KJ. 38 years! Yes, 38 years. It was such a magnificent time in my life. Even if there were always challenges to overcome, sometimes truly tragic ones. Indeed, they started since the very beginning, in 1976, when my family and I arrived in Milan, and spent the very first night in a hotel by the train station. It was another world. For me, a farm boy from Akureyri, it was a bit frightening. I was with my first wife, two children, my daughter, then very little, and my son, who must have been 6 years old. I could hardly speak a word in Italian back then [*the present interview was held in Italian in Akureyri on Saturday, 25 January 2015, and then translated into English*]. I knew that my teacher there could speak English, though. The following morning we went to catch a bus, the blue kind [*for long-distance routes*], in order to go to Turin, since my teacher was supposed to be there, at the local music school [*It. conservatorio*], not in Milan. However, not even that was a straightforward matter…

My teacher, Giuseppe Valdengo, a baritone known as "Toscanini's baritone" for he was Toscanini's favourite, and an accomplished violinist and pianist—indeed a great musician despite being somewhat eccentric—was no longer in Turin! As I said, he was eccentric, amusing, but only to a certain point. He took things lightheartedly and liked making fun of circumstances as well as people, often ending up with offending those around him. Well, just about the time of my arrival, he had gravely offended the director of the music school in Turin, so that he had to leave Turin and go elsewhere, which was not a problem for him, given that he found immediately a new position at the music school of Aosta, in the French-speaking part of northern Italy. For us, on the contrary, it was quite a problem: we had to change our plans on the spot and go to Aosta instead. Valdengo was kind enough to help us find an apartment in Saint Vincent, near Aosta, not far from the well-known casino. We found him there, cheerful, pleased, and I had my first class with him the following morning. I was introduced to the director of the music school in Aosta and that is how I commenced my first year of studies in Italy. I followed an intensive programme that should have helped me catch two pigeons with one stone, namely to learn the Italian musical repertoire and, at the same time, the Italian language.

NM. *Were you following a regular study course, then?*

KJ. Yes and no. I was at a regular music school, but every three months I would take an examination and move up one grade. After one year, if I kept going at that pace, I would be at the second-from-last year of the school curriculum. It was an ambitious plan and a very interesting experience, also because the school was very vibrant and demanding, much more so than here in Iceland, where there is far too little to do and life is far too easy, back then as well as today. Believe me, I do think that, without adequate pressure placed upon the students, real world-class talents cannot emerge.

NM. *Do you think that there are still significant differences between the musical education available in the Italian schools and the one that you can get in the Icelandic schools?*

KJ. Yes, it is still the case. In Italy you can tell a student that something is wrong and that he must do something about it, put more work into it. If you do it in Iceland, then you, the teacher, are in trouble! It makes an enormous difference.

NM. *But why Italy? When you decided to go abroad to pursue your studies as an opera singer, you could have chosen other countries, closer to Iceland, either geographically or culturally, if not both.*

KJ. Certainly, Sweden was very much talked about as a suitable option. Nonetheless, choosing Italy was such an important decision in my career. And I have a person to thank for that. You see, I had studied classical singing here in Akureyri with *maestro* Vincenzo Maria Demetz, who, among other things, had taught me some Italian—very little, in fact, just a few words! Unfortunately, we spoke together mostly in English and in German, since he came from Val Gardena, in the Alps of [*German-speaking*] Alto Adige. He had a rather particular opinion of me, in truth an amazing insight. He said to me: "You are more southern Italian than the southern Italians [*maestro Demetz used the tongue-in-cheek derogatory term* "terrone"]: your physique, your temperament, your type of voice; you must not go to Germany or Scandinavia, you must go to Italy! There you will be able to let yourself go and, verily, sing. In Germany, in a way, they might get you to sing *Lieder*. That way, you could acquire a certain refinement, which would be good for a strong and loud voice like yours. But that is not really the place for you. Go to Italy!" *Maestro* Demetz was correct on all accounts, for I was not a lyrical tenor, I was not light, I was without agility; I had to get straight into Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini. Then, but only then, I could work on some additional aspects of my voice. He had seen all this back then, already, which is fantastic, for he was right!

