

CMJ Music Marathon. Paolo De Gregorio, Editor in Chief of the "Deli Magazine" & Big Apple's Music Scene

Gianluca Taraborelli (October 27, 2007)



Since 1980, the CMJ Music Marathon has been the most important New York City event dedicated to independent music. We talked about it with Paolo De Gregorio, music producer and editor in chief of the Deli Magazine, a musical revue dedicated to the Big Apple's music scene

With more than 1150 live sets spread over 5 days, amid hundreds of bands and record labels, this year's CMJ Music Marathon was dominated by I'm Not There, Todd Haynes' controversial movie about Bob Dylan and by a retrospect dedicated to the Clash. The event boasted an inexhaustible schedule almost impossible to follow that included seminars, debates, and promotional showcases dedicated to emerging bands. Since 1980, the CMJ Music Marathon has been the most important New York City event dedicated to independent music. We talked about it with Paolo De Gregorio, music producer and editor in chief of the Deli Magazine, a musical revue dedicated to the Big Apple's



music scene.

How many CMJ editions have you seen? What has changed since your first marathon and what is still the same?

This is my fourth edition. Honestly I don't think that the festival has changed all that much in the last four years. The most relevant innovation for CMJ is the change of headquarters. Before it was located at Lincoln Center, in Midtown Manhattan, a very modern and cold building, far from the core of the music scene and definitely not fit to host a Rock Marathon. This year, thanks to NYU sponsorship, the CMJ headquarters is based at the Puck Building in close proximity to the Lower East Side, a place with a lot of history and soul. If you want to find a meaning behind all this, we can say that this change seems to endorse a shift by the music industry from the corporate world, symbolized by Lincoln Center, to the independent and DIY (Do it Yourself) world, symbolized by NYU. I consider that a really natural choice. The music industry is now facing a critical situation. There is no money, and the little money that is available in the business goes to Apple. When the market shrinks and the possibilities for revenue get smaller, it would seem natural that the control would go back into the hands of the fans and the young people.

How did your collaboration with CMJ start?

They contacted us 2 years ago asking if we wanted to do a promotional and advertising exchange.

Your magazine is specifically focused on the NYC scene, what's your explanation for the "New York Renaissance", that the city has been experiencing for the last 5 years?

Do you know of any particular bands that are worth noting?

I don't think there are particular reasons. New York has always been fully populated by musicians. In the end I think it's just a matter of statistics, with more bands you obviously have more chances to find someone able to emerge. The New York Scene is a melting pot of styles and genres. There are no more "waves" like 20 or 30 years ago. The Indie market seems particularly individualistic, while the Brooklyn DIY scene (inspired by bands like Fugazi) works like a community, without necessarily following a particular style. Maybe the "renaissance" is due to the fact that many artists now understand that major record deals don't play that big role anymore. Nowadays you got to be able to organize by yourself, and not only for the creative aspects. The situation is not stable though. If the prices in this city don't slow down, all the artists will be forced to move away from Manhattan. It's so hard to make a living only through music, and with such high rents, things get even more complicated. My favorite band in town is Pterodactyl, they slightly remind me of Jane's Addiction, but they are faster and more punk. I also find Professor Murder very interesting. If you're looking for something more melodic, I just discovered Bronwen Exter, The Naysayer, Mike Wexler and Seasick. Experimental music lovers should listen to Dub Trio.

What about the strong role played by the return of Folk Music?

Even in this case, there is not a real scene. There is the so-called "Anti-Folk" community (they mostly do pure original folk and they gravitate around the Sidewalk Cafe in the East Village). There are also a number of very talented songwriters that know very well how to promote themselves (Bright Eyes, Devendra Benhart etc.) and others that have found a serious record label ready to invest time and money in them (Sufjan Steven, Cat Power, etc.).

How did the Deli Magazine project start?



It was a folly of youth...my passion for New York City music was the reason why I conceived The Deli. We published the first issue in October 2004. The name is playful and serious at the same time. We wanted to give everyone the idea that an indie band at the end of the day is nothing more than a commercial activity. We didn't want to be too serious or have a political approach, like most of the traditional fanzines. The Deli follows music made in NYC and everyone who's involved in the scene through the website www.thedelimagazine.com [2], which also represents a place to connect with all the musicians living in the City.

Besides the US, you have also worked as a Music Producer in Italy and the UK; what's the difference between the 3 markets?

In Italy, I didn't produce anyone, I just had my band. In the UK my experience was also limited, but what I can tell you about is the difference between the musicians in London and the ones in New York. I find the New Yorker to be more realistic and humble. It seems to me that in England the welfare system is penalizing the artist instead of helping them. If you don't work, the government gives you a house (Council Flat) and a dole for years and years. Many musicians end up losing contact with reality and become lazy. Many of the English also have this nationalistic pride that I honestly can't stand, not to mention their ridiculous sense of class affiliation that often divides and creates tensions amongst the musicians.

What's your relationship with Italy? Are you interested in the growing Italian indie rock scene, are you following any projects?

Honestly I am not interested in Italian music at all. Since I moved abroad I haven't even taken it into consideration. I have always been interested in American and English music, and now, since we started the Deli project, I can only concentrate on the local bands. NYC is the most politically correct city in the world. Every ethnicity is respected with care and attention. There are aspects of Italianità that I noticed only when I moved here. For example Italians divide everything into beautiful and ugly, there is no hesitation in the aesthetic judgment. Here in NYC if you don't like something you have to be careful, you can voice a criticism, but it has to be justified and respectful, even if the object of your criticism is not part of the conversation.

Five must have Italian records?

Any record by Paolo Conte and Fabrizio De Andrè. Even Battisti and Battiatto of the pop years are unforgettable. I would like to mention a female artist, but I never liked Mina. I don't know...any suggestion?

With the onset of the digital era it is now easier to put out a record, but on the other hand this revolution hasn't seemed to affected the creativity of the musicians...

Creativity is in the people, not in the instruments. There are still unexplored ways to play acoustic guitar. 95% of the music we listen to is completely derivative. It's always been like that and it always will be. But there is nothing to be ashamed of: originality without great songs is pretty useless. A great song can touch you even if it's played with the basic chords.

Have you ever tried taking a look at the insides of CD booklets? In almost every rock band there is a member with an Italian name...

There is no need to look at the CD notes: I can tell you with absolute certainty that 30% to 40% of the musicians I work with or that I've worked with, have at the very least an Italian parent or grandfather.



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