

New York. Flavors and Notes from Umbria

Marina Melchionda (May 07, 2009)



A four-day event in New York (May 5-8) to introduce Umbria's attractions to the American public. The Italian musician, singer, and entertainer Renzo Arbore presented this year's Umbria Jazz Festival at the Italian Cultural Institute. After the conference, a performance by the Italian pianist Danilo Rea. (i-Italy will interview Renzo Arbore! Stay Tuned!)

Tuesday, May 5 was the third consecutive rainy day here in the city, but the atmosphere at the Italian Cultural Institute on Park Avenue was electric. A delegation from Umbria was going to hold a press conference in the hall decorated in marble and wood. The American preview of the Umbria Jazz Festival '09 and the Due Mondi Festival opened that evening with a piano concert by Danilo Rea, one of the most famous Italian Jazz musicians.

When we got there, the first thing we noticed was a group of very young students standing in front of the institute waiting for the event to start. While they were talking and exchanging laughs, other



people arrived. They were all well-dressed and their smiling faces witnessed a visible excitement. The institute had never been so crowded. In the foyer a long table was being set up, and it foreshadowed the rich buffet that would be served a few hours later. It was only 6:00 pm but it was already impossible to find a seat in the conference room. The Many gave up trying to find a spot and instead they sat outside, waiting to watch the event on a wide-screen.

International and Italian journalists occupied the first rows, sitting next to several representatives of Italian institutions such as Riccardo Strano, Director of the North American branch of the Italian Tourist Board, Deputy Consuls Maurizio Antonini and Marco Alberti, and Consul General Francesco Maria Talò, along with Carlo Pagnotta, Artistic Director of the Umbria Jazz Festival and Renzo Arbore, President of Associazione Umbria Jazz. With them, the New York producer Enzo Capua, one of the main organizers of the event.

The continuous whispering was finally interrupted by Consul Talò who took the podium to present the region's beauty: "Umbria has come here to introduce us to its excellence, its products, and its music. The quality of the wine produced in this region makes it one of the most valued areas in Italy. The region's exceptional water is widely recognized to the point where it is exported to many different countries, especially America. (...) Umbria is the ideal place for anyone to visit. There you can rest and have peace and quiet, or decide to explore its ancient historical sites and amazing national parks. You can get there by car from Florence or Rome and enjoy a relaxing outdoor one-day trip or even plan to stay there longer. Its small, medieval towns are so welcoming that many have decided to spend their lives there."

The quality of life in this area is also enhanced by the many cultural events organized by local public institutions throughout the year, as Mr. Talò explained: "Jazz made in Umbria is certainly the best in Europe, especially since we know that jazz is typically an element of American and Italian culture."

Stefano Cinicchi, Director of the Umbria Regional Office for the Promotion of Tourism, echoed the Consul's remarks. He commented that the Umbria Jazz Festival is certainly one of the most important international events dedicated to this genre of music: "I represent a lucky region, the birthplace of Saint Francis, Saint Chiara, and Saint Pagnotta," referring to Carlo Pagnotta, the festival's artistic director.

Carlo Pagnotta was soon introduced by Silvia Gianpaola, the official at the Italian Cultural Institute responsible for the promotion of Italian music in New York. He discussed the first international edition of the festival which took place in the same venue more than twenty years ago, and he could not hide his emotions when he listed the international participants in this year's festival: Burt Bacharach, Steely Dan, [Simply Red](#) [2], Chick Corea, [Wynton Marsalis](#) [3], [Maceo Parker](#) [4], [Solomon Burke](#) [5], [George Benson](#) [6], [James Taylor](#) [7], [B.B. King](#) [8], [Richard Galliano](#) [9], [Ahmad Jamal](#) [10], [Dave Douglas](#) [11], Roy Haynes, [McCoy Tyner](#) [12], [Bill Frisell](#) [13], [John Scofield](#) [14], [Mingus Dynasty](#) [15], [Tuck & Patty](#) [16], the [AACM](#) [17] (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians), and the Great Black Music Ensemble, along with some of the most prestigious names in Italian Jazz: [Paolo Conte](#) [18], [Enrico Rava](#) [19], Enrico Pieranunzi, [Stefano Bollani](#) [20], [Gino Paoli](#) [21], Flavio Boltro, [Paolo Fresu](#) [22], [Rosario Giuliani](#) [23], [Gianluca Petrella](#) [24], [Danilo Rea](#) [25], Renato Sellani, [Roberto Gatto](#) [26], [Francesco Cafiso](#) [27].

The Italian entertainer, musician, and singer Renzo Arbore finally took the microphone and gave glowing praise for the amazing goals that Mr. Pagnotta has accomplished in the last two decades: "Thirty-seven years ago Jazz in Italy was not popular at all. Thanks to the festival, jazz's ticket sales have surpassed 30% with respect to other music genres. The credit goes to Carlo Pagnotta; he understood that the festival had to promote not only jazz, but also other genres that can be mixed with its sounds, like rock or Brazilian music. This has allowed it to appeal to a wider audience while maintaining a high level of quality. Thanks to Mr. Pagnotta, as you can hear, today many famous musicians agree to participate in the festival for the widely recognized prestige of the event".

As the conference ended, Danilo Rea entertained the audience with a 30-minute concert, a series of improvisations with only one pause filled with applause. Seated at the baby grand piano, he improvised songs by Modugno, De André, Tenco, Paoli, and Puccini. The audience grew quiet, moved



by the overwhelming notes composed by his agile fingers sliding on the keyboard.

The evening finally ended with a "delicious" moment: those present could taste typical products from Umbria showcased in authentic local dishes. They chatted for a long time while enjoying wine that perfectly matched the food served.

We all went away with one only wish: to take a trip to Umbria and have the chance to attend both festivals, the Umbria Jazz Festival (July 10-19) and the Due Mondi Festival (June 26-July 12).

The New York Presentation of Umbria Jazz '09 will last until May 8.

Upcoming events

Thursday, May 7 - Friday, May 8 Italian Cultural Institute (686, Park Avenue - New York 10065, NY)

6 pm: Umbria Jazz presents "Italian Songs in Jazz" with

ROBERTA GAMBARINI, voice

RENATO SELLANI, piano

NEIL SWAINSON, double bass

7 pm: reception with superb wines from the Umbria region

RSVP: 212 8794242 ext. 366 (May 7)

RSVP: 212 8794242 ext. 368 (May 8)

Free admission

(Edited by Giulia Prestia)

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