

Opera star Vittorio Grigolo talks to C Music TV about his career & exciting new album, 'The Italian Tenor'

C Music TV's Studios, London, England, 15th September 2010



C MUSIC TV – Mark Forest: Great to see you again Vittorio

Yes nice to see you too

How far back do we have to go for your first experience in music?

I think my first experience of music was inside my mum's belly so you have to go very far back! My mum said "oh look at the temperament." She thought I was a football player coming out of her belly, but as I came out of her belly she started talking to me and saying sounds. I would answer her in the same pitch and tune. She was surprised so since then she said "oh this boy is going to be a singer!"

How important was music to your family, to your mother and father?

I think music is something that belongs to our family. It's something that is all around. Music is around everybody, it's the first language, it's the first thing we speak. I was very lucky because my father couldn't even prepare himself in the morning without waking everyone else in the house. That was my childhood. It's funny because in the morning I would start shaving in the bathroom and I would sing with him, it was every morning, a morning concert, a morning performance!

There is a very big difference between an Italian family who enjoy singing socially together and to actually developing a career. Do you remember who actually first recognised your abilities?

I think I was first really recognised for my abilities when I was in the Sistine chapel choir. Before it was a joke, we just loved music and just started singing but then I did my audition at the Sistine

chapel. There was this particular priest; he was really a mentor for my 4 years of preparation, which are the most important years. You discover all the music acapella, all the composers and the music that comes from these buildings of the Vatican. It seems so powerful and so tough to be inside there and maybe sing music that will never go out of those walls.

A kid that is able to read music already knows a different kind of language. It's not like the movies, it's important to know our history and be able to approach the future. For me to be able to read that music from the Vatican will help me today. For example, in my opera it helps my light sweet voice in the bel canto style. It really gives you a background and you really form the tune.

I think the priest, my mentor, was really the first one to say " Oh wow! Here we have raw material to work with" Raw material in terms of where it's going, cause you're kids, you don't know where your voice will go, it's always in expansion like the universe and it's always going towards infinity. That is how a career should be seen, how a projection of a voice should be seen, always going towards the infinity.

You would have got in to that choir at about 9 years old? To make that decision, to do that instead of, for example playing football is quite a big thing to do. Was that from within yourself or your mother and father?

I was asked this question when I was 9 or 10 years old and another time when I was 17, they asked "Are you ready to put aside your youth in order to achieve a result? In order to put the water on the seeds of your talent" This is the main point, you have to invest very young. I am here today and talking to you because I had the opportunity to discover this so young, the opportunity to burn in a certain kind of way and take all the steps and grow in emotion, spirit and technique. Today I can analyse, be wise and really understand what's in front me in terms of life experience. It's not that I assume everything but I know a lot and I am always open to learn.

It was very hard for me to say yes, I was very excited, a kid. I said " Oh wow! Yeah I want to do it, I want to be a singer! I want to be the soloist of the Sistine Chapel Choir". This actually happened after only 2 years. I saw the soloists before me, how they managed it and as a kid I would always open my mouth and something magic would come out. You know the little guy with the flute who hypnotises the rats?

Pied Piper?

I love that story, I wanted to use my singing like his flute!

You talked about your parents, the fathers of the Sistine chapel, you also had the most extraordinary experience as a teenager of working with Pavarotti. How important was that opportunity for you and your decision to do what you've done?

Not only for me, it would be a great experience for anybody. Working with Pavarotti was great. As a kid it was a dream, it was an inspiration. Luciano waiting for me behind stage and always complimenting me and supporting me, it was a special gift. It was beautiful.

A similar thing actually happened when I met Domingo. We worked together and had a beautiful connection, like something that passes from one man to another. These are legends and there's

everything to learn from them and how they manage the pressure of everyday life, the demand from the public.

