

'Area' in New York: Italian Music-with-Ideas. Interview with Patrizio Fariselli

Maria Rita Latta (April 26, 2010)



Waiting for the concert of the "Area" — for the first time in New York later this week — i-Italy interviewed Patrizio Fariselli, who founded the historical band in 1972 together with Demetrio Stratos, Victor Edouard Busnello, Giulio Capiozzo, Patrick Djivas and Paolo Tofani.

Patrizio Fariselli is one of the most multifaceted artists of the Italian musical scene. Born in Cesenatico in 1951, he is considered one of the most important contemporary pianists in the world. Together with Demetrio Stratos, Victor Edouard Busnello, Giulio Capiozzo, Patrick Djivas and Paolo Tofani, in 1972, he founded the historic band "Area".



After the band broke up he mainly worked in cinema and theater, composing music for many films such as *Era una notte buia e tempestosa*, *Zitti e mosca*, *Caino e Caino*, *Ivo il tardivo*. He also wrote for the theater, for ballets and even for *L'Albero azzurro*, a television show for young children.

Among the many prizes he received during his career are the “Ciak d'oro” for best soundtrack for *Ivo il tardivo* and First Prize for soundtrack for the animated film *The horseman* by Michel Fuzellier at the Holland Animation Film Festival in Utrecht, presented by MTV.

However, along with these compositions, he never interrupted his activity in jazz music, collaborating with many artists from the international panorama. In his multifaceted career, Fariselli returned to Area many times, founding the band over and over, presenting historic pieces again, proving the “one can't forget the first love”.

And in fact, Area's music represented something unique within the history of Italian music, with a very personal style, distinguished by the fusion of musical components deriving from different genres, from folk to jazz, to rock, to ethnic music, all experimented often to the extremes, but always in search of new musical languages. And now, thirty-eight years since the birth of Area, Patrizio Fariselli is getting ready to set foot in New York for a series of concerts with a band called “Area Reunion”.

We interviewed him before his departure for the United States, excited about facing this new experience. He immediately asked me to speak colloquially and began to tell me how he got into music: “I come from a family of musicians. My father, grandfather and uncle played, so I was naturally drawn towards the piano. I studied at the Conservatory in Pesaro, even though my passion for the instrument emerged as an adolescent, listening to the Bill Evans trio and jazz music. After having seen Evans live with his band, I convinced myself that music is something very, very interesting and fun”. At this point I had to ask him how Area were born: “I saw them come to life: I was living in Cesenatico, in Romagna, where Giulio Capiozzo – soon-to-become Area's drummer – lived as well. We played together a lot as kids and had promised each other to found a “stratospheric” band... and then came Demetrio Stratos (he laughs). A strange coincidence, because while I was off in the army, Giulio Capiozzo entered Stratos' band, which wasn't called Area yet, but was the band with which he played gigs. The band included musicians that would later be part of Area. When I was discharged from the army I became part of the band and soon after we came up with the definitive name and began to work on the first album. Let's say that the band coagulated around the figure of Stratos who served as catalyst and then our career began. This happened between 1971 and '72, and we recorded the first album in 1973.

How did the name Area come about?

It was a quote from Allen Ginsberg.

Stratos defined the music of Area as an “internationalist type of musical fusion”. What does that mean?

The internationalist quote was also in our name: the actual name of the band was Area International Popular Group. But the term “internationalist” was also a direct reference to our political inclination. Furthermore, our so-called “internationalism” was due to the fact that our band was in international mix of people, since Stratos was Greek, our guitarist, Johnny Lambizi was of Hungarian origins, Eddie Busnello worked in Belgium for his whole life, Patrick Djivas was of French origins. And then there was this idea of thinking big, not locally. Our internationalism, though, didn't really go beyond San Marino, since we played very little abroad, except for France and Portugal. But now we're avenging ourselves. Thirty years later our albums are sold all over the world, we are known all over, and our work has found fulfillment.

