

Sir Elton John To Rock Italy's Barolo Wine Country - Forbes



British singer and musician Sir Elton John (photo credit: Gil Cohen-Magen/AFP/Getty Images)

Pricey and tannic Barolo wine—known as the King of Wines, and Wine for Kings—is about to be rocked by a king of, well, rock.

For a century and a half, the hilly Italian enclave of Barolo at the base of the Italian Alps has produced a back straightening tannic wine that makes drinkers gasp if they don't know what's coming. On July 15th the rocket man who stung us with emotion when he played a eulogy "Goodbye England's Rose" at the funeral for Princess Diana will arrive. He'll have to croon some magic to trump the emotional foreplay his audience will get from drinking bottles of Barolo in these hills between Genoa and Turin cities.

The musician's schedule is aggressive: after successive nights of playing in Aix-les-Bains and Albi in France, he'll bop eastward to play Porto in Portugal for one night before flying northwest again to play at the Piazza Colbert in hilly Barolo. This small city includes two castles, fewer than a thousand residents and neighboring sloped fields producing Nebbiolo grapes for the Barolo and Barbaresco wines that collectors snap up for dozens and hundreds of dollars per bottle.

The rapid pace of this tour is nothing new for a musician who has played more than 4,000 concerts while selling a quarter-billion records. His one night show in Barolo forms part of a tour that moves across Europe in July, over to London and the U.S. in September and October, then returns to Europe in November and

December—inclusive of Sweden, Latvia, Belgium, Germany and the Czech Republic, as well as Northern Ireland and Zurich.

Italy is shaped like a partially rotated 'T' and Barolo sits within the upper left horizontal bar—legacy of the 10th-century feudal king Berengar who granted a local lord permission to construct a defensive structure against invading Saracens. The countryside is dotted with hillsides that are in turn dotted with castles—crafted to protect nobles during the medieval ages, when music was played on cornets and flutes, and when wine might be colored black or green and was often considered medicinal.

I visited Barolo years ago to meet the convivial winemaker Flavio Fennochio at the Marchesi di Barolo winery. He lined up a vertical tasting of Barolo wines to instruct me in the niceties of drinking rare, fermented pleasure. The beauty of this wine derives from the complexity of underlying limestone, a remnant of a sea that once covered this land. Sea creatures died and fell to the ocean floor, their calcareous bodies contributing to the strata that today provides robust flavor to exquisite local wines made from Nebbiolo grapes.

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The food here at least matches the quality of wines: soft cheeses, chocolate, and truffles as well as wild boar (best cooked in Barolo wine). It is also worth trying the sweet and sparkling white Moscato d'Asti wine, served best with nougat made from local hazelnuts.

When we spoke years ago about creating Barolo wine, Flavio's words also summarized parallels between great music and fine wine: "You have to impress. To do something people remember."

Barolo is not like an easy drinking rosé. It's a serious red, for what we presume will be seriously good music. The musician's latest album titled *Wonderful Crazy Night*, came out earlier this year. I look forward to meeting friends in Milan and bopping down to Barolo for, well, a wonderful crazy night. As well as at least one bottle of scrumptious Barolo.

That, Sir Elton, will be your competition.

Tom Mullen