NM. *Moving to Italy, studying so hard: it must have been not only an exciting time, but also a hard one. What sort of sacrifices did it involve?*

KJ. Big sacrifices. I was young, 26 years old, but I was already married. Besides, I had a fairly clearly defined life in Iceland: I had my own small enterprise, which I managed, I had two children, a house… Yet, I said it right there to *maestro* Demetz: if I go there, I'm going to make it; I won't to be fooling around, wasting my time. I knew that, at my age, I had to be ready to go on stage in two or three years. Also because, back then, there were no scholarships, no grants, no student loans, like today. When I decided to go, I sold my house, I loaned out my small enterprise for two and a half years, in order to see how things would have worked out, and for that time we lived off the little revenue coming from my small enterprise in Iceland. After two years and a half I felt like I was dying. Moreover, after just one year, it was pretty clear that my wife couldn't cope: she and Italy didn't get along with each other. Not to mention the Italians: she thought they were all mad!

NM. *As an Italian expatriate, who left his native country for the quieter north, I may be able to understand her!*

KJ. Yes, exactly: the quiet north! Well, eventually, she needed to come back to Iceland. And so the troubles started. I began having a little fun around and, in the end, our marriage went down the drain. Also, I felt that she wasn't really backing me. As regards singing, we didn't have the same perception of things. She thought that we were going to have some fun for one or two years and then we would move back to Iceland, where I would have kept singing, certainly better than I did before. I wanted more. After six months in Italy, it was clear that things were going well for me at the music school and, at least for a year, my work with Valdengo produced tangible results. I was already giving concerts around, taking part in semi-staged operas. It was the beginning of my professional life. I mean, after just six

months, I had my debuts in *La Traviata* and *La Bohème*. The voice was good, in all the ways that matter: it responded well, I wasn't fatigued, and the high notes were good, solid and bright. After a year, I thought it sensible for my wife to go back home, for she was stopping me, rather than supporting me. Still, it was hard.

NM. *And your children?*

KJ. Our elder boy stayed in Italy with me, studying in the schools there. He grew up in Italy and thinks of himself as Italian. Later on, he went to the University of Bologna. Our daughter, instead, followed her mother back home and grew up in Akureyri. They remain close to each other to this day. My wife and I tried to be reasonable and avoid their mutual separation, as well as being separated from either parent. Besides, my daughter came to Italy when there were school holidays in Iceland. As a child, she would sometimes travel on her own. She was a strong little girl back then; she is a strong woman today—my dear Barbara. It was hard, but that much my wife and I could understand: that we didn't understand each other any more. I was determined. I was strong-willed: I wanted to be on stage and be good at what I was doing. Furthermore, after a year, right in the middle of all this family chaos and unpleasantness, I felt I couldn't progress much more with Valdengo. He was too lighthearted, too cheeky, he wasn't taking things seriously enough for my taste. Thus, after a year, when I kept being told that everything was going well, I could sense, almost by instinct, that I was still lacking much to be a real opera singer.

