

'I never imagined getting the actual Golden Buzzer!'



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW AND PHOTOS

FROM CANADA TO HOLLYWOOD
ROBERTA BATTAGLIA
HELLO! GETS TO KNOW A RISING STAR AND THE PROUD PARENTS SUPPORTING HER DREAM



She may be only 10 but Roberta's dreams are already coming true. Right: The young singer gets the Golden Buzzer after performing for *America's Got Talent* judges Howie Mandel, Heidi Klum, Sofia Vergara and Simon Cowell. In addition to her vocal talents, Roberta (opposite top, with parents Gabriella and Alessandro) also plays the piano.

BOTTOM INSETS, FROM TOP: NBC/GETTY IMAGES; NBCU

Do you guys feel proud of me?" 10-year-old Roberta Battaglia asks sweetly as she turns to hear her parents' answer. "We are very proud of you!" mom Gabriella chimes in without hesitation. "I was so happy for you because I was seeing your dream come true. It's what you've wanted and spoke about since you were a little girl."

Roberta became the talk of the town earlier this year when she wowed the *America's Got Talent* judges with her powerful rendition of Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper's "Shallow" – a performance that prompted Sofia Vergara to press the Golden Buzzer, fast-tracking

Roberta to the show's semi-finals, expected to unfold in August. It was a moment that Roberta later told the judges was a dream come true. "She was perfect," adds her father, Alessandro, a fellow musician who sings and plays instruments such as the piano and saxophone. "I'm so happy for Roberta. She sang amazing."

The Toronto native has shown her musical flair since she was a toddler. She made her first public performance at age three when she picked up a microphone during one of her dad's gigs and began singing with him onstage. Since then, the father-daughter



**'I think she
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- MOM GABRIELLA**



Performer by day, philanthropist by night! In her spare time, Roberta (wearing a colour-block Givenchy dress) designs bracelets that she sells to raise funds for SickKids hospital in Toronto. Says the kindhearted musician (opposite, wearing one of the bracelets): 'When I see people smile, it makes my heart smile.'

duo have performed together often – at local engagements and festivals, including ones coinciding with Italian Heritage Month (Alessandro is Italian by birth, while mom Gabriella is a Canadian native with Italian roots).

HEART OF GOLD

While Roberta is your average kid in some ways ("she rides her bike, she goes swimming," says her mom), she can convey a maturity beyond her years thanks to her powerhouse voice, composed presence and some of her interests. The singer (who turns 11 in August) has already developed a strong passion for

philanthropy – in her spare time she makes bracelets to raise money for SickKids hospital in Toronto.

She also became an advocate for anti-bullying after bravely telling the *AGT* judges that she's been a victim herself. Luckily, Roberta has people she knows she can count on. "For me, a couple of friends is all that I need," she says.

As she looks forward to returning to L.A. for the semi-finals, Roberta has been keeping busy at home working on her first full-length album – "10 songs!" she says with enthusiasm – and spending time with her parents and dog, Happy. "It's like having a little brother," she says with a smile. "He's so goofy and all over the place!"

Here, in our exclusive *Hello! Canada* feature, Roberta opens up about her pinch-me moment at *AGT*, her supportive family and her biggest

passion. "The way other kids like sports, I like singing," she says. "It's just a thing to relax. It helps me get away from all the bad and celebrate the good. I just love it."

Congratulations on your success, Roberta! How are you feeling ahead of the *America's Got Talent* semi-finals? I'm so excited to go back to Los Angeles for the live shows. I can't wait to perform again for the judges!

Are you nervous at all? I really am not nervous. I never have been nervous. Even on *AGT* the first time I wasn't really hesitant...I was actually excited to perform on the biggest stage in the world.

You got quite emotional after that first performance. Why was that? I was just very excited. I hoped that I would do well...but I only imagined

getting out with a few yeses. I never imagined getting the actual Golden Buzzer, so when I did, I was in shock. I was like, "Wow. How did this happen?"

Gabriella: And her favourite actress was there, right? She was so excited to see Sofia Vergara.

Roberta: Yeah. [Smiles] She's always been my favourite actress, ever since I started watching *Modern Family*. But I loved all of the judges, they're all such amazing people.

Watching Roberta perform from the side of the stage, it was clear to see you were nervous, Gabriella. What was a highlight of that day for you? For me, the most memorable moment was when the confetti came down and I ran to her to hug her. The first thing she said to me when I hugged her was, "Mom, my dream is coming true." And I said, "Yes, it is." [Smiles]

'I would love to perform with Lady Gaga or Pink. Those are my two idols'



As parents, how do you feel about Roberta's success?

