

After Seeing My Son Dance a Tarantella in Fairfield, Iowa

Joe Benevento

whose only Italian-Americans are east and west
coast transplants who moved for the Meditation
Center at Mararishi U. Still, they reverence
their roots enough to take over the small town
square once a year for "All Things Italian,"

including semi-authentic renditions of lasagna
biscotti, cannoli, opera singers from Iowa City,
a zampogna player (that's an Italian bagpipe
if you're wondering), and me, who they import
from small town Missouri to deliver

my Diaspora stories and poems from years
back in Brooklyn and Queens. This time there's
also a folk-dancing troupe from Des Moines,
led by a woman who at almost 80 is still lively,
reminding me a lot of my just dead Aunt Louise.

This paisana, peasant costumed like the rest,
announces the selections and keeps time
on a tambourine, while young, Midwest-Italian-Americans
launch one folk dance after another, with more than one
tarantella, the one my relatives would recall throughout my childhood

at all their celebrations. When it was time
for audience participation, my sixteen year old son,
named for his grandfather, got up and literally
gave it a whirl, making me dizzy with thanks
at how gracefully he took to that old dance,

with no self-conscious concern of where any of us now were.