

# **A PLACE OF SAFETY**

**A Journey into the Central Mediterranean**

**Kepler-452**

**ER T**

*conceived by* Kepler-452

*direction and dramaturgy by* Nicola Borghesi *and* Enrico Baraldi

*with words by*

Flavio Catalano, Miguel Duarte, Giorgia Linardi, Floriana Pati,  
José Ricardo Peña

*with*

Nicola Borghesi, Flavio Catalano, Miguel Duarte, Giorgia Linardi,  
Floriana Pati, José Ricardo Peña

*assistant director* Roberta Gabriele

*set and costumes* Alberto Favretto

*lighting design* Maria Domènech

*sound and music* Massimo Carozzi

*movement consultant* Marta Ciappina

*video project* Enrico Baraldi

*dramaturgy consultant* Dario Salvetti

*production* Emilia Romagna Teatro ERT / National Theatre, Teatro Metastasio di Prato,  
CSS Teatro stabile di innovazione del Friuli Venezia Giulia, Théâtre des 13 vents CDN  
Montpellier (France)

*in collaboration with* Sea-Watch *and* EMERGENCY

The project is supported by the Culture Moves Europe call for proposals, funded by the European Union and the Goethe-Institut.

This work is produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

This project has been selected by Prospero NEW platform co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

**UBU Award 2025-Best theatre performance**

**Le Maschere del Teatro Award for best Italian new authors 2025**

**Franco Enriquez Award for dramaturgy 2025**

*Photos*

Dario Bosio / EMERGENCY ONG Onlus (cover)

Luca Del Pia (pp. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9)

Geraldine Hofmaier / Sea-Watch (pp. 15, 16, 17, 22, 23)

Alberto Camanni (p. 19)

Zeno Morino / EMERGENCY ONG Onlus (pp. 20, 21)

Suzanne de Carrasco / Sea-Watch (p. 20)

Megan Williams / CBC (p. 20)

Stefano Belacchi / Sea-Watch (p. 21)





An Italian theatre company, Kepler-452, embarks on a ship conducting search and rescue missions in the Central Mediterranean, the Sea-Watch 5. They are not entirely sure what they are looking for; they only know that for a long time, they have been hearing about what happens just a few kilometers off the Italian coast. Perhaps the time has come to go and see for themselves what is happening along the deadliest migration route in the world. During this mission, they rescue 156 people, who are later disembarked at the “place of safety” of La Spezia, a safe port in Italy, 4 days of navigation away from the rescue location.

From this journey emerges a series of thoughts, questions, anxieties, and encounters with rescuers from various NGOs operating in the Mediterranean—besides Sea-Watch, also operators from Life Support, the search and rescue ship of Emergency. Some of these rescuers will recount on stage what they have witnessed over the past few years just a few kilometers from our shores.

*A Place of Safety* is the story of the meeting between a theatre company and a group of people who have chosen to dedicate part of their lives to civil sea rescue. But it is also, and above all, a spark of attention on the collective blind spot of our continent: what happens in the Central Mediterranean.

Ultimately, it is an intimate reflection on what Europe aspires to be, what it is not, and what it could become.

What makes this show a radical challenge is that the Mediterranean is, in this moment, the greatest repressed issue of Europe and of Italy in particular. It is what we willingly remove from our sight before than from our conscience. It is so not only because it is a huge mass grave of innocents, but also because it reminds us that the allegedly safe piece of land in which we live is a kind of strange oasis in an increasingly literal world on fire, knocking on our doors and reminding us that our privilege is fragile and ready to shatter in the face of the most recent upheavals. The rejected or drowned migrants concern the very idea that Europe has of itself, undermining from the foundations the image of civilisation that the continent wants to give to others and give to itself. In the same way, the ground staff and the crews on board the rescue ships are a set of European identities that, perhaps, tell us of another Italy, another Germany, France, Spain, another possible Europe.

# The Process of Research

## **Before Boarding...**

Before boarding, Nicola and Enrico underwent a training period via online meetings with the NGO Sea-Watch for around two weeks. These briefings covered various aspects of life on the ship, including daily responsibilities and potential emergency scenarios (such as pirate attacks, fire, explosion, flooding, etc.).

