



# VNY *La Voce di New York*

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## Entertainment

February 5, 2023

# As 100th Birth Anniversary of Zeffirelli Approaches, the World Celebrates Him

Here are some of the commemorations, exhibitions and performances in Florence, Italy and elsewhere



*Italian Hours*

Lucy Gordan



*Franco Zeffirelli in Florence.*

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Stage and film director, producer, set designer, painter, wartime partisan, politician, and gourmet chef Gian Franco Corsi Zeffirelli was one of the world's most significant opera and theater directors during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly renowned for his lavish stage sets and film adaptations of Christian biblical stories and literary—especially British—works, he was born in the outskirts of Florence on February 12, 1923 after an affair between Florentine Alaide Garosi, a fashion designer, and Ottorino Corsi, a wool and silk dealer from Vinci and descendant of Leonardo da Vinci. Since both were married to others, Alaide couldn't transmit her surname or Corsi's to Franco. She chose instead "Zeffereetti", meaning "little breezes" mentioned in her favorite opera, Mozart's *Idomeneo*. Misspelt in the municipal birth register, it became Zeffirelli.



Fondazione Zeffirelli.

To commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of its world-famous citizen, his beloved Florence has organized many events. These actually will begin a day early, on the 11th, at the *Maggio Musicale Fiorentino* with a symposium entitled *E per castelli in aria—Franco Zeffirelli a cento anni dalla nascita*, during which scholars and colleagues will talk about the various phases of the *maestro*'s career and passions like his anglophilism, his deep religious faith, love of opera and Maria Callas' voice, cooking, painting and literature, especially Shakespeare. A guided tour of the Historical Archive of the *Maggio Musicale Fiorentino* theater, which houses many of Zeffirelli's preparatory works, will end the day.

The birthday morning ceremonies will begin at 9:30 with a benediction at his tomb in the cemetery of Porte Sante (Collodi, the author of *Pinocchio*, is also buried here; tours are available also in English during spring and summer). Soon-to-follow at 10 the mayor, Dario Nardella, will name a section of the *Belvedere* under the *Piazziale Michelangelo* for the *maestro*, who left the majority of his estate to Florence.

Immediately afterwards the *Frecce Tricolori*, Italy's world-famous acrobatic pilots, will fly over the city. In the afternoon Italy's Post Office is issuing a cancellation and a commemorative stamp, and at 3 PM a Zeffirelli-themed stamp exhibition, *Franco Zeffirelli tra arte, fede e politica* will open at the *Fondazione Zeffirelli*, *Piazza di S. Firenze 5*, just behind *Piazza della Signoria* open Tuesday-Sunday, 10 AM-6 PM, Closed Monday. The day's commemoration will end with a concert at 5 PM also at the *Fondazione*. All the events are open to the public; reservations required.





Zeffirelli's Bar, Tea Room and Restaurant

The Florentine commemorations will end on February 14 with a performance also at the *Fondazione* by the tenor Massimo Giordano. The proceeds will be donated to Florence's *Ospedale Pediatrico Meyer*.

Other commemorations in Italy will include musical performances and exhibitions: 8 performances of Zeffirelli's 1963 production of *La Bohème* between March 4 and 26 at *La Scala*; 4 performances between February 12 and 19 at Verona's *Teatro Filarmonica* of *Aida*, produced by Zeffirelli for Busseto's *Teatro Verdi* in 2001; and his 2005 *Pagliacci* at Parma's *Teatro Regio* in April.

The exhibitions will be: *Zeffirelli al Teatro dell'Opera* opening in Rome on March 12; *Zeffirelli all'Opera*, also in March, at San Daniele del Friuli's *Palazzo Monte di Pietà* and in June at Vieste's *Castel Svevo*. Still in preparation is a documentary about Zeffirelli's collaboration with Eduardo de Filippo to be held at the *Fondazione de Filippo* in Naples.


Outside Italy: 7 performances of Zeffirelli's 1998 production of *Aida* at Tokyo's New National Theater, but no dates are as yet available; also with no specific dates, an exhibition about his movie *Gesù di Nazareth* at Ribat di Monastir in Tunisia where the movie was filmed; and still under negotiations, performances at the Metropolitan Opera of *La Bohème* and an exhibition of Zeffirelli's paintings (watercolors, pastels, and oil) of his opera sets. Contemporarily *La Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò*, in collaboration with NYU, will organize a retrospective of Zeffirelli's films.




Museo Zeffirelli

To learn more about Zeffirelli's life view, his semi-autobiographical film *Tea with Mussolini* (1999) and read his autobiography, *Zeffirelli*, first published in 1986 and updated in 2006, as well as **Grace Russo Bullaro's** *Franco Zeffirelli: Director of World Fame and Italian Aesthetic Sensibility, Dies at 96*, published in *La Voce*, the same day Zeffirelli died on June 15, 2019.

However, if you want to see for yourself full-immersion, visit the Museum at the *Fondazione*. Its four sections: Luchino Visconti, his mentor, and Maria Callas, his inspiration; theater; opera; and cinema follows Zeffirelli's career, each in chronological order. Its some 250 artifacts include a reconstruction of his *studio*, sketches, drawings, models, costumes, correspondence, photographs, film clips, awards, and posters. On the ground floor are the Archives of his personal and professional documents and his personal library, as well as *Zeffirelli's, Tearoom, Bar, and Restaurant* serving his favorite Tuscan specialties.

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