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Massimo Ferrante - Ricuordi

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Ricuordi, singer-guitarist Massimo Ferrante's follow-up to 2005's *U Ciucciu*, extends that album's approach to traditional southern Italian music and also departs from it. *Ricuordi* means memories, and the album explores the historical roots of Mezzogiorno song and dance idioms. The track, "Valljia," harkens all the way back to the 15th century, with a chorus of women chanting in Arberesh (a dialect of Albanian-descended southern Italians) a praise-song for the Albanian-Italian commander Giorgio Castriota Skanderbek, who defeated Turkish troops attempting to reach the Adriatic coast of southern Italy.



As on *U Ciucciu*, Ferrante is not interested in mere historical recreation. His ricuordi are living stories, in which past and present are intertwined in a politicized vision of southern Italian life and culture. As Ferrante told me in an e-mail, "The political and the social are something that I have inside me and I can't but reflect them in my recordings."

The CD's 15 tracks, varying widely in style and mood, comprise protest songs of migrants and farm workers ("Rosso Colore," "É Fatta Notte"), buoyant wedding dances ("Aria Pianettese"), rowdy New Year's Eve drinking songs ("A Strina Ara Cusintina"), nursery rhymes ("Piripiriddri") and tender love ballads ("La Ceserina," "Fiore di Tutti Fiori").

Perhaps the album's most pronounced departure from *U Ciucciu*, there even are two numbers of non-southern Italian provenance, the Egyptian-born Greek songwriter Georges Moustaki's "En Mediterranée" and "La Santa Caterina Dei Pastai" from the Po Valley in Northern Italy. Both are protest songs, one against Greece's 1960s military dictatorship, the other an ironic salute by pasta factory workers to their boss who throws them a "bella festa" and then deducts the cost of the fine party from their paychecks.

Ricuordi, like *U Ciucciu*, has a homemade quality, all performances having been recorded either in the home studio of his producer and sideman Enrico Del Gaudio, or captured live, like field recordings. ("A Strina Ara Cusintina" comes from a recording in Ferrante's Calabrian hometown, Joggi, with his sister, brother-in-law and other relatives playing and singing.) And once again, the arrangements range from traditional rustic simplicity to savvy post-modern conceptualism, the latter exemplified by "É Fatta Notte."

"Valljia" commemorates the defeat of Muslim invaders during the Middle Ages. The folk song "É Fatta Notte," in Ferrante's reinterpretation, is all about the temporary presence of "musulmani" in Italy, as exploited laborers. Ferrante sings in the Salerno dialect, Marzouk Mejiri in Arabic, both play percussion while tenor saxophonist Rino Saggio unleashes wild squalling obbligatos. Ferrante says that

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