



tradizioni

NEWSLETTER OF THE ITALIAN FOLK ART FEDERATION OF AMERICA

VOLUME 11

1991

AUTUMN NO. 2

Greetings!

Our sincerest appreciation and gratitude to Rita Tonitto for the many years of dedication, commitment and outstanding leadership as President of the "Italian Folk Federation of America". Under her direction, IFAFA has attained a steady rate of progress, growth and achievement.

Regretably, Rita has tendered her resignation as President, effective March 25, 1991, but will remain an active member of the Board of Directors.

Mary Briggs, Vice President, who has taken over the duties of President for the remainder of the term, is pleased to announce the newly elected officers for the next term.

Anna Marie Fiori, President

Jane Ferro, Vice President

Carmella Caparelli, Recording Secretary
Rose Giurusso, Corresponding Secretary
Clementine Di Salvo, Treasurer

Formal installation of officers will take place on November 2, 1991 at 2:00 P.M. at the Sara Jackson Black Community Center, 1050 Windemere Drive, Swissville, PA. Dinner and entertainment will follow. Please make your reservations to attend by calling or writing to Anna Marie Fiori at 6393 Saltsburg Road, Pittsburgh, PA. 15235, (412) 793-1927.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude and appreciation to Michael D. Blum, Executive Director of the Nationalities Service Center, for his support and cooperation and permitting IFAFA the use of NSC's facilities as the main headquarters.

Mary G. Briggs
President

Commemorative Issue

In honor of the 500th Anniversary of Columbus's landing in the Americas, the 1992 Spring Issue of the TRADIZIONI Newsletter will be devoted to the region of Liguria, birthplace of Columbus, its customs, folk traditions, and costumes.

We are asking anyone who has an appropriate article(s) for this issue to send it to us, attention Editor, 543 Gorge Road, Cliffside Park, N.J. 07010.

Together we can have a more comprehensive Commemorative Issue.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The following is a list of contributors who have generously responded to our appeal for funds. All contributions received after July 1, 1991 will be acknowledged in the next issue of TRADIZIONI.

\$100 or more:

Ralph Miller Angela Molle

Others:

Eleanor Allen Carmella Caparelli
G.F. D'Andrea Dario C. Meniketti
Dr. Paul Petraglia

YOUR MEMBERSHIP AND CONTRIBUTIONS ENABLE IFAFA TO:

- foster and preserve the folk arts of Italy in America;
- research Italian folklore, traditions, customs, costumes, dances, music, instruments, foods, etc.;
- act as a center for gathering and storing information and resources;
- encourage publication of related books, records, etc.;
- hold workshops and conferences; publish TRADIZIONI, the official newsletter of IFAFA;
- provide groups to perform in costume at educational and community events;
- train and provide leaders in Italian folk dances, songs and other folk arts.

"EL MESERO"

by Elba Farabegoli Gurzau

El Mesero is a huge shawl, exclusively characteristic of the Ligurian women's attire. Liguria, named after the ancient people called "Liguri," is on the Northwest Coast of Italy and its capital is Genova, the birthplace of Christopher Columbus.

I got acquainted with a group from Liguria when I attended the International Folk Festival in Venice in 1949.

Most dialects are similar to Italian and can be understood. There are a few dialects, however, including the Ligurian, that are so different they seem to have nothing in common with the language of Tuscany, the official language of Italy.

Of particular interest to me was the immense shawl, the size of a bedspread, worn by one of the members of this group. They explained that it was used for many purposes, such as to keep warm, to cover one's head when entering a church, to carry babies, and to carry things from the market. They also explained that the small patterns and border were made with sand, but they did not know the shawl's origin. I believe that perhaps the Ligurians, who were famous for their seafaring, might have brought back what became the *mesero* from India. Some years ago, I bought a bedspread that looked like "El Mesero" from an Indian vendor at the Folk Fair in Philadelphia. I have been using it ever since to demonstrate the famous huge shawl worn by the women of Liguria in the past. □

We are happy to report that the number of member-performing groups has increased from the original seven to over thirty and that the membership within the various groups now totals several hundred. Moreover, we have recently added to our mailing list all the teachers of Italian in both private and public high schools throughout the United States.

Because our readership has changed and increased over the years, the editorial board feels it owes its new members the opportunity to read some of the articles from previous issues that have generated the most interest.

THE REVOLUTIONARY SOUND

Towards an Understanding of
Italian Folk Music

by Anna L. Chairetakis

Whether it is learning by doing or learning by listening and analyzing, we are being programmed to a set of complicated rules and aesthetic patterns -- those of Western (Euro-American) art music and popular music. We drink them in unconsciously everywhere as the sounds of classical music, rock, country, pop and musak reach our ears. The aesthetic criteria by which we judge and respond to our own music do not apply to most world music, nor to a great deal of European folk music, and this is most assuredly true of much of Italian folk music.

