

Cities On Stage | Città In Scena

The Veil | Il Velo

Intro:

Cities On Stage is a project started in 2011 by the European Union that involved six theatres of some major cities: Théâtre National of Brussels, Folkteatern of Gothenburg, Odéon- Théâtre de l'Europe of Paris, Teatrul National Radu Stanca of Sibiu, Teatro Stabile of Naples, Teatro de La Abadía of Madrid. The project ended April 29, 2015 at Folkteatern Gothenburg after seeing Naples as the last character of a show conceived and created by the Neapolitan director David Iodice. His role in this project was not only limited to the creation and the technical aspect but he has also taken on the task of leadership in the discovery of the city along with his students of Scuola Elementare del Teatro. For being hosted there were seven Swedish actors: the Italian Gemma Carbone, Kristin Falksten, Peter Jägbring, Harriet Ohlsson, Caroline Sehm, Robert Söderberg, Linda Wardal.

The name of the workshop Neapolitan "*The Veil*" was inspired by the statue of the "*Veiled Christ*" Chapel of San Severo, adopted as a symbolic image of the city.

On the basis of the characteristics of the actors and their perception of the city, the director has committed to each one an aspect of Naples: Christ himself was personified by the dancer Linda Wardal, which interprets the changing body of Naples; to Kristin Falksten the pain, materialized in the shape of Filumena Marturano; to Caroline Sehm the magical aspect, through the images of the mermaid Parthenope and Cinderella; to Peter Jägbring was committed the typical mask of Pulcinella, representing the theatrical aspect; to the rapper Robert Söderberg the dark and criminal soul; to Gemma Carbone the restless and superstitious soul. Harriet Ohlsson was the breath and spirit of the city through her music, the soundtrack of the entire show.



In this photo we can see the producer Davide Iodice who is watching the training of the seven swedish actor and his own students of the Scuola Elementare di Teatro.

1. Linda Sofia Wardal – The Veiled Christ

«Here the stone Christ who breathes»



Linda Wardal, dancer and choreographer, played the role of the Christ. The figure of the Christ inspired by the famous statue “The Veiled Christ” is situated in the historical heart of the city. “The Veiled Christ” is an impressive strong symbol of Naples and the director Davide Iodice has chosen this image as the central thread of the workshop intentionally entitled “The Veil”.

«The Veil reveals and hides, holds and shields that Body who seems perpetually ready to revive, this way Naples arises to me».

— Davide Iodice



Linda Wardal said that previously in Sweden, the director thought to give her the role of the Christ, “*corpus*” of Naples and “*corpus*” of the entire performance.

«I played the Christ, inspired by the statue “The veiled Christ” in our performance “il Velo”. The theme of the performance was based on this statue and I’ve heard that the director had planned to give me this role before we even arrived in Napoli. For the first rehearsal we started with this image of the Christ lying on a bed in the middle of the stage. At that point I had only seen a picture and yet not visited the statue. The second day we started by visiting this chapel where the statue is situated. The statue looked so alive and was very detailed and made a great impression on me. When we later that day tried the scene again it was more clear, I had another perspective of the body and my thoughts around it».

Since for the first scene, after Kristin's monologue, appears the Christ on stage, a feminine Christ, dragged by Pulcinella (Peter Jägbring). With *Spaccanapoli* on the background and the lying Christ

in the middle of the stage, immediately start a sequence of deep breaths (Harriet Ohlsson) that move and shape the body of the Christ.

The Christ starts to breathe, it seems to come alive, also the other actors join the scene following the breath of the Christ, breath of the city.

It is a really touching moment, it is the deep and penetrating breath of a city that blows into you, it is the breath of an entire community.



The Christ who starts to come alive from the beginning of the show, comes to view again in the final part, it's a circular figure.

“Ecce Homo”.

In the final scene, like a broken china doll trying to put its pieces back together, the Christ tries to come back to life. Coming forward towards the audience with shaking and syncopated movements the Christ eventually falls apart again lying on the floor.

Bereft of life, it lies down among the arms of a frightened Pulcinella (Peter Jägbring) searching for help. The Christ symbolises the destiny of the whole city, always about to rise but it never rises at the end.

It should not have been easy being the Christ, especially here in Naples, where on the one hand religion is so deep-rooted and strong, on the other hand this figure is just a “marble Body” contemplated exclusively for its artistic beauty.

Linda Wardal, a Stone become Flesh, has delightfully incarnated the figure of Christ.

The Swedish dancer has shown no difficulty putting herself into the Christ's body.

Here, her impressions about this important and significant role:

«Personally I found it both interesting and quite challenging to play this role. It's a character that means something to a lot of people. It symbolises love and hope for many, but can also provoke. It will never be neutral to put the Christ on stage, it will speak strongly to the audience. I found it difficult personally because of my own religious beliefs. I truly believe in Jesus Christ as the son of God and that he died for our sins and resurrected. The most difficult about it was that I was struggling to understand the religiosity of Naples. I visited a lot of churches and saw a lot of statues of Madonnas and experienced many rituals on the streets. But it was very hard for me to believe it because it was all mixed with legends, and pagan beliefs. For me, my religion is not theoretical, it's very practical. I don't know why, but God has shown himself to me 2 times in my life. This was so strong and powerful it changed my life forever. I saw many beautiful pictures, statues and symbols, but I never met any young religious people. From my point of view, this was very disappointing. Young people talked about religion as something that had to do with tradition. I felt that the traditions were very far from the God that I know that is constantly present and doesn't proclaim guilt: but peace and forgiveness. So the more I was struggling to try and understand and take all these new experiences in, I also struggled being the Christ. I felt how I was the only one really believing for real in this image that we were trying to create. To try to experience on stage how it could have felt to resurrect from the death, was a very hard and strong emotion inside of me. And after doing the scene on rehearsal, going through a lot of emotional states in a couple of minutes, and then: having to do it again and again, that was quite difficult in a way. But it was also interesting to try and do it while thinking about it in a more theoretical and practical way: how does it look like from the outside if I breathe starting from the stomach, or from the chest? In what position can I raise my arm for the audience to still see my face from the right angle”. It was also interesting to work with time, and trying to make it suitable. The choreographer and the director

talked to me about trying to feel like I was waking up after a long sleep, trying to fight death. In my head I tried to think two different things: that it was Jesus who woke up after dying on the cross 2000 years ago. And also: trying to feel like I had been asleep for 2000 years and now suddenly waking up in the theatre in Napoli. It was an interesting idea to play with and investigate. During my last week I had a back injury which made me forced to rest for 3 days and later the process had to be focused on how to make the movements without hurting my back. So then the process changed into something very practical. I also constantly had to orientate myself with the help from the light in the ceiling, since I was covered in a veil and I had to walk very slowly, raising from my bed and walk forward towards the audience».



