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[Author](#) || Marco Palladini

[Translation from Italian](#) || Flora Pitrolo

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## Simone Carella, always on-and-off-stage

by *Marco Palladini*

1.1. I can no longer remember who, long ago, spoke about Carella's Artaudian soma sauteed in a Roman sauce. Born in Puglia but adopted by the capital from the 1960s onwards, Carella's erratic career was homaged by Magazzini Criminali in their *Ritratto dell'attore da giovane* ('Portrait of the actor as a young man', 1986) – the character of Simon Mago, played by Federico Tiezzi, was based on Carella himself. This goes to show just how influential Carella has been, both explicitly and implicitly, for an entire generation of Italian alternative theatrical culture from the 1970s onwards, a generation epitomised in the space Carella himself founded and dated in its name, the Rome basement theatre Beat 72. His influence was never patronising and never imperious; good at seeing things askew and at letting others take the initiative, his attitude was both noble and mobile. Simone was a pure artist: he was structurally irregular, intermittent and epiphanic, an infinite and ever-surprising re-configuration of instincts and projects.

With his roots in the form of the happening and of the poetry-performance, his style was always to be both on-stage and off-stage: when he was inside the theatre, his instinct was to erupt, to blow up, to get out; when he was outside the theatre, he would always be returning in, via ever-more lateral doors. After *Iperurania* (1980), he left the stage for over five years; his version of Gunter Grass' *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*, (*I plebei provano la rivolta*, 1987) was a true re-debut, a new and unexpected beginning, with actors and dramaturgy. Same with *Stalker* (1988), which was motivated, amongst other things, by a case of empathic hybridisation with an actor called (Victor) Cavallo. But looking back onto earlier experiences, it's clear that Carella's experimental élan was always based on ripping it all up and starting again: in his *La cavalcata sul lago di Costanza* (1975), Carella burnt the margins of his directorial role to work towards a de-personalisation of the roles of the theatre; shortly thereafter, he performed his radical Theatre of Rebeginnings without actors, in the historically extremely significant and spectacular, crucial piece *Autodiffamazione* (1976). This was a shard of analytical-conceptual research on light and on the photogram: cold films of Steve Paxton's contact dance were placed alongside the minimal lines of La Monte Young's music, which gave way to the iconic and saintly image of Vladimir Mayakovsky. On stage, in a beam of light, an empty chair: the tragic (or stoic) marker of an absence which, at the same time, marked the birth of a concentrated semantic objectivism. From here onwards, Carella pursued a techno-cybernetic integrated theatre, with works such as *Esempi di Lucidità* (1978), before brilliantly veering off-course once again in 1979, with his curation of the Poets' Festival on the beach in Castelporziano. Made with his accomplice Franco Cordelli-Pat Garrett, this was the most extraordinary act of generational genius encapsulated in an event which was both a para-theatrical festival and a literary-political challenge to the history of Italian culture: it was the last great anthropological outburst of the aftermath of the 77 Movement.

1.2. Cut to the beginning of the 21st Century: I find Simone still working on his original lines of inquiry – still intrinsically tied to poetry, to Rome and to being both on and off-stage – he was mounting the performance *Al suo poeta Peppe er Tosto* (2001), outdoors on the banks of the Tiber, in the warehouse spaces of Teatro India. With the collaboration of the great poet and critic Elio Pagliarini, Carella attempted to stage a sort of ode to Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli's sonnets by encapsulating them in the form – the fictitious form – of "street theatre". Carella effectively turned Belli upside down: if the great Roman poet's oeuvre of more than 2250 sonnets was intended as a monument to the city's lower classes in the 1800s, a monument made even more precious by an exquisite expressive and linguistic representation, Carella demolished this monument by giving Belli's verses back to the degraded plebeian multitude of contemporary Rome.

He put together a group of over seventy performers, most of whom were non-actors, and allowed them to have a quick chew through Belli's verses before setting them out into the city, mimicking the chaotic entropy of modern-day Rome: a rickety, unrefined, multi-colour catwalk made up of rambling old men, kids in football shirts, angry shop-keepers, provocative coquettes, bullish body builders, humble proletarians, tarted-up whores and loud-mouthed taxi drivers. After all, Carella was faithful here to the thirty years he had spent calling for anti-theatricality; and there's something like a quote in the presence, within the performance, of a 'wild bunch' of friends and collaborators from the Roman 1970s, such as Guidarello Pontani and Alessandra Vanzi from the company La Gaia Scienza, and Rossella Or and Patrizia Sacchi. The piece seemed to use the magma formed out of the anthropological detritus of contemporary Rome to also commemorate the city's alternative theatrical culture that was and is no more.

1.3 But Carella's diastematic sparks still haven't drawn to a close. In 2007 he re-contacted his old companion Ulisse Benedetti and inaugurated a new space – the E-Theatre / Nuovo Colosseo – with a party for Pagliarini's 80th birthday. The space is the Beat 72 for the new millennium: a theatre whose shows and events are shown live on the internet. An interconnected theatre that is both online and offline, that uses the net to finally realise his desire to mass-mediatise the theatre – a project he had already attempted with two endeavours, TeleBeat and Canale Zero, a private TV channel that was supposed to make experimental theatre flow into televisual space. Today internet makes Carella's old utopia more thinkable and more achievable. We'll see, and those who survive will see how it all ends up. Carella is and remains the most romantic of the avantgardists and the more avantgarde of the romantics.