PICNIC

The Sicilian Association of Australia’s (TSAA) annual Sunday Picnic Lunch was held on 8th December at Olinda. Over 60 members and their friends enjoyed the day, eating home cooked food, from scaccie to pasta al forno to salisciccie to finocchio to caponata, all to the fabulous sound of Gianni Cannata. Gianni played Sicilian music, old and new, and even some music from “mainland Italy”. Oh, I forgot to mention the desserts, from giggiulena to sfinci to pignolata.

The weather was kind to us as we danced to Gianni’s wonderful songs. All in all, another great day out with friends.

TSAA takes this opportunity to thank all its members, and their friends for the support they have given to it throughout the year.

2014 looks like another exciting year, so don’t forget to renew your membership, and if you are not yet a member, what are you waiting for... Visit our website www.tsaa.net.au or write to P.O. Box 418, Avondale Heights. 3034

SWAG

On Wednesday 27th November TSAA held its last SWAG (Sicilian Wine Appreciation Group) for 2013. This time the venue was Mezzo Bar & Grill Restaurant. It provided the 80 odd members and friends an opportunity to compare two Sicilian wines, a red and a white from the Mandoletto winery near Trapani, to two Australian wines produced in the Hunter Valley from the Three Pond Winery owned by a member of the association, Aniello (Nello) Iannuzzi.

The evening provided us a culinary experience, tasting a variety of Sicilian dishes, from sarde infarinati to meatballs, to pasta.

TSAA was fortunate enough to arrange the attendance of Peppe Magnano, a Sicilian musician currently in Australia, who enchanted all with some traditional Sicilian songs, which took us all back many a year.

TSAA thanks all who attended and promises that 2014 will provide many similar evenings.

DID YOU KNOW?

CAPONATA

The Sicilian antipasto relish known as caponata is said to be of Spanish origin. The Sicilian food authority Pino Correnti believes that the dish is derived from the Catalan word caponada, meaning a similar kind of relish, and says it first appears in a Sicilian etymology of 1709. This Catalan word, which literally means “something tied together like vines,” can also refer to an enclosure where animals are fattened for slaughter. But the root word capón figures in the expression capón de galera which is a gazpacho or a caponata-like dish usually served shipboard.

Alberto Denti di Pirajno, the learned Sicilian scholar, medical doctor, and gastronome, suggested that the dish was born shipboard as a mariner’s breakfast because of the large amount of vinegar used, which would have acted as a preservative. Giuseppe Coria, author of an authoritative tome on Sicilian cooking, offers another suggestion: That the word derives from the Latin word caupo (tavern) where cauponae was served, that is, tavern food for travellers. Even if this interpretation is correct, cauponae certainly wasn’t the caponata we know today.

(Clifford Wright - The Medieval Beginnings of Sicilian Cuisine)
**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Sicilianu: Italian Dialect or Separate Language?**

Often considered merely a dialect of Italian, Sicilian (Sicilianu) is in fact a separate language. Both modern Italian and Sicilian are based upon Vulgar Latin, the everyday speech of Ancient Rome. Linguistic experts put Sicilian in what is known as the Italiano meridionale-estremo language group along with the Greek influenced Calabrian dialects of Southern Italy. Further proof that Sicilian is indeed a language is the fact that is has at least eleven regional dialects. Some experts, such as Dr. Joseph F. Privitera even credit Sicilian as the first Romance language to split from Vulgar Latin. Although this is debatable, it is a fact that Sicilian differs enough from Italian to be regarded as a language and not a dialect.

**The Sicilian Language: Brief History**

Thousands of years ago the island of Sicily was occupied by the original Sicilians, the most well-known being the Siculi. These people spoke a language that has not been spoken for millennia, but some words (mainly local names for plants) still survive in modern Sicilian. Once the Phoenicians and later the Ancient Greeks arrived, the indigenous peoples and their language were eventually supplanted. Dialects of Greek were mainly spoken in Sicily until the arrival of the Romans after the First Punic War. It was then that Sicilian received a substantial Latin influence but Greek continued to be the main language for centuries.

With the fall of Rome and the conquests of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, Greek was further solidified as the Lingua Franca for most of Sicily. However a new layer would be added to the Sicilian language with the arrival of the Saracens from North Africa. The invasions did not stop there of course as the Normans, Hohenstaufens, Angevins and Aragonese all took turns ruling Sicily. While not every conqueror influenced the local language, most of the major occupiers have at least bequeathed a few words and phrases which have helped to make Sicilian so colorful.

**The Sicilian Language: Outside Influences**

Like every other aspect of Sicilian culture, thousands of years of domination by foreign powers have left its mark on the language. Italian is mostly founded upon a Latin base, whereas Sicilian has elements of Greek, Arabic, Catalan, French and Spanish as well as words derived from the ancient Siculi. All of these linguistic and cultural influences blended with the Latin of the Romans to create the unique character of Sicilian.

