Composer, violinist, pianist: meet Little Miss Mozart, 10

Richard Morrison Chief Music Critic

Not everybody loves a precociously gifted child. So it's no surprise that Alma Deutscher has been dubbed "Little Miss Mozart" by some unkind souls in the classical music world. The irony is that this is a pretty accurate assessment of her talents.

Ten years old, she has already written a violin concerto, half a piano concerto, sonatas, a full-length opera … oh, and a novel about terrifying creatures who fly through the night on horses and "suck time out of the universe". For that she is also composing the background music. She is bilingual in Hebrew and English, and learning German.

However, this is less than half the story. Her piano playing is already up to conservatoire standard and her violin playing far above that. The YouTube clip of her performing her own violin concerto is an internet sensation and her YouTube channel has had 200,000 hits. "Simply mind-blowing," Stephen Fry tweeted after watching it.

And she's British! She lives in a house stuffed full of musical instruments in Dorking, Surrey. That's the good news. The bad news is that her parents — an Israeli linguist father and an English mother who was an organ scholar at Oxford — are thinking of emigrating to Berlin. Is it legal to slap an export ban on a child?

Alma, who was born with perfect pitch, began studying the piano when she was two. On her third birthday she was given a miniature violin. Her progress on both instruments was mercurial, but it was her composing — which started at four — that marked her out as something astonishing.

From where does that inspiration come? "I have an imaginary land called Transylvanian and in this land there are a lot of composers," she replies. "They all have names and compose in different styles — some romantic like Schubert, others more classical like Mozart. They compose without me, and I just sit at the piano and play their tunes. Then I think: 'That's nice, I will steal that'."

Her first mini-opera, about a pirate, was written when she was four. Her second, *The Sweeper of Dreams*, written three years later, was highly commended in a competition for new music-theatre works run by English National Opera. Now she has completed a new, full-length opera — on the *Cinderella* story, but with a twist. "The ugly stepsisters are operatic divas with no talent, whereas Cinderella is a young composer with beautiful melodies in her head," she explains. "And instead of her shoe, the prince has the beginning of one of her melodies in his head, but can't remember the special harmony that comes next. So he goes round looking for the girl who knows what it is."



Alma Deutscher's violin playing is far beyond conservatoire standard

She and her sister are schooled at home. She receives violin and piano tuition from teachers based at the Yehudi Menuhin School, in Surrey, and composition lessons (via Skype) from teachers in Switzerland and Chicago.

When asked what her friends think of her precocious talent and glamorous engagements, her father, Guy, replies: "The advantage is that she doesn't go to school, so that pressure is not there."

Alma is not short of influential backers. David Giampaolo, the Fitness First gyms founder, is behind a philanthropic initiative to support Alma's future work (and particularly to get *Cinderella* fully staged). Sir Simon Rattle has asked to meet her and she is greatly in demand in Israel. This month she will go to Bavaria to perform at the Verbier Festival's winter outpost in Schloss Elmau.

Before that, she has a few minor matters to tidy up. "I have to finish my symphony and my piano concerto."