

Eleonora Duse Award 2014

Sonia Bergamasco

There has never been a more suitable time than this one to begin, from this very stage, to try to comprehend if not the secret, at least the spirit of being the actress that Sonia Bergamasco is - her buoyant grace, her iron will, her theatrical intelligence, her special way of acting, her talent. It was on this very stage, in fact, that she appeared one evening in 1990, in the role of a young 18th century woman in love who disguises herself as a man in order to go safely in search of her beloved, in "Arlecchino dei Giovani (Harlequin of the Young)". It was the final show of the students finishing the Copeau course at the Piccolo Teatro, directed by Giorgio Strehler, and whoever saw her as Beatrice, in her three-cornered hat, has never forgotten her. That evening launched her into flight and she has been soaring ever since.

To get to that point while still so young, she already had a history behind her. She graduated from the Conservatory with a degree in piano, which she began playing when she was five, at her parents' volition. After her father's death and the subsequent upheaval in the family, it was her own wish to make a change that led her to give up a life that seemed pre-ordained. By chance, on the advice of a friend, a girl who may not have been to the theater but who read plays, actually devoured them, along with a lot of literature and poetry, showed up for the entrance auditions at the Scuola del Piccolo. At the end of the audition, she was suddenly approached by Giulia Lazzarini, a member of the selection committee, who said, "Sonia, what you're doing is interesting, it's as if instead of saying the lines, you're intoning them." From that audition on - her mother was unaware of her choice, as she often practiced locked in the bathroom - Sonia cultivated her particular way of acting, in search of a dialogue between music and theater, already having quite clearly in mind that the declination of ways to do so onstage are almost limitless.

That is where her history as an actress began, a history strongly marked by the originality not only of her experiences but also of her choices. A formidable resume, a true journey in which, regarding the stage (her career includes film and television), there have been four key moments: discovering theater with Strehler; the important, rigorous years of stage training with Campo, where she met her future husband, Fabrizio Gifuni; the confirmation, with Carmelo Bene, of a different way of doing theater in which her two loves - music and speech - are integrated in such a powerful way that they become one with the body of the actor; and her encounter with Giuseppe Bertolucci - equally important for the theater and for the cinema, as well as for them both as human beings. In just a handful of years, this young actress went from Marivaux's "Dispute" and "The Game of Love and Chance", to Goldoni's "Holiday Trilogy" - where she was a superb, sensitive Giacinta who knew how to play the vagaries of the heart - to the total reversal with Carmelo Bene in his final "Pinocchio", where he was bound and motionless while she, as the Fairy, moved all over the stage wearing different masks, in synch with the recorded text.

After those rich, exciting experiences, she decided to work solo, or to do very successful readings with Fabrizio Gifuni, often accompanied by skilled musicians. But she says she is ready to go back to working in a group, in a show mounted by a director she admires, in a project that attracts her. Today, however,

we ponder a whole fantastic gallery of solitary female characters, among whom the standout so far is the more mature "Anna Karenina, prove aperte di infelicità (open rehearsals in unhappiness)", directed by Giuseppe Bertolucci shortly before he died. In this piece, she also plays the piano - indeed, you might say she makes love within it, in a crescendo of contrasting emotions and tensions. Right now, we are awaiting her new show, which will be staged at the Franco Parenti and based on the story "The Dance" by Irene Némirovsky. A work-in-progress version was presented in Rome this year as part of the "Rooms" event.

In films as well, Sonia has been able to bring into focus her ability to be both dramatic and buoyant at the same time, working with such directors as Franco Giraldi, Franco Battiato, Marco Pozzi (who directed her in "Maledimiele", a film about the drama of anorexia), Marco Tullio Giordana, and both Bertolucci brothers (she played a role in Bernardo's film "Io e te (Me and You)"), always playing characters who live on the edge, possibly burning up their lives. This brings to mind "L'Amore Probabilmente (Probably Love)" by Giuseppe Bertolucci, a journey towards understanding love today - sometimes cruel, sometimes fragile - wherein she plays Sofia, who learns the deep meaning of an actor's work and life, from a very special teacher played by Mariangela Melato; and "Il Meglio Giuventù (The Best of Youth)" by Marco Tullio Giordana, where she plays a young woman who goes underground with the Red Brigade, reflecting the tragic sense of failure of a generation.

She has also had a significant presence on television: for example, she plays the ironic, somewhat snobbish editor in the serial "Tutti Pazzi per Amore (Everyone's Crazy for Love)"; and in "Una grande famiglia (One Big Family)" (the third season is currently in production), alongside Stefania Sandrelli Alessandro Gassmann and Piera degli Espositi, she plays a lawyer with rigid moral standards who discovers the generosity and wisdom of understanding when she is forced to confront her son's homosexuality. And last but not least, it must be said that this actress of many faces, brimming with nuance and curiosity, besides giving voice to beloved poets such as Amelia Rosselli, also writes poetry and will soon have a volume of her own in bookstores (perhaps it's already there), which we await with eagerness. But beyond her roles, her talent, her wealth of interests and her charm, today she is here as herself: Sonia, a proud, self-aware woman, wife of Fabrizio, mother of Valeria and Maria, actress.

Maria Grazia Gregori