Pazzi Lazzi Troupe

presents

Isabella Unmasked

The Legacy of an Italian Renaissance Woman

One Actress, Ten Characters. One Musician, Ten Instruments

By Chiara Durazzini and Walter Valeri

Directed by Marco Remo Zanelli

Featuring Chiara Durazzini and Dan Meyers

ABOUT COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Commedia dell'Arte is a particular kind of theatre that started in the Italian streets and "piazze" in the first part of 1500s. In Medieval terms, the word "arte" means "craft", therefore implying performances by professional actors as distinguished from amateur actors who played in the courts of princes and kings throughout Europe. In fact, this is the first instance of professional theatre in the Western world. Within Commedia dell'Arte we also find women as actresses for the first time in theatre history. For each show, the touring troupes of actors used a scenario (a plot summary), but they didn't take the time to write the dialogue, which was improvised. The only non-improvised elements in the show were the lazzi. Lazzo means "trick", and was whatever could make the show more interesting or funnier to the public. All the scenarios had the same stock characters, only the story changed. Every troupe member during his/her life would always play the same character. Characters are divided into men and women, old and young, noble and servant. To be quickly recognized, every character had his own costume and leather mask –the Nobles and female characters did not wear masks. Today, Arlecchino, the agile, witty and always hungry servant, has become the symbol of the Italian Carnevale.

THE MUSIC OF "ISABELLA UNMASKED" (in order of performance)

La Morte Della Ragione – *Anonymous dance, 16th century*

Bergamesche Varie from "Il Scolaro" – *Gasparo Zanetti (ca. 1600 – 1660)*

Üsküdar'a Gider İken – *Anonymous Turkish folk song, 17th century*

La Parma – *Giorgio Mainerio (ca. 1530 – 1582)*

Canario – *Anonymous dance, 16th century*

Streets of Cairo (Snake Charmer Song) – *Sol Bloom (1870 – 1949)*

Tarantella del Seicento – *Anonymous folk dance, 17th century*

Habanera from "Carmen" – *Georges Bizet (1838 -1875)*

Scacciapensieri – *jaw harp improvisation*

La Traditora Mi Fa Morire – *Anonymous dance, 16th century*

Gaudeamus Igitur – *Anonymous Medieval Song*

La Monica – *Anonymous song, 17th century*

NOTES ON THE MUSIC AND INSTRUMENTS

The majority of the music used in "Isabella Unmasked" comes from 16th-century Italy, where every royal court in the major city-states—Venice, Florence, Mantua, Ferrara, Milan, and others—employed dozens of musicians and paid for the creation of new music for every dance, feast, and theatrical presentation. The musical instruments used are also some of those commonly played in the Italian Renaissance, when professional musicians were expected to be able to play several instruments rather than specializing in a single one; this aesthetic gives us the modern term "Renaissance man/woman" to describe someone who has a wide variety of knowledge or skills. Some of the music comes from more recent eras and is used as a way of creating specific associations or inside jokes with the audience, a technique which was also common to 16th-century Commedia dell'Arte. In choosing the music for "Isabella" we have tried to create a sound world that is both evocative of the Renaissance and relatable for a 21st-century audience.

PLAYWRIGHTS' NOTE

Historians don't have much information about the life of Isabella Andreini, who was born in Padua in 1562 as Isabella Canali and died in Lyon in 1604. However, her fame as an actress - one of the first female theatre professionals - is still alive today. A renowned poet and a performer of extraordinary talent, she became famous for playing male and female roles, for using different languages, for her flexibility in playing all the Commedia stock characters and for tearing her clothes off on stage. She was the "femme prodige" of the Italian Renaissance theatre. With our desire to bring back her myth and put on a show about her, we began writing this show, basing it loosely on the Flaminio Scala's scenario "La Pazzia di Isabella" (the name of the protagonist being the same of the actress who made it famous) as we imagined Isabella wearing the various Commedia dell'Arte masks both on her face and with her body, changing her physicality. Traveling back in time, and rediscovering the origins of drama, we also took some inspiration from Pietro Aretino, the love poems of the mediaeval women troubadours, as well as Andreini's own sonnets.

