



ermanna montanari / Teatro delle Albe

Maryam

ermanna montanari / teatro delle Albe

Maryam

text *Luca Doninelli*

on stage *Ermanna Montanari*

music *Luigi Ceccarelli*

sound director *Marco Olivieri*

lighting designer *Francesco Catacchio*

technical director *Fagio*

space and costumes assistant *Roberto Magnani*

consultancy and translation in Arabic *Tahar Lamri*

on video *Khadija Assoulaimani*

audio voice and percussion *Marzouk Mejri*

videomaker *Alessandro Renda*

music creation *Edisonstudio Roma*

organization and promotion *Silvia Pagliano, Francesca Venturi*

photos of the performance *Enrico Fedrigoli*

devising, space, costumes and directing *Marco Martinelli, Ermanna Montanari*

producers *Teatro delle Albe/Ravenna Teatro*

in collaboration with *Teatro de gli Incamminati/deSidera*

thanks to *Luisa Orelli per i preziosi suggerimenti riguardanti la spiritualità coranica,*

Yiad Hafez per la consulenza sulla musica araba, E production, Gerardo Lamattina

Maryam

play in 4 movements

1. zeinab's prayer

2. Intisar's prayer

3. Douha's prayer

4. Maryam

Maryam is Mary, the Mother of Jesus in the Koran. *Maryam* tells us how much her figure is central to Islamic culture. In times of terrorism and ferocity, Maryam stands as the "woman of meeting", a bridge between Christianity, Islam and contemporary culture. Ermanna Montanari gives voice to three Palestinian women who share with Mary the pain of the death of children and siblings due to the injustice and horrors of the world. Mothers who turn to her for consolation, or to shout their own rage, to claim revenge or simply to invoke an answer to the why of war and violence. They invoke her as they do in many Islamic sanctuaries in the Middle East and the Maghreb. And in the end it is Maryam herself who appears and, mother of mothers, shares these women's pain.

«The idea for Maryam comes from far away," writes Luca Doninelli, "to be precise from the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth which I visited between 2005 and 2006. There I witnessed the spectacle of an almost uninterrupted line of Muslim women who entered the church to pay homage to the Madonna. I already knew about Muslims' devotion to Mary but what I saw struck me all the same by its solemnity, the trusting certainty that these women transmitted. I carried it within me for years until it sprang back to mind when I wanted to write a theatre piece on Mary. I'm very grateful to Ermanna and Marco, not only for the decisive help they gave me with the script but also for various suggestions about things to read. Thanks to Marco and Ermanna, I was able to grasp how a piece of writing can be "personal" without necessarily being "solitary"».

With this show the Albe return to collaborate with writer Luca Doninelli (Finalist, Campiello Prize 2016), about ten years after *La mano* (The Hand). And they continue along the avenue of experimentation with the marriage of Montanari's kaleidoscopic voice and Luigi Ceccarelli's powerful music. This happy encounter between Ceccarelli's music and Ermanna Montanari's unique voice gave birth to *LUŞ*, a concert-show in Romagnol dialect from a text by Nevio Spadoni, which continues to receive acclamation in Italy and abroad. Last December it was hosted in China at the R.A.W! - China Shanghai International Arts Festival.

Ravenna Teatro is at the disposal of anyone with rights to photographic, video and music sources whom it was not possible to identify.

Teatro delle Albe works in Ravenna Teatro Centro di produzione Teatrale, via di Roma 39, 48121 Ravenna
www.teatrodellealbe.com - info@teatrodellealbe.com - tel 0039 0544 36239

critical glances

The cry of pain of Palestinian women

BY MAGDA POLI

Ermanna Montanari, “queen” of the Albe of Ravenna, with her extraordinary ductile voice succeeds in giving breadth and depth to words, in embodying the word. Excellent.

Motionless at the lectern, behind a veil on which projections and plays of colour are shown, she brings to life the prayers of three Palestinian women addressed to Mary, Maryam in Luca Doninelli's text, the mother of Jesus, venerated also in the Muslim faith.

Four movements, four cantos, with Marco Martinelli's rigorous direction, for a pain that elicits a vibrancy that no one could fail to share (Teatro Due, Parma). Set forth with formal and expressive elegance (fine musical “dramaturgy” by Luigi Ceccarelli) in a darkness cut by slashes of light, among projections of mosaics, crowds devastated by war, writings in Arabic, the monologues proceed, concluded by that of Maryam who understands the impotence of love before man and before God – she never forgiven for the death of her son – but also understands her strength which is hope in life and after death. Women who demand revenge, comfort, responses to the why of so much violence. For them the wisdom and power of Maryam, inspiration to those who seek strength and meaning in faith.

