

Case study: Theater workshops in Palermo

NAME OF ORGANISATION

1) *I Bohémiens*

I Bohémiens is a company recently formed to mark the reopening of Finocchiaro theater in Palermo. Finocchiaro theater was built in 1923 by architect Paolo Bonci and many national and international artists came to Palermo to perform on its stage. Despite the beauty of its Art Nouveau architecture, after its golden age that lasted until the 50's -60's it remained closed for several years. It reopened on February 14th 1998, inaugurated as a movie theater with the presence of famous Italian film actress Claudia Cardinale. It closed again in 2006 and remained closed until December 2014.

In January 2015 began the theater new season thanks to the effort and the investments of I Bohémiens.

The artistic directors Casimiro Alaimo and Katuska Falbo have worked in the theater field since 1996. Besides the project Vision, I Bohémiens have been involved this year in another social project called "Pogrom - Slaughter", on the issue of legality. A collaboration between I Bohémiens and Giampiero Finocchiaro, an anthropologist and principal of a school in a suburban district of disadvantaged in Carini "I.C. Laura Lanza", author of the book "On your legs. Letter to my students about the Mafia" (2010).

Casimiro Alaimo, actor, director and acting teacher, has worked in several social inclusion projects, teaching acting and drama in disadvantaged schools, in the juvenile hall and in the Institute of the Blind of Palermo.

Mission/objectives:

Enhancement of drama and acting and their social value.

The company's aim is to create an alternative space, in which there can be events of different genres, from musical entertainment and comedies to classical music concerts, from speech theater to dance and also social theater projects and events. The innovation consists in bringing back the tradition of "théâtre à la table", so that the audience can drink and eat inside the theater and enjoy the artistic performance. Finocchiaro theater aims to be open to international projects, not only artistic projects but above all social projects, creating connections and cultural exchanges with other European countries.

2) *Music'Arte*

Music'Arte was formed in March 1997, in an effort to give a contribution to the cultural scene of Sicily.

It was founded by people from the world of music, theater and university.

The current president is Silviu Dima, musician, concertmaster of Teatro Massimo. Our organisation proposes classical music concerts and theater performances and has also organized drama, diction and phonetics workshops. In 1998 Music'Arte proposed a concert project, entitled "Concerto 900" in which were performed by Trio Siciliano music by composers of the twentieth century as R. Sakamoto, D. Shostakovich and A. Piazzolla. The project was approved and took place at Cantieri culturali alla Zisa (Palermo).

Trio Siciliano has participated in perfectionist courses for chamber ensembles with M° Eliodoro Sollima and Trio di Trieste, at Siena at the music academy "Chigiana" and also at the music school in Fiesole since 1985. The trio has been awarded prizes in various national competitions and has played for the bigger musical associations in Italy including Amici della Musica Palermo, Trapani, Messina, Siracusa, Ravenna, Dolo, Alessandria, Vicenza, Novara, Köln, Festival 900 Palermo.

In 2008 Music'Arte has organized "Trio in concert" at Villa Malfitano in Palermo. Trio Siciliano, composed by concertmasters (violin Silviu Dima and cellist Giorgio Gasbarro) of Teatro Massimo of Palermo and a pianist and piano teacher at the conservatory of Palermo Fabio Piazza, founder of the Trio, see www.triosiciliano.it performed five concerts proposing a path that began from the classical period, continued with Romanticism and Impressionism, to conclude with best known film soundtracks and Argentine tango of Astor Piazzolla.

In 2010 Music'arte has participated in the co-production of the play "Quotidiani Obliti", an adaptation of "Nausea" by J. P. Sartre.

Music'Arte and Trio Siciliano commemorated the victims of the Holocaust on Memorial Day at RAI (Italian Television) in 2007 and at Teatro Politeama of Palermo in 2015.

Trio Siciliano is also known abroad thanks to a cultural exchange at the Italian Cultural Institute in Köln (Germany).

Music'Arte has also produced a CD of music by Beethoven and Brahms performed by the Trio Siciliano.