Through Isabella Andreini playing a variety of Commedia dell'Arte stock characters, we return to the ancient and rustic origins of Italian theatre, which allows us to reflect upon undying themes such as love, sexism, madness, money, old age, hunger, and theatre itself. The character of Isabella represents the stubborn unrequited love which inevitably leads to madness; Orazio, with his narcissistic need for other lovers, incarnates the sexual pleasure rediscovered during the Humanism and Renaissance times; Arlecchino, who tries to satisfy his appetites coming up with countless excuses to justify his actions; the gossipy Ricciolina with her judgmental restlessness due to the lack of a rich personal life; and the Dottore, who will discover

only in the end which is the only possible cure for Isabella's madness. It will not be hard for the audience to recognize the tragi-comic archetypes portrayed by Chiara Durazzini, accompanied by the enchanting period music played by Dan Meyers.

Chiara Durazzini and Walter Valeri

-Note: The English translation of the women troubadours' poems is by Meg Bogin. The English translation of Isabella Andreini's sonnets is by David Gullette.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"Isabella Unmasked" takes us on a journey through the world of Commedia dell'Arte by presenting some its most notable stock characters, in addition to presenting Isabella, the character, and Isabella Andreini, the prolific Renaissance artist (1562-1604). The stock characters depicted are distinctly delineated by the traits established by the Commedia players of the past, and Isabella is portrayed as both herself and the character she plays in her famous scene, "The Madness of Isabella". Thus, "Isabella Unmasked" takes on the technique of metadrama, or rather, a play within a play. The technique has been utilized in many works from the past to the present, most notably in Shakespeare. We also very clearly see it in Pirandello's "Henry IV" and "Six Characters in Search of an Author". Unlike the stock Commedia characters, the character of Isabella is presented using a very generic looking mask that obscures her true nature and emotions, hence also incorporating the Pirandellian concepts of perception as seen in his works, "One, No one, and One Hundred Thousand", and "Right You Are (if you think so)", to name a few. The device of and the deliberate generic masking of her face, in addition to her very general movements and monotone voice leaves Isabella, the character, devoid of any emotion, thereby allowing, perhaps forcing, each individual audience member to see and interpret her in a very unique manner. Some of the stock characters wear masks as well, but the difference here is that each stock character mask somewhat incorporates the personality of the character itself, and along with their very distinct movements and physicality, makes it more likely that each audience member will have similar, rather than unique, interpretations of Arlecchino, Pantalone, Dottor Graziano and Zanni. Traditionally the nobles, Orazio and Flaminia, and the female servant, Ricciolina are without masks at all, thus allowing them the most freedom in their visual expressions. With all that in mind, sit back, relax and as the Commedia actors used to say, "Andiamo senza'altro a incominciare -Without further ado, let us begin."

 Marco Zanelli – Director

MANY THANKS TO: Eleonora Francesca Cordovani, David Gullette, Callie Chapman, and everyone else who has helped with this project.

English translation of the sonnets by David Gullette

Hark and turn and halt your steps a bit,

Ungrateful man, here are my tear-soaked prayers,

See how, for you, I'm utterly undone.

Deny me not this single act of grace:

If you don't want to burn within my fire,

Then teach me how to freeze within your ice.

<div align="right">Isabella Andreini, Sonetto IX</div>

If anyone ever reads these half-forgotten poems

Of mine, I beg you: don't trust their false

ardors. The love scenes in particular are

trotted out full of fake emotions.

 As for the high passions of the muses,

I've dressed them with lies no less than counterfeit outbursts,

So sometimes I bewail my (feigned) sorrows

Then warble about my (make-believe) delights,

 And like an Actress, switching my styles,

Sometimes I play a woman, sometimes a man,

Following the cues of Nature, and of Art.

 So in green April, following once more

The star of my fleeting years, wearing these varied masks

I've written lines enough for a thousand pages.

<div align="right">Isabella Andreini, Sonetto V</div>