THE PHANTOM'S SONG

Written by

Gaston Leroux
FADE IN:

INT. GRAND THEATRE - NIGHT

The voice of twenty four year old, Croatian Tenor, ANTONIO TADINOVIC, resounds from the centre of the ornate stage.

He is world class. Each note pitch perfect, the depth of emotion, breathtaking.

Closer, perhaps we see the reason for such sincerity. He is blind and his face deeply scarred.

He reaches the crescendo, takes us to the very heights, and gently finishes. It’s like being awoken from a dream.

For a second, stunned silence, then APPLAUSE washes over him like a tidal wave. He bows graciously, tears in his sightless eyes. The applause becomes even more thunderous.

He bows again and departs the stage.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

In sharp contrast to the stage, the area behind the curtain is filthy and covered in dust.

Antonio orientates himself against the wall, stumbles blindly past well-dressed men and women stood in the corridor.

MAN’S VOICE (O.S.)
You were wonderful. Absolutely incredible.

WOMAN’S VOICE (O.S.)
A revelation, dear. Your best performance yet.

A woman in her Fifties takes his arm. Tall, lithe and blonde, with the intensity of the genius, or obsessive. MAESTRA. Her long, black dress sweeps behind her as she moves.
MAESTRA
Thank your audience. Never lose your humility. It grounds us.

Antonio bows, stiffly.

ANTONIO
Thank you, thank you all. It is my pleasure to serve you.

A grunt of approval from Maestra before she turns and addresses the crowd.

MAESTRA
Thank you all for coming, and thank you all for your continued support. Antonio is very tired, as I'm sure you can all imagine, and he will not be receiving visitors this Evening. Thank you, again.

She leads Antonio through a door.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The noise from people outside ceases the moment the door shuts. Antonio and Maestra are alone in a room which is a memorial to lost grandeur.

The fading walls are adorned with images of great Artistes, Operatic singers and Composers from the past.

Maestra shepherds Antonio to a black, velvet seat in front of a huge, silver mirror.

MAESTRA
They were right, you were wonderful, Darling. Wonderful, but not Perfect. We should practice more.

ANTONIO
Not tonight. Let me rest, just this once.
MAESTRA
To lose your gift to laziness would be a tragedy. We must continue.

ANTONIO
Please Maestra, I'm so tired.

MAESTRA
See your tiredness for the false belief it is. Overcome it. We have a big performance tomorrow. Let it be the day we achieve perfection. You want to be perfect, don’t you?

He nods.

MAESTRA
I know you do. Excellent. Let's start with The Siren.

Antonio sings scales through a closed mouth. Even this is beautiful.

Maestra stands behind him, puts her hands on his firm stomach.

MAESTRA
Keep your back straight, always from the diaphragm.

Her hands glide up his body to his throat. Feeling it as it undulates under her touch as he sings.

MAESTRA
The mechano-receptors in the tissue of the vocal folds are intricately affected by emotional changes. That’s why every performance is subtly different. Unique. In one of those performances, perhaps only one, there is Perfection. What is the secret, do you think? How much love and hope, how much pain is the perfect mix?
Do you think you can achieve it? Do you think you can find Perfection?

She stares into the mirror at his dead eyes.

ANTONIO
I will try, Maestra.

MAESTRA
To give your soul, it must be a conscious decision. Will you give me Perfection?

ANTONIO
Yes, Maestra.

MAESTRA
Good. I believe you. So many others have failed me. Now, rest. Let me help you from your clothes.

She unbuttons his Dinner Suit, helps him from his clothes leaving him naked in front of the mirror.

He instinctively covers his form with his hands.

MAESTRA
An Artiste is always naked, my dear. There is no shame.

Maestra walks away and gets Antonio’s dressing gown which hangs near the door.

She slips it on to him and kisses his hair.

MAESTRA
Good night, Antonio. I’ll see you tomorrow.

ANTONIO
Good night, Maestra.

She opens the door.
MAESTRA
I’ll lock it, make sure there are
no prying eyes.

