

CALANDRA  
ITALIAN  
AMERICAN  
INSTITUTE

# *il Bollettino*

*dedicated to the history and culture of Italians in America*

VOLUME 2 • ISSUE 1 • WINTER 2009

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## LETTER FROM THE DEAN

Welcome to the third issue of the Calandra Institute's newsletter, *il Bollettino*! Since I last wrote to you, numerous events have come to pass, which you will read about in this issue. We are already busy preparing for a new roster of activities.

This March we will sponsor a special event of great interest to all. "Neapolitan Postcards: The Canzone Napoletana as Transnational Subject" is a first in-depth look at this musical and cultural phenomenon. The conference includes an impressive array of international scholars, and promises to yield spectacular results. In April we will hold our annual conference, this year dedicated to the theme of "return." "The Land of Our Return: Diasporic Encounters with Italy" will host scholars from around the globe.

These two conferences complement the regular events we offer every semester that comprise the "Writers Read" presentations, the "Philip V. Cannistraro Seminar Series," and the "Documented Italians" film series. In addition, on January 20th, the Institute will present the world premiere of Ugo De Vita's film, *Mussolini, l'ultima notte*. On January 30th we will host a symposium entitled "Memoirs and Memories," dedicated to the Italian Jewish presence in the United States. This event is part of a larger program commemorating the "Giorno della Memoria" that includes symposia and lectures hosted by the Centro Primo Levi, the Italian Consulate of Italy, the Italian Cultural Institute, the Casa Italiana of New York University, and the Italian Academy for Advanced Study at Columbia University.

The Calandra Faculty Fellows program, suspended for years, was revived last year with a call for proposals among CUNY faculty. We are delighted to announce that Dr. Donna Chirico, of York College, and Dr. Francesca Canadè Sautman, of Hunter College, will spend this semester developing their chosen research projects. As Calandra Faculty Fellows, each will deliver a public lecture reporting on their respective progress.

We shall also commence work on an ambitious project, the Oral History Archive of Italian-American Elected Officials. We will begin interviews at the state level, with our senators and assemblypersons, a number of whom helped fund the project. This spring the project will be led by Dr. Ottorino Cappelli, professor of Political Science at the Istituto Orientale of the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II. Dr. Cappelli will spend the semester here at the Calandra Institute as our visiting scholar, and give a public lecture on a topic related to his work in developing the archive.

We have also made significant progress in our library holdings. We have reorganized and put into working order the Institute's original collection and that of the late Professor Philip Cannistraro, who bequeathed his more than 2,000 books to the Calandra Institute. We continue to work on the Saraceno Collection. Most recently, we inherited the mighty private library of the late Professor John Cammett, retired CUNY scholar and expert on Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci.

Facing this letter is an article entitled "Teaching Italian!" penned well over a

month before I began this letter. In the interval, one major event has taken place: the College Board announced their decision, in a letter on January 8, 2009, to suspend the Advanced Placement Program in Italian. Let us also realize, however, that while this setback to the AP is indeed a grave and serious one, overall enrollments in Italian at both the K-12 and college levels continue to grow. This success is the result of an aggregate effort involving numerous Italian and Italian-American associations and entities that have worked consistently with representatives of the Italian government.

We continue to enjoy great support from all venues. Our colleagues and friends within CUNY, and the Italian-American community of the New York area, continue to be most helpful and encouraging. Our events are increasingly more populated, support is forthcoming, and we shall be embarking on new projects. This year will see the debut of new Calandra publications. Closer to home, I am happy to say, the Calandra staff has stepped up to the plate, and then some!

Please do not hesitate to call on us if we can be of any assistance. Be sure to join our electronic and postal mailing lists.

*Dulcis in fundo*: All of what we have been able to accomplish could not be done without unyielding support from both Chancellor Matthew Goldstein's Office of CUNY and President James Muysken's Office of Queens College. They and their staff have cleared many a path for the Calandra Institute.

— ANTHONY JULIAN TAMBURRI

### PERSONAGGI



PETE PANTO (1911-1939)

Pietro "Pete" Panto, a longshoreman working the Brooklyn docks in the 1930s, led a rank-and-file revolt against the mob-controlled International Longshoremen's Association. The organization was rife with corruption, political patronage, and violence. Deplorable working conditions on the Brooklyn docks included the

"shape-up" hiring system, mandatory salary kick backs, extortion, and high rates of work-related injuries. Overseeing this waterfront fiefdom was gangster Albert Anastasia, head of the crime syndicate "Murder, Inc."

Panto headed the Brooklyn Rank-and-File Committee, a group of radical longshoremen fighting for workers' rights. Union officials attempted to stop Panto's work, ultimately threatening him with violence. On July 14, 1939, Panto left his apartment and never returned.

Trade unionists and political activists demanded that police and city officials find those responsible for Panto's disappearance. The Committee posed the question *Dov'è Panto?* on pier walls and in pamphlets. Panto's corpse was not discovered until January 1941. No one was convicted for his murder. Inspired by this working class hero, Brooklyn's Italian-American longshoremen organized "Il Circolo Educativo Pete Panto" (Pete Panto Educational Circle) as a tool for achieving justice for working people.

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# TEACHING ITALIAN!

The challenges in teaching Italian at the public school and college level are ever present as we continue to wage the battle for the Advanced Placement (AP) Program in Italian. The nascent Italian Language Foundation (ILF) has begun fundraising and its president, Dr. Margaret Cuomo, is holding meetings to develop task forces around the country. We gratefully recognize the extensive work that Louis Tallarini, president of the Columbus Citizens Foundation and chairperson of the ILF, has done in this regard. Three important meetings have already taken place, in Chicago, New Jersey, and New York City. It is clear from these encounters that teachers are most eager to save the AP.

Recently, the results of the third iteration of the AP exam in Italian were made public, and the distribution of grades follows a percentage similar to that of previous years. Most impressive is the overall increase in Italian language class enrollment. From 2006 to 2007 enrollment increased 2.8 percent; the difference from 2007 to 2008 is an admirable 17.5 percent. We can feel a sense of accomplishment as a community of Italian educators as well as Italian Americans and Italophiles! However, we need to continue the efforts of this past year. This work has been, and must continue to be, a group effort, which has thus far resulted in constructive dialogue among growing ranks of people and organizations.

Especially uplifting is the proactive work of leaders in the Italian government, from the Embassy in Washington, D.C. to the various consulates and institutes, including Francesco Maria Talò, Consul General of Italy in New York; Marco Mancini, First Counselor at the Embassy of Italy in Washington; Luigi De Sanctis, Director of the Education Office at the Embassy of Italy in Washington; and Alfio Russo, Director of the Education Office at the Consulate General of Italy in New York. Their activities were joined by the more recent contributions of, as mentioned above, Margaret Cuomo and Louis Tallarini.

Such efforts, when combined with those of the teaching community, can effect powerful results. The Italian teaching community and the community at large have begun to construct what promises to

be a sustained conversation on the issue of the AP. In a general sense we are beginning to bridge the proverbial town-gown gap. And as the community at large becomes more familiar with the Italian language teaching community, the actual practice of teaching Italian gains greater currency as a professional choice. These are some of the basic issues to which we continue to strive in this age of border crossing. These are some of the new borders we must transcend in order to move forward successfully in our roles as leaders and educators.

