

"Pasta Poetry Battle" with Grandfather Rana

Mila Tenaglia (June 12, 2014)



When was the last time someone wrote a poem for you? "Pasta Poetry Duel:" a challenge to the last ravioli amongst compositions of poetry and generous samples that Giovanni Rana is offering at Backbar in Manhattan, just behind the well-known Giovanni Rana Pasta & Kitchen at Chelsea Market

Backbar, eleventh street of the finally summery Manhattan. Something truly unusual is about to happen.

It's seven o'clock in the evening, The light outside is still shining strong, but inside the room is dim and all of our senses are pleasantly surprised as the air carries the sent of freshly cooked ravioli and



the sound of the "tic tac tic tac" of the old-fashioned typewriters.

Above, on one side of the room, a balcony similar to the most famous one in Verona. There is no Juliet on it, and no Romeo below it, but above it there is a hashtag that reads #PastaPoetry.

Here we talk about pasta and about pasta we write.

Sitting on the leather chairs are "The Haiku Guys" quickly stroking the keys of the typewrites. What are they writing? They're creating impromptu poems. "Give me a topic and I will compose a verse," says a girl with a smile. I say: "Art," and a few minutes later I am handed a card with the words: "What comes unbidden is a blessing to receive always stay open," by Carolyn Silveira.

Energetic and always with a radiant smile, Antonella Rana comes to meet us, together with the most famous and beloved Italian grandfather, Giovanni Rana.

"The duel is about to begin soon," he says. There is a certain level of adrenaline in the air.

In fact, a pair of impromptu poets, will hold a challenge reciting haiku composed on the spot, the topic is chosen on the spot. Giovanni Rana is the deciding judge. Nearly all participants are American.

The atmosphere is sparkling, the "Haiku Guys" are all dressed "The Great Gatsby" style, they all look stunningly beautiful, especially the girls in blush colors, fringes and vintage hats. You can tell that even their choice of clothes was a studied one. One of them initiates the competition by asking the audience to silence. The gong? A spoon striking a shiny copper pot. How appropriate!

The first theme: "Mother." The contestants take the stage, take a sheet of blank paper, bend over and start writing ... and on it goes, round after round, wins and losses intertwined with a glass of wine and a plate of pasta. The participants feverishly recite their short poems.

Some laughter breaks through in the audience as someone is trying to say a few words in Italian.

Antonella Rana's chooses the word "Verona" as a theme. One of the challengers replies: 'Oh! Verona, I would repeat this word without end, your language is so musical: "Romeo e Giulietta," " Ravioli," "Pesto."

The poets clearly are having fun while composing the short poems and as the jury swiftly decides their fate.

Another theme? Pesto. Here we see a bit of lack of food knowledge in this young poet. He speaks of the green and attributes the color of the Genoese sauce to peas! No... perhaps he doesn't know the smell of basil, since pesto - the real one - you can smell most of all!

The winner? The Italian filmmaker and writer Francesca Coppola. She certainly had the advantage of knowing about pasta and giving her the ability to play with words, but certainly having to write in English did not facilitated the task.

"I've always loved poetry and writing," she tells us after the awards ceremony and a photo with Giovanni Rana. "I heard about this event thanks to my friends Eric and Daniel who perform with me at the Bowery Poetry Club and love Italy," says Francesca, giving us a big smile.

"My friends at the club enjoy writing haiku on the typewriter for random people and during certain types of events, so for all of us and it was very nice to play the game."

Living in New York for more than seven years now, Francesca was awarded last year for her short film "Flamingos" at MoMA and Lincoln Center as part of the "New Directors / New Films 2013."

Of course there is the final photo opportunity with the group and the always-present "Rana-Bag" containing a ravioli usb, a rolling pin and a package of fresh pasta that we can enjoy at home.



Pasta and poetry, what better way to celebrate Italy?

Giovanni and Antonella Rana attended the event with great enthusiasm and curiosity, socializing with all the poets. The atmosphere was truly special. The smell of freshly cooked ravioli in the air transported the mind elsewhere and there was a pleasant dissonance between this classically New York place and what was occurring in it. Poetry, love, pasta and Rana. There could be no better combination.

And we will never forget the sweetness with which Giovanni Rana, at the end playfully posed together with all the participants for a group selfie.

The young poets gave him some poems written especially for him on a piece of paper. We are sure that Grandfather Rana will keep them among his treasured things.

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