

A portrait of Giuseppe Stillitano, a young man with curly brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue tuxedo jacket, a white shirt, and a dark blue bow tie. He is holding a baton in his right hand. The background is a dark, neutral color.

GIUSEPPE STILLITANO

Conductors of the future by CRISTINA FIERARU

This issue's protagonist of the *Conductors of the future* rubric thinks that, sometimes, it is music that chooses you, and he couldn't help but follow it. Keep reading his interview by *CRISTINA FIERARU* and discover the story of the young but promising conductor *GIUSEPPE STILLITANO*.

Giuseppe Stilitano approached music at the age of 7 thanks to his mother. The choral training, always active since childhood, is combined with violin and singing studies at the Liceo Musicale in Cinquefrondi (RC). At the Conservatorio di Musica Francesco Cilea of Reggio Calabria, he obtained the Academic Diploma of I and II level in Piano with honors under the guidance of Maestro

Roberto Giordano, and at the same institute, he studied Composition with Maestro Massimo Donadello. In 2022, as a pupil of Maestro Donato Renzetti, he graduated from the Conducting Academy of Saluzzo (CU) in union with the Filarmonica del Teatro Regio of Torino. From 2021 he studies at the Conservatorio di Musica Giuseppe Verdi of Milano in the conducting class of Maestro Daniele Agiman, in collaboration with the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano. As Assistant conductor, he followed Maestro Francesco Di Mauro for the diptych *Cavalleria Rusticana & Pagliacci* at the Teatro Antico in Taormina (August 2019) and M^o Donato Renzetti in *Tosca* at the Arena Sferisterio in Macerata (July 2022).

Currently, he is Assistant to M^o Gianluca Marciànò who he followed in the production of *Manon Lescaut* at the Teatro Lirico in Cagliari (October 2022) and in the production of *Tosca* at the Teatro de la Maestranza in Seville (May 2023). He was a guest of the television studios of ReggioTV for the transmission Il Salotto dell'Editore and of the radio studios of RadioLibertà for the transmission of L'angolo della Musica Classica.

Dear Giuseppe, I would like to thank you for accepting my invitation and welcome you as the newest member of our charming Conductors of the Future family. The whole team and our readers look forward to getting to know you better and discovering your musical origins and plans as much as possible. First, I would love to find out how you chose this path. Who guided your steps in the musical world?

I think it's not you who chooses this path but that, somehow, the music chooses you, and you can't help but follow it. The first guide was my mother, who taught me to move my fingers on her piano. Then my mentor, Maestro Roberto Giordano, shaped me musically during my piano studies at the Conservatory of Reggio Calabria. Last but not least, Maestro Donato Renzetti who forged my character and gave me the tools to tackle the trade. Naturally, I would not have continued along this path without the love of my large family and without the financial and moral support of my uncles, Pino and Tina, whom I thank.

You have an exquisite musical background! You had vocal and

choral training since you were little, played the violin and the piano, and had an Academic Diploma of I and II levels in piano with honours. After all of that, you decide on the path of conducting. When did the spark of conducting appear, and how did your musical background reflect your training as a conductor?

Thank you! The spark came when I was about 15 years old. I was studying violin in high school and was already deeply interested in symphonic music. Watching concerts on YouTube, I was fascinated by Herbert von Karajan, his personality, charisma, and temperament. And the first CD I received as a gift from my grandparents was a complete recording of Tchaikovsky's ballets with the Berliner Philharmoniker led by Karajan. This is where my curiosity began. I started studying conducting seriously at the age of 21, and, without a doubt, my musical background (including studies in composition and analysis done at the conservatory) allowed me to approach the new subject "with stronger shoulders". But it was partly a coincidence: since I was a child, I have always sung in choirs and played the violin in a youth orchestra for pure pleasure, in a certain sense also to distract myself, and without thinking that one day I would have embarked on the path of conducting. It has been a pleasant and gradual process, which has proved to be very useful today.

Given your rich experience as a participant in masterclasses, I would like to know your opinion on an important matter. What do you think it's best - having only one maestro you trust blindly or having a maestro and being able and free to listen and search for another opinion or perspective?

Especially in the early years of training, I think listening to just one bell is more appropriate. In this case, it is essential to find and totally entrust yourself to a good Maestro who will give you a solid technique and who will help you develop your own musical personality. J. Joachim Quantz said: "You have to secure the best possible teacher right from the start, even if you have to pay him two or three times the amount that the others take. Better a good teacher for a year than a mediocre teacher for ten." I was very lucky in this sense: my mentor never took a penny from my pockets and followed me for ten years! However, once sufficient maturity has been reached, in this case, it is good to listen to the opinions of other Masters. Each of them has a past, their own school, and a new story to tell you, which enriches you a lot.

What should a young aspiring conductor know before approaching this path?

You know, our work is a continuous research and, consequently, a constant discovery. It's hard to say what you need to know when at my age, there are more things you don't know than you do. However, I can say that it is essential to have a good general culture, as well as a musical one. Read a lot, take an interest in history, literature, and art history and notice, perhaps even be amazed, the strong ties that exist with music. Culture comes first, that's for sure! At the same time,

it is important to have the foundations of composition, to know how to make a harmonic and formal analysis - gradually, for example, starting with Bach's chorales and passing through Beethoven's sonatas up to the most complex scores. Also, aside from playing the piano, I've always found singing to be relevant.

Now we go to the 'statement questions' of this rubric. First of all, do you think there is a difference between the choir conductor and the orchestra conductor?

