



A LIFE IN MUSIC

Synopsis

ACT 1

“IL BALEN DEL SUO SORRISO”

Theme: meeting and friendship

15 May 2008

It's Creativity Day at the Teatro Regio di Parma and Antonio, 18 years old, is very worried. Hundreds of students are crowding the entrance. Antonio is alone with his iPod and a folder in his hands. He's intimidated but also fascinated by the beauty of the Teatro Regio, imagining the many artists that have stepped out to perform on that historic stage. The triumphant march of *Aida* plays in his headphones when someone crudely pulls them out. It's some kids from his school, the ones who are always teasing him for his slight stutter and introverted nature. One of the bigger boys pushes him towards another boy and Antonio's elbow hits the glass of a blonde girl standing nearby. The drink spills all over his trousers and new shirt, a present from his father for the event. It also ruins the folder holding the score of one of Antonio's compositions that, with a pinch of courage, he was going to give the famous musician that was playing there. The group of boys leave laughing and Antonio, in silence, heads to the bathroom to attempt to dry himself. He slumps down against a wall and turns his iPod back on but changes the music. He closes his eyes and starts to sing “Il balen del suo sorriso”.

- 1° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi -

For Silvia, 19 years old, it's a very important day. She is going to perform with her indie rock band at Creativity Day at the Teatro Regio di Parma. She's a beautiful blonde with a bright personality that everyone is attracted to. She arrives in her boyfriend's car and waves goodbye from the entrance to the theatre. She's totally at ease and when she enters, being one of the most popular girls in the city, it seems absolutely everybody knows her. Her band has already moved towards the stage for a sound-check but she needs a moment to herself. Looking at her reflection in the bathroom mirror, she is splashing her face with water when she suddenly hears a voice singing a particular song. A song that her grandfather used to sing, the person she was closest to before his death a few years earlier. She decides to follow the sound of the voice that seems as though it's coming from the men's bathroom. She enters with little hesitation and nearly trips over the boy sitting on the floor who is obviously feeling down and trying to stay out of the way. In embarrassment, he tries to cover his wet trousers but Silvia notices anyway and offers her jumper to cover it. With a big smile, she offers her hand to help him up before running off towards the stage, leaving the boy confused and surprised.

Antonio watches and listens to Silvia's performance dumbfounded. Despite the two being so different, perhaps even diametrically opposed, Antonio is truly moved by the chance meeting that won't be easy to forget.

ACT 2

“UT MALIS TIBI PLACERE”
Theme: research and inspiration

16 May 2008

A day has passed. Antonio is in his room at home and reflecting on that fateful morning. In his mind, he's imagining himself with Silvia on stage performing. He's stopped worrying that he didn't give his composition to the musician and instead feels that he can improve it. Taken by the moment of inspiration, he sits at his piano, making notes on his composition as he plays.

- 2° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi -

Having found a poster of the event held at the Teatro Regio di Parma, Antonio puts it on the wall by his piano, right next to the one of Maestro Verdi. Antonio's father walks past his son's room and immediately notices the new addition, a splash of colour in an otherwise empty and bare bedroom. Antonio is able to track down Silvia thanks to the poster. Now he has her number but he can't find the courage to contact her. He thinks about giving her jumper back and how that could be a good excuse to get in touch with her. Lulù, the family dog, enters the room and Antonio takes her back down to the lounge room where Antonio's father is laying the table for dinner. Shortly before sitting down, he finds the courage to send Silvia a message. Despite his father being the only true confidant in Antonio's life, this time, Antonio decides not to mention his new acquaintance. A short time later his phone vibrates, Silvia has replied. His father notices and passes comment but Antonio decisively ignores it.

After dinner, Antonio exchanges a long series of messages with Silvia. She is at home alone, her parents are away for work and she is used to being by herself. Her house is very big and full of expensive things and antique furniture. Silvia's only companion at home is the cat curled up on her lap while she writes to Antonio. She wants to get into the Conservatorio in Milan but has to pass an admission selection test. The musician who played at the Teatro Regio had advised her to continue studying music. She would like to learn Giuseppe Verdi's operas and Antonio, who grew up with the Maestro's work, suggests that they visit Villa S. Agata, where Verdi lived. Silvia accepts and the date is set.