They were also trained on topics related to migrants, including Search and Rescue (SAR) zones, Italian and European rescue laws in the Mediterranean, and proper conduct once migrants were on board. Moreover, they spent one week in Lampedusa with the staff of Sea-Watch for a training on field, also witnessing how the NGOs work on the island with people who are disembarked there.

## **On Board...**

The journey on the ship began in July 2024 from Siracusa, Sicily. They embarked on Sea-Watch 5 and actively participated in the final preparations before setting sail towards the SAR zone in the Central Mediterranean.

Immediately before the mission there were some technical problems related to the maintenance of the ship that caused a delayed departure.

During the mission the ship navigated and sailed through the Italian, Maltese, and Libyan SAR zones. Finally on the 25th of July the Sea-Watch 5's crew rescued 156 people. After the rescue the Italian authorities designated the place of safety where the people could disembark: La Spezia, located over 1000 km away from rescue point. This situation resulted in a 4 day journey that the migrants had to spend on board, despite their already long journey. On 29th of July, the ship arrived in La Spezia, where all 156 rescued migrants were able to disembark.

After finishing the disembarkation procedures, the ship returned to the port of Siracusa, marking the end of the mission.

During these days on board, the company met the migrants, talked with them, and connected with their life experiences, which provided as a source of inspiration for the creation of the show. Enrico Baraldi was credited on board as Field Media Coordinator for Sea-Watch; he filmed video materials for their social media and general communication, plus, he collected audio-visuals to be included in the show. Besides, Nicola was committed as a journalist, writing a column for an Italian newspaper every 2 days.

After the disembarkation, the company maintained contact with Sea-Watch 5 to keep them updated on the project and to gather information about potential crew members who could join the stage with Nicola to share their stories.

to disembark at ports that might  
even be 5 days' sailing away.





HANGAR

FIRE  
PLAN



# Press Review - Extracts

## **MINIMA&MORALIA – Graziano Graziani – 01/03/2025**

(...) If we can define *A Place of Safety* not only as a successful performance but even a memorable one, it is because it manages to materialize the epistemological fracture that Europe, the West, is experiencing in the face of an historic process that has literally shaken its moral compass and, with it, its identity.

(...) With its multilingualism—ranging from English to Portuguese, from Spanish to Italian—*A Place of Safety* is already conceived as a profoundly European production. But what truly makes it so is not just its linguistic breadth; it is above all its dramatic and dramaturgical completeness. With this work, Kepler-452 takes a significant artistic leap, placing their theatrical explorations of reality within the tradition of great continental dramaturgy—from Milo Rau to Rimini Protokoll—while refining the company's stylistic signature. They demonstrate their ability to construct a production of great scope (...) capable of filling the stage of Arena del Sole Theatre in Bologna, where the work premiered, and holding the audience's attention for two hours, only to release the emotional tension at the very end with a long, thunderous standing ovation.

## **IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO – Francesco Ferasin – 01/03/2025**

(...) A feature film already seen and replayed on TV, in the news, on social media, on the lips of politicians and political figures. Yet, it is almost never felt on the living skin in the way that the company Kepler-452 manages to make us feel.

(...) Borghesi boards the ship as a reporter (for *il Fatto*), takes notes on what happens onboard, lives the life of the rescuers. He emerges as a director of a brilliant, surgical, real, and honest dramaturgy that moves you and makes you want to say “to hell with it” and get on that ship.

## **LA STAMPA – Masolino D'Amico – 03/03/2025**

(...) The result is a highly engaging evening, also from a spectacular point of view, thanks to the set design, lights, sound, and projections, all executed with sober yet admirable precision. The performance begins with stories of the volunteers brought on stage. They speak in many languages about themselves and about the reasons behind their choices, with the confidence of professional actors and an excellent coordination.