NM. *What couldn't Valdengo give you as a teacher?*

KJ. He was an excellent listener and very helpful. Nonetheless, as I travelled around Italy and attended concerts, also at *La Scala* in Milan, I heard and understood that there were certain additional elements of my musical education that I had to acquire or improve considerably more. Above all, I had to become an artist. The voice is one thing, but to sing as an artist is another. To interpret the music well, to master the Italian language, to absorb the Italian culture and make it mine: I couldn't do it there, in Aosta, with Valdengo. So I told him that I was going to study under a tenor in another place. He became furious with jealousy! Just think of this: after Christmas that year, I took part in, and won, the Maria Callas Award: I had a scholarship, an Italian scholarship, and a contract to sing in five performances of *Madama Butterfly* at the Spoleto Music Festival as Pinkerton. Valdengo was so mad with rage and jealousy that he wrote a letter to the ministry in Rome, complaining that they were a bunch of idiots, that they had awarded the prize to a hopeless case, who sang like a dog, and so on and on… He destroyed me. The scholarship was revoked and I lost my performances in Spoleto. He destroyed me out of jealousy. In the process, he also destroyed the friendship that he had with Demetz, who took upon himself the full responsibility of sending me to Valdengo in the first place. It was horrible. And yet, what could be a catastrophe turned out to be a lucky break. I went to Piacenza, at the Nicolini music school, where I got my BA, studying with Poggi. Also, I studied acting with Eugenia Ratti, a world-class singer that had performed all over the world, including *La Scala* and the Met, and that taught acting there. It was precisely what I needed: how to move on stage, how to interpret different roles, how to master and use the Italian language effectively, how to make the Italian culture my own and, above all, how to approach the different composers, understand them. I travelled to Tuscany, to Emilia Romagna, to "meet" with Puccini, Verdi, even Bellini down in Sicily.

NM. *Did you make many friends during your studies and your travels around Italy, people that helped you to absorb the Italian culture, or did you work primarily at the music school?*

KJ. Under this perspective, I trusted and benefited from the music school, most of all. Also, in my profession, it is hard to make real friends. You are too much on your own. There is too much competition for that to be likely to unfold. Besides, you cannot rely on friends, even if you can make them. Still, there are exceptions, and I met at the Maria Callas Award a lovely man that has become a life-long friend, Maurizio Barbacini. But before I talk about him, let me say that, in those years when I was based in Piacenza, life went on rather well. I was singing frequently, there, in Bologna, Parma, at a number of opera societies, in Turin. My name was getting around. Life was nice. I met also a dear Hispanic-American woman, Doria Cavanna, whom I married in May 1983. Sadly, she died the 31 December of the same year. Another tragedy in my life. She was an amazing artist. Much more developed than me as an artist. I learnt so much from her. I tried to absorb all the suggestions that I could get from her, especially when she was on stage. She wasn't only a singer, by the way. She had been an actress. She had made movies in America. She was a great woman and a great artist. Despite our time together being so short, it was a very healthy and important period of my life. Her death was a terrible blow. Yet, they say that suffering helps an artist to mature and evolve. There can be no joy without sadness; nor sadness without joy. An artist must understand both realms of experience. I paid a terrible price for that understanding, but, over that period, I did open up to acting and to theatre as art forms.

NM. *As time went on, given what you are describing, it seems clear to me that you integrated well within Italian society and the local way of life. However, how much of that Icelandic farm*

boy that had travelled from Akureyri to Milan, Aosta and Piacenza was left within you? Was there anything that you deem quintessentially Icelandic that helped you face and overcome the challenges that you met?

KJ. Absolutely so! I grew up in a big family, seven children, I was second-from-last; I had to fight every time to get anything I wanted, nobody ever gave me anything for free; in this sense, I was tough and autonomous; whenever I liked to do or achieve anything, I knew that I had to fight, on my own, in order to get it. Therefore, even after the shocking way in which my relationship with Valdengo had concluded, the sort of thing that would annihilate a person's self-confidence, I thought that I would succeed anyway; in fact I wanted it even more than I did before. He told me to go to hell? I will show him that I am a real devil. He told me that I wouldn't make it? I will show him; I will make it! Nothing could discourage me. And this is very Icelandic: personal autonomy, self-sufficiency. I knew that I had to fight and I did it. Then, you know, in the end, that Maurizio Barbacini of whom I told you briefly before, he helped me too. Consider this: I was penniless, I had been repudiated by my former teacher, I was divorced; in fact, I had left everything to my wife: I thought it was right to do so—and I wanted to be a gentleman. I needed only my toothbrush and I wanted my freedom. Besides, I felt guilty, so, in the end, it seemed right that way. And this is how I actually left Akureyri behind me.

