

THE CREATION OF AN ARTISTIC COMMUNITY THROUGH
UNCONVENTIONAL VENUES: THE FESTIVAL OF THE TWO WORLDS IN SPOLETO,
ITALY

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The Festival of the Two Worlds is an arts festival in Spoleto, Italy, held every June and July since 1958 that was conceived by the Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti (1911-2007) with the help of the American conductor Thomas Schippers. The Festival features all the major arts of our time: dance, drama, visual arts, cinema, and above all music. The predominance of music in the numerous editions is attributable to the profession of Menotti himself, who had been born in Cadegliano, Italy, to a family that fostered his prodigious musical talents. While undertaking musical studies at the Conservatorio G. Verdi of Milan as a teenager, the famous conductor Arturo Toscanini convinced Menotti to study at the newly established Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where the professor of composition Rosario Scalero was teaching. Menotti, following Toscanini's advice and his studies in America, launched a long and successful career as a librettist and opera composer in the United States. By the 1950s, however, even though he was considered the most famous living opera composer in the world, he felt he needed to undertake a new project that would fulfill his urge to prove the importance of the artist in society and this desire led to the establishment of the Festival of the Two Worlds.¹

Menotti expressed this desire on many occasions, sometimes showing his personal and "egotistic" urge and at other times displaying a more altruistic intention to prove the importance of artists in society. When asked about the reason for starting an arts festival, he replied that he felt disenchanting about the role of the artist in contemporary society. He envisioned a world where the artist would become "a *necessary* element of society instead of a simple ornament." This was personal for the composer:

I wanted to feel necessary and I wanted to see if I could contribute in recreating, so to say, an ideal city with my music and with all the things I

¹ John Gruen, *Gian Carlo Menotti* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 119.

knew. Actually, my dream was not to make a festival, but to create a small city in which the artist had *carte blanche* and was an essential member of society.²

This idea of forging a connection between the artist and the community remained part of Menotti's mission for the rest of his life. In an article that Menotti wrote on occasion of the 41st year of the Festival, he stated

Today's artist lives in a little world of his own that reflects only a tiny aspect of the life of a community. The confines of this universe are set by his manager and his public. But neither his manager nor his public are part of his private life. Nor can they have any great influence on his development as an artist or a man. Basically, the contemporary artist does not know his public, or knows it only as 'public', not as human beings, his fellow-citizens—and to the public the artist is an inaccessible idol to whom it sacrifices the cost of an admission ticket, or a book, or a painting, in exchange for a few hours diversion. It's always been hard for me to feel on the edges of society, and I felt the need to convince at least a small community like Spoleto that an artist is just as useful and necessary as a doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer ("Spoleto's no safari").³

Menotti wanted to prove that the artist, even subconsciously, participates in each person's daily life:

It takes patience to show your fellow-citizens that civilized man 'lives' by art without even realizing it. The tune he whistles while he's shaving has been written by a composer, and his morning newspaper and evening TV comedy are prepared by writers; the beautiful material of the dress his wife is wearing was created by a designer, so were the stylish cutlery and china that grace his table ("Spoleto's no safari").⁴

Therefore Menotti created the Festival to slowly convince the public of the artist's importance in society.

This paper will discuss how Menotti realized his vision of a community for artists with the Festival of the Two Worlds in Spoleto. The creation of unconventional venues was an integral part of this, since the utilization of typical Italian social emblems (for example churches and *piazze*) as performance spaces situated artistic performances in everyday locations for people in the community. The frequent choice and predilection of small and intimate venues also fulfilled Menotti's aim of increasing communication between the performers and the audience and in turn humanizing art.

² Ibid., 119-20.

³ Located in the yearbook of the 1998 edition of the Festival, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

⁴ Ibid.

Why Spoleto?

Menotti and Schippers traveled through Italy for three summers to choose the right place for the Festival. They decided to search in Italy for two reasons: first, because of the influence that Menotti, a native Italian, had in the country; and second, since they wanted a town with a rich artistic history and many performance spaces, they felt Italy was a good fit. They considered other towns such as Lucca, Bergamo, and Todi, but the first two appeared to be too large to embrace the small artistic community that Menotti wished to create.⁵ An article by Alberto Moravia in the Festival's first edition yearbook sheds further light on why a small town was chosen. Moravia states through a metaphor that "the new wine of modern art—at times, diabolically heady—is profitably poured into old bottles, to everyone's advantage, in these little, historical cities. [...] Playing on the title of this Festival, one might say that it is, indeed, an encounter between two worlds."⁶ Here the author, while showing the economic advantage for a small town to host such an event, demonstrates the artistic triumph of combining the avant-garde and the traditional.

