

WFPW Russia's Angels of Peace ensemble of children serve society in Italy

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The idea of Angels of Peace, an ensemble of children, was conceived inside the Women's Federation for World Peace -- Russia. Founded in 2008 by Olga Vakulinskaya, together with a group of mothers, members of the federation, it has grown thanks to the determination and dedication of these women, who have been investing time and resources for its development.

The idea is to form in the children who participate a spirit of attention to others that is translated into a real service to society. This is essential in the light of the WFPW mission to develop projects for peace, moral and family education and solidarity initiatives. With the spirit of breaking down barriers and fostering reconciliation, the Angels of Peace have led Bridge of Peace Ceremonies between Russians and Georgians, Russians and Belarusians, and Russians and Ukrainians. With the desire to bring joy to those who suffer, they organize shows for children and adults with disabilities, the elderly and war veterans. In 2012, they received the gold medal at an international festival in South Korea and joined in an artistic Bridge of Peace Ceremony with the "Little Angels," the famous ensemble of Korean children, performing both for each other at their prestigious school. The performances of the Angels of Peace gather the sounds and colors of the great Russian tradition with its dances, from Caucasian to that of the Tatar, the Scarf Dance, its folk songs and the notable popular songs in the world, such as "Katyusha" and "Moscow Nights."



Angels of Peace in Piedmont

This was ten days of maximum effort, fun and an expression of great love and respect for Italy. We had various aims in bringing the Angels of Peace to Italy. First, to reaffirm the historical bond between the people of Russia and Italy, by letting song and dance, a common language to all cultures, touch people's hearts through the purity of children. It is an effective way to build bridges and break down barriers to peace. In addition, we wanted to connect the ensemble with Italian children and young people eager to learn about the roots of different traditions going beyond cultural and language barriers. Not least of all, we wanted to show Italy the beauty of the Russian culture and traditions. Too often in recent years, Russia's image in the media has been that of a military and economic power, neglecting to make known the beauty of the heart of the Russian people. The two sponsoring organizations of the initiative have given valuable opportunities to children and young Russians and Italians and their families to meet and go

beyond cultural exchanges to build peace through art, but also to be in peace by engaging together for the sake of others.



Turin and its valleys

The Angels of Peace visited Turin and its surroundings from April 26 April–May 6. Eighteen young people between ten and fifteen years (thirteen girls, five boys) led by ten leaders, mothers and fathers, including the founder and artistic director, Olga Vakulinskaya, president of WFWP Russia, and the director of the choir, Liubov Smirnova.

The organizers of the Italian tour were Maria Gabriella Mieli of WFWP Turin and Italy and Sergio Coscia of UPF Turin. To support the project with great enthusiasm we were assisted by other local associations, including FFWPU, whose many volunteers hosted the children in their homes, and the Italo–Russian Cultural Association "E Ora?!" (And Now?!), which helped in accompanying them and took the lead in guiding the tours around several museums. Kate Veshkina, the president, also collaborated in co-presenting the shows.

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Various families hosted all the Russian guests. Both young people and adults were able to experience the warmth and embrace of the Italian people. In particular, the younger ones, in their reflections, expressed their gratitude for having felt "at home."

Three performances of traditional songs and dances were matched to the same number of solidarity activities in the territory. At Bruzolo, in the Susa Valley, thanks to the collaboration of the municipal officials, including Mayor Chiara Borgis: we raised funds and donated to a fund in support of the weaker sections of the city. For the show a large gymnasium was made available, where the Angels of Peace made their Italian debut. Local families also offered dinner to all the participants.

Second and third shows

The second show was held at the Teatro Murialdo in Turin to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Parish of "Nostra Signora della Salute" (Our Lady of Health). With the parish priest, Father Augustine, we decided to donate the funds collected for needy families who attend their parish.

The third show was organized at "Casa del Teatro Ragazzi e Giovani" (House of Children and Youth Theatre) granted by the City of Turin. The funds were collected for Casa UGI (Italian Parents' Union Against Children's Cancer) an excellent facility that houses children in cancer treatment and their

families, from all over the world.