What is most important for our present purposes is to begin to understand and appreciate the aesthetic patterns and preferences and the performance styles which were developed over centuries and millenia throughout the Italian peninsula by peasants, laborers, artisans, fishermen, muleteers, hawkers, miners, wives and mothers. In order to do this, we have to cast aside our Western educated biases. Music notation, conventionally applied, does not serve us here, nor do singing lessons or the piano, which is designed for major-minor chord progressions and accommodates primarily the diatonic scale. For learning or as mediums for experiencing and interpreting folk music, these will limit and, indeed, hinder us. What we do need is a good set of records and a new frame of reference, new ways of organizing our perceptions of the often strange sounds, and of making sense of the profusion of musical styles which Italy has to offer.

FOLK DANCES COSTUMES AND CUSTOMS OF ITALY

by

Elba Farabegoli Gurzau

This book of 128 pages includes 17 dances with sheet music, instructions and background information plus pictures and descriptions of costumes from the various regions of Italy. \$10.00.

An educational tape with music for the dances is available. \$5.00

Add postage 2.50

Total: \$17.50

Please make check or money order payable to:

Cav. Elba F. Gurzau
1326 W. Roosevelt Blvd.,
Phila., PA 19140
(215) 324-1250

Fortunately, in the early 1950's, Alan Lomax did an extended recording survey of Italian folk music with an Italian collaborator, Diego Carpitella. This and similar research in Spain and the U.S. inspired Lomax's theory of folk song style which is applicable to world music and which is based upon a massive quantity of recorded data from all over the world. From this research came forth a theory and an analysis of Italian folk music which is today accepted and used by Italy's foremost folklore scholars and ethnomusicologists. The beauty of this theory is that it is accessible to nonmusicians and nonexperts as well. My own work with Italian folk musicians/singers in the U.S. makes clear to me that any more in-depth study of the music

of a particular region or locality will surely support and refine Lomax's analysis.

First and foremost, one must understand that Italy is a veritable mosaic of musical styles. Italy is remarkable among European countries for the great regional and local variety of her music and for the rich and very diverse cultural influences, which has helped to shape it. Think for a moment of the north Albanian populations in Calabria and Abruzzi; of the Byzantine-Greek settlements in Reggio Calabria, Puglia and Sicily; of the Piemontese enclaves in Basilicata; of the town of Gurro in Piemonte settled by Scottish soldiers in the 16th century. These migrants and successive waves of conquerors and settlers have left their unmistakable imprint upon the localities and regions that nourished them. Think of the differences between the familiar Alpine choruses and the highly decorated, mournful solo singing of Sicily and Basilicata.

Now, let us turn to the method developed by Lomax and his colleagues to analyze and classify songs and other types of music, Western and non-Western. Here are some examples of the important features which are examined:

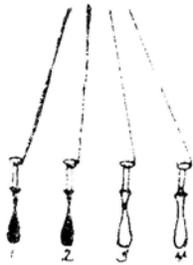
1. the composition and organization of the performance group and the way performers structure the music (very roughly, solo or chorus, with/without leader, with good or poor vocal blend, in unison or some kind of poly-phony, etc.);

(Continued on Page 4)

Anna Chairetakis is an anthropologist and a Doctor in Cultural Anthropology. Recently the Italian government bestowed upon her the title of Cavaliere for her unique and scholarly contributions to Italian folk arts.

MOVEMENTS

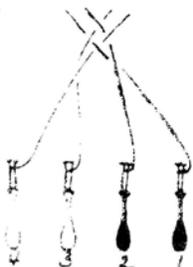
The basic movement of bobbins.



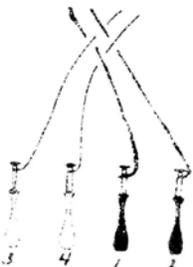
Starting Position



(1) Cross #2 moves over 1 space to right.



(2) Twist



(3) Cross



(4) Twist

BOBBIN LACE

by Anna Marie Fiori

Although bobbins have been found in Roman ruins, no lace has survived from ancient Rome. So no evidence of bobbin lace can be made before the fifteenth century. There are two laces of Italy, needle-made lace and bobbin-made lace. Needle-made lace was primarily by old family noblewomen and had an aristocratic tradition. Bobbin-made or pillow lace was essentially a tradition of the peasant people. It was done in the cities of Genoa, Milan and the region of Abruzzi. The classical district of lace making was Cantu. But studying available documents, and inventories, it became apparent that Italy was the first country to produce lace made by bobbins. The earliest traces are to be found in a contract of division, made in Milan in 1493, between the sisters Angela and Ippolita Sforza Visconti. This speaks of a piece of lace worked "with two bobbins for a sheet". In this contract there is mention of work done with "bones" and it is probable that these "bones" were bobbins. In fact, before being made of wood, the bobbins were made of bone. It is also believed that before the advent of pins, fish bones were used to hold the thread in place on the pattern.

Each family of laceworkers had one design which they handed down from generation to generation. By the age of four, children started learning the bobbin lace technique with a few bobbins. By the age of sixteen, a girl was usually skilled enough to make lace designs requiring hundreds of bobbins. A curious fact of bobbin lace is that the art continues to be preserved in all its characteristics and in the way which it is worked. It has never been possible to change it in spite of its commercialization, and so it has never been affected by the 19th century industrialization which took almost every other kind of artisan work into the factories.

