

VoX Borealis

Vincenzo di Bartolomeo da Brescia
Ealdormere Culture Edition



*Supplemental Newsletter for the
Kingdom of Ealdormere, December 2023*

Anno Societatis LVIII

Regnum Ealdormerensis

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From the Chronicler

Welcome World Travelers! The goal of the Vox Magazine, under my time in this office, is to focus in on what makes Ealdormere special. Last issue was about what to expect when you join Ealdormere. If you have suggestions for topics I am glad to explore them.



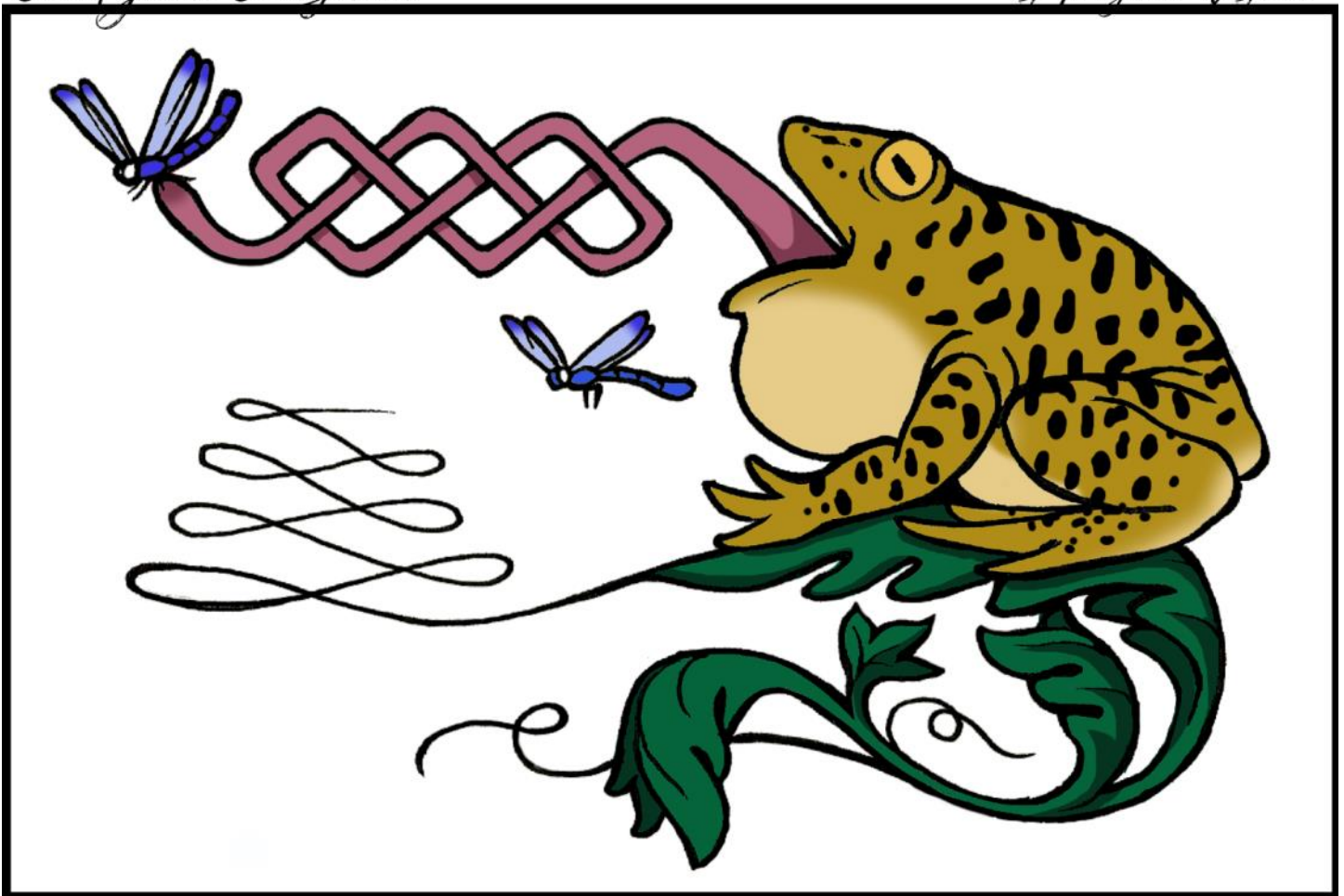
This, issue is all about The Honourable Lord Vincenzo di Bartolomeo da Brescia. He is a musician who travels all over the world, visiting all the places our personas are from. Music is important in Ealdormere, and to our culture as a Kingdom. We hope you enjoy the story about the man behind the music.

