



UPDATE

Italic Institute of America

“Italian Pride on a Classical Foundation”

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www.italic.org



Outpacing Our Resources

by John Mancini, Executive Director



Not many people know the word *sprezzatura*. It’s actually a concept meaning to make things look easy, even when much effort goes into them.

Our Institute has been practicing *sprezzatura* for 38 years now. We have gone where no other organizations have gone: a philosophy based on our Classical heritage not an immigrant one, an educational maga-

zine (*Italic Way*) without recipes or travel photos, a comprehensive youth program (*Aurora*) for pre-teens that exposed them to Latin and history, as well as Italian vocabulary. More recently we have completed a reader-friendly 4-volume history of Fascism, that turbulent era that still shadows us today; Vol. 4, *Italy and the Holocaust* has already sold out and another printing needed. We have produced videos, reports, blogs, and have digitized books on every facet of the Italian heritage that are freely accessible online to anyone interested in the Italian heritage. We deal often with media misinformation and distortions. The Chicago and New York dailies know us.

But it pains me that our ambition and scholarship outpace the financial resources available to us. There are Italian American museums, cultural centers, and even academic centers, but we are the only Italian American “Think Tank” devoted to research, reflection, and outreach. We don’t compete but rather offer our products to other organizations. For example, colleague Bill Dal Cerro has produced a *Film Study* of Hollywood defamation that is now being referenced internationally. Our well-designed pamphlets on Columbus are a goldmine of facts for any debate.

Sprezzatura doesn’t come cheap!



USS BASILONE

The Navy’s latest addition is the USS John Basilone, a guided missile destroyer christened last June at the shipyard in Bath, Maine. It is the second ship named after the courageous Marine who earned both the Medal of Honor and Navy Cross for service at Guadalcanal during World War II.

Basilone was transferred to the U.S. to sell war bonds but refused to remain stateside. He was returned to the Pacific Theater only to be killed in action at Iwo Jima in 1945.

He was the subject of two episodes of Steven Spielberg’s HBO series *The Pacific*.



PROF. GATES DEMURS

Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates occasionally has Italian American celebrities on his PBS series *Finding Your Roots*.

Invariably, they learn that Ellis Island recorded their immigrant ancestors as Italian in “nationality” but southern in “race.” You can imagine how this might shock his guests; made worse when Gates explains that the Italian population—north and south—was considered two distinct races at the time.

While it is true that the Ellis Island manifest for each arriving ship had such categories as Nationality and Race, and that

Italians were subject to a north and south division, many researchers apparently do not know the whole story which casts doubt on their expertise.



Prof. Henry Louis Gates

Our ancestry researcher Ellen Maresca quickly found the original Ellis Island instructions for completing the manifest. Two facts emerged: 1) the term “race” actually meant an ethnic or cultural group, not race as we know it. Italians were not alone in being subdivided into different people. British immigrants were considered four different “races”: English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish; and 2) the north-south division of Italy was further north than we understand it. The eugenics of the 19th Century considered northern regions like Liguria and Tuscany as “south.”

Such a dividing line meant that Columbus (*Liguria*), Cabot (*Lazio*) and the bulk of the Renaissance geniuses of *Toscana* (daVinci, Michelangelo, Vespucci, and Verrazzano) were “southerners,” like many of us! Prof. Gates’s guests would be flattered knowing this instead of confused.



We sent a certified letter with the pictured map to Prof. Gates. No response. Will his next Italian American subjects be given this information? Stay tuned.

Ageing Gratefully



Dominican Sister Frances Piscatelli insisted on having Cavatelli & Eggplant for her birthday meal. After all, it was her 112th celebration, making her the second oldest nun in the Church (the oldest is in Brazil, 118).

Sister Frances lives in an Amityville, New York convent and has suffered physical challenges such as having her left forearm amputated when she was 2-years-old, and a shattered right arm in an auto accident. A fall at 102 caused a near-fatal brain bleed and she has had a hip replacement.



Other than that, she still has the sharp mind of a former math teacher and an Italian appetite.

Walter Santi of Chicago just turned 102. A long-time associate of our Institute, Walter famously called out a brewery for using Al Capone to market their product on

city billboards just as Chicago was preparing to welcome tourists to the 1994 World Cup soccer championship.