We are human beings we suffer, we cry, we have a life like everyone else, and sometimes this reflects on stage. It's not true we close a door and we just do our job. There is always an inner character, a bit of ourselves, especially me, I always bring my character, a lot of my life, a lot of the experiences of my life [to my work]. It wouldn't be fair or real for me not to connect the inside part of me, the instrument who produces the sound, with the music.

[Tell me about working with Domingo because you recently have been performing Rigoletto](#)

Performing Rigoletto, being broadcast live to 148 countries in the world, Domingo next to you?

In terms of working this was a great inspiration. But also I learned a lot from him about how to be able to be more natural with the cameras, because having 20 cameras on your face like this and singing outside in the rain, it's a great challenge. But the biggest challenge was the cameras because every gesture you would do in theatre is with your eyes or your singing. The camera catches too much and it's like a heart beating. The first two hours we recorded the director told me to come see it on the camera and it was funny for me because I could really see my eyes going. Of course in the theatre you don't see my eyebrows going up too much as it's 30 metres away so you would have to have binoculars! But with cameras in HD are you kidding me!? You can see everything! Even the last dentist that was in your mouth! So I really have to force myself to have the same voice, the same power, the same energy but be natural, be the character at the same time. That's the challenge.

[The new album is 'The Italian Tenor'; it's such a difficult job to pick 15 arias for one disk. How did you go about it?](#)

The Italian tenor is very special. I could have recorded classical before, but why didn't I? Because I was not ready. In opera I feel the right moments, the right times, this was the right time to record a classical CD. This album for me, The Italian Tenor, is going to be like a business card. You know in the world of business they always meet you and they give you business cards? I would like to give my music, so this is my business card. In this album you can feel, you can really hear Vittorio still fresh as he was when he started.

At the beginning of my career I was singing in restaurants and outside. I wanted to keep this with a soft way of singing and be gentle, really give the people the opportunity to listen to that Vittorio in some of the album.

Vittorio today is this kind of lyric voice with a temperament and energy but this would be Vittorio tomorrow so this voice is the colour. If I did record 3 or 4 years ago, I wouldn't have had so many colours to paint my canvas, it was not complete. Now I have a lot of colour in front of me, I can choose whatever I want.

Can you pick for me your favourite Aria?

Listen, how could I pick one child if I was a big Mamma? I feel like these are all my babies, all the guys, I don't want to be in a position to choose one!

That's understandable. Now then let's talk about performances in the Opera house. Your debut, La Scala, you were very young then, years ago now! But recently you debut at Covent Garden, you said "this is my favourite performance so far" is that still the case?

Yes, it is. Performing Manon at the Opera House at Covent Garden was not only a great experience but a dream come true.

I have a lot of friends in tennis, Federer, Nadal. I associated music with tennis and I said "this time I'm winning my grand slam!" I felt the public were so in love with the way I performed, with the chemistry on stage. It was just so easy to work with Anna [Netrebko] too. I love to share my talent with the English public who receive it so well. It was like being in a stadium, 2000 people looks like 10,000! That's the way you want it.

I was actually performing my pop album when I received a Classical Brit Award and I said, like Arnold Schwarzenegger, "I'll be back!"

And you were right!

It's like "let's kick some ass!"

I last spoke to you when you were doing West Side Story with Hayley Westenra - you appeared on the biggest opera stages in the world. Are they both as important as each other or would you put one above the other?

There are no bigger or smaller opera houses; every opera house is the same to me. When you accept a production you know where you're going to perform, you know the people you're going to work with, you chose how you want to play your game. That's what makes you free, when you know everybody before you come and you know everybody will do their best to give you the best.

Do you know how many operas you already have in your repertoire?

I think I have about 30 or 40 operas maybe 55 or 60 roles aside from religious works too.

What advice would you give to younger viewers of C Music TV who are watching you now and dreaming of being an opera star?

I think they should just start living their life. You need to seize all of the opportunities you can. Study, use your experience. Then put them aside and start on the technique. Put everyone you listen to aside. Don't listen anymore, start studying technique.

