

## **An Opera in 3 Acts, Starring Gino Quilico**

Author Connie Guzzo recently published the biography of the Quilico family, starring Gino, his father Louis and mother Lina. *An Opera in 3 Acts* recounts the tragedies and successes of a family of Italian Canadian opera singers from Montreal, that took place on and behind the scenes of some of the most prominent opera houses in the world. Encounter with Connie Guzzo and Gino Quilico.

By Carole Gagliardi

### ***Why have you decided to write your first biography on the Quilico family?***

*Connie Guzzo:* After the publication of my last novel, *The Women of Saturn*, inspired by my own personal experience but highly fictionalized, I thought long and hard about my next project. I am a fiction writer but have always enjoyed reading or watching documentaries about the lives of exceptional personalities and I felt the need to write in a non-fiction book and challenge myself as a writer. Slowly an idea crystallized: Why not shine a light on someone from our Italian community that has accomplished something special? Our community more often celebrates financial and business success but often overlooks the effort and talent that it takes to make it in the artistic sphere.

I had met Gino Quilico through my brother Vincenzo, a musician and choir director, and it occurred to me that Gino, together with his father Louis, had reached world fame in the opera world and yet, the family is not as well known outside of this very rarified world. I thought it was time for the community at large as well as the general public to discover the accomplishment of this exceptional family. My personal curiosity and interest lay also in exploring what it took for the Quilicos with humble origins in the Italian community to achieve this level of success and fame and at what cost.

### ***You adopted a particular style using the first person to recount each one's story. Why?***

*Connie Guzzo:* My interest in telling this story was not to write about opera as an art form, or about voice technique or simply list a series of their career accomplishments. I wanted to tell the personal and human side of their story. I chose to write the book in a creative non-fiction genre, that is to tell a real story but use the techniques of fiction to make it interesting for those readers that may not be all that interested in or familiar with opera.

I never met Lina nor Louis, but in my interviews with Gino, I sensed their strong voices. Throughout the book, I also created some scenes which may or may have not happened exactly as I imagined them, but I maintained all the facts of their lives as they really happened.

The concept of having each of the three family members tell their own story in their own voices made sense.

***Il faut faire preuve d'une grande humilité pour accepter de s'exposer aussi ouvertement que vous le faites, pourtant, vous êtes un Divo et dans le milieu de l'opéra, l'humilité n'est pas une valeur courante.... Pourquoi avoir accepté de vous livrer ainsi ?***

*Gino Quilico:* Moi, toute ma vie j'ai été un livre ouvert. Je suis sincère envers mon public et mes proches. Je voulais partager mes expériences. Je voulais faire comprendre aux lecteurs tout le travail et les défis rencontrés dans le parcours de ma vie personnelle et artistique. Oui c'est sûr que j'ai fait des bêtises dans le passé, mais je ne regrette rien.

***Vous avez vécu une relation très difficile avec votre père, Louis. On sent une dualité, une compétitivité entre vous. Comment cela a-t-il joué dans votre développement personnel et professionnel?***

*Gino Quilico :* C'est intéressant que vous ayez perçu à travers la lecture du livre une dualité et une compétitivité entre mon père et moi.

Il y avait effectivement une dualité entre Louis Quilico, mon père et son père. Mais pour ma part, il n'en était rien. C'est sûr que lorsque deux chanteurs d'opéra se rencontrent sur scène, on cherche à se dépasser, ce qui pourrait être interprété comme une rivalité.

Louis était mon père, mon ami, mon professeur, mon idole et mon mentor. À la fin, lors des dernières années de sa vie, il s'est remarié et une distance s'est installée entre nous, c'est possiblement la raison pour laquelle vous avez ressenti une compétitivité. Les plus beaux moments de ma carrière sont ceux où nous avons partagé la scène, ce furent des moments de grâce. Lui, me prodiguait des conseils en tant que mon professeur de chant, et moi, je l'aidais à relever le défi d'avoir accepté des nouveaux rôles afin de pouvoir chanter avec moi, dans le même opéra. Mon père était un bariton verdien, et il s'est réinventé dans le répertoire de Rossini et Mozart.

***Why did you choose to dedicate a whole chapter on Lina Pizzalongo, the mother of Gino and wife of Louis?***

*Connie Guzzo:* Gino had a great love for his mother, an accomplished musician in her own right. She grew up in Montreal's Italian community of Mile End, studied music from an early age, and had been considered a child piano prodigy with a great future ahead of her. But she gave up her dream of becoming a concert pianist when she met Louis and then dedicated her life to the careers of her husband and her son. Gino also spoke very highly of his father whom he claims taught him all he knows about voice technique. But the two had a falling out after Lina's death and Louis's remarriage after which Lina's contribution seemed to have been forgotten. I gave Lina her due in the first act which I titled The Bohemians, because Lina recounts the struggles of the early years, just like the artists in La Boheme.

**An Opera in 3 Acts Starring Gino Quilico, published by Éditions Guernica is available in English and French.**