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NEW YORK FOLKLORE
129 Jay Street
Schenectady, NY 12305
518/346-7008
Fax 518/346-6617
Email: info@nyfolklore.org
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

Italian Folk: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives, edited by

Joseph Sciorra. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011. 257 pages, black-and-white photographs, index, \$28.00 paper.

Masterfully arranged by the editor, the articles in this book comprise a sterling collection of Italian American folklore research. The organization of the work provides seamless transitions from essays on foodways to material culture, cultural landscape to explicit art forms, and large-scale ceremonial events to religious belief, all situated in diverse locales from New York to California. By “listening with an accent” (10), the authors provide fresh insights about everyday creativity and ethnic identity formation.

In the first section, Simone Cinotto’s “Sunday Dinner? You Had to Be There!": The Social Significance of Food in Italian Harlem, 1920–40” is followed by John Allan Cicala’s “*Cuscuszu* in Detroit, July 18, 1993: Memory, Conflict, and *Bella Figura* during a Sicilian American Meal.” The complexities of collective food consumption are not given short shrift in these two essays, which consider food and food rituals as contested narrative space, where individual and group identities are negotiated, reexamined, and refined.

Lara Pascali’s “The Italian Immigrant Basement Kitchen in North America,” an outstanding analysis of Italian American indoor vernacular space as “dream space,” provides a smooth segue from the home to outdoor vernacular environs. In “Creative Responses to Italian Immigrant Experience in California: Baldassare Forestiere’s Underground Gardens and Simon Rodie’s Watts Towers,” literary scholar Kenneth Scambray compares the work of two Italian American “grassroots artists.” Using building skills acquired in the United States, the artists create outdoor “architectural narratives” that “express the conflicted and often bifurcating experience of Italian immigration to America” (63). Art historian Joseph J. Inguanti’s “Landscapes of Order, Landscapes of Memory: Residential Landscapes of the

New York Metropolitan Region” couples formal analysis with interviews with gardeners to compare urban and suburban vernacular spaces. His focus on “landscapes of memory” and “landscapes of order” reveals the crucial role vernacular landscape plays in the construction of Italian American ethnic identity. I found the author’s description of vegetable gardens in cemeteries intriguing, especially his conclusion: “Domesticating their graves by tending grave gardens, Italian Americans make clear an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead” (87). At one time, however, the tomato plant was grown for purely decorative purposes. By the eighteenth century, the tomato was used as a food, but it was still listed among poisonous plants. Is the planting of vegetables like tomatoes and squash primarily ornamental? Inguanti never reveals if he asked Italian American gardeners this question and others about practical cemetery logistics, such as who controls the plot, and what happens if more space is needed for burials. In other words, how do practical concerns mesh with practices that yield a “harvest of memories, some less pleasant than others” (97)?

The connection of place to memory, both nostalgic and conflicted, is also explored in Joseph Sciorra’s essay, “Locating Memory: Longing, Place, and Autobiography in Vincenzo Ancona’s Sicilian Poetry.” Sciorra takes an ethnographic approach to reveal the nuances of a Sicilian immigrant poet’s creative work. Situating the poems in the cultural and social world in which the poet lived, he examines Ancona’s poetry as “memory work” to elucidate how the poet and his audience “developed a collective voice to commemorate the past and forge ways of moving forward” (128). Sciorra’s article provides an elegantly written bridge to Marion Jacobson’s “Valtaro Musette: Cross-Cultural Musical Performance and Repertoire among Northern Italians in New York,” another ethnographic chapter. Jacobson’s fieldwork provides solid documentation of the evolution of the song repertoire and style of *vallaro*, a northern Italian accordion music adapted for performance in 1930s and 1940s Manhattan nightclubs. Eventually adopted

by Italians and Italian Americans in general and today a cherished part of public ethnic displays, Jacobson notes, “Valtaro songs performed an ineluctable American truth: that music, particularly folk song and its hybrid offspring—influenced by jazz and pop—provide a powerful and positive medium of cultural exchange” (151).

In the next section, the strength of Joan Saverino’s article, “Italians in Public Memory: Pageantry, Power, and Imaging the ‘Italian American’ in Reading, Pennsylvania” lies in its historical research, which traces the development of a unified public Italian American identity. Peter Savastano’s “Changing St. Gerard’s Clothes: An Exercise in Italian American Devotion and Material Culture” is a stellar example of in-depth research grounded in fieldwork. This important study focuses on behind-the-scene ritual preparations that reveal how devotees—whether male, female, gay, or straight—all participate in an intimate ritual place “where these parallel universes encounter and intersect with each other in interesting and creative ways” (182).

The final chapters bring the book full circle. Luisa Del Giudice’s “Cursed Flesh: Faith Healers, Black Magic, and (Re-Membering) Death in a Central Italian Town” and Sabina Magliocco’s “Imaging the *Strega*: Folklore Reclamation and the Construction of Italian American Witchcraft,” deal with reclamation of religious belief from two different ethnographic perspectives. By researching her own family history, Del Giudice finds herself “reassembling, possibly inventing, a fragmented magical inheritance about which I had known little” (195). Magliocco interviews contemporary Italian American spiritual seekers and practitioners of revival witchcraft to reveal how the reclamation of *Stregberia* is a political strategy that transforms a folk-magic tradition into source of ethnic pride.

