



“NATIBONGO 2008 - FESTIVAL DI MUSICA AFRO-AUSTRALIANA”

Locations: [Cividale Del Friuli \(Lesa Park – Carraria Village\)](#) North east of Italy

When: [28-29-30 Agosto 2008](#)

Report by: [Jack Azzarà \(primarily published in Italian on the 'Yidaki News' paper magazine\)](#)

...and finally I came to the Valli del Natisone - more precisely, to Cividale del Friuli, in the Parco della Lesa, to attend the 2008 edition of the Natibongo Festival.

I wrote 'finally' because, although I've been following the didgeridoo scene since 2002, this was the first edition of this festival I ever attended. As the saying goes, 'better late than never'.

As is often the case, the first impression is very important, and if a festival is held in a nice place, the first impression can only be a positive one.

So was my first impression of Natibongo, because the Parco della Lesa is beautiful, a large green area next to the Natisone river and just 2 km from Cividale del Friuli.

A huge *free* parking lot (formed by two football fields and a few lay-byes) allowed people to park easily, with no stress or waste of time. Those who had a camper could fix themselves up how they pleased.

From the entrance (a small wooden stall), a short downhill road led to the enclosed area where the festival was held.

On the left, next to the main stage, was a wide space for free camping. On the right and in the back, was a small stage surrounded by several stands, including catering facilities. Lots of tables and benches allowed those who wanted to eat not to stand in line for hours before finding a seat. The best situation to enjoy a didgeridoo and percussion festival!

The shows covered three nights, from Thursday to Saturday, and the acts' list was wide and varied.

All acts were warmly greeted by an outstandingly excited audience: a few YouTube videos bear witness of the 'good vibes'.

Nevertheless, I found a few shows a bit unimpressive. Albeit acknowledging all acts a great deal of enthusiasm and professional attitude, I must admit that I had expected something better from a few of them.

First on stage on Thursday night were the Djetal Vehicle, a Psytrance-cum-didgeridoo act. Being a long-time Psytrance and Goa enthusiast, I really liked their music, in which (if I remember well) I could spot hints of old school Goa Trance.

Moreover, their didgeplayer, Federico Petrei, showed off good technical skills.





Unfortunately, as is often the case with this kind of musical combination, I had a hard time hearing the didgeridoo, particularly the low-pitched parts.

I heard a few Djetal Vehicle tunes on their MySpace, and the didgeridoo parts were much more easily discernible than live in concert.

Next on stage were the Broken Spare Parts. Maybe because I was tired, or maybe because of the thoughts that listening to live electronic music after a long time had stirred up in my mind, my memories of their set are a bit blurred, albeit good. In particular, I remember a tune featuring a very low-pitched overtone singing.

The performances ended with a dj set that went on until very late in the night.

First on stage on Friday night were Lars Wallin, on didgeridoo and acoustic guitar, and his bandmates, Peter Hansson on bass and Thorolf Andersson on cajon. This was the second time I heard Wallin playing live. To be honest, I found his performance quite unimpressive, and the didgeridoo parts repetitive, with a redundant use of vocal shrieks.

For fairness' sake, I'll report that other members of the audience commented that his set was, virtually, the live version of his latest cd, which was much better.

Next on stage was the trio composed by Ansgar Manuel Stein and the father-and-son percussion section formed by Mike and Joss Turnbull. They performed a live version of their 'Regen' cd, with a few variations, plus a couple of new tunes.

Their set was by far the best of the entire festival: I found their performance simply perfect, hypnotic, overpowering... in short, unforgettable.

The two Turnbull percussionists are incredible. Only once in the past I had heard percussion and didgeridoo blend so nicely: I'm talking about the now-defunct Wild Marmalade.

I had heard Ansgar many times in the past, the last being two years ago. Back then I thought of him that he was a superb didgeplayer - so good, actually, that I thought he couldn't possibly play much better than that. But, boy, did the man improve, indeed! His didgeplaying is powerful and ultrafast, while at the same time clear and accurate.

Maybe it was just my impression, but in his phrasings I heard something that reminded me of (Austrian didgeplayer extraordinaire) Ali Andress.

I may be mistaken, but, actually, during the past two years Ansgar and Ali played together many times. I also noted in Ansgar a very sporadic use of the cheeks; when he used them, they were almost imperceptibly inflated. Finally, it must be remembered the set's strong visual impact, the result of a masterly combination of makeup, colours, costumes and stage act.

As the night before, the whole event was wrapped up by a long dj set that lasted until the wee hours.





First on stage on Saturday night were the Orange Project, an all-Italian, five-piece outfit coming from Asti and formed by Manuel Tappa, a.k.a. Mr Ramu, on didgeridoo, Tiziano Villata on guitar, Gianluca Rosso on drums, Luca Zappa on djembe and Francesco Calemme on bass.

Orange Project are surely an interesting band with lots of potential, but in this occasion their performance was a bit see-saw, alternating powerful and innovative tunes like 'Arancia Balkanica' to uninspired and dull ones like 'Sveglia!'.

I hope to catch them live as soon as possible, perhaps at the Covo di Moncalvo, close to Asti, where they play very often.

The festival was closed by former Wild Marmalade didgeplayer Simon Mullumby and percussionist Philipp Pluhar, who offered a substandard performance that partially disappointed me.

I had heard Simon playing with Wild Marmalade and, in all fairness, it had been quite another thing. First of all, the rhythm patterns were more varied; then, Simon's didgeplaying, albeit not on Ansgar's same level, was much clearer and accurate.

Instead, during his set at Natibongo, the sound of his didgeridoo seemed so muddled to make me think of some technical problem with the PA. Finally, albeit good, Philipp Pluhar was no match for the Turnbells or even Matt Goodwin and Mat Ledger, the former Wild Marmalade rhythm section.

Anyway, for the sake of fairness, I must say that a large part of the audience didn't share my unenthusiastic opinion about Simon's and Phillip's performance, which they seemed to very much appreciate. Once again, the event was closed by a lengthy dj set.

I was very happy to attend Natibongo 2008. The organization was good, and I really appreciated the attention paid by the organizers to certain details such as: the signs warning that the road at the entrance was dangerous; those who warned that keeping dogs at leash was compulsory (which, of course, way too many ignored); the posters hanging from the trees, describing many percussion instruments and the didgeridoo - something really useful for beginners and non-didgeplayers alike. A real, nice touch of class, then, were the signs greeting the acts coming from abroad in their mother tongue. Well done!

A few suggestions for the 2009 edition, which, hopefully, I won't miss.

- 1) Improve the quality of certain facilities, such as showers and toilets.
- 2) Lower the beverages' prices (I saw many people bringing in their own drinks), maybe raising the admittance fee to €5, at least for the shows held on Friday and Saturday night.
- 3) For what regards the shows, budget permitting, it would be nice to have three shows per night, and to have at least one show for didgeridoo only and one for percussion instruments only.
- 4) Finally, I think it would be a good idea having a sort of 'showcase space', for didgeridoo and percussion players alike, on the smaller stage, possibly before the main events (that is, between 7:30 and 9:30 p.m.). Of course, in order to avoid totally impromptu (and aimless) performances, all potential participants should be requested to send a demo beforehand.





Summing up, I greet all the Natibongo people and I thank the organization for what they put up. Finally, I encourage them to raise a further octave the percussive power and the explosive vibe of Natibongo, a great festival and a great showcase for Afro-Australian music!

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