

Patrick Rogart

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Italian II

Professor Trombetta

Santa Monica College

The Sicilian Pupi

What a marvelous presentation we all had the pleasure of seeing recently on the Sicilian Pupi! Marco Saglimbenni spoke with such passion and curiosity on the subject that I was transformed by his infectious love of this original Sicilian art form. Through his presentation I learned just what a mark of stability the Pupi Theater has been in the ever changing life and times of the Sicilian people.

A turbulent history in Sicily has produced this remarkably unchanged and somehow ever evolving favorite past time. The sagas are both nostalgic of an identity struggling for and developing out of oppression. The ability to stretch a single story out for generations to both relish and reflect upon demonstrate the inseparable connection between the Sicilian people and their Pupi. An initial glance suggests the Pupi are steeped in feudalism, a direct reflection of the harsh reality of an island conquered by many empires over the centuries. The stories, however, tell more.

While it can be argued that feudalism is the birthmark and to some degree the bedrock of the art form, it certainly is not the ceiling. We know from Mr. Saglimbenni's presentation that the Pupi Theater evolved into a form of ritual over time. It was not a simple overnight floor show. The myths and legends that have come out of the Pupi are vast and deeply rooted. Taking for example the clip of the World War II American GI who is introduced to the Pupi is a fine demonstration of how the Pupi are cross cultural. The GI does not understand Italian yet is somehow drawn into the fight he witnesses on stage. He is so deeply moved by his immediate devotion to a single Pupi that he literally climbs the stage to defend his theatrical hero.

This is exactly why the Pupi have been so popular over the centuries. They have served as a bridge to the people between their struggles and a reflection of personal identity. The American GI found a hero in a marionette that did not even speak his language. He did this I

believe in great part because as a fellow soldier he recognized and appreciated his character's chivalry and was moved by the character's loss. The same goes for the Sicilian people; the battles lost have been the motivating factor that caused them to look inward for identity and out came this most colorful and original work of art.