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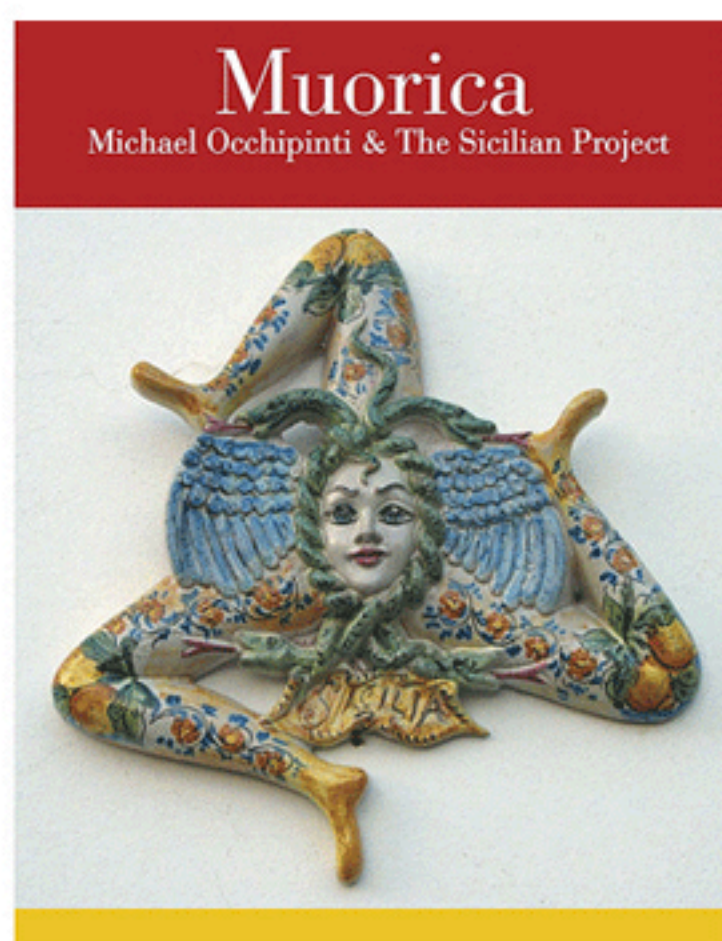
REVIEWS CDS

## Michael Occhipinti & The Sicilian Project: Muorica

By Raul da Gama · Nov 23, 2015 👁 292 💬 0



To be moved by so little is to show in perfectly appropriate terms the very nature of these pieces, and a rare and special event on any disc (let alone one made in a dialect of Italian). But the phrasing and articulation of this music by Michael Occhipinti and his iconic Sicilian Project are so precise yet carefully understated, and of a kind of total acceptance simplicity, that the music is given space to 'sing' and 'dance'. All of this aided and abetted by Michael Occhipinti's miraculous sounding guitar, Don Byron's warm and woody clarinet and the magnificent voices of the ineffable Dominic Mancuso and the divine Pilar. No pomp; no circumstance; just wonderfully and old-fashioned magically made music.



At no point in this dignified performance does Michael Occhipinti resort to 'oversharing' or even 'overshadowing' fellow members of The Sicilian Project, or even listeners, to make his point. He is simply revered for his musical intensity – setting a fine example for the rest of the group – and even when it isn't as obvious here as it may be in his *Sicilian Jazz Project* or his voyages into other musical idioms, and quite rightly. This is pure passion for and of music. One of the qualities best served by his respectful withdrawal from the soul-baring front line of the music – to let the vocalists shine, basking in the poetry and lyricism of the music – is that the dance identity is so joyfully evident. The phrases relay into each other like a figure skater moving from pose

to pose; the end of each never experiences a heavy footfall; and the openings of many are so graphic that you can almost see the (imaginary) dancers bowing to each other before they begin (I see this especially in *Muorica* and the two parts of *Lingua E Dialettu*). The musicians, especially Michael Occhipinti and Don Byron, are so fleet of foot, even in the slowest movements, that it is not long before it becomes clear that this performance is a master class in passionate restraint and musical altruism. The musical interpretation itself is almost transparent – nothing disturbing the millpond, save the knowledge that the tranquility of its performance is in inverse proportion to its depth.

Michael Occhipinti plays on a sweet-toned guitar, and his refined finger technique produces a delicate and crisply elegant sound with richly rounded, plum-like trills. The gentleness of his touch shows beautifully in the strummed chords and the plucked single note lines that seem to glide out of the tips of his fingers. There is a rare and convincing lilt in the phrasing of *Lingua E Dialettu* and an exquisitely slight *inégale* illuminates the music of *Spunta Lu Sole*. Elsewhere there is a tendency towards flexible rhythms and this can seem relentless in some of the profounder music on this disc. Where it works better is in *The Soldier And The Siren* or in other lighter dances that can run themselves like dynamic gigue, which Michael Occhipinti and The Sicilian Project executes with compulsive flow.

It's easy to think that the definitive recordings of these important pieces could not only be studio recordings but also live ones. However studio may work better where every phrase has been scrutinised and, if necessary, retaken. But the very least Michael Occhipinti's living, breathing manifestation of a lifetime of study can do is make the listener reconsider whether the most three-dimensional way to present such profound music is, in fact, to prepare in private but trust to luck in public. I, for one will be looking forward to the latter as well.

**Track List:** Amuninni Bazietta; Muorica; 'A Staciuni; Lingua E Dialettu (Part 1 – Poesia); Lingua E Dialettu (Part 2 – U Cantu); Pirati A Palermo; Favi Amari; Spunta Lu Sole; Saccio Chi Parla A La Luna; The Soldier And The Siren; Cantu A Timuni; Cialomi; Marzememi.

**Personnel:** Michael Occhipinti: all guitars and ambient effects; Dominic Mancuso: vocals; Roberto Occhipinti: bass; Louis Simao: accordion and pandeiro; Mark Kelso: drums; Kevin Turcotte: trumpet; Ernie Tollar: saxophone and flute; Don Byron: clarinet (2, 4, 5, & 10); Pilar: vocals (1, 2, 4, 5 & 10); Maryem Tollar: vocals (8); Francesco Pellagrino: vocals (11); Yvette Tollar: backup vocals (1); The Cecilia String Quartet (2, 4, 5, & 10): Min-Jeong Koh and Sarah Nematallah: violins; Caitlin Boyle: viola; Rachel Desoer: cello.

**Label:** Independent

**Release date:** October 2015

**Website:** [michaelocchipinti.com](http://michaelocchipinti.com)

**Running time:** 1:11:56

**Buy music on:** [bandcamp.com/album/muorica](http://bandcamp.com/album/muorica)