo recital programs, and popular crossover albums. Her recordings have garnered six Grammy nominations, two Grand Prix du Disc awards, the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis, Italy's Premio della Critica Discografica, and “Best of the Year” citations by Stereo Review and Opera News. Miss von Stade was awarded France's highest honor in the Arts when she was appointed as an officer of L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and in 1983 she was honored with an award given at The White House by President Reagan in recognition of her significant contribution to the arts.







## Directed by **Ian Gabriel**

Ian Gabriel was the first director of colour to open an independent, director owned film production company in South Africa.

Ian's feature project Four Corners, was the South African Official Submission for Best Foreign Language Film at the 86th Academy Awards, was awarded both Best International Feature and Best Feature (USA) at the Santa Fe Independent Film Festival, won Best Film at the 2014 Niagara Integrated Film Festival, was Best International Film nominee at the 2014 IPA awards and was Best Film Runner-up at Giffoni in Italy in 2015. Four Corners was the winner of 6 Golden Horn Awards including the Best Picture Award at the 2015 SAFTA Awards. In that year the SAFTA Golden Horn award for Best Actor was awarded to first time feature film actor 13 year old Jezriel Skei, the lead player in Four Corners. Jezriel Skei remains the youngest award winner in the history of this category.

Ian Gabriel's debut feature Forgiveness won the Best South African Film Award and the Best African Film Award, was a Golden Leopard nominee at the 2004 Locarno Film Festival, and was winner, in the same year of the Locarno Youth Jury Best Film Award as well as Ian being a recipient of the

Human Rights Award at the 57th Locarno International Film.

Ian is a multiple award winning Commercials Director and has collaborated with celebrity talent as diverse as human rights icon and activist Nelson Mandela and Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, celebrities such as Charlize Theron, Cristiano Ronaldo, Alek Wek, Haile Gebresellase, and Hudson River aviation hero Chesley Sullenberger

Ian is concept originator and development partner with 2018 Academy Award nominee Joslyn Barnes on the historic gangland TV Series \_Sabela Gold. Ian is also in development on several other feature and TV projects, most notably 'Anne Frank & Me' based on the play and novel of the same name by Cherie Bennett, to be filmed in the Netherlands with Jerry Leider, Don Schneider, Michael Robinson, Hubert Toint and Emjay Rechsteiner producing.

In South Africa Ian is represented by Giant Films, a participant in the Free the Work initiative which aims at broadening creative representation of underrepresented talent. Ian is a Directors Guild member as well as being a participant in the Directors Guild of America Diversity program. He is represented in USA by Paul Canterna

## Concept By **Stanislas Yassukovich**

Stanislas' exploration of the life and work of Ivan Turgenev led him to the discovery of Pauline Viardot.

Stanislas Yassukovich was born in Paris in 1935, of a White Russian émigré father and a French mother, and was educated at Green Vale School, Deerfield Academy and Harvard College. He served in the US Marines in the late 1950s. After joining New York investment bankers White, Weld and Co., he was transferred to its London office and spent the rest of his working life in the City of London. He is considered one of the founders of the international capital market. He was the founding CEO of the consortium merchant bank European Banking Company which provided financing for two of producer Euan Lloyd's motion pictures. He has held a number of non executive Board positions, including the Royal National Theatre – then under the directorship of Richard Eyre. He chaired the cable and satellite TV content company Flextech, a vehicle of John Malone's cable empire, and oversaw a joint venture with the BBC.

On moving to France, a strong interest in the entertainment world led Stanislas to join an English language theatre company in Provence, founded by Ronald Neame's son Christopher. He produced and acted in a number of plays, including a production of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, which was the subject of Mike Fox's “making of” documentary film: *A Spirit in Provence*.

In retirement, Stanislas has authored several published works: *Two Lives, a Social & Financial Memoir*, a double memoir of his father's life and his own; *Lives of the Luberon*, a recollection of the family's life in Provence in the later years; *James Grant*, a novel set in East Coast America, and *A Collection of Short Stories*. A further collection is due for release in 2021.

Stanislas was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA), and a Freeman of the City of London. He is married to the former Diana Townsend and they have three children: Tatyana, Michael and Nicholas. Stanislas now lives in Cape Town.







## Screenplay by **Tatyana Yassukovich**

Tatyana Alexandra Eugenie YASSUKOVICH was born and raised in England. She was educated in England, Switzerland and Germany where she learnt French and German.

