

ExtraTeatro: Bilingual Theater and Fun For All

Natasha Lardera (August 20, 2014)



EXTRA Teatro wants to stimulate young audiences to love theater and to embrace a new culture and language in a fun and entertaining way. They came to NYC to present two shows, Vagabond\$ and My Monster Friend, at the 18th annual New York International Fringe Festival – FringeNYC. It was a great success!



Hailing from Rome, [ExtraTeatro](#) [2], a theater company specialized in bilingual theater introducing a second language to children through music, is in New York presenting two shows, [Vagabond\\$](#) [3] and [My Monster Friend](#) [4], at the 18th annual [New York International Fringe Festival](#) [5] – FringeNYC. These are two children's musicals that had their North American premieres. Both shows are for English and Italian speaking audiences of all ages and are filled with fun sing along songs and zany comedy. The plays have been put together by the writing team of [Arianna De Giorgi](#) [6] from Italy and [Jason Goodman](#) [6] from America. Arianna is also the show's director, while Jason composes the music and acts. Completing the team is the talented Sicilian actor and musician [Andrea Trovato](#) [6].

[My Monster Friend](#) [4] tells the story of a “Lonely Doctor Science-stein who creates a friend in his lab with a brain he ordered online. “Buongiorno! Oh no! It's an Italian brain! Don't worry doctor, this monster makes pasta and knows how to rock.” It's a musical for all ages. As for [Vagabond\\$](#) [3] “Ciao! Hello! They might not fully understand what the other is talking about... but boy do they know how to put on a show! An American and Italian vagabond form a crazy musical duo.”

i-Italy had a chance to speak with Arianna as soon as the group arrived in NYC, after a pretty adventurous flight! “The main issue was that Norwegian Airways lost our luggage. Obviously part of the scenes and all our puppets were in there... Basically we had to rebuild everything... it was a race against time, it was stressful but we made it work! It was a relief to see that American children laugh the same way the Italians do.”

Director and Co-writer Arianna De Giorgi was born in Rome, studied acting with [Giulio Scarpati](#) [7] and worked as an assistant to Oscar winning set designer [Dante Ferretti](#) [8] before studying film and television production at NYU.

Tell us about the importance of making bilingual theater.

Our theater group has developed the project of making bilingual theater using the English language with the goal to bring new generations closer to theater arts using an idiom that is pretty much universal right now. English is part of everybody's cultural heritage right now and it is important as our society is becoming more and more multiracial. Back in 2008 we wrote our first show, [I Rock](#) [9], which brought together artists of different backgrounds: Daniela Remiddi, author of children's theater, director and puppeteer with a strong background in classic theater; Jason Goodman, American musician and actor; Arianna De Giorgi, Italian director who's attended NYU. That show and all the ones that followed really captured audiences – from the teachers to the students of all ages. Our theater offers a new and fun way to learn English. This is mostly made possible by our use of actors whose native language is English working together with native Italians (who always act in Italian) thus offering kids an opportunity to identify themselves with the characters in their adventures and misadventures in a foreign context.

How did you decide to do all this in a musical way?

The use of music in children's theater is pretty much imperative. It's the way to communicate moods, feelings and emotions. Listening to English songs has always favored passion for the English language and the English culture. Jason is a musician whose roots are in the “Americana/Country/Rock'n' Roll” genres. So he has brought to the shows his own very personal



musical key of interpretation that has immediately captured the kids' attention. Seeing the audience sing along his songs always makes us proud.

How is writing with a partner and on top of that, how is writing in another language?

Writing with another person is always a challenge but it's also an incredible source of stimuli and ideas. We are not a team only at work but in our private life as well: we have two kids, a three and a five year old. We've worked together for a while now and in the past few years we have developed a working method that's very efficient for us: usually I start by writing down some ideas, then I let Jason review them. He's the one who add the most foolish and fun elements of the story and when he's done we look everything over together. Lately the source of all our ideas is very intimate and real: it comes from our kids! At home we speak both languages. This is a constant in our private life and in the linguistic approach of our writings.

Tell us about the origins of the two shows you are presenting at Fringe NYC.

My Monster Friend and Vagabond\$ are two bilingual musical comedies that we have been traveling with throughout Italy for the past few seasons. On stage, along with Jason Goodman, there is the Sicilian actor Andrea Trovato, an irresistible talent whose energy and humor never fail to capture each and every audience member. In Italy, the viewers learn their first English words and sentences, while here in NYC we want them to get familiar with our language and our culture. The two actors are a real comical pair: one is tall and one is short... and they need to be careful not to exchange their costumes...During My Monster Friend they need to quickly change into an astronaut suit. The suits are identical that's why once they messed up, and Jason came out wearing a tight and short suit, while Andrea was lost in a giant suit... it was not done on purpose but its was a perfect comic skit.

Future plans?

Next season we'll have our own bilingual theater program at [Teatro Belli](#) [10], in Rome. We are working on two new shows: a musical in English from kids age 12-18, titled [Hamlet and Ophelia](#) [11], and a bilingual show for younger kids titled SpaceCrazy. And then... we'll see what comes out of our American adventure.

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- [6] <http://extrateatro.it/en/the-company/>
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