Linda Wardal has also played the role of the “Wounded Angel”. This image has become alive after visiting the sanctum of Madonna dell’Arco. The two key figures of this scene are Kristin Falksten with her opening monologue and Linda Wardal playing the Wounded Angel.

“Tammurriata on one leg”

Bewildered, wandering around as a sleepwalker, Kristin opens the scene. Walking absent-mindedly in front of us in a dressing gown and slippers like an housewife in the “*vicoli*”, holding in her hand a plastic bag she acts the part of Filumena, the part of a prostitute, the part of Kristin (the actress always used to walk through the city carrying a plastic bag with her, so the director thought to leave this element in the scene). She walks slowly reciting “Troubles” one of her poems, talking about her experience in Naples, Kristin combines her inner turmoil with the tumult of the city, trying to find an identity in here:

«There's a man outside the train station with his naked fragile back. Who is he?
Another Jesus from the 21:st century floating around with no beliefs.
The blonde girl entering the city- who is she?
A Piazza Cavour sono l'ucraina in cerca di lavoro
Sul Corso Umberto sono la prostituta in cerca di clienti».

In this chaos the only certainty for her, here and in Sweden is:

«I am the girl with no beliefs».

The actress feels the struggle and the pain of the city, she inhales the street, capturing its essence and turning it into poetry. In “Troubles” she reflects herself into a homeless met outside the train station, she shares his curse and condition.

The monologue of the actress ends with a new symbol:

«A Montesanto sono il cane a tre zampe in cerca della quarta per scappare.»

Kristin gives us a new image of the city, the Three-Legged Dog, another Wounded Beauty seeking escape.

At the end of the monologue, all the actors go on stage from the back. It's a procession.

Everybody wears a red band, which reminds the ritual and the clothing of the “*Fujenti*”¹, seen during a trip with the director to *Madonna dell'Arco*.²

¹“Fujenti” is the Neapolitan word for “those who go”, devoted to the Virgin Mary for her graces. They usually dress in white with a red or blue bend across the chest, which alludes to the colours of the Virgin Mary. They also bring really huge standards and a small altar representing the Holy Spirit. Fujenti are famous for sacrifice themselves walking barefoot or on all fours.

²Madonna dell'Arco is an area and a sanctum in the province of Naples. Believers meet here on every Easter Monday, sometimes seeing the Holy Mary, for those who are truly devoted, arouses crying, shouts and convulsions.



Robert and Peter conduct the procession carrying on a sedan chair a white figure with black wings, it is about the Wounded Angel played by Linda Wardal, Gemma and Caroline close the procession.



The scene is really touching, it clearly reminds the adoration of an idol, in this case there is no Saint to be worshipped but rather a Wounded Angel.

The Wounded Angel represents a Wounded Beauty as well as Cinderella and the Mermaid, three figures that reflect the city: Naples itself is a Wounded Beauty.

After the solemn entrance, Robert and Peter arrange the Wounded Angel (Linda) in the middle of the stage, all the actors fasten their leg with the red bend before the “Tammurriata”³ dance.

The “Tammurriata on one leg” represents coercion, agony, inspired by the Three-Legged Dog. All the actors dance in pairs on the stage using “castagnette”, it is a kind of catharsis.

³“Tammurriata” is a traditional dance of Campania, it is usually danced in pairs with the help of the arms through the use of “Castagnette” which provide the basic rhythm. It is also used the “tammora” (a big drum with tin bells), the human voice and sometimes other traditional instruments.

There is a mixing of holy and profane, the prostitute, Filumena is part of this moving moment dancing the Tammurriata with the Angel.

There are no differences among them, they are all on the same level exorcising their sorrow that become the sorrow of the entire city.

A huge and warm sun on the background (symbol of Naples, the city of the sun) reminds dry and sunny lands.

The “Madonnari” (Robert Söderberg, Gemma Carbone, Peter Jägbring and Caroline Sehm) after the dancing arrange the Angel on the sedan chair again and leave the scene together in procession. Here some pictures taken during the “Tammurriata” lesson with pupils and actors of “*Scuola Elementare del teatro*” led by Davide Iodice.



