

Everybody's Right: Iaia Forte Brings Sorrentino's Novel to the Stage

Natasha Lardera (May 27, 2014)



The Neapolitan actress, who starred as Trumeau in *The Great Beauty*, stars as Tony Pagoda, a fictional Neapolitan singer who's the protagonist of Paolo Sorrentino's novel *Hanno Tutti Ragione* (*Everybody's Right*). The show is featured in the second edition of the In Scena Italian Theater Festival, (June 9-24)

The character walks on stage: he's wearing a jacket covered in sequins, a bright red tie, thick glasses coming straight from the 70's and rings on every finger. He sets himself right in front of the microphone and lets his own cockiness envelope the audience that's come to see him. He sings, his voice is hoarse, a victim of a lifetime of abuse of cigarettes, alcohol and cocaine. His name is Tony Pagoda and he's a Neapolitan singer, the fictional character who's the protagonist of [Paolo Sorrentino](#) [2]'s novel [Hanno Tutti Ragione](#) [3] (*Everybody's Right*).

Tony has such a strong personality that he's left the pages of the book behind and has come to life on stage, in the theatrical representation of his long career. Tony Pagoda is a singer from the



suburbs of Naples and during his long career, he has performed on stage across the world's most important venues, he's even met Frank Sinatra! He's a great ladies' man with a soft spot for prostitutes, a cocaine addict and an alcoholic who emigrates to Brazil to start a new life.

Tony is played by [Iaia Forte](#) [4], who starred as Trumeau in [The Great Beauty](#) [5] by Paolo Sorrentino (Academy Award, 2014, Best Foreign Language Film). Yes a woman gives life to a macho and bully who tries to hide his fragility. Iaia Forte is from Naples, graduated from the [Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia](#) [6], made her theatrical debut opposite the award-winning actor [Toni Servillo](#) [7] and began a long collaboration with the theater company [Teatri Uniti](#) [8] and some of Italy's most prominent theater directors.

She was awarded the critics' prize for best actress in *The Misanthrope*, directed by Toni Servillo, and the 'Florino Doro' award of the Societa' Dantesca. On film www.inscenany.com/ [9], she has worked with [Pappi Corsicato](#) [10], Peter Greenaway and many others. She has won two [Nastri D'Argento awards](#) [11], a David award (the 'Italian Oscar'), a [Globo D'Oro award](#) [12], a Ciak d'oro, as well as a Linea d'Ombra and a Sacher award for Best Actress in a Leading Role.

Iaia Forte is now bringing *Hanno Tutti Ragione* to New York, as the show is featured in the second edition of the [In Scena Italian Theater Festival](#) [9], (June 9-24). The show is particularly close to her heart as she is the one who had the idea to bring Tony's story to the stage, she's its director and actor.

In order to find out more about it, we had a nice chat over Skype.

How did you find *Hanno Tutti Ragione*?

I've known Paolo Sorrentino for years. This book was awarded the Premio Fiesole, an Italian literary award, and Paolo had asked me read two of its chapters at the ceremony. When I read it aloud, I realized it has such a strong and unique language, and not just an interesting storyline. That's when I knew I wanted to bring it to the theater. Fortunately, the theater is not a place where verisimilitude is necessary, the fact that the story's main character is a coke addict, an alcoholic, and a male singer did not worry me. Friends were trying to talk me out of it, but considering that Sorrentino is even crazier than I am, I had to ask. He gave me the thumbs up. That's how the show came to be. In order to bring it on stage, I picked only the novel's first two chapters, which tell about the concert that Tony Pagoda is about to do at the Radio City Music Hall in New York in front of Sinatra.

Did you make a lot of changes when adapting the novel to theatrical form?

No, but I have extracted some parts that were theatrically functional. Paolo helped me create a dramatic construction that works in the theater. Everything you see on stage is found in the novel, I have not changed anything. The show starts in Tony Pagoda's dressing room, then he performs his New York concert, which is followed by a meeting with Sinatra and with some prostitutes. After all this Tony thinks about his life and where it has taken him.

