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The Little Countess's Romance. Version from 1982

Play

Based upon a popular romance from the 15th-16th centuries and known as Romance del Conde Flores or Romance de la Condesita, with numerous versions in Spain, Portugal and America.

Plot

The Count Flores, just married, leaves for war. The Little Countess waits for him, as she promised her husband, for three long years (even more). Seeing he does not come back, her parents ask her to marry again, but she, dressed in a "sayal"*, decides to search for him, hoping he is alive. Eventually she finds him: he is now a rich castle owner about to marry again. The Little Countess, trying to avoid being discovered, begs him for alms. He gives her a coin. Dissatisfied, she uncovers herself and the Count falls claiming: "The first loves are very hard to forget". He comes back to the Little Countess and the bride to whom he was about to marry is left alone.

*(rustic fabric)

Release

This third version, carried out using a new and astonishing technique, was released at the First International Festival of Zamora (1982). His five daughters joined the group as puppeteers and the narrator.

Characters Exhibited

Count Flores and the Little Countess. The Little Countess's father. Bride.

Main Performances

School of Arts and Crafts of Segovia, accompanied by the group Hadit (1982).
Florence Festival (1983), Bergamo Festival (1985), Italy.
First International Festival of Segovia. Titirimundi (Spain, 1985)
International Festivals of Tolosa (1984), Cádiz, Seville, Bilbao and Zaragoza (1985), Spain.
First Biennial International Festival of Évora (Portugal, 1987).
8th World Puppet Festival Charleville (France, 1988).

Creation date

1982

Technique

Table top rod puppet, with rods in their hands fastened to the puppeteer's body with a harness.
Handmade costumes by Matilde del Amo.

The Little Countess's Romance. Vesion by students from Andrés Laguna Secondary School, in Segovia, 1980

Release

A new version of the Romance de la Condesita was performed in October 1980 as the final production of a course delivered by Francisco Peralta to students aged 13 and 14 in Andrés Laguna Secondary School in Segovia.

The play was performed within a modest programme which the company Libélula ["Dragonfly" in Spanish], directed by Julio Miguel and Lola Atance, organized in Segovia during those dates, one of the early stages of what from 1985 onwards would be the International Puppet Theatre Festival, Titirimundi (Segovia).

The puppets, which were used on stage by the students themselves, were made with recycled domestic materials, pieces of wood, rods and cloth. It is worthy of admiration how Peralta was able to obtain from those learners such a fresh and elegant outcome in just a few days and using such simple materials.

Figures exhibited

Bride, Count Flores, Little Countess and Father.

Main Performances

One-off performance in October 1980, in Segovia.

Technique

Rod puppets.

Draft of a figure from the Romance de la Condesita

In order to admire properly the inner architecture of these figures, it is necessary to undress them, to strip them of those delicate costumes with which his wife, Matilde del Amo, used to cover them.

We can observe the base that the puppeteer places on his shoulder to hold the figure, free up his hands and, thus, be able to manipulate the puppet's body, head and arms. The puppeteer can control in this way all the puppet's movements.

At the same height as the puppeteer's face, we find the linkages which allow the body's inclination and the head's movements. This performance of the Little Countess came about as a street show like, in the popular tradition, the gigantes y cabezudos [giant carnival figures with oversized heads]. The vertical proportion of these puppets is important as the manipulator gets lost among the public.

According to the requirements of the script, these puppets can change their facial expressions with the aid of masks.

These mechanisms were conceived by Francisco Peralta during the long hours inside his workshop, rehearsing one time after another the mobility and bodily expression of his puppets, to almost reach perfection.

The night

Play

La noche is a poetic tale by Montserrat del Amo especially conceived for Francisco Peralta's puppets. The authoress wanted to create a new plot with this work embodying the archetypical characters of the Italian comedy. The mischievous Harlequin, the enamoured Pierrot, the beautiful Columbine...

Written in 1955, La noche is a play of great originality and complex play-writing on which Peralta started to work from that time.

Plot

Pierrot, in love with Columbine, sighs for a love which he regards as unattainable. But for the lively Harlequin, nothing is impossible and, in order to help his friend, he makes Columbine descend from the star on which she dwells.

Performances

Francisco Peralta has delivered numerous seminars and lectures to show the secrets of the puppets, their manipulation and to teach how to create them. The most outstanding one took place during the year 2003 in his workshop in Valdemoro, with the collaboration of the Community of Madrid.

In some of these seminars, Montserrat del Amo also participated with the aim of introducing the students to the creation of original texts suitable for performance as puppet theatre.

