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## The Second Coming of Joan of Arc

 [Lucy Ashe \(https://playstosee.com/author/lucyashe/\)](https://playstosee.com/author/lucyashe/) © 13/05/2024

### THE SECOND COMING OF JOAN OF ARC

5



Reviewer's Rating

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**B**ringing the In Scena! Italian Theater Festival to a close is *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc* (or *Giovanna D'Arco – La rivolta*), an outstanding play performed with thrilling charisma by Valentina Valsania. While the story of Joan of Arc may be familiar, Carolyn Gage's feminist retelling exposes a grittier, darker, angrier truth. This is a story still relevant today, a tale of a young woman seeking a better version of a world run by men, only to be punished for daring to venture away from the rules.

Performed in a stark white box theater and surrounded by strobe lights, Giovanna paces her space like a creature trapped in a cage. Before the play even begins, we get the sense of a woman who knows she is right, a woman who refuses to be confined. She tells us her story – a teenager who led an army only to be abandoned by her countrymen and labelled a heretic. And for what reasons: because she is female, she wears men's clothes, she listens to her voices and, most dangerously, she believes those voices.

Valsania is mesmerising throughout. Moving with agility and power, she performs as much with her body as with her words. For, of course, it was Giovanna's body that caused so much of her pain. She was terrified of puberty, of what would happen when her body was no longer her own, her privacy destroyed, dresses expected. Giovanna learnt that she could starve herself and puberty wouldn't come: when she was killed, aged nineteen, she had not started menstruating. Clothes are also important to her. She hates the red dress that seems to speak for her, presenting her as impractical, slow, weak, easily touched and possessed. It is when she wears men's clothes (protecting herself with multiple buttons and ties), or 'human clothes' as she calls them, that she finds her power and her self-belief.

The energy of the production never wavers. The passion in the script and in the performance, directed with imaginative and creative care by Ester Tatangelo and Luchino Giordana, is addictive. Giovanna is a rebel and she believes in herself. These two characteristics in a woman are, according to male authority figures, highly dangerous. If only women had the courage to believe in their instincts, their desires, themselves. Instead, Giovanna tells us, we search for permission to feel what we feel, permission that men will only give us if it suits their agenda. For men, the bishops, judges, guards, soldiers, the leaders of the Church, state, and army, need to feel in control, and they will do anything to keep women in their place.

*The Second Coming of Joan of Arc* crackles with wit and anger. Giovanna's trial was quickly moved from the packed public court room to her tiny cell, just a few officials in attendance, for the simple reason that she was too clever. The judge did not like her wit, her intelligence, the way she responded to his idiotic questions. Within this harrowing tale, Giovanna keeps asking us a question: how do you torture a woman? Her words are powerful – 'Every woman who's ashamed of her body is a victim of torture. Every woman who doubts her own judgement is a victim of torture.'

This is the message of the play, a message just as relevant for women today as in the thirteenth century. Joan of Arc, or Jeanne Romée as she was really called, inspires women to stop seeking permission. Instead, she tells us, listen to your voice.

Written by Carolyn Gage, Translated by Edy Quaggio

Directed by Ester Tatangelo and Luchino Giordana

Performed by Valentina Valsania

Assistant Director Giulia Cosentino, Music by Arturo Annecchino

Lighting Designer Diego Laboni

Set Design by Francesco Ghisu

Costume Design by Ilaria Capanna

Produced by Hermit Crab Production

May 12, 2024

Running time: 75 minutes

Theaterlab, NYC (<https://theaterlabnyc.com/>)



Lucy Ashe

(<https://playstosee.com/author/lucyashe/>)

→ Editor &  
Reviewer  
(USA)

Lucy Ashe trained at the Royal Ballet School before moving to Oxford University to study English Literature. She is an author and her first novel, a historical fiction thriller entitled 'Clara & Olivia', was published in 2023, with her second novel, 'The Sleeping Beauties' published in 2024. She lives in New York City and she enjoys reviewing all theatre with particular interest in dance.

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