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Dear Mr. Manteo -

I cut this story out of the New York Times about 42 years ago. I thought you might like to have it.

You don't remember me I am sure but about 1930 I used to go down from Columbia Univ to Mulberry St. every few weeks to watch the Great Show. I can remember your father and mother very well.

They used to let me go back stage and up in the loft. It was a treat I have always remembered with pleasure.

All good luck to you and your family and the show.

Sincerely,

Hartwell Webb

This Show a Family Affair

Seven Manteos All Take Part in Their Puppet Production of Orlando Furioso.

By MABEL GREENE.

Sociologists and such, who decry the vanishing unity of family life in New York city, should make a visit to the Manteo Theater at 109 Mulberry street, a marionette show which is entirely a family affair.

From the hand-carved heads of the armored warriors created by Papa Manteo to the elaborate costumes of the court ladies, hand-sewn by Mamma Manteo, who also doubles as ticket seller, to "The Adventures of Orlando Furioso," an episodic presentation of the traditional Italian marionette play given nightly with the aid of four stalwart Manteo sons and the pretty, dark-eyed Manteo daughter, this primitive puppet theater is the work of the Manteos.

Papa Agrippino Manteo is producer and director. Nightly during the thirteen months required to complete the play, he sits on a camp stool in the wings of the tiny, dusty theater and reads the lines of the many characters in his rich, sonorous voice. Twenty-five years ago Papa Manteo was an actor on the Sicilian stage, a member of the companies of such famous Italian stars as Giovanni Grassano and Cesare Rossi. Today he still is an actor, clenching his fists and rounding his own plump knees as he speaks the puppets' lines, his short, squat figure and earnest red face an incomparable picture to the backstage visitor. Sometimes, when there is a fight in progress on the stage, he nearly falls off his chair.

All Equally in Earnest

Equally earnest are the Manteo Ahas. The three eldest—Mike, 23, Leo, 21, and Ritz, 17—are the puppeteers, while eleven-year-old Jennie helps with the props and stamps his feet when the followers of Charlemagne are engaged in particularly heavy fighting. Aida, the Manteo daughter, who is responsible for the countless painted, backdrops of garden scenes and Moorish palaces, as well as a fair share of the fine sewing on the costumes, now and then substitutes for her mother in the rare feminine lines of the performance.

The play, which is being produced for the fourth consecutive time in six years, is an adaptation of the legend of the French epic hero, Roland, taken from Ariosto's "I Paladini di Francia." The heroic friendship of Roland and Oliver, the motives of Ganelon's treachery, the famous fight between Roland and the giant Ferragus and many other details are there, and there are more battles than any other action in the performance. The audience loves a good scrap and rather than take chances on missing a single fight many Italians in the neighborhood buy season tickets that entitle them to a key

The puppets, which range in size from two and a half to six feet, when they get their hand-wrought brass armor on, weigh from forty-five pounds up to 120 pounds each. They are operated by iron rods bent into a handle at one end and are so heavy that the Manteo boys all have developed enormous muscles from shifting them about.

Have Their Own Storehouse.

When not in use the dolls are kept in the second and third floor lofts, which also house the workshop of Papa Manteo. Here, with the aid of a small hand lathe and a vise, he carves the puppets' heads from blocks of wood and fashions their authentic armor from sheets of brass. Scars and gashes and dents are repaired here, too, and following the heavy fighting which is almost certainly a nightly feature there are numerous mending jobs to be done. There are more than 400 different puppets to keep in shape, freshly costumed and armored.

Access to this dim, enchanted region is gained by a creaking, flimsy ladder, but if you are brave enough to climb its rungs you emerge into a room filled with heads and lined with shelves on which are ranged brass helmets, gauntlets, shields and swords in every stage of construction. Here is kept the six-foot giant Ferragus, the grinning dragon and the cunningly constructed puppet whose wooden body is wired so that it can be split in half. Its hollowed chest is filled with red wine, and when his adversary's sword cleaves him, through the middle this is released, spurting blood everywhere to the immense delight of the audience.

"They know every line of the play," Ritz said. "If we make even the slightest slip we are greeted with a storm of hisses and whistles. Now and then, in our haste, we snatch up the wrong figure—as the story progresses Roland and his friends grow older, you see—and at once they tell us about it out front."

The Manteo Marionettes are a family heritage, it was explained. Years ago in Italy Michael Manteo, the grandfather of Agrippino, was a puppeteer, and one of the marionettes now being used was once the property of Michael Manteo. It is an elaborate figure, with heavily embossed nickel armor.

Kept to the Tradition.

When Agrippino left Sicily he lived for several years in Argentina, but brought back the

York before the war. Always he dreamed of establishing his own marionette show, and as his son grew older he began his preparations. It was a family tradition, and besides working on it would keep his sons off the streets and out of mischief.

Six years ago the first performance was given, and it has been presented continuously ever since. Weekdays the neighborhood and a few uptown students of the puppet art pay their 25-cent admission fee and sit goggle-eyed between 8 and 10:30 P. M., watching the fortunes of Roland, Charlemagne and the twelve peers, and on Sundays they attend from 5 to 7 P. M. The lines are entirely in Italian, and Papa Manteo, who knows nearly all of them by heart, is now toying with the plan of giving English performances. But English or Italian, there is no mistaking the action of the puppet players.

Mike, the elder Manteo son, who has been a six-day bicycle rider, is the only married one. He is the father of an eight-month-old boy, whose chief plaything is a puppet larger than himself. Ritz is attending West Side Textile High School, studying engineering day times. Leo, who used to be a tap dancer in vaudeville before the advent of the talkies, spends his daylight hours with his father and two brothers conducting an electrical contracting business on the first floor of the family home at 38 Market street.

But when evening comes the Manteo family moves en masse to the 109 Mulberry street address, where, with stage props as primitive as the legendary drama they present, the marionette show begins. Each of them is fluently conversant with medieval history, and backstage the illusion of legendary antiquity is as thick as the dust on the floor.