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THE 18/19 SEASON
THE HEIGHTS OF IMAGINATION

PEAK Premiere!
Romeo Castellucci
Democracy in America



May 9–12, 2019
Alexander Kasser Theater

**Arts + Cultural
Programming**



MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY

Dr. Susan A. Cole, President

Daniel Gurskis, Dean, College of the Arts

Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Premiere!

Romeo Castellucci

Democracy in America

Freely inspired by the book by Alexis De Tocqueville

Direction, Scenes, Lights, Costumes by **Romeo Castellucci**

Texts by **Claudia Castellucci** and **Romeo Castellucci**

Music by **Scott Gibbons**

With **Olivia Corsini, Giulia Perelli, Gloria Dorliguzzo, Evelin Facchini, Antonella Guglielmi, Sophia Danae Vorvila**

and Additional Dancers **Bria Bacon, Julia Bengtsson, Alexis Branagan, Storm Budwig, Jennifer Campbell, Carla Giudicelli, Oksana Horban, Navarra Novy-Williams, Caroline Quinn, Kim Savarino, Claire Westby**

Choreography freely inspired by the folk traditions of Albania, Greece, Botswana, England, Hungary, Sardinia.

With choreographic interventions by **Evelin Facchini, Gloria Dorliguzzo, Stefania Tansini, Sophia Danae Vorvila**

Assistant director **Maria Vittoria Bellingeri**

Maître Répétiteur **Evelin Facchini**

Stage Sculptures, Prosthesis, and Mechanisms **Istvan Zimmermann** and **Giovanna Amoroso**

Costume Realization **Grazia Bagnaresi**

Footwear **Collectif d'Anvers**

Stagehands **Andrei Benchea, Pierantonio Bragagnolo, Emanuele Cavazzana**

Lighting Board Technician **Andrea Sanson**

Sound Board Technician **Claudio Tortorici**

Costumes Keeper **Elisabetta Rizzo**

Photographer **Guido Mencari**

Technical Direction **Eugenio Resta** and **Paola Villani**

Technical Production Staff **Carmen Castellucci, Francesca Di Serio,**

Gionni Gardini, Daniele Magnani

Decorator **Silvano Santinelli**

Production Supervisor **Benedetta Briglia**

Promotion and Distribution **Gilda Biasini**

Production Assistant and Tour Manager **Giulia Colla**

Administration **Michela Medri, Elisa Bruno, Simona Barducci**

Economic Consultant **Massimiliano Coli**

Duration: One hour 50 minutes, no intermission.

In consideration of both audiences and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted in the theater.



“Interlopers: Artists and writers who interpret the history of lands and peoples that are not their own,” by Siddhartha Mitter in *PEAK Journal*, Claudia La Rocca, editor

Program Notes

Democracy in America echoes the title of the seminal theoretical treatise by the French diplomat Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), which rigorously anatomizes the American civic institutions from a European viewpoint. Freely inspired by de Tocqueville’s work and period, Romeo Castellucci transports us to the communal life of American puritans and Native Americans. By employing a strategy of words

and images, he aims to cast light on issues such as the language of communication, religion, and the notion of community.

The New World colonists have formed communities governed by a stern and austere Old-Testamentarian system of rules, which, according to de Toqueville, forms the basis of American Democracy. Biblical egalitarianism and religious dogmatism have now replaced the democratic function of the city and the experience of Tragedy, which, for Castellucci, constitutes the highest form of personal self-awareness and political identity. In the puritan value system, reflection and doubt are punishable offenses. Whoever exhibits aberrant behavior is stigmatized and becomes an outcast.

Romeo Castellucci places woman at the very center of the performance, as the seed of doubt blemishing the immaculate puritan purity. The heroine, a white woman, a member of the community, will be the first to question divine providence and the words of God “ask and thou shalt receive”: the new motherland is barren. But the natives know the secrets of nature and of their land, like “that old Indian woman” who reversed the flow of the river.

Democracy in America invites us to discover the alienation of the very nature of human language and communication, of human speech, and therefore of human communities. Following a retrograde trajectory, Romeo Castellucci investigates the seeds of the modern democratic regime, long before it grew and spread throughout the western world.

