

Miss Italia nel Mondo. New York Chooses its Italian-American Beauties

Alessandra Grandi (February 27, 2010)



We'll find out in a few months if one of these young women will go to Italy for the world finals, but today we know for certain that five young women have proven themselves and their "italianità."

The 2010 Miss Italy in the World in New York pageant was an undeniable success. On Saturday, February 20 the exclusive Marquee nightclub in Chelsea served as the setting for the event. Fifteen beautiful young women of Italian descent were put to the test by five exceptional judges and had fun parading in front of a large and animated audience.

The event not only drew the attention of the largest Italian media outlets in New York, but it also benefitted from corporate sponsorship by some of the most important companies in Italy, such as



[Alitalia](#) [2], [Birra Moretti](#) [3], [Bronxnet](#) [4], Hector, [Jolly Hotel](#) [5], [Kestè Pizzeria](#) [6], [+Tono](#) [7], [Rai International](#) [8] and i-italy.

The evening comprised three walks by the contestants on the red carpet as well as an interview with the judges, and three performances by guest singers. The five lucky finalists are each represented by a corporate sponsor and will participate in the national competition on April 26. We hope that one of them will be selected to go on to compete in the Miss Italy in the World pageant which will take place in Italy.

Members of the jury included [Mario Fratti](#) [9], writer and playwright whose most well-known work [Nine](#) [10] the musical based on Fellini's film 8½ was recently brought to the silver screen by Rob Marshall; Fred Gardaphé, Distinguished Professor of Italian and Italian American Studies at the [Calandra Italian-American Institute](#) [11], CUNY/Queens College; Aileen Riotto Sirey, Founder and Director of the National Organization of Italian-American Women ([NOIAW](#) [12]); Simone Sandri, correspondent for [SKY Italia](#) [13] and [Gazzetta dello Sport](#) [14]; and Monia Venturini, correspondent for [Costume e Società](#) [15], Tg2's magazine.

With their short but concise questions, the judges attempted to look into the world of these young women, to understand their relationship with Italy and what prompted them to take the stage.

One judge asked, "What advice did your family give you when you told them that you would be participating in the Miss Italy pageant?" "To simply be myself and show myself for what I am. To remain calm and have fun," was one contestant's response.

Mario Fratti, recalling his father's advice to read the newspaper everyday, asked one candidate what useful advice she always carries with her. "I was also told to read the newspaper every morning, and it's a practice that I observe every day."

The theme of family appeared in another contestant's statement, as she responded to the question, "Who are your heroes?" "My parents are my heroes. I admire them very much and I have always looked up to them."

The contestants' responses all reflected a strong sense of family, the desire to travel, and to strengthen that feeling of participating in and belong to a country that despite the distance of empty space still continues to evoke their heritage. There was an overwhelming sense that growing up in two different worlds that do not intersect is a challenge and a privilege. For these young women, taking the Italian stage means reclaiming a piece of their hearts, speaking the language of their parents or grandparents (albeit with strong regional accents), always smiling, and filled with the desire to know more.

Graziano Casale, one of the evening's organizers, President of the [Commissione Giovani NY](#) [16], and Founder of [Sunday NYC](#) [17], co-hosted the event with Rossella Rago, hostess of the online program "[Cooking with Nonna](#) [18]." They were a decidedly successful and brilliant duo, entertaining the crowd and helping to create a memorable evening. Several singers were also given an opportunity to perform: [Gio Moretti](#) [19], an Italian singer who collaborated with Brazilian musicians, Simona D., and the tenor [Christopher Macchio](#) [20] who despite a sore throat still regaled the crowd with a moving performance. The duet with an over-the-top Graziano covering "Io Ti Adoro," originally sung by [Dj Francesco](#) [21] and [Pavarotti](#) [22], was particularly amusing.

Nothing was missing from this evening full of music and levity. Everything was tinged with just the right amount of self-effacing humor that is always necessary at an event of this kind. It should be noted, however, that the participants (along with their mothers) took the competition very seriously.

Every seat was filled, and the audience was animated and engaged. As always, everyone had his or her favorite and everyone was a fan. We saw some young women who were timid (or intimidated) and other young women who without any hint of self-consciousness showed themselves off and talked themselves up in the true spirit of competition and the game.



Christina Maraccini, Miss Italia USA 2009, awarded the five finalists.

Johanna Sambucini, 22, from Rome, was awarded the title of Miss Italian-American Press i-Italy for her ability to communicate effectively in addition to her obvious beauty. With long, dark hair and a captivating smile, she told our reporters: "I am honored to participate in this contest because it allows me to demonstrate my Italian identity. I was born and raised in Bensonhurst, the Italian-American neighborhood in Brooklyn. My family has always taught me about the culture and traditions of our country, values that I hold dear and will in turn pass on."

The other finalists who will go on to compete in the next round in Connecticut are Ligeia Moltisanti, 19, originally from Ragusa (Miss Personality, sponsored by the Jolly Hotel); Margherita Medici, 18, originally from Milan and Cosenza (Miss Poise, sponsored by Moretti Beer); Melissa Fiore, 23, from Sicily, Naples, and Calabria (Miss Elegance, sponsored by Hector Boots), and Syra Maroutti, 20, from Puglia (Miss Hair & Look, sponsored by +Tono).

We caught up with the judges for some commentary on the evening's events.

"It was enjoyable to be among so many young Italian-Americans who are so enthusiastic and who are so obviously connected to Italy," Mario Fratti told us.

Remembering the golden age of Italian cinema and the divas who were admired all over the world and who often became famous after being crowned Miss Italy, we asked him if today the contest still represents a privileged entrée into the entertainment world. "The Italian climate at this moment is not, in fact, moral. There is a lot of corruption, and in this milieu occupied and dominated by decadent television, there isn't a lot of room for cinema." Pleased with his experience as a judge, he also added: "We all agreed on picking the best, most intelligent candidate who was the most prepared."

Fred Gardaphé was also pleased with the evening's events. "I am happy to see that obscenely thin young women, those inspired by runway models, did not participate. For me, an Italian woman is beautiful when she makes an impression because of her physical appearance but also knows how to have a conversation. I think the same is true of Italian-American women. I was impressed by the fact that all of these young women spoke a bit of Italian; it was more than I expected. I don't see beauty as something that is separated from intelligence, and I think this was demonstrated this evening by our choice of the five candidates who will go on the finals in Connecticut."

The Founder and President of NOIAW, Aileen Riotto Sirey, talked to us about the true essence of feminine beauty. "When I look at a woman, the first thing I notice is her eyes. I look for a smiling face that communicates a love of life, success, a desire to understand. I find that Italian women have particularly expressive eyes, and to me, this makes them even more beautiful. The fifteen contestants all had this characteristic, and it was difficult to decide among them. I would have liked to know more about their aspirations, their future plans, but also more about their own personal stories. I sincerely wish them a wonderful future where they find ample space not only to cultivate their beauty but also the charm and femininity that we Italian-American women must always know how to maintain.

Miss Italy is an event that preserves a long history and documents the changes in our country's customs, traditions, and standards of beauty. We are witnesses to the fact that even in small ways, a country never stops talking about itself. Italy has continued to do this with Miss Italy (and its sister pageant, Miss Italy in the World), as it has done with Sanremo, for example, the music competition that just recently wrapped up in Italy. These are the rituals that remind us where we come from and where we are headed.

Translated by Giulia Prestia



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