

# So, What's Your Nationality?

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"Ryan, hmm, Kevin Ryan, and you say your mother is Italian" ... "Oh, what's that?" ... "Excuse me, your mother is Sicilian. So what are you, Irish, Italian- what?"

I was asked this after reviewing opening night of the superb Solano College Theatre production of "The House of Ramon Iglesia." Before I could respond, a Sicilian folk love song tarantella'ed across my temporal lobe. Then I saw him

Although diminutive in stature, the future of Gioacchino (Sicilian for joy-filled) Piccione would loom large. One afternoon in 1907, under a bright Catania sun, the shining seminarian embarked on a path that would eventually rip him from family and friends. The articulate celibate scholar would soon be smitten by love and tempest tossed into a tower of Babel, illiterate in his new nations' tongue. He would shepherd a different flock. It would grow from a privileged and pampered young Sicilian bride ferrying their meager fortunes and a four year old child on a WW I troop ship; shivering, shell shocked and frightened that the torch of Lady Liberty would not light and protect their path. They were immigrants; new Americans

They would jump into the sugo (sauce) of new citizenry spewing forth from Ellis Island. Some irretrievably lost their unpronounceable names but fewer lost their hope and their passion. They came and they conquered their most formidable adversary- their fears.

In my review I wrote, "Solano College Theatre's gripping production of "The House of Ramon Iglesia"...reminds us that emigration and severing the umbilical cord of ones' homeland is neither surgically precise nor bloodless. America is a jumbo melting pot gumbo of ethnic spice whose sizzle and seasoning is best when (all of our) flavors remain vibrant... (However)... the ... necessity of assimilation of immigrants into the American recipe is undeniable." I think Gioacchino would have agreed

I am Gioacchino's grandson. Although I am 6'3" and he a foot shorter, they say our hearts were cut from the same flesh and our minds shared more than a passing neuron. I am here because that courageous man legally bet on a dreamer, himself, while steeling unwavering faith in the dreamscape on which to paint those dreams, America

So in the wake of the play House of Ramon Iglesia and amidst the political fury fueled by fence builders, illegal free loaders, exploitative "economic pimps", sincere population bean counters, naive open armed idealists and noble "Gioacchino's" from other lands, my eyes are more open. I now see glimpses of a man I never saw.

I see that giant little man a bit in all of us and I know that the loss of failing to see him as clearly before is mine. There is little more American than adopting a nation against horrific odds, bereft and disemboweled of home and loved ones, adopting new ways and working to be part of the process and solution.

So, thank you to generations who built this land. Generations from whose seeds my friends, your friends and our leaders of hearts and minds have been born and enriched our lives.

We have good laws and they should be respected and enforced. We have a language and it must be spoken. We are a dream-works factory and the invitation to place a factory order must remain alive and discreetly extended.

‘American’ has both vowels and consonants. Frankly, if you are here legally and your name has at least one or the other, you are every bit a stakeholder and every bit as responsible to creatively produce as I.

So to all legal residents may I suggest that the next time there is a question about your heritage, pause for a moment and in the very best language of our land say proudly, “I am an American” Count the letters folks; it’s not a dirty word.

And gratzi, mi nonno Gioacchino; molto Gratz!

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