## **DOPPIOZERO – Alessandro Iachino – 03/03/2025**

(...) Kepler-452's theatre is (...) a theater that chooses to stay, to inhabit the border as if it were simultaneously the last refuge of a disintegrating present and the only possible outpost from which to contemplate the future. It is a theater capable of grazing the center and observing its architectures and constructs (class conflicts, small

and large collective hypocrisies, cultural stereotypes claimed by both the left and the right), as well as contemplating the elsewhere, the repressed and the forgotten—everything we push to the extreme margins of maps and consciousness. (...) Kepler-452's creation (...) seems to take inspiration from the great European theater, foremost among them Tiago Rodrigues' *Dans la mesure de l'impossible*. (...) As in the work of the Portuguese director, the scenic multilingualism returns to each individual their mother tongue, the language of the heart, especially in the moments of deeper immersion in memories.

#### **INTERNAZIONALE – Annalisa Camilli – 04/03/2025**

(...) The theater this company stages in an innovative yet now recognizable way is a language of the present time. It effortlessly finds a narrative perspective in reality and in non-professional actors, who are also the true protagonists of the story and who self-narrate with remarkable ability to reveal themselves.

#### **HUFFPOST.IT – Mario De Santis – 04/03/2025**

(...) They are all outstanding interpreters of their own stories, their own doubts and struggles, existential crises, stress, and contradictions, which are the other, thorny side of a virtuous activity. Borghesi weaves this with his own narrative as both witness and director grappling with a new reality, putting himself on the line.

(...) What emerges is a choral narrative, fluid in its scene composition and movements (...) a sort of powerful civil oratorio, yet avoiding the risk of rhetoric. Borghesi and Baraldi, by writing the text with everyone's words, confront and deconstruct this risk, allowing contradictions to surface as well.

(...) The words we have are no longer enough. It is precisely by showing the fragile side of Good that *A Place of Safety* becomes a great performance, because it goes beyond the noble gesture of an arm lifting a body. It becomes a powerful fresco on the rifts, the internal crises within a vision of progress that is perhaps currently suspended, on this border between the rightful principle of welcome and rescue, yet almost trapped within it, just as we are torn between a progressive vision (save them, welcome them) and a right-wing vision (raise the walls).

#### **LA REPUBBLICA - Anna Bandettini – 04/09/2025**

There is something heroic about it, yes: in saving lives, of course, but also in accepting defeat without falling, in front of those who are swallowed up by the sea anyway. And this is also why *A Place of Safety* is received everywhere with great emotion.

# Documentation / Travel Diary

Nicola Borghesi's duties were to write a daily journal for an Italian newspaper, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, and to provide any information, assistance, or support needed by the migrants onboard.

Here you can read some extracts of the articles written by Nicola:

## **The Blue Zone 19th July 2024**

*I embarked on the Sea-Watch 5 a few days ago. (...) The crew is preparing to set off on the seventh mission of this boat that rescues people trying to cross the Mediterranean in extremely dangerous conditions. These are strange days of waiting, especially for me, who am on board to do a documentary theatre show. (...) The aim these days is for the entire crew to be fully prepared for when we leave for the SAR, the search and rescue zone, that portion of the sea where it is more likely for people to need to be picked up from the water before it is too late. (...) During a drill on abandoning ship, the first officer tells us what you have to do to survive on a lifeboat. He says that the first thing to remember is that human beings are not meant to be in the sea, which is a desert of water. Then he adds that, in case of emergency, we are privileged: we are Europeans, someone would save us within a few hours. The same cannot be said of those who try to reach our shores.*

## **The So-Called 21st July 2024**

*(...) Then there is a briefing on the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. (...) They are novel villains, according to the documents and videos they show us. They are basically a militia employed by one of the parties to the conflict in Libya that roams the central Mediterranean with very large machine guns and very fast patrol boats graciously donated by our government. They show us some videos: in one they open fire into the water during a rescue to ward off rescuers. In another, from a few weeks ago, they bludge on migrants brought to safety on a merchant ship and then take them back to Libyan camps. In another they circumnavigate the ship of an NGO holding weapons, saying they must leave the area. The NGO ship replies that they are in international waters and they have no right to send them away and continues its journey. How brave, I think. And then I think that if we found this boat, in that situation, I would not be very happy. (...) As the sun sets spectacularly orange behind Sicily still close by I think again to those who are preparing on the other side of the sea. I hope they meet us and not them. I hope that, in this huge sea, the dot they see on the horizon is this blue ship with people on it who are wondering how best to welcome them and not those grey ships paid for with my taxes that are ready to take them back again to the hell from whence they came.*

