

Italian Interlude: 14th Annual International Mandolin and Guitar Accademia By Barbara Conrad



When snatches of mandolin music keep running on your mental sound system, you know you must have just taken part in an intense musical experience. This one was no exception.



*Musicians take a relaxing break
Photo by Barbara Conrad*

An international group of mandolin and guitar enthusiasts of all ages spent a blissful week that included playing music together, swimming in the warm Ligurian Sea and enjoying gelato and other Italian specialties. Carlo Aonzo and his team have found a winning formula for a satisfying kind of mando-tourism that keeps many returning time after time, while attracting newbies each year.

The 2019 edition, the largest yet, brought together at Genova-Nervi 55 players from far and wide, including North America, Down Under, the United Kingdom, Japan, Turkey and several European countries. Italian speakers represented nearly half, so everything was in both Italian and English.

Teaching staff for mandolin consisted of Carlo, Michele De Martino, Sabine Spath and newcomer from Rome, Francesco Mirarchi. Guitarists were

led by Roberto Margaritella and Elisa Ferrando, with newcomer Elio Rimondi from Genova. Our guest artist was mandolinist David Surrette from Maine, returning for the second year, this time with his wife, singer/guitarist Susie Burke.

Organizing staff, headed by Giulia Alliri, had handled all the logistics and kept the week running smoothly.

The musical program at Carlo's Accademias is always a unique mix. He and his instructors choose lesser-known pieces from the mandolin repertoire that end up being enjoyable for players and the eventual audience. This year's program ranged from baroque to modern:

- Carlo Adolfo Bracco, *Souvenirs d'un concert*, Op.90 (Serenade)
- Michel Corrette, *Concerto op.26/6*, in three movements, with harpsichord and Carlo on the solo mandolin part
- Gustav Gunsenheimer, *Konzert no.1*, three movements, with solo harpsichord
- Vincent Beer-Demander, *Le petit bal des bêtes*, five movements
- Dino Berruti, *Nell'oriente misterioso (introduzione e danza)*

David Surrette led the orchestra in two pieces:

- *Hanter Dros/Eliz Iza*, a mix of traditional Breton tunes
- *Blackbird* (Lennon/McCartney), arranged by David, with Susie singing

Each of us was assigned to one of the ensembles, three for mandolin and one for guitar. Each ensemble played two pieces, led by a different instructor. All of the music was sent out ahead of time, and for the orchestra music and for the ensembles, each of the mandolinists was assigned to one of two groups, playing the M1 part for half of the pieces and M2 for the others.

Mandolas and mandocellos were in great demand, and some of them played with more than one ensemble.

(continued from page 25)

My ensemble group played a *Ballet Suite* by Fabritio Caroso, led by Francesco, and *Napoli (Tarantella)* of E. Mazzacapo, led by Neapolitan Michele.

The schedule had sessions for orchestra, sectional and ensemble practice, as well as time for personal study. Everyone was scheduled for a private lesson with David, and also had the opportunity to sign up for a lesson on the baroque mandolin.



David Surette shows Taka some cello licks
Photo by Paola Sogliani



Final touches at the luthiers' display
Photo by Paola Sogliani

On Sunday afternoon, once everyone had arrived, a number of luthiers set up an exhibition of instruments, and people were trying and buying. Monday evening we had a welcoming reception,

featuring a type of local cheese-filled focaccia and sparkling wine. Later Francesco presented a talk on the baroque mandolin, with demonstrations by himself and Sabine.



Francesco's presentation on baroque instruments
photo by Paola Sogliani

Each of the following evenings offered a concert. All were open to the public and drew an appreciative audience. All except for Thursday's were held in the courtyard of our Collegio.



Collegio Emiliani from the promenade
Photo by Barbara Conrad

Tuesday we saw a young people's concert. A local instructor, Amelia Saracco, brought three students from her program. Her vision, dedication and persistence resulted in the introduction of the mandolin into the renowned Suzuki program ten years ago.

Next, two of Michele's students each played a solo piece. Francesco's group of seven young men followed. Francesco calls himself an "outlaw" because as a guitar teacher at a school in Rome, he introduced the mandolin into the program.

Closing the show were our Baltimore Mando for Kids: seven of the graduates from Laura Norris's first class, playing in concert for the first time on their own, with Tony Norris on guitar. Some of us were moved to tears during their flawless performance of the third movement of Vivaldi's double mandolin concerto – we were so proud of them.

All of these talented young people, except for Amelia's three students, were participants in our Accademia week, adding much energy and bringing down the average age.

For me, the Accademia began at the airport in Paris, where I met up with the Baltimore Mando For Kids group at the gate for our connecting flight to Genova. When our plane was delayed, a few of them brought out instruments and played – from memory – some of the pieces they would be

performing in concert, delighting all of the waiting passengers.

Wednesday's concert featured the Carlo Aonzo Trio, playing jazzy music from their new CD. This concert opened with David and Susie and their Celtic/old style set.

Thursday was the inspiring concert by our instructors, held at the beautiful Church of San Siro in the center of Nervi, a short walk from our base. As last year, the program featured pieces with some relevance to the Genova area. For example, the first piece, *Luna e Amore* by Nicola Massa, was written for what seems to have been the first-ever mandolin convention, held in Genova in 1892, as an en masse piece for all the orchestras to play together.



*Instructors at their concert, L-R: Elio, Michele, Sabine, Carlo, Roberto
Photo by Paola Sogliani*

Friday was the concert by all of the ensembles. Saturday we had our final concert, which went well after all the intense work of the week.

