

Pino Daniele in New York. The ambassador of the Neapolitan soul

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An indelible memories in New York with the Neapolitan?Italian pop icon. We said goodbye envisaging a return to New York. It's not going to happen, but this city loves him, together with me. And will love him forever.

Pino & Friends". He chased the notes with his words. His

voice was always incredibly intense

even though,

occasionally, slightly tired. But not his hands on the guitar, not his music, which was his passion.



I saw him surrounded by American friends, including the great guitarist Richie Havens, and artists that I had seen in Italy many years ago, like Tullio de Piscopo and Rino Zurzolo. All this happened in New York, to the amazement of all. This was the last time I heard him playing and singing live, in Midtown.

Pino Daniele, the musician that made me love Naples even more, that accompanied my adolescence, whose blues made me feel a little American far before I moved to New York. I had met him a few years earlier, in 2009, when he came to play at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem.

It was an unforgettable success. His appeal to the public was extraordinary. There was no concert, only his music. The rhythm filled the theatre so much that, oblivious to security, the public abandoned their seats and danced all around and under the stage.

And they all did it, the audience as well as those who were there to work. I remember finding myself keep the beat together with an Afro American woman who only moments earlier had been blunt with the cameraman that was with me. She smiled and let the music carry her away. "I like the blues".

It was in those days that I got to know Pino.

I interviewed him, and then met him again with his family in 2012 and 2013, when I followed his New York tour more closely.

The second time the concert was held in the Harlem temple, the theater overflowing with people and again it was a great success. Two days earlier I had organized, together with Stefano Albertini, the Director of 'Casa Italiana' of NYU, a conversation about Naples with Pino and the actor John Turturro. I'll never forget when these two icons met here in New York.

His American producer Massimo Gallotta had asked me if we could do something different with Pino Daniele. I thought of Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimo' of the NYU, the most welcoming place narrating the Italian Culture in NY, and then of the actor/director John Turturro.

His movie "Passion", a journey in the Neapolitan Music, had just been released. The original version of "Napule è" is the closing piece of the movie, even though the Neapolitan author does not appear. Pino accepted enthusiastically and so did Turturro.

They had never met before. It was electrifying to witness with my own eyes the subtleties of that red thread that connected the two great artists. And then, of course, there was Naples, that 'passion' that had so much attracted Turturro and that Daniele translated into music.

The third time Pino came to New York was a different experience again. The concert wasn't held at the Apollo theater, a place where the sacred atmosphere almost puts a distance between the artists and the public. Or at least that's how one feels. Playing with him this time his New York friends but also the old companions of his musical life journey, directly from Naples. I remember his son, who this time more than before, followed him with eyes filled with tenderness. I sensed some sort of fragility in Pino, but the concert was enthralling and no one else noticed.

Following him backstage, walking with him and his band, watching the rehearsal, eating together... I remember those moments, tinged with little envy. The magic that friendship can create is certainly exponentially amplified when there is music. And if the one making the music is an artist of the stature of Pino Daniele, then everything becomes magical and seems to flow easily. It's a unique



improvisation, but one that requires great mastery and harmony.

I recall Pino's affability towards me, especially during his last New York trip when he already knew me a little. He asked for me to find out more about the city and its people, his questions always implying a feminine answer. I wasn't just a journalist anymore, but an american friend who helped him in his search for Naples in New York.

His strength came from Naples. It may sound prosaic but it's important to reiterate it. He clearly said it in his last interview: "Being from Naples was hard at the beginning, but now Naples keeps me alive from a creative point of view. If you are a healthy carrier (of Neapolitan spirit), then 'napolitanita' " is a way of being. This city has a beautiful and noble heritage, and I draw from Eduardo, from the Neapolitan music of the early 1900..."

He would wear the New York atmosphere like a silk garment that happily rests on the skin. He was comfortable, walking around the city listening to its sonorities, to its voices and noises. He would stop by Pizzeria Ribalta, craving for a pizza you cannot do without, even in New York.

He had many American friends and it wasn't uncommon to come across famous faces of the music world, almost in disguise, watching his concerts.

The atmosphere of the Big Apple would become as one with Naples the moment he picked up his guitar and played the first notes of his blues.

Then Naples was in New York. He allowed us into its belly, in its alleys, in its promenade. With its odors, noise, screams, and its 'munnezza' (the trash), its superstition and its history. An interior beauty that only his music was able to narrate. A beauty that captivates, whether the background is the gulf of Naples or New York's skyline. A beauty open to other people, cultures and music.

Pino is maybe the shyest Neapolitan I've ever met. But what do you need words for when the music says it all. And so eloquently!

" I'm not an entertainer. I'm someone who plays music", he also told me.

In these words maybe a message to many who today entertain rather than play music.

Pino, our hug when you left, after our interview, before you got onto your tour bus, has been recorded on camera. It wasn't fake, it was spontaneous and I thank my video staff for having caught the moment.
An indelible memory.

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