

Wives & The Academy: Women in Fratti's Plays

Natasha Lardera (September 22, 2015)



From October 8 to 25, Theater for the New City will present the world premiere of "Wives," newly written by Mario Fratti, in a double-bill with his breakthrough play, "The Academy." Taken together, the two plays illustrate the changing nature of the battle of the sexes between the postwar period and now.

"If I had to convey a message today, my message is that through the years American women have evolved. Today women are super strong and always in control, they do what they want. While in the past, in the fifties for example, they were more naive and did what men wanted them to do. That's why we are presenting two of my plays: one set in 2015, *Wives*, and one set right after Fascism, *The Academy*. I wanted to show two different realities and believe it or not, in both scenarios women, whether they are victims or not, triumph."



Playwright [Mario Fratti](#) [2], a prolific writer and drama critic who was born in Italy but has been living in New York since 1963, thus explained to i-Italy the two works that will be performed from October 8 to 25, at the Theater for the New City.

The program consists of a world premiere of *Wives*, Fratti's latest work, in a double-bill with his breakthrough play, *The Academy*. The two-part evening is directed by actor/director [Stephan Morrow](#) [3], who plays the instructor of a school for gigolos in *The Academy*.

"The Academy is set in the 1950s in Venice and amid the postwar nihilism and defeat, a reactionary professor has organized a school to teach young Italian men how to seduce and exploit American women. The six young gigolos who are his students are not the helpless loafers we know from [Fellini's *I Vitelloni*](#) [4].

Rather, they are enterprising young men, most bearing names that were commonly given to babies of the period (Afro, Benito, Corso, Donato, Elio) in praise of Mussolini's regime. All owe a curious debt to the Professor's wife, who oddly represents the postwar nation as reflected in the character of a woman."

"In *The Academy* the woman who is linked to the professor is a total victim, she has been hired to serve him, while the American women are used by the Italian gigolos," Fratti continued and then answered to my questions regarding the men in his plays: "Men think they can manipulate but in truth they are the ones being manipulated. In *Wives* the man thinks himself charming and seductive but the *Wives* literally destroy him. This type of man does not exist anymore, things have changed."

In *Wives* women instead of being victimized by an opportunistic man, are firmly in control. "These women are really tough. I was inspired by all the women I meet every day," Fratti continued, "I always do my homework and study my characters. When I am with a woman I let her talk, and I learn a lot."

The Academy's Professor, who trains the young men in the sympathetic tactics to conquer vulnerable American dowagers, will be played by director Stephan Morrow. Morrow has directed Fratti's recent productions performed at the Theater for the New City: "*Trio*" (2010), "*Quartet*" (2011), the double-bill of "*Three Sisters and a Priest*" and "*Suicide Club*" (2012), "*The Vatican Knows* (about the kidnapping of that young woman)" (2013) and "*Six Passionate Women*" (2014). When asked about their collaboration Fratti explains that "I always have to explain to Stephan how my women are. He sees them as prostitutes but I see them as victims so I need to make him see that too. He gets the men right away. Together we work in total harmony. At the beginning I am very present in the rehearsing phase and then I let go and let Stephan and the actors take flight. "

In *The Academy* the Professor's wife will be played by [Kate Rose Reynolds](#) [5] and the students will be played by [Michael Striano](#) [6], Fergus Scully, Kellan Peavy, Nick Palazzo and Taylor Petracek and Tucker Lewis.

In *Wives*, Carlotta Brentan plays the man's divorced wife while Giulia Bisinella plays his new fiancée. The two young Italian actresses have worked in Fratti's plays before and the playwright remembered seeing them act and not noticing an Italian accent. "It is important, if you want to work here, where you are a foreigner no matter what, not to have an accent. If you do, you won't be taken seriously. My agent doesn't want me to meet with my producers. She is scared of my spoken English, and prefers to let my writing speak for itself."

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