

Angels of Peace

The heart of children: a bridge of peace between nations

Torino, Italy, May 2016



By Maria Gabriella Mieli

The Angels of Peace are an ensemble of children born inside the Women's Federation for World Peace Russia. Founded in 2008 by Olga Vakulinskaya, together with a group of mothers, members of the federation, it has grown thanks to the determination and dedication of these women, who have been investing time and resources for its development. The idea is to form in the children who participate a spirit of attention to others that is translated into a real service to society; all that in the light of the WFWP mission that develops projects for peace, moral and family education and solidarity initiatives. With the spirit of breaking down barriers and fostering reconciliation, the Angels of Peace have led "bridges of peace" ceremonies between Russia and Georgia, Russia and Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. With the desire to bring joy to those who suffer, they organize shows for children and adults with disabilities, the elderly and war veterans. In 2012 they received the gold medal at an international festival

in South Korea and joined in an artistic Bridge of Peace with the "Little Angels", the famous ensemble of Korean children, performing both for each other at their prestigious school. The performances of the "Angels of Peace" gather the sounds and colors of the great Russian tradition with its dances, from Caucasian to that of the Tatars, the scarf dance, its folk songs and the notes of popular songs in the world as Katyusha and Moscow nights.

The "Angels of Peace" in Piedmont: 10 days of maximum effort, fun and great love and respect for Italy

There were various aims in bringing the Angels of Peace in Italy. First, to reaffirm the historical brotherhood between the people of Russia and Italy, letting song and dance, a common language to all cultures, touch people's hearts through the purity of children: a



unique way to break down barriers, build bridges and bring peace. In addition, we wanted to meet the ensemble with the Italian children and young people eager to learn about the roots of different traditions going beyond cultural and language barriers. Not least, to Italy to show the beauty of the Russian culture and traditions. Too often in recent years Russia's image given by the media was that of a military and economic power, neglecting to make known the beauty of the heart of the Russian people. The two sponsoring organizations of the initiative have given valuable opportunities to children and young Russians and Italians and their families to meet and go beyond cultural exchange to build peace through art, but also to be in peace by engaging together for the sake of others.

Turin and its valleys

The Angels of Peace visited Turin and its surroundings from 26 April to 6 may: 18 young people between 10 and 15 years (13 girls and 5 boys) led by 10 leaders, mothers and fathers, including the founder and artistic director, Olga Vakulinskaya, president of WFWP Russia, and the director of the choir, Liubov Smirnova.



Olga Vakulinskaya and Liubov Smirnova



Sergio Coscia and M. Gabriella Mieli

The organizers of the Italian tour were Maria Gabriella Mieli of WFWP Turin and Italy and Sergio Coscia of UPF Turin: both WFWP Int. and UPF Int. are NGOs at the United Nations. To support the project with great enthusiasm we were assisted by other local associations, including the FFWPU (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification), which many volunteers hosted the children in their

homes, and the Italo-Russian Cultural Association "E Ora?!" (And Now?!) which helped in accompanying and took the lead in guiding the tours around several museums. Kate Veshkina, the president, also collaborated in co-presenting the shows.



Kate Veshkina and Sergio Coscia



Nina (right side) Tour guide and member of "E Ora"

A heartfelt thanks goes also to the sponsors, among whom we would like to remember the owners of the restaurants "Alla Portata" (Alessandro), "Sovietniko" (Giovanna), "Sol Levante Fusion" (Mr. Yan) and the herbalist's shop "Gino San" (Luigi Ventura).



The restaurants

Rich and intense, not only in activities, but also emotions, the stay of the Angels of Peace in Turin and the Susa Valley; all the guests were hosted in various families and in this way both young people and adults were able to experience the warmth and embrace of the Italian people. In particular, the younger ones, in their reflections, expressed their gratitude for having felt "at home".

Three performances of traditional songs and dances were matched to the same number of solidarity actions in the territory.

At Bruzolo, in the Susa Valley, thanks to the collaboration of the Municipality, we would like to especially thank the Mayor Chiara Borgis, the Councillor Mauro Bergamaschi and the Pro Loco: funds were raised and donated to a fund in support of the weaker sections of the city. For the show a large gym was made available where the Angels of Peace made their debut in Italy. Local families also offered dinner to all the participants.



Chiara Borgis (Mayor), Olga, Gabriella



In front of Bruzolo's audience

The second show was held at the Teatro Murialdo in Turin to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Parish of "Nostra Signora della Salute" (Our Lady of Health). With the parish priest, Father Augustine, it was decided to donate the funds collected for needy families who attend the parish.



Don Agostino and the theatre's staff



The show from the audience

The third show was organized at “Casa del Teatro Ragazzi e Giovani” (House of Children and Youth Theatre) granted by the City of Turin. The funds were collected for Casa UGI (Italian Parents’ Union against children’s Cancer) an excellent facility that houses children in cancer treatment and their families, from all over the world.



With Dr. Armocida (left) and Dr. Marceddu

association was founded in 1925 in this beautiful historical building where we organized an artistic bridge of peace between the Angels and the Giacomette, the folk group of girls dressed with the typical costumes of the florist ladies of 18th century. The Giacomette performed for the Angels the traditional “Monferrina” At the end of the show the Famija Turinèisa offered everybody the typical “Merenda Sinoira”.



