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Franco Zeffirelli

**Short biography**

Franco Zeffirelli was born in Florence (Italy) in 1923. His mother died when he was still a child and he was brought up by an aunt and by a British lady whose love for Shakespeare and for the Opera marked the very young Zeffirelli for his entire life.

In his teenage years he fought with the Italian partisans and when the war was over he started to study at the beaux-arts Academy in Florence. Very early attracted by theatre he became part of a theatre group as an actor. Soon he started to design sets and costumes of various productions.

The great change in Zeffirelli's career was his encounter with Luchino Visconti, one of the greatest Film, Opera and Theatre directors of this century. He became Visconti's assistant and worked at his side for more than ten years. Franco Zeffirelli is today one of the best-known Italian directors in the world. His activity goes from Cinema, to Theatre to Opera. His theatrical productions range from **“Romeo and Juliet”** with John Stride, Judi Dench and Alec Mc Cowen in 1960 to Joan Plowright and Laurence Olivier in **“Saturday, Sunday, Monday”,** from John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft in a **“Othello”** at Stratford-upon-Avon to Susan Strasberg in **“La Dame aux Camelias”** on Broadway, from **“Lorenzaccio”** by the Comédie Francaise to the modern **“Absolutely, Perhaps”** in London.

His opera productions in the major theatres of the world are countless with the participation of artists such as Maria Callas, Luciano Pavarotti, Herbert Von Karajan, Leonard Bernstein, Carlos Kleiber, just to name a few. Unforgettable are his productions of **Aida** (1963) (Leotyn Price, Carlo Bergonzi, Fiorenza Cossotto and Nicolai Ghiaurov) and **Bohéme** (1963) ( Mirella Freni and Gianni Raimondi) at La Scala in Milan, of **Tosca** (1964) at the Covent Garden (Maria Callas, Renato Cioni, Tito Gobbi) and **Turandot** (Teatro La Scala - 1983), with Placido Domingo and Katia Ricciarelli. In 2000 **Tosca** at the Roma Opera with Luciano Pavarotti. The **Falstaff** (Leonard Bernstein as conductor), **Don Giovanni** and **Traviata** at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and of **Carmen**, **Il Trovatore**, **Aida** and **Madame Butterfly** (all with Daniel Oren as conductor) at the Arena di Verona, and Aida at the National Theatre of Tokyo. Two extraordinary experiments at Busseto with the tiny productions of **Aida** and **La Traviata** which continue to have wide international renown. In 2004 the Busseto **Aida** was taken to Moscow, at the Bolshoi and in 2005 the Busseto **Traviata** was produced in Moscow as well, before being taken to Tel Aviv in November 2005 where **I Pagliacci** had already been produced in January of the same year. In January 2006 the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma staged **Don Giovanni** and an **Aida** was staged for the opening of the season at La Scala. In 2007 he presented a **La** **Traviata** at the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma and a new **Tosca** in January 2008. He also took his **Pagliacci** to Moscow in September 2007, to Florence in January 2009 and to Rome in May 2009. The Arena of Verona opened the 2009 season with a renewed production of **“Carmen”** and in 2010 (Arena’s season in the name of Zeffirelli) with the **Turandot** to which followed **Aida**, **Madama Butterfly**, **Carmen** and **Il Trovatore**.

In 2011 a new **Turandot** celebrates the opening of the Royal Opera House of Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman. In 2012 for the first time at the Arena of Verona, Zeffireli presented the “**Don Giovanni”** of Mozart that inaugurated the opening season’s of the Arena.

In Cinema his name is linked with great international successes such as **The Taming of the Shrew** with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in 1966, **Romeo and Juliet** in 1969 with Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey, **Brother Sun Sister Moon** in 1971 with Alec Guiness and Graham Faulkner, **The Champ** in 1980 with John Voight and Faye Dunaway, **Endless Love** 1981 with Brooke Shields and Martin Hewitt, **The Young Toscanini** 1988 with Elizabeth Taylor and Thomas Howell, **Hamlet** in 1991 with Mel Gibson, Glenn Close, Helena Bonham Carter and Alan Bates **Sparrow** 1993, **Jane Eyre** 1994 with Charlotte Gainsburg, William Hurt, Joan Plowright, Geraldine Chaplin and Maria Schneider, **Tea with Mussolini** in 1995 with Judy Dench and Joan Plowright and his latest film, **Callas Forever 2002** with Funny Ardant and Jermy Irons.

For television he is the author of **Jesus of Nazareth** (1976/1977) which has been seen by over a billion and a half people throughout the world. He has also made several documentaries such as **Mundial ’90** on Historic Florentine Football in 1990, **Tuscany** in 1991 and **Rome** in 2009.

The artistic choices of Franco Zeffirelli are underlined by a constant devotion to the classics, particularly Shakespeare, which he often transposed into the world of cinema. Also to be remembered are his movie transpositions of the Operas **Cavalleria Rusticana** and **Pagliacci** (1981), **Traviata** (1982) and **Othello** (1986) which contributed to make young audiences draw closer to the Opera.

Zeffirelli has also directed great celebrations of the Catholic Church, such as the Opening of the Holy Year in 1974 and 1983 and the great celebration concert for the bicentennial of Beethoven requested by Pope Paul VI (1970). Zeffirelli granted by Queen Elizabeth the second of the Dignity of a Honorary Knight Commander of the civil Division of the Order of the British Empire.

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