

ROMA HEROES IN THE STREETS OF EUROPEAN CITIES



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Genesis of a Theatre Company

Created by
A.P.S. Rampa Prenestina, Italy



ROMA HEROES IN THE STREETS OF EUROPEAN CITIES

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ORIGINS

This second project of the ROMA HEROES series, was born from the input and the guidance given by the Hungarian Independent Theater Hungary (UTH) the Budapest based Theater Company of Roma artists, whom for a decade has been supporting the creation of a European network of Companies, Actors, Playwrights and theatrical productions realized by artists from the Roma community or close to it, giving space and voice to the self-representation of the subjects and the internal narrative of the community.

There is no "Roma theatre" as such, but there is today a theater production created by Roma artists. This is inevitably imbued with the ancient and modern history of the diaspora of a people scattered throughout the European territory and beyond. At the same time, UHT carries out inclusive pedagogy activities and organizes professional artistic trainings that facilitate the approach of the youth of the Roma community to theatrical art and its crafts.

UTH annually organizes an International Theater Festival in Budapest which presents theatrical creations and artists of Roma origin from all over Europe. It was on the 2018 edition of the festival that I met UHT, who invited me to the festival, commissioning me to write and create a theatrical storytelling performance. I presented a story about the hidden Roma-Sinti origins of my paternal grandparents, my past ten-year experience as a nomadic artist in Europe and my now twenty-year dedication as an activist for the civil rights and social inclusion of the young generations of the Roma community from Serbian origin, born and raised in the institutional camp located in my neighborhood of residence in east Rome.

I have always limited my action mainly to the Roma community present in my area of residence, as I strongly believe in the so-called Glocal action, which allows deepening and giving continuity to the social activism that is based on and acts out of human relationships. This has allowed me to follow the young people of the Roma community in via dei Gordiani for three generations and acquire an in-depth knowledge of their social condition.

The Roma camps builded by the institutions in the largest Italian cities are a unique phenomenon in Europe, a manifestation of the inability or lack of political will to intervene to protect the weakest groups and promote their inclusion through effective interventions to contrast economic and educational poverty. Once built, the institutional camps are left to themselves by the institutions, in a condition of degradation and lack of basic social services, slowly decaying into ghettos. Here young people grow up without prospects, with very high percentages of early school dropout, unemployment, depression that often leads to addiction on drugs, psychiatric drugs and just as often, leads young people by reaction to become easy laborers of petty crime.

My activities for Roma minors and youth refers to the concepts of Pedagogy of the Oppressed by P. Freire and are mainly of artistic nature. Since 2002 I have offered theater, circus, music courses at a school structure adjacent to the Roma camp, through the organization of which I am the founder and legal representative, the Rampa Prenestina Cultural Association for Social Promotion. The school structure, Di Vittorio Lattanzio Technical Institute, has hosted our activities since 2004, facilitating their realization by its close location to the Roma camp providing easy access for the young people and minors of the community.

EVOLUTION

The present ROMA HEROES IN THE STREETS OF EUROPEAN CITIES project, of which I write the report at the end of a passionate collective experience, was born, by natural evolution, from the success of the first project carried out under the guidance of UHT from 2018 to 2020, named ROMA HEROES IN THEATER EDUCATION AND EVERYDAY LIFE. During this first project a group of 4 Peers of mixed Roma and non-Roma origins, carried out a training in theatrical storytelling as tool for social exchange and in conducting debates and discussion workshops on topics such as racism, discrimination and social exclusion on ethnic grounds, human rights, citizenship, equal opportunities. All those concepts reflect on the condition of inequality among the young generation of today's society, largely multiracial but increasingly divided into social classes, bringing specific attention on the condition of young people born and raised in Roma camps who are real ghettos established by the public institutions.

The four young people who participated in this first Heroes project tried their hand at presenting workshops in the social and scholastic fields. They developed the ability to introduce themselves, speak and moderate public debate. Most important, they acquired awareness of their condition, the own potential for emancipation, the courage to open up and tell about one's own lives to confront the lives of others to show how many dreams and aspirations young people born and raised in the ghettos can have in common with those who were lucky enough to grow up in comfortable conditions.

This first project was successful, despite the difficulties experienced during the pandemic period and the four Peers took turns presenting in moderating the workshops presented in various social and school structures of our territory. The training started a process of awareness in the young peers and grew in strength during the international meeting that took place in Budapest between the groups of the four partner countries (Spain and Romania together with Italy and Hungary). During that summit, the Peers experienced an important broadening of their cultural horizon through the recognition of peers from other countries of different cultures, but linked by similarities in social condition, culture of origin, traditions and linguistic kinship of the many forms of the Romani language, legacy of the diaspora of a people exiled for a millennium from their land of origin, today scattered throughout the European Community and in the world.

I am convinced that this meeting was fundamental for the group of peers from the Italian team, who later decided to continue their training by participating in the present project that has led to the creation and public presentation of the theater performance "ASPETTANDO BO" (Waiting for Bo). The performance stages as protagonists two young people of Roma origin and two young Italians. Along with this group, another group of 4 Peers has been involved, of mixed Roma and non-Roma origin. Two of them are women, who have worked on the creation of a debate workshop regarding the main topics of the performance, the condition of the youth generations born and raised in legal Roma camps in Italy.

The underlying desire is to tell, through a free theatrical game, the life and emotions of 2 youngsters born and raised in a Roma camp. This is our contribution put at the service of a transformation that affects everyone and all, Roma and non-Roma. We dream of a society in which cultural differences are a positive asset, a society in which ethnic ghettoisations is just an old story to be told to young people, so as not to let them happen. Never again.

Erasmus

Through participation in the Erasmus+ program, APS Rampa Prenestina is giving a wider scope to its educational activities by participating in the creation of a network on transnational level, in the in certainty that the experience of meeting and exchanging with similar realities of other nations brings cultural enrichment to the activities hitherto confined to the local territory. We thus want to make the young participants in our activities aware of the international dimension of their work, give them the opportunity to work in groups outside their home territory, exchange experiences with other volunteers and enrich their preparation by following training with educators from other countries and diverse cultures.

Through the international relations built through the Erasmus+ projects, we observe in the young Roma involved, an exponential growth of awareness on the perception of the outside world and the sense of belonging to an international reality which, in the case of the Roma diaspora, is today rich in cultural variations while maintaining the common denominator of origins, through language and traditions.

In the support of the growth and diffusion of Roma Theater and its artistic production, We have identified in an important evolutionary potential for the cause of the community as a whole. In its artistic expression, Roma Theater has always remained on the margins, considered a mere folkloric curiosity. Today, also thanks to modern technologies, to the inclusive European policies, but above all thanks to the passion and dedication of the numerous Roma artists scattered throughout Europe, Roma Theater proves to deserve a space in the formal and institutional artistic context of today's European society

WAITING FOR BO: Birth of a theater performance

THE EMBRYO OF AN IDEA.

During the first decade of the 2000s, I attended the Roma camp in via dei Gordiani every day, to invite young people and children to our recreational and educational activities and build relationships of trust with their families. I already sensed the incapacity of institutions, even the most benevolent ones, to deal with the many problems of a marginalized community also due to legislative negligence of the institutions themselves. For this reason I directed my commitment towards the community itself, in order to get to know it thoroughly and understand its internal social mechanisms.

For about five years I assiduously related to the families of the camp and in parallel with the educational activities with the minors, in my free time I offered various forms of support to the community: orientation in bureaucracy and job placement, drafting of curriculums, maintenance work on sanitary ware and electrical systems, overall cleaning of the campsite. The intervention I carried out that definitively won the trust of the community was the installation of external pipes and taps that greatly facilitated the washing of carpets regularly practiced by women.

Generally, my contribution to everyday problemsolving has been fundamental in building the trust that today the older families in the camp place in me. In fact, after its construction and the installation of metal containers, the camp got left to its own destiny, above all in regard to its technical and sanitary maintenance and safety systems, decaying in a very short time to the condition of slums.

I saw young people living in constant expectation of an existential turning point that never came, a stroke of luck, a job, a lottery win, a football career, a happy marriage, a home, "a life without trouble" as written in a short poem by one of the members of the youth band that I trained in those years, named SaràBanda, who played in a style that the boys themselves called "Rock&Rom".

In that period, I often saw couples of boys leaning against a low wall, a post, a moped, the wreckage of an abandoned car, in poses that reminded me of the two Beckettian characters, Vladimir and Estragon, immersed in that condition of apparently eternal and perhaps even useless waiting. Adolescents or young adults, they had abandoned school education due to social or economic unease, many of them did not even have citizenship or regular legal status, chronically unemployed, with no future prospects other than the art of getting by.