The final choice of Spoleto was influenced by its geographical position, between Rome and Florence, but Todi also shared this characteristic. Todi, however, did not have Spoleto's two opera theaters (Teatro Nuovo and Teatro Caio Melisso) and the Roman theater, an extraordinary quality for such a small town. Moreover, Spoleto appeared to be both aesthetically and acoustically superior for hosting performances. Concerning the aesthetic perspective, Giuliano Ricci—who wrote a book on Italy's theaters and dedicated a chapter to Spoleto ("Spoleto, a theater-town")—asserts that in Spoleto "the event of mannerism not only does not appear in any period, but the opposite procedure actually takes place, almost a depuration of the superfluous and a reduction to essential elements." This, according to the author, creates a naturalness and a bond with daily life, which make the city "so receptive in its streets and squares and it can be so vital through time, with its space that welcomes and can show human actions."⁷ Thus, the general structure and feel of Spoleto not only lends itself to performances and exhibits, but conveys a simple and direct contact with everyday life that fulfilled Menotti's desire to create a real community for artists. Not only were Spoleto's venues particularly suitable from an aesthetic perspective, but also from an acoustic one. Spoleto has numerous churches built in the Middle Ages. Liana Di Marco stated that the architectural simplicity of these churches is acoustically more suitable than, for example, baroque churches, the domes and overall grandiosity of which make a performance difficult.⁸

⁵ Umberto Nicoletti-Altamari (former artistic advisor of the Festival of the Two Worlds), in discussion with the author, December 16, 2012. Spoleto, Italy.

⁶ Located in the yearbook of the 1958 edition of the Festival, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

⁷ Giuliano Ricci, "Spoleto, una città-teatro," in *Teatri d'Italia* (Milan: Bramante Editrici, 1971), 255.

⁸ Liana Di Marco (art historian), in discussion with the author, December 28, 2012, Spoleto, Italy.

The research for new performance spaces was integral to the success of the Festival. Since the town offered two conventional venues—a lot for a town like Spoleto, but not enough to host an eminent arts festival—Menotti needed to find more performance spaces to satisfy the needs of his festival. Still recovering from World War II, all of Italy was facing a hard time economically. Spoleto, in particular, needed to be renovated architecturally. Through the subsequent decades from the beginning of the Festival, the town faced an increasing structural renovation, both thanks to the general Italian economic boom and Menotti's influence.⁹ It is impossible to know exactly what venues Menotti had in mind when choosing Spoleto to host the Festival, but the diversity of the performance spaces that were utilized over the years suggests great creativity. The combination of the artistic genius of Menotti and Spoleto's natural potential for hosting artistic performances created the grounds for the artistic community that the founder of the Festival had envisioned.

The Churches of the Festival

The deconsecrated church of San Nicolò was an important performance space for the Festival. San Nicolò was built between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century. The church has only one vast nave and unfortunately it has lost almost all original decorations, frescos, sculptures, and chapels that enriched the church from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century because of the earthquake of 1767. After the restoration of the church and of the convent that surrounded it in the 1960s, the church was used for the first time for performance purposes in 1967 for *Laudato sii o mio Signore*, an adaptation for theater of Saint Francis' *Fioretti*. San Nicolò mostly hosted drama.

The most striking dramatic production at San Nicolò was *Orlando Furioso*, directed by Luca Ronconi. *Orlando Furioso* introduced a new way to present a dramatic work. Being a medieval chivalric poem, it was composed of many scenes, which Ronconi staged in many different "stations" dispersed throughout the convent, the courtyard, and the church, making it an itinerant performance. Nicoletti-Altimari points out that this performance "changed the relationship parameters between audience and performance, as the audience moved towards the performance."¹⁰ It is interesting to notice that in both the *Orlando Furioso* and in the "Marathon Concert" (which will be discussed below) there is an intention to modify the relationship between the audience and the performers, a method of "humanizing" art and making it part of community life.

Many other churches were used in the Festival. San Domenico, a church built in the twelfth century, was employed mostly for music, as well as the baroque church of San Filippo, which needed acoustic adjustments because of the presence of a large dome. San Simone, a deconsecrated church of the thirteenth century, was

⁹ Sandro Morichelli (journalist), in discussion with the author, December 19, 2012, Spoleto, Italy.

¹⁰ Nicoletti-Altimari, discussion.

used for the first time in 1982 for the play *Incantesimi e magie*, written by Aldo Trionfo, and has been utilized primarily for drama since then.

Santa Maria della Piaggia, built between 1594 and 1605, had a special role for many years beginning in 1990; every year it hosted shows performed by the Compagnia Marionette Carlo Colla e Figli, which specializes in marionette plays. The inclusion of marionette plays in the Festival reflected Menotti's fondness for marionettes. As a child, he wanted to write a marionette opera for the set of marionettes he owned, but it never happened. The marionette plays staged at Santa Maria della Piaggia enjoyed much success and were popular for both children and adults.¹¹

The Sala Pegasus, originally the church of San Lorenzo, is a deconsecrated church of the twelfth century that was renamed after Mobil Oil financed its restoration in 1972. The Sala Pegasus was used for many arts, but is mostly remembered for the 1972 dance show "Tres." The Sala Frau, originally the church of San Gregorio della Sinagoga, is another deconsecrated church that was restored thanks to the generosity of the furniture design company Poltrona Frau. Since then it has been used for drama and cinema and, in 1997, for Menotti's children's opera *Chip and his Dog*, which Menotti himself directed after having personally selected some of Spoleto's most talented young artists. This is another aspect of the Festival that shows its commitment to bond with the community by involving local people who could contribute in a professional way. Artistic involvement, other than the occasional extra, was rare but *Chip and his Dog* featured students from the town's historic music school. However, the Festival almost always employed local talent in the costume shop, as stagehands, and other collateral labor needed for the artistic productions.

