

I Burattini Cortesi. The Comedic Joy of "Arlecchino Lovesick"

Gabrielle Pati (April 08, 2010)



On March 31, the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò hosted a performance of "Arlecchino Malato d'Amore", or "Arlecchino Lovesick", performed by the Cortesi family (La Compagnia I Burratini Cortesi) of Bergamo, Italy. This performance was done in a commedia dell'arte style, with characters such as Pantalone, Arlecchino and Gioppino all interacting in one maniacal plot with Venice as the setting

Last week the Costesi family from Caravaggio, Italy (Bergamo) gave a puppet show entitled "Arlecchino Lovesick" at the [Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò](#) [2]. Children and adults packed the small theatre and let themselves be drawn into the world of some of commedia dell'arte's funniest characters, including Arlecchino, Giuseppino, and Pantalone, with Venice as the backdrop to the story. Although the stage was built in New York, the scenery was also constructed by the Cortesi family and seamlessly alternated between scenes, showing various vistas of Venice.

This hilarious show gave voice to the talented Cortesi clan who writes the stories, builds the puppets and props, and performs as puppeteers. To say these performers are talented would be an understatement. In describing the artistic and theatrical abilities of the Cortesi and their collaborators,



one could say that they inject life into the puppets with the energy and voices of real characters from the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*, which is an Italian theatrical style in which characters clearly represent a certain city through their dialects/accents. In "Arlecchino Lovesick" many of the characters were from Bergamo, the biggest city near Caravaggio where the Cortesi live.

Daniele Cortesi and his wife Maria Teresa Zenoni, along with Virginio Baccanelli, portray such a wide range of voices/characters. The voices and actions of the puppets gave so much life to the puppets on stage that when Arlecchino or Giuseppino fell down or danced, one could sense the motion and almost feel the pain or joy of the puppets.

The plot of the performance centered around Arlecchino's love for Smeraldina; when he hears her name, he grows sick with love. Attempting to marry Smeraldina, but being rejected by her father Pantalone because he is poor, Arlecchino and his friend Giuseppino devise a plan to marry her, only to find that the evil Marquis with the advice of his cunning servant Brigella, has planned to marry Smeraldina to pay off his debts with her dowry. Through about ten or more scenes of comedic drama, Arlecchino prevails and his lovesickness is relieved.

For the younger audience the plot was a bit complicated, but this did not stop the kids from engaging in dialogue and song with the players. The energetic interaction between the audience and the lifelike puppets, and the beautifully constructed Venetian scenery, both created a lively and fun atmosphere. Kids and adults alike enjoyed the performance and the sheer joy produced by "Arlecchino Lovesick" lingered until after the show was over, when the Cortesi and Virginio showed the children the puppets up close and gave them a little tour of the stage.

During this visit to the U.S., the Cortesi family also performed at [The Hoboken Shelter](#) [3], and gave a puppetry workshop hosted by the [Hoboken Historical Museum](#) [4]. This show is part of "Burattini a Palazzo", a festival that will occur in June in Bergamo.

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