

Anything Goes: Spending Carnival with(out) Captain Coward

Natasha Lardera (February 07, 2012)



Masks are an important part of the Italian Carnevale festival. Every year there is a growing trend toward pop-culture references in costumes and this season's new arrival seems to be Francesco Schettino. People can buy the outfit online but the character portraying the infamous captain allegedly responsible for the tragedy of the Costa Crociere ship has been excluded by Viareggio's popular float competition.

Batman, Spiderman and Iron Man are just a few of the superheroes that every year come alive and appear in the Halloween parade or trick or treating door to door. Apart from the classics, every year there is a growing trend toward pop-culture references: Halloween 2011's top choices for men was actor Charlie Sheen, who caused a frenzy following his departure from the sitcom *Two and a Half Men*, while women included Katy Perry, Lady Gaga and Snooki (or any member of the gang from the "Jersey Shore" cast). As for the kids, it was all about the popular mobile phone app *Angry Birds* according to Spirit Halloween, the country's largest seasonal Halloween retailer.



Italy does celebrate Halloween too but its real masquerade party happens for Carnevale, a huge winter festival celebrated with parades, masquerade balls, entertainment, music, and parties ... and this year, there is one costume coming from pop culture that the press has declared the country's most popular... Costa Concordia's captain [Francesco Schettino](#) [2], Italy's infamous anti-hero. Whether he "tripped" into a life boat and didn't mean to abandon ship or he is a victim of a witch-hunt, as his wife Fabiola Russo declared in an interview for Oggi Magazine, "Captain Coward," has become a carnival costume.

Several web sites, including, Ebay sell a reproduction of the Captain's hat that can be worn with a white uniform, absolutely kept unbuttoned at the top to show the guy's chest hair just like the captain did.

(on Ebay people can also buy gadgets like casino tokens, mugs and glasses, menus, and so forth. More macabre postings were removed by the administration of the web site that does not approve of profiting from tragedy).

In the days leading to Carnevale, which begins 40 days before Easter, (the 2012 date for Carnevale is February 21 but celebrations in Venice and many parts of Italy start in early February, as did the one in the Tuscan town of Viareggio that started on the 4th) the buzz was that an actor portraying Schettino was going to participate to [Viareggio's famous carnival](#) [3]float parade but the official committee has denied them all.

The Italian press was reporting that a Schettino character was to be added at the last minute to one of the floats; as there was no time to create a mask in papier-mache, singer Gianluca Domenici was supposed to dress as the captain and sing a song "We are on the Titanic" while starring in the "Where is the crisis?" float.

The Fondazione Carnevale, the official foundation in charge of the organization of Viareggio's Carnevale, is very adamant in explaining that they never authorized the presence of a Schettino impersonator in one of the floats that is participating in this year's competition.

The float, created by Fabrizio Galli, titled "Where is the crisis?" portrays the difficult international economic situation by featuring the Titanic as it is sinking. The boat hits the iceberg of public debt and is slowly immersed into the abyss. Behind the Titanic there is the imposing figure of Mario Draghi, president of Europe Central Bank, an Italian economist at the helm of one of the most important banks in the world.

The idea for this float was presented by Mr. Galli himself to the foundation last September, months before the Costa Concordia tragedy. So the similarities with what has recently happened are just a mere coincidence. The original project foresaw the presence of an actor, a singer to be exact, dressed as a naval captain. Neither the designer or the Fondazione Carnevale di Viareggio wish to exploit the tragedy that has recently affected Italy and the rest of the world, so there is absolutely nothing on the float that will refer to Captain Schettino.

Alessandro Santini, the President of the Foundation, and the rest of the staff wish to emphasize their lack of involvement in the rumors that the float was going to somehow portray "Captain Coward" and he declared "Here in Viareggio we know what pain is and our Carnevale, since the moment of its inception, wishes to bring joy and solidarity to those who are suffering. We have done it for the victims of the railroad accident of June 29th (the Viareggio derailment was the derailment of a freight train and subsequent fire which occurred on 29 June 2009 in the train station of Viareggio. 26 people were injured and 32 died) and we want to do it now for the victims of the Costa Concordia."

There is a time for everything and Carnevale is a moment to throw confetti at each other, play pranks, celebrate heroes and satirize on what is wrong. There is no room for the Schettinos in the world, they have been thrown overboard.



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[1] <http://test.iitaly.org/files/carnevalegrande1328646244.jpg>

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costa_Concordia_disaster

[3] <http://www.viareggio.ilcarnevale.com/>