

Opera Diva Speaks on Beauty and Tradition

Supporting classical vocal art with NTD Television in New York

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NEW YORK—From Sicily's Teatro antico di Taormina, where the ancient spirit of music resonates in natural acoustics, to Carnegie Hall, where the greatest musicians of our time perform, the world's leading soprano Lucia Aliberti embarks on new journey. This journey takes her aesthetic of pure Italian bel canto to the heart of a surprising renaissance of classical music emerging in New York—a renaissance of ancient Chinese culture.

Dubbed the "Queen of bel canto," Lucia Aliberti shared the stage with winners of New Tang Dynasty Television's Global Chinese Vocal Competition at Isaac Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall in New York on Sunday, Oct. 30.

The audience braved the first snow blitz of the season in New York to embrace the warmth, elegance, and fluidity one of the most authentic vocal artists from the traditions of Italy.

With standing ovations, roaring applause, and flowers, the internationally celebrated Italian diva was warmly hailed for her spectacular performance and, as well, for her support of Chinese bel canto singers on stage.

"Beautiful!" said Dr. Eduard Schmieder, a distinguished music professor of Temple University who took a two-hour train ride from Philadelphia to attend the performance.

"It's the first time for me to hear real Italian bel canto and I loved it!" said Alice Wong, a Chinese audience member in New York.

"First time for me, too," Ms. Aliberti said. Collaborating with New Tang Dynasty TV to promote classical vocal arts is a new adventure for her. She wanted to support Bel Canto singers from around the world, especially from China "because I have never been to China," she explained.

The New York-based New Tang Dynasty Television, named after the most glorious dynasty of China's 5,000 years of civilization—the Tang dynasty (618–906)—fulfilled Ms. Aliberti's dream to visit China on stage—despite the fact that she was in New York.

During her stay in New York, Ms. Aliberti watched a classical Chinese dance and music performance by Shen Yun Performing Arts in New Jersey's State Theater.

Aliberti raved about her first encounter with classical Chinese culture. "I was astonished by the beauty of Chinese melody,

rhythm, choreography—the perfectionism."

"Big energy coming from stage goes to the public." She felt stunned. In fact, the effect was so strong that she had a physical reaction: "I am trembling. I like it very much. The creator is a genius!"

The well-traveled Italian prima donna has sung for many state heads and celebrities, including Pope Johannes Paul II, Prince Charles of England, German President Horst Köhler, Prince Hiro of Japan, and Prince Albert of Monaco.

Aliberti said she was very interested in the mission stated by The New Tang Dynasty TV's Global Chinese Vocal Competition: promoting pure authenticity, pure goodness, and pure beauty in the traditional vocal arts. The competition is for bel canto singing only.

"There couldn't be a better person suited for this mission than Lucia Aliberti," Stefan Schmerbeck of Munich told The Epoch Times on the telephone. Schmerbeck, an arts manager for world-class opera singers has known and worked with Madame Lucia Aliberti for more than 20 years.

"She is the embodiment of Italian bel canto," Schmerbeck said. Ms. Aliberti carries the most authentic Italian bel canto heritage—passed down directly from

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Lucia Aliberti

the greatest Italian opera masters in the 19th century.

Tradition and Beauty

"Luigi Ricci was my teacher," Ms. Aliberti said in an interview at the hotel she stayed near Carnegie Hall prior to her performance there. She was the last protégé of Ricci, and he, who died in 1981, was the last person in Italy with closest link to the household names of Italian opera greats



Accompanied by Scottish pianist Geoffrey Duce, Lucia Aliberti receives standing ovations and flowers at New Tang Dynasty Television's "Future Stars" concert following the finals of the Fifth Annual Chinese International Vocal Competition at Carnegie Hall on Oct. 30.

such as Bellini, Rossini, Donizetti, and Verdi.

A coach, accompanist, and close friend of Italian tenor Beniamino Gigli (1890–1957), Ricci worked closely with Puccini (1858–1924) for eight years and with Mascagni (1863–1945) for thirty-four years in Rome. He accompanied voice lessons given by Antonio Cotogni (1831–1918), an Italian baritone regarded internationally as being one of the greatest male opera singers of the 19th century.

According to Schmerbeck, the Messina-born Aliberti went to Rome many times to knock on Ricci's door, asking to be taken as a student. "I am too old to take a student," the master lamented. He was 84 years old at the time. But touched by her talent and passion, Rucci finally relented; he passed on to her the bel canto tradition until his death at the age of 88.

