

## — DIRECTOR'S NOTES —

### *The Liar: Walking on Water*

In 1749 Goldoni committed to writing eight works every year for the company managed by Girolamo Medebach, at the time in residence at the Sant'Angelo Theatre in Venice. The success of the first season incensed competing impresarios and playwrights, especially the abbot Pietro Chiari, who had replaced Goldoni at the San Samuele Theatre. Thus began one of the most famous theatrical rivalries. Following the flop of Goldoni's *Lerede fortunata* ('The Lucky Heiress'), his detractors foresaw his creative demise, but Goldoni doubled the stakes and promised as many as sixteen new comedies for the next year. One of the sixteen was *Il bugiardo* ('The Liar').

As a result, the 1750-51 season marked the conscious birth of Goldoni's "reform" of Italian drama in opposition to the excesses of baroque style and the depleted mechanisms of *commedia dell'arte*. In his manifesto play, *Il teatro comico* ('The Comical Theatre'), the Venetian playwright emphasized the necessity of a written text as a guarantee of realistic action and language, while insisting on a clear moral stance. However, the ambiguities of his theatrical reform have been brought to the fore many times. Given the existing troupes, the transition to fully scripted playtexts was much slower than expected and, as for morality, he was too good a playwright to fully adhere to a *moralistic* view. *The Liar* is a perfect example of how ambiguity actually implies richness of potential perspectives.

On the one hand, Lelio is a liar who wants every woman he sees and is ready to ruin two girls' reputations, as well as his father's credibility, in order to attain the objects of his immediate desires. On the other hand, nearly everyone in this play lies, though not nearly to the same extent as Lelio: Harlequin lies to Colombina, Rosaura lies to her sister Beatrice, Florindo lies to Ottavio. In turn, the fathers are ready to ditch the promises made to each other should a better financial opportunity arise for their son and daughter. Furthermore, Goldoni has endowed Lelio with every trait to make him likeable to the audience: he is daring, witty, and a master of invention. This could of course indicate that the liar's façade is even more dangerous, but, if one looks a little deeper, the final weddings that conclude the comedy are only made possible by Lelio's lies. Without them, neither the shy Florindo, nor the insecure Ottavio would have obtained much. In this context, there is no choice but to consider lying not only a common human trait, but rather one of the elements of cleverness which makes things possible. Lying as the foundation of creation and art, as a way of going beyond seemingly impassable obstacles.

There is a Zen saying that goes "Leap and the net will appear," and this could be the unifying concept for this production. Goldoni on the balcony is writing the play: pressed by his own promise to create such a large number of new plays, he has no choice but to adapt the plot from someone else (Alarcòn and Corneille) and deliver the work as the company begins to rehearse it; the same happens to the set and costumes, which need to be created along the way and can only be ready *at the end* of the play. Of course, actors are always lying "as characters," but in our production we have young women in masks playing old men. Realism? Truth? We are artists, for Goldoni's sake, our actors can even walk on water, provided it is a stage! We all got so carried away by the beauty of creative lying that incredible things happened. Our new translation compresses time so that Venice has become Venice Beach and European nobility has been transformed into a business hierarchy. We added songs specially created for this production. Finally, we ended up introducing a few lies here and there into our own biographies for your entertainment... Well, let the scavenger hunt begin!

—Stefano Boselli



Carlo Goldoni