Daughters of Maryam

BY MARIA GRAZIA GREGORI

Ermanna Montanari on her part commands, with simplicity and intensity, the text written by Luca Doninelli and directed by Marco Martinelli. Three women, three stories of pain and hope, united in the invocation of Mary-Maryam.

We glimpse a female figure in the dark: we know who it is but it is by her unmistakable voice, which here achieves an extreme degree of simplicity and intensity, that we recognize her. Ermanna Montanari, amid projections, shadows and writings in Arabic on transparent drapes is, as often happens, alone on stage to tell us the story of three women which concludes dramatically with the story of Maryam, the name given to the Virgin in the Koran. Mothers, sisters, friends marked by a deep pain linked to violent death, to the disappearance of dear ones, to the brutal kidnapping of a friend, raped and forced into prostitution by a man of her own family who should have protected her. Ermanna Montanari is accustomed to the challenges that are the real field of a job – the theatre – which is her *raison d'être*, where one chooses different travelling companions destined to be interchangeable, excepting the presence of Marco Martinelli who, with her, did the direction, set designs and costumes, as well as devising this one woman show seen at the Teatro dell'Elfo and upcoming at the Teatro Due in Parma. The show that bears the title *Maryam* came into being from a text by Luca Doninelli which aims to transmit to the spectator the emotion felt by the writer during a visit to the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth where many Muslim women queued to pay homage to the Virgin. Having already written *The Hand* for Ermanna, the author wanted to highlight not only the sense of trust, of abandonment, of rage that links these three stories in the form of prayer, of invocation but, I believe, also to bear witness to how, in times so hard, a different cohabitation might be possible, far from wars, slaughters, violence, from unbridgeable distances. He does it in a language at once soft and poetic: it is down to us to find the assonances, emotions, ineluctable truths. Ermanna becomes the voice, sublimated body, of these three characters – Zeinab, Intisar, Douha – and of Maryam, far from the stylistic elements of the monologue: it would almost seem as if she didn't care about being "seen" so much as heard, as she climbs the musical scale (the sound engineer is Mauro Olivieri) to give life to the narration. An image projected all round brings us the face of a woman wearing the hijab to cover her head, while the three protagonists one by one give way to a Virgin with a halo of light-bulbs. And behold Zeinab, the friend of Sharifa, who tells a story of violence. Her friend was kidnapped by a pervert uncle who lusted after her and sold her nobody knows where. And she asks for revenge, a terrible illness for that disgusting man. Intisar's prayer instead tells of the tragic disappearance of her brother Fouad who wanted to be an engineer but was transformed into a kamikaze, blowing himself up in the marketplace and killing twenty: Muslims, Jews and Christians. She intuits the end when a man arrives with a bag full of money because thanks to Fouad's sacrifice his family will live "without worries", but she thinks of her mother who, by now out of her mind, pursues the ghost of her son in the streets by day and by night. Douha speaks of her son, Ali, handsome with blond curls, drowned at sea while following his father who was escaping from someone or something on one of the many boatloads of desperate people that we hear of every day in the news. A death that separated husband and wife for good, leaving an irremediable void in both. To these three women Maryam responds and speaks of her pain, of seeing her son crucified, of her ignored invocations to God to save him: "I have never forgiven God," she says, "for letting my son die", and she promises the three women that they will always be with her "in the heart of the world where no children die". The passage from life to eternity is too painful and a mother can neither understand or accept it, But in the end the stage is wholly Ermanna's: sweating, panting, victorious.

Mary of All Peoples

BY RENATO PALAZZI

The argument is vibrant but risky: the cult of the Virgin Mary in the Islamic faith, the Arab women who appeal to the mother of Jesus for succour and consolation. In a historical phase when relations between Christians and Muslims are dominated by tensions and fears, it is a fine and just thing that a theatre company should pose the question of a possible bridge between the two cultures, of a thought that unites rather than lacerates. But obviously the subject matter is difficult to tackle on the stage: the slightest thing and it could get out of hand, slip into facile ecumenism, into spiritual abstraction, a little rosary image.

It should be said at once that *Maryam*, the Teatro delle Albe show presented in national premiere at the Elfo Puccini in Milan, is one of those creations halfway between concerto, vocal performance and actual *mise-en-scène*, highlighting Ermanna Montanari's intensity and acting talent, and appears custom designed to elude these traps: Marco Martinelli's directing builds up a tight sound, visual and verbal score that contributes to eliciting an interweave of pure emotions, over and above the themes dealt with. Montanari is marvellous. And Luca Doninelli's text functions, at least to a certain extent.

