



Ferdinando Romano **The Legends of Otranto**

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His previous albums, Totem (2020, Losen Records) and Invisible Painters (2023, Jam/UnJam Universal Music) have been highly appreciated by critics and audiences, obtaining important awards such as "Best New Italian Talent 2020" in the annual Top Jazz of Musica Jazz magazine, the SIAE Award 2021, second place as "Italian Musician of the Year 2023". Both records were included in the Top Jazz among the Italian Records of the Year and Invisible Painters also among the Italian Ensembles of the Year. The Legends of Otranto further differs from previous albums by presenting a very original lineup with Finnish accordionist Veli Kujala, Estonian pianist Kirke Karja and an Italian rhythm section consisting of Ferdinando on double bass and Ermanno Baron on drums.

The album is a suite in six movements, inspired by stories and legends related to the city of Otranto.

It is a musical tale of this magical and ancient land in the deep south of Italy: The Snake's Tower, Idrusa, The Bauxite Cave, The Tree of Life, The Two Sisters, King Arthur are characters, places, and images that gradually come to life note after note. Some of these stories are rooted in the historical events that have characterized this area of Salento, others handed down by popular culture. The Legends of Otranto was born in 2023 upon a commission from AccordionFest Estonia, with the aim of creating an original composition for the accordion repertoire that could combine sounds of contemporary music with improvisation. The premiere was performed in October 2023 in Tallinn and broadcast live on Estonian Radio. Compositionally, the music is very heterogeneous, with its own characteristic character that is difficult to define, drawing from jazz, contemporary music, chamber music, experimental, drum'n bass, and rock. Fast-paced rhythms and interwoven polyrhythms, sound experimentation, atonal passages and improvisations alternate with minimalist and introspective moments. The suite is pervaded by careful writing and complex polyphony involving all the instruments, producing at the same time a warm and melodic sound, evocative of the folk narrative dimension of popular legends, between Mediterranean sonorities and northern European echoes evoked by the language of Veli and Kirke.

I- La Torre del Serpe

The Torre del Serpe is a symbolic place in Otranto, it is located on top of a small hill close to the cliff of the Adriatic coast, south-east of the city and near the Bauxite lake. The origin of the Torre del Serpe is that of a coastal watchtower, common to the entire Salento coast. It was built in the Middle Ages and its purpose was to protect the coast and the city of Otranto from the attacks of enemies who could arrive by sea; later it was used as a lighthouse to guide boats carrying goods to dock.

Imagine that it is night and the soldiers guarding the lighthouse fall asleep, their tired faces illuminated by the reflection of the oil lamp that produces a glow on the surface of the water. Every night, taking advantage of their torpor, the same thing happens: a large black snake emerges from the sea and glides silently, producing a barely perceptible hiss. The beast moves nimbly between the soldiers' legs and feeds on the oil that keeps the light of the lighthouse alive. Every night the snake, emerging from the cold waters, eats its dinner, solitary and punctual.

The soldiers, waking up in the morning when the first dawn makes the still deserted port shine in the distance, inexorably find the light off and the oil that fed it completely consumed. One night in the year 1480 the Turks tried to invade the Salento coast in the middle of the night. Ships loaded with soldiers approached the coast of Otranto dangerously, but the soldiers guarding the lighthouse were asleep and did not realize the danger. The alarm signal did not go off, while the black surface of the Adriatic was furrowed by enemy ships advancing inexorably. Suddenly the situation was reversed, it was a matter of moments: the snake emerged from the dark waters and eating its usual meal turned off the reference light. Panic broke out among the Ottomans; after moments of uncertainty, caught by the darkness, they decided to land in Brindisi, hijacked throughout the night by the lack of a point of reference. The danger was thus averted and the population of Otranto woke up safe from the danger that had threatened their freedom.