What do you do to become Tony?

First of all, I had to think about his look, his physicality... I decided I wanted a wig that is so obviously a bad, fake wig... I wanted to create a sort of mask. That was the starting point. Then I worked on my body, I changed its center of gravity. I worked on my voice, so through the whole show my tone is decisively lower than my normal, every day voice, but also of my stage voice. My body and the way I move help me become the character. My Tony is the combination of a heavy body and a kitschy 70's look. I was inspired by [Franco Califano](#) [13], a famous Roman singer, a "cafone anni 70".

I saw some pictures, you wear a lot of rings, one on each finger, a flashy jacket, thick glasses... is there anything in the costume that really helps you?

Even my shoes are horrendous! But what helps me the most are the wig and the glasses. I feel I am wearing a mask and that allows me to enter a different dimension. My shiny jacket is also essential,



my body disappears under those huge shoulder pads. All this contributes to the success the show has had in Italy, both with audiences and with the press. And it is such an achievement for me because I give it my all.

Are there any aspects of Tony that you like, admire or dislike?

Saying I admire him is stretching it a bit... but there is such great irony in this character that I find myself liking him no matter what. What I like most about him is that he has no moralism. He never judges. I was able to bring out of him his feminine side: there is romanticism, torment, longing, a bunch of characteristics he doesn't even acknowledge but that are part of him. This strange combination of boldness and tenderness find their best vehicle in a female performer. And here's where I come into play.

You brought the show to several cities, was the audience's reaction any different?

This show speaks to everybody and therefore is liked by all. I think it's because of its language, which is strong and communicative, and because it's "pop" and cool... there are songs, dance numbers, a certain type of glamor, the 70's, irony. It seeks to all – the elite and the masses.

And now you are bringing it to New York...

Earlier this year I came to New York to act in a show by Paolo Martone and I was really looking forward to coming back. I am Neapolitan, and I always say, just like Sorrentino does, that other than Naples I could only live in New York. I can't wait to perform for this new audience... I can really picture being at the Radio City Music Hall, as we are so close... when I was here I went to see it and I took a picture of myself in front of it. Being in this show is fun. Having fun creates a necessary distance between the character and myself, I never forget that I am playing.

Tell me about your collaboration with Sorrentino and if having been in a film that has won an Academy Award has had any effect on you and your career?

We've known each other for a very long time. He is younger than me but we both belong to a group of actors and directors, like Servillo and Martone, called Teatri Uniti. Plus he's always been a real fan of a director I've often worked with, Pappi Corsicato. Hanno Tutti Ragione has been our first collaboration, The Great Beauty has come after. When I read the script I immediately thought it was a masterpiece, I felt it had a unique strength, something different from the current Italian cinema. I never thought though that we would get an Academy Award, even though I felt so passionate about it. I don't know if it has changed anything... Any actor's dream is to get an Oscar. A recurring joke among actors is to tell each other "you're so good, you'll get an Oscar." And when you actually get it, it's just out of this world.

Acting for the cinema vs acting for the theater...

A famous actor said "cinema belongs to the directors, the theater to the actors." This quote sums it all up perfectly. I have more fun acting for the theater but the most important factor when I chose a role to play is who is involved in the project, the creative team behind it. I like being in projects I believe in, either for the theater or the cinema.

When did you know you wanted to be an actress?

I was a restless teenager and I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I was studying dance and then I started working with a group making experimental theater where the body was an essential tool to the performance. That's how it all started. I think an actor's vocation never ceases to exist, but it has to be continually challenged. Today I still ask myself if doing this makes sense or not. I'll never stop asking myself that.

Performances

(In Italian with English supertitles)



June 10, 8:00 pm, Dicapo Opera, 184 E 76th Street, Manhattan

June 12, 7:00 pm, Embassy of Italy, 3000 Whitehaven St. NW, Washington, DC

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- [2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Sorrentino
- [3] <http://www.amazon.com/Everybodys-Right-Paolo-Sorrentino/dp/1609450523>
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