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# Corsica Bulltinu

June 2009

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## Some useful links...

OUR PARTNERS...

Corsica Isula - a mine of information about Corsica

Corsicaholiday.com - your

Corsica holiday booking site

-//-

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5. Visit Corsica Isula's revised travel pages

6. Book a holiday with Corsican Places

## Dear Dermot,

I'm writing this on a beautiful June morning in England, but by the time you get this I'll be enjoying Corsica's sunshine. So, greetings from our favourite island!

To start this summer edition of Corsica Bulltinu, I want to introduce you to an artist called Francis Katz. He is not Corsican, but has taken this island to his heart and spends much of his free time here.

Next up we have Liz Casanova's second article about Corsica's defences - this time her subject being World War II. Mo Browne contributes a haunting poem about the herb Immortelle, and Robert Sharp paints a pen-portrait of Ajaccio's 1920s star Irène Bordoni.

Finally, I've added a note about a polyphony workshop, which may interest some of you.

Enjoy Corsica Bulltinu!

Mac

## Corsica as you have never seen it before...



I get several emails every day about Corsica. Some are wistful - from people who want to visit our favourite island and can't do so for one reason or another. Others

7. Corsica Isula car hire at great prices

-//-

SITES FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

Liz Casanova's new site about Corsica

The paintings of Francis Katz

Newswire photos of Irène

Bordoni

Polyphony workshop: Maison

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Buy Lonely Planet's Guide to Corsica

Buy the new Granite Island edition

are partisan - pushing the case for Corsican independence, perhaps, or arguing some other cause. I also get my fair share of spam (who doesn't?) and I sometimes hear from lazy travel agents who can't be bothered to do their own research.

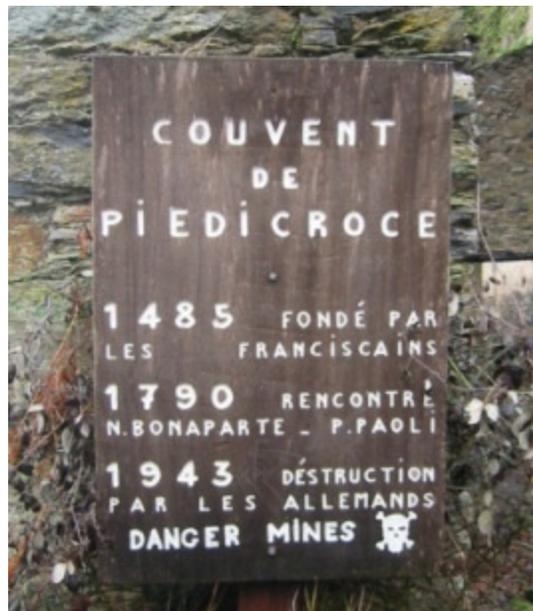
But every now and again, I receive a communication that gives a new perspective on Corsica, and one of these arrived in my inbox last month. Londoner Francis Katz discovered Corsica a few years ago while sailing with a friend, and, like so many of us, instantly fell in love with the place.

Francis is a painter, and since 1994 he has been exercising his talent in Corsica. If you like your paintings to be photographically accurate representations of well loved scenes, you probably won't much like his work. If on the other hand, you appreciate art that captures the spirit of the place, you'll love it. He does oils and watercolours.

I'm no art critic, but Francis's paintings remind me a little of Cézanne. However, the famous impressionist never saw the colours of Calvi's sun-bleached buildings at sunset, or the green hills behind Tizzano. Francis has an unfair advantage here!

You can see more of his paintings, or even buy one, [here](#).

## Occupied: Corsica During World War II



**By Liz Casanova**

*The Convent of Piedicroce in the Castagniccia, site of the famous meeting between Pascal Paoli and Napoleon, was one of the casualties of World War II.*

On November 11, 1942, Corsica was occupied by 85,000 Italian troops. The following year, Hitler sent 10,000<sup>1</sup> German soldiers to fortify those troops, fearing that Corsica would be the site of a future Allied invasion. With a population of 215,000 inhabitants, this amounted to about one soldier for every two islanders.

### Setting the stage

Two weeks later on Nov 27, 1942 the French navy stationed in Toulon was ordered to sink its own ships, but the crew of the submarine *Casabianca* refused to obey orders and fled to Algiers under enemy fire to join the Allies.