Find a good teacher who really knows voices. That's the hardest part because finding a teacher is like finding someone to guide you, to take your hand and discover yourself. Learning how to sing opera means learning yourself, learning how to be a medical Doctor for yourself. Knowing every single thing that's going around your throat, forehead, everything. A teacher needs to guide you through those sensations. Everyone is different, everyone needs a different road but they arrive at the same

result. Everyone in the end who sings well, sing the same. They are relaxed, it's not hard, it's comfortable. You study and then you come back and feel like everything was already there.

Of course the first recipe is to believe in yourself, be confident. Don't lose the energy, the passion. Don't let people step on you, they'll try put knives in your back. You've got to think like a gladiator in the arena. You're not a tennis player and every ball you miss is going to be taken as a note that you miss and with every note you miss in the theatre you're not going to hear people say "wow or ooh" you're going to hear "boo boo...". So you got to risk it to get the biscuit!

You're a busy man with a hectic life but hobbies and interests away from music must be important?

Hobbies and interests in life are important, very important. When you are so busy and you don't have time, everyone wants a piece of Vittorio.

I try to go away, I fly away. So it's kind of like the song "Come fly with me lets fly, lets fly away " but I use real planes and helicopters to fly away! I like to build RC helicopters and planes and fly everywhere I can. I was actually here, flying them, when I was in London doing Manon [des Sources].

It cuts everything off. When I'm there and I'm watching those planes I'm so concentrated that I don't think about anything else. It's important to have something to escape with, something that will make you free from everything.

Of course, I love cars. I've always loved powerful engines. Challenging sports, I've tried all the sports, for example paragliding. I love feeling in touch with nature and feeling the air, it's all about flying really, and speed! Because those are things that really make you feel alive and give you a lot of adrenaline. Big engines are like big orchestras. If everything works well, you hear the sounds. Like horse power is a big voice, you can control this voice with applying gas. Very cool.

Do your Management allow you to fly and drive fast cars and put yourself in danger?

I don't think that it should be Management that should suggest these things, it should be me! Whatever I want to do, I should be able to do it. We are free people and when I only have a few moments, if I'm not able to decide what I want to do, I'm a dead man. So I think the management should be aware about that before signing me!

Do you usually listen to music and what do you listen to?

Yes, I listen to everything. I really love every kind of music, I couldn't pick anyone. Alicia Keys, Britney Spears, U2, Robbie Williams, Barry White, Louis Armstrong, R&B, Soul...Funk. I like all kinds of music. I like to escape from my genre when I can because when I'm not working I want to see what's going on out there.

C Music TV is removing the boundaries between classical, chill out and soundtrack music. Are you perceiving that as happening now?

I am very happy C Music TV is doing this. I think what C Music TV is doing is important, not only for music but also for people to understand there are no boundaries between music. It gives people culture and background to everything. It's important to be able to chose and understand, to know

the history and the future. So maybe C Music TV is preparing something for the future. It's important to connect all these little kind of worlds to make one big unique music world.

[So you sang at La Scala in Milan, you sang in Covent Garden, you're about to sing in the Met in New York, you have performed with Pavarotti and Domingo...what ambitions are left for Vittorio?](#)

The only ambition left for Vittorio is simple, to be able to sing as long as possible.

I am 33 year old I have fulfilled all the ambitions. I am kidding! All my ambitions are still inside my heart, inside Vittorio. My only ambition now is to continue being Vittorio. That is my only request and I hope Vittorio will be smart enough to keep his talent and make the right decisions with relationships, repertoire and everything that makes me happy. Being happy means a happy life, happy music and happy people around you. Be positive, I'm always a positive guy.

[And being Italian you must have a family?](#)

Of course "A big famiglia!" They always make fun of Italians like we talk like that! We don't talk like that. But, of course, I'm going to have a big family... And one day "I'm going to make an offer you cannot refuse!"

[And finally why is music so important to you?](#)

Music is important to me because it is my oxygen.