



SULMONA AND ITS “CONFETTI”

THIS SPLENDID CITY IN THE ABRUZZO REGION OF ITALY, BIRTHPLACE OF THE LATIN POET OVID AND WITH ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS REACHING FAR BACK INTO HISTORY, IS ALSO FAMOUS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD FOR ITS SUGARED ALMONDS, KNOWN AS “CONFETTI”.

THE COLOURS AND FRAGRANT PERFUMES WHICH LIGHT UP SULMONA’S MAIN STREET, CORSO OVIDIO, COME FROM THE SHOPS ALONG IT WHICH DISPLAY AN INCREDIBLE VARIETY OF SHAPES AND FORMS OF CONFETTI PRODUCED IN AND AROUND THE CITY.

SULMONA IS THE UNDISPUTED HOME OF CONFETTI. ALREADY IN THE 15TH CENTURY THEY WERE BEING MADE VERY MUCH AS TODAY AND EVEN 100 YEARS BEFORE THERE IS EVIDENCE OF THEIR PRODUCTION AND THE EXISTENCE OF SPECIAL EXPENSIVELY MADE CONTAINERS FOR THE CONFETTI, THE EARLY VERSIONS OF THOSE BOXES OF SWEETS PRESENTED TO PEOPLE TODAY ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS SUCH AS WEDDINGS OR CHRISTENINGS AND KNOWN IN ITALY AS “BOMBONIERE”

CONFETTI IN FACT GO BACK TO ANCIENT ROME, THE NAME DERIVING FROM THE LATIN WORD *CONFICERE* MEANING “TO PREPARE” OR “TO PRODUCE”. THE 1ST CENTURY ROMAN FOOD WRITER GAVIO APICIO WROTE A COOK BOOK ENTITLED *DE RE COQUINARIA* (ABOUT COOKING) IN WHICH HE GAVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING THE KIND OF CONFETTI THAT THEN EXISTED, MADE FROM OF DRIED FRUIT COATED WITH HONEY.

SULMO MIHI
DELIZIA
EST

“Confetti”

Art and tradition

TOWN OF SULMONA
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SULMONA
A B R U Z Z O
A L L A R O U N D



THAT WHITE SWEET COATING

The arrival of sugar from the Orient was what was needed to make confetti as it is produced today - soft insides coated in layers of sweetness, white or other colour outsides. But though confetti are usually thought of as sugared almonds, in fact not only almonds were used. There were beech nuts, hazelnuts, coffee, cocoa, pistachios, aniseed, cinnamon...virtually anything that could be coated in the same way became confetti. Sugar was for a long time a priceless commodity. Extracted from the cane, it was made into crystals and initially called *Arab salt*, because it was the Arabs who started trading it around the Mediterranean from the 8th century onwards. In the 13th century it began to be cultivated in Sicily under King Frederick II, but it remained an extremely expensive product available only in pharmacies. The fact that almond, beech and hazel trees were to be found on the slopes of Mount Morrone and in the countryside around Sulmona gives a clue to why this particular tradition of manufacture was conducive to the area and took root here, as attested by scholars of the 18th and 19th century. In 1792 Michele Torcia wrote: *“These hills produce cumin, coriander, aniseed and other seeds as well, which the people here know how to use to make superior sweetmeats”*, and, likewise, in 1874 Antonio De Nino noted that *“in the old days the fruits from the beech trees in these mountains were gathered and used to make those delightful little sweets”*. Nevertheless, during the 17th century confetti production could not have been a major activity given the high cost of sugar and its relative scarcity. So confetti would definitely have been a luxury item confined to the privileged few and presented as gifts on special occasions to illustrious people. Not until the end of the 18th century do we have the beginning of what can be called “industrial” production, tied as it was to the invention of a new technique for extracting sugar from the sugar beet. At this point the confetti pioneers of Sulmona began to build up their family works introducing new machinery, first steam driven and then electrical. Production today is not in fact very different from the past. The

making of the confetti happens slowly in rotating copper basins and, when the sugar has been coated with syrup and various aromas and then applied in successive layers, the various processes to produce the different types of confetti begin. The final stages are the drying and the wrapping and packing.

