

Two Cultures with One Passion for Dance

Angela Manzolillo (April 04, 2013)



“Italy has given us many great things, but the best it gave us was you.” Words poignantly expressed by actor and dancer Ben Vereen to legendary Jazz choreographer Eugene Louis Faccuito, popularly only known as Luigi, at the first annual Italian International Dance Festival (IIDF).

[Luigi](#) [2] received the IIDF - Lifetime Achievement Award and was one of the few honorees presented with awards at the two-day festival event. Internationally renowned ballerina, [Alessandra Ferri](#) [3], was awarded the IIDF - A Heart for Art Extraordinary Dancer Award during a reception of the festival’s first night at the [Ailey School](#) [4] on March 21st.

Born from Italian parents in Ohio, Luigi became infamously known for creating his own Jazz dancing technique and coining the term “5, 6, 7, 8” as a means to initiate dancing. His innovative technique was developed through overcoming paralyzing injuries in a car accident when he was a young adult. At 88 years of age, he still remains an inspiration to many dancers and choreographers, where in

which his presence at the festival was notably appreciated.

[The Italian International Dance Festival](#) [5], presented for the first time in New York by Executive Director Gianluca Blandi, Artistic Director Antonio Fini, and Creative Director Tabata Caldironi, introduced to the American public what Italy could also offer in the art of dancing. With 2013 being the [Year of Italian Culture in the US](#) [6], a bridge of Italian and American choreographers and dancers was connected at Talent Unlimited's Julie Richmond Theatre on March 22nd. The evening kicked off with Talent Unlimited High School students' performance of a "tarantella", choreographed by Calabria native [Nicola Iervasi](#) [7], Artistic Director of Mare Nostrum Elements.

The evening's host, [Tabata Caldironi](#) [8], introduced ten more creative works from Italy and New York based dance companies such as: Michael Mao Dance which performed "Kyrie" to the music of Verdi to commemorate his 200th Anniversary, [Caliince Dance](#) [9] of Pauline Legras, Mare Nostrum Elements, Staten Island Ballet, Alex Atzewi Dance Company from Modena, and Aconcoli Dance from Milan. In dedication to Luigi, two of his solos were performed. The first entitled "Solitude", danced by Jessica Black along with music from Duke Ellington. The second solo and final performance of the festival was "New York New York", danced by Erika Black to the song's version by former Luigi student, Liza Minelli.

Choreographer [Elena Albano](#) [10] from Aconocoli Dance was presented the IIDF A Heart for Art Bridge Award by Martha Graham Center Director, Virginie Mécène. Elena Albano is accredited in her career teaching modern dance at the Centro Studi Coreografici Carcano Theater in Milan. Upon accepting her award, she dedicated it to her students. Neapolitan choreographer and television dancer Sasa` Di Donna was awarded the IIDF Ambassador Award for bringing the technique of American Jazz Dance to Italy. New York's Caliince Dance Company also welcomed the winner of Calabria's dell'Alto Jonio Dance Festival, Antonella Perazzo, to choreograph her piece "Tripudium" from Italy to the company's dancers.

One special inspirational piece was a performance by composer Noa Guy and Antonio Pio Fini, IIDF Art Director. Having been told she'd never be able to walk or compose music again after sustaining a brain injury from a car accident, Noa Guy refused to stay in a wheelchair and learned to move again. As Luigi would notably say, "Never stop moving". Her graceful performance with Antonio Pio Fini touched the audience as they watched her on her feet onstage.

Overall, every performance demonstrated its own range of elegance and endurance. From Atzewi Dance Company's effortless looking strength in "La Pelle Sotto L'Abito" to the Staten Island Ballet's homage to the Italian Vespers, the night summarized the Italian International Dance Festival's theme of "L'Abbraccio dell'Art", The Embrace of Art.

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