

'Med 3' rock and blues band to Trieste

Rod Bale

On a recent visit to the UK, Dr Giuseppe Dell'Acqua, a leading exponent of the Italian psychiatric reforms, heard the 'Med 3' band play and extended an invitation to visit Trieste and give a concert. 'Med 3', the name being an allusion to the medical certificate, were formed in 1992. A Mental Health Week was held in the City of Portsmouth that year. In association with the Arts Connection, a local organisation promoting the arts to a wide audience, and the Portsmouth Care Consortium who were organising the event, artists in many fields ran workshops for mental health service users. Guy and Emma Heape, session musicians, ran a workshop at the Social Service Mental Health Day Centre and it was so successful it led to a band being formed. The band achieved recognition by winning a Mental Health Task Force award in 1993. An invitation to accompany the band to Trieste was readily accepted.

The equipment for a rock band, amplifiers, speakers, mixing desk, guitars and percussion necessitated taking a coach rather than a plane. The group of 24, comprising 18 band members and accompanying staff, including an interpreter, arrived after a two day journey on a late September evening at the Centro Di Salute Mentale, Barcola, which also houses a day centre. The staff had generously stayed on to provide an evening meal and a warm welcome.

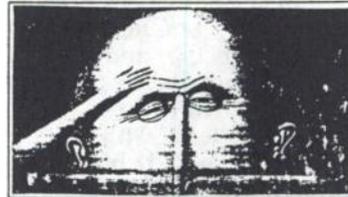
The group stayed in a small hotel in the old town centre for the four day visit. Trieste is a beautiful city of approximately 240 000 inhabitants. It was formerly the main seaport of the Austro-Hungarian empire and lies in the north east corner of Italy near to the Italian border with Slovenia. It has a famous gale force wind, the Bora, which suddenly comes down from the mountains and some of the streets provide handrails for pedestrians in anticipation of this event.

The concert was held the following day, Saturday, in the grounds of the old mental hospital, San Giovanni. A stage had been

ASSOCIAZIONE CULTURALE "FRANCO BASAGLIA"
POLITECNICO - FUORICENTRO

MED 3

ROCK BLUES from Southampton



MUSICA DAL VIVO

Sabato 10 settembre 1994 ore 20.30

al BAR "IL POSTO DELLE FRAGOLE"

COMPENSORIO DI SAN GIOVANNI - EX O.P.P.

con i musicisti del PORTSMOUTH MENTAL HEALTH
HAMPSHIRE COUNTRY COUNCIL

ingresso libero

erected on a grass lawn beside one of the old wards. Graffiti were painted on the stones of the building 'Liberare Tutti' (freedom for all). A restaurant run by the 'Cooperativa Il Posto Delle Fragole' was nearby. The setting for the concert seemed ideal. The atmosphere of the surroundings felt friendly and supportive. It took all afternoon to set up the equipment ready for the evening. The concert began at 9 p.m. The restaurant was brightly lit and people appeared to come from the campus buildings and arrive from the surrounding city. Chairs were placed on the grass and people sat or stood.

A rock and blues band has a strong effect on the listener. The music is insistently loud and rhythmic. The band has a strong percussion

section. The effect on the audience was evident and groups of people danced to the music. The band aims to give every member a chance to perform and six band members did individual vocals. After the finale, a marvellous rendering of 'Wild Thing', guest players from the audience came on stage to join the band for an impromptu session. The band members were elated by the performance and relieved it had been successful.

The following day was spent on a short visit to nearby Venice. On Monday the band collected their equipment which had been stored at San Giovanni, and those who wished visited the facilities of the local psychiatric service. The wish and subsequent legal compulsion to transfer mental health care away from the mental hospital and place such care firmly in community settings, has acted as a strong force for change in the Trieste service. The mental hospital, as formerly developed, is now seen as embodying all that was bad in former mental health care because of its institutionalising and dehumanising effects on the individual. The new service has sought to redress such effects.

In my conversations with Dr Dell'Aqua ('Pepe') I was impressed by his constant tone of realistic optimism and his emphasis on the need to promote the health, rather than the ill health, of the mental health sufferer. In the Trieste service, this extends to a close attention to the decor of buildings within the service. They are invariably light and friendly with murals, posters and paintings on the walls.

The mental hospital is regarded as closed. Former residents who cannot be rehoused, live in villas in the grounds. They are regarded as guests rather than patients. The administrative centre for the Trieste service is housed in a converted ward. It was there that I saw the famous blue horse 'Marco Cavello' made of papier mâché that was wheeled out from the hospital gates as a symbol of freedom in 1972 when Franco Basaglia was Director of the hospital. Its belly was filled with wishes for the future written by the patients. A copy of the horse has been refashioned in metal and stands as an impressive sculpture outside the administrative centre.

The city is divided into five zones which each have their own mental health staff. The psychiatric service has an emergency unit in the general hospital in the centre of the city and is regarded as a first aid station, acting as

a filter for the teams. It is staffed on a rotational basis by medical staff from the mental health teams. Each zone is served by mental health centres providing a team base and crisis centre. Each team has day facilities and a 24-hour residential care facility. The day centre at Barcola, already mentioned, was pleasant and spacious. We visited a residential centre, Aurisina, which provided a total of eight beds for one zone. Here the coach broke down. An impromptu musical event occurred. The bongo drums and guitars were fetched from the coach and an Italian patient played his accordion and people danced in the garden. During our stay we visited a women's centre shared by the teams. This gives special attention to the needs of women within the service, providing individual, group and complementary therapy, such as aromatherapy. Men are not excluded from the centre and can attend for social events after 8 p.m.

In the field of rehabilitation the work of the co-operative is well known and we saw their work in operation. Funding is through government and private contracts and in some circumstances from the European Union. Among the activities of such co-operatives are running a small hotel and restaurant, carpentry, gardening, cleaning, drama, music, video production (many of which have been shown on Italian TV) and a local radio station.

We returned safely to Portsmouth. The band had performed with credit and the individual members had felt a sense of personal achievement. We felt we had shared something of the spirit of the Italian reforms and witnessed their strengths at first hand. They have much in common with the best aspects of our own mental health services. We had undoubtedly benefited from sharing experiences with our Italian colleagues and enjoyed the opportunity to promote international friendship.

Further reading

DELL'ACQUA, G. & DEZZA, M. (1985) The end of the mental hospital. A review of the psychiatric experience in Trieste. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, Supplement 316.

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