



# Sotto Voce

---

## VITTORIO GRIGOLO

*In an Exclusive Interview with Katherine Phelps*

---

WITH A GOLD AND PLATINUM-SELLING SOLO ALBUM, A GRAMMY-NOMINATED RECORDING OF BERNSTEIN'S WEST SIDE STORY AND HIS MOST RECENT ALBUM "THE ITALIAN TENOR" RELEASED THIS PAST FALL ON SONY CLASSICAL; VITTORIO GRIGOLO IS ALREADY ESTABLISHED AS A SUCCESSFUL RECORDING ARTIST AS WELL AS A CHARISMATIC AND ACCOMPLISHED STAGE PERFORMER. HE BRINGS THE SAME ENERGY TO HIS LIVE CONCERT PERFORMANCES AS HE DOES TO HIS OPERATIC ROLES, AND NOT LONG AGO SANG BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF OVER 40,000 AT AN EVENT ORGANIZED IN CHICAGO IN TRIBUTE TO THE LATE LUCIANO PAVAROTTI. PREFERRED CAUGHT UP WITH VITTORIO AFTER A RECENT PERFORMANCE OF LA BOHÈME AT THE MET.

---



*Photo: Nilou Shokrai / [www.niloushokrai.com](http://www.niloushokrai.com)*



La Traviata – Valencia April 2010 / Palau de Les Arts Reina / Sofia, Valencia / Photo: Opera for Life

*When Grigolo* was a boy soprano in the Sistine Chapel choir he was assigned to sing the Shepherd in Tosca, alongside Pavarotti as Cavaradossi. After the performance, Pavarotti admirably signed Grigolo's autograph book "A Vittorio Primo" 'to Vittorio the First'. Grigolo has always interpreted this as Pavarotti's prophecy that he was destined to be the next great tenor. "The story of my first meeting with Luciano was a true, very special moment for a young boy! It is an incredible memory that makes me always work harder, but of course when you repeat this story millions of time it sounds like normal to me and loses the "magic" of the first moment. And I am always asked about this moment."

Grigolo realized his talent or "gift" as he refers to it at an extremely early age: "I guess I was about 4 years old and I was with my parents during the summer vacation. It was a very nice place in the south of Italy called Torrecanne and always during dinner there was a band playing. My parents went inside for a moment to get the first course and I quickly went to the band under the little stage and asked for the microphone. When they came back I was on stage singing! That was my real first performance."

Inevitably at some point puberty struck and Vittorio had to set aside his voice training and singing temporarily. "I was not able to perform for a time, because I didn't know what my voice was and I preferred to concentrate on musical preparation, composition, solfeggio, (a popular technique used for teaching sight-singing) piano etc...All the things that one day I might find most useful to my career."

*"I always try to look to the future and attract younger generations to this incredible style of music which can still move the inner soul of anyone who takes the opportunity to experience it."*

While Pavarotti was an all-important mentor for Vittorio, there have been several others. "Yes, most definitely" he said with a reminiscent smile. "First of all, my beloved vocal teacher, Danilo Rigosa. Since our first meeting at his house in Adria (northern Italy) we have never

separated. We have developed a lifelong musical relationship that has completely built my voice and my character and helped with the important decisions at the beginning of my career. It was not easy to deal with a 17 year old boy with a lot of, let us say...energy. This great energy and temperament had to be streamlined and focused. That's what Danilo did and still does today. Of course with my debut in Washington and my first appearance in America as a tenor, Placido Domingo took over from Luciano and continued to help and support me in all the steps that require making a lot of important decisions. The Rigoletto movie we did together was the coronation of our artistic union along with the discovery of another great support in the figure of Maestro Zubin Metha. My collaboration with experienced artists that are legends in the opera field can only add something special.

Along with special people there are always special places that help to mold us and make us who we are. Grigolo, although far more well-traveled than most is no different in this respect. He has traveled the world and gleaned a great deal from his global adventures. "Every country has its own special places and phenomenal secrets to discover and appreciate. I love



Photo: Nilou Shokrai / www.niloushokrai.com

America for all it offers, but I also appreciate the extreme cultural differences between it and Europe. For example, the attention to slowing down and simply enjoying life...the simplicities of life. In Europe the pace is slower. It is sweeter with more time to enjoy. Ahh...all those differences...that is why life is so amazing.”

There are so many famous arias and operas, but even a master virtuoso has personal favorites. What are Vittorio’s? “Always the next piece I have to sing! I adore La Boheme! Che Gelida Manina. And since you must know my favorite operas they are Elisir d’Amore and Lucia di Lammermoore. When he’s not immersed in his operatic music, Vittorio has an extremely eclectic cache downloaded onto his Ipod. “There are so many great artists...Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Barbra Streisand, Franco Califano, Lucio Dalla, Vasco Rossi, Mina, Adriano Celentano, Julio Iglesias, U2, Robbie Williams, Michael Jackson, Eminem. I like to be in tune and open minded...I am 360 degrees musically open!”

Grigolo feels that he is more than just the latest thing on the market and is taken quite seriously by the more sophisticated opera aficionados. “I think I am respected and I achieve this respect by sweating and claiming success in those opera houses where many legends and great artists have performed before me. Every opera is a great challenge and a new role debut even more so...and we are always trying to have the support of the Opera lovers. Today I compete only with myself and it is a difficult competition, believe me. I never

like what I hear of myself. I am 33 years old which is still a young age for the tenor voice. I hope always to give my best and to extend or refocus my repertoire as my voice matures.

While there are several talent competitions on network television every season, such as Canada’s Got Talent, and there is always one reasonably good opera competitor, viewers respond with shock and awe over the prospect of these contestants actually winning. This would indicate that we are not really “opera friendly” or a bit opera deficient so to speak. “I don’t think America is really deficient,” states Vittorio, “ It is only that America is incredibly big and sometimes there are other things that are given priority. Opera, of course, is not part of your school program, but opera it is a part of American music. It is only a matter of time and investing quality time in young talents that can relate their generation to opera and start spreading the word! I always try to look to the future and attract younger generations to this incredible style of music which can still move the inner soul of anyone who takes the opportunity to experience it.”

Vittorio’s dreams and goals for the future are quite clearly directed and self-defined. As he attains continuing fame and mega stardom his goal is to “Always deliver the best, not holding anything back inside ever, but at the same time never becoming self-destructive. I wish to still be myself, free on stage and have it feel like the first time even after many years. To keep the love and the freshness in my life and always try to find the extraordinary in the ordinary... even if I have to sing always the same opera. That’s how I would want it!” ■