Crowds of young people destined to live a life of expedients, with no alternative but to confine themselves within their own community, the family, the only safe island, accepting the condition of marginalized as an ineluctable destiny. I often stopped to chat with them, listening to their stories, their dramas, their dreams, which are those of all young people of that age. As a friend and silent witness, I collected and preserved some of their stories, the most singular ones and the phrase often resounded within me: "They are waiting for Godot".

I collected the most absurd, tragicomic stories, those with events with Kafkaesque turnings in which the caotic complexity of the institutions and its bureaucratic apparatus lead to the intertwining of tangled situations bordering on the comical, if it weren't for the tragic and grotesque outcomes that obtusely prevent the peaceful development of human life. I collected stories and fixed in my memory all those moments, those images, words and sensations that, as a theater actor, I could one day bring on the stage to share it with the world.

CREATIING A DRAMATURGY.

CHOICE OF COMIC, ABSURD, SURREAL LANGUAGE.

Those first years attending the Roma camp, I was also active on the European theater scene as professional member of a successful company present in the major theater festivals, the "Teatro de los Sentidos" of the anthropologist Enrique Vargas, which conducted a deep theatrical research on the unconscious aspects of mankind, teaching me the importance of the theatrical experience as vehicle of awareness, awakening and transformation of the human soul. At same time I was continuing my acting career as a Clown, deeply influenced by the figure of the great Charlie Chaplin, whose work has strongly influenced the popular masses of the whole world, with his way of touching the drama of poverty and marginalization through poetry and comedy and laughter.

The Clown uses love and the smile to break in the heart of his audience, irony and comedy to overturn social canons and conventions, innocence to awaken the feeling of community and empathy inherent in all human beings, in children and adults . The theater of social denounce is often violent, dramatic, raw, direct, it aims to demonize the structure of society of which, however, the spectator himself voluntarily or involuntarily builds the foundations. In my opinion this creates unease in the public that reacts in refusal and denial on the dramas of life, activating defenses and removal mechanism, due to the heavy burden of the subjects dealt with crudely.

On the other hand, the poetic of comic theater and surrealist theater allows dramatic themes to be conveyed through irony, comedy, poetry, lightness, qualities that naturally activate feelings such as empathy, hope, solidarity, identification.

For these reasons, for the writing of the dramaturgy and the dialogues I turned to the Doppio Senso Unico (DSU) theater company, an artistic theater duo, Luca Ruocco and Ivan Talarico, who have been working for years on a strongly ironic theatrical vein, inspired by surrealism, dadaism and the theater of the absurd. Furthermore, for many years DSU has been an integral part of the Rampa cultural space, shared spaces with our association and over time they have been able to know in depth the reality of young Roma in the Gordiani camp who grew up frequenting our venue. The choice proved to be appropriate because, knowing well the problems, tastes, aspirations, dreams, vices and defects of the young Roma, DSU managed to produce a drama very close to the spirit of the boys who, moreover, liked the text, recognized and identified with it immediately.

For the final production of the drama, with DSU I shared the collected stories and anecdotes and closely followed the writing process, giving guidelines where necessary during meetings also attended by the Roma youth representative. Further adaptation of the drama is was finally done by our director Claudia Sorrentino, through a cut and sew process, adding material issued from improvisations and brainstormings with the Roma youth, during the staging work and rehearsals.

For the artistic direction, the choice fell on Claudia Sorrentino. Clown, actress, comedian, director and theater teacher, excellent artist tout-court, who has decades of experience in comic theater and in particular on the character of the Clown. Claudia is also a fervent civil, social and political activist who has been fighting for civil and social rights for many years. Claudia has also youthful ties to the Roma families with whom she lived as close neighbours in her home territory.

THE STORIES AND TOPICS COVERED

The stories collected and adapted for the staging, are real-life situations experienced by many of the young Roma, in their attempts to leave the marginalized community in which they live in a sort of forced confinement, at the mercy of pressures both from the outside and the inside. Between bureaucratic entanglements and marginalized tradition.

Young people who bravely ventures outside the narrow circle of their community often find themselves having to deal with often unsolvable bureaucratic complications. The lack of a document, a certificate, a birth certificate, a legal census or residence act, leads young people to give up. Everything becomes difficult: finding a job, opening a bank account, obtaining a subsidy, enrolling in training, all things that should be simple become impossible and contribute to increased sense of helplessness, inadequacy, apathy, depression and fatalism from which only the few manage to break free.

The performance WAITING FOR BO shows in a comic key a series of situations experienced by two young people who ventures out in search of a job, that would allow them to earn enough money to build a house and leave the Roma camp. The two continually fails, due both to their inadequacy and to the prejudices they encounter along the way, due to misunderstanding they also get in trouble with the law, to finally return resigned to the Roma camp, the only safe place, to the identical condition of departure: The eternal and useless waiting.

The stories staged were collected, chosen and discussed by the group, they are all real life stories that shed light on four main themes:

CITIZENSHIP

In our case, we are in a community of Serbian origin, non-EU citizens, less fortunate than their Romanian brothers who enjoy more free access to work and live in EU. Many of these families are forced to renew legal residence permits during years and today many young people born and raised in Italy have problems obtaining citizenship. The Italian law for non-EU citizens recognizes and protects minors born in Italy until they reach the age of majority.

It grants citizenship only if the family has continuous and regular residence, work and income, a condition that Roma families rarely reach and many young people born in Italy are forced to renew their residence permit but only up to the age of majority, after which the subject it automatically becomes clandestine.

Over time there have been cases in which the subject has been expatriated to the parents' country of origin, where he has never been, whose language he knows badly and where there are no longer any family ties except for distant ones. In many cases young people return to Italy, which is their true country of origin, and are content to live in semi-clandestinity just to return to their families, their loved ones, their world.

For many years the question of citizenship for young people born in Italy has remained on the political table without finding a solution, despite the fact that today the problem no longer arises only for Roma but affects the entire migratory movement of our era.

ACCESS TO WORK

Many young people live in a perpetual condition of chronic unemployment, in my opinion mainly due to educational poverty. School dropout is around 40% already in primary school while for high school it reaches very high peaks. The cases of young people from the Roma camps who have obtained a high school diploma are very rare and none reaches the university degree.

The Italian law grants them access to education; during the first years of primary school, most Roma children attend school regularly, even if there are already problems due to hygienic and behavioral conditions. Roma children, accustomed to play in the street in great freedom, often struggles to self-regulate, to sit in composure for many hours and in many cases have concentration and learning issues, due to the initial linguistic difficulties typical of bi-lingual individuals. The condition of being marginalized, different, becomes overwhelmingly apparent during primary school: the youngster, now an adolescent, become aware of his status of marginalized in his relationship with peers who live in so-called "normal" social conditions and experiences situations of bullying and racism mainly due to prejudice, which leads to dropout.

School dropout is often followed by attempts to enter in professional training programs, which in many cases are unsuccessful for the same reasons as above, the search for work is made difficult by one's ethnic origins, and young people often have to hide their Roma origins in hope to get a job.

Often the linguistic difficulties, the sense of inadequacy, but also the exaggerated pace of work, underpaid work or undeclared work lead the subject to give up searching and resign to live by their wits, expedients such as collecting iron, selling roses on the street, begging from house to house, in extreme cases give themselves over to petty crimes.

LIFE IN THE ROMA INSTITUTIONAL CAMPS

The institutional Roma camps are legal in Italy, but considered illegal by the European Community that, since their foundation, has been inviting Italian institution to close them, providing guidelines on access to proper housing to the Roma community that are still dead letter as today.

There is a Roma community of around 7,000 in Rome, nearly 4,000 living in state-maintained legal camps, segregated from the rest of the population. There have been eight state camps in Rome since the early 1990s, and similar ghettos exist in other cities as well.

Their official goal is to be to preserve the nomadic culture, however, the reality is far from the political intention. Camps tend to be in out-of-reach locations, close to highways or agricultural sites, making it difficult for residents to access education (there is a school bus system for primary school pupils but not for high school), work and health care.

The camps consist of steel shacks or mobile homes, surrounded by fences and monitored by civil guards, however there is often no public lighting and public safety is problematic. Sanitation is also poor and residents are often in poor health, with problems with alcohol, drugs or mental disorders. The fact that Roma are often discriminated against in healthcare aggravates this situation. Those people who immigrated to the country without legal documents are not entitled to health care.