NM. *You didn't leave it for good, though. You kept in touch with Iceland, didn't you?*

KJ. Yes, every once in a while I came to Iceland, almost every year, singing in Reykjavik as well as Akureyri and, of course, to see my daughter. My son was with me, in Italy. My

daughter was here, in Iceland, her family was here. In 1982, to tell you the truth, I doubted that I could go on, and started thinking about coming back to Iceland. Yet, here in Iceland, I had made friends, powerful friends, people with money, politicians. I wrote to one of them, I described in the letter my situation; I told them that I was penniless and that my predicament was really desperate; I told him that I had to tour around Germany for some auditions there, and that I was ready to do anything. I got some help in return. Not much, but enough to rekindle hope. You see, in 1981…

Actually, going a little further back, in 1979-1980, I graduated with Poggi, and they asked me to take part in a concert in Mantua. There is a beautiful little theatre there, and it is there that I got lucky: at the piano was Ettore Campogalliani, a great musician, who for 25 years had been working at *La Scala*, a real giant in the world of music! He was there, at that concert, playing the piano for some of his students, who would later become some of the most important singers in the world. I sang for him both big arias from *Tosca* and was very successful. I also sang other arias, from *La Bohème* and other operas by Puccini, receiving great applause—the little theatre truly seemed to be crumbling down upon me with excitation! So I had an opportunity to talk to him. He was a real gentleman and a man of great culture, not only an accomplished musician, but a published author of many books as well. He was also a poet, and he taught at the university in Venice. Over dinner, I spoke to him candidly and explained to him that he could give me what I needed most. Almost everywhere else, included here in Iceland, the music scene was provincial. I say this despite having been born and raised in the theatre here in Akureyri. My house was near the theatre. My father worked there and so did my mother. At the age of two or three I was already in the theatre of my hometown. That was already a great advantage. I had already understood many things there then, but in Milan, at Campogalliani's prestigious theatre, I could advance so much more!

I needed more culture. That was the point. He said to me: "I really liked you today. In Milan, at least fifty of the best singers in the world have come to me: Luciano Pavarotti, Mirella Freni, Katia Ricciarelli, Gianni Poggi, Carlo Bergonzi…" I couldn't list them all! Renata Scotto

and so many others! “However,” he said, “I normally require an audition, hence you will have to come to Milan and sing for me… No! I’m joking! You proved your worth today: we can start our classes tomorrow, if you like.” So I went to him, and there was also Antonio Tonini, who was a good friend of his, and after two or three months with him he told me that, in Ancona, maestro Zino was going to stage *Il Trittico* by Puccini and that they needed a tenor, as usual! That’s how I got the job! Back then I knew well *Rigoletto*, *La Bohème*, *La Traviata* and I was preparing *Lucia di Lammermoor*. “Leave Lucia and study as Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi*“—that’s what he said. After a month, Tonini came to listen to me and told Campogalliani: “Let’s have him for *Il Tabarro* as well. He should do both, for there is no better singer—and we can save some money too!” This combination of roles is very rare, given that *Il Tabarro* is complex, deep and dramatic, while *Gianni Schicchi* is lyrical, even light, since Rinuccio’s role is very high [*in the vocal register*]. In May we go to the Marche for the rehearsals—and it was so beautiful! I had an enormous success in both roles. I was the newcomer, though, hence I was not getting paid much: I was the last name on the list! Still, it was enough to survive. All these events happening in a rather short span of time. In Ancona, moreover, I met an Englishman, who was the director of the English National Opera. After listening to me, he decided to offer me the role of Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* at their theatre in London…

NM. *From one thing to the next…*

KJ. Yes. Life seems to move that way. This is also how I met, out of sheer chance, the great *maestro* Menotti. It was at a concert in Parma. We started talking together. He told me that he was disappointed not to have me singing for him, as Pinkerton, in Spoleto. Then, I had to explain to him what had happened, how an angry person had tried to destroy me, my reputation, my career. He replied: “Don’t worry. In 1983 you come to Spoleto and sing in a

new edition of the *Madama Butterfly*. It will be an over-the-top one, I warn you now!"—Ken Russell, a real genius, was going to direct it… Menotti and I became friends that way. He was then the super-intendant of the theaters in Rome, where I spent eventually 20 years as a regular performer, singing in all the big roles: *Tosca*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Gioconda*, *Manon Lescaut*.

