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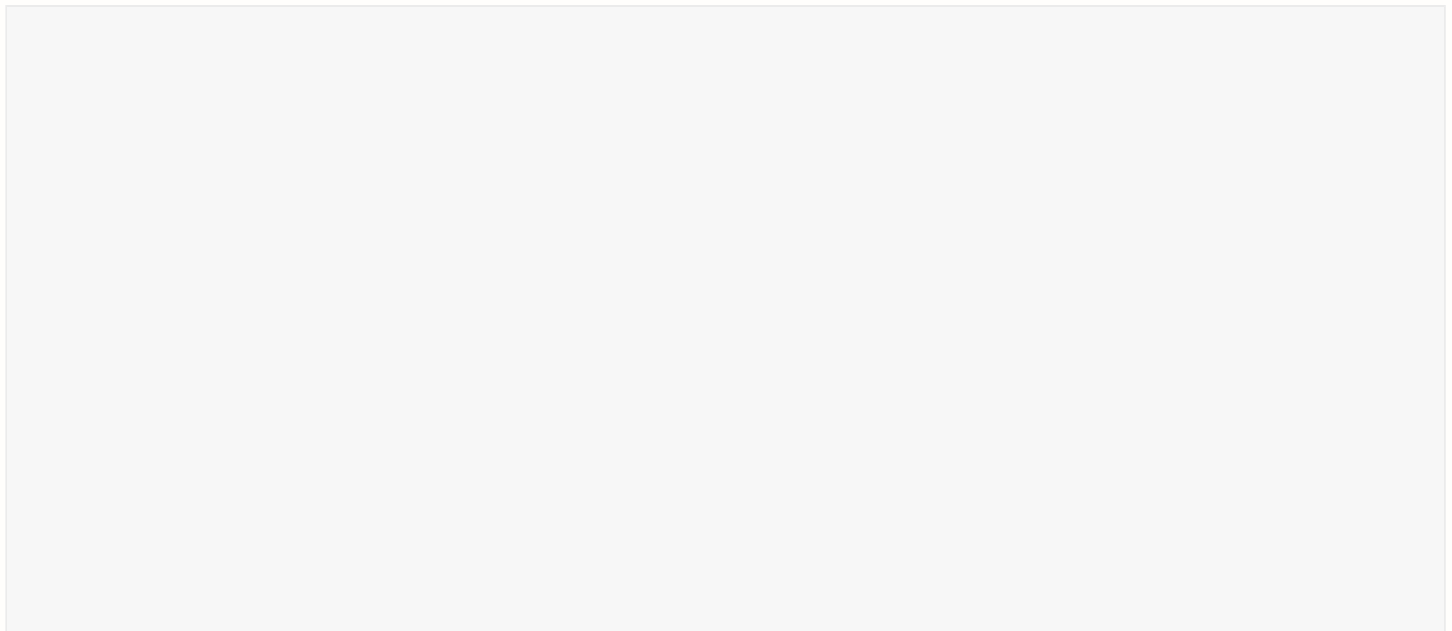
## People

# Marco Cappelli, Sophisticated Musician Between Naples and New York

Guitarist, composer, and bandleader, he has established himself as a figure in the “new music” scene since he moved to the city twenty years ago



*George De Stefano*



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*Marco Cappelli. Photo: George De Stefano*

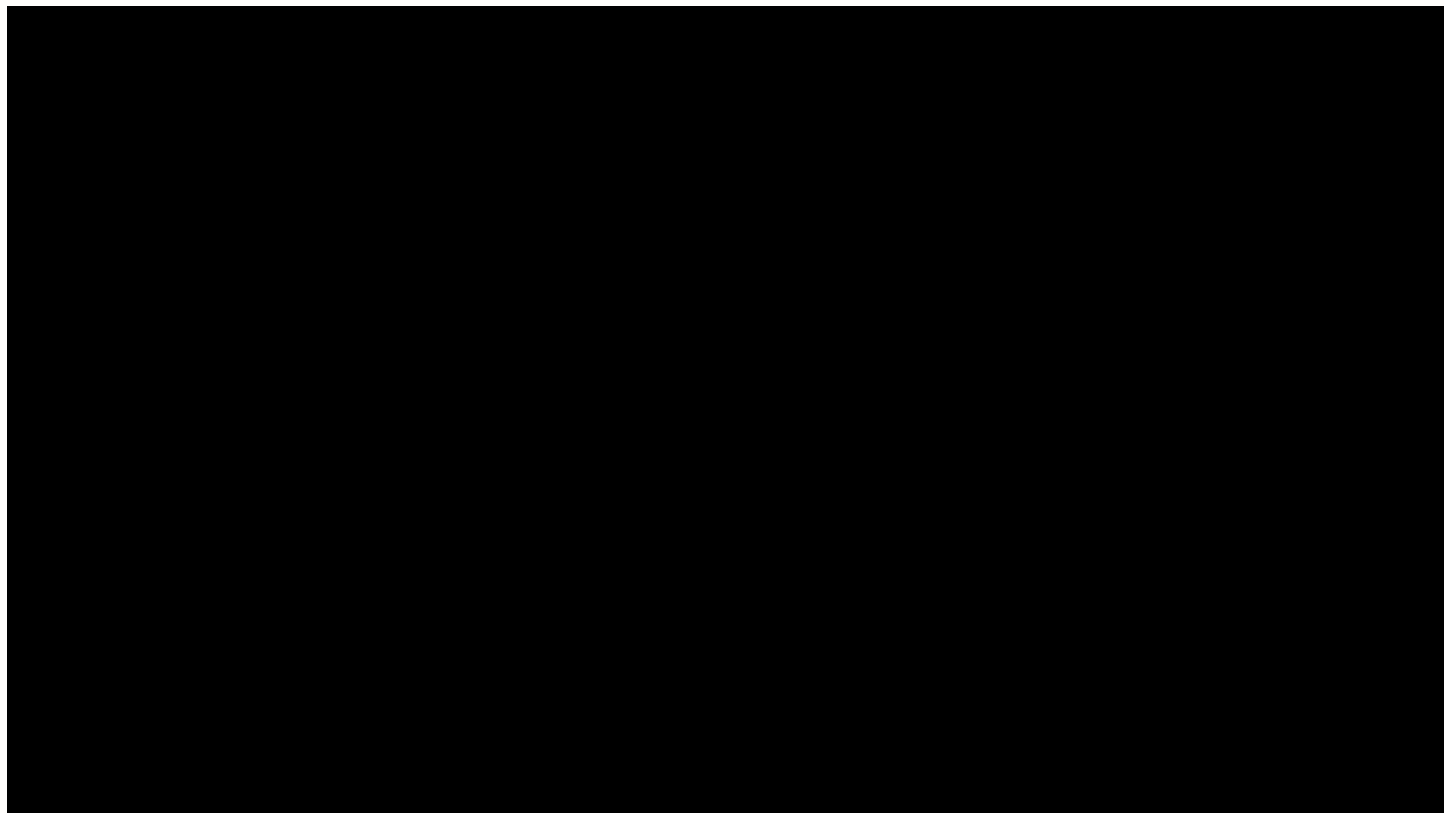
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Marco Cappelli, the Brooklyn-based guitarist and composer, makes music that is beyond category while remaining connected to Southern Italy. He has founded a new label, 41<sup>st</sup> Parallel Records, to distribute his genre-bending works.

Cappelli, a musician from Naples, lives in a walk-up apartment, in a building with an Italian American landlord, in the Carroll Gardens section of Brooklyn, a historically Italian American neighborhood. Gazing out a window facing the backyard, you see his neighbors' well-tended grape arbors and gardens. But as a twenty-first-century Italian immigrant, now a U.S. citizen, Cappelli, 57, doesn't much resemble the poor immigrants from Naples and other places in Southern Italy who arrived a century or

so ago, carrying *valigie di cartone* (cardboard suitcases).

A sophisticated, conservatory-trained guitarist, composer, and bandleader, Cappelli has established himself as a figure in the "new music" scene since he moved to New York twenty years ago. Proficient in composed music and free improvisation, he has performed and recorded with such eminences as the avant-garde composer and instrumentalist Elliot Sharp, guitarist Marc Ribot, pianist Anthony Coleman, the Italian jazz trumpeter Enrico Rava, the late cornetist and composer Butch Morris, and many more. In addition to composing and performing, he teaches classical guitar at the Conservatorio Vincenzo Bellini in Palermo.



