

The Irreplaceable Mister B, the (Sur)real Obsession of Being Irreplaceable

Natasha Lardera (August 17, 2013)



The Irreplaceable Mister B, the original play written by Sicilian journalist and writer Paolo Tartamella was selected to compete at the Thespi Theater Festival, produced by the Cabrini Theater of Washington Heights. It is the story of a successful Wall Street executive who dumps his lofty life just to be rejected by all those who surround him.

Mister B is a middle age, wealthy and successful Wall Street executive. He is obsessed by the desire of being irreplaceable. When he is offered a promotion he has time to think and he quits his job hoping to have more time. But his choice is not a success with those surrounding him. He is rejected by his son, wife, parents, lover, gardener and baseball team. In order to escape this painful realization, Mister B seeks the advice of a landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, who died a century earlier. And after his failure, he embraces a drastic change.

In a few words we have recapped the story of The Irreplaceable Mister B, an original play written by Sicilian journalist and writer Paolo Tartamella. The play was selected to compete at the [Thespi](#)



[Theater Festival](#) [2], produced by the [Cabrini Theater](#) [3] of Washington Heights. The winner will be announced this coming September. The Thespis Theater Festival/Competition is organized to help bring never-before seen work of playwrights, directors and actors to the stage in a way that may lead to future performances.

I-Italy had a chance to ask Tartamella a few questions.

How was your passion for the theater born and what brought you to write a surreal story?

Before moving to New York I took a creative writing class taught by Italian author Alessandro Baricco in Torino. It was about 18 years ago. Those were six exciting months, I was on a leave of absence and I had the chance to write and read as never before. I was inspired to write for the theater by reading Dürrenmatt and Beckett. Actually us Sicilians are a bit uninterested in reality because we consider it totally ineluctable. We make fun of our fantasies and believe that each and every goal is basically unachievable. I have thought of characters able to enter and exit reality at will, characters who go beyond their historical time. I actually have already experimented with these themes in a previous piece based on the stories of Pugliese immigrants living in Stalin's Russia. Yet in Mister B I have finally put together unlikely characters in an unlikely reality.

What has inspired you to write the story of Mr. B?

As newborns, my kids, while trying to stay afloat in a swimming pool, would hold on to me afraid of going underwater. I felt a gratifying paternal power. Then they learned how to swim and it proved to me that I would be soon substituted. I thought of a story of a man who would not accept this sort of thing, a man who would dedicate his life to being irreplaceable. That was the starting point, then Mister B evolved: he incorporates my discomfort towards the typical New York attitude to make tons of money, to feel complete only when making a fortune. I don't make much money and I am not interested in my financial productivity, but this does not bother me. Mister B was, in a way, my chance at revenge; we actually spent a few bucks to put it up, we just bought the lamps we use on stage. Let me just add that the recession and the attacks of September 11 helped New York leave behind a materialistic view of life.

Many of the characters of the play are male but the cast is all women, how is that?

I had a hard time finding a director who would work with zero budget. Then I met Clare Hammoore, a young assistant at NYU, just a month before opening night. He suggested an all women cast to stress the surrealism of the text. Indeed five of the eight characters in the play are male, including the main character. Clare has always worked with actresses so it was also a practical choice. The show has strengths and weaknesses and that of choosing actresses to play male characters is definitely one of its strengths.

Tell us about the character of Frederick Law Olmsted?

I read Frederick Law Olmsted's biography when I lived in the Prospect Park area, that's the park Olmsted designed right after Central Park. I was so taken by the serenity that park oozes with. I cannot find that in Central Park, even though it's ten years I live just a block away from it. Olmsted believed a park helps achieve social equality and that if someone poor was looking for serenity of spirit he would find it in a public park. He spent his life without ever compromising; for example, he left the Central Park project when they tried to impose on him the construction of some buildings that, according to him, would have altered the bucolic vision of the park. It was a concept he had to deal with, years later, when working on Prospect Park. He was a journalist and the manager of a gold mine. He did not work for money, he was an illuminato. I chose him because he is the right man to suggest Mister B the right way to become really irreplaceable.

Production details: Paolo Tartamella (writer); Clare Hammor (director), Christine Nyland (Gardener), Emily Kugel (Mister B), Jamie Law (Baseball Manager), Lauren Durdach (Wife), Karah Gravatt (Mistress), Joyana Feller (Frederick), Rachel Smith-Weinstein (Son), Ashley Lauren Hamilton (Mother).



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Links

[1] <http://108.61.128.93/files/cast1376761230jpg>

[2] <http://thespisnytheaterfestival.com/>

[3] <http://cabrinireptheater.com/mission-statement/>