Various institutions also received the Angels of Peace well. At "Palazzo di Città," headquarters of the Municipality of Turin, they met Dr. Giovanni Giovannetti, the mayor's spokesman, and International Affairs, Cooperation and Peace staff members with the director, Dr. Fortunata Armocida, her collaborators, Dr. Francesca Marceddu and Dr. Maria Bottiglieri, together with a Councilor of Piedmont Region, Dr. Giovanni M. Ferraris. Here the Angels, who were welcomed in the Hall of Columns, performed their repertoire of Russian Folk songs.

At Palazzo Lascaris, the headquarters of the Piedmont Regional Council, there was a very intense and exciting meeting with the president of the Regional Council, Dr. Mauro Laus, and his spokeswoman, Dr. Maria Grazia Grippo. President Laus shook hands with all the components of the group taking interest in their activities and in the projects of WFP and UPF, then asked for a small exhibition. At that point, the Angels offered Russian songs followed by the Italian national anthem, to the great surprise of the president. This moved his heart.

Another significant meeting took place at the headquarters of "Famija Turinèisa." The president, Daniela Piazza, together with Gianduia and Giacometta, the historical Turin masks, welcomed the Angels of Peace. This association was founded in 1925 in a beautiful historic building where we organized an artistic Bridge of Peace Ceremony between the Angels and the Giacomette, the folk group of girls dressed with the typical costumes of the florist ladies of eighteenth century. The Giacomette performed for the Angels the traditional "Monferrina." At the end of the show the Famija Turinèisa offered everybody the typical "Merenda Sinoira."

Among the different services, the Municipality of Turin offered was a walking tour of the city including a visit to the National Cinema Museum and the Mole Antonelliana. In addition, there was a tour of the National Automobile Museum; here the group had fun taking photos near the carriages, the prestigious Italian cars of last century as well as Ferrari and several race cars.

Dr. Guido Curto, director of the Museum of Palazzo Madama offered a guided tour of the Museum, which is currently hosting seventy masterpieces from the Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg. What touched people most in this experience was the intercultural and educational encounter. The prayer with the Catholic priest of Nostra Signora della Salute and the meeting with Father Ambrogio from the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate were memorable as well as the visit to the Synagogue of Turin ended with a moving prayer hand in hand offered by Olga in Russian, Ruth in Hebrew and M. Gabriella in Italian.

Among their peers

What involved the children more was the meeting at the schools; we had three beautiful opportunities.

The first was at the Russian school Azbuka, where the children of Italian-Russian families meet weekly to study Russian. Here, the Angels of Peace, divided into groups according to their age, were included in the different classes and interacted with their Italian peers speaking in Russian. In the end, they all met in the Great Hall for the show. The Italian children offered the anthem of the Russian school and a pleasant scene, while the Angels performed their traditional repertoire. The audience was composed of many children and their parents, fascinated and moved by the show.



A middle school

The second meeting was held at the Middle School Matteotti of Turin. After the musical entertainment, offered by some Italian students, the Angels of Peace played in the schoolyard, where more than four hundred children attended.

The mothers of the students of Class 1C prepared and offered lunch, and in the afternoon, the Italian pupils accompanied the Russian boys in an orienteering trail in the school's park. The Matteotti Institute, two years ago, won the national first prize in the discipline of orienteering. After other games together and interviews for the school newspaper, the leaders of the Italian and Russian WFWP held a Bridge of Peace Ceremony, involving children, parents and teachers and thrilling all.

A Jewish School

The last meeting was held at the Jewish school Artom-Colonna and Finzi, thanks to the collaboration of Carola Ovazza of the Jewish community and the headmaster of the school. The Italian children met the Angels of Peace offering songs of the Jewish tradition, listening to the songs of the Russian tradition, singing along with the Italian National Anthem, requiring the Russian National Anthem and offering the Israeli National Anthem. At the end of the show, which was attended by about a hundred and fifty children, WFWP organized another ceremony, a Bridge of Peace between the Russian children and those Italian Jews, which touched everyone. In total over a thousand two hundred people attended the shows of the Angels of Peace in this intense Piedmont program.

Bridge of Peace Ceremonies

In the distant past, Italy and Russia were on opposite sides during the years that Italy sided with Germany in World War II. The Angels of Peace, with their pure hearts, being beautiful children who think and see only peace, helped build a beautiful Bridge of Peace Ceremony between our nations. Thank you, Angels, you have left a deep imprint in our hearts!