## **Enjoy Your Privilege**

**23rd July 2024**

*(...) why are the people here? I ask someone of the crew. Often they are people who are so used to it, that maybe they haven't think about it, why they do it. Verena, ship's doctor, says that when you start working in humanitarian situations, when you have seen with your own eyes what happens outside the reassuring confines of our European daily routine, something clicks in you. When you watch the news, on television, the image is missing something: you, making yourself useful in some way.*

*(...) José, the electrician on board, an American from Houston, but whose parents are Mexican, says that he is here because he seeks family redemption: his parents were immigrants, now he is an American citizen, he has a strong passport, but he struggles to stand by. Because people die in the Rio Grande as in the Mediterranean Sea.*

## **Central Mediterranean**

**25th July 2024**

*We are off. We have left Sicily behind and Sea-Watch 5 heads straight for the Central Mediterranean, the world's deadliest migration route. (...) Watching shifts begin: four hours for each group, in rotation, we watch the horizon with binoculars. The aim is to look for a tiny dot that moves. Many of the rescued boats are found like this, with eyes, too small to be detected by radar, especially with high waves. (...) I try to imagine the same circumstance but from a different perspective: not from above the deck of a large ship overlooking the waves, but from below, in middle the waves, towering above, on a small wooden or rubber boat. Around only darkness and moon. No one on the horizon, an even thicker unknown, with no points of reference points. Nothingness, everywhere, and a group of people who don't know each other, huddled together, thinking, who knows what they are thinking. Impossible to imagine. If I meet them, I ask them.*

## **A Unicorn-Shaped Lifeguard**

**27th July 2024**

*(...) We see it from afar, a tiny dot that slowly, through the binoculars, it becomes a boat the same colour as the sea. They send out the rescue lances, in a few minutes they are there, they distribute the life jackets and start boarding. (...) And then again and again, there are about thirty of them. A boundless joy. They stagger, they laugh, they pray, they give thanks. Then we spot a second case: a larger boat, with a covered deck. We board another 120 people. They are in worse conditions than the first. Some, who were below deck, are intoxicated by fuel fumes. Some fall ashore. They are sent to the hospital on board. They recover. If we had not intervened, it is very likely that they would have died. One little girl has a pink unicorn-shaped life jacket. (...) No one can believe that they have been so lucky. Some people say: last night I did not think I would see another night.*

## **Merriness of Castaways**

### **30th July 2024**

*(...) Shortly after the two rescues we learn that the port assigned to Sea-Watch for the disembarkation of the people rescued in the Mediterranean is La Spezia, basically the Italian port farthest possible from where we are: four days by sea. This happens thanks to the Piantedosi decree, a perverse piece of legislation invented by the government Meloni that aims to exhaust the NGOs, dispersing their energies and making their ships hundreds of kilometres, increasing costs and decreasing operational capacity. (...) I don't know how, suddenly Bella ciao starts (I think because of La Casa de Papel). Many people know it. So, in the middle of the central Mediterranean, 30 Europeans and 156 people fleeing from something that escaped a shipwreck sing in the thin air a song that they don't know what it is about but it is about us, there.*

## **The Last Time We See Each Other**

### **1st August 2024**

*When the sun rises the Sea-Watch 5 is not far from the port of La Spezia and there is already an effervescence, on the ship, full of expectation. (...) They conclude by saying: this is probably the last time we will see each other. The guests of the start shouting, in chorus: Sea-Watch, Sea-Watch! I think it's a way of saying: thank you. (...) Strange to say, but the foreigners, in this circumstance, seem to me to be my compatriots waiting for us at the port. There is tense effervescence, on the deck of the ship, as if waiting for something beautiful and frightening that is about to happen.*

## **Mugshots**

### **3rd August 2024**

*(...) They start with the pregnant women, who greet us noisily and cheerful. The crew, on the other hand, seems quite moved. Some are crying. They scold them, with gestures, and seem to say: what are you crying about? Everything went well. Can't you see that we have made it, that we are going to be OK? I think: let's hope you are right. (...) The Somali women come down all together, wearing winter down jackets with synthetic fur collars. They explained to me that this often happens: when they leave they take all their things and, since they cannot have luggage, they keep them on.*

