

# The Hills Are Alive with Music

Throughout Italy, now is the time to enjoy beautiful music in unique settings. Near Lucca, two festivals especially merit our attention, one near the coast, the other in the mountains. Both are highly worth attending, for the quality of the music and the exquisite settings, with cool evening breezes chasing away summer's heat.

From 27 June to 7 July, International Academy of Music (IAM) holds masterclasses in the medieval town of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana. Then, jazz, chamber music, and classical concerts, 27 in all, most of them with free admission, are planned for unique, special places little known to the international public. Concerts will also take place in the heart of Castelnuovo, where Ariosto wrote his epic, *Orlando Furioso*.

Some concerts, outside of Castelnuovo, will offer the option of an aperitif, tastings, or dinner. While listening to a concert dedicated to Louis Armstrong on 9 July, have a drink or dinner at Villa Beatrice at Marigliana, just a few kilometers from Castelnuovo. Or enjoy a fine dinner at Agriturismo Tripala (*photo below*) in Levigliani di Stazzema on 14 July, while gazing at the Apuan peaks and enjoying the Puccini Jazz Choir directed by Michela Lombardi.

The Rocca of Ceserana (Fosciandora) is a beautiful ancient fortification. Here, within the Romanesque S. Andrea Church, IAM professors will perform Brahms quartets on 4 July.

Other concerts are planned for Castelnuovo's impressive Cappuccine convent, to which audiences will be transported by shuttle bus. The surrounding hills will resound with the music of Mozart and Dvorak, Beethoven, Schubert, and Grieg.

The International Academy of Music Festival (IAM) is organized by the Civic School of Music in collaboration with the town of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana.

The festival's most international component is its teachers, in particular Artistic Director Maestro Efrem Briskin, professor at Westchester Conservatory (New York) and director of IAM in Spain (Burgos) and Italy. Briskin returns alongside the other two

master creators and directors of the Festival: organizational director Piero Gaddi, teacher and coordinator of La Spezia Conservatory Jazz department, and program director Massimiliano Mainolfi, teacher at Trento Conservatory and Nuremberg Hochschule für Musik.

At **Pieve di Elici**, overlooking the Versilia coastline above Massarosa, stands the lovely and ancient Romanesque church, San Pantaleone, which for 57 years has welcomed musicians. This year's chamber music season is dedicated to Marcello Pardini, who was so active in promoting these concerts for the Associazione Musicale Lucchese, for 36 years until he passed away in 2023. Sunday evenings (at 9.15 pm), with the sun settling down over the sea, are extra special, as the music rises and flows over the nearby hills, covered with olive trees.

Opening on 7 July will be the Carol MacAndrew prizewinners, from the Boccherini Conservatory. Carol, with Maestro Herbert Handt, was the energetic founder of the AML.

This will be followed by the New Italian Strings Trio on 14 July, then on 21 July the Faccini Piano Duo entertaining listeners with Sounds of Cinema.

On 28 July, mezzosoprano Veronica Simeoni offers a concert dedicated to Giacomo Puccini, who lived nearby, across the lake of Massaciuccoli, which is visible below, glowing in moonlight. We can almost imagine him listening.

The concerts continue on 4 August with the internationally acclaimed pianist Maurizio Baglini playing music by Chopin, Rossini, Liszt, and Musorgskij. And on 9 August, the talented young cellist Miriam Prandl, who is also an excellent pianist, will perform pieces from Bach and Scarlatti.

Tickets can be purchased outside San Pantaleone Church in the hour preceding the concerts. The cost is €12 (€8 for AML members, €2 for children under 14).

At both festivals, the audiences will surely feel their spirits lifted by the quality of the music and the magical surroundings.



Details for all of the concerts can be found in the Music Calendar, pages 12 and 17.

– by Norma Jean Bishop

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