

Title || Fanny & Alexander. Dorothy. Sconcerto per Oz (2007). Presentation
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Translation from Italian || Edward Tosques
Published in || «Sciami», 2017 - www.nuovoteatromadeinitaly.sciami.com
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Number of pages || pag 1 di 3
Language || ENG
DOI ||

Fanny & Alexander. Dorothy. Sconcerto per Oz (2007)

Production Macedonian Opera and Ballet, and Fanny & Alexander

In co-production with Kampnagel Hamburg

With the contribution of POGAS – Politiche Giovanili e Attività Sportive

Music from Sonnambula by V.Bellini, Lakmè by L.Delibes, Madam Butterfly by G.Puccini, Pygmalion by J.J.Rousseau-H.Coignet, Prometheus by A.Scriabin

Texts from The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz by F.L.Baum

The characters of the Witch of the South, the North and the West are inspired by Gurù (La pietra lunare), Donna P. (La piccola Apocalisse) and Lucrezia (Il Mar delle Blatte) by Tommaso Landolfi

Idea Luigi de Angelis e Chiara Lagani

Direction, staging, lights, orchestration Luigi de Angelis

Dramaturgy Chiara Lagani

Costumes Chiara Lagani e Sofia Vannini

With Milena Arsovska (soprano), Annalisa Bartolini (soprano), Nicoletta Bassetti (violino), Maria Chiara Braccalenti (oboe), Marco Cavalcoli, Chiara Lagani, Francesca Mazza, Fiorenza Menni

And with l'Orchestra da camera Mosaici Sonori conducted by Elena Sartori: Maria Agostini (second horn), Federico Benini (bassoon), Anton Berovski (first violin), Emiliano Frondi (first horn), Luigi Lidonnici (oboe), Elisa Nanni (viola), Samuele Pasini (double bass), Andrea Poli (second violin)

Debut performance Skopje, Macedonian Opera and Ballet, February 17, 2007.

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by Alice Fadda¹

Staged for the first time in Skopje, Macedonia in 2007, thanks to a co-production with the Macedonian Opera and Ballet and the Hamburg Kampnagel, *Dorothy. Sconcerto per Oz*, defined by Fanny & Alexander as a “musical theater piece or *scène lirique*,”² is rather a “cyclone” of sights and sounds, whose structure refers explicitly to John Cage’s *Europeras*³. Its protagonists are a chamber orchestra, three actresses, three singers, three musicians and an actor. After taking refuge in a theater to escape an impending cyclone, while waiting they rehearse as if they had to stage a theatrical performance.

The cyclone, which everyone expects, thus takes on the features of a profound metaphor, setting in motion the tale of the Wizard of Oz, the supernatural force that drags Dorothy, just as it does in Baum’s novel, far from her beloved Kansas to a marvelous, unknown world, an instrument capable of recalling all the natural disasters⁴ that have stricken and will strike the Earth, alluding to the forces of Nature and consequent human weaknesses. The cyclone becomes the work’s constructive device, reflecting its structure, a multi-layered musical score that interweaves the motifs and arias of the works of Scriabin, Bellini, Delibes, Puccini and Rousseau-Coignet, along with fragments from texts by Baum and Tommaso Landolfi, but also the original soundtrack of the 1947 film.

A koine of voices, music, sounds, noises and colored lights get mixed together, and any idea of order seems to be repudiated by all the participants, except for the single male character, who continually tries to impose order on this chaotic concert with an orchestra conductor’s baton, leading all the participants into following a sort of plot outline in the story of the Wizard of Oz.

HIM

For Fanny & Alexander Him is a sort of *genius loci* whose peculiarity derives mainly from his physical appearance, identical to Adolf Hitler’s, the world’s greatest symbol of evil. The Fanny & Alexander **players** were inspired for the creation of this particular director/dictator by Maurizio Cattelan’s sculpture *Him*, presented in 2001 in Stockholm, depicting Adolf Hitler, in gray dress and black boots, under life-size, kneeling, his hands joined together and his gaze turned upward almost as if in prayer or asking forgiveness.