Regarding the teaching of Italian as a choice of profession, we have come to realize that there is a significant need, as illustrated by numerous calls for teachers of Italian in the public schools. To some extent, one might say, we were caught off guard. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) report released in 2002 (Jamie B. Draper and June H. Hicks, "Foreign Language Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools") indicates that Italian language enrollments in U.S. public high schools for the decade 1990–2000 rose impressively from 40,402 to 64,098, an increase of more than sixty percent. Enrollments at the college level saw an equally substantial increase within the past sixteen years. The years 1990 to 2006 saw a rise in enrollment from 49,699 to 78,368, a similar increase of more than sixty percent. Our work is cut out for us!

The Italian language continues to thrive and will surely endure as long as there is support for it. And while Italian is on the rise within the academic community as the first and second language of choice among high school and college students, Italian is also a "practical" language. Last summer, on July 22, 2008, Mayor Bloomberg signed New York's first Language Access Executive Order, establishing equitable policy and standards that require city agencies to provide language assistance in the top six languages spoken by New Yorkers: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian, and French Creole. Gone are the trials and tribulations of yesteryear: "Millions of immigrant New Yorkers will now be able to go interact with city government and get the help of an interpreter when they need it," said Andrew Friedman, Co-Executive Director of Make the Road New York, "never again will we have to ask our children and grandchildren to translate complicated

government forms for us." The executive order will impact many of the estimated 300,000 people who speak Italian in New York City's five boroughs.

Thus we find ourselves with a significant advantage for fostering the study of Italian. It is the language of art and culture, as more than sixty percent of the world's art is Italian, and in order to understand more fully the intricacies of any culture, language is the primary mode of access. It is also a language of necessity, as proclaimed by Mayor Bloomberg's above-mentioned Executive Order 120. These are two among many fundamental and compelling reasons for studying Italian. Anything counter is simply *insensato e, in ultima analisi, sbagliato!* •

## ORDER BOOKS FROM THE CALANDRA INSTITUTE

- *The Autobiography of Carlo Tresca*, Nunzio Pernicone, Ed., 265 pages, softcover, \$10
- *Freeing the Angel From the Stone: A Guide to Piccirilli Sculpture in New York City*, Jerry and Eleanor Koffler, 122 pages, softcover, \$12
- *The Italians of New York: Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement*, Philip V. Cannistraro, Ed., 177 pages, hardcover, \$35
- *I Vote My Conscience: Debates, Speeches, and Writings of Vito Marcantonio*, Annette Rubenstein, Editor, Gerald Meyer, Introduction, 515 pages, softcover, \$15

## ADD SHIPPING COST:

1 book=\$3; 2–5 books=\$5; 6–10 books=\$10

TO ORDER send a check or money order, payable to John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, to:

Calandra Italian American Institute  
Attn: Book Orders  
25 West 43rd Street, 17th floor  
New York, NY 10036

## INSTITUTE UNDERGOES RENOVATION

The Calandra Institute has been renovated to create a more functional and appealing environment for staff and visitors alike. Our reception area is now located at the front entrance, and the conference room has been expanded to accommodate up to sixty people, making it possible to host larger in-house audiences. State of the art audio visual equipment will enhance speakers' presentations and allow for film screenings. We hope to see many old friends and new faces at future events. •

MARCH 19–21, 2009 NEAPOLITAN POSTCARDS: THE *CANZONE NAPOLETANA* AS TRANSNATIONAL SUBJECT

## PROGRAM

## THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2009

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute  
25 West 43rd Street, 17th floor, Manhattan

## 6 PM WELCOME AND RECEPTION

ANTHONY JULIAN TAMBURRI

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute  
Queens College, CUNY

JAMES MUYSKENS  
Queens College, CUNY

FRANCESCO MARIA TALÒ  
Consulate General of Italy in New York

JOSEPH SCIORRA  
John D. Calandra Italian American Institute  
Queens College, CUNY

GOFFREDO PLASTINO  
The International Centre for Music Studies  
Newcastle University

PAQUITO DEL BOSCO  
Archivio Storico della Canzone Napoletana, RAI

## 7 PM FILM SCREENING

Closing Time: Storia di un negozio (2006), 30 min.  
VERONICA DIAFERIA, director

## FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2009

CUNY Graduate Center, Elebash Recital Hall  
365 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan

## 9:30–10 AM Coffee and Pastries

## 10–11:30 AM THE COMPOSER AND SINGER IN CONTEXT

Chair: GOFFREDO PLASTINO, Newcastle University

Francesco Pennino and the Italian-American *Sceneggiata*  
GIULIANA MUSCIO, University of Padua

Enrico Caruso and the Emergency of Italian Identity  
SIMONA FRASCA, Federico II, University of Naples

The Musical and Literary Neapolitan Chant: The Songs  
of Aurelio Fierro  
GIULIA GUARNIERI, Bronx Community College, CUNY

## 11:45 AM–1 PM THINKING NEAPOLITAN

Chair: ANNA LOMAX WOOD, Association for Cultural Equity



Logo for Edizione Pennino, New York City, courtesy of Simona Frasca.

*Quann'ò soul se ne scenne*: Neapolitan Musics as Sites  
of Cultural Mediation  
PASQUALE VERDICCHIO, University of California at San Diego  
Everyday Life, Resistance, and the Autonomous Neapolitan:  
Rhythms of Otherness as Tradition  
WILLIAM ANSELM, University of Alberta

## 1–2:30 PM Lunch on your own

2:30–4 PM TEMPORAL/SPATIAL CONSIDERATIONS  
OF THE SONG

Chair: EDWARD SMALDONE, Queens College, CUNY

Mediated Renderings and Diasporic Musings:  
"Core 'ngrato," a WOP Song  
JOSEPH SCIORRA, John D. Calandra Italian American  
Institute, CUNY

"Maria Mari"/"Oh, Marie": Acculturation from Italian  
Folk to Italian-American Jazz  
SAMUEL PATTI, Independent Scholar

"Tammurriata Nera": Collective Memory, Recuperation,  
and Contamination in a Neapolitan Song  
JENNIFER CAPUTO, University of Alabama

4:15–5:45 PM CULTURAL POLITICS AND THE  
ECONOMICS OF CULTURE

Chair: JAYSON KERR DOBNEY, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Tears and Triumphs: Five Topical Songs in Neapolitan from  
the United States, 1923–1941  
MARK PEZZANO, Independent Scholar

The Neapolitan Mandolin and Italian Music Publishing Houses  
in New York City during the Early Twentieth Century  
JOHN LA BARBERA, Bergen Community College

Alternative Musics and Alternative Economies in Naples  
JASON PINE, Purchase College, SUNY

## SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2009

CUNY Graduate Center, Elebash Recital Hall  
365 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan

## 9:30–9:50 AM

Napoli International (delivered in Italian)  
PAQUITO DEL BOSCO, Archivio Storico della  
Canzone Napoletana, RAI

## 10–10:20 AM FILM SCREENING

*Neapolitan Heart* (2002), 20 min. excerpt  
PAOLO SANTONI, director

10:30 AM–12:30 PM PERFORMING/  
SCREENING IDENTITIES

Chair: ANTHONY JULIAN TAMBURRI  
John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY

Italian Immigrant Identity in American  
*Sceneggiata* Performances  
REBA ALAINA WISSNER, Brandeis University

You Can Go Home Again: *Santa Lucia Luntana*, the Film  
GIORGIO BERTELLINI, University of Michigan

Neapolitan Song as a Source of National Identity among  
the Italians of Australia  
MARCELLO SORCE-KELLER, Monash University

## 12:30–2 PM Lunch on your own

## 2–3:45 PM HYBRIDIC FORMATIONS IN SOUND

Chair: JOSEPH SCIORRA, John D. Calandra Italian  
American Institute, CUNY

From *Canzone Napoletana* to *Tango Criollo*  
ANA CARA, Oberlin College

Returning to Sorrento: Diasporic Hybridity in  
Italian-American Popular Music  
JIM DE FAZIO, Arizona State University in Tempe

Cowboys vs. Macaroni: Ethnic Stereotypes in a Pre-Global  
World, 1920s–1960s  
PAOLO PRATO, Pontifical Gregorian University

## 4–5:15 PM KEYNOTE

*Tutta n'ata storia*: Authenticity and Otherness in the  
Neapolitan Song Canon  
GOFFREDO PLASTINO, Newcastle University

## IN PIAZZA

## TI PIACE (You Like It)



OSIAA performers at Italian Heritage and Culture  
Month Music Wrap Party, November 2008

Ti Piacce, founded by JoAnn Robertozzi with co-founders Robert Ciani and Vincent Cuccia, is a newly formed performing arts organization that provides Italian-American artists with performance venues and workshops to groom them for the professional stage.

Last November, Ti Piacce hosted On Stage Italian American Artists for the Italian Heritage and Culture Month Music Wrap Party, at Drom in Manhattan, where performers entertained a standing room only

crowd. Performers included James Adamo, Dan Ferrari, Lorraine Ferro, Deborah Longino, Sal Manzo, Laura Monaco, Dimitri Minucci, JoAnn Robertozzi, Allison Scola, Allison Tartalia and Anthony Tolve.

The New York State Council on the Arts awarded Ti Piacce a first time performance grant in 2007. Senator Serphin Maltese awarded the organization a grant to produce a show, based on the 1903 Shirtwaist Factory Fire, scheduled to debut at Queens College this spring. •

# BETTER THAN EVER

*Italics* The Italian-American TV Magazine  
Celebrates its 20th Anniversary and 200th Episode

In the fall of 2008 *Italics*, the longest running cable television program on CUNY TV (channel 75), celebrated its 20th anniversary by hosting its most innovative programming to date. The 200th episode was especially poignant as it aired from Ground Zero and commemorated the New York City firefighters of Engine House 10 who perished in the tragedy of 9/11. This episode also featured the celebration of the Madonna Nera del Tindari (The Black Madonna of Tindari) held at the site of the original shrine in New York City's East Village.

While September's 200th episode represented a historic milestone for *Italics*, quality programming was aired throughout the remainder of the year. In October, during Italian Heritage and Culture Month, interviews were conducted with Lawrence Auriana and Louis Tallarini of the Columbus Citizens Foundation, who spoke of their organization's history and commitment to philanthropic work. Other

interviewees included Berardo Paradiso and Joseph Sciamè, key organizers of the Italian American Heritage and Culture Month Committee, who reflected on the selection of this year's theme: "Andrea Palladio: Architect for the Ages." The diplomatic work of Francesco Maria Talò, Consul General of Italy, and Renato Miracco, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in New York, was also highlighted. Additional excerpts included the New York Italian American State Legislators Conference and annual *Festa Italiana* in Troy, N.Y.

October's programming continued with an in-depth interview with author Roberto Saviano regarding his book *Gomorra*, supplemented with clips from the eponymous film directed by Matteo Garrone, Italy's official submission to the best foreign language film category in 2009. The month concluded with a segment on the Piccirilli Brothers, renowned marble carvers from the Bronx, whose works include the colossal statue of Abraham Lincoln in Washington, D.C. and the famous stone lions standing guard in front of the New York Public Library. In this segment, authors Jerry and Eleanor Koffler discussed their

book *Freeing the Angel from the Stone, a Guide to Piccirilli Sculpture in New York City* (Calandra Institute, 2008).

In November, *Italics* stepped onto the red carpet of the National Italian American Foundation's 2008 Annual Convention and 33rd Anniversary Gala Awards Dinner, with honorees Joseph DePinto, President and CEO of 7-Eleven; legendary actress Gina Lollobrigida; Wayne Pacelle, President and CEO of The Humane Society; and Gianmario Tondato da Ruos, CEO of Autogrill, S.p.A.-Italy. In December, *Italics* concluded the year with host Anthony Julian Tamburri, Dean of the Calandra Institute, who treated viewers to Italian holiday festivities in New York City.

*Italics* episodes can be viewed online at [www.cuny.tv/series/italics](http://www.cuny.tv/series/italics).



*Italics: The Italian American TV Magazine*

CHANNEL 75

Last Wednesday of the month  
10 am, 3 pm, 8:30 pm

Repeats  
Saturday 8 pm  
Sunday 10 am

## AD MEMORIAM

### ON GIANTS' SHOULDERS

Remembering the Legacies of Rocco Caporale, A. Kenneth Ciongoli and Rudolph J. Vecoli

Gifted poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in his essay "The Friend" (1828) "the dwarf sees farther than the giant, when he has the giant's shoulder to mount on." Our nation's Italian-American communities and colleagues from around the world mourn the loss of three outstanding giants upon whose shoulders we have had the rare privilege to stand. Dr. Rocco Caporale, A. Kenneth Ciongoli, M.D., and Dr. Rudolph Vecoli were each notable thinkers, writers, and advocates who generously devoted their lives to battling ethnic stereotyping, and discrimination, and who inspire us to deepen our quest for knowledge, tolerance, and compassion. Their unique legacies are worthy of our reflection and celebration.

Rocco Caporale was an internationally renowned author, professor, and Italian-American scholar. He was Professor Emeritus and former chairperson of the department of sociology and anthropology at St. John's University, where he taught and mentored students for three decades. Born in Santa Caterina dello Ionio in southern Italy in 1927, Rocco Caporale received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and spoke

nine languages. He was founding director and president of several international organizations promoting Italian-American research, cultural exchange, and ethnic pride, and authored numerous research texts on immigration, ethics, ethnic identity, urban studies, social stratification, and religious and social systems. He served as a consultant to many foundations including the prestigious Agnelli Foundation in Turin, Italy. Dr. Caporale's rare combination of intellectual acuity, integrity, and moral rectitude is a legacy that will be treasured by his students and colleagues alike.

Dr. A. Kenneth Ciongoli was a prominent neurologist who demonstrated a passionate interest in the arts, especially literature. He was one of the few truly invaluable friends of the humanities at large. As president and chairman of the National Italian American Foundation he was a selfless promoter of Italian-American culture. Ciongoli fought arduously against ethnic stereotyping and discrimination, and did so with grace and aplomb. He was always responsive to inquiry and discussion, yet never yielding to those who might disagree. Dr. Ciongoli leaves us the legacy that we, too, engage in meaningful dialogue and debate as we move forward in our work to perpetuate the overall culture of Italians in the United States.

