

Tevereterno

AE interviews Kristin Jones
June 16, 2007

On Friday, June 22, at 9pm, this year's **Tevereterno** (Eternal Tiber) will take place with Ars Ludi performing music by Steve Reich, Nicola Sani, David Monacchi, and Corrado Fantoni, and a concert of environmental sound, curated by EMF, with music by Jean-Claude Risset, Joel Chadabe, Steven Feld, Carla Scaletti, and Aleksel Stevens.

WRITINGS



Kristin Jones

HOME

AE What gave you the idea for Tevereterno?

KJ The historic center of Rome is a spectacle. Water is celebrated everywhere in all its fountains and aqueducts. But the Tiber River – the very spine and source of all the city's water – is completely neglected. Walking across the Ponte Sisto one day, the New Yorker in me was stunned by an absolutely crystalline rectangle of water and sky. The rectangular space framed and reflected the sky. It made me think of the organic shape of the island of Manhattan and how nature is framed within the rectangle of Central Park. The Tiber River site itself questions the relationship between the concrete, built environment and nature, between wild and civil, and also between past and present – because it is Rome. The rigid rectangle imposed on the fluid serpentine form of that space has haunted my imagination ever since. The fantastic serpentine meander of the Tiber that defines the City of Rome – and its total neglect – stunned me.

The use of the Tiber River site as a Water Theatre, where artists from around the world could be called upon to take an active role in inspiring awareness of water, this planet's most vital resource, seemed inevitable.

AE How did you get started?

KJ Rome is a city of piazzas with fountains. Yet the Tiber, an essential element of the city, has no piazza. Twenty years ago, I was amazed to discover the seemingly hidden, straight section of the Tiber River. I immediately recognized its tremendous potential as a powerful site where contemporary art could be accessible to the public and where history could inform the present.

A decade later, as a Rome Prize winner at the American Academy in Rome, I envisioned this piece of the Tiber as a public space – which I christened the Piazza Tevere – a space where contemporary artists of all disciplines could collaborate on staging spectacular events that would celebrate the river. I returned to Rome in 2001 as a Senior Fulbright Fellow, and at that time, began to work with the City of Rome to actively plan and produce TEVERETERNO, which is based on the belief that art can be an important catalyst for urban renewal.

In recent years, the Tiber has drawn international attention, and numerous national and regional campaigns have targeted environmental issues relating to the river. In July 2003, I proposed the idea for a Piazza Tevere with an ongoing program of events to the Mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, who enthusiastically offered the City's in-kind support in realizing the vision. Mayor Veltroni is a strong advocate for the revival of the Tiber River, and is actively concerned with water issues in the world. A new Master Plan for Rome calls for the reintegration of the river into the life of the city. The plan, adopted in 2004, incorporates TEVERETERNO's concept of a vital Piazza Tevere as a cornerstone for the revival of the river.

AE How is it organized?

KJ The project is an impossible task in many ways, because the Tiber River is not managed by any single entity, nor does it flow through a single state. The Tiber belongs to everyone and to no one, "a tutti e a nessuno" ("to everyone and to no one"). The path to an official recognition of the project has been circuitous. Numerous city agencies have offered a great deal of in-kind support and goodwill. Since November of this year, the City Planning Office of Rome has officially adopted the project as a key initiative toward the revival of the river. An agreement has now been signed with the City, naming TEVERETERNO as the steward of annual programming at the site. This significant action on behalf of the City enables the project to receive public financial support for the first time.

It has been seven years now since I returned to Rome and began work on TEVERETERNO. In the very beginning, the Kitchen in New York adopted the project, offering fiscal sponsorship for the first two events. Over the last four years, the Candy Jernigan Foundation for the Arts (founded by Phillip Glass) has acted as the project's fiscal sponsor, granting TEVERETERNO its nonprofit status in the United States. The project has been a registered non-profit organization in Italy since 2004.

Most of the project's financial backing has come from the United States. A single foundation created in the name of David Bermant, a beloved friend and collector, has contributed extensively to the project for the past three years. They have helped enormously to keep my head up amidst the daunting challenges. Several individual foundations in the United States who recognize the complexities of working in Italy have also offered their support.

The project's greatest support has come from a dedicated team of advocates and volunteers, in both the United States and Italy.

Our hope for the future is that the City of Rome will support the ongoing administrative and fundraising costs, the existing Italian festival producer, RomaEuropa, will manage the project's administration and Italian fundraising, and an international advisory committee will oversee the site's programming. Once the project has a firmer footing in Rome, we anticipate collaborating with foundations, institutions and individuals in the United States to support the commissioning of site-specific works for the Tiber.

The philosophy behind TEVERETERNO is completely resonant with the concept of EMF's Ear to the Earth program, and we are excited to initiate an artistic and administrative partnership with EMF in this year's program.

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