The legend is as fascinating as it is interesting: the snake has become the symbol of the city of Otranto, which managed to save itself thanks to the presence of the ravenous beast. For this reason, the people of Otranto are eternally grateful to that monster with silent coils, capable of creeping among careless soldiers and then disappearing again into the depths of the Adriatic. For this reason, the coat of arms of the Salento city represents a tower wrapped in the coils of a black snake.

II- Idrusa Idrusa was a young woman from Otranto, a symbol of freedom and emancipation and stood out for her vital, curious and rebellious character in a social context of economic poverty and prejudice.

Despite this, she was forced at the age of seventeen to marry a fisherman, a good man with whom she was not in love. Her true and great love was a Spanish officer, Manuel, with whom she fell in love in a night of passion but fate would have it that during that same night Idrusa's husband died in a shipwreck and enormous feelings of guilt stirred in her. Even her love for the Spaniard proved to be ephemeral when she realized that he had deceived her.

Some time later the Turks arrived in the city and Idrusa showed great courage, despite the prejudices around her, helping the wounded taken to the Cathedral transformed into a hospital and risking her own life to save that of a child taken prisoner.

The moment one of the invaders tried to possess and kill her, she rebelled and took her own life, taking his dagger from its sheath and sticking it in her chest while not falling into the hands of the invaders.

Idrusa is an important figure in the mythological imagination of Salento, she embodies the beauty, lightheartedness, strength of spirit and pride of all the women who showed great courage during the invasions.

III- La Cava di Bauxite

The tragic tale tells the story of Asmodeide, Theophant's betrothed.

The girl, with hair as red as fire and white skin, was hiding a secret. Once the sun went down, when it was time to sleep, something terrible happened: Asmodeides had the gift of dreaming of the future, but she, who remembered very little of what appeared to her when she closed her eyes, considered it a curse. Every morning she was terrified of witnessing dark omens, misfortunes that she could not avoid in any way.

On her fifteenth birthday, after organizing the long-awaited wedding with her fiancé, she went to her favorite place, just outside the walls of Otranto. It was there, on the path, that she met Fate, dressed as an old shepherd, who told her that she should not marry Theophant or he would pay her dearly. And he also told her what would happen: on the wedding night the attic would collapse on the groom's bed, who would die without noticing anything.

The young woman rebelled. Once in bed, as soon as she heard the roof beams creaking, Asmodeide pushed her husband out of bed in an attempt to save him. The roof collapsed just as fate had predicted. Theophant was alive, but he rushed to check that his wife was well, stumbled over the rubble and fell on a beam that pierced his heart.

Asmodeides, full of anger and pain, went to the quarry, where Fate was waiting for her. The old man accused her of having used his gift to alter the future: every time she tried to speak, as punishment, water would flow from his mouth if she did not agree to become his wife.

The girl cried out to Fate that he would never have her, and threw herself into the well.

Moments later, the water began to gush out of the hole. A lake was thus formed in the cavity, still fueled today by Asmodeide's pain.

IV- L'Albero della Vita

The city of Otranto holds several treasures, among which the most mysterious charm is certainly the floor mosaic of the Cathedral in which the Tree of Life is depicted.

It was commissioned by the Bishop Gionata between 1163 and 1165 and made by the monk Pantaleone, as we read in one of the inscriptions. Three trees of life are placed in the central nave and in the side aisles. There are numerous interpretations given to the symbols and representations present. Two elephants support the main tree in the nave. On the left is Diana the huntress pointing her arrow at a doe, on the right Alexander the Great. This is followed by

the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel and the Great Flood.

Inside the roundels are the zodiac signs with the representation of work in the months corresponding to the constellations; Adam and Eve expelled from the Earthly Paradise, King Arthur on horseback, the killing of Abel with the scene of fratricide by Cain and the inscription "Ubi frater tuus?". In the transept there are roundels with real and imaginary animals inside and scenes from the Old Testament, with the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon and the scene of the serpent who instigates Adam and Eve to commit original sin.

