

Sketchy Building

LUIGI PORTO is a New York-based musician and producer who taps into his Italian heritage seamlessly. His music is an interesting and intriguing blend of experimentalism and progressiveness, knitted together perfectly through mediums of alternative rock and ambient psychedelic music. This unique and fantastic blend has perhaps been best captured in Luigi's impressive full-length outings, 2014's *Scimmie* and 2021's *Tell Uric*. These two releases provide a snapshot of a supremely talented composer and arranger really coming into his own. They sit brilliantly alongside Luigi's other projects and recordings too, 2017's sampling opus 'Stana Bambina', and further back 2007's *Respirano* EP. These are offerings from a musician who is in a continuous state of growth and evolution. Following the release of *Tell Uric*, Luigi took some time out to chat to *Aldora Britain Records* about his musical journey so far.

Luigi Porto has previously contributed his track 'The Sun' to our 'Face the Distance' compilation. Listen and download [HERE](#).

Aldora Britain Records: Hello Luigi, how are you? It is a real pleasure to be talking to such an innovative artist. Thank you for your time. I wanted to start off by rewinding the clocks. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Luigi Porto: Hi Tom and thank you for your kind words. Earliest musical memories. I remember one of my first cassettes was The Police's *Reggatta De Blanc*. I was listening to it when I was eight or something. I remember I would choose my favourite songs casually while I was not listening to them. Like one day, I was in front of my grandpa's store and 'Bring on The Night' suddenly came to my mind and I realised then it was my favourite, and I was craving to listen to it again. The same thing happened with Queen's 'Under Pressure'. I was probably ten, was at a restaurant, and suddenly I decided I



“I was already more conscious about my aims in music. I wanted to create little musical universes ... something that’s going on forever and has no beginning nor end.”

needed to listen to that song again. Other than that, now that I think, my dad singing me ‘Chim Chim Cheree’ – ‘Spazzacamin’ in Italian – to make me sleep, or the title music from *Pinocchio* by the great Fiorenzo Carpi. Or again, *La Piovra* by Ennio Morricone. My mom would watch every season of that programme. And later, sound memories, like the tuning of a radio.

About what brought me here. I grew up in a city with a pretty intense musical scene, many of us kids were playing music. My first rock bands were in my teens, like everyone, and I was a guitarist. When I was seventeen, I bought a synth workstation with a thirty-two track recorder and started composing electronic tracks. I was fascinated by Die Form, industrial and wave, and dark ambient stuff. Later, folk music too. All of this merged together.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let’s stop off at 2014’s outing, *Scimmie*. This is a really good record and an interesting snapshot of your evolution as an artist. How do you reflect on this release now and how would you say you have evolved as a musician since?

Luigi Porto: *Scimmie* was a sort of rebirth in my production. After my first releases, between 2004 and 2007 as Mond, Appleyard College and with other bands, I started working in film sound in Rome. There I met Romano Scavolini and gave him a demo. He was hit by the music and proposed to me that we collaborate on his *L’Apocalisse Delle Scimme*, a very ambitious project that is still unreleased. I remember



working on it wherever my documentary sound job would bring me. Like an old farmhouse in Puglia or in Paris. I was already more conscious about my aims in music. I wanted to create little musical universes, like you open a window on something that’s going on forever and has no beginning nor end. Later, I moved to the US and kept working on it in New York, where I met Mr Dead who I knew from Antipop Consortium and some of his singles too. We met on a film set and I found out that he was a big fan of Romano’s work, so we did a hip hop track for the film. A similar thing happened with Rudi Assuntino, a songwriter that did some political hits in Italy in the 1960s, who I met on a documentary trip.

As agreed with Romano, the soundtrack would have been a deflagration of violence and spirituality, something that would go on even if the film stopped. I had a great freedom in writing it, he is so far the only director that gave me such freedom. Later, I released it on Cineplot, whom I admired for their artworks and their devotion to Italian sounds of the 70s. With *Scimmie*, my career was restarted under my own name. I think it reflects the rush I was living in back then, constantly on the move, and the attempt to coagulate the most diverse inputs.

Turn over for more Luigi Porto...

“I think our music beautifully reflects our defects.”

Aldora Britain Records: Your work has a strong experimental element. You are always trying to advance and push against boundaries. I really like that about your music. How would you say your sound has come about, what goes into it, and who are your biggest influences as an artist?