The Duomo is the main church of the town and it features contrasting architectural styles. Initially built in the eleventh century in the Romanesque style, the façade and the bell tower were renovated in the thirteenth century. During the fifteenth century a *portico* was added. Because of the final renovation of the interior of the church in the baroque period, it presents a grandiose internal architecture with a very large dome above the altar. This created an acoustical disadvantage that was often overcome by moving the performers forward, whether they were an orchestra, a choir, or smaller ensembles.¹² On the other hand, Joseph Flummerfelt loved to conduct the Westminster Choir in the Renaissance *portico* of the Duomo, considered by him acoustically perfect.¹³ These performances, among others in the town by other musicians, were impromptu; the resulting music through the streets gave the impression of being a haven for artists, where art was a part of everyone's daily life.

¹¹ Michael Summers (former artistic administrator of the Festival of the Two Worlds), in discussion with the author, December 20, 2012, Rome, Italy.

¹² Carmelo Parente (former staff member of the Festival of the Two Worlds), in discussion with the author, December 21, 2012, Spoleto, Italy.

¹³ Ibid.

Sant'Eufemia is one of the most unconventional performance spaces used in the Festival. Its three naves and matronea in Romanesque style were built in the first half of the twelfth century. The church does not have direct contact with public streets, as it is located in the courtyard of the Bishop's Palace. Sant'Eufemia exemplifies how close attention was paid to choosing the most appropriate venue for each performance. The church's simple architecture perfectly suited spiritual and mystic performances like *The Play of Daniel*, which was the first production in the space in 1960. *The Play of Daniel* is based on familiar episodes from the "Book of Daniel" in the Vulgate. According to tradition it was performed annually between 1150 and 1250, which means it was written at the time of Sant'Eufemia's construction. In 1975 Sant'Eufemia hosted *Your Arm's Too Short to Box with God*, a gospel play with dance and music, which, although it did not convey a mystic feeling, certainly pertained to religious matters.

The most innovative performance that Menotti conceived for Sant'Eufemia was undoubtedly "Ora Mistica" (Mystic Hour), a series of religious concerts consisting mainly of plainchant and motets, which made its debut in 1996. Rather than merely presenting these works in concert, "Ora Mistica" reestablished the music's function by using it to create a spiritual experience for the listeners. The timing, too, helped to fulfill that aim, as the concerts started at 11:30pm. Michael Summers points out that it was Menotti's intention to provide the listener with an "uplifting experience" by combining the mystic atmosphere of Sant'Eufemia with an appropriate repertoire. In particular, Summers asserts that "you can perform Gregorian chant in a church on Fifth Avenue and you can sing it beautifully, but doing it in a place like Sant'Eufemia is just something special."¹⁴ Sant'Eufemia has been used almost solely for musical performances.

Not only was the indoor space of Sant'Eufemia used for performances, but its courtyard was utilized as well. It was employed for the first time in 1972 for the five-hour-long "Baroque Music Marathon Concert," which was inspired by Ernest Fleischmann's and Lukas Foss's "Hollywood Bowl"¹⁵ of 1971. The purpose of this type of concert was to create an informal atmosphere where people could enter and exit freely. Each piece would be introduced before being performed, so as to create greater interaction between performers and audience. This was a recurring theme in the Festival of the Two Worlds, as the communication between the parties of a performance was considered vital for the implementation of the idea of immersing people into art, thus creating an artistic community. The concert program

¹⁴ Summers, discussion.

¹⁵ Fleischmann and Foss organized the "Bach at the Bowl Mini-Marathon" and two other marathons during the summer of 1971. They were "purposely informal six-hour dusk-to-midnight events at which listeners were encouraged to come and go freely, picnic and snack, and even, in those days, smoke, all the while watching the L.A. Philharmonic, plus smaller ensembles and soloists, making music."

Daniel Cariaga, "Running a Marathon at the Bowl," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1996, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-07-06/entertainment/ca-21502_1_hollywood-bowl

announced that it was “the antithesis of the mundane or traditional happening”;¹⁶ in a way, however, it was a return to tradition, as the informality of the concert recalled that of eighteenth and nineteenth century performances. The “Marathon Concert” format was replicated in 1973 with music composed by Mozart, in 1974 with Beethoven’s music, and again in 1975 Sant’Eufemia’s courtyard presented the “Bel Canto Marathon Concert” dedicated to Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini. From 1977 the “Marathon Concert” was abandoned in favor of the “Dance Marathons” that did not take place at Sant’Eufemia’s courtyard, but at the Teatro Romano (Roman Theater).