Residents of legal or illegal camps often end up here after being evicted from their homes. Living here is also linked to strict requirements, for example children have to go to school. Often no warning is issued before the eviction, so families don't have time to look for alternatives. Applying for social housing is made difficult by the years long waiting list, the grant of social houses to Roma families is often opposed by the neighborhood, often fueled by racist movements, often hindering physically the Roma families to take possess of the houses legally granted. There have been cases of violent demonstrations forcing families to flee the houses and return to the camps.

LINGUISTIC MINORITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

A people, put them in chains, strip them, shut their mouths, they are still free. Take away their job, their passports, the table where they eats, the bed where they sleeps, they're still rich. A people becomes poor and enslaved when their language is taken from them, the language received as a dowry from their fathers: This people is lost forever. (Ignazio Buttitta)

Linguistic and cultural diversity is one of the fundamental principles of the European Union, enshrined in Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights: "The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity"; Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights recognize linguistic diversity as a citizen's right... ..endangered languages must be conceived as part of Europe's cultural heritage and not as a mere vehicle for political, ethnic or territorial aspirations; all the languages of Europe are equal in value and dignity, as an integral part of its cultures and civilizations contributing to the enrichment of humanity;

"Around ten to twelve million people of Roma origin live in Europe today, including six million in the countries of the European Union: the Roma are the largest ethnic minority on the continent, as well as the one that suffers the most discrimination. Indeed, a recent survey demonstrates how, within the countries of the European Union, prejudices against the representatives of these communities remain particularly widespread."
<https://www.eastjournal.net/archives/100915>

Today Romani is a recognized minority language in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden and Hungary, the official language of the Šuto Orizari district in North Macedonia. But not in Italy, where for several years the few Italian intellectuals of Roma origin have been fighting for the recognition of the Roma people as a linguistic minority without any success.
https://www.ucri.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Proposta-di-legge-UCRI_09_07_2020.pdf

Such recognition would induce national institutions to provide funds and tools for the preservation of the Romani language, which, in the case of institutional Roma camps, is gradually disappearing. Specifically, the community of Serbian origin of our young Roma participants of this project today speaks a mixture of languages that includes ancient Romanian, Serbian, Italian, the latter strongly dialectical and weakened by educational poverty. The few elderly people still alive only speak Romani. The ancient language survives in Roma music that is still very much alive; however, young people only partially understand the lyrics of the songs. The younger generations therefore speak various languages but all of it in a summary, incomplete way, with difficulties even in reading and writing to the detriment of school performance, condition that aggravates their social path and their ability to address the outside world.

SELECTION OF THE PEERS

Around ten young people participated in the various stages of work and training, eight of whom are of Roma origin. Three of them already had previous experience in the first ROMA HEROES project described above. It is significant that these three were initially somewhat distrustful of their theatrical abilities, a conception that later changed through the work with the trainers and the example of their peers from other countries, the international value of their work encouraging them in the path undertaken. During the selection period, these three accepted the idea of get on the stage and two of them are now the protagonists of the performance.

This group participated in the theater training, four of whom is now part of the "Theater Company" and four are in the team that in turns presents the thematic workshop. Out of eight people, five of the selected are from the Roma community.

Other Roma youngsters took part in the training but did not want to get on the stage, out of shyness and insecurity. Later, after having attended various public presentations to which they are regularly invited, they changed their mind, manifesting desire to participate in future projects. One Peer has taken the role of "substitute" for when occasionally an original member is missing.

Three of the selected ones, those who had previous experiences with our organization, besides being part of the performance or moderators of the theme workshop, collaborate in this project as trainees in various tasks, such as social media manager, organizational assistant and cultural mediator. Our goal is for these Peers to acquire over time the ability to independently manage the bureaucratic and organizational aspects of European projects. Finally, a young Italian of Ukrainian origin joined the project initially only as an assistant and administrative support, but later fell in love with the theater work and he too will go on stage, as I will describe later.

At the conclusion of the training there was a spontaneous selection among those who felt ready to go on stage. Subsequently changes and substitutions will later become necessary. The team of actors and original workshop moderators is as follows:

Theater:

Erik and Choppi protagonist actors

Beppe: Stage Servant (Substitute by Dragisa)

Simone: Musician and stage technician.

Thematic laboratory:

Workshop 1 Larisa and Ljiuba

Workshop 2 Bruno and Daniela

THE ACTOR TRAINING

Lasting about two months, the actor training was conducted by Claudia and me in turn, leading the ten young people to gradually to get to know and approach the theatrical language and the work of the actor. Claudia's and my common experience on the Clown and the comedian, based mainly on play and playfulness as a creative stimulus, it made it easy to amalgamate our interventions.

Claudia concentrated on acting language, improvisation, awareness of the scenic space, individual and group scenic focus, teamwork, listening and meticulous attention to detail, looks, words and movements on the scene, essential for conveying one's message to the public with clarity. Claudia also conducted brainstorming moments with the boys, collecting opinions, words, memories, impressions that became part of a poetic composition later used in an important scene of the performance. My intervention was more focused on body language, mime and pantomime, manipulation and juggling and manipulation the hats worn on stage.

We started training by working on the most obvious difficulties for young people at their first experience in public, namely shyness, insecurity, authority in presenting themselves to the public.

Specific exercises of theater training were used:

- Enter an empty scene and introduce yourself. The posture, the look, the control of the emotion through the breath, the essentiality of the gestures.
- Oratory skills (in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, the ability to speak in public, correct enunciation and rhythm of speech, the importance of pauses and the role of silence)
- Awareness of the scenic space, where and how to place oneself in front of the audience, not turning away, sharing the scenic space with the other actors in a balanced way, always having clear where the focus of the theater scene is to be able to support it, how to reinforce the actions of the other actors on stage.
- Know and activate creative dynamics through free improvisation.
- The importance of music in creating atmosphere and as a guide for the rhythm of the actor in the movement and body language, the rhythm of the word

In this phase, the training main topic was the game and the exercise of playfulness, as mean to overcome the barriers and limits created by the mind, self-prejudice and prejudice toward others, preconceptions in human relationships. We used individual, pair, circle and team games. These are expressly constructed games but also popular games adapted for the purpose. In the experience of immediacy, the energetic and emotional charge of the game, the peers rediscover the value of spontaneity towards others and explore concepts such as lightness, complicity, fairplay, balance, which will be useful in the experience with the public.

The atmosphere during the trainings was mainly serene and trusting with moments of great enthusiasm and considerable involvement during the games and improvisations, particularly on the side of the Roma peers. Being devoid of superstructures and accustomed to play and team, they did always freely launched themselves into improvisations, showing great self-irony up to wearing clown hats and noses with the utmost easyness.

There were moments of tension among the younger members of the group which, however, once they were overcome, helped to strengthen the sense of belonging and teamwork. Emotionally strong moments were also experienced during group discussions on the topics covered by the dramaturgy, in search of the right imagery to convey to the public, how to tell dramatic situations actually experienced with humor and lightness.



Rehearsals of the show "Waiting for Bo"

A particularly emotional moment aroused around the sad memory of a big fire that happened many years ago in the camp, which led to the death of two peers, one of whom was the sister of one of our peers. This memory unites all the Roma youngsters working in the project, even though they were still kids at the time, I too witnessed the tragic event and keep the sad memory. The other boy who died was my music student for five years and played the drums in the SaràBanda. I had actively participated in the organization of their wedding party. This memory came up several times during the brainstorming and I transformed it by inserting it in a poetic composition later included in the dramaturgy.

Long discussions have been held on whether or not to talk about this event in the frame of the performance as it is an indelible memory that has involved the entire Roma community. The last word was given to the brother of the deceased girl: he experienced that sharing the memory on the stage was a form of pain relief. So it is for me as well and I regard this as a further confirmation of the transformative power inherent in the theatrical action when this is conceived as a sacred rite of collective sharing.

THE MUSIC

The development of the stage music took place during specific individual meetings with Simone, one of the non-Roma component of the group. Young and talented guitarist, attended my music workshops from 2016 to 2019, during which he built a close friendship with the Roma peers, participated in the first Erasmus project with them. In this new project Simone has the role of stage musician and company technician.

Simone plays the electric guitar, which has little to do with the Roma musical tradition. But this is precisely the reason for my choice. Today's Roma youth, thanks to new technologies, has expanded their musical horizons, in addition to Roma music they listen to modern music such as pop, rock, rap, reggaeton and shows particular fondness for neo-melodic Neapolitan music, both for the themes covered (poverty, injustice, crime, marginalization, prejudice) and for the oriental connotation of the I singing style. For these reasons, we have created together arrangements of Roma and manouche melodies for electric guitar, combining tradition and modernity and bringing to the stage a sound that is sometimes energetic and biting, sometimes comical, sometimes poetic and suggestive. Neomelodic Neapolitan music also characterizes one of the scenes of the performance.

