

ITALIY

LISCIO FOLK DANCING

by Laura Liverani





Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), a dancer from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) shows a detail of her handmade costume during a rehearsal in a community centre; costumes are usually handmade by the dancers themselves, relatives (typically aunts or grandmothers), and family friends.



Punta Marina (Ravenna, Italy), dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) line up on stage after an outdoor summer show by the beach.

The liscio is the popular Italian dance of the Romagna Riviera.

After a period of apparent decline, it is making a comeback especially among the younger generation

Liscio, the Italian version of ballroom dancing, originated at the end of the 19th century in the Romagna region, and later spread all over the country. This type of popular dancing, which is also known as Romagnolo Folk, comes from the polka and the mazurka, and is usually performed in pairs. Liscio had its heyday in the 1980s, but in recent years it has been going through a process of cultural and social revitalization, after over a decade of apparent decline. On closer inspection, however, it's clear that Liscio never stopped being practiced, especially in rural areas. The dance has always been ubiquitous on the Romagna Riviera: at summer festivals, in the countryside or on beach stages with live orchestras, in dedicated ballrooms called balere, where ballerini of all ages dance and the sciucares, the whip lashers, strike their whips to the sound of the clarinet.

Despite being more visible in the summer with public dance shows, Liscio is practiced all year round, in small villages and towns alike,

in amateur schools, dance groups and clubs in Emilia Romagna and elsewhere. Here children and adults, who are often part of the same extended family, learn the tradition of Romagnolo folk dancing together. The youngest members in folk dance schools are usually referred to as 'miniballerini' (little male dancers) or 'miniballerine' (little female dancers). They are often introduced to the dance group by their older relatives, who are dancers or former dancers at the same club. Dancing partners can rehearse and perform together for years, sometimes from a very early age. On stage they wear matching costumes that are typically handmade, either by themselves or by relatives. It's also quite common for dancing partners to become a couple outside the dance club. How did this popular tradition develop into the passion that still engages amateur dancers across generations, not only in Emilia-Romagna but all over Italy? What is the significance of folk dancing in building a sense of belonging, identity and community?



Marina Romea (Ravenna, Italy), a dancer and Sciucaren from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) ready to perform on stage at a summer show at a beach camping site; the “whip dancers” or “sciucaren” in Romagnolo dialect, accompany polkas and mazurkas with the sound of their whip in a series of choreographed moves.



Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), a dancer from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) poses to show the back of her handmade costume during a rehearsal in a community centre; costumes are usually handmade by the dancers themselves, relatives (typically aunts or grandmothers), and family friends.

On stage they wear matching costumes that are typically handmade, either by themselves or by relatives. It's also quite common for dancing partners to become a couple outside the dance club. How did this popular tradition develop into the passion that still engages amateur dancers across generations, not only in Emilia-Romagna but all over Italy? What is the significance of folk dancing in building a sense of belonging, identity and community? The series portrays two amateur dance clubs and schools in Romagna: the Gruppo Folk Italiano 'alla Casadei' at the Scuola di Ballo Malpassi (the Malpasso dance school) and the Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (the Thousand Lights dance group). The Malpassi is one of the most iconic and respected schools, and

is based in Ravenna, a town in the Romagna region. The school caters to all generations; its dance group performs at local fairs and summer festivals, as well as at national folk dance events. It also appears on television, and took the stage at Sanremo, the country's most popular music festival. The school's founder Bruno Malpassi, who is now in his eighties, learned Ballo Liscio dancing as a boy in postwar Romagna, and started his first dance group in 1968. The Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci, on the other hand, was founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, a small village in the Romagna countryside. It is, however, a young liscio dance club, seeing as it's managed by a woman in her twenties, and many of its members are teenagers and children.



Fosso Ghiaia (Ravenna, Italy), plastic chairs are lined up in front of the outdoor stage at a summer festival in a countryside village, for an upcoming live dance show by Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci, a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside.



Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), three dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) pose for a portrait during a rehearsal in a community centre, wearing handmade costumes, that are typically made by relatives.



Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), three child dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) pose for a portrait during a rehearsal in a community centre, wearing handmade costumes typically made by relatives.



Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy) students wear dance shoes and tracking suits during a rehearsal at the Malpassi dance school (one of the most iconic and respected Liscio folk dance groups in Italy) in the community centre where the dancers normally train.



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Marina di Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), partner dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) fix each other's costumes backstage, before entering the stage at an outdoor summer show at a beach camping site.



Punta Marina (Ravenna, Italy), two 'miniballerini' or child dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) pose for a portrait on stage after a summer beach show; child dancers are often introduced to the dance group by their older relatives, who are also dancers or former dancers.



Marina Romea (Ravenna, Italy), dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) perform on stage at an outdoor summer show at a beach camping site.



Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), three dancers from the Malpassi dance school pose for a portrait during a rehearsal in the community centre where they normally train, wearing the uniforms that were especially designed for the Romagna-based dance group, one of the most iconic and respected Ballo Liscio schools in Italy.



Marina di Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), the mother of a young dancer from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) waits backstage at an outdoor summer show at a beach camping site, by the dance group tour van and racks of stage costumes and plain clothes.



Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), a child dancer from the Malpassi dance school poses for a portrait during a rehearsal in the community centre where they normally train, wearing the uniform that was especially designed for the Romagna-based dance group, one of the most iconic and respected Ballo Liscio schools in Italy.



Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), two dancing partners from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) pose for a portrait during a rehearsal in a community centre, wearing matching costumes, that are typically handmade by themselves, or by relatives.



Fosso Ghiaia (Ravenna, Italy), a dancer from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) enters the stage at an outdoor summer festival show in a countryside village.



Fosso Ghiaia (Ravenna, Italy), two dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) pose for a portrait backstage at an outdoor summer festival show in a countryside village.



Marina di Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) wait for their turn backstage before entering the stage at an outdoor summer show at a beach camping site.



Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), a “miniballerina” or child dancer from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) poses for a portrait during a rehearsal in a community centre, wearing a handmade costume.



Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), a “miniballerina” or child dancer from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) poses for a portrait during a rehearsal in a community centre, wearing a handmade costume.



Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), the interior of Circolo Endas, the community centre where dancers from Malpassi dance school (one of the most iconic and respected Liscio folk dance groups in Italy) normally train, featuring a giant tropical beach poster pasted on one of the walls.



Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), two dancers from the Malpassi dance school pose for a portrait during a rehearsal in the community centre where they normally train, wearing the uniforms that were especially designed for the Romagna-based dance group, one of the most iconic and respected Ballo Liscio schools in Italy.



Alfonsine (Ravenna, Italy), two dancing partners from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) pose for a portrait during a rehearsal in a community centre, wearing matching costumes, typically handmade by themselves, or by relatives.

Punta Marina (Ravenna, Italy), the dunes at a beach venue hosting a Liscio outdoor dance show by Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci, a Romagnolo folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside.





Punta Marina (Ravenna, Italy), a dancer from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci, a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside, poses for a portrait on stage after an outdoor summer show by the beach.



Ravenna (Ravenna, Italy), two dancers from the Malpassi dance school pose for a portrait during a rehearsal in the community centre where they normally train, wearing the uniforms that were especially designed for the Romagna-based dance group, one of the most iconic and respected Ballo Liscio schools in Italy.



Punta Marina (Ravenna, Italy), dancers from Gruppo Ballerini Milleluci (a Liscio folk dance club and school founded in 1974 in Alfonsine, in the Romagna countryside) on stage at an outdoor summer beach show.

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