

Voice of the Heart

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Abstract: *Lucia Stanescu is a Romanian woman born in 1926 at the foothills of the Apuseni Mountains in a village with fairytale scenery, Somesul Cald (the Warm Somes). The three generations of priests from her father’s side of the family and the honest, hardworking family of her mother have joined and shed their virtues upon the young Lucia, the youngest of the four children of the family. Shielded by her father’s Christian upbringing and her mother’s, Aurora Stanescu, of the Professor Paul Turcanu, the child Felicia, as she was named in the official documents has also experienced the aura of the significance of her two first names: glamour, Lucia and the bliss of public appreciation, Felicia. Since the age of four she had the support of her godparents living in Bucharest, aunt Leontina Navrea and uncle Stefan Navrea, who provided her with good upbringing and formal education.*

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We often have with us people who change our destiny. They may be teachers, mentors, spiritual protectors providing unconditional fatherly care to us, those in need, those who are ready to receive their guidance. Lucia Stanescu is part of this blessed category, of those guiding not only the voice but also the life, with a lot of altruism and an obvious solicitude towards the native virtues of every soul of an artist.

The voice, a God-given gift, a chalice in which the most concealed and delicate qualities of a man vibrate. Experiences of the heart break out through the voice. The voice is the sound imprint of each and every one of us. The voice is launched only when we are prepared to know the world, when our goodwill, love and forgiveness are synonymous with the gift of life.

At the same time, this chalice gushes out only when a true guide discovers the sweetness of the voice. The special lady Lucia Stanescu, the lyrical artist appreciated and applauded worldwide, has the ability to lead any voice which would let itself be molded to performance, proving knowledge of the vocal system through science and at the same time through experimentation. She has built and developed a bel canto school in Romania and Italy where she lives for over twenty years.

Lucia Stanescu is a Romanian woman born in 1926 at the foothills of the Apuseni Mountains in a village with fairytale scenery, Somesul Cald (the Warm Somes). The three generations of priests from her father’s side of the family and the honest, hardworking family of her mother have joined and shed their virtues upon the young Lucia, the youngest of the four children of the family. Shielded by her father’s Christian upbringing and her mother’s, Aurora Stanescu, of the Professor Paul Turcanu, the child Felicia, as she was named in the official documents has also experienced the aura of the significance of her two first names: glamour, Lucia and the bliss of public appreciation, Felicia. Since the age of four she had the support of her godparents living in Bucharest, aunt Leontina Navrea and uncle Stefan Navrea, who provided her with good upbringing and formal education. In the ambiance of the capital of Romania “during that period called interwar, full of peace, culture and wellbeing”¹ young Lucia attended the classes of the *Orthodox Institute for Young Ladies* and then those of *Zoe*

¹ Stanescu, Lucia. *Was It Life Or Was It A Dream?*, Eikon Publishing, 2012, pg. 88

Ramniceanu High-School, education facilities where the strictness of the teachers in preparing their classes, discipline and decency were primary. Not long after, in 1939, “the path ordained by God towards music and not only was open.....”. Her music teacher, Mrs. Aura Davideanu, a mezzosoprano at the Opera, was the one who has remarked the sweetness and glamour in the child’s voice. Her guidance was intertwined in time with the one of baritone Jean Athanasiu and that of his wife the soprano Enrichetta Rodrigo. Then followed the enrollment with the private *Oancea* Conservatory, where the classes were especially theory and solfeggio. “When the two years of theory and solfeggio were complete, as the teacher Aura Davideanu had suggested, I took lessons with the teacher tenor Mihailescu-Toscani for the admission examination for bel canto. At the time the conservatory was called the Royal Music Academy, subsidized by the Royal Family and president was the composer Mihail Jora”.

With in-depth knowledge of the human voice, Lucia Stanescu always begins her pedagogical endeavor from the voice evaluation, at the same time testing her qualities and knowledge. In order to convince a student, it takes a good demonstration of musical, anatomical, artistic and musical knowledge, corroborated with those of physical nature regarding the forms of movement and the laws of inorganic nature phenomena, those of sound producing. Quintessentially, the educator Lucia Stanescu knows that the technical guidance aims to discover and transform the student, reminding him of who he really is: and artist in service of the people seeking to discover the Divine in the hearts of others.

Lucia Stanescu builds the complex artist of later starting from the emission of sound. The set of rules and steps to preserve and cultivate the voice are elements emphasized by Professor Lucia Stanescu, inevitably the lifespan of a voice being directly proportionate with the vocal hygiene. The correct warming of the voice, the impostation on easiness, avoiding the emission defects, provides the student with the necessary baggage, upon which the professor may later on build the voice of the future lyrical artist. The physiological mechanisms which are triggered during phonation are fully explained to the student, by examples, live illustration or audio and video recordings.

