

# THE FLORENTINE

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THE  
INNOCENCE  
OF FLORENCE

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# Marina Evans

Photo by Sheila Roberts Orlando



## EXPATS IN FLORENCE by Mary Gray

American singer-songwriter Marina Evans self-diagnoses as a “total type A”, though her impromptu move to Italy and mellow, Joni Mitchell-esque vibe might suggest otherwise to the casual observer. Ending up in Tuscany was never on her to-do list, but she found that deviating from her plans led her professional and personal life to blossom.

A New England native, Marina moves mainly between her home bases of Florence and Gloucester, Massachusetts, and is no stranger to the rambling musician’s life. Although Florence is her most “fixed” home, she returns stateside every few months, and past tours have taken her from Boston to Los Angeles, Nashville to New Orleans, New York to Atlanta and back again. But her bi-continental career has its roots in the Boot.

Back in 2008, while pursuing a music degree from Barnard College, she spent her spring semester (and the following summer) in Florence. A longtime Francophile and language lover, Marina had always envisioned studying abroad in Paris, but her school’s strict music theory requirements meant she couldn’t find any suitable programs. With some high school Italian under her belt, she shifted her focus away from France, stumbling on the Sarah Lawrence College program in Florence. So began a chapter that was “fundamental to my whole story,” she explained.

On top of a regular course load, Marina took voice and theory twice a week at the Accademia Musicale in Gavinana, and eagerly looked for places to perform. On a recommendation from Sarah Lawrence’s director, she took part in an Open Mic night one Scandicci music school was organizing for its students. One of the audience members, a bassist and instructor at the school, approached her afterward and offered to record and produce her first demo.

Faced with bad timing and logistical constraints, the project didn’t come to fruition, but it brought a crucial character into Marina’s story. Florentine

guitarist and producer Bernardo Baglioni was recruited to play on a couple of tracks, and both musicians remember feeling a sense of “mutual intrigue” during the sessions. But since the summer was ending, Marina’s imminent return to Barnard put any prospects—recording or romantic—on the backburner.

After her graduation a year later, Marina moved to Gloucester for a promising day job in publishing, but spent all her spare time on booking, performing and rehearsing for gigs. She stresses that “all musicians will always

Bernardo at a bar in Sant’Ambrogio. The two had stayed vaguely in touch since Marina’s semester (“via Myspace,” she laughs), but reconnecting in person brought back the “mutual intrigue” from two years prior. Marina phoned her publishing job and asked for a trial run of working remotely from Florence.

Bureaucratic complications kept her bouncing back and forth for a few years, but she and Bernardo remained recording and romantic partners, even doing some mixing work for their 2012 album *The Tuscan Sessions* via transatlantic telephone calls and emails.

Marina cringes a little when she remembers that method: “I’m still learning how to articulate what I’m hearing in my head to a producer or engineer, and I think I will be learning that for some time,” Marina says. “Then imagine trying to translate those ideas into Italian, via email. It was crazy.”

The two wed in 2014, and they’ve continued to live the bi-continental life, with most of their concerts taking place in Tuscany and New England. In Florence, Marina most recently performed for Bob Dylan’s Week, a festival celebrating American folk music. Currently, she’s busy preparing for the summer release of her next album, *Tide and Stars*.

Getting booked in Florence and around Italy can be challenging, she says—certainly more so than in the States. Both, however, require a creative approach. “In the States, I have hundreds of venues that I’ve been in contact with on and off for years. It takes patience”—but her persistence has landed her gigs with folk legends like Judy Collins and Jonathan Edwards. In Italy, the cold-

calling and emailing approach doesn’t get her very far: “Here, I rarely get a gig booked unless I know somebody, or Berna knows somebody, or a friend of a friend knows somebody—there’s got to be some kind of connection.” Marina’s unfazed by this, however, and chalks it up to a cultural difference she doesn’t see as unique to her industry.

Though she admits that Florence’s music scene can feel a bit “self-referential” at times, she’s optimistic about the city’s potential. She’s noticed more local crowds taking a liking to her music, though she’d like to see more singer-songwriters in the spotlight. When she senses that an audience is less captive than she’d like, “I love switching from English to Italian during the between-song stage banter,” she grins knowingly, “because no one expects it.”

## FLORENCE QUICKFIRE

### Best bar for an aperitivo?

Rifrullo

### Best restaurant or place for bistecca fiorentina in Florence?

Trattoria Omero

### One place in Florence that makes you happy or inspires you?

The Giardino dell’Orticultura

### Biggest difference between Italians and Americans?

Italians are more relaxed

### Best day trip in Tuscany?

To Villa Vignamaggio in Greve in Chianti

### Favorite view of Florence?

Villa Bardini

### Something you will never get used to living here?

*Lampredotto*. I’ve tried, valiantly, but I just can’t get into it!



Photo by Jose Luis Vasquez