

AUDIENCE

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Rise of the machine

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“Our differences are our biggest strength, because they allow us to exchange views all of the time,”

Adolfo Galli of promoter Di & Gi in Italy



Mimmo and Adolfo with Joe Cocker

If music be the food of love ...

As a unique duo of promoters in Italy, Adolfo Galli and Mimmo D'Alessandro combine their love of music with, as some observers relate, a love of good Italian food – whether they are in Naples or Los Angeles. The end product has earned them both respect and loyalty from the artistes and business people they work with. **Johnny Black** reports

Celebrating 25 years together, the promotions partnership Di and Gi – Mimmo D'Alessandro and Adolfo Galli – is justifiably proud of the major part it has played in changing the face of the Italian live music scene.

D'Alessandro and Galli have grown to prominence over the past quarter of a century by proving time and again, that international artistes of the stature of Paul McCartney, David Bowie and Paul Simon can play innovative tours and prestigious one-off concerts across the country.

They can both recall the dark days when a unique combination of political unrest, corruption and bureaucratic incompetence led to infamous events, such as the night in 1977 when a Santana gig in Milan's Vigorelli Stadium had to be abandoned after a Molotov cocktail was lobbed onto the stage, reducing much of the band's gear to molten metal.

"There was a time, back in the '70s and early '80s when Italy was a dangerous place to tour," recalls UK-based AEG Live president of international touring Rob Hallett. "I can remember one local promoter putting a gun on the table during negotiations for a gig in Naples."

Despite this, the lure of Italy's sun-kissed coastline, sophisticated cuisine and romantic Latin culture remained irresistible to many.

"Eric has always loved Italy, so we went down there a lot, but there was always trouble," says Peter Jackson, long-time tour manager for Eric Clapton.

"The show would be oversold, or the fans wanted to get in for nothing, or the stage wouldn't be what you'd been told to expect," he recalls. "So when we eventually found Di and Gi – an honourable, hard-working pair of guys who understood how to put shows together in Italy, it was great. Things have never looked back."



Rob Hallett

is completely unique not just in Italy but across the globe.

Before coming together as a team in 1987, D'Alessandro and Galli had already racked up an enviable wealth of experience.

"I got my start in Naples, in the early '70s, working with a major

Italian music star called Peppino Di Capri," reveals D'Alessandro. "Then, in '76, I moved about 350 miles North to Via Reggio, where I became the manager of La Bussola [The Compass], a very exclusive, prestigious venue with 1,700



Barrie Marshall

seats. The best artistes in the world played there, from Ella Fitzgerald to Oscar Peterson."

D'Alessandro subsequently took over the running of a newly-built 7,000-capacity venue, Bussoladomani, from which he supervised a live TV show every week, while also moving into management and record production for singer/songwriter, Giorgia.

Galli, meanwhile, had started out trying to be a professional guitarist in his north Italian hometown of Brescia, before taking over the management of a local theatre where, through a connection with America's Newport Jazz Festival founder George Wein, he started booking jazz artistes.

Given his love of guitars, Galli was delighted, in 1985, to meet agent and international promoter Barrie Marshall of Marshall Arts in the UK, who was then looking after John McLaughlin and Paco De Lucia.

"That brought my breakthrough into dealing with musicians of international stature. The first gig I did with Barrie was McLaughlin with Jonas Hellborg, his bass player from the Mahavishnu Orchestra."

Marshall still fondly recalls those early days. "For at least a year we thought Galli was his



Adolfo and Mimmo with Jennifer Lopez in 2012



Lucca Summer

25
AMAZING
YEARS



Dear Adolfo and Mimmo,
sending you many congratulations on 25 amazing
years of success - here's to the next 25!

With love from Elton,
and all at *ROCKET* Music.

first name. He was, I believe, in the army at that time, so he would call us from phone boxes," remembers Marshall. "I would take the call as quickly as possible, so he could stay on the line long enough to do a deal. We actually set up some Jose Feliciano shows during those phone calls."

Double bill

With D'Alessandro and Galli both moving up the north Italian music business ladder, it was inevitable that they would cross paths.

They spoke from time to time on the phone, but didn't actually meet face-to-face until 1987. "I met Adolfo at a David Bowie show I promoted in Stadio Comunale, Florence," reveals D'Alessandro.

"We shared a love of good music, blues, jazz and soul and we got along well. I was working with an Italian artiste, Zuccherò, and Adolfo was working with Joe Cocker. Zuccherò was a big fan of Cocker, so we had the idea of making a joint tour with both of them in Italy. That was the start of our relationship."

That astute pairing of artistes sold out in Rimini (16,000 tickets), Viareggio (18,000) and Naples (22,000).

From that moment forward they knew they had something special in their partnership but, notes Galli, "We are very different culturally, first of all because Mimmo is from the south and I'm from the north. Mimmo is a Napoli [football] supporter and I support Milan. We often find ourselves in opposing positions about pretty much everything, but ..."