NM. *20 years, during which you inaugurated with* Il Trovatore *the newly built opera theatre in Genoa, in 1992, as the city celebrated the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the Americas.*

KJ. Exactly. The theatre Carlo Felice in Genoa. It was 500 years since the "discovery" of the Americas and 50 years since the destruction of the old opera house, which the Brits had bombed during World War II. I remember it very well.

NM. *Yes, that is true, only the wing to the east had survived the aerial bombings and is still visible today. The rest is new—so new that it had sparked some controversy…*

KJ. What a theatre! And what an occasion! Singing in one of the best roles Opera can give

you. It was a remarkable experience. I recall the actual theatre, which is sort of inside-out, for it is meant to give you the idea of singing in a medieval square, like those you see in the old part of the city, which is just nearby. When I saw it, I said to myself: “It is true what they say about the Italians [*that they are all crazy!*]”. I found it very strange, but, at the same time, very interesting. It was something daring and novel. A stroke of genius, I would say.

NM. *Verdi’s* Simon Boccanegra *is said to be the best opera ever staged in that theatre, for it is possible to create the illusion of being in medieval Genoa, given the subject of the opera and the look of the theatre.*

KJ. It’s true. Singing in a medieval square! By the way, I sang also *La Gioconda* and *Rigoletto* in that theatre. Somehow, 1992 was the year of my “explosion” as an international tenor. I started singing regularly in Britain as well, which lasted over a period of ten years.

NM. *And what was your relationship with Iceland at that point of your career?*

KJ. I was far away, very much. The sense of separation ran deep. Also, I was being mocked back home, they said that I had gone to Italy to become the new Caruso… Some rascal, I

mean… But I took it mostly as a bit of fun.

NM. *You had also Icelanders that supported you, though.*

KJ. Yes, certainly. Valur Hafþórsson, the head of KEA, had sponsored me. So did the Town of Akureyri. Not huge sums of money, but enough to make life easier. Above all, I knew that I had not been deserted. They were beside me. They supported me. Nevertheless, I felt distant. I was the first young Icelander to go to Italy in 25 years. After the war, in the 1950s, a few went to Italy to study, without great results. Then, nobody else. Even today, far too few Icelanders go to study in Italy. I cannot understand why. Italy is the cradle of civilization, the cradle of culture, the cradle of Opera. Why are they going elsewhere? Why London or the US? It's all second-hand there!

NM. *Do you think that in Italy there are still the best opportunities for opera singers? The best schools?*

KJ. Yes, I do. Absolutely. I am certain of that. Also, think of this fact: while we are sitting and conversing here, today, there are literally thousands of concerts and operas being performed

worldwide. More than 70% of them are either Italian or in Italian. Then, what's the point of studying elsewhere? The main reason why I don't do German *Lieder* is that I cannot speak German very well. A singer must have a high level of competence in the languages he wishes to sing in. Now, if more than 70% of the classical singing going on in the world is in Italian, then it is simply logical that anyone interested in opera singing should acquire a high level of competence in the Italian language. You cannot get that in London, Vienna, New York. You can only get that in Italy!

Also, let me add a few words on Maurizio Barbacini, whom I met at that Callas competition of which I was talking to you before. He sang back then and also played the piano very well—a gifted musician. I had him joining me in Iceland for some concerts, conducting the national symphony orchestra. We issued a record together too. Now he is often in New York and Vienna. A great pianist and a man of great musical culture, especially Italian opera. I would consult with him very often in those days, even if his career was not yet blossoming, for I trusted his judgment. He always had great insight in musical matters. Well, I was waiting before commencing at *La Scala*, which had hired me, but, as you know, theaters have often many-years plans to run through, meaning that, like with the Met, I sang for them in 1986 and then walked on stage in 1990! Well, I met with Barbacini. We conversed, had some fun, did some music together. And then he said to me: "Why do you take on these roles, which everybody else can take too?" He was referring to high lyrical roles in *Rigoletto*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, possibly the toughest one among them, *La Traviata*, some Bellini, like *La Sonnambula* and *I Puritani*—I had always very solid high notes, which are *de rigueur* for that kind of repertoire. He continued: "There must be at least three or four other tenors out there that sing these roles as beautifully as you do. But I know you, your vocal capacity, your temperament, your strength, both of will and of body: you must sing those parts that nobody else, in this day and age, sings really well. Those parts for which you cannot find really good tenors, apart from Luciano [*Pavarotti*]. He's the only one." It was an excellent idea. Also, I had noticed my own mental and physical development over those years, which was calling for something new in my career. Someone once told me that no idiot has even sung well!