On December 14, 1942, the Casabianca made its first secret landing in Corsica, on the Gulf of Porto, bringing weapons, explosives and commando forces to the island to strengthen the resistance movement. By the summer of 1943, Corsicans had assembled a partisan movement of 12,000 combatants from all corners of the island.

### **A secret location**

On the northern coast of Corsica, between Ostriconi and Saint-Florent, lies a desolate area known as the Desert of Agriates. On this remote coastline is the beach of Saleccia, one of the most beautiful in Corsica and to this day, accessible only by foot, 4-wheel drive or boat.

Except for a small military presence in Ostriconi, Saint-Florent and the village of Casta (south of Saleccia), the Italian troops considered it was useless to monitor and occupy this deserted and inhospitable area. For this reason, Commander Jean L'Herminier chose Saleccia as a convenient location to disembark the Casabianca and unload more than 20 tons of weapons and explosives, in July and August of 1943. After each mission, local peasants from Casta spent several weeks helping leaders of the resistance to transport the cargo, guiding their mules at night through a three hour hike along the path that runs from Saleccia to the village of Casta. The path was not far from the Italian camp stationed at Casta. Despite the dangers, the peasants led members of the resistance through the nearby mountains where they met other fighters who distributed the weapons to other resistance cells on the island. By the time Italian soldiers discovered the plot, after the second landing, most of the weapons had already been moved to safety.

### **The liberation of Corsica**

In July 1943, following the invasion of Sicily, Hitler began to move his forces from Sardinia to Corsica, from where they could be easily deployed to the Italian mainland. When Italy surrendered on September 3, many Italian soldiers joined the resistance fighters and fought the Germans while others removed their uniforms and tried to blend with the local population.

On September 13, 1943, the Casabianca, in its final mission to Corsica, transported 109 men from Algiers to Ajaccio as part of Operation Vesuvius, where 6,400 French troops were shipped from North Africa to capture the island.

After several days of intense fighting near Bastia, the Germans finally withdrew on October 3rd. Unfortunately, due to miscommunication from Allied Command, the following day American bombers tragically attacked and killed hundreds of civilians in Bastia, as the city celebrated in the streets. On October 5, 1943, Corsica officially became the first department of France to be liberated, eight months before the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944.

### **Solidarity with France**

Corsicans continued fighting in the continent until the Nazi surrendered on May 8, 1945. Despite their Italian family names and the similarities between Corsican and Italian dialects, by the time war broke out, the majority of Corsicans thought of themselves as French. The mistreatment and reprisals inflicted on Corsicans by Mussolini's soldiers during the occupation strengthened their bond with France and for the first time, speaking French came to represent for them freedom from totalitarian oppression and loyalty to a greater cause<sup>2</sup>.

### **Epilogue**

It is estimated that one in 20 men in Corsica was a resistance fighter. Their endurance and audacity, coupled with centuries of experience resisting occupation, no doubt helped Corsicans recapture their island in less than a year, eight months before D-day.

However, the Liberation of Corsica would not have been possible without the daring missions of Commander Jean L'Herminier who managed to complete seven successful landings in Corsica, and supplied the resistance with much needed weapons, radios, commando forces and money from the Allies. Despite being crippled by disease, he refused to abandon his post as long as France remained occupied.

On October of 1952 Captain L'Herminier was awarded the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor for his heroic service during the war. He died a year later on June, 1953 at the age of 51.

It is also important to recognize the contributions of thousands of soldiers from the French colonies of Africa who fought alongside Corsicans in their struggle to free the island. Hundreds of them died in the fierce battles that took place on September and October of 1943 as the Germans retreated. A monument to their bravery and sacrifice stands today on the highway between Bastia and Saint-Florent at Col de Teghime, a mountain ridge with a stunning view over the Gulf of Saint-Florent.

Corsica was the only French territory where Jews were not persecuted during WWII.

<sup>1</sup> *Towards the end of the occupation the number of German troops increased to 27,347 as a result of the evacuation of Sardinia into Corsica, ordered by Hitler on September 1943.* - The Second World War, by Sir Martin Gilbert.

<sup>2</sup> The State, the Activists and the Islanders, - by Robert J. Blackwood

### **Further reading**

Corsicans remember Americans of World War II - [International Herald Tribune, June 10, 2008](#)

### **Immortelle**



Every issue I plead for stories, pictures and poems. Poems of a suitable length and subject matter have been very thin on the ground, until now.

I'm pleased to say that Mo Browne has changed all this and has sent us a poem with a very Corsican theme, and I have great pleasure in reproducing it below.

