

# ERIC MARGOLIS



## Grand opera

Act I of Italy's most dramatic opera, *L'Imbroglia Fantastica*. Time: 1981. Location: A clothing factory in the Tuscan Hills. A police raiding party discovers the membership list of a secret Masonic lodge, Propaganda 2, or P2.

This is not your normal Elks club or Rotary group. On the P2 roster are 962 names of Italian cabinet ministers, military brass, politicians, bankers, civil servants, intelligence chiefs and journalists. The lodge leader and clothing factory director, one Licio Gelli, manages to evade the police and hotfoots it out of Italy.

Act II of this Italian *Dallas* opens to a thunderous chorus of political scandal. The P2 members, it seems, were plotting some sort of rightist coup against the government. All of those dire Catholic warnings about the nefarious Masons were at last confirmed. The government collapses.

Curtain time for Act III was in Rome this month. A parliamentary commission report, just leaked, linked more establishment figures to the plot. Prime Minister Bettino Craxi was brought close to resignation; his budget minister, Pietro Longo, a P2 member, was forced out of office.

This slowly unfolding drama, which has a certain relentless Wagnerian quality in spite of its Italian spice, boasts a number of startling subplots.

It seems that the P2 cabal had close links to Roberto Calvi, head of the Banco Ambrosiano. Thanks to Ambrosiano's intimate financial and personal ties to the Vatican, Calvi was known as the "Divine Banker." In the midst of the P2 scandal, the Banco Ambrosiano collapsed, producing some very queer revelations.

### Financial chicanery

Calvi may have bilked the Vatican for billions; or the Vatican chief banker, Fr. Marcinkus, may have been in cahoots with Calvi — no one knows for sure. The Vatican lost a few hundred million and was sorely vexed. Paper companies set up in Panama by Calvi turned out to be conduits of Vatican aid to rightist forces in Latin and Central America. All manner of financial chicanery came to light.

Following true operatic tradition, Calvi fled to England, where he sang the stirring aria, *Donani parlero (Tomorrow I'll tell all)*. Some of Calvi's critics, whom he threatened to implicate, did not, apparently, like his voice. Calvi was found hanged beneath London's Blackfriars Bridge, his feet soaking wet.

Even the most rustic Sicilian instantly understood the deep symbolism of this act. Renegade Masons are supposed to die in water: There was Calvi, feet wet, under the bridge of black friars. The British, after initially ruling the death suicide, have reopened the case. Italians have no doubt this was a perfect example of *Maledetta* — the curse supreme.

As if all of this was not enough, more subplots further clouded the already murky P2 plot. First, there were the Red Brigades who terrorized Italy and killed Prime Minister Aldo Moro. One of the goals of these frightful terrorists was to provoke a right-wing coup. The members of P2 almost obliged them.

During the early 1970s, at least three abortive military coups were attempted in Italy, largely in response to the spreading of left-wing terrorism. Now it appears that Licio Gelli, P2 grand master, may also have had secret contacts with these same left-wing terrorists. Very curious, indeed.

On top of this, the Italian parliamentary investigation of the Moro murder revealed, last year, that Marxist factions of the PLO and the Bulgarians had supplied arms to the Red Brigades. Astonishingly, the committee also charged that Israel had offered arms and cash to these same terrorists in an effort to bring down the pro-Arab Italian government.

### Not so secret war

On the other side of the stage, there was a not so secret war going on between Italy's various civilian and military intelligence agencies. In a subplot too baroque for comprehension, these competing agencies somehow got involved in the Arab-Israeli dispute: Some were pro-Israeli and worked with the Mossad. Others were pro-Arab, and pro-Libyan. All, it seems, were involved to some degree with the ubiquitous Licio Gelli and his Masons.

What we have here is a Grand Guignol operatic tableau: Assassinated government leaders, coups and counter-coups, kidnappings, conspiracies, bribery, embezzlement, murder and blackmail. Starring: The Masons, the Vatican, the Red Brigades, the Israelis, the Libyans, the CIA, the Bulgarians, French and German terrorist groups, the Italian military and intelligence services.

The real mystery in this brain-bending drama is how Italy managed to continue operating in the midst of such turmoil. Fendi put out clothes, Fiat made cars and Italians continued to eat gnocchi with divine gorgonzola sauce. In fact, a visitor to Italy who avoided newspapers, might have thought the most serious national problem was artichoke blight.

The answer is, of course, that the delightful, wise and worldly Italians discovered centuries ago that government is largely superfluous. Italians, by and large, don't pay taxes and have little to do with their monstrously inefficient government. Italy runs in spite of its governments that have been locked in political paralysis since 1946.

For Italians, Licio Gelli and his hooded Freemasons, devilish Libyan plots, hanging bankers, embarrassed prelates, and peculating politicians are just so much grand opera. What will Act IV hold in store? As an opera lover, I can't wait.

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