**Here are a few examples of the foreign influence upon Sicilian:**

**Greek based words:** Bucali (water pitcher), cirasa (cherry), naca (cradle), many Sicilian surnames (including the author’s) are Greek in origin.

**Arabic based words:** Babbaluciu (snail), cassata (round bowl - now a name for a dessert), Marsala (Arabic for “port of God”), sceccu (donkey - derived from “Sheikh”), zaffarana (saffron).

**French/Provencal/Lombard based words:** Accattari (to buy), addumari (to light up), babbu (fool), cirasa (cherry), Lunniria, Martiria, Miercuri, sceccu (donkey - derived from “Sheikh”), zaffarana (saffron).

**Spanish/Catalan based words:** Addiu (goodbye), babbu (fool), balanza (scales), cascia (box), caa (here).

(Don't forget to check out the diagram on the next page.)

**Historical note on TSAA**

On the 3rd June 2011, the Governor General of Australia Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC CVO attended a reception in Sicily for Sicilian communities hosted by David Ritchie the Australian Ambassador to Italy. Not only was TSAA invited to (and did) make suggestions in relation to the reception, it was represented at the reception by one of its members Ivan Sebastian Agricola who presented Her Excellency with a gift on behalf of TSAA (a plaque from Ivan Sebastian’s home town of Pachino).

Reproduced below is Her Excellency’s speech.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your generous welcome.

I want you to know how thrilled and delighted I am to be here with you in gorgeous Sicily.

Europe, Africa and Asia in a single place with a powerful history; Greek tyrants, Arab emirs, Norman knights, Byzantine bishops and Holy Roman Emperors.

My friends, Sicily touches the world. Your island is breathtakingly beautiful; rich in art, archeology, folklore and family.

How I wish I had more time here to enjoy your much loved treasures.

Australia and Italy enjoy a multi-layered, longstanding relationship.

Last week at Government House in Canberra we celebrated its significance to our country at a dinner for Italian Australians, community leaders in every field, business, the professions, the arts, sport, science, academia, industry.

It was a joyous occasion where conversation flowed about heart warming and inspiring immigration family histories.

850,000 Australians claim Italian ancestry, it’s a remarkable figure. It represents an enormous impact on cultural, social and economic life in our country.

Some of Australia’s first immigrants came from Capo d’Orlando.

People who established Western Australia’s successful fishing industry in Fremantle Sicilians from the east side of the island came to my home state Queensland. They built our sugar cane industry in the north – back breaking labour in the early days.

Evocative stories of these times have been depicted in literature and film.

These pioneers established opera groups, and brought new and delicious food, music, cooking – wonderful things that are enjoyed throughout our community and are part of the special hospitality of Australian Italian homes today.”

I love to be part of it and I notice the way the men always reminisce about their mother’s cooking.

My friends, we have enormous warmth for Sicilian Australians.

We respect their dedication to family, their pride in their homeland and cultural heritage. The strength of our links is vividly reflected in the unions between twin cities: Canada Bay and Lipari, Werribee and Vizzini, Fremantle with Capo d’Orlando, and Moorabbin with Malfa.

It is hardly surprising that 30,000 Australians live in Italy, and 100,000 travel here each year.

Thank you, thank you my friends for your warmth and your hospitality, for this opportunity to celebrate our enduring friendship, and the wonderful contribution Sicilians make to Australia.”
We all know that William Shakespeare is a towering literary figure and that his writings have shaped the English language. There have been questions asked over the years about many aspects of Shakespeare's writings, one of which is how did he seem to have such an intimate knowledge of Italy when he never set foot there? It has been suggested that not only was Shakespeare not English, he was, in fact, Sicilian born and his real name was Crollalanza – crolla (shake) lancia (spear)! Perhaps this is what he was referring to when one of his characters exclaimed “To be or not to be?”.

Speculation:
Was Shakespeare Italian? Was he born in Sicily?
This thought has perplexed many people, especially in England. It’s generated the same indignation that it would cause us to hear an allegation that Pirandello was a foreigner who had moved to Agrigento.

Over the centuries, scholars have been puzzled by Shakespeare's profound knowledge of Italian. Shakespeare possessed an impressive familiarity with stories written by Italian authors such as Giovanni Boccaccio, Matteo Bandello, and Masuccio Salernitano. His plays contain too many accurate details about esoteric affairs in distant places, at courts, to have been written by someone “of low social standing such as Shakespeare”. Fifteen out of thirty seven Shakespearean plays are set in Italy, which is quite amazing if one thinks that Shakespeare never set foot abroad. He never mentions Stratford in his plays, for instance, while his knowledge of Italian toponomy, art, ways of living, laws, history and traditions are things that everyone can verify by reading his plays.

In an attempt to solve the mystery of Shakespeare’s Italian leanings, one former teacher of literature has published a new hypothesis especially for people eager to hear something new about the bard.

