

Happy Birthday Mina!

Maria Rita Latto (April 01, 2010)



Mina, the greatest Italian female singer, turns 70! Happy Birthday!

[Read the Italian Version](#) [2]

She's seventy and does not seem it at all! At least as far as her voice goes, since for some time her physical appearance has been cloaked in mystery, appearing only in sporadic photos stolen from the paparazzi or on album covers often modified by special effects. It's a game that seems to entertain Mina, the Italian music icon born Mina Anna Mazzini in Busto Arsizio on March 25 seventy years ago. But reading her biography, it's clear that Mina is more than just a singer; she comes through as an Italian woman struggling with love, children, and a society which seems to be evolving but always falls short at doing away with certain conventions and clichés.



Her career is truly her own in every respect with 150 million records sold and nearly a thousand recorded songs, including some of the most beloved in Italian music history and the distinction of being called “the greatest white singer alive” by Louis Armstrong.

Her career began in 1958 under the stage name Baby Gate, and she has sung in English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Turkish, Japanese, as well as in the Milanese, Neopolitan, Genovese, and Roman dialects.

What’s the secret to her success? Undoubtedly, it’s her versatility and her simply unique presence. It all started fifty years ago when Mina, provocatively stroking her fingers on her lips, left her mark with the song “Le Mille Bolle Blu.” Musically speaking, it was a little scandal but it was soon linked to a larger scandal in her private life, specifically her “forbidden” love for the actor Corrado Pani who was married to another woman. The relationship resulted in a child who was referred to as a “child of sin” by the Italian media at the time. That child, Massimiliano, is the singer’s primary musical collaborator today.

Mina’s choice was courageous in those days, and it sparked a media backlash fueled by hypocrisy and moral superiority. The singer was banned from [RAI](#) [3] for an entire year in 1963, a decision that was made in keeping with the editorial viewpoint of the state-run television network. Led by Ettore Bernabei, RAI was a stronghold of the Christian Democrat party and frequently resorted to censorship, especially of people who challenged Italian mores during the economic boom of the 1960’s.

Fortunately, only a fraction of the country agreed with the hard line decision and public opinion completely melted after seeing photos of the new mother in the hospital with baby Massimiliano in her arms, nicknamed “Paciughino.” As we all know, the word “mamma” in Italy is the key that unlocks the door to the public’s heart – and the public certainly didn’t agree with the ban, especially since it was imposed against such an unquestionable talent.

The Italian people’s affection brought the singer back to RAI and from there her career took off. Her legendary performances of “Studio Uno,” “Canzonissima,” “Teatro 10,” and “Milleluci” literally created a cult following and become an international symbol of quality television.

These variety shows made history on the small screen and are still a part of Italians’ collective memory, especially Mina’s timeless duets with Totò, [Lucio Battisti](#) [4], Alberto Sordi, and Paolo Panelli. Her last television appearance took place in 1975, her final concert in 1978, and she then retired, albeit only physically, from show business.

She started a new life outside Italy, in Switzerland, where it became increasingly difficult to photograph her. The only images, besides those taken by the paparazzi, were the ones released with each new album, usually depicting Mina in a recording studio before a microphone wearing her trademark dark glasses and enchanting her audience as always.

This retreat from the stage at the height of her career at only thirty-eight was interpreted by the media and fans in various ways, even as a way for her to create buzz and get publicity, but Mina has never worried much about giving explanations, always living life on her own terms regardless of public opinion. Roberto Benigni made a witty remark about her seclusion: “Now only Mina and Bin Laden send pre-recorded video messages when they want to say something.”

Fortunately, however, Mina’s retreat from the spotlight has not affected the quality of her music, which has always been exceptional, especially duets with other great Italian singers; “Questione di Feeling” with [Riccardo Cocciante](#) [5] and “Acqua e Sale” with [Adriano Celentano](#) [6] are the most famous that come to mind.

A few days ago, in fact, Celentano extended birthday wishes to his friend. It was in an interview that, truth be told, seemed to be a declaration of love in the truest sense of the word. In it he called Mina “a bomb that cannot be defused and explodes when you least expect it.”



Among her well-known admirers, we can't forget that [Federico Fellini](#) [7] wanted to cast her in a movie but she refused to be filmed and [Frank Sinatra](#) [8] tried to persuade her to perform in the United States. Even President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano recently confessed, "I was a huge fan of Mina's work years ago, she's a really great singer." [Liza Minnelli](#) [9] considers her Italian colleague to be "the greatest" and said, "If she did a concert, I'd go backstage and ask for her autograph."

In short, it's a milestone birthday that has gotten media coverage for days, on every channel and in every way imaginable. And so how did the birthday girl react? She did so in her own characteristically individual way, in the newspaper [La Stampa](#) [10] where she has a weekly column. "Have you ever tried to recover from your own autopsy?" began the singer, who apparently was trying to get over several days of unsolicited festivities.

Apparently Mina had had it with someone who was a self-appointed "pathologist," delighting in "quietly poking around the archeology of [her] psyche, [her] memory, [her] carnaccia sbranabile, contained within the whys and wherefores of [her] life. Devoted admirers, indomitable adversaries, and fearful objectors all reveled in their findings," continued Mina, "sure of possessing me as well as having me completely figured out."

The singer went on to challenge "the culture of getting into the affairs of others and condemning their choices" while confessing that she did not recognize many of the views expressed, especially the interpretations of her life given by people who she's never seen. "Over the past few days," Mina concluded, "I attended a performance of my life that was played over and over on a crazy videotape that made me dizzy beyond belief. I turned seventy, but yesterday I was sixty-nine. So what?"

The "Tiger from Cremona" still has sharp claws despite the passing years, and once again she has taught a lesson in class and style to a barbaric society attempting to appear objective while it obsesses over debates and long-winded celebrations seemingly from another planet. What else is there to add, except to express our humble best wishes while quoting your own words: You are great, great, great!

Translated by Giulia Prestia

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