2. Kristin Falksten – The sorrow of Naples

Kristin’s character was the first to appear on the scene, rather she opened the show in a particular and captivating way: she entailed the wrecking of the fourth wall and ended with her interacting with the public that, predictably, didn’t miss the chance to interplay. She entered from behind a curtain while coughing and asking for a doctor; as far as it may look simply as a theatrical device, she actually appeared this way on the real “scene”, before Davide Iodice’s work came into being: she suffered from a really tough bronchitis and medical treatments were asked; this will delay Kristin’s rehearsal of a week. This was for her, and we mean her as actress and not as character, an intimate moment, a period during which she could concentrate all her strengths just on her personal reflections and emotions. These are moments that helped her to get an impression on the Neapolitan reality that surrounded her and that she slowly started to face, moments from which her poems saw the light, that opening the show and during almost the wholly time of the performance, made it deeper and touching. Kristin’s character evolved alongside her experiencing of the city, almost following the chaotic movements of the Neapolitan crowd. The actress lived in the centre, corso Umberto I, an experience that half touched her positively half negatively. Living in one of the main streets of Naples means living its core: this inspired her the evocative images her poems described: for instance, the strong conflict between holy and profane, allowed her to join the images of the Madonna Immacolata and the one of the homeless sat at her feet; the one of the Jesus protected by a glass and of the prostitute along the corso Umberto I, that is by the way linked to the other Kristin’s character Filumena Marturano. As visible, Kristin had been capable of a multi-pronged movements, becoming different personages, without anyway losing her identity: the very Filumena Marturano was filtered through those reflections and sensations, translated as said before into poems, the actress felt by living in the city. Thanks to her character the show opened touching the thorny theme of the Neapolitan stereotype: when she asks for a doctor to help her, she is astonished, disappointed and finally indignant that everybody refused to help her, seen that “*this is the land of crucifixions and saints*”; indignant again she labels Naples as “*the land of the refuses*” (playing on the puns refusal and refuse); then she throws garbage on the stage and forces at the intrusion of another character that is stereotypically typical Neapolitan: Pulcinella.

One thing that is touching was that the audience can see on the stage the path of transformation from the Kristin-actress that told her story of bronchitis and, to the character of Filumena Marturano that told her story of prostitution and motherhood. Just between the space of the two were set Kristin’s poems: a mean that allowed us to feel the second without quitting the first. And it is in these poems that she also transmits part of her personal stories, revealing a sensitive woman, fragile and perhaps hurt by something that brought with her during the days of stay in Naples. Her opening

scene ends in fact with a "curse" that someone has turned to her before leaving: "*If you leave me, you're gonna get sick. And so, here I am. Eccomi*". "*This is the Christ of stone that breathes*", marks the entry into the scene of Christ / Linda lying on the bed, staged by Peter. Then the others come as a group of tourists, observing the "statue" and breathing in unison. And Kristin keeps on talking about his discomfort felt in Naples, the city where, according to her, you must always be on guard, "be awake"; she would like to have dark hair to melt in.



The street is all flesh and blood, no illusion, no mask. And this lack of "Swedish politeness" leads the actress to pour her words of sorrow and dissent over the entire performance.

Immediately Iodice clarifies that Kristin will embody the character of Filumena Marturano, being an important symbol of Naples and women's empowerment.

And it is exactly the first day of work at the theatre when the director offers the artists a fragment from the namesake play, directed by and starring Eduardo De Filippo. It fits perfectly in one of the most important themes of the show, which is the birth and rebirth.

The fragment in point, that the director wants Kristin to learn also in Neapolitan, is the description of the "bassi" (the humble houses at the bottom of the buildings), hot, dark, crowded, "*Addò nun ce sta luce manc 'a miezo juorno*" ("Where there is no light, not even at noon"). Iodice explains to the actors who Filumena: she is one of the many Neapolitan postwar who, coming from poor families, are almost forced into prostitution. She is also a woman who has experienced much suffering, without ever externalize it; It will be only at the end that the tears will come out. In the play the protagonist says that only those who have experienced the happiness, are able to cry; and so, just to never be able to feel happy, he has never been able to cry.

At first being able to make Kristin say a few words in Neapolitan, it seemed like a challenge, and a challenge that often puts the nerves of the actress to the test, recovering from bad bronchitis. We trainees with Tonia Persico (assistant director), with tips, advice and lots of practice, help her, and she progresses, even though slow and gradual, increasingly lead to the construction of the scene. In this scene in which she says some verses of Filumena, which follows the one in which Caroline personifies the siren Parthenope, Kristin comes from a wing, while a light bulb is lowered almost on her head; she's always dressed with a night gown and slippers, worn in the first scene, the speech begins. Meanwhile the dancer Linda performs movements inspired by gesticulation, while Harriett accompanies with background music.

The director decides to build her monologue "Filumena" mixing a few lines of De Filippo in his composition "Madonna Immacolata", in which arise some feelings of the actress, who feels like Naples: angry, creepy, frantic.

The attention of Kristin toward the "lasts" emerges already in this poem, "*Madonna Immacolata, next to the homeless, who is the holy one? The silent stone or the struggling flesh?*". The monologue, then, ends with other verses of Filumena Marturano. In this "scene of gestures," the

actress, like the others, moves imitating the very Italian way of gesturing.



Another time starring the Falksten is one in which she reads another of her works, "Troubles", which transmits the episodes in which she, *"the blonde girl entering the city,"* was mistaken for another person : *"A Piazza Cavour I am the Ukrainian seeking a job"*, *"On the Corso Umberto I am the prostitute in search for clients."* Although difficult to interpret, they are verses that tell the perspective of a woman with many questions, that certainly does not remain indifferent to the image of *"the old man outside the station with his naked fragile back"*, perhaps a *"Jesus from the 21st century"*, with which she shares the same trouble, from which she is able to *"steal his stories"*.



We finally find Kristin in the last scene, where she is to drag on stage the bed of Christ. “E comm’è bello a chiagnere”, are the final lines of Kristin but also of Filumena Marturano when, in De Filippo’s play, speaks with her husband of her own drama, already mentioned, of never being able to cry. But, this cathartic moment comes. Kristin told us about her tears, which were witnessed by the nurse who took care for her; so, the correlative created by the director, is very suitable in this case. Perhaps Kristin didn’t have the same difficulty in expressing even the negative perceptions, that poured in her poems, in her feedback and in her stories.

Or, maybe, it was just Naples the spark that triggered the explosion of personal, intimate emotions, of the “*girl with no beliefs*”.

3. Caroline Sehm – Partenope and Cinderella

Caroline’s scenes prove that the actors’ impressions on Naples were not always good. Staying in her shoes, we can understand why. Caroline is a grown-up woman from a country where equal opportunities are a fact. In Italy, on the other hand, still lives the tradition of the woman as “angel at the heart”. The emancipation of women has begun here as well but, undoubtedly, the male-centered society has influenced the stories and the art of the past (and certain ways of living in the present). “Statues of men made by men and requested by men”, stories whose female protagonists are men’s victims or subordinates, women staring from their kitchens’ windows as if something held them inside; this is what impressed Caroline first, what she wished to bring on the stage. The two characters Iodice gave her proved perfect for such goal.