ACT 3

“BELLA FIGLIA DELL’AMORE”

Themes: chemistry and promises

19 May 2008

The day arrives and Antonio is waiting for Silvia in front of his house. She arrives on time and picks him up on her Vespa before they make their way to Villa S. Agata. Antonio knows the Villa well, its gardens have provided him a refuge on more than one occasion. He tells Silvia about Verdi’s life but she pays little attention and is more interested in the architecture and the park that surrounds it. There are few visitors and one of the rooms with the Maestro’s historic piano is left empty and unattended. Antonio stares at the piano while Silvia is distant, immersed in her thoughts. For the first time in his life, Antonio does something transgressive and starts to play his own composition on the piano. Silvia recognises the great talent that lies within him, hidden away behind his timid and private soul.

- 3° Transizione a Rhythm ‘n Game con brano di Verdi -

Silvia sits down on the grass in the garden and invites Antonio to do the same. For Antonio, it is the first time that he’s ever been so close to a girl and sits some distance away. From her backpack, Silvia pulls out some paper and a pen and sketches the villa while she smokes a cigarette. Antonio gives her a pen-drive containing a selection of some of Verdi’s most well-known pieces, the music that inspires him most to compose. Silvia suggests he play his compositions for someone important, someone capable of recognising his talent, but Antonio doubts anyone would want to listen to them. Silvia asks if he would let her listen, so she can drop his name to some famous producers once she and her band start performing in and beyond Parma. Antonio smiles, for the first time someone besides his father believes in his potential. Before she’ll help him though, Silvia makes a point that he has to help her prepare for her final school exams.

Antonio agrees to make her a playlist of his compositions and makes another date with Silvia for her lessons.

ACT 4

“ARIA”

Theme: perseverance and distance

23 May 2008

Some days have passed since that meeting at the Villa and Antonio hasn't received a reply from Silvia who seems to have disappeared. Suddenly, he gets a message: it says she can't come to her lessons. She confesses that she has broken up her boyfriend following their umpteenth fight about jealousy and says the band are rehearsing more and more frequently. Antonio jots some final notes on the staves in front of him, closes his notebook and responds to the messages. Antonio's father is busy preparing dinner, he coughs and Lulù trots over as if to check that he's ok.

Silvia is doing yoga in her room when she receives Antonio's reply. A conversation starts about the reason behind the fight and while she continues to message him, Silvia decides to listen to the Verdian playlist that Antonio gave her.

- 4° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi –

The playlist concludes with “Il balen del suo sorriso”, the song Silvia's grandfather would so often sing. She closes her eyes and starts to recall the afternoons she'd spent at the farmhouse where her grandfather looked after her. Then she remembers her last moments with him and the way he would joke, even at such a terribly sad time. Silvia smiles again, a tear running down her cheek.

ACT 5

“TACITO ASSENSO”

Theme : trust and intimacy

28 May 2008

Silvia is at Antonio's house for her lessons. Antonio is very anxious but trying not to show it. The two study in his room. With the ice now broken, Antonio sits at the piano, his initial nervousness melting away the more he plays. Silvia sits down next to him. He's focused, concentrating on playing one of the compositions he intends to include on the playlist he's going to give her. As he plays, he lightly brushes against her arm.

- 5° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi –

Antonio finishes the piece and, smiling, turns his eyes towards Silvia as if he had just noticed she was sitting there next to him. For a moment, the two are caught in each other's gaze. Antonio's father appears by the doorway, drying his hands before knocking to attract their attention. Antonio jumps up startled, Silvia feels the tension and gets up too, greeting Antonio's father in a friendly manner. Silvia offers to help in the kitchen and Antonio's father invites her to stay for dinner. During dinner, Antonio's father and Silvia get to know each other better and he encourages her to never abandon her passions. Antonio is still visibly tense and when his father goes to wash the dishes, he's so lost for words he can't think of anything to talk to her about. To cut the tension and to thank him for the evening, Silvia invites him to a concert that's taking place the following week. Not wanting to disappoint her, Antonio accepts despite being very uncertain about it.

