



Doing Theater Together: Marco Martinelli & Teatro delle Albe

Natasha Lardera (February 09, 2012)



Italian theater has a strong tradition of social and political engagement and Martinelli's Teatro delle Albe is at the forefront of it. The writer and director was in New York to present one of his most celebrated pieces, *Rumore di acque*, a monologue on African immigration to Italy, and his non-school acting method that has captivated kids of all backgrounds.

Rumore di acque takes place on a phantom islet between Europe and Africa, situated in a strip of sea that has been the scene of devastating tragedy over the past fifteen years. On this volcanic and seething piece of earth, adrift like a raft, there is only one inhabitant, a general with demonic features and flashing eyes. In relations with an equally phantom 'Minister of the Inferno' he practices



the 'Policy of welcoming' (Politica degli accoglimenti): the islet is inhabited by the invisible spirits of the dead and the lost at sea, the rejected, whom the general welcomes and stows on his island-raft. Each of them is a 'number,' deaths and lives reduced to statistics. In the general's rambling talk, the voices of those invisible ones speak through him: halfway between a sorcery séance and a bureaucratic catalog."

This is the abstract of yet another story of immigration, a tale that touches us all.

[La Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi](#) [2] in collaboration with [Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò](#) [3] celebrated the work of Marco Martinelli, director of [Teatro delle Albe](#) [4], in Ravenna, in two special events (both held on February 8th): a presentation of Martinelli's non-school acting method and a reading of his monologue **Rumore di acque**, (**Noise in the waters**, translated by Thomas Simpson, [Northwestern University of Chicago](#) [5]).

Writer and director Marco Martinelli founded the theatrical cooperative Teatro delle Albe in 1983 together with Ermanna Montanari, Luigi Dadina, and Marcella Nonni. Having already used Romagnolo dialect as a vehicle to explore the mythic roots of local and marginal cultures from a global perspective, in 1988 the company expanded their principle of *meticcio teatro* by working with several Senegalese actors, including Mandiaye N'Diaye, a collaboration that continues to today. In 1991 the company established the producing organization Ravenna Teatro and in the same year initiated their non-school project to train young performers. A notable development of the on-going non-school has been *I Polacchi*, a re-conception of *Ubu Roi*. *I Polacchi* has grown into stagings with young actors in Chicago, Naples, Sarajevo, and Diol Kadd, Senegal. The Senegalese production has subsequently been presented in Limoges, Naples and Modena. Through their producing organization Ravenna Teatro and their work at the annual Santarcangelo Festival, the company has become a major motor and organization point for avant garde theater, linking Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, and the United States.

The idea of **Rumore di acque** came to Martinelli back in 2008 when he was working in Mazzara del Vallo, a town in southwestern Sicily that directly "looks" at Africa, at his non-school project.

"Non-School" means doing theater together, and comes from the idea that acting cannot be taught, but it is a game we all play together, actors and audience, as the theater is a gym of wild and overturned humanity, of excesses and measure, where you become what you are not; schools is the great theater of the hierarchy and of learning early to be a society," Martinelli explained earlier in the day during his presentation at La Scuola d'Italia.

As he was working with 60 kids, 50 from Tunisia and 10 from Sicily, he got to speak to many of those people who had crossed the sea and arrived safely on the Italian coast. "What impressed me the most is that they did not tell me their stories of success," Martinelli recalls, "but they told me the stories of their relatives, friends, acquaintances or total strangers that, for a reason or another, did not make it. It was a real tragedy, a tragedy that we can call a Shoah, as it was a true slaughter of people who were fleeing from war and torture in search of a different life." Gaddafi was still in power and he was told by the [Italian Government](#) [6] that he had to guard, no matter how, these people from arriving to Italy.

"Fishermen were prohibited to help," Martinelli explains, "If they found someone in the water they had to go against the law of the sea, a law that wants to help a fellow human in need, and respect the 'Policy of rejection' (Politica dei respingimenti) or they would have to face serious repercussions, such as losing their fishing license or their boat, thus being put in a situation of not being able to work and live."

"At the beginning I wanted to call the general himself, Gaddafi, but then I thought otherwise as he



does not represent a specific person, but he represents all of us, as we all possess this indifference, this lack of brotherhood for all those who deserve to live their life just like we do. We see them on TV and feel nothing. 33 dead today, 15 dead yesterday, they are just numbers... we don't feel for them anymore, we don't even realize they are lives that have been devoured by the sea."

So the general stands center stage, in a position of authority. Behind him there are two musicians, who represent the voice of the victims. "He embodies all politicians. Think of their faces when they have to give a speech after something terrible has happened. They need to show grief and compassion. Yet when the TV show, something switches off, the victims are forgotten, they become routine, every day issues to deal with," Martinelli explains.

The play is now touring Italy with Alessandro Renda playing the general, and Fratelli Mancuso, the Mancuso Brothers, playing the voices of the victims. Overall the audience's reaction has been extremely positive. "People are stunned," the director adds, "as they are somehow familiar with these stories, as they have seen them in the evening news but here they are told differently. Nothing is sugar-coated. Yes, theater is small compared to other media, but it has a voice and the great responsibility to shed light on what is going on."

The reading was held at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò, where Martinelli acted excerpts in Italian and actor Jacopo Rampini acted out the English translation. The duo had time to rehearse only once in the morning, yet the final product was a passionate and touching performance that enthralled the audience and left all craving for more. The wish is that Martinelli and his company will return to New York to share their non-school method with the students of La Scuola d'Italia and to perform **Rumore di acque** in its entirety soon.

To learn more about Teatro delle Albe click [here](#) [4]

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[2] <http://www.lascuoladitalia.org>

[3] <http://www.casaitaliananyu.org>

[4] <http://www.teatrodellealbe.com>

[5] <http://www.northwestern.edu>

[6] <http://www.quirinale.it>