I would like to let you know we have a mailing list to receive the latest issue of the Tidings and Vox Borealis. To join the list on email do email me at ealdormere.kchronicler@gmail.com. If you want past issues of Tidings, or Vox, please reach out to me.

Joyfully Yours, Baroness Lucia de Enzians

Marginal Mayhem

by Augusta Weyfare



Vincenzo di Bartolomeo da Brescia



Ostuni 2022

I've been Vincenzo my entire life and, having spent childhood Sundays at the home of my Italian immigrant grandfather, part of me still expects a pinched cheek every time I hear it. When I decided upon an Italian SCA persona there was only one name he could possibly have, a name I'd always recognize as my own. I am Vincenzo.

I found the SCA in high school but wasn't interested in heavy combat so didn't give it a second look. Seeking to make friends at university and having seen an epic demo at my local Renaissance faire, I struck up a conversation with Scadians by asking about nearby faires, oblivious to the local culture clash between different groups of people who spent their free time wearing funny clothes in the woods. Later I would hear other tales about that problematic time for the canton, but I'll forever be in their debt for blowing me off and inadvertently connecting me to a faire-oriented student organization.

And so began my lifelong love affair with the Renaissance festival circuit. It became my hobby, then my obsession, and in short order my career. I combined a few years of foundational piano

lessons with my high school choral tenure to moonlight as a Celtic folksinger in the heady days of the Riverdance craze, and completing a tech degree in the teeth of the dotcom crash made an artistic career bizarrely seem like a smart choice.

My very first musical performances were with my voice and mountain dulcimer, ironically having no relationship to the hammered dulcimer that later took over my career. Being a quiet instrument played seated it has a lot of limitations, and for a more pub style I found a Celtic cittern for sale in a music catalogue. Having ten strings and shaped like a large mandolin, it was a simple jump from the standard mandolin I'd already been playing at Irish music sessions.

I soon found myself performing at the Ontario Renaissance Festival in Milton, making many of the friends who have remained key figures in my life. Unlike some parts of the States there wasn't a divide between faires and the SCA and I got to know many stalwarts of Ealdormere who were either working or attending as guests. When I later picked up hammered dulcimer as a hobby the director of that festival gave me the first big push to incorporate the instrument into my act, which it eventually took over.

Stateside, I had been brought into the SCA by my fiancée who was Pennsic drinking pals with a friend I knew from high school. As a baby Scadian working a spring faire in Florida, I took a 2002 pilgrimage to camp behind a friend's merchant booth at Gulf Wars. There I ran into Garraed Galbraith, who I had befriended at the Ontario Festival, and latched on to his social group. One night, as we were singing around the fire, he introduced I've Been An Apprentice by offhandedly referring to the time before his elevation. Someone made a joke about their protégé and I looked more carefully around the group, noticing subtle regalia scattered about. I had been drinking for three days with peers and King Roak of Ealdormere without any idea of anyone's rank! This level of informality was utterly unheard of in my home Kingdom Of The Middle and it made a lasting impression.

A few years later Garraed was autocrat of a new event and due to a scheduling mistake I found myself with the weekend free to come up and play at the Raven Tavern for Fruits Of Our Labours. The whole experience was absolutely magical, and I reconnected with friends I knew from faire while making a massive tranche of new ones (many of whom, incidentally, were on a new online platform and to keep in touch I signed up for Facebook). Meanwhile, my marriage was on the rocks as we'd grown apart while I went back to school to study history, and in the divorce I decided to step away from certain mutual friends to avoid awkwardness. Between the informality of its nobility and the brilliance of FOOL I loved how Ealdormere played the game, so when I changed kingdoms it was my obvious destination.