Further on, the professor captures the color of the voice, its resonance and the vocal pitches. With the attention of a physician, he pays a special attention to the bridge to prevent from creating a hiatus between the three areas of the vocal ambit and not to disturb the native voice balance. In time, the professor builds the vocal support and the technical exercises provided for this purpose are essential. The process of clearing the breathing forms is a lengthy one, which involves otherwise pleasant and convincing demonstrations of the soprano’s virtues as well as the student’s arduous study of the diaphragm muscle and the awareness of the respiratory system capabilities.

These are stages which Lucia Stanescu passes through very thoroughly in order to benefit later on from the native texture of the student’s voice, to boost the artist in reaching the next level, that of melodic construction. Showing experience, the professor manifests his entire musical education in selecting the musical repertoire. The established lyrical artist this time as well builds the morphological and syntactical aspects of chosen works through explanations and motivations. It is the moment of refinement, of filigree work, when the student often enters in a productive and motivating competition with the soprano Lucia Stanescu. On this higher level we catch a glimpse of the real music through its uplifting message. The educator’s joy is formed as the musical pieces are agglutinated, are personalized as stylistic and sense of communicating the meaning.

The bel canto professor has his work cut out for him. Yet, Lucia Stanescu has the moral and artistic strength to mold voices and artists who will carry with them the seeds of a bel canto school synonymous with the joy of living, of giving and of being.

The distinguished lyrical artist, Mrs. Lucia Stanescu was kind enough to grant us an interview from the sunny and near Italy where she lives for more than 30 years. We selected a few of her most important opinions:

1. **Ruxandra Mirea:** The will and determination to build a role on stage depends to some extent on collaborators, stage partners, soloists, and at the same time conductors and directors. In fact, opera is a syncretic genre, which impresses by involving all arts: vocal and instrumental music, theater, choreography, painting, design, architecture, history of costume, of furniture and lighting. What can you share with us about some moments, totally remarkable which you have shared with these colleagues of yours from other fields?

Lucia Stanescu: The thorough training of the opera singer from all points of view, technical, musical and why not cultural is an excellent shield against any surprises, perhaps not always agreeable. They do not work in the same way everywhere. It depends on the “reputation of the theaters” in the sense of value and even from one country to another. Not to mention the fact that in overseas tours, partners and not only are usually always others. It would be remarkable if from the first rehearsal the characters would create a natural interpretational affinity and collaboration. Fortunately, I have been given such moments, the show becoming almost real.

2. **Ruxandra Mirea:** Who are those maestros who have instilled their knowledge and grace on you, who have developed your talent through special pedagogical qualities?

Lucia Stanescu: Of course my discipline and strength of character have been some sort of atavistic security without anybody shaping or adjusting them. I do not believe that this has been too useful to me. It would be safe to say that my only bel canto professor, the maestro Constantin Stroescu has created through his experience and wisdom the good taste and certainty that some day I would make my mark in the lyrical world.

3. **Ruxandra Mirea:** You have resonated with the Puccinian creation, you are acknowledged as a valuable singer of this veristic composer with an obvious Postromantic emphasis. The voice, the most precious instrument, how have you lead it on the notes of composer G. Puccini? What is the character which impressed and challenged you the most in interpretation?

Lucia Stanescu: I have respected all the composers who have honored and made my carrier beautiful. Yet I can honestly say that I loved maestro Giacomo Puccini also because he is closer to us all. For example, the four students of *La Boheme*, we can find them today as well, not only in Paris but all over the world, almost always with their various financial, housing problems and especially with the feelings of love beneficially flooding their young souls, even maturing them. All that the music of the Maestro does is underlining methodically, brilliantly and warmly the experience of his characters. Ever since Conservatory I was taken by him, as a love which you wish it were eternal. Undoubtedly, the Puccinian character closest to me was the fragile Cio Cio San from *Madame Butterfly*, who during the opera becomes a woman full of dignity and capable to give up her only son out of love and then leaving this world so merciless and unsympathetic to her spiritual sensitivity with the courage specific to her race.

4. **Ruxandra Mirea:** You are and have been a remarkable voice that has captivated young voices who wanted to allow themselves to be molded by your knowledge. How do you remember the meetings and work ambiance with your students?

Lucia Stanescu: As bel canto method, the idea of personalize the gymnastic vocalization of the vocal chords is mine. I have never worked on them with groups of students simultaneously. It seems illogical and even dangerous. With regards to the teacher-student relation, I have chosen a path in which understanding, patience, assistance, even in key moments, but also the student-teacher respect shall not be absent. I do not particularly approve of the American custom, also rooted, unfortunately, in the old Europe.

5. **Ruxandra Mirea:** What is the secret which can be shared with your students about bringing novelty to the interpretation of an applauded role, perhaps hundreds of times?

Lucia Stanescu: The sincere experience, identifying with the character so much so that at some point you forget who you are, maybe your real name.

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Interview granted to Ruxandra Mirea in 2012, Quercinella, Livorno, Italy

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