## **A Musical at the Port of La Spezia**

### **6th August 2024**

*(...) The disembarkation from the Sea-Watch at the port of La Spezia, which had started off at a good pace, at a certain point comes to a standstill. (...) One of the sailors picks up the speaker with which speeches are usually made and starts the party playlist. (...) Soon everyone on the ship starts rocking to the music and I think: maybe I've ended up in a musical? (...) When the last lone male leaves as well, a round of applause starts from the ship. The migrants who are still there join in the applause. Then also those of the Red Cross.*

## **The End** **11th August 2024**

*(...) After we disembarked the 156 people we rescued, we stayed on board for a few more days. The ship was strangely desolate and we thirty Europeans left were a little lonely, a little sad. (...) The image of the migrant, in our country, has two possible declinations: either the caricature of the right, which gives us images of cunning and violence, or the pietist simplification which tells us of human beings undone and eternally desperate, begging and contrite. (...) The reality, if you look at it closely, as I did in this case, is, as always, different: these are people who have escaped a shipwreck, who breathed in toxic fuel fumes under the deck of a precarious ship, who thought they would die lost in the Mediterranean night and then discovered they were alive, that the world is not just Libyan jails or European detention centres, that people sometimes make a surprisingly kind gesture, they come and pick you up in the middle of the sea when there is no one around and then, once you have recovered, you just want to dance, to be close, to say dear and stupid things.*





 **UNITED<sup>4</sup>  
RESCUE**  
Gemeinsam Retten e.V.

IM09421556



2

Sea-Watch 5

# About the Company Kepler-452

Kepler-452 was founded in 2015 in Bologna by Nicola Borghesi, Enrico Baraldi, Paola Aiello and, for the organization, by Michela Buscema first and then from 2021, by Roberta Gabriele. Since the beginning, the company has cultivated an ambition, a desire, an urgency: to open the doors of the theatres, to go out, to observe, through the lens of the scene, what is outside, in the unshakable belief that reality has an autonomous dramaturgical force, just waiting to be organized on stage. The theatrical formats created by Kepler-452 range from the involvement on stage of non-professionals on the basis of their biographies, to theatrical reportages that transform investigations of the reality into performative moments, to the creation of audio-guided itineraries and other devices for interacting with urban space, up to the creation of the 20 30 Festival which, starting from 2014, brought hundreds of under 30s to the stage in an attempt to trace a generational fresco.

In 2018 Kepler-452 began the productive collaboration with ERT / National Theatre that leads to the production, in 2018, of *Il giardino dei ciliegi- Trent'anni di felicità in comodato d'uso* (*The Cherry Orchard - Thirty Years of Happiness on Loan*) in which Chekhov's text meets the story of an eviction that really happened in Italy in 2015; *F. - Perdere le cose* (*F. - Losing Things*), which premiered at VIE Festival in 2019, and deals with the story of an undocumented migrant who, according to Italian law, cannot enter the stage; in 2022, premiered in VIE Festival *Il Capitale - Un libro che ancora non abbiamo letto* (*Das Kapital - A Book We Haven't Read Yet*), in which Marx's fundamental text is told through the voices and bodies of a group of workers from GKN in Florence, a factory whose workers were fired with an email in July 2019. The performance *Il Capitale* has been presented abroad in important international festivals: *Kunstenfestivaldesarts* in Bruxelles (2023) and *FIND Festival* in Schaubühne Berlin (2024).

Since 2017 the company made several editions of *Comizi d'amore*, a format of participatory theatre telling on stage some communities starting from the questions posed by Pasolini in his homonymous documentary. In 2021 *Comizi d'amore* opened FIBA, Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires. The show *The Others. Investigation on the Brand New Monsters* (2021) is a report in the form of a monologue dedicated to social hatred and social. In 2022 *Album* was released, a survey on the relationship between memory, Alzheimer's disease and environmental disasters, created from the experience of the company during the flood in Emilia Romagna. In 2022 premiered *Non tre sorelle* (*Not three sisters*) directed by Enrico Baraldi with the dramaturgy of Enrico Baraldi and Francesco Alberici, a show in which three Ukrainian actresses and two Italian actresses stages the story of their encounter at the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

Among the awards, Kepler - 452 won the Critical Network Award (2018), "Gli Asini" Prize (2020), the ANCT Prize (2022), the Ubu Special Prize (2023).