Non-Religious Venues

The Teatro Romano was one of the most important venues for the Festival of the Two Worlds. It was built in the first century A.D. and over the centuries gradually became buried under layers of dirt and soil. Historian and archeologist Giuseppe Sordini discovered it in 1891, excavation work commenced in 1938, stopped during the war, and resumed in 1954. Twenty years later, the Teatro Romano was once again used to host artistic performances. The environment in which the theater is placed today is fascinating for the heterogeneous elements that surround it; the apsis of the church of Sant’Agata behind the stage, the *portico* of the Monastery of Sant’Agata on the left, and the countryside of Spoleto behind the *cavea*, where the audience sits, add a scenic charm to the venue. However, the innovation of this space does not reside in itself. The employment of Roman theaters and amphitheaters for artistic performances in Italy was already in vogue between the 1920s and the 40s during the Fascist regime, with an intention to glorify Ancient Rome.¹⁷ The originality of the Teatro Romano in the Festival’s editions resides nonetheless in its use for ballet and for dance in general. Although the poor backstage and only two entrances on the stage make it difficult to organize a dance production, the dance performances that have taken place at the Teatro Romano were very successful. The first production in 1974 by the Ballet Company of Annie Beranger was followed in subsequent years by some of the most famous dance companies in the world, including the Washington Ballet and the Bolshoi of Moscow. As mentioned before, beginning in 1977 the “Dance Marathons” took place, which were similar to the “Marathon Concerts.” The length of the dance or the music marathons and the freedom to enter and exit them informally broke down the barriers of formality that separated the audience from the performance, and therefore helped situate the performances within the community. The Teatro Romano primarily held dance productions of all kinds, from classical to avant-garde, but it was not limited to this genre; in 1976, for example, it was utilized for the “Gershwin Celebration,” a concert dedicated to the American composer.

The history of the Teatrino delle Sei (6 O’Clock Theater), first called the Teatrino delle Sette (7 O’Clock Theater), is perhaps the most intriguing of the

¹⁶ Located in the concert program of the “Baroque Music Marathon Concert” of 1972, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

¹⁷ Nicoletti-Altinari, discussion.

performance spaces in Spoleto for it is not, in fact, a theater. It was originally the basement and storage space of one of the two opera theaters, the Teatro Caio Melisso. Before the Teatro Caio Melisso was built in the seventeenth century, the Teatrino delle Sei was the ground floor of an ancient Longobardic building; the architectural style thus is of that era. The transformation of this basement into a theater inspired similar venues all over Italy, in Rome, Milan, and Naples.¹⁸ The name of the theater refers to the time the productions were staged, 6:00 and 7:00 pm. What was once called Teatrino delle Sette, became Teatrino delle Sei in 1970, as performance time was moved back an hour; for a few select years after 1970 this venue changed its name to Teatrino delle Sette.

The Teatrino delle Sei is a dark, small but long and low ceilinged room that can host about one hundred people. Its small dimensions reflected the type of shows that were programmed there. The main focus of the venue was for Chamber Theater, in particular experimental and avant-garde productions or, as Summers asserts, “adventurous and unusual repertoire”.¹⁹ The venue was intended for repertoire that was more difficult to comprehend, thus attracting spectators with an “eccentric taste,” as Nicoletti-Altimari noted.²⁰

The Teatrino delle Sei was also a space that would encourage communication between the audience, creators, and performers. Mildred Dunnock, in an article for the Festival’s 1963 yearbook, argued that “[the Teatrino delle Sei] is a workshop, a theater in which performers, playwrights, and directors may communicate with each other and with the audience.” As for the content of the programs, Dunnock continues by saying that “the repertory has been selected from short pieces and one-act plays to make possible a kind of sampling from several sources.”²¹ The keyword for this performance space is thus “small,” for the nature of the theater, the audience, and the type of performances; the size of the venue undoubtedly accentuated the communication between parties of the performance.

The Teatrino delle Sei was utilized for the first time in 1963 for a mixture of drama, dance, and mime. Acts were directed by Mildred Dunnock, John Arthur Kennedy, and others; choreographed by Jerome Robbins; and pantomimed by the “Piccolo Teatro della Fonte Maggiore of Perugia.” As this first staging suggests, the Teatrino delle Sei was not limited to drama. In 1988 Spiros Argiris organized a concert featuring the “Rantos Collegium Chamber Orchestra.” From 1967 the Teatrino delle Sei started hosting the “Dance Concerts,” which also had an experimental and avant-garde nature. This small theater proved to be very versatile. Alberto Testa wrote in the concert program of the “Dance Concert” edition of 1970 that

following a modern tendency, some of these ballets use different elements that vary from acting to research towards visual arts, to the most advanced

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Michael Summers, discussion.

²⁰ Nicoletti-Altimari, discussion.

²¹ Located in the yearbook of 1963 edition of the Festival, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

systems of lighting, to the use of the most unthinkable materials. We are thus again in that form of ‘total theater,’ which is not only today’s aspiration.

