

Ambassadors OF JAZZ

by Nicola Orichuia

When the city of Pescara held its first Jazz Festival in 1969, very few people in Italy even knew jazz was a word, let alone a musical genre. Nowadays, though, Pescara has become one of the most respected jazz cities in the world, with one of the longest-running festivals in Europe. "This will be a very special year," says Lucio Fumo, artistic director and co-founder of the Pescara Jazz Festival. "We celebrate our 40th edition [the festival took a three-year hiatus in the 1970s], as well as the return of a partnership with Columbia College Chicago."

The local liberal arts college teamed up with Pescara organizers 13 years ago. "For three years, we welcomed five or six Columbia professors a year and they held seminars and played in small towns in the Pescara province," says Fumo. "We had this program called 'Jazz in Provincia,' through which we wanted to spread the music across the Pescara territory while showing our guests the unknown beauties of our land." Situated on the eastern coast of Italy, the city of about 400,000 is part of the Abruzzo region. Three lucky and talented Columbia College jazz students will have the opportunity to visit the city this summer as part of the renewed collaboration between the school and the festival.

The partnership is due in part to the efforts of Coco Bucci, a Pescaraese himself and longtime collaborator with Columbia. "I have a very special relationship with the school," he says. "When I came to Chicago in 1995, I was hired by Columbia's musical director at the time, Bill Russo. He needed someone to promote his big band in Europe. A few years later, we teamed up with the Pescara Jazz Festival, offering three scholarships to young talents from Abruzzo. I try to go back as much as I can because I love it there. When I can, I bring some of the

artists I work with, like Buddy DeFranco, who is in love with Pescara."

The winners of the first scholarships back in 1999 are now set to return to Chicago to celebrate the Columbia-Pescara reunion. Guitarist Giancarlo Alfani, saxophonist Max Ionata and pianist



Saxophonist Max Ionata

Claudio Filippini have become big stars in the Italian and international jazz worlds. They will join Abruzzese bassist Maurizio Rolli and drummer Nicola Angelucci in a short musical visit to Chicago this month, with shows at 8 and 10 p.m. on April 24 and 25 at the Jazz Showcase, and a concert at 7 p.m. on April 27 at the Columbia College Concert Hall, where they will be joined by guitarist Mike Stern. "We were all just starting our music careers," says Giancarlo Alfani. "We never expected we'd have the opportunity to study in the land of jazz and get to know a reality we had only read about in books. The experience was a life-changing one." Ionata and Fil-



▲ MAURIZIO ROLLI

The renowned bassist will be one of several Italian jazz giants to perform in Chicago this month thanks to a long-standing musical exchange with the Abruzzese city of Pescara.

ippini became professional musicians and moved to Rome. Alfani traveled a different path, choosing instead to open an event planning and advertising agency. "I still play guitar, though, and I haven't closed my musician account with the bank."

Alfani will be back in action in Chicago this month. The other four members of the band are professional musicians with dozens of records to their credit. Max Ionata has become one of the most requested saxophonists in Italy and — oddly enough — Japan, playing for big names like Mario Biondi, Robin Eubanks and Reuben Rogers. Pianist Claudio Filippini also has become a well-known name in international jazz. He earned the Columbia scholarship at age 17, and won several other scholarships and prizes in the following years. Now he performs with dozens of famous artists, including Giovanni Tommaso and Maria Pia De Vito. Interviewed by Fra Noi in 2010, Maurizio Rolli is the extremely talented and versatile bass player who founded the Rolli's Tones Big Band and has played alongside jazz giants Hiram Bullock, Mike Stern and Peter Erskine. As for Nicola Angelucci, legendary saxophonist Benny Golson described him as

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