

In 1993 Philip Contini and I presented a programme in Valvona & Crolla during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe called 'Italia n Caledonia.' Our aim was to show everything that was good about Scotland and Italy. It was a musical feast about food and the stories were all about our grandparents' generation who came from Italy and set up small businesses serving ice cream, fish and chips and Italian produce to their Scottish hosts. Many of these stories were told to us by older Italians who remembered the years before the war. We also watched home movies that were made in the 1930s. In these films we saw our parents and grandparents as youngsters playing football, running races, eating and drinking and having a great time at the annual picnics. We also told stories from our own experience of growing up in the Italian community during the postwar years. We were lucky boys to have aunts and uncles who had ice cream cafes and chip shops – lucky boys indeed to grow up in a community with so many interesting tales to tell.

But there was another story.

Mussolini's declaration of war on Britain on June 10th 1940 was a catastrophe for the Italians who had made their homes in Britain. At a stroke they became 'enemy aliens'. Some of these men were born in Britain. Some of them had sons fighting in the British Army. Britain stood alone against the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy. MI5, afraid of a potential fifth column, interned and deported Germans and Italians living in Britain. Many of these interned Italians embarked on The Arandora Star to be deported to Canada. On July 2nd 1940 the ship was struck by a torpedo from a German U-Boat and sank. There were very few survivors and nearly every Italian family in Scotland lost a father or a husband.

July 2nd 2010 is the 70th anniversary of the sinking of The Arandora Star. It is a time when the dead will be remembered in public ceremonies.

We are revisiting the stories we told seventeen years ago but this time the tragedy of 1940 is not so much the interruption of an otherwise happy story but more of a defining moment. We look back from the dark days of the war to those pre-war days of picnics and holidays and watch the tragedy unfold. When I look at the movies of those picnics I see my mother as a little girl being presented with her prize by Philip's grandfather. They salute each other – not the full straight armed salute, more a wave of the right arm, but nevertheless quite clearly a fascist gesture. There is an innocence in that footage which persuades me to try and look at the unfolding tragedy without hindsight.

Among the British Security Services there were many shades of opinion – there was the official who labelled every Italian as a traitor and there was the local policeman, sometimes well known to the family, who apologised with embarrassment as he made the arrest.

There were many shades of opinion too among the internees on the Arandora Star. There may well have been fascist sympathisers who supported Mussolini. However, the vast majority of the Italians were men whose only home was in Britain, whose livelihood was in catering and some of whose sons were fighting in the British Army. There were also German prisoners of war and there were Germans fleeing Nazi

persecution. They all drowned together alongside the British soldiers who were guarding them and the captain, officers and many of the crew of the Arandora Star.

There are rumours that it might be appropriate for the British Government to apologise for mistakes that led to the deaths of so many innocent people. A happy consequence of throwing off hindsight is that it leaves nothing to apologise for - just a sequence of mistakes. Whether we repeat the mistakes or not – that's our responsibility.

17 years on from the first *Italia n Caledonia* and we are in a new century. There are less fish in the sea and fewer fish and chip shops on the street. There are still some wonderful Italian ice cream makers in Edinburgh but their excellent product no longer defines the world of the Scottish Italian community who are more likely to be found working in hospitals, laboratories, universities and high tech industries rather than in cafes and restaurants. Mazzini's 19th century vision of an independent Italy in a union of European Nations is realised. Europeans move freely from one country to another. The Italians who came a hundred years ago made a far different journey from Italians who come here today. They made a journey that took a week or two and many of them stayed for a lifetime. Today it takes a few hours and they might return tomorrow. The Italian families who stayed for a lifetime gave birth to today's Scottish Italians. They are as Scottish as any other Scot but they have a special place in their hearts, a real place which air travel allows them to visit more often and more easily than their grandparents could ever have imagined. Many of these Scottish Italians cook and eat like their grandparents and they go to live in the Italian villages their grandparents left 100 years ago where they speak to each other in broad Scottish accents.

Mike Maran Productions presents
Italia n Caledonia
Told by Mike Maran and Philip Contini
With music by David Vernon

Some of the material presented in this new version of *Italia n Caledonia* comes from Mary Contini's book 'Dear Olivia' in which she tells the story of Philip's grandfather, Alfonso Crolla, and her own grandfather, Cesidio Di Ciacca, who both perished on The Arandora Star.

Mike Maran Productions gratefully acknowledges financial support from the Consulate General of Italy for Scotland and Northern Ireland.