

One World. Chatting with Claudio Baglioni

Letizia Airos & Maria Rita Latta (December 08, 2010)



One of the most beloved artists in Italian popular music history speaks with us from Rome about his tour which will come to New York with a much-anticipated concert at the Angel Orensanz Foundation. There will also be a talk with Baglioni at Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò on December 16.

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His voice comes on after a brief musical pause. The notes are those of “there is only one world and it’s only one world and we are only one world in flight for a century....”

Unmistakable, he apologizes for the slight delay. He greets me and dives into the conversation. He has a full, rich voice which almost makes the distance disappear. Like a close friend, he talks about his upcoming concert in New York, his worldwide tour, his return to Italy, emigration, and the world he saw abroad. “One World” is Claudio



Baglioni's first international tour after about twenty years. Let's begin by asking why. Why did he wait so long?

"I ask myself that, too. It's a shame. I stopped touring for a long time, or at least I have worked on more local projects. About twenty years ago I had a sort of identity crisis. One can decide to go, moving from one part of the world to another, but still fail to capture the different sensations that every single place offers. The world seemed the same to me in every city – no surprises, no particular emotion. So I said, better to cultivate a closer relationship with audiences nearby. And then finally the tour in 2010...so there's a bit of regret but there's also a reason related to having an identity crisis in both artistic and human terms.

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}p.MsoNormal, li.MsoNormal, div.MsoNormal { margin: 0in 0in 10pt; font-size: 12pt; font-family: "Times New Roman"; }span.longtext { }div.Section1 { page: Section1; } **And so this new tour came about. Why did you choose the name "One World?"**

I like to think that there can be only one world. The title is taken from a song chosen as a symbol of the world swimming championships that were held in Rome. I've written many anthems for sporting and music events. There's a verse that says, "There is only one world," which expresses this feeling of how close we are in this global world.

In "One World," there is also the concept of a musician as one world with one orchestra – the orchestra of humanity, of all the people who play the same symphony with their own instruments.

Five continents. So we can say that it's a trip that you took physically but also mentally. What inspired you after all this time?

The idea of going around the world to perform concerts in seventy-nine days – it's been quite a challenge. To tackle eighty days, that is, Jules Verne's famous trip around the world, and then beat that record. Let's say that these emotions became superimposed on the journey.

It was a very quick trip, and so at the end of it I'll need to review everything to go deeper. It revved me up a lot because the trip was so demanding. On the one hand it took a lot of stamina, but it also inspired me and my friends to go on new adventures.

On this tour you met ordinary people, but you also met representatives from institutions and international cultural initiatives. Did you feel a little like an ambassador with the mission of helping to share rather than divide the world?

I wanted to experience the trip both as a musician and as a world citizen; I wanted to delve deeper into the itinerary. Every place can give you an understanding and awareness that you did not have before, and so everywhere I went, I tried to meet with representatives, especially from Italian cultural institutes.

The role of ambassador is a great responsibility. More than anything, like any other traveler, I was motivated to share rather than divide. And I really experienced a great deal of satisfaction, sometimes even greater than a round of applause. On the whole, it was very positive – not so much as an ambassador but as someone who traveled and experienced many different situations.

What do you think about before a concert, just before going on stage?

It depends. There is never a concert that is exactly like another, and there is never a situation that is the same as another. Sometimes things happen and you cannot predict their magnitude and so the unexpected creates a bit of fear.



Let's say that there is a responsibility to be there. Whether it's a small place or a large stadium, there are always other people on the other side of the curtain.

You feel that someone has already given you his or her trust and love, and therefore you have the responsibility to respond to so much friendship, curiosity, respect. You must also be physically fit; a concert is like a sports competition – you have to be in top shape.

And I always feel this great privilege and honor every time I go onstage. I say, "It went really well. The heavens smiled down on me because I was given the opportunity to have a beautiful career – the honor of playing for the people."

It seems that the emotion you felt the first few times has hardly changed...

The thrill has remained the same. The attitude is a little different. Let's say that the general emotion now is no longer panic. It helps to focus, to be there at that place, to make every show as unique as possible. Never the same as before.

From the stage to the street. You've also organized special events, given away albums in airports, performed impromptu concerts, and played on public busses. Would you like to do something like that in New York?

I once dressed in drag as a sort of "macaroni Canadian," and I sang in the central gallery in Naples, opening my guitar case like a street musician. I pulled several like these. Once in a truck driving through the Roman suburbs....

I did it for the sake of the game. In a career like this, it's very important. Success is likely to go to your head, and it's not easy to manage.

After forty years it can also get repetitive. But it should be extremely varied, artistic, passionate work. And so levity is necessary, and that you don't take it too seriously.

And so in New York, where would you do it?

The subway is always possible. But it would be a less of a challenge because of the lack of popularity. In a country where you are not as recognizable, it doesn't work as well.

How did you choose your songs for the tour?

There's a basic repertoire that I change a little from country to country. For example, in South America there are songs that are part of the collective memory. The basic criterion is that of a concert anthology. It's like taking forty years of songs, music, words, arrangements and styles, the recognizable and popular tunes. All of this goes along with the possibility of inventing something at the last minute.

What do you think about the Italians abroad who you've met on this tour?

Sometimes one feels a strong sense of being Italian [italianità] more so outside of Italy. Italians abroad seem to be more Italian than those of us who live in Italy permanently. There is a huge community all over, in North and South America, in Australia, as well as in Europe.

There are several generations who often do not even speak Italian but have the same bond in spite of the language, which has receded a bit.

