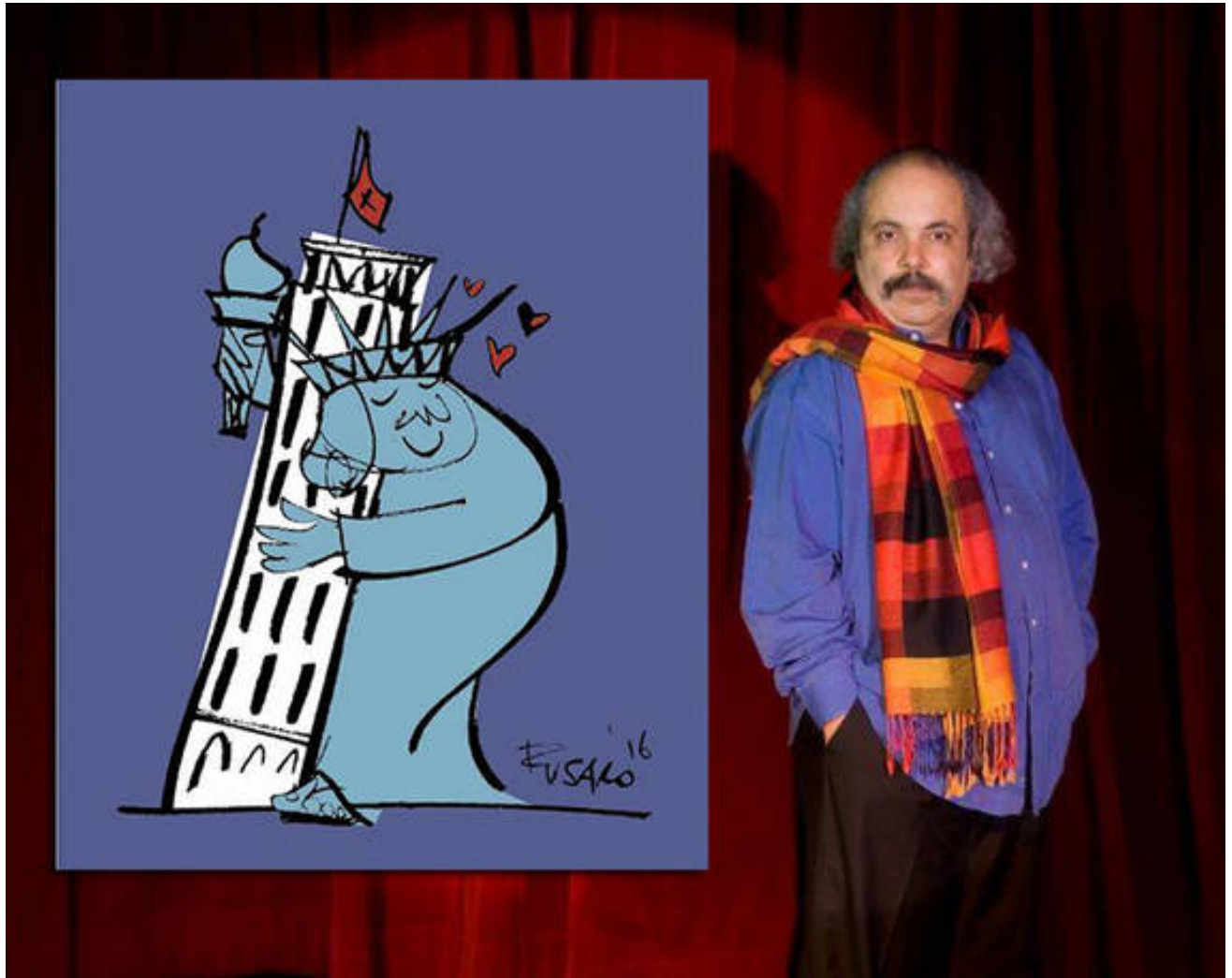


## THE ITALY I LOVE - The Unique Gift of Sociability

Fred Plotkin (June 07, 2017)



I know, I know—Italians are not perfect. But who is? Yet it is the full expression of their humanity that makes being with Italians so pleasurable.

I am asked several times a day—at least—what it is I love about Italy. I find that the way the question is posed says more about the person asking it than how I might answer. The questioner often seeks confirmation for his or her perception of what Italy might be. And that, to me, makes little sense. The Italy the person is asking about represents a mere slice of what Italy is.

For people who love food and wine, that is what they want to know about. And, yes, I think Italian



food is the best in the world and the wine is distinctive because it is made to pair with all manner of dishes that emanate from kitchens in all 20 regions of Italy. There is so much more that we might call the Excellence That Is Italy: Agriculture, Architecture, Automobiles, Cinema, Dance, Design, Fashion, Gardens, History, Literature, Mountains, Music, Natural Beauty, Opera, Painting, Religion, Romance, Scientific research, Sculpture, the Sea, Theater, Urban Studies, and many other things you can surely think of.

One of the things I love about Italy—I have not yet reached the moment to disclose the thing—is the Italian people in all of their beauty and imperfections. They are more connected to their humanity than in many other countries and live life so that everything can be savored.

While in other countries people see social media as a tool of friendship, in Italy they are a tool of communication. But nothing beats the sense of intimacy when you and your Italian friends are together. This gift of sociability is something very treasurable about Italians.

When an Italian is your friend, he or she becomes devoted to you and your inclination is to do the same. All over the country I have people about whom I think and care and they feel the same about me.

I know, I know—Italians are not perfect. But who is? Yet it is the full expression of their humanity—whether it is based on compassion, frustration, irascibility, curiosity, generosity or humor—that makes being with Italians so pleasurable. They are the inheritors of one of the great civilizations the world has known and they often feel its weight and the demands it makes. Such a burden—and the bureaucratic and structural challenge it can impose—means that life can seem less beautiful than it could be. But in Italy, it is the juxtaposition of beauty and burden that makes every delight the nation offers so much more savory.

Which brings me to the answer as to what it is I love about Italy: This nation is an extraordinary teacher for anyone who is open to it and eager to learn. Its civilization and its seemingly natural vocation for creativity means that everything one sees, tastes, touches, hears or smells in Italy is part of a magnificent whole.

Italy is a compliant muse whose only requirement is that anyone who claims to love her be willing to learn and have one's assumptions challenged and upended rather than merely confirmed. Italy teaches us what it means to be human.

A "Pleasure Activist"

[Fred Plotkin](#) [2] is one of America's foremost experts on opera and has distinguished himself in many fields as a writer, speaker, consultant. He has written for the [New York Times](#) [3], [Los Angeles Times](#) [4], [Opera News](#) [5], and other publications. He lectures frequently at the Smithsonian Institution, the Juilliard School, and Columbia University. He is the author of nine books, many of them on Italian topics. He lives in New York and Italy. "I am known as a pleasure activist, which does not connote mindless hedonism, but a deep and passionate pursuit of ideas and knowledge, with emphasis on using one's senses and intuition to the fullest," Fred says. In June 2016, [Frank Bruni](#) [6] wrote in The New York Times: "Fred Plotkin [is] an American who might as well be Italian, given how extensively he has studied and worked in Italy, the subject of many of the books he's written."

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