



New York: Jovanotti's Dream Comes True

Marina Melchionda (March 01, 2009)

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Two concerts and two public debates: Jovanotti had a full calendar for his American debut tour. Actually it took place in one single city, the place that induced him to become a singer, the streets that saw him wondering with no direction but still feeling at home, the stages that saw many of his favorite singers perform for a public he had never known but always felt part of. This city is New York, his own "ombelico del mondo" (the world's bellybutton), from which "all energies origin, where rules which do not exist give room to exceptions".

Throughout his more than 20 year career, Jovanotti travelled all around the world to write and record his songs and produce his videos. This gave him the opportunity to meet people of all ethnicities and cultures that contributed in both direct and indirect ways to the enrichment of his sounds and music. His mixture of melody, hip-hop and funky made (and still makes) of him the first and only representative of the genre in Italy. His recent visit to New York is thus a sort of return to the origins, to the homeland of hip-hop, a dream come true for him (as he confessed us). However, he still remains a "Mediterranean singer", as he defines himself. His public is mainly Italian, but his recent exhibitions and public appearances in New York promise to become a launching pad for a new career in the United States.

Lorenzo Cherubini Jovanotti @ Casa Itiana Zerilli Marimò (NYU) with Stefano Albertini and Antonio Monda (February 20, 2009)

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Jovanotti, as mentioned before, gave two concerts in the City, the first at the Highline Ballroom (Feb.18) and the second at the Poisson Rouge (Feb.19). Actually, the second date was added after the first one sold out quickly, which is already something exceptional for an Italian singer playing abroad!

The two exhibitions had two peculiar characteristics that make of this singer a true exception in the contemporary music panorama. The first consists in the fact that the public was made up of people of all ages and visibly different social classes: grandparents and grandchildren, young professionals, parents, couples and teenagers were all singing along by heart. Thus, although the great majority of the public was Italian or Italian American, Lorenzo demonstrated to be able to cross generational borders, embracing in his rhythms a completely heterogeneous public in terms of music tastes: a fundamental premise to reach the goal of popularity in the USA.

The second peculiarity lies on the musical choices he made for the two exhibitions. Although he played the same songs, the arrangements were completely different. At the Highline Ballroom he seemed to be wanting a more harmonious, "classical" sound for most of the pop songs: the atmosphere became almost muffled when songs such as 'Mi fido di te' and 'A te' involved the whole audience in a soft, collective whisper. The venue was ideal for an evening with friends: most of the people were sitting at tables where they could also enjoy a fast dinner and quietly chat while waiting for the concert to start.

Among them, the director of the Italian Cultural Institute Renato Miracco, the son of the late Italian writer Tiziano Terzani, Folco, and also Joe Sciorra, one of the most preeminent experts of Italian-American hip-hop in the United States.

The repertory spaced from some of his first songs such as "Penso Positivo" (I think Positive), Ragazzo Fortunato (Lucky Guy) and Gente della Notte (Night People) to the most recent ones from his latest album "Safari", passing through great successes like "Tanto(3)" (A lot), "Una tribu' che balla" (A Dancing Tribe) and "Una storia d'amore" (A Love Story).

The second evening was somewhat different. As I said, it might have depended on the very different kind of venue: more a disco than a pub, more a dancing floor than an eatery. Dancing was almost mandatory and Jovanotti knew it: two hours of concert spaced out by duets with his musicians and pictures with the public, two hours in which he alternatively transformed himself into a DJ, an entertainer and a showman.

Among the teenagers who were there for him that evening, was Danilo Gallinari, the famous Italian basketball player who was recently signed up by the Knicks. He is a fan of his from his early childhood: when he was just four, he attended one of Jovanotti's concerts sitting on his father's shoulders. That evening the tribute was reciprocal: Lorenzo wore Danilo's playing shirt while singing "L'Ombelico del Mondo", his greatest hit ever.

Several moments of both concerts deserve to be mentioned. However, maybe the greatest one occurred when, on the notes of "Una tribu' che balla", Jovanotti pointed to a good quarter of the public standing near the stage telling to each one "You are unique in the world". It really made them feel as they were each custodians of an untouchable secret.

The two concerts, in any case, were not the only occasions Jovanotti had to communicate with his public. On February 19, a meeting at the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [1] preceded the second performance. Director Renato Miracco introduced him as the symbol of "positive life philosophy".

The Consul General of Italy in New York Francesco Maria Talo' sat in the front row with Consul Giovanni Favilli, basketball player Danilo Gallinari and actress [Pamela Villoresi](#) [2], who was also in New York to organize and participate in the [Divinamente New York Festival](#) [3].



Jovanotti, interviewed by journalist Piero Negri, talked about his relationship with the city of New York. His first "encounter" with the city goes back to his early childhood, when his father showed him shots he took in the city after a one-month sojourn.

The United States became for him a sort of mythology, a personal dream to reach. When he was just a teenager he fell in love with rap music -New York's genre par excellence - and decided to become a DJ and then a song-writer and singer, a job that in a few years would open him the gates of the largest Italian stadiums and arenas. Although his success came quickly and was considerable, he never forgot his first source of inspiration: New York, "the reason why I chose this path, or this path chose me... I really don't know".

The following day, [Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimo' at New York University](#) [4] hosted his last public appearance. Director Stefano Albertini and Italian Cinema Professor Antonio Monda introduced him to the audience, which was mostly composed by American students who study Italian language and culture. Lorenzo was open to all sorts of questions, ranging from his relationship with Italian and International music and cinema to his projects for the future. We definitely discovered the "normal man" behind the singer, the one who likes movies such as "Saturday Night Fever" and Fellini's "Amarcord"; the one that loves spending afternoons reading in cafeterias or libraries in continuous search of answers.

Finally, he revealed two important projects for the upcoming future to us. The first one concerns the restoration of an ancient castle in his hometown, Cortona, Tuscany. It will become a sort of laboratory for debuting actors where they will find a temporary place to live, write and play. It will also host an orchestra composed of more than 60 children and teenagers that will play a contemporary Opera about Mozart's life, of which Lorenzo himself wrote the libretto: "I feel like an old-time craftsman that opens a boutique to teach young fellows the secrets and 'tricks of the trade'. In my case, however, I see my workshop as a continuous exchange of experiences and thoughts. I think young artists can teach me a lot".

The second one regards the American public much more closely: Jovanotti will most probably come back to New York this coming summer. He will remain here for a couple of months and perform at least once a week in a small and "cozy" venue in Manhattan.

Just can't wait.

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[1] <http://www.iicnewyork.esteri.it>



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