Rudolph J. Vecoli, a historian whose research chronicles Italian immigrant experiences, provided new views on the resiliency of culture over time. As Director of the Immigration History Research Center, and in numerous articles and books, Vecoli argued against the notion that Italians who migrated to the United States left their cultures behind favoring assimilation into mainstream American society. Rudolph Vecoli was born in Wallingford, Connecticut to immigrant parents from Tuscany. He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Washington where he studied the social and economic experiences of Chicago's Italian Americans. Dr. Vecoli joined the University of Minnesota as professor of history and director of the Immigration History Research Center. He was founder of the American Italian Historical Association and served as president from 1966 to 2003. Dr. Vecoli's boundless efforts to document and preserve Italian heritage, and save it from abstraction while broadening our humanity, are the legacy he leaves behind.

The Calandra Institute is privileged to commemorate these outstanding Italian Americans. Through their memory we celebrate the best of who we are, and are provided the foundations from which we can better understand and shape our rich and vibrant heritage.



# APRIL 23–25, 2009 THE LAND OF OUR RETURN: DIASPORIC ENCOUNTERS WITH ITALY

Location: John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 25 West 43rd Street, 17th floor, Manhattan

## PROGRAM

### THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2009

**6:30–8:30 PM WELCOME AND RECEPTION**

### FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2009

**9–9:30 AM Coffee and Pastries**

**9:30–10:45 AM ITALIAN/AMERICAN/JEWISH/ISRAELI**

Chair: DAWN ESPOSITO, St. John's University

Comparative Experiences from Different Parts of the Diaspora I, CRISTINA BETTIN, Ben Gurion University

Comparative Experiences from Different Parts of the Diaspora II, MARIA MAZZIOTTI GILLAN, Binghamton University, SUNY

You Want to be Americano?, ROBERT ZWEIG, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

**11 AM–12:15 PM**

CONFERENCE ROOM: **ROUTES OF RETURN**

Chair: DONNA CHIRICO, York College, CUNY

"Took a Bird to the Boot": Hip Wop and the Digital Diasporic Consciousness, JOSEPH SCIORRA, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY

No Longer Innocents Abroad: Ethnic Tourism's Influence on American Leisure Travel, MARIA LISELLA, journalist

*Fuori in Italia*: A Gay Grandson Encounters la madre patria, GEORGE DE STEFANO, author

LA GALLERIA: **LANGUAGE OF RETURN**, Chair: MARIA ENRICO, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

Returning with Standard Italian and the Question of Italian Linguistic Diversity, CHRISTINA TORTORA, College of Staten Island, CUNY

Study Abroad Programs: Language and Identity as an Experience of Return, ELISABETTA CONVENTO and LAURA LENCI

**12:15–1:30 PM Lunch on your own**

**1:30–2:45 PM**

CONFERENCE ROOM: **RETURN MIGRATION AND THE NEW POLITICS OF BELONGING IN ITALY**

Chair: CHRISTINE GAMBINO, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY

Governing Diasporas: The Italian Case, GUIDO TINTORI, FIERI, and FRANCESCO RAGAZZI, Science Po

FILM: *Merica* (2007), FEDERICO FERRONE, MICHELE MANZOLINI, and FRANCESCO RAGAZZI, directors

FILM: *Orizzonti e Frontiere* (2007), ERNESTO MORALES, director

LA GALLERIA: **THE TEXTUALITY OF NO RETURN**

Chair: Anthony Julian Tamburri, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY

Forms of Return as a Process of Creativity, VINCENZO PASCALE, Rutgers University

On the Impossibility of Return, PAOLO GIORDANO, University of Central Florida

Immigrant versus Emigrazione: A Tale of Laceration in Tommaso Bordonaro's *La spartenza*, GIULIA GUARNIERI, Bronx Community College, CUNY

**3–4:15 PM**

CONFERENCE ROOM: **RE/CLAIMING ITALIAN/ EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP**

Chair: ROBERT VISCUSI, Brooklyn College, CUNY

Why Italian Americans Should and Must Reclaim Italian Citizenship, KAREN TINTORI, author, and LAWRENCE S. KATZ, attorney

Discovering Italian Origins: Connecting to European Identity, ANDREA AMBROGETTI, independent scholar

Just Visiting: Issues Arising from Reclaiming Italian Citizenship, LINDSAY A. CURCIO, attorney

LA GALLERIA: **CANADIAN VOICES**

Chair: Joseph Sciorra, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY

The Disappearing Sicily, MARIA FRANCESCA LODICO, author

On Leave Takings and Monuments, DARLENE MADOTT, author

Of Death and the Immigrant: A Journey, MICHAEL MIROLLA, author

**4:30–5:45 PM ABSENCE AND THE EMOTIONS OF SEPARATION ACROSS TIME AND DISTANCE**

Chair: DONNA GABACCIA, University of Minnesota

Longing for Kin and Country: Family, Nostalgia, and Nation through the Practices and Processes of Long Distance Caregiving, LORETTA BALDASSAR, University of Western Australia

When the Letter was the Only Tie to their Love: Exploring the Connections between Longings, Separation, and Imagination in Postwar Italian Migration to Canada, SONIA CANCIAN, University of Minnesota

Bridging Emotional Distance Through Television: Montreal's Teledomenica Experience, BRUNO RAMIREZ, University of Montreal

Discussant: LINDA REEDER, University of Missouri

### SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2009

**9–9:30 AM Coffee and Pastries**

**9:30–10:45 AM TEXTUAL RETURNS: CELLULOID AND PAPER**

Chair: MARY JO BONA, Stony Brook University, SUNY

Italian-American Persephone in a Sicilian Setting: Susan Caperna Lloyd's *No Pictures in My Grave* (1992), THEODORA PATRONA, Artistotle University of Thessaloniki

The Poetics of Migration Houses: Return, Land, and Architecture in Camilleri's *Maruzza Musumeci*, TERESA FIORE, California State University Long Beach/New York University

The Odyssey of Ideal: Lamerica/Litalia, NICOLETTA DELON, College of Staten Island, CUNY

**11 AM–12:15 PM**

CONFERENCE ROOM: **RELIGION, POLITICS, COMMERCE**

Chair: NANCY CARNEVALE, Montclair University

The Soul of a Stranger: Italy, America, and Italian-American Protestants, DENNIS BARONE, Saint Joseph College

Italian Merchants and Consumption during the Age of Mass Italian Migration, LIZABETH ZANONI, University of Minnesota

The Political Dimension of Return Migration  
STEFANO LUCONI, University of Rome "Tor Vergata"

LA GALLERIA: **METAPHORS OF RETURN**

Chair: GEORGE GUIDA, New York City College of Technology, CUNY

*Fumetti* as a Vehicle of Return to Italy, GIL FAGIANI, The Italian American Writers Association

"We don't have enough men to dance": In Search of Our Music and Dance Roots, CELEST DIPIETROPAOLO, independent scholar

The Tenacity of Heritage: The Promise of Festival Foods and Parish Cookbooks as a Return to Italy, SUSAN M. ROSSI-WILCOX, Harvard University