Testa continues by specifying that the key element of the “Dance Concerts” is “tradition and renovation,” which reflects the contrast between the old location and the modern performances.²² It also recalls Moravia’s metaphor of the “new wine in old bottles,” as well as Menotti’s original idea of starting an innovative arts festival in an old, mostly medieval town like Spoleto. Indeed, the combination of tradition and innovation is a central concept behind the Festival of the Two Worlds.

Dunnock claimed that the inspiration for the *Teatrino delle Sei* came from the “Noontime Concerts” at the Teatro Caio Melisso, particularly the “relaxed, communicative, and satisfying atmosphere” that she hoped the *Teatrino delle Sei* would achieve as well.²³ Although the venue for the “Noontime Concerts” was not innovative, since they were held in a normal small opera theater, the time and nature of the concerts were. The decision of setting a concert at noon was determined by two objectives: to maintain an informal and relaxed nature of the concerts and to fill that portion of the day with a performance. Nicoletti-Altimari notes that, also thanks to the “Noontime Concerts,” there was a perpetual flow of performances each day of the Festival, fully immersing the spectators and community in art throughout the day.²⁴

The idea of the “Noontime Concerts” was to offer the public a short performance (no more than one hour) featuring young talented musicians, either in solo or in chamber formations. These concerts were performed daily at noon since 1961 and they presented an impromptu program. The content of the concerts would not be disclosed in the general program of the Festival, but it would be written on a chalkboard prior to the performance while the people were waiting in line to purchase tickets.²⁵ ²⁶ Summers recalls that once Menotti was walking in the Piazza del Duomo, the square in front of the Teatro Caio Melisso, when he encountered the Soviet pianist Sviatoslav Richter, who was in Spoleto for another performance. Menotti asked him if he would like to play at that day’s “Noontime Concert,” and the pianist accepted the invitation.²⁷ The most incredible aspect of the “Noontime Concerts” was that many of its performers were unknown at the time of their performances and today they are world-renowned talents. The spontaneity of the “Noontime Concerts” and the featuring of young and unknown talent contributed to the sense of an artistic community by abandoning formality in favor of playful extemporaneity.

²² Located in the “Dance Concert” program of 1970, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

²³ Located in the yearbook of 1963 edition of the Festival, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

²⁴ Nicoletti-Altimari, discussion.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Liana Di Marco, discussion.

²⁷ Summers, discussion.

Menotti particularly liked the Teatro Caio Melisso, both because it was small and because it was located in a pleasing environment. Being located in Piazza del Duomo, upon arriving at the theater the spectator would be delighted by the view of the façade of the Duomo and of the Rocca (Spoleto's fortress on top of the hill) in the background. The Piazza del Duomo is surrounded by the Duomo, the Teatro Caio Melisso, and a wall (where the ashes of Thomas Schippers are located); the fourth side proceeds on a long, uphill staircase composed of relatively lengthy and wide steps that terminate at the back of the Town Hall. The Piazza presents a mixture of styles, from the thirteenth century bell tower and façade to the Renaissance *portico*, and the seventeenth century theater to the Romanesque apsis of Sant'Eufemia.

Piazza del Duomo is famous for having hosted the "Final Concert" every year since the 1959 edition, which featured Verdi's Requiem Mass. Summers claims that it has never rained during a "Final Concert" of the Festival, joking that "it's almost a sign of the heavens giving their approval."²⁸ Though not designed for concerts, the Piazza del Duomo is a natural home for such performances. In the 1965 Festival yearbook Mario Rinaldi defines the square as a "masterpiece, loving silence and the sun and shaped in such a way that it seems to have been designed for listening to concerts—with its sloping auditorium and the backdrop of the façade—of religious music such as the Festival provides once a year." According to the author, the concert in Piazza del Duomo is composed of the actual music and the one provided by the swallows skimming the square. He continues "I seem to feel this peace at times, during certain static bars and *adagios*, when the swallows have finally given up their flying and the friendly sun has made a firm date for the next morning and departed."²⁹

The Piazza del Duomo, being an open space venue, needed additional acoustic engineering in order for it to have the necessary characteristics for a successful concert. For some years, a large "shell" surrounded the stage, following the project of Francesco Tozzi.³⁰ In later years, the "Final Concerts" were electronically amplified through various systems, such as the one developed by James Lock in 2001, consisting of a crane that supported a series of speakers right in the middle of the Piazza;³¹ although not the best solution from an aesthetic point of view, it was acoustically successful.

In addition to the "Final Concerts," Piazza del Duomo has hosted the "Inaugural Gala Concert," the "Firework Concert" (1988), and the "Dance Gala" (2003), and numerous other events. From 1996 Café Chantant played daily at the Piazza; the small chamber group performed Viennese repertoire while people dined at the "Tric Trac," a restaurant and café in the Piazza. In the past couple of decades, the Piazza del Duomo has also hosted "Spoleto Jazz." This space hosted many easy-going performances that were both memorable and informal enough to allow listeners to converse during the performance. Piazza del Duomo seems to be

²⁸ Summers, discussion.

