

Lady Gaga & Gay Rights in Italy

Tiziana Maggio (June 14, 2011)



On June 11, Euro Pride 2011, the pan-European international event dedicated to LGBT pride, was held in Rome and welcomed an international public of about 1 million people. The parade, which flooded the streets of Italy's capital, ended with a show by Lady Gaga, the extraordinary and spectacular contemporary Italian-American music icon.

Described by many as the new Madonna, Lady Gaga was born in New York City from Italian-American parents with a different name: Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta. She started her career in a burlesque bar in New York along with drag queens and go-go dancers, where she often performed for her astonished entrepreneur father. In just a few years Lady Gaga has come to dominate the music industry thanks to powerful hit singles, a unique vocal power, one of a kind



costumes and spectacular choreographies that really are theatrical performances.

After the release of her first two albums, *The Fame* (2008), and *The Fame Monster* (2009), this year she released *Born this way*, an album that brought her yet again at the top of the hit charts. Lady Gaga can boast important collaborations, with the likes of Kanye West, Michael Bolton, Beyoncé, Elton John, but that's not all, the numbers speak for themselves: her last album sold 1.108.000 copies in America in its début week, she has gained the number one spot on the annual *Forbes'* list of the 100 most influential celebrities, beating Oprah Winfrey, and she can count 38 million fans on Facebook and 11 million on Twitter.

The 25 year old star was invited to participate to Euro Pride 2011 in Rome, with the support of the Ambassador of the United States in Italy David Thorne. As a matter of fact, Miss Germanotta has always showed awareness and pride of her Italian origins, and she has often been very committed to the equality of gay rights, becoming in a short time the most acclaimed and loved gay icon of the world.

Her speech in Washington for the equality of gay rights for the DC Gay Rally in 2009 or her decision to end an exclusive and economic partnership with the US retailer Target to sell a special edition of her new album over its support of anti-gay political candidates are two very meaningful examples of her position toward the gay issue.

At Euro Pride this year, wearing a green wig and a vintage dress by Gianni Versace, she spoke from her heart with resolution and demanded the end of discrimination against gays and transgenders: «We fight for freedom, we fight for justice, we beckon for compassion and, above all, we want full equality now. I stand here as a woman of the world and I ask governments with you worldwide to facilitate our dream of equality.»

Thanks to her participation to the Rome event, attention was immediately paid to the complete lack of gay, lesbian and transgender equal rights in Italy. Unfortunately the wind of change in institutional thinking but also in the common mind has blown feebly in Italy. The awareness campaign to pass a specific law against homophobia, that is the social, political and institutional aversion to homosexuals, but also to officially recognize gay civil weddings and unions, and adoption rights, is still an idea not a reality. This situation in Italy is clearly in conflict with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Parliament, in particular with art. 81 that prohibits every kind of discrimination, included discrimination base don sexual orientation.

Some important and official changes on this issue have taken place in legislations of some European countries and in the world. Equal rights for couples, regardless of their sexual orientation, are officially recognized in Austria, France, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Finland, Andorra, Croatia, Ireland, Colombia, New Zealand and Uruguay. Homosexual weddings are now allowed in countries like Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, but also in Canada, South Africa, Mexico and Argentina. In United States, these unions are legally recognized in five states (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, Washington D.C.).

Italy and Greece, instead, represent the awkward exception in European and developed countries. A specific law against homophobia is now necessary and urgent. The Annual Report 2011 of Amnesty International denounces the state of human rights in Italy: «Derogatory and discriminatory remarks by politicians against roms, immigrants and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are promoting a climate of rising intolerance. Violent homophobic attacks are continue to happen» and «due to a gap in the law, victims of crimes motivated by discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity were not given the same protection as victims of crimes motivated by other sorts of

crimes motivated by other sorts of discrimination.»



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