NM. *An interesting motto…*

KJ. One must think about the roles he chooses, the possibilities available in the repertoire and in the theaters, selecting the place and the moment with some wisdom. It is not enough to just go on working, relentlessly. Thus, it was the mid 1980s, I started studying for Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, which I knew would have been performed in Iceland, with me in it, the following year. Then I started studying Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, for which I had received an informal offer from Florence, with Bruno Bartoletti conducting it. Meanwhile I had sung *Tosca* in Florence with Zubin Mehta, and it was very successful, at least as much as my *Trovatore* in Genoa. In between I sang the *Gioconda* and, in Turin, *Il Trovatore*. So, I had the *Tosca* in Florence and *Il Trovatore* in Turin: I was going back and forth between the two—what a mess! But I was young, lustful and strong! Up to 80 concerts a year! Barbacini was right: with these operas, my strong voice, my will and my wisdom, I must say—I had always 20% of my voice in my pocket, so to speak, for 80% of my strong voice was more than enough, while other colleagues in the same roles would have to push 100% all the time—it could be done. Theatre directors were happy with a singer like me. They long for stability, reliability; they don't want to worry about whether the lead tenor will make it or not. I had this surplus of vocal strength that they could rely upon. Therefore they were happy to offer roles to a madman like me: "You sing better when you are sick than when you are in good health", one of them told me once! My friend Barbacini was right: I knew more roles, I was known as reliable, there was now one of these roles available in Vienna, then another in New York, and then yet another in Florence…

NM. *You expanded your repertoire and established your career.*

KJ. Precisely. And I was always cautious in deciding my next move. I didn't rush forward. I thought things through, paying attention to the health of my voice, never pushing too hard. I must concur with the adagio: no idiot has ever sung well! You may have a golden voice, but without wisdom you cannot go anywhere!

NM. *Let's get back to Iceland…*

KJ. Yes, well, in the late 1980s there was Sigurður Björnsson, conductor of the national orchestra, which was a bit boring, to be frank. They took themselves far too seriously. They didn't care for Opera. They cared for pure music, especially contemporary, which is good, but to a point. One should never forget what Karajan used to say about orchestras: the best ones play regularly in operas, meaning Vienna and Berlin, for the players must listen to the singers, pay attention to what is going on, following the artists on stage. Sigurður wanted to change this and he did change it, fighting and making use of me in this direction. It was a big bet—on a real racing horse, though! We staged many operas, also semi-staged ones, and there was no year in the two following decades when I didn't sing something in Reykjavík. Needless to say, many local colleagues became very jealous! His wife, a fantastic soprano, with whom I had debuted in 1981 in *La Bohème*, was a good friend of mine. We were the best singers in the country. It is as simple as that. But then I could start hear people gossiping about us, spreading lies, being nasty. Now, I am no angel by any means, but things were being twisted and blown out of proportion… All this made me feel more and more separated from Iceland.