²⁹ Located in the yearbook of the 1965 edition of the Festival, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

³⁰ Morichelli, discussion.

³¹ Parente, discussion.

particularly apt for this purpose; Ricci states that “this *piazza* [...] becomes the symbol of the type of environment that Spoleto makes possible in almost all of its public spaces [...]: the possibility to feel the contact with the neighbor, to be solicited to comment and compare.”³² This is particularly meaningful in Italy, where the *piazza* is perhaps the most important social emblem.

The Rocca is a dominating presence in the background of the Piazza del Duomo and it served as another performance space in the Festival. The Rocca was built in the second half of the fourteenth century for defensive purposes by Cardinal Albornozy under the supervision of the architect Gattaponi. After Italy’s unification in 1861, it was used as a State penitentiary until the 1980s. When the prisoners were transferred to a new penitentiary outside of Spoleto, a complete restoration of the old fortress began. During its first restoration in 1982 the Festival staged *Vigilanza Sorvegliata*, a play featuring prisoners from the Rebibbia penitentiary of Rome, perhaps symbolically showing the shift from a penitentiary to a newborn artistic monument. The first important performance in the Rocca was in 1983 with the play *L’ultimo sogno di Ballois Caria*, directed by its author Lelio Lecis. Since then, the Rocca has been mostly utilized for visual art exhibits, drama, and musical concerts.

The performances at the Rocca were always outdoors. The Rocca has two courtyards, the “Cortile delle armi” (Arms courtyard) and the “Cortile d’onore” (Noble courtyard). Being the space in which the army would assemble, the first one is very large. The second one is small, elegant, decorated, and intimate, with a small, ancient well in the middle. Menotti always preferred using the “Cortile d’onore” as it was acoustically and aesthetically more pleasing than the other one. Moreover, this choice is reflective of Menotti’s preference for smaller venues. Thomas Schippers stated that Menotti initially wanted to choose Todi for his festival because its smaller theater was more in line with Menotti’s vision for the performance of opera at the Festival.³³ Menotti was convinced that television changed people’s perception of live performances.³⁴ Because of television’s attention to detail and its various framings and close-ups, he felt that people had grown accustomed to a closer approach to a performance.³⁵ Although Menotti ultimately did not choose Todi for the location of his festival, he continued to favor smaller, more intimate venues, as his preference for the Cortile d’onore indicates.

In a 1962 exhibit titled “Sculptures in the City,” Giovanni Carandente displayed sculptures throughout the town of Spoleto, treating the whole town as an open-air gallery. Carandente’s idea was to “unite for the first time the ancient

³² Ricci, “Spoleto, una città-teatro,” 258.

³³ Gruen, *Gian Carlo Menotti*, 120.

³⁴ There is a strong link between Menotti and television. In 1951 he was commissioned by the NBC “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” the first opera ever written for television. Again for NBC, in 1963 he wrote “Labyrinth” which exploits the possibilities of special camera techniques.

Bruce Archibald and Jennifer Barnes, “Gian Carlo Menotti,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root <http://oxfordmusiconline.com> (Accessed 30 January 2013).

³⁵ Parente, discussion.

artistic work with the modern one [...] in the sublime urban plan of Spoleto.”³⁶ As for the location of the sculptures, they appeared “everywhere, against the iron and stone curtain walls, between houses, on terraces, in the squares, under the solemn vaults of the medieval arches, along the slopes of the Rocca.”³⁷ Many world-renowned artists had their works featured in this exhibit: Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Giacomo Manzù, and many others. Carandente placed sculptures in the most unexpected locations. Pietro Consagra’s work “Colloquio Spoletino,” for example, was situated at the top of a steep pedestrian alley way, connecting people’s everyday life with art. In the international artistic community, the reaction to this innovative idea was enormous: the *Observer* of London dedicated an insert to “Sculptures in the City,” *Das Schonste* of Munich featured a special photographic collection for this event, and the American magazine *Life International* published an article about it.³⁸ It was an example of how Menotti wanted to display visual arts in an unconventional way and it contributed to the holistic feeling that he wanted to create for the arts in Spoleto. By treating the whole town as an exhibit, people had a direct contact with art while conducting their daily tasks.

Venues Outside Spoleto

The Festival not only employed spaces within the walls of the ancient part of the town, but also other locations outside of the historical part of Spoleto. Villa Redenta was one location that caught Menotti’s attention. The seventeenth century villa, purchased by the Province of Perugia in 1973, is surrounded by a large garden that features local and exotic plants. The Festival utilized Villa Redenta for the first time in 1973 for the art exhibit of Orneore Metelli, a local artist. The villa has been used in subsequent years for other exhibits, such as the exposition “Costume Art in Luchino Visconti’s Films,” curated by Romolo Valli. The most important performance at Villa Redenta was *Risorgimento*, a play recalling the Italian Resurgence, the process of unification of Italy in the middle of the nineteenth century. *Risorgimento* was a processional play, as it was presented throughout the entire Villa Redenta complex, in the villa and in the garden. Nicoletti-Altimari points out that it was not a mere play, but a realistic reenactment of the Resurgence that included drama, battles, trumpet rings, and so on.³⁹ Like *Orlando Furioso* at San Nicolò, the staging of a processional show at Villa Redenta achieved the concept of artistic community; a performance where the audience walked towards the artists changed the perspective and the role of the audience itself.

