

## The Luciano Pavarotti Home Museum, Modena

by Lee Denham

*Of course, in the current climate the restrictions on movement and the rules for social distancing mean that any plans for holidays and travel have been all but totally ended. However, one hopes that eventually they will be lifted and while things may never be quite the same again, maybe one day museums will start opening their doors to the public once more. Meantime, let me share with you my thoughts on a visit to the Luciano Pavarotti Museum last summer.*

If the wise and good of MusicWeb International found themselves in the Parma area of Italy, I'm not sure whether they would make their way to the city of Modena. After all, why would you? While its medieval centre is pleasant enough, by Italian standards it isn't particularly noteworthy, whereas Parma is, as I'm sure you know, the home of Verdi. Plus, just a short drive from there, is Lucca, birthplace of Puccini. Of course, if you have a need for speed and the fast n' furious is your thing, then perhaps you would go there, as Modena is next door to Marinello, home of Ferrari, and across the valley is Sant'Agata, home of Lamborghini, both with their respective museums – all of which explains my presence there last summer, having two sons whose fondness for the said marques does not sit well with the practical requirements of a family of four, plus a dog.

However, Modena is of course also the birthplace of both Luciano Pavarotti and Mirella Freni and, believe it or not, there is now also a museum dedicated to the former and located in his former home. Indeed, the museum occupies the whole of it, a surprisingly modestly-proportioned property which UK readers may recollect was the setting of a South Bank documentary on the singer in the mid-1990's. Although it appears to be quite an imposing house (see the photos on [the museum's website](#)), the ground floor isn't especially large and the overall square footage has been enhanced by the conversion of the attic into living quarters, while the adjacent garage now serves as a ticket office and souvenir shop, so you can actually wander around Luciano's home, his living room with grand piano, his kitchen (!), as well as the bedroom where he died, which overlooks the back garden. It is all disarmingly frank and charming: you are allowed to wander into said bedroom's en suite bathroom, where, somewhat disconcertingly, there is a very sturdy-looking toilet fitted with arm supports to assist someone getting on and off and, as one of my sons gleefully pointed out, a still-operational bidet (don't ask how he found out). Most of the other upstairs rooms have now been converted to show displays documenting his life: several rooms contain costumes of some of the roles he undertook, while others showcase personal correspondence from President George W Bush, Kofi Anan, Frank Sinatra, Princess Diana etc. The remainder show many memorabilia and awards, as well as paintings done by Pavarotti himself, which are somewhat Picasso-esque in style, if not substance.

I was surprised how much I enjoyed the visit, insisted upon by my wife, since it really wasn't on my bucket list. The oak-floored and beamed house was warm and inviting and hardly reflected great wealth or celebrity at all - indeed, I would say a similar property in the area would probably only cost around a million Euros! Okay, not that cheap (and Pavarotti also owned other properties, including an apartment overlooking Central Park in New York which I suspect would have cost a little more), but you get the picture. It was fascinating, too, to see in the display cabinets what were apparently his vocal scores. Sometimes I wondered if things had just been chucked in for show, as I was surprised to see here, among the usual suspects, the score of Bréton's *Dolores*, as well as Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and *Rienzi*, plus Massenet's *Werther* - but you never know. Also in the small, Pavarotti-only CD collection there were three - yes, three - different versions of the Decca *Madama Butterfly* with Karajan and Mirella Freni. Surprisingly, she isn't mentioned much at all, and equally surprisingly, Karajan most certainly is: on the grand piano in the living room are a few framed photos, including what was a quite obviously a rather old, signed photo of Karajan, with a much later card inserted from the conductor, congratulating Pavarotti on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his debut. The name of Karajan comes up frequently in the audio guide which accompanies the tour, whereas only Levine

and Molinari Pradelli are mentioned in passing, since the latter presided over the singer's debut performance of *La bohème* in Parma. A huge montage of photos on the wall of the top floor shows Pavarotti with many of the rich and famous; there are shots of the singer with Freni and Karajan recording *La bohème*, plus two others in different performances with Muti and Mehta - and that's it for conductors. Other framed photos on the piano feature Domingo and Carreras, while on the wall next to it are framed letters written by Puccini, Verdi and Toscanini, plus on a stand a vocal score of *Cavalleria Rusticana* complete with Pavarotti's markings (you can even physically turn its pages by hand).

Just as when I visited the Handel House in London last autumn, it was incredibly quiet that Saturday morning, with only a handful of visitors; as a consequence, you are often completely on your own in the rooms, which adds to the intimacy of the experience. I would certainly recommend a visit to The Pavarotti Home Museum too, if ever you find yourself in that part of the world and aren't otherwise racing Ferraris around the narrow country roads.

**Casa Museo Luciano Pavarotti**  
Stradello Nava, 6, Modena