

## Dante, the “Father of the Italian language”



The Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York Prepares to Celebrate the Genius of Dante: Poet, Philosopher, Political Thinker

On the occasion of the 699th Anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri, the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York, Inc. (IHCC-NY, Inc.) celebrates his genius as the great medieval poet and philosopher, on March 24 and 25. On the evening of March 24, a Dante symposium at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute will be held; and on March 25, excerpts from the *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy) will be presented at the Dante Statue at Dante Park, where Dante is positioned in front of Lincoln Center at 63rd Street and Columbus Ave. Following a wreath laying ceremony, an IHCC-NY, Inc. and Società Dante Alighieri di NYC, Inc. sponsored reception will be held at a place yet to be determined.

The events are being planned with the support of the Consulate General of Italy in New York. The New York events follow the Italian government’s recent establishment of an annual national day dedicated to the poet, known as the “Father of the Italian language,” as proposed by the Italian Minister of Culture, Dario Franceschini. March 25 is thought to be the date for the start of the journey by Dante and his guide Virgil in the *Divina Commedia*. The events are in anticipation of the 2021 celebration of the 700th anniversary of Dante’s death, with numerous commemorative events to be planned by educational and cultural institutions, including the Dante Societies, in Italy and worldwide.



Dante’s importance includes his being the first to use the vernacular of Florence in a major literary work, rather than in Latin, which had been accessible to only the well-educated. Dante set a precedence that subsequent Italian writers followed, such as Boccaccio, Petrarca, and Tasso. More important, Dante’s Italian became the accepted national language, unifying the people of Italy across diverse regions and dialects. His *Divina Commedia* with Dante’s journey through Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso, guided first by Virgil, the ancient Roman poet, and then my Beatrice, his idealized love, takes the reader through his epic philosophical poem, considered to be the greatest poem of all times.

In announcing the events for March 24 and 25, 2020, Comm. Joseph Sciame, President/Chair of the IHCC-NY, Inc. stated: “We are most honored to be the protagonists for this year’s 699th anniversary of the life of Dante and will celebrate it well. The events, coordinated by the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York, and spearheaded by long-time member Uff. Mico Licastro, will certainly be varied and celebratory. For those of us in the 21st Century to continue such a recognition after seven centuries is quite incredible, for the legacy that has been left to us by Dante Aligheri!”

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