Martina Franca 2018



By this point the hammered dulcimer had taken over as my primary instrument and I went looking for a new musical hobby. Being a historical-research geek, I had discovered that my Celtic "cittern" was a 1970s invention named after a 16C instrument it resembled so I bought a historical replica, printed out facsimiles of period music from the Lute Society's microfilm library, and dove into a new musical adventure. Even now, with dozens of primary sources saved as pdfs on my phone, a few of those printed documents remain foundational to my music collection.

Continuing to improve as a dulcimer player, I started incorporating more of that period music into my repertoire. Beginning with simple medieval music such as dances and Cantigas De Santa Maria, I eventually progressed to playing much more complicated pieces. That's when my Lute Society experiences really bore fruit, as adapting period cittern and lute arrangements became a vital part of my recordings and performances.

Just as my skills and repertoires were evolving, so was the rest of my career. I began crossing the pond beginning with a 2006 solo vacation, then with a string of European festival dates providing music for acrobats, and finally as an independent busker in the winter of 2007.

On that first European trip in 2006 I flew to Italy after a week in London. I had spent my time in England marveling at its beauty and history, but people kept scoffing, “you should see Rome”. Luckily that was my next stop, and disembarking brought a sense of homecoming that’s really rare for someone who had already spent years on the road. The money for the trip had been a

graduation present from my parents, and the timing of my marital separation meant that our planned weeklong vacation became three by myself.

A week in Tuscany followed my week in Rome, and I continued falling ever deeper in love with Italy. I knew that I’d be back, but didn’t expect the opportunity to come mere months later when an acrobatic troupe, The Aerial Angels, booked a tour of summer festivals. I’d been playing music for them at Renaissance faires and while those services were less important in venues that welcomed recorded music I was still a small part of the show and an important part of the road crew; maneuvering an aerial rig through medieval streets is quite the challenge.

Having my dulcimer to hand with free afternoons before evening shows in the courtyard of Certaldo which once hosted Boccaccio , author of The Decameron, I caught a train to busk the lunch hour in nearby Florence. In hindsight it was an absolutely illegal pitch, which I should have realized when a passing cop winked at me without interrupting, but I was left undisturbed and my earnings gave a sense that this might be a sustainable way to travel. The seed was planted.

All autumn I thought about touring as a busker; I have a compulsive streak and the idea wouldn’t let me go. I brainstormed with my close friend Paolo Garbanzo, who in addition to juggling at Ren Faires and Pennsic had spent time performing and teaching circus arts in Italy. Finally I bought a plane ticket and, in my biggest leap of faith, didn’t renew my spring festival contract in order to spend four months busking my way across Italy.

And that’s what I did, January through May 2007. I arrived in Rome and was welcomed with open arms by the audience and fellow buskers alike. By day I played an along the Via Del Corso and in the evenings in Campo de’ Fiori. After two amazing weeks I was ready to move on and return to Florence.

Pisa 2017



That first night I stood in Piazzale Michelangelo, where the previous year I had been told local boys took American girls to impress them with the view, and gazed on the city laid out like a buffet before me. In a moment of hubris I prematurely declared victory for my tour, which the next day was disabused when the local constabulary informed me of how things really worked and what I wanted to do was illegal. I slunk back to Rome to lick my wounds and recover my budget, but last-minute lodging was hard to find and I ended up in a charmless 12-person hostel dorm on the edge of town. After a week I was eager to leave and took a train up the coast.

Genoa is a city I will forever love while everyone else is wondering why; it's dirty and a little dangerous, but it boasts the largest surviving medieval quarter in Europe. Its residents are famously inhospitable, but they absolutely love music and I felt welcomed everywhere. Still perhaps my favorite place to play, I make it back whenever I can and part of that charm for me is the role it had in reviving my confidence on that first tour.

And that was my pattern for the season, two steps forward and one step back. Sometimes it was a pretty big step back, though, like when a roommate in Perugia made off with my €1200 stash. The hostel owners had struck me as sketchy so I turned down their offer to keep my valuables in the safe and I learned important and expensive lessons, not least of which was a drastic reduction in my use of hostel dorms; a little bit of research showed that private hotel rooms with a shared bath were almost as cheap and a lot more secure.

The experience didn't keep me from loving Perugia, however, where according to family legend my grandmother had been conceived. I don't get back very often these days because a subsequent trip involved a frustrating encounter with the polizia; my Italian had gotten good enough that I'd researched the relevant regulations and the cop said "yes you're right, now go away" and there's not much you can say to that.