We also worked with Simone on the technical aspects of the music, building a battery-operated sound system to have the possibility of presenting the show even on the street where it is not always possible to access an electrical connection.



SCENOGRAPHY AND COSTUMES

For the choice of sets and costumes we have chosen to be as essential as possible. A light cloth acts as a backdrop for the entrances and exits, a table with a few objects and two benches for the musician and the stage servant, a large waste bin. For the costumes, the director chose that the protagonists and the musician, playing themselves, be dressed normally, with only the added detail of the bowler hats and felt hats typical of the Godot characters. Only the stage servant, in his dress, has connotations that refer to typically Roma characters. The whole scenography is contained in a trunk and a bin, easily transportable. The show has been adapted so that it can be presented in open spaces, as well as indoors in halls and theatres.





ASPETTANDO BO

Personaggi e Interpreti

Cioppi : Roberto Djordjevic
Erik : Erik Nikolic
Musicista : Simone Fruscella
Servo di scena : NZ
Voce fuori Campo : B.Toscano

Ideazione, Organizzazione
generale, Arrangiamento
Musicale : NZ

Drammaturgia :
L.Ruocco e I.Talarico (DSU)

Adattamento e Regia :
Claudia Sorrentino

PR : E. L. Ciubotaru

Jolly Boy : B. Toscano



Rampa Prenestina

ASSOCIAZIONE DI PROMOZIONE SOCIALE

0761/20111



The poster of the show "Waiting for Bo"

LAST MINUTE ADJUSTMENTS

A series of adjustments and modifications have been necessary in the last few days close to the expected date for the show's debut. The most urgent change was caused a week earlier by the renunciation of one of the Roma actors who, fortunately, only held the marginal role of stage servant, but still quite a challenging role and difficult to replace in such a short time. This is why I decided to do the substitution myself, having in-depth knowledge of the text, the dramaturgy and the scenic actions. At this point, being on stage, I decided to also reinforce the music playing the accordion, a typical instrument of the Roma tradition, to better define the musical poetics.

The same problem recurred on the second presentation of the show. This time Simone the musician had fallen ill, but we absolutely could not and did not want to cancel the event, as the whole delegation of the project Partners would have been present and the show had been included in the programming of a thematic festival. This time we were saved by Dragisa, one of the young Roma who had participated in the training and who initially refused to go on stage but after seeing the debut, he was enthusiastic and agreed to participate as stage servant.

Another adjustment that became necessary concerned the voiceover carrying a constant dialogue with the protagonists. Initially we had tried with a recorded voice, but this solution did not satisfy us and inhibited the possibility of improvising on the text. During rehearsals we found that the rhythm of the dialogues, puns and verbal jokes were much more effective if an actor performed the voice-over live. On the occasion of the debut and the following show the voice was interpreted by our director, Claudia, later Bruno took over, who initially only had organizational tasks but, during the weeks of rehearsals, helping as a prompter, he fell in love with the text and the show and currently holds the role of voice-over permanently.

THE PREMIERE

The debut of the show took place on August 7, in the external courtyard of the Asinitas headquarters, an organization of our territory, in front of an audience of about 40 people, unfortunately few, due to the summer holidays that had already begun, a period in which the city is empty. The public was diversified, made up of university students, activists and workers from the scholastic and social world, relatives, families and friends also from the Roma camp.

During the last rehearsals the show was already convincing, but in presenting it to the public the spark was struck by the adrenaline and the emotion that made the show magical, convincing, real. Surely the protagonists, young actors in their first theatrical experience, felt reassured by my presence on stage and by the director in the voice-over, but they were absolutely convincing and completely immersed in their characters.

The audience responded warmly, repeatedly interrupting with applause and bursting onto the scene to dance along to the closing music of the show. Many children were also present in the front row of the audience and we were able to see that the text, due to its lightness, irony and comedy with which the dramatic themes and social protests are treated, is suitable for audiences of all ages, which it is in line with our intention to bring the show to schools too, starting from lower secondary schools.



The premiere at Asinitas Cultural Venue

THE SECOND PERFORMANCE

The project schedule provide two representations of the play, to reach a certain number of spectators, and we had included the second show in the programming of a festival organized by the alternative cultural space SCUP (Sport and Popular Culture). We arranged for the event to coincide with the presence of the project partners in Rome for the expected international meeting on the 14th October 2022. For the occasion, Claudia helped us build a themed evening, inviting a street band that performs traditional Roma music, the Balkan Orchestra that closed the evening with a magnificent dance concert.



"Waiting for Bo" at SCUP

Given the rainy day, we had to give up the outdoor presentation and the absence of the musician due to illness forced us to further rehearsal on the morning of the event. Despite the difficulties, working in the indoor theater space, having the lighting and sound system available helped improve the quality of the show, bringing it to a more professional level, which positively impressed the young actors, who were dealing with a real theater ambient for the first time. For the Partners from Hungary, Romania and Spain we organized the screening of English language subtitles in real time, which proved to be useful later on. Great turnout of the public, about a hundred people, once again varied and heterogeneous, students, activists, as well as circus, theater and dance professionals regular visitors to the SCUP, a dozen representatives of the Partner countries. We were surprised by the large turnout of the youngest Roma families from the Gordiani camp, who regard the performance about their camp as a source of pride. Final Standing Ovation, great compliments and positive comments also from the Partners.

THE CITY TOURNEE



"Waiting for Bo" at Casale Garibaldi

From my long experience in the theatre, I know that a show, in order to refine, evolve and perfect itself, must necessarily be performed in public as much as possible. For this, despite having completed the project schedule with the two shows performed, together the company decided to offer the show to the cultural and social structures of the city. But a surprise awaited us!

Absolutely unexpected came an invitation from the International Roma Theater festival, in Bucharest Romania, organized by the artists of ARTHUB Cultural Center, in collaboration with the Bucharest City Hall, that decided to include us in their program at the COMIC OPERA THEATER in Bucharest, a real theatre, a splendid building with various stage spaces furnished in traditional Italian style.

Originally, the organizers intended to invite me personally with my individual performance. I decided to transform the invitation into an opportunity for the peers to have a real Tournée experience and I am thankful to the ARTHUB organization who trusted me and decided to support the growth of our peers who, however, did not disappoint the expectations of the organizers the audience (again around forty people) who welcomed the show warmly.

The Italian Cultural Institute in Bucharest also got involved in the organization of the event by taking care of the drafting of the subtitles in Romanian. Their representative, present and active during the performance, expressed the intention of the Institute to invite our company in future events. The representatives of ArtHub expressed the same. Although tiring, this wonderful experience contributed to the growth of the young team, their enthusiasm and their confidence in their own potential.

We further presented the performance in three different cultural spaces of the city:

27/11/2022 Casale Garibaldi

05/12/2022 Casale Falchetti

21/01/2023 Spin Time Lab

The first two dates were organized in the Roma Camp's territory and we invited local schools representatives, with whom we opened a dialogue to collaborate in the future to bring the show in their schools. Being the two spaces located near the field, here too we recorded the presence of many young Roma among the spectators.

On the two dates, we counted around 50 people per event and received an enthusiastic welcome with positive comments from the public. Among the spectators was the well-known storyteller Nino Racco who, after watching the performance, invited us to enter the theater program of the Spin Time Lab, one of the most important alternative cultural spaces in the city.

The performance at the Spin Time Lab was perhaps the most successful of this short city tour. The theater space is fully organized and we were able to take advantage of the support of excellent stage technicians. The week before Nino Racco invited us to a couple of cognitive and training meetings led by him, manifesting his interest in future collaboration with our company. This we welcome with joy as further confirm of the validity of our work .

In the same evening, Nino Racco wanted to include another show, presented by the storyteller Daniele Mutino, who in one episode tells of the sad event of the fire at the Rom camp and the death of the newlyweds described above. Great emotional moments for everyone and great success of our show. The performance followed up with the thematic workshop in the form of open debate with the audience.

Below Nino Racco's review he wrote about our show at Casale Falchetti, which I think reflects the general impressions of the whole audience, followed by comments received from the public.

A Sunday afternoon at Casale Garibaldi on the Prenestina neighborhood, to see the Roma Theater performance WAITING FOR BO (inspired by Beckett). A little cold but the garden is welcoming, the scenic space cut out between the stalls of the organic/artisanal market.