The first to appear on stage is the Mermaid, inspired by the legendary Partenope who first discovered the coasts of Naples. Introducing the scene, Harriet’s music works as a call, to which Caroline answers, intensifying the sensation of a marine setting. Interestingly, the entrance was conceived while the actress was talking about her experiences in Naples and the topics she wished to bring in the show. We were sitting on the stage, as usual, and Caroline was covering her bended knees in a large sweatshirt. After everyone had talked, before breaking the circle, Iodice told her to cover her feet also. «Now come towards me while describing a mermaid» he told her; that way of dragging herself, without using the legs, clearly belonged to such a character! Even more pathos can be found in the next action when, reached the proscenium, she struggles to stand up. As expected from a “poetic director” like Davide Iodice, such simple action may have countless meanings, the clearest of which is the Naples’ ability to resurrect and raise again, as the city as often had to do in the centuries. The final verse “Come, sisters, come back to the sea!” is due to the original set of the scene, with Gemma and Linda dancing together with Caroline right after. But I find a lot more meaningful the final decision of letting Caroline dance alone. To explain why, I have first to tell about her journey through Naples.



Caroline actually met one of the “mermaids” she talks about. She was wondering about what concept of the world could have those women who, with self-denial, dedicate their lives to family and home. This is why, along with Linda, she came up with a particular idea: sitting in the streets and inviting people to tell them about their life. Despite being unable to understand the language, Caroline was impressed by a woman in particular, whose story (translated later by us the trainees) ended up being similar to the ones told in Cinderella’s scene: young and deeply in love, she married and had children, but was later left by her man, who divorced to stay with someone else; a woman who saw her happiness taken away from a man, but who still carried on to care with love of what remained of her family.

These same topics can be found in the scene of Cinderella, the second character Iodice gave to Caroline. And not by chance! We all know the tale as told by Charles Perrault, but only some know it was inspired by an even older one, written by Giambattista Basile right in Naples (“Gatta Cenerentola”). As always, Harriet sets the rhythm. Soon, Gemma and Peter join her to sing, as a chorus, “Pigliate l’alma mia” (“Take my soul with you”), a Neapolitan song from the XVI century about self-denial and devotion to the loved one. Right after the chant has begun, Robert enters, letting us presume there’s going to be no happy ending for poor *Zezzolla* (the original name of Cinderella). All hopes end as soon as he wears his helmet, bringing on the stage the Dark Soul of Naples. Cinderella’s run gets abruptly interrupted by his desire for her shoe, which is fiercely pulled out after a tiring fight/dance. Caroline ends the song by herself, alone after even the chorus broke up. Violated and abandoned, Cinderella becomes the symbol of women at the mercy of men and victims of male chauvinism.



If this was the whole story, one could think Caroline’s experience in Naples was solely negative. Here comes in again the mermaid’s dance! Caroline herself admitted she brought on stage negative aspects of Naples, discovering the positive ones after the scenes were already set. To compensate, she wrote a song. A song about her growth: from the Swedish concept “ensam är stark” (“alone is strong”) to the realization of how beautiful it is to work with others and accept their help, how liberating it is to express herself over that “Swedish politeness” which can be suffocating at times. All this considered, the last verse of her song gets charged with meaning, something a Neapolitan may take for granted, but which came as a discovery for her: you don’t have to be alone to be strong. Too bad, the song was not included in the show, but I like to think it is still represented in the mermaid’s dance: after resurrecting, Caroline does not sing, but she can freely improvise a dance; she doesn’t use words to tell how she found the freedom to express herself, she shows it straight to us.

Before concluding, here’s a little secret: Davide Iodice let the cat out the bag sometimes, telling he was about to exclude Caroline during the auditions. She plays in musicals in Sweden, and he thought this influenced way too much her performance. I never asked him what made him change his mind, but maybe Caroline herself answered. The artists had to improvise a dance as one of the

trials. She told me that she managed to let go, that time, dancing freely and spontaneously. Probably that is how Iodice noticed her “presence” on the stage, her beauty he often praised and which became clearer day by day during the workshop.

An instant of spontaneity during a dance was probably worth Caroline’s ticket for Naples; making such spontaneity her own is the treasure she managed to bring back in Sweden.



4. Peter Jägbring – Pulcinella

Chaos.

It was the first thing that Peter noticed when he arrived here in Naples. All that he could think about was the chaos, and how the people's idle chatter, the sound of their steps on the ground, the hooters, the seagulls, the constant and tumultuous changing of the city was so extremely different from what he left back in Sweden, in his calm and quiet Göteborg.

It was like the whole Naples was moving and changing itself on the base of a secret code that only the inhabitants knew. The collision with this uncontrollable and imminent chaos has been able to rise many important feelings, like loss and fear. Maybe Peter felt lost, at least during the first weeks, and he was so scared of this chaos that he wanted to protect himself from everything. Nobody can deny that he was confused and wanted to run away because Naples wasn't his world, so much different from his Sweden where everything is silent, peaceful, introvert and self-centred. Be used to our way of living the present, kissing on the cheeks, laughing, being emotional and extrovert was too much for him. But after a while Naples takes you and you get comfortable with almost everything. His experience started in Göteborg, with the auditions made by the producer Davide Iodice. Every actor had to create a scene with an object and Peter's one was based on an improvisation where he interpreted a man in pyjamas with an empty dog leash, looking for his dog Daisy. He asserts: «For the auditions Davide told us to prepare a scene with an object and an action, and also to present a song. In the afternoon we were showing our prepared scenes, one at time. Then Davide tried to work with the scenes and develop them. I really liked this kind of audition, it gave you the chance to relax and enjoy the time with the director and the group».

