

Paolo Fresu, Daniele di Bonaventura e Leila Shirvani
Jazzy Xmas



JAZZY XMAS

Paolo Fresu: trumpet, flugelhorn, effects
Daniele di Bonaventura: bandoneon, effects
Leila Shirvani: cello

In December 2012, I was asked to perform a concert for the city of Sassari at Christmas time.

The original idea was to supplement the usual repertoire with some Christmas-related pieces, but the idea of performing the whole thing on this theme immediately took over.

For a few years, in fact, I had loved to play some Christmas tunes with my group to coincide with the Advent season.

This time we chose a different path, combining some perhaps more traditionally known pieces with Christmas melodies that are certainly less famous but of extraordinary interest. Many of these are almost entirely part of the well-known repertoire of the 'Cantones de Nadale', which Berchiddese parish priest and scholar Pietro Casu wrote together with Canon Agostino Sanna of Ozieri in December 1927, and which have been performed throughout Sardinia ever since.

Ho ancora nelle orecchie le melodie celestiali di "Notte de chelu" e "In sa notte profundha" cantate dal coro di Berchidda e da tutti i fedeli la notte di Missa 'e puddhos.



It often snowed outside, and in the houses the fireplaces were lit in anticipation of Christmas dinner and presents. The little lambs with the red ribbon, given by the shepherds to the children, bleated in the houses and waited for the faithful to return after the mass that we altar boys had the honour of serving on that special night.

The voices of Frank Sinatra, Mel Tormé and Bing Crosby came later, with television, and they embodied in the common imagination the American dream, Walt Disney's cartoons and the big trees decorated and surrounded by glittering parcels but often also by poor but intensely flavoured gifts like those offered by the earth.

Two different and distant worlds united by beautiful songs.

Popular are those of Pietro Casu but equally popular those of 'White Christmas', 'Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas' or 'The Christmas Song'.

But there is also a third and a fourth way to the endless Christmas repertoire.

These are those songs that tell of reindeer setting out from the northern moors to bring presents to children, and of joys experienced with those we love.

Those that the comet brings with it all over the world and which are recounted here in 'Till Bethlehem' and 'Joy To The World'.

Everyone's Christmas is different, but the sense of happiness and sharing that belongs to people on all continents is the same.

JAZZY CHRISTMAS is, in short, our way of putting together unforgettable feelings and memories in music.

We have decided to experience the project in a more intimate way in the form of a trio with Daniele di Bonaventura and the extraordinary beauty of the angelic sound of Leila Shirvani's cello, winner more than 30 times in national and international competitions, historic collaborator of Giovanni Sollima and Enrico Melozzi and already on a few occasions alongside me as well as the protagonist of some of my label's recording projects including the successful 'Lumina'.

Paolo Fresu

Some excerpts from the program:

“White Christmas”

It is a famous song written by Irving Berlin whose lyrics were inspired by White Christmases. Countless versions of it have been performed, many of them in Italian with the title Bianco Natale.

The morning after writing the melody, Berlin ran to the office and said to his secretary: <Take out your pen and take notes on this song. I've just written my best song; hell, I've just written the best song anyone has ever written!>.

The most famous recording is undoubtedly Bing Crosby's, recorded in 1942.

Crosby was summoned to the Decca Records studios on 18 March 1947 to re-record it, as the original recording had been damaged by frequent use. Every effort was made to make it identical to its predecessor, again summoning the Trotter Orchestra and the Darby Singers. This version became one of the best-selling songs in the history of recording.

“I'll Be Home For Christmas”

It is a melancholic American Christmas song, written in 1943 by Buck Ram, Kim Gannon and Walter Kent. It was recorded that same year by Bing Crosby together with the John Scott



Trotter Orchestra for Decca Records. It was a great success among US citizens and soldiers at the height of World War II, as the title means 'I'll be home for Christmas'.

Later, it became almost a traditional, also recorded by Perry Como and Frank Sinatra and later by numerous other singers.

The song is about a person far away from his loved ones who wishes to return home for Christmas Day and communicates this in an epistolary style. A letter in which he invites his family to maintain - despite their sorrow for his distance - Christmas traditions.

“In sa notte profundha”

It is one of the pieces written by Canon Agostino Sanna (musical part) and Babbai Pedru Casu from Berchidda (text).

Sanna was first organist at Ozieri Cathedral and then director of the 'Schola Cantorum' in Sassari, before coming to Berchidda as vice-parish priest from 1927 to 1930.

It was during these years that he worked on the music for the Cantones De Nadale, adapting some Sardinian melodies then in use.

Pietro Casu composes the lyrics and from this encounter the most beautiful and poignant Christmas melodies performed throughout Sardinia today are born.

They are simple compositions that can also be sung by children.

In Sa Notte Profundha, the sounds of nature stand out: a nightingale sings in the deep night and a calm river tells of mysterious merriment.

“Joy To The World”

It was composed in 1719 by the English writer Isaac Watts who re-adapted a Psalm dedicated to King David.

The melody is based on the Messiah by the German composer Georg Friedrich Händel, later arranged in 1836 by Lowell Mason.

“Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas”

It is a song written in 1943 by Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane and first recorded by Judy Garland, who performed it the following year in the film Meet Me in Saint-Louis.

The song was also recorded by Frank Sinatra in a slightly modified version that became more popular than its predecessor.

In the film in question, it is sung in a scene in which the main family, living in Saint-Louis, is devastated by the imminent departure of the head of the family for work reasons: the character played by Judy Garland sings it on Christmas Eve to hearten her distraught little sister.

“The Christmas Song”

Mel Tormé, endowed with an elegant voice with a velvety timbre, was one of the greatest jazz singers of the last century and composed this classic holiday song with Bob Wells.

The song is also known as Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire.

“Notte de chelu”

Another song written in four hands by Agostino Sanna and Pietro Casu, which tells of a celestial night and of man's happiness at the birth of the Child who will free us from the pains of Hell.



“Till Bethlehem”

It is a nostalgic and little-known Norwegian traditional. The simple and effective melody is sung in streets and homes all over Scandinavia starting on 13 December, St Lucia's Day, with groups of girls dressed in white holding a lit candle.

“O Little Town Of Bethlehem”

It is a traditional Christmas carol, composed in 1868 by the American bishop Phillips Brooks, author of the text, and his organist Lewis Redner, author of the melody.

The song was probably inspired by a trip to the Holy Land made by Brooks three years earlier.

“Naschid'est in sa capanna”

This is probably one of Agostino Sanna and Pietro Casu's most successful compositions.

This time the protagonists are the angels singing in the sky for the High King and perched around the poor hut, flying and glowing with light.

“Adeste Fideles”

There is insufficient evidence to attribute its authorship to a clearly identified author. The only certainty that emerges from the existing documentation is the name of the copyist, i.e. the one who physically transcribed the text and melody: Sir John Francis Wade. He would have taken it from an Irish folk theme in 1743-1744 for use by a Catholic choir in Douai, a town in the north of France, at that time an important Catholic centre of reference and refuge for Catholics persecuted by Protestants in the British Isles.

Our version is the only deliberately acoustic piece among those performed in Sassari.

Hence the very different sound. More reverberated and spatially distant, it is played in trio with bandoneon, muted trumpet and soprano sax.

The brass and reeds ideally represent the male and female voices of the choir, while the bandoneon, an instrument that originated in Germany in the mid 19th century, regains - especially in the long introduction - its original role as a small portable organ that served to accompany religious services in Protestant churches.