The two actors of Roma theater - Roberto Djordjevic (Cioppi) and Erik Nikolic - appears shy or fearful at the beginning (in the audience there are friends and relatives of the Roma community) and also a little embarrassed, make you wonder if "they're faking or are they real?", but as soon as they got assisted by the stage servant ZN and the off-screen voice of Bruno T (a renewed Pozzo) you understand that they "are real", in the best theatrical sense, of an honest and sincere theatre.

Cioppi and Erik, like Vladimiro and Estragone, are waiting: they are waiting for Bo.

But, unlike the Beckett characters who "rightly" wait for who or what we don't know, the two Roma boy-characters (they) more simply and materially expect a job or something that will finally straighten out their lives.

They will find nothing, every attempt or solution will prove to be a failure and a loser, perhaps they are not made for this society. What is left at the end of the show? Their indelible smile and a conscious irony remain that will give them the strength to denounce the condition of the Roma communities, the most discriminated people in Europe, without a passport and without legal status: a people that in our civil Continent has 5 million people (around 40,000 in Italy) and which still awaits institutional, political and cultural recognition.

The interpretation of Roberto Djordjevic and Erik Nikolic is light and at the same time profound: the scenic contribution of ZN and Bruno Toscano is of great skill. Punctual and biting the guitar and the sounds of Simone Fruscella.

A project, this one by Rampa Prenestina, of great value and human depth. The show, in its city tour, will be hosted at Spin Time on the Esquiline Hill on 21 January 2023 in the Spazio Cantastorie (Space for storytelling) review.

Thanks to Bruno Toscano and Sebastiano Spinella for inviting me.

Comments from the audience

Sahra: Original and unique in its kind, it is a didactic show in the wake of the absurd... but not too much. Starting from its title, 'Waiting for Bo' reveals, with intensity but also "lightness", the theme of the integration into the Roman reality of two Roma boys, through their paradoxical and totally uncertain vicissitudes. Involving, it offers food for thought to a varied audience by presenting an ethnic group that - although present in the area - is still unknown and needs to be known, with still a lot to tell.

Francesca: The prevailing feelings are: Admiration because damn I wouldn't be able to and they are very good. Then one thing that happens is that you forget a little that they come from a field and when there are jokes or things that bring you back to that reality it's a bit like a stab in the heart.

It's wonderful to throw things around for a laugh and also the fact that the narrator disappears a little when the "serious" speech begins so that the viewer feels called into question. Maybe I don't see it as very suitable for a non-majority audience though because some speeches made to the narrator in which the viewer identifies assume that the narrator is white cis or at least of the "majority"

Then the proverbs were beautiful, I loved it and the second time around I appreciated them more also thanks to the slightly more intimate setting which worked better for many things, but it was also nice to have the horizontal conformation eh, I felt more involved in the situation than to stand on a stairway. However, every time I get excited by their (the actors) desire to get involved, super admired and I really love them instinctively. And they are beautiful when they talk about their families

Sara: Two aspects of the show particularly struck me. The first is that faced with the representation of what are the major prejudices about the Roma community, all the people present laughed; the second is that, on the other hand, when the two Roma boys, following the reasoning of the off-screen voice, arrive at the conclusion that they do not exist because they lack documents, we all realized how much those prejudices that had made us laugh so often because of their unfounded, instead they have a significant impact on the identity and even the existence of that person.

Marta: I enjoyed seeing the performance "Waiting for Bo", popular music gave rhythm to the performance and involved the audience that often followed it by clapping. I appreciated the comic language used to tell a harsh and difficult reality like that of the Roma community, and as me the whole audience, who often laughed at the jokes. At the end of the show the audience was invited on stage to dance and it was nice to see the enthusiasm that was generated among all the presents.

Gloria: There are those topics that are talked about too much but in reality they are not talked about at all. This is a bit of the feeling that wanted to rush at me during the show. At least we don't talk about it to be aware of a Real, to be able to share it. Usually finding the Other turns into a treasure hunt that wants to track down the how, where, and why to regurgitate frustration, distrust, phobia. While instead at the end of this show we danced.

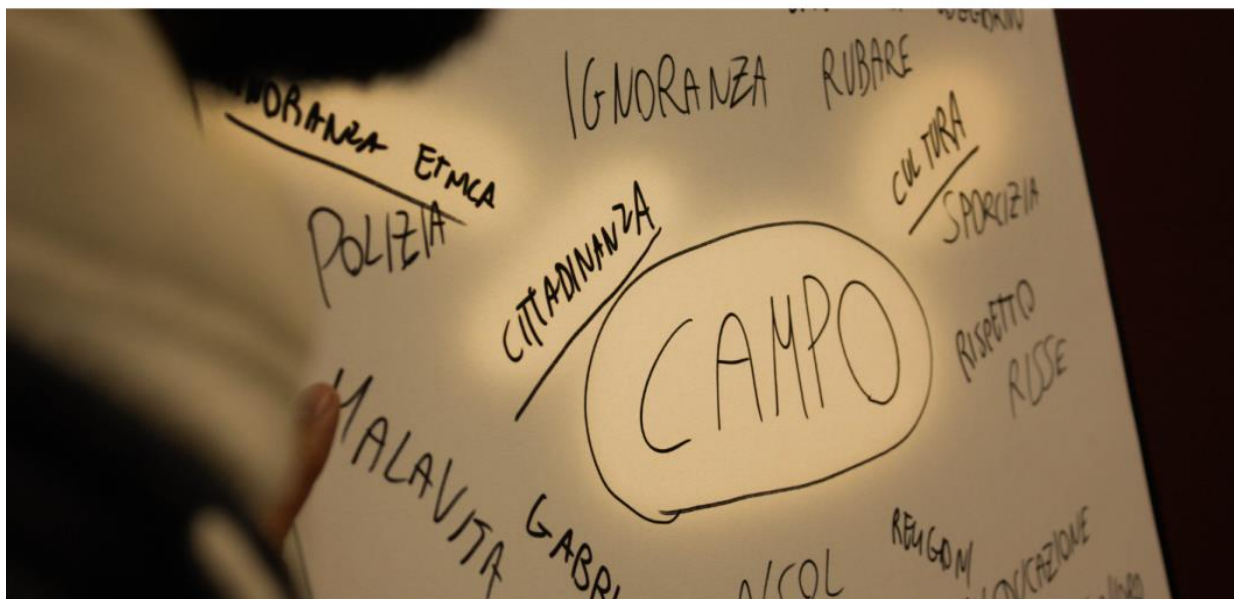
WHAT FUTURE?

After the August debut, all the participants in the show decided to unite as RAMPA PRENESTINA THEATER COMPANY, thus confirming their willingness to continue along the path undertaken. We are currently in negotiation with various theater spaces as well as local schools of the city that attend students of the Roma ethnic group.

In the meantime we have had access to new European funds in partnership with Hungary and Romania for a new project which involves the organization of a Roma theater festival in the three countries that will include the shows created with this project and new creations by the three Partners .

We are therefore right to be optimistic about the future and we keep working even outside the framework of the project.





ROMA HEROES nelle strade delle città europee

Workshop di Antiziganismo

condotto da una coppia di giovani Rom e non Rom, focalizzato sulle tematiche dei Campi Rom, della cittadinanza e della discriminazione nei confronti del popolo Rom dal punto di vista di giovani nati e cresciuti in quel contesto. Utilizzando tecniche di narrazione orale, scritta, video e dinamiche creative e di gioco teatrale, si farà luce sulla condizione di emarginazione che da sempre circonda le comunità Rom, come anche le comunità di immigrati e rifugiati. Tra il materiale usato si evidenzia la produzione teatrale di artisti di origine Rom da Italia, Irlanda e Romania.

Il 07.10.2022 Ore 16.00 - 19.00
Roma, Via della Stazione Tuscolana 82/84
Presso : Scup - Sport e Cultura Popolare



The poster of the thematic workshop

THEMATIC WORKSHOP CREATION AND TRAINING

Parallel to the presentation of the show, we have created a workshop for debate and discussion on the themes highlighted in the dramaturgy, mediated by a mixed Roma and non-Roma couple of Peers. Through the use of social games, individual and collective narrations, theatrical games, the projection of videos of chosen excerpt of the performance combined with moments of debate and brainstorming, the goal is to shed light on the prejudices surrounding the Roma community. Two young women, Ljiuba and Daniela, joined the training, agreeing to talk about their life experience within the community of Roma camps, their need of freedom from stereotypes and the difficulties encountered in their efforts to build a "normal" life condition.

