



## ON DEC. 21 BRING AN APPETITE!

We don't want to get too prescriptive regarding the holiday potluck on Dec. 21 ... after all, we *are* Italian. A little chaos is in our nature! However, the one thing we want to avoid is a purely dessert buffet. This is supposed to be dinner, folks!

So, plan to bring something you'd like to drink, as well as an appetizer, entree or salad to share. It's your choice which of these dishes you want to bring. If you really prefer to bring a dessert instead, please contact Audrey Perino at [audrey@woodbloom.com](mailto:audrey@woodbloom.com) or 503.246.6462. She's in charge of making sure there is antipasti, salad and hot foods and as well as panettone, biscotti and cookies!

*This is the last La Lettera Toscana until February.*

## LA BEFANA ARRIVES JAN. 11

*Festa della Befana* presented by *Amici d'Italia* and the Tuscan Association of Oregon will take place **Sunday, Jan. 11**. It begins at 2:30pm and is open to children ages 3 to 10. The *festa* occurs at St. Michael's Church, in Ballestra Hall, 424 SW Mill Street, downtown Portland.

*La Befana* will give out gifts to the children as she passes through on her journey to find the Christ child. **Children MUST be pre-registered** to participate. Registration is limited to 50 kids. Please contact Kerry-Lynne Demarinis Brown at [difamiglia@aol.com](mailto:difamiglia@aol.com) or 503.287.3255.

Josephine Moore is representing the Tuscan Association in coordinating the event. Our club is responsible for providing cookies. Please contact Josephine if you can make some goodies. She can be reached at 503.643.2199 or [jandjmoores1952@comcast.net](mailto:jandjmoores1952@comcast.net).

The cookies need to be dropped off at St. Michael's on Jan. 11 from 1:30 to 2:00pm. Please do *not* use nuts or peanut butter in your cookie recipe to avoid potential food allergy issues.

**NEXT MTG:**  
**SUN., DEC. 21, 3:30PM**  
**CARVLIN HALL**  
*LA BEFANA* JAN. 11, 2:30PM  
ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

**DAL PRESIDENTE**  
**BUON NATALE!**  
BY JIMMIE MOGLIA  
PRESIDENT



Our December 2014 meeting will be a holiday potluck. (See the box to the left.)

In addition, we'll do some Christmas caroling, and reminisce about the holidays. It should be a fun gathering.

Due to the length of the movie at our last meeting, we skipped the session of "Fast Dynamic Italian." I hope to return to our FDI lessons beginning with our first meeting of 2015, which takes place on Feb. 15.

(see **NOTES**, page 7)

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# LA BEFANA COMBINES CATHOLIC TRADITIONS WITH PAGAN CUSTOMS

BY JIMMIE MOGLIA

*La Festa della Befana* is an occasion to bring a bit of cheer to children, while remembering a millenarian tradition. *La Befana* is an example of how the Catholic Church managed to blend pagan customs into acceptable festivities, without dramatically altering the spirit of the legend.

The origin refers to pagan rites connected to seasonal cycles in agriculture – the old harvest of the past year (hence the old woman, the *Befana*) and the (hoped-for) harvest of the new year.

The ancient Romans associated these rites with the newly minted 12-month Roman calendar (ever



wondered why September, which means the seventh month, is actually the ninth?).

The 12 days between the Winter Solstice and the feast of the “Invincible Sun” were needed by Nature to die and be reborn, an interregnum between the old and the new year. Associated with the transitional 12 days were

mythical representations of female figures flying over fields to propitiate fertility. Hence the myth of the airborne *Befana*, who is old (last year’s crop), and carries a broom to dust off any remainder of the previous year.

In the Catholic tradition, the term *Befana* derives from the liturgical Epiphany, in turn a Greek word, meaning “I make myself visible.” And very visible were the Three Middle Eastern Kings [or magicians, hence the Italian term *I Re Magi* (the magician kings)], who brought to Bethlehem their gifts of mass delight. Or rather, the Italian advertising industry has converted the gifts for Jesus into gifts of mass enjoyment, for children but not only.

The actual gifts were gold (not a bad idea when we think of quantitative easing). The second was incense, originally an air-freshener, and later symbolizing the honor paid to a person you feel is important, in an atmosphere made pleasant by the scent.

The last gift, myrrh, is the most puzzling of the three. It is an aromatic resin, whose original meaning is “bitter,” used by the Egyptians for embalming. And for 3,000 years its oil has been used as a preventative disinfectant of the intestine, or added to water as a mouth-rinse.