Tatyana studied acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute. She became a member of the Actors Studio and worked in session when Frank Corsaro was the Artistic Director. Tatyana appeared in revival productions of *Watch on the Rhine*, *The Seagull*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Romeo & Juliet*. Tatyana also worked with contemporary playwrights such as Eduardo Machado and Julia Jordan. In addition her film work as an actress includes *Primary Motive*, *Delivering Milo*, *Exiles in New York* and *Chocolat as the Narrator!*

Tatyana moved to Los Angeles in late 2001 and developed a distinguished career as a voice actress. In addition to a variety of assignments voicing commercials - using her large repertoire of accents, Tatyana has voiced the characters Barris Offee in the animated *Star Wars-Clone Wars*, Morgan le Fey in the TV episodes and video games of *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, the Baroness in several episodes of the TV animated series *GI Joe - Renegades* and various voices in the video games *The Bard's Tale*, *Quantum of Solace*, *Lord of the Rings – Battle for Middle Earth*, *Might &*

*Magic Heroes*, and a number of other animated characters. Tatyana has also been the narrator in the TV documentaries *Discovery Atlas* and *Russia Revealed*. She also appeared in episodes of the popular TV series *Six Feet Under* and in the series *Hung*, as well as a revival in Los Angeles of the National Theatre's production of *Masterpieces* playing the lead role to critical acclaim.

In the last seven years Tatyana has lived in Philadelphia where she began her life as a filmmaker after turning her play *the Rehearsal* into a short film. Her inspiration came from reading a book on film by Werner Herzog.

After filming *the Rehearsal* she was inspired to explore the idea of creating a quartet of films based on the backstage world of acting.

In April of 2017, Tatyana won the Golden Trolley award for Outstanding Artistic achievement at the Media Film Festival in Philadelphia for her film *the Audition* which became part of the *Fourth Wall* series. Amazon Prime distributed this series in November 2019 after a premiere at the Ambler Theatre in Philadelphia. The Series has had strong reviews and Tatyana is now working on her feature narrative *CARELESS* which she plans to shoot in the fall of 2021.

## Music Director: **Jeremy Silver**

Jeremy Silver studied at Clare College, Cambridge - famous for its musical traditions. He went on to the Royal College of Music in London, studying under the great Norman del Mar. He continued his musical education at the National Opera Studio, focussing on conducting. Since 1989, Jeremy has been a free lance opera and symphony conductor. He has held a number of positions: Music Director at the English Pocket Opera Company; Music Staff at the English National opera; Principal Conductor at Opera Africa; Music Director at Opera Brava, Assistant Head of Music at the National Opera Studio; Associate Artist at the Longborough Festival Opera, and finally Director of the Cape Town Opera School at Cape Town University.

Jeremy has conducted an extensive repertoire of operatic performances by a variety of composers at venues all over the world. He is known as a particular expert in the Bel Canto tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> Century opera. He has written articles on operatic issues and lectured widely.







## Recording Pianist /Accompanist: **Marek Ruszczinski**

The life and work of Pauline Viardot was drawn to Marek Ruszczinski's attention by his friend Frederica von Stade, and has since become an expert on Viardot's many song compositions. He has produced several video concerts where singers perform Viardot's songs , accompanied by Marek, and he lectures on their origins and the inspirations behind them.


Marek Ruszczinski has given recitals in concert halls across Europe, including the Wigmore Hall, the Barbican, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Musikverein, Carnegie Hall and the Opera de Bastille. Marek grew up in Poland and received his early musical education from Prof. Katarzyna Popowa-Zydrón. At 19 he was awarded a prize by The Polish Ministry of Arts and Culture for Musical Achievement. With further awards under his belt, he moved to London to continue his formation. Marek developed a passion for vocal music and concentrated on acquiring the skills necessary to support opera singers. He has worked with such notables as Kiri te

Kanawa, Christa Ludwig and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

At the Guildhall School of Music, he won the Gold Medal Accompanist prize in 2009 and 2011, and then the Prix de Piano at the Nadia and Lili Boulanger International voice- piano competition in 2019 in Paris. Marek is also a graduate of the Académie Musicale de Villecroze and works as an accompanist for Teresa Berganza.

Marek became a vocal coach at both the Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. With an Opera Awards Foundation grant, he trained as a répétiteur at the National Opera Studio in London, where he studied under Jeremy Silver. Currently he is a member of the music staff at the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme of the Royal Opera house, Covent Garden and works as a vocal coach at the Royal Academy of Music and the Kiri te Kanawa Foundation. He has given master classes at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London and the University of California in Santa Barbara.





**Screenplay now available.**

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