**12:15–1:30 PM Lunch on your own**

**1:30–2:45 PM**

CONFERENCE ROOM: **MEMORY AND IMAGINING HOME**

Chair: PAOLO GIORDANO, University of Central Florida

Memory, Nostalgia, Geography: Looking at the Homeland from a Distance, PATRIZIA LA TRECCHIA, University of Florida

Imagining the Home Country: Intersecting Memories of Class, Generation, and Gender, CHRISTA WIRTH, Harvard University

LA GALLERIA: **THE POETICS OF RETURN**

Chair: VINCENZO MILIONE, Calandra Institute

Poets of "The Return," DANIELA GIOSEFFI, author

Nine Poems in Basilicata: A Poetry Film with John Giorno, ANTONELLO FARETTA, Noeltan Film

The Quest for Home, JOANNE TANGORRA, High/Scope Education Research Foundation

**3–4:15 PM**

CONFERENCE ROOM: **ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES TO RETURN**

Chair: ANTHONY JULIAN TAMBURRI, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, CUNY

"Io mi considero tambien argentina": Returning Emigrants and New Immigrants in Campania, LAURA E. RUBERTO, Berkeley City College

"When they all came home": The Experience of Return Migration on the Amalfi Coast, AILHLIN CLARK, Lancaster University

Between Italy and Argentina: Parents and Children's Departures and Returns, LAURA GAMBI, independent scholar

LA GALLERIA: **RECLAIMING/REINVENTING**

Chair: EDVIGE GIUNTA, New Jersey City University

Returning, Retaining, Reinventing the Homeland, PATRICIA D. VALENTI, University of North Carolina

An Essay on Reclaiming, Reconnecting and Giving, ROBERT DI GIULIO, Johnson State College

"Bells to Saint Michael": A Short Story, TIZIANA RINADLI CASTRO, author

**4:30–5:45 PM SEEING AND PERFORMING RETURN**

Chair: FRED GARDAPHÉ, Queens College, CUNY

Observing Contemporary Italy as a Semi-Insider, BLAISE TOBIA, Drexel University

Return as Artistic Performance, LULU LOLO, performance artist

Was Rosemary Clooney Right?: A Mixed Up Siciliana's Journey to Healing Truths, CHICKIE FARELLA, independent scholar

**6–6:35 PM CLOSING COMMENTS**

# A FESTIVAL OF NEW ITALIAN AMERICAN CINEMA

Last fall the Calandra Institute sponsored a film retrospective dedicated to new Italian American cinema, as the United States edition to the 43rd Annual Pesaro Film Festival of June 2007. The "Festival of New Italian American Cinema" took place on September 24–27, 2008 at various City University of New York locations, and screened more than thirty feature and short films as well as presentations by film aficionados and filmmakers.

The first day of the festival was dedicated to critical panels by scholars, critics, journalists, directors, and actors. Roundtable discussions with filmmakers punctuated the sessions, providing a balance between theory and practice.

The opening panel, "Italian Americans and Organized Crime," questioned the often bemoaned, belittled, and troublesome gangster representations that have dominated media attention over the years. Journalist George DeStefano's "Mobbed Out: Is the Gangster Genre Finished?" suggested that there is nothing new to come out of the images after *The Sopranos*, and that it is time to move on to other subjects. Fred Gardaphé's "You Got a Problem with That?: Cinematic Gangsters and the Italian American Community" examined the role the celluloid gangster has played in creating perceptions of Italian-American identities, and how various segments of the Italian-American community have responded to its presence. Giancarlo Lombardi gave a reading from the final season of *The Sopranos*, suggesting that it successfully criticized larger aspects of American culture. Robert Viscusi's cogent responses to the presentations united various perspectives in his creation of a sense of need for Italian Americans to deconstruct the gangster figure in thought and criticism in order to move beyond it all.

The first roundtable of filmmakers and actors featured Philip Botti, Lucia Grillo, and Marco Ricci, whose lively conversations shed light on their forays into the film business and the expectations and experiences of their young careers.

The second session presented a historical survey of representations of Italians and Italian Americans in twentieth century American cinema. Giuliana Muscio, professor of film at the Università degli Studi di Padova and co-curator of the 2007 Pesaro Film Festival, delivered her research on the presence of Italian actors and actresses in film, from the first silent movies to the films of the 1940s. Dawn Esposito, chairperson of Sociology at St. John's University, examined the presence and absence of Italian Americans in World War II films, arguing that the great contributions made by Italian Americans to the war effort have never been well depicted. Francesca Canadé Sautman of the CUNY Graduate Center examined the role gender and race have played in the changing nature of the Italian-American family. Peter Carravetta responded by synthesizing the themes as he advocated for more intense scrutiny based on the presentations.

A second roundtable featured directors Matthew Bonifacio and Kevin Jordan, who shared their experiences behind and in front of the camera as they acted in, produced, and directed, short films. The young filmmakers discussed the challenges of seeking funding, acquiring equipment, and working with film vs. digital media.

The final panel addressed documentary and short films. Joseph Sciorra's talk focused on the presentation of documentary films and Anthony Julian Tamburri discussed the role that the short film plays in the development of Italian American themes and cinematic careers. In each case, the scholars spoke to the limited inroads that befall these two genres. They also underscored how both documentary and short films engage the viewer in thematics that we do not necessarily find in the so-called traditional feature length film. Respondent Edvige Giunta pointed to the importance

of presenting real life experiences as a way of countering the conflicts created by stereotypes found in many dramatic films.

The evening ended with an insightful roundtable led by directors Bob Giraldi and Maria Maggenti, and actor Carl Capotorto, who recounted tales of their tribulations and successes in the industry. Capotorto also discussed his endeavor into autobiography and the recent publication of his book *Twisted Head: An Italian American Memoir*.

For the next three days twenty-nine films were shown in both English and Italian. On Thursday screenings were shown at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. The film viewings were capped by a roundtable discussion with working couple Nancy Savoca and Richard Guay, director and co-screenwriter/producer respectively.

Friday's venue was the Graduate Center. Between films an impromptu roundtable took place with directors Maggenti, Len Guercio, and Susan Caperna Lloyd. Evening screenings were followed by a discussion with directors Matthew Bonifacio and Joseph Greco on the trials of making a feature-length movie and moving from the short venue to the feature film.

The festival concluded on Saturday with screenings at Hunter College, including Gianfranco Norelli's documentary film *Pane amaro* (2007), a moving account of the living and working conditions of New York City's Italian immigrants in the early twentieth century. Anthony Julian Tamburri led a discussion with Norelli and Suma Kurien, Nancy Savoca, and Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and Jerome Bongiorno. The panel reflected on their work, and discussed their somewhat unique status as working career couples.

The festival's success was apparent in the participation of many noted scholars and accomplished artists, as well as the seamless programming and large audience turnout. A companion book of critical essays entitled *Mediated Ethnicity*, translated from the Italian and previously published as *Quei bravi ragazzi* by Marsilio Editori, will be published this year by the Calandra Institute. •



Film clips, left to right: John Corbett and Marita Miller in Bob Giraldi's "Dinner Rush"; Devon Gearheart in Joseph Greco's "Canvas"; Processioners in Katherine Gulla's "Mio paese—My Town"; Derick and Steve Martini in Kevin Jordan's "Goat on Fire and Smiling Fish"; Lucia Grillo and Teresa Attisani in Grillo's "A pena do pana."