Epiphany, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and Ascension are the liturgical *Feste di Precetto*, or Canonical Feasts of the Catholic Church.

In Italy, *La Befana* delivers her gifts to children in a sock, but to an unruly child, she would leave coal – though the *Befana* industry has morphed actual coal into coal-looking sugar-lumps. Hence, the threat is no longer a deterrent.

## L'ANGOLO ITALIANO

DAL CARLO ILIO MANNOCCI

Continua l'altalena degli alti e bassi nell'arena politica italiana. Le ultime elezioni regionali (Emilia-Romagna e Calabria), pur confermando che il Partito Democratico (PD) e' in voga ha anche rivelato un aumento del'assenteismo con percentuali impensabili.

I vari movimenti politici gia' iniziano le manovre per designare i candidati alla elezione del Presidente della Repubblica dato che il Presidente Napolitano ha preannunciato il suo ritiro alla fine del corrente anno o ai primi del 2015.

Le elezioni dei Comites sono state posticipate al 17 aprile 2015 per dare maggior tempo agli elettori per registrarsi negli elenchi dei votanti. Purtroppo una ventina di consolati non avranno nuovi Comites per problemi giuridici nella presentazione delle liste. Negli Stati Uniti non si votera' a Detroit, Chicago e anche a San Francisco, la nostra circoscrizione consolare.

Continuiamo a sperare che le cose vadano in meglio nel prossimo anno ormai alle porte...  
A tutti Buon Natale e Felice 2015!!





## ONE PERFECT TUSCAN DAY...

TEXT BY CARLO ILIO MANNOCCI; PHOTOS BY FROSTYPHOTOGRAPHY

*[Editor's note: Last month, Carlo gave us the rundown on the first three days of his Italian odyssey earlier this fall with his son Steven. This installment chronicles another fabulous Tuscan day.]*

On the fourth day our destination was Florence, the cradle of the Renaissance, where art transpires everywhere. The train ride was pleasant and we arrived in Florence by mid-morning. We walked from the station to the *Duomo* and Baptistry to admire the complex and the fantastic fusion of colored marble.

I did the basic explaining and let Florence do the rest. The beauty of this fabulous city is that every corner, every building has something to tell you. You can almost feel the frantic competition of the opulent years when rich merchants or wealthy nobles challenged one another to build something which would outdo the competition.

We stopped briefly at the *Loggia del Porcellino* (right) to admire the bronze wild boar continuously running water from the mouth – a mouth kept shiny and lustrous by the thousands of hands constantly rubbing it and the snout for good luck while placing a coin in the open cavity.

The arrival at *Piazza della Signoria* revealed the grandeur and the magnificence of the square – the

*Uffizi* with the *Loggia dei Lanzi* adding the prominent *Perseus* bronze by Cellini.

I took a break and let Steven go alone to discover the *Ponte Vecchio* (above) with the fabulous goldsmith shops and to visit *Palazzo Pitti* and the *Boboli* Garden. I parked myself on one of the gigantic marble benches at the side entrance of the Old Palace and while waiting for Steven's return I did something very characteristic to the Italian way of life: people watching!

The majority of people were, of course, tourists of all nationalities, shapes and forms, but the body language, the clothing and other peculiarities described their whole story! We had a lunch break at *Il Pennello*, a popular eatery near Dante's birthplace, where the owner greeted us and sat at our table giving us advice about various dishes. At the end, the espresso was just magnificent, one of the few *perfect* espressos I've enjoyed in my life!

Steven was eager to go back to Montecatini, but I suggested we visit two more places before leaving Florence. First, we walked to *Santa Croce* and made a stop at *Vivoli*, the quintessence of gelato in Florence. It was fully worth the walk! Then I flagged a taxi and asked the driver to take us to

(see **VIEW**, page 6)





# INTO THE WOODS ... ITALIAN STYLE

BY KEN KANE

On Christmas Day the much-anticipated movie version of the Stephen Sondheim musical *Into the Woods* will debut. But in this issue of *La Lettera Toscana* you'll find Internet links that also will take you into the woods – two different kinds of woods: one vertical, the other musical but not Sondheim – rather Stradivarius.

First, what's become known as *Bosco Verticale* – two residential towers with balconies filled with hundreds of trees. Last month, the 367-foot and 260-foot towers (right), located in the *Porto Nuovo* district of Milan, won the International High Rise Award presented annually by the City of Frankfurt, Germany and the German Architecture Museum. Called the world's first "Vertical Forest," the structures incorporate over 15,000 plants into their above-ground exteriors.

