

'Rumore' places refugees' plight center stage



PHOTO: THEATRE GIGANTE

Original cast member Alessandro Renda will perform *Rumore di Acque*, with a new accompanying score by frequent Theatre Gigante collaborator Guy Klucevsek.

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Contributing writer

Turn on the news on any given night of the week and the struggles of the Syrian refugees stare back at you. They are individuals clinging to a hope for survival by crossing the Mediterranean.

It's a story that seems far away, a world removed from Milwaukee. Theater Gigante hopes to change that.

On Oct. 1, the company will present the local premiere of *Rumore di Acque*, a play that puts the struggles of Mediterranean-crossing refugees center stage.

Written by Marco Martinelli, *Rumore di Acque* ("Noise in the Waters") is set against a beautiful Mediterranean backdrop, telling a story that is anything but. The piece illuminates the tragedy of African immigrants who have been found at sea, trying to escape war, hunger and all sorts of terror in their own countries. In the past 20 years, over 20,000 refugees have drowned trying to escape.

Co-artistic director Isabelle Kralj says Martinelli's piece neither glorifies nor fictionalizes its events. Rather, it draws on true accounts collected by him and collaborator Ermanna Montanari. "This piece is powerful because it takes all the numbers that are thrown at us in the media and humanizes (them)," Kralj says. "It personalizes the story and gives a face to the tragedy that we are seeing in the news on a daily basis."

Rumore di Acque has previously been performed in Chicago and New York, following the world premiere in Ravenna, Italy, in 2010. New to this production is a score written by composer and accordionist Guy Klucevsek.

"The music Guy has written for us is very accessible and beautiful. It makes you feel emotions without forcing you," says co-artistic director Mark Anderson

in a recent interview. "The music is tonal while still being avant-garde. It is contemporary but has elements of a truly classical sound as well," added Kralj.

Original performer Alessandro Renda will be performing the work in the original Italian, with Thomas Simpson (a professor of Italian at Northwestern University in Chicago) translating the words live into English. The partnership will allow the show to move back and forth between Italian and English seamlessly, Kralj says.

This unique and powerful production provides several opportunities for collaboration, which Gigante is pursuing as part of its mission. Renda will teach acting classes at UWM and in local high schools. Talkbacks will give audiences a chance to ask questions. And following the completion of the show, the cast will record Klucevsek's original score for performance use overseas. "We are so excited about the reception of Guy's score and really thrilled that it will be used for future performances. It's a truly beautiful score," says Kralj.

The subject matter may seem difficult at times, but it is not as far away from home as the location may seem — Kralj is living proof. "My parents were immigrants," she explains. "They didn't have to go through what these individuals in the Mediterranean are facing, but it was hard. A lot of the emotions discussed in this show hit home. This is a powerful work that will resonate with everyone."

ON STAGE

Rumore di Acque will run Oct. 1-4 at UWM's Kenilworth Studio 508, 1925 E. Kenilworth Place, Milwaukee. Tickets are \$25, \$20 for seniors, \$15 for students. Visit theatregigante.org to order.