

## Beside the road

February 16, 2015 | By Thom Dibdin | Reply

### Migration and identity at Summerhall

**The issues of migration and identity are constantly abused in contemporary politics under the knee-jerk banner of an “immigration problem”. But they are hardly new and even less a “problem”, as a fascinating work-in-progress at Summerhall on Friday explores.**

*A Bench on the Road*, presented by Charioteer Theatre in a co-production with the Italian Cultural Institute of Edinburgh, tells the story of six women over the period from 1850 to 1950.



Italians in Scotland. Photo: ISRC – Edinburgh University

It is a century which stretches from Italy’s political unification through to its post-WW2 economic boom; a century over which there was a global migration of over 25 million Italians. Many thousands made their homes in Scotland, especially since the 1880s. There were further peaks around the World Wars and rise of Fascism, with the whole generating one of the most successful socio-economic integrations on record.

And it is to the record which writer and director Laura Pasetti has turned for her inspiration. Her script is based on hundreds of interviews collected over years by various academics and was commissioned by the University of Edinburgh as part of the Italian-Scottish Research Cluster project (ISRC).

Laura Pasetti told Æ: “This is a story of women’s courage, of sisterhood and pride. It concerns everyone because it is about identity and about finding your place in the world. It is about relationships and connections beyond the borders and beyond preconceptions.

building a consciousness

“It is particularly relevant nowadays because of so many people reaching this country in search of a better future... It is very important that these kind of stories are told, as building a memory is like building a consciousness and we must create a European consciousness.”

Performed by Helen Cuinn, Vanda De Luca, Lorraine Hemmings, Sian Mannifield, Anna Panzone and Sita Pieraccini, six women tell a century of history from their own points of view: as mothers, wives, daughters and brides who played a key role in the Italian immigrants' integration in Scotland.

The play mixes prose, poetry and folk songs belonging to both the Italian and Scottish traditions with the voices of Scottish women heard as a Chorus – in the style of Greek tragedy, responding to the dialogue and sentiments of the Italian women.

The project is co-directed by Andrzej and Teresa Welminski, former members of the company Cricot 2 (founded by Tadeusz Kantor) and who are acclaimed and recognised practitioners of Kantor's craft.

Stefania Del Bravo, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Edinburgh, says: "I'm very keen to support *Bench on the Road* and its director Laura Pasetti. I have been in contact with her for some years, and this work is the final exit of a long and fruitful collaboration on the evergreen theme of migration and identity.

"The Italian community is one of the largest in Scotland, and I think that a recollection of their memories through works such as *Bench on the Road* is crucial to better understand a page of history rich of meaning, a little, hidden epic not yet well studied and understood."

## Listing and links

**A Bench on the Road** Summerhall, Main Hall, 1 Summerhall EH9 1PL Friday 20 February 2015, 7.30pm.

Entry by donation. Book tickets at [charioteer.theatre@googlemail.com](mailto:charioteer.theatre@googlemail.com)

Details: <http://www.summerhall.co.uk/2015/a-bench-on-the-road/>

Charioteer Theatre: <http://www.charioteertheatre.co.uk/>

Italian Cultural Institute in Edinburgh: [http://www.iicedimburgo.esteri.it/IIC\\_Edimburgo](http://www.iicedimburgo.esteri.it/IIC_Edimburgo)  
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