

Interview published on Blogfoolk Magazine n. 352 of 05/04/2018

http://www.blogfoolk.com/2018/04/marco-beasley-antonello-paliotti-catari.html?utm_source=BlogfoolkMailingList&utm_campaign=cf1d0b217a-Blogfoolk_Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3ae60e669d-cf1d0b217a-174925201&m=1

Marco Beasley and Antonello Paliotti – ‘Catari, Maggio, l’Ammore...’ (private production 2017)

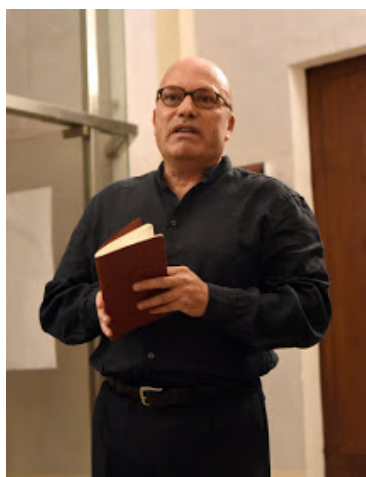
Salvatore Esposito



A year after the publication of ‘Le Strade del Cuore’, Marco Beasley returns with ‘Catari, Maggio, l’Ammore...’, a splendid album dedicated to the Neapolitan song, result of a collaboration with the refined guitar player and composer Antonello Paliotti. High-culture music and popular songs intertwine in a highly evocative musical journey, an acoustic enchantment of great imaginative force, in which voice and guitar elegantly dialogue, revealing to us the charms and poetry that have over the years inspired many Neapolitan poets and musicians. We have interviewed the Neapolitan tenor, actor and musicologist, to have him tell us in his own words about the genesis of this new work, dwelling on the choice of songs and the arrangements that characterize them.

Since a couple of years, your successful artistic collaboration with *Accordone* has ended. How would you make up the balance of this important part of your career?

Accordone came into existence as a trio consisting of Guido Morini, Stefano Rocco and me. All three of us were in Bologna, the seat of the magnificent Conservatory Library that preserves manuscripts and old prints of the compositions of a repertoire that for us became a key point of reference. The artistic experiences that I have had from that moment onwards can without doubt be traced back to the approach to music of our trio, an approach that, in its own small way, has opened up a mode of interpretation of which I can say without false modesty that it is imitated by some even today, for better or for worse.



In the interview we held about 'Solve et coagula' you told us the collaboration with *Accordone* came to and end not out of tiredness, but in a phase of creativity. Which projects have you put out in these years as a soloist, and what are you working on now?

Newly emerging interests and explorations have presented themselves in these years, in which I am inevitably approaching the end of a happy career. These projects, that on the one hand regard the old and never abandoned love of the renaissance repertoire of the 'cantare al liuto', and on the other hand the close contact with the music from the city where I was born, Naples, are giving me great satisfaction. Both of these aspects are taking shape now, or have already been executed in concerts.

How did the collaboration with Antonello Paliotti come about?

It started with the felicitous proposal of a dear common friend, the cellist Leonardo Massa; first for a program of compositions of the same Paliotti that focused on the repertoire of songs published by the Cottrau family, musical editors that established themselves in Naples in the early nineteenth century and published a big part of the repertoire of the Neapolitan song. The program, with which we toured in Europe during various months, was called *Le forme di Dionisio*, or 'The shapes of Dionysius'. I am very happy to have made the acquaintance of a person like Antonello, from our encounter a good friendship has grown.

With *Accordone* you have made several CDs dedicated to Naples: you have explored the seventeenth century cantata in 'Il settecento Napoletano', the traditional songs in 'Storie di Napoli', and then you told the story of the Prince of Sansevero in 'Solve et Coagula'. Where does the need to make a CD for only voice and guitar like 'Catari, Maggio, L'Ammore' come from?

For several years already I felt the desire to do a concert for voice and guitar, I wanted to sing those Neapolitan songs loved by many all over the world, that however in my opinion are often executed in a manner that follows the stereotype of an exaggerated virtuosity, that favours the vanity of the singer more than the beauty of the music itself. 'Catari, Maggio, l'Ammore' is the title I wanted to give to this homage to the city of Naples, and it contains very clear elements of identification with the city itself: Caterina, a name found very often in Naples, and used many times in the poetry chosen by the composers; May, the month of love, the fragrant explosion of Spring that brings along the perfumes of a lush and happy nature. Love, a subject about which any discussion is superfluous... All of this united with the mastery of Antonello, with the competence and sensitivity with which he expresses, through his guitar, a wide palette of colours and feelings. Not in the last place, the fact that we both come from the city itself has facilitated every kind of communication between us.



