

Italy Is My Second Home, It's That Simple!

Francine Segan (April 11, 2015)



Born to a Syrian-Italian immigrant family in Pittsburg, PA, he was best known for playing alongside Al Pacino in *Serpico* and *Scarface*, before winning the Academy Award for Best Actor for his role as composer Antonio Salieri in *Amadeus*. Here he talks with us about his love for a country where he “never feels uncomfortable or unsafe.”

Murray Abraham may be best known for his Academy Award-winning performance as Antonio Salieri, the famous Italian composer, in the film *Amadeus*, but he has also starred in such fine films as *All the President's Men*, *Scarface*, *The Name of the Rose*, and last year's hit, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. He's also made dozens of films in Italy. This year, he starred in the *Mystery of Dante*, directed by acclaimed Italian filmmaker Louis Nero. In 2004, F. Murray was given the “Premio per gli Italiani nel mondo,” an award from the Italian government. F. Murray is also renowned for his theater and television work, and is a regular on the award-winning series *Homeland*. I'm thrilled he's accepted to chat with us about his connection to Italy.

Let's start with your ties to the bel paese. What does Italy mean to you?

Italy is very important to me – for a couple of reasons. First of all, my mother is from Italy: Giussepina. Because she was so proud to be Italian, she made sure that her three sons were very



aware of the country. I have also made a lot of movies in Italy with very good people. It's my second home. I'm very offended that people have a stereotype of what Italy and Italians mean. They seem to forget the Italian Renaissance; they seem to forget Galileo and Michelangelo and Leonardo and Caravaggio. They forget that they are some of the greatest artists who ever lived.

Tell me a little bit more about your mother. What was it like when you were little in her home? What Italian things did she add?

My mother was from a family of fourteen. My grandfather, Bruno, was a coal miner, on his hands and knees six days a week for 24 dollars a week. He raised fourteen children. My mother was the world to me. I'm a real Italian son; I worshipped her. When I wanted to become an actor, everyone was against it except my mother.

Can you tell us a little about your recent portrayal as Dante?

I can tell you that that is one of the most important films I made – a very little film, but very important. Nero was responsible for it. I think Nero is one of the most important filmmakers in Italy today. He's a very smart man and we based a lot of what we did on the classic mystics in history. There are still important, very independent filmmakers like Nero. There aren't enough of them, but I think they're coming up.

You have performed with some of the great female Italian actresses—Sophia Loren, Claudia Cardinale... Do you have any good stories to tell?

Let me tell you something about Sophia. We were working with Lina Wertmüller, and my mother, at the time, God rest her soul, was very sick in America. I asked Sophia if she would mind calling her to say hello, because all Italians love Sophia. She called my mother and spoke to her for about 25 or 30 minutes. That's just the kind of woman she is. It meant everything to me. If for some reason I had to leave America, my first love, I would move to Italy immediately. When I'm in Italy, I feel like I am at home. It's that simple. I think most people feel the same way. I teach once a year at Cinecittà. I teach Shakespeare and I have a translator for people who don't speak English because my Italian is terrible. Last year, for example, I taught *The Merchant of Venice* and I had everyone perform certain scenes. It was such a good experience that I have been invited back every year. I just feel like I could live there very easily. It's as though I had another life at one time and I lived in Italy. No matter where I go there – the north, the south – because I've worked all over, I'm always welcome there. I never feel uncomfortable or unsafe. People talk about Italy like you have to be careful, but that's not true. That's a lie. I love good wine and I love good food, so I think I must belong in Italy.

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