

# PLAYS

## INTERNATIONAL & EUROPE

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**PLUS**

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REPORTS, PICTURES  
& LISTINGS



# Features



Felix Mitterer. Photo: Herwig Prammer.

## On Being An Austrian Playwright

Find out more about Felix Mitterer, an Austrian playwright beloved in his home country yet little known abroad. Why is that? Ludovico Lucchesi Palli's interview with Mitterer provides some clues.

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Evgenia Parfenova in front of documentary evidence of the 1931 rebellion at the Tomsk Regional History Museum.  
Photo courtesy of Tomsk Regional Museum.

## From Documents to Drama

What happens when a Siberian museum uses its archived material to dramatize the story of a local rebellion against the Soviets in 1931? Mikhail Kaluzhsky tells the story of the making of the play.

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### FRONT COVER:

Kate O'Flynn hides behind her glass unicorn in the production directed by John Tiffany of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* at the Duke of York's Theatre. Read the review on page 10.

Photo: Johan Persson

# Sergio Lo Gatto in Rome

Contrary to Great Britain or France, contemporary Italian theatres do not normally rely on text-based productions. Although Italian playwrights like Luigi Pirandello and Eduardo De Filippo made history in the twentieth century, theatre artists began to detach themselves from the written page in the late 1960s, heading rather in the direction of more visual and sensory experiences. The so-called "new theatre" of the 1970s, happening mainly in basements – the famous *cantine* – and outside of the institutional venues, launched a group of experimenters. On one hand, Luca Ronconi and Federico Tiezzi kept alive the tradition of "critical directing" initiated by Giorgio Strehler and Massimo Castri; on the other hand, poetic and imaginative theatre-makers like Carmelo Bene, Leo De Berardinis, Studio Azzurro, and Mario Ricci proved to be so influential that a great part of the following generation continued to use strong visual impressions and poetry in performances.

In turn, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Teatro Valdoca, or La Gaia Scienza gave birth to an "artistic lineage" represented by groups from the early 2000s such as Santasangre, gruppo nanou, Muta Imago, Pathosformel, Emma Dante, Anagor, or Alessandro Sciarroni. Pretty much all these companies preferred the image over the word, leaving the Italian scene almost without the authored scripts of traditional playwrights. Now the story is changing again and - using an extraordinary variety of theatrical languages - many younger artists are going back to the page, trying to build a bridge between the past and the future. The few publishing houses dedicated to theatre and playwriting are slowly coming back to life to print the words of Stefano Massini, Gabriele Di Luca, Emanuele Aldrovandi, or Davide Carnevali.

Among these new artist playwrights are the duo who founded the Compagnia MusellaMazzarelli. Lino Musella and Paolo Mazzarelli both have a background in acting. They met in 2000, discovering a very strong

synergy that led them to their first joint work *Due Cani (Two Dogs)*. With *Figli di un bruttocio (Sons of an Ugly God, 2010)* the duo gained national attention. With *La società (Society, 2013)*, they involved a larger group of actors and obtained the support of the state theatre Marche Teatro in Ancona, a theatre devoted to works with cultural relevance that is still their main producer.

With *Strategie Fatali (Fatal Strategies)*, produced at the Teatro di Roma's Teatro India in early 2017, Compagnia MusellaMazzarelli is further exploring the relationship between text, acting, and staging. For this play, the duo wrote an original script which they claimed was inspired by two main literary figures: William Shakespeare and the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, specifically his 1983 book *Fatal Strategies*. The script combines what they see as timeless lyric verse that lets human inner reality both appear and disappear with an apocalyptic vision that fixes external reality in a simulacrum of appearance.

In an interview, Musella and Mazzarelli said, "In this work, theatre is not a metaphor. It is environment and argument. It is both content and container." Nestled between a prologue and an epilogue where a couple of grotesque detectives are in the footsteps of a teenager who went missing in an abandoned playhouse, the main plot follows a theatre company rehearsing *Othello* under the guidance of a clumsy director who is unable to explain his crazy ideas. Two new actors arrive to replace the actors originally in the roles of Othello and Desdemona: Alberto a handsome TV star and his young girlfriend Sara who is hiding inconvenient secrets about her sexual habits. In a metatheatrical scenario, some old resentments surface between Alberto and Federico (the actor who plays Iago) who will use Sara's secret metaphorically as the infamous handkerchief in the Shakespearean tragedy. But this is just the beginning. The script references Baudrillard's philosophy by dissociating reality from life on stage. It is a sort of series of nested,

or Chinese, boxes. The audience member is directly confronted by the director's absurd ideas, and suddenly Othello and Iago are not on stage but instead there is a janitor who took over the abandoned theatre and is preparing to bomb it so as to prevent the building being sold to a construction company. These three separate narratives are ingeniously juxtaposed to create a mind-boggling enigma that ends up to be the core of the message.

Alongside Lino Musella and Paolo Mazzarelli, Marco Foschi, Annibale Pavone, Laura Graziosi, Astrid Casali and Giulia Salvarani

provide an outstanding performance in this refreshing play about theatrical madness that avoids becoming trapped by tricky hyper-intellectual premises and which questions the actual power of theatre. Thanks to a very well organized visual impact, strengthened by a close-knit group of professionals, this production of a written script leads me to say that definitely the art of playwriting in Italy has been re-awakened.

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Lino Musella and Paolo Mazzarelli in *Fatal Strategies*. Photo: Marco Parollo.







*Marco Foschi and Giulia Salvarani in Fatal Strategies. Photo: Marco Parollo.*

*Astrid Casali and Paolo Mazzarelli in Fatal Strategies. Photo: Marco Parollo.*

