WILMA VERNOCCHI



Encouraged by soprano Lina Pagliughi, Wilma Vernocchi attended the G. Rossini Conservatory in Pesaro and the G.B. Martini Conservatory in Bologna (1962).

Selected for the Centro Perfezionamento Artisti Lirici (Center for the Advancement of Opera Artists) at La Scala in Milan, she studied the opera repertoire under the guidance of renowned teachers and conductors (1966-1970).

From 1964 to 1970, along with her studies, Wilma was part of numerous national and international competitions dedicated to promising opera singers. She won twelve first prizes, which allowed her to make her debut at the Teatro Nuovo in Milan (1966) in D. Cimarosa's opera “Il matrimonio segreto” (Carolina) and later at the State Theater in Sofia in the opera “La bohème” (Mimì). The critics were flattering; Eugenio Gara wrote at the end of an article: “...the young Wilma Vernocchi was truly born for the theater, and we will hear more about her.”

Wilma represented Italy in Tokyo at the “2nd Worldwide Madama Butterfly Competition”; she was the youngest competitor and won the “Tamaki Miura” first prize for the best performance and interpretation of Butterfly (1970). In Japan, where she sang several times, a garden was dedicated to her in the historic Glover Park in Nagasaki, where the Madama Butterfly monument stands.

Her prestigious Japanese success allowed her to make her official debut at La Scala in Milan in the opera Madama Butterfly, “Elisir d'amore” (Adina) with Luciano Pavarotti (1972), and the following year she played ‘Mimì’ in the opera “La bohème” at the Regio Theater in Parma with José Carreras.



Wilma sang at La Scala for fifteen consecutive years in leading roles, performing in Italian and foreign opera houses and theaters such as the San Carlo in Naples, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Arena di Verona, the Comunale di Bologna, Teatri Emiliani ATER, the Paris Opera, the Munich Opera, the Zurich Opera, and the Salzburg Festival, performing a vast repertoire ranging from Monteverdi, to Italian opera buffa, and 19th-century melodrama classics.

Also interested in modern repertoire, Wilma has performed works by 20th-century composers such as Hindemith and Maderna and has been sought after by Franco Mannino and Nino Rota for their theatrical productions.

Vilma was conducted by maestros such as C. Abbado, G. Pretre, M. Arena, O. De Fabbrittiis, A. Gavazzeni, F. Molinari Pradelli, G. Patanè, N. Sonzogno, A. Votto, and collaborated with directors such as Villar, M. Wallman, G. Strehler, M. Bolognini, R. DeSimone, C. Maestrini, and G. Sbragia.

In her theatrical work, Wilma was accompanied by artists such as C. Bergonzi, G. Bumbry, F. Corelli, M. Caballé, F. Cossotto, P. Cappuccilli, P. Domingo, G. Di Stefano, S. Bruscantini, F. Labò, A. Protti, and R. Panerai. She toured the East with Maria Callas and Giuseppe di Stefano (1973), which is documented in photographs in the book “Callas by Callas” by Renzo Allegri, published by Mondadori (1997).

Wilma was the first Italian artist to perform in recitals and operatic performances at the new Cultural Center Theater in Manila (Philippines), where the new production of the opera “Madama Butterfly” (1973) was staged especially for her. In 1984, Wilma performed for the last time at the Malacanan Palace in Manila for the President of the Republic of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, and Donna Imelda.

Wilma has performed in concerts on Belgian Radio BRT, Japanese NHK, and Italian RAI TV. She created and hosted the television programs “Lirica in salotto” (Globo TV, 1980) and the series “Lirica oggi”, broadcasted by RAI-Radio Italiana (1990). Wilma created and presented the new edition of eight television episodes of “Lirica oggi” for educational and informational purposes, with the participation of guests, artists, musicians, and opera singers from Italian theater (web: www.Teleromagna.it/LiricaOggi/2015/16).



Since 2013, Wilma has been an honorary member of the Rotary Club district 2072 in Forlì, where she has collaborated on humanitarian and educational concert activities for the series “Il canto lirico entra nelle scuole” (Opera enters schools) (2019).

Wilma held “Italian Opera Master Class” courses at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland for the European Erasmus programs and projects (2005/2009).

Wilma organized and directed seven editions of the international seminar “Vacanze in lirica” for the Municipality of Riccione (1992 to 2000), which became itinerant in Italy, celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2024 for its uninterrupted summer activities.

Wilma was a member of the Board of Directors of the Museo alla Scala in Milan from 1989 to 1996.

After thirty years of living in Milan, Wilma returned to Forlì, her hometown, where she was awarded the gold medal of the “Dmenga a ca' nostra” and she received the gold medal and diploma of merit “Al merito Fedeltà al lavoro” (For Merit and Loyalty to Work) by the Chamber of Commerce of Forlì-Cesena (March 2001).

Wilma has performed in concerts in Italy and abroad: Tokyo, Osaka, Nagasaki for the Makizo Nakagawa Foundation (October 2003); Academy for Performing Arts in Hong Kong (October 2003); for the Italian Consulate in Osaka (October 2004); Helsinki National Opera House for the International Association “B. Gigli” (February 2005); Arkhangelsk and Nowodwinsk Philharmonic Orchestra, Russia (January 2009); Bologna Festival San Giacomo Maggiore (May 2010) “Laus Marie” recitals of madrigals, motets, and Marian cantatas.

Wilma was awarded the “Premio Puccini 2016”, on the occasion of the 45th theater season, at Torre del Lago Puccini, in memory of her performances of Madama Butterfly in 1973.

Wilma was the protagonist of the concert celebrating the 60th anniversary of the 'Club Verdiano dei 27' at the Auditorium Paganini, in Parma (May 2018).

Wilma was celebrated for her sixty years of artistic activity in Forlì, (2022) with the award of the ‘Sigillo Araldico di Caterina Sforza Riario’ and performed with twenty-nine students who came all the way from foreign countries and different Italian regions for the occasion. In memory of this, Wilma recorded the CD “Chi canta, il suo dolore incanta” (Those who sing, their pain enchant) for Artuniverse Studio S.r.l. Rome, with melodies by Francesco Paolo Tosti and lyrics by contemporary Italian poets.

Wilma was a singing teacher in Vietnam for an Italian opera concert performed by Vietnamese singers at the Ho Chi Minh City Opera House (Saigon) in September 2022.

Wilma has taught singing at the following conservatories of music: “A. Vivaldi” in Novara (1987/88), “F. Cilea” in Reggio Calabria (1989/90), “G. Verdi” in Milan (1990/95), and “G. B. Martini” in Bologna (1995/2009). Wilma currently teaches singing at the “Angelo Masini” Music Institute Foundation in Forlì.

For her artistic achievements throughout her career and for her ongoing teaching activities, Wilma was awarded the honor of Grand Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic (2004).

Wilma has presented the concert conferences “Il teatro lirico oggi” (Opera today), “I poeti cantati da F.P.Tosti” (The poets sung by F.P.Tosti), and “Come nasce l'opera lirica” (How opera was born).

Wilma received the “Maria Malibran alla carriera 2025” award, reserved for those who have dedicated their lives to music.

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