The research for new spaces outside of the town was amplified starting in the year 1998 with “Musica nell’Umbria Segreta” (Music in the Secret Umbria [Umbria is the region in which Spoleto is located]). The name of the concert series indicated the

³⁶ Located in the yearbook of the 1962 edition of the Festival, included in the Festival Collection of the Public Library of Spoleto, Italy.

³⁷ Toscano and Morichelli. *La città e il Festival dei Due Mondi*, 59-60.

³⁸ Toscano and Morichelli. *La città e il Festival dei Due Mondi*, 59-60.

³⁹ Nicoletti-Altimari, discussion.

purpose of discovering the unknown treasures of Umbria. “Musica nell’Umbria Segreta” was the vision that Menotti’s son Francis designed. It consisted of staging small chamber concerts in old churches around Spoleto, usually not more than a one-hour drive from the town. Umbria is considered the “green heart of Italy,” because of its forests and nature. Spoleto is located right next to the Valnerina, a mountainous green valley rich in small, ancient villages, which usually have one or more Romanesque churches. Most of the “Musica nell’Umbria Segreta” concerts occurred in Valnerina.

The concerts were limited to about fifty audience members, as it was the number that would fit on a tour bus. In the first editions, when an audience member purchased a ticket, he or she would not know the works that would be performed, the ensemble that would perform the works, or the location of the performance. The spectator discovered everything only when he or she got to the destination.⁴⁰ The ticket also included a buffet immediately after the concert, so once it was finished the spectators would eat local delicacies before having some time to explore the village. With one ticket, the audience would have the opportunity to listen to a quality musical concert (musicians of the caliber of Jennifer Koh performed for this concert series), visit a nearly unknown authentic Umbrian village, taste its local food, and be immersed in nature. “Musica nell’Umbria Segreta” was a concert series that mostly appealed to international visitors, as they had the opportunity to discover the genuineness of Italian villages through it. Although these performances did not occur in Spoleto, the concept of artistic community was once again achieved; the audience fully experienced the life of rural Umbria.

The organization of “Musica nell’Umbria Segreta” was not always simple. There were often logistical and acoustic considerations that interfered with the choice of a specific venue. Summers recalls that the repertoire needed to match the logistics of the church. For instance, for a concert at San Pietro in Valle it was possible to bring a piano, but for other churches it was necessary to organize a string chamber formation because of the impossibility of bringing in large instruments.⁴¹ In other instances, management wished to utilize specific spaces for their aesthetic charm but they were rejected by the artistic director because of poor acoustics. The choice of the venues was a balancing act between the wishes of the marketing office and the artistic office of the Festival.⁴² The aesthetic outcome was sometimes built on purpose. Parente, for instance, reveals an anecdote about one concert of “Musica nell’Umbria Segreta.” While doing a preliminary inspection a few months before the Festival at the church of Sant’Andrea in Campi Alto, Menotti and his staff met a shepherd with his sheep right outside of the church. Menotti then hired the shepherd to appear next to the church on the day of the concert, in order to provide the bucolic setting that spontaneously manifested itself to Menotti’s eyes on that day.⁴³

⁴⁰ Summers, discussion.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Parente, discussion.

⁴³ Ibid.

Spoletto thanks to the Festival became a theater-town, through the innumerable performance spaces that were discovered and created and through the artistic community that the Festival produced. This paper has investigated only the most important unconventional venues, but it is worth mentioning some of the others: the courthouse for oratorical shows; the town stadium for “Zingaro Eclipse” in 1999, a show featuring elaborate horse choreography and stunts; many of the historical palaces for art exhibits, such as Palazzo Collicola, Palazzo Ancaiani, Palazzo Leti-Sansi, and Palazzo Arroni; the courtyard of the Seminary for musical and dance performances; and many of the squares of the town for all sorts of shows, such as Piazza del Mercato, Piazza Garibaldi, and Piazza della Libertà. Some of the venues were improvised. Joseph Flummerfelt, who conducted the Westminster Choir for many editions of the Festival, loved to perform impromptu concerts throughout the town, such as in the *portico* of the Duomo.^{44 45} Musicians in general, not only the Westminster Choir, would practice on the streets, creating a constant harmonious background of sound all over the town.

