

Review of Saffron Hill (event/203776/saffron-hill-2/)



"Italian immigrant families life stories"

by David Franchi (user_view.php?uid=27240) for remotegoat on 08/10/15

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(reviews_official.php)

Saffron Hill, an Italian family story in London.

REMOTEGOAT: DAVID FRANCHI

"Saffron Hill" the original play by Penny Culliford successfully sold out, at The Pleasance Theatre, London.

Produced by Tricolore Theatre Company, "Saffron Hill" is the fictional story of Italian families in Clerkenwell, London. The performance focuses on the difficulties, the positions and the music of different decades. It also commemorates the 75th anniversary of the sinking of the Arandora Star.

Although fictional, the narrative comes from real life stories of Italian immigrant families. The author Penny Culliford, supported by producer Nadia Ostacchini, made a great research, by interviewing and meeting people and surveying publications and documents.

Once one of the most deprived areas of London, Saffron Hill was described by Charles Dickens, in *Oliver Twist*, as "a narrow and dismal alley" where in filthy shops traders purchase from pickpockets. Or by Peter Cunningham, in his *Hand-Book of London*: "A squalid neighbourhood between Holborn and Clerkenwell, densely inhabited by poor people and thieves." (1850).

The first show scene is in 1872. Giuseppe arrives in Saffron Hill (from Borgo Taro, Parma) to start a new life with his two daughters, Rosa and Lucia. They are poor, they struggle and England is cold. While corrupted landlord Samuel Peters threatens to bring Lucia into the dark London underworld, Rosa got engaged with good Vincenzo, who will open an ice cream shop.

The second scene is in 1940. The family heirs have successfully established the ice cream shop, now run by Vita and Lorenzo, Sofia and Roberto. Following the Churchill's "collar the lot" policy, when the war begins Roberto and Lorenzo are arrested by policeman Arthur, regular customer and friend. They are embarked to be deported but the ship is the unfortunate Arandora Star, which was sunk in controversial circumstances by a German U-boat (2nd July 1940). More than 800 people died, of which 446 were Italians. While Roberto returns home, Lorenzo is missing. The Arandora was built in 1927, requisitioned as a troop ship in 1940, and assigned to transport German and Italian internees and prisoners to Canada.

In 1967 is the third scene. Antonio and his wife Maria Vittoria run the business, while Antonio's sister, Carlotta, prefers to enjoy the Swinging London with cousin Giovanni, just arrived from Italy. Carlotta gets pregnant and marries Giovanni. However, struggling with the new life style, Antonio, decide to close the historical business.

The three stories follow the changes in the quarter of Clerkenwell Road, in an interesting parallel with the transformation of the society. There are suggestions for present days, including gentrification, habits, human behaviour. For example, protagonists are migrants and someone throws a brick to their window. Or else, despite born and bred in the UK, they still speak a language, which is a pastiche of English, Italian and their parent's dialect expressions.

The author follows the tropes of the Italians lifestyle, there is a lot of gesticulation, passion, and coffee flows abundantly.

The Italian settlement in London began in the first half of the 1800s. However, a strong presence is already registered from 1720, when the Sardinian Chapel, was built as part of the Embassy of Sardinia - today rebuilt into the Church of St. Anselm and St. Cæcilia, Holborn.

In 1863 St. Peter's Church was opened in Clerkenwell Road and still today is a referent for the Italian community, which is not anymore located around that area but spread around London.

The play is excellent. Professional actors are at their ease in different roles, delivering genuine emotions, and they are: Anthony Comerford, Edmund Dehn, Roseanna Frascona, Maeve Leahy and Fed Zanni.

<http://www.backhillonline.com/saffron-hill-play-review.html>

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Saffron Hill Play Review

Saffron Hill (produced by Tricolore Theatre Company)– a new play by Penny Culliford premiered on 6th October 2015 at Pleasance Theatre, Islington

One street, one family, three stories.

The play consists of three acts which follows the lives and fortunes of generations of a fictional family in Saffron Hill, Clerkenwell from the 1870s to the 1960s. The play explores, through the eyes of this family, the issues, attitudes and music of the times. Although based around historical events, these stories represent the personal lives, loves and losses of Italian immigrant families living in the area.

