

**LAURA BUFF**Class of 2013  
Raleigh, NC

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“*Inspirazione.*” That is “breath” and “inspiration” combined in a single Italian word, and is thus the perfect word to symbolize opera. Whenever people ask me about last summer, I find myself at a loss for words. *Inspirazione*, however, comes close to encapsulating my summer. As a Vocal Performance and Italian double-major, I wanted to push myself in both fields through my Burch Fellowship experience by immersing myself in the study of opera in Italy.

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Rosina Storchio, an Italian soprano whose career lasted from 1892 to 1922, became the muse of my studies. I carried out research at the libraries at Il Teatro della Scala and the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi; took voice lessons from Giovanna Canetti, formerly affiliated with both La Scala and the conservatory, attended performances at La Scala and other major venues; and explored Italy’s culture, history, and breathtaking beauty. However, the unanticipated personal growth that accompanied this experience is something only I will ever completely understand.

Research carried out in the libraries comprised the main component of my Burch Fellowship experience. I began this research by spending most of my time in the conservatory to understand a broad view of vocal technique in the nineteenth century in Italy. This information came from treatises and method books on vocal technique written over the course of the century, with an effort to gather information from the beginning, middle, and end of the century. Some of my areas of focus included changes in voice type, breath, vibrato, and forms of articulation such as portamenti.

After gaining a general picture of the voice itself throughout the nineteenth century, I focused my research on Storchio. Most of this sector of my research took place at La Scala. I used



a variety of media to find details about Storchio’s life and career, including letters, the press, and biographical writings. Researching Storchio’s career was

inspirational to my own progress as a performer. Many of the press reviews painted a clear picture of Storchio as a singing actress and praised her for both her intellectual qualities and her dramatic specificity. She premiered at least six roles in major opera houses in Italy by composers of the *giovane scuola*, or the “new school” in operatic composition, such as Puccini, Leoncavallo, and Mascagni. This affinity for pioneering new roles resonates especially with me, as I have discovered a passion for new music during my time at UNC.

While I spent most of my time researching in the libraries, my Burch experience also delved into other dimensions of my topic. I attended performances of *Don Pasquale* and *Manon* at La Scala and *Roméo et Juliette* at the Arena in Verona, all operas that Storchio performed regularly. These performances brought my research to life and allowed

me to compare and contrast the ideas I was able to gather from reading about Storchio’s singing and dramatics. To gain a hands-on understanding of modern Italian vocal teaching, I took voice lessons with Giovanna Canetti, formerly affiliated with both La Scala and the conservatory. This branch of my experience allowed me new insight on my own vocal development, as Signora Canetti took me back to fundamental concepts of singing to rebuild certain aspects of my technique. She focused especially on my breathing and vibrato, which are closely interconnected. As a whole, using Signora Canetti’s lessons as representative of the current Italian school, much of modern Italian vocal training seems to be consistent with that of the end of the nineteenth century. Italian vocal training

continues to place heavy emphasis on a bright, forward tone with consistency between vowel sounds, along with purity of those sounds.



My summer in Milan allowed a huge amount of growth in my ability to speak Italian. While my reading comprehension is nearly fluent in the language, it is hard to truly develop conversational fluency without being immersed in the culture. Being alone rid me of the temptation to speak English with fellow Americans that I previously experienced during an opera program my first summer in Italy. Instead, I got to know lots of Italians both young and old with whom I could speak. I began to learn slang terms and grew much more comfortable with day-to-day interactions. As I grew more fluent in the language, I also gained the confidence necessary to live alone in a foreign city.

Most importantly, my Burch Fellowship summer confirmed my idea that performance and research can and should coexist. I realized that I truly enjoy immersing myself in a research project that I have designed based on my interests, and hope to combine my desire to conduct research with my love of music in a career. While the fields of performance and musicology often exist separately, I hope to work to bring those two together as an “intellectual performer” of sorts, carrying out research that will directly inform the roles I perform.

