



“If the buzz surrounding this dynamic Italian opera star is anything to go by then 2006 is going to be Vittorio's year” Hitsheet (UK)- December 2005

It might have something to do with being passionately Italian, but the term ‘half measure’ is not in the vocabulary of Vittorio Grigolo. Born in Rome but brought up in Arezzo, near Florence, Vittorio, at 28, has already become one of the premier tenors of his generation.

Encouraged by his father, who played opera in the car while driving him to school, Vittorio was singing arias around the house by the age of four. At age nine he was discovered while singing in an optician’s shop in Rome, and was chosen for the world-famous Sistine Chapel Choir. Vittorio soon became a soloist in ‘the little bambino choir.’

A few years later, Vittorio was invited to sing Tosca with Pavarotti at the Rome opera theatre. Pavarotti was so impressed by his adolescent co-star that he raved about him after his performance to the press, who in turn dubbed him *il Pavarottino*, or the ‘little Pavarotti.’

By 18, Vittorio was singing with the Vienna opera company, and at age 23 became the youngest Italian tenor ever to sing at Milan’s La Scala. Vittorio’s career was deemed so promising and culturally vital that he also became the first Italian male to be excused from compulsory military service. However, Vittorio’s career did not continue uninterrupted; motor racing, his other passion, briefly took hold of his ambitions, which led him to the Pre-3000 Formula race in the Italian championships. Vittorio’s immersion in racing briefly threatened his career as a tenor. ‘Somebody bumped my car in a race, and I had to cancel a concert in Rome because I hurt my ribs and couldn’t sing. So I had to decide between racing and singing.’

Fortunately for music lovers, Vittorio chose singing. He sold his car (but kept his Porsche and motorbike) and rededicated himself to the opera. It wasn’t an easy decision, but the call to realize his potential as a tenor was too great to ignore. Vittorio was also encouraged to return to singing by his father, who once had an ambition of his own to become a tenor. ‘He said, ‘Do it for me!’ As the only child in an Italian family, Vittorio couldn’t help but be compelled by his father’s exhortation.

Vittorio has been a fixture on the international opera scene for half his life, having performed in Japan, America and all points between. He's even faced the ultimate challenge of trying to whisk up an American accent in order to sing the role of Riff in a performance of *West Side Story* at La Scala, which also starred James Gandolfini (of *The Sopranos* fame) in the role of Tony, Riff's gangland buddy.

Many around Vittorio have wondered why a cosmopolitan kid who grew up in modern, pop-crazy Western Europe chose the traditional, demanding genre of opera. In response, Vittorio can only gesture toward his chest and say, "I like pop, but I wanted to use my body, and in opera, you use your whole body. With pop it's more breath. With opera, you use essentially the diaphragm. You have a macho, military regime, and you need to know music, the tempo, and the notes." He often gives a quick demonstration. "When you sing pop, you sing from the throat," he says, mustering a wispy, pussycats croon by example. "With opera, you essentially use the diaphragm. You have a macho, military regime and you need to know music, the tempo and the notes."

Vittorio hasn't been afraid to express his discontent with the current state opera. Seeing it not as something that should be preserved like a relic, but instead be allowed to grow and change like a living thing, Vittorio definitely has a musical ambition. "I want to link opera to the modern world. In Italy, opera is just for the elite. You can be very famous in opera but no one knows who you are. Pavarotti was 29 when he became a star, when opera was the pop music of its day. What Pavarotti did for opera is what I'm trying to do now, to make it pop music again."

It was during *West Side Story*'s run that Vittorio began to consider the idea of exploring a broader take on music. He met manager and executive producer Eric Ghenassia and Romano Musumarra, the widely-respected Italian composer, conductor, producer, and songwriter. The two had previously worked with Pavarotti, Alessandro Safina, Elton John, and Celine Dion. As Vittorio remembers it, "Romano said, 'I'd like you to sing one of my songs.' I tried it, and it was a joke at first, adapting his songs to my voice. And then I realized I could do it."

The partnership produced astonishing results, and has left Universal Music very happy that it was able to win the £1 million bidding war to sign the Italian tenor. Vittorio's self-titled debut album compellingly combines the emotion of opera and the immediacy of pop. Recorded in Rome, the CD is designed to captivate music fans of every stripe. Vittorio insists, however, that he's different from other cross-over acts. "I'm more, more true," he says.

The passion, raw emotion and sheer beauty of Vittorio's voice is displayed in full over the course of his self-titled debut, with songs sung in Italian, English, and Spanish. His stunning renditions of Keane's "Bedshaped" and Stevie Wonder's "All in Love is Fair (Se L'Amore E Ce)," described as "thunderous" by the UK's Daily Mail, stand beside original compositions such as "Tu Sei" and "Magia De Amor." Each track is a uniquely moving piece of music, and allows sumptuous instrumentation to share the stage with Vittorio's incredible, warm, resonant voice. The album also includes a gorgeous version

of the *West Side Story* standard "Maria" and the new "Butterfly Forever," which offers an inventive take on the story of Puccini's "Madame Butterfly."

Standout track "You Are My Miracle" appears on the album as a duet with Nicole Scherzinger of the Pussycat Dolls. Scherzinger, who couldn't help but rave about Vittorio to The Guardian stating; "apart from looking like Orlando Bloom, [Vittorio] has a voice to die for, very mellow despite all that Italian emotion and expression. He's very young to be a working tenor but you can tell immediately he is the real deal." UK press agree, with publications such as Music Week, raving "Vittorio's debut promises to provide an ongoing impression in the charts."

Opera purists will not be disappointed- the album, at its core, is about Vittorio's voice, which shines as brightly as ever. Vittorio still considers the opera to be his first love, and has insisted that Universal allow him to perform three operas a year in the interest of keeping his vocal chords "well-oiled." "Opera is gymnastics for the voice," Vittorio says. "I'd lose my technique if I didn't practice. I want people to say that I'm a great tenor, like hearing one of the legends of the past. I don't want people noticing they can't hear me in an opera house anymore. But opera recognizes me as a great artist now."

Though adapting to the pop scene is a definite challenge, Vittorio seems undaunted. "I want to learn," he says. "When you've arrived, you've stopped learning." Vittorio considers himself to be a fan of pop music, and both Oasis and U2 have a home in his CD collection. And if he happens to cross paths with a pop star in search of some classical training, Vittorio will be happy to oblige. "I met Robbie Williams in Birmingham and we sang "O Sole Mio" together. He was okay - needs some lessons, maybe!" he says with a wink.