

Dario D'Ambrosi Brings to the Scene the Discomfort of Mental Illness

lavocedinewyork.com/en/arts/2018/05/20/dario-dambrosi-brings-to-the-scene-the-discomfort-of-mental-illness



Forty years later the historic show *Tutti Non Ci Sono/We are Not Alone* comes back to New York to tell the loneliness and disorientation of patients left to their own devices, the dismay of the society unprepared to welcome them. Here's our review of the show.

A man, a man who looks different from everybody else – he's wearing a hospital gown, he's carrying an empty birdcage and his face is translucent white – walks into a restaurant. The patrons are eating, minding their own business but they cannot help but noticing him. Some seem concerned, others also don a white face. This is not one of those "A man walks into a bar" jokes, this is a real situation, or rather a theatrical one. The restaurant's owner approaches him and forces him to leave. His presence alone is a nuisance, even though he's minding his own business. He hasn't done anything specific, but he has to go. This video kicks off [Dario D'Ambrosi's](#) play *Tutti Non Ci Sono/We are Not Alone*, his solo show that opened the sixth season of [In Scena! Italian Theater Festival NY](#).



A scene from *Tutti non ci sono/We Are Not Alone* – Photo by Andrew James

The play first debuted in the US in 1980 at *La Mama* and it was written and performed by D'Ambrosi himself as a reaction to the revolutionary Italian Mental Health Act of 1978 (also known as Basaglia Law or Law 180). The Law called for the closing of all psychiatric hospitals, the release of mental patients and their replacement in alternative community based care facilities. As we watch a young D'Ambrosi aimlessly roaming the streets of NYC he represents all those patients who were released from psychiatric institutions and simply had nowhere to turn to. Many were left living on the streets. Few were relocated. Even though descriptions of the law affirm that nobody was involuntarily discharged into the community, it doesn't seem to be the case in this story. At the end of the video we see the patient arrive at *La Mama* and enter. That was back in 1980; in 2018, the present, the patient entered the Cherry Lane Theater, to everybody's alarm. He's still carrying an empty birdcage, he's still wearing an hospital gown and slippers. He's introducing himself to anybody he can reach, he asks direct questions, gives hugs, spits out uncomfortable truths ("Why are you wearing glasses?" he asks, "Isn't it better not to see anything?") and makes people laugh out loud.

Moments of laughter alternate with moments of concern, when the audience sees that this funny man has incidents when the voice in his head comes out. It's scary, and not just for the way it sounds – thundering and menacing – but also for what it says and commands him to do. He suffers from schizophrenia. We see him sticking his hands in his mouth pulling at something invisible... the invisible voice that doesn't want to get out, that doesn't appear on his birth certificate although it's been there since his beginning. "Why is it there?" "Why isn't he like everybody else? Everybody who is normal?"



A scene from Tutti non ci sono/We Are Not Alone – Photo by Andrew James

But there are those like him too – his friend Tommasino, aka Masino, whose head was sliced open by several doctors aimlessly looking for something in there. It sounds like they don't even know what to look for. After the surgery Masino is not the same anymore. But the doctors don't seem to care, they seem rather indifferent. During the performance, the character of the doctor is on stage even before the theatergoers walk in. He sits there silently, his back to the audience but also to his patient. He is distant, unsympathetic, doesn't want to be touched, doesn't want to talk about anything personal and seems to be communicating only through orders... and when the patient reacts with violence, he slices his head open, just like it was done to Masino.

Eventually the patient wakes up but he's not the same. Nothing is the same anymore. The shell of the man who walked in an hour earlier walks out, with emptiness in his eyes. With a white, translucent face.