

The Boomer's Guide to Music & News **BENTLEY'S BANDSTAND**

Michael Occhipinti

The Sicilian Jazz Project

True North Records

There are some albums destined to blow your mind. On the surface one called *The Sicilian Jazz Project* seems a little predictable. What are they going to play: Italian music? But dig a little deeper and the plot sickens real fast. Michael Occhipinti has parental roots in Sicily, but his family immigrated to Canada before he was born, and from there everything hit the fan. There are so many global styles in these songs it's impossible to pin anything down. Guitarist/composer Occhipinti uses the early field recordings by Alan Lomax of traditional Sicilian folk music being performed by sulfur miners, tuna fishermen and assorted peasants and folk entertainers as a jumping-off point. From there, it's an emotional free-for-all, with classical, Arabic, Cuban, Brazilian and other influences sweeping freely into the mix. The musicians are world class, able to perform almost anything with a swirling enthusiasm that is quickly contagious. There are a lot of them too, with a complete string section joining in, along with the alluring vocalists Dominc Mancuso and Maryem Tollar adding just the right seductive touch. Everything combines to create a joyous blend of indefinable sounds, an atmosphere that erases all worry and replaces that with the feeling anything is possible and it's only a matter of time before the clouds will lift to reveal a startling sky of beauty. This is really why we listen to music: to be surprised and lifted up, stripped of our preconceptions and left breathless by hearing something brand new. Big props to Michael Occhipinti and all the players for taking jazz into a new room, one where the floor is moving and the walls keep breathing in and out, leaving listeners somewhere up near the ceiling hoping to never come down.

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