



Paolo Lattanzi Interview

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a cura di

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Sixth episode of the rubric **Chi fa da sé fa per tre: Paolo Lattanzi.**

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01/03/2013: Kathodik came across Paolo Lattanzi for the first time a few years ago when the young Italian drummer published his debut release 'Night Dancers'. An itinerant musician who has been living in the United States for quite some time, he is branching out from a modern jazz base in the search for new inspirations that the country - and especially New York City - offers to anyone who is willing to dive into that “melting pot”. I recently ran into him, which resulted in the sixth installment of ‘**Chi fa da sé fa per tre**’. I asked some routine questions to which Paolo Lattanzi provided some refreshingly honest and thoughtful answers. Here is what happened. By the way, you can read the interview in Italian [here](#).

1. What are your origins as a musician? More specifically, why and how did you make the choice to play the drums?

Music always had a strong emotional impact on me, as far back as I can remember, but over the years my musical side remained dormant, perhaps because of a lack of exposure to live music, which wasn't abundant in Macerata when I was a kid. It was in my teenage years, when I was

listening to Led Zeppelin all the time, that I realized I wanted to be a musician. I wasn't attracted by the band's stellar stature (fame, prestige and so forth), I become aware of the fact that I didn't want to be just the listener, I needed to be the medium and the origin of the music. The majority of Led Zeppelin's tunes are quite profound compositionally, and that resonated with me. The choice of the drumset was completely instinctive, or should I say intuitive if you consider that I had never seen one up-close before I bought my first kit. The day I set it up in my garage I started to study right away, I didn't want to waste any time.

2. *Why did you choose to study in the United States? How would you describe your experience at Berklee College of Music? Why Berklee, anyway?*

At a certain point I got stuck. I didn't have access to a sufficient variety of musical opportunities (both educational and practical) and I couldn't learn anything new, so I started to feel frustrated. I had already begun listening to some jazz and fusion and I was interested in taking that direction, musically. In the meantime, I had already played with some cover bands of Satriani, Steve Vai and similar artists. Dream Theater was at the peak of its success and the idea of Berklee started to form in my mind. When I realized that I could only quit or venture somewhere else I decided to fly to the United States. Berklee College of Music is well known overseas and it accommodates many international students, which made things easier for me, it was encouraging. Also, I was eager to learn as much as I could. At the time the Conservatory in Italy wasn't a real option if you wanted to learn the music that I liked, let alone private schools.

3. *Who are your sources of inspiration when you compose? Any specific artists?*

I would say all the great masters. If you asked me a few years ago I would have listed Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Dave Holland and more recently Kenny Wheeler and Avishai Cohen (the bassist). Eventually, though, I realized that I have always been influenced by everything. Literally. Once I understood the principles at the foundations of jazz, my ability to be inspired by different sources of music expanded considerably, regardless of genre. At this time, as far as I am concerned, a musical idea is just a musical idea, it is the way in which that idea is executed that defines to what genre it belongs. I don't think that stretching out is corruption.

4. *In the previous answer you mentioned certain principles of Jazz and provided a brief interpretation of this style of music. Could you further elaborate what these principles are for you? Or even better, what is Jazz to you?*



(photo by **Vishesh Sharma**) What I mean is that if one tries to keep an open mind – from an emotional point of view as well – it is possible to be influenced by all sorts of music and then reinterpret them through one's own personality and style. When I say “principles” I refer to a certain type of sound and approach to the music. It is a context where the roles of technique and

expressivity meld into each other. There is a lot in it besides the improvisation, which is a big subject itself. It is about how rhythm is treated, the harmony, dynamics, the way the melody is put in relation with the rest of the elements.

This holds true, in different ways, for all music styles, including Classical and Rock. As cliché as it may seem, I draw a parallel with spoken language. Different languages have their own phonetic, syntactic rules, cadences, organization of ideas and, surprisingly, even different vocabularies. There are words specific to certain languages that do not exist in others, it is because of the culture they evolved in – and yet translation is nonetheless possible. Furthermore, languages evolve to accommodate new ideas.

Jazz, by the way, is hardly confined by one genre. Straight-ahead and Contemporary are perhaps the two biggest groups, but there are countless subgenres (so to speak). The departure of contemporary jazz from the straight-ahead is due to generations of musicians who continued to expand the vocabulary both on their own instrument and in the way the instruments interact with each other, especially in the rhythm section. Miles was one of the initiators of this process, but the list of contributors is long.

What always interested me about jazz is that it helps me reduce to the minimum the gap and the filters between what is inside of me and what exits through my instrument or the instruments that I write for. This is what attracted me. It is a style that has a rich vocabulary and that allows for a lot of freedom.

5. *Let's get down to the nitty gritty: after an interesting and promising debut, in your second album 'Multitude' you changed the ensemble and involved the famous trombonist Robin Eubanks. How did you come up with the concept for this recording and how was it to play with such a Jazz giant?*



I didn't write the tunes in 'Night Dancers' with the plan in mind to make a recording. For the largest part they were Berklee projects, and the rest was music that I wrote just for my own pleasure. So, even if arranged and orchestrated to have a cohesive sound and character, my first recording is a composite work that was created thanks to a decision that I made long after I composed that music. I wanted to record 'Night Dancers'

because those tunes - which I had played in different settings - are representative of those four years, and I wanted to celebrate the end of that era by fixing them on disc.