The 50,000 euro prize recognizes buildings which combine "exemplary sustainability, external shape and internal spatial quality, not to mention social aspects, to create a model design." The prize was presented to architect Stefano Boeri and developer Manfredi Catella.

It is hoped the diverse vegetation of the Vertical Forest balconies (right) will provide urban habitats for birds and insects, and will also produce oxygen while shading



the residences from harsh sunlight. It's expected the plants also will absorb dust in the air, helping to cut pollution in Milan.

To see more of this stunning project, go [here](#) and click on the link to play the video, or go to [this Website](#) and look at the slideshow.

The other Italian woods in the news lately concerns the grove of trees from which Antonio

Stradivari and other famous violin makers found the spruce for their instruments.



Those "musical woods" still stand (below) and contain trees which were saplings when Stradivari, Guarneri and Amati were creating their instruments 300 years ago. Some of those violins and cellos cost millions today.

On Dec. 6, National Public Radio's *Morning Edition Saturday* did an excellent story on this forest in the Italian Alps. You can read it [here](#) or, better yet, listen to the audio version [here](#).



2015



WELCOME  
IN THE  
NEW YEAR  
WITH LUCIA!

Join **Lucia Galizia** and Italians of all stripes for her second annual New Year's Eve party! \$65 gets you a buffet, prize giveaways, party favors, midnight champagne and dancing to the sounds of the 1940s, 50s & 60s.

The event takes place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at 1441 NE Second Av. in Portland. For tickets, call Lucia at 503.284.6989 by Dec. 15.



# NEED A HOLIDAY GIFT? HERE ARE A COUPLE OF ITALIAN-INSPIRED IDEAS...

BY KEN KANE

Red Ridge Farms and the Oregon Olive Mill held their annual *Olio Nuovo* Festival the weekend before Thanksgiving. 2014's freshly-milled olive oil – still containing sediment in the bottom of the bottle – was released for the first time. The three-day event attracted hundreds of olive oil enthusiasts, including some OregonTuscans.



Numerous stainless steel casks containing the new oil filled the tasting room (right) where lots of sipping and *slurrrrrrrp*!ing took place! Bottles of the precious condiment, including a Tuscan-inspired blend and a single varietal using locally grown fruit from Italian Frantoio olive tree stock, were sold for \$15 and have since made their way into countless holiday dishes.



Local, newly released, unfiltered olive oil, is quite a treat. The Oregon Olive Mill *olio nuovo* is only available at Red Ridge Farms near Dundee for a short time. But their filtered oils are available year-round at Red Ridge Farms and at a number of Portland-area markets and specialty food stores. A bottle of artisan olive oil is a nice alternative to wine as a holiday hostess gift or stocking stuffer.

If you're looking for a bottle of something Italian to *drink* during the holidays, but want something out of the ordinary, try an Italian craft beer. Yes, like Oregon did a generation ago, Italy is spawning a microbrewery industry to stand alongside its famed viticulture.



Just this month the blog sites [Weekly Pint](#) and [First We Feast](#) topped their Beer Lover's Bucket List of vacation sites with [Birreria Baladin](#). It's one of Italy's pioneering craft breweries, located in Piozzo, in the heart of Piedmont's wine region.

Can't make it to Piedmont by Christmas to track down a bottle of Baladin (right) to put under the tree? Well, head over to [Belmont Station](#), a bottle shop at SE 45<sup>th</sup> and Stark which specializes in exotic craft and import beers. They've got about a dozen different Italian beers in stock (including several Baladins) and only one of them is Peroni!



## Italy in December

A dance party fundraiser  
benefitting **Transition Projects**

**12 dicembre 2014, Friday**  
**8 p.m. – Midnight**  
DON'T MISS THIS one-time event  
at Portland's classic  
**Melody Ballroom**  
615 SE Alder Street

Ray Massa's **EuroRhythms** from  
Columbus, Ohio, the country's most popular  
Italian-American show band

Savor antipasti from **A Cena Ristorante**  
and gelato e sorbetto from **Gelato Maestro**

Cash bar serving Italian selections of  
wine, beers, waters and liqueurs

**Tickets \$40 each**  
Includes small plates—  
All proceeds to Transition Projects

**Transition  
Projects**

Tickets Available: [www.italyindecember.com](http://www.italyindecember.com)



# VIEW OF FLORENCE OPENED PHOTOGRAPHER STEVEN'S EYES

(continued from page 3)

Piazzale

Michelangelo

(right). Steven did not have the foggiest idea of where we were going.