—Eleni Papalexiou

Co-produced by deSingel International Artcampus; Wiener Festwochen; Festival Printemps des Comédiens à Montpellier; National Taichung Theatre in Taichung, Taiwan; Holland Festival Amsterdam; Schaubühne-Berlin; MC93–Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis à Bobigny with Festival d’Automne à Paris; Le Manège–Scène nationale de Maubeuge; Teatro Arriaga Antzokia de Bilbao; São Luiz Teatro Municipal, Lisbon; Peak Performances @ Montclair State University. With the participation of Théâtre de Vidy-Lausanne and Athens and Epidaurus Festival.

The activity of Societas is supported by Ministero Beni e Attività Culturali, Regione Emilia Romagna, Comune di Cesena.

First Impressions: Saturday, May 11, post-performance

Alexander Kasser Theater

Join Romeo Castellucci, Scott Gibbons, and Jedediah Wheeler to share reflections and responses immediately following the performance.

About the Artists

Romeo Castellucci (Direction/Scenes/Lights/Costumes) continues his own creative work through theatrical performances and opera stagings. In 2002 he was honored with the title of Chévalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture. In 2005 he directed the Venice Theatre Biennale, entitled *Pompei. Il romanzo delle cenere* and intended to bring a subterranean theater to the surface, moving towards an essentially plastic art. In 2008 he was nominated “Artiste associé” at the Festival d’Avignon. In 2010 he began a new project that led him to create *Sul concetto di volto nel figlio di Dio* and *Il velo nero del Pastore*, part of a cycle that came to a conclusion in 2012 with *The Four Seasons Restaurant*. In 2010 *Le Monde* gave his trilogy dedicated to the *Divina Commedia* (2008) an award for best theatrical performance and included it among the world’s ten most influential cultural events seen in the first decade of the new century. In 2011 he staged Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal* at the Théâtre la Monnaie—De Munt in Brussels, where in 2014 he directed Gluck’s *Orphée et Eurydice*. A series of important debuts followed shortly thereafter: *Neither* by Morton Feldman (2014); *Go Down, Moses* (2014), a Societas production; *Le Sacre du Printemps* by Igor Stravinsky (2014); *Ödipus der Tyrann* by Friedrich Hölderlin (2015); and *Moses und Aron* by Arnold Schönberg at the Opéra Bastille (2015). In late 2016 and early 2017, two new Societas productions directed by Romeo Castellucci were premiered in Antwerp only a few months from one another: *The Minister’s Black Veil*, based on Hawthorne’s short story (December 2016) and *Democracy in America*, freely inspired by the text written by Alexis de Tocqueville (March 2017).

In late 2018, when *The Magic Flute* was presented at La Monnaie, the doors of other important institutions in the capital city were opened as part of the project

Un automne avec Romeo Castellucci, including the exhibition History of Oil Painting, which opened in BOZAR, and the latest Societas production, *La vita nuova*, staged at the Kanal-Centre Pompidou, in which Castellucci questions our collective destiny and art. In January 2019 he debuted at the Opera Garnier with Alessandro Scarlatti's *Il primo omicidio*.

Scott Gibbons (Composer) is an American-born composer and performer of electroacoustic music. His work is notable for its rigorous use of single and unexpected objects as sole instrumentation: for example, *Unheard: Sonic arrangements from the microcosmos*, which uses only sounds recorded at the molecular level using the prototype of a new type of microphone; and music for the 120th anniversary of the Eiffel Tower, which incorporated sounds of the tower itself. His work with Romeo Castellucci and Societas (*Genesi: From the Museum of Sleep*, *Tragedia Endogonidia*, *Inferno*) demonstrates an acute balance between delicacy and physicality, often focusing around frequencies that are at the outermost limits of human hearing, and embracing quietness as a central element.

About the Company

The **Societas Raffaello Sanzio**—now Societas—was founded in 1981 by Claudia and Romeo Castellucci, along with Chiara and Paolo Guidi, brought together by an idea of theater predominantly related to the visual and plastic arts. Theatrical author and director Romeo Castellucci is also responsible for the sets, costumes, and lighting. Chiara Guidi concentrates her research on dramatic rhythm and the voice, in addition to inventing a radical experience in theater for and with children, with her school of children's theater research and the landmark performance *Buchettino*, as well as directing critical observatories—such as *Mantica* and *Puerilia*—and workshops at the Teatro Comandini di Cesena, where the company is based. Claudia Castellucci has interpreted many performances, written dramatic and theoretical texts, and founded various schools—based in Cesena—revolving around rhythmic movement, philosophical study, and the technique of representation, including *Stoa*, *Mòra*, *Catalysi*, and *Conia*. The works produced by the Societas Raffaello Sanzio have been staged worldwide in major international festivals and

theaters: from *Santa Sofia* (1986) to the *Tragedia Endogonidia* (2002–2004), a cycle made up of eleven episodes named after an equal number of cities, in a gigantic recapitulation of the tragic, experienced and suffered in the present while feeling the pressure of the future. After an intense participation in this shared artistic endeavour, the Societàs Raffaello Sanzio is now undergoing a threefold division of its work, meeting the need for greater individuality felt by the artists involved.

