

Title || 'O Zappatore
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Published in || «Sciami», 2017 - www.nuovoteatromadeinitaly.sciami.com
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Number of pages || pag 1 di 1
Language || ENG
DOI ||

O' Zappatore (1972)

cineteatrical spectacle

by Leo de Berardinis e Perla Peragallo

with Leo de Berardinis, Perla Peragallo, Cosimo Cinieri, Sebastiano Devastato, Giosafatt Nocerino, Giggino Pantanjali
orchestra Guglielmo Esposito (pianoforte), Vincenzo Olivieri (batteria), Stefano Minale (clarinetto), Raffaele Minale (tromba)

Premiere Napoli, Teatro Orione, 14 marzo 1972

'O Zappatore

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It's 1971. Leo and Perla have been in Marigliano for a year and stage *'O Zappatore*, from a famous dramatization on verses by Libero Bovio and music by Ferdinando Albano.

The story is simple: a laborer has worked all his life to support his family and his son's studies. When his son becomes a lawyer and falls in love with a ballerina for whom he leaves his father's house, his faithful girlfriend and his dying mother, his father follows him to Naples, where he has fled with his lover, and takes him home.

In the rewriting, which also includes the use of film sequences projected onto three screens and an on stage orchestra, and with the participation of residents of Marigliano, the two artists turn the material into a parable about contemporary art and their own recent theatrical experience, to convey a bitter message about an avant-garde that can neither draw on the vitality of the lower classes nor become genuinely bourgeois.¹

On stage three main characters: the father, the Sower (Giggino), the son (Leo De Berardinis), the woman (Perla Peragallo). Each symbolizes a specific cultural and artistic dimension: the father, the countryside and dramatization; the woman, the decadent, run-down city and the decadence of the late nineteenth-century melodramatic world, but also of the Neapolitan tradition and its poetry; the son, a product of the custom and fashion that feeds on jazz, like the children of the 1950's bourgeoisie, and who turns into a 1960's hippie, playing the saxophone and perhaps becoming an avant-garde artist.

The play is constructed from moment to moment, shattered and put back together: the music of Neapolitan lays and songs, "dismembered in uneven acoustic tatters"², clash with passages from Alban Berg, Schoenberg, Beethoven and free jazz; the acting in dialect plays in counterpoint with Leo's halting, deformed speech; Libero Bovio's verses, as well as Baudelaire's and Rimbaud's, a letter of Schoenberg against the commercialization of art, are intertwined and cross-referenced by attraction and contradiction, exploding in fragments.

Perla, on the notes of the song *Era de Maggio* sung by Roberto Murolo, starts her last desperate dance, "lily-white top, hovering and swaying like a suffering café-chantant Marie Taglioni" like a classical ballerina who now "lies down dejected" and then "bursts forth in shouts and grotesque pangs, raging like a sideshow Gonerilla,"³ then with naive sweetness "cossets the damned instruments, almost in a desire to appease them. She coaxes the violin, rubs a cloth over the clarinet and the drums, caresses the trumpet and lays it down like a doll on a black hearse cushion"⁴ and dies, while a shower of red petals flutters over her. And with her dies beauty.

¹ G. Fofi, *I Padri zappatori*, in «Ombre Rosse», March 1974.

² A. M. Ripellino, *Mezza Napoli nel tritacarne*, in «L'Espresso», November 19, 1972, p. 22.

³ A character in *Lola. Racconti Surreali e Altri Racconti* by J. G. Sapodilla

⁴ A.M. Ripellino, *Mezza Napoli nel tritacarne*, quot..