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Singing star from Poland beginning to feel at home in U.S.

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Gazette Reporter

CLIFTON PARK — Irena Jarocka isn't homesick anymore.

An international singing star from Poland, Jarocka moved to the United States four years ago with her husband and their daughter, Monika, who was then 8.

They spent more than three years in West Virginia, moving to Clifton Park three months ago.

Jarocka missed home at first, because she'd left a lot behind in Poland — friends, fans and a career filled with concert and festival performances, radio and television appearances, international tours and chart-topping records.

She traveled back to Poland at least twice a year for concerts, recording sessions and television shows, but she still had trouble adjusting to new turf.

"My audience is still very big over there," she said in a recent conversation.

But Jarocka's days of feeling blue are over. She now has a number of concerts lined up in this country.

Her Capital Region debut will be at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Church of St. Adalbert in Schenectady.

The program will include an international mix of carols, including Polish favorites. She'll sing several popular carols in English and her version of "Silent Night" in Polish, French, English and German.

Jarocka moved to the United States when her husband, computer expert Michael Sobolewski, took a job at West Virginia University four years ago. At first, Jarocka, felt as though she was on vacation, but as time went on, she found she was having trouble adjusting to her new life in America.

Her outlook began to change about a year ago when she read a book by Louisa Hay called "You Can Heal My Life," which got her thinking positively about her situation. "I discovered myself all over again," she said.

She read several other books about

positive thinking and took up yoga, which helped her to think more deeply about herself.

"When I became happier, everything around me became better," Jarocka said.

Suddenly she was controlling her own destiny.

"I accepted the fact that I'm here and propositions to sing in this country began coming in."

On Jan. 28, Jarocka will perform a concert at a Lithuanian Hall in Philadelphia. On the following day she has a concert scheduled at the Polish National House of Culture in Baltimore.

In February, the singer is scheduled to perform in Florida, Chicago and Paterson, N.J. In March she'll be back in Poland for a few weeks to record a new compact disc and appear on Polish television.

Jarocka began singing as a child in a hometown choir. When she was a teenager she enrolled in a school for singers aspiring for careers on Polish radio.



Irena Jarocka

Her career began to blossom in 1968 when she won an award on the Opole

Festival of Polish Song. In that same year, her song "Gondoliers from Wislula" was a smash in Poland and she began study in Paris on a five-year scholarship.

In 1970, the singer won the "Silver Ermine" at the International Festival of Song in Rennes, France. Three years later she had two more hit singles in Poland. She received her first Golden Record for an LP titled "Wcieniu dobrej drzewa (I Thought About You)" in 1975.

In 1976 Jarocka had the starring role in the Polish film "I Am A Butterfly." She portrayed a singer in the movie and the title song became one of her many hits.

Over the years Jarocka recorded more than 10 albums in Polish, German, French, English and Italian. Three were Gold Record winners.

Early in her career, Jarocka was influenced by Barbra Streisand and she has several Whitney Houston songs in her repertoire.

"I like songs in which I can tell people something about myself," Jarocka

said. "Lyrics are very important to me and I think of each song as a small theatrical piece."

The singer said she feels it's also important to be able convey the emotions of a song to people who don't understand the language she is singing it in.

Her husband is now employed by the General Electric Co. and the Sobolewskis bought a home in Clifton Park three months ago.

"I was working in Poland for one of those months, so I've really only been in Clifton Park for two months," Jarocka said.

Jarocka's concert at the Church of St. Adalbert is a benefit for the Sisters Retirement Fund. The fund is sponsored by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany for the religious orders of sisters who serve area parishes.

Diane Deptola will accompany her on piano.

The church is located at 550 Lansing St. on Crane Street Hill.

Minimum admission at the door will be \$10 for adults and \$3 for children under 12.