

## **An Italian Musician in New York** by Rachel Tallis

Alessandro Spreafico moved to New York City from a small town in northern Italy called Como. He grew up in front of a lake called Lake Como. Though the city is rather small, it has been famous for quite some time. According to Alessandro, it has been the "...worldwide center of silk manufacturers until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." Some other people who have grown up in Como, Italy are Pope Innocent XI and scientist Alessandro Volta, who invented battery. The measurement of a unit of electrical potential is called Volt, named after the scientist. Alessandro mentioned that Hollywood actor George Clooney decided to buy a villa there, which increased the small city's popularity. Alessandro loved growing up in Como and said it is a beautiful place to be born and to have grown up. He mentioned that within the last few decades, many universities have opened and the city is making several "...efforts to raise the level of culture and entertainment." Unfortunately, Italy as a country is currently "...going through one of the worst crises..." since World War II that "...even a beautiful city like Como has to face the lack of hope and optimism."

While still in Como, Italy, Alessandro began piano lessons at age six; art and music have always been an important part of his life. He enjoyed playing in a band as well as taking part in a local theatre company. He "...liked to make movies and talk to artists." Alessandro also began to do some art exhibitions prior to moving to New York. He made the decision to move to New York because he was enrolled in a filmmaking program at Tisch School of the Arts in Manhattan. However, this is not the reason he remained in the city afterwards. He met a fellow Italian named Elena Avesani. He refers to her as a "...brilliant engineer and revolutionary mind. Just like me... not the engineer part- my brain is more confused than Times Square in the rush hour- the revolutionary part." They collaborated to create an art organization called Contaminate. They came across many young artists who wanted to share their creativity and who tried "...without success to impress big galleries in Chelsea." Alessandro explained that the issue was that these young artists could not choose a path in the fine art system that was different, which caused frustration. Alessandro and Elena "...thought it was a great waste of creative potential and it was important to try to find a new and different route to create opportunities for emerging artists." The main focus of Contaminate was to change the approach to the art show experience. They tried to "...move the exhibitions from a cold white cube to places where people live their everyday lives like lounges, bars and shops." It was important to Alessandro and Elena to give artists a chance to present to different crowds and allow them to have a different perspective in a new world. As Alessandro puts it, "... by contaminating everyday places, there was also the possibility of contaminating people with a fresh reinvented art experience." They believed that adding live performances, music, videos and food, which "... all related to a unified created concept, was a good way to give the audience more keys to unlock the artists' world".

Even though Alessandro became successful with his company, all was not smooth when he first came to New York City. He had a few issues with obtaining a VISA, which is quite common when moving to a new country. After solving this, he had to learn about the market, the

people in the city, issues he might come across, and look for ways to have an original and unique company. Alessandro believes that “In New York, you find the best people, the best companies; the competition is very difficult and there is always someone better than you or that had the same idea you had, probably a week before you. In New York, you cannot stop building. You have to run and try to be faster than others.” This is wonderful advice for anyone trying to build their own business, especially in a fast paced city. Alessandro was not nervous when he made the decision to move to New York. He has traveled before and has studied in Berlin, Germany. He says that “... the taste of art and internationality is pretty alive there.” That kind of environment was natural for him. What Alessandro likes about New York is that it “... has this unique skill of opportunities facilitator.” You can come to New York and “...realize that you have lived only the 1% of the opportunities the world can offer.” All of the things that Alessandro had dreamed of seemed unreal until he made the move. He says that since he moved to New York, he “... had the sense that here (he) can find all the tools (he) needs to make (his) ideas real.” For him, “Contaminate proves that.” He feels strongly that he could not have started this organization anywhere other than New York.

Alessandro understands the importance of networking and creating contacts to move forward with your dreams. “That’s how you make things and how you have ideas.” It only took Alessandro and Elena two months until they had their first art show. He knew this was a great way to make new contacts in New York, as well as possibly finding a job. Alessandro says that he did not know that this would begin his career. His job is not simply a job to him; he considers it a mission. “In this mission, there is music and all forms of art. We believe that it’s important to create room for who has something interesting to say.”

Contaminate’s Manifesto: “Here’s to the pioneers, explorers, creators. To the innovators, inventors, and entrepreneurs. To the ones who know life to be a creative act: they mold it and push it until it fits them. They dent flat words and invent new art forms, aesthetics, technologies, social structures, and cultural movements. They see art as immersion. They are oddballs who outwit the rules. We bridge the many gaps between brainchild and full-grow execution. We draw maps alongside such pioneers, who wander territories without worry of results, who always search and never settle. We are always on their side because they antagonize the humdrum. Contaminate. Reboot the World.”