

American Italian Historical Association

WESTERN REGIONAL CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

A people without a past is a people without a future

Bolinas, California

www.aiha-wrc.org

Fall 2009

President's Message

As summer comes to a close and fall nears, several of us venture out to one or more of the Italian Festivals in the Bay Area. The North Bay Italian Cultural Foundation celebrates its 19th Annual Festa Italiana: Discovering Florence, Italy, on Sunday October 11, 2009. Treasurer Richard Vannucci and I spent August 29 in Willow Glen at the Italian American Heritage Foundation's annual festa. Congratulations to Foundation President and WRC member Ken Borelli, his committee and crew for a fantastic festa.

At the State Capital, efforts continue to focus on the contributions Italian Americans have made to the Golden State. On August 17, 2009 Assembly Members Cathleen Galgiani and Anthony Portantino introduced ACR 89 to designate October Italian American Heritage Month in California.

The 42nd Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association will take place October 29 through November 1 in Baton Rouge, LA. The theme of this year's conference is Southern Exposures: Locations and Relocations of Italian Culture.

Last Spring the WRC co-sponsored the first Italian Film Festival at Las Positas College: *Ciao Italia, Ciao America*. The three-day festival included several short films, a documentary and feature films. The audience enjoyed the films, discussion and delicious food from Terra Mia.

I am on sabbatical for the 2009-2010 academic year. I have two main projects to occupy my time. The first involves creating a Women's Studies Program for Las Positas College, including the curriculum for two new courses. The second project includes adding two new communities, San Jose and Stockton, to the California Italian American Project. I can be reached at my home number (925) 833-9194.

Benvenuti to new members: Catherine Suarez & Richard Dunbar & family.

I am delighted to announce that WRC member Deanna Denurra has agreed to serve as our new volunteer coordinator. Interested members, who may have a little time to volunteer, please feel free to contact Deanna at (925) 935-7343.

Finally, anyone who receives this newsletter by post and is willing to receive subsequent ones electronically, please email Lawrence DiStasi at lwdistasi@sbcglobal.net.

Wishing all of you a healthy & happy upcoming holiday season.

Ciao e a presto.

—Teri Ann Bengiveno

Upcoming

Jazz at the Dogpatch *A Tribute to Lennie Tristano*

Date: Sunday, October 18, 2009

Place: Dogpatch Saloon, 2496 3rd St. (at 22nd),
San Francisco, CA 94107

Time: 4:30 pm to 8:30 pm

In this fourth in the series of Italian American jazz events, all put together by our in-house jazz aficionado, Richard Vannucci, tribute and homage will be paid to one of the giants of jazz, Lennie Tristano. Both the house band (Vince Lateano's quartet) and other musicians will participate in the tribute to the blind pianist who many say initiated free-form jazz improvisation. Though Tristano almost never performed publicly during his last twenty years, he cemented his reputation and influence with legendary performances, and with his students, who included saxophonist Lee Konitz, pianist Sal Mosca, and vocalist Sheila Jordan.

For an afternoon of great live music, evoking the major role played by Italian American musicians in jazz (previous events have celebrated Frank Rosalino, Tony Fruscella and Vince Guaraldi), seasoned with Italian American camaraderie and food—all for \$5 admission—check out the Dogpatch Saloon on October 18. For info, call Richard at 510.581.9139.

Avanti Popolo: A Reading

Date: Saturday, October 24, 2009

Place: Temescal Branch, Oakland Public Library
5205 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland CA 94609

Time: 2:00pm to 4:30 pm

The 2008 collection of poems, articles and memoirs, *Avanti Popolo: Sailing Beyond Columbus*, gathered together the efforts of Italian American groups, writers, and scholars to explore alternatives to the received standard celebrations of Columbus Day. Over a period of five years, editors James Tracy and Tommi Aviccolli Mecca held events at City Lights Books in San Francisco at which Italian American writers expressed their range, their diversity, and their solidarity with oppressed groups, including, historically, Italian Americans themselves. The resulting collection includes offerings by

some of our best-known writers: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Diane diPrima, Kim Addonizio, Tom Centolella, and many others.

On October 24 in Oakland, the WRC will host a reading by a few of the writers included in that collection: WRC members Michael Parenti, Giovanna Capone and Lawrence DiStasi, and editor Tommi Mecca. The readings will commence at 3 pm.

Prior to the program, the WRC will hold its **annual General Membership Meeting**—a time when WRC members are encouraged to voice their opinions, suggestions, and concerns. The membership meeting will begin at 2:00 pm, and continue for an hour. All are welcome. Light refreshment to be served.

Una Storia Segreta

The Pittsburg Historical Society will host the Una Storia Segreta exhibit in early 2010, probably in January. The Historical Society has also agreed to keep the exhibit in its permanent collection when it is retired. While a retirement date has not been set, a U.S. government grant for upgrading the exhibit has been applied for through the offices of Rep. Bill Pascrell of New Jersey. The grant request was part of an overall application for funding for Judith Erlich's documentary-in-progress on the wartime story.