Act 1 (1872) admirably portrayed the cultural and social challenges faced by the first Italian economic refugees seeking pastures new as they try to adapt to their new lives. Perhaps the difficulties were a major driver behind the business success many subsequently enjoyed. How many of us Anglo-Italians realise the depth of the challenges our grandparents and parents faced in establishing themselves in the UK?

Act 2 takes us onto the Second World War years. The horrors of war and the devastation caused to families and communities was superbly brought out in this Act – particularly the scenes portraying the background to, and implications of, the Arandora Star atrocity. Who will forget the harrowing description of the horrific event from a survivor of the sinking of the ship and, not least, the trauma he suffered from his unsuccessful attempts to save his friend who, like many, lost his life ?

Reeling from the emotional battering of the Arandora Star tragedy, Act 3 concludes the play with an amusing reflection on the changes in beliefs and behaviours brought upon by the swinging sixties – combined with the very real challenges family businesses faced in adapting to rapidly changing times.

To cover three significant, and very different, eras in two hours from a small cast and a modest budget might be considered ambitious. The reaction of the audience confirmed that the play more than delivered what was promised.

All five of the cast (Anthony Comerford, Edmund Dehn, Roscanna Frasca , Maeve Leahy and Fed Zanni delivered convincing performances. Tickets for all the performances were in great demand with the house full for each performance for the duration (from 6th to 11th October 2015).

Congratulations to Producer Nadia Ostacchini, Director Anthony Shrubbsall and all involved in the show. A lovely gallery of pictures (photography and compilation by Paddy Gormley) is available at <http://tricolore.org.uk> .

Tricolore Theatre Company is seeking additional sponsorship to finance further performances of Saffron Hill in 2016. For sponsorship details please contact Nadia Ostacchini (nadia@tricolore.org.uk).

Peter Ciccone

LIFE, LOVE AND LOSS IN LITTLE ITALY



Nella foto, attori, sponsor e organizzatori

Saffron Hill is Tricolore Theatre Company's new play telling the stories of

three generations of Anglo-Italians set in the heart of Little Italy. Written

by playwright, Penny Culliford, it follows the lives of three generations of

one family, starting in the 1870s and ending as many Italians left London's Clerkenwell in the 1960s. The play includes the story of the sinking of the Arandora Star, a significant event in the family history of many British Italians, and serves to commemorate the 75th anniversary of that tragedy.

Following the arrival of Giuseppe Musetti and his two daughters in Saffron Hill, fleeing the poverty in Italy, they struggle to be accepted into the community. Two generations on, the War once again separates husbands and wives, British and Italians. The "swinging sixties" brings about the further fragmentation of the community and explores the changing attitude to sex and relationships.

Directed by Anthony Shrubsall, the cast of five actors, Anthony Comerford, Edmund Dehn, Roseanna Frascogna, Maeve Leahy and Fed Zanni each play three parts and music from the periods and newsreel sound clips provide the evocative timeline. Producer Nadia Ostacchini said: '2014 marked

the 150th Anniversary of Giuseppe Garibaldi's visit to London as well as the establishment of the Mazzini-Garibaldi Club, founded by Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi. I asked Penny to write a new play which celebrated the close links between the British people and the creation of modern Italy. I think she has written a really special play which will touch the hearts of many Italians and non-Italians, not least because Immigration is such a topical subject. Also, the Arandora Star is pretty much a forgotten tragedy and I really wanted people to know about it. It would be nice if our story of the Anglo-Italian community could reach a wider audience.'

Sponsors include the Mazzini Garibaldi Charitable Foundation, the Parmigiani Valceno Association, the Parmigiani Valtaro Association and the Club Sociale Italiano di Finchley.

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Saffron Hill, a teatro la storia della “Little Italy” londinese

By *Marco Colombo* on October 9, 2015 [0 Comments](#)

La piece teatrale racconta un secolo di vita di una famiglia italiana a Londra, dall'epoca vittoriana alla swinging London

Nadia Ostacchini e Penny Culliford con **Saffron Hill** portano in scena la storia di Little Italy a Clerkenwell.