D'Alessandro interrupts with an assertive, "No, no, no! The real difference is that I play soccer very well, but Adolfo doesn't play anything very well ... except his guitar."



Adolfo and Mimmo with Elton John in 2009

The pair erupt into good-natured cackles until Adolfo eventually regains his composure and picks up his original thread. "We often disagree about pretty much everything, but we truly believe that our differences are our biggest strength, because they allow us to exchange views all of the time, and our best ideas usually come out of our confrontations."

Another element which both men believe has shaped their destiny is the fact that they have remained firmly outside of Italy's two major music business centres.

"It's true that all the major companies of the Italian music industry are in Rome or Milan," acknowledges Galli, "which forces us to travel a lot during the week. However, I believe that being

away from those environments has helped us to create a work style of our own, very different from any other company."

Outsider strengths

One of many associates to agree with them on that point is Peter Grosslight, executive vice-president and worldwide head of music at William Morris Endeavor Entertainment (WME) in Los Angeles.

"Not being based in Rome or Milan means they have a better feel for the potential of what's possible in Italy as a whole," he reckons.

Their determination to foster local events is perhaps best illustrated by the Lucca Festival, which they initiated in 1998 and now attracts 70,000 people each year to one of the most beautiful Renaissance cities in north-western Italy.

"Lucca Festival grew out of a smaller event we were doing each year in a 1,500-capacity open-air venue, La Versiliana, about five miles from Via Reggio," says Galli. "We are part of Lucca Province, so we started talking to the local authorities who were looking for ways to attract tourism to Lucca."

The pair recognised that, with a bigger population and the potential to use the town's elegant Piazzas – Amfiteatro (2,000), San Martino (6,000) and Napoleone (11,000), they could create an event with a real potential for growth.

Its 1998 debut was a three-day event headlined by Bob Dylan, with subsequent festivals presenting acts such as the Eagles, Elton John, George Michael and James Taylor. This year's event spanned 13 days, and featured artistes as diverse as Tony Bennett, Kasabian and Tom Petty.

Grosslight, who has watched Galli and D'Alessandro build the event for 15 years, observes, "They've done an amazing job of developing that festival and maintaining such a high calibre of artistes. The Eagles in 1991 was a big deal because they had never played in Italy before, but not only was the square full, but every street leading into it was jammed with people." ▶



Peter Grosslight

“Our differences are our biggest strength, because they allow us to exchange views all of the time”

Adolfo Galli



Mimmo and Adolfo with George Michael in 2011

But not only are they outside the major Italian business hubs, they don't even work out of the same office. Galli still operates out of Brescia, while D'Alessandro remains ensconced in his beloved Via Reggio.

"Yes, we work in different locations, but we speak 10, maybe 20 times a day and we make our decisions together," explains D'Alessandro.

Today, the company has grown to a team of 11, plus D'Alessandro and Galli, spread across the two offices.

"We have an accountant, production, press office, ticketing, artwork, logistics and so on," says Galli, revealing that they also have an unusual hiring policy. "Many of our staff are



Andrew Zweck with Roger Waters

the same people who started with us at the beginning and, when we bring in new people, we do not recruit them from within the music business. Most companies recruit from record companies or from other promoters. We never do."

Grosslight characterises Galli as an astute businessman and a tough negotiator, but believes he has found a strategy to over-

come any serious disagreements. "If I'm doing a deal with Adolfo and he says 'no', I usually just ring Mimmo and get a 'yes' from him."

WME international agent Tony Goldring adds, "The important thing is that you can always rely on them to do a completely professional job. Even if an event hasn't sold quite as well as

we'd hoped, they always take the best care of the artiste."

Another US agent, Ron Kaplan of Monterey International in Chicago, who has worked with Di and Gi on Buddy Guy, Bonnie Raitt, Los Lobos and others, says, "They are honest, they deliver based on their promises and see everything through till the end. They are also committed to development of acts and that makes for a long-standing successful professional relationship."

Acquired tastes

Intriguingly, almost as much as their reliability and attention to detail, the duo's eccentricities have won them friends all over the world, including Barry Dickins of UK-based agent and promoter ITB.

"I met Mimmo first when he co-promoted a Diana Ross show in Florence back in the '80s. After I knew both of them, they got nicknamed The Shadows because they seemed to follow me around everywhere. I'd go to the ILMC [International Live Music Conference] and there they were. Adolfo even turned up once when I was in Cape Town."

Dickins confirms that Galli is the dealmaker, and believes that Mimmo's greatest strengths lie in handling the nuts and bolts at the venues. "I always think of food when I think of Mimmo. He's the man you go to for food and wine at the gigs, and yet he seems to eat the same thing every day - spaghetti pomodoro."

Grosslight confirms, "When they come to Los Angeles, they eat in the same restaurant every day because the chef is a guy from near Via Reggio where Mimmo lives. Mimmo eats the same pasta there every day."