Erlich has recently completed a film on Daniel Ellsberg, the whistleblower of "Pentagon Papers" fame. Among other venues, the film will be screened at the Mill Valley Film Festival, Friday Oct. 16 and Sunday Oct. 18.

Another level of the World War II story has recently advanced in the U.S. Congress. HR 1425, the European Americans and Refugees Wartime Treatment Study Act, passed out of the Judiciary Committee recently, and is on its way to being marked up for submission to the full Congress. The text and the latest on the bill can be viewed on <http://thomas.loc.gov> by keying in the bill number, 1425.

Member Activities

Fred Marazzo has just been selected as a Franklin Fellow, working as a consultant with the Bureau of International Information Programs supporting U.S. foreign policy objectives. He will be working with top diplomats in Washington D.C. learning some of the tradecraft of public diplomacy, and will be away from the Bay Area for a year for the program. *Auguri*.

Vincenza Scarpaci is touring the Bay Area to publicize her new book, *The Journey of Italians in America*. Among her stops in the area are: Museo Italo Americano, Nov. 1; Santa Rosa Jr. College, Nov. 4; Book Passage, Corte Madera, Nov. 7. For more info, see www.italianamericanjourney.org.

Sam Fumosa, WRC member and tireless supporter, shipper, and promoter of Una Storia Segreta, has been elected National Historian of the Order Sons of Italy in America. It is a fitting capstone to a long career of service to Italian America. *Auguri*.

Francesca Roccaforte is calling for films produced and directed by women, to be screened monthly (on the last Friday of the month) in a new independent film venue in Oakland. Doors open at 7 pm, films at 8. The Space is located at 4148 MacArthur Blvd., Oakland. A nominal charge of \$5 is

requested for screenings. Email rocknfranny@mindspring.com with proposals.

Diane diPrima has been selected as the new Poet Laureate of San Francisco. An announcement ceremony was held at the Richmond Branch Library in San Francisco on May 15, with a more official "inauguration" to come.

Luisa del Giudice is helping a folk group from Basilicata find venues in the West. The group, *I Tarantolati di Tricarico*, will be performing in Las Vegas Oct. 12-18, and then in Los Angeles. Anyone interested in hosting the group should contact Meri DeLorenzo Howard at italianfolk@lycos.com.

Italian American Activities

Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "Drawings from Life: A selection of works on paper," will be displayed at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in San Francisco, September 11 through October 9. At an opening reception on September 10, the Consul General conferred on the artist the *Commendatore all'Ordine del Merito della Repubblica Italiana*. A gala followed at the Italian Athletic Club. The Istituto is located at 425 Washington St., San Francisco. For info, call 415.788.7142, ext. 18.

The Italian Heritage Columbus Day Parade will be held in San Francisco on October 11, starting at 12:30 pm. It is the city's oldest civic event, and the nation's oldest Italian American parade and community celebration. It will be preceded by the **Madonna del Lume Blessing of the Fleet Ceremony**, with origins in Porticello, Sicily, on October 3 and 4 at San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. Sunday Oct. 4 will start with an 11:30 am mass at SS Peter & Paul Church, and a parade to the boat harbor for the blessing of the fleet.

The Italian language children's program, **Mondo Bambini**, founded by WRC VP, Laura Ruberto, and Angelo Del Priore, was sold this summer to Girotondo, a Marin-based school. Girotondo has taken over MB's Berkeley location and has plans to expand the program into a full Italian immersion preschool and elementary school.

Gianfranco Norelli, Eurus Productions, NYC, has produced with RAI TV a film on Italian immigration and IA history titled *Pane Amaro*. The film covers three generations of Italian America from the 1880s to the end of World War II. Originally broadcast by RAI in 2007, the film will be shown by San Jose's IAHF Nov. 15. For info call: 408.298.4278.

Marin's Italian Film Festival will take place this year starting from October 3 and continuing through November 4. Showings take place at the Marin Center Showcase Theater in San Rafael. For info and schedule, see www.italianfilm.com.

Your last newsletter?

In trying to maintain our services for those who value them, our treasurer has sent out numerous membership renewal notices. Accordingly, if you wish to continue receiving this newsletter, indicate your interest by joining the AIHA/WRC and paying our modest dues. A membership form for that purpose can be found on the back cover. Thank you.

Book Review

Instead of a review, I thought it might be useful to excerpt a couple of selections related to our upcoming programs— one on Lennie Tristano from my *Big Book of Italian American Culture*, and one from *Avanti Popolo*. The hope is that these will whet your appetite enough to impel you to attend. LDS.

The Teachings of Lennie Tristano

by Robert Palmer

“Women are more open, they’re looser,” the late pianist Lennie Tristano once said when asked why so many of his budding jazz students were women. “They’re more intuitive and original; they’re never out to prove how fast or how loud or how high they can play...”

