



ANDREA BOCELLI

COURAGE, PERSEVERANCE, AND THE VOICE OF AN ANGEL

For a man whose soaring tenor has touched so many hearts with words of amore, Andrea Bocelli is not comfortable getting mushy. Passion, romance, love ever-lasting...the 43-year-old doesn't consider himself an authority on any of the above and simply won't go there. "To talk about these things is difficult," he says through an English/Italian translator. "What do I know, really, of this? I am just a voice."

That voice, however, has quite a following. "If God had a voice, it would be Andrea Bocelli," says pop star Celine Dion, who performed with him at the Academy Awards. In less than five years,

Bocelli has sold more than 40 million records worldwide, 10 million alone in the U.S. His tours take him from Venice to Atlantic City, Pisa to Anaheim. He's even heard as the theme song for the Vegas casino Bellagio: In the elevators, in the lobby, yes, even at the slot machines, Bocelli's 1993 international megahit "Con Te Partio (Time to Say Goodbye)," a sweeping duet with Sarah Brightman, echoes through the air. For many of his American fans, the song was their first introduction to the young, charismatic—and blind—singer. **BY SHERYL BERK**



Bocelli's recent memoir

Celebrity Dossier

NAME: Andrea Bocelli

DATE OF BIRTH: September 22, 1958

PLACE OF BIRTH: Lajatico, Italy, a rural village in Tuscany

PARENTS: Father Alessandro and mother Edi, who ran a family business selling farm machinery. They also had a small vineyard

SIBLING: Younger brother Alberto, an architect

EDUCATION: A law degree from the University of Pisa

FAMILY: Wife Enrica; sons Amos, 7, and Matteo, 4

FYI: Born with a hereditary form of glaucoma, Bocelli struggled over whether he should become a father. "I didn't want my children to have to go through life blind, just like me," he once said. He and his wife consulted many specialists, all of whom assured them the chances were extremely small that a child of theirs would have an eye abnormality. Both their boys are in perfect health.

But the "B word" does not seem to be in Bocelli's vocabulary, and he sighs heavily when it comes up. By now, you'd think he'd be used to reporters asking the inevitable: "Is your blindness an obstacle?"

"Can we move on to the next question?" he protests (this time, in English, to make sure the point is communicated loud and clear). It's not that he's in denial about his blindness—it's just that he hates to be defined by it. "Why should I be limited to this?" he once remarked. "I do not limit myself." He skis, rides horseback, skydives, moves fluidly around a complicated stage set to perform Puccini's *La Bohème*. "I think the facts speak for themselves," he says. Case closed.

Occasionally, however, he does open up—albeit, under the thin veil of a pseudonym. His recent memoir, *The Music of Silence*, tells the story of a boy named "Amos" (incidentally, the name of his older son) who falls in love with music around the same time he tragically loses his sight. The story is his own, but the publisher says modesty prevents him from writing it as a traditional autobiography. Bocelli, however, won't apologize for being guarded. "I would like people not to know so much," he says. "In the past, my life has been out in the open in a way that has been hurtful and painful to me."

Yet he does have his reasons for writing the book (beyond "filling many idle hours in countless changing rooms and hotel rooms"), which are revealed in its

final pages: "Maybe I write this to satisfy the curiosity of my children and my grandchildren. Or to discover, after the fact, what arcane secret has guided a blind child, born and raised in the remote countryside, toward goals so ambitious as to surpass the confines of any fervent imagination."

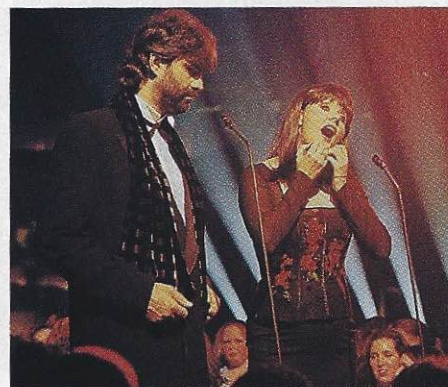
ings, "Corelli, diStefano, Pavarotti, Gigli...all of the greats." By 12, he was participating in local talent contests and winning prizes. At that time, he was also injured during a soccer game and suffered a brain hemorrhage. The accident completely wiped out what little sight he had left. Nothing, however, could deter him: He contin-



Performing at Liberty State Park in 2000 with the Manhattan skyline as a backdrop



A solitary moment at the piano, 1997; he learned to play flute, saxophone, and piano as a child



Bocelli and Sarah Brightman, who teamed up for the international megahit "Time to Say Goodbye"

Andrea Bocelli was born September 22, 1958, among the vineyards and olive groves of Tuscany. His parents, Alessandro and Edi, sold farm equipment and produced wine in the tiny town of Lajatico. He was only a few months old when his beautiful blue eyes began to fail from glaucoma. He underwent his first eye operation at 8 months. "He suffered much," his mother recalls. The only thing that would soothe the tormented child was music, so his parents nurtured his passion for it, sending him for piano, flute, and saxophone lessons and encouraging him to sing. He loved to sing along to opera record-

ued with his music, using special sheet music written in Braille.

