

Cradled by the Music of Francesco De Gregori

Letizia Airos (November 08, 2017)



The prince of singer-songwriters and his concert at The Town Hall in New York. Slender and refined, he graced the audience with moments of great depth and intensity. An encore and at the end, De Gregori, together with his wife Alessandra Gobbi, sang the audience a special Neapolitan song.

[ARTICOLO IN ITALIANO >>](#) [2]

This time I was among the many. In the back row gazing across the whole room. Around me was an audience comprised of people of all ages, but there were certainly many who were born in the 60s and 70s. Everyone knew that they were participating in a historic concert for Italian music—Francesco



De Gregori's first in New York. It's a concert that has been much awaited and that has arrived later than it should have, in my opinion.

Anyway, there I was, among the people. Just like the first time when I went to see him with my father. I was a girl and too young to go on my own. There was also that time in Pescara when I went to the very memorable "Banana Republic" concert. That time I went with a boy with whom I shared a kiss while Lucio Dalla and Francesco De Gregori were singing.

Why am I sharing all these personal details? Because before saying that, in my opinion, Francesco De Gregori's concert at The Town Hall was one of the best concerts that I've ever seen given by an Italian artist here in New York, I want to be honest and say that I'm perhaps not impartial.

This was a special concert for me. A bit of a flash back. For my job, I've interviewed many Italian artists who have come here to New York. I've seen them up close, and I've even become friends with some of them, such as Pino Daniele, Fiorella Mannoia, Claudio Baglioni, Vinicio Capossela, Zucchero, and many others.

This time, thanks to a series of certain circumstances, I went to the concert simply as a spectator and not as a journalist. One of my partners had interviewed Francesco De Gregori prior to the show. I didn't have a reserved seat. I was among the people. Just like years ago.

It was so beautiful to relive certain feelings. Feeling his music from a distance, seeing him from a distance, and then hearing him up close through the magic of his songs. It brought me back to almost 40 years ago.

He sang a lot with extreme generosity. He sang Bob Dylan and some recent songs but also his classic repertoire: "Buona Notte Fiorellino," "La Donna Cannone," "Rimmel," "Viva l'Italia"...

His words in music. A simplicity that is refined and, at times, disarming. Listening to De Gregori live again after so many years, it floors you. His far away long-limbed figure at first glance didn't seem to resemble him. Then you see him walk, raise his arms, tune his guitar, pick up the harmonica. You recognize his motions, and it leads you to his unmistakable voice.

Are there lyrics today that are just as poetic and musical? You ask yourself this while his words are flowing, and you're accompanied by memories that, thanks to his sound, feel just like fairy tales.

"I'm going to sing you sad songs," began De Gregori, referring to certain lyrics. But the sadness arrived later when he left for good. The public cheered for him, yelling "Francesco, Francesco." Francesco gave his encore and, together with his wife Alessandra Gobbi, closed with a Neapolitan song, "Anema e Core," a gem with the affection of their story lasting a lifetime.

The stage lights dimmed. Many members of the audience had dreams in their eyes, which were cradled by his unmistakable music. Outside, the incessant rain pounded the streets of Manhattan. Far away in the fog stood the Empire State Building. But there was a great desire to sing, even among friends, and perhaps even to play a guitar or harmonica.

From a long-time admirer and journalist, thank you, Francesco, for having cradled us with such a special concert here in New York.

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