# Cast



**FLAVIO CATALANO**  
**(Deck Leader, Life Support, EMERGENCY)**

With a scientific background (naval and mechanical engineer), he served as a technical submarine officer in the Italian Navy. Engaged in volunteer activities - ranging from politics to the preservation of historical memory, from fair trade to the restoration of old industrial artifacts, and international cooperation in countries of Sub-Saharan West Africa - in 2022 he contributed to the outfitting of the *Life Support*, the ship of the NGO EMERGENCY.

After preparatory work in the shipyard, he remained on board for operational search and rescue activities in the central Mediterranean. To date, he has participated in twenty-six missions, the most recent of which, between September and October 2025, was in support of the Global Sumud Flotilla.



**MIGUEL DUARTE**  
**(Mission Leader, Iuventa and Sea-Watch)**

A Portuguese mathematical physicist, he conducts research on black holes and teaches at the university. He is co-founder of HuBB – Humans Before Borders, a collective for migrant rights. He has been a Civil Sea Rescuer in the central Mediterranean since 2016. He was a crew member of the ship *Iuventa* and was among ten humanitarian operators who faced up to twenty years in prison on charges of facilitating illegal immigration by the Italian government—the first and longest case of criminalization of sea rescue in Italy, lasting eight years, until the acquittal of all involved. Today, he works as a mission leader on board Sea-Watch vessels. In August 2025, he embarked with the Global Sumud Flotilla. On October 1, he was captured along with all crews by Israeli armed forces a few miles from Gaza and taken to Israel, where he was detained in prison until October 5.



**GIORGIA LINARDI**  
**(Jurist and Spokesperson, Sea-Watch)**

Graduated in Political Science and International Relations, she specialized in International Law. Since 2015, she has been collaborating with the NGO Sea-Watch, serving as a legal and operations consultant, Italian team coordinator, advocacy officer and spokesperson. Between 2016 and 2017, she worked with Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) as a Humanitarian Affairs Officer aboard the *Aquarius* ship. In 2022, she spent a year in Tunisia and Libya as an advocacy manager, supporting migrants in detention centers in Tripoli. In 2023, she was a lecturer in Refugee Law at the University of Milan-Bicocca and is currently a Visiting Professor at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. Since 2024, she has been coordinating a project for the NGO *Avocats Sans Frontières* focused on promoting youth activism against structural racism in the Euro-Mediterranean region.



**FLORIANA PATI**  
**(Nurse, Life Support, EMERGENCY)**

After an initial experience in hospitals in Lombardy (Italy), she shifted her focus to the healthcare sector within the third sector, assisting migrants and addressing urban marginalization. In 2016, she began volunteering with EMERGENCY, supporting the mobile clinic in Milan and migrant landings in eastern Sicily. She later specialized in Global Health, and from 2020 to 2024, she worked in various EMERGENCY clinics in Italy, dedicated to ensuring the right to healthcare. In this context, she gained extensive experience in migration medicine. She has participated in five search and rescue missions in the central Mediterranean aboard EMERGENCY's Life Support ship.



**JOSÉ RICARDO PEÑA**  
**(Electrician, Sea-Watch)**

Born in Houston, Texas, to immigrant parents (his mother is a U.S. citizen raised in Mexico, while his father crossed the border illegally).

He started working as an electrician. In 2023, after randomly coming across a sponsored job ad on Instagram, he applied for the position of maritime electrician at Sea-Watch, despite knowing nothing about civil search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. Three weeks later he found himself in Vinaròs, Spain, aboard the Sea-Watch 5. Since then, he has completed four missions and contributed to ship maintenance during dry-dock periods.







Emilia Romagna  
Teatro Fondazione  
Teatro Nazionale



css teatro stabile di innovazione  
del friuli venezia giulia

théâtre  
des 13 vents centre  
dramatique  
national montpellier



Funded by  
the European Union

