

Franco Battiato. Artist in Search of "The Being"

Letizia Airos & Benny Profane (September 29, 2009)



Interview with the iconoclastic Italian musician Franco Battiato. "I come off as a difficult artist, but tell me: How can someone who has sold millions and millions of records be difficult?". "However, I am about to release a new album in which I directly attack the political class". Battiato will have his first New York appearance after 10 years on Monday October 19, 2009

[Franco Battiato](#) [2] is one of the most innovative artists in Italian music. Conversations with him not



only cover music but spirituality as well as art in the fullest sense possible. He talks about these topics with the spirit of research and as someone who experiments with life itself.

We begin by discussing Sicily, the region that he left at an early age but that he returned to in 1987 after living in Milan for many years. It's an area that has seduced him and one that he says he will never leave again.

"Yes, there was a detachment that I considered sacred and necessary. Today we live in a globalized society. You can live in Taormina and make a name for yourself in Japan, but in my day this wasn't the case. I also wanted to leave that stereotypical place where I saw Sicilians as fatalists, defenseless, and static. I left for Milan when I was 19; I had just started college. With time, my atavistic roots reemerged and Sicily reappeared in my mind. I now have no doubt that I will stay here."

Battiato is an eclectic artist. He expresses himself through various art forms such as [film](#) [3] and [painting](#). [4] From his home in Sicily located on the slopes of Mount Etna he has been successfully painting for years.

"From an artistic point of view, whatever you have inside, you have inside. I very much believe in the 'imprint' that you receive at birth. You can then improve or deteriorate depending on the conditions that you encounter in life and depending on your awareness. Painting for me has been a kind of therapy. I couldn't understand why I wasn't able to draw anything. I took this path for that reason. It's also clear that a creative person like myself can express himself through any means, whether it's film, painting, or music. Sicily has given me the foundation. Over the course of your life you encounter interesting things that you then bring back to your native land."

We ask him what American music means to him.

"I can't say the conventional thing. I can't say that I like American or English music. I have definitely liked specific artists, but they haven't influenced me. I have a very different background in music."

"For 20 years I have only listened to classical music. It's inevitable, though, that getting into a taxi or going to the airport or watching television will keep me current. For musicians, all it takes is a minute to decide whether something is interesting or not. Of course I couldn't listen to Madonna's records. No offense."

What does he expect from his visit to America? "I have been to the United States several times, either for work or as a tourist. In general, I don't have any expectations. I am not someone who maps out or even enjoys setting goals. I am from the school of 'hic et nunc,' here and now. When I get there I will understand it, but I can't determine it in advance or have preconceived notions."

He also talks about Barack Obama: "I predicted his election when everyone else said that he couldn't do it. From my experience with international politics, this is the first time that I've seen a president in a new light, as someone who doesn't use those disgusting political clichés...."

We stay on the topic of politics. We remind him of one particularly successful single, one that is different from the others. "Povera Patria" is a song that has political overtones and it is certainly different from his other music. "Povera Patria" continues to be sung in protest and it is well-known within the community and on Facebook.

Battiato in "Povera Patria" (by La7-Niente di Personale)

"Yes, it is very much an anomaly.... But I'll tell you that there is a single that's about to be released called 'inner eye'. In it, I attack the political class in a direct and violent way. 'Povera Patria' was a melancholy song, but this is an attack on the government. Let's just say that I don't accept the fact that our tax money is used to keep politicians comfortable."

"And I must admit that during my tour last month I felt that the audience reacted in a much stronger way when I sang 'Povera Patria.' There are a lot of people who can't take it anymore. It's a



melancholy song, a kind of emotional reaction from someone who is an artist first and then a citizen."

For several years there has been talk in Italy about a music scene developing in Catania. We ask Battiato if he is familiar with it. "I'm the grandfather of those kids. When I was growing up, this artistic genre didn't exist in that area. It formed a little at a time. Today we have Denovo, Carmen Consoli, Luca Madonia, Mario Venuti... In some way they get together, they diversify. They belong to the same musical stock."

Battiato has had collaborated with many important musicians over the course of his career.

"I definitely had a more intense artistic relationship with Giuni Russo. Today Etta Scollo who lives in Germany and plays ethnic music is one of my closest friends, Carmen Consoli, Luca Madonia, Mario Venuti...."

What kind of concert are you hoping to do?

"It will be like my Italian concerts. I will mostly play music from the new album in November. I'll play compositions that are considered minor but that I think are much more interesting than the major ones."

At this point we pose a provocative question. Do you really make the kind of music that you would like to make?

"This is an interesting question because, in reality, as a musician I was born to do something else. I was destined for another genre, but someone put me in a place where I became a bridge between certain audiences and a certain kind of spirituality. And I got into the genre of light music. I could have made another type of music, experimental music, but that's enough said without adding anything more. That was my passion...."

Do you say that with any regret?

"No, in my opinion, they are the most beautiful things that I have accomplished in my career. I have created things like '[L'Egitto prima delle sabbie](#) [5]' or 'Sud Afternoon.' In reality I did what I wanted to do. "

Was there ever a compromise?

"The compromise is the gift of music that is completely different from light music. I'm talking about someone like me who is a means of communication and who is destined for different vantage points. I don't believe that everything is casual."

What inspires you to write music that is so different? What inspires you to write?

"It stems from the fact that I have dedicated myself to the research of being. I have studied why I am made the way I am, I have tried to improve my shortcomings and in some ways I have succeeded. This process of transformation has brought me more opportunities than someone who is lost in the mechanics of living. I've never had any problems. I am 64 years old, and since I began my career I've never had any problems with discipline or inspiration. I've never experienced any crises and I still feel fresh."

Would you say that you are an artist who has bridged the gap between seemingly elite music and music that is commercially viable?

"I come off as a difficult artist, but you tell me: How can someone who has sold millions and millions of records be difficult? How is it possible to say that I am one of the elite? We can say that, in a certain sense, it is a great achievement to pass as someone from the elite while selling so many records...."

Franco Battiato ft. Carmen Consoli.



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