

Capossela. Mythology in the Air

Natasha Lardera (January 19, 2008)



Mythology was in the air at Vinicio Capossela's concert a few nights ago. That doesn't really happen at Webster Hall, location of the fifth edition of Global Fest. Sure many international artists grace its stages but none is like Capossela. Not to belittle anyone, but that's the way it is

"E balla il cha cha della medusa

chi l'ha provato piú non riposa

ballalo subito non hai una scusa

se non lo balli saró scontrosa...”

(LYRICS from Capossela’s song Medusa Cha Cha Cha)

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“Twelve artists, three stages,” this is the motto of the New York-based event that every year welcomes major representatives of world music in search of business on the American market. Sure, the different performances can overlap, but who’s there to work needs to have a chance to sample as many artists as possible, thus needs to be able to move from one room to another easily. Those there just for fun can freely do the same or just stay for an entire set.

There really is something for every taste: in the first couple of hours I moved from the jovial mood of Chango Spasiuk, Argentine artist who experiments with traditional music from the north-eastern corner of his country, to an even more folkloristic ambiance created by the Korean group Dulsori, the 99% female ensemble plays with amazing percussions, to the circus of Vinicio Capossela. I, among others, was simply mesmerized.

Ironic, sentimental, audacious, and eclectic, Vinicio Capossela is an artist who started at the bottom doing the most disparate jobs just to be in the music business. Now he is one of the strongest representatives of Italian contemporary music and the shining star of an entire generation. His most evident music influences are Tom Waits and his blues, along with Paolo Conte and his chansons.

His musical repertoire mixes together aspects of Brecht’s theater, cinema (his song Zampanò is inspired by Fellini’s film *La Strada*), traditional Mediterranean tunes, literary works (Oscar Wilde’s *The Nightingale* and the *Rose* is responsible for the song *Con una Rosa*), pantomime and Greek mythology (a portrait of Medusa the character of Vinicio’s song *Medusa Cha Cha Cha* was actually admired by the singer at a German friend’s art show. He was thrilled by the image he saw but also by the painter’s theory on the snake-haired monster).

At the circus of Mastro Vinicio the singer is the protagonist of many little scenes where the alternating of masks and costumes leaves the public wondering what song he’s going to do next but also what cool outfit he’s going to wear for us. “New York is great for shopping,” Vinicio tells the microphone as he puts on a pink jacket with black furry lapels. Indeed I happen to know from secret sources, secret but safe, that right before the concert he was out shopping in the East Village, haven of second hand stores.

The mostly all-Italian audience welcomed numerous Americans who were completely unaware of what was going on. Right in front of me two guys from Brooklyn were mesmerized. Capossela had just put on a wooden mask representing a bull and they were smirking but enjoying what they were seeing. They couldn’t walk away. But they were dancing, overcome by the *Ballo di San Vito*, even though they didn’t know what it was.



"This is pure entertainment," Matt Du Verger, one of the two, says to me, "Even though I have no idea of what he's saying, I got the idea that it's something important but said differently. Max, his friend, continues, "The program says that there's a sense of desolation in his songs but delight as well, I just think it's cool. Look at the people, they are in awe. It's like being at a bacchanal."

All this enthusiasm was cut short by the time limitations of the event, sets are indeed supposed to last 45 minutes. But the production allowed an encore despite the numerous requests to leave the stage that needed to be prepped for the following artist.

But for Mastro Vinicio they can do this and much more...

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