



tradizioni

NEWSLETTER OF THE ITALIAN FOLK ART FEDERATION OF AMERICA

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General Folk Costume Characteristics

BY ELBA F. GURZAU

The probability of seeing or buying real old Italian folk costumes in this country is well-nigh impossible. In fact, one can rarely find them even in Italy today because those few who own costumes will rarely consider selling them as they are family heirlooms, and to have a costume made there would cost several hundred dollars due to the amount of embroidery and work required, even if it were possible to locate someone able and willing to make it.

For those who visit Italy there is now, after many years, the opportunity to see a complete display of folk costumes at the "Esposizione Universale" in Rome. This has come about through the untiring efforts of Prof. Paolo Toschi, teacher of folklore at the University of Rome, editor of the folklore magazine "Lares" and author of several books on the subject.

But not too many people will be going to Italy; thus the alternative is to make costumes, copying them from accurate detailed designs as the ones presented here. Also at most large libraries there are collections of pictures of costumes of different countries as well as some books. The larger libraries have the beautiful volume by Emma Calderini "Il Costume Popolare in Italia", published by Sperling & Kupfer of Milano. It has two hundred beautiful, large color plates of costumes and a scholarly introduction to the costumes of Italy written in Italian.

Details of the woman's folk costume.

Colors — Colors are influenced by the locality and the climate. In northern Italy, for instance; blues, greens, and purples predominate; bright reds, greens, and maroons are popular in the south, while

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FOLK GROUPS GIVE SUPPORT TO ANTI-NUCLEAR ARMS BUILDUP

Millions of Europeans are taking to the streets in loud protest as the buildup of nuclear arms throughout the world continues to grow.

Demonstrations and marches consisting of hundreds of thousands of people have been staged.

According to the international news services folk groups from the various countries are actively marching and performing on the sidelines to liven up what is otherwise a "deadly" issue.

The following is a partial list of demonstrations for disarmament in Europe as reported by the S.E.A. Alliance.

Oct. 10 Bonn, W. Germany - 300,000
Oct. 24 London, England - 150,000
Oct. 25 Brussels, Belgium - 200,000
Oct. 25 Rome, Italy 200,000
Nov. 14 Bucharest, Romania - 100,000
Nov. 20 Timisoara, Romania - 100,000
Nov. 21 Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 350,000
Nov. 28 Florence, Italy - 200,000
Dec. 5 Bucharest, Romania - 300,000
L.L.P

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The fifth Annual Conference and Workshop of I.F.A.F.A. is planned for the weekend of October 22, 23 and 24th at Philadelphia, Pa.

The conference is designed to bring together folk groups and other interested parties to share their knowledge and to participate in Italian folk singing and dancing and various other aspects of Italian folk art. Members and nonmembers are welcome. For additional details, write E.F. Gurzau c/o I.F.A.F.A.

Please mark your calendar!

Songs of the Alps

BY MARIA PERONA

Italy, unlike other nations in Europe, expresses its popular music in many different ways. The Italian regions, extending on a longitude of more than 700 miles, are exposed to much diversity of climate, landscape, costumes and dialects.

The music that has naturally come forth from the people of the Alpine region with its majestic mountains and eternal glaciers, is profoundly different from the one of Sicily, whose most southern shores are not too distant from the dunes of Africa.

The songs of the Alpine region are but a small expression of the land and its people. The person who has climbed a summit or walked a steep, difficult path to reach another valley, probably wonders little about how these songs have come to be. But they are there, just as the sounds of the mountain are there. One hears the wind passing through the trees and around the rocks; he hears the murmur of a stream; he hears but the echo of the bell of a little church far away; he hears the sound of his own footstep as his boot hits the hard rocks.

He has to stop in order to see the valley around him filled, at times, with all the hues of pink and red of the rhododendrons. The mountaineer is at times confronted with a very harsh environment before reaching the more gentle fields of the high pasture. There, the meadows are dotted with flowers of blue, yellow, lavender and white. From there he can see the little church with the pointed steeple, and the stream that glistens in the sun as it flows down into the valley.

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SONGS OF THE ALPS

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A "baita" or mountain hut is nestled against the mountain. It will be his refuge for the night. In the morning he will resume his climb up to where the snows are eternal and from where he can see far, very far into the vast distance.

In the mountains, dusk lingers late into the evening. As the shadows grow darker around the "baita" the lights go on in the villages and towns down in the plain.

It is then that the songs are heard while in the hut the lamp and the fireplace are lit: first one voice, then another, until it becomes a harmony which is in unison with the mountain itself. *La Montanara, La Val Sugana, Lo Sciator, Il Mazzolin di Fiori*, and so many more. These songs tell of the mountains, the streams, the flowers, of lost loves and of pretty girls dancing in the village square. Some have the tempo which seems to resemble the cadenced step of the mountaineer. Some tell of the valleys and their people, in some way these songs reflect their spirit which some say to be just as indomitable as the region they inhabit.

