



Pino Daniele: Neapolitan, Italian, and World Citizen

Maria Rita Latta (May 09, 2012)



Interview with the musician about his latest album, *La Grande Madre* [The Great Mother], which combines the blues and Mediterranean music. "Italy is the center of the Mediterranean. Its culture has not only been affected over time and influenced by Arab as well as African and European music, but also by the blues and American music." Pino Daniele will be in New York (Apollo Theatre, June 7), Boston (Berklee Performance Center, June 9), and Washington, DC (Jazz Festival, June 10).

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This past March, Pino Daniele released *La Grande Madre* [The Great Mother]. Daniele is the Italian singer and songwriter, who for more than thirty years has been at the top of the Italian music charts. Pino Daniele's image graces the CD's cover: a 50 year-old kid who despite a long and distinguished



career is still ready to travel the streets of the world armed only with his guitar and his music. We caught up with him by telephone during the tour that's taking him through Italy and then overseas to New York (Apollo Theatre, June 7), Boston (Berklee Performance Center, June 9), and Washington, DC (Jazz Festival, June 10).

Two years after his last, his new album entitled *La Grande Madre* [The Great Mother] has just been released. He explains where the idea came from: "It's a record that's connected to the blues but also to the Mediterranean. The Great Mother refers to the Earth as well as our roots. The Great Mother is energy generating; it's the Earth that we should respect, help, and preserve through small measures. It's also the mixed blood of music. Italy is the center of the Mediterranean. Its culture has not only been affected over time and influenced by Arab as well as African and European music, but also by the blues and American music. All of this is part of our modern musical culture. All of this, for me is 'The Great Mother.'"

The CD is presented very well. Included is a booklet that is a true 80-page manifesto with lyrics, scores, new and old photos, thoughts, and complete biography of the Neapolitan singer-songwriter, with everything written in both Italian and English as if to underscore the international flavor of his music. "It's not just a musical product," he says with pride, "but it's also the artist's statement, of what he has done, which path he has chosen. I wanted to make the most of the booklet because it can be a tangible object, just as vinyl LPs once were. Because I wanted to add something extra I also included the songs' scores."

The song "Melodrama" opens the album, an unconventional song with a mix of Italian bel canto and contemporary rock music, composed, perhaps, by thinking back to 1998. That was the year that he met the great Luciano Pavarotti in Modena, when Daniele's hit song "Napule è" was reinterpreted by the opera great. Daniele, in fact, confirms this. "It's a memory of my meeting with Luciano, who inspired my love for classical music. For a long time I had wanted to compose a song that had the classic elements and at the same time was characterized by an international sound." And "international" is the term that perfectly describes Pino Daniele's music, especially since his is always willing to collaborate with artists from all over the world, and in Pavarotti's case, with artists from almost any genre. On this album, in particular, in addition to eleven new songs there's also cover of "Wonderful Tonight" by Eric Clapton, inspired by a meeting with the great blues master. "Clapton had invited me to play at the Crossroads Festival two years ago in Chicago. It was a wonderful experience, personally and professionally. In the summer of 2011 at Cava dei Tirreni, we met at one of my concerts and I asked his permission to reinterpret "Wonderful Tonight." Since I don't do well with English, I translated it into Italian. Meeting a great artist like him was such an extraordinary experience for me; it gave me the opportunity to challenge myself and grow."

The *Great Mother* is an album with songs that not only speak of love but, as we have seen from the title, also imparts important messages. "Searching for the Water of Life," a song composed by Kathleen Hagen was written to support the charitable organization Save the Children's "Every One" campaign. "It's a modest way of doing something through music, in this case by trying to end infant mortality," Daniele says.

This album, perhaps more than any other, reflects the Neapolitan artist's desire to communicate, to improvise, and most especially to travel. And it's not just a trip through musical notes, but also through memories, encounters, and language. "This is a record in so many languages. There is also a particular language, *Parlesìa*, which was used Naples by both orchestra and street musicians alike. My friend Enzo Avitabile is an expert on this mysterious language so I asked him for a short guide which I then published and included with the CD."

Daniele explains that the song "O Fra" attempts to rediscover the language of *Parlesìa*. Through its



rhythm, the song “O Fra” seems to connect the desire to improvise to another song, “Coffee Time.” “Yes, this is a song a little ‘New York,’ since at the moment my back up band is mostly comprised of musicians who are from there. In ‘Coffee Time’ there’s a connection between the U.S. and Naples; it’s a jazz piece with shades of Naples. In my world there is a tendency to adapt certain types of music to my personality.”

