

LUCCA

Lucca & the Summer Festival: an exceptional stage for the most prestigious stars of the international music scene

“In Lucca something magical, incredible, beautiful and impossible has happened: the history of the world's music has passed through this city, on the stage of the Summer Festival”. This is what Mimmo D’Alessandro, creator and artistic director of one of the most appreciated events on a European level, says about his Summer Festival..

Lucia Maffei

Born in 1988 at the BussolaDomani nightclub, on the Versilia coastline, with the precise intent of making quality music, it arrived in Lucca ten years later, in 1998, thanks to a casual meeting that meant and still means so much for the city of Lucca, between D’Alessandro and the President of the Province of Lucca at the time, Andrea Tagliasacchi.

And so, on the night of July 6th, 1998 American singer/songwriter Bob Dylan got on the stage in Piazza Napoleone and for over two hours, enchanted 5000 people with his voice and his guitar. That night marked the official beginning of the Summer Festival, and it immediately carved out a place for itself as an internationally important event. That same month, concerts by Joe Cocker, Tito Puente and George Benson followed. And since that first summer, each year the magic repeats itself. It is not by chance that the following year's Festival opened its doors on July 2nd to 7000 people who came to listen to Elton John.

“I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW LUCCA,” says Mimmo D’Alessandro. “Back then, Piazza Napoleone, where the concerts are held today, was still a parking lot and the month of July was strangely a very low-season period.”

Then came the collaboration with the Province of Lucca and the Municipality of Lucca, and from that moment on, the Summer Festival has become an element of great importance in the promotion of the city, which since then has been discovered not only by the greatest artists on a worldwide level, but also by a great many tourists who today, in July, choose this city for the music and for its beauty. The thousands of fans for whom the Summer Festival has become a fixed appointment span in age from 18 to 70.

EACH YEAR, FROM 60,000 TO 80,000 SPECTATORS COME TO LUCCA FROM ALL OVER ITALY AND FROM ABROAD. A demanding, attentive, cultured, competent audience that loves good music and appreciates not only the Festival's high quality but also the splendid cadre offered by the city's piazzas and historic center.

To answer the demands of such an audience, stars the likes of David Bowie, Pat Metheny, James Taylor, Alanis Morissette, The Cranberries, Ray Charles, the Eagles, Jamiroquai, Toto, Roger Waters, Eric Clapton, James Brown, Burt Bacharach, Santana, Leonard Cohen have come to town: a list of music's greatest names, the top the world has to offer and that D’Alessandro has brought to Lucca in the course of the Festival's 14 editions.

“THINGS HAVE HAPPENED THAT I NEVER WOULD HAVE IMAGINED,” continues D’Alessandro. “The history of music has passed through here. And this happened because a unique magic was created between the city and the Festival. I never thought to be able to listen to James Taylor and Sting improvising together on the same stage in Piazza Anfiteatro.

It went like this: at the end of his performance, Taylor saw his friend Sting applauding him from the audience and called to him to come on stage. That night, they gave life to an absolutely unique performance by singing together ‘Knock on wood’, Eddie Floyd's classic, and sending the audience in veritable delirium in a completely sold-out piazza.

I'll never forget the duet between Giorgia, the Italian singer from Rome, and Ray Charles in a wonderful and touching rendition of ‘Georgia on my mind’, his greatest hit. But maybe the most incredible appointment - that's if a classifi-

cation were indeed possible -- is July 14th, 2001 and the Eagles' concert. The historical country-rock band that had dominated the music scene in the 1970s chose Lucca's Summer Festival as their only Italian concert date. Over 12,000 fans filled the walled city to sing together the legendary 'Hotel California'. It was a grand event".

A magic that is repeated every year in two of the city's piazzas: Piazza Napoleone with its tree-lined frame and its Parisian air, and Piazza San Martino, with its ancient and splendid cathedral. Places where the music of the greatest names in Italian show business and music, too, have resounded: Ennio Morricone, Roberto Benigni, Renato Zero, Patty Pravo, Pino Daniele, Riccardo Cocciante, Giorgia, Eros Ramazzotti, Elisa, Biagio Antonacci, Fiorello. And in the Festival's calendar, there is always a famous name called in just for the younger generation. In the course of the years, Massive Attack, Placebo, Ricky Martin, Chicago, Pink and Moby have sent the piazza into rapture through their exhibitions.

"At the beginning, it was very difficult to convince the big names like Bob Dylan, for example," admits D'Alessandro. "No one knew Lucca. Today, everybody knows it. Word has spread about this beautiful city and everyone loves to come here. They are struck by extraordinariness of its historic center that has remained practically intact over the years, and by its atmosphere. And today, above all foreign artists but also Italian ones choose Lucca over Rome for their concerts".

AND THIS YEAR, WHAT IS IN STORE FOR OUR EMOTIONS? "Three great events whose tickets are on pre-sale already, and just as many music giants," announces D'Alessandro. "On July 9th, Arcade Fire, an incredible Canadian group, beloved by the young generation and this, for the time being, is their only Italian tour date. On July 14th, Elton John returns, acclaimed as always, and on the 15th, Joe Coker and B.B. King together in an exceptional duet". Really, no presentations are needed. •

For information and reservations: www.dalessandroegalli.com or www.summer-festival.com