Thanks to this improvisation Davide Iodice decided very quickly to bring him in Naples and work with him. Since the beginning he knew that Peter would have interpreted the Pulcinella's mask, one of the most important and iconic figures in Naples, because Peter had already worked with masks and character of this kind. It took him a long time to create a connection with Pulcinella, to know

and accept him for who the mask really is. We may say that the more Peter was discovering Naples the more he was understanding how important Pulcinella is for the city and what he means.

The sun and the happiness, the excitement and foolishness.



As regards the show, we can see the actor in many different roles whom we weave together during the *mise-en-scene* and change constantly, to represent the growth that him and Pulcinella had here. He appears for the first time at the beginning, when Kristin/Filumena is playing her monologue, after she had thrown the garbage on the stage. Peter enters playing Pulcinella's role, with the black mask covering half of his face and sweeping all that garbage away as he wants to delete the stereotype of a dirty city or as he wants to defend the entire city and clean it. Later he appears in a scene with the other actors and we can see how his role is changing from Pulcinella's one to the role of a simple tourist of Naples, who is visiting the Cristo Velato for the first time and who is abandoning himself into the breath of the Christ, marked by Harriet's saxophone. In his own scene, which was created on the base of the actor's experiences in Naples, Peter and Pulcinella play on the same stage at the same moment and he enters with a pretty long rope. Everybody, looking at the scene, wouldn't be able to imagine that at the end of the rope there would be a skull.

A white, cold and disturbing skull called *Augusto*. Pulcinella treats him like he is a real human being, he also looks for some food because "*Augusto is hungry like a Swedish.*" After this, Peter stands up in the centre of the stage, takes off the black mask and, leaving the role of Pulcinella, starts speaking: *«In Sweden this is only a clinical object, for anatomic studies, but here the death is still alive. Nothing is taken for granted, it seems like everything is happening for the first time, in a continuous present».*

In this specific moment Peter is presenting us a specific feature of Naples: people's spirituality. Here in Naples the death is not considered as a big black end but as *the life after*; in fact many and huge are the graveyards and people is used to take care of the dead everyday of their life, to not forget about them and not leave them.

The entire scene was born after a trip to the "Cimitero delle Fontanelle", there Peter could see a way of living the death that is typical of Naples but not of Sweden, and of course this has made some changes in him.

All this stuff about spirituality, dead and ghosts appears once again in another scene, Gemma's one: while she is living the stage, she leaves an orange on the ground "to calm down the turbulent spirit" and immediately Peter and Augusto steal it. In this case, Augusto is nothing but a Neapolitan ghost called "Munaciello" who is bothering the poor Gemma.

After other group scenes, Peter and Pulcinella come back to the stage when the Christ dawns and dies immediately. He is the only one who notices that the Christ is dying and he runs to him, holds him while he is falling and starts crying.

«Help me! I didn't want to come here, I wanna go home!»

He screams, keeping holding the Christ.

Thanks to these words, we can understand how it has been difficult for the Swedish actors to come here and live in a different culture for so long.

«I discovered that Naples awoke my curious and adventurous side. The downside is that I become restless returning home after such a great experience. I learned a lot of new things about Italy and Naples. My impression was that Neapolitans are less self-centred than Swedes. I feel like Naples

changed me to become more open and spontaneous. But the hard thing is to keep that spirit even back home».

We trainees, as Neapolitan people, couldn't be more happy about Peter's words, so similar to the other's words, and about the fact that our city so full of problems has given them so much feelings. At the end, the quote "*Vedi Napoli e poi muori*" ("*See Naples and then die*") becomes true: Naples changes you so deeply that then you are able to see the world with other eyes.



5. Robert Söderberg – The dark soul of Naples

Robert Söderberg is the one among the artists of this project who embodied the dark and criminal soul of Naples. His artistic career is born with the rap, being notoriously a kind of music originated from poor environments and experiences, and then moves to the world of acting. His lonely and sometimes mysterious aura make him perfect for the role of the classic juvenile delinquent who populates the suburbs of Naples. From the first day the director Davide Iodice clarifies that he wants to introduce and let Robert visit the "toughest" neighbourhoods of the city, that is to say Forcella and Scampia, in order to dive completely into those parts of Naples that condemn people to a life of crime. The idea is to have a physical impact, breathing and touching a reality to which he has probably never been used.

The first week is dedicated, during the mornings, to the customized guided tours. The first visit is one to which everyone, including us interns, is invited to participate: it is the one to the seductive statue of the Veiled Christ, connected to the image of the "veil" that is the basis of the show. From the impressions taken from the view of the artwork it one of the most important scenes is built, in which Linda Wardal the dancer personifies the Christ. Robert, together with others, comes on stage following the rhythm of the breath, done by Harriet Ohlsson, that moves the body of Linda. The director asks them to move as tourists in a museum.

Thursday, March 26, along with Damiano Rossi, Mattia Di Mauro and Michele Vitolini, the actor visits the streets of Forcella, piazza Garibaldi e piazza Garibaldi, the areas that will inspire him to shoot a short video, which is going to be the background to its future performance.

The next day the director brings the artists together to listen to their first impressions, and they are all aware of the different perception they have of the urban Neapolitan environment. What emerges at the end is that each of them struggles in the search for themselves.

"Who are you?" It is the question that arises Iodice at one point, suggesting to them to keep on taking notes about how they feel and encouraging them to abandon the status of tourists. Robert for the first time says that he feels bipolar, feeling the constant impression of wanting to suddenly abandon this experience, and then immediately wanting to continue. "I change my mind 10 times a day, but it's my nature and I like to be so." The director wants to continue to focus on this sensation, which can become the starting point for his performance.

Since the beginning, his experience in Naples is turned into a song, a rap whose slow development we all follow. We the trainees translate it from English into Italian, but perhaps this concern led the artist to change almost daily those verses so full of darkness. Even the exterior is treated according to the threatening role that he interprets, the boy of the "ghetto": he will wear almost always the

motorcycle helmet and will hold a gun, as its main costume.