With *The Great Mother* Pino Daniele makes a big move, joining other artists who have bid farewell to major music companies in favor of producing records on their own. “It’s a challenging step, even economically speaking. But being an artist always means starting at the beginning, always questioning. For me it was important to have the freedom to do what I wanted, not having to depend on the judgment of people who only want to sell but who don’t know what it means to create. I admit that I’m exaggerating,” Daniele says with a laugh, “but it’s worth it. I wanted to collaborate with great musicians. (Many major international artists appear on the album, including Steve Gadd on drums, Chris Stainton on piano, and Mel Collins on sax. ---Eds.) I managed to make a CD that is also a book.”

At this point we must ask him what it means to be an artist in Italy in 2012. “The problem with music in Italy today is that there is cultural impoverishment. We must not give up on this. We can’t let our guard down but instead intensify our efforts to make something of quality. It’s hard, it’s difficult, but it’s the best way, the one that we can be proud of. A quality Italian product is a beautiful thing. It sounds banal, but music is my life. I like looking at and listening to other artists to understand other points of view, to learn new perspectives. It’s an ongoing process of renewal and growth.”

The tour, which began in March, has no stage gimmicks. This is what Daniele wanted. On stage, it will be only be him, his band, and his music. We asked if there will be any differences between the U.S. tour and the Italian one. “There will be more songs that reflect who I am today, but also older songs that have defined me. We’ve played the Apollo Theatre before and it went well. I hope to repeat that experience, although I still want to be discovered by those who have never heard my music, especially third-generation Italian Americans who might think that Italian music is what their grandparents listened to. All over the world, as well as here in the United States, Italy is only known for the bel canto, when in reality we also produce excellent modern music, from blues to rock and jazz. Now we’re all in the same place with the globalization of music, even though I have always believed that music has no boundaries. Nowadays we are all very close, especially through the Internet.”

There’s time for one last question about where Pino Daniele is today, in terms of his origins and as a Neapolitan. “There are songs that I still play that connect me to my memories of just starting out. These songs have marked my musical career; they’re based on the melody of traditional Neapolitan songs and have taken me around the world. It’s a beautiful thing when I play a song from back then; I always feel a twinge of emotion, yet every time it’s in a different key and the song is never the same. Naples is always inside of me. Today my city is following its own path to preserve its traditions while it seeks to become a modern city like all other historic cities throughout Europe. It has its own set of difficulties in adjusting to a new world. It’s a city at the center of the Mediterranean that’s trying to keep up with the times while preserving its heritage and cultural capital.”

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[Contest "Pino Daniele in New York"](#)

[An image, a story, or a video for Coffee Time >>](#) [3]

DON'T MISS PINO DANIELE & JOHN TURTURRO AT CASA ITALIANA TOO

On June 6 at 6 pm [Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#) [4] will open its doors to two artists from different backgrounds and nationalities, but with a shared love and a lot to say about it. The artists are Pino Daniele, Neapolitan singer and songwriter, and John Turturro, Italian-American actor and director. Their shared love is for Naples and for its very specific musicality.



Stefano Albertini, Director of Casa Italiana, Massimo Gallotta, Producer and Letizia Airos, Editor in Chief of i-Italy, will converse with Daniele and Turturro about the importance of Naples as a source of inspiration for both, and about their collaboration in Turturro's movie "Passione," which features the famous hit song "Napule è" by Pino Daniele, released in 1977 and considered as one of the most powerful declarations of love to Naples ever sung.

Analyzing the importance of Naples as a source of artistic inspiration, Turturro's "Passione" is a remarkable case-study: the Italian-American director decided to embark on a journey of discovery of Naples' music and musicality. From the "bel canto" tradition to the newest popular sounds, Turturro documents the immense cultural heritage of Neapolitan music, and does so by directly involving Neapolitan artists in the process. Among these artists is Pino Daniele.

The sound of Naples permeates the musical DNA of Pino Daniele, from the debut album "Terra Mia" to the latest works. His songs echo Mediterranean vibrations, mixing the Neapolitan dialect's peculiar musicality to influences from different genres. The result is a unique "world music" sound, his creative hallmark, also characterizing his latest record, "La Grande Madre," released last March, about which Daniele will answer questions at Casa Italiana.

The event will take place on the eve of Pino Daniele's first US concert for 2012. On June 7, the artist will perform at the legendary Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York, where he will present the American audience with tracks from his new album.

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