

NAPLES

SOUNDING OUT...

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The capital of Italy's south is a sprawling city of extremes with music playing a key part in its identity. By **Ciro de Rosa**

A Mediterranean metropolis, whose urban nucleus goes back to the tenth century BC Greek settlement, Naples has, over the centuries, experienced a remarkable mixture of foreigners – more conquerors than welcomed guests. The spirit of the city, its culture, language and music are the outcome of this complex legacy. Recent immigration has enriched the urban-scape.

Squeezed between Vesuvius, a dormant

volcano, and the sulphurous, bubbling mud pits of the Phlegrean Fields, the city is notorious for ear-splitting traffic, mugging and organised crime; the rational order of the public space, constantly being suspended and deviated by pockets of illegality and corruption. But it's most renowned for the theatrical attitude of Neapolitani, atmospherically run-down streets and alleyways, as well as the *centro storico* with its layers of history unfolding before visitors like

a charming history volume and the scenery – the Bay, one of the most impressive sights in the world. Beyond its heritage, 21st century Naples offers contemporary arts displayed both in the recently-built tube stations and in newly opened galleries.

For centuries Naples has been a European music capital, with splendid music ranging from *villanellas* to baroque ornamentation, from *opera buffa* to *tarantellas*, and from *ballè 'ncopp 'o tammurrè* (from *tammurrè*, a large frame drum) to mandolin airs and *canto 'a fronne*. This multiplicity of forms would later coalesce in the *canzone napoletana* (Neapolitan song), flourishing in the 19th century to reach its climax between the turn of the century and the first decades of the 20th. The passing away of the last minstrels Sergio Bruni and Roberto Murolo has left the city orphan of notable talents. Though the glorious days are nearly gone, classic Neapolitan songs still furnish a sense of belonging and influence pop styles. Also nearly gone is the art of *Posteggiatori*, wandering street ensembles, performing at cafés and *trattorie*. Nowadays, you may come across the last professori, such as Mastro Masiello Mandolino occasionally playing in the Galleria Umberto I (pictured left).

Folk revival took Naples by storm in the 70s. Following the aesthetic teachings of the anthropologist and composer Roberto De Simone, the band Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare,

Mastro Masiello
Mandolino playing in
the Galleria Umberto



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VENUES

Teatro San Carlo One of Italy's foremost opera houses and the largest in Italy, it opened in 1737 but was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1816. (Via San Carlo, 98/F, 80132 www.teatrosancarlo.it)

Teatro Mercadante This 18th century house features the best in touring Italian theatre and music. (Piazza Municipio, 80133, www.teatromercadante.it)

Teatro Mediterraneo and **Arena Flegrea** Both are located in Mostra d'Oltremare exhibition centre and host concerts. (Piazzale Tecchio 52, www.mostradoltremare.it)

Teatro Trianon (below) This is the home of the Neapolitan song, showcasing music and drama from performers such as Peppe Barra and Antonello Paliotti. (Piazza Vincenzo Calenda, www.teatrotrianon.it)



was and still are at the forefront of a fertile approach to traditional music. On the steps of those hectic days are recognised artists such as composer Eugenio Bennato, giant man of theatre Peppe Barra, and working class ethos band 'E Zezi.

What's more, new generations of artists give fame to Neapolitan sounds: the genial Daniele Sepe, the cultivated guitarist Antonello Paliotti, the saxophonists Marco Zurzolo and Enzo Avitabile. Local accents crossed by transnational musical modalities are distinguishable in the singing of Raiz, former Almamegretta lead vocalist.

LISTINGS

Naples Tourist Board (Piazza del Gesù, www.inaples.it) issues a free bilingual monthly publication *Qui Napoli*, containing historical notes, information on public transport and main exhibitions. For the music scene, check for **Zero81 Napoli**, a free pocket guide handed out in music shops, listing arts events and venues. Entertainment pages of the local edition of national papers can also be a good source of listings.

LABELS

Polo Sud (www.polosud.it) Its roster includes Neapolitan classic songs, rock and pop.

Marocco Music (www.maroccomusic.com) committed to releasing quality local artists, such as Peppe Barra and violin wizard Lino Cannavacciuolo.

CLUBS

Clubs vary greatly in style and policy, so check listings or follow insiders' tips. The bars around piazza Bellini and the *decumani* (main roads in the original Roman town) offer live music and a funky scene. People meet late in the evening and gigs are not a prime time affair. In the height of summer, nightlife is more subdued in the city centre as clubbers may head out to seafarmer venues.