ATTO 6

“REQUIEM FOR A LOVE”
Theme: disillusionment and distrust

20 June 2008

Antonio says nothing to his father about Silvia's concert. It's not something he would normally go to and, in fact, you could say this would be the first time he was going out to have fun. Arriving at the local bar he orders a Coca-Cola and, a little lost, he looks around searching for signs of the band setting up and hoping to see Silvia. The instruments are laid out next to the stage but the band is still in the dressing room. Hesitantly, Antonio goes down the corridor to the dressing rooms where he can hear the musicians of the band talking loudly. They are teasing him, making fun of his dress sense, his music and his personality. Silvia laughs and plays along with the jokes. Responding to a quip by one of her bandmates, she says she'd never go from her ex to someone like Antonio, and that she's really only seeing him out of pity and because he's helping her prepare for her exams. Antonio glimpses her through the crack between the door and the doorframe before he runs away.

- 6° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi –

In his rush to leave, Antonio trips over a cable running across the floor and falls over. The pen-drive he wanted to give to Silvia slips out of his pocket. He runs across the city until he reaches home completely exhausted. Lulù celebrates his return, dancing by the door as always, but for the first time, Antonio doesn't stop to stroke her instead going straight to his room and locking the door. He deletes Silvia's message history and in the first real rage of his life, slams his fist against the piano.

Hearing everything, his father tries to intervene but Antonio pushes him away. His father intuits what might have happened, something has gone wrong between his son and Silvia.

Silvia is enthusiastic about how the evening has gone but before leaving the bar, she is stopped by a bargirl who gives her the pen drive. She tells her she found it on the ground and knew it was for her given the name written on it. Silvia puts it in her bag and forgets about it.

It's the middle of the night and Silvia is lying on her bed when she decides to send a message to Antonio. She tells him about the fantastic evening and how she would have loved it if he had been there to listen to it. He sees the message but doesn't reply.

ATTO 7

“F.O.R.S.I.L.V.I.A.”

Theme: realisations and acceptance

23 July 2008

Silvia has just passed her final exams and received her diploma. Those weeks of intensive study in Antonio's company have paid off. She has just come home when she receives a Skype call from her parents congratulating her. She tells them about her plans for the future and that she wants to go to Milan to pursue a musical education. Her parents, who have always been sceptical regarding her possible future as a singer, encourage her to take a different path, one that will see her in a stable and more socially acceptable job. That same afternoon, Silvia has an appointment with an agent, but she decides not to tell her parents. In a moment of rage, she throws her phone against a wall, smashing it. Calming herself, she is searching for another phone when she finds the pen-drive she was given at the concert that she had completely forgotten about. Moved by curiosity, she decides to see what's on it. It's full of audio files and as the first track plays, she immediately knows that it can only be a playlist of Antonio's compositions. The first piece seems to be the complete version of the one he had played at Villa Sant'Agata.

Silvia is with her band in the agent's office but the meeting doesn't seem to be going well. The agent wants them to play a series of concerts in different bars from mid-September onwards but it is going to clash with her university admission tests so she decides not to accept. Before leaving, Silvia gives the pen-drive with Antonio's compositions on it to the agent.

Alone in his studio, the agent listens to the first track: he can't believe that an 18 year old has managed to interpret such a traditional piece in such a modern way... He goes on to listen to the other tracks and as he does, he seems all the more convinced of Antonio's talent.

- 7° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi -

Antonio has passed his final exams without difficulty and with full marks. He runs home to tell his father. They hug each other lovingly, his father is just as happy, if not more so, than Antonio. His son, despite his challenges in life, has achieved his first really important goal and he can do nothing but admire him. Following a conversation between the two in which they talk about what happened the night after he got home from the bar and slammed the piano, Antonio gets a call from the agent who offers him a chance to record a demo in his studio. Antonio doubts himself though and turns the opportunity down. Having heard everything in the next room, his father comes in and persuades Antonio to make the most of it. Antonio rings the agent back and accepts.

ACT 8

“LAST CHANCE”

Theme: courage and sacrifice

21 September 2008

Today, a changed Antonio is going to the studio to finalise the recording of his first demo. He feels he knows himself better now and has started hanging out with a group of friends. He has finished the paperwork for his Conservatorio di Parma application and will be attending his first interview in the next few days. He's even able to control his slight stutter better and in fact, it has nearly disappeared. Finding himself in the recording studio, he looks out from behind the glass at a group of people including the producer and his new agent, watching and encouraging him. Later, having wrapped up the last track and making his way out the recording studios, an intern stops him to congratulate him on the emotion his music evokes. She tells him that with just his notes and the piano, he can convey more feeling than any sung melody. She asks if she can join him for lunch and Antonio is just about to refuse when she unexpectedly takes him by the arm. He's very stiff and thoughts swirl through his mind. For a moment he thinks of Silvia and what he would have given to have had her there for his first time recording.