Silviu Dima studied violin in Romania with Hamza Luliu and won various national competitions. After moving to Italy in 1984 he won 1st prize in the International Violin Competition "Città di Stresa". Afterwards he graduated at the Conservatory of L'Aquila and he started intensifying his chamber music activity, playing with "I Solisti Aquilani" for several years and also touring as a solo player Spain and Romania. He has also attended numerous master classes with Mariana Sirbu, Corrado Romano, Zinaida Gilels and Pavel Vernikov. He is currently concertmaster of Teatro Massimo orchestra in Palermo.

Stefania Vitale has worked in the theater since 2005, has a degree in Theater, Film and Media studies at the University of Palermo. She has also studied Pedagogy and is a qualified Primary school teacher. She has first worked with disability at the University of Palermo (2006-2008) as a tutor and study supporter of a student with Down Syndrome (the first student with Down syndrome to get a degree). She has worked as Drama and Acting teacher at the Institute of The Blind "Florio-Salamone" of Palermo for 4 years. In 2012 she took part in the project of the City of Palermo "Touris'Art" holding acting and improvisation open-air workshops for children in the gardens of Villa Trabia. She's currently working on theater events and workshops organized by Music'Arte, as an actress in Sicily and as a Diction teacher and acting teacher for children in Palermo and for the Italian community in Luxembourg.

Mission/objectives:

Enhancement of music and art in general (drama, dance) as an important means to communicate emotions and keep collective memory.

Our musicians play mostly classical music. Our president Silviu Dima is concertmaster of the orchestra of Teatro Massimo, the main opera and ballet theater of Palermo, and organizes

concerts with readings and performances in special occasion, i.e. on the Day of Commemoration in the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. The aim of our organization is to keep alive Art in the broadest sense in all its forms and give everyone a chance to share it, benefit from it and grow with it. Art, even the classical art music, is in our opinion for everyone and anyone should be able to get in touch with it, especially children, students, disabled people, who need to receive the right incentive to increase their awareness in their growth path.

PROJECT NAME (What was the name of the project you would like to tell us about?)

From 2007 to 2012 courses focused on art and theater took place at the Institute of the Blind of Palermo "Florio-Salamone".

"Art and Theater" (PROF 2011 – Regional Training Offer Plan 2011 - Progetto FOCUS IF2011B0046/A) and "Laboratory of applied arts" (PROF 2010 – Regional Training Offer Plan 2010 - Progetto FOCUS IF2010B0213) are the names of the latest workshops we held in those years.

PARTICIPANTS (Who took part in the project?)

17 Vision impaired people took part in the project, 10 males and 7 females. The average age was 30-40 (only two 16-year-old kids and two people over 40). 8 of them were blind, 11 partially sighted.

They suffered from multiple co-morbidities: congenital hearing loss, epilepsy, ischemia, multiple sclerosis, Down syndrome, paraplegia, schizophrenia, psychosis. Only in 2 cases blindness was caused by accidents.

AIMS (What were the aims of the project?)

The project aimed to improve psychomotor skills of participants and increase self-awareness.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Describe the activity that took place)

Both actors and teachers Casimiro Alaimo from I Bohémiens and Stefania Vitale from Music'Arte have worked in the projects as theater experts and trainers. Classes took place 3 days a week either in the morning from 8:30 to 14:30 or in the afternoon from 14:00 to 20:00 in the Institute of the Blind Florio-Salamone of Palermo. The length of the project was about 6 months.

FACILITATORS AND BIOGRAPHIES (Who ran the project? What roles did they have?)

Maria Badalamenti (Vittor). Visual arts expert.

Painter and Art teacher. Many years of teaching experience related to graphic arts and painting at "Ucciardone" Prison of Palermo. Art therapy for psychiatric communities in hospitals in Genzano (Rome), Trapani, Palermo.

Donatella Armeli. Counselor, Psychologist, psychotherapist and PhD in "Tourism Sciences: Methods, Models and Policies". Practice Areas: Negotiations inter and intra-institutional, mediation and conflict negotiation.