Luigi Porto: Yeah, as I just said, my life has always been pretty intense. The opposite of what you may think of a composer: meditative, methodical, ritualistic. I always found my mediation between one vortex and another. My life is so hard, I don't know how to explain it. So is my music. I think our music beautifully reflects our defects. If you are a boring person, your music is boring. If you are nervous, your music will be nervous. I am kind of forced by some curse to always break through barriers and boundaries, find ways to go around problems. And in between things, I have those moments of introspection, that I value very much because they're few and far between. You'll find this pattern in my music. At least, I am proud to say my first influence is life. I got trained in music in unorthodox ways. I am a working-class musician turned composer, with all the limitations that brings, and I try to treasure these limitations. Other than this, of course I have my musical models too. I can mention Neil Young, Christian Death, Igor Stravinsky and Charles Ives. All restless artists more or less.



Aldora Britain Records: 2021's *Tell Uric* initially introduced me to your music. It is definitely an album that I still play regularly. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this record? It must have felt good to get back to it after the COVID years.

Luigi Porto: The idea behind *Tell Uric* started many years ago. It has something to do with me coming from below and trying to fit into different worlds. I always felt that burden of where I come from, either in a bad or good way, depending on circumstances. I was born in one of the poorest regions of Europe, which is one of the richest parts of the globe. Wherever I was, I would realise that people who are

familiar with the class struggle could 'smell' each other. And the more I advanced in my career, the less of those people I could find. Privilege is real. The very top of all worlds – music, arts, sports, economics – consists of certain people. Those people have something more but also something less than others. One thing they have is ambition. That is very unknown at the lowest levels. Also, it is very different in Europe and in the US, where belonging to a lower class also means being cut off from a proper education. That is something that is more or less granted everywhere in Europe.

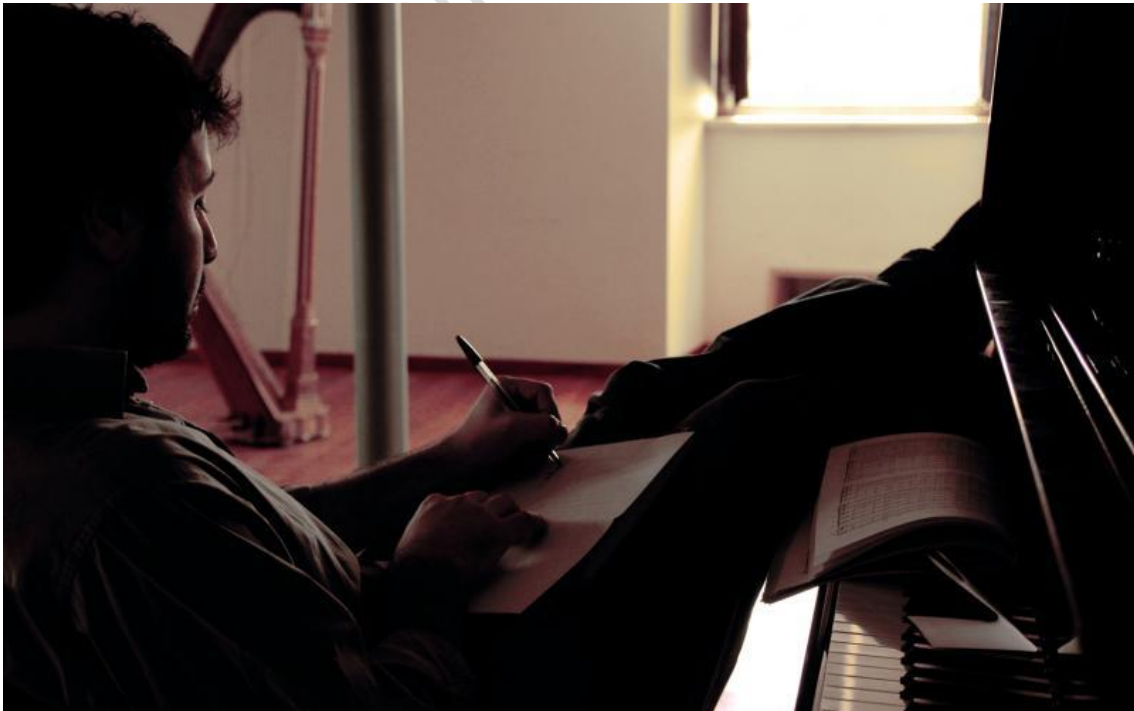
It may seem a militant political dissertation that goes nowhere – and maybe it is. But it is rooted very organically in my mind on a deeper level. I would say spiritual. I began reflecting about the Eastern concepts of caste and the way it clashes with class. That was years ago while I was still living in Rome. In 2020, something happened. I had spent the last few years of my life studying and producing notated music, writing an opera, orchestral and chamber stuff. It was necessarily dealing with certain people. I'm talking bowties and turtleneck sweaters. Musical aristocracy. In 2019, I took a work trip to South Dakota and realised I felt much more at home there, amongst conservative farmers, than in the New York progressive intellectual world. Nothing really new, it's a known issue, but it added to the pile. I also felt an urge to go back to where I came from musically. Not just go back but fall, plummet, into