Un affresco intenso, divertente e a tratti commovente di una famiglia di emigrati. Vivono, amano e soffrono, senza dimenticare le loro origini e radici, in un percorso generazionale che dall'epoca vittoriana, fatta di sacrifici e stenti, arriva fino alla frizzante *Swinging London*.

Gli attori con mestiere e sicurezza raccontano il tessuto sociale e culturale, le vicende di famiglie sconvolte dalle deportazioni volute da un paese impaurito dalla guerra e la tragedia della **Arandora Star**.

In prima fila una arzilla 95enne nata e cresciuta a Clerkenwell conferma commossa e orgogliosa: questa è la storia della mia vita, i bambini che giocano nelle strade, i caffè ovunque, la Chiesa Italiana, le bombe e la ricostruzione.

Una deliziosa piece teatrale che è anche memoria collettiva, per conoscere e ricordare la comunità che da Mazzini e Garibaldi fino ai giorni nostri ha dato tanto alla cosmopoli londinese.

Marco Colombo

Londra, 9/10/2015

Saffron Hill è in scena al The Pleasance Theatre di Islington fino a domenica 11 ottobre 2015.

UK Theatre.net

Saffron Hill at the Pleasance Theatre

Published by: [Carolin Kopplin](#) on 9th Oct 2015 | [View all blogs by Carolin Kopplin](#)



Siamo forti!

Presented by Tricolore Theatre, this compelling new play by Penny Culliford traces the history of an Italian family who immigrates to England in 1872 over many generations up to the 1960s.

Newly arrived in Saffron Hill, Clerkenwell, Giuseppe Musetti and his two daughters Rosa and Lucia face hardships of Dickensian proportions. Forced to live in a mouldy dump with a broken window and furnished with a flea ridden mattress, their welcome to their new home is less than promising. As the Musettis don't have connections within the Italian community, they cannot get work and Giuseppe has to earn the rent money with busking. Meanwhile their unpleasant landlord Peters has his eye on the attractive Lucia whereas the permanently homesick Rosa might find a husband in the clumsy but good natured Vincenzo, who works as an assistant in the local pharmacy.

Two generations later, the family has established a successful ice cream business but with Italy's entry into World War II and Britain's weak position against the Nazis, paranoia sets in and Italians have become enemy aliens. Roberto and Lorenzo are detained under Churchill's "collar the lot" policy and are shipped off to Canada aboard the Arandora Star.

Several decades later in 1967, the ice cream parlour has been transformed into a coffee shop, run by Lorenzo and Vittoria's children Antonio and Carlotta, along with Antonio's wife Maria Vittoria. Carlotta falls for the attractive lothario Giovanni, newly arrived from Italy, and soon expects a child from him. Meanwhile the coffee shop sees fewer and fewer patrons as the young crowd prefers hipper establishments.

Peek into the past of Little Italy

SAFFRON HILL
PLEASANCE THEATRE, N7

★★★★☆

Saffron Hill, a street off Clerkenwell Road, has a rich cultural heritage stretching back to the early 19th century. In 1837, it was made famous in *Oliver Twist* when Dickens wrote “a dirty and more wretched place he had never seen”; yet by the 1900s, it was better known as the heartland of London’s burgeoning Little Italy district.

It is this street from which writer Penny Culliford’s new show at the Pleasance takes its name. Introducing a poverty-stricken family of first-wave Italian migrants in 1872, the play then follows their descendents through World War Two, before jumping forward to the ‘60s as a third generation struggle to keep their traditional café afloat, which increasingly symbolises the last clear link to their heritage.

Indulgent autobiographical confession: my own family

descends from two Italian brothers who moved to Clerkenwell around the 1840s, so I was intrigued to see if Saffron Hill would provide any clearer sense of their history. Unfortunately, the play sheds little light on why the fictional Musetti family made the move from their homeland; across all three generations, Italian culture is mostly limited to food, otherwise they seem much the same as any other British family.

