

Exploring The Kraken

George De Stefano (September 18, 2015)



In a new mixed-media performance presented as part of musician Marco Cappelli's residency at the East Village venue The Stone, a strange doctor dissects a creature ... and a city

The Kraken

Written, directed, and performed by Lemosche

Live music by Marco Cappelli



The Stone, New York City
September 11, 2015

What was under the sheet covering what appeared to be a body lying on a gurney?

And who was that strange masked creature exploring the body with scalpel, hacksaw, and power drill?

If "The Kraken" didn't provide definitive answers to those questions, the multi-media piece presented at the East Village venue The Stone delivered an intriguingly strange experience, with a fittingly atmospheric soundtrack performed live.

"The Kraken" is the brainchild of a two-year-old Palermo-based arts association called [Lemosche](#) [2] (The Flies). Gaetano Costa, one of the group's founders, wrote and directed it; other company members designed the set and the video projections while John Turturro provided recorded narration. The music was by guitarist and composer [Marco Cappelli](#) [3], who collaborated with Lemosche as part of his weeklong residency at the Stone in celebration of his fiftieth birthday.

Cappelli, a venturesome and versatile musician born in Naples, has been involved with a wide range of projects since coming to New York City in the '90s. He plays classical and contemporary music, improvises and works with written scores, leads his own groups and collaborates with a diverse group of composers and musicians. He currently leads three bands, the Marco Cappelli Acoustic Trio, Italian Surf Academy and [IDR-Italian DOC Remix](#) [4]. As a side musician, he plays with fellow guitarist Marc Ribot's band [Caged Funk](#) [5] and composer Adam Rudolph's [Go: Organic Orchestra](#) [6]. Besides all that, he teaches at Columbia University and at the Conservatorio Vincenzo Bellini in Palermo.

It was at the Palermo conservatory that Cappelli met the members of Lemosche.

"Gaetano Costa is an amazing painter and also a sculptor," Cappelli says. Lemosche "are related to the world of performance, a mix of art and theatre, with music." The company, founded in 2013, "put together a series of very interesting artistic events, including organizing concerts in people's homes. They shine as a pearl in the cultural atmosphere in Palermo, which is pretty depressed right now."

"I'm very interested in multidisciplinary art, and in collaboration," Cappelli says. "Working together with theater people, artists, musicians, I'm very attracted to that. I have a great appreciation of their work as artists."

Cappelli says that the performance of "The Kraken" at the Stone, its first anywhere, was actually an excerpt from a longer piece that still is in development.

The strange masked figure performs an autopsy on a body whose peculiar, parasite-ridden viscera bewilders him. The "doctor" (played by Lemosche member Philippe Berson) slices open the corpse, which the audience never sees, while a video showing abandoned city buildings plays, Turturro narrates, and Cappelli, on a guitar adapted to produce percussive sound effects, accompanies the movements of the doctor.

The work, Cappelli explains, is an allegory about Palermo and the Mafia.

"Gaetano Costa put together this theater piece with idea of talking about a corrupted town," says



Cappelli. The town is Palermo – the video comprises scenes shot in the Sicilian capital – and the parasites that perplex the doctor are the Mafia. "The doctor who does the autopsy doesn't really get what's going on, he's confused, he's not clear how this body could work, and how did it get corrupted? Was it predisposed to be attacked by parasites or have parasites attacked a perfectly functioning body – this is a mystery," Cappelli says. "It's a very ambitious project; I fell in love with this idea."

But he acknowledges that the piece's ideas aren't always clear. For one thing, the city in question never is identified as Palermo.

"We had a lot of discussions," Cappelli says. "I recommended that it be more clear, to give a few signs that can really make sense of the point of all this." Costa, he says, wanted the audience to read "The Kraken" at different levels – but mainly aesthetic – to focus on images and movement more than on meaning. Costa didn't want the piece to be "too literal or obvious," but Cappelli felt "there was too much ambiguity to communicate the core of the thing."

This audience member agrees with Cappelli. And the ambiguity wasn't solely textual. The doctor's mask, for example, resembled images of the title character, a mythological, squid-like Scandinavian sea monster. My companion and I both wondered whether the doctor was supposed to be the Kraken, performing an autopsy on itself. Cappelli says, however, that a stock character of commedia dell'arte, "Il Dottore," inspired the mask. But in commedia, Il Dottore's mask doesn't cover his entire face, as it did in "The Kraken."

Although the piece's meaning was somewhat obscure – perhaps that will change since it is a work in progress – Cappelli's music created a disturbing and compelling mood. "The music had to be kind of dark and heavy, like everything is happening in a cave, and creating a level of anxiety," he says. Cappelli played an electric guitar designed by Mark Stewart of the avant-garde ensemble Bang on a Can All-Stars. The guitar has a pickup to amplify its six strings; attached to it was a device made of metal and strings with a contact microphone that amplified the sounds Cappelli made by striking it. He also made use of a few pedals that allowed him to record and repeat sounds as he played.

"I had this vision the thing should be mysterious, with a feeling of danger, fear and anguish and anxiety," he says. "This instrument was perfect for creating that kind of atmosphere." Cappelli's score also included bits of melodies from classical pieces by the 19th century Spanish composer and guitarist Francisco Tárrega. "I followed the movements of the performer Philippe [Berson] and tried to create a sonic environment for him to perform in, but he also suggests to me with his movements where to go. There is interaction between the two of us."

Cappelli says he and Lemosche will perform "Kraken" in Palermo in late October; they hope also to present it in other Italian cities during the 2016-2017 theater season.

"We will probably do it in Naples," he says. "And maybe Calabria, or Catania – other places that would be appropriate given the theme."



Links

- [1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/40084thekraken1442550703jpg>
- [2] <https://lemosche.wordpress.com/tag/palermo/>
- [3] <http://marcocappelli.com/>
- [4] <http://www.iitaly.org/bloggers/3146/italian-docs-cutting-edge>
- [5] <http://marcribot.com/caged-funk>
- [6] <http://www.metarecords.com/go.html>