Under the supervision of a senior trainer, this phase of the training was conducted by two senior Peers from the actors group, trained in the previous project, who were thus able to experiment and increase their skills as educators. For the two new volunteers, young and with no experience of running events, the training required the deepening and study of various aspects of communication within a heterogeneous group of people. The goal is to develop communication skills and in-depth knowledge of the topics covered and to equip the volunteers with a wealth of tools for leading participants through a playful-educational experience with the right competence, preparation and ease. Most of the games and exercises practiced during the training will be used in the creative work with the workshop participants. This will allow the moderators to have a wide range of choices with which to diversify the laboratory from time to time and to test its effectiveness on the different types of audience.

Below is a description of the topics explored in the various phases of the training.

- Knowledge of theatrical games and ice breaking exercises.
- Create complicity and group intimacy, overcome mistrust, dissolve the discomfort created by shyness and personal closures. Make sure to involve the whole group, that participants can see and hear clearly, use eye contact a lot.
- Discursive clarity and simplicity in presenting the various phases of the laboratory, in giving instructions and explaining the mechanisms of the games and exercises. Make sure all participants follow and understand. During the games and exercises, observe that everyone is involved in body and mind, be ready to re-explain the instructions and if necessary, give diversified possibilities and information, accept suggestions and modifications, pay attention to all the participants.
- Make the various phases light and fun while preserving the seriousness of the objectives. Give opinions or suggestions during the games.

- During the debate, be assertive without being authoritarian, overbearing or coercing towards the participants, but always kind and inviting.
- Sharing and participating in the group atmosphere without losing authority.
- Avoid competitive games. Competition and challenge must always be motivated, directed and cooperative.
- According to the needs of the moment, use energizing games and thematic games in a differentiated way. Have a list of alternative games available to replace if the atmosphere of the group requires it.
- Respect the pre-established time duration of the games.
- At the end of the games, where appropriate, evaluate collectively the effect, the meaning, the usefulness of the game, the results for a supportive and positive purpose. Compare games with real-life situations, being careful not to detail, judge or personify.

Two workshops were held by the students: the first was held on 07/10/2022 at the SCUP and the second on 21/01/2023 at the SPIN TIME LAB in the form of open debate. In the meantime, a dialogue is undergoing with educational institutions to bring the laboratories to local schools.

INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AND EXCHANGES

International meetings are important steps for enriching and building teamwork, real windows on the outer world. I consider it particularly important for the training and the human and artistic growth of our Peers to take part in the travels and meetings made possible by international mobilization. As far as possible, we have made sure that in groups or in turn, our Peers get the opportunity to follow up.

Kick-off Meeting

Budapest 30/7- 3/8 2021

The project started in the international meeting between the partners in which everyone exposed the social situation of their territory and shared their own methodology with the partners. Below is the report of our contribution.

On the first day of the meeting, we presented the general policy for Roma communities implemented by the Italian government, segregating communities within "Legal Camps" in the suburbs of large cities, far from city centres, services and structures.

Our focus is on the life of young people living in the Roma legal settlement called "Campo Gordiani" located in the eastern suburb of the city of Rome. Erik, the Peer Trainer and project participant, born and raised in this reality, gave a heartfelt testimony of the psychological stress suffered by the young people of his community.

The population of the camp emigrated around 1975 from Serbia, a neighbor country, but not recognized by the EU, and for this reason, together with the lack of regular work, income, documented residence, citizenship is difficult to achieve by many.

Three generations of young people born and raised in Italy in many cases have no legal recognition, thus constituting an invisible army of segregated youngsters. This complicates any interaction with institutions, schools, the health system, the labor market, etc.

Any contact outside the community can be intimidating for these young people, preventing the development of adequate living conditions and in some cases forcing them to live in hiding as clandestines. They often lead a depressive life, locked up in the camp, avoiding contact with the surrounding society, in conditions of poverty, early school leaving, and easy prey for criminal organizations. Abandoned and forgotten by the institutions during their youth, these young people waste their lives without any possibility of developing their potential as positive citizens.

SHARING RESEARCHES

On the second day of the meeting, the focus was on the artistic and creative tools that concern the theatre. The task entrusted to us was to expose and explore two specific topics: How to create a theater space in unconventional places and how to capture and keep the audience's attention.

We choose to proceed through a practical demonstration, by presenting a short theatrical storytelling show entitled "The memory of the earth" which is an extract of my previous professional experience of immersive sensorial theater.

The articulated structure of the place that hosted the meeting, with its numerous rooms, made it possible to gather the group of participants in a procession, walking slowly and silently through corridors and stairs, guided by Erik as a silent guide. This moment lasted about 5 minutes, in which the participants experienced a changed perception of the place, a common meeting room, transformed into a ritual place by the simple invitation to silence and the slow-paced procession creating curiosity and expectation. Erik then silently introduced the participants, one by one, into the room where the theatrical action will soon take place.

Upon entering the space, participants find an actor sitting on the floor at the back of the empty room. Suggested by the solemn pace of the procession, the participants sit on the ground around the actor, who is seated completely still as if he were sleeping, with a white jute sack placed in front of him. Once all the audience is settled, the actor wakes up, opens the jute sack like a large square on the floor, the sack contains moist and perfumed soil. The actor distributes a handful of earth to participants, silently inviting them to feel its texture and smell its scent, that hold memories of natural environment, memories often linked to childhood.

The actor then begins to tell a story about the human being who, forgetting his bond with nature, in the throes of technological development, continuous growth and wild and useless consumerism, destroys the natural environment on which his own life depends.

The hands of the actor who, continuously moving the earth, drawing landscapes and using it to model miniature characters, keeps the audience's attention illustrating the story on the fresh earth, spread out in a perfect round on the square white jute mat to represent the planet.

The performance led to a brainstorming highlighting the following topics:

- The energy of the actor in creating expectation
- How to prepare the audience before the show
- The actor as master of ceremonies
- Any space can become a performance space by including it in the structure of the performance

- The power of silence

- The suggestive manipulation of elements and objects to create curiosity and expectations in the public

The training staff also discussed the importance of creating a safe space for young first-time performers. To make them feel comfortable during their first public performances, it is advisable to organize it in protected places such as festivals, open-air parties, events, schoolyards.

The last day of the meeting, which coincided with the day of remembrance for the victims of the concentration camps. The entire staff of Partners conceived and performed a flash mob in the center of Budapest, to join the commemoration of the Porrajmos the tragedy of Roma community exterminated in Nazi concentration camps during World War II

International Meeting

Bucharest 01/03 – 03/03 2022

Giuvlipen's Romanian partners organized a guided tour for us in the Ferentari district, a district on the outskirts of Bucharest housing a large Roma community. Here is the headquarters of the cultural organization STUDIORILE FERENTARI that collaborates with Giuvlipen in organizing cultural activities for the local youth.

As a general context, Ferentari, also called Ferentexas, has fame as a no man's land, a place where there are no social rules, dominated by drug use, prostitution, poverty and violence. There are many urban myths surrounding the neighborhood and the press usually use the subject to add more layers of stereotypes and to inflict judgment on the Roma community living there.

Ionut Oprea, theater trainer and local mentor, led us to assist the reading of the dramaturgy of the play they are staging for this project. A group of young Roma women performed the reading; Ionut described the structure of the performance, staged as a sort of ironic traveling safari in the Ferentari district. The meeting ended with a brainstorming on the methodologies applied in the training and the dramaturgical strategies used.

INTERNATIONAL ROMA THEATER FESTIVAL

Budapest 05/05 – 09/05 2022

In May 2022 our group of peers together with us trainers traveled to Budapest to attend the 5th International Roma Theater Festival organized by the ITH Lead Partners, The initiative was not scheduled in the project, it was my personal decision in order to further strengthen and motivate our team. Watching many of the theatrical performances and formally meeting fellow Roma artists and actors of other nationalities instilled new enthusiasm in our peers. For this occasion, we held an official meeting with the lead Partner of ITH.

International Meeting

Rome 13-14/10 2022

The planning of the meeting in Rome has been modified by prior agreement with the lead partner as the arrival of the consortium members in Rome coincided with the theatrical review in which our show will be staged the day after the official meeting and our team has been busy with rehearsals and preparation for the event. Despite this, the meeting was held and after the professional and economic arguments, our team illustrated the steps taken during the training and staging of the show. After the viewing, subtitled video extracts of the performance were screened and discussed with a focus on the situation of the Roma camps in the city.

All partners each developed a theme during the meeting on the main topics of the project:

- Training methodology,
- Traveling outdoor shows
- Impact on the lives of Peers and their community.

