



## All Over the Map: GlobalFEST 2012 - New York

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By **George de Stefano**

**The Ninth Annual GlobalFEST presented an eclectic array of artists from Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia.**

GlobalFEST, New York's annual festival of international music, is literally all over the map. Now nine years old, the event showcases an eclectic array of performers from Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. At a time when glossy and vapid computerized pop dominates the charts, GlobalFEST affirms the phenomenal diversity and creativity of the contemporary global music scene—aka "world music".

This year's edition, held January 8th at Webster Hall, was no exception. Most of the twelve acts presented over five hours on the club's three stages (Studio, Marlin, and the Ballroom) have roots in traditional or folk music. Whatever their national origins or ethnic affiliation, they are grounded in local culture yet open to the world, confidently and adeptly incorporating influences from other styles and genres. Not everything I heard this year knocked me out. (And with many of the sets overlapping, I couldn't catch everything. My biggest regret was missing Yemen Blues, the Middle East-meets-Mississippi Delta-nonet led by Yemenite-Israeli vocalist Ravid Kalahani.) But the producers' claim that that GlobalFEST offers "the best in world music" is no idle boast. There was plenty of fresh, exciting and surprising fare to keep a fan entertained over a long evening.

This year's cross-cultural mix included the socially conscious Haitian singer-songwriter Bélo; Chinese jaw harp virtuoso Wang Li; MAKU Sound System, a New York-based Colombian ensemble; Debo Band, a Boston group specializing in Ethiopian styles; Irish-American quintet The Gloaming; Italy's Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino; Maya Andrade, a Cuban-born singer of Cape Verdean heritage; Malian rappers SMOD (one member is the son of the blues-rock duo Amadou and Mariam); the Silk Road Ensemble, the multicultural orchestra founded by cellist Yo-Yo Ma; samba singer and songwriter Diogo Nogueira; French vocalist Zaz, and Israel's Yemen Blues. But no matter the performer or the stage, the sound was excellent, production values high, and the sets began and ended on schedule. Would that more festivals were conceived as well and run as efficiently.

Bélo, from Haiti, played the evening's opening slot, in Webster Hall's smallest space, the Studio. Backed by his quintet, the lean, young singer (the braces on his teeth made him look even more youthful) turned in a brisk set steeped more in Jamaica than in the sounds of his homeland. He used Haitian compas rhythms on a couple of numbers, but mostly favored '80s-style roots reggae, à la Bob Marley and Robbie Shakespeare's and Sly Dunbar's work with Black Uhuru. Introducing his songs in English, Bélo sang mostly in French and Haitian Creole, in a strong and flexible tenor. The Marley by way of Sting mannerisms were sometimes too obvious, and the songwriting often derivative, but I enjoyed Bélo's earnest, forthright presence and his band's focused, no-frills approach.

Mayra Andrade began her set by acknowledging that she was "very nervous". But she overcame her jitters to deliver a coolly sensual and beguiling performance drawing on samba, jazz and Cape Verdean styles, accompanied minimally and sensitively by a trio of bass, guitar, and percussion. At times Andrade, who sang mostly in Portuguese, evoked the Latin fusion jazz of Airto and Flora Purim.

The Silk Road Ensemble, sans their founder Yo-Yo Ma, is a mini-United Nations comprising fourteen musicians from Europe, Asia, and the United States. During their dizzyingly eclectic set, they traversed continents and genres, covering Chinese folk music, European and Indian classical styles, Sicilian tarantella, Romani dance, and Galician bagpipery. The musicians were scarily virtuosic, and sometimes they slipped into crowd-pleasing, jam band showboating, with one flashy solo after another. But, as one member announced, the band has a large repertoire, of original works and commissioned pieces, so if one number didn't move you, the chances were good the next one would.

Diogo Nogueira, a Brazilian singer-songwriter who also is a TV star in his homeland, was one of the most eagerly anticipated performers at this year's GlobalFEST. The son of samba composer João Nogueira, Diogo is actor-handsome and appealing, but not a particularly charismatic or exciting performer. (His two dancers were more fun to watch.) Nogueira's singing was warm and pleasant but not much more than that; his light voice lacked rhythmic incisiveness. His set, made up of short songs that clocked in at about three minutes each, never caught fire or built momentum.

Though GlobalFEST's reach is far and wide, one country has been represented only once on its roster—Italy, by the singer-songwriter Vinicio Capossela, in 2008. That's surprising, given Italy's wealth of folk and folk-derived music, from the Alps to Sicily. (Musicologist Alan Lomax, who during the 1950s traveled the country to record its folk artists, regarded Italy as a "20th century museum" whose music was "the least spoiled, most vigorous, and most varied of all Western Europe".) In recent years, a number of Italian performers have crossed the Atlantic to perform in North America: singer-songwriter Carmen Consoli and the trumpeter-bandleader Roy Paci, from Sicily; Peppe Voltarelli, from Calabria; pop star Jovanotti and the rock band Negrita, from Tuscany, and Campania's Capossela and Avion Travel. Last year, John Turturro's successful documentary "Passione" introduced filmgoers to Naples' lively and variegated music scene.

Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino, an ensemble from the Salento peninsula of Italy's southern Puglia region, embarked on their first North American tour in 2011, giving audiences in the U.S. and Canada a taste of *pizzica taranta*, a centuries-old folk style that has undergone a revival in recent decades. CGS returned to New York for GlobalFEST, and their performance was a triumph. Led by violinist and percussionist Mauro Durante, the septet played a fiery, rhythm-driven set that electrified the packed Marlin room. While hewing to pizzica's traditions, the band subtly wove in other influences—a bit of bluegrass stomp, some qawwali-style vocals, and jazz (courtesy of the Lebanese-born and France-based trumpeter Ibrahim Maalouf). Each musician demonstrated a vivid musical personality and formidable chops, but three made especially strong impressions: lead singer Maria Mazzotta; guitarist, bouzouki player and singer Emanuele Licci; and Giancarlo Pagliarunga, a powerhouse on the *tamburello* frame drum and a thrilling vocalist whose incantatory solo on one number conjured up Salento's Hellenic and Saracen antiquity. Dancer Silvia Perrone, who is married to Mauro Durante, delighted the audience with her graceful, sensual moves.

The band was so on fire that after their set ended, and while the stage crew set up for the next act, they played an impromptu jam in the audience. After the impressive debut they made this year, the return of Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino ought to be on the bill for GlobalFEST

2013.

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