# PRESERVING HISTORY

## and the Legacy of New York State Italian-American Elected Officials

No single organized depository of research on Italian-American political leadership exists, making it difficult to examine the history and role of Italian Americans elected to New York State political offices. In response to the dearth of available data, the Calandra Institute is

planning to conduct a series of in-depth interviews with current and former elected officials, and create an oral history archive based on this research.

The documentation of the experiences and personal narratives of these elected officials will provide insights and answers to questions such as: What motivated him or her to seek public office? What is the individual's current political philosophy and how has that philosophy changed over time? How has an Italian heritage and

value system shaped and guided his or her political viewpoint?

This archive will provide scholars and interested individuals a significant vehicle by which to research the development of Italian-American political life, and preserve the politicians' roles in the regional and national history of our country. Interviews will be recorded on master DV tapes and transferred to DVD format for public access. The DVDs will be available for viewing at the Calandra Institute library. •

### Staff News

DR. FRED GARDAPHÉ, Distinguished Professor of Italian American Studies, taught in the Summer Academy of the Centro Altrealtie of the Giovanni Angelli Foundation in Torino, Italy. Dr. Gardaphé was honored for his outstanding contributions to higher education by New York City Comptroller William Thompson at the October 2nd Celebration of Italian Heritage and Culture Month. He presented a paper, entitled "Commedia della morte: Theories of Italian American Life and Death" at the CUNY-SUNY conference of the Forum for Italian American Criticism, October 3-4, 2008.

JOSEPH GROSSO is the recipient of a grant from State Senator Serphin Maltese to create the fifth edition of *il Giornalino*, *The Italian Journal* which highlights the literary products of high school and college students enrolled in Italian language programs.

DR. VINCENZO MILIONE attended the annual conference "Consejo Iberoamericano en Honor a la Calidad Educativa" (Latin American Council in Honor of Quality Education) in Guayaquil, Ecuador, as Board Director for International Research. Milione convened the second "Italian Diaspora Workshop for Italians in the Americas" and presented a mathematical model projecting Italian ancestry in South America. Conference attendees collectively agreed to create a Council of Italians in the Americas Oggi (CIAO) to connect Italian descendants in Latin American countries and North America. An agreement was drafted with the goal of promoting research on Italian experiences in the Americas. Dr. Milione also met with Dr. Arnaldo Bigalli, President of the Comités in Ecuador, and its members to explore these initiatives.

DR. JOSEPH SCIORRA presented several lectures during the fall 2008 semester including: "Built With Faith: Place Making and the Religious Imagination in Italian New York City" at the Museum of the City of New York, and at the annual conferences of the American Academy of Religion (Chicago), the American Folklore Society (Louisville), and the American Italian Historical Association (New Haven); "The Ethnoscape of Hip Wop: Alterity and Authenticity in Italian North American Hip Hop" at the American Studies Association (Albuquerque); "Italian-American Devotion to the Black Madonna," Flushing, Queens Library; and "Sacred Landscapes of Italian New York," Ciao Italy Performing Arts Festival (Brooklyn). Dr. Sciorra also received two grants from Professional Staff Congress/CUNY to present conference papers.

## The Art of Claudia DeMonte

### ARTIFACT SERIES



Vaphio Small Bowl, bronze, 2007



Vesteria, bronze, 2007

*"For the last thirty years my work has dealt with the roles of women in contemporary societies. I want my work to challenge our ideas about women's everyday lives and the concept of beauty in our global culture. The 'Artifact Series' is inspired by the elongated forms of Cycladic art. The 'Female Fetish Series' is made of actual-size wooden objects, representing stereotypical items, densely covered with pewter 'milagros' (ex-votos) that I nail into each piece. These works are heavily influenced by my Italian Catholic background and my interest in and collection of folk art."*

— CLAUDIA DEMONTE

Claudia DeMonte has had more than sixty one-person and three hundred group exhibitions nationally, and has lectured and exhibited in thirty-five countries. Her work is in numerous museum permanent collections and public commission spaces. DeMonte is the curator of *Women of the World: A Global Collection of Art*, a traveling exhibition that includes the work of women from 177 countries. Her new project, *Real Beauty*, uses handmade fabric dolls to express beauty standards around the world that are being lost due to plastic reproductions and globalization. For more than three decades DeMonte served on the faculty of the University of Maryland, where she was named Distinguished Scholar Teacher and Professor Emerita. She also holds an Honorary Doctorate from the College of Santa Fe. Claudia DeMonte is represented by the June Kelly Gallery in New York City. A monograph on DeMonte's life work is being published this year by Pomegranate Books.

*Photographs of Vaphio, Vesteria, Stylish Shoe, Handbag ©Jean Vong; Photograph of Iron ©James Dee*

For more information visit: [www.claudiademonte.com](http://www.claudiademonte.com)

### FEMALE FETISH SERIES



Iron, pewter on wood, 2001



Stylish Shoe, pewter on wood, 2003



Handbag, pewter on wood, 1996



# DOCUMENTED ITALIANS

The issue of “negative” media images of Italian Americans looms large in the public consciousness. Celluloid and cathode gangsters have caused interminable *agita* for many self-appointed community spokespeople. Some cultural critics contend it is not the mob film, per se, that is disconcerting but the tedium of the genre’s persistent association with a single ethnic group. Into this sociocultural mix comes a new generation of directors producing documentary films and videos that offer varied and nuanced accounts of Italian-American histories and lives.

In fall 2006 Dr. Joseph Sciorra, associate director of the Calandra Institute’s academic and cultural programs, inaugurated “Documented Italians,” a monthly public program featuring some of these exciting new documentaries. This series, whose title calls attention to the problematic status of Italian Americans in film, presents alternative narratives to mainstream Hollywood fare. Discussions with individual directors and producers, led by a noted scholar knowledgeable about the subject matter, follow the respective screenings.

A few documentaries develop, in part, as a reaction against the big-budget gangster film and explicitly seek to create “positive” images of Italian Americans on film. In this pursuit of the affirmative, some filmmakers engage in a form of feel-good ethnic boosterism permeated with nostalgia for an imagined past that all too often results in portrayals verging on the stereotypical. Lost in these self-congratulatory and ultimately insipid documentaries is the particularity, variety, and depth of Italian-American experiences past and present.

“Documented Italians” presents well-made documentary films that tell engaging, albeit sometimes disturbing, stories that move beyond the merely celebratory.

To date, the series has shown films that reclaim the great narratives of twentieth century American history, as with Peter Miller’s *Sacco and Vanzetti* (2006) which revisits the infamous arrest, trial, and execution of the two avowed immigrant anarchists. The willingness to tell relatively unknown stories is witnessed

in Camilla Calamandrei’s *Prisoners in Paradise* (2003) as it traces the World War II history of 51,000 Italian soldiers brought to the United States as prisoners of war, some of whom returned after the war to marry Italian-American women.

A number of films explore those places where individuals have come together to live, work, play and, ultimately, express themselves and create community. Atlanta Film Festival prize winner Veronica Diaferia’s debut video *Closing Time: Storia di un negozio* (2006) documents the final days of a venerable business and cultural institution, the eighty-year-old E. Rossi & Company, a music and novelty store in Manhattan’s Little Italy. Paul Reitano and Terrence Sacchi’s video *Dyker Lights* (2001) looks at New York City homeowners who transform the mundane into a nocturnal tapestry of festive landscape by decorating their house exteriors and front yards. Stephanie Foerster’s film *Watch the Pallino* (2006) chronicles the residents of Toluca, Illinois and their annual Labor Day *bocce* tournament.

