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Voices from the Depths

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Stories about illegal crossings reveal the bravery of those who confront innumerable dangers to escape terrible living conditions. Their goal is to ultimately achieve a better life for their families and themselves. Each immigrant has a deeply emotional story to tell about persecution, extreme poverty, sickness, the perils of the crossing, and the discovery that their destination is as filled with problems as their countries of origin. These are the stories that make up *Rumore di acque (Noise in the Waters)*, a melologue, which is a short work created for voice and music, produced by Teatro delle Albe and written and directed by Marco Martinelli. The piece is a collection of all those migrant voices that can be heard along the Strait of Sicily, the 90-mile wide portion of the Mediterranean Sea that divides North Africa and Sicily. Some of their tales are being told for audiences at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club by a solitary demon on a volcanic island in the Mediterranean Sea.

In the melologue, a bureaucrat working for the Ministro dell' Inferno (Minister of Hell), a clear reference to the Italian Ministro dell' Interno (Minister of the Interior), is appointed to a deserted volcanic islet located in the middle of the Sicilian strait. The island is suggested in the bare theatrical space by a spiral of stones on the floor. The narrator stands at the center of the spiral, symbolizing his location within the bowels of the watery and volcanic hell. This figure wears dark sunglasses and a blue military uniform adorned with medals, establishing a physical reference to the now defunct Muammar Qaddafi. The General, magnificently performed by Alessandro Renda, explains in a gravelly voice that his job is to count and record all the African immigrants who have perished on their voyage to Europe. Nevertheless, the narrator never expresses any emotion towards the subjects and only shows outrage for the fish, which make his job harder by eating the flesh of the dead at sea. He is only interested in the numbers, a clear indictment of how Italian and North African governments are indifferent to the plight of immigrants.

Among his deliberations about numbers, his anger with the fish, and a discussion about how inferior bureaucrats should address him, the general tells us the sad stories of four African refugees. The character and his delivery never really lead the audience into an emotional involvement with his stories. The listener rejects everything that the narrator stands for. In this way, Martinelli resists manipulating the audience's emotions and forces us to think critically about what the character really represents and where we are located in his narrative. Although the general is a representative of power, the refugees

are still heard through the painfully beautiful music and vocals of Enzo and Lorenzo Mancuso. While the general is at center stage, the Mancuso brothers play and sing from stage right. They occupy a dreamlike space outside the volcanic islet from where their vocals act out the desperation and pathos of those who have sacrificed themselves for a better life.

Rumore di acque presents stories of refugees from Libya and many communities throughout the Sahara that are as relevant to Europe and Africa as to the United States and Latin America. The writing, direction, performance and music blend harmoniously to make audiences see the plight of immigrants and the indifference of those in power.

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