MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Writer and journalist Beppe Severgnini said it best when he remarked that what Italian-Americans can do to “give back” is to “be informed” about Italy and not settle for stereotypes, but to use stereotypes as a “springboard to jump higher, and when you are higher, you can see more.” In an entertaining and wide-ranging conversation with ICS Board member and journalist Sara Forden, ostensibly about his book “Neoirlandesi. 50 reasons to be Italian,” Severgnini used the opportunity to answer questions from the audience and to speak insightfully not only about Italy, but about America where he has lived and worked in the past. If you missed it, you can watch it here.

On February 21st at 4:00 pm, the ICS will celebrate Carnevale with a virtual party featuring: Chef Roberto Donna revealing the recipe for the best traditional Chiacchiere (also known as ‘scarole to some southern Italians), the music of Igor Stravinsky’s Pulcinella with the participation of the CORO of the ICS Music School, directed by Maestro Felicia Toscano, The Carnevale Costume Contest, a short introductory history of the Carnevale Veneziano, and a “Who is in the audience?” contest: A brindisi in which you unmask yourself after showing off your costume. Those in the DC area can also celebrate with a special dinner prepared by Chef Roberto Donna. Please register! Here is a link to the event.

Since our last message, the United States has successfully transitioned to the new Joseph Biden presidency despite an unprecedented, deadly attack on the Nation’s Capitol by thousands of angry Americans mis-guided by the urgings of the previous president to overturn the recent election. As we speak, a trial is going on in the U.S. Senate to convict that person who has been impeached by the House of Representatives for initiating the insurrection. Ignoring that “noise”, the Biden administration is working steadily to improve the distribution of the COVID vaccines, get students back to school, and help the millions of Americans whose lives have been deeply disrupted by the pandemic. We wish him and the new administration every success in their herculean efforts to clean up the mess left behind.

We look forward to seeing you there and at all the events as we develop them during this year. Lastly please register for your favorite courses.

Ronald Cappelletti, Acting Board President.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS
Beppe Severgnini - NeoItaliani..........................3
San Valentino - Amore e Tradizioni......................4
Festa di Carnevale 2021..................................5
Report of the Italian Language Program..................6
La Nostra Avventura a Lucca...............................7
Il Teatrino di Vetriano.................................9

WE ARE SOCIAL!

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AMAZON SMILE
The season of cultural events hosted by the Italian Cultural Society of Washington D.C. has started again in style on January 31st with the journalist and writer Beppe Severgnini presenting his new book “Neoitaliani.” The book outlines 50 reasons to be Italian, a fusion between a list and a manifesto, and a decidedly unusual way to explain who Italians are today and who they may be in the future.

A dynamic conversation with the journalist and ICS Board Member Sara Forden, explained to us who the neo-Italians are, those who have gone through the strange spring of 2020 and are now facing an uncertain political future. Severgnini says: “We came out of the storm different. Worse or better? I would say we have not gone back. In our own way, we have moved on. We have been forced to find within ourselves, in our cities, in our families, in our heads, in our hearts; resources that we did not know we had”.

A large audience attended the event and asked the journalist for his opinion on Italian politics, with its recent government crisis, and American politics, with the change of Presidential administration. Many references were made to other books by the author such as “La Bella Figura. A Field Guide to the Italian Mind”, the book that explained to foreigners the national character of Italians and is currently entertaining the students of the Italian Language Program.

The positivity of the journalist was a constant theme throughout the conference, while reading some of the 50 reasons Severgnini told us: “The virus has put our backs to the wall. The position in which we Italians traditionally give the best. We have shown that we know how to be disciplined, but it hurts us to admit it. We are afraid of ruining our reputation.”
La tradizione di San Valentino, festa degli innamorati risale all’epoca romana, nel 496 d. C., ma solo durante l’Alto Medioevo si diffuse l’usanza dello scambio di regali e di biglietti d’amore.

