



**MATERIAL SUCCESS:** From Carnegie to the Coast, Dimi draws 'em in

## Aria Speedwagon

Hunky Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky is fast becoming the hottest ticket in opera

**R**USSIAN SADNESS—it's my normal emotion. To be sad, to enjoy being sad," baritone Dmitri "Dimi" Hvorostovsky remarked through a translator years ago.

But success has lightened up Hvorostovsky (the *H* is silent, if that helps). A sold-out October

production of *The Barber of Seville* in San Francisco had critics raving. Yet the force that drives "the Siberian Express," as he's known, is still a melancholy one, as his album titles attest: *Dark Eyes*, *Russia Cast Adrift*, *My Restless Soul*. He's played to full houses at New York's Carnegie Hall and Wash-

ington's Kennedy Center, and his fusion of sexiness, romantic angst, and just-plain-gorgeous voice are turning a new generation on to longhair music. Hvorostovsky's latest release, *Credo*, features Russian liturgical music performed with the St. Petersburg Chamber Choir.

This frenzy of fame wasn't what Hvorostovsky, 33—the only child of a physician mother and a chemical engineer father who was an amateur singer—expected growing up in Siberia. But after he won the BBC's 1989 Singer of the World Competition, the Siberian Express became a runaway train.

And he's going at full speed. While Hvorostovsky lives in London with his wife, Svetlana, a retired ballerina, and 14-year-old stepdaughter, Masha, his busy touring schedule keeps him playing to appreciative crowds. "American audiences give you a reaction right away. They don't keep it inside," he says. "Russian audiences are very tough, very inside themselves. They like and hate me at the same time. I don't live there anymore—they feel betrayed."

With his shock of silver hair, animal-like eyes, and dynamic stage charm, Hvorostovsky was one of PEOPLE magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People in the World" in 1991. No longer needing an interpreter, he good-naturedly refers to his publicity as "Oh, yeah—'blah, blah, blah.'" But it's that "blah, blah, blah" that lures them in.

"I really do believe in the power of music," he enthuses unabashedly—and, it seems, in the potent effect of mixing in smiles with his world-renowned sadness. "Russian melancholy still belongs to me." —Lawrence O'Toole