Despite its setbacks, that first busking tour went really well. I had brought a box of CDs and left another with a friend "just in case"; not only was that second box shipped to me partway through the tour but I coordinated a transatlantic print run to obtain a third. I was flabbergasted by the generosity of the Italian audience, especially in cities that didn't usually get a lot of buskers; my favorite question to this day is "but why are you *here*?"

Rome 2022



I wasn't exclusively a busker, of course; in a country arguably the tourist capital of Europe I saw a lot of sights. I turned thirty wandering the Roman ruins of Herculaneum, fulfilling a lifelong dream since National Geographic Magazine had featured them so heavily in my childhood. I spent an afternoon in Assisi after being robbed in nearby Perugia and which is still a favorite oasis when I need to find peace. And shortly thereafter I made it to Pisa where I caught a flight to Dublin and spent two weeks with my dad, one each in Ireland and England.

I took note of Irish busking culture, which I would take advantage of in later years, and I returned to the States with a head full of ideas for future tours that I've been bringing to fruition ever since. I have since expanded my busking range to include Greece and Croatia, generally sticking to southern Europe since my traveling season was winter and early spring. For several years I thrived dividing my year between busking and renfaires; I particularly enjoyed the balance of independent performances with no management direction but also no support compared to festival work that involved performing to someone else's schedule but who also had my back.

It hasn't always been a smooth path. First came 2011; having spent so many years ambitiously striving in my career I felt adrift without the struggle. Realizing that creative ambition counted for as much as professional ambition, I doubled down on complicated period music whose difficulty kept me focused and interested. As a bonus I took a vacation to Buenos Aires as a simple tourist without an instrument, and my desire to set up and perform convinced me the internal engine had a lot of mileage left.

I returned to the States revitalized for the 2012 season, but started feeling back in a rut late in 2013. I decided to make changes and tried a bunch of new things all at once, spending a month street performing in San Diego, coming eastward home via the Estrella War, and catching a plane back to Argentina for South American busking. I had built budget projections around the idea that "they can't all fail" which led to a harsh reality adjustment; amazing experiences though they were, my 2014 bottom line took a serious hit that wasn't matched until 2020.

Foligno 2017





Amsterdam 2021

Part of the problem was the continuing long-term decline in CD sales; the Crash of 2008 coincided with the rise of streaming platforms to devastate independent music. I started looking for a new income stream, intrigued by the shiny new Patreon platform. After more than a year of brainstorming I finally came up with the foundation that has served as my subscription model since 2016; weekly videos featuring performances, glimpses behind the scenes, and tours of the amazing places I see in my travels. I built a tiered reward structure with the helpful advice of several friends and the result has stabilized my income through the shocks of years since.

I returned to South America in 2017; my time in Argentina had included expeditions to Chile and Uruguay, and

the glorious Chilean city of Valparaiso convinced me to dedicate a tour to the continent's west coast. I hit numerous cities with a great deal more success than I'd found in Argentina, finishing the tour by celebrating my fortieth birthday in the ruins of Machu Picchu.

It's all been quite a ride, to say the least. I've had the pleasure of arguing with police in multiple languages including using a flyer and miming to let a Montenegrin cop know I was part of an officially sanctioned festival in Budva. I got in trouble in Padua, Italy for selling CDs and was so annoyed I caught a train to nearby Venice to play a set I knew was illegal, figuring that karma owed me. That set in turn led to my writing Venetian Refuge while taking cover from a sudden rain squall, as well as a hilarious miscommunication with a busker in Seattle who was talking about playing in Venice, California while I was discussing its Italian namesake. As frosting on the cake, a different Paduan cop was later so impressed by my willingness to accept the rules he gave me the cheat code: removing the price sign and merely displaying my CDs put me in technical compliance with anti-merchandise regulations.

I've had Greek police tell me to make way for a Good Friday parade in Heraklion but who tipped me in the process. An off-duty police officer who had officially talked to me in Brescia bought a CD when our paths crossed while grabbing breakfast croissants. The mayor of Agrigento, Sicily filmed my performance and put it on the town's Facebook page, and a Naples officer I thought was going to bust me offered his compliments and walked away.

