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BY LOUISE T. GUNTHER

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# Infinite Jest.

Italian bass  
**Maurizio Muraro**  
makes funny  
a fine art.



► **MAURIZIO MURARO IS THE REAL DEAL**—the rare *basso buffo* whose vocal and dramatic gestures come from a finely observed and sublimated humanity. The Italian bass never indulges in schtick but injects beautifully imperfect life into the characters he inhabits. At fifty-four, Muraro has established a career tempo that only a master of rapid-fire patter could maintain: this season, Met audiences have seen him in *Trittico*, as *Tabarro's* Talpa and *Gianni Schicchi's* Simone, and as the Prince de Bouillon in *Adriana Lecouvreur*. This month, he sings Sulpice in the Met's *Fille du Régiment* revival, and next month, he sings Bartolo in Hamburg *Barbriere* performances before traveling to Covent Garden in June for *Figaro's* Bartolo.

"Onstage, I try to be focused and true—to be a real human being. You can't *look* to be funny," Muraro says from his home in Padua when we connect via Skype. "In the past, these kinds of roles were sung by Italo Tajo or Renato Capecchi. It doesn't matter to me if it's a short role or big role. I have the same approach, the same attitude in every

—  
Javier  
Camerena's  
Almaviva  
befuddles  
Maurizio  
Muraro's  
Bartolo at the  
Met, 2017

character that I'm singing. I try to forget my ego at home and don't play myself, but deliver a character inspired by real people. If you try to be funny, it becomes so ridiculous that you lose the audience. It's boring for them and boring for me—you fall down on the cliché of a basso buffo."

In conversation, Muraro seems self-effacing and even a little nervous. His voice, though, is unmistakably the same oaken instrument that binds every word to its musical line. In the Met's *Barbriere* in 2017, the bass

summoned a maelstrom of bluster with “A un dottor della mia sorte,” before turning Bartolo’s patter into a thing of filigreed beauty instead of the usual party trick. On Yannick Nézet-Séguin’s 2016 *Figaro* recording, the way the bass roars “obbliar” in “La vendetta” serves as a reminder that Mozart’s Bartolo is the same *dottor*—unmellowed by age and perhaps a bit more dangerous. Muraro’s Don Alfonso, seen in New York in 2014, was a master class in prosody: Mozart’s recitatives seemed less sung than overheard in a Neapolitan market.

Raised in Treviso, in Italy’s Veneto region, Muraro studied at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan and spent three seasons singing in the chorus at La Scala. He made his professional debut in 1994 at Spoleto, as Dulcamara, but he’s quick to point out that a major turning point in his career came in 2001, when—after countless unmemorable *Figaro* performances—he sang Bartolo under the baton of Riccardo Muti at the Vienna Festival. “That’s when I started to get much more interested in the importance of the text,” Muraro remembers. “Maestro asked the cast to work for two long days on just the recitatives. I was much younger than I am now. I didn’t say, ‘I am the only Italian member of the cast. It will be so boring for me.’ Fortunately, I changed my mind in the first ten minutes we started to work.

## “I try to deliver a character inspired by *real people*.”

That [experience] allowed me to discover every single meaning hiding in just one phrase that da Ponte had written with Mozart.”

Now in the third decade of his career, Muraro is garnering some of his best notices. On a 2017 recording of Bellini’s



*Adelson e Salvini* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the bass’s characterization of the *buffo* Bonifacio practically jumped out of the speakers and stole the show. And the DVD capturing Terry Gilliam’s slapstick production of *Benvenuto Cellini* has earned Muraro rave reviews for his Balducci, a perfect vehicle for his quintessentially Berliozian admixture of surreal humor, pathos and idiomatic French. It’s a performance to be studied and savored.

If there’s a downside to Muraro’s increasingly busy career, it’s that he now finds himself away from his home and family (his wife of twenty-five years and



From left: Muraro as Simone in the Met’s *Gianni Schicchi*, 2018; as Geronte in *Manon Lescaut* at Covent Garden, 2014

renders onstage. “I like to collect sculpture, photographs, paintings. I started with Italian figurative painters—Pietro Negroni to Renato Guttuso. Then, step by step, I opened my mind and eyes to modern art,” he says. “When I’m in New York, I spend my free time in Chelsea. I’ve become friends with some international artists, and I like to collect pieces by people that I know—I like to be in touch with the artists.”

Muraro’s keen eye for quotidian detail lends his characters an unmistakable vitality, but he admits a more personal connection with the role of Sulpice. “With that character, I can show my fatherly feelings,” he says. “Sulpice is a very tender man.” Ditto Don Pasquale, which the bass sang two seasons ago in San Francisco and is eager to bring back to the stage. “I love that man. He is very tender, and it’s interesting to see the conflict between two generations. He’s almost seventy years old, but he’s able to be in love again. Pasquale is not naïve,” he continues, “but he believes in love, and at the end you have to love him.” ■

their seventeen-year-old daughter) for eight or nine months each year. When the bass returns to Padua, he mostly spends his time hunting for additions to an art collection that sounds as capacious and carefully curated as the gallery of humanity he