Molte, sono le storie legate alla vita di San Valentino che hanno contribuito ad unire il suo nome con quello degli innamorati. Una di queste storie racconta che un giorno il santo incontrò due giovani che stavano litigando. Si avvicinò a loro con una rosa e li invitò a tenerla unita nelle loro mani, un gesto che li fece riconciliare subito. Secondo una variante della storia, invece, San Valentino avrebbe fatto tornare l’amore tra i due giovani facendo volare intorno a loro diverse coppie di piccioni. Da qui si sarebbe diffusa anche l’espressione “piccioncini” per riferirsi alle coppie di innamorati che si scambiano effusioni d’amore. Un’altra storia racconta di come San Valentino, quando già era stato nominato Vescovo di Terni, abbia celebrato il matrimonio tra Serapia, giovane cristiana molto malata, ed il centurione romano Sabino. I genitori di Serapia non erano favorevoli al matrimonio, ma Valentino, chiamato dal soldato al capezzale della ragazza, avrebbe prima battezzato il centurione e poi celebrato le nozze. San Valentino è per questo considerato anche il protettore dei matrimoni.

Muore a Terni, nella bellissima Umbria, il 14 febbraio del 237 a 97 anni. Oggi esiste una bellissima basilica in suo onore.

In Italia, San Valentino, in molti paesi è il patrono, per cui il 14 febbraio si festeggia sia festa degli innamorati e chi ha il nome di Valentino/a per cui è un momento di festeggiamenti per tutta la comunità.

In questo giorno si ha l’abitudine di fare regali e cene affettuose meno costosi.

In Italia, San Valentino è il patrono in molte città, per cui il 14 febbraio si festeggia sia festa degli innamorati e chi ha il nome di Valentino/a per cui è un momento di festeggiamenti per tutta la comunità.

In ultima analisi, tutti i giorni si è innamorati ma non poteva mancare un giorno in cui festeggiarlo.

La tradizione di Valentine’s Day, the feast of lovers dates back to Roman times, in 496 AD. C. but just during the early Middle Ages, the custom of exchanging gifts and love cards spread.

Many, are the stories related to the life of Saint Valentine that have helped to combine his name with that of lovers. One of these stories tells that one day the saint met two young people who were arguing. He approached them with a rose and invited them to hold it together in their hands, a gesture that made them reconcile immediately. According to a variant of the story, however, Saint Valentine would have brought back the love between the two young people by making different pairs of pigeons fly around them. From here the expression “lovebirds” would have spread to refer to couples of lovers who exchange effusions of love.

Another story tells of how St. Valentine, when Bishop of Terni, celebrated the marriage between Serapia, a very sick young Christian, and the Roman centurion Sabino. Serapia’s parents were not in favor of marriage, but Valentino, called by the soldier to the girl’s bedside, would first baptize the centurion and then celebrate the wedding. Valentine’s Day is therefore also considered the protector of weddings.

He died in Terni, in the beautiful Umbria, on February 14, 237 at the age of 97. Today you can see a beautiful basilica in his honor.

In Italy, Saint Valentine is the patron saint in many cities, for which February 14 is celebrated both the feast of lovers and who has the name of Valentino/a for which it is a time of celebration for the whole community.

On this day it is customary to give more or less expensive gifts and dinners.

In short, we are in love every day but we can not miss a day in which to celebrate it.
FESTA DI CARNEVALE 2021
RSVP & TICKETS HERE

The Italian Cultural Society of Washington D.C.
cordially invites you to

FESTA DI CARNEVALE 2021

Sunday February 21st at 4:00 pm (ET) on Zoom

Enjoy music, traditional recipes and a special dinner
from Chef Roberto Donna

Get dressed in your favorite costume and join our Carnevale Costume Contest
to win special prizes

Info and RSVP on the ICS website
REPORT OF THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAM
BY FRANCESCA CASAZZA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This Winter term, 54 online courses began and 8 more should start for Session 2 – see our schedule, including the February Cooking class, on the 18th, with Laura Loddo Moticka.