Alongside its performances, Societàs has published—in addition to a large number of video productions—various books on theater theory in Italy and France. The Societàs Raffello Sanzio Archive—created and directed by Claudia Castellucci—was recognized in 2015 as a “particularly important historical archive” by the Emilia-Romagna archival superintendence, and is currently being digitalized under the title *ARCH—Archival Research and Cultural Heritage. The Theatre Archive of Societàs Raffaello Sanzio*, curated by the university professors Eleni Papalexidou (Peloponnese University) and Avra Xepapadakou (University of Crete), coordinated by Professor Anna Tabaki, director of the Department of Theatrical Studies at the University of Athens. With the advanced course *Il ritmo drammatico* (2019), the Istituto di Ricerca per le Arti Applicate took shape, based at the Teatro Comandini and embracing all of Claudia Castellucci and Chiara Guidi’s educational practices.

Synopsis

Nations always feel the effects of their origins.—Alexis de Tocqueville

Democracy in America revolves around two puritan farmers, Elizabeth and Nathaniel. The land is their mission. They want to transform America into the new Promised Land. It is to be conquered not with arms, but with seeds and ploughs. They trust in the God of the Exodus, who guarantees “material abundance” for all. But self-denial, inspired by the law of Moses, taken literally, only leads to rotten potatoes and desperation. There is a conflict in the woman’s individual relation with the Holy Scripture, and her prayer becomes a blasphemy that punctures the divine nature of the word and invokes “I am” as the void that echoes with the devastating epiphany of a broken promise. The American dream, the dream that the human

species has concerning the earth, destiny, and living together, comes up against a defeat that shatters its own representation.

By inventing this dramatic nucleus, Romeo Castellucci incisively penetrates, with powerful intuition, into the pages written in 1835 by the young French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville following his long voyage in the United States of America. The performance delves into the hidden areas of this text, fundamental for the political culture of the West. The potential of the new model of representative democracy now hinges on an experience of life, a conception of the earth, and the collective conscience of the colonies founded by puritan communities who chose to emigrate from the old continent in an attempt to lay the foundations of a true and biblically inspired equality among human beings.

The link between these puritan origins and the foundation of the newborn American political institutions provides a chance to look, with an unreconciled gaze, towards the dilemma of the emancipation from the law as an apprenticeship in freedom, the manipulation of consciences, the muscular strength of individualism, the role of single choices in the social contract that defines the rights and rules of collective life: all of these issues appear, and yet never become a direct discussion of democracy.

Once the Greek root has been severed, the model of ancient Athens is no more than a papier-mâché frieze, and the history of America becomes a mere sequence of facts and dates with a cruel echo. Archaic and choral dances, the barter of a young girl in a swamp, and a Sabbath that invokes the violent strategy of control seen in witch-hunts all provide a frame for profound far-off and atmospheric views. The primary human institution, which is language, cuts across the entire performance; the earliest institution, it is the one that acts as a model for all others, at the juncture between the body, knowledge, and power. And so, an entire sonorous and vocal archive appears, including possessions, speaking in tongues as in American Pentecostal churches, permutations and anagrams of letters, the Ojibwe language of the Minnesota Indians—thorny evidence of subversion and resistance, fleetingly opening up onto the massacre of the natives carried out in the name of God.

Far removed from current political events, *Democracy in America* is a work on language, faith, the Old Testament and the ambiguous relation between common interests and individual ambitions. It also deals with a lost innocence and the

collapse of values held to be indestructible, casting a shadow across the face of American democracy, and offers the portrait of a flower that grew following the conquest of the endless prairies, a flower permeated by its own heart of darkness.

— *Piersandra Di Matteo*

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Programs in this season are made possible in part by funds from:

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts



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