Catholicism has had a fundamental yet ever changing influence in the lives of Italian immigrants and their descendants, and two recent films look at the complicated ways Italian Americans interact with their faith. Abigail Honor’s *Saints and Sinners* (2003) tells the story of Edward DeBonis and Vincent Maniscalco of New York City, an Italian-American gay couple and devout Catholics, who decide to formalize their relationship in their religion’s “Holy Sacrament of Marriage.” Joseph Cultrera’s video *Hand of God* (2006) employs a personal and poetic approach to recounting the disturbing story of his brother Paul, a survivor of clerical pedophilia.

Focusing on a single individual is one way to tell a much bigger story. Alex Halpern directs the camera on his then 104-year-old grandmother, Mary Mirabito Livornese Cavaliere, in *Nine Good Teeth* (2003), a film that will rid the viewer of any stereotypical notion about “little old Italian grandmothers.” Basile Sallustio’s *My Brother, My Sister, Sold for a Fistful of Lire* (1998) follows Pia Dilisa, a farmer from Molise who struggles to locate her long-lost brother and sister whom their destitute, widowed father signed over to an Italian-American adoption agency during the deprivations of post-World War II Italy.

A recent crop of films explores the rich legacy of Italian-American cultural expressions. Sabato “Sam” Rodia, the featured artist of Edward Landler and Brad Byer’s *I Build The Tower* (2005) was a Campanian immigrant who designed and single-handedly built the celebrated Watts Towers, a marvel of unique structures in Los Angeles. In *Poem in Action: A Portrait of Vincent Ferrini* (2000), Henry Ferrini captures poet Vincent Ferrini’s passionate creativity and magnetic presence in this portrait of the artist, spokesperson, and social activist. Don McGlynn’s *Louis Prima: The Wildest!* (2000) documents the jazz trumpeter and consummate showman’s Sicilian upbringing in New Orleans, his Las Vegas shows, and his exhilarating performance as King Louis in the Disney film *The Jungle Book*.

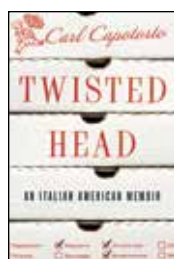
The Calandra Institute provides a unique venue for films about Italian Americans that are not readily screened in theaters or on television. These stories about and representations of Italian Americans cannot be simply labeled negative or positive but, instead, are more complex and ultimately more revealing. •

## From the Archives



During the 1950s and 1960s, the Oddo House was a thriving resort located in the Catskills catering to Italian Americans. I was so happy to find this photo (circa 1954) of my mother Mary Ann Vaccaro (left) and godmother Yolanda Fiorenza Rollando (right) because the Oddo House has played an integral part in our family’s history. My grandmother Rose Vaccaro, fearing her son Anthony would get into trouble during the idle summer months in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, quit her seamstress job every June and traveled with her two children to Highland, New York, to work at the Oddo House. My mother waited on guests in the dining room, my grandmother changed beds, and my uncle washed dishes, something he never did at home. Years later, my Uncle Anthony took his mother back to the Oddo House, but this time as a guest where she could sit back and be served like a lady.

— STEPHANIE ROMEO, Picture Editor, W.W. Norton & Company



*Twisted Head: An Italian American Memoir*  
Carl Capotorto  
\$23.95 hardcover  
ISBN: 978-0-7679-2861-8  
Broadway Books, 2008

Carl Capotorto's *Twisted Head: An Italian American Memoir* is a powerful account of how a kid from the Bronx made it from a pizza joint past to success on the Broadway stage, in independent films, and on national television. Capotorto literally translated his family name for the title of his narrative and gives a moving recollection of growing up under a father he loved through fear, a mother who taught him how to put up with men like his father, and sisters who challenged him to defy the status quo of his time and place. Until he learns that he can control his own life, his "head" is "twisted" in a number of ways. First, in relation to his family. Next, in relation to the boys in the 'hood who tease, tempt, and taunt him as he finds a way to express his sexuality in New York City's late 1970s and '80s disco culture.

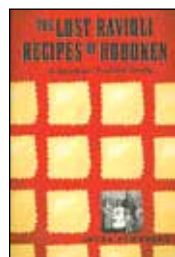
*Twisted Head* rises above other memoirs in Capotorto's ability to write as if he had his arm around your shoulder and was walking you through his Belmont neighborhood as he navigates through his fears, foibles, and fantasies. His honesty is refreshing and his insights profound. "My father seems to have been bent on preparing and training me not for life in general, or for the world, but simply for life under his rule, in his house . . . I wound up being secretly scared of my own shadow well into manhood, insecure and self-conscious to an unbearable degree." He overcomes his anxieties through disco dancing, which enables him to create a self in public performance, and the pursuit of an artist's life that liberates him from his father's pressures as he focuses on playwrighting and acting.

The intimacy in his prose avoids in-your-face braggadocio as it takes you through the good and bad times of the Capotorto family. He divides his story into "The Pizza Years" and "The House Years," and both sections are anchored on the work his father does and draws the young Carl into because he is the only son. Carl becomes his father's helper in a never-ending campaign to renovate the family house they move into when the pizza business is sold. One can see where Capotorto drew from his own life experience in his portrayal of Bruno, in John Turturro's film *Mac*, as he deals with his father's demons and demands. The

lessons Carl learns are ones that we each must master in some way as we make sense of our upbringing while in the process of creating our identities both inside and outside the family.

The rough life dependent on a pizzeria business that barely provides for the family is never depicted as quaint; the disco days transcend the shallowness of *Saturday Night Fever*, and his days in high school and college never reek of nostalgia. Capotorto accomplishes all this by creating an authoritative voice born of hard knocks and deep thinking that surfaces through beautiful language. It is not so much the story he tells that compels the reader, but rather the way in which he writes that keeps the pages turning.

Based on a one-man show Capotorto wrote and performed, *Twisted Head* is full of fine stories that speak to a generation of American life that tries to remain connected to ethnic roots while it stretches to become American. By the time you finish *Twisted Head*, you get the feeling that this guy has become a good friend of yours and, while you may have never met him, you certainly will never forget him.



*The Lost Ravioli Recipes of Hoboken: A Search for Food and Family*  
Laura Schenone  
\$26.95 hardcover  
ISBN: 978-0-393-06146-8  
W.W. Norton & Company, 2007

It is difficult to write about one's past, and it is the rare book that does it well enough to make it matter to others. Marcel Proust was drawn into his masterpiece by a sense of smell, and now we have Laura Schenone's memoir inspired by the taste of her grandmother's ravioli. The result of her attempts to master that creation leads to a search for the original recipe. More than just a culinary mystery, this is a story ripe with meaning, and reveals how the author's personality is transformed in the process of searching.

*The Lost Ravioli Recipes of Hoboken: A Search for Food and Family* is a joyful story of how Schenone rebuilds her cultural identity one recipe at a time. It is insightful without being simply celebratory. The plot, if there is one aside from tracking down the original recipe and ingredients for her family's ravioli, unfolds through a conversion Schenone experiences as she becomes a born-again Italian American.