He does it for the first time at the end of the choral scene of the "Veiled Christ", where after being hidden behind the bed on which lies Christ, gets up with the helmet on his face, holding the gun. When Linda / Christ is taken away, with the others following her, Robert is left alone and proceed to the front of the stage, continuing to breathe and following the breath with the movements of the arm. "This is the land of bipolarity" is the beginning of his monologue, which tells about the pairs of opposite sensations tried since in Naples. His distress is perceived through the verses "I'm icy and warm", "I'm violent but calm" introducing his song. The free-style of Robert follows the social unrest that he has evidently found in the places and people he met, especially on April 1, visiting gyms and boxing. "*Cante, si nun cante mor'!*", "*Sing, if you don't you'll die!*" and "*Search for peace but I'm prepared for war,*" are some of the verses full of unease composing his song, where you could also hear a typically Neapolitan kind of vocal. The streets, the neighbourhoods become the "valley of the shadow and dark skies." It is not the rap that talks about money, girls and success, but it is the rap that tells the "hard knock life", the life which "hits hard." On the panels of the stage is shown the video he shot and edited, in which markets, religious elements and rubbish backdrop to his rhymes.



One of the first scenes that are built is the one whose protagonists are Robert and Gemma Carbone, representing one of the most shameful symbols of Naples: the bag-snatching. Initially, after entering the scene and looking at each other for a few moments, the one wears the helmet on his head, the other a handbag. On the stage starts a chase, a sort of struggle for survival, Gemma tries to resist. The tension raises, Robert grabs Gemma, but not with violence, rather as if there is an attraction between them. The stereotype is then passed, and in the background the rest of the artists sings in chorus the melancholy and ancient folk song "Pijate l' alma mia". In the two following weeks some changes are made at this scene: the background music changes, and when the two begin to chase, Harriet improvises a melody with the saxophone. The two "rivals" chase each other, both shouting words; for a while they hold hands and then separate again. "*Not only Gemma run away from him, but then both run away together from a greater evil, something worse than a robbery*", is the explanation given by Iodice.

In the "scene of gestures", where all the artists are on stage moving their arms after the manner of Italian and Neapolitan gesturing, Robert once again shows the attitude of the tough guy typical of a ragged child.

In the next, however, in which the protagonist Gemma is tormented by a ghost, Robert is one of the figures hindering the woman in finding peace and rest in a chair, because they continue to pull it off and on.

When the fallen angel / Linda, who is also mentioned in his song, is brought on stage on a sedan, it is Robert, along with Peter, to hold her. They all wear a red band, then tied around one leg. After the monologue of Kristin is the moment of "tammurriata on one leg" and Robert dances in couples with Caroline Sehm.



There is another important scene and full of significance for Robert / the criminal: that of "Cinderella":

Harriet goes on stage, marking the time with the xylophone and positioning herself on the bottom of the stage, followed by Gemma, Peter and Linda. Caroline is in front of the audience reciting his monologue about the "bulky" presence of men in Naples and the almost total absence of women and she puts a sumptuous noblewoman gown on: becomes Cinderella.

"Pijate l'alma mia ca' te la do" is sung this time by Cinderella. *"Non me ne curo, non me ne curo di senza restare"* marks the moment when Robert comes in, helmet in hand, singing. According to Iodice, at this time Robert is the violent man, who wants to take away the virtue, the virginity of poor Cinderella. In fact, she runs away, continuing to sing in a broken voice as he impassively, remains at the center of the stage. Suddenly grabs her foot, controls her movements, throws her on the ground, dragging her. And then, he pulls off the shoe.



In the last week, during the feedback in which the director collects the impressions of all, Robert

says to feel passive, *"The action is missing. On the street I saw a fight in which two men insulted each other shouting. I wish my character would show the same kind of violence, even verbally."* In short, he describes one of the many scenes that we see daily in Naples. But Iodice, while not ignoring his request, lets him know that's not the way he would like to transmit the expression of violence in the show. It 'something the people of Naples are all too used to, there is no need to be so loud.

The performative path of Robert Söderberg ends with the last scene of the show. Initially, the criminal scene burst in with force, drawing the gun on the players, forcing them to sing (*"Cante, si nun cante mor !"*), and then drawing it on the audience. Subsequently, the director decides to let him on stage in a less reckless way, with a helmet on his face, still drawing the gun on Peter, who meanwhile holds the dying Christ, and then on the public. When the helmet is taken off and the weapon is laid on the ground, Robert strips himself of the garments of the criminal and becomes the boy, silent but deep, who we met during the project.

About the audition he tells us:

"It was long, intense and with powerful exercises. Davide was fearless and challenging and able to push you to get the best of you. And I really like his genuine will to work in the theatre with homeless people, criminals, poor... I felt some connections with him".

About the experience in Naples, the expectations and impressions:

[...] About Naples, I really found that "Jag har nog aldrig känt mig så påverkad av en stad. En stad som verkligen påverkade mitt humör" (" I never felt so affected by a city. A city that has really affected my mood "). It is not an easy city, I'll tell you. But above all, I like the vibes of Naples and I really want to come back one day. About my expectations, I just tried not to have any.

6. Gemma Carbone – The restless soul of Naples.

Gemma is the one that, more than the others, found herself to be a sort of bridge between the two groups involved in this project, the Swedish one and the Neapolitan one. She is of Italian origins, Tuscans actually, though she is living in Sweden for a while, consequently her function in the group has been to be interpreted through the several meetings that succeeded in that period, since the beginning: on the first meeting at Teatro Mercadante, her intervention as interpreter has been fundamental as to let the actors catch the point of the project, that is try to abandon the prejudices about the city and feel free to live it the way the city itself leads to be visited. Of course, the same invitation translated to the actors, was addressed to her as member of the company.