Walter snapped a photo of the ad and sent it to the *Sun-Times* which got Mayor Daley’s attention. Hizzoner got the brewery to replace Scarface with Chicago’s nuclear pioneer Enrico Fermi. Walter knows how to shake things up.

Walter celebrated his birthday with pizza, Peroni, and chocolate cake. His advice for a long life: “*Just relax!*”

Veteran **Dominick Critelli**, 104, is our neighbor in Floral Park, New York. During the Second World War, Dominick kept the Air Corps flying as a mechanic stationed in England and then France. He was awarded the French Legion of Honor last year and booked another trip to France for this month’s D-Day Commemoration.



Italici In Memoriam



Joseph Borrelli, 93, former NYPD detective for forty years. As a precinct captain in 1977, he closed the case on the “Son of Sam” (David Berkowitz) who had murdered six victims and wounded seven others over a 2-year reign of terror. Borelli retired as Chief of Detectives in 1996.

Ruth Buzzi, 88, was of Swiss-Italian heritage and raised in Connecticut. She was synonymous with comedy, appearing in movies and television with every celebrity imaginable. Her most famous gig was with *Laugh-In* during the 1960s where she appeared in every episode from 1967-73, usually as a purse-wielding spinster with a hair bun.



Maria Gloria Rando, 93, was Italic to the core. She taught primary school in San Francisco for 35 years. But her true passion was heritage. For 47 years she authored a column in the weekly *l’Italo-Americano* including an Almanac and news items from around the country. She was a supporter of the Italic Institute and plugged our accomplishments often.



What Hollywood Forgets

The Italian American contributions in America's wars are not the stuff of Hollywood films. So the story of the Faraone family on Long Island is our little secret.

Nicholas Faraone Jr.'s father, Nicholas Sr., served in the Army Air Corps in the Pacific as a B-29 tail-gunner.



Nick Faraone Jr. and his grandson Benjamin holding Nick Sr.'s Purple Heart and other decorations. (Photo by James Carbone)

In 1944, while on a mission his plane exploded killing all on board. Nick Sr. was one of five brothers who volunteered for service after Pearl Harbor. But his story goes deeper. After Nick Jr.'s mother passed, he found a box full of recordings by his father. Before the war, Nick Sr. had a professional singing career appearing on CBS Radio and was soon to sing with a young vocalist named Tony Bennett. Yet, he volunteered to serve and asked for no special treatment like being assigned to the USO. Nick Jr. was born three months after his dad was killed.

The New Latin Pope



He may have a French surname but Pope Leo XIV's actual name should be Riggitano. According to research by Ground News, a firm used by the Nobel Prize people, Pope Leo has a complex genealogy with French, Italian, Spanish, and a dash of Black.

On his paternal side, his grandfather was born in Sicily, moved to France, then came to Louisiana where he married a French American lady with the surname Fontaine. For reasons unknown, Salvatore Riggitano adopted his wife's mother's maiden name to become John Prevost.

On the Pope's maternal side, his great-great grandfather was born in Genoa as Giacomo Martino. When he settled in Louisiana he became Jacques Martinez and may have married a French Creole with mulatto DNA.

So, Pope Leo's actual family surnames should be Riggitano and Martino. DNA-wise he may be 50% French, 35% Italian, 10% Black, 5% Spanish....but 90% Latin.

NIAF Denies a Grant Request

There aren't many places to go for grant money if you're an Italian America organization. Federal agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts favor other ethnic groups. Within our community, project grants are only available at the National Italian American Foundation...with strings.

Just to apply, you need to be a Silver Member of NIAF (\$250) and an Affiliate organization (\$1,500). Our Institute did just that and forked over \$1,750 to apply for a maximum \$10,000 grant. Sadly, we didn't make the cut.

Rather stunned at our financial loss, we asked for our money back, which was done. But is this the way "foundations" should be operating?

The Lottery King

Lottery jackpots are obscene these days. It's not enough to entice gamblers with \$1 million pay-offs. Powerball reached \$2 billion in 2022 with one winner, the same for Mega Millions with a \$1 billion pot last December.



