



## **Christmas at The Italian Consulate. Just like in Italy.**

Roberta Michelino, (December 12, 2013)



The Italian Consulate inaugurated the Christmas season with the exhibition of the “Nativity of Solidarity” and with the participation of the traditional pipers.

On December 8th, at the [Italian Consulate of New York](#) [2], you could really feel the Christmas atmosphere. Nothing was missing: the Nativity, the Christmas tree, the pipers, pandoro and panettone and hot chocolate. Also the snow decided it was time to fall down making the atmosphere even more magical.

In Italy, the 8 of December is the day in which usually Italians decorate the tree and set up the Nativity. To remember this tradition, Consul General Natalia Quintavalle and Vice Consul Lucia Pasqualini decided to celebrate this special event in New York. And it was a lucky coincidence that all



along Park Avenue the illuminations were lighted up.

The Nativity, exhibited within the garage of the Italian Consulate, fascinated both adults and children who would want to take a closer look at the little statues that were completely hand made and hand painted.

People's attention focused mostly on the details of the hands, the faces, the dresses and all the other beautiful objects typical of the Neapolitan Nativity.

Along the San Gregorio Armeno Street in Naples, Nativities like the one exhibited at the Italian Consulate are exposed all the year. In this city it seems that time has stopped leaving space to the creativity and the amazing skills of the Neapolitan artisans. The small shops, the colorful stands and the careful handcrafted work make this city in the South of Italy a unique place in the world and a destination for many tourists. During the years, as a testimony of the proximity of the Neapolitan Nativity to people, many characters of the crib represent public figures. From Obama to Maradona, from Madonna to Matteo Renzi.

"The preparation of a Nativity like this one was not easy at all," confessed Consul General Natalia Quintavalle.

" I contacted Casa Belvedere that sent me the images of how this Nativity was prepared in the past. Thank to some people here at the Consulate, who have arranged Nativity exhibitions before, we were able to build it."

" When I saw it exhibited last year I realized that not everyone knew the tradition of the shepherds of San Gregorio Armeno. So I thought we needed to let people know that these statues are not industrial products or just religious symbols, but they are a strong expression of the creativity of a Neapolitan artisan. Moreover, this exhibition is part of the Year of the Italian Culture in the US.

The history of this Nativity is very significant. Known as the "Nativity of the Solidarity" because it was donated just a little after the attack at the World Trade Center from the [Chamber of Commerce of Naples](#) [3] to the St. Michael Church on West 34th st., it is considered a symbol of Neapolitans' support to American citizens.

It's a gift that was given to not forget the victims of 9/11 and to imprint into everyone's mind the courage of the firemen and the first-aid agents who sacrificed their lives to save many innocent people.

The Nativity, realized by Giovanni Sinno, Ulderigo Pinfildi and Alfredo Molli has been for many years a place to visit but unfortunately, after the suggestion tied to the 9/11, it was forgotten and suffered several damages caused by negligence.

In 2006 it was restructured thanks to the [FDNY](#) [4] Chief Daniel Nigro and Vincent Tummino and was exposed first in Jersey and then at Casa Belvedere in Staten Island.

The Neapolitan artisans use the same techniques of the XVII century. But in this New York Nativity there is something very particular in the hands of the Three Wise Men: firemen helmets with the numbers 01, 9 and 11.

The event at the Consulate saw the participation of Daniel Nigro, Chief of the FDNY, William Seelig, Commissioner of the FDNY and Keith Tanico, President of the FDNY of the Columbia Association.

To admire the Nativity, with its 83 characters and 28 animals and many other objects, there were many guests and well-known faces. Among them, the apostles'nuncio of the [UN](#) [5] Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, the UN Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi, the Director of the [Italian Trade Commission](#) [6] (ICE) Pier Paolo Celeste and Eugenio Magnani of [ENI](#) [7].

"We are really honored to receive this symbol of friendship from our Italian brothers and sisters to remember the tragedy of the World Trade Center," affirmed Daniel Nigro. "This demonstrates a



great relationship with the city of Naples. There are many American firemen that have Italian origins and this factor implies a stronger link with Italy. Besides, it's a great emotion to see it exposed here as well."

"It's important to maintain Italian traditions make them become ours," continued Keith Tanico. "After the tragedy of 9/11 we all felt closer to each other and we cultivated friendships with cities like Venice, Rome, Naples, Palermo and Milan."

The pipers, one of them came all the way from Philadelphia, accompanied the evening with the typical wind instrument, the bagpipe. Domenico Porco told us that before discovering this passion for traditional popular music he was a jazz musician. But after having listened to popular songs during a bonfire together with his friends, he decided to convert to traditional music.

Thanks to the pipers, the Italian Consulate in Park Avenue became a real Italian Christmas house. During this period, in Italy, if you walk down the streets, you would start to hear the typical holiday melodies played by these traditional instruments.

And it can also happen to find the pipers playing their wonderful music right in front the door of your house.

Tranlationb by Giulia Madron

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