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Generations



The new generation of opera

By Peg DeMarco - Special to The News Herald

Since I'm always an early bird at an airport, I'm writing this column sitting at Charlotte Douglas Airport getting ready to board a flight to Baltimore to visit my daughter. It's always wonderful to get together with her, but this trip was planned to introduce her to opera.

It was after one Saturday night, after catching a glimpse and then a full program of *Il Volo*, the new three young tenors that are making history with their fantastic voices, when I saw that their American tour included a stop in Baltimore. Perfect.

Perhaps she would enjoy something that I had missed many years ago that I so much regretted. I had never taken the time to see Luciano Pavarotti, Jose Carreras and Placido Domingo perform at a live concert, but their 1994 concert at the Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium, captured on both CD and DVD, were very worn out from my constant use throughout the years.

I fell in love with Pavarotti the moment he opened his mouth to sing on a PBS special and the love has never wavered. I smile every time I watch him give a "high five" to Domingo or embrace the conductor as he walks out on stage, carrying his famous white handkerchief, and dressed in a tux that doesn't quite fit his girth.

No matter how many times I hear or watch Pavarotti sing "*Nessun Dorma*," I adore how he clasps his hands together before singing as if in prayer for God to bless his performance. He hits every note with perfection and his misty eyes easily translates an unrequited love story sung in Italian.

My Dad taught me to love opera. He had a penchant for Verdi, particularly "*Rigoletto*," but his favorite aria was from Leoncavallo's "*Pagliacci*." Most of you would know it if you heard it, perhaps from your cartoon-filled childhood that often featured a cartoon character of a crooning sad clown.

One of the last memories I have with my Dad was when I bought him a copy of the 3 Tenors' 1994 DVD and sat and watched it with him and my Mom one afternoon. He was in a lot of pain, suffering from a brain tumor, and fighting a tough battle of survival.

He was quiet as each tenor sang an aria, and I looked for a sign of recognition from the ashen face of a father that had once been so passionate about opera. Then, when Domingo began to sing the aria from "*Pagliacci*," I saw a spark in my Dad's eyes that I hadn't seen for months. When the last note was sung, I walked over and hugged him, something I didn't do often enough like I should have.

The first time I saw Il Volo, it was a lot like when I first saw the 3 Tenors. Flipping through channels on a Saturday night because Time Warner Classics only offered a corny aquatic musical and my one movie channel, sans commercials, featured yet another movie about a bunch of zombies stalking a group of wild, half clothed teenagers, I settled on life-saving PBS and caught a glimpse of three young handsome men walking across the stage, so much like the 3 Tenors back in 1994.

I wondered who these three young scruffs were who actually thought they could sing like the famous tenors and almost flipped the remote back to the zombies until, once again, some 22 years later, I heard the familiar orchestral bars of "*Nessun Dorma*," Pavarotti's signature song, and quickly put down the remote.

When Pavarotti performed it in 1994, the entire audience rose to their feet in a standing, bravo, ovation, including George and Barbara Bush, Frank Sinatra, and Gene Kelly. It was truly the highlight of the show.

This is enormous impudence, I thought, for anyone to attempt to sing Pavarotti's baby! However, once again, I was wrong when I heard each tenor open his mouth and something wonderful came out of it. And the note that Pavarotti attains and holds at the end of the aria, that I thought could never be duplicated, was being duplicated and sung by a slender young man, probably no more than 100 pounds, in his twenties, with black horn-rimmed glasses, looking nothing like the Pavarotti I had grown to love but sounding like him to the very last note of musical greatness.

The new tenors, Il Volo, received a standing ovation, and rightfully so, and, with it, I was hooked once again, basking in the newest generation's gift of splendid musical mastery of an art that should never be forgotten.

For those interested who live in our area, Il Volo will be performing on Monday evening, April 3rd, 7:30 PM, at Symphony Hall in Atlanta. Go see it and let me know how you like it even if you don't like opera. You won't be disappointed.

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