London banker-turned-bookmaker Bernard Marantelli (left) figured a way to corner any lottery by buying up all the combination numbers. Totally legit.

His target was the Texas lottery with a total of 25.8 million number combinations. He and his staff flew to Texas and ordered dozens of official lottery ticket machines. At \$1 per ticket and working 24/7 the team cranked out all the combos in three days. The payoff: \$57.8 million, enough to pay the overhead and enrich Marantelli's investors.

Texas officials admitted the win was totally compliant with the rules of the lottery and state law, but they are concerned with the optics among lottery ticket buyers. Changes in the lottery rules are in the offing.

Don't Put Off that Haircut!

That's the message Institute associates Ivana and Frank Di Piero, owners of a hair studio in Chicago, advertise. To emphasize the message, it's in Latin: *Carpe Diem!* "Seize the Day!"



Inside the Institute

Among its subscribers, supporters and staff, the Italic Institute has an array of talent: doctors, lawyers, teachers, businessmen, and activists who operate cultural centers or otherwise promote *italianità*.



Joe Graziose is one of our researchers living on Long Island who holds a degree in Music and has taught multiple generations to play piano.

Since music is an Italian *forte* we asked Joe to reflect (sometime humorously!) on his background and his students over the years.

When did you begin lessons as a kid? Rather late by today's standards...around 12...but I knew how to play by ear before starting lessons. I wanted to be a soap opera organist as a kid and mimicked them on those home organs.

Did your parents force you to take lessons? Never. They only "forced" me to visit grandma.

When did you fully embrace piano? One grandma with two spinster aunts lived on the adjacent property in the Graziose compound and they had an upright in the basement that I would play.

Is your field concert or general music? I specialize in the serious classical repertoire but my musical tastes are very broad if it is high quality.

Were you in the high school band? No, but I became the high school choral accompanist which started a long association for me in collaborative piano with other instrumentalists and vocalists.

Did you study music as a major? Yes, I received a BS in Music Ed. at Hofstra. I earned a scholarship to the 92nd St. Hebrew Y which afforded me opportunities to work with great opera star Nico Castel.

Was teaching the piano your only job after college? It became so. I did a little work in public schools but branched out on my own. I began offering private lessons in 1974. I had to be a real maverick Italian boomer to pay for my own health insurance.

How many students have you taught over the years? Countless. At one point in the 90s I had 60 stu-

dents a week. It was total madness and I was going to their homes! The landscape is different now and student competition is keen.

What has been the ethnic composition of your students over the years? When I first started I had a lot of Jewish students. The families adored my outgoing Italian personality combined with my competence. But, I also had many Italian American families similar to my background. Invariably there was an aroma of coffee in those homes and my comfort was important to them.

Have you taught East Asians and South Asians? Which predominate? Although I always had a contingent of Asian students before 2000, the demographics drastically changed for me after that. I had Indian students who referred me to other Indian families. Once I got my foot in the door with the Chinese, that has prevailed to this very day. Teaching them today requires preparation for competitive goals including international standards, recitals, competitions, festivals, and local exams.

Why have Euro-American students not pursued concert piano? Western child-rearing has become very solicitous over the past 40 years, combined with an explosive growth of ADHD and other maladies that were not indulged or even existed in our day. Instant gratification, eye laziness from flashy video games add to the dilemma. Asian homes are not solicitous and the intellectual emphasis has them carrying the torch for Western Civilization. Sad, but true.

What level have your best students achieved over the years? Acceptance into major conservatories and winners of competitions especially in the NYC area.

Have you been recognized by professional organizations? I was voted Steinway Teacher of Excellence in 2023. But it's my students' achievements and their parents' referrals that I'm most proud of.

How has your heritage inspired your career? Our great musical tradition lit a fire in me even as a toddler. My family took a special pride in our achievements. My mother's side of the family was very musical, including my Uncle Al who was on the staff orchestra at ABC. He also played guitar for the *Joe Franklin Show* and was asked by Henry Mancini to go on tour. Mancini was one of my childhood idols. Uncle Al was also "instrumental" with jazz guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli in developing and championing the 7- string guitar. ****