



## Italian-American Acting in NYC. A Life Experience

Marina Melchionda (February 19, 2009)



Interview with Lauren LoGiudice, a young and promising actress and model. She recounts her life as an Italian American in Queens, NYC, and the way her origins influenced her career. She cultivates a strong relationship with her public through the internet



"I grew up in Howard Beach, a largely Italian-American and Italian section of Queens. Everyone I grew up with was Italian, or at least understood that the prevalent culture of the neighborhood was Italian. In high school I was around students of all different ethnicities, but most of my good friends were Italian-American and so was a large part of the student body." From her very first words, it appears that Lauren LoGiudice's private and professional life has been strongly influenced by her Italian Americanness...

"It was not until I went to university at Wesleyan that I realized how isolated my upbringing was. For the first time I was around people who not only were not Italian, but who did not understand Italian culture. They went to high schools with only a handful of Italian-American students at best. Their parents grew up calling Italians WOPS [a derogatory term meaning "With Out Papers".] I had a really hard time relating to these students."

How do you live your multicultural background today?

Now that I am working between Italy and NY I have the opportunity to directly engage with Italian culture. Learning the language, reconnecting with family in Naples and making life-long friends in Rome has enabled me to gain a better understanding of Italy, Italians and my Italian-American family and community.

Tell me an episode in which you felt more Italian than American...

In high school I went to a friend's house for dinner. She was Irish and lived in an Irish section of Queens. Now that I think of it, I think that was probably one of the first times that I had ever eaten dinner at a non-Italian home. We sat down to eat spaghetti and they proceeded to shovel the pasta into their mouths. I politely asked for a spoon and they looked at me like I was crazy. Using the spoon, I showed them how to twirl the spaghetti around the fork so that sauce did not spill all over their clothes. They looked at me like I had invented the wheel.

What is your relationship with the Italian-American community?

When I was growing up I felt like I never fit in, largely because I look so different from my family. My ancestry is only Italian-from Naples and Sicily. For some reason I came out looking Nordic. I am taller than everyone-dad, mom, cousins...I have been fortunate to have been rewarded opportunities to live and work outside of NY. This has enabled me to grow as a person. It was hard at first for my Italian family and community to understand and accept the changes that I have gone through. I was very angry at them for a long time for that. Finally we have all come to terms with what we are and I feel a lot more comfortable with the Italian-American community.

You are a model. What side of your personality comes out the most in your pictures? What kind of emotions do you want to communicate through them?

When modeling I bring the artistry I have developed through acting to convey a story. Every photo needs to tell a story. The model is part of that. You need to take into account the setting, the lighting, the ideas behind the shoot and you need to allow the appropriate emotions flow through you. It is a collaborative effort between everyone involved. I try to sync myself to what we are trying to accomplish for a shoot and push myself to meet everyone's expectations.

You are also an actress. What made you decide to work in this field?

I love performing. I tried a few different fields of work but nothing felt right. I was always a performer and loved it. A few years ago I was lucky enough to be rewarded a fellowship to work in India. My experience in India was intense- poverty and homelessness is rampant. It made me see how lucky I was and that if I was not doing what I love to do everyday-and doing it well-then there is no point. So, I decided to work in acting full-time.

You have worked in TV shows and now you are both a theatre and movie actress. If you had to choose, which one of these three paths would you follow for the rest of your career? Why?



I couldn't really choose between TV, theater or cinema because I learn so much from each genre. I mainly look for projects that are intelligent, with people I love collaborating with. If you made me choose I would say cinema. The film-making process is interesting to me and I love creating characters that people will remember.

Is there an Italian actress from whom you take inspiration?

I take inspiration from Italian filmmakers. Fellini especially. When writing and working on characters I often think of his films.

Your latest work, "Queens Girl", is a monologue in which you transform yourself into different characters and personalities. Is there something autobiographic in it?

"Queens Girl" is largely autobiographical, with a few twists for the stage. It was quite an experience to work on characters that you know-my mom for instance. To truly see the world from her eyes was astonishing.

Why did you choose the monologue form?

Monologues give the audience direct access into the inner life of the character. It leaves them vulnerable, on stage, for everyone to see. Which is phenomenally interesting. We integrated a few other elements to the show-dancing, character interactions-but monologues are my favorite.

What kind of public do you want to reach?

People who need to be inspired. Which is really most people.

You have your own website. Is Internet a mean you use to communicate with your fans? How has it affected your relationship with them?

The internet has become the medium of communication between performers and the public. I have to operate within that reality, but there is nothing like having people see your work and afterwards hearing their thoughts. Direct contact with the public is what keeps me motivated. When I hear how someone has been moved by what I have done I know that I am on the right track.

A message you would like to send to young people like you who want to work in this field...

If you really want to do it you can, but make sure you really want to do it. It is not easy and requires more time and effort than you could possibly imagine. So make sure your heart is really into it before you start.

Projects for the future?

A fun short film called, "Plus One", hosting a webseries and (when I finally have time) a novel.

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