They stroll through the city and enter a bar for a coffee taking a table next to a large window that overlooks one of the main city streets, not far from Antonio's house. The girl gets up, approaches the old juke box, inserts a coin and selects one of her favourite songs.

- 7° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi -

Silvia is at home preparing her last suitcase, today is the big day. She is closing the latest chapter of her life and is about to open a new one. From tomorrow, she will be living in Milan just as she wanted, but not to follow her dream. She has given into the pressure from her parents and enrolled in a university in Milan to study marketing in what was probably the first compromise of her life. In the last few weeks, she has got back together with her ex, who is also moving to Milan for his specialisation. As one who has always planned for the future, Silvia has decided to keep a tie to her past to help keep her calm in confronting this new challenge. She has said goodbye to her band, a farewell more than a see you soon, and the only piece of Parma that she will take with her is her marvellous cat.

In an hour, her boyfriend will come by to pick her up and they'll drive to Milan together. From her drawer, she takes out and re-reads a letter she had written for Antonio in the days before. The letter contains questions and thoughts that she has never had the courage to tell him. She goes to the street to get her scooter. Even though she hasn't finished applying her make-up and getting ready, she must see him and give it to him in person. Now, close to Antonio's house, she sees him laughing with a girl. Misinterpreting the scene, she believes she now knows the reason Antonio hasn't been replying to her. She tears up the letter and returns home where she waits for a cool sports car to pull up. As she loads her bags, her phone vibrates. A friend of hers from the band has sent her a picture of Antonio while he was recording in the studio.

ACT 9

“TI RICORDI DI ME?”

Theme: Transformation and awareness

6 May 2018

Silvia is employed as a marketing manager at a multinational company, she has maintained her passion for music, and goes to concerts and hangs out with artists as often as she can. She is alone in a taxi and going to the Teatro Regio di Parma for an evening of music. Arriving at the entrance, she reads the concert playbill. Antonio is going to perform and there will even be television crews from national broadcasters to record it. The two haven't seen each other for ten years.

Antonio is in his dressing room adjusting his jacket in front of the mirror. He is totally at ease and sipping a glass of whisky (to think that as a youth he was teetotal) when the scene director calls him to the stage. He has a more authoritative presence now, a long beard and is decidedly more robust in respect to the past. When Antonio steps onto the stage, it seems as though centuries have passed since that morning 10 years prior. He sits at the piano and dedicates the concert to the memory of his late father. Silvia is in the front row, nervous. The concert begins with the piece that Antonio had played for her at Villa Sant'Agata.

- 9° Transizione a Rhythm 'n Game con brano di Verdi –

Antonio finishes the concert passionately and is acknowledging the audience when his eyes meet Silvia's.

ENDING 1: Antonio is immobile and as the audience erupts in thunderous applause, he continues to gaze straight at her. Silvia looks back with a smile and a veil of sadness. Antonio remains on stage, motionless, unable to move in disbelief. Then he takes a deep breath, nods his head slightly while holding Silvia's eye contact, and bows once more before the curtain falls.

END ACT 9 – FINAL “A”

ENDING 2: Antonio looks at her for a moment and smiles before returning to thanking the audience. Silvia stops clapping and stands still, incredulous. Devastated, she leaves the stalls while Antonio follows her with his eyes. Antonio goes backstage.

It is evening. Silvia leaves from a service door and walks quickly drying her tears. She takes out her phone and calls home to tell the babysitter she's on her way back. Antonio leaves from the same service door. He catches up, then stops behind her. Silvia puts her phone back in her bag. Antonio moves closer, Silvia turns slowly. Antonio leans forward and kisses her unexpectedly. Silvia is taken by surprise but then returns the kiss. Antonio steps back and moves back towards the Teatro, leaving Silvia stunned. He looks at her smiling and thanks her. Silvia stands in silence and watches him go back into the Teatro before she leaves with Antonio's music playing in her mind.

END ACT 9 – FINAL “B”