The following day the whole consortium joined the Theater Festival to attend our performance. To facilitate their presence, we arranged for English subtitles to be shown, and a Hungarian team member helped us overcome technical issues, thus creating a lively cooperation. We are proud to report that the evening was a total success; the performance received a standing ovation from an audience of approximately 100 people including our Partners. The evening continued with an exciting concert of traditional Roma Balkan music that invited the entire audience to the dance floor. We held an impromptu meeting with the Hungarian Leading Partners team who wanted to convey their satisfaction and congratulate our team on the goal achieved, thus confirming our belief in the importance of staging the performance over any virtual description live for our Partners.

International Closing Meeting

Seville 08/02 – 09/02 2022

Last international meeting foreseen in the project, we have reached the closure of the project, the sums are drawn and the results achieved evaluated. During the second day the representatives of the Spanish team of AAIUN PRODUCCIONES took us on a long walk through the streets of Seville, in the historical places that bear witness to the tragic event known as "the great roundup" which took place in 1700. The King of Spain ordered the capture and sentence to slavery of all the Roma people settled throughout the Spanish territory. The story is told to us orally with the support of a smartphone application, which gives access to short video clips of theatrical scenes interpreted by young Spanish actors.



THE VOICES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Erik (Actor, cultural mediator)

I am Erik, I am 24 and I am from Rome.

This is the second time that I participate in a European project through the Rampa Prenestina association.

The first project consisted in creating a workshop to sensitize on the issue of anti-Gypsycism, racism towards Roma, by the use of theater and storytelling, taking the starting point out of the structure created by our Hungarian partners.

Since the problems of Roma communities are different in each country, we at Rampa Prenestina managed to create a specific structure adapted to the local social condition. We were very enthusiastic in doing so and seeing the good results.

This first project thrilled me a lot, it made me have unforgettable experiences and meet fantastic people and for this reason, I decided to continue this path in the second project. This, unlike the first, includes not only a workshop but also a theatrical performance. I was very happy because it also consisted in involving other Roma youngsters; other fellow peers could have done the beautiful experience I had the opportunity to do.

However, the project being more complex than the first one, it needed fresh forces with logistical and theatrical skills. Luckily we managed to find fantastic people to help us in the bureaucratic, organizational and artistic part.

Thanks to " Doppio Senso Unico ", a couple of playwrighters, we managed to have an initial text on which we worked together to finalize at the drafting of the current script. On the theatrical part we were given great help by meeting a very good teacher, Claudia, who with Sebastian set about directing the show.

Together we worked hard to meet the deadlines set by the project. As I wrote earlier, this consisted in finding other Roma peers, so we were lucky to find Roberto (Choppi) and Beppe, peers I grew up with in the Roma camp where we were born. For me, the inclusion of other Roma kids was important because, given the wonderful experience I had and the much broader vision I acquired, they too had the opportunity to have this life changing experience.

On the organizational and bureaucratic side we were lucky to find Bruno, a peer who studies International Cooperation and Development and is a real "war machine" who works alongside Sebastiano, they do a fundamental job for the management of the project.

So working as a team, we put up what is now our performance "Waiting for Bo" inspired by Samuel Beckett's masterpiece. Roberto and I are the main actors and we immediately felt familiar with the characters in Waiting for Godot because they are very similar to us: always in the same place with the desire to go, to do something, we go round and round but in the end always finds ourself standing at the very same place where the desire had begun.

Everything was going swimmingly, but about ten days before the show Beppe decided to abandon the rehearsals, because he understood that the theater didn't fascinate him all that much and he didn't care about the mission, so we greeted him affectionately, thanking him for the time he has dedicated to us.

However, we weren't demoralized and Sebastian decided to enter the stage replacing Beppe and adding his long theater experience. In the little time left, he managed to learn all his part just in time for the "premiere" and it went very well with many compliments from the public.

The second time we staged the performance it was within an alternative cultural space: "SCUP", which organized a Roma-themed day to which we were invited. It was raining so we had to drop the open air space and do it inside. Together with the technicians of the SCUP we worked on the technical part of the show with all the effects and lights and it was very interesting to see how the atmosphere can change only with a variation of the light.

Again another unexpected, event a week before this performance Simone, the guitarist, got sick and couldn't go on stage. But we didn't panic and contacted Dragisa, a Peer from the camp who wasn't scared or perhaps didn't realize how important that evening would be for us because we knew that the project partners would also come to see our show and therefore we had a great responsibility. Together with Dragisa we got to work and trying and trying again, we managed to go on stage also receiving a standing ovation from the partners and it was a beautiful emotion.

Despite the problem we had, we still managed to make a good impression and this time, thanks to it, we discovered Dragisa, our future to cultivate.

Thanks to another group of Romanian Roma artists, we also managed to bring the show to Bucharest, to the "Opera Comica de Copii" performing in front of the local institutions as well. We made a great impression and even more we had a good experience as a company and brought our show out of Italy, despite being so young.

Now together with our theater company we are taking the show on a city tour.

Together with Simone (our company's guitarist) we were in charge of finding two Roma girls and training them to lead a workshop that talks about issues such as citizenship and recognition of Roma as an ethnic minority in Italy.

It wasn't easy but we did it, I contacted two girls from the camp where Roberto and I come from and they were enthusiastic about collaborating and learning new things about our community. We managed to train them under Sebastian's supervision and create our own workshop structure which we plan to reinforce and bring into neighbor schools.

The path I have taken in this second project is even more exciting than the first and I hope it continues. I thank our company which, even faced to the thousand difficulties, has still managed to move forward and achieve great goals, I sincerely thank those who have given us the opportunity to create all of this and I hope to continue to create many other beautiful things together with the company.

Simone (Musician, stage technician)

When all four of us put our hands in the center, the lights go out.

Breath. I enter the stage and silently thanks the large audience with a bow.

I go to my guitar and pick it up.

Fingers tremble, the guitar rocks back and forth from the beat.

I start performing, pleased.

The show begins.

This was the initial emotion I felt during the performance held at the Bucharest Comic Opera House, where we represented our country in the international festival "KATHE, AKANA!, HERE, NOW!".

Exhibition after exhibition (Asinitas Onlus, Casale Falchetti, Casale Garibaldi, etc.) the show takes shape and improves, like a child learning to walk:

- the music gets better defining itself more and more during the scenes;
- the actors become more familiar with the roles, allowing to improvise where possible;
- Bruno's off-screen voice is always more confident and stimulating in the dialogues;

The rehearsals began during the hot Roman summer, with all the complications of the case: I do not remember why we could not rehearse in Rampa's usual venue, enormous delays with consequent psychological pressure, remedy to the withdrawal of one Peer shortly before the premier, etc. Despite all of this, against the predictions of some, the performance took place successfully during the first weekend of August.

Another interesting experience was the training of two young Roma girls regarding the creation of a seminar, topically connected to the theatrical performance and aimed at making people aware of anti-Gypsyism. I was thus able to take advantage of the experience developed through the skills acquired in Erasmus+ European project "Heroes in Theater, Education and Everyday Life". That experience allowed me, not without difficulty, to get to know better what is the mindset of fellows of my own age, that unlike me lives in a Roma camp, learning to relate to it in order to improve my function as trainer.

Over the years, the relationship with the Rampa has also evolved through the collaboration with the aforementioned Erasmus+ European project, which has allowed us to train in Rome and Budapest, the birthplace of the project, and to carry out various seminars on the theme of hero.

I met Rampa Prenestina, at the time residing on the same building of my school, the Di Vittorio - Lattanzio institute, right through the theatre, during an essay held in the great hall.

Relationships were born and tightened more and more, both through a path of school-work project to which I personally applied and furthermore activities carried out within Rampa's spaces dedicated to music.

When I was a student at the higher education institution, there were rumors about the "presence of gypsies" inside the building, described as mysterious mythological creatures, as rare as they were dangerous. By attending the Rampa, without awareness, I had already made friends with them, without realizing that they belonged to an ethnic minority.

The Aspettando Bo performance allows me to explore one of the many roles that the musician possesses, growing artistically and expanding the boundaries even further, also through the comparison with a reality different from one's own.

The show goes on.

Larisa (Thematic workshop moderator)

My collaboration with Rampa Prenestina begins in 2019.

Right from the start the project proved to be beautiful, exciting and often difficult but at the same time the result of small and great satisfactions. From the beginning, there were challenges that concerned and still concern every member of the group. The problems were various, from the family, financial, to those of time, second thoughts, organizational or of bureaucratic nature.