You debuted with *Arbeit Mach Frei* in 1972, an album that aims to the heart. You immediately show your band's natural search of new languages, continually experimenting. But also the contents were innovative. What did you wish to communicate?

Among the many ideas there was criticism towards the Left which was losing touch with social themes: we were trying to stimulate it on the need to reflect. Then, in a song like “Luglio, agosto, settembre (nero)”, we tackled the issue of the Palestinian problem. To even mention the



organization "Black September" which had claimed to be behind the Munich Massacre of 1972, was a strong statement.

What weight did politics have within the band?

Politics were very important because we decided to lend a hand towards the worker movement, helping through our presence to bring solidarity towards those who worked for a better life. We never enlisted in the Party. But we introduced social themes in our lyrics, always maintaining a critical stand.

In 1979, just before a large concert organized at the Arena Civica in Milan, Demetrio Stratos died in a New York hospital of sudden aplastic anemia. After his death what happened to Area? Did his loss lead to the end of the band?

From a human point of view, Demetrio's death was very painful. Professionally speaking, though, Stratos had already left the band and we were already at the natural end of the project. After a decade of working together, the band was naturally breaking up, looking for different paths. Each one of us felt the need to pursue his own musical and artistic voyage in another direction.

Has there ever been another Italian singer with the same potential as Stratos?

It's not a matter of potential, beautiful voice or vocal power, but it's about a thinking head, a capacity of working with ideas. Stratos left many small heirs. Don't ask me for names, please... (laughs). His legacy is still present, his road was covered by other singers also internationally, and his techniques, so revolutionary then, today are common ground for young singers.

I read on certain magazines about Demetrio Stratos' memorable live improvisations....

Improvisations were always an important element of our work, not only Demetrio's. An exploration of the potential of our instruments is at the base of each one's work. And the voice is an instrument that we always carry along with us.

What are Area doing now?

Area have taken out the old flag again, a bit as a joke, and a bit seriously (laughs again). It started from an idea of Mauro Pagani to involve us in a concert we did last year in Siena, bringing on stage people who hadn't been seen for thirty years. Behind our reunion is the will to play seriously, not like many reunions of bands who monkey around pretending to be young again.

So you are still researching, experimenting...

Research is at the core of everything. You cannot live off of what was done in the past....

How do you see and live the Italian musical scene, today? Is it very different from the Seventies?

Today, in Italy, there is no space for a band like ours. It's a very heavy moment both culturally and musically, there is only homologation and flattening. It's very tough, creativity isn't appreciated, and horrible values are commonly accepted. We live in a country of ignorants, happy to be ignorant. The situation has become much worse since the Seventies: anyone who wishes to carry on something in Italy must face a difficult climb ten times harder than it should be.

Is there space for a music like yours?

We create our space, nobody gives us anything...

In an interview you spoke about the need to be "artists without mediation". What does that mean?

First of all it means to not be constrained by market issues. A mental posture to not have to be liked



by everyone, being able to carry on a musical project that deals with the history of music in order to better itself intelligently.

What are Area now, only the past?

We are musicians who have found the pleasure of playing together again, to see if something new and fun will result. If we look at the old repertoire, our behavior was always playful. But we also try to explore the possibilities of this material that at the time we might not have noticed or developed to its full potential. We will rework older pieces, but also write new ones.

Have you ever performed in the United States or in New York?

No, it's the first time. I had never visited the States before. At the moment we have a small number of selected gigs. The New York event is promising and we'll have fun. We will play at the Italian Cultural Institute and also in a local Auditorium called the Brecht Forum. Then we will meet with some musicians of the New York scene since we were invited to a third concert in a club called New Blue, together with Batch Morris, a conductor who will conduct an event called "creative conduction". Also present will be Mauro Pagani and Walter Bianchi, a young drummer. We will call ourselves Area Reunion with Paolo Tofani, Ares Tivolazzi and myself, together with other guests, such as Mauro Pagani.

What do you expect from New York?

Lots of hamburgers (laughs again, enjoying himself)...

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