

Pino Daniele: "Napule è" a New York. Naples is in NY

Letizia Airos (May 21, 2013)



Interview with the Neapolitan musician who returns to New York City for a very special concert. And his friend, Tullio De Piscopo, the legendary Italian drummer and singer, will definitely come with him

By now it seems that Pino cannot do without New York. He left exactly one year ago, after enchanting the audience at the Apollo Theater with an extraordinary performance - both in terms of the quality of his music and the warmth with which it was received. He's back to promote Grande Madre, his latest CD that over the course of the past year has garnered critical acclaim from critics and audiences alike. This time he returns to New York (and then Boston) for another project, one that has a Neapolitan accent.

"Over the past few months, I realized that seven out of eight concerts in Naples were with the same



group of Neapolitan artists, which has widened since then. They were wonderful. I'll do something similar in New York. Some of them are musicians who have been with me forever: James Senese, Antonio Onorato, Enzo Gragnaniello, Tony Esposito, Joe Amoruso, and Tullio DePiscopo (who will definitely come to New York). I'm experimenting on some music with them, music that draws on all my Italian songs, from classical to blues."

And so over the telephone, from the warm, unmistakable voice of Pino Daniele, I get wind of a highly anticipated event overseas. It will be a tribute to America and to Naples, together. A tribute to the music that blends together yet distinguishes itself because of friendship. It's a tribute to the friendship that exists between the notes.

"I'll be on guitar and then there's a very Italian double-bass player, very classical and very jazz at the same time. On drums we have a jazz musician who has played with a lot of famous international artists. We have all the full range of jazz experience. We'll also have Neapolitan pianist playing with us, Elisabetta Serio, who is very good. And there will be other international musicians playing alongside us. A Senegalese singer will sing with me in English, French, Neapolitan, and Italian. It's also a multi-ethnic concert."

"We'll present Naples as the center of the Mediterranean, with some pieces that have Africa at their core. It's important to reassert the significance of Neapolitan culture within the Mediterranean. I'm a Neapolitan singer, but I'm very close to the music of North Africa. I'm connected to Byzantine culture. Popular Neapolitan songs also connect easily to jazz. I'm sure there are many Italian-American artists, musicians who love this kind of music. My concert attracts, cultivates, and combines shared roots but also looks to the future."

It seems that Pino wants, through a musical mash-up, to bring Africa to America via Naples. Everyone who has attended one of his recent concerts in Naples has described it as a great music festival in which musicians all play together and enjoy themselves as they search for the most diverse combinations.

"The essence of jazz that refers back to Black music is fascinating. I try to put my character, show my personality while taking into consideration everything that surrounds me. Those who play with me. This concert came about almost by accident, in a meeting at the end of year with Neapolitan colleagues. It was an event with other musicians who I had asked to play with. An open concert was born and everyone played together - musicians, singer-songwriters, saxophonists, and the group Napoli Centrale which I was a member of many years ago. I want to breathe new life into my city.... I want to do that around the world.... When you have a way of playing that you can then mix with other genres, it's beautiful."

Pino Daniele is known for always having played on a team. It's in his DNA. He's an Italian artist who has focused on duets and collaborations with other artists, often very famous ones, including Ralph Towner, Yellow Jackets, Mike Mainieri, Danilo Rea, Mel Collins, Pat Metheny, Al di Meola, Wayne Shorter, Luciano Pavarotti, and Eric Clapton.

"Yes comparisons are necessary for growth, and it helps you get to know great artists. It helps you become a musician who is always looking for completion. A true musician is never totally complete. Meeting another allows you to improve yourself, to understand diversity."

I remind him that last year, in addition to his concert at the Apollo Theater, there was another magical event that took place at NYU's Casa Italiana. There, Pino Daniele discussed Naples, music, and film in conversation with the Italian-American actor and director John Turturro.

"Yes, I had a special rapport with him immediately. There was a union: the search for the musical roots of an international actor and my own musical history. It's the charm of Neapolitan culture that touches many international artists like him. There's more to it than the Camorra, fortunately."

This is not to say that Pino has forgotten or hides the difficulties his city faces.

"It's a challenging time all over the world, not only for us, but we do our part, we were given the



opportunity to do it this way.... Many youngsters are leaving because they can't find any work. It's a real crisis. But I'm sure, that from negative, terrible things, something better always emerges, and beautiful things are always born of struggle, we hope. We hope....

It's finally understood that Italy must invest in its own cultural heritage. There's no other place like it in the world.

Fortunately, we have a president who was elected a few days ago who recognizes this, and I hope that he can help Italy. We hope that the Minister of Culture becomes as important as the Foreign Minister. "

But who is Pino Daniele today? Is he the same person he was many years ago? How do you feel? Where are you headed?

"I think, as I said before, I'm a musician who tries to share his identity, his own culture in places where it's not recognized.... I could very easily live in New York City. I love it to death, but I would never do it. I have to keep in touch with my roots, I have to change things by staying in Italy and trying to recreate things. Today you can have immediate communication with New York and everywhere else. I have to remain in direct contact with my land to give birth to new things. I'm a musician who seeks to spread his musical experience in this way, through sharing his own culture."

And we're waiting for him, along with Tullio De Piscopo, his old friend. Along with his other friends who are ready to embrace him, ready to give him warm and thunderous rounds of applause. Because the audience generously responds when an artist is so generous like him.

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