Katia Gianmalva. Specialized assistant.

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS (How were the participants selected?)

The participants were selected by the psychologist of the Institute of the Blind. She decided for the most serious cases to take part in the project, so that they could have a beneficial effect from the workshop.

PARTNERS/FUNDERS

We worked with "Euro – Research, Promotion and Community Initiative Center". The project was funded by Regione Siciliana, Ministero del Lavoro e delle politiche Sociali, the European Union, FSE – European Social Fund.

OUTCOMES (What were the outcomes?)

What changed as a result of the project?

- The participants who took part in the project experienced an increasing individual and group self awareness. Evidence of their improvements was given by their commitment and behavior, the critical and creative abilities they developed during the workshop and feedback from their families, doctors and psychiatrists.
- *From my point of view it was an extreme, powerful experience. It changed my way of living, looking and exploring the world around me. Also my way of directing has changed since then. (Casimiro Alaimo - I Bohémiens)*
- *I understood that the art of acting is suitable for everyone. No matter what kind of physical or psychological obstacles are put in your way. Acting is a form of communication that goes far beyond our 5 senses. It has to do mostly with presence and self awareness. I also learned that blind or partially sighted people have much to teach us about "being". They're not so easily influenced by surrounding circumstances and they're normally more in touch with their emotions. (Stefania Vitale Music'Arte)*
- As for all the other people working in our organizations and also around us in the Institute, our workshops and the final events we created (documentaries/performances/short films) definitively changed the way they saw the students and their idea that they were "only vision impaired people". Their need to test themselves and their ability to play was a means for the others to consider them as people, just people, as human beings.

EVALUATION METHODS (How did you evaluate the project?)

The improved ways of listening, talking, feeling accepted inside a group were all tested by interviews with the counselor and by the final events. In some cases improvements were also recorded, some exercises and improvisations were filmed.

EVIDENCE (What evidence do you have to show that your aims were met?)

Some of the participants have joined our classes for 4 years. Improvements were visible in the final performance and in their approach to the rest of the group. We have photographs and films that show their improved behavior and interaction. Also some articles were written by journalists that were present at the auditorium of The Institute of the Blind when the performances took place.

DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW (What did you learn from the project? What impact has this project had on your practice?)

We learned that being more confident and have the courage to take some risks are two important points that can change anyone's life. Now we're making a lot of more practice asking people working with us to do most exercises with their eyes closed, even when we're working with non vision impaired people. Sensorial work and music are great means to relax and open the mind even when strong opposition and considerable resistance are present.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS (What guided what you did and how you worked? What did you think about in order to make this best practice?)

As Theater experts we refer to various professional theater theories and practices for our training, among which Theater laboratory by Jerzy Grotowski and Odin Teatret by Eugenio Barba as theoretical principles carefully adapted to our particular kind of users. It's a theater training methodically guided in which is strongly involved and put on the line "the awareness of the body-person as an organism made of mind-heart-body". Removing psychic inhibitions and focusing on the creative process are our main objectives. The creative process itself, using symbols and metaphors, involving users in activities that involve a sensorial and kinesthetic commitment, is proposed as a means to identify, express their emotions and to understand and resolve certain difficulties.

From our experience we learned that some practical principles are also to be considered when organizing workshops for such kind of end users. It is really important to check if age (mental age) and severity of diseases that are often present in co-morbidity with vision impairment are going to cause interaction problems within the group of work. Regularity and continuation of the activities are also highly recommended.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR VISION (How might this project inform your approach to the VISION project and your work with visually impaired young people?)

Our previous experience with vision impaired people with multiple co-morbidities has put to the test our ability to adapt to various special needs and circumstances. In such a heterogeneous group we needed to work hard to create and maintain its cohesion. Vision impairment was really only one aspect of the various issues we had to deal with. We know from other workshops experiences with children and teenagers how great is their creative imagination. Working with younger vision impaired end users will be for us a fine adventure and an added value.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (List any sources that you may have used or referred to (articles, interviews, books, websites etc.))

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