THE ART OF CONFETTI MAKING

Sulmona’s very special presentation of its those fragrant confetti in numerous delightful forms and colours seems to have begun when the nuns of the convent of Saint Chiara started to tie confetti together with silk thread in the forms of religious symbols such as rosaries, ears of corn or bunches of grapes, that could then be presented to couples, especially from the nobility, when they came together in marriage or to important people at special events. There is evidence of this tradition from the 15th century onwards but it may well have been common before then. The tradition continued and became a specialist decorative art with flower forms, baskets and bouquets tied together not only with silk thread but also with other fine materials such as tulle and satin. The confetti with their bright colours and sweet scents decorate the outside of Sulmona’s shops and to the amazement and delight of passers-by even spill over on to Corso Ovidio itself.

WHAT’S IN A WORD?

As we all know, in English the word “confetti” refers to those tiny bits of coloured paper which are thrown over the heads of newly married couples to wish them good luck as they depart for their honeymoon. In Italy today, the word used for this kind of “confetti” is “coriandoli”, but, a curious fact is that, in the 16th century the word “coriandoli” was also used in Italy to refer to what the Italians today call “confetti” (i.e. “sugared almonds”). It is also a fact that the word “confetti” in

English is derived from the Italian word, dating back to the early nineteenth century.

TRADITIONS AND BELIEFS

The throwing of confetti (sugared almonds) towards newly married couples to wish them well is a well known tradition in Italy. Confetti and wedding days go together: the white coating stands for the purity of the bride, the two spheres of the almond linked at their edges represent the union between the man and woman, the sugar is for the couple to be happy and thrive. You can choose between offering the confetti loose or in one of a wide range of different containers. If the container called a “bomboniera” is chosen, by tradition it must always contains an odd number of confetti, since, in popular belief, an odd number represents the unusual and has magic power, and the fact that an odd number cannot be divided by two confirms the indissoluble nature of the marriage. In addition, an odd number is a good omen for the birth of a child, in the sense that when this happens two become three. The confetti are thus symbolic of the continuity of the family, of life itself.

NOT JUST WHITE

As a symbol of celebration, of a happy event, or of an important day, confetti lend themselves easily to virtually any occasion. Any colour can be chosen, each representing a particular occasion: blue or pink for a new baby, red for the award of a degree, gold or silver for wedding anniversaries, lilac as the new colour chosen for today’s gay unions.

FACTORIES

Sulmona has nine factories which work full time producing confetti – evidence of a proud tradition which is very much alive in our city. From the oldest to the most recent, all strive continually to improve

the quality of their product and to ensure that Sulmona confetti remain the very best to be found anywhere. Still operating today are those factories that pioneered confetti making in the early days and managed to survive even the most difficult times. Their history still manifests itself today in the forms of their buildings and their equipment from the past, all in Liberty or Art Deco style. If you visit them, you can taste some of their many kinds of confetti they make and admire their displays of fascinating objects from the history of confetti making.

CONFETTI MUSEUM

Sulmona’s *Confetti Museum (Museo dell’Arte e della Tecnologia Confettiera)* was opened in 1992 and pays ample tribute to the history of the product. It occupies the two floors of the fine late 19th century building which was originally the *Mario Pelino Confetti Factory*. On display are rare and interesting historical objects, such as production machines, tools, articles used to carry out administration, confetti containers, testaments of satisfaction, and records of prizes won. There is also a reconstruction of an eighteenth century confetti workshop with old instruments such as machines for milling and roasting, a threading tool, vases with ancient ingredients, a peeler, polishing machine, etc.

FINALLY

Sulmona has a traditional reputation not just for confetti but for all kinds of sweet things. For example fine nougat and cream cake (“cassata sulmonese”), special nougats (“torroni”), chocolate and nut cookies called “scarponi”, as well as the famous “ceci ripieni”, small filled pastries bursting with delicious ingredients. Here we have triumphant blends of sugar and nuts, almonds, lime, walnuts, pressed grape juice (“mostocotto”), chocolate...delicacies for every taste in fact. And there are also Sulmona’s famous digestive drinks, one of them a precious distillation of gentian root, another the much appreciated *Centerbe* (“hundred herbs”).

THE CONFETTI FACTORIES

- Pelino Confetti Factory
- Di Carlo e Figlio Confetti Factory
- Pareggi Confetti Factory
- D’Alessandro Confetti Factory
- DiSulmona Confetti Factory
- William Di Carlo Confetti Factory
- Rapone Confetti Factory
- Ovidio Confetti Factory
- Palazzone Confetti Factory