How did you select the pieces you wanted to sing?

The choice has not been easy, given the existence of such an endless repertoire of Neapolitan songs. At the beginning of the project, there were many more songs that were eligible for inclusion, and therefore the choice has fallen on those that for me most represented the story I wanted to tell: that of man, and his 'self' as a lover. Very human, never only ridiculous, instantly recognizable – and not only with the face of a pulcinella or a comedy act. Certainly, the comical moment is there, in songs such as 'M'aggia curà or 'È pazzo chi se 'nzora', that however are paired with more reserved and meditative moments in for example 'Munasterio 'e Santa Chiara' or 'Catari', and eventually arrive at the melancholy sufferings of love in all its chords, in 'Cara Lucia', or the short masterpiece by Pino Daniele, 'Terra mia'.

How was the work organized in the arranging phase?

Antonello intervened in more than one piece with an arrangement for only guitar that respected tradition and the intention of the song itself, but with harmonious moments that are both innovative and still clearly recognizable at the same time. This is the case in 'Te voglio bene assaje', for example, where at some points the guitar stops being 'accompaniment', in order to assume the role of direct interlocutor of the voice. And in the two beautiful instrumental pieces, the 'Villanella a ballo' and the 'Variazioni sul basso di tarantella', the last in particular, we hear the guitar become a snare drum for an instant, and all of this is obtained not by means of technical artifice but only by the technique of the player.



Compared to the other CDs dedicated to Naples, how has your approach towards vocal technique changed, and which aspects of your voice have you chosen to put in the spotlight with this CD?

Actually, I don't think I have changed that much. I always seek to adapt the sound of my voice to the instrument that sings with me, be it a lute, a harpsichord, or a guitar as in this case. There has been some attention for finding a style, but I have mostly favoured the text above all other things. For me it is absolutely necessary that the story you tell in music can be understood fully and without any effort by the listener. In order to make this encounter of emotions come about, we must take great care to deepen our understanding of that which we wish to narrate, and dose the voice with the right pauses, the right emotional intensity. The stories expressed in those poems are too beautiful to be subjugated to an excessively theatrical voice, for me it would be a mistake to accentuate the powerful expressivity that lies within the DNA of the song itself with vocal artificialities.

The most surprising thing about this album is its very immediate listening experience. How important is it to speak to a larger public?

Personally I don't think my singing is addressed to a niche audience, although I realize that ancient music is considered to be a genre that belongs to that category. CDs are like messages in a bottle, once they are thrown into the sea of listening, they more or less by themselves find a destination or shipwreck. I often receive feedback from unexpected places and people, that have appreciated the music and its execution, that was brought to them by these small vessels.



How does the encounter between your voice and the guitar of Antonello Paliotti fit into your artistic journey?

For some time now I prefer to work with few musicians, to comply with a need of intimacy that after much grandeur makes me feel at home. Antonello is one of those precious musicians, I hope there will be other projects together. Let's see what the future holds for us.

The CD is produced in a limited and numbered edition, the packaging made by hand. Why this peculiar choice?

The market of musical reproduction on physical carriers, the CD in particular, has been in free-fall for some time now, and the ever more struggling record companies need easy and light products that often have the life span of a meteor... This is the third title that I've produced myself, effectively the CDs for now cannot be found on the market, but are sold exclusively at the concerts. But the next step, that of selling online, is imminent. Almost every day I receive requests of people who would like to obtain a copy of the CD and I don't like to deny this possibility to the listeners. Of 'Catari, Maggio, L'Ammore' I have made only 399 copies, a first edition of 99 and then 300 copies as a first reprint. Every CD is numbered by hand: I wanted to do this as a sign of attention for the listeners, so that they have in their hands something that they know to be artisanal, every copy is unique.



In the recital with which you are presenting this CD live, songs are alternated with some readings. How did this concept come about?

The concert, like the CD that carries the same name, does not deviate from the formula, dear to me, of a concert with tales – a formula that I would very much wish to call Theatre of Song, reminiscent of Giorgio Gaber. I have used it often over the years, and I am much attached to it because it creates another moment of contact with the listener, introducing him or her to the piece as if we were in an informal conversation. Actually, on the CD the readings are limited to one only, the 'Lettera Ammiosa' (Love Letter) by Salvatore di Giacomo, a beautiful poem, a small love story that develops against the sound tapestry of the guitar. During the concert I do not so much include readings as tell small anecdotes connected to the songs, or give small presentations of the

songs themselves, like in the case of “O surdato innamorato” (The soldier in love) a famous song connected to the First World War, presented by us like a love letter from the front.

