

Levante Rocks Manhattan

George De Stefano (April 01, 2015)



The Sicilian-born singer and songwriter dazzles in a showcase performance

Levante's March 25 appearance at [The Standard](#) [2] in Manhattan's East Village was more of a showcase to introduce her to media and music industry tastemakers than a full-fledged concert. But her brief set was enough to convince this writer that the up and coming singer-songwriter, born Claudia Lagona in Caltagirone, Sicily, is a big talent with the potential to become an international pop star.

A gifted tunesmith and lyricist and a compelling singer, [Levante](#) [3] has been likened to another artist from eastern Sicily, [Carmen Consoli](#) [4]. Levante acknowledges La Consoli as a role model and influence, citing her *Mediamente Isterica* as "the album that changed my life." But although her music sometimes suggests Italian folk styles, Levante leans more toward indie rock than the Mediterranean folk-pop of Consoli's recent releases.

Fresh from the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, where she played five shows, Levante, 27, performed in the penthouse suite at The Standard, a hotel that offers live music. Seated in front of a row of floor to ceiling windows that gave a spectacular view of Manhattan, Levante, playing



acoustic guitar and capably backed by electric guitarist Federico Puttilli and drummer Alessio Sanfilippo, offered stripped-down and passionate versions of several songs from her 2014 debut album, *Manuale Distruzione*. They included two versions of "[Alfonso](#)," [5] her 2013 hit single that captured the mood of a generation – and a nation – with its chorus, "Che vita di merda!" (What a Shitty Life.)

Levante was rocking a '90s alternative rocker/skatepunk look, wearing a wool cap over her long brown hair and a sweater over a plaid skirt. Her music echoed that decade, too, with songs that used the quiet verse/loud chorus formula that Nirvana worked so effectively. If she started a bit tentative, she hit her groove soon enough, especially once she opened up her voice. Levante's a powerful singer, and one with taste and a great sense of dynamics. She knows exactly when to let loose her big sound, and when to make it soft and intimate.

Since this was an "unplugged" kind of gig, Levante's physical presence was restrained; she remained seated throughout the set, unlike in her concerts, where she's much more antic. When she spoke, she came off as winsome, and even a bit shy, although she clearly appreciated the audience's enthusiastic response. A relative novice, she nonetheless is a polished performer whom one suspects will only become more authoritative with time and experience. The versions of the *Manuale Distruzione* songs that she played at The Standard were as tight and well-paced as the album tracks, but they often rocked harder and felt more emotionally potent. She and her musicians ended the set with "Duri Come Me," one the album's best tunes, an ode to courage and tenacity in the face of obstacles to achieving one's dreams. She and her compadres opened up the song, adding a long instrumental coda that featured some fine slide guitar work by Federico Puttilli. It sounded like rootsy Americana, steeped in the blues, and it was an unexpected delight.

Two days after her appearance at The Standard, Levante released in Italy her new single, "Ciao per sempre," from her forthcoming album, *Abbi cura di te*. Her manager told me after the show that her second album "is more like a third one" in that it represents a major leap in her development as a singer and songwriter. Levante will tour Italy this summer to promote the record, with a return to New York City in the fall.

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