

Speaking Dante

24 hours ... 100 cantos ... live in Florence ... streamed across the world ...

A once-in-a-lifetime marathon live reading of *The Divine Comedy*

Marking the 700th anniversary of the poet Dante Alighieri

13th-14th September 2021, Cinema la Compagnia, Florence, Italy

September 2021 marks the 700th anniversary of the death of the poet Dante Alighieri in 1321. 700 years on, Dante's epic narrative poem *The Divine Comedy* continues to grip the imagination of countless artists, composers, film-makers, writers and academics across the world. Translated into more than one hundred languages, *The Divine Comedy* stands alongside the Bible and the works of Homer and Shakespeare as one of the ultimate pillars of literary creation in human history. A dream-journey through Hell (*Inferno*), Purgatory (*Purgatorio*) and Heaven (*Paradiso*) undertaken by the poet Dante himself, guided by the ancient Roman poet Virgil, in 100 *cantos* of some of the most sublime poetry ever written.

For the first time ever, to mark the 700th anniversary, in celebration of Dante's astonishing legacy and his poem's enduring power and fascination, Milan theatre producer **Julia Holden** in collaboration with award-winning UK playwright **Justin Butcher** is curating a 24-hour marathon live reading in Florence of the whole of the *Divine Comedy*, in the acclaimed English translation by Robert & Jean Hollander, with a live audience & live-streamed, with contributors including **Ralph Fiennes, John Nettles, Kate Fleetwood, Amaka Okafor, Mary Chater, Clara Francesca, Andrew Harrison, Rupert Mason, Jan Noble, Brigid Zengeni** and a team of top UK and international theatre professionals. Video designs by acclaimed artist **Damian Hale**, drawing on the illustrations of **William Blake, Gustave Doré** and **Gabriele dell'Otto**, combine with music and sound by award-winning designer **Sebastian Frost** to conjure a richly textured, haunting immersive experience.

Speaking Dante will be hosted and live-streamed by the **Cinema la Compagnia** in Florence, in partnership with the **Teatro della Pergola**, the **Comune (City Council) di Firenze**, the **British Institute in Florence** and **The Florentine** magazine, from 19:00 on Monday 13th September - 19:00 on Tuesday 14th September.

Dante was a high official of the mediaeval Republic of Florence, and fell foul of the protracted civil war that engulfed the republic throughout much of the 13th century, and was eventually arraigned and exiled on pain of death, at the height of his career. He lamented his cruel betrayal by his mother city, and the pangs of exile, for the rest of his life. Echoing this theme in Dante's life and work, the producing partners have decided that *Speaking Dante* will be a charity fundraising event, with all proceeds going to support projects working with refugees and migrants in Italy, specifically in Florence.

The charity partner is the **Community of Sant'Egidio**, whose pioneering work supporting refugees and migrants in Italy includes the Schools of Language & Culture, the Humanitarian Corridors Project, the *Genti di Pace* (People of Peace) project and their work with the Roma People.

As a celebration of the first great work of Italian literature written in the vernacular, *Speaking Dante* will raise funds for the **Schools of Language & Culture, Community of Sant'Egidio, Florence** - a vital, creative and empowering project enabling refugees and migrants to learn the Italian language and engage with Italian culture, an inspiring and transformational environment described as a 'workshop of the culture of co-existence'.

<https://www.santegidio.org/pageID/30104/langID/en/Schools-of-Language-and-Culture.html>

The founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio is the internationally renowned academic, politician and human rights activist, Professor Andrea Riccardi, who is also the current President of the Dante Society, *Società Dante Alighieri*.

SUPPORT *Speaking Dante* to support Sant'Egidio's work with refugees and migrants in Italy.

Tu lascerai ogne cosa diletta più caramente; e questo è quello strale che l'arco de lo essilio pria saetta.

You shall leave everything you love most dearly: this is the arrow that the bow of exile shoots first.

Dante Alighieri, Paradiso, Canto 17, 55-57

CONTACT: Julia Holden, Producer, J. Productions, Milan
Justin Butcher, Director, *Speaking Dante*

juliaholden@jproductions.it
info@justinbutcher.co.uk

+39 340 293 9869
+44 7972 779 501

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