Mo tells us that Immortelle, which of course grows all over the island and contributes its

mysterious scent to the fragrance of the maquis, has been revered as a herb since the time of Homer and the ancient Greeks for its great wound-healing ability. it is said to heal physical and emotional scarring, and open the heart.

This picture, by the way, was taken not in the wilds of the Balagne but in the [Park of Saleccia](#), which you can find on the coast road just north of Ile Rousse. I heartily recommend you visit if you haven't done so already.

And if you have a poem about Corsica in your heart, I'd be delighted to receive it!

### Immortelle - by Mo Browne

## Immortelle...

I was reading X's poems  
about trees, plants and flowers  
that survive on the edge of the land,  
when I remembered being told  
by Y, near the Tartagine,  
that the plant bravely growing  
in her rock-strewn lower pastures,  
was a sure cure for many ills.

≈

I forget its shape and colour—  
recalling only: *immortelle*,  
just the lovely sound of it,  
the very lofty claim of the name.  
I thought perhaps it could help  
feed my malnourished brain,  
extend my life for three decades.  
I saw myself pounding leaves  
in a pestle and mortar, to make  
a *tisane*, an elixir of life.

≈

Then we saw the dead cow,  
a perfect Damien Hirst creation,  
skin tautly stretched on bone,

The fireman-farmer, Z, smiling,  
said he could charge to view this art,  
exhibit it, get rich quick!  
We looked from 20 yards away.  
I thought: a lengthy 2-year wake  
in an alfresco funeral parlour.

≈

The sun slipped, casually,  
behind the sullen snow-tipped crags,  
their shadows slowly inching down  
the lushly velvet fields.

Uphill, past the turkey oak  
that straddled a huge, smooth rock  
as if laying an enormous egg,  
we found a cow's eyeless skull,  
a finely blanched *memento mori*,  
home to leaves and small insects.

≈

Z said, "Wild boars clean them up.  
We leave the bones to rest out here,  
as memorial to our animals,  
so that they become immortal".

≈

its top-knot bleached quite blond,  
 like an aborigine's hair,  
 legs slightly raised, braced,  
 caught protesting, in mid-kick,  
 against the inevitable fence.



Mouth, teeth, legs, rump,  
 tail, ribs, horns, hooves,  
 held on a frame of old bones,  
 a taxidermist's dream!  
 I was loath to photograph it -  
 'stealing souls' came to mind.



A big silence filled the valley,  
 that sucking out of all sound  
 before a 'quake or tidal wave.  
 Then the reassuring cowbell  
 in the distance, reminding us  
 of mothers, milk, and warm skin.  
 So we left the mountain meadows,  
 scattered, white, immaculate bones,  
 unexpected art, oaks,  
 and the herb that heals all wounds.



### Memories of Irène Bordoni

by Robert Sharp



It is not easy to name too many people born in Corsica who became well known in the broader world of entertainment. One such was Tino Rossi, covered by an article in the Bulltinu last year. Another, though perhaps less familiar, was the singer and actress Irène Bordoni (1895-1953).

Coming from an Italian family, she was born in Ajaccio on 16 January 1895. As a child actress she appeared on stage in Paris, also making at least half a dozen French silent films between 1910 and 1915. She had, though, made her Broadway debut in November 1912, in the Shuberts' production of the musical revue *Broadway to Paris* at the Winter Garden Theatre. Although short in stature, she had a strong voice (which apparently always carried a notable Corsican, as opposed to French, accent!) and was particularly noted for her seductive brown eyes as well as her coy and coquettish style of performing.

More Broadway performances followed: *Miss Information* (1915, a comedy with music in which she sang Cole Porter's 'Two Big Eyes'); the musical revue *Hitchy-Koo* (1917 and the 1918 revival, which featured some songs by her first husband, E. Ray Goetz); the play *Sleeping Partners* (1918); and the revue *As You Were* (1920). In 1922 she appeared in the musical comedy *The French Doll* in which she sang the George Gershwin/Buddy De Sylva song 'Do It Again', following this with the musical comedies *Little Miss Bluebeard* (1923), *Naughty Cinderella* (1925) and *Mozart* (1926). Few of these are remembered today!