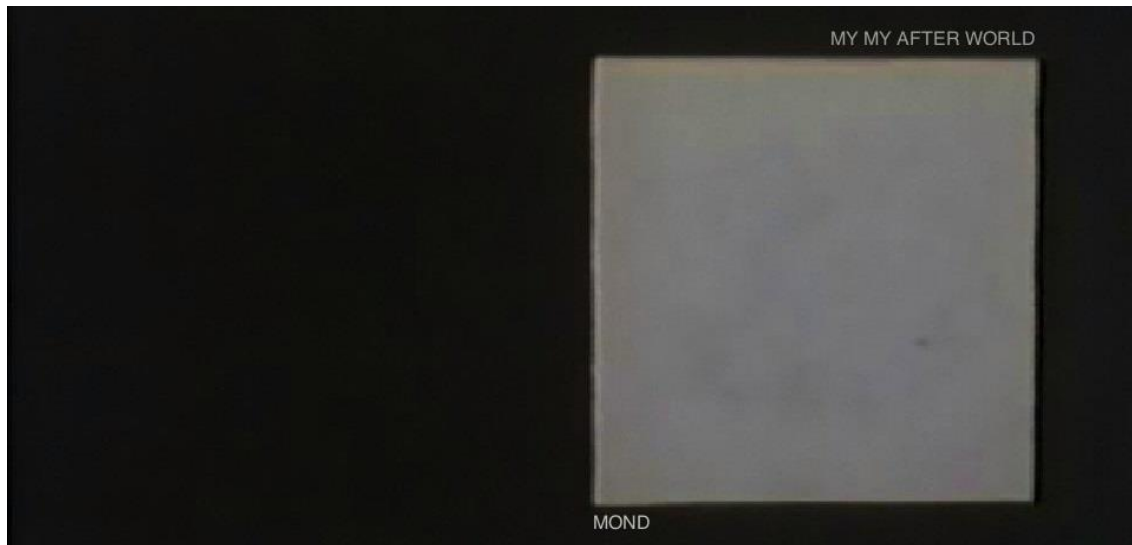
“I ... felt an urge to go back to where I came from musically. Not just go back but fall, plummet, into it.”

it. I did a concert at Carnegie Hall and just some weeks before I had bought myself a guitar amp, I was craving a pause from that work. One week after the concert, March 2020, the whole world shutdown. I went from reading music on the piano everyday to not reading a single note for a straight two years. And I had just finished working on the soundtrack to *Uljhan*, an Indian thriller shot by Ashish Pant dealing with – guess what? – the clash of class struggle and caste. Everything was sending me signals to complete *Tell Uric*, and it was there waiting. So, I did. That’s how I work, life sends me signals to do things. The arrow facing downwards become the natural symbol of it. It’s difficult to talk about it. If I could tell exhaustively in words what that album means to me, there would not be a need for music. A big thank you goes to my friend and collaborator Ray Lustig, a genius composer who had been my teacher at Juillard and went through a similar process of repealing classical music to fulfil a songwriting urge. We kept hanging out with our circle of musician friends of very diverse extraction, even through the lockdown, and that’s when the last big collaborations on the album happened. Also the *Uljhan* theme, that we recorded at Joe Patrych’s studio in the Bronx, ended up on the album with the kind permission of the director and the producer.

Aldora Britain Records: I would like to single out some personal favourites now if you don’t mind. Let’s talk ‘The Sun’ and ‘Sketchy Building’. For each, what is the story behind the track, did anything in particular inspire it, and what does it mean to you?