Lontano da Dove Refined bookshop and tearoom open to exhibitions and folk, jazz and ethnic music at weekends. (3, via Bellini, www.lontanodadove.com)

Mutiny Republic Gallery Cross-cultural art bar staging mixed music, live acts and workshops. (45, via Bellini)

Rising South Situated downstairs in a former cellar with an ethnic styled ambience. Music varies from lounge to rock, from world and DJ sets. Live gigs, videos and films are all part of the menu. (19, via San Sebastiano, www.risingsouth.it)

Kestè A tiny, vibrant bar which hosts exhibitions and live folk, jazz and world music acts. (26/27, Largo S. Giovanni Maggiore Pignatelli, www.keste.it)

Around Midnight On the hill district of Vomero, a long-running jazz venue. (via Bonito 32a, www.aroundmidnight.it)

Otto Jazz Club A well-established jazz club. (23, Salita Cariatì)

Ethnos Club A world music outpost in Torre del Greco, at the foot of Vesuvius. Pompeii meets Fès ambience. Regular live sets at weekends. (962bis, via Nazionale, www.festivaletthnos.it)

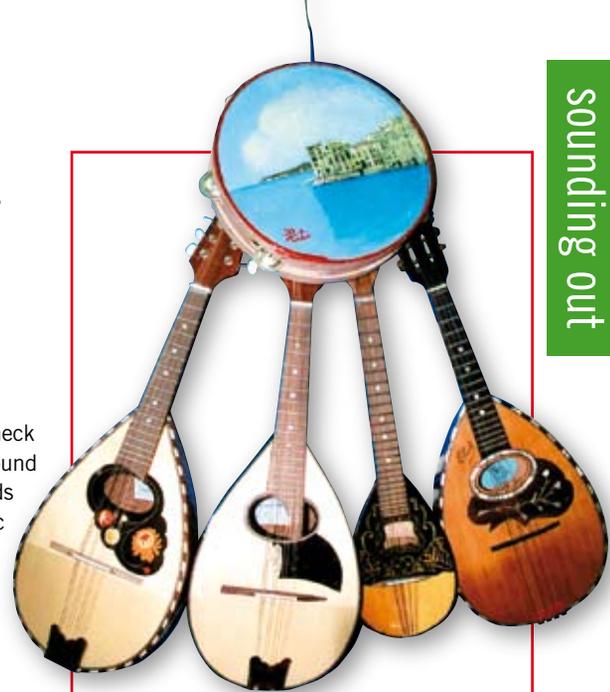
FESTIVALS

Maggio dei Monumenti Top cultural yearly event spreading from the end of April to early June. Music performances are part of the scheduled programme. (www.comune.napoli.it.)

La Notte della Tammorra Summer solstice open-air gathering held in Villa Comunale, by the sea. Impromptu traditional music played by revivalists and tradition bearers. (www.lanottedellatammorra.it)

From Easter to September, the area around Naples is fired with Virgin Mary celebrations. Old peasant masters of tradition and urban revivalists mix in the streets off the shrines for furious singing and dancing.

L'Intrecciata A cultural association mainly devoted to research and dance courses, may



SHOPS

Feltrinelli (23, Via S. Caterina a Chiaia) and **FNAC** (59, via Luca Giordano) Chain stores displaying selections of Italian traditional music.

Fonoteca In Vomero, next door to the British Council Resource Centre. Late-hour music shop and lounge bar. (31/C, Via Morghen, www.fonoteca.net)

Tattoo Visit the tiny church of Sant'Angelo a Nilo, go for a snapshot of the River Nile statue, then call at this record shop to buy Neapolitan music. (15, piazzetta Nilo)

Via San Sebastiano Leading to the prestigious conservatory of San Pietro a Majella (www.sanpietroamajella.it), this street is lined with shops selling musical tools of the trade: **Music Magazine** Historic instruments are displayed here (40, via San Sebastiano) **Miletti** Noted for string instruments (46, Via S. Sebastiano). Further along, try **Demos** which sells rock, avant-garde and world music (20, Via S. Sebastiano).

provide general information and tips. (www.intrecciata.it)

Ethnos Festival Eagerly awaited July event staged at venues across the city and 18th century villas along the so-called Miglio D'Oro on the outskirts. Past editions have included Mariza, Rokia Traoré, and Rimitti. (www.festivaletthnos.it)

Pomigliano Jazz Festival Long running free event held in the small town of Pomigliano D'Arco every July, which guarantees a strong line-up. (www.pomiglianojazz.com)

Neapolis Rock Festival Annual extensive event for popular music. This year it's located at Mostra d'Oltremare. (www.neapolis.it)

Promoters behind yearly events **Lo Sguardo di Ulisse** (www.sigbloom.it) and **Sacro Sud** (www.musicemigranti.it) are joining forces to create the Napoli World Music Festival aiming to become the top summer music gathering. ■

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