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Wesley Diener

Arts Award Outcome Report

Bel Canto in Tuscany: Learning the Italian Art of Vocal Technique and Expression

When my airplane departed from Dulles Airport on July 26, I was unaware how transformative the next month would be. I attended Bel Canto in Tuscany for three weeks through the end of July and beginning of August 2017. The institute offers a generous curriculum: daily lessons, coachings, masterclasses, Italian lessons, and music lectures. The faculty roster was equally impressive, featuring internationally-acclaimed, singers, pianists, and directors from the Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, Manhattan School of Music, and more. I knew that I would benefit from this greatness, but the opportunities expanded even after I arrived in Tuscany.

My first surprise was the extreme talent of the other artists. I was in the younger ensemble, the Young Artists, and there was an older ensemble called the Emerging Artists. These are singers who are finishing advanced degrees or beginning their professional careers and are looking for additional insight. I was absolutely blown away by these singers. They had achieved flawless vocal technique, beautiful expression, and confident stage presence, and they were still working to improve their craft. Their dedication was inspirational. Additionally, it was incredibly valuable to watch them perform in masterclasses and concerts. At UVA, there are no graduate students, so our exposure to peers is limited to those immediately in our age range. I now have a clear idea of what I should aspire to accomplish in the near future and what more long term goals may be. It was great to connect with these artists who come from all over the world, including Mexico, China, Italy, and Australia.

I also received an unexpected performance opportunity. By the end of the first week of classes, the program's leader, Giovanni Reggioli, approached me and asked if I would be willing to join the Emerging Artists in their final concert, which will take place in the town's main square. Of course I agreed! I was fortunate to join four other singers in the famous quintet from Bizet's *Carmen*. This quintet is infamous among singers for the speed at which you must sing the many French words. I had never approached an operatic piece of this difficulty, and I was quite overwhelmed. However, the added repertoire provided me additional time with faculty members for coachings and staging rehearsals. I felt fortunate to work with coaches that worked exclusively with the older artists and to receive additional time with our illustrious stage director, Dona Vaughn. In the end, I feel that I truly succeeded in the final performance.

My final major surprise was the intellectual and academic discourse that I encountered this summer. One of the staff coaches was conductor and musicologist Will Crutchfield. In addition to his work as an international conductor and coach, Will has developed an entire lecture series on Bel Canto repertoire, originally designed for his program Bel Canto at Caramoor. This lecture, pulling source material from the beginning of recording technology to today, seeks to evaluate the changes in operatic voices between the "golden" Bel Canto era and today. He attributes much of these differences to the invention of recording devices, believing that the ability to hear oneself radically changes their vocal development. He spoke in depth about many fundamental vocal topics, including vibrato, trills, portamenti, and ornamentation. I feel extremely fortunate to have been accepted as an Apprentice Artist at his new opera festival, Teatro Nuovo, this summer.

I thank the Miller Art Scholars for their financial support that allowed myself the opportunity to receive such a unique and valuable educational experience. Thank you to the all of

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