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GIORGIA FUMANTI

The Italian soprano releases her debut album



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GIORGIA FUMANTI

Under the shady trees at one of Joburg's popular restaurant venues, we meet Giorgia Fumanti for breakfast. She hangs back until we've greeted our hosts and colleagues from her record company EMI, and been introduced to her manager, and then she comes forward, a little hesitantly, to meet us. We are charmed immediately.

The beautiful Italian-born soprano is on a short tour to South Africa – her first visit to our country – to promote her second album *From My Heart*, which is set to delight fans with more of her contemporary classical crossover style. EMI have managed a coup in that SA is the first country worldwide where the album is released. Judging by Giorgia's sweet and rather reserved manner, this business of success is still very new to her. She has no affectations, and soon we're all chatting comfortably and she's showing us pictures, stored on her camera, of her family back home in Italy.

Giorgia does not come from a musical family, she says. Neither her parents nor her sister showed any aptitude for a career in music, and, up to a point, neither did Giorgia. 'When I was a teenager I wanted a job with a social focus. I wanted to help people, like a missionary. I was also very close to the church, because here I could express all my feelings and emotions.' Born in the medieval village of Fivizzano in Tuscany, she grew up in the nearby historical city of Aulla, which stands at the foot of the thirteenth century castle Fortezza della Brunella, and which is still her family home. Her parents had other hopes for their



daughter – they wanted her to become a lawyer or join the family business, a TV/hi-fi store. Even Giorgia, who wanted very much to please her parents, had no idea what lay in store for her. ‘My grandmother used to sing to me. She was the one who introduced me to music.’

Because of Giorgia’s close affinity with the church she soon went for auditions to join the choir of Citta di Aulla. ‘The maestro wanted to hear my voice, so he could know in which section to place me. And out came this soprano voice! Everybody was amazed!’ Only at the age of 17, then, did she, and those around her, have any real idea of the potential that she possessed. It wasn’t long before she was the choir’s soloist. The choir at that time concentrated a lot of singing medieval tunes that were quite difficult. ‘I enjoyed those,’ said Giorgia, ‘and later when people were telling me that I should think of singing as a career I was hesitant, because for me it was easier to sing those complicated church songs than to sing pop songs.’

For years she didn’t want to take that step, although several people, including music producers, suggested that she try ‘younger’ music such as pop. ‘I still wanted to study. I wanted to be a good daughter.’ She did study for her law degree but with two exams remaining, has yet to finish it. By the time she was in her early twenties she realised she was on the wrong road. ‘I was following everyone’s advice but not listening to my own. I had to change. I began to train as a yoga instructor and that helped to clarify my direction. For a while I was very emotional and unsure, but I had to follow what I felt was right.’

Her parents did not encourage her, saying a music career would be too hard and unstable. But Giorgia found that singing was becoming more and more important to her. She enrolled in the Conservatorio di Parma Arrigo Boito to study classical music. ‘The school was very rigorous and conservative,’ she says. ‘For instance, they didn’t like my hair!’ She refers to the purple streaks that are something of a trademark for her. ‘I had to hide a lot of myself, so although I had learned a lot I decided to leave after three years. I didn’t want to be put into a box, and that is one of the reasons I didn’t want to focus only on opera.’

In the meantime Giorgia had met Maurice Velenosi, who was to become her manager, at a festival. He heard her sing back in 2000 but nothing came of it – the time wasn’t right. They met again in 2002, at a party, and this time Giorgia was ready, although she didn’t know it yet. ‘One of my friends told me to bring my demo CD with, and I also was persuaded to sing at the party. Maurice then asked me if I had a manager, and ten days after that I was in Canada.’

Based in Montreal, Maurice advised her to move to Canada for the sake of her career. It was a difficult decision but in the end the music was the most important consideration, and now Giorgia lives there on a part-time basis. Her career began to take off, with live appearances in concerts and festivals in Canada and importantly, she overcame a personal hurdle of

performing in front of her home crowd in Aulla – the audience applauded her enthusiastically.

Her first album was released in 2004. Entitled *Like a Dream*, the music is based on songs by two of her great inspirations, Ennio Morricone and Vangelis. Giorgia describes it as a mixture of jazz, new age and classical. Recorded at London’s Abbey Road studios and in Montreal, the album also features the English Chamber Choir and musicians from Le Cirque du Soleil. The album did very well across Italy, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and India and was backed up by promotional concerts and appearances, both live and televised. This brought her to the attention of major record labels, and she now has a contract with Angel Records, distributed in SA by EMI.

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The new album is available in South African stores. Produced by Craig Leon, and recorded at Abbey Road as well as Wisseloord Studios in Holland, *From My Heart* gives Giorgia’s many fans much more of what they’ve come to know and expect from her. She is accompanied by the likes of the Netherlands Media Orchestra and the English Chamber Choir. There are four Morricone classics for the new CD, including themes from *The Mission*, *Cinema Paradiso*, and *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Sting’s ‘Fields of Gold’ gets a gentle arrangement and an Italian translation – by Giorgia herself. On the classical side there’s the ‘Aria’ (based on ‘The Swan’ from Saint-Saëns) and in a light-hearted vein she sings ‘Espiritu’ and ‘Volero’. The songs for the album were all chosen by Giorgia, and she co-wrote two of the tracks. Asked if she composes much of her own music, she says, ‘I would like to, but I’m still quite shy! I feel that I can only write about what I relate to. I can relate to universal love, but not, for instance, the love between a man and a woman.’ She will be visiting many more countries to promote her new album, but she hopes to return to SA. ‘I feel something here,’ she says. ‘The air is so special.’

Even with her career blossoming at a steady pace, Giorgia’s long-time desire to help others has never diminished. She is today the World Ambassador for the Cerebral Palsy Association of Quebec (L’Association de paralysie cérébrale du Québec), performing at concerts, meeting with members and doing what she can to increase awareness of the condition.

And today her parents, who still live in the city where she grew up, are very proud of her. ‘They play my music in the store all day! They just wanted me to have a good career,’ she reflects. It seems that their wish for the child is certainly coming true! **CF**