Finally, in the apse Jonah who is about to be swallowed by a fish holds the prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh and on the left Samson who fights against a lion. The tree in the right aisle is difficult to read, while on the left we find the representation of the Last Judgment, with Hell and Paradise. Regardless of the countless interpretations that have been given to the depictions of the mosaic, one of the most striking elements is the mixture of heterogeneous cultural influences, Byzantine and Oriental, Franco-Norman and Arab. This heterogeneity must be read in the perspective of Otranto as a "gateway to the East", a place of cultural exchange and meeting between different populations and traditions.

V- Le due Sorelle

A few meters from the cave of San Cristoforo there are two very special stacks, detached from the rocky ridge and very similar to each other: they are the two sisters.

It is said that these two rocky monoliths were originally two people, two sisters who lived in the area, of unparalleled beauty. On a hot summer day they decided to go to the beach to cool off. They arrived at the top of the cliff and the older sister was so enchanted by the landscape and the blue of the sea that she dived, without reckoning with the storm in progress.

She found herself in great difficulty and screamed so loudly that her sister heard her and dived to save her, but in vain. Both were unable to return to shore and found death in the very waves of the sea of Torre dell'Orso. But the gods, in front of the heartbreaking scene, were softened and transformed them into rocks to make their memory eternal.

The most romantic will not struggle to see the two rocks reaching out towards each other, furrowed by the sun and the wind.

VI- Re Artù

One of the great fascinating mysteries contained in the mosaic of the Cathedral are the representations of King Arthur. A very special presence because the myth of King Arthur was apparently foreign to the culture of southern Italy at the time. The first manuscripts that speak of King Arthur's exploits are far later than the time of the mosaic, so it is logical to suppose that the monk Pantaleone (who made the mosaic) had direct contact with the representatives of the Order of the Temple, the Templars. In fact, in the mosaic we find the Chessboard, symbol of the Cathars, later adopted by the Templars, which represents the cosmic order, the eternal struggle

of good and evil, which never ends. The chessboard also has an esoteric meaning, the king represents the sun, the limited creative principle, the queen (the Queen) represents the Earth, it can move in any direction, the rook represents Saturn, its movement is the square, the bishop is Jupiter the trine, while the knight indicates the knight who must make the leap to purify himself while the pawn is the man.

Proceeding in this direction you arrive at King Arthur. In the mosaic, King Arthur is depicted riding a goat with a cat (leopard), reminiscent of the name "wolf-cat", which tries to attack him. Looking at this scene there is perhaps Parcival, whose appearance is particular. He stands, upright, handsome, stands above Arthur and Abel, almost a symbol of those who are worthy of heaven; the point, however, is, as we have already said, that Parcival's story is posthumous by a lot compared to the mosaic. However, some believe that it may be Parcival himself who, after the recovery of the Grail, "seems to straighten up and shine with superhuman beauty". Parcival or Parzifal, King Arthur, the Grail, are all symbols that could be defined ante-litteram, since in 1163, when the work was begun, there was no trace of them in the local culture, much less in the Byzantine one; So why put them in the floor of a basilica? This still remains a great and fascinating mystery.

Band member

Ermanno Baron
Ferdinando Romano
Kirke Karja
Veli Kujala

Producer

GleAM Records

Mixer

Jambona Lab (Livorno) by
Antonio Castiello & Aldo De
Sanctis

aufnahmestudio

on November 7th and 8th,
2024 at Extrabeat Recording
Studio (Rome) by Clive
Simpson

Mastering

Jambona Lab (Livorno) by
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Phonotraphy

Giuseppe Manta

Cover Artwork

Studio Clessidra

Tracklist

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1.	La Torre del Serpe M: Ferdinando Romano	04:02
2.	Idrusa M: Ferdinando Romano	08:06
3.	La Cava di Bauxite M: Ferdinando Romano	10:22
4.	L'Albero della Vita M: Ferdinando Romano	11:10
5.	Le Due Sorelle M: Ferdinando Romano	06:51
6.	Re Artù M: Ferdinando Romano	08:19