Completely surrounded by mountains there is a lake. Its waters are cold and grey even during the summer time. It is called "Il Lago della Vecchia" or The Lake of the Old Woman. There is no music to her tragic story. It is engraved instead on a rock by the lake. It tells of a woman who, disillusioned by the world, climbed the steep and unfriendly mountain to live in solitude and peace among the rocks near the lake. Her only companion was a bear. As time went by and she grew on in years, the people of the village started to worry about her and went to her to try to convince her to go back with them. But she refused, and drowned herself in the icy waters of the lake, freeing her soul forever!

Only the wind sings her story as it circles the lake and sweeps down the mountain along the stream. Near the village it stops and leaves its song among the whispering trees. □

Mania Perona is a native Alpinista and presently teaches at the Berlitz School of Foreign Languages.

Words and music available. "Medley of Alpine Songs" Members, free; non-members, \$2.00.



Just off the press, the long-awaited, second and enlarged edition now available —

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GENERAL FOLK COSTUMES

Continued from page 1

blue is preferred by people living near the sea. For centuries red has been the color of brides and married women.

Headdress — It is from the headdress that one can recognize the region from which the costume originated.

Skirts -- Materials for skirts are always of a heavy texture: woolen, damask, heavy taffeta, etc. Never sateen or flimsy material. The colors are dark; blue, green, purple and black for the north; bright red, green, maroon for the south. The lighter shades appear in the apron and trimmings. Skirts are quite wide, at least three and a half or four yards, and shirred or pleated (small, large, accordion, tubular) never flared. The length varies: in northern Italy, the skirt might reach somewhere between the calf and the ankle, while in southern Italy — except in Naples where they are shorter — skirts are generally only a few inches from the ground.

Blouses — Blouses are of linen or other heavy white material. Never violet or organdy. They frequently have puffed sleeves, long or up to the elbow, not above, with ruffles at the neck and wrists

edged with lace or embroidery and tied with ribbons. The neckline is often low and round.

Jackets — Just a word about jackets because they are little used except for special occasions and when it is very cold. They can come to a little below the waist or, more often, they take the form of a short, open front, bolero with no sleeves. The sleeves, however, often do exist, and they are put on separately and tied to the jacket or bolero at the tip of the shoulders by ribbons; or they may be abbreviated into a form of high cuff worn at the wrist over the blouse sleeve.

Bodices — The bodice is always stiff and held straight by stays. It can be quite abbreviated, just covering the waist and under the breasts; or it can be high, coming over the breasts and down to the hips, worn under the skirt. Although it is most frequently laced in front, it can also be laced at the sides or in back. The material used is generally dark velvet, sometimes striped or with small pattern; occasionally bright plaid taffeta is also used. It is most often one solid color with edging in bright colors or gold.

Aprons — The apron is the decorative part of the costume; it is very important. Raffaele Corso, authority on Italian folklore, claims it comes from the primitive habit of wearing a panel in front of the body. The apron is like a painting; it requires much thought and work and trimming. Some of the designs used may have symbolic meanings: a bird carrying a branch may mean love and fertility; two hearts, faithfulness, etc. On the other hand the costumer may use her imagination and create a thing of beauty that is different and lovely.

The apron varies in size and shape, although the very large rectangular ones are the most popular. It can be of delicate white or black homemade lace, of linen, silk, velvet, homespun wool, and even leather. Sometimes the apron will match the headpiece.

Shoes and stockings — To reproduce a costume accurately, stockings should be the right color, generally white, and shoes low heeled and most frequently black. It is most disturbing to the eye and quite incorrect for a girl in a colorful folk costume to wear modern stockings and to be perched on high-heeled shoes!

Kerchiefs and shawls — Kerchiefs or shawls are used with the majority of Italian costumes. They are of many colors with bright floral designs and fringe.

They can be of varying sizes, from the small shoulder type pinned at the chest, to the larger one crossed and tucked in at the waist, to the much larger one, black, long fringed as worn in old Venice, and finally to the huge one worn in the vicinity of Genova in Liguria. This shawl, called "Mesero", the size of a large table cloth with block print borders and floral designs, is worn over the head and shoulders covering a good part of the body and gracefully folded over the arms. It seems to resemble the large cloths, used for spreads, that come from India.

Jewelry — Earrings of various designs are always worn. They are most frequently pendant type, often circular in form. These can be of gold or silver filigree similar to the necklace and pins. Coral, which is found profusely on the shores of Italy, is a favorite decoration. Rings are used, but rarely bracelets.

Details of the man's folk costume — Unlike the woman's folk costume, which has retained elements of tradition and symbolism easily explained by woman's love for memories and sentiment, the man's costume has undergone considerable change, tending toward a more simplified form of dress.

Except for the Island of Sardegna, as will be seen later, the basic elements of the man's outfit are rather similar all over Italy, even though details, such as colors, ornaments, etc. may vary from region to region and even from town to town.

Headgear — Either a dark felt hat or stocking cap is worn. The felt hat can be the alpine type as worn in the North or the flat or pointed crown type as worn in the Center or South of Italy, while the knitted stocking cap is favored by fishermen because it can't be blown off by the wind. In Naples the cap is usually red, while in Sicily it is either black or dark blue.

Shirt — Vest — Jacket — The shirt is generally of heavy white linen with wide sleeves gathered at the wrist, and a soft collar. Over it, the man wears a colorful silk or velvet vest trimmed with gold buttons. When it is cold, he adds a dark short jacket.

