

VareseNews

De Gregori, a real “Prince” for the Chiara Prize

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With *Rimmel* playing in the background, De Gregori received a standing ovation from the whole Aula Magna of Insubria University. On a lovely Sunday in May, he came to Varese to receive the **Chiara Prize Career Award, “Music in Words”**.

It was a brilliant, willing and ironic Francesco De Gregori who kept the audience entertained for over an hour and a half, with stories about his journey, starting with the author commemorated by the prize. **“I love Piero Chiara, and I consider him one of the greatest writers in Italy. His literature doesn’t require ideological acceptance, even though, in his simplicity, he paid attention to history; I only have to think about the positions of many of his characters towards Fascism. To write a novel, you need to have a story, and he was able to tell them. When you read Chiara, you never get bored.”**

The “Prince” started talking literature at full throttle, but immediately stated, **“I’m not an intellectual. I’m a singer, which is no small thing, but I’m a superficial sort.”**

He and Vittorio Colombo were joined on the stage by Enrico De Angelis, the artistic director of Club Tenco, and Antonio Silva, the presenter of the Tenco Prize. **Bambi Lazzati and the organisation of the Chiara Prize were extremely proud.** The five people that have received the award in the last few years speak for themselves. The first to receive the Career Award was Francesco Guccini, then it was the turn of Paolo Conte, followed by Luciano Ligabue, Gianna Nannini, and this year, **Francesco De Gregori.** “I don’t like awards, but when they called to tell me I’d been chosen, I was overjoyed to accept immediately,” De Gregori said.

The conversation with the singer-songwriter from Rome started with *Viva l’Italia*. “Our country is really half a garden and half a prison. This isn’t a political song, although many have used it to support their position. But it seems to stand up, given that its soul is still intact.”

About his colleagues that have previously received this award, De Gregori said, “At least three of them are colleagues of Piero Chiara. They know how to write. I think very highly of all four of them, and their lyrics are strong and beautiful. Ours are songs in which the words must clearly fit with the music, but it isn’t poetry. **Rhyming isn’t all that’s necessary to write poetry.** It’s true that we singer-songwriters have revolutionised pop music, and I think this is already a lot.”

After a video from 1974, in which he sang *Niente da capire (Nothing to Understand)*, **De Gregori lit up a cigarette. This caused laughter and even astonishment in the Aula Magna.** “Maybe it’s never happened, but it’s the price you’ll have to pay for showing this video. I need to relax now,” he explained.

The words are the protagonist of the song, and De Gregori is one of the innovators. “I wrote songs in the way that I wanted to. They have no linearity, but you can understand them. **It’s a little like abstract art. If you can’t understand Alice, how can you understand Picasso?** There’s nothing *to* understand is like an answer to anyone that criticised Alice, saying they didn’t understand anything.”

This year, *Rimmel* is forty years old. “It’s a hit record that has remained. I’m still surprised when

people come and bring me *Rimmel*. I'm doing a concert in Verona with a lot of colleagues, such as Fedez, Caparezza, Sangiorgio, and many others. For the first time, I'm going to do all nine songs on the album."

It was a great thrill when a video with Lucio Dalla at the 1995 New Year's party, in Assisi, was shown. "It's true that I urged Lucio to write his lyrics alone. When he spoke, he used such rich language that, fortunately, he listened to me in the end, and did it."

On 1 July, De Gregori is opening a Bob Dylan concert. "I'd buy the newspaper for him every day. Discovering his music was important to me."

When De Angelis mentioned Enrico Ruggeri attacking De Gregori, because "you can't write songs from an ivory tower", the Prince lit up another cigarette, but then joked about it. "I learned from Fabrizio De Andrè why I write a song. We were friends, and with me, he got to know American music."

The meeting ended with *Vivavoce*, his latest disc, which is like a cover version of himself, in which the songs are reinterpreted. "There's no official version, except maybe that of the first recording. But this doesn't mean you can't change the way you perform it. This is also one reason why people come to concerts, to listen to a story that's alive. **My profession is jolly, and a little self-mockery doesn't hurt.**"

di Marco Giovannelli Translated by Lory Zoto (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)