Her opening doubts are well reflected in such insights as: "Despite the assumptions,

I always knew the truth—I was not Italian. My father was Italian, but not me. There was simply not enough left by the time my generation came around. Because of intermarriage and the passing of time, I was born in the twilight of ethnicity, the barely tail end of it."

While this story is common, Schenone's writing is simply delectable and the result is a literal feast made of food for thought. Schenone doesn't just tell or describe what happens, she realizes truths by recreating those experiences that inspired her and, in the process, captures the sensory stimulants that provoked her attention. She recalls with a brilliancy that replaces nostalgia with new knowing, doubt with understanding, and ethnic chauvinism with a balanced sense of ethnic pride.

Some of the general history reads as though it might better fit an encyclopedia and some of the family history comes off a bit stilted like old home movies. Most of this is in the chapter on Hoboken but fortunately it does not spill out from there.

Schenone recreates family history through her genealogical search, reconnecting with long-lost relatives, awakening dormant memories, and creating new relationships with distant relatives. By the time she is finished with her search, she has found a part of herself that was always there, it just took a return to the old country to renew it. Her travel to Liguria, several times by herself and the last with her husband and small children, is captured in a travelogue that is informative without being sentimental or smug. Eventually, her grandparent's hometown "feels like another place inside me. It is primitive, buried in my chest or body, it is water and mountain side by side, all open and calm."

But all is not peace and love in the extended family. One of the points of greatest tension is the way father and daughter struggle to relate to each other, and Schenone renders this with all the honest awkwardness that we expect when confronting the truths of our past.

Schenone knows that recipes are not the way back to all this, but the map that helps you create experiences worth remembering. By the time you are done reading *The Lost Ravioli Recipes* you will not know whether to place it on your library shelf or keep it in your kitchen. This is literary as well as culinary art, for Schenone not only concocts a worthwhile and well-written story, but gives you the recipes, and everything you need to create them on your own.

*Book reviews by Fred Gardaphé*



# BALDASSARE FORESTIERE'S "UNDERGROUND GARDENS"

In 1977 the United States government listed a sprawling underground labyrinth of chambers in Fresno, California, on the National Register of Historic Places. Over the course of forty years Sicilian immigrant Baldassare Forestiere (1879–1946) singlehandedly dug the San Joaquin Valley hardpan to create an astonishing subterranean marvel.

Leaving Filari (Rometta township, Messina province), Forestiere arrived in California around 1906 with the intention of growing citrus trees. He purchased seventy acres only to discover the land was unsuitable for planting due to the

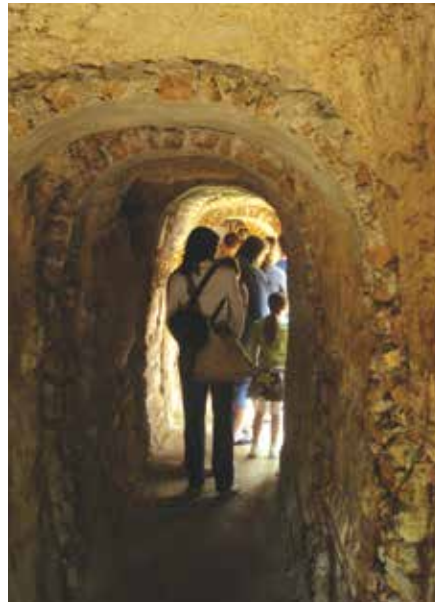
impermeable sedimentary soil. With the searing valley heat—summers could top 105 degrees—Forestiere burrowed underground to find relief. He used only a pick, shovel, and wheelbarrow to carve almost one hundred chambers spanning ten acres, digging as far down as twenty-five feet. There he grew a variety of grapevines and fruit trees—grapefruit, lemon, orange, pomegranate, quince—in oversized, handcrafted planters below opened skylights.

The arched passage ways, vaulted ceilings, and open skylights create a truly hybridic Italian-American site crafted from childhood memories of grottoes and caverns

from the Sicilian countryside and using excavation skills honed digging tunnels in Boston and New York. Forestiere's horticultural expertise also conjoined the training received among his father's Sicilian olive and citrus groves and as a hired hand working as a grafter for valley farmers.

This chthonic retreat is internationally recognized for its architectural engineering and horticultural ingenuity. Each year hundreds of people venture underground to explore and experience Forestiere's unique earth environment. •

*Photographs by Joseph Sciorra*



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### PHILIP V. CANNISTRARO SEMINAR SERIES

**Wednesday, February 25, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad  
MARK CHOATE (Brigham Young University)

**Tuesday, March 10, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
The Crescent City Lynchings: The New Orleans Parish  
Prison Lynching of 1891  
TOM SMITH

**Wednesday, April 29, 2009**  
"Fade to White": Colonial Mulattoes in Cinema and  
Literature in Fascist Italy  
ROSETTA GIULIANI-CAPONETTO (University of Connecticut)

**Monday, May 18, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
Italian Divas in American Film: Changing Images of  
Italian Womanhood  
VERA DIKA (New Jersey City University)

### WRITERS READ SERIES

**Tuesday, February 10, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
CARL CAPOTORTO reads from *Twisted Head: An Italian  
American Memoir* (Broadway Books, 2008)

**Thursday, March 12, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
JUSTIN CATANOSO reads from *My Cousin  
the Saint: A Search for Faith, Family, and Miracles*  
(William Morrow, 2008)

**Monday, April 6, 2009, 6 p.m.**  
LAURA SCHENONE reads from *Lost Ravioli Recipes of  
Hoboken: A Search for Food and Family* (W.W. Norton &  
Company, 2007)

**Monday, May 4, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
CAMILLA TRINCHIERI reads from *The Price of Silence*  
(Soho Press 2007)

### DOCUMENTED ITALIANS FILM SERIES

**Monday, February 23, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
*Magic Man* (2007), 60 min., TAMMY LEACH, director  
ANTHONY TAMBURRI, discussant

**Monday, March 16, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
*Texas Tavola: A Taste of Sicily in the Lone Star State* (2007),  
34 min.; CIRCE STURM and RANDOLPH LEWIS, directors  
*Sanctuary of Love: The Mission of Salvatore Verdirome*  
(1997), 30 min.; ERIC GEARITY, director;  
KAY TURNER, discussant

**Wednesday, April 15, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
*Polizzi Generosa, My Little Brooklyn* (2005), 55 min.;  
CAMILLA ROOS OVERBYE, director;  
TERESA FIORE, discussant

**Monday, May 11, 2009 at 6 p.m.**  
*Odyssey in Rome* (2005), 86 min.; ALEX GRAZIOLI, director;  
JOHN TINTORI, discussant

> All SEMINARS, READINGS, and FILMS take place at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 25 West 43rd Street, 17th floor, Manhattan  
All events are free and open to the public. Pre-registration required: 212.642.2094. Photo ID requested by building concierge.

### UPCOMING INSTITUTE CONFERENCES:

**MARCH 19-21, 2009**

Neapolitan Postcards: The *Canzone Napoletana* as Transnational Subject

**APRIL 23-25, 2009**

The Land of Our Return: Diasporic Encounters with Italy