I was told to stop playing in Sarajevo, but the set had already gone so well that my expenses for the week were paid. An official in Cordoba, Argentina told me he couldn't get me a permit before I was due to leave town, but told me where to play so I wouldn't get caught. An officer in Prato, outside Florence, Italy, said she'd be back to discuss city regulations, and I call it a win to have spent a week there without seeing her again.

You can't win them all, of course. The owner of my hotel in San Luis, Argentina was incensed that I was the most interesting thing he'd seen come to his town and the cops gave me grief for it. I got a permit in Bolzano, Italy only to find it prohibited all the good places to play, which was similarly the case in nearby Trent. Memorably, when a cop in Turin told me there was no legal busking anywhere in Italy I accidentally laughed in his face.

The best resource on local busking regulations is, of course, other buskers. Some places have unenforced laws on the books and others enforce laws that aren't there, so while knowing the legal terrain is helpful it's never 100%. The first thing buskers will do is share where they've played, both as a means of indicating shared experience and as a swap of useful information.

As a general rule I've found my busking colleagues to be both an amazing resource and delightful company but there have been some exceptions. For example, until they changed the regulations the best busking pitches in Rome were along three blocks of the Via Del Corso, but one day a highland piper set up and blew out the entire street. I stood briefly in angry solidarity with a half dozen other musicians before wandering off, so I don't know what exactly what was said but that piper never played there again; he found a much less intrusive spot a ways down the street.

Agrigento 2019



It's not just other buskers who get annoyed when one of us gets out of line. I was playing in Genoa when an amplified guitarist set up half a block away and cranked the volume. I held my guns for two songs before giving up; there are too many good pitches in Genoa for me to lose out in making a principled stand to no effect. I wish I'd hung around, however, because someone in an apartment above with a grudge and an incontinent dog decided to solve both problems at once making use of the convenient window.

Arrogant guitarists aside, busking is an amazing way to meet people. In Brescia, home to my persona, I met jazz musicians who invited me to their concert. I quite enjoyed it as an amazing exhibition of music I don't usually care for, and the opportunity to witness a more formal musical exhibition influenced my performance practice on the street. Complimenting the band, I was invited to lunch the next day at what ended up being a commune overlooking Lake Garda, jamming traditional Irish tunes with brilliant improvisational players.

In the city of Lecce I met a poet who caught my attention by effusively throwing the title "maestro" in my direction. It turns out his wife was with the tourist board, and I landed a gig playing in a 15C tower for its reopening after renovation. In Aosta I played for a historically-themed feast in a medieval basement. In Pescara, the approval of five guys in leather led to my doing a recording session with the progressive metal band Zippo (and with that official credit I'm technically a metal musician). The cake may have been taken, however, in Spoleto.

As in Lecce I was approached by an effusive artist, but this time he was throwing the word maestro at someone else. There was an art exhibition that evening, just steps away from where I planned to finish busking at about the same time. I agreed to do it, figuring it would be fun and easy and it was, being typical of such gigs with a musician playing quietly in the corner. My night was made when the maestro took some brushes, gave me a beat, and I improvised musically while he danced a watercolor painting into existence. It was beautiful in a way I struggle to express, and that being the finale I told him so as I packed my things. He bade me wait a minute while the guests cleared out, and I figured he was going to slip me the customary €50 bill.



Pisa 2023

Instead, he painted for me. He asked what size of poster board "canvas" I'd prefer and was surprised when I chose the smaller, but I had to get it back across an ocean by wrapping it around the dulcimer inside its case. He sent me off with a giddy smile and a work of art, and I was floored when my mother did some googling and told me that painting might be worth thousands.

More prosaic are the small interactions I have with my audience. For years the highlight of my day would be making nuns smile, and a career highlight was getting tipped by one while playing an Ave Maria I'd lifted from local church bells. Monks and priests are much easier audiences by comparison, but still a lot of fun to play for and I swear I once saw friar tuck wander past.

Kids are, of course, magical, and I've always been delighted by the wide-eyed reaction the dulcimer elicits. I've seen children bully their parents into tipping me, but even better was a pair of small siblings in Rome who had been given money for my hat. When I thanked them they decided to grab some coins back out to toss them back in, I thanked them again, and this went on for several rounds before mom and dad noticed and took off in mortified embarrassment.

