



50 Italians and Anna Frank to Honor Remembrance Day

Benedetta Grasso (January 19, 2010)



On the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945, the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute of CUNY has organized the screening of two movies: "50 ITALIANS. The men who Saved 50,000 Jewish Lives" and "Memories of Anna Frank" (January 20, 11:30 am and 6:00 pm). The two events are part of the 4th edition of Rai Fiction Week (January 19-22, 2010)

As we are approaching the anniversary of January 27 1945 - the day the world discovered the tragedy of the concentration camps and revealed the horrific truth of what was actually going on inside them - Jewish communities all over the world are coming together to reflect on their past, to confront with others and most of all simply remember.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day marks the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-



Birkenau by Soviet Troops and it's particularly important for Italy, as it connects with some of the most controversial periods of our history – the introduction of racial laws, the deportation of the Jews and the collaboration with the Nazi. All these topics are still relevant nowadays when the Italian Jewish Community still struggles to define itself, outside of stereotypes, misconceptions and fights for its political and religious goals within a dominant Catholic culture.

In the occasion of this anniversary and as a way to foster discussion, promote knowledge and provide an original point of view on this issue, the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, CUNY) has organized the screening of two movies on January 20th, as part of the 4th edition of Rai Fiction Week (January 19-22, 2010).

There are very few movies that depict the Italian Jewish Community. Still too often these two words together, Italian and Jew, sound almost like an oxymoron as it is little known that Italian Jews have indeed contributed a lot to the national culture. Artists like [Moni Ovadia](#) [2] have sometimes crossed borders. One of the few movies that have had some success abroad is Vittorio De Sica's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*. It shows, in its daily life, an aspect of the country often unknown to most people. Of course, there also was the international success of *La vita è bella* by Roberto Benigni in 1999. Therefore it is important that the work of Italian artists spread these traditions around be supported.

The first movie presented during the festival is a documentary, *50 ITALIANI. The men who Saved 50,000 Jewish Lives*, directed by Flaminia Lubin and produced by Francesco Pamphili. In Jerusalem, at the [Museum Yad Vashem](#) [3] there is a garden for those who, for whatever reason, during the prosecutions, decided to help the Jews and put at risk their own lives to do so. These 50 Italian men, diplomats and generals, found a way to help Jews escape or offered them help of different sort. As described by the authors of the documentary when they started working on it: "We will crisscross through parts of Southern Europe where the 50 Italians were stationed, and where they used all the tools in their possession to avoid handing over the Jews Italian and non-Italian to the Germans. They were the protagonists of a revolt against a cruel, horrific power a revolt which also illustrates the unique personality of the Italians: chaotic, courageous, rebellious and even comic but at their core, a deep sense of humanity."

The second movie, *Memories of Anna Frank* (directed by [Alberto Negrin](#) [4]; with Rosabell Laurenti Sellers, [Emilio Solfrizzi](#) [5], Moni Ovadia) is based on the novel *Memories of Anna Frank: The story of the woman who helped to hide the Frank family* by [Alison Leslie Gold](#) [6], itself inspired by the worldwide famous *Diary of Anne Frank*. The *Diary* had an enormous impact on generations of people, who could read about the Holocaust through the pages of an ironic and naïve 13 years old, in the simplicity of her everyday life, although confined in an attic to hide from the Nazi.

The book was published in Italy by the editor [Giulio Einaudi](#), [7] who struggled to get it out and make it accepted in a society still shaken by the war. It's interesting that recently the book has been put again into question, as Paolo Grimoldi, a deputy belonging to the right-wing party Lega Nord, argued against its reading in public school, on the ground that some of its material are allegedly too explicit and inappropriate.

Both these movies focus on people who decided to help, who stepped out of the "grey area" and made a difference. This is even more relevant today, especially after the Pope's visit at the synagogue in Rome on January 17th 2010, which was surrounded by the ongoing debate about whether or not the Church did enough to help the Jews during Fascism, and whether Pope Pius XII's "silence" and lack of action has to be intended as a form of "collaboration" with the Nazi.

January 20, 2010

50 ITALIANI. The men who Saved 50,000 Jewish Lives
(11:30 AM)

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Memories of Anna Frank

(06:00 PM)

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER

365 Fifth Avenue

Manhattan, New York

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