But the efficacy of the proposal, more than in the writing lies in the highly refined composition of images and words devised by the director, in a close fusion between the projections – phrases in Arabic, stains of colour, the face of a girl wearing the hijab – and the vibrant, physical presence of the actress: there's a moment when the whole stage is invaded by a huge black and white photo of a Syrian city being bombed, and her body immersed in the shadow seems to emerge from a barbed wire entanglement like the living fruit of that metal bush, with an effect that is overwhelming.

A fundamental role in the fine-tuning of this compelling emotive intarsia is played by musician Luigi Ceccarelli who reprocesses and in a certain sense internalises ethnic themes, echoes of middle-eastern motifs and instruments, making them a sort of reflection, extension, of the actress's voice. Ceccarelli has often filled this role for the Teatro delle Albe, achieving absolute technical perfection above all in the recent and very fine *Lus*. But it is different here where his contribution is perhaps less technical, richer in dense poetic values.

As for Ermanna, how to describe the result she achieves? With regard to her other top performances, in this case she is on less familiar terrain. She is not called on to delineate those powerful Romagnol peasant women of hers but Arab women, bearers of another culture, another expressive measure, another temperature of passions: she must diversify these three female presences in their accents, must curb their vehemence in order to avoid rhetoric, and she does all of this with a naturalness that amazes. Immobile and erect before the microphone, standing out in a tenuous pool of light, with no external artifice except, in Mary's response, a bizarre luminous halo of the kind used in popular devotion, she seems here and there to dematerialise, she becomes pure *phoné* and her delivery, now restrained, now raucous, angry, comes to resemble a motionless song, a song without notes, not sung but solely spoken, intoned within herself without need of accompaniment.

1st February 2017

new critics / maryam

BY FRANCESCA SATURNINO

In these hallucinated and hallucinating hours of closed borders, death by drowning and millions of women united in protest marches worldwide, the national preview of *Maryam* – which closes the Casa del Contemporaneo's focus on The Albe – stands out as an (unrealized) prophecy.. Indeed it functions as a collection basin for the emotive secretions, the assuaging collective energies that not even very secretly seize us every day and in the worst cases implode with a dull sound: inside. Three women with their souls in turmoil call upon another woman: "um una Maryam".

They invoke her with grace but each prayer ends with a call for revenge: sacrosanct, enraged, without allowances. "Um una Maryam, Mary, mother of Jesus to whom the author of the text, Luca Doninelli, has seen women mourn in the Holy Land: the nucleus of the writing starts from here. Let us state immediately that it is a deeply laic and unabashedly human work: human in the Lucretian sense, where empathy – which is not punishment – corresponds to a choral distribution of pain. And on the 'heretic' function of the chorus the Albe have yet more to show. As in the recent *Lus*, once more this time all the voices are entrusted to the equally heretic and kaleidoscopic fibre of Ermanna Montanari who, on the syncopated weft of Luigi Ceccarelli's refined music, lays down soliloquies that rip the thin opalescent curtain/veil dropped between stage and stalls. The writing has the acute insight of imagining the normal everyday life of stories interrupted by the violence of the established (always patriarchal) order: to live with names, faces, bodies the anonymous figures to which we are by now indifferent. We are in the collapsing post-human, in a martyred, very close Orient.

On the backdrop and on the veil, projections of bombed cities and soldiers; crooked cuts of violet light, verses from the Koran, a woman's face. Montanari, stage right, is wearing a thin dark red leather cape, the hood falling on her forehead. She measures herself as always with a microphone, the only prop, extension of her nerves and throat. She embodies the anarchic and submissive cult of the friend of Sharifa, sold as a slave by her uncle as punishment for not giving herself; of the mother of Ali, drowned at twelve years of age in the dark waters of a crossing; of Amira who, having discovered that her son died as a kamikaze, "lost her reason and wanders by night in the war-torn city, risking stray bullets and the deformed glances of the warriors. Not a show but a dedicated phonic-vocalic performance which brings about a crossing.

Montanari, under the calibrated direction of Marco Martinelli, abandons herself to a space-time extradition that in the mysterious black of the Sala Assoli – in more than thirty years it is the first time that the company debuts outside Ravenna – becomes a collective prayer, a crazy and necessary invocation. The Maryam who at last responds is a modern and highly human Fassbinderian mother, set in a crown of red lamps: "she never forgave God for letting her son die". Hands and arms extended, impotent, they bear the weight of a love "unknown to butchers and undertakers, to priests, to general procurators" which, like the theatre, still obstinately resists and exists.

