

Interview with William Sersanti on the feast of “Our Lady of May”- (Madonna di Maggio) in S. Oreste (Rome) great lover of the history of his country.



Environmental Guide Hiker, Higher Technician for the Organization of Marketing and Integrated Tourism and with a curriculum studiorum linked to the Conservation of Forests and Nature, he loves ecotourism, walks in the woods, the familiar environment of small villages, customs typical, the aromas and flavors of genuine products. He also deals with ethno-folkloric research in the municipality of Sant’Oreste, his hometown, collaborating with exponents of the Interdisciplinary Group for the Study of Traditional Culture of Upper Lazio.

Could you make a brief presentation of S. Oreste, your village, and describe its relationship with the feast of “Our Lady of May”?

S. Oreste is located 40 km north of Rome on the ridge of Mount Soratte, known for its shape and its isolated position which rises in the middle of the plain of the Tiber river; therefore the town enjoys a unique position on the valley, characterized by a varied landscape with the background of the Sabine Mountains in the distance. I am William Sersanti, a great lover of the history of my village where I also work as an Environmental Hiking Guide. In 2020, the Municipal Administration and the Pro Loco gave me the symbolic title of "Ambassador of the Santorestese Culture" precisely because I have always wanted to make it known even outside the territory. Regarding my relationship with the feast of “Our Lady of May- Madonna di Maggio”, although I am not an active part of the committee (even though I participated in lighting the reeds just once), I live it intensely, with respect and admiration. And above all I try to talk about it on every useful occasion, in order to ensure that as many people as possible become aware of it.

Could you briefly say what the feast of Our Lady of May consists of?

Every year, on the last Sunday of May, since 1814, the feast of “Madonna di Maggio” has been celebrated as the most important and heartfelt anniversary in town. For the occasion, the historic centre is adorned with sumptuous flower decorations (the one on the main altar of the collegiate church of San Lorenzo Martire is not to be missed), triumphal arches and coloured balloons; in addition, there are many cultural initiatives that are a corollary to the event. The event ends in the evening with the transport of the historic "machine" by porters on their shoulders, with the unmissable votive torchlight procession on Mount Soratte and with a magnificent fireworks display. It is a unique ceremony of its kind, in which faith, folklore, a sense of belonging and tradition come together and coagulate indissolubly, creating an atmosphere of wonder.

Who is involved in the preparation and celebration of the feast?

A large part of the population is involved in the preparation of the feast and the various activities are coordinated by a committee of volunteers, made up of people of all ages.

How long does the preparation and celebration of this holiday take?

It begins in the winter months (January, February), when some men gather periodically to cut the reeds that in the spring months (March, April, May) will be left to dry, then gathered in special "bundles" and suitably positioned on the part of Mount Soratte facing Saint Oreste, in order to be set on fire on the evening of the celebration of the feast. Other men, over the last month, carry on what is locally called "a cerca da Madonna", a sort of itinerant begging, which goes around the districts of the historic centre, with the aim of raising funds. And speaking of fundraising, women are no less important: they cook sweets and various delicacies, which are sold on the Sundays preceding the important anniversary.

What does this participation and the feast itself leave you inside?

Participation and the feast itself leave a great sense of belonging, as well as pride and emotion. It is an occasion in which many people from Sant'Oreste who, for various reasons are forced to live elsewhere during the year, return to their town specifically to breathe the air of the celebration, that air that invigorates and tones the cultural roots of every citizen from Soratte. Without a shadow of a doubt, this anniversary represents the identity symbol par excellence of Sant'Oreste.

How do you keep this tradition alive?

The only way to keep this tradition alive is to let the youngest people live and get to know it (in the broadest sense of the term), so that they can appreciate its intrinsic values and understand its importance, its essence. And in this, I must say that the members of the committee are very good, as older people often try to involve their children and grandchildren, by passing the tradition down from generation to generation.

Could you suggest a way to make this feast better known?

With regard to giving greater visibility to the feast, nowadays it is certainly an achievable result: I would focus a lot on telematic promotion, which allows you to get anywhere.

