

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Founding  
of the Pirandello Society of America

6 p.m., May 13, 2009

Elebash Recital Hall

The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

365 Fifth Avenue (at 34th Street)

New York City

Free. First come, first served.

Co-organizers

Jane House, Ph.D., Artistic Director, Jane House Productions

Janice Capuana, Graduate Center doctoral candidate in theatre and dramaturg

Featuring

“Pirandello’s Muse, Marta Abba”

Benito Ortolani, Professor Emeritus, Brooklyn College

Editor and translator, Pirandello’s Love Letters to Marta Abba

&

Staged Reading, Pirandello’s one act, *The Other Son*

Jane House, Director and Translator

&

Panel Discussion with

Benito Ortolani, Jane House, and Janice Capuana

*Cosponsors*

Pirandello Society of America

Italian Cultural Institute of New York

Center for the Study of Women and Society, and

Italian Specialization, Ph.D. Program in Comparative Literature,

The Graduate Center, CUNY

The co-organizers hope to accomplish at least three aims: to emphasize the influence of the Italian actress Marta Abba on Pirandello’s later work; to let the audience experience, through a professional reading of the one-act play, the plight of Sicilian women left behind during the period of great immigration at the end of the nineteenth century; and to address Pirandello’s unique dramaturgical methods. A panel discussion with the co-organizers and Benito Ortolani will conclude the evening.

**Marta Abba and Pirandello**

The Italian actress Marta Abba (1900–1988) provided inspiration and encouragement to the Nobel Prize-winning playwright Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) in his twilight years. After encountering this young, beautiful, and passionate actress, in 1923, Pirandello, already 58, was smitten; and he began to write plays for her: *The New Colony* (*La Nuova*

Colonia); *As You Desire Me* (*Come tu mi vuoi*); *Finding Oneself* (*Trovarsi*); *The Wives' Friend* (*L'Amica delle Moglie*); and *Diana and Tuda* (*Diana e La Tuda*). Abba quickly became first actress (*prima attrice*) for his acting company, the famous *Teatro d'arte* in Rome, and worked exclusively with the Maestro on many productions. Theirs was a love affair realized only in art. They exchanged hundreds of letters, which Abba later donated to Princeton University. The collection was translated and edited by Benito Ortolani, the speaker at this event, and published as *Pirandello's Love Letters to Marta Abba* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

After Pirandello's death, Abba kept his name alive with productions of his plays throughout Europe and North America. While overseeing translations and productions of his work, she also conquered Broadway in her debut in *Tovarich* in 1936. In 1938, she married a businessman and settled in Cleveland, OH, but they divorced in 1952 and she returned to Italy. She continued to promote Pirandello's work until the end of her life and also wrote an autobiography in Italian, *La mia vita di attrice* (*My life as an actress*).

### **Pirandello Society of America**

Abba founded the Pirandello Society of American (PSA) in 1958. The Society is a membership organization dedicated to the study of Luigi Pirandello's work and its impact on modern literature and theatre. George Freedley, well-known writer, editor, drama critic, and curator of the New York Public Library's Theatre Collection, served as the Society's first president.

Current Society officers and board members continue the work begun fifty years ago by sponsoring readings, panels, and performances of Pirandello works. PSA is an allied organization of the Modern Language Association, participates in other national and international conferences, and has formed alliances with numerous organizations, such as the CUNY Graduate Center, NYU's Casa Italiana Zarilli-Marimò, L'Istituto Italiano di Cultura, and the Players Club in New York City.

The Society's peer-reviewed journal, the *Pirandello Society Annual*, PSA, is distributed to libraries and members of the Society. The editors welcome articles, performance and play reviews, documents, and essays pertaining to the work of Luigi Pirandello. Further information: [www.pirandellosocietyofamerica.org](http://www.pirandellosocietyofamerica.org)