Right the fact that she can be seen halfway between the two groups, made her character, and herself, more and more fascinating: she lives in Sweden, although Italian, and this portraits her suspended, more that between the two groups, between the two countries. This is the start for the creation of her

character that seems to express the intention of finding a definitive place, feeling herself unsettled: alone on a red stage, she falls as soon as she hears the sound of the sax. She keeps on falling while explaining that her room is haunted by a ghost; slowly, from the upper of the ceiling a chair lowers, moved by the ghost that previously caused her spills. She runs toward the chair, trying to catch it, but it starts to fly away; then she manages to grab and sit on it: she finally found a “place”, an identity, in this tortious moving from a country to another, looking for the sensation of being home.

She goes on explaining that as to ingratiate this haunting presence she offers it a present, an orange: this leads our thoughts to the typical Neapolitan spirit, the *Munaciello* who had the power to offer presents to the people that had fallen into disfavour or to foretell misfortune in the opposite cases, by behaving badly. The scene is concluded when both the lady and the chair go back from where they entered, simultaneously: she leaves the orange for the ghost on the ground, under an orange, hanged lamp, that stands there from the previous scene, while the chair is raised up to the ceiling, from which it was previously lowered. But another character closes not the scene, but the trailing scene of the ghost: the stealthy Pulcinella enters to grab the orange left on the floor and offer it to Augusto, his *capuzzella*; after that, he blows on the lamp that switches off.



Another scene was built around Gemma’s character, anyway in collaboration with another actor, Robert Söderberg: she wears a coat and a purse in which her head is introduced, while he wears a helmet and has a gun in his hand.

They chase in circle catching their hands at interchanging moments: they run together, then separate, then take their hands and keeping on this way until the going out. Trying to interpret it, it could be possibly said that it resembles the always contrasting soul of Naples, a city where the opposites coexist: the ones who appear as enemies walk instead side by side, as escaping from a bigger enemy. Yet, in this contrast-full city she has been able to find a balance and most important of all to keep it, that’s why it is possible to say that her character, as herself, has evolved a lot thanks to the experiences offered by this great city.

7. Harriet Ohlsson – The breath

Entering the stage as a musician and a singer rather than as an actress, she represented the voice and breath of Naples.

Along with the others, first thing she visited in the city was the chapel Cappella Sansevero. She was charmed by the “breathing” statue of the veiled Christ, but her considerations regarded more than just that. She considered the chapel as a whole, noticing its ostentation and the ten showy statues of virtues surrounding the Christ: too much celebration over a simple corpse, says the artist, who prefers to exalt the beauty of life. Something happened in that same chapel helped us know her personality better. She told about an apparently autistic child who was trying, with effort but noisily, to express his amazement in front of those works of art. His mother reacted trying to silent him, caring more about etiquette than her son’s excitement. Harriet was clearly disappointed while telling

about that woman's stance, but it made us appreciate, since those first days already, her nonconformity and her very sensitive spirit.



Her ability to feel amazed and to go adventuring proved her to be, since the beginning, the “more Neapolitan” in the group, able to adapt to all the changes she went through in Naples. She actually seemed even happy to be “put to the test” by this city she explored so gladly. She told us with endless cheerfulness about her enjoyment in discovering life both in the city and in herself, but she also admitted such love came by degrees: at first, in fact, she felt uncomfortable because of the noisy streets, which prevented her to sleep during the first nights. Thanks to her ear for music, however, she was soon ready to make melodies out of those noises, using them on the stage to make the show more evocative and alive.



She didn't contribute just with sounds, but also telling about her experiences through the city, which she didn't explore only with the actors from the Scuola Elementare del Teatro but also by herself. In fact, she once got voluntarily lost in the streets, so she eventually had to ask someone how to come back. Her mother once suggested her to ask for information to old women, but she ignored such caution and picked out a “tough muscle guy”, deciding to ask him. Well, his kindness surprised her. I don't what she exactly saw, but she was impressed by the sweet, almost feminine way that guy

used to move and talk. This is how Harriet got to first discover one of Naples' secrets: many people here wear the "tough mask", using it to scare off possible threats; a mask which increases the same stereotype it was born from, representing Naples as a city full of any kind of criminals; a mask which easily wears off, revealing the brotherly and warm spirit appreciated by those who know the Neapolitan people.

This leads to a further consideration made by her on Naples' appearances: what she noticed is that the city seems to be simple, sometimes spare, with long and tight alleys that could strike with a sense of oppression. But it's enough to step the entrance to discover the brightly coloured world that's hidden behind the windows and front doors, and the sweetness concealed in its "angry and grumpy" old men.

Anyway Naples didn't only let her discover the Neapolitan friendly spirit, but above all, as she cheerfully said, that childish side she keeps inside and that she felt free to express because not constrained by any kind of label or formality.

Living so closely to her we realized – as she admitted – that this sensation didn't last long but until her daughter's arrival. This showed us another side of her kaleidoscopic personality; actually it was Naples to do so and set it under her eyes. The change has almost exclusively influenced her relationship with motherhood: the city's unpredictability, the chaotic movements of the crowd, the beauties that catch your attention and distract made her hyper protective towards her babe, to the point of inspiring her the image of the mama-wolf, always ready to fight any possible external threat, that fits the bill with her.

"I'm a wolf now, never thought I'd be", she was sometimes absent-mindedly singing during the rehearsals. Only her daughter departure cut her maternal instinct some slack, permitting her to focus again with all her strengths on her theatrical responsibility, giving birth to those wonderful rhythm on which the whole show danced.



Obviously, this has been a great month even for us trainees, it has left many and beautiful memories that we will bring with us for a long time. We would thank all the people that have welcomed us with open arms in the Teatro Stabile, Davide Iodice, Michele Vitolini and Marzia D'Alesio for the great opportunity to put ourselves to the test and to take part into this great project. At last but not at least, we want to thank the swedish actors who have been able to leave a little piece of Sweden here in Naples and in our hearts.