I would like to draw your attention to our Courses + Trips: Discover Veneto with Dario Penzo which starts on February 18th. In Spring, we will offer the Immersion Course for Travelers, over the weekend of March 20-21 and courses on other regions. You can take advantage of the unique, personalized trips that our contacts in Italy organize for our members and friends. We hope that you can experience the country as an insider, speaking in Italian or in English, as preferred, and discover history, archeology, art, traditions, gastronomy, and the natural beauty of each region, with a warm welcome.

We also encourage you to experience Italy while studying the language. Our page Study Abroad has our best recommendations of schools where to study Italian.

We hope that this summer people will be vaccinated and able to travel. And if not, we will be patient for a few more weeks, or months. In the meantime, you can join our courses and events and be well prepared for your next trips!

Registration for Summer camps started. We are offering a significant discount for enrollment before April 1st.

The ICS chorus directed by Felicia Toscano enchanted our audience during the virtual Festa di Natale. Now, for the virtual Festa di Carnevale, The Chorus will entertain us with an outstanding interpretation of the Pulcinella Suite by Stravinskij.

See you all at the Festa di Carnevale, on February 21st!

Un caro saluto,
Francesca Casazza, Executive Director
LA NOSTRA AVVENTURA A LUCCA

BY SARAH LIVINGSTON, STUDENTESSA ICS

Il 2018, mio marito, John, ed io abbiamo passato due settimane e mezza a Lucca, una bella città toscana, circondata da mura antiche. Per me l'obiettivo era di studiare l'italiano, per John era dipingere. Prima di arrivare, abbiamo trovato un appartamento su Internet, una scuola di lingua per me e un'insegnante di pittura per John. Siamo arrivati in Aprile, quattro giorni prima dell’inizio dei nostri corsi. Il proprietario del nostro appartamento doveva venire a prenderci alla stazione, ma non riuscivamo a trovare la sua macchina gialla. Dopo venti minuti, due ragazzini, che sembravano cercare qualcuno, mi hanno chiesto se fossi Sarah. Erano i figli del proprietario. Ci hanno spiegato che il loro padre era stato ricoverato all'ospedale quella mattina. Erano chiaramente spaventati e noi eravamo imbarazzati di essere arrivati in quel momento difficile. Siamo andati tutti all'appartamento, ce l'hanno rapidamente mostrato, e poi sono andati via.

L'appartamento era all’ultimo piano di un vecchio palazzo senza ascensore. C’erano settantadue scalini per arrivare e, implacabilmente, le scale dell’ultima rampa erano più alte e più ripide. L'interno dell’appartamento aveva molta personalità, con un soffitto a travi, un antico pavimento di piastrelle, delle pareti inclinate, e molte finestre con vista sui tetti di Lucca. All’inizio, eravamo molto contenti. E poi, sfortunatamente, i problemi sono cominciati. Il televisore e l’aria condizionata non funzionavano e la notte le zanzare entravano dalle finestre. Non c’era che un mazzo di chiavi per l’appartamento, e avevamo bisogno di due. La chiave per il portone al piano terra entrava con difficoltà nella serratura. Infatti, il secondo giorno, non siamo riusciti ad aprire il portone e abbiamo dovuto far venire uno dei figli. Lui non era contento di dover lasciare il suo lavoro. Allora ci siamo domandati se avremmo fatto meglio a cercare un albergo o un altro appartamento. Finalmente, però, abbiamo trovato un altro mazzo di chiavi su uno scaffale e, dopo molti tentativi, John ha capito come aprire con la chiave del portone. Era più facile rimanere.
In 2018, my husband, John, and I spent two and a half weeks in Lucca, a beautiful Tuscan city, surrounded by ancient walls. My goal was to study Italian and John’s to paint. Before our arrival, we found an apartment on the Internet, a language school for me, and a painting teacher for John. We arrived in April, four days before the beginning of our courses. The landlord of our apartment was supposed to pick us up at the station, but we couldn’t find his yellow car anywhere. After about 20 minutes of searching, two young guys, who seemed to be looking for someone, asked me if I was Sarah. They were the landlord’s sons. They explained to us that their father had been hospitalized that morning for a medical emergency. They were clearly upset and we were embarrassed to have arrived at that difficult time. We all went to the apartment together, they quickly showed it to us, and then they left.

