

# Interview with the team behind the In Scena! Italian Theater Festival

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Show-Score sat down with the creative minds behind the [In Scena! Italian Theater Festival](#), which has been bringing the best of Italian Theater to all five New York City boroughs since 2013, to discuss the history (and inspiration) behind this intercontinental festival.

**Show-Score: What's it like bringing theater across the ocean to the US? Both logistically (Do you ship your costumes and set pieces? Is the ensemble the same as the Italian production?) and symbolically.**

Laura Caparrotti: We're not a 'traditional' festival. Logistically, we work together with the artists in order to help them recreate their shows here in New York City as much as possible. Going into all five boroughs--from theaters to auditoriums to schools and community centers--they have to be able to adapt. We assist them with props, sets, lights and they come over with a flexible adaptation of the show they usually tour with in Italy.

Symbolically, to me, it's like opening a window to show what is going on in Italy, and to discover that we have the same issues, that we talk about very similar themes, and that there is so much beyond the stereotypes. What also makes me very happy is that we do have an American audience! We actually have a bigger percentage of non-Italian speakers in the audience for most of our programming. And I love it!

Carlotta Brentan: Yes, each show that we feature comes over with the same cast that they had in their Italian productions - with very few exceptions over the years but always by the specific production themselves and always coming over from Italy. Producing any kind of theater is demanding, and thrilling, and has its own set of challenges. Bringing Italian theater overseas has some specific ones: Who is our audience? How do we reach them and communicate with them? Can we overcome the language barrier? Can they?

What we continue to see with In Scena! is that we all have so much more in common than we think. It's been wonderful to see how many of our In Scena! productions --so specifically and intrinsically Italian in nature and themes and dialogue and aesthetics and performance style -- have resonated so deeply and successfully with American audiences.

**S-S: What inspired the creation of IN SCENA! in 2013?**

Laura Caparrotti: I was living in New York for many years doing theater as an Italian and noticing that there wasn't a proper Italian theater festival in the city. Many companies were coming over, but a theater festival was not there. The idea of a festival sounded quite crazy for an off-off theater company. One day I heard that 2013 was going to be the official year of the Italian Culture in the States and I felt it was a sign. I told Donatella Codonesu (I still remember her face when I told her) in Italy and Carlotta Brentan, who was collaborating already with me in New York. Now, in 2018, after six years, In Scena! is a reality -- and a great one! We have wonderful artists who come here completely at their own expense and perform in a free admission festival. It's a celebration not only of theater but of connections, relationships, and open arms. It's a dialogue that I hope to keep doing for a long, long time.



Capparrotti and Codonesu at the first In Scena! in 2013. Photograph by Stefano Corso.

**S-S: How has the festival grown and changed over the years?**

Carlotta Brentan: The festival has definitely grown immensely in terms of sheer size. In 2013 we started out with three productions, and this year we're up to twelve. It's really been an exponential growth. We started out very ambitiously, and each year we've added more shows, more days, more collaborations, more special events, more readings, a playwriting award, and a published collection of the award-winning plays.

We have also evolved in that, at first, a significant amount of energy was going towards explaining to our prospective audiences what this festival was and why they should join us. In Scena! is now solidly established in a number of our venues, with loyal audiences who look forward to May each year in order to see what we're offering. This has allowed us to turn some of our focus outwards, and begin exploring new ways of being of service to the international theater community, such as the free panels on theatrical practices that are part of this year's

festival. What has not changed at all since we started is our mission: to create a cultural exchange, a bridge between Italy and New York, and foster the spread of contemporary Italian theater in America.

**S-S: Is there anything you're particularly excited about bringing to New York for this year's festival?**

Donatella Codonesu: Every year, there comes a moment when I look at the festival calendar and suddenly realize what my favorite event on the list is. This year, I was surprised to find out that it's not a show, but a conference "On theater's changing relationships – with critics, artists, and audiences." (May 11th, Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò).

In fact, one of the most interesting driving forces of the festival since its first edition have been relationships: Italian artists who actually meet New York city artists and audiences. This year, the conference will be an important moment to meet, share and learn for both Italian and American theater professionals, debating on fundamental issues of global concern (such as accessibility, communities, and criticism), and involving the audience. And I am particularly excited to be part of this international event.

*The IN SCENA! Italian Theater Festival runs from May 7 to May 21, 2018. [Click here to read more about this year's lineup.](#)*