

Review: "Cingomma" at In Scena! Italian Theater Festival NY

In Scena! Italian Theater Festival NY continues through May 20.



The fourth night of the IN SCENA! Italian Theater Festival NY was presented at the beautiful and intimate Casa Italiana in Greenwich Village. There in the downstairs auditorium, I experienced *Cingomma*, written and performed by the wildly talented Jessica Leonello. With a variety of lush and complex characters, this comic yet highly moving monologue examines the notion of time through old and new worlds as Ms. Leonello and her family travel North in the midst of a new and changing Italy.

Beginning with a modern-day flight from Milano to Palermo, the writer hilariously utilizes two mannequin heads as flight attendants who perform a riotous duet of exhausting and complicated travel instructions. In a world that seems to move all too fast, Ms. Leonello tells us, "God has built Italy to give us the luxury of slowness."

The writer moves us back to a simpler time when the age of European train travel -- specifically Italy's "TrenItalia" -- was nothing short of a theatrical experience. In a train car with her parents, Ms. Leonello poignantly portrays these and several other characters en route to their seaside paradise. She laments the pre-technology days of when the railroad proudly ran on a relaxed schedule if at all. Her grandfather offers his own pearl of wisdom noting, "the train going on confirms there is time in the universe."

Performed in Italian, a screen behind the actress flashed English subtitles. Scenes are cleverly transitioned with music, lighting and Ms. Leonello's own pantomime magic. She is at all times an endearing and strong presence. Her work is original, vibrant and intelligent. Her roots in Commedia dell'arte are apparent in the use of her body, her voice and her masterful execution of her material. It is no surprise that for this work, Ms. Leonello is the deserved recipient of the 2012 Petroni Award and the 2014 Offerta creative/teatrinrete award.

Brava, Ms. Leonello, for reminding us, "In a fast world, it is good to still have Italy."

In Scena! runs through May 20th and closes with the unveiling of a new exhibition by Palermo's Museo del Pupi, hosted at BREAD, 20 Spring Street in Manhattan.

Lisa Ellex



Working as a writer and performer on the New York and Provincetown cabaret circuit led Lisa to a long-term gig as lead vocalist for THE NEW VIPER JAZZTET. A singer by night, Lisa's day job had her selecting programming for the launch of HBO's, COMEDY CHANNEL, where she also wrote and produced numerous junkets. Moving to HBO DOWNTOWN PRODUCTIONS, Lisa wrote guest segments for comedian Alan Havey's talk show, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT on COMEDY CENTRAL. She worked on the staff of numerous NYC TV productions, including NIGHT MUSIC with David Sanborn and Jools Holland. A prolific playwright, Lisa is presently developing STATEN ISLAND EXPRESS, a piece examining the relationships between riders of a commuter bus and the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. She is currently writing and directing, MUSIC ON THE MENU, a half-hour episodic concerning Jazz and food.

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