



A banner depicting a scenic view of Venice billows in the wind during 'Celebriamo l'Italia,' a two-day celebration of Italian heritage and culture sponsored by Casa Italiana of Nazareth College Sept. 19-20. Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Casa Italiana festival pays tribute to Italian arts

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — This was one Italian festival that offered much more than the usual music, food and drink.

"Celebriamo l'Italia," a celebration of Italian heritage and culture, was held on Sept. 19 and 20 at Nazareth College, 4245 East Ave. This first-time event drew about 2,500 people each day, according to Roseann Centanni, coordinator of the college's Casa Italiana.

Established in 1978 on the Nazareth campus, the Casa Italiana building serves as a center for educational programs in Italian language, literature and culture.

"This was a real history maker. It's the first time there's been a non-profit Italian cultural event in this community," Centanni said.

A wide range of activities highlighted the event: bocci competition; an Italian open air market; artists such as lace makers, glassblowers and sculptors displaying their crafts; an art contest; folk tale and folk dance presentations; and several other musical and theatrical performances.

Two major performances took place during Celebriamo l'Italia. On Sept. 20, the Rossini Gala was held to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of famed composer Gioacchino Rossini, whose works include "The Barber of Seville" and "William Tell." The production was directed by Richard Pearlman, director of opera at the Eastman School of Music.

On the gala's first day, I Giullari di Piazza (Jesters of the Square), a well-known New York City-based

troupe, presented "Caffe Concerto." This show featured a mixture of music, magic, dance and comedy. According to Centanni, I Giullari di Piazza is "the only group in the country which devotes its efforts to traditional Italian music."

The works of several Italian-American artists in the Rochester area were displayed throughout the weekend at the Nazareth Arts Center's Foyer Gallery. These exhibits were all entered in a contest, which featured awards in five categories: painting, sculpture, print/drawing, photography and mixed media.

First place went to Antonio Petracca of Rochester, who received \$500 for his painting. Six prizes of \$250 each were also awarded. The works will remain on display in the Foyer Gallery through Sunday, Oct. 4.

Carl Zollo, who headed the art show's organization committee, referred to the exhibitions as the "first opportunity for (local) Italian-American artists to exhibit as a group."

Centanni noted that Rochesterians of all ethnic backgrounds enjoyed Celebriamo l'Italia.

"We're trying to say that you don't have to give up being an American to enjoy your (Italian) heritage, and you don't have to be Italian to enjoy Italian culture," she said.

Centanni also drew a link between Christopher Columbus and the Renaissance period of 1400 to 1600 during which he lived. That era was marked by a revival of art and literature, which began in Italy and spread to other countries.

"Columbus reflected the Renais-



This two-story stained-glass window, donated by Joseph and Leonard LoCurto in memory of their parents, adorns the main stairwell at Casa Italiana.



Suzanne Stevens, a member of Rochester's Eastman Opera Theater, performs an excerpt from Gioacchino Rossini's *Semiramide* during a Rossini Gala Sept. 20.

sance society coming out of the Dark Ages," she said. "During the Middle Ages people lived for the hereafter, but the Enlightenment period said we can have vision now. I think that's what moved people like Columbus; it enabled them to extend their vision of the here and now."

However, Centanni also emphasized that the recent celebration at Nazareth was staged only partially for the purpose of commemorating the 500th anniversary of Columbus' voyage to America.

"We are not a Columbus society," said Centanni. "The intent of doing this was to provide what Casa Italiana does year-round."

Classes at the Casa Italiana are open to both the Nazareth student body and the community, with scholarships available to Nazareth students of Italian heritage.

Casa Italiana programs are financed through a combination of college funding and community donations.

According to Centanni, Casa Italiana's academic and cultural committees are considering the possibility of holding a future celebration similar to Celebriamo l'Italia.

Organization plans fall events

Activities to include talks, holiday brunch

Upcoming events at the Casa Italiana for the fall season are:

- Oct. 18, 4 p.m.: A lecture titled "The Italian Personality 500 Years After Columbus." The seminar will be led by Francesca Guli, a Nazareth poet and published author. The program will also feature selections from Guli's new book, *The Italians Never Say Goodbye. They Just Keep Talking*. There is no admission charge. A reception is scheduled to follow.

- Oct. 22, 11 a.m.: A benefit card party and luncheon, sponsored by the Casa Italiana Social Committee.

Tickets are \$13 per person. The event will be held at Midvale Country Club, 2387 Baird Road, Penfield.

- Nov. 12, 8 p.m.: A group visit to GeVa Theater's showing of Jerre Mangione's *Mount Allegro*.

- Nov. 19, 7 p.m.: The 1992 Casa Italiana Mancini Lecture, titled "Primo Levi: His Life and His Death," will be presented by Dr. John Romano, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Rochester. The lecture, which is free and open to the public, will take place in Nazareth College Arts Center Room A-14.

- Dec. 13, 11 a.m.: Casa Italiana Family Holiday Brunch. Children of all ages are welcome.

For information on any of the group's events, call 716/586-8744.

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