



Richard Haskin Photography

***“Francis the Holy Jester”* a masterpiece of wit, spiritual insight, and inspiration.**

This is how Peter Feldmeier, Professor and Murray/Bacik Chair of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo, OH described his personal reaction, shared by many others in the audience, to Friday night’s Detroit premiere performance.

According to Prof. Feldmeier: “Mario Pirovano proved to be a delightful tour de force. His interpretation of Dario Fo’s brilliant play was itself brilliant. As he provided the audience with images and conversations between Francis and many historical figures, I found myself not only drawn into the narrative, but also actively drawn into the Fo’s vision of Francis and what that might mean for my own life. This made the play both fascinating in its own right and utterly relevant to me and our consumer society.”

Mario Pirovano’s performance of Dario Fo’s “Francis, the Holy Jester” at Wayne State University captivated the audience of students, faculty, and members of the community. “Pirovano’s skillful, energetic delivery communicated the electric effects that Francis’ own energy and oratorical skills had on his audiences nearly 800 years ago” said Elena Past, Associate Professor of Italian at Wayne State University.

In Pirovano’s able hands, the audience soaked up lessons about papal history, Biblical stories, and contentious Italian politics, all while sharing heartfelt, collective laughter and the occasional tear.

According to Professor Past: “The charming episodes of Francis’ life were sutured together with equally entertaining and critically important explanations of the context, both cultural and historical, in which they arose. Reimagining Francis with Dario Fo and Mario Pirovano makes one appreciate this remarkable historical figure all the more. Ultimately, “Francis, the Holy Jester” proved that the wit, intelligence, and generosity of the man from Umbria transcends the historical distance that separates us from him. With Pirovano’s performance, these qualities traveled across time and blossomed, miraculously, in the theater”.

Nobel Prize winner Dario Fo’s play was kept alive and true to its original spirit not only through Pirovano’s English translation but also by his energetic and kaleidoscopic interpretation which delivered one punch line after another in a barrage of lines, images, and body language. In this 90 minute monologue Pirovano artfully created mesmerizing scenes where the audience was joyfully both spectator and participant in his colorful tableaux.

“Even for me, who had just returned from Assisi only days earlier, he created an unforgettable encounter with Francis in a wholly and holy different way.” said Rev. Kenneth Kacheck of the Archdiocese of Detroit. “Mario Pirovano is an excellent actor who brings forth the greatness and the humbleness of Francis all in the same show. His timing was excellent, his exuberance catchy, and his fresh and direct delivery most enjoyable. He brought together both the earthliness and the holiness of Francis coupled with his great love of the gifts of life, nature and relationship with God. Truly excellent!” concluded Rev. Kacheck.

Thus was this special event organized and brought to the Detroit metropolitan area by the Detroit chapter of the Italian Film Festival USA, as part of their fundraising efforts.

By Pietro Sarcina
IFF USA Metro Detroit organizer