



For many, bagpipes conjure up images of Scottish men in kilts – but not so at the Italian bagpipe festival in Maranola, which takes place every winter.

Alessio Surian looks at the *zampogna* phenomenon

ALL PHOTOS BY Angelo Maggio (ARPA)

# La Zampogna FESTIVAL

In Italy, an *edicola votiva* is a holy place, usually a small niche where the statue of a saint or Madonna can be worshipped by local passers-by. Since 2001, Maranola, on the southern Lazio hills (near Formia, between Rome and Naples) has had its own special *edicola votiva*. It reflects the village's devotion to traditional music and in particular to bagpipes. The shrine features a pottery Madonna along with *zampognari*, the local name for bagpipe-players. Those who had the good fortune to be in Maranola for this year's La Zampogna festival would have witnessed, on a cold Sunday morning in February, some 50 *zampognari* and the local priest performing the opening ritual of the festival, a kind of spiritual gathering – a ritual that is sure to become a regular feature of this

annual bagpipe gathering.

And rightly so, because coming to the festival is a kind of ritual; for the group of 30 or so bagpipe-players it is often their only opportunity to meet with fellow players from surrounding villages. Maranola seems to meet their expectations and for the last ten years it has organised the most important winter gathering of bagpipes; a series of concerts that draw a mixed audience from all over Italy, and an essential meeting point for musicians and instrument makers.

Archivio Aurunco, the organisation behind the festival, has been nourishing this spirit of musical fraternity with open air concerts in the town square and small gatherings of people listening to *zampognari* playing in a couple of the local *muntano* (olive oil pressing rooms). For most Italians, this kind

of music is synonymous with wintertime – if you go into Italian churches around Christmas, notice how many nativity scenes feature bagpipers. The music is best experienced live, preferably with some local wine (sometimes served warm).

In Italy, the *zampogna* or *piva* as

it's called in northern regions, presents quite a unique structure when compared to its neighbouring equivalents. The fact that the two main *zampogna* festivals take place in central Italy bears witness to the presence of the instrument mainly in the rural areas of central and southern Italy. While it is uncommon to find it in the northern regions, one of the best players and researchers – Gabriele Coltri – lives in Milan, and other young players can be found in urban areas.

Since the 1970s, there have been two traditional bagpipe festivals: one in Scapoli in July and another in Acquafondata (near to Frosinone) in January. With the disappearance of the Acquafondata festival in the early 80s, musicians needed a new common venue where they could come together during the winter season. Finally, in 1992, Archivio Aurunco took the initiative and organised a free festival, entirely dedicated to *zampogna* in Maranola and neighbouring villages.

Festival director Erasmo Treglia divides his time between touring and recording with the Italian Gypsy music group Aquaragia Drom, managing the FinisTerre label and working on the various initiatives of Archivio Aurunco, including La Zampogna. "When we started," he recalls, "we feared that we were organising an event that would more or less signify the end of an era, the disappearance of the *zampogna*. However, the opposite was true. People who have come to the festival year after year have witnessed how the older generation of



ABOVE: *Surdulina*, bagpipe-player from Calabria

LEFT: Antonio Critelli, pipita-player & Giuseppe Ranieri, bagpipe-player



ABOVE LEFT: **Diego Battaglia**, 'a moderna' bagpipe-player  
 ABOVE RIGHT: **The Tarantella dance**  
 BELOW: **Giuseppe Ranieri playing an 'a chiave' bagpipe**



players and makers have integrated with new ones. The players know that they will meet current makers such as Piero Ricci, who has introduced new holes and notes on the drone pipes, Giancarlo Parisi or Gianni Perilli, whose father introduced significant modifications to the pipes of the old instruments. The general feeling is that we are at a turning point, with young people extending the possibilities of the traditional repertoire, making new instruments with different types of wood (boxwood and ebony) and structural innovations such as adding keys to the drone pipes. Ten years ago, accordion-makers had to provide the reeds, but today bagpipe-makers such as the young Marco Tomassi are experimenting with different materials such as plastic."

For many musicians, one of the main



## We are at a turning point, with young people extending the traditional possibilities

reasons to come to La Zampogna is to visit Tomassi's or Oreste Minghella's stands, along with those of percussion-makers 'O Lione and Raffaele Inserra. Gradually, the local museum of Lazio is gathering a good selection of these fine musical instruments.

In the last couple of years, the three-day festival has almost been a victim of its own success, attracting more and more musicians and a larger audience. The 2002 festival had programmed ten groups but another ten turned up spontaneously. While the festival organisers try to provide comfortable board and lodging facilities for the numerous visitors (some 1,500 people on the Sunday and 250 on the Friday and Saturday), they are keen to offer musicians a meeting place to discuss instrument-making and to exchange and learn specific techniques. The 2003 festival will feature a round table in Maranola on the Sunday, including foreign musicians such as French bagpiper Thierry

Bertrand, while the annual three-day music workshop will focus on *ciaramella*, the keyless double oboe, often associated with zampogna and usually tuned a third apart. Maranola will also host a thematic exhibition, dedicated to the astonishing Jew's harp collection assembled by Fabio Tricomi. Most concerts will take place in the various neighbouring villages of Maranola such as Itri, Monte San Biagio, Esperia and Spigno-Saturnia. Some of the best ensembles performing at the festival come from these same villages, along with outstanding local performers such as Piero Ricci and Emilio D'Alessandro. |

**La Zampogna,**  
**January 24-26 2003**  
**Archivio Aurunco**  
**Via Rotabile 66,**  
**04023 Formia (Latina), Italy.**  
**Phone/fax: +39 06 594 0685**  
**Email: finisterre@iol.it**  
**www.finisterre.it**

### How to get there

It is easy to reach Maranola from Rome by train and bus. It takes about 75 minutes by train to Formia (140km south of Rome). From Formia, it's a 15-minute journey by bus to Maranola, which is the main site of the Aurunci Natural Park, surrounded by mountains of up to 1,500m, a short distance away from the sea. The festival organisers can provide contacts with local hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation. Traditional meals offered by the festival usually include local goat meat and *pasta e fagioli* recipes along with red wine.

### Recommended CDs

The best CD guide to the music is *Italian Bagpipes* (Silex 225111), a 1995 compilation on the French Silex label. This features field recordings made between 1969 and 1990, mainly by ethnomusicologist Roberto Leydi, in Lazio, Molise, Campania, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily. It is an outstanding selection of different instruments, styles and repertoires. *La Zampogna* (FinisTerre FTCD 18) is the first festival CD and includes 21 recordings by the best ensembles.