Lynn Anderson, a jazz singer and former student of Tristano’s, quoted those words in an unpublished tribute she wrote shortly before the Lennie Tristano Memorial Concert, held at New York’s Town Hall in late January. The six-hour concert was a remarkable confirmation of Tristano’s thesis. Women sang—their traditional role in jazz—but they also played intense, two-fisted piano... There were men, too, most notably young saxophonist Warne Marsh, and Eddie Gomez, favorite young bassist of the late Charles Mingus.

Still, the strongest, most vibrant presence was Tristano himself, who died of a heart attack on November 18, 1978, but who seemed to live on in every note played.

Tristano was the mystery man of modern jazz—a blind pianist with a reputation as a pedagogue who rarely performed in public during the last twenty years of his career. His influence has been felt most strongly through the work of his students, among them the great alto saxophonist Lee Konitz, pianists Ronnie Ball, Joanne Brackeen, and Sal Mosca, and vocalist Sheila Jordan...

Born in Chicago in 1919 at the height of a flu epidemic that damaged his eyes, Tristano had his sight further weakened by a serious attack of measles at age six. He went to a school for handicapped children, and then to Chicago’s American Conservatory of Music. He moved to New York in 1946 and immediately established himself as a formidable player: “In 1944, I had reached a point where I could rifle off anything of Tatum’s” he once said, “and with scandalous efficiency.”

Among the souvenirs of that period is a remarkable 1947 radio broadcast that united Tristano with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Max Roach. His dense, jagged chording was probably the most challenging accompaniment Parker and Gillespie had ever experienced, and they responded with exceptional playing.

During the next few years, Tristano became the guru of a small, select circle of jazzmen, with saxophonists Konitz and Marsh and guitarist Billy Bauer as his most impressive disciples.

Instead of playing within the demanding bebop idiom that had been devised by Parker and Gillespie, Tristano and his cohorts struck out into new territory. While improvising, they would completely reharmonize standard tunes until the original melody and chord progressions were almost unrecognizable.

In 1949, with bassist Arnold Fishkin and drummer Denzil Best, they recorded the first free-form jazz improvisations, “Intuition” and “Digression”... Critic Barry Ulanov called it “the most audacious experiment yet attempted in jazz...”

from *Avanti Popolo*:

Generations, by Kim Addonizio

Somewhere a shop of hanging meats,
shop of stink and blood, block and cleaver;

somewhere an immigrant, grandfather, stranger
with my last name. That man

untying his apron in 1910, scrubbing off
the pale fat, going home past brownstones

and churches, past vendors, streetcars, arias,
past the clutter of supper dishes, going home

to his new son, my father—
What is he to me, butcher with sausage fingers,

old Italian leaning over a child somewhere
in New York City, somewhere alive, what is he

that I go back to look for him, years after his death
and my father’s death, knowing only

a name, a few scraps my father fed me?
My father who shortened that name, who hacked off

three lovely syllables, who raised American children.
What is the past to me

that I have to go back, pronouncing that word
in the silence of a cemetery, what is this stone

coming apart in my hands like bread, name
I eat and expel? Somewhere the smell of figs

and brine, strung garlic, rosemary and olives;
somewhere that place. Somewhere a boat

rocking, crossing over, entering the harbor, I wait
on the dock, one face in a crowd of faces.

Families disembark and stream toward the city,
and though I walk among them for hours,

hungry, haunting the streets,
I can’t tell which of them is mine.

Somewhere a steak is wrapped in thick paper,
somewhere my grandmother is laid in the earth,

and my young father shines shoes on a corner,
turning his back to the old world, forgetting.

I walk the night city, looking up at lit windows,
and there is no table set for me, nowhere

I can go to be filled. This is the city
of grandparents, immigrants, arrivals,

where I’ve come too late with my name,
an empty plate. This is the place.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT: BECOME A MEMBER OF THE AIHA/WRC....TODAY!

Send dues (Individual: \$15; Family: \$20; Organizations: \$25)

to: AIHA/WRC Treasurer
5072 Elrod Dr.
Castro Valley, CA 94546

From:

(name)

(address)

(city, state)

(phone)

(email address)

(volunteer skills—events, computers, mailings, etc.)

Send AIHA National Dues (Individual: \$40; Student: \$20; Senior: \$25) to:

JOHN D. CALANDRA INSTITUTE
25 W. 43rd St. – 17th Floor
New York, NY 10036

(NB: Please DO NOT send National dues to us. Send only to the above address.)

Members with items for the next newsletter should send them to:

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The American Italian Historical Association

Western Regional Chapter

P.O. Box 533

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AIHA National Conference – Oct. 29 – Nov. 1
Baton Rouge, LA
“Southern Exposures: Locations and Relocations
in Italian Culture”