

Promo shot of Dustin Wills for the latest English Theatre of Rome production 'Black Snow'
(Photo by Daniel Brock)

All for One, One for Tutto

BRACE YOURSELVES FOR THE ARRIVAL OF TUTTO THEATRE COMPANY IN ROME THIS SUMMER, ALL THE WAY FROM AUSTIN TEXAS. IN WHAT CAN ALMOST BE DESCRIBED AS A 'TRAVELLING CIRCUS', ACCLAIMED DIRECTOR DUSTIN WILLS RETURNS WITH AN UNFINISHED SCRIPT AND WITH HIS USUAL MAGIC TRICKS UP HIS SLEEVE INCLUDING A TRUNK FULL OF ACTORS TO PERFORM A TYPE OF THEATRE THAT HAS YET TO BE SEEN BY ROMAN AUDIENCES.



Actors rehearse for an earlier ETR play
(Photo by Daniel Brock)

by Nicola Ferlei Brown

'Off the map' theatre

Named 'Tutto' because it is "off the map", that is to say everywhere, there are no geographical boundaries to where Dustin and his cast (three Texan actors, a Chicagoan, and an Angolan) want to perform. His aim is to offer an international exchange with Tutto, by taking theatre to countries where English is not the prevalent language, offering new exciting prospects for theatre in Rome. For Dustin, the buzz is generated by "different countries and cities and seeing what's happening in theatre in different parts of the world". While bringing American actors to Rome to perform for English speaking audiences, in future he would like to bring as many international actors together as possible. The main character is the only actor who looks 'American' in the show with the rest of the cast being a combination of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.

Italian inspiration

Wills' passion for all things foreign started in 2004 when he studied Roman History and Italian Language at the *Centro di Studi Americani* in Rome. Dustin wonders, "What is the architecture telling you about the world that we see?" And what better place to ponder this than surrounded by Baroque buildings. He explains that he is inspired by the Roman way of life, "Rome is a circus, everyday becomes a performance in a way". He spent a week in March walking around Rome taking photos of the city to get inspiration for his new play that is taking place in Austin in June. Inspired by Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday* and having an appetite for a challenge, Dustin is going to "create Rome in Austin, and then go to Rome."

Pushing boundaries

Not that he has written the show of course. Dustin likes to work on a whim in a 'last-minute' whirlwind of magic, in an ensemble manner with his cast, as a team who bring the play together by threading it like a patchwork. As a collaborative writer myself, having partly written his latest play on the Spanish steps at Piazza di Spagna, I asked, "Do you know how it ends?" "No, I have no idea" he replied. The audience bring their own bottle of wine and Dustin explains that it will be a "Red dirt circus wagon". The idea of pushing actor/audience barriers is what he likes. In an English theatre he has actors speaking in Italian with no subtitles to make the audiences feel as alienated as the characters on stage. According to Dustin, "The audience is tracking the actor's story, she is confused by what she is hearing and the audience should feel the same thing." There is a lot of inspiration from Fellini.

Writing and designing a show for a small space

such as the Teatro Arciliuto in Piazza di Montevecchio (near Piazza Navona), here in Rome, he wants to design a show whereby the actors make use of the different rooms of the theatre, the music room, the bar, the bathrooms and even backstage becomes a stage. There will be performances happening simultaneously. "So the audience sees the show but they all see it in a different order and this shapes the reality of the performance."

Getting ready for Rome

This year the cast is rehearsing for three weeks at the Bomarzo house of Gaby Ford (founder and director of The English Theatre of Rome, which performs regularly at the Arciliuto theatre), which is a sanctuary for performing artists, surrounded by the beautiful Parco dei Mostri. If all goes well, this will be Dustin's third 'Roman' hit. His 2006 production of *Ophelia* was a big success in Rome. A near sell-out, it led to 'talk' of a talented young director who wowed audiences again in 2007 with his imaginative direction in *The Moths*, a play set within a fantasy wonderland of characters on the theme of 'identity', inspired by Virginia Woolf's novel 'Orlando'.

You never quite know what Dustin Wills will come up with next so be sure not to miss him this time round at the Teatro Arciliuto (for six nights on 21-23 and 28-30 July) in whatever (*as TRF went to press the latest title was 'Black Snow' - Ed.*) his latest extravaganza turns out to be. ■

Look out for more details and dates on www.rometheatre.com and www.tuttotheatre.org

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