Master Peter's Puppet Show

Figures exhibited

Charlemagne carried on a litter by four lackeys

Gaiferos and Don Roldán playing "tables" [a board game similar to backgammon)

Princess Melisendra
Don Gaiferos on horseback
Punishment of the Moor in love: 8-figure group
King Marsilio

Play

El retablo de Maese Pedro by Manuel de Falla (1876-1946), drama and musical version based upon an episode from Don Quixote of La Mancha, by Miguel de Cervantes. Commissioned to Falla by the Princess of Polignac in 1919 and released in Paris in 1923

Plot

The Puppeteer Master Peter performs Retablo de la libertad de Melisendra [The Freedom of Melisendra Puppet Show] for Don Quixote, Sancho Panza and the rest of the guests at a Castilian inn. In the play, Melisendra is confined and made prisoner of the Moors in the castle of the Aljafería of Zaragoza. King Charlemagne urges her husband, Don Gaiferos, to stop playing tables and undertake her search. Beautiful Melisendra is courted by King Marisilio and also by a Moor who will eventually be punished for his daring. Don Gaiferos finds her, rescues her and both escape on horseback

Release

1960 Santa María de las Nieves school (Madrid)
1973 (2nd version). Tour around university centres financed by Juan March Foundation

Main performances

First International Puppet Festival of Madrid, 1974

Organized by the National Commission for Music and with an orchestra conducted by the composer Odón Alonso, it participated in:

25th Granada International Music and Dance Festival. Centenary of Manuel de Falla (Spain, 1976)

7th Segovia Chamber Music Week, 1976

7th Corpus Chamber Music Week of Lugo. Lugo (Spain, 1976)

Universities and International Festivals all around Spain

Figures exhibited

Charlemagne carried on a litter by four lackeys
Gaiferos and Don Roldán, playing tables
Princess Melisendra and the Moor in love
Gaiferos on horseback
Punishment of the Moor in love (8-figure group)

Date of creation

1973

Technique

Marionette or string puppet. Handmade costumes by Matilde del Amo
Melisendra in the tower
Master Peter's Puppet Show

Technique

Marionette or string puppet

Character appearing in the play

Melisendra, confined by King Marsilio in one of the towers of the Aljafería Palace of Zaragoza, leans over the balcony looking towards France, wishing that one day her husband would arrive to rescue her. The lady is desired by the Moorish king and also by one of the main vassals of his crown, who, on being surprised while kissing her, will be harshly punished

Don Gaiferos on Horseback (Master Peter's Puppet Show)

Technique

Marionette or string puppet. Complex group of horse and knight moved by strings

Characters appearing in the play

After a long journey, don Gaiferos arrives at the foot of the tower. At first, Melisendra does not recognise him, but don Gaiferos reveals his identity. The overjoyed Melisendra lowers herself from the balcony to mount the horse. Happy, they hastily leave but when their flight is discovered, a large Moorish troop pursues them

Belisa's Affected Ways

Play

Los melindres de Belisa, also called La melindrosa or Los esclavos supuestos, is a situation comedy by Lope de Vega, written between 1606-1608 and published in 1617

Plot

Belisa is a young, beautiful, rich heiress beleaguered by many suitors. However, she finds fault in all of them. Two youngsters who are in love, Felisardo and Celia, are fleeing from justice due to a love quarrel and seek refuge at Eliso's house, a good friend. Lisarda, Belisa's mother, arrives to collect money from a pending debt. Eliso thinks that the authorities have come for the young couple and disguises them as slaves. As he has no money, the authorities decide that the slaves will cover the debt. The pretend slave boy is very handsome and he dazzles both Lisarda and her beautiful daughter Belisa. Whereas don Juan, Belisa's brother, feels a strong attraction for the pretend slave girl. After many predicaments, the love of the young couple triumphs over the desires of the others

Release

This play was only performed during the closure of the 1961-1962 academic year by the students of Santa María de las Nieves school. (Madrid)

Figures exhibited

Lisarda and Belisa

Technique

Marionettes or string puppets. Handmade costumes by Matilde del Amo

Bastien and Bastienne

Play

One act German opera written by Mozart when he was 12 years old

Peralta includes in his performance the musical version by the Pequeños Cantores de Vincennes, under the direction of Max Gaeti

Plot

Bastienne, a young shepherdess, is afraid of having lost Bastien's love. To recover it, he turns to the wizard Colás who, as a fortune-teller, knows that a young lady is wooing Bastián. Colás advises each of them, feigns the performance of some spells and sets them back on the path of love

