

Nine of These Prizes!

Marina Melchionda (March 17, 2010)



On March 4, the Italian Journalist and Scriptwriter Mario Fratti, author of the world-famous musical "Nine", was awarded by the Italian Culture and Heritage Commission for his outstanding contributions in the spread of the Italian culture in NY and the US. The ceremony was held at the headquarters of the Columbus Citizens Foundation

While the general public sees journalist and scriptwriter Cav. [Mario Fratti](#) [2] as the author of the musical "Nine", a sold-out show in Broadway for several years and readapted in 2009 in the movie format by Rob Marshall, the Italian-American community views him as a true roquefort of Italian culture in New York.

On March 4, the [Italian Heritage and Culture Committee](#) [3] in New York, represented by its President



Cavalier Joseph Sciamè, awarded Fratti with a special prize in recognition of his outstanding efforts in the promotion of Italian heritage at the Headquarters of the [Columbus Citizen Foundation](#) [4] in the Upper East Side. The occasion was also taken to award the former President of the Columbus Citizen Foundation Louis Tallarini with the "Da Vinci" Prize 2009, for his commitment to the spreading of the Italian Language in the US and his support to the Italian AP Program. Astronaut Michael Massimino was also supposed to be awarded on that night, but he could not attend the ceremony due to previous commitments with [NASA](#) [5].

In this elegant framework, some of the major representatives of the community and of its most prominent institutions, foundations, and organizations, gathered to greet their common friend. Among them were the Consul General of Italy in New York Francesco Maria Talò, Consul Laura Anghillare, the founder of the [National Organization of Italian American Women](#) [6] Dr. Aileen Riotto Sirey, and its Executive Director, Maria Tamburri; the Dean of the [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [7], Anthony J. Tamburri; the President of the [Italian American Committee on Education](#) [8] Berardo Paradiso, and many others.

The award ceremony, well covered by the major Italian and Italian-American media operating in the area, was preceded by a rich cocktail hour, during which the new President of the Columbus Foundation, Frank Fusaro, joined his numerous guests. Ment to be also an occasion to collect funds to devolve to community activities and Italian-American students in need, the evening also featured a lucky dip, in which the first prize was a purse by [Braccialini](#) [9], one of the sponsors of the event.

Cav. Mario Fratti was visibly emotional, and, with humility, claimed to our microphones to be humbled by such a huge attention to his career. "What I love the most of this evening is to see so many smiley faces gathered in one room", he said with eyes as bright as the handkerchief sticking out of his breast pocket. "I can't believe how many friends are here, both Italians and Italian-Americans, this shows me that I did something I can be proud of".

Mario became a naturalized American a few years ago, but has always felt like an Italian, defending the lifestyle and habits he carried on from L'Aquila into his cosmopolitan city of residence, New York. "I never felt the necessity to become an American; instead I always tried to hand down to my new friends my cultural baggage, to 'educate them'", he added laughing.

Mario has written more than 90 theatrical works, which have been translated in 19 languages and represented in over 24 countries of the world. With works such as "Suicide", "The Bridge", "The Return", "The Academy", "The Cage", and "Race", he has gained international popularity, as his career has been crowned by the assignment of three Outer Critics Circle Awards, eight Drama Desk Awards, and five Tony Awards. The recent readaptation of his "Nine" to the wide screen had several nominations at the Oscar 2010.

As he was called to the stage to receive his prize, Cav. Fratti spoke about his musical and the movie based on it. "It's a wonderful film, and everybody should see it. The cast is outstanding, and I find that the director did a great job. But still, it is not my musical. Marshall missed some of the most hilarious moments of the musical, and most of all, he changed its end. The scene featured a kid telling to a 40-year-old guy that he has the maturity of a 9-year-old. That scene explains the title of the musical, its deep meaning, but you can't find it in the movie".

As Professor Emeritus of Italian Literature at [Hunter College](#) [10], Mario was very touched to see some of his students among the audience. "The fact that some of them have become great professors themselves makes me proud. Looking at them, I know that I accomplished the most important goal: I handed down the love for Italian culture, so that it could be further spread now and in the future".

Mario is not only a man of theatre, but has often used his talents for social and political purposes. He carried on his personal values and beliefs with extraordinary tenacity, sometimes taking the risk of ruining his career for his political views. "I always fought for liberty and democracy, even in this country, where they have been in serious danger for a number of years. I wrote poems against the Vietnam War and the Gulf War: I had to speak up in spite of the possible consequences".



As Cav. Sciame explained to the public, it was not easy to decide which shape to give to Fratti's award. A big star, finally, looked like the most natural solution, an Italian star shining in the Hollywood firmament.

After a final performance by soprano [Cristina Fontanelli](#) [11], Mario received the compliments of the guests, who lingered for a while to continue enjoying this special Italian-American event together.

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- [2] <http://www.mariofratti.com>
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- [11] <http://www.cristinafontanelli.com>