NM. *Why coming back, then?*

KJ. After singing for 30 years around the world as one of the best three or four tenors in the profession, facing also envy and gossip on your own, you become very self-centred. But the world doesn't spin around you. In 1985, during the rehearsal for *Un ballo in maschera*, I met the woman that became my wife, with whom we will soon celebrate 30 years together. She was younger than me, a stage actress, I fell madly in love with her; and she with me, fortunately! Everything worked out well. There was something in her that my second wife also possessed: they were women of great culture, educated, and cosmopolitan. I had been alone for two year. Suddenly, thanks to her, I felt inspired again: I could receive so much from such a talented artist. And she understood me. She came with me to Italy without any qualms, She had been abroad herself: 10 years in Norway. There was no uprooting. Nothing radical. She was cosmopolitan. She liked that kind of life. In Iceland, an artist's life is very hard. Artists are paid poorly and, at times, treated poorly. People expect them to be available to act, sing or play, but they are flabbergasted if then the artists ask for money in return. And what they get is very little anyway. Thus the overall level of artistic life in the country, and I am talking about the widespread mentality not the artistic quality, has been condemned to provincial mediocrity.

NM. *Haven't things changed over the past 10-15 years though?*

KJ. Yes, they have. And I think I played a role in this change. I insisted to be taken seriously and so all artists with and like me. It is fine to have amateur singers or artists that win their bread in a different way, but you also need people that go past that stage and turn their art into a career, a profession, a life. A life that can take you around the world: we lived for almost 10 years in Monte Carlo, we travelled regularly between Italy and the US. And we had kids…

NM. *That changes things, doesn't it?*

KJ. Yes, I used to joke about the fact that I led a better life than Onassis: travelling worldwide, singing in the best theatres, being famous, wealthy—and always with my family! But then the kids started growing and they had to go to school… As a result, my wife started being less mobile, while I travelled more and more often on my own; then she got seriously ill—now everything is fine, thanks God—and I was constantly worried for her while abroad. All this didn't go down well, with her especially. She wanted to change things, for herself first of all. As for myself, I had had my shot. Thirty years on the top of the world, so to speak. Now she wanted, she needed, to think more about herself. And I understood that very well. After receiving so much from my family, I had to give back to them. So I slowed down, moved back to Iceland and began to teach on a regular basis, while she went to the university in Reykjavík. Meanwhile, I spent more and more time with the kids; she completed her first degree, got a Master's degree… Now she earns more than I do! And that is just great: we are ready to face the future together. But be sure about this: I still love being, and I think I am still loved as, a man of music. In fact, I hope to die on stage!

NM. *And what would you say of yourself as a teacher?*

KJ. I do my best to coach as many young voices as I can. Just few weeks ago, at the opera house in Reykjavík, there was Verdi's *Don Carlo*: 8 singers were former students of mine. Some people acknowledged this fact; some didn't... I am saddened, to tell you the truth, about the way in which Icelandic music schools operate. They are too relaxed, too lenient. Students approach their courses as some kind of fun or entertainment. I have always thought of education as something more than that. Getting an education, enriching your culture, pursuing a study line are meant to take you to some higher or deeper place—a stage at least! It is not just a bit of fun. I teach differently than most of my colleagues. I make demands.

Also, there are too many music schools in the country, which are starved of students, since these are never enough for all of them, hence the schools are always on the verge of bankruptcy, which reduces dramatically the scope for teachers to make demands on the students. Ten music schools, two for singing, would be enough in Reykjavík: there are 19 now! All are competing for the same funds. Fewer, better poles—that's what we need. As long as the funds are not reduced, then they could be distributed among the fewer schools, which could then hire teachers as needed and increase the level of musical education in the country. Icelandic taxpayers pay about 65% of the cost of advanced students in music schools: the students should ponder upon this fact and behave more seriously, taking their studies more seriously, working much harder. On my part, I try to teach the way it is done in Italy: you pay more to study with me, but you get more hours, both with me and the piano accompaniment, and you are expected to do all that is required, such as music theory, etc.

You are to be prepared as an artist. And I am much harder than my colleagues. You cannot spend five months studying one aria! And I can get very angry: sometimes I give the students a dressing-down. They accuse me of being mad, but mad are those students that do not study: they have the opportunity, the general population pays for much of it, and they are registered as students. Why on Earth should they consider studying as a discretionary option, then? If you are a student, then you study. It is that simple!