

Coro Ortobene. From Sardinia to NYU

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Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò welcomed Coro Ortobene from Nuoro on the stage of its small downstairs venue which provides wonderful acoustics for such an event.

A small Sardinian city of Nuoro is the home of 8 folklore choruses consisting of 20-30 people each. That is a significant number of singing souls for a town with a population of about 36,000. Friday evenings after the choirs' rehearsals the streets of the town of Nuoro often fill with the sound of song as the members stroll the streets, meet in the city squares and continue to sing their hearts out. It is not uncommon to hear them serenade under the windows of the locals, especially if they happen to be newlyweds. Seems to be almost surreal, yet the shared passion for their culture and folklore has been in full swing and unswerving since 1973 for members of Coro Ortobene, one of Nuoro's famous, all male choral groups.

Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò welcomed Coro Ortobene on the stage of its small downstairs venue which provides wonderful acoustics for such an event. The stage filled up with identically dressed men led by their Choir Leader, Alessandro Catte, a solo singer and composer who recorded three albums of his own and has been a part of live theater performances and also sang alongside famed Sardinian musicians. He greeted the audience and spoke not only about the choir's history but gave an insight to the spirit that keeps the tradition of folklore singing going strong for so many years. He spoke about the locals' love for their native land of Sardinia, and of how important song and dance are to maintaining regional identity, for Sardinians consider their small island a continent of its own. After setting the mood, the members of Ortobene opened their mouths and transported the listeners from the shores of Sardinia to its mountainous terrains and all the way to the top of Monte Ortobene from which the choir gets its name.

The concert began with a song titled A Duruseddu (F. Satta, A. Catte). In it, a poet grandfather wishes a lifetime of virtue to his newborn grandchild. Among religious themes, popular tradition songs such as this one have a strong presence in the collection of Nuoro's choruses. Other songs written by the same poet speak of the disheartenment that invades his soul when he thinks of that which could have been, the lost loves of the youth, and of the sadness and regret he feels now. He returns to good spirits though when in Focos De Brama (F. Satta, A. Catte) the poet states: "But I will continue to sing of the good that I have dreamt and which guided me in life."

The folk music, or popular music (canto popolare) was often used to voice out things that were forbidden to say in the open. For example in Nanneddu Meu (P. Mereu, A. Catte) the writer pretends to be writing a letter to a friend, Nanni Sulis, whom he tells of the oppression the Sardinians were forced to withstand at the end of the 1800's. A seemingly upbeat rhythm of the song in reality hides the sorrow of a difficult social situation of the time. Procurade e Moderare on the other hand is an open protest of the people. Composed by Francesco Ignazio Mannu, this hymn was written after the dramatic events that took place on the 28th of April 1794, the day in which the revolt led by Giovanni Maria Angioj began. These are examples of the strength of Sardinian identity and their propensity to achieve democracy and justice.

Both song and dance have a strong presence in the lives of Sardinian people. Unu ballu Pilicanu (F.



Satta, A. Catte) is an example of a popular tradition that is still widely practiced in the Sardinian land. Before the presence of musical instruments, dances were solely accompanied by singing, and often when the singing stopped the dancers would continue their movement following the rhythm and sound made by their own steps. Many of the songs in Ortobene's repertoire address emotions and one's state of mind, soul. Moreover, singing was and still is one of the ways of expressing feelings for the Sardinians, whom are known to be rather closed-up when it comes to emotion and sentimental manifestation.

For more information on Coro Ortobene: http://www.ortobene.it/sezione_3.htm [1]

Find a sample of their music here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObIDfnKhT6s> [2]

To learn more about the Nuoro please visit: <http://www.discover-sardinia.com/regions/nuoro.htm> [3]

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