Can you tell us something about your future projects?

In this very period I am realising the CD registration of a project that is called “Le Due Radici”, “The two roots”. A composite program, that has music of Purcell go side by side with that of Nick Drake, and places music by Ivan Fossati in an imagined dialogue with the music of Claudio Monteverdi or Tarquinio Merula. Devoid of scandal or false contamination, this programme tells the autobiographical story of the journey of listening that has made me the person and the singer that I am now, from the early beginning around the end of the seventies until today. Two roots, the Italian and the English one. But in a wider sense, also the two people that we are, Stefano Rocco and I, first of all friends, before being musicians. I am very thankful to Stefano for having agreed to participate in this project in which he plays the tiorba, baroque guitar and archlute with great mastery and tranquillity. ‘Le Due Radici’ will come out on CD and vinyl, something that seems right to me because of the chronology of the music and the recent revival of vinyl, fortunately never fully assigned to oblivion. Last but not least, a final project will follow, dedicated to the ‘canzone villanesca alla napolitana’, a repertoire from the early 16th century that can be considered the archetype of the Neapolitan song. This will be the last of the five CDs, of which the first title is “Il Racconto di Mezzanotte” (MB001) published in 2013, followed by “Le Strade del Cuore” (MB002) in 2016 and “Catari, Maggio, l’Ammore” (MB003) in 2017, continuing with “Le Due Radici” and “Villanesche”. But about those last two I hope to speak in the not so distant future.



Marco Beasley and Antonello Paliotti – ‘Catari, Maggio, l’Ammore...’ – 2017, private production

The royal park of Portici, surmounted by the Vesuvius, the houses of Sorrento and then the sea, enveloped in the embrace of the Gulf of Naples. This landscape, unique in its extraordinary beauty, cannot be separated from the many songs that this city has inspired, songs that express profound feelings that are often difficult to communicate in words, but find their most perfect expression by way of song.

Salvatore di Giacomo, Libero Bovio, Eduardo de Filippo, Totò, and musicians like Ernesto de Curtis and E.A. Mario have ‘used their passion and their artistic talent to make the moods of love more real, to keep alive the sounds and dreams of a city, and to remind us (and themselves) that, wherever we are, we have to live,’ writes Marco Beasley in the liner notes that introduce ‘Catari, Maggio, l’Ammore’, a new album realized in a limited edition of only 399 copies in cardboard case made by hand, born from the collaboration with Antonello Paliotti - one of the most appreciated guitar players of the Neapolitan musical scene – and dedicated to the Neapolitan song.

Recorded at studio Apollo in Genova between May and June 2017, the album contains nineteen pieces that as a whole accompany us to the discovery of some unforgettable pages of music that came to blossom in Naples: from traditional songs to the great classics, arriving even at the songbook of Pino Daniele, the whole made even more precious by the arrangements of Paliotti and the rare intensity of the tenor voice of Marco Beasley. When we listen to these songs, we are given the gift of a highly evocative musical experience, during which we rediscover all the charm of the original melodic structure of pieces like the opening song ‘Te voglio bbene assaje’, ‘Reginella’, ‘Dduje paravise’ e ‘Catari’, or the heart-breaking poetry that shines in ‘Santa Lucia’ and ‘Fenesta vasca’.

Not missing are two small instrumental gems authored by Antonello Paliotti like the ‘Variazioni sul basso di tarantella’, and ‘Nonna nonna’, or some delicious forays into the comical song in ‘È pazzo chi se nzora’ and ‘M’aggia curà’. The album reaches its highest point however with the superb versions of ‘Munasterio ‘e Santa Chiara’, ‘O Surdato ‘nnamorato’ and ‘Cara Lucia’, that lead us to the finale where ‘Malafemmena’ written by Totò and the ‘Villanella a ballo’ from *La gatta cenerentola* by Roberto di Simone stand out. ‘Terra mia’ by Pino Daniele concludes an album of great merit, an act of love for Naples and its music, in which voice and guitar find each other in a passionate embrace, such as this city reserves for those who manage to capture her immortal beauty. And so we can only wish that this CD can reach as large a public as possible through a wider distribution, because this is the kind of work of which music feels a need.

Translation: Marjolein Van Zuylen



Click here to listen to two songs:

'O surdato 'nnamurato - Marco Beasley & Antonello Paliotti

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ix34gXE7F8

M'aggia curà - Marco Beasley & Antonello Paliotti

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0pWqf75Pvg>