The concept behind "Multitude" is more mature. I started to compose the music with a clear idea of what I wanted in terms of sound and instrumentation: an acoustic album where I could work in depth with the arrangements. I wanted to think multiple voices rather than single melodies. Initially, I had written everything for quintet. Robin Eubanks became part of the project practically at the last minute, so I rushed back to the writing desk and composed the trombone parts only days before the recording session, working within the spaces defined by the other instruments. Not exactly the conditions you want to be in when you write for such a master! But it did work out.

Playing with people like Robin Eubanks highlights what really matters in music, both in terms of sound and musical choices. I learned a lot from that experience. He became part of the band and played my compositions selflessly, committing to the music rather than acting like a star. For me,

that confirmed what I had been thinking for a long time, and what is sometimes overlooked: that a musician should listen to what the music needs rather than what the ego demands.

6. *Who would you like to work with after this experience?*

With everybody! Hyperbole? Maybe. Let's just say that I would like to work with any musician who has a sound and a personality.

7. *What are you currently working on?*

I have been composing a new set of tunes that will become a recording, as far as my original music goes. The rest of the Characteristic Pitches - the group with which I recorded 'Multitude' - is in Boston, so I will put together a new ensemble.

Following my relocation to New York City I met a number of musicians interested in free jazz. Playing this kind of music so frequently gave me an interesting perspective on composing: in my newest tunes, I am experimenting with different ways to incorporate elements of free jazz. I am not abandoning composition and arranging because I believe that those are necessary elements, but I am trying to blur the boundaries between those two worlds while remaining true to my personal aesthetic principles. In 'Multitude' I had already started to use the solos in a different way than I did before, so I think that I am moving forward in the same direction.

8. *What do you usually listen to? Any specific genres?*

I listen to a lot of jazz, especially contemporary jazz. Sometimes I go back to my roots and put on some 60/70's rock. I keep track of what is going on in the popular genres to see where the taste of the general public is going, and sometimes I hear things that impress me. Most of all I go to see as much live music as I can.

9. *How is your experience with the music scene in the US, and more in particular in New York, in terms of networking with musicians and venues to perform at?*

Musically, New York is an incredibly active city; there are so many places where you can see live music. I discover new ones all the time. Usually they are small rooms where there is an intimate vibe between the artists and the audience. Socializing is in the nature of the city, and musicians themselves often go to see live music, so networking tends to happen naturally.

The relationship between the audience and the musicians is also different. In a way the two planes are closer to each other. The performers are more approachable and the audience is more emotionally invested.

The music level in general is very high: New York is both a great challenge and a great inspiration. Even the people who play in the subway or on the street are generally pretty good. Sometimes while you wait for a train you get to enjoy a fine performance: solo, duo, trio...

10. How do you see the music scene in the US from your perspective of Italian expatriate?

From day one, I was struck by the ease of the relationship between people here and music. There is very little mysticism. They decide what they want to do, and then they do it. Honestly I can't speak for the entire country - it's quite big and diverse - so I refer only to what I have seen in Boston and NYC. Keeping in mind that these are generalizations, I am impressed by the relationship between musicians: they tend to encourage each other or at least show respect. Live music is quite present in the American culture – for example, on TV it is quite normal for the late shows to have their house bands and to feature music guests.

It is also interesting to see the number of philanthropic associations that support deserving artists through financial aid, grants, access to higher educational programs and so forth. These are things that can make a difference in the life of a young artist and at the same time promote indirectly the idea that arts matter. It would be great if the same happened in Italy.

More specifically to the world of jazz one of the many things that I like is that established musicians welcome new artists: often times older and newer generations come together and make meaningful new music. What seem to matter are the qualities and the contribution of who is playing. After all if in the 1960s Miles Davis had not cared about four young musicians, he probably would have continued to make successful recordings, but the evolution of jazz would have been very different.

11. How do you see the music scene in Italy from the American perspective?

This is a tough one. In the short periods of time that I am in Italy I am there on vacation, to visit family and friends. I wasn't born in a big city, so my perspective is unavoidably distorted by that. It seems that the jazz scene is picking up with the new generation. Unfortunately I hear that there is not a great demand for live music, and especially jazz concerts are perceived as somewhat elitist. I fear that perhaps part of the responsibility is on the musicians' side, for covering themselves in an aura of mysticism that may have invoked admiration, but that in the long run created a fracture in the audience that felt the music to be inaccessible.

I have also heard that there is a scarcity of venues for performing and for musicians to exchange ideas. Still, Italy hosts a significant number of jazz festivals that involve both national and international artists. Luckily these events are quite successful and are well-known abroad, so I suppose that the issue is on the local scale.

A beauty of Italy is that there are many companies that make high quality musical instruments. I think that it is a heritage of our artisan origins. For instance, the Italian accordion (fisarmonica), as well as all the string instruments (double bass, violin and so forth), are held in high regard in the United States. I play UFIP cymbals - and they sound great; they work perfectly for me and also for the people I play with.

12. Finally, we must ask: how do you see your future, music, life, everything else?

I keep working on improving, both on the drums and as a composer. I maintain an interest in

learning more about music. I play with as many people as I can and I try to be inspired by them and to inspire them myself.

I also try to evolve as a person. I guess that the rest is not in my hands. After all, as human beings, the best we can do is just our best. Isn't it?

Links:

[Characteristic Pitches Home Page](#)

[Paolo Lattanzi Soundcloud.com/paololattanzi](http://www.soundcloud.com/paololattanzi)

[Paolo Lattanzi Home Page](#)

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