Luigi Porto: You’re the first to ask about ‘The Sun’. That song is basically the centre of my musical world. It was written in 2003, the day a building with a primary school inside collapsed in southern Italy, killing many children. It was a big laboratory song where I experimented with many devices. It was ending with a long coda that would reprise the main chord progression and extract another distant ‘ghost’ melody from it. Well, that coda was released in 2004 already as a track called ‘On





Walden' on my album *My My After World*. That melody haunted me forever, I quoted it as one of main themes of my opera *Anita Di Laguna* and you can also hear it in an art installation I did in 2013. When I later released 'The Sun' in its final form on the album, I inserted that ghost theme in the song. You can hear it beneath the school kids, in the pause before the guitar solo. It's twelve notes that belong to my life on a deep level.

'Sketchy Building' was first written in Rome and then finished in Washington Heights, New York. It is an attempt to return an astonished sense of incumbent danger. All the scenes briefly depicted come from real life, from the little gypsy girl on a bus calling everyone 'dad' to the 'boy with the gun' and the couple with the corpse in their bed. The final spark to finish the song came after David Bowie's death in January 2016. New York was gloomy for days and the music community felt like they lost a father figure. I will never forget the feeling of those days. I was living in a rent-controlled building. Five days before, I had a fight with an armed robber in front of my door, and my neighbour, an Iraq veteran, would ask me for alcohol and drugs, and later knocked on my door at 3.30am completely naked with a knife, yelling in fear of his own visions. My other neighbour, whose son was in jail and left him alone and drunk, was showing up with a gun holster and tried to get me evicted from my apartment for some reason. Another neighbour was dying of cancer in those days and systematically locking himself inside leaving his annoying wife out. Like, 'It's my last two months, shut the fuck up, leave me alone'. The meth head girl downstairs was playing homeless and begging in front of the speedway. She later overdosed and dies. And there was the mentally challenged boy who stabbed his mother. There was a drama at every door, literally. The city is like that outside the tourist areas. And I have a lot of these stories, I lived in many 'sketchy buildings' in the past, but that one was the top. I recorded most of *Tell Uric* in it.

Aldora Britain Records: In recent years, you have set up your very own record label, Respirano Records. What drew you towards making this move and what do you hope to achieve through the label? Is it an outlet for your own work as a musician or more of a collaborative network? I believe the record label is also linked to a sound studio.

Luigi Porto: Setting up my own label has always been something I wanted to do. Respirano Records is named after my old EP *Respirano*, one of my works I am still most affectionate to. I run it with the help of Ray Lustig. We have two planned releases, *Manicburg* and *Misospoek*, scheduled for 2023. Plus, we'll soon come out with a compilation that will include some fantastic artists amongst the people we know. Great musicians with great visions; Groove Temple, Al the Coordinator, Eyal

Marcovici to name a few. My models are Mute Records and 4AD. Mute is very heterogenous, driven only by a taste in an innovative approach to the song form. This can include artists who are apparently distant in style as they are very close in their collections of true music listeners. Think Nick Cave, Depeche Mode and Einsturzende Neubauten. 4AD is driven by a vision of an individual, Ivo Watts-Russell, who created a de facto new genre. Right now, I am trying to start out with people from my inner circles, coming from uptown Manhattan, Brooklyn and also southern Italy.



The sound studio is the other face of the company. Respirano Sound is a film sound design studio that I run with some great professionals, Stefano Di Fiore and Marco Ciorba, and that functions between New York and Rome. We do sound design, mix and post for arthouse films. Independent, psychological thrillers, dramas. Daring films from daring directors. I keep working as a documentary sound mixer, travelling around the world from time to time too.

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Luigi:** I mentioned them before. Neil Young, Christian Death, Charles Ives and Stravinsky.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Luigi:** Christian Death's *Insanus, Ultio, Proditio, Misericordiaque*. That also includes a quote from Stavinsky. The most important album of my life is a collection of lo-fi demos.

AB Records: First gig? **Luigi:** Probably Giorgio Gaber, an Italian songwriter, when I was a toddler. First big trip for a concert was for The Cure in Rome.

AB Records: Style icon? **Luigi:** You mean dress style? Probably Bruce Springsteen post-*Nebraska*, Neil Young, Michael Stipe past the blue eyes makeup. I generally dislike rockstar outfits, elegant smartass and hipster attires. I like people dressed normally for the season.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Luigi:** *Persona* by Ingmar Bergman and *Mulholland Drive* by Lynch. It's one film.

AB Records: Favourite up and coming artist? **Luigi:** I would say King Krule, but not sure if he falls into the definition of 'up and coming' still.

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Turn over for Aldo Buzzi...