There is no difference from a technical/gestural point of view - except that the orchestra conductor often uses the baton, unlike the choir conductor. After that, given the different nature of the two teams, there is a difference in terms of skills. To conduct an orchestra, you need to know the instruments, while to conduct a choir, you need to know the voices, including their peculiarities: extension, articulation techniques, phrasing, breath economy, intonation and, especially for the choir, diction, breaths, vocality, etc. Then there is a distinction between opera and polyphonic choirs, which have different repertoire and performance practices. Specific skills are also required for leading a children's choir - working with children is always very delicate! So: apparently, there is no difference, but in essence, there is.

And the second one, when you approach a new score, do you listen to it on recordings before you know the music in its entirety, or do you listen to it after you know the piece so that your vision of it is not tarnished?

Good question. I like to have the first sound feedback on the piece. Unless you have a superhuman ear for music, listening to a recording cannot obscure what will later be your vision of the piece, also because there is music that you already know or have already listened to! Everything changes when I open the score, and the study phase begins. From that moment, there was nothing more. Indeed, any

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recording could only annoy me. Thus, I catapult myself into exegesis, epistolary correspondence, and historical connections - all of this for me comes before the music; it is essential to introduce me to the climate and have an initial key to reading the score. Immediately after I analyze it harmonically and formally, I play it on the piano and identify what may be the most critical points musically and technically (if there are any). Only when my idea has consolidated - after

days, weeks or months - I listen to what Furtwängler, De Sabata, and Mitropoulos did.

As Assistant conductor, you had the opportunity to work on *Cavalleria Rusticana & Pagliacci* at the Teatro Antico in Taormina, on *Tosca* at the Arena Sferisterio in Macerata, on *Manon Lescaut* at the Teatro Lirico in Cagliari, and just the previous month on *Tosca* again, but at the Teatro de la Maestranza in Seville. You also obtained the highest level of scholarship at the 2021 Vienna Opera Academy, where you worked on *Così fan tutte*. Of all these beautiful experiences you've had so far, which was the one you will never forget, which marked you and challenged you. Tell us more about it, please.

For sure, Vienna was a major turning point for me. The previous year I had worked on *Le nozze di Figaro* in Rome, and conducting another opera of the Da Ponte's *Trilogy* in the city where Mozart lived and worked was touching. It was also my first experience abroad after the year of the Coronavirus. I, along with seven other colleagues worldwide, was thrilled to have a fantastic guide, Maestro Toby Purser - who I also followed in London recently. I cannot fail to mention my previous experience in Seville where, for the second time after *Manon Lescaut* in Cagliari, I had the pleasure of assisting Maestro Gianluca Marcianò, this time in *Tosca*. You always learn a lot from him; he is a true craftsman of the work, confident in what he does, tireless, and a great example for us young people. It was a very intense and fulfilling period, and after a month spent there, I can say that I fell in love with Andalusia, the culture, the people, and the food. I ate croquetas and jamón nonstop; I have to go on a diet now, haha!

Do you believe in the power & the actual need of social media to maintain the connection between you, the artist, and the public?

Absolutely yes. I believe that social media if used well, can be an

excellent window to the public. The public that loves art that has a certain sensitivity towards beauty, that understands the sacrifice hidden behind a performance, that makes you feel your closeness through a like or a comment or a message. With this in mind, I believe that Instagram is a good means of interaction.

Quick questions time - firstly - please tell us a funny stage story if you have any.

Luckily I wasn't on the stage yet, but backstage! It went like this: just before a concert, people informed me that the first cello had ended up in the hospital and that they were looking for a replacement. I was almost ready; I just had to put on my shoes and jacket. You can imagine, I was a little worried and lost in thought, of course, and instead of taking the tuxedo jacket, I grabbed the bathrobe on the armchair. I put it on and leave the dressing room - calm, nonchalant. In the elevator that took you down to the stage, a friend of mine was the first clarinet of the orchestra, and when he saw me, he said: "Giuse' ma che stai andando alla SPA?" / "Giuse' are you going to the SPA?". At first, I couldn't understand, then I turned my gaze towards the elevator mirror, and when I realized it, I exclaimed: "Noooo!". After a long laugh, I retrieve my jacket (the right one this time) and reach the podium!

Secondly - do you have any hobbies? What's your relaxing routine?

I have different interests; it is difficult for me to get bored. I like reading and photography; I do physical activity to keep fit. I used to visit art galleries; I often go to opera and drama theatres, and I enjoy cooking at home - risotto with pumpkin and bacon is my specialty. I like being with friends and entertaining them with my "southern" way of doing things; I enjoy watching Totò's movies, and I love traveling and discovering new cultures. In my homeland, Calabria, going to the beach relaxes me a lot: swimming, being underwater all the time, sunbathing on a deck chair, and taking a boat ride. Over there, I often go horse riding, and when I feel particularly "inspired", I try my hand at drawing or painting. Those who know me would say that I also like shopping and that I am a good fork at the table, but we can discuss it...

Now that we're getting closer to the end of the interview, where can we see you next, and what are your plans?

With the Marble Foundation of Milan, of which I am the Music Director, I will soon hold a concert with the young baritone Pasquale Greco, and there will be other surprises later that we will announce from time to time on our website and our Instagram



page. At the same time, I will continue my activity as assistant conductor of Maestro Marcianò in Ljubljana for a concert with Sondra Radvanovsky and Piotr Beczala, at the Lericci Music Festival to reprise *Tosca* with a stellar cast (Giannattasio/Calleja/Terfel) and in Palma de Mallorca for *La forza del destino*.

What's the most *charming* feature of opera?

The charm of opera lies in its versatility, in its entirety, in its power to unite several forms of art: music, prose, acting, singing, sometimes dance, direction, set design, costumes, etc. It is "supreme art"; indeed, we could use a term so loved by Richard Wagner: "Gesamtkunstwerk", which in German means "total work of art".

Thank you!