Kerchief — At the neck he uses a kerchief, with dark background and floral designs in the North, and frequently red in the South.

Sash — The sash at the waist is a **must**. It is always wide, bright, and frequently striped. It is wrapped around the waist

THE MAZURKA

"How the Mazurka became one of Italy's favorite rhythms"

BY MAE FRALEY

The Mazurka came very close to being just another name in a long list of historical dances.

Chopin, as a teenager, joined in folk festivals and dancing in villages around Warsaw, Poland and collected these tunes and melodies in his memory. It was the lovely Mazurka music of Frederic Chopin that revived the dance for posterity.

The recorded history of the Mazurka goes back to 1544 when it was a song accompanied by dancing. Some believe its origin dates back to pagan times. The name is derived from the Mazurs who inhabited Masovia and is often called the Mazur Dance.

Until the Italian Renaissance, dancing for pleasure had been spontaneous and whatever form it acquired grew up through practice rather than arbitrary rules. However, the courtly circles of Italy, turned their backs on this spontaneous approach and developed official dancing masters to invent and teach socially acceptable forms.

Thus the rhythm in 3/4 was brought to the French Court by Catherine de Medici as the Italian Volta, and was identical to the waltz. For the first time in polite society partners were face to face with their arms around each other, to the horror of the conservatives.

The Mazurka, the saltorello and the piva are lively peasant dances which persisted in their natural state, although a trifle polished up for polite society. And so it was that the Mazurka became one of the favorite rhythms of Italy.

and often trimmed with fringe when the ends are permitted to fall on the man's left side.

Trousers — The trousers are of dark wool or velveteen, frequently tight-fitting and reaching to or just below the knees. In the last century, the straight long trousers started to become popular.

Shoes and stockings — Stockings are heavy, hand knitted, generally white, occasionally red or blue, or striped horizontally. Our Bermuda socks resemble them.

The shoes, like the woman's, are often

(The Mazurka was brought to California around the early part of the 1800's by the Spanish and to the eastern U.S. by the Poles who migrated in 1830.)

Today we find that among Italian folk dancers in the U.S., the Mazurka steps exist only in a devised dance such as the "Graziella Mazurka," a two-step waltz.



ITALIAN MAZURKA

Music: Any slow Mazurka

Form: Couples at random on the floor; partners face, both hands joined. Opposite footwork.

Measures:

1-2 Man steps left, swings the right foot across; the Lady dances counterpart; then step right, swing left across.

3-4 Releasing Man's left, Lady's right hands, placing free hands on waist, dance two two-step waltz forward.

5-8 In closed ballroom position, dance turning waltz.



Mae Fraley is a lecturer and International Folk Dance teacher based in Maryland.

Footnote:

Millie Von Kinsky of San Francisco said that at an International Folk Festival in France, sponsored by the Folk Music Council, she met an Italian Folk group doing a dance which inspired her to create Graziella. Since she did not have original music she adapted it to a lovely tune called Graziella Muzurka and thus it got its name.

E.F.G.

black leather, sometimes with buckles. In central Italy, the one-piece leather "ciocie" laced around the ankle are typical (see "Costumes of Central Italy").

"Zoccoli" are used even today by both men and women in the country and villages. They are made of a thick wooden sole with a piece of leather or velvet over the toes, which is often embroidered. One can hear them in the distance treading over cobblestoned streets. □

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Regional Costumes: North, Central and South can be found in "Folk Dances, Costumes and Customs of Italy" by Elba F. Gurzau. See ad in this issue.

ARTICLES NEEDED

Tradizioni is a "special interest newsletter" revolving around various aspects of Italian Folklore. Needs: original articles of general interest, historical, interviews, travel, humorous, brief news items, festivals, rituals, etc.

Length: maximum 1500 words

Terms: We will be glad to publish any material approved by our editors free of any expense to you.

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Back issues and back issues available.

FOLK TOUR PLANNED

I.F.A.F.A. in cooperation with the Federazione Italiana Tradizioni Popolari (Rome) and Alitalia are organizing, for the Spring 1983, a folk tour of Southern Italy. We will be visiting Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily.

There will be dance classes and cultural talks with native instructors. We will sing and dance with local folk groups; have fresh wines, cheeses, fruits — wonderful scenery and friends.

If interested be sure to notify us. This way you will get information immediately without having to wait for next newsletter. Write I.F.A.F.A.



Letter from Australia

"Thank you for sending your most interesting newsletter. I am and indeed have always been most keenly interested in Italian folklore, folk music, popular traditions and dialects. I have insisted on including them in our Italian Studies Program at the University of Wollongong, to assure our students a more complete immersion into Italian culture."

Professor Vincent J. Cincotta
Dept. European Languages



CUSTOMS AND HABITS OF THE SICILIAN PEASANTS

By Salvatore Salomone -- Marino
Edited and Translated by Rosalie N. Norris
Published by Fairleigh Dickinson
University Press

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Correction. . . .

The following was inadvertently omitted from "The Neopolitan Song" which appeared in the last issue.

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