«For me the experience "Cities On Stage" was much more than a normal apprenticeship. It was, which have been also confirmed by the other participants, a sort of "group therapy". Sometimes it

just took the form of a meeting of AA, when, for example, the director brought us together in a circle on stage to express our opinions and personal impressions. The project has come in a difficult period, in a time of great uncertainty and demotivation, in which the idea of attending the rehearsals of the show for up to six hours a day it seemed impossible. But the director has involved us, has totally immersed us in the experience, he has opened the doors on a Naples for me still unexplored.

The introduction to these seven brilliant artists that was first marked with a bit of uncertainty, then revealed a pleasant surprise, an acquaintance that went beyond the theatre scene. We found the guys humble and genuine, disoriented at the beginning, but in the end conscious and "instructed" about the city. And I really hope that the warmth we have tried to inject has given a sense of familiarity and affection to them.»

— Chiara Trojano

«Who knew actors need a "training"? Being ignorant about theatre, as soon as I heard about it I wondered if they were actors or athletes. Well, truth is they are both, as Gemma told me quoting Antonin Artaud: "The actor is an athlete of the heart". So, every afternoon, before the rehearsal and guided by Alessandra Fabbri, the actors trained their body and spirit, getting to know both themselves and their colleagues better. Even we the trainees joined sometimes. It's been a wonderful experience, which made me understand what Peter and Caroline meant by "sense of liberation". But the training has not all the merits. Something was even more influential on those artists coming from afar. I realized it the last few days, right during the training. I was a bit late; surely Alessandra told them to act freely, since anyone was making strange movements and sounds. If I saw them like this during the first week, I would have thought they were drunk! But maybe they actually were, in a way: they were drunk with Naples. The sensation of "hands that pull and hold", which Gemma talks about, is something all of them felt somehow. It's no surprise it was Peter to first talk about it (he evolved from shiest to jester of the group!). From what he said, in Sweden's order and quietness one can walk while being very introspective; Naples, on the other hand, it too chaotic, with so many things happening around that one's soul gets caught and pulled out. A day in its streets is enough to understand what he meant. If I could add a scene to the show, following the original scheme, it would start with: "This is the land where you are free to express your individuality, where etiquette is not so strict as to become censorship and politeness goes hand in hand with brotherhood". I think we the Neapolitans take it all too much for granted, while it has been like a discovered treasure these seven Swedish artists. Their wonder, their "blossom" I witnessed, helped me figure out the beauty of my city, its admirable aspects I was born in and couldn't notice. Who ever thought we needed seven Swedish artists to get to know Naples better?

I guess this is one of the purposes of Cities on Stage as a cultural exchange. It has been interesting on an artistic and technical point of view, but a lot more on the human one. A subject we could not expatiate upon, being it way too personal. But I tell you: sometimes, while we were sitting on the stage discussing the artists' experiences to make the show, more than a workshop it seems to me like a group therapy! ... With Naples as a medicine. I realize I was wrong at the beginning, when I thought the making of this show would have been just routine to the Swedish artists. Their personal growth (and ours as well) shows the real reach of an experience such as Cities on Stage.»

— Boris Pacchiano

«There are no words to describe all the emotions and feelings experienced during this workshop. It has been such an honour to take part in this community, I had the opportunity to meet such wonderful and talented people. It was a Rising for all of us, I felt alive, thrilled, inspired. The Swedish guys were ravenous of emotions, they explored new places of the city every day, and every day the city gave something to them that they turned into words, songs, poetry. They let themselves get carried away by the chaos of the city, exploring "vicoli", squares and streets. They were overwhelmed by the sounds and the taste of Naples, by the spontaneity and warmth of people becoming a little bit Neapolitan in the end. In our collective moments on stage, I saw myself in their words, I relived the same feelings and the same thoughts experienced years before when I was just nineteen and moved from my quite and cozy village to the lively and captivating Naples.

I was truly stunned by this experience, the days spent at Teatro San Ferdinando were magical thanks to all the people involved in the project. During all the apprenticeship, the Swedish guys gave me unforgettable moments, in and outside the theatre. We confronted each other, we got to know each other better, we became friends, I felt close to them sometimes and some of them really

inspired me. Hope to see and hug them again. Until then.»

— Giovanna Vitale

«Have managed to live such an experience meant to me to find a true rarity, especially because Swedish actors have been involved. The unpleasant situation I lived was that of underestimating my city: everyday I walk through the old town centre lingering blind to what it, if I only stopped, would offer to my eyes. Something that goes beyond the simple monuments that stand out among the piled floors of the apartments. And my astonishment was of hearing the sound of my thoughts being given words from them, those seven actors, sometimes tourists starving for feelings, sometimes friends, always willing to share nights. I think that to say of them that are touching is not enough: everyone, each of them, has contributed in defining the city with always truthful words, in explaining it to us and to their selves, in authenticating the turmoil of emotions this experience evoked in them and, above all, in us.

What really amazed me has been the evolution faced by everybody, an unforeseen but anyway obvious extroversion: this because Naples fills you with incentives to the point of exploding and forcing you to describe them. As it were the only way to treasure them. From here originated those conversations that went along our nights and our sharing moments on the stage, under the bright lights. Moments during which impressions and emotions of any kind emerged, thanks to the amazing polyhedrality of these wonderful seven people; of course we didn't miss funny moments and episodes lived by the actors who let themselves be captivated by the vivacious and warm Neapolitan personalities met through this trip; a trip that, I basically, has been given to us in order to find seven such deep souls.»

— Rosa Cirillo

«I'm not a person who speak very much, but I have to tell only one thing: thank you for everything. It's been a great adventure that helped me to be more open and that gave me the chance to meet people who come from that part of world in which I would like to live, one day. These seven swedes/friends has been able to bring their land into Naples. At the beginning they were so shy, closed, distant but during the weeks they opened themselves and enjoyed our wish to get in contact with them. I wish these bonds will never break and that we will meet again someday. After all, the world is not so big as they say.»

— Teresa Speranza



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