"It is in my blood, in my skin," Aliberti said, touching my face with her slim fingers. "Bel canto means beautiful singing. 'Bello' means beautiful, elegant, like touching you with flower, velvet."

She explained that the beauty is both inside and outside. "The outside is the voice, the technique," and then, pointing to her heart and brain, she said: "This is inside. When you have the connection between outside and inside, it is the best." Not only best, "It is 'profundo,' not superficial."

Asked what evokes beauty for her, and the Queen of bel canto said she is a deep person and loves history. "Physically I feel the beauty of the past." The period of

opera's peak in the 19th century "is magical. The melodies are so simple, but so strong. It touches your heart—you never forget."

"I like traditions—everything is clean and beautiful."

She believes there are amazing treasures in history. "When they constructed the Teatro antico di Taormina, they didn't have an elevator; they didn't need a microphone. When you sing there, the voice just goes. Amazing acoustics. Magical!"

The old castles of Rome, the ancient Greek amphitheater, the classical Chinese dance that she saw in Shen Yun Performing Arts—all these provide her 'edonista' or moments of beautiful and pleasant feelings.

She attributes her music talent to family influence. "We were born like this. All the family members on my father's side played music. My grandfather was a big musician. He played 10 instruments, also did conducting and teaching. In my house, I have all the instruments from my grandfather. Music is in my blood."

Aliberti began playing piano at 6. She also plays violin, viola, guitar, accordion, and mandolin. She composes too and has composed pieces for piano, clarinet, flute and voice.

Adhering to a Doctrine of Beauty Aliberti explained that keeping to tradition and tending to the beautiful is a challenge:

"I have to combat, to protect traditions. Beautiful things are being destroyed. I must combat." She explained that "God gave you big task, you must combat."

"I must combat to keep my style, my way." The Italian opera diva said, "As a woman, I like to be feminine. I think woman should be feminine—not masculine." She likes beautiful attire, flowers, gardens, and atmosphere.

"I am a Purista—this is my religion. It means pure and clean, and never to compromise—to be pure in everything, melody, sound."

"This is 'dottrina del bello' or doctrine of beauty. 'You have to cultivate yourself, refine yourself, and follow the traditions.'"

Combating to keep her dottrina del bello in today's world isn't easy. Like the perilous waters separating the Strait of Messina mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*, it is a challenging voyage that tests one's mettle. But the Messina-born diva has managed to navigate difficult waters, both its currents and undercurrents, with beauty, grace, and principle.

"When I sing, I sing with love. I give good energy to the people," Aliberti said she uses her voice to convince people of what is good, what is beautiful, with kindness.

"There is something in her voice and personality that touches people," Schmerbeck said. A German man wrote to Lucia Aliberti from a hospital: "Thank you for the 'trost' (consolation) that I find in your voice and interpretation." The man said Aliberti's singing gave him the strength to survive hard times.

"I receive many, many letters from people, from around the world—Germany, France, Russia, Japan, America, Argentina. They told me after meeting me, my voice, my energy, they were changed."

Her Favorite Composer

When speaking of Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835), Ms. Aliberti's all-time favorite composer, she smiled. "I like Bellini. He wrote for voices."

"Bellini adapted to the singer. He followed the voice." She said Bellini once made changes to his work "Casta diva" (from "Norma") for Giuditta Pasta (1797–1865). After the Italian soprano (considered among the greatest of opera singers) told him "This is too high," Bellini toned it down.

As a singer, she pays mutual homage to the composer. To immerse herself in Bellini's original intention and musical ideas, she dedicates herself to intensive study of Bellini's manuscripts.

She discovered a shared passion with the composer through the study of his manuscripts: "He is a perfectionist—just like me." She found that the composer was never ready to settle. "He was always making changes, corrections, many, many times, just like me. I insist on change, change until it is perfect."

"I am for quality. I know what is the best." But quality is not an easy thing and not just anybody can accomplish it. It requires hard work, arduous training, and uncompromising dedication to perfection.

Aliberti says that today's media should promote quality, and not just anything out there. In her mind, there has to be some standard as to what is good and what is not, what people should be striving for. "Not everything is ok."

(LAI BING/THE EPOCH TIMES)

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