

Having graduated from the La Scala Ballet school, Francesco joined the ballet company of La Scala in 1997, making his debut as a soloist in William Forsythe's *In The Middle, Somewhat Elevated* at La Scala in 1998, and in 1999 was cast as the Bronze Idol by Natalia Makarova in her production of *La Bayadère*.

He danced numerous soloist roles with the company, including that of the Toreador in Roland Petit's *Carmen* and Quasimodo in *Notre Dame de Paris* and also works by Balanchine, Ailey, Neumeier, Cranko, Preljocaj, Godani, Kylián and Béjart. Internationally, his performances with La Scala included *Hilarion* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and at Covent Garden, opposite Sylvie Guillem in her creation of *Giselle*.

He began his choreographic career whilst a dancer at La Scala, having created a diverse repertoire for the Ballet School of La Scala, his own company Heliopolis and other freelance works. For Roberto Bolle, he created *The Fight* (Curia of the Roman Senate in the Imperial Forum); *New Year's Concert* (La Fenice, Venice, later televised); and *The Myth of the Phoenix* (Teatro Smeraldo, Milan).

The Heliopolis Company made its debut at the Venice Biennale in 2007, with a new piece "*Il Mare in Catena*" (The Sea in Chains), an investigation of eroticism and physical disability with the original music of Emiliano Palmieri, which was nominated for the Golden Lion. The following year he created a new work "*Normale*", which explored the concept of love and mental health: with these two titles Francesco curated a diptych as an investigation of differences present in modern society. Also in 2007, he created *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Jago*, the honest poetry of deception, for the Arena di Verona, with étoile of the Opéra National de Paris, Eleonora Abbagnato and Alessandro Riga. His pas de deux, *Black* has been performed at the Bolshoi Theatre by Svetlana Zakharova and Andrei Merkuriev (2008) and in New York by Irina Dvororenko and Maxim Beloserkovsky. In 2008 for the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg he created *Contraddizioni* for Ulyana Lopatkina. In 2009 he created a new work specifically for Svetlana Zakharova titled *SuperGame* which is a multimedia collaboration for the prima ballerina and six principal dancers of the Bolshoi Ballet. Additionally, his works included *Immemoria*, a work for 40 dancers to music by Shostakovich, premiering at La Scala in May 2010, and *Sed lux permanent – Transit umbra*, to music by Schoenberg, for the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Between 2007 and 2012, Francesco and Emiliano Palmieri collaborated on four creations: *Il Mare in Catene*, *Normale*, *Pinocchio* and *Willy Wonka and Chocolate Factory*.

In October 2010 he was appointed director of MaggioDanza in Florence, Italy.

In 2014, for Anna Antonickeva and Andrey Merkuriev (Principals of the Bolshoi Theatre) he created the evening "Fortuna vis Lucem: Bolero and Carmina Burana", performed with the New Ballet RU of Moscow, in tour across Russia and Cannes.

Francesco was appointed as the Royal New Zealand Ballet's Artistic Director in November 2014. In 2015 he led the company on an international tour (The UK and Italy). Additionally, he increased the repertoire of the Company, introducing never before performed choreographers to New Zealand audiences such as Andonis Foniadakis, Alexander Ekman and Roland Petit.

In 2016 he created a newly staged, longer version of his work "Wizard of Oz", touring across New Zealand. Originally devised for MaggioDanza, it was never performed after the theatre was closed on opening night due to building structural issues. The restaged production, designed by Gianluca Falaschi, toured New Zealand and was seen by over 38,000 people in its first season. Well received by audiences and critics alike, the production is regarded as one of the most successful productions created for the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Regularly interviewed internationally in both print and radio media as an advocate for ballet and Italian Dance, Francesco was invited to be a judge of The Genée International Ballet Competition 2016, alongside other judges David McAllister of the Australian Ballet and Kevin O'Hare of the Royal Ballet.

Francesco's tenure as Artistic Director of the Royal New Zealand Ballet concluded in June 2017, however he continued his artistic relationship with the company, creating a new full length ballet, Romeo and Juliet which toured nationally. Designed by triple Academy Award winner James Acheson, the production was both a critical and box office success. Reviewed as his "Love letter to New Zealand", the production was hailed as a "splendid and triumphant" production.

From January 2018 until December 2020 Francesco was Adjunct Artistic Director of the National Ballet of Uruguay, alongside Artistic Director Igor Yebra.

In 2020 Francesco established himself in Sydney and co-founded the Sydney Choreographic Centre with Neil Christopher. Sydney

Choreographic Ensemble is the resident performing group of the Centre, and made its debut with the world premiere of *GRIMM* at Parramatta Riverside Theatres.