What the story does show, however, is how these immigrants acclimatised to London. In the first act, Edmund Dehn endearingly portrays an exhausted father slaving as an organ grinder to support his two daughters. In the second, the lesser-known impact of Mussolini’s wartime actions is made clear as innocent British Italians are rounded up and detained by order of Winston Churchill. (While slightly over-entative, a scene where Fed Zanni’s young café owner returns to his relatives in Saffron Hill reveals the

■ Maeve Leahy and
Roseanna Frasca
in *Saffron Hill*.
Picture: Paddy
Gormley



rupturing impact this had on many families.)

Under Anthony Shrubbsall’s direction, the narrative moves smoothly. Occasionally, though, the

delivery feels forced, and despite a British-trained cast, it is largely the cockney, rather than Italian, accents which fail to convince.

Nonetheless, this is an

interesting, if under-developed, look at Clerkenwell’s cultural history that will no doubt hit home with the theatre-goers of *Little Italy*.

Alex Bellotti

Saffron Hill: l'immigrazione italiana nella Little Italy londinese, tra stereotipi e difficile integrazione

15 ottobre 2015 di [paneacqua culture](#) [Lascia un commento](#)



ROBERTA LEOTTI | I primi arrivati, la famiglia Musetti da Borgotaro, si ritrovano impreparati ad affrontare le difficoltà di inserimento; Saffron Hill, Clerkenwell è una zona poco raccomandabile di Londra, infestata da ladri e dove la gente vive in ambienti malsani e fatiscenti.

Dopo aver scritto un libro sul tema "A Better Life" Penny Culliford firma la drammaturgia di questa pièce diretta della talentuosa Nadia Ostacchini (Tricolore Theatre Company) e di recente in scena al Pleasance Theatre di Londra, che affronta il tema dell'immigrazione visto attraverso tre generazioni di una famiglia di immigrati.

Pensata per il 150esimo anniversario della visita di Garibaldi a Londra e altre ricorrenze legate alla nascita dello stato italiano, lungi dall'essere triste e retorica, questa della Ostacchini è una produzione brillante, nella cui narrazione l'italiano è uno strumento ambivalente, come sempre per chi emigra: arma a doppio taglio e confine fra emarginazione e conferma dell'identità, usato per schernire gli immigrati in certi passaggi e per sottolineare la tragicità in altri dialoghi tra i protagonisti.

In questa Londra che sembra così affine a quella di Oliver Twist di Dickens, il farabutto padrone di casa dei Musetti ripara la finestra (elemento predominante dell'allestimento scenico) buttandoci su uno straccio in malo modo, e sempre in questa prima parte, il corteggiamento tra Rosa e Vincenzo comincia con un pacchetto contenente insetticida.

Il tutto reso ancora più esilarante dalla gestualità e dall'accento volutamente marcato degli "Italians", qui interpretati dagli attori: Anthony Comerford, Edmund Dehn, Maeve Leahy, Roseanna Frascona e Fed Zanni. Si cerca il pubblico, consapevoli sia un affresco che ha a che fare con una



L'Ambasciatore d'Italia
Londra

Londra, 8 ottobre 2015

Gentile Dolores O'Keefe,

La ringrazio per il Suo cortese invito a presenziare alla messinscena di *Saffron Hill*, la pièce scritta da Penny Culliford e diretta da Anthony Shrubbsall che ripercorre alcuni momenti topici della storia della comunità italiana nel quartiere londinese di Clerkenwell. Trattasi di un'importante testimonianza culturale dei trascorsi dei connazionali giunti nel Regno Unito tra la fine dell'Ottocento e la prima metà del Novecento, anche in momenti particolarmente delicati quali la tragedia dell'Arandora Star.

Purtroppo non mi è stato possibile parteciparvi in quanto ero in missione a Manchester per l'annuale conferenza del Partito Conservatore, ma so che il Dott. Schneider dell'Ufficio Stampa e Affari Culturali ha rappresentato l'Ambasciata in questa occasione.

Mi preme congratularmi con Lei, la Sua Associazione e con la Fondazione Mazzini Garibaldi che ha sponsorizzato il programma, per aver realizzato tale iniziativa che contribuisce a mantenere viva la memoria storica della presenza dei nostri connazionali nella capitale britannica.

in saluto cordiale


Pasquale Q. Terracciano

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