

Marche & the Splendor of Italian Opera

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Award-winning director and artistic director of the Macerata Opera Festival Francesco Micheli held a lecture at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò called Marche and the Splendor of Italian Opera, a special presentation that was part of the series Marche Is Good, a month of events in New York dedicated to the whole region.

“My passion for opera started with my love for cinema. When I was little my parents took me to see first *The Magic Flute* by Ingmar Bergman. I was really little, about 4 years old, and it was incredibly suggestive but still it did not really leave a scar on me. Then when I was 12 I saw *Amadeus* by Milos Forman and that's what truly “ruined” me. It left a permanent scar. So when I started making my own choices and going after what I liked I started going to the opera and I still have not stopped.”

This is what Award-winning director and director of the Macerata Opera Festival Francesco Micheli confessed to i-Italy after his lecture held at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò Marche and the Splendor of Italian Opera, a special presentation that was part of the series Marche Is Good, a month

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After his bachelor of arts degree in modern literature, Francesco Micheli, graduated from the Civica Scuola d'Arte Drammatica "Paolo Grassi" (Academy of Dramatic Arts) in Milan. Right after school, he started working as assistant director for opera productions by the Region of Tuscany, the Region of Lombardy and the Festival of Wexford.

His debut as a director dates back to 1997 with *La Cantarina* by Niccolò Piccinni, for the Museo del Teatro alla Scala. Through the years he is the author of innovative pieces that are the perfect combination between a concert and a show, with the aim to bring forth a lyrical theater of experimentation. Such personal quest brings him to collaborate with several theaters: for Romolo Valli in Reggio Emilia he produced *W Verdi*, for Teatro Sociale di Como he presented *Da Vivaldi a Pasolini* and *Da Verdi a Mina*, and for Teatro Giacosa in Ivrea he created *Diva*. In 2012 he became Artistic Director of the Sferisterio Opera Festival in Macerata and subsequently he becomes Artistic Director of the Teatro Sferisterio.

"At the beginning, when I first fell in love with opera, I realized that my peers and other generations pretty much close to mine were totally indifferent to it. I felt the need to put out there shows that represented opera the way I enjoyed it, as theater, a theater that is close to life. A theater that would involve all the younger generations that enjoy Hollywood films. The stories told in opera are just like psychological and gory thrillers you see at the movies today. Most of Verdi's work can inspire current Hollywood flicks. *Pretty Woman*, for example, is a sort of rewriting of *La Traviata*. *Simon Boccanegra* and *Don Carlo* are great thrillers that would do great at the box office. Generally speaking, we can also say that Italian American cinema has stolen a lot from opera. Cinema is an offspring of opera."

So when Romano Carancini, the mayor of Macerata, wanted to renew the Sferisterio Opera Festival, bringing it closer to contemporaneity, he thought of maestro Marchini. "He had seen my work, he was interested in it and so we started collaborating. I couldn't be happier."

The small yet rich region of Marche is known for its music. "The timeless masterpieces of Gioacchino Rossini, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, and Gaspere Spontini are just the beginning of the many rich musical enclaves. Boasting over 70 active historical theaters, all authentic architectural jewels. Music is well alive today, like yesterday, with young composers ready to carry on a prestigious tradition with celebrated musical events such as the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, the Sferisterio Opera Festival in Macerata, and the Pergolesi Spontini Festival in Jesi. Melodious are also the universal verses of Leopardi, a beacon from the Romanticism for all the modern and contemporary poets."

In his lecture, maestro Micheli introduced the unique and rich operatic tradition of the Marche region, talked about the origins of Opera Houses and the Italian genius behind their construction, explained the job of the director ("a director is someone who knows how to create an ambiance and an invisible thread that connects the performers to the audience") and spoke about the Sferisterio Opera Festival that is dedicated (from 2013- 2015) to Giuseppe Verdi (the program for 2014 features *Aida*, *Tosca* and *La Traviata*). "Verdi was not from Marche," maestro Micheli explained, "but he is one of the greatest, it would have been a sin not to represent his work."

The event also included a selection of arias performed live and was followed by a tasting of wine and food from Marche... other jewels from this wonderful region.

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