

Written by Deborah Bostock-Kelley

An Intimate Look at Lyric Soprano, Lia Menna

She enters the coffee shop and greets me like an old friend rather than the stranger she's spoken to by phone one time before and has only seconds now to assess. She sits across the table, a chestnut highlighted bob framing a naturally luminous face with dark eyes and wide smile. She's twenty-two, Florida born and bred, writes her own music and plays, is musically inclined, and speaks four languages. *But none of this is not what makes Lia Menna unique.*

Since second grade, Menna has been a performer, introduced to Ruth Eckerd Hall through summer camps and other performance programs throughout her school year. "I did acting, dancing, singing through my eight grade year," explains Menna.

Unlike other young girls whose only desire is to emulate Britney Spears or other pop princesses, Menna's musical influences range from Beverly Sills, Maria Callas to Luciano Pavarotti.

Grandparents who emigrated from Italy exposed Menna to the love of opera at a very early age. "My grandparents listen to a lot opera and my family is Italian, so it's kind of like this is my life. When I was thirteen, I started taking my first vocal lessons with a woman at Ruth Eckerd Hall. When I was 15, I was truly blessed. I started working towards my professional goals with acclaimed European/Scandinavian opera singer Gro Miller. I didn't go into musical theatre, Broadway show tunes or pop music. I just wanted to sing opera and that's the way it's always been."

With a luscious and sparkling timbre that belies her twenty two years, this petite, polite Lyric Soprano is patiently-- or not so patiently-- waiting. A 2008 graduate of Eckerd College with a major in music and double minor in German and Italian, Menna is eagerly waiting for the month of April and the crucial envelope that congratulates her on where her graduate degree and opera career will take flight. "It's extremely nerve-wracking and the longest process ever that started in October. I spent all last month travelling with my accompanist, auditioning throughout the country. He's amazing. He plays all of my concerts and was a professor at Oberlin in Ohio for thirty years."

She explains she remained local for her undergraduate degree to continue her technical opera voice training. "My voice teacher didn't think I was finished with my training. I'm glad I stayed home. I had great professors and since it was a liberal arts school, there were all kinds of artistic people."

In a field where rejection is commonplace and validation of talent comes few and far between, Menna stays positive. She says her biggest achievement in her life besides graduating college is her concerts. "I have concerts and people actually come to them. I'm not known or anything, so that's really cool to have people come and listen to me."

Before she leaves Florida to begin her Masters Program in Music, Menna's summer schedule is packed. "I'm working on doing recitals over the summer and working with a tenor doing duets. We'll be doing a lot of concerts."

While in grad school, Menna will have the opportunity to do regular opera performances. "After grad school, I want to get an apprenticeship with an opera house. My dream is to go to Europe and get picked up by the Berlin Opera House, Vienna Opera House or La Scala in Milan and have an international career traveling the world."

But for right now, she's simply wondering which location will be her home over next two years.

When asked what her long-term goal is, Menna did not hesitate in her response. "I want to do something that has a profound effect on people. There are so many bad role models out there. I want to be someone a young person can look up to. When I was a teen, after I did a performance, a young girl came up to me and because of my performance, she wanted to study opera. That was an amazing feeling." Menna punctuates her sentence with a full smile.

No matter where the envelope takes her, no doubt Menna will be leaving a positive impact and making her own unique impression on the opera world.
