

The Sisters Macaluso go to the U.S.

Massimo Mascolo, Claudio Napoli (December 04, 2017)



Memories and comments from Emma Dante's company, the organizers, and the audience. On Saturday 18 November 2017 we had the pleasure of attending a vibrant performance of Emma Dante's *Le Sorelle Macaluso/The Sisters Macaluso* by the Compagnia Sud Costa Occidentale/Southern Company Western Coast. Memories and Comments from Emma Dante's Company, the Organizers, and the Audience

Featured in the 2017/2018 PEAK Performances season, celebrating women innovators in the Performing Arts, the four nights limited engagement of *The Sisters Macaluso* marked the US premiere of this play by [Emma Dante](#) [2] and a great moment in the ever challenging endeavor of supporting and promoting contemporary Italian Culture.

After a short charter bus ride from Manhattan's Port Authority, thoughtfully organized by PEAK Performances, we were welcomed in the beautiful [Alexander Kasser Theater](#) [3] at [Montclair State University](#) [4].



The exuberant Executive Director of PEAK Performances Jedediah Wheeler introduced the performance: "Emma Dante's work 'Le Sorelle Macaluso' captured PEAK's celebration of women innovators in the performing arts perfectly by introducing the vision of an important artist whose memorable stage work is so revealing of life's paradoxes and incomparably performed by a brilliant cast, the majority of whom are women. What an honor!"

The display of talent both on stage and behind the scenes is, in the case of The Sisters Macaluso, truly amazing.

Ten performers play the family members: seven sisters, two parents, one son/nephew: Serena Barone, Elena Borgogni, Sandro Maria Campagna, Italia Carroccio, Davide Celona, Marcella Colaiani, Alessandra Fazzino, Daniela Macaluso, Leonarda Saffi, Stephanie Taillandier.

Their bodies emerge from the dark. They move across the empty scene. Their walk evokes images and builds both an emotional and a physical space for the action. The visual richness of their body language perfectly blends with the sounds of laughter, the cries, the soft and heavy breathing, and mostly with the endearing overlapping dialogues in Sicilian dialect. They perform a peculiar balancing act with their eloquence, as they transport the audience into the dynamics of the Macaluso family: you feel like you can almost understand everything they say when actually you are not catching a word. The non-invasive and very well done supertitles give you enough understanding to complete the picture and overall you can let it go, and lose yourself in the play.

The specificity of this Sicilian family portrait is so thorough and heartfelt it becomes universal. A constant sense of urgency fills the humorous parts as well as the more dramatic and tragic moments. It's a truthful representation of life in its ever shifting waves of joy and sorrow, and the blurred lines between memory and experience vanish into a fast-paced seamless exchange between the living and the dead. A passage from the beautiful essay Emma and her Sisters by Professor [Teresa Fiore](#) [5] - Associate Professor and Inserra Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies at Montclair State University perfectly sums it up:

"The ultimate desire may be to die with the dead or, as in the case of "Le Sorelle," to live with them in a dream pregnant with the South."

The article is available at this link, click here [>>](#) [6]

Professor Fiore was the one who proposed to bring this important play to the U.S., she closely collaborated with PEAK Performances and with Emma Dante to make it happen. Professor Fiore also moderated a community talk soon after the ending of the performance.

The whole company came back on stage to share their take on this work and on the long process they face every time they create a new show. The company made clear that the process starts and ends with Emma Dante's ability to channel her vision through the performers, tuning in with a careful observation/suggestion work. The actors start moving along a line, back and forth. The story and the characters reveal themselves and are sculpted bit by bit out of the movements of the bodies. Dante watches, selects, suggests, changes the trajectories and guides the improvisation. This process shapes the performance in unique and unexpected ways. There is always room for new developments and the performers only get a complete script when the show is about to open.

The company and the audience engaged in a layered and interesting exchange for a while after the show, discussing theatre in general, [Sicily](#) [7], the Italian language, metaphor and reality, analyzing various aspects of the play like the use of color: the dead wear colorful items while the living dress in black, the living are in mourning the dead aren't.

Days after the performance we were still thinking about it and about the community talk that followed. It was a privilege for us to be able to reach out once more to the company to ask them to share some thoughts about this American experience.

Sandro Maria Campagna (The Father of the Sisters Macaluso):



"I was curious to meet an American audience, I did not imagine what the reaction could be. From the deep silence, the waiting silence, during the few seconds of complete darkness that open the show, I had the distinct perception of a predisposition to listening, a willingness to connect with us expressed by the audience; that immediately moved me. I knew then that our story, the story of the sisters Macaluso, would touch the audience's hearts. Also I was impressed by the affection shown at the end of the show. And the theater that hosted us has been amazing, they took good care of us. We met such a strong interest in discovering Emma Dante's work, that made this American experience really exciting."

Stephanie Taillandier (The mother of the Sisters Macaluso):

"Apart from the warmth of the American public, I was very impressed to find such a beautiful venue, the Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University, and such a diverse program. The executive director Jedediah Wheeler and his team demonstrated a real desire and enthusiasm to enable the American audience to discover our work."

Finally, we asked Professor Fiore to sum up this experience and to tell us about what comes next:

"The idea of bringing Emma Dante's work to Montclair State University in collaboration with the Kasser Theater/ACP, and by extension the NYC area, stemmed from my desire to talk about Sicily from a different perspective, one of daring artistic experimentation and keen social observation at once, and in a mode that is both discomfiting and lyrical. It was a gamble, given the over-connoted nature of things Sicilian, especially in the U.S., and the fact that Emma and her company were not well known in this country. After the overwhelmingly positive response to the play and Emma's story from audiences and critics, I am more convinced than ever that the hyper-local reality of Sicily can be a unique starting point to talk about human resilience and inventiveness across cultures. I look forward to more projects like this one that can bridge the New York area with Sicily, both vibrant crossroads with intense stories to tell."

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Links

- [1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/04sorellemacaluso2qajpg>
- [2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_Dante
- [3] <https://www.montclair.edu/arts/theatre-and-dance/facilities/alexander-kasser-theater/>
- [4] <https://www.montclair.edu>
- [5] https://www.montclair.edu/profilepages/view_profile.php?username=fiorete
- [6] <https://www.peakperfs.org/event/le-sorelle-macaluso/2017-11-19/>
- [7] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicily>