Talented tenor takes on Trinity by Oliver Trapp

    In the auditorium, a nervous senior Richelle Burke performed the famed “O Mio Babbino Caro” by Puccini in front of a particularly large audience. However, the crowd was not what intimidated Richelle. What made her nervous was that she was performing for Fernando Varela, a well-known tenor and finalist in *America’s Got Talent* last year with his trio, Forte.

  After she finished, Varela congratulated her for taking on such a challenging song and gave her some constructive criticism, which she said was immensely helpful.

  “ He suggested that I should work on improving my pronunciation of the Italian language and polish my breath control,” Burke said.

   She added that Varela possessed the rare gift to phrase his criticism as helpful suggestions. In the spectrum of the music industry, there are very few artists that possess this type of charm.

   Burke and several other students were participating in Fernando Varela’s Master Class, which was sponsored by the Music Department. In the session, the talented tenor coached eight of Trinity’s best vocalists.

   From commenting on the students’ posture to addressing the amount of emotion the vocalists portrayed, the professional covered the majority of skills necessary to be successful in the notoriously competitive music industry. Even for an untrained audience member, Varela’s class provided insight into this mesmerizing art.

   The singer’s ample knowledge of the vocal interpretation of music comes from years of experience. Varela was born in the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. As a child, he enjoyed listening to Michael Jackson and still holds “Thriller” as one of his greatest influences.

   Yet, when he turned eight, the amateur singer distanced himself from learning music when he immigrated to Central Florida.

   “When I moved, I had an accent and people made fun of me,” Varela said. “ I didn’t want to do something that would give people more of a reason to mock me.”

  As a result, the immigrant didn’t take part in his elementary school choir or middle school glee club because of the fear of embarrassment. However, during his senior year of high school, Varela discovered the passion that he would pursue for the rest of his life. He finally summoned up the courage to start training as a singer and joined the Central Florida Lyric Opera, which he describes as being fundamental in his development as an artist.

  During his senior year, Varela liked a girl who took vocal lessons. One day, he joined her in one of these classes, and her teacher urged him to join the Opera group because they lacked male singers. In most situations, affection is an excellent motivation to do well in things you would have never done before.

  Varela joined the opera group and began his training in this classical art. His love for music grew to the point where he became obsessed with it.

  “ I practiced about 30 to 40 hours per week,” Varela said.

   In college, his love for music continued to grow to the point that he attempted to switch his major at the University of Central Florida from public relations to music. However, in the beginning, music did not love him back. When he tried out in front of the Music Department, the people mocked him and Varela reminisced about the days when he still carried the Puerto Rican accent.

 Even though he had been let down by the Music Department, his obsession with music was still very much alive. The rejection sparked in him the motivation to turn his career from a momentary affair to a lifelong marriage.

 “When they told me I wasn’t good enough, it made me want to do everything possible to be the best singer I could possibly be and prove them wrong,” Varela said.

  After years of hard work and training, Varela went on *America’s Got Talent* and continued as a part of the tenor trio, Forte, to become the 4th overall out of 75,000 acts. Even though Forte did not win, the publicity was enough to grant his vocal group a deal with Columbia Records.

  Days after finishing *America’s Got Talent*, Forte began recording its album at a lightning pace(11 songs in five days). Since the talent show, opportunities have appeared in every corner of the music industry, including gigs in Vegas, concerts in Carnegie Hall, and even performing for the president in the White House.

  Thus, even if Forte lost, just competing on the national stage gave the group exposure, and enough recognition to become stars. At the end of the day, exposure is winning.

  Trinity’s vocal students had access to this man’s expertise(a mastery of the art of music that can only be reached after years of training and experience). Now, everyone in our school will have ability to hear this talented man do what he does best. On the very same stage where he instructed our students, Varela will return to perform for the public on January 31, 2014 at eight p.m.

    Other than performing in our auditorium, this year Varela will also tour, rejoin with Forte, and potentially participate in a PBS special. Fernando is living the life of an opera star, but his story is an example that a TPS student can achieve this same status. Varela offers his advice.

   “You have to love music. You need passion and drive. I remember not getting the roles and gigs, but that only meant that I was still in the process of learning. Rejection is only an incentive to work harder. If you have persistence, then eventually you will have your moment to shine,” Varela said.

   From singing Michael Jackson in Puerto Rico to performing operatic arias for the president in the White House, Fernando Varela has had the drive to propel his career to the national stage. Even though initially rejected, Varela was still able to craft an outstanding voice and astound those who had neglected his talents. Without a doubt, Fernando Varela is a star, but his story is far from over. Varela still has many songs to perform and many crowds to enchant.