Gabriella: I'm very, very proud of her. I think she deserves it because she works hard.

Alessandro: I'm happy for Roberta because it's her dream. For seven years, she's dreamed to sing on *AGT*. So I'm so happy for her.

Did you think this success would happen so soon for her, Gabriella?

No. I expected it a couple of years from now, but not at 10 years old. You know, you see her sing on a daily basis and perform on weekends with dad, and that's one thing. But to actually see her dream come true and be on the world stage where she wanted to be, it is surreal.

Roberta, how did your friends react to your *AGT* moment? They were so happy for me. They were very excited – calling me on the phone saying, "Oh my God, you got the Golden Buzzer. You got the Golden Buzzer!"

Who was one of the first people to call and congratulate you?

Gabriella: The first congratulations that evening after the show was from one of the kids who bullied her.

Was that a surprise to you, Roberta? A little bit. Because before *AGT*, it was all, "No, no, no. You're this, you're that." And after it was, "You were so amazing on *AGT*." It was nice of them.

Tell us about what "Shallow" means to you. Why did you choose to sing that song? Because *A Star Is Born* was such an amazing movie and I love Lady Gaga – she's one of my favourite singers.

Is it safe to assume, then, that Lady Gaga would be your dream duet partner? I would love to perform with Lady Gaga or Pink. Those are my two idols. I just adore them. I love their music, so singing with them would be another one of my biggest dreams come true.

Speaking of dreams, what will you do with a million-dollar prize if you win *AGT*? I would really like to buy a dog [a friend for Happy]!

I would also like to save some money for college or university. And I would like to donate some to charity.

Alessandro: What about us? [Laughs]

Roberta: Well, whatever I have left. [Smiles] Just kidding!

You share your passion for music with your dad. Would you say that he's been your greatest influence musically?

Yes! And I know that my mom doesn't sing, but she's always been a big piece of encouragement, too. They're both so good at parenting and they're just amazing parents. I'm sorry to all the other parents out there, but mine are the best!

Alessandro, as a singer yourself, do you think Roberta gets her musical talents from you? I think so, because my father is a musician, too. And my grandfather, my great-grandfather ...

Gabriella: It goes back many generations, they all did music. It's in the genes.

When did you first recognize Roberta's talents? ►

TOP LEFT: COURTESY BATTAGLIA FAMILY (3)

Roberta may have stage presence and professionalism beyond her years, but she's still your typical tween. 'She rides her bike, she goes swimming, she watches TV,' says mom Gabriella. Opposite (from left): Roberta shows musical flair over the years at ages four months, two and nine.



'I would like to help many children and many people around the world'

Alessandro: When she was around two and a half because she started to sing kids' songs and was very on pitch and had a sense of rhythm. I recognized then that she was a singer. Later, at three years old, she started to sing Italian songs because usually I listen to Italian music and she was very good. She would also invent her own songs when she was just four years old.

Roberta: They made no sense. [Laughs]

Roberta, in addition to singing, you also make bracelets for charity. Tell us a bit about that? Yes, 100 per cent of the proceeds from my bracelets go to SickKids in Toronto – a hospital that helps kids in need who have to have surgeries.

What inspired you to start making the bracelets for SickKids? My friend, Amelia, was born with a heart problem, and there's so many additional costs that her family has had to pay. So I said, "OK, I have a friend that's going through this but there are also other children that are going through this as well." Slowly I would like to help many children and many people around the world.

Where do you think this philanthropic spirit comes from?

Gabriella: She was always like this, ever since she was small. We would be walking downtown and she would see someone who was homeless and she'd tell them to get up off of the floor and come into the restaurant or Tim Hortons or whatever, and just offer them something to eat. "Mom, can we buy him a sandwich?" It's just her.

Roberta: [Smiles] It's me. **H**

INTERVIEW: ROMINA MONACO
PHOTOS: CONSTANT VAN RUYMBEKE
LOCATION: COURTESY OF MARIO AND GINESIA CORTELUCCI



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During quarantine, Roberta – who takes vocal and piano lessons at Arcadia Academy of Music in Brampton, Ont. – has enjoyed spending time with her family (top). 'We keep ourselves pretty busy – baking, cooking with my mom, staying outside,' she says. 'Sometimes I go downstairs with my dad [to our home studio] and we sing a couple of songs together.'