

ITALIAN ENSEMBLE

Rather than going for a cute name, the Italian Ensemble gets right to the point. Devoted to promoting their nation's classical and folk music, they chose their moniker so there would be no confusion about their mission. 'Eventually our goal is to take Italian music to the world, so hopefully little by little, we'll be able to get outside Italy,' says violist Luigi De Giorgi, speaking through a translator.

'While we're considered a classical group right now, the real term should be "alternative classical music group," because we do our own arrangements. We try to make classical music more enticing for younger people and also use the popular folk music to also draw the younger crowd in,' De Giorgi stresses. 'We're trying to be the middleman pulling in the youth a little bit more to this type of music. In one concert, we try to please everybody.'

Making the concerts enjoyable and interactive for the audience is something the Italian Ensemble strives for. 'While we do some classical things that are a little bit more formal, we also do folk music which the audience usually knows, so they are invited and encouraged to sing along, clap their hands,' he continues. 'We do little gags and jokes throughout the concert to get the audience involved. Obviously the concerts in the theatres are more serious – in a church we wouldn't do this!'

All six members of the Italian Ensemble come from the opera orchestra of the Teatro Massimo Bellini in Catania, Sicily. Group members De Giorgi, violinists Marcello Spina and Salvatore Domina, cellist Vadim Pavlov, double-bassist and accordionist Davide Galaverna and guitarist and mandolin player Adriano Murania have played together for 15 to 20 years, even informally outside the orchestra.

'We love the music so much that outside the opera house, we do this in our spare time,' De Giorgi says. 'On



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the weekends, in our free time, we're always together practising.' One perk is that Domina has a second home on Mount Etna, so when the ensemble doesn't want to be disturbed, they trudge up the volcano. 'We try to practise as much as we can at the Teatro, though, as the instruments are heavy to carry around.'

During these practice sessions, the group works on changing the arrangements of songs. In fact, that's how they got their start as an official ensemble. In the spring of 2008, the director of the Teatro heard their versions and asked them to perform at a concert in London in May; thus the Italian Ensemble was born.

While the opera house sponsored this first concert, other appointments that the group has had so far have been funded by the sale of their first CD, *From Opera to the Italian Popular Song*. While the CD only costs €10, the group has invested all proceeds to cover their travel expenses performing concerts around Italy. 'Fortunately, we still have our stable work

at the orchestra that covers our daily expenses,' De Giorgi notes. 'Since we're in the promotion phase, we want people to get to know us and get our name out there. We hope that eventually we'll earn some kind of profit off the CD sales, but basically we're breaking even now.' De Giorgi adds that the ensemble is hoping for future sponsors to help fund their travels abroad, especially as their goal is to champion Italian music worldwide, not just in Italy.

Despite promoting the music of their country, the group has started receiving offers from international composers to create music for the ensemble. De Giorgi says that they would work with a non-Italian composer, as long as the work was something fun. The group has also received requests from singers to accompany them at concerts as well.

<http://italianensemble.altervista.org>
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