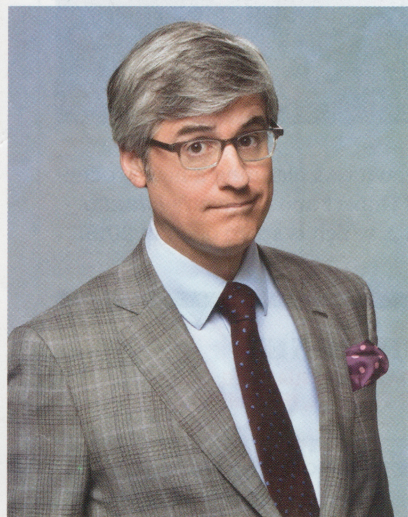


Liner Notes:

Mo Rocca.



The Basics

Mo Rocca's career has encompassed acting, writing, producing, blogging and radio and television journalism. He worked on the Emmy and Peabody Award-winning children's TV. series *Wishbone* and won an Emmy of his own as cowriter of the 1994 Tony Awards. He has been a correspondent for *The Daily Show* and the *Tonight Show* and is a regular contributor to *CBS Sunday Morning* and a panelist on NPR's *Wait Wait ... Don't Tell Me!* He is also host of *My Grandmother's Ravioli*, a show he created for the Cooking Channel.

OPERA NEWS: How did you become interested in opera?

MO ROCCA: I did a lot of Gilbert & Sullivan growing up—three *Pinafores*, one *Penzance*, one *Iolanthe*. The kids out there probably think *Iolanthe* is a party drug. G&S is sort of a gateway to opera. Then at the College Light Opera Company, I did *Périchole*. All I remember is that I played a scraggly guy in a prison cell.

ON: Who is your favorite opera singer?

MR: Maybe it's just because I like to be different, but my favorite of the three tenors is José Carreras. I kind of like short guys—and he seems like the funnest hang. Joyce DiDonato is really cool. I follow her on Twitter, but she doesn't follow me.

ON: What is your favorite opera?

MR: I love to listen to *Tosca*. I know that sounds like saying, "Meatloaf's my favorite food."

ON: As a humorist, are you partial to comic opera?

MR: No, I like when people die. I prefer when people die of things that used to be eradicated but are now making a comeback in Marin County. Those parents are making opera relevant to a younger generation by facing their kids with consumption. Not to make light of sickness and death, but I'm consumed with consumption!

ON: What is it about opera that most appeals to you?

MR: It's getting harder and harder in our world to find a place where you can have an experience that's both deeply emotional and shared. That's what the opera house seems to be able to do. You the individual can be having this larger-than-life, deeper-than-deep emotional experience, and it's shared with the other people in the space.

Coda: What Else to Consider

Rocca, a presidential history buff, has an idea for a new opera: "I think a great opera could be made about Ulysses S. Grant," he says. "At the end of his life, he was devoted to his wife, Julia, and he was dying of throat cancer, and he had been swindled out of money, and he had nothing left. And Mark Twain said to him, 'You need to write your story.' Twain had a friend with a house in Mount McGregor, New York. He said, 'Go to this place, the air is good there, and write.' There are pictures of Grant on the porch, flanked by his family. He wrote furiously, and then he stopped writing, and he dropped dead a couple of days later. And it's considered the greatest presidential memoir ever. I want to see that opera—*The Final Days of Ulysses S. Grant*. I can't do the music, but I'll do the libretto."