

Interview with Jovanotti. A Global Singer

Marina Melchionda (February 09, 2009)



Jovanotti, one of the most popular Italian songwriters and singers, will soon debut in the US (New York, Feb. 18-19). We interviewed him about his music, his relationship with his public and Internet, and the new US President Obama

For the Italian Version of this Article [click here](#) [2]

They say that your stage name, Jovanotti, comes from Joe Vanotti, a name that seems to be Italian American. When and how did you choose it?

It was a little by chance. As often happens with things that are chosen casually, they remain with you for life. But I am glad since it is a name that has really brought me a lot of luck. Among other things, it's true what they say: I picked Joe Vanotti. One day I telephoned the artist who was preparing the cover of my first album to tell him that he wrote "Jovanotti" by mistake. When I saw the printed cover, I decided to leave it that way. I liked it.



What relationship do you have with Italians abroad, especially the Italian-American community?

Like all Italians, or almost all, I had a relative in America. My aunt immigrated to Canada and lived in Montreal. When I was a child, for me, this aunt was a legend. She sent me many gifts, and best of all, “American” sneakers. I was always waiting for them! We did not see her often, but my mother and my grandmother went to see her from time to time. So I always felt this strong tie to America which was my second country.

My love for this land was reinforced when I decided to start a career in music and discovered important influences in American music.

You will perform in New York on February 18 and 19. Why did you choose this city for your American debut?

Despite being my first concert here, I feel like it’s “my” city. I feel like I belong here and that’s why I come at least once a year. I visited this city for the first time in 1989 and when I got off the plane I felt at home. I arrived in a place that I already knew well, without ever having visited. I grew up listening to the city’s music, rap, and I was the first to introduce the genre in Italy. This launching pad has helped me to get where I am today. And so I feel that I owe a lot to New York.

Who are your American musical influences?

I could mention a thousand. But probably the most important ones for me were the [Beastie Boys](#) [3], [Public Enemy](#) [4], and the [Talking Heads](#) [5] who are all from New York. And also [Run-DMC](#) [6], a hip-hop group from Queens. I love the Latin sound from Harlem, funk that was influenced by Puerto Rican rhythms and black music. As you can see, a lot of my music is rooted in this city.

Which singer would you like to work with here in the U.S.?

I would like for Chuck D. of Public Enemy to come to my concert. They were definitely the most important rap group for my generation. I met Chuck years ago. In an interview that was recorded in Italy recently he said that he remembered me. I really hope that we can play together in the future.

Throughout your career you have worked and collaborated with many artists, from [Pavarotti](#) [7] to [Nannini](#) [8], to [Syria](#) [9], [Ron](#) [10], and [Negramaro](#) [11]. Which one has excited you the most?

I believe that they were all important, each for a different reason. Some of these duets have also helped me to forge profound friendships. My friendship with Giuliano from Negramaro is very rich; it is a continuous and deep exchange. Most of all I was happy to have met Luciano Pavarotti. I was really lucky. I see him as a historical figure who always elevated Italy’s image in the world. His friendship was invaluable to me.

What feeling do you want to inspire in your New York audience?

I define myself as a global singer. I live for music from all over the world, but I retain an Italian quality. I am able to combine melody and rap, and I have been doing it for years. That’s not the case here in America and I know that I will present something new. My show is very Mediterranean, with an influence of rap and funk. I think it will be an interesting experience for a New Yorker.

On stage, are you more of a DJ or a singer?

I’m a bit of both. I am a DJ when I organize and decide on which set list to use. During my shows I communicate a lot with my audience. I want them to have fun! In my songs, though, I am always more of a singer. My passion for writing grows more and more every day and so does my desire to sing.

Your fans will create the fifth official version of “Mezzogiorno,” your new single, and you have dedicated a book of photographs to them that covers your “Safari” tour. You believe in them very



much. Is there is an artistic choice that you made which was directly inspired by this special bond with your audience?

I do feel a very strong bond with my audience, it's true, but I always try to maintain a certain level of independence in the artistic choices that I make. When I write and record my records I forget that I have an audience. My songs are born of pleasure and come from a completely personal need. But if my dreams and my passions coincide with the audience's, that's wonderful; it means that we are in sync.

You have been writing your personal blog "Sole Luna" for some time. How do you feel about technology?

The Internet is changing the world, and I think the change is still in its early stages. Thanks to my blog I can communicate with my fans, wherever they are, and they can follow me, while downloading and listening to my music from their computers. Even if it is virtual our relationship is much more direct.

I use the Internet for much more than just my blog. I stay up-to-date almost exclusively through the 'net. Now when I buy a newspaper it seems like I am holding a piece of the past in my hands.

In one of your blog posts you quote [William Blake](#) [12]: "If the doors of perception were opened everything would appear as it is: infinite." Would you use this quote for Obama's United States? What do you think has changed in this country?

Obama has sparked strong enthusiasm in me that I shared with the incredible crowd in Washington at the inauguration. I feel that he is also my President; he is an international figure. His choices will have repercussions not only in America but elsewhere in the world, even in Italy. America suffered greatly during the Bush administration which had moved away from the land of opportunity, of freedom. Let's remember, among other things, that in the constitution of the United States, there is the word 'happiness.' Obama's entry on the political scene has fortunately helped to shorten the distance between the country and the ideals that it inspired. The new president truly embodies the "American Dream" and he represents the defeat of the cynics and the recovery of the democratic spirit that has always moved the American people. With him, America will go back to being a legendary place for younger generations and their 'land of opportunity.'

In your opinion what really drove the majority of Americans to vote for Obama?

Citizens always choose the candidate who most closely reflects the values they believe in. I think the fact that he was elected is already an important sign of change. In reality, I think that we should also thank the Bush administration. I see America as a child who after a high fever grows stronger, fortified by a deep separation from the previous administration. He had the courage to change and learn from the past. This is the opposite of Italy that after fifteen years of Berlusconi still fails to turn the page. Obama is not Bush's rival, but he is a new change. And this is what makes this election so important from a historical and political point of view.

In the magazine Internazionale you wrote that Obama's victory is potentially more important than Kennedy's, and that he represents the great historical moment of your generation. What would you like for your daughter Teresa's generation?

I would like for my daughter and her contemporaries to help solve two fundamental problems that affect us all, albeit in different ways. The first one is definitely poverty: there is still a large percentage of the world's population that still suffers. It is unfair that there are so many differences between a child born in a poor country and a child born in a rich one. The second is discrimination: I hope that we are headed toward a world where discrimination is no longer imaginable, whether it is based on race, color or sex.

And after the concerts in New York? Projects ...

I'll come back to write and I will devote my time to making a new record. I will study, read, I will do

the things I like most, and get my private life back. Out of the spotlight.

Jovanotti's Concerts in New York:

February 18, 2009 (8:00 pm): [Highline Ballroom](#) [13] (431 W 16th St, New York, NY 1001)

February 19, 2009 (8:30 pm): [Le Poisson Rouge](#) [14] (158 Bleecker St, New York, NY, 10012)

Jovanotti will meet his public at the [Italian Cultural Institute of New York](#) [15] (686 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10065) on February 19, 6:00 pm. He will also have an encounter with a group of NYU students on February 20, 6:00 pm, at [Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimo'](#) [16].

(Translated by Giulia Prestia)

LATEST INFO! [55DSL](#) [17] is inviting you to attend an intimate live showcase with Jovanotti at the NY store located in Soho (281 Lafayette Street) on February 17th from 6pm-9pm. This event is free and will have free drinks!!!! For more info please contact the 55DSL NYC press office at 212 255 6603

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