All About Italy, in Sixty Minutes

ALICE BONVICINI (November 12, 2010)



With Laura Caparrotti up and down the peninsula, among stereotypes, customs and dialects. We talked with Laura about her one-woman show “ABC.. L'Italiano Si Impara Così”

They often say that when you live away from your country you are in a privileged position to observe it. Maybe that's why Laura Caparrotti [2], born in Rome, but an adoptive New Yorker for the last fifteen years, has successfully put together her one-woman show ABC.. L'Italiano Si Impara Così. Laura plays Miss Margherita, the diva-esque teacher who brings the audience into a 60 minute tour de force of Italy and Italian culture. Laura/Margherita synthesizes the bel paese in the three letters of the title: A as “Amore,” B as “Buono,”and C as “Città.” Love, good food and cities.

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And, on October 5, she played her crash course of Italianness at the Cell Theater [3] in the heart of Chelsea in front of an enthusiastic crowd of both English and Italian speakers. “Initially ABC was different,” Laura admits “I used to sing songs, recite poems, then the sketch ("La Deposizione") of a dear friend, actor, and fellow theater writer Uberto Kovacevich, inspired me. I reworked the initial material, I added and subtracted, and that’s how ABC was born.” And this incarnation seems to truly please her audience.

Laura navigates her comic skills around common stereotypes about Italy and Italians. “It is important to have a sense a humor,” she says, “when you laugh about stereotypes you recognize diversity with cheerfulness.” And it is exactly what many audience members have thanked her for. “They leave the show with a better understanding of friends, neighbors, boyfriends and family.” But Laura also has a talent at reproducing dialects and she uses it for humorous effect but above all to illustrate the diversity that exists within the country. During the last chapter of the show, Città, we see and hear the same story from the points of view of six different characters. They come from different longitudes along the peninsula, from Bolzano to Palermo, which dramatically -and hilariously - changes their perspective. And with the 150th Anniversary of Italy's unification few months away, Caparrotti underscores for her audience how the mosaic-like DNA of Italy is still very much alive.

The protagonist’s name, Margherita, comes from the 1970s tragicomic monologue of Brazilian playwright Roberto Athayde, Miss Margarida's Way [4]. Miss Margarida, despotical and cruel, was meant as a metaphor for the Brazilian totalitarian regime of the time. Laura’s Margherita, however, pretends to be a tyrant, but is not one at heart. “More than anything she is a diva.” And when I ask Laura who inspired the diva nuances of her character, she doesn’t hesitate: “you know, my nick name is DIVA! I inspired it.” Later she adds how she also injected the traits of one of her high school teachers into the character. “She’d be absolutely thrilled to know it.” And if ABC ends up on the other side of the Atlantic, as Laura has been envisioning, maybe her teacher will have a chance to recognize herself in Miss Margherita.

Laura Caparrotti studied independently with Dario Fo [5] (Nobel Prize for Literature 1997), Annie Girardot [6] and Elsa Wolliaston [7], among others. In Italy she played with Giancarlo Cobelli [8], Mario Carotenuto [9], the Teatro Stabile di Torino, and many others. In New York she has played at The Kitchen [10], The Fringe Festival [11], Abrons Arts Center [12], Bernie West Theatre [13], Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò [14], the Center for Jewish History [15] and Lincoln Center [16]. She is now the Artistic Director of KIT-Kairos Italy Theater [17] in New York City. A polyedric and talented woman, Laura is also a journalist, a lecturer, a curator, and a panelist for the New York State Council [18] on the Arts.

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