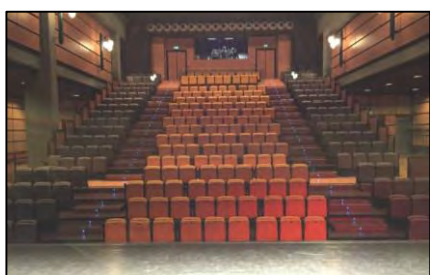
The arrival at the theatre



Dr. Giovanni M. Ferraris (Piedmont Region)



Gianduja, Giacometta and the Giacomette



The big hall

At Palazzo Lascaris, the headquarters of the Piedmont Regional Council there was a very intense and exciting meeting with the President of the Regional Council, Dr. Mauro Laus, and his spokeswoman, Dr. Maria Grazia Grippo. President Laus shook hands with all the components of the group taking interest in their activities and in the projects of WFPW and UPF, then asking for a small exhibition. At that point the Angels offered Russian songs followed by the Italian Anthem to the great surprise of the President who was particularly moved by this.



Daniela Piazza, Gabriella and the Angels

The Angels of Peace were also received by the Institutions. At “Palazzo di Città” headquarters of the Municipality of Turin, they met Dr. Giovanni Giovannetti, the Mayor’s spokesman, and International Affairs, Cooperation and Peace staff with the director, Dr. Fortunata Armocida, her collaborators, Dr. Francesca Marceddu and Dr. Maria Bottiglieri, together with a Councilor of Piedmont Region, Dr. Giovanni M. Ferraris. Here the Angels, who were welcomed in the Hall of Columns, performed their repertoire of Russian Folk songs.

Another significant meeting was held at the headquarters of “Famija Turinèisa”. The president, Daniela Piazza, together with Gianduja and Giacometta, the historical Turin masks, welcomed the Angels of Peace. This

Among the different services the Municipality of Turin offered was a walking tour of the city including a visit to the National Cinema Museum and the Mole Antonelliana. In addition there was a tour of the National Automobile Museum: here the group had fun taking photos near the carriages, the prestigious Italian cars of



The Angels in Sala delle Colonne



Dr. Giovanni Giovannetti with Gabriella and Olga



last century as well as Ferrari and several race cars.

Dr. Guido Curto, Director of the Museum of Palazzo Madama offered a guided tour of the Museum which is currently hosting 70 masterpieces from the Ermitage Museum of St. Petersburg.



Palazzo Madama



Masterpieces from Ermitage

But what touched people the most in this experience was the intercultural and educational encounter. The prayer with the catholic priest of Nostra Signora della Salute and the meeting with Father Ambrogio from the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate were memorable as well as the visit to the Synagogue of Turin ended with a moving prayer hand in hand offered by Olga in Russian, Ruth in Hebrew and M. Gabriella in Italian.



Don Agostino's prayer



Padre Ambrogio (left)



Prayer in the Synagogue

What involved the children more was the meeting at the schools: three beautiful opportunities. The first was at the Russian school Azbuka (sincere thanks to Larissa Terzago, Director of the school and in charge of the Russian Community in Turin, who organized the morning) where the children of Italian-Russian families meet weekly to study Russian. Here the Angels of Peace, divided into groups according to their age, were included in the different classes and interacted with their Italian peers speaking in Russian; at the end, they all met in the Great Hall for the show: the Italian children offered the anthem of the Russian school and a pleasant scene, while the Angels performed their traditional repertoire. The audience was composed of many children and their parents fascinated and moved by the show.



In the classroom



Welcoming the Angels of Peace



The Angels' performance



The Principal Dr. Larissa Terzago with Olga

The second meeting was held at the Middle School Matteotti of Turin. Particularly important was the support of the deputy Claudia Bocca with the gymnastics teacher, Angela Baratta, who organized a wonderful day. After the musical entertainment offered by some Italian students, the Angels of Peace played in the schoolyard, where more than 400 children attended. The mothers of the students of Class 1C prepared and offered lunch, and in the afternoon the Italian pupils accompanied the Russian boys in an orienteering trail in the park of the school. The Matteotti Institute, two years ago, won the national first prize in this discipline. After other games together and interviews for the school newspaper, the leaders of the Italian and Russian WFP started the Bridge of Peace ceremony, involving children, parents and teachers and thrilling all.



Welcoming the Angels of Peace



Vice Principal Dr. Claudia Bocca (left)



Singing the Italian Anthem together



The Angels, the teachers and the class IC

The last meeting was held at the Jewish school Artom - Colonna and Finzi, thanks to the collaboration of Carola Ovazza of the Jewish Community and the Headmaster of the school. The Italian children met the Angels of Peace offering songs of the Jewish tradition, listening to the songs of the Russian tradition, singing along with the Italian National Anthem, requiring the Russian National Anthem and offering the Israeli National Anthem. At the end of the show, which was attended by about 150 children, WFWP organized another ceremony: a bridge of peace between the Russian children and those Italian-Jews, which touched everyone. In total over 1200 people attended the shows of the Angels of Peace in this intense Piedmont program.

Special thanks to the Piedmont institutions involved in the project and to all the associations and the people who supported us by giving their patronage and participating in performances: especially Aurelio Albanese (Sportello del malato),



Carola Ovazza and the Principal of the School



Singing together

Barbara Cervetti, Councilor for Culture and Youth Policy of the Metropolitan City and Daniela Ruffini, Vice President of the Regional Council of Piedmont.



The three bridges of peace

In the distant past, Italy and Russia were on opposite sides ... The Angels of Peace, with their pure heart and beautiful children who think and see only Peace, helped build a beautiful bridge of peace between our nations. Thank you, Angels, you have left a deep imprint in our hearts.