

# INTERVIEW: Italian theater festival spreads across five boroughs in NYC

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ThemeGrill

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*Photo: The Mejerchold Twins features two distinctly different siblings who continue an eternal struggle for domination on the cabaret stage and in real life. The play stars Francesca Airaudo and Giorgia Penzo. Photo courtesy of Marco Mantovani / Provided by EDGE Media Network with permission.*

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The In Scena! Theater Festival kicks off its sixth year of programming tonight, May 7 with a special performance of *We Are Not Alone*, a play about a psychiatric inmate facing struggles in the outside world. Other theater offerings throughout the course of the 15-day festival run from thrilling to dramatic to comedic and tragic.

The best bit of news: All performances are free.

At the helm of the festival is Laura Caparrotti, co-founder and artistic director of Kairos Italy Theater, the presenter of In Scena! Her theatrical partner is Donatella Codonesu, co-founder and artistic director of KIT Italia.

The festival prides itself on diversity and includes works from many female playwrights and female directors, a couple of them also focused on LGBTQ themes.

“It’s to discover,” Caparrotti said about the festival’s mission. “One is to discover the Italian theater, what is going on in Italy in theater. Two, because Italian theater doesn’t arrive very often, and there’s kind of a stereotype when you think about Italian theater.”



Claudia Donadoni’s *Stria* is inspired by the true story of a northern Italian girl accused of witchcraft and burned at the stake, in the late Middle Ages, her punishment for trying to exact revenge after a childhood friend is brutally raped. Photo courtesy of Massimo Alari / Provided by EDGE Media Network with permission.

The artistic director said it’s actually rare for New York City, the theater capital of the world, to receive authentic Italian productions. Often the offerings stray toward Italian-American fare, so In Scena! tries to showcase the most interesting, eclectic and moving theater directly from the European country.

“And the other thing is, which I think is the most important element, is to show that we are talking about the same issues,” she said. “We are having the same issues. We are facing the same issues as America. So many times we have a show, and then the audience’s reaction is, ‘I didn’t know in Italy you had the same problem. I didn’t know you were facing this kind of issue in Italy.’ So it’s a kind of discovery.”

Other offerings this year include *Echoes* written by Lorenzo De Liberato, which finds one man interviewing the person responsible for a million murders. Another play is ripped from the headlines: *This Is My House* by Alessandro Blasioli centers on a powerful friendship set amidst the 2009 Abruzzo earthquake. There are also info sessions, a conference and writers’ meetups.

Keeping these many elements together is a difficult task.

“Well, it is challenging,” Caparrotti said. “We have very small staff, and we go into outside boroughs. We have always been in the outside boroughs, and we keep doing it. So it’s challenging because we as a theater [festival] we offer a space that is not always the same. ... They have to adapt to different kind of spaces, and also the festival is all free admission. They come at their own expenses, so we don’t have a participation fee. But also we don’t cover any expenses. It’s all them putting [up] their own producing.”

She added: “The first time we did it in 2013, we started thinking who knows if it’s possible to go in outside boroughs, if Italian companies will accept to travel to different boroughs and different spaces and to adapt. They did, and it is possible. There is a lot more work than having one location, but it’s challenging. But it’s happening, and I have to say, we have submissions where they send us a video of the show. ... So from what I see in the video is more or less what I see here on stage, so the adaptation is very small. Of course, also we choose productions based on the flexibility of the production because sometimes we get submissions with fantastic productions. They could be fantastic at Lincoln Center.”

The audiences over the years have not only been Italians or Italian-Americans. In fact, Caparrotti said the crowds have predominantly been a cross-section of the United States.

“Percentage-wise, we have a very small percentage of Italian Italians and a very small percentage of Italian-Americans,” she said. “It’s a mix, and that is really amazing to all of us. It’s a mix, but also again we don’t go only in Italian institutions or Italian schools. We go everywhere, and that I think is key for getting other kinds of audiences to come and see us.”

*By John Soltis / Publisher / [John@HollywoodSoapbox.com](mailto:John@HollywoodSoapbox.com)*

*In Scena! Italian Theater Festival will play several venues in New York City, May 7-21. Tickets are free. Click [here](#) for reservations and more information.*