Food looms large in any conversation about Di and Gi. Andrew Zweck of Sensible Events in the UK has enjoyed a fruitful relationship with them, working on artistes such as Elton John, Paul Simon and Eric Clapton and he too retails a foodie factoid.

"My artiste Mark Knopfler plays over there a lot, but it has become a standing joke that he always wants to bring his English caterers, which annoys Adolfo, because he believes Italian food is the best in the world. So if ever the food isn't 100 per cent right, maybe backstage at a festival, there's sure to be a conflict."

Throughout their career, Di and Gi have assiduously carved out their own distinctive path. "Mimmo and I have always tried to do shows in challenging and prestigious venues," says Galli. "We did Elton John at the Piazza del Plebiscito in Naples in 2009, which was a live television broadcast with RAI 1. We have done shows at the Arena in Verona and Piazza San Marco in Venice.

"If you get a prestigious artiste in a prestigious location it's one of those cases where one plus one equals three."

Keith Bradley, tour manager for Elton John, confirms that, "All the concerts we have worked with them have been interesting, sometimes ▶



Adolfo and Mimmo backstage in Lucca, with Sting and James Taylor in 1999

Track records

PAUL SIMON: Town Square, Florence – 11 July 1991

"This was the first event I did with Di and Gi and it turned out very nicely. It was such a positive experience that the next thing I remember was doing a double bill in stadiums with Elton John and Eric Clapton in the early '90s."

Andrew Zweck, Sensible Events, UK

THE BACKSTREET BOYS: Stadio Comunale, Via Reggio – 9 July 1999

"No other promoter would have put a band on at a stadium in Via Reggio, a small coastal town in the middle of nowhere. We blocked the streets, it was chaos. I remember looking out of the hotel windows and the whole beach front was totally packed with girls. You could not get out of the hotel."

Rob Hallett, AEG Live

ERIC CLAPTON: Lucca Summer Festival – 7 July 2006

"I'm always very wary of doing open-air town square gigs, but the way they had it all worked out, the route in to the stage was through government offices, and the stage was directly in front of the town hall. They delivered it, exactly spot on, precisely as they'd said it would be."

Peter Jackson, tour manager, Eric Clapton

BILLY JOEL: The Colosseum, Rome – 31 July 2006

"One of our great highlights with Di and Gi was the Billy Joel free concert at The Coliseum. We had about 400,000 people and the event generated a tremendous amount of press, and raised the bar of who Billy Joel was in Italy."

Dennis Arfa, Artist Group International, US

WAVE

WE CONGRATULATE

ADOLFO GALLI &
MIMMO D'ALESSANDRO

ON 25 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP



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D'Alessandro e Galli
PRESENTS

through location of the city, or style of venue in the city. We've had amphitheatres, town squares, opera houses, grounds of stately homes and villas, some very unique locations."

Having worked with Di and Gi since 1990 on acts such as Crosby Stills And Nash,

Jackson Browne and Elvis Costello, Paul Charles of UK-based Asgard is always impressed by the pair's ability to tailor conditions precisely to fit an artiste's needs.

"Tom Waits, for example, goes out of his way to make sure his audience is never taken advantage of. Adolfo worked really hard on Tom's three Milan concerts in 2008, ensuring that tickets were kept away from touts and, from his side, delivering an evening that was perfect for both the artiste and the audience."

D'Alessandro and Galli's attention to detail has also particularly impressed Canadian Sam Feldman who, as co-founder of Macklam Feldman Management in Vancouver, looks after James Taylor.

"Throughout James' 2012 tour," he reveals, "we came to realise that Italians are rabid autograph seekers, literally four or five



Sam Feldman



Paul Charles

hundred people would line up after a show. Adolfo was diligent in standing right beside James, helping to both ensure his safety and make sure that the eBay sales folks were limited."

After 25 years together, it seems, Mimmo and Adolfo are continuing just as they have always

done, putting the music first, paying attention to detail and taking care of business in their own uniquely Italian fashion.

“They deliver based on their promises and see everything through till the end”

Ron Kaplan

"We recently did Leonard Cohen, we have Jennifer Lopez coming and we've just put seven shows with Mark Knopfler on sale," says Galli, "Beyond that, we have a lot of shows in the pipeline for next year, so we are kept busy." ■



Adolfo and Mimmo with David Bowie in Brescia in 1997





25 YEARS

 CONGRATULATIONS

 TO

DI & GI

 FROM EVERYONE AT

AEG LIVE



Heartfelt Congratulations

to Adolfo & Mimmo on 25 years
of inspired collaboration...
I've been working with you
for almost as long; For me
that has been a great blessing.

Love & happiness,

James Taylor

James Taylor,
Boston, MA

James performing in Teatro del Giglio,
Lucca, Italy, March 10, 2012
Photography: James O'Mara

Adolfo & Mimmo

*Thank you for a sensational James Taylor tour...
and all that you do.*

*Tutto Perfetto, Mille Grazie
Sam Feldman &
Michael Gorfaine*

