



An entry from The Encyclopedia of Imagined Italian-Americana

Joey Skee (December 14, 2009)



The lost Christmas special of "The Honeymooners" with an Italian-American theme, from the Imaginarium of Joey Skee.



In January 1956, Jackie Gleason saw a RAI-TV version of Eduardo de Filippo's Neapolitan-language play "[Natale in casa Cupiello](#) [2]" broadcast on "Continental Miniatures," the television program that aired Italian films on New York's WOR-TV (see Martin Scorsese's 1999 documentary [My Voyage to Italy](#) [3]), and decided to produce a Christmas special for his successful The Honeymooners. This episode expanded on the show's previous Christmas specials by including an Italian-American theme.

The plot involves Ralph Kramden seething at his Italian-American neighbor's boisterous Christmas festivities. When he goes upstairs to complain he discovers that the Rossi family is too poor to afford a holiday meal and is simply putting on a show for their neighbors, the Monettis. As in the de Filippo play, Luigi Rossi has built a sprawling Nativity scene (presepio) in his Brooklyn apartment, which fascinates Ralph Kramden.

The show had a stellar cast of Italian-American actors, with [Vito Scotti](#) [4] and [Argentina Brunetti](#) [5] as the Rossis, and [Tito Vuolo](#) [6] and [Esther Minciotti](#) playing the Monettis. [Jerry Colonna](#) [7], with his distinctive bulging eyes and extended moustache, makes a comic entrance doing his opened-mouth siren routine.

The Honeymooners was cancelled in September 1956 and the episode was never aired. "JUS Classic TV" released the episode in 2002 as part of its three-DVD box set "Lost Christmas Specials from the Golden Age of Television." As part of the DVD "Features," Professor Vanessa Longo-Murphy of Montclair State University commented that this episode marked a high point in the representation of Italian Americans in American media, given the "gravitas of the Italianate Christmas Carol theme plunked down in the middle of American's defining television comedy."

In the seven years since the episode's rediscovery and release, it has become an instant classic and seasonal perennial. Now during the holiday season families all over America can be heard joyfully repeating Ralph Kramden's bellowing declaration that closes the episode and, effectively, the television show: "Of course the apartment is a mess, Alice. I'm building a friggin' presepio!"

The author thanks Prof. Bernard, Prof. Carnevale, Prof. Fausty, Prof. Giunta, Prof. Guglielmo, and Prof. Ruberto for their invaluable support of this ongoing research.

Source URL: <http://www.iitaly.org/magazine/focus/life-people/article/entry-encyclopedia-imagined-italian-americana>

Links

- [1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/12172casakramden1260766325.jpg>
- [2] <http://www.italialibri.net/opere/natalecupiello.html>
- [3] <http://www.amazon.com/My-Voyage-Italy-Martin-Scorsese/dp/B000092T5D>
- [4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vito_Scotti
- [5] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/argentina-brunetti-521320.html>
- [6] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0904446/bio>
- [7] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Colonna_\(entertainer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Colonna_(entertainer))