

Ready for Italian Doc Remix?

Stefano M. Ross (February 25, 2012)



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Italian Doc Remix opens a new chapter in the history of Italian-American music by mixing ancestral memories from the lost homeland with the urban sophistication of New York’s downtown sound innovations. The sextet led by Italian-born guitarist Marco Cappelli and Italian-American percussionist Jim Pugliese offers a musical experience that reconnects contemporary American life to the traditional roots of the Italian identity, redefining the one and the other each time they play.

Southern Italian melodies meet jazz, rock and improvisation; tarantella, pizzica and tammurriata



mixed and mashed with blues and hip hop are infused with a new global reach, and they echo the new and the old world they evoke bringing them both to a next level.

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Before meeting Marco, Jim had listened to and even transcribed some of the traditional music from Southern Italy but had never had the experience of playing this music with someone who had grown up performing it. “I felt very connected to this music because my family is from Campania, but Marco’s understanding of this music took my passion to a different level,” Jim says. “I believe there is a special passion when you play the traditional music from your region,”

Marco indeed learned to play guitar by playing folk music in Naples. When he was a teenager, in the early 1980s, there was a big revival of folk music in Italy, especially in Southern Italy, and this included music historically performed in sacred rituals during the festivities. “This music belongs to a very old tradition, and sometimes it has deep roots in early music forms like ‘madrigale’ and ‘villanella.’ But, Marco recalls “in the ‘80s in Naples to go in search of this kind of music was also a political statement, a sort of revolt of progressive intellectuals against the mainstream.” Marco was involved in the movement, to the point that he was more likely to take part in the folkloric Carnevale of Montenarano than to listen to the Police. But later he turned to classical and contemporary music, and never considered to play that stuff again... “until I met Jim here in New York.” Being both part of the same avantgarde-improv scene of downtown Manhattan, they re-discovered the power of that music together. “I realized how much improv music has in common with ancient Southern Italian rituals... and with the music I was used to play as teenager. I would say that Jim had the vision and I had the knowledge of the original source: a perfect team!”

Both of you are related to the same Italian region, Campania. Where did you meet?

JIM: “The Story is that our dear and mutual friend Anthony Coleman had already met Marco and I was planning a trip to visit the village where my grandparents were born in Castelnuovo di Conza, east of Naples. Anthony said that I had to meet Marco who was in New York at the time. I remember it well. I was at a concert at the Tonic and Anthony was there with Marco. He introduced us and a new, very close friendship was born. Very soon after that I traveled to Naples for some concerts and stayed with Marco and during that time we talked about the music in depth. I also visited Castelnuovo and became even more passionate about my roots.”

How did you get the idea to translate into music this mutual background?

JIM: “I had listened to folk music from Campania and surrounding areas for years but I had never met a musician that had played this music since his young years. Long before I met Marco I put together a band to translate some of this traditional music and I hired some of the best improvisers on the downtown scene at the time. We first performed, oddly enough, at Roulette. It was a success, but I felt it was lacking in some respect the true sense of the traditional music. Upon meeting Marco we talked about this and it seemed like we had no choice but to pursue this idea and collaboration.”

So this is how IDR was born. How did you transform a music related to the tradition of Campania into a New York sound?

MARCO: “That is not particularly difficult. New York is made of immigrants—it has always been like this. Everybody has somehow memories of a place where their ancestors lived before moving here, carrying hopes and traditions in the same suitcase. Then time passes, but something of those memories remains ingrained in the minds and hearts of the following generations of ‘hyphenated Americans.’ This is what makes what we call ‘New York sound’ so special, and so naturally related to any traditional background, because it contains them all. That’s why two Italian Americans drummer and bassist, an American Jewish clarinetist, a Portorican trombonist, an Afro-american dj, and myself from Naples, understand each other perfectly.

JIM: “When you transcribe these traditional songs, as Marco did, and then have them interpreted by



some of downtown's most incredible musicians and improvisers, the so-called call 'New York sound' comes up automatically! The freedom and passion of traditional Southern Italian music is very similar to the freedom and passion that you can find in the New York improvisation scene. In both cases you may sense the freedom to travel to that magical place where music becomes spiritual."

You worked with some of the greatest musicians in the New York scene. How did they contribute?

JIM: "They contribute exactly by being some of the greatest musicians in the New York scene. They are virtuosic and open to exploring new ideas, and that combination creates an incredible band for this music! Doug Wieselmann skills on clarinet has some klezmer echoes, while the latin jazz influence by Josè Davila is such a drive, well sustained by Ken Filiano's solid bass lines... not to speak of the contribute of DJ logic, which is the real 'jolly' in the band. I want also to mention Marc Ribot, who recorded with us in our debut CD (http://www.itineramusica.it/disco.asp?id_dis=10), and has been our guest in several live concerts. Unfortunately he is not in town on March 1st...but you can buy the CD and check it out!"

IDR is a mashup of tradition and new language, and it is also rather provocative. Young people will love it and we recommend not miss your concert. But what is it that will surprise us all? Why would YOU recommend to go and listen to IDR on March 1st?

JIM: "We can't tell you the surprise because then it won't be a surprise but you will be surprised and so you have to come to find out! Believe me, once you know you will never forget!!!"

MARCO: "I can tell something about a surprise: our next CD will be dedicated to the music of Nino Rota, who composed the most famous Federico Fellini's soundtracks. You will have a taste of our new repertoire on March 1st at Roulette, together with our 'hits.' We warmly invite people of all ages to share this experience with us, but young people can be sure that we'll rock the house!"

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