Having seen how Carlo's Accademia has evolved over the years, I was interested in his views on where it has come from and where it is going. He told me, "I imagined from the beginning to create a reference point for people who want to deepen the knowledge of the Italian classical mandolin. I was originally asked to do it by students overseas [at the New York workshops]. I think we are on the right path to accomplish it and now we are way ahead of expectations."

I asked him about the future, and the continuing growth we are seeing. "Rather than enlarging the numbers for that week, I am thinking to expand the proposals, opening new opportunities in other camps, discovering other places. The Winter edition [in Sorrento] is an example, and we are at the fourth edition." He went on to add, "[I would like to] expand the presence of the Accademia in other cities to give our participants the opportunity to visit new places, but also to give something locally, to promote mandolin music more widely. Also to involve as faculty members mandolinists with different roots and ideas for the classical mandolin."

I asked what he feels has been responsible for the success so far. "We feel very responsible for the good outcome of this event, which represents for many participants their summer vacation, or an important investment in terms of money and time. We work all year long for it. We have committed ourselves to allow young students to participate [by helping to subsidize them financially]. Part of the success is related to the amount of enthusiastic youth attending this year! The magic was to see how people of different ages were interacting musically and socially, people tied by the same passion."

Carlo has announced the dates and location for next year: August 16 to 23, in the same place, Collegio Emiliani, in the town of Genova-Nervi.

The website, accademiamandolino.com, has photos from this year's Accademia, and is the place to go to find more details for 2020.



*Orchestra takes well-deserved applause
Photo by Paola Sogliani*

Baltimore Mando For Kids Go on the Road

by Jan McIntosh



Petra, Sarah, Sophia, Hayk, Leo, Abbie and Toalima
photo by Paolo Sogliani

After my first visit last year to Carlo Aonzo's Accademia in Genoa, Italy, I was ecstatic about the whole experience. On my return, I told all my mandolin and guitar friends in the States about it.

Laura Norris had also been thinking about a future trip for her Baltimore Mando For Kids group. We talked about how we could make it happen. She asked them if they wanted to go – yes and yes! The first Mando For Kids (MFK) graduates, the seven “Pioneers” accepted the challenge of raising money for the trip.

A few early sponsors, including me, helped raise the airfare. Laura and her MFK community of parents, fans and neighbors scheduled a full tour of house concerts throughout the spring. They raised enough for their registration fees, room and board, and general traveling expenses.

The trip was well organized, planning everything needed for the trip (kudos to Laura), including Accademia music study group rehearsals throughout June, July and August in Baltimore. I benefited from these pre-Accademia rehearsals as well.

On August 16, the MFK Pioneers (two guys and five gals aged 14 to 17), along with Tony and Laura, two parents and two other chaperones, left Dulles Airport for the trip to Genoa.

The young adults from Baltimore met all the young

adult attendees from Italy, including a group of mandolinists from Rome and a group of guitarists from north of Genoa in Piedmont. The young people loved the location and amenities, including swimming, foosball in the courtyard, meals on the seaside terrace, and late-night gelato just down the street.

Tuesday night's concert was the young adults' night to perform. The MFK group were the final act. They played *Smiling Rose Schottische*, *Tarantella Napolitana*, *Belfast Hornpipe* and the third movement of Vivaldi's double mandolin concerto in G Major, with Tony Norris accompanying on guitar. It was just beautiful, in the Collegio's courtyard under the Italian stars and moonlight.

Laura sat in the audience with her heart filled to the brim. What a moment! The Mando For Kids program, which she started eight years ago after a trip to the Montessori schools to introduce the mandolin, showcased in Italy by the original first class out of the program.

This talented group of musicians had a fantastic week in Genoa, and they know it has been life-changing.

Just a few of the comments from the students attending:

Leo: I formed really deep friendships and connections that I doubt I'd have been able to create on my own, from swimming down in the cool Mediterranean to playing amazing music after dusk with true maestros at a seaside bar. Sitting on a sea wall, feeling the ocean breeze, walking through town, admiring ancient architecture.

Petra: Every day I would meet new people by asking if they'd like to practice the music pieces, asking if they liked yesterday's concert, or just by sitting next to them during orchestra and borrowing a pencil. In America, when I tell someone that I play the mandolin, I'm usually met with confused looks, so seeing a large number of people who also play this instrument gave me the opportunity to feel that I'm a part of a larger community. The Accademia showed a variety of genres the mandolin can play. We played music from modern to baroque and we attended a concert

that included bluegrass. It was a great way to form connections.

Toalima: I met so many amazing and wonderful teachers. I learned so many techniques on the mandolin. The pieces we played were so beautiful and unique. I felt so privileged to be meeting so many talented musicians from around the world, a very diverse group of people.

Hayk: I loved the music repertoire; it was beautiful and at the same time at a good difficulty level and enjoyable to play. We explored the surroundings of Nervi, which were very beautiful and picturesque and provided a wonderful setting for our musical adventure.

One of the MFK group told Carlo: I want to thank you for the life-changing experience this summer. I grew incredibly close with my group, I made

friends from around the world, and I worked with wonderfully understanding and brilliant teachers. I cannot thank you enough for the Accademia, and I've been so inspired to practice and pursue my mandolin since my return from Italy.

Upon their return, the group was invited to play at the French Embassy in Washington, D.C. The invitation came from the French mandolinist and composer, Vincent Beer-Demander, who also performed at the Embassy. The orchestra played one of his compositions, *Le petit bal des bêtes*, in their Accademia program.

He was thrilled to have the first class of Mando for Kids perform and referred to them as the Gang of Seven. They are an accomplished group of musicians who have worked hard and enjoyed this journey. Certainly, they are bright lights for the future of the classical mandolin.



*Sabine conducts at final concert
Photo by Paola Sogliani*