
Sanremo Music Festival. Msgr. Suetta: “Acknowledge the responsibility this popular showcase entails”

The Sanremo Music Festival, held every year for the past seventy years, is about to begin. The song contest, now in its 72nd edition, will take place February 1-5 at the Ariston Theatre of Sanremo, in Italy's Liguria region. As in previous years, also this year was marked by the customary pre-Festival controversies, besides - as February last year - the challenges related to the Covid-19 epidemic. SIR interviewed Msgr. **Antonio Suetta**, Bishop of Ventimiglia-Sanremo, on the imminent opening of the Festival. He outlined his expectations and hopes for the forthcoming musical contest and announced the launch of the 2022 Sanremo Christian Song Festival, which will be held during the same period.

Your Excellency, what do you expect from this year's Festival? The Sanremo Music Festival is a very important event for the city and for the Liguria region because of what it entails in terms of tourist promotion and the indirect business it creates. This is an aspect that is less linked to music, but which significantly benefits the area. *However, whilst remaining a "popular" event for more than 70 years, the Festival is a significant showcase for culture and customs. I therefore hope that all the people involved in the success of the event, starting with RAI public broadcaster and ending with the anchorman and the performers, will acknowledge the responsibility this showcase carries with it.* **As in previous years, and perhaps even this year, the Festival was surrounded by controversial issues that deflected attention from what Sanremo is all about: a music festival. What are your thoughts on the subject?** Indeed. Quite simply, I think that good music can be played, artistic content can be expressed, and people can enjoy themselves while respecting the boundaries that reflect the features of our country, our society and our history. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the last few years, as in some ways the Festival is an ideal showcase for cultural and social trends. However, it has lately acted as a mouthpiece for certain new trends and ideologies, which in my opinion should be handled differently. **How?** These issues require in-depth analysis and discussion, and cannot be addressed in a light-hearted setting like Sanremo. Therefore, a debate must be launched and the issue must be dealt with seriously. If not, certain issues will be restricted to a more simplistic context they are not intended for. This, besides being inadequate, could become dangerous. **This year's edition will also be the second after the Covid crisis. In your view, how does the situation compare to last year?** I am pleased to note that, compared to last year, the situation has improved, and I think this is a positive sign overall. Last year's Festival was held with no theatre audience and no red carpet. Instead, this year there will be both, although the red carpet is green. Fairly legitimately, but perhaps belatedly, retailers had suggested postponing this year's edition by a month, in the hope of having overcome this new wave's peak. However, given the stabilising infection rate, and considering vaccinations and other preventive measures, I think and hope that the predicted financial decline will be lower than expected, but it will not amount to zero. Inevitably, restrictions are still in place. Two years ago, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Festival, the entire city had been mobilised extensively. This is impossible now, but we must welcome these improvements compared to last year. **The first Sanremo 2022 Christian Song Festival will make its debut simultaneously with the Festival. This event is sponsored by the municipality of Sanremo, in co-operation with the diocese of Ventimiglia-Sanremo, with Vatican Radio - Vatican News as official media partner. Could you tell us more about this event?** This Festival forms part of a process that has been underway for about twenty years, since, during the Jubilee Year 2000, the diocese of Ventimiglia-Sanremo, in collaboration with the Italian Bishops' Conference's Youth Ministry Department and other organisations and sponsors, launched an event called "Jubilmusic". The diocese continued to organise this event and then had to suspend it. Now, this new Christian music festival has been proposed along the lines of 'Jubilmusic' and it has rekindled widespread interest. It should also be said that

Christian music is a veritable experience. It brings to the fore a number of substantial ecclesial groups spread throughout the country. The emphasis is not so much on the individual artist, but on shared ecclesial and Christian experiences.

This is a source of richness in terms of testimony and in terms of cultural and evangelising potential.

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