

A Calabrian Garden in New York

Franco Vallone (April 22, 2010)



The documentary “Terra sogna terra” by Lucia Grillo, filmed in the Calabrian vegetable gardens of New York, will be screened on April 23 at the Calandra Italian American Institute in New York during the conference “Terre Promesse: Excursions Towards Italian Topographies”

“Exterior, day, vegetable garden with fig trees, an aged man surrounded by a tree's leaves picks ripe fruits... Action!”

It takes place in a crop just outside New York City, but this movie makes it seem part of Calabria, while we walk along sunlit vegetable gardens, among figs, tomatoes and purple eggplants, grapevines, red onion from Tropea and hot peppers. These gardens are looked after and cultivated with the same ancient procedures of the Calabrian tradition, with roots, plants and trees often imported to America from the homeland. In reality we are on the other side of the ocean from the homeland, somewhere close to the Big Apple, more precisely in New Rochelle. It is here, in these truly Calabrian gardens that Italian-American actress and director Lucia Grillo decided to shoot her



latest cinematic endeavor.

The documentary is called *Terra sogna terra* [Land Dreams Land], because the immigrants that take care of these cultivated spaces with fatigue and memories, come from “the land”, having all been farmers in the past. Grillo's interesting passionate theme is the outline of the film, centered on these Italian immigrant gardens of America.

The movie will be screened on April 23 in New York.

It contains many interviews, many of which done by the author herself to elderly immigrants from Calabria, (specifically from Francavilla Angitola, in the province of Vibo Valentia, the small town of origin of Lucia Grillo). The director chose to also insert some familiar faces, her 95-year-old grandfather, Francesco Antonio Grillo, aunts and uncles, Antonio Pizzonia, Rachel Rifilato and Vincenzo De Rocco, and also a Sicilian immigrant. “My father is also present in his blue shirt with red stripes, - adds the director - a true inspiration for the documentary because his garden was always a source of wonder and fascination for me”.

Terra sogna terra, twenty minutes long, is the cue for a conference on the theme of *Terre Promesse* [Promised Lands], during which the movie will be screened.

Characters and performers of this document on film were farmers in Calabria during the first half of the twentieth century who painfully chose to leave, migrate, and, once settled in America (all in New Rochelle, NY) began to cultivate vegetable gardens, dreaming of a better life and future; “so - adds Lucia - they returned to 'the land' by holding on to tradition and cultivating American land, taking advantage of it to eat and survive”.

Lucia Grillo was born in New York in 1971, went to school and studied at NYU, got a degree in acting from the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute of New York and later Lucia specialized in the same cinematic school previously attended by Marilyn Monroe and Al Pacino.

After a few years she obtained a second degree, this time in Italian literature, and became present in the world of figurative and performing arts around the world. She obtained a scholarship for Italian poetry and studied music, mainly piano, sculpture and photography. She began acting in the theater, and made her way into the world of television commercials with a few works that even made their way to Europe, among which a spot for a famous vodka in Finland.

For eleven years she lived in Greenwich Village in downtown New York and then moved to Los Angeles, California, where she initially founded a work group called *Sperduti* [Lost] together with other Italian-Americans. The group dealt from the start with film and theater production. After four years of experience in West Hollywood she founded “*Calabresella Films*” which was Associate Producer of the Los Angeles Italian Films Awards in 2002.

Lucia produced and directed LAIFA's television ad. She performed with Vincent Schiavelli, one of the actors of the movie *Ghost*, in *Favole Siciliane*. During those years she appeared in many movies, plays and commercials, among others Spike Lee's *Summer of Sam*, the unforgettable comedy *Winning Girls Though Psychic Mind Control* and the great success *A pena do pana* (shot in Calabria), once again with the great Vincent Schiavelli, in which Lucia Grillo is actress, director and producer. As actress she was also in *Duplicity* [2009] and *Pop Machine* [2006].

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