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THE TABLE

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and international superstar

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ON A POSITIVE NOTE



by Jessica Kohl

At first glance, Jessica Weidman looks every inch the dramatic opera diva. The Lebanon, PA singer's got fiery red curls spilling out of an updo, picture perfect makeup and features that beg for comparisons to Bernadette Peters and Bette Midler. However, as soon as she opens her mouth, her charm, warmth and deep passion for singing and mission work defy all stereotypes. She's the kind of gal that you talk to for a few minutes and walk away feeling like you've known her forever.

When I asked Weidman about her earliest singing memory, she told me she can't remember. She's just always been a singer.

"When I was about 9 months old I was in the playpen and my mom heard a high pitched noise and realized I was whistling, even before I could talk," she says. Playpen whistling led to her first singing appearance in church with her siblings at 4 years old. She sang solos in church, starred in school musicals and won every music competition she could find, including a national operatic competition her senior year of high school.



"Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be on stage next to Pavarotti's piano!"

Jessica Weidman



Her competition wins got her noticed by Hartford University School of Music and she was offered a nearly full scholarship. However, she was not able to find the remaining funds to make a college education possible and fulfill her dream of being a full-time opera singer. Instead, she married and gave birth to her three boys (now teenagers) and let go of her dream until the day she says that God asked her to use her gift and start singing again.

She found Palmyra vocal teacher Roger Lentz in 2004 and was classically trained using the Bel Conto method, which means “beautiful voice” in Italian.

“With Bel Conto, you learn to hone your voice to the best of your ability, versus trying to sing like a particular singer,” she says. Lentz also challenged her with exercises and music for a more mature voice when Weidman was several years shy of 40, the age she says your vocal abilities fully mature.

Weidman is considered a Lyric Soprano, or as she explained it, just three notes from the “Mariah Carey” high soprano range. Singing, she explained, is a little like running a race. Some days you finish the race with no problems, or can hit that high note, other days you fall flat.

She began singing as the principal soloist for the Lebanon Community Concert band several years ago and continues to this day. She has sung classical, Broadway and spirituals at nearly every local venue in the tri-county area as well as held a starring role in the musical “Hello Dolly” to sold out performances at the Hershey Area Playhouse.

For several years, some of Weidman’s most interesting singing adventures have taken her overseas to Scotland to help fund everything from the roof on an orphanage in Africa to a Scottish church in need of antique toilet repairs.

One of her most memorable moments occurred when she had the opportunity to perform at the Royal Concert hall in Scotland where Luciano Pavarotti himself has performed. These concerts raised over \$120,000 for Children’s Hospice Association Scotland.

“Never in my wildest dreams did I think I’d be on stage next to Pavarotti’s piano!” she says with shining eyes. “And to sing to 3,000 people and know you are helping raise funds is just amazing.”

When she is not on a formal stage, she also sings at many local churches and donates her voice to non-profit groups such as the AGAPE house. She only has a set fee for weddings and private events and donates her time to churches and other non-profits.

“I like to look at everything from the positive side,” she says with a smile.

Her positivity and faith have helped her cope with a Multiple Sclerosis diagnosis last year which caused her to reschedule Scottish and French tours because she was unable to leave the States. Interestingly, Scotland has one of the highest incidences of MS in the world so she found herself with a network of people already in place who had friends and family coping with the disease. Fortunately, despite poor test results, Weidman does not show any side effects of the disease.

She also suffers from Pseudotumor Cerebri or an increase in intracranial pressure that mimics symptoms of a brain tumor. Gastric bypass surgery 11 years ago has helped her to manage the disorder, which can lead to vision loss if not treated.

But she doesn't want either diagnosis to define her.

"You need to be God's copilot, not the other way around. I had such aspirations and was living on a highway heading toward them," she says. "But once I let God lead, he took me down backroads that have been much more beautiful. And when my car broke down, so to speak, I met amazing people to help me."

"He will provide," she says. "The bible says to give of your gifts, that doesn't necessarily mean just your money."

Weidman has been a featured artist on Pandora Internet Radio and has released two CDs, "Unforgettable," a collection of nostalgic songs and "My Soul Waits for the Lord", a compilation of hymns and sacred pieces.

Visit www.jessicaweidman.com for a list of her current show dates or to contact her directly to book a private event or place a request for a nonprofit event appearance. ■



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