



Castelsardo, photo J-F. Favreau

voicEncounters

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The Phenomenon of Latin Confraternities, a model of ideal society

In the years 2006-2009, Teatr ZAR led several research expeditions to the islands of Corsica and Sardinia, focused around polyphonic singing. During this experience, we came close to some people and groups, and understood then that singing is only the visible side of a much wider human phenomenon. Among them were some lay societies centered around the life of villages or churches and devoted to a spiritual and social role: the confraternities.

Latin confraternities, rooted in the Middle Ages, developed greatly during the Counter-Reformation in reaction to the rise of Protestant values. Fundamental to their identity are all forms of representation (performance, iconography etc...) as well as the culture of pain: the anonymous penitent brother wearing the traditional hood during demanding ceremonies embodies the spiritual role of **the painful and the faithful**.

The brotherhoods of penitents often appear protected behind symbols and rites – the hood, Latin language, an esoteric iconography, the cross and the penitent's rope – the images of the Passion. Their home place is the church yard or the confraternity's chapel – on the very doorstep between the church and society. Their function concerns ethics, mediation, education, welfare, defense of the local culture and prayer. They are the spiritual guardians of their communities and culture as well as laboratories of democracy and common life.

Singing appears as one of the ways to reach their aims, as well as a metaphor of them all. It is a vehicle through which gathering and sharing takes place, social links are getting (re)created, as well as for prayer and rejoicing, transmitting the tradition to the youth and accompanying the dead. The oral transmission of singing is built in a traditional way on personal initiative and challenges, and differs from the model of teaching. It takes place on specific sacred or festive occasions (ceremonies, funerals, feasts, singing competitions) when it is possible to listen, learn and join in the singing. This model inspired our first voicEncounters. We would like to evoke this phenomenon here in Wrocław by creating a space and time to make this experience possible, and by offering a chance, for those who want, to gather, sing, discuss, rejoice or meditate in their own way.

This phenomenon of confraternities will give us a focus and reference point, both as the theme and the mode of the first **voicEncounters**.

Our first impulse was to **gather in Wrocław** the precious people we had the privilege to meet in Bastia and Castelsardo on the basis of their incredible common experience of the voice and their human warmth.

During 4 days of meeting, singing, speaking and feasting, we want to create, together with our guests, a working group including singers, actors, musicologists as well as anthropologists and philosophers. These meetings will be structured around two poles of the traditional culture: **the church and the table**.

Having had with Teatr ZAR the experience of taking part in the Holy Week ceremonies in Corsica and Sardinia, we decided to mirror some elements of this phenomenon in Wrocław.

In a church, we would like to share with the Corsican confraternity di a Pieve di a Sera an echo of the “**ceremony of darkness**” (Good Thursday ritual), and focus on the time of the Holy Week. One week after the Day of the Dead, we also want to share with the confraternity of Castelsardo a **meditation for this year’s dead**, and to bring all of us to take part in an open **Sunday mass**, sung in alternance by the two guest groups and the voicEncounters’ participants.

We will also gather for a **festive dinner and lunch** around the table, which is the best way for songs to happen and be shared.

As well as this, **round table discussions** will be held every day, dedicated to aspects of the confraternities in Corsica and Sardinia. The gradual development of the voicEncounters towards a **pole of resources** hosted by the Grotowski Institute will then offer individuals and groups the opportunity to continue their quest using archive materials.

We also want to give a place at the table to the Museum of Corsica, which recently dedicated an exhibition to the phenomenon of Corsican confraternities, and welcome among us two researchers from Corte to aid our search and present some rare materials.

To welcome and host our Mediterranean guests, we will be glad to have with us members of two contemporary lay societies from Poland: the Schola Gregoriana Silesiensis and Schola Wegajty, who we have invited to join our work and voices.

While the working languages of these encounters will be English, Polish, Italian and French, **the Latin language is the core**, the secret thread connecting Poland and the Mediterranean Sea, Gregorian and traditional singing, the contemporary world and antiquity.

Accomplishing with our guests some aspects of liturgy and evoking under their guidance moments of their annual ceremonies, we hope that the first **voicEncounters** will bring to life some aspects of the incredibly rich spiritual heritage of confraternities, and let us taste in practice what the core of the brotherhood model could consist of.

Jean-François Favreau, with Teatr ZAR