The apartment was on the top floor of an old building without an elevator. There were 72 steps from the ground floor to the top and, mercilessly, the steps of the final flight were taller and steeper. The interior of the apartment was full of character, with a beamed ceiling, an old tile floor, sloping walls, and many windows with views over the rooftops of Lucca. At first, we were super happy. But then, unfortunately, the problems started. The television and the air conditioning didn’t work and, at night, mosquitoes came through the screenless windows. There was only one set of keys, and we needed two. The key to the building’s large entrance door was nearly impossible to turn in the keyhole. In fact, on our second day, we couldn’t open the door and had to get one of the sons to come by. He wasn’t happy about having to leave work. We wondered whether we should look for a hotel or another apartment. Finally, however, we found another set of keys on a shelf and, after many attempts, John figured out how to get the key to work in the entrance door. It was easier to stay.

The Monday after these challenges, I began my lessons at the Lucca Italian School, located in an impressive mansion next to the city walls. I was in class with students from the US, Wales, New Zealand, Germany, Japan, Poland and Canada. It was a very interesting and friendly group, and our teacher, Lorenza, was lively, encouraging and well organized. During our breaks, many of us had coffee in the garden of the school or in a park on the city walls. I am an introvert and after four hours of class every morning I was usually too tired to do the many activities available in the afternoon. Instead, while John was out painting somewhere, I read or got lost in the tangle of Lucca’s streets. In the evening, we either had an aperitif in one of the beautiful piazzas or went out to dinner. Our favorite restaurant, down a small side street, was L’isola che non c’era, where the food was terrific and the welcome warm. After a shaky start, we ended up having two weeks of the “bella vita” we had dreamed of. But, no, the 72 steps never got any easier!
Il teatrino misura solo settantuno metri quadrati; il teatro ha una forma trapezoidale con due balconi laterali e ottantacinque posti a sedere in tutto. È una bomboniera! Oggi ospita eventi culturali e artistici, spettacoli e musical compresi, organizzati in collaborazione con il Teatro alla Scala. Inoltre, ci si può anche sposare nel teatrino.

Ora, chi di voi vorrebbe salire sul palco e cantare un’aria?

Poche Parole

IL TEATRINO DI VETRIANO
BY LARA SULLIVAN, STUDENTESSA ICS

Per favore, chiudete gli occhi e immaginate di essere nella gigantesca Arena di Verona. Ora, immaginate di guidare per trecento chilometri a sud-ovest, e immaginate di essere nel minuscolo, infatti il più piccolo teatro pubblico storico del mondo, come certificato dal libro Guinness dei primati. Ora, aprite gli occhi.

Benvenuti nel Teatrino di Vetriano, in Toscana, vicino a Lucca. In un bell’esempio di una comunità intera che lavora insieme per arricchire la qualità della vita nel villaggio, nel 1890 gli abitanti hanno deciso di trasformare quello che era un fienile in un luogo di ritrovo per le rappresentazioni di spettacoli teatrali. Erano gli abitanti del villaggio stesso a portare le sedie da casa che venivano poi utilizzate come posti a sedere del teatro.

Purtroppo, nel 1980, il teatro è stato chiuso per motivi di sicurezza, perché inagibile. Nel 1997 il teatro è stato poi acquisito dal Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI), che si è adoperato per restaurarlo, affinché potesse essere riaperto. Il FAI lo ha riportato al suo antico splendore. Il bellissimo sipario, dipinto dagli abitanti stessi del villaggio, è così tornato in situ e raffigura il volto di Dante accanto ad angeli e cherubini. I balconi, con i loro intagli a forma di fiori, sembrano splendenti, e gli affreschi neoclassici decorati a tempera, che circondano il palco, brillano.
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