

## Diabolically Fascinating: the General of Noise in the Waters

Natasha Lardera (February 09, 2014)



Interview with Alessandro Renda, the actor playing the General in Noise in the Waters playing at La Mama until February 16. The play is a dark, intense monologue written by Marco Martinelli on the tragedy of migrants in the Mediterranean, based on true stories collected and conceived by Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari.

Supported by Amnesty International and lionized by Italian critics, Noise in the Waters is a dark, intense work for voice and music, by the Italian company Teatro delle Acque, that protests the indifference of Fortress Europe to the everyday tragedy of refugees from Africa, who have perished for years in the Strait of Sicily on fruitless sea voyages to escape massacres and starvation in their homelands.

The play, at La MaMa until February 16, stars actor Alessandro Renda and multi-instrumentalists Enzo and Lorenzo Mancuso. Renda plays a soul of the underworld, clad in a general's uniform, who has been charged with making a census of the dead at the bottom of the sea, bringing order to a desperate state of bookkeeping.

Alessandro Renda entered Teatro delle Albe through the non-scuola (non-school) workshops the company has run in the high schools of Ravenna since 1991. He appeared in the company's



celebrated production of "I Polacchi," inspired by Alfred Jarry's "Ubu Rex," and in nine other productions. He heads the company's video division.

He was interviewed by I-italy after a successful performance.

**Before being part of this project, were you personally interested in this topic?**

Ravenna is my city, it's where I grew up and where I got to know the Teatro delle Albe, but I am originally from Sicily. I've always been interested in the stories of the Mediterranean, of Sicily, of its past and crossings. Theater feeds a certain affinity to the observation of the world that surrounds us, in particular of those stories that are not always told, or are not given the appropriate attention. So when I, Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari, stayed in Mazara del Vallo to do some research, we realized that there was too much left unsaid on this topic. The migrations in the Mediterranean and the more than 2000 dead, from the year 1988 to today, are often portrayed by the media as minor news, as minor statistics, numbers with no faces or stories. By being in Sicily we had the chance to meet people and listen to the tales of their desperate voyages to Europe in search of a different future.

The research process was completed with some essential reading: the books by Gabriele Del Grande and Fabrizio Gatti. But this approach is not new to the poetic of our theater, we are always trying to become a "world" through relations and encounters. Teatro delle Albe, in its thirty years of activity, has always been particularly interested in "the other," the others... from the griots of Senegal in the '80s, to the topic of "interbreeding", the "non-school" and the Dionysiac energy of the adolescents.

**Four years have passed since the debut of Noise in the Waters in Ravenna, has it evolved through the years?**

The show debuted in the summer of 2010 and overall it has not changed. Here in New York it has been presented in a totally different space that has been designed by Ermanna Montanari specifically for La MaMa, but the essence of the show remains unchanged. Furthermore, the beauty of theater is that every night Noise in the Waters "changes." Every night is a new "opening night" for us and for the audience attending the show. The Mancuso brothers and I, have a different dialogue every time. But there is no explanation for this, it is just magic. There are people who have seen the show several times, and every time they have felt differently.

**How is acting in a foreign language and how does it affect your representation of the General?**

In the Italian version, the General at times speaks to the audience and to the spirits in Arabic. For the General the addition of some parts in English is basically meaningless. Actually, he is the one and only citizen on an imaginary island in the middle of the Mediterranean. This strange and diabolical character is used to being "infected" by the languages and the stories of the dead and the spirits he is forced to count. Years back in the Mediterranean there was a special language called Sabir, it was a mix of Sicilian, Arabic, Catalan and Turkish. It was a service language. That's how English is for the General here in New York. My English is bad, but the feedback from the local spectators has been extremely positive and on stage, that language that is foreign to me becomes mine and the words of the General are brought to life.

**The General is based on Gaddafi, how did you create him?**

Gaddafi is the historical figure that has inspired Marco Martinelli in the writing of the monologue/short poem, and me in the acting. There was something diabolically fascinating in that figure. Savagery and the grotesque cohabited in him. On one side he was an uncompromising dictator, on the other he had an almost theatrical personality (let's not forget the Berber tents he used when traveling abroad, his Army of Amazons and the fancy sunglasses). In order to give shape to the General of Noise in the Waters, he was essential, just to avoid falling into the trap of sentimentality. This General, at times hideous and ferocious, others silly and grotesque, is not someone that different from us. It's almost our dark side, our evil shadow, it talks of us. At times he is scornful towards these victims, he creates discomfort in the audience while other times he himself



is overtaken by the tragedy of some stories, as in the case of Jean-Baptiste, a poor child, or of Sakinah, a young woman.

**When in Mazara del Vallo, you videotaped some testimonies, is there a story that has particularly affected you?**

During our long stay in Mazara del Vallo, where we have conceived the show, we have heard tons of stories. I used my camera as my personal notebook. I even went to Lampedusa to see the "cemeteries of the boats." Each and every story has left something behind. They're all stories of similar abuse, although each and every story, each face, each voice is its own reality. I was struck by a woman, who in the show we renamed Jasmine, who, when asked if, given the chance to retake that trip, she'd do it again she replied, shyly but firmly "NO."

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**New York**

Rumore di Acque a La MaMa  
La MaMa - First Floor Theatre  
30 gennaio - 16 febbraio  
giovedì-sabato ore 19.30/domenica ore 14.30  
[www.lamama.org](http://www.lamama.org) [2]

**Eresia della Felicità a New York**

Workshop dal 15 gennaio. Esito finale del workshop (a cura di Marco Martinelli e Alessandro Renda):  
11 febbraio  
Middle School-Liceo campus  
406 East 67th Street  
[www.lascuoladitalia.org](http://www.lascuoladitalia.org) [3]

**Incontri**

Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò/New York University  
28 gennaio - ore 18.00  
[www.casaitaliananyu.org](http://www.casaitaliananyu.org) [4]  
Istituto Italiano di Cultura di New York  
5 febbraio - ore 18.00  
[www.iicnewyork.esteri.it](http://www.iicnewyork.esteri.it) [5]

**New Jersey**

Laboratorio Marco Martinelli e Ermanna Montanari  
Life Hall Dance Studio  
4 febbraio - ore 10.00 -12.30  
[www.montclair.edu/inserra/events](http://www.montclair.edu/inserra/events) [6]  
Laboratori alla Montclair State University  
Laboratorio Enzo e Lorenzo Mancuso  
Leshowitz Recital Hall  
13 febbraio - ore 10.00 -12.45  
[www.montclair.edu/inserra/events](http://www.montclair.edu/inserra/events) [6]

Rumore di Acque alla Montclair State University  
Leshowitz Recital Hall-John J. Cali School of Music  
18 febbraio - ore 19.00  
[montclair.edu/inserra/events](http://montclair.edu/inserra/events) [7]

**Chicago**

Rumore di Acque al Links Hall  
Links Hall - STUDIO A  
21 e 22 febbraio - ore 19.00  
[linkshall.org](http://linkshall.org)  
[8]



La tournée del Teatro delle Albe negli Usa è sostenuta da La MaMa, La Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi, NY, Inserra Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies at Montclair State University NJ, NYU (Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò e Center for European and Mediterranean Studies), gli Istituti Italiani di Cultura di New York e Chicago e la Northwestern University of Chicago, IL.

Per maggiori informazioni:

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