



Calabrian Cantautore PEPPE VOLTARELLI Coming to Canada and New York City

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Standard SOUNDS

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PEPPE VOLTARELLI

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The tradition of a troubadour singing and telling stories has been with us for eons. Whether it's griots in West Africa, bluesmen in Mississippi or Moroccan gnawa players, these traveling musicians inform and entertain with a mix of political and social satire, love songs, comedy, praise of a deity or whatever else inspires them.

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"I think its kind of Mediterranean blues," Voltarelli says of his music. "I'm a modern songwriter looking at the culture that has dominated our land and then creating imaginary place where a tribal African rhythm meets the sweetness of Greek serenata."

This restless soul brought his Mediterranean blues with a touch of babalu to Germany, Argentina, the U.S. and elsewhere, settling down for a while before moving along to the next country or returning home for another major concert, television appearance or collaboration with noted Calabrian film director Giuseppe Gagliardi.

"It is an escape," Voltarelli says of his time away. "The people of other countries help me to understand life from different point of view. It's a never-ending exodus and Italian emigrants are my mirror, my music is like blotting paper that preserves the memories of my peoples."

While Voltarelli cites such Italian artists as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Roberto Saviano and particularly Domenico Modugno (composer of the standard "Volare") as influences, his music moves well beyond its Italian roots. This is a performer that transcends his bloodlines with a swagger that recalls fellow global pop iconoclasts like Gogol Bordello's Eugene Hutz, Billy Bragg, Manu Chao or Shane MacGowan, delivering his message with a dynamic intensity and singular style.

Voltarelli (now 43) got his start in music at the ripe old age of 11, eventually founding the popular alternative rock band Il Parto delle Nuvole Pesanti (The Birth of the Heavy Clouds). A band that mixed punk rock and Calabrian folk traditions, it became one of Italy's seminal bands of the 1990's. He eventually left that band in 2006 to pursue a solo career.

His first album "Distratto Ma Però" was released in 2007 and it was among the finalists for Italy's prestigious Tenco Prize. Distributed in Europe by Universal, Voltarelli's second solo album, "Ultima Notte A Malà Strana," came out in 2010 and won the Tenco Prize for the Best Album in Dialect. It is the first album in Calabrese to do so.



Nonetheless, Voltarelli's amazing run of New York City performances in late 2012 needed few if any subtitles. During four Saturday nights at the intimate but influential Barbès, his audience grew each week and eventually led to a fifth and final show at Drom in Manhattan's East Village to accommodate the crowd and accompanying buzz.

Those who were there saw Voltarelli accompany himself on guitar and accordion in a tour de force performance called "Trip, Fathers, Belonging." He performed Italian songs of other famous artists and his own compositions, interspersing personal stories that were both funny and poignant about his life on the road and what it means when Italian immigrants leave their homeland.

"The basis of my music is the Calabrian dialect and the place itself," he explains. "Then I translate everything to the present, but not to succumb to the stereotypes (mafia, corruption, etc.) associated with it. This, for me, begins the challenge write the song and become a better person for doing so."

Like all great satirists there has to be strong element of humor to help the message along. Voltarelli takes this tradition into the digital age, making hilarious YouTube videos often directed by Giuseppe Gagliardi that feature the singer goofing around with people he meets on the street, in restaurants and bars, or at his shows.

He's also done formal film work with Gagliardi, most notably in the mockumentary "La Vera Leggenda di Tony Vilar" (The Real Legend of Tony Vilar). The film, which appeared at 2007's Tribeca Film Festival, features a Calabrian present day singer-songwriter (Voltarelli) searching of his rock star hero who came from the same village and became a huge star in Argentina back in the '60s, but then disappeared after all his hair fell out under mysterious circumstances. The trail eventually leads to the famed Italian-American community centered on Arthur Avenue in the Bronx.

While Gagliardi and Voltarelli first collaborated on "Doichlanda," a serious 2003 documentary about Italian immigration to Germany, the most recent collaboration is 2011's "Tatanka" -- Voltarelli wrote the score for the film, which was adapted from the Roberto Saviano's best-selling novel entitled "Gomorra."

Voltarelli is currently concentrating on the not so easy task of writing the best music he can for his upcoming third solo album. "I'm looking for a melody with simple and direct words that excite people," he explains, adding, "a song that speaks of this time and is useful to society."

June 25 Toronto - Bata Shoe Museum (with Daniela Nardi)

June 26 New York City - Chez André @ The Standard, East Village

July 3 Montreal - Savoy du Metropolis 34° Montreal International Jazz Festival

July 4 Montreal - Savoy du Metropolis 34° Montreal International Jazz Festival

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