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[Number of pages](#) || pag 1 di 1

[Language](#) || ENG

[DOI](#) ||

## Luca Ronconi - Biographical notes

by *Mauro Sabatini*

Luca Ronconi was born on March 8, 1933 in Sousse, Tunisia. At the age of twenty he received an acting degree from the Accademia d'Arte Drammatica Silvio d'Amico in Rome. Shortly afterwards he made his acting debut in starring roles in plays by Orazio Costa, Luigi Squarzina and Michelangelo Antonioni.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1950's and the early 1960's Ronconi acted in some of the most important productions of contemporary Italian theater, but his interest in acting gradually declined with the discovery and exploration of his talent as director<sup>2</sup>. In 1963 he had his first directing experiences in the company headed by Gianmaria Volonte and Corrado Pani, for which he directed *La buona moglie*, combining into a single theatrical text Goldoni's plays *La putta onorata* and *La buona moglie*.

1966 saw the debut of *I lunatici*, a play that led Ronconi to be considered by many as one of the most promising directors in Italy's Nuovo Teatro<sup>3</sup>. The following year he participated in the Ivrea conference "For a New Theater" and was among the signers of its "Manifesto."

In 1969 he directed *Orlando Furioso*, one of the most famous (and exhibited) works of Italian theater in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, which ensured his fame first in Italy and soon, after a world tour success, abroad.

In the 1970's his theater work was reinforced by the staging of plays such as Wilcock's *XX* (1971), Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (1972), Aristophanes' *Utopia* [i.e., *The Birds*] (1976), Euripides' *The Bacchae* (1977) and Hofmannsthal's *The Tower* (1978). But he went even further. In 1975/1976 he took over the Theater section of the Venice Biennale, and between 1977 and 1979 founded and directed the Laboratorio di progettazione teatrale di Prato [Laboratory of Theater Design of Prato].

In the 1980's Ronconi realized three milestones of his artistic career: Arno Holz's *Ignorabimus* (1986), Bernanos' *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (1988) and Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1989).

From 1989 to 1994 he directed the Teatro Stabile di Torino, whose acting school he founded in 1992 and directed. His Turin experience saw the historical staging, within the vast environment of the engine room of Turin's Lingotto, Karl Kraus's *The Last Days of Humanity* (1990).

In the decades following the 1970's Ronconi undertook opera direction, alternating the great classics of Italian and European opera (Verdi's *Nabucco*, 1977 and *Aida*, 1985; Bizet's *Carmen*, 1970; Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, 1979; and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, 1990) with selections from the great age of the Italian Baroque (Rossi's *L'Orfeo*, 1985; Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, 2000) and from contemporary opera (Janáček's *The Makropulos Affair*, 1993; Battistelli's *Teorema*, 1996).

In 1994 he became director of the Teatro di Roma, for which he staged, among others, Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1996) and Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1998).

From 1999 he was consultant to the Director of the Piccolo Teatro, and head of Milan's Theater School for Actors. In the early 2000's he staged Calderón's *Life is a Dream* (2000) and Giordano Bruno's *Candelaio* (2001).

In the summer of 2002, on the occasion of the annual classical theater festival celebrated in the Greek Theatre of Syracuse, he staged Aeschylus' *Prometheus* trilogy, Euripides' *Bacchae*, Aristophanes' *The Frogs* (later performed at the Teatro Strehler in Milan). Also in 2002, his staging of Francesco Andreini's *Amor nello specchio* marked the debut of the Centro Teatrale Santacristina, a training workshop Ronconi founded with Roberta Carlotto.

In 2006 he staged, in honor of the Olympic symbol, five plays at the Winter Olympics in Turin: Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Edward Bond's *Acts of war: a Trilogy*, Corbellini's, Donghi's and Massarenti's *Biblioetica, Dizionario per l'uso* (co-directed by Claudio Longhi), Foa's, Mafai's and Reichlin's *Il silenzio dei comunisti*, and Ruffolo's *Lo specchio del diavolo*.

In the twenty-first century Ronconi was also involved in organizing art exhibits. Of these we recall *La bella Italia. Arte e identità delle città capitali*, using the Juvarriane stables of Turin's Venaria Reale to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italy's unification (2011).

In the following years Ronconi dedicated a project to the contemporary Argentine playwright Rafael Spregelburd, staging two of his texts, *La modestia* (2011) and *Il panico* (2013).

As part of the Teatro Biennale, he received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement (August 2012).

In 2014 he directed Michel Garneau's *Celestina laggiù vicino alle concerie in riva al fiume* (after the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish playwright Fernando de Rojas), Witold Gombrowicz's *Pornografia*, and, on the occasion of Spoleto's Festival dei 2Mondi, Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*.

On February 21, 2015, while what would be his last theater direction, namely Stefano Massini's *Lehman Trilogy* (2015), was still running at the Piccolo Teatro, Luca Ronconi died in Milan.

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<sup>1</sup> From Luca Ronconi's lesson at the Teatro Era-Grotowski of Pontedera, November 2010, transcribed by Renza D'Inca, <http://palcoit.blogspot.it/2011/03/luca-ronconi-per-costa.html>, in [http://www.lucaronconi.it/mostraronconi\\_scheda\\_scuola.asp?num=229](http://www.lucaronconi.it/mostraronconi_scheda_scuola.asp?num=229)

<sup>2</sup> "As an actor I started out well, and then I gradually lost momentum, both professionally and personally. I felt I lacked many of the aspects that were necessary for an actor; cit. Luca Ronconi in [http://www.lucaronconi.it/mostraronconi\\_scheda\\_scuola.asp?num=228](http://www.lucaronconi.it/mostraronconi_scheda_scuola.asp?num=228).

<sup>3</sup> We refer especially to the anthology devoted to the line of 1960: G. Bartolucci, *La scrittura scenica*, Lerici, Roma 1968.