

ITALIAN JAZZ. The influence of John Coltrane

Enzo Capua (January 20, 2014)



Today our jazz has seen the fruit of his influence. I don't want to name too many names and then have to apologize for forgetting others, but musicians like Francesco Cafiso, Max Ionata, Rosario Giuliani, Pietro Tonolo - if we stick to saxophonists - are the young Italians who have fully absorbed this spiritual lesson in jazz and have given it back to us with great artistry and profound beauty

As I write this article, I'm listening to John Coltrane. For those of you who don't know who John Coltrane was, all I can say - briefly - is that he was one of the greatest saxophonists in the history of jazz, one of the true trailblazers in the evolution of that music. Coltrane played tenor and soprano saxophone, instruments that have affinities and differences.

That means that, while they have different sounds and shapes, they are nevertheless controlled by



human breath. Among the many wind instruments out there, the saxophone is the one most commonly associated with jazz. They say it's the lead instrument. Anyone in the music business knows perfectly well that's not the case, that there are many other very important instruments out there, but we can set aside the jargon for now and follow the images and sounds that wash over us when we go see jazz played live.

So, someone might ask, how is John Coltrane relevant to this article about Italian jazz? Well, let's just say he's very relevant. Why? Because when Italian jazz reached the end of its first mature phase, around the mid 1960s, in order to develop further it turned to two giants who, at that time, were like beacons lighting the way, warning of rocky shores: John Coltrane and Miles Davis.

We'll save Davis for another time, but the Coltrane beacon was an enormous help to Italian musicians who wanted to make important music, something serious to listen to, not just background or dance music. You might say that every saxophone player in Italy from then to now – every jazz musician in general – cannot ignore the lessons and innovative style of Coltrane. Lessons about freedom, about cutting loose, about predetermined connections and, above all, about real spirituality. In the end, his music turns into the kind of art that can help us achieve a less materialistic relationship with life. It helps us understand that not everything is made for consumption, that something can enter our souls and raise the stakes about what we should expect from our hearts and minds. Italians, who have this sensitivity to the human and elevated aspects of existence written in our DNA (except on the occasion when we forget about it...), could not ignore this beautiful, grand, serene lesson. And we welcomed it with open arms.

Today our jazz has seen the fruit of his influence. I don't want to name too many names and then have to apologize for forgetting others, but musicians like Francesco Cafiso, Max Ionata, Rosario Giuliani, Pietro Tonolo – if we stick to saxophonists – are the young Italians who have fully absorbed this spiritual lesson in jazz and have given it back to us with great artistry and profound beauty. Unfortunately, John Coltrane died young, at 40 years old, in 1967. But I'm sure that were he alive today, he would be proud of his Italian disciples.

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