Not every experience is so harmless, of course. A Neapolitan child decided to steal from me by ostentatiously "dropping" things into my case and picking up coins inside his recovered mitten, for example. I've had difficulties with the mentally challenged who couldn't understand why they weren't welcome to help themselves, and one beggar woman grabbed a fistful of coins making full eye contact because she knew I wouldn't escalate.

But that was before I learned to bluff from an experience with pair of tweens in Naples. You may notice a pattern about that city; I get street cred among European buskers for daring its pitfalls, where the living statues chain tip jars to pedestals and baristas fill theirs with water to make it easy to deposit coins but impossible to subtly remove them.

I had set up on a shop-lined street and gotten suspicious glances from the shopkeepers, who as a general rule are distrustful of buskers who may be loud, unskilled, repetitive, or otherwise bad for business. Two older children decided to mess with me, not actually doing anything but threatening to grab my coins or push over the dulcimer, just enough that I couldn't perform. I stood between them and the instrument, giving myself five minutes for them to get bored and leave before my own attention span wore out, when a big man bearing boxes passed by, parked



Pisa 2023

his dolly, removed his right glove, and used it to slap the kids about their heads and shoulders until they ran off. I muttered a stunned "grazie", and suddenly all the shopkeepers were on my side because these kids had likely been a menace to them as well. That gave me a cheat code because, while I knew I wouldn't hit anybody, no one else did and so merely swelling my chest solved a number of later issues.

Again, however, such negative experiences have been rare. In the Greek city of Heraklion I had to stop a begging boy from dumping his entire day's collections into my case because I knew he'd be punished for it at home. In Rome a small child of maybe six years grabbed a coin and took off running, obviously assuming I was right behind him. The situation was so absurd I started laughing and my audience joined in and was so generous I came out ahead on the transaction.

Although busking isn't easy, the emotional rewards are ample. The people I meet and the places I see are clear highlights, but equally rewarding is overcoming the random challenges that emerge as I dance with the universe. I'm forced to be flexible and inventive, to dodge and weave with the unpredictable, so that when I return to comparatively stable and familiar terrain I feel I can handle any shock that might come my way. And shocks there have been.

I turned 43 at the beginning of March 2020, pleased by the good luck of a prime number. Two weeks later I was roughly disillusioned as the world locked down and I watched my career evaporate before my eyes. I dove headlong into music, grateful that my artistic coping mechanism was there to support my teetering mental health, and coming through financially thanks to the generosity of my Patreon subscribers, a crowdfunded album release, and a sizable government loan.

With travel a mere memory I had a lot of time to think about itineraries. I love Italy and it's my travel mainstay, but I realized I'd left neglected other corners of the world. I wanted to play Ireland again, visit The Netherlands and Belgium with my new taste for their amazing beer, go back to Greece, and return to South America for another Argentina tour now that I have a better idea of what to expect. During lockdown I picked up a dirt-cheap ticket to Amsterdam I wasn't sure would be usable, and my luck held such that they reopened the country to tourism two weeks before my 2021 travel dates. I returned to Italy in the Januaries of 2022 and 2023, took a busking tour of Ireland in 2022 (where I won a small cash prize at the Letterkenny Busker Festival in County Donegal), and I'm currently holding a ticket to Athens for January 2024.

Throughout everything I've been overwhelmed by the generosity of my audience and my friends, who welcome me into their homes and my music into their lives. Entering midlife I feel I'm slowing down, but only compared to the breakneck pace of the last twenty years; I recently cashed in frequent-flyer miles to spend three weekdays in Spain to see traveling friends between festival weekends. I have my next two recording projects plotted out, three future tours in mind, plans to release a book of Renaissance sheet music, and I couldn't do any of it without the love and support of so many amazing people to whom I'm deeply grateful. Wassail, huzzah, olé, opa, and andiamo!

Bari 2022



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Cover Art

The photo of the borealis by his excellency Sir Shahid. Photos provided by Vincenzo di Bartolomeo da Brescia/Vince Conway. Costumes by Truly Carmichael/Eleanor Fairchild

THE TIDINGS THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR THE KINGDOM OF

A few things we're required to say...

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