

## Prix Italia— an Act of Love

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The English translation of the French 'aimez' is 'to like, or to love'. To me, 'like' was never enough. For longer than I care to think, I have loved the Prix Italia. If you like someone or something, there is a reason. It's 'because.....' If you love something, there is no reason, no cause, no gain to be made by association. It's in the heart. So how did this love affair begin? Paradoxically, it was not in Italy but in France.



*Awarded by the Council of Europe, the flag was presented by the Mayor of Barcelona (third from right) to a group in Newcastle U.K., which included Jim Graham, BBC Regional TV Manager, North East, for helping develop cooperation between European regions. It followed a programme exchange between BBC North East and FR3 Nancy, France, which led to Jim Graham's first encounter with Prix Italia in 1980.*

We stood on a bridge near Nancy in the Lorraine, like Alsace, one of the disputed provinces between France and Germany at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I was with a French academic and television producer called Michel Kuhn. He told me how his father had taken him to the bridge and explained how, in 1940, German forces had crossed the bridge on their way to occupy France. In 1944, the Americans pushed their way eastward over the bridge. Their advance did not last. The Germans counter-attacked in what was known as the Ardennes

offensive. That did not last either. A few months later, General Paton took US and Allied forces across the same bridge, towards the heart of Germany.

A little bit of history, that time prods us to forget, for most Prix Italia delegates will not have lived through that period? No, not for me. I was seven when war broke out and 11 when it ended. It was part of my life and Michel Kuhn's. So we looked at each other and he put into words what I was thinking and feeling: 'What a tragic waste'. I recall that we pledged, at that moment, to do what we could to advance the cause of a Europe of co-operation and never again confrontation.

He lived in North East France, which was suffering economically, as it moved into an era of post-industrialisation, the giant steelworks at Longwy threatened with closure, as the mines of Emile Zola gradually shut down. I was the BBC television manager in North East England, going through a similar process, with the decline of coal, steel and shipbuilding. I said: 'Why don't we work together? Come across and do two programmes on how the British are tackling these problems and I will do two in France and we'll swap.

He looked astonished! Paris would never give him the budget for overseas work. He was programme controller of a regional station, FR3 - France Regional 3. So I said: 'Forget the budget. Your crew can stay in the homes of our crew and we will do the same when we come to Nancy. You use our film library and we will use yours. Who needs a budget!

And that is absolutely what we did. We bartered our way through. We each ran the other's subsequent films, with sub-titles, each getting four films out of the exchange. Actually, we wound up the project with a live debate via outside broadcast. More than that, we made history.

The project came to the notice of the Paris-based Circom, who invited me to Riva del Garda to explain the idea. I did not know then, that a leading figure in Circom was Sergio Borelli, director, under Secretary General, Alvis Zorzi, of the Prix Italia. I explained my idea at a Circom meeting at the Prix Italia, which was taking place there at the time.

The idea was taken up with some enthusiasm, as an example of region-to-region co-operation in Europe. Circom launched Circom Regionale on that basis, with conferences to see what exchanges could take place. That led to an award from the French Prime Minister, Michel Barre, who was mayor of Lille. I remember he presented me with a metal copy of the Lille belfry, Le Beffroi d'Or. Being British, I was terrified when his blue chin skimmed mine and I thought: 'My God! He's going to kiss me'. (I escaped!) Because of the extended co-operation that ensued between two regions, the European Flag of Honour followed, an award I treasure.

Heady days! But something more subtle had taken root, something that was to influence the rest of my life in broadcasting. I had slipped, sideways, into the arms of Prix Italia. At first, it was through Sergio Borelli, Dario Natoli, Mike Fentiman of the BBC, and the cerebral Hans Geert Falkenberg, between them, the core of Circom. But, after a spell at BBC Headquarters, in London, as Head of the Governors' Secretariat, I heeded a call to switch back to ITV, to take charge at Border TV, the Anglo-Scottish station where I had begun. That way, I could get back to production and have the freedom to shape the station's programme destiny, with Channel Four coming on stream to take bright ideas.

I was a Council Member of ITV, then the biggest commercial channel in Europe and where the distinguished Paul Fox decided to hand on to me, the post of Prix Italia delegate, in light of my European experience. I seized it with both hands.

That must be some 40 years ago. Some of our colleagues of that era have passed on, among them Michel Kuhn, although our President, Remy Phlimlin, continues to remember him. There are few now who bear the scars of war, as people like Hans Geert Falkenberg. He had been enrolled in Hitler Youth, as many young people were at that time. His father had wound up in Britain and there was a period when they were fighting on opposite sides, in northern France. Hans Geert became a prisoner, in a Paris jail, from which he and others had managed to break out as the war drew to a close. He had by then become Communist. His partner, a New Yorker called Marcia Lehrner, won the Prix Italia with a programme using previously un-reported tapes, on the life of Marilyn Monroe.



*It all started here ... Prix Italia's founders arriving at our first Festival, Capri 1948*

How different the world is now. But what has not changed are the values of the Prix Italia, a festival which chose not to recognise the Cold War, and was therefore one of the few venues where Americans and Soviet Union delegates mixed freely. Delegates still do, no matter what the political stance of the countries they represent. Life-long friendships are struck up on juries, many cemented around checked table-cloth suppers, or late-night coffee on the way home.

These are the simple threads of friendship, worldwide, but inextricably woven into the fabric of Europe. A Europe of friendship? A Europe of commitment? If these words are inadequate, a Europe where the Prix Italia has helped spread the value of a love of mankind that so often runs through its programme entries. Of that, we can be proud.