Thus the Fanny & Alexander **players**, in wrestling with the question of evil, traced a link between the figure of the Wizard of Oz, a true quack capable of anything to protect his secret, even sending Dorothy and her traveling companions to their

¹ A. Fadda, *Fanny & Alexander: Il progetto O-Z e il dispositivo dell’eterodirezione*, M.A. dissertation, supervisor V. Valentini, assistant supervisor P. Quarenghi, Sapienza Università di Roma, a.a. 2014-15.

² Fanny & Alexander, *Dorothy. Sconcerto per Oz* in http://www.fannyalexander.org/archivio/archivio.it/dorothy_home.htm

³ Cage wrote three theatrical works between 1987 and 1991, *Europeras 1&2*, *Europeras 3&4* e *Europeras 5*, structured as a vast collage of the most famous titles of the 18th and 19th century lyrical repertory, which by fragmenting, deforming and transfiguring them, he replaced them in a sequence through a series of complex random operations regulated by a special computer program devoid of any logical relationship.

⁴ In August 2005 the southern USA was stricken by hurricane *Katrina*, one of the five most powerful hurricanes in US history in terms of the deaths it provoked, and the most powerful in terms of economic damage. The *Fanny & Alexander* players, as we shall see, refer to it by means of the news photos it used in its scenic presentation.

deaths, and Hitler, the symbol of evil par excellence, but also a strong personality who was able to enter into contact with his own people. *Him* takes on, in this theatrical piece of the same name, and in the following pieces of the O – Z Project, the role of guardian angel and metronome, but at the same time he represents the nastiness and ambiguity that can hide behind any figure.

Dorothy. Sconcerto per Oz also investigates the possibilities of film, sound, literary and visual languages, and implementing John Cage's concept of absence of intention, which "enables the individual spectator, listener or observer to complete the sense at his or her discretion, in a form that can change from one person to another."⁵

This freedom of view is confirmed by the scenic layout itself.

The space is occupied by eighty mattresses, scattered evenly over the floor together with military blankets, some already occupied by the nine performers, while the remaining ones seat the spectators in the manner of an armchair⁶. On the floor, between the mattresses, there are cardboard boxes with the acronym UNHCR⁷ full of shoes, clothing and plastic bags⁸, and women's red shoes in various models and styles, paired or odd. In a corner there is a grand piano and at the back right a curtain hides the orchestra, which throughout the performance plays Rousseau-Coignet's *Pygmalion*, interfering with the action on stage. Various lighting installations are set up, inspired by the works of Dan Flavin and James Turrell: about 600 colored fluorescent lights make up a kind of organ of light rods, two yellow fluorescent fences that suggest the yellow brick road that Dorothy must take to the Emerald City, columns of blue fluorescence and monuments of white and green fluorescence that light up the bleachers on which Him is stationed throughout the piece, like an icon that can keep the entire action under control from above.

The spectators are thus immersed in a continuous kaleidoscopic swirl of noise, music, sound and light, in which everything plays out simultaneously or in overlapping sequences. A simultaneity of action that is detected from the start of the piece: up above, on the empty bleachers the kneeling figure of Him emerges from the darkness, a baton in his hand, conducting an imaginary orchestra, humming the famous tune Judy Garland sang, *Over the Rainbow*. Victor Fleming's *Wizard of Oz* is projected on the screen, its soundtrack audible only to the actor Marco Cavalcoli, through his headphones, becoming the real personal score of *Him* (this is the germ of hetero-direction that begins to take concrete form!). The performers, who have been dormant on their mattresses, gradually come to life: whimpers, dull thuds like heel clacks on the floor, moans, voices and songs like a kind of vocal warming up, then a distant indefinite music of violin and piano notes: some run confused among the mattresses, while others sit and talk intimately to the audience, or sing, play, scream or cry, but some also laugh. The nine performers are divided into groups of three: an actress, a singer and a musician, each group giving life to the same character/type whose affinities are indicated by their clothing, objects and actions which are gradually made clear to the spectators. These characters draw inspiration from three female characters of three stories by Tommaso Landolfi: Donna P in *La piccola Apocalisse*⁹, Lucrezia in *Il Mare delle Blatte*¹⁰ and Gurù in *La pietra lunare*¹¹. But the references do not end there, because every character is also associated with a character in an opera (Delibes' *Lakmè*, Amina in Bellini's *La Sonnambula* and Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*), a musical instrument and even the witch in Baum's story.