Next year we are celebrating 150 years since the unification of Italy. But in Italy there is a sense of alienation that is still very palpable.

And Italians abroad have been abandoned long ago. They didn't have the proper tools to better cultivate this bond. For example, they still don't get much of contemporary Italian culture, popular culture, cinema, theater, and popular music itself.



This is a shame for many reasons, and it's not just nostalgia. The affection for one's country of origin is forever repaid because the feeling remains very intense.

On the other hand, I've had many surprises like the concert in Tokyo with 85% of the Japanese audience singing my songs in Italian, as well as in the United States, Canada, and South America. There are so many Italians who do not speak Italian but who still know the words to my songs.

It's a pity to lose the language; it's not just a matter of communication, it's also a question of culture, lifestyle.

You like to quote the Seneca tribe: "The earth is only one country: we are waves of the same sea, leaves of the same tree, flowers of the same garden." Your sensitivity towards emigration has inspired you to become the promoter of "O' Scià," an initiative that could be defined as a music festival in the most simplistic terms. Can you tell our Italian-American readers about "O' Scià?"

It's hard to explain it even after eight festivals. It's a musical event that has social, political significance. Usually artists are accustomed to a "one shot" deal. This event began underground; I started it on a small beach on Lampedusa, the most southern island in Italy and probably in Europe, the closest to Africa. It began with the idea of getting involved to promote integration and interaction, to work together, and to get along together. And all this happened on Lampedusa because Lampedusa has become something of a geographic symbol of illegal immigration.

So I started calling many of my colleagues, not just singers, but also musicians, actors. They wanted to witness landing on the island, this joyous landing in which we declared a culture of peaceful coexistence and solidarity, of looking at the integration of cultures as enrichment.

The United States is a classic example where they have worked on integration albeit with many difficulties. It's not easy but it's an undertaking that can succeed in Europe with intelligence and patience.

And then there are places where many different cultures and ethnicities have become a treasure. And so we brought together more than three hundred artists from all over the world.

In dialect, "o'scià" means "my breath," breath like the wind, like something that tickles the heart, that inspires emotion.

I'm so proud of this event. I even brought it to the European Parliament with a debate, an international press conference. We also organized several special concerts on Malta and we plan to go to Africa in the next few years.

It's a non-stop music festival that takes place over five days and nights, a sort of Italian-style Woodstock Italian with music and spoken word on a crowded beach.

We artists are very lucky people, and so we put into practice the idea of a more peaceful world that looks confidently toward the future.

Music can break down barriers but your music has something special. It has succeeded in uniting different cultures but also the varied tastes of different generations. What's the secret?

This is a kind of miracle that I will never understand. I've always done this work thinking that it wasn't a job, so I continued as an amateur who had to learn more. But I have also tried to put everything I knew into it - the emotions I felt, attention to the details of every performance. I've tried to change the invitation every time, as if I were a travel agent who didn't want to bring people to the same place.



Every trip has to have a different destination, with a different idea for its structure. And my music has withstood the test of time. Indeed, I have seen it; sometimes there are four or five generations at one concert. Clearly, the younger ones may have been forced to go by their parents or older siblings.... But I think this is also due to the fact that I have not followed trends, and I have always done what I thought was best and what I could succeed in doing.

Another reason for my success is that I've worked with very diverse musicians, from different genres and from many countries around the world.

What advice would you give to a young Italian who wants to become a musician?

It's a difficult time, certainly because there is a crisis of creativity in general around the world. In the last twenty, thirty years things have happened that have revolutionized modern art and artistic discipline. Everything that happens now is a revised repeat of what has already happened in the last century.

But there are many talented performers in Italy even though there are fewer composers. Italian music, especially in South America, Spain, and Japan in the '70s had a strong influence. We were almost considered masters.

Giving advice today is not easy; there are so many avenues that it's not hard to get noticed but it's hard to have staying power. There is a sort of bulimia where a little bit of everything is consumed at top speed.

First, you must be very well prepared to do this job, very curious, a little courageous and not just do what works but sometimes defy public taste. You have to be as honest as possible – this is fundamental. When you begin a career like this, in the long run, something that is not true does not last.

Is there a premise for your creative process on this trip?

I hope so. I undertook it for that reason, as well.

In the last three or four years, while doing concerts I was working on a mammoth project, a work inspired by "This Little Big Love." I made a double album, I reworked the story, I wrote many unpublished songs, and I recorded fifty-two songs. It's a modern musical work in which I involved another seventy Italian artists such as Mina, Bocelli, Pausini, Jovanotti – the list is endless.

So I really needed a physical journey to find a creative stimulus. I think my trip will be significant, but I can't yet say how. On the 31st, I will finish this trip around the world in the city where I live, where I was born, in Rome on Via dei Fori Imperiali.

They're expecting nearly a half million people, so it will be a great end to this whole story. A return home, and then I'll disappear, literally, because I'm working on a new project. After a kind of lethargy in the '90s where I got a little contemplative, this is my healthy desire to accomplish something.

So the last leg of Baglioni's world tour will be in New York. I say good-bye to him after a long conversation that could have easily continued. The editors say that it's long, but they'll publish it in its entirety.

Claudio will perform in New York on December 17 at 8:00 p.m.

[ANGEL ORENSANZ FOUNDATION](#) [3]

(172 Norfolk Street, Manhattan)

December 16 at 6:00 p.m.

Claudio will be at [NYU's Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#). [4]

The discussion will be introduced and moderated by Letizia Airos, journalist (i-Italy), Mario Platero, journalist (Il Sole 24ore), and Tiziana Rinadi Castro (writer).



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