ITALY

SAINT AGATHA's FEVER

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parallelozero

Catania (Italy), fireworks above Saint Agatha's cathedral during the festival

In February, the religious feast that turns Catania in a theater

"In Catania - wrote novelist Giovanni Verga at the end of the 18th century - Lent comes with no Carnival. To compensate this, there's the festival of Saint Agatha, a great city event where the whole town turns into a theater". The festival of Saint Agatha, held every year from February 3rd to 6th, more than a century after is still this alive, transforming Catania in an gigantic stage where saint's devotees (the whole city) act full time.

This is one of the most popular events of Christianity, defined by UNESCO one of the "ethno-anthropological heritage of humanity". Agatha, the Picciridda (the little girl) was born in the third century in Catania, and resisted the advances of the Roman proconsul Quintianus through violences and atrocities that killed her, in the end, including the cutting off of her breasts.

A 1969 movie titled "That splendid November", starring Gina Lollobrigida and with the soundtrack by Ennio Morricone, shows clearly the unbelievable amount of energy Catania radiates during those magic days: the overwhelming devotion, the folklore made of sweat and tears, the sleepless nights the cittadini (citizens, as the devotees are called) spend chasing the palanquin conserving Saint Agatha's relics. And that mix of sacred and profane that in the Duomo square sees together mafia and religious cult.

Catania (Italy), two valets dressed up like in 17th century during a reception in the town hall in the days of the festival of Saint Agatha

Catania (Italy), Pardo square: during the festival of Saint Agatha a group of young women waving red carnations, symbols of the martyr of the saint

Catania (Italy), aerial view of the town

Catania (Italy), a candlemas coming to honour the town hall in the Duomo square during the festival of Saint Agatha

Catania (Italy), Saint Agatha's icons for sale in the San Cristoforo district during the festival dedicated to the saint

Catania (Italy), a reception in the town hall during the festival of Saint Agatha

Catania (Italy), celebrations during the festival of Saint Agatha in front of the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Carmine

Catania (Italy), a devotee in the cathedral of Saint Agatha waiting for the relics of the saint

Catania (Italy), carrying a cardboard candlemas during the festival of Saint Agatha. From left: Alessio Privitera, 8 yo, Salvatore Russo, 7, Rosario Conti, 10, and Michael Calogero, 7

Catania (Italy), people waiting for the fireworks in Etnea street during the festival of Saint Agatha

Catania (Italy), during the festival of Saint Agatha, members of religious confraternities are waiting for saint's relics in Stesicoro square, in front of Saint Biagio's church

Catania (Italy), during the festival
of Saint Agatha Cardinale Dumset
street is light up by illuminations

Catania (Italy), during the festival of Saint Agatha some candlemas carriers pause in front of the town hall

Catania (Italy), during the festival of Saint Agatha in University square: the bishop Salvatore Gristina (left) and Catania's mayor Enzo Bianco

Catania (Italy), during the festival of Saint Agatha the crowd follow the silver palanquin that conserves the relics of the saint

Catania (Italy), during the festival of Saint Agatha some candles light up an image of the saint inset in a wall

Catania (Italy), during the festival of Saint Agatha two tourists take some pictures from the roof of the Diocesan Museum

Catania (Italy), during the festival of Saint Agatha, a group of devotees wearing the traditional white 'sacco' (sack) take a break in a bar

Catania (Italy), a scale model of a candlemas and dolls wearing the tradizional white 'sacco' (sack) for sale during the festival of Saint Agatha

Catania (Italy), enjoying the fireworks from the town hall courtyard during the festival of Saint Agatha

Catania (Italy), devotees following the relics of the saint in Stesicoro square during the festival of Saint Agatha