Release

1956 Santa María de las Nieves school (Madrid)

Main Performances

Ateneo, Círculo Medina of Madrid and the first broadcasts of Spanish television(1956)

Madrid Circle of Fine Arts (1971)

4th National Conference of Theatre for Children and Young Adults Madrid (1973)

International Festivals of Casablanca (1973), Madrid (1974) and Barcelona (1975)

El Carro de la Farsa, Spanish television (1982)

Figures exhibited

Bastien, Bastienne and wizard Colás

Date of creation

1967 (2ndversion, here exhibited)

Technique

Marionettes or spring puppets. Handmade costumes by Matilde del Amo

The Priest who only Knew one Mass

Play

The priest who only knew one mass is the 11th poem in Los Milagros de Nuestra Señora, a collection of poetry written in the 13th century by Gonzalo de Berceo, the most important writer of the Mester de Clerecía [Ministry of Clergy]

Plot

A priest says the same mass every day: the one devoted to the Glorious Virgin. He knows only that one and for that reason people tell his bishop that he is an ignorant man. The bishop rebukes him and forbids him to say mass so that the priest is deeply saddened and without any livelihood. He asks the Virgin for advice and help, she appears in front of the bishop and she discredits and threatens him. The terrified bishop reinstates the priest in his chaplaincy where he will say the mass of the Glorious Virgin until his dying day

Release

Closure of the 1962-1963 academic year. Santa María de las Nieves school (Madrid)

Main performances

1969 Santa María de las Nieves school (Madrid), 2nd version

1982 Segovia School of Arts and Crafts, accompanied by the group Hadit

Figures exhibited

The bishop, the Virgin and the priest

Technique

Marionettes or spring puppets. Handmade costumes by Matilde del Amo

The Little Countess's Romance. Version from 1966

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*(rustic fabric)

Release

1956-57 Santa María de las Nieves school (Madrid)

1966 Second version, here exhibited. Santa María de las Nieves school (Madrid)

Figures exhibited

Count Flores on horseback. Little Countess and bride

Date of creation

1966

Technique

Marionettes or spring puppets. Handmade costumes by Matilde del Amo

Emperor Charlemagne carried on a litter by four lackeys (Master Peter's Puppet Show)

Technique

Marionette or spring puppet. Complex group of five string puppets. The lackeys are walking and Charlemagne is sitting upon the litter

Character appearing in the play

Emperor Charlemagne, Melisendra's putative father, appears on stage with the symbols of his power: the Crown and the sceptre. He squabbles with don Gaiferos, Melisendra's husband because, instead of leaving in search for his wife, who has been captured by the Moors, he spends his time playing tables with don Roldán: "It seems that he wanted to knock him on his head a dozen times," Cervantes wrote.

Don Roldán y don Gaiferos jugando a las tablas [Don Roldán and don Gaiferos Playing Tables]
Master Peter's Puppet Show

Technique

Marionettes or string puppets. The figure in dark clothes is don Roldán. Don Gaiferos is dressed in red

Characters appearing in the play

Emperor Charlemagne catches don Roldán and don Gaiferos, the husband of Melisendra – who is being held captive by the Moors -, playing "tables." After being severely rebuked by the King

and warned about the possible danger to his honour, don Gaiferos throws the board to the floor and decides to go to her rescue.

Don Gaiferos asks don Roldán for his sword called Durindana, but don Roldán does not give it to him though he offers to go with him. Don Gaiferos refuses, "he alone is enough to rescue his wife, even if she is in the deepest place on earth."

Castigo del moro enamorado [Punishment of the Moor in love]

Master Peter's Puppet Show

Technique

Simple marionettes or spring puppets without operating cross

Characters appearing in the play

While Melisendra is held captive in the tower, one of the knights of King Marsilio goes to her room, quietly approaches her and, before she can prevent it, he kisses her on the lips. King Marsilio, who has witnessed the effrontery of his subject, orders his arrest and condemns him to receive 200 lashes. Before the punishment is executed, he is to be walked through the streets of the city to shame him and to serve as a lesson to his neighbours

King Marsilio on Horseback (Master Peter's Puppet Show)

Technique

Marionette with strings and rod. Complex group of horse and knight that are moved with strings and a thick wooden rod

Characters appearing in the play

King Marsilio is among the Moorish troop that pursues don Gaiferos and doña Melisendra and he does not want his beloved lady to escape from his control. It is at this moment when Don Quixote, who is attending the puppet show, stands up, sword in hand, and attacks the Moors as if they were real: "Stop lousy troop, do not follow or pursue them; but fight against me in battle." King Marsilio is the first to be defeated by the anger of the clever nobleