



Meet Laura Campisi, A Sicilian Jazz Musician Between Two Worlds

Chiara Montalto (June 11, 2016)



I recently got to know Laura Campisi, a wonderful musician from Palermo, who now lives in New York. Laura is an award winning songwriter and jazz singer. She performs a wide range of music: jazz, folk, r&b and traditional Sicilian music. On Monday, June 13, Laura will be performing Italian Jazz at Zinc Bar in the West Village. This particular show is about creating a bridge between contemporary Italy and the United States. Laura and I recently sat down for a chat about music, inspiration and her current projects.

What made you come to New York, where are you from in Italy and how long have you been here? What brought you to New York and why?

I visited NYC for the first time in 2010 and I immediately fell in love with its vibe. Not sure how to



explain it, but it felt like home to me, right away. Back then I was still in Palermo, Sicily, my hometown, and I was constantly thinking about living abroad. I really wanted to experience something different, both as an artist and on a personal level. I needed new inputs, new inspirations, and NYC was definitely the right fit. I moved here in late 2011. I can't believe it's been 5 years already!

What inspires you? How does your Sicilianita or Italianita influence your music?

My emotions are my first source of inspiration. Whether I write about something that actually happened to me or not, whether I sing my own tunes or someone else's, the emotions are key to my creative process. The reason why I do music has always been to communicate – with others, strangers or not, and within myself – that's why emotions are crucial: they allow us to connect with each other on a deeper level that makes the exchange profoundly meaningful. In order to create an emotional impression that stays with the people we get in touch with, we need to give a bit of ourselves.

I find this process truly rewarding, even healing at times. I guess a big part of all this is the result of my being born in a gorgeous and yet incredibly violent land, an island that is – by definition – a world of its own with its own internal rules, just like the realm of human emotions.

In Sicily, everything is like amplified by the brightest sunlight you'll ever see, the bluest blue, so beautiful that it hurts. Sicily doesn't speak, it screams. Its songs are as loud as its people, and so are its laughs and weeps. That's why I created a project, Sicily Revisited (with an album on its way), which blends Sicilian music and Jazz using their emotional common ground. There's so much more to music than its style, in fact it should not be about the style at all. To me it's about telling the kind of stories that every human being can relate to, using the power of emotions that make boundaries disappear.

What are some of the differences and similarities in the music scene in Palermo and New York?

Although at a different scale, both Palermo and New York are multiethnic and creative places, and I believe these two concepts are not separated. Diversity around you makes for a rich life experience, providing a multiplicity of points of view and enhancing our capability of inclusion. These are all crucial aspects of the creative process, hence of an inspiring music scene. To give you an example, I used to sing with a band of African drums and percussions when I was living in Palermo, and I perform with Pakistani musicians here in New York. Both experiences have greatly influenced me, even when I'm doing Jazz, Funk or Folk.

The main difference between the music scene in NYC and Palermo are the opportunities that the first one offers compared to the latter. Opportunities to me means to feel that what you are doing can really get out there, and that makes all the difference when one chooses a music career. The frustration I was experiencing in Italy is what made me go away, for it was killing my creativity and making me doubt my own purposes. Being a professional musician is tough everywhere, but to know that recognition is possible is gasoline to our Ferrari, so to speak, and one cannot do without.

Tell me about your upcoming album, Double Mirror.

Double Mirror is a tribute to the enriching experience of living between two worlds, Italy and the States, and it features American and Italian rhythm sections playing together with me, as a double trio - vocals, upright bass, electric bass and two drums. The project was born before I even moved to NYC and it has grown along the years. It's a pretty challenging experiment but I love the result and the many lessons learned in the process.

On June 14th, I will be leaving for Buenos Aires, Argentina to record the final vocal lines and to mix and master the album. I'll be working with a stellar team featuring Latin Grammy-winning producer Emilio D. Miler, Grammy-winning sound engineer Ari Lavigna and Latin Grammy-winning mastering engineer Andrés Mayo. Equally upstanding is the band's personnel: Ameen Saleem, Gregory Hutchinson, Gianluca Renzi, Flavio Li Vigni and special guests Vincent Herring, Jonathan Scales, Zach Brock and Giovanni Falzone, everyone bringing their unique voice to the choir.



The album has the shape of a dream: it seamlessly moves from one frame to the next with an ever-changing vibe that aims to tap into the subconscious and reveals emotions, hopes, and fears that every audience can relate to. I really can't wait to put it out there!

How do you want people to feel when they listen to your music?

I have one main goal, and that's to touch people. When I create something that speaks to someone's feelings - of pain, joy, reflection, lightness, etc. - I get confirmation that I'm on the right path. To me, songs are nothing but containers for the audience to fill up with their own lives, but in order for the artist to deliver such a mystical tool, there must be a profound connection. I'd like my listeners to feel like entrusting me with their purest emotions. It is a mutual give-and-take of the highest form of energy and I love the very fact that music can make it possible.

Tell me about your June 13 concert. When/where and what kind of music?

On Monday June 13th (7 to 9pm) I'll be debuting at Zinc Bar, a well-respected jazz club in Greenwich Village. I lost count of how many times I've been there listening to the best cats around, and it's not without a thrill that I'll be bringing to the stage my project Italian Jazz, born to show the NYC international audience what Italian music is really about. Our music tradition includes some of the finest songwriters and interpreters and I feel it's time to enrich the face of Italian music abroad by sharing these compositions, so dear to Italians of all ages, and make them known outside the national borders.

The repertoire embraces Italian songs from the 1950's to the present and revisits them through the lens of American Jazz, combining intimate arrangements and intense Latin-inspired rhythms. The songs include evergreens from the Italian songbook, such as *Nel blu dipinto di blu* (Volare) and *Parole Parole*, as well as hidden gems like *L'appuntamento* by Ornella Vanoni and *Mi sono innamorato di te* by Luigi Tenco. More recent compositions by Vinicio Capossela and Cristina Dona', plus a few originals of mine will also be featured.

Tell me about your next project or any upcoming projects.

My projects for the future are to publish and push as much as possible the two albums that I am working on, *Double Mirror* and *Sicily Revisited* (see above). I'd like for them to be heard on a global scale and for my own compositions to find "friends" all over the world. That's the dream, being able to tour performing this music in front of people of all ages, races and tongues. Of course I'm also working on new songs and have many new projects in mind, but the priority right now is to create something unique and put it out there for the people to pick it up and make it their own. Music is all about sharing, my friend!

Don't forget to come to Zinc Bar on June 13 for an incredible evening of Italian music!

Monday, June 13, 2016 7-9PM (\$12 Cover)

Zinc Bar 82 W.3rd St, NY

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