But Bordoni became best known for her role as Vivienne Rolland in the musical comedy *Paris* (1928), co-written by Cole Porter, Martin Brown and her husband Goetz. With some songs by Porter it ran for over a year at the Music Box Theatre, and it was Bordoni who introduced his 'Let's Do It (Let's Fall in Love)'. [Goetz, a songwriter (best known for 'For Me and My Gal'),

author and producer, was not only Bordoni's husband, he was also Irving Berlin's brother-in-law.] Bordoni recreated her Paris role in First National's 1929 film version, making her talkie debut; Jack Buchanan and Jason Robards (Sr) co-starred. Bizarrely, however, it did not use Porter's score, 'thus depriving itself of the one element that might have guaranteed its success'.

Although in the same year she performed 'Just an Hour of Love' in the Warner Brothers film *The Show of Shows*, a huge omnibus of individual revue items, her film career never took off. She made a few forgotten shorts in the 1930s (*M'lady* ('31), *Paris in New York* ('36), *Du Barry Did All Right* ('37)), but we can see her online today singing 'Just a Gigolo', with a bouncing ball accompaniment, in Max Fleischer's 1932 cartoon/live action short of the same name. One website describes her 'rolling eyes, pursed lips, comedic hauteur and voluminous gowns' but *Just a Gigolo* shows her rather theatrical delivery and strong accent were probably what actually ensured that her undoubted stage talents and charm did not transfer successfully to the screen.

Additionally, she was now a rather stocky 37 year old and there were numerous younger female performers coming through in musical films . Or perhaps her heart was always devoted far more to the stage.

In fact, much of her performing career was in vaudeville or non-musical plays away from Broadway. She did, though, return to Broadway in *Great Lady* (1938, with music by Frederick Loewe) and in *Louisiana Purchase* (1940) which ran for over a year at the Imperial Theatre and in which she introduced the Irving Berlin song 'It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow'. She reprised the latter role in Paramount's 1942 film version starring Bob Hope. She made a comeback in 1951, touring as a rather unlikely Bloody Mary in *South Pacific*, but died in New York on 19 March 1953.

Thanks to the appalling policy of television channels these days it is now almost impossible to see any films on television from the Bordoni era, let alone her films in particular. She seems to have had a rapport with Cole Porter (and it is possible to hear her singing his songs 'Let's Misbehave', 'Don't Look at Me That Way' et al., with Irving Aaronson and his Commanders orchestra, at certain websites). Indeed, one version of Porter's 'You're the Top' includes the line 'You've the Eyes ... of Irene Bordoni'.

*We couldn't find any recordings of Irène Bordoni's work for sale online, but if you are interested in the original sheet music from her shows and some early newswire photos of her (such as the one above), you'll find them at [US Amazon](#) - Ed*

### **Your chance to attend a Corsican Polyphony workshop**

Would you like to attend a workshop in which you learn to sing Corsican and Georgian Polyphony? Thought you would - well here's your chance!

This five day workshop will take place in the Maison Sainte Hyacinthe Convent in Santa Maria di Lota (about 7km north of Bastia) between Monday 28th September and Friday 2nd October this autumn.

It will be run by Jean-Etienne Langianni of the Tavagna and Organum Ensembles and Frank Kane, founder of the Marani Vocal Ensemble. Frank tells me that Jean-Etienne is a highly experienced and versatile teacher, singer and composer who is greatly appreciated throughout Corsica and beyond, particularly through his work with the Tavagna Vocal Ensemble. Frank Kane will be teaching secular and sacred songs from the Republic of Georgia. He has been working with Georgian polyphony since 1985. Instruction will be in English (Jean-Etienne will teach in French with English translation).

And for those of you who don't know, there are strong links between Corsican and Georgian Polyphony - Georgian singers regularly take part in the Calvi Polyphony festival.

If you are interested, contact Frank Kane at [kane.frank@gmail.com](mailto:kane.frank@gmail.com) for more details.

A big thank you to our contributors this quarter, especially Liz Casanova for all her hard work researching Corsica's fortunes in World War II, Robert Sharp for another excellent article, and Mo Browne for her poem.

Francis Katz and Frank Kane were kind enough to write in about their activities in the worlds of Art and Music. If you are involved in any Corsica-related activity and would like it publicised in the Bulltinu, please let me know.

If you are planning your Corsica holiday at the moment, don't forget to visit our sites [Corsica Holiday](#) and [Corsica Isula](#). There are some good deals available if you book online right now, and please remember that by booking your holidays and car hire through our sites you are supporting this newsletter.

Enjoy the Summer!

Mac

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