

My Voice and Me
Libretto by Chris and George Newell
© Christopher and George Newell

Don't be alarmed,
and do not adjust your set.
Ha.
Hello. Can you hear me?
My name is Oliver Curry,
and for those of you who don't know me –
know of me –
I used to be a professional singer.
An opera singer.
This is me then.
And this is me now.
Ha.
If you haven't noticed,
my voice has lost some of its expressive qualities.
Ha.
Twenty years ago I lost it.
No,
really:
lost it.
Like a glove or a library card.
One minute: world class voice.
Next:
speechless!
Nobody really knows why.
Doctors,
surgeons,
speech therapists,
psychiatrists.
Since then...
Dot, dot, dot.
Ha.
My book is full of memorable melodies,
charming airs and graces,
musings and muses.
Plenty of muses!
We singers love anecdotes,
dropping in a few famous names.
A Zeffirelli this,
and a Callas
that.
Pavarotti's top,
Domingo's bottom.

We love the sound of our own voices.

Ha.

Here's an anecdote.

Vito Bovino,
the Mayor of Naples,
was financing a production of,
Il Pagliacci,
Il Paliarcci,
and Alberto Gonsalves was due to star.

Ha.

Ha.

Ha.

Alberto and I would never admit to it,
but we were rivals.

Management would choose between us.

They would say.

"Do we need 'the voice' or the 'performance'?"

I was the performance,

he was the voice.

Everyone knew Alberto couldn't -
wouldn't -

act,

but the singing...

well, that is in a different league.

Like Mr. Whippy ice cream, it plops out effortlessly,
flawlessly.

Anyway,

Bovino's niece,

Maria Bovino,

wanted to be an opera singer,

so he paid for the production,

starring her.

It turned out Maria was a student.

The minute Alberto heard her sing,

he was gone.

So they ended up hiring me.

The part suited me but I had never sung it.

I wouldn't have taken the job,

but my agent,

he said he had it on good information that Maria Bovino was on the verge of quitting.

The whole production would fall apart,

and I would be paid a fortune for doing nothing other than turning up.

So of course I didn't bother to learn the role.

Ha.

Ha.

Ha.

That was my mannerism:
 constantly clearing the throat.
 Not laughing:
 coughing.
 Lots of tenors do it.
 Making sure
 the instrument -
 the voice - still works.
 Is still there.
 Pathos.
 Now that's something opera has in bucketfuls.
 Tears of the clown.
 Pagliacci,
 Paliarcci.
 Forgive us:
 my voice,
 it's stupid.
 Well,
 actually that's me.
 Can't speak Italian,
 either of us.
 Recitar!
 Mentre preso dal delirio,
 non so più quel che dico,
 e quel che faccio!
 Eppur è d'uopo,
 sforzati!
 Ha.
 Maria didn't quit.
 When I landed in Naples I knew I was in trouble
 with two days to go and no hope of learning the part.
 As you know my Italian was not good at the best of times,
 and under pressure -
 and under pressure -
 and under pressure -
 the notes and the words were Morse code.
 But I could still act.
 They had an understudy.
 I could act losing my voice.
 Cough.
 Cough.
 C.
 O.
 U.
 G.
 H.

Air-conditioning.
The flight.
Jet lag.
Dry air.
Malaria.
Ha.
Ha.
Ha.
Ha.
Ha.
Ha.
OK, maybe litigation.
My agent could handle that.
Alternatively.
A career wrecker.
“Curry’s chips are down.”
“Curry is not hot.”
“Bel carnto.”
So I lied. Well.
You may be wondering why they haven't used an actor to play me?
Ha.
I insisted.
This is me
now.
Oliver Curry:
ex-owner of a world class voice,
survivor,
raconteur.
Now I can't speak
or
sing,
but I like my new voice.
My electro-Americano tappety-tap gadget.
Tappety-tap.
Tappety-tap.
Punctuation is the key.
A misplaced full stop and we sound terminated.
Here's one.
Ha.
Did I act no voice?
I still remember the big aria.
Vesti la giubba.
Nothing.
A rasp of air.
Tu se' Pagliaccio!
Strings stretched.

Silence.

Vesti la guibba.

e la faccia infarina.

Breath held.

La gente paga, e rider vuole qua.

Silence.

E se Arlecchin t'invola Colombina,

ridi, Pagliaccio, e ognun applaudirà!

Applaudirà!

Applaudirà!

Tramuta in lazzi lo spasmo ed il pianto

in una smorfia il singhiozzo e'l dolor,

Ah!

We can't complain,

my voice and me;

no, we can't complain.

How fittingly operatic to be fatally and inexplicably struck dumb.

And a dying-breath aria to boot.

Perhaps it was something I picked-up in Naples.

Oliver!

I guess that's it.

Maria.

My muse.

Mia voce.

Tappety tap.

Tappety tap.

My voice

and me.

And I think that's -

yes -

I'm out of time.

The book's out now.

It's a good read:

lots about my illness,

and doing what you love, and...

yes.

Thank you for listening.