

MICHEAL CASTALDO—ST. LUCY’S CHURCH, NEWARK, NJ—DECEMBER 13, 2013

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By: Rosaria Caporrimo, Ph.D.

I have been a Micheal Castaldo fan for years but I’m always amazed at the uniqueness and personal touch he brings to each performance. On December 13th, I was privileged to attend his Christmas concert at St. Lucy’s Church in Newark, N.J. This concert was particularly memorable not only because, as always, Castaldo’s voice was in excellent form, but because of his graciousness and humility, as well as the amazing venue at which the concert took place.

December 13th is the feast day of St. Lucy, Santa Lucia in Italian, one of the virgin martyrs and patron saints of Sicily, though the feast day is celebrated in Scandinavia as well as Italy. The Church of St. Lucy in Newark is a beautiful tribute to the saint and to the founders of the church as well as its faithful. Built in 1891, it reminds one of the cathedrals of Italy—huge marble columns and high vaulted ceilings with paintings, a semi-circular altar also in marble, and several side altars. The lighting, the candles, and the Christmas decorations and greenery all added to an amazing ambiance in which Castaldo performed songs from his *Extravirgine* Christmas CD.

Even before the start of the concert, there was a hushed sense of anticipation, doubtless attributable to both the featured artist and the serene environment of St. Lucy’s. Guests spoke in lowered voices about Castaldo’s voice, his demeanor, and CDs they already owned. It was clear that this artist is not only admired for his musical genius but also for his kind soul, generosity, and ability to impact fans beyond his unique voice talent. The filled-to-capacity church was a testimony to his ever-increasing fan base and to the spirit of the Christmas season.

Castaldo’s *Extravirgine* CD has become a treasured part of the Christmas season for me, with its Eastern Mediterranean roots and unique approaches to several traditional tunes as well as Castaldo’s own composition, *Tutto e Bianco nel Cuor’*. *Extravirgine* itself is a musical masterpiece. The only two songs that had already been translated into the Italian language are *O Santa Notte* (Oh, Holy Night) and *Astro Del Ciel* (Silent Night). Micheal is the first person to have written Italian lyrics for the remainder of the songs on the CD. In fact, *Piccolo Gesù* is a traditional Polish Christmas hymn that Castaldo translated into his native Italian.

It is difficult to put into words the transformative aura of the event—from the first song to the encore, for a brief two hours the audience was simply transfixed, removed from the worries and anxieties of the world and the hectic pace of the season and whisked away to a peaceful, spiritual space of true “comfort and joy.”

Gioia Nel Mondo was an inspired introduction to the concert that followed and to the pure enchantment of the Christmas season. Each song that followed highlighted the diversity of the

artist's voice—from the powerful rendering of *Adeste Fideles* (Oh Come all Ye Faithful) and *Puoi Sentire Quel' Che Sento Io?* (Do You Hear What I Hear?) to the innocence and quiet beauty of *Piccolo Gesù* and *O Santa Notte*. Many in the audience had never heard Castaldo's version of Little Drummer Boy—*Batte nel Cuore, Suona Natale*, nor *Piccolo Gesù*, a truly numinous work of art. Micheal's composition, *Tutto e Bianco nel Cuor'* (Everything's White) is a moving piece that is destined to become a traditional Christmas tune and a holiday favorite. And then there is Castaldo's brilliant combination medley of *Gloria, in Excelsis Deo* and *Day-O* (the Banna Boat Song) one of my personal favorites. Everyone, and I mean everyone was singing along with Micheal when the Day-O part of the chorus was sung. It was an awesome moment hearing 400+ people sing along. This performance, as well as several others during the concert, brought the audience to its feet well before the final standing ovation.

Castaldo's celebrated generosity and humility were demonstrated several times during the concert. He featured four talented young musicians from the John J. Cali School of Music Strings, leaving the stage and allowing them to take "center stage" performing a moving *Angels From the Realms of Glory* and *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*. Before performing *Piccolo Gesù*, he "introduced" the audience to his wife, Bozena, and credited her with the translation of this lovely hymn from her native Polish into English, affording him the opportunity to translate and perform it in his Italian version. Another highlight of the evening was during the performance of the beloved traditional Italian Christmas song, *Tu Scendi Dalle Stelle*, when Castaldo invited one of the priests from the parish, Father Luigi Zanotto to sing along with him at the microphone. Soon after, Father Luigi, still excited from performing with Micheal rushed back to the sacristy to get his harmonica and played a moving instrumental version of *Tu Scendi Dalle Stelle* to a rousing applause. Throughout the concert Micheal invited the audience to sing along-- it was clear that the audience appreciated his graciousness.

Castaldo performed two songs that do not appear on *Extravirgine* CD-- the classic *Ave Maria* by Schubert and his Italian translation of the Leonard Cohen masterpiece, *Hallelujah*, (both songs are from his *Aceto* CD) which Micheal performed as an encore with the soul and spirit with which this artist has become associated. The audience reaction was clear; they were truly moved and many were brought to tears by his performance of both pieces.

For me, this concert will remain a vibrant memory of Castaldo's talent and commitment to his craft and supporters. With each performance he brings the spirit of a poet and the soul of an angel. His performance at St. Lucy's warmed both the heart and animas. I witnessed several post-concert conversations -- it was clear that his performance touched those in attendance and started their Christmas season with joy, hope, and a sense of tranquility. The standing ovation at the end of the concert was a testament to his effect on the audience. Afterwards I attended the "post-concert" festivities when people snacked on Italian pastries and chatted with one another and the artist himself, as he graciously autographed the many copies of *Extravirgine* and other CDs that were sold that evening. The concert left me with a sense of pure felicità (happiness), and a sense of peace and spirituality, which I welcomed in what has become a too-commercialized time of year and not one of insight and gratitude. Amen!

The following organizations partnered with Micheal Castaldo to help promote the Italian culture and heritage at this Italian Christmas concert: The Italian Tribune, Coccia Foundation, UNICO, Sempre Avanti, Federation of Italian American Societies of NJ, Comitato Italiano di Santa Brigida, Investors Bank and Brown Paper Tickets. Post concert refreshments were generously donated by Palazzone 1960 of Wayne, NJ, and Hot Bagels-N-More of Verona, NJ.

For more information, about Micheal Castaldo, go to <http://www.michealCASTALDO.com>, contact Majestic Castle Music at 877-642-7271 or send an email to majesticcastlemusic@yahoo.com