

Mauro Pagani. Back to US with Taranta

Benny Profane (June 27, 2013)



The multi-instrumentalist returns for concerts in New York and Boston. This time he's showcasing the tradition and flavor of the taranta. "I hope that Italians and the children of Italians will attend, those who have connections to the music's historical roots, but we also hope to attract a local audience." Mauro Pagani has been a steady presence at the Notte Della Taranta as its "Maestro Concertatore" from 2007 to 2009. Other than being a key figure in folk music, he was also a member of PFM, the historical progressive-rock band and first Italian group to achieve success abroad in both the British and American charts. He worked side by side with first-class singer-songwriters such as Fabrizio De Andrè (as its co-author, arranger, and artistic producer, winning two 'Album Of The Year' awards), Ornella Vanoni, Roberto Vecchioni and Gianna Nannini. Mauro Pagani & La Notte della Taranta Jul 15 - 16 7:30p Le Poisson Rouge New York, NY

Mauro Pagani returns for concerts in New York and Boston - and that's good news for all of his fans in the New York area. This time he's showcasing the tradition and flavor of the taranta. In recent months, Mauro has been busy working on the soundtrack for the new film by Gabriele Salvatores and

organizing the San Remo music festival.

He's taken time away (unfortunately, but let's not tell him that) from composing his new album and writing his new novel. We caught up with him at a bar in Brera, at sunset, while all around us young and old were consuming one alcoholic aperitivo after another (but judging from the snippets of conversations, there didn't seem to be any traces of that "Johnnie Walker wisdom running high" as sung by the exceptional Leonard Cohen).

So you're about to leave for New York after a stop in Japan. Can you tell us something about this experience?

It was really exciting. I have wonderful memories of the concerts I did there years ago with PFM. I remember that there was an almost devout level of attention. We hadn't been back since, and I found out that there had been a nearly frantic wait. It was very exciting and rewarding.

What can you tell us about this tour, playing the taranta throughout the United States?

We came here on the occasion of the Year of Italian Culture in America. It's an honor, in a sense, to be the most "Italian" musical element that's presented in that regard. There will be many good jazz musicians, but not many things that are typically Italian. Above all, we'll bring something of Italian pop culture and music, carefully revisited of course, but that's still part and parcel of traditional Italian music.

What do you expect the audience to be like at this concert? What does America know about the taranta?

In general, Americans know very little about the taranta. The official blessing as a "sophisticated" musical form came from the great ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax who did field research in the 50s and 60s, and later De Martino. So there is a whole popular tradition connected to tarantismo, familiar to specific groups of educated Americans, but this music is not widespread. We hope that Italians and the children of Italians will attend, those who have connections to the music's historical roots, but we also hope to attract a local audience. We're playing a festival in Boston so we hope that the music will be appreciated there as well.

You're the artistic director of the San Remo music festival, you created the soundtrack for Salvatores's latest film. That's a lot of projects, but we're still awaiting the arrival of your new album. Can you tell us a little bit about it?

Yes, I've been very busy with various projects but I've continued to work on the album. I'm headed to New York to finish recording. I hope to have it finished by the fall.

In recent years you've played with many talented avant-garde musicians in New York such as Anthony Coleman and Marco Cappelli. How have these experiences influenced your music? What impression did they make?

This journey and the experience of collaborating with them have been very valuable; it helped me a lot. I was able to determine the "state of the art," so to speak, to take stock of the way in which contemporary American musicians relate to their musical heritage, which is often awkward, especially in jazz. For us, the influence of jazz is an addition, an enrichment of our musical scene since it's not part of our traditional "baggage." For them it's different.

On the one hand, it's very refined music, but on the other hand it enters predominantly as musical texture, and it runs the risk of being cumbersome. Sometimes you hear a classic jazz theme or refrain and you may not even know where it comes from. In the end it's not important, and at that point swing and improvisation begin, and it runs the risk of covering up the rest. And so contemporary American artists, I noticed, sometimes try to free themselves from this legacy.



The meeting point for Americans and Europeans are the European avant-garde musicians of the 20th century, and these are the major points of common interest. The New York avant-garde tries to discover “other” languages with respect to classic jazz themes, with interest in musical languages from South America and Asia, for example. For me it was very beneficial to work with American artists.

You’re also working on a new book. At what point are you?

The new book has suffered since I’ve had an intense period of work over the last year. I’ve already completed 70 pages of plot. In reality it’s already all in there, but I have to massage it into narrative form, to render it as I have it in my head. I hope I can work on it and finish it soon so it doesn’t become 120 pages of plot. (He laughs.)

Mauro Pagani & La Notte della Taranta

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