

April 6, 2022

Hello Everyone!

I hope you are all well, working hard and making lots of joyful music. We are gearing up for our thirteenth season in Verona, Italy and we are so excited that you will be coming to make music with us! I will be writing letters from time to time now, giving you important information and directions. I suggest that you start a file of all Opera Viva correspondence. Every year I get a multitude of questions around departure time, the answers to which were already sent in an email. But the student might not have kept the emails in a separate spot and cannot recall my directions. So, please set up something, so you will be able to readily retrieve the information you need.

PASSPORTS

If you are a US citizen, you do not need a visa to travel as a tourist to Italy. What you do need, though, is to **MAKE SURE** you have at least six months left before your passport expires from the day you **LEAVE** Italy. In other words, look at the date you will be leaving Italy, and be sure you will have seven months left on your passport before it expires. There are no exceptions to this rule, so if you need to renew your passport, please do so as soon as possible.

ID CARDS

There are numerous times when you will be able to get discounts on things such as travel or museum entrance tickets if you have a college photo ID card. So be sure to bring yours.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DATES

You should arrive at the Verona airport or Verona train station any time of the day or night on June 24, June 25, or the morning or early afternoon on June 26. Our first official meeting will be the evening of June 26. My husband or a rep from our car service will be there to greet you. They will be holding a pink sign that says "Opera Viva." Please complete the form on our webpage with your itinerary as soon as possible, as it is a challenge for us to organize pick-ups for all students and faculty. We cannot pick you up if you fly into another Italian city like Milan, Venice, Rome, etc. But if you get a very cheap flight into those cities and feel brave enough to get a train while carrying a suitcase, that is up to you. Just let us know when you will arrive at the Verona train station, and we will be there with the pink sign. Since we will have no idea what train track you'll arrive on, we will be out in front of the Burger King at the front of train station building.

You must leave Opera Viva and check out of the Residence on July 18 or July 19. **BE SURE NOT** to leave at any time on July 17, as we will have a concert that night.

MEDICAL RECORDS AND PASSPORT COPIES

Be sure to bring a photocopy of your passport and keep it SEPARATE from your actual passport. Every now and then, passports are stolen or lost. If you have a photocopy of it, it will be a million times easier to get a replacement. Four years ago, two of our students lost their passports in Rome. But because they had photocopies of them, that was the proof the authorities needed that they were US citizens and it was very easy for them to get replacements.

If for some reason you have a medical emergency, it would be helpful for me to have your medical history, medication list and EMERGENCY CONTACT in a sealed envelope. I will place the envelopes in a drawer and only use them in an emergency. Believe me, I have no interest in knowing your medical history. This is to help you in a crisis situation. At the end of our program, I will just return the unopened envelope to you.

You will also need to bring proof of your COVID vaccination and boosters to participate in our program and enter Italy. More on this below.

MEDICINE

Please be sure to bring any medication that you think you will need. Don't forget sunblock. You should bring Band-Aids and/or moleskin for blisters as you will be doing a lot of walking. If you have ever had allergies, bring Zyrtec or another over the counter allergy medicine to help you. If you are prone to sore throats, bring whatever works for you. We do live about two blocks from a pharmacy and the pharmacist is really sweet. Every year, I do have to bring students to her for help. But it will be much easier if you think of your own body and what normally happens to you and then be proactive in avoiding sickness. The allergy thing is hard, as you are going to a new area with totally new environmental allergens and you don't know how you will react. We are more allergic than we have ever been, so really give that some thought. If you take prescription medication, please bring a written prescription should anything happen to your meds and you need a refill. A couple of years ago, a student left his medication in the airplane seat pocket.

EVERY DAY DRESS

It will be very hot in Italy. So please know that our classroom attire is very casual. You can wear shorts and t shirts or little sun dresses with flip flops or sandals or sneakers. It is probably easiest on your feet to wear sneakers when touring Venice or walking a lot.

Ladies, bring a shawl to cover your shoulders when touring in an Italian church. Women will also not be allowed into a church if wearing short shorts. Often, men are permitted to enter only if wearing long pants, but usually longer style Bermudas are okay.

Women are requested to bring a dance skirt for stage direction classes, something that flows like a gauze skirt with elastic waist is fine. Women should bring character shoes for rehearsals and performances. This is very important.

REPERTOIRE

All students must bring five opera arias with them. Three should be by Mozart or Handel, and the other two can be anything you are studying with your private instructors at school, or something you are preparing for a college entrance or grad school audition. We also like the Tosti songs and the Donaudy pieces. You should also bring three musical theatre pieces and one sacred music piece.