In its entirety, *Italian Folk* surpasses previous studies on the topic of Italian American folk culture. Through the authors’ “engaged listening,” readers are offered opportunities to reexamine and reconsider their own understandings of creativity’s role in everyday

lives. While the authors are writing primarily for folklorists with an interest in Italian Americans, this exemplary work should be on the reading list of every scholar of immigrant folklore.

—Felicia McMahon, Syracuse University

Send Your Story to *Voices*!

Did you know that *Voices* publishes creative writing, including creative fiction (such as short stories), creative nonfiction (such as memoirs and life/work stories), and poetry? We also publish artistic and ethnographic photography and artwork, in addition to research-based articles on New York State folk arts and artists. If you are one of New York's many traditional artists or working in a traditional occupation—including fishing, boat building, traditional healing, instrument making, firefighting, and nursing, to name a few—please consider sharing your life or work story with the readers of *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*. Check out our new column heading First Person, which spotlights folk artists and folk arts workers, giving creative people space in each issue to share their life stories in their own words. First Person allows people to share the reasons they have spent a lifetime supporting or recreating New York's diverse traditions, passing them down through generations—whether it's gardening, carving, roots music, village dancing, egg decorating, weaving, quilting, fiddling, traditional singing, basketry, ethnic foodways, traditional calligraphy, or home altar building. For more information, see our submissions guidelines on this page or contact me, Eileen Condon, acquisitions editor of *Voices*, at econdon@ctmd.org.

Submission Guidelines for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*

Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore is a membership magazine of the New York Folklore Society (www.nyfolklore.org).

The New York Folklore Society is a nonprofit, statewide organization dedicated to furthering cultural equity and cross-cultural understanding through programs that nurture folk cultural expressions within communities where they originate, share these traditions across cultural boundaries, and enhance the understanding and appreciation of folk culture. Through *Voices* the society communicates with professional folklorists and members of related fields, traditional artists, and a general public interested in folklore.

Voices is dedicated to publishing the content of folklore in the words and images of its creators and practitioners. The journal publishes research-based articles, written in an accessible style, on topics related to traditional art and life. It also features stories, interviews, reminiscences, essays, folk poetry and music, photographs, and artwork drawn from people in all parts of New York State. Columns on subjects such as photography, sound and video recording, legal and ethical issues, and the nature of traditional art and life appear in each issue.

Editorial Policy

Feature articles. Articles published in *Voices* represent original contributions to folklore studies. Although *Voices* emphasizes the folklore of New York State, the editor welcomes articles based on the folklore of any area of the world. Articles on the theory, methodology, and geography of folklore are also welcome, as are purely descriptive articles in the ethnography of folklore. In addition, *Voices* provides a home for “orphan” tales, narratives, and songs, whose contributors are urged to provide contextual information.

Authors are encouraged to include short personal reminiscences, anecdotes, isolated tales, narratives, songs, and other material that relates to and enhances their main article.

Typically feature articles range from 1,000 to 4,000 words and up to 6,000 words at the editor's discretion.

Reviews and review essays. Books, recordings, films, videos, exhibitions, concerts, and the like are selected for review in *Voices* for their relevance to folklore studies or the folklore of New York State and their potential interest to a wide audience. Persons wishing to review recently published material should contact the editor. Unsolicited reviews and proposals for reviews will be evaluated by the editor and by outside referees where appropriate. Follow the bibliographic style in a current issue of *Voices*.

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Letters should not exceed 500 words.

Style

The journal follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Consult *Webster's Third International Dictionary* for questions of spelling, meaning, and usage, and avoid gender-specific terminology.

Footnotes. Endnotes and footnotes should be avoided; incorporate such information into the text. Ancillary information may be submitted as a sidebar.

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Language. All material must be submitted in English. Foreign-language terms (transliterated, where appropriate, into the Roman alphabet) should be italicized and followed by a concise parenthetical English gloss; the author bears responsibility for the correct spelling and orthographics of non-English words. British spellings should be Americanized.

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For the initial submission, send an e-mail attachment or CD (preferably prepared in Microsoft Word and saved as Rich Text Format).

Copy must be double spaced, with all pages numbered consecutively. To facilitate anonymous review of feature articles, the author's name and biography should appear only on a separate title page.

Tables, charts, maps, illustrations, photographs, captions, and credits should follow the main text and be numbered consecutively. All illustrations should be clean, sharp, and camera-ready. Photographs should be prints or duplicate slides (not originals) or scanned at high resolution (300+ dpi) and e-mailed to the editor as jpg or tiff files. Captions and credits must be included. Written permission to publish each image must be obtained by authors from the copyright holders prior to submission of manuscripts, and the written permissions must accompany the manuscript (authors should keep copies).

Materials are acknowledged upon receipt. The editor and two anonymous readers review manuscripts submitted as articles. The review process takes several weeks.

Authors receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which their contribution appears and may purchase additional copies at a discount. Authors of feature articles may purchase offprints; price information is available upon publication.

Submission Deadlines

Spring–Summer issue	November 1
Fall–Winter issue	May 1

Send submissions as Word files to Eileen Condon, *Voices* Editor (e-mail preferred): econdon@ctmd.org or c/o Center for Traditional Music and Dance, 32 Broadway, Suite 1314, New York, NY 10004.

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