

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Andrea Bocelli in Los Angeles

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, September 30th, 2015

Andrea Bocelli, the beloved Italian tenor, was in Los Angeles recently for a series of performances. It was very exciting for an opera lover like me to see him sing live at the Dolby Theater in Hollywood (September 18), during an elaborate stage production videotaped for a PBS-WNET television special celebrating movie music (scheduled to air on November 27). These popular songs, from movies like *Evita*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Godfather*, *Breakfast at Tiffany*, sung in Italian, English, French, Spanish and Sicilian dialect, had also been recorded at Bocelli's home in Tuscany for an upcoming album titled *CINEMA* (to be released October 23). At one point during the show, hosted by David Foster, and co-produced by Italian singer Tony Renis, Bocelli's beautiful wife Veronica joined him on stage to sing a duet from *Top Hat*, "Cheek to Cheek" by Irving Berlin.

The only operatic aria, sung as an encore, was "Nessun Dorma," from Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*. But opera fans were delighted by a benefit concert, *Remembering Pavarotti*, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (September 25), where Bocelli sang duets with American soprano Renée Fleming. He also performed "Maria," by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, from *West Side Story* at the *Governors Ball after the Emmys* (September 20). A devout Catholic, Bocelli then flew to Philadelphia to sing for Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Families (September 26).

As a journalist in the Hollywood Foreign Press, I had the opportunity to interview Andrea Bocelli (September 23) and sit next to him, while helping translate his answers from Italian into English. Having never met him in person, I was pleasantly surprised by his charm and sense of humor; he looked taller and more handsome than I expected, in a stylish powder blue suit. I did some research to prepare my questions, and discovered some interesting facts.



Andrea Bocelli: Cinema (c) Joseph Sinnott/THIRTEEN

Andrea Bocelli was born September 22, 1958 on a farm in Lajatico, a small village near Pisa; he had poor eyesight from birth, and became totally blind at age 12, after he was hit in the head by a ball during a soccer match, where he played as goalie. His exceptional musical talent was discovered at an early age; he was encouraged to pursue it by his elementary schoolteacher, who taught him that his voice was a gift from God. He earned a law degree from the University of Pisa, while taking singing lessons from tenor Franco Corelli. He married his first wife Enrica in 1989, they had two sons, Amos (born February 1995) and Matteo (born October 1997).

His singing career was launched in 1992, when Luciano Pavarotti suggested he sing “Miserere” by Gregorio Allegri on a record and concert produced by Zucchero. In 1993, he signed a record contract with Sugar, owned by singer Caterina Caselli, who promoted him as a pop singer. For more info, read “[Andrea Bocelli: How a Star was Born.](#)”

In 1998, Bocelli performed as a tenor in *La Bohème* by Giacomo Puccini at the Cagliari opera house in Sardinia, and he released his first opera album, *Aria*. After this his career took off, with several more recordings, pop and opera performances all around the world, that made him internationally famous.

In 2002, Bocelli moved out of his family home in Forte dei Marmi, a beach town in Tuscany, to live in a nearby villa with his new partner, Veronica, then 18. Later they had a daughter, Virginia (born March 21, 2012), then married (March 21, 2014), after his first marriage was annulled.

When I meet him, Bocelli confesses his love for all women, although he doesn’t claim to understand them. His wife, who is also present, makes a joke of it. They seem to have an easy rapport. Veronica tells the story of when Andrea, who cried when he heard that Francesco had become pope, immediately offered his voice and his heart to the Holy Father, whenever needed. She adds that the Pope also blessed the work of the [Andrea Bocelli Foundation](#) to help fight poverty in Haiti. Bocelli confirms his friendship with Luciano Pavarotti, the tenor from my hometown of Modena, who passed away in 2007, stating that he will live forever through his recordings. He does not like to be called a crossover artist; when he sings popular tunes, like Caruso, Beniamino Gigli, Mario Lanza and Luciano Pavarotti also did, he forgets his tenor voice because it would sound ridiculous. Bocelli believes that art in general was given to mankind to communicate what cannot be expressed with words, that the singing voice in particular transmits strong emotions that reach people’s hearts and move them to tears.

I’m looking forward to hearing the new album CINEMA and watching the show on PBS: *Andrea Bocelli: Cinema.*

Elisa Leonelli’s interview with Andrea Bocelli in the original Italian is here in the Italian film monthly Best Movie.

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