

Q&A



TONY BENNETT

Sixty years and 17 Grammys later, the master's career is still going strong

AFTER RELEASING MORE THAN 70 albums in six decades, Tony Bennett continues to dazzle audiences worldwide. The 86-year-old, 17-Grammy-winning crooner keeps a simple attitude when it comes to career consistency. "You learn more from the errors than the things you get right immediately," he says. On his latest, *Viva Duets*, Bennett sings from his catalog with leading Latin artists including Marc Anthony, Franco De Vita, Gloria Estefan and Juan Luis Guerra. It's his third duets project—and intimacy in the recording process was paramount. "We had the artists in the studio with the musicians," says Bennett. "I think that brings an energy to a performance."

What inspired this album?

On both *Duets* and *Duets II* we included a song with a Latin artist. I enjoyed working with them so much that my son Danny, who's also my manager, approached me about doing an entire CD with only Latin artists. The response we got from the performers was very enthusiastic. I love Latin artists because they are trained to respect the melody and the lyric. It's not about who can be the loudest or most outrageous. It's a tradition committed to beautiful singing.

How were your guests selected?

Danny worked with my record label to approach the artists, and I met most of them for the first time in the studio. I have known Marc Anthony and Gloria Estefan for many years, so it was a treat to finally record with them.

How do you pick songs?

If it's a duet project, we pick a few songs for the guest artists and they choose the one they like best. If it's a solo project, it will sometimes depend on the instrumentation involved.

What was unique about this project?

The biggest difference was the duet guest performing in Spanish while I sang in English. I also did some traveling, recording in Guadalajara with Vicente Fernández, who is a legend in the Latin community.

How has your voice evolved?

I started out as a tenor, but I guess you could say I am more of a baritone now. It's not just about how your voice evolves, but how you evolve as a performer. As you gain more experience, you learn what to leave out and how to truly express the essence of a song. After returning from World War II, I got the

chance to study at the American Theatre Wing and learned bel canto technique. I still use that technique to keep my voice in shape.

Recall a memorable moment onstage?

Several years ago I was at the Hollywood Bowl singing the Kurt Weill song, "Lost in the Stars." In the middle of the song the audience exclaimed, "Ahhhh," but I kept on singing. When I walked offstage, the stagehands said, "Tony, did you see what happened?" I said, "No," and they told me that right in the middle of performing "Lost in the Stars," a shooting star fell over the Hollywood Bowl. The next morning I got a call from Ray Charles and he said, "Tony, how did you do that?"

Any advice for aspiring artists?

Young artists have it very tough today. The minute they hit it big they are on the internet or have to fill up stadiums—they don't have time to be bad before they get good. That puts a lot of pressure on artists. They aren't nurtured from a creative standpoint, and very quickly it all becomes about commercial success. So my advice is to follow your creative enthusiasm, and the rest will follow.

—Blake Boldt

'It's not just about how your voice evolves, but how you evolve as a performer'