Cappelli currently leads three bands: the Marco Cappelli Acoustic Trio, Italian Surf Academy, and IDR-Italian DOC Remix. *Downbeat* magazine designated the first Italian Surf Academy album, *American Dream*, an Editor's Pick, describing it as "a mixture of Dick Dale and experimental composer John Zorn, or perhaps a far-out musical crossbreeding of the Ventures with a mind-blowing, avant-garde jazz education." Like Zorn, a composer and saxophonist who is a leading light of New York's experimental music scene, Cappelli resists categorization.

His latest project is a new label, 41st Parallel Records, which he founded to present his music. The label takes its name from the 41st parallel north, the geographic circle of latitude that connects Naples with New York City. The label's latest release is *The Falcon's Hats*, an homage to the music of Neapolitan guitarist and composer Alberto Falco, who died from Covid in 2020, a victim of flawed pandemic policies and hospital negligence.

“I founded 41st Parallel Records basically because I was struggling to find a label to release *Pandemonium*, my second album with Italian DOC Remix,” he says. “IDR is such a weird band in terms of which shelves you would put it. So, as usually happens with my music, I get a lot of compliments, recognition and warm feedback. But then, they often don't know what to do with it because it's not jazz, folk music, or classical. They know only what it's not, and they don't find a place for it.”

“I was kind of suffering from this condition in the beginning, but I ended up being proud of it. Nowadays, you don't make money with records unless you are a major company selling pop music. So it doesn't really make sense to run after labels that turn you down. Why not try to start one? So I decided it was time for me. I called it 41st Parallel Records because of the parallel which [connects] New York and Naples, my hometown.”

With six releases to date, the label currently distributes only Cappelli's music. He plans, however, to add other artists to its roster.

New York and Naples, two music capitals, have shaped Cappelli's artistic path. “I was born in Naples, then I went to Rome for some years, then to Switzerland to study classical music. Then I went back to Naples, and then I moved here. The first record of Italian Surf Academy was called *American Dream*. It was exactly that because I remember perfectly this American mythology that didn't correspond to reality, but it was in the mind of all of us kids or young people growing up in Naples. I was born in 1965, so I was a kid in the '70s and a teenager in the early '80s. I remember that

Naples was this beautiful town with this incredible energy, but there was something wrong, some cloud of shit that makes it impossible to wish for things, to realize things.”

There were two omnipresent cultural influences in Naples when Cappelli was growing up: American pop music (rock, jazz, blues) and the Neapolitan folk revival. Cappelli says his musical sensibilities were shaped by both. There was the traditional, folk-oriented music popular in the ‘80s by such artists as Roberto Murolo and La Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare (NCCP). (The IDR album *Pandemonium* includes “Jail the Bakers,” a re-working of “In galera li panettieri,” a song associated with NCCP.) “In Naples, you had to pay this tax to the folk culture,” he recalls. “So I learned to play music through that scene. I was very much involved because it was very political in a way to do that. I was very much involved, but at some point, I needed something different. That’s why I went to Rome, Switzerland, and New York.”

“But I always kept this [Italian] thing; that’s why I did Italian Doc Remix and Italian Surf Academy. There is always this Italian element, not in cliché terms but in the real



history of the country where I was born and raised, especially Naples. Now the idea of sharing my life between Southern Italy and here makes perfect sense to me.”

*Marco Cappelli regularly performs in Brooklyn at such venues as **Barbés**, the **Owl Music Parlor**, and **Soup and Sound**, a performance series created by the jazz drummer Andrew Drury. His recorded music is available at **41<sup>st</sup> Parallel Records** and **Bandcamp**.*



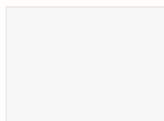
George De Stefano

*George De Stefano is a New York-based writer and*

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## DELLO STESSO AUTORE



Marco Cappelli, Sophisticated Musician Between Naples and New York

George De Stefano



“Let’s Kiss”: Documentary on Franco Grillini Screened at NYU Casa Italiana

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