I do not have appropriate words to describe Steven's facial expression upon seeing the magnificent view of Florence with the Arno River, the *Duomo*, *il Campanile di Giotto* and the *Ponte Vecchio*, all in one single fantastic view. As a photographer, Steven was discovering something unique and almost unbelievable! It was my joy was to see my son totally happy!!

We returned to Montecatini and we decided to take a stroll along the main promenade of this beautiful resort! As usual the many visitors walked in couples or small family groups. We stopped at the *Gelateria Desideri* to say hello to the owner, a charming and beautiful lady known to me for over 20 years. She was happy to see us and, as the Italian tradition dictates, she offered an array of goodies. We politely declined, accepting only a cone of rice ice cream (*gelato di riso*).

Returning to the hotel, I paid a visit to one of my favorite people: Ms. Giovannini, owner of *Pasticceria Giovannini*. She's a 96-year-old lady who sits at



the cashier desk, with a sharp mind, handling the business with the enthusiasm and spirit of a 20-year-old. Her son, age 72, told me that she was the first person in the store able to manage the conversion from lire to euro, then she taught everyone else!



Steven was excited to discover things which were familiar to me. Alone, he ventured to the *funicolare* – a cable car which lifts people from the valley to the top of the hill where Montecatini Alto is located. He visited that simple, small village, and discovered views, scenery and antiquities of a world unknown to him until a few days before. In my mind there was a certainty that my mission was accomplished ... but we still had three days to go!

(to be continued...)

[Editor's note: If you'd like to see more of Steven's Italian photos – heck, maybe even buy one – go to:

<http://www.frostyphotography.com/gallery.html>]





# NOTES ON POST-WAR ITALY AND PRESENT-DAY ATTITUDES

(continued from page 1)

Speaking of the film on Nov. 16, we showed the final part of the movie *Una Vita Difficile* (*A Difficult Life*).

As I said, the film gives an accurate view of the life and times in Italy, after World War II. The protagonist, an idealist at heart, refuses a large bribe for protecting from exposure a well-connected tycoon. Sharing the destiny of many whistleblowers, the accuser becomes the victim. At root, his troubles stem from daring to challenge the system.



In the end, however, he trades his dignity (above) for the benefits and perks offered by the very man who sent him to jail.

But in the last scene, our very human hero rekindles his lost idealism (so to speak), after slapping his pretentious, arrogant and disrespectful employer, and delivering him into a swimming pool ... in front of a priest, no less! (right) We are left to wonder whether the loss of perks was worth regaining his dignity.



This question would not arise today. Italy rates with Senegal and Swaziland, in the doubtful rank of the most corrupted countries in the world. The discontent is palpable in numerous counter-culture online blogs – as the mainstream media is but an echo of the regime.

The historical left has disappeared, or limits itself to bitter, obscure, philosophical disputes on whether any revolution should have progressive, Trotskyist, Leninist, Bakunin, Marxist, liberal-socialist or socialist-liberal inspiration.

This is reminiscent of the learned, medieval, scholastic and ecclesiastic disputes about the sex of the angels. A matter, by the way, still left unresolved – witness the medieval pictorial representations of angels, whose name is unmistakably masculine, but whose complexion is too fair to be manly. A modern census-taker, uncertain about the appropriate entry for an angel's sexual orientation, would probably mark "both."

Back to Italian current public opinion and mood. Yes, many moan and lament. Unemployment among the young is staggering – statistics say 40 – 50 percent.

On the other hand, many complain publicly ... while privately are ready to admire or emulate him who gets away with it, and builds his fortune on a very ambiguous interpretation of honor (let alone virtue). Witness the remarkable, lasting popularity of Silvio Berlusconi, condemned to seven years in prison, for sundry undisputable crimes, and promptly absolved on appeal.

But let's not be too critical. If I am allowed to quote from my favorite source, Shakespeare, "The web of life is of a mingled yarn. Good and ill go together. Our virtues would be proud if our sins whipped us not. And our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues."

*Arrivederci! Buon Natale e Buon Anno!*

## LA LETTERA TOSCANA

is the monthly newsletter of the Tuscan Association of Oregon. It is edited by Ken Kane, the club's communications manager.

We welcome your feedback, story ideas and thoughts. Please send them to:

[OregonTuscans@gmail.com](mailto:OregonTuscans@gmail.com)