She leaves, closes the door. Keys turn in multiple locks.

Antonio is left in silence.

He rises, walks unsteadily to the corner of the room.

Behind a curtain, a Four Poster bed. He climbs inside and
huddles into a foetal position.

He sings an old, Croatian folk song to himself till he falls
asleep.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Maestra enters the room. She’s now wearing an elegant, red
ball-gown.

She finds Antonio sitting silently in front of the mirror, already dressed.

MAESTRA
Good Evening, Antonio. Are you well?

ANTONIO
Yes, Maestra.

Maestra gathers a comb, prepares Antonio’s hair for the
Evening performance.

MAESTRA
Tonight, is the night, Darling. I can feel it. The Muse is here. When
you go onto that stage, remember you are not only singing for
yourself, nor for me, not even for the World. You are singing for the
Gods themselves. I have something special for you.
She walks to a locked cupboard on the other side of the room. Opens it. Takes out a package.

There is a long, black jacket inside. She puts it on him. Classically elegant. Timeless.

MAESTRA
This has been worn only by the greatest singers who have ever lived. Honour it.

She admires him in the mirror.

MAESTRA
Let’s go. I’ll be watching from the stands, as always.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Antonio stands alone. He closes his eyes in silent prayer. Steels himself for the performance to come.

The compere can be heard above the general hubbub of the audience from behind the curtain.

COMPERE (O.S.)
Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the Voice, not only of this century, but of this Millenium and the next. The irrepressible, incredible, Antonio Tadinovic.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

RAPTUROUS APPLAUSE from the unseen audience greets him as he reaches the centre of the stage.

Under the lights he looks incredible, his disfigurement somehow only adding a sense of mystery to his appearance.

Slow, haunting orchestral music begins to play. He begins to sing, matching the haunting melody with his incredible vocals. But he stops, suddenly. A breakdown.
He runs off stage.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Antonio collapses into his chair in front of the mirror. Bursts into wracking sobs.

Maestra storms into the room.

    ANTONIO
    I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I have nothing left to give.

    MAESTRA
    Darling, There’s always more to give.

She grabs his face.

    MAESTRA
    Or have you forgotten?.

    ANTONIO
    Please, I’m sorry.

    MAESTRA
    You think you have sacrificed, but what I have taken, I have given back ten fold. You were born with a gift. But to concentrate that gift I had to take away distractions. The physical beauty that made you a prize for women who would have ruined you. Like your wife. The eyes that tricked you into fixating on material realities. But perhaps I need to take more?

    ANTONIO
    Please. No.

    MAESTRA
    Your hands so you may not touch, your feet, so you may not walk?
Your arms, your legs? That proud cock of yours, until you exist solely in a world of sound and emotion. Until what is left is only the distillation, the pure Soul of Music.

ANTONIO
Maestra, please. I will be better.

MAESTRA
You see, you have so much more to give. You have to go deeper. I need to hear the pain of your existence, the torture. To hear you Transcend that pain. To hear the Truth. I want to hear the Truth, Antonio.

She drags him by the hair from the chair.

MAESTRA
You will sing. You will give me True Perfection, or you will understand what true sacrifice is.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

She drags him through the hallway, past the same men and women that were there before, but we realise now that they are not real, they are only MANNEQUINS.

Their voices supplied by speakers attached to their mouths.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Maestra pulls Antonio into the centre of the stage.

MAESTRA
You will sing. Not for money, for fame or esteem. You will sing to live...

She storms down the stairs at the side of the stage.
MAESTRA
...And you will give me Perfection.

Takes her seat in the middle of the auditorium. In the completely empty stands.

She takes a remote control from her pocket and presses play. The voice of the compere plays through the impressive speaker system all around the Theatre.

COMPERE (O.S.)
Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the Voice, not only of this century, but of this Millenium and the next. The irrepressible, incredible, Antonio Tadinovic.

The beautiful Music begins again. The same haunting Melody. A shiver runs through Antonio’s body. A prayer.

ANTONIO
God, help me.

He starts to sing.

FADE TO BLACK.