First of all, we all agree with Prof. Juvara when he says that it is the substance of Shakespeare’s plays and its heritage that really counts and it belongs to humanity in the first place. After all, nationalities are social conventions.

In his book “Shakespeare era italiano” (2002), retired Sicilian professor Martino Juvara claims that Shakespeare was, in fact, not English at all, but Sicilian. His conclusion is drawn from research carried out from 1925 to 1950 by two professors at Palermo University. Juvara posits that Shakespeare was born not in Stratford in April 1564, as is commonly believed, but in Messina as Michelangelo Florio Crollalanza.

His parents were not John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, but were Dr. Giovanni Florio, and Guglielma Crollalanza, a Sicilian noblewoman.

Crollalanza, literally Crolla (Shake) lancia (Spear) according to Juvara studied abroad and was educated by Franciscan monks who taught him Latin, Greek, and history.

Because of their Calvinist beliefs, Michelangelo Florio’s family was persecuted by the Inquisition (Messina was then under the Spanish yoke) for alleged Calvinist propaganda. It seems that Giovanni Florio had published some sort of invective against Rome and the Church. The family supposedly departed Italy during the Holy Inquisition and moved to London. It was in London that Michelangelo Florio Crollalanza decided to change his name to its English equivalent.

Juvara’s evidence includes a play written by Michelangelo Florio Crollalanza in Sicilian dialect. The play’s name is “Tanto traffico per Niente”, which can be translated into Much traffic for Nothing or Much Ado About Nothing. He also mentions a book of sayings written by a writer, one Michelangelo Crollalanza, in the sixteenth century Calvinist Northern Italy. Some of the sayings correspond to lines in Hamlet. Michelangelo’s father, Giovanni Florio, once owned a home called “Casa Otello”, built by a retired Venetian known as Otello who, in a jealous rage, murdered his wife.

In Milan, according to documents found by prof. Juvara, Michelangelo falls in love with a 16-year-old countess belonging to the Milanese aristocracy, Giulietta. The girl’s family opposed their love, so the girl is sent to Verona (…) under the protection of the city governor. When Michelangelo reaches her there, he learns that the girl has committed suicide because of the sexual harassment of the governor, a fervent anticardinalls, who accuses Michelangelo of having murdered the girl.

After Giulietta’s death, Michelangelo Florio Crollalanza decided to flee Italy because the inquisitors had already murdered his father.

We must admit that the similarities between Michelangelo Florio Crollalanza and Shakespeare are intriguing…

Karolina Rakoczy
DID YOU KNOW?

**SCECCU**

Every Sicilian knows the word “sceccu”. It is dialect for donkey or ass and it is also a mocking way of describing someone who is a bit of an idiot or someone who is ridiculous (been called that myself over the years!).

But, what is the origin of the word?

According to the Sicilian language expert Dr. Joseph F. Privitera (Beginner’s Sicilian) “sceccu” (SHEH koo) comes from the Arabic ‘Sheikh”, a name given by the islanders to the donkey, in derision of their medieval Saracen masters, who rode on donkeys from village to village, maintaining order and collecting taxes.

Another story that is probably apocryphal (but fits in with the dislike of invaders by Sicilians) is that the Arabic masters would insist on riding around on their Arabian horses to demonstrate their power and superiority over their Sicilian subjects. The Sicilians decided to poison all of the horses to make the Arabs walk and bring them down a notch. The Arabs, rather than walk, commandeered and rode around on local donkeys until a new shipment of horses could arrive. The Sicilians thought the Arabs in their flowing white robes looked ridiculous riding on the back of donkeys and would mock them as they rode past with cries of “eccu va nu sceccu” (there goes a sheik) and hence, “sceccu” become a word meaning both donkey and a term of derision.

Sebastian Agricola

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**Upcoming TSAA events**

There is much planned for 2014

**Sunday 2nd February**

*Classical Music afternoon with Massimo Scattolin*

**Friday 28th February**

*Trivia Night*

**Tuesday 29th April**

*Sicilian Vespers Dinner*

Saturday & Sunday 24th & 25th May

*Food and Wine weekend excursion to Bright/Mytleford*

All details will be published on the TSAA website

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Kavisha Mazzella has finished recording a new Italian Folk Album *RITURNELLA* " (The Swallow)"

It features songs from 7 regions of Italy including 3 from Sicily: *Fammi Restari, E tra Lla Lleru* and *Mi Votu Mi Rivotu.*

Kavisha plays mandolin, gnnachere (neopolitan castenets) and vocal harmonies. In this collection she has stylistically made a homage to the great Neopolitan folk singer and song collector Roberto Murolo.

Riturnella is available now and will be officially launched in early 2014.

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Visit our web site

www.tsaa.net.au

**Contributions**

To submit contributions to this newsletter or to announce your events and activities please contact the editorial team:

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“The Sicilian Association of Australia”

“The Sicilian Association of Australia Youth Page”

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