Bobbin lace consists of three basic stitches namely, the linen stitch, the net stitch and the Point d'esprit or leaves type. This seems simple but there are literally hundreds of variations of these stitches. Necessary materials are the bobbins, a kind of wood rod furnished with a ball at one end on which thread is wrapped and always used in pairs; the pillow, in the form of a bolster stuffed with straw, wool or sawdust. The pillow generally rests in a basket or on a wooden stand. A pricker serves to prick out the holes on the pattern card. The pins are used to fix the thread during the course of the work. The thread can be of cotton, linen, gold, silver, or silk. Bobbin lace is formed by crossing or twisting the thread (rather than by knotting) to follow the pattern. Pins stuck into the pattern hold each crossing of the thread and thus the design is created. Each thread is weighted by a bobbin which also holds extra lengths of thread.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Lace Book — Hanna Moore 1904

Creative Crafts — February 1971 — Faith Rogers

Lavori a Fuselli — Mani Di Fata

For further information and a list of suppliers as well as name and address of "lace groups", send self-addressed stamped envelope to:
Anna Marie Fiori, 6393 Saltsburg Rd., Pitts., PA. 15235

Lace-Making Terms

1. **Cross-(C)**: using left hand, move bobbin in second position from left over one bobbin to right to become bobbin #3.
2. **Twist-(t)**: take new bobbin #2 in left hand, bobbin #4 in right hand, move each one over one bobbin to the left to become #1 and #3.
3. **Whole Stitch-(ws)**: Cross, twist, cross, twist (c,t,c,t). In England this is called double stitch or whole stitch & twist.
4. **Half Stitch-(hs)**: Cross, twist (ct).
5. **Cloth/Linen Stitch**: cross, twist, cross. In England this is called whole stitch.

In Brief...

"ENCOUNTER 500" A BROADWAY MUSICAL ABOUT CRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, LYRICS BY MARIO FRATI, SPRING OF 1992. "Encounter 500" will be the first stage presentation portraying Christopher Columbus as a navigator who does not bring civilization to a new land, but on the contrary, encounters a Native American culture already filled with its own customs. Columbus discovers a prosperous civilization in this "New World", where he learns new customs and finds true romance. Native Americans prefer the term "encounter" to the more common term "discover" because "encounter" more accurately describes what occurred upon Columbus's landing.

GENEALOGY is the study of family origins and history. It does not concern itself exclusively with highly placed families (as does heraldry) but has an equal concern and value for the history of the average person's family. Should you desire to begin a study of your family history, the following is a partial list to get you started:

Genealogy and local history departments of the New York Public Library; the Boston Public Library; the Library of Congress Annex, Washington, D.C.; and college/university libraries; the Istituto Geneologico Italiano, Via Torta 14, Florence, Italy 50122; and public libraries in regional capitals of Italy, along with provincial and town libraries (or town rectories) from where the family comes.

For a nominal fee, Louis Di Girolamo, Jr., will supply you with a report about your surname and family history. He has lectured on Italian family histories and genealogies for the past 25 years and has published numerous articles on Italian family histories. His personal library contains over 200 volumes dating from the 1600s to the present. For further information, write or call Louis Di Girolamo, 5 South Beer Street, Holmdel, NJ 07733; (908) 264-1516.

Continued from Page 2 — REVOLUTIONARY SOUND

2. vocal techniques or the characteristic ways in which singers use their voices (e.g., low and guttural, nasal, narrow and high with embellishment; open, throaty and relaxed, without embellishment, etc.

3. melodic type and structure;

4. the relative importance of text (repetitive or nonrepetitive).

A style profile emerges for each song and a regional profile, with enough examples from a given region. Applying this method, we find that Italian folk songs fall into clear and very distinct stylistic groupings according to whether they are from the North, the Central area or the South (Sardinian and ethnic musics, as well as that from some of the mountainous interior, represent somewhat special cases overlapping North-Central-South distinctions). These groupings correspond closely with differences in regional ecology, variations in agricultural organization, organization of work, type of long-prevailing political system, the roles and activities of women, etc.

(to be continued)

(Part 2 will deal with the largest and most obvious contrast in Italian folk music, that between the North and the South.)

The Italian Folk Art Federation of America, Inc is a non-profit, educational federation. Its purpose is to research, preserve and foster interest in the various aspects of Italian folklore. All correspondence should be addressed to: I.F.A.F.A., c/o N.S.C., 1300 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19107.

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IN FUTURE ISSUES:

- ✓ LIGURIA — birthplace of Columbus, its customs, costumes, and folklore.
- ✓ THE REVOLUTIONARY SOUND, Part II — towards an understanding of Italian Folk Music.
- ✓ SELECTED FOLK DANCES
- ✓ REFERRAL SERVICE UPDATE

I am interested in:

Membership

- Performing Folk Group \$25.00
(send for application)
- Supporting Organization \$25.00
(nonperforming)
- Individual \$10.00
- Student/Sr. Citizen \$5.00

Contributing to the work
of I.F.A.F.A. \$_____

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