

# NEW FILM PROVES THERE'S MUCH MORE TO MYSTERIOUS SICILY THAN THE MAFIA

And Raises Funds For Italian-American Service Groups In The Process *By Kim Weiss*

In select locations in the U.S. and Canada, folks are flocking to one-night-only screenings of the new feature-length documentary "Sicily: Land of Love and Strife."

Written, produced, and directed by Mark Spano, the film celebrates the island nation's natural beauty, its passionate peo-

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ple and epic human struggles, the depth and diversity of its culture, the philosophic insights that originated in Sicily, and its wealth of historic sites – all facets of Sicily that have been obscured by the mysterious country's association with organized crime.

"Sicily has been the most invaded place on earth because of its fertile land and its location in the Mediterranean at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia," said Spano, a Sicilian by heritage (he holds dual citizenship). "Ownership of the island has been contested for millennia."

He pointed out that Sicily rivals Greece and Egypt as a primary source for Western ideas, "and fewer places on the planet compare to Sicily as a place of wonder and intrigue. Yet the island's association with the Mafia, so deeply entrenched in popular consciousness, has obscured more rounded and accurate depictions of its history and culture."

Spano hopes the documentary he worked on for three years will change public perception of his family's homeland.

Sicilian-American genealogist and author Angelo Coniglio of Buffalo, who specializes in Sicilian heritage, believes it will. "The customs, colors, and sounds of both 'old' and modern Sicily are vividly brought to life by this film," he said. "If you've never been to Sicily, the film will invite you to visit. If you have already been there, then 'Land of Love & Strife' will haunt you."

## Support Through Sponsorship and Enthusiastic Audiences

One of UNICO's objectives is to promote the image of Italian Americans. Therefore, the organization has supported the filmmaker's effort by co-sponsoring the first screening: the U.S. premiere in Kansas City, Missouri, on April 11. Two others followed closely after in Hamilton, Ontario, on June 20; and Buffalo, New York on June 25.

Other sponsors for those shows included the American Sons of Columbus in Kansas City; Sicilia Canta in Hamilton; and in Buffalo, The Italian Cultural Center of Buffalo, the Federation of Italian-American Societies of Western New York, and the Per Niente Club of Buffalo.

Since sponsoring organizations receive a portion of the profit from ticket sales, the screenings have been successful

out, and the crowd loved the film. I was truly humbled by their responses."

Frank Cherrito, former president of UNICO's Kansas City chapter (2009-2011), remembers when the enthusiastic filmmaker first told him about the documentary he wanted to make.

"Mark came to us with an idea," Cherrito recalled. "Although it wasn't really clear to us, the vision he had for this wonderful film was crystal clear to him. And it proved to be an incredible fundraiser for our organization. Many people came out to support the film primarily, I think, because it highlights the Italian-American culture in a positive way."

Jack Ancona, the organization's current second vice president, concurred. "When I heard about the film and was able to view the trailer, I felt that this was a great opportunity for the Kansas City community to see Sicily from a fresh perspective void of stereotype. It inspired me to get involved in the screening here. The interaction from the audience was rewarding, but the comments from my 26-year-old told me that was the audience it was made for."

In Hamilton, Ontario, Sam Cino and Joe Baiardo of Sicilia Canta and Charles Criminisi of Cinema Insieme offered the following:

"Sicilia Canta and Cinema Insieme were pleased to host Mark Spano's film, Sicily: Land of Love and Strife. The film was beautifully created with breathtaking images and a captivating soundtrack. Diverse perspectives on the history, culture and norms of Sicilian life were presented by international scholars and authorities who introduced facts that were unknown to many about this beautiful three-sided island. Feedback from many of the 300 viewers was very favorable. Funds from the screening will be used to promote future community initiatives and events of particular interest to the local Sicilian community."


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fundraisers for each of them. The Hamilton show sold 400 out of 500 seats. In both Kansas City and Buffalo, the 7 p.m. shows sold out in advance. So the theaters in each both cities added late-shows. In Buffalo, the late show on a Monday night at 10 p.m. sold over 100 more tickets.

Although Mark Spano lives near Chapel Hill, North Carolina, he chose Kansas City, Missouri, for the U.S. premiere of his film because he grew up there and welcomed the input he would receive from that community.

"Holding the premiere in my hometown not only allowed me to see friends and family I hadn't seen in years, but it also gave me the opportunity to present my film to a very diverse Middle-American audience," he said. "Their responses were both informative and heartwarming. I could not have asked for more. The theater was sold



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## **Upcoming Shows**

So far, two more special screenings of “Sicily: Land of Love and Strife” are already scheduled:

**The New York City premiere will be held in the Bernie Wohl Center on Columbus Avenue on Wednesday, September 12.**

**The Triangle Sons and Daughters of Italy, Lodge 2817, in Cary, North Carolina, will present the film as a fundraiser on Sunday, November 11.**

Also, the Westdale Theater, a soon-to-open art house in Hamilton and North Park Theatre in Buffalo that hosted the film’s initial show in that city – are planning theatrical runs. No dates have been announced yet.

For more information on “Sicily: Land of Love and Strife” and filmmaker Mark Spano, visit: <https://markspano.wordpress.com/>