The piece constantly swings between peaks of chaos, simultaneous actions, overlaps and moments of dead calm.

The image that *Him* speaks about and that closes the piece is actually a sound and light image: Scriabin's *Poem of Fire* from his opera *Prometheus*, in which various musical areas are conceived according to a grammar and rhetoric of color. These synesthetic games reach their climax in the finale, a bright riot of color so necessary and essential as to bring Him to ask for

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ This analysis of the theatrical piece and the description of the stage space refer to the staging of *Dorothy. Sconcerto per Oz* at Hamburg's Kampnagel (March 2007). In some of the repeat performances, because of lack of seating space, spectators were also accommodated on mattresses placed in the orchestra section.

⁷ The UN High Commissioner for Refugees sponsored the show and provided the mattresses and blankets.

⁸ The spectators were asked not to bring into the hall any bulky object or item of clothing. They could only bring what was strictly necessary but in a plastic bag provided at the entrance.

⁹ A story written in 1935 as part of the collection, *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi*, and featuring a complex three-part structure: *Nippies*, which tells of four friends, A, B, C, D, (indicating categories of things) sitting in a bar and involved in conversations presided over mainly by D, through prose and verse monologues; the second part, *La donna nella pozzanghera*, begins with D returning home and starting to write «un meta-racconto che solo in superficie appare giustapposto alla narrazione e che invece, in conclusione, risulta profondamente intrecciato. La terza parte, in corsivo, è – secondo il luogo comune del manoscritto ritrovato – la nota di un non ben definito filologo alle prese con la cura redazionale del testo [...]» (cfr. R.Sacchetti, *La lingua «impossibile» della Piccola Apocalisse*, in *Chroniques italiennes* n. 81-82 (2-3/2008), <http://chroniquesitaliennes.univ-paris3.fr/PDF/81-82/Sacchetti.pdf>)

¹⁰ Part of the collection, *Il Mare delle Blatte e altre storie*, of 1939, it narrates a story full of absurd descriptions, about a trip to the Sea of Cockroaches, «in un groviglio di pulsioni erotiche e aggressive che si rivela alla fine frutto di un sogno» (cfr. G.Ferroni, *La letteratura tra le due guerre 1910-1945*, in *Storia della Letteratura italiana*, Mondadori, Milano 2002, pag. 22).

¹¹ Landolfi's first novel, also of 1939, which narrates «dell'amore di Giovancarlo, studente senza età e senza lavoro, senza infamia e senza lode, per Gurù, inquietante donna-capra, creatura lunare e stregonessa [...] personaggio-cerniera, come direbbe Deleuze, fra il mondo della provincia [...] e della vita quotidiana e il mondo notturno dell'immaginazione tra realtà e sogno» (cfr. S.Cirillo, *La pietra lunare*, pag. 69, in *Landolfi libro per libro*, edited by T. Tarquini, Hetea Editrice, Alatri, 1988).

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total silence in the hall.

Him, and therefore also the Wizard, can be understood as Prometheus figures, bearers of light, but at the same time also actors and dominators who by trickery give the world a different, better-looking appearance than it really has. If Him and the Wizard make an admission of guilt in the final monologue, can we also say that the little kneeling dictator is doing likewise? We cannot know, but the Dorothies lined up silently beneath Him look like a small military platoon. The trickery, then, continues. And this happens in history as in fiction: When the Wizard convinces the Scarecrow, the Lion and the Tin Man of having been conferred powers merely by means of speech, they are at once convinced they actually have such powers. This is the persuasion, the deception, the illusion that humanity decides to accept merely from wanting to snatch a bit of happiness. Power is the great illusionist, and if he asks forgiveness it is certainly just a trick.