For the same reason of the cry

BY CATERINA PICCIONE

There is a theatre that arises from urgency. It germinates because it is necessary, it's been sown by the world and it is the world that calls it into life (not onto the stage). For forty years the Albe have been riding the wave of a necessity, a long wave that has carried them today to the threshold of *Maryam*. In these times consumed by fear of the different, the Albe give voice to three Muslim mothers, women who are devoted to the Virgin Mary. The three prayers, which are complaints, curses and subdued cries, represent a paradoxical meeting point between two cultures, Christian and Islam, lost in making war and forgetful of their common roots. Going to the heart of these religions we discover that *Maryam* is the most important female figure in Islam. The idea for this show came from a visit to Nazareth during which the author, Luca Doninelli, saw a long queue of Muslim women going to pray to Mary in the Basilica of the Annunciaton. Thus we discover that in the midst of the terror that fills our news far and near, the cult of Mary is a possible bridge. The encounter between Christianity and Islam takes place paradigmatically at the exact point in which human and divine touch: the death of a child. The Muslim women who invoke the mother of Christ have lost a child, as she did. They suffer the greatest pain imaginable, mothers of children drowned at sea, or blown up in the square. And so they turn to the divine, urged by a very natural impulse of the human being inasmuch as she is human. In the prayers to Mary, all the women are the same, prostrated by the same death, sisters in the same life. The mothers invoke the mother of Jesus in search if not of hope at least of a plausible answer to the absurdness of their pain, a response that goes beyond what is visible and comprehensible, beyond the world. The need for the divine arises from an expectation of reparation, from the desire to resolve evil and stitch up the threads of pain. The loss of a child seems an event against nature, an absolute non-sense. There is no death more contradictory. *Maryam* evokes all the torment, the heart torn by mourning, the nothingness of meaning that remains as nothingness of life. On the other hand, the event of death in itself leaves us shocked. We cannot really believe in death, cannot allow ourselves to think of it deeply except when we come up against it. We cannot think that the people around us, around whom we build our life, can really leave us from one moment to the next. On the Albe's stage the impossible thought of death is chiselled by the characteristics of a voice of fire and iron. Beautiful, full of grace and force, capable of cruelty and abandon, Ermanna Montanari is mother of a love that eludes rhetoric. Mary combatant who has neither answers nor vendettas nor redemptions. She has not forgiven God for letting her son die, even if he was then resurrected. *Maryam* does not know resignation or pacification, she leaves intact the pain of loss. Pure, whole, absolute, this pain seems an enigma. While problems may be solved, enigmas have no solution, they put us to the test, we must bear them, be equal to them. The pain of mothers who have lost their children is an enigma which rises like a mountain and cannot be levelled. It is possible only to try to climb. Perhaps together. And behold an unforeseen love, "unknown to butchers, undertakers, priests and general procurators", which is generated in the sharing of suffering. If Mary could have saved her son from the cross, it would have been the reward of a beatitude distant from the world and no other woman would ever have turned to her. On the contrary, *Maryam* is loved because she lives within the same suffering.

Com-passion – it is the secret of the theatre – in the voice of Mary we feel all this pain.

Identifcation spreads like contagion. We have a desire to shout. Ermanna Montanari moves imperceptibly, fixed in space, bound to the thin microphone stand. The way of her body, absolutely present, alive but immobile, impetuous but restrained, arouses a growing, subterranean longing in the spectators. Francesco Catacchio's lighting fills the bare stage. Only the voice moves and shifts the bodies all around it. The boundary between stage and stalls is dissolved. The motionless pain in the gestures

seems reflected in the Koranic sounds, now solemn, now frantic, of Luigi Ceccarelli's music with the sound engineering of Marco Olivieri. A veil separates us from *Maryam*. Ungraspable, the woman's body is a shadow, it is all the shadows of the world, all the names of history. On the veil, the text of the show in Arabic is projected, alternated by images of devastated cities and rivers of people, exodus and apocalypse. They are images we are used to, we see them every day in the anaesthesia of the TV news. We think we know by heart what is happening in Palestine, we're almost bored by it. *Maryam* fights inurement to tragedy, creates an organic reaction in the spectators and demonstrates that at the theatre we learn nothing but we change. Operativeness of metamorphosis. Here is a possible direction for the theatre: neither experimentation for its own sake, behind closed doors, technique of the self-referential marvel, miracle without witnesses; nor the triteness of a political theatre without research, which leaves a vague sense of guilt and claims to be informative about reality. *Maryam* embraces the urgency of restoring meaning to the world, also through the non-sense of absolute pain. It is theatre as political gesture, multifaceted flower of the world. In this rite of bodies and voices being together, we remember that Dionysius is dead. Dionysius is alive in us. And even in the midst of the sacred and the desperation we smell a perfume of heresy and happiness.