



Da feast! /

Willis, Artemis,
film director,
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Each summer for the past one hundred years, local residents on an otherwise tranquil block in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn turn their lives upside down for two weeks in order to host the reenactment of a centuries-old religious pageant. The annual feast of San Paulino di Nola has its roots in an archaic fertility rite with exotic pagan undertones. Italians from the Campanese village of Nola, who emigrated to Williamsburg in the 1880s, brought their blessed saint statues, fig trees, and traditional values to New York. Soon after they arrived to a new world of stoops and storefronts, they formed a special "society," dedicated to maintaining the annual feast of their hometown saint in their new-world neighborhood. But what makes this display so spectacular is an 85-foot, 3-ton obelisk known as the Giglio, which, along with a full brass band and church pastor, is hoisted on the shoulders of 100 neighborhood men and carried aloft through the streets. The blocks-long procession provokes many moods, alternating between reflective piety and frenzied hysteria, around which fireworks are set off and everyone receives a fertility blessing. Da Feast! celebrates a very special day in the life of the Giglio, on its 100th anniversary in the streets of Williamsburg. While the intimate documentary features the neighborhood's dynamic young priest, Father Fonti; the ceremony's Capo Paranza, Phil Galasso; an appearance by Brooklyn's colorful Borough president, Marty Markowitz; and a swinging original jazz score by Joe Magnarelli, the real star is filmmaker (and Williamsburg resident) Artemis Willis' 96-year-old landlord, Massimino -- who built the Giglio in Italy and brought his craft and his soul to Brooklyn. More than a block party or a church social, the Feast continues to unfold on personal, political, communal, familial, and cosmic levels in this constantly changing community. Today, zeppole carts are likely to stand adjacent to henna tattoo parlors, and the area's young hipsters observe a lesson in community from the local Italian Americans, and they both embrace a soundtrack that ranges from ancient folksongs to "Gonna Fly Now" (the theme from Rocky)

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