We at Rampa prenestina, thanks also to the Erasmus+ project, are carrying out our mission, that has already given many fruits and satisfactions, such as the show staged by two Peers from the camp in a theater in Bucharest. Even though I could not be there with them, I rejoiced wholeheartedly thinking that they were going to do the show and that it made them more confident and proud of themselves.

I really hope that this project continues and that Sebastiano lives 200 years, because it is above all thanks to him that this project exists.

As regards my work specifically, I have had the opportunity to grow a lot in recent years both in the skills acquired and as a person. Initially I was a Peer in the Roma Heroes in theater Education and everyday life project, where I learned to be on stage, to understand and communicate emotions. All this has served to make workshops with people unrelated to this sensitive issue, the Roma.

During my journey as a peer I was lucky enough to be surrounded by people who were not only very good, but also very patient, who, despite my second thoughts and difficulties, have always been there, ready to welcome and understand me. Covid certainly did not help. But as mentioned before, we have always found a way to get together and restart.

I have had different roles in the association, in the bureaucratic and the organizational part, working as web manager and secretary, organized meetings and worklunches, moved chairs and dusted. Above all, I had the opportunity to "teach" in turn what I learned through this journey, to a girl from the camp, Ljuba.

We created a Workshop on the theme of the Roma Hero together and it was wonderful, not only because it was exciting to see Liuba leading the discussions and brainstorming, but because we were two girls who led it, two Roma girls who have nothing less than the gaji and the same ability to learn.

I hope this project can continue to help other young people like Ljuba and me. There are many things we can still improve as a team, such as complicity and trusting each other more. All things that I hope will be resolved with the New Year, when the new project is meant to start and Rampa finds a new working venue.

Claudia (Theater Trainer and Director)

The meeting with the Rampa Prenestina Association

For me, as for all those who have taken part in this project, it all started with the meeting with Sebastiano Spinella. We both knew a kind soul who suddenly left this world; in a moment of remembrance and goodbye for this mutual friend, it was there that we met. We were both looking for help at that juncture: I with a very demanding situation of fighting for human rights in old people "care homes", he with a European project to carry on. After Sebastiano helped me in various difficult passages, it was my turn.

Sebastiano had to build a show with Roma Peers.

"Another time the gypsies are back in my life!" I thought.

In fact, there have been many interactions, meetings, exchanges, connections that I have had, from when I was a little girl until recently, with Sinti, Roma from the ex-Soviet Union, Marocco and Andalusia. These encounters, which took place at various ages, had extremely different motivations and perceptions. Without going into details, it is enough to know that these experiences, in addition to giving me direct knowledge, have activated my unbridled curiosity and have led me, already from a very young age, to research, listen, study many stories related to Roma culture.

I have been working for about 20 years in the field of live entertainment. I am an actor and a clown. I work in theaters, on the street, under circus tents. I write and direct. I have been an avid teacher for many years. My personal theater has often had a clownish, satirical, poetic and social protest soul. I am an activist, I have built many social and cultural initiatives and projects in the Roman grassroots, in many situations of precariousness and unconventional spaces. I have a lot of experience in training and creating theater work with groups of all sorts and ages.

At that moment, I was the right person to help Sebastiano and I was passionate about the project, I gladly began to collaborate.

GENESIS OF A SHOW

We started offering workshops in various places to train young people and bring new ones closer to the idea of building a show together. From here on, many elements and contributions flow into the bed of the river that brought us to the sea of the scene.

The upstream source was the commitment, listening and care that in the first place Sebastiano, and all those who have collaborated with the association over many years, have dedicated to the children and the youth of the Roma camp in Via dei Gordiani. This is why there was already a small group motivated to start: Eric, Simone and Larisa.

Thanks to the workshops, other boys and girls have approached us with whom we have started courses; among these, there was also Cioppi who will become one of the protagonists of the show.

In the meantime, Sebastiano asked Ivan Talarico and Luca Ruocco to write the text, the actor duo known as Compagnia Doppio Senso Unico. They were part of the Rampa Prenestina experience (when the physical place existed, before its eviction) and who for this reason knew the boys, their stories and the stories of the camp. Ivan and Luca accepted and started writing out Sebastiano's idea inspired by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

During the trainings, I propose to the group a brainstorming on the life in the camp. Many new elements, stories, perceptions arrived in the river that give way to stories full of emotions, deep reflections and lines of poetry written by Sebastiano which will later be used in part for the finale.

Meanwhile, time is running out, the group that will go on stage is defined and we begin rehearsals. I take all elements that have come to me and start re-writing the script, selecting, cutting, writing new connections and creating the direction.

I try to involve the Peers as much as possible in my work, above all to show them the process with which I went about building the definitive script, version after version.

In Rome it is the hottest summer we remember, in the space where we rehearse it literally foams. There is no one who can play the role of the voice-over! I do it, while directing.

4 days after the show Peppe, one of the Peers, gives up and so does Sebastiano, who in the meantime had dedicated himself to musical adaptation with Simone and the difficult organization of everything, enters the scene.

So Cioppi, Erik, Sebastiano, Simone will go on stage, including me for the voiceover. In addition to our work, for the first staging, the help and support of Larisa and Bruno was fundamental; the latter, a new entry at that time, will later take the role of the voice-over.

It were very hard and tiring days, but the result was more than satisfactory for me, considering the conditions and the unexpected events we had experienced.

And so the story of "Waiting for Bo" began. A show is born that through satire, the theater of the absurd, music and poetry lightly tells something important about the lives of the protagonists.

The journey was exciting. Working with all the Peers was fun and smooth; they let themselves be carried away with confidence. In them, there is theatrical and musical talent and a lot of curiosity. They learned so much in a very short time and they could still learn. I nourished myself with spontaneous exchanges and warm friendships.

Certainly having Sebastiano on stage and his experience helped them and created a very pleasant energetic amalgam. It seems that in the end, also thanks to the unexpected, all the pieces have fallen into place!

From my point of view, the show is not just a pleasant show to watch, I believe that what we have built is something important not only for us.

I believe that an Italian-Roma company that managed to address the issue of what it means to live in a Roma camp, in a condition of ethnic segregation and heavy housing deprivation, is an important step. It will make flowers of meetings and reflections blossom that has sown and can continue to sow seeds of awareness and questioning of the dominant culture.

The Italian Roma camps are (also) a social shame that continues to "condemn" new generations to a life of hardship immersed in which, it is extremely difficult to choose anything else. I am very happy to have helped the Peers who grew up there, to talk about this through theatre.

In Italy, the gypsy often becomes the scapegoat of a worn-out, greedy and petty society, which tries to give itself a tone by identifying from time to time the enemy on whom to unload blame, anger and frustrations. The gypsy is always an excellent social target, when the terrorist or the dictator of the moment is not in fashion.

The Roma camp in via dei Gordiani was built by a villainous policy that did not and does not intend to improve the social conditions of the poorest people (Roma or otherwise). An ignorant policy that is never open to listening and confrontation. Committed to protecting the dominant interests and to lead us all together, cheerfully, towards the destruction through real and metaphorical pollution of everything that can be authentic, beneficial and vital.

Italian citizens in general are still victims of prejudices and fears that we have seen even lead to terrible acts of hatred and intolerance.

The question is not "helping the poor gypsies", the question is to deal with the very strong social emergencies created by the context of ethnic segregation and housing problems developed at the table of the competent institutions through the time.

The question is a huge culture, never recognized, never valued.

The question is being born in Italy and finding yourself illegal.

The question is to take action from below, in order to have the minimum of rights and tools to implement more conscious choices, that can trigger personal changes and for one's community.

The history of the physical site of the Rampa Prenestina also speaks of all this.

It was a physical place, a cultural space, where many activities took place. It was also a meeting and learning space for many Roma and non-Roma kids who lived in that space thanks to the efforts of the association and took an important and not at all obvious step by entering that place: getting to know the other. Cleared out, swept away, evicted.

In spite of all this, the Rampa Prenestina association has survived and is now wandering around, without a wagon, with an enormous baggage of experience, a trunk and a bean containing the performance *Aspettando Bo ...* in search of a new space.

A last thought

"The most successful Projects with long-term effects (some lasting for years) have been those that have managed to mobilize community members to contribute their unique skills, hobbies, knowledge, materials and social capital Your task will be to recognize these potentials as assets, inspire community members to self-recognize them as tools and means to fulfill their needs, and prepare members to identify the steps of the project where they could best contribute their skills. This is a special power of collaborative artistic creation (combined with sharing) that artists and those who work with the community often use in putting their ideas into practice and projects." (U.A.)