Ever practical, he thought he should have a backup, just in case his talents didn't turn profitable. "You cannot live just with dreams," he explains. "You have to have something more concrete." So in 1986, he enrolled in the University of Pisa to study law. He practiced as an attorney for a few years, all the while singing at piano bars around Pisa. In 1987, 17-year-old Enrica Cenzatti walked into one of those bars and was immediately smitten with Bocelli ("his voice first; then him"). They were married in 1992, the same year he auditioned for Italian rock star Zucchero Fornaciari, who



Bocelli and wife Enrica enjoy a sunny break, 1997

Doubling Their Pleasure

Andrea Bocelli's biggest hit has been his soaring duet with Sarah Brightman, "Time to Say Goodbye." Many other "solo" singing stars also have found pop-chart success when they teamed up for a song or two. Here are some of the best-known examples:

- ELTON JOHN AND KIKI DEE** "Don't Go Breaking My Heart"
- ELTON JOHN AND GEORGE MICHAEL** "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me"
- MICHAEL JACKSON AND PAUL McCARTNEY** "Say Say Say," "The Girl is Mine"
- PAUL McCARTNEY AND STEVIE WONDER** "Ebony and Ivory"
- BARBRA STREISAND AND BARRY GIBB** "Guilty"
- BARBRA STREISAND AND NEIL DIAMOND** "You Don't Bring Me Flowers"
- BARBRA STREISAND AND CELINE DION** "Tell Him"
- BARBRA STREISAND AND DONNA SUMMER** "No More Tears (Enough is Enough)"
- BARBRA STREISAND AND BRYAN ADAMS** "I Finally Found Someone"
- BILLY JOEL AND RAY CHARLES** "Baby Grand"
- MARVIN GAYE AND TAMMI TERRELL** "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"
- JOHNNY MATHIS AND DENIECE WILLIAMS** "Too Much, Too Little, Too Late"
- FRANK SINATRA AND NANCY SINATRA** "Somethin' Stupid"
- DOLLY PARTON AND KENNY ROGERS** "Islands in the Stream"
- NATALIE COLE AND NAT KING COLE** "Unforgettable"
- CHRISTINA AGUILERA AND RICKY MARTIN** "Nobody Wants To Be Lonely"

was looking for a tenor to record a demo tape with him. Fornaciari sent the tape to Luciano Pavarotti, hoping to persuade the legend to record a duet with him. Pavarotti did, and the song "Miserere" was a hit. Pavarotti was also very impressed by Bocelli, and offered to coach him.

In 1993, Bocelli made his first record, and in 1994 his first album; it went platinum in a few weeks. "Time to Say Goodbye" exploded onto the charts two years later, and while Bocelli gained millions of fans from it, he also gained critics who labeled his singing "popera."

Bocelli shrugs off the cynics. He sees the

two types of singing—pop and opera—as two different ways to communicate. "I believe I have only one career, and that is a singer," he insists. "But I also believe one can learn to speak two languages." The Italian pop albums *Romanza* and *Sogno* were his ticket to mass appeal, coupled with his sexy image (he's 6'1" and favors a scruffy, unshaven look). In 1998, *People Magazine* voted him one of the 50 Most Beautiful People in the World. "Without the pop success, no one would have accepted me on the classical side," he says. The latter, however, is where his heart lies and where he is most self-critical: "The more I

learn about singing, the more I realize I need to know."

Over the past decade, Bocelli has released eight albums (three of them pop), including his current, *Cieli di Toscana* (*Skies of Tuscany*). These songs, he says, are the most personal he has ever recorded. "L'Incontro" contemplates the beauty and birth of his children, Amos, 7, and Matteo, 4. "I think it conveys all the sweetness that you feel when you meet your child for the first time," he says. "I would hope to touch the



The singer with his father Alessandro, son Amos, and Enrica, 1997



Bocelli, who refuses to limit himself, has a law degree and also skis, rides horseback, and skydives

listener in the same way I was touched as a child by my favorite singers."

He likes the recording part of his profession, but performing on-stage in front of a live audience makes him a bit weak in the knees. "Singing at home or before friends is fine, and behind a [recording studio] microphone. But from the stage, the audience for me is like a monster, a terror!" Yet he does it repeatedly. "Yes, there is fear," he says, simply. "But you have a saying in English, 'Where there is a will, there is a way.'" ●

SHERYL BERK IS SENIOR ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR FOR THIS MAGAZINE.