



NYU's Casa Italiana Turns Twenty

Letizia Airos (November 10, 2010)

A festive celebration marked the most anticipated cultural anniversary of the year: Casa Italiana's twentieth birthday. A film depicting its history, a concert, and a gala dinner honored the best place in New York for Italian culture

Casa Italiana **Zerilli-Marimò**. That is its name. It was born twenty years ago in November. Today it is one of the most important cultural and academic centers in the United States. And every day, inside its walls, it pulsates with culture and continues to grow and expand. This year dozens of Italian, American, and Italian-American students as well as students from all over the world have visited it and experienced this firsthand. It has hosted countless guests from the fields of culture, academics, art, and politics, all with one thing in common: Italy.

All of this has been possible thanks, above all, to the foresight and generous donation from Baronessa **Zerilli-Marimò** who chose, purchased, and founded Casa Italiana in memory of her husband, Barone Guido Zerilli-Marimò, diplomat and entrepreneur in the pharmaceutical industry who wanted to do something for Italy in New York. Casa Italiana's continued success is also thanks to the work of its initial directors Professor Ballerini and James Ziskin, and current director Professor Stefano Albertini, in addition to the supportive relationship with the New York University which has developed over the years.

To celebrate its twentieth birthday - we like to imagine it as a young adult with a long future ahead - Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò was honored last Thursday with a series of distinguished and remarkable events. Those guests who were lucky enough to be invited spent a delightful evening in familiar, friendly, yet elegant surroundings.

Many friends of Casa Italiana spoke, including students, alumni, teachers, admirers, and regular visitors to the place that for twenty years has presented the best of Italian culture in the heart of New York City.

Also present were important figures from academia and the art world. As for Italian institutions in Washington, Italian Ambassador Terzi was accompanied by Renato Miracco. From New York, Ambassador Cesare Maria Ragagline, Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN and Consul General Francesco Maria Talò attended along with the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in New York, Riccardo Viale, Director of the Italian Trade Commission Aniello Musella, and Honorary Consul Stefano Acunto. There were also many famous guests from Italy, including Cardinal Renato Martino, who blessed Casa Italiana with a heartfelt speech at the gala dinner.

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The celebrations took place in two venues. In NYU's Skirball auditorium a short film on the history of Casa Italiana was screened and guests enjoyed a benefit concert featuring soprano Maija Kovalevska and Maestro Marco Armiliato conducting the NYU Orchestra.

The moving film, produced by i-Italy.org, presented the history of Casa Italiana and was told in first person, narrated by Isabella Rossellini. Following the film, the party continued late into the evening

in a beautiful dining room on the tenth floor of the building, where an extraordinary gala dinner was served.

The twenty year-old Casa Italiana could not have wished for a more vibrant atmosphere. In the words of the speakers and on the faces of those who attended, both stakeholders and guests alike, there emanated a profound sense of satisfaction. They were commemorating something tangible and visible – an ongoing, daily mission that has made the institution a cultural center and a veritable meeting place for the Italian, American, and Italian-American communities, and beyond.

There were several touching moments for everyone, both during the film screening (especially the Baronessa's memorable words) and the various speakers' remarks.

On behalf of NYU, President John Sexton honored Baronessa Zerilli-Marimò, NYU trustee and founder of Casa Italiana, with a University Medal. Also honored with the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò Medals were NYU trustees Maria Bartiromo and Kenneth Langone. The evening's speeches were also charged with emotion. Casa Italiana's director, Professor Stefano Albertini, set the tone for the party with his opening remarks and sincere thanks.

The Baronessa then introduced Casa Italiana's honored guests, Maria Bartiromo and Kenneth Langone. Of the latter, she jokingly said that he is a real Santa Claus for NYU. And there is no description that is more apt for Kenneth Langone, son of a plumber and a cafeteria worker who went on to become co-founder of Home Depot. Known for his extensive philanthropy, Langone expressed his strong ties to NYU, and gratitude for his Italian-American heritage and sense of belonging.

Also present were many members of the Zerilli-Marimò family who traveled to New York to be with the Baronessa on this important occasion. They came to honor their mother, sister, grandmother, and friend who has helped to make New York more Italian.

Noted journalist and alumna Maria Bartiromo said that she has always been proud of her Italian-American roots. In 1995 she was the first journalist to report live from the New York Stock Exchange, and today she works for CNBC and the Wall Street Journal. In her speech, she fondly recalled her ancestors who emigrated from Sorrento. "It was 1919 and they boarded a ship..." she recounted.

To commemorate the occasion, a limited edition book was printed, distributed, and published by Edizioni Olivares, highlighting Casa Italiana's colorful twenty-year history. The introduction to this refined collection includes greetings and best wishes from President of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano, followed by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of Milan Letizia Moratti, and Ambassador Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata.

We would like to echo the wish that the Baronessa makes at the end of the film saying that, "we will all come together again in ten years for the 30th anniversary and that it will continue on long after us."

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