You will work on your arias during your lessons with our faculty and when it is time for performances, you will make a joint decision on which piece to perform. Your opera scenes will be assigned early in May. When you arrive at Opera Viva, those scenes **MUST** already be memorized.

CONCERT ATTIRE

Our faculty will be in touch once we have assigned the opera and musical theater scenes on our about May 1, and they will let you know if you need to bring a specific prop or piece of clothing for a costume. Women should bring a long evening gown for the concert performances. You may wear the same gown for all three performances if you wish, as it will make your packing easier. Your gown should be long to the floor, not a semi formal dress or one that has a high-low hemline.

For concert performances, men **MUST** wear formal tuxedos. No suits, please! Every year, we have a male who comes without a tuxedo. This year, I am requesting that every male student write back to me and say they understand that a tuxedo is required for the performances. Thank you.

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

Opera Viva requirements: each student and faculty member must show proof of full COVID-19 vaccinations. Monica Ricci will be collecting that information from you in the coming weeks.

Italy requirements: you may be required to show proof of vaccination when entering certain areas in Italy. Be prepared to show proof of vaccination wherever you go.

Classroom requirements: we are monitoring the situation closely, both the pandemic transmission rates and the health and safety requirements in Italy. We will finalize our COVID protocols for Opera Viva's daily operation in May, so please pay attention as we send updates. At that time, we will specify whether you must be masked in our classrooms, and what our requirements for self-testing will be. As you know, a singer's exhaled aerosols could accelerate the transmission of the disease, so we will rely on the expert guidance of our faculty's universities, combined with the current state of the variants, to establish our masking protocols. We have already arranged for ample ventilation and sanitizing of our classrooms at the Residence. Be prepared to bring masks and a few self-tests.

PAYMENTS

Your tuition balance is due by May 31. If you mail a check, just let me know when you actually mail it. Snail mail is notoriously slow these days, but it is a less expensive option for you, as using PayPal requires you to pay their small service charge. I am leaving Florida for New Hampshire on May 1, so I advise that you send the check to me after May 1. This will save us all from the horrors of the forwarding attempts of the US Postal Service!

Our New Hampshire mailing address is:

Opera Viva!
PO BOX 177
Hampton, NH 03843

MONEY NEEDED IN COUNTRY

Every year I am asked how much money you should bring, and it is difficult to answer. I do not know how much you eat or travel or spend on things. I always discourage students from bringing American money in cash. If you do, you will have to get it exchanged in the train station, the airport or one place in downtown Verona. All three places give terrible exchange rates. You should plan to get about €100 cash at your bank in the States. Other than that, bring a credit card. I find that using my credit card (Capital One Venture) I get the best world market exchange rates. Also, you get points that you can use on future plane tickets etc. I use my credit card for all restaurants, shop purchases, groceries and gas for our rental car. If you have a debit card and need a cash bank machine, there is one located a few blocks away from our apartments and several in the center of Verona. Do not bring travelers' checks.

PARENTS AND FAMILY

Every year, some of our parents and family members arrive during the final week of the program so they can come to your final concert, attend the final opera in the Arena with us, and attend the final dinner. We are thrilled to have them be a part of this momentous event in your lives. I will be able to order opera tickets at the student rate for your family, if you tell me ahead of time. I will remind you of that deadline later, but for today, just know that everyone is welcome to join us. Our concerts are always free of charge. I will let you know as soon as possible what the dates of our concerts will be. But we do present a concert each week and we attend an opera at the Arena every week. The final week, we have our final dinner. Usually, parents can come to that, but we are a very large group this year, so I won't know if the restaurant can accommodate family members until we are in Italy.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Residence where we live and work in Verona has Wi-Fi throughout. You will be able to email and FaceTime your parents and friends. Later, I will send you my phone number to give your parents in case of emergency. I will arrive in Verona a few days before you, at which time I will get an Italian SIM card and number for you to give you parents. This number is not to be used for casual conversations, it should only be used in case of emergency.

Your meals are not included in our tuition. The Residence does have a breakfast room for its guests, and the continental breakfast buffet costs about €10/day There is a grocery store right up the street where we all go to buy our food and fix our meals in our apartment kitchens.

SHARE THIS INFORMATION

Please be sure to forward this entire letter to your parents.

That is everything for now. If you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me. Ciao for now!

Joyfully yours in music,

Madelyn

Dr. Madelyn Spring Gearheart
Artistic Director, *Opera Viva!*