Name

1550/10:00

 Leon

Memoir

"Casta Diva, che inargenti queste sacre antiche piante..." As the words to the bel canto aria floated from my heart and out of my throat, the stage melted away from conscious thought. I felt more like I was expressing the emotions that I had kept deep in my heart. Through singing, I was able to express my deepest feelings that otherwise seemed hard to express. For me, singing was not just about hitting the highest possible note; it was the way I found my true identity.

As a child, I moved around a lot. For this reason, I was not able to make deep connections with most of my classmates and neighbors. Growing up, I always thought anybody I meet is a friend. Any time I was asked about someone I had met a few times before, I would respond, “Oh, I know her! We are really good friends.” However, as I got older, I realize how difficult it is to find true friendship and not be lonely.By the end of my freshmen year, I started to wonder what I really wanted from my life. My inner voice had begun to grow strength of purpose, and at that point in my life I knew it was time to explore the world and find something on which can me out of this loneliness. As I soon discovered, that music is that “something” and it will be my friend when no else can.

Although I didn’t know exactly where this new path would take me to, my instincts told me that I had return to China, because it was the right place for me to start my journey. With my mom’s support, I relocated to a city called ShenZhen. It was at ShenZhen Arts School that I first experience a style of Italian opera called Bel Canto. I was captivated by the freedom of its beauty and emotion, but I soon learned how that freedom was grounded in solid singing technique. At first my voice was plain and inflexible, but though many hours of lessons I learned how to connect it to the rest of my body, by supporting it with proper breathing and vowel placement, so it would make the same sounds I heard in my mind. As it strengthened my voice, this technique helped me to express through opera the feelings that lay deep inside me.

With new self-awareness from my experience at Shenzhen, I realized that I wanted to attend an American university. So after a year, I decided to come back to the U.S. Because I did not want to stop singing, I joined my high school choir. For the first time I saw the importance of teamwork in making music. Unlike solo singing, where I concentrated only on my performance, singing in a choir required me to focus on every part of the music. I enjoyed the social interaction of singing in a group, and from working together with my peers; I was able to develop new forms of musicianship and cooperation. While Bel Canto showed me how to function as an individual, the choir allowed me to develop a new entity, one that existed in a group dynamic.