Over decades the whole town of Spoleto became a performance space, beginning with the pressure Menotti put on the local administrators before the Festival even began. Menotti advanced the proposal to modify the town’s public lighting, from generic street lamps to more “artistic” lanterns, as Morichelli recalls.⁴⁶ The journalist also states that the Teatro Caio Melisso was restored thanks both to the composer’s insistence and his personal finances. Already from the first edition of 1958, all the medieval storefronts in Via dei Duchi were renovated and transformed into boutiques and shops; this enhanced the traditional element in the Piazza del Mercato area with characteristic art galleries, antique shops, and ceramic and haute couture boutiques. Via dei Duchi was not the only street that was involved in this process of renovation; art galleries owned by the artists themselves started to appear all over the town, following the example of Bizzarri, a local artist.⁴⁷

The process of renovation of Spoleto towards its authentic period style attracted both tourists and performers. Summers claims that artists were enticed to come to Spoleto not only because of the prestige that the Festival had garnered, but also for their eagerness to perform where art had been made.⁴⁸ In other words, artists from all over the world came to the Festival to perform and they acknowledged that Italy was the cradle of Western civilization. Spoleto, with its vastness of styles and with its impression of returning to the past, was a very inspiring town to feel the art that the artists were performing or displaying.

The renovation of Spoleto fulfilled Menotti’s intention to create an artistic community. When visitors arrived to the town it was as if they were stepping into a foyer that would lead them to various individual venues. Parente claims that

⁴⁴ Di Marco, discussion.

⁴⁵ Summers, discussion.

⁴⁶ Morichelli, discussion.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Summers, discussion.

walking along the streets of Spoleto before a performance was an opportunity to meet important people. In particular, he recalls a businessman from New York City who was nearly unreachable by appointment in his professional domicile, but businessmen would come to Spoleto to have the chance to have a quick talk with him about particular deals.⁴⁹ On this matter, Nicoletti-Altimari uses the analogy of a “salon with many rooms” in describing the nature of Spoleto during the Festival.⁵⁰ This aspect of Spoleto was crucial for the Festival’s private fundraising. The sponsors, in fact, did not only contribute to the Festival to advance and display their company logo on the Festival’s programs, but also to make important business acquaintances before and after performances, such as during the elegant parties that the Festival organized for the sponsors and the authorities.⁵¹

Although he considers his music very good, Summers points out that the Festival was Menotti’s most magnificent creation. The greatest quality that he recognizes in him is his ability as a director. Even composers that criticized Menotti’s music, such as Stravinsky, recognized his great talent as a director. Stravinsky, in fact, hired Menotti to be the director for the European premiere of “The Rake’s Progress.”⁵² Summers, however, does not only identify Menotti’s ability to be a superb director for theater productions. He also recognizes it in its broader sense, as a successful organizer and director of the arts in general, highlighting his ability to envision the big picture and find the right artistic solution at the appropriate time and location. The Festival of the Two Worlds in Spoleto exactly reflects this quality. Menotti’s objective to create the first arts festival in the world that included nearly all the arts is the demonstration of the artwork of a great director, in its broader sense.

The uniqueness of the Festival resided in Menotti’s primary objective: to create an artistic community. There are many elements that contributed towards this: the employment of performance spaces that belonged to the everyday life of a town, such as churches and *piazze*, emblems of Italian social life; the professional involvement of local workers for the achievement of the performances; the architectural renovation of the town; the creation of a high-society and socialite salon; and the presence of first class artists. Ricci believes that “the importance of the Festival of the Two Worlds does not rely much on the quality of the performances—albeit excellent—rather it relies on the fact of having discovered the polyvalence of some messages that come from the most intimate soul of Spoleto and of having instituted a full relationship of exchange between preexistence and avant-garde display.”⁵³ The most innovative venue, then, was the whole town, with its magical combination of old and new.

⁴⁹ Parente, discussion.

⁵⁰ Nicoletti-Altimari, discussion.

⁵¹ Parente, discussion.

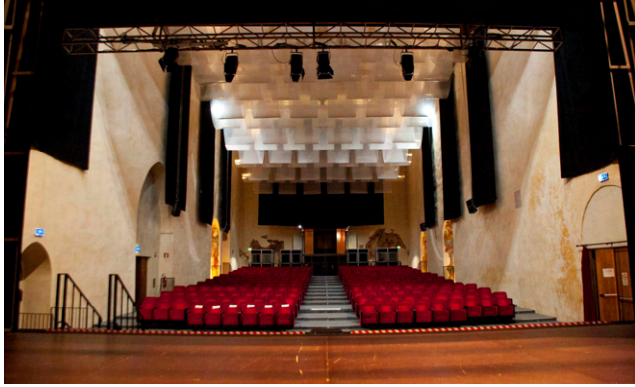
⁵² Summers, discussion.

⁵³ Ricci, “Spoleto, una città-teatro,” 258.

Venues in Spoleto

Pictures made available by the City of Spoleto





*The deconsecrated church
of San Nicolò
and its cloister*





Teatro Romano



Teatrino delle Sei



Piazza del Duomo





The Duomo



Sala Frau



The Rocca and its Cortile d'onore





Sant'Eufemia



Santa Maria della Piaggia



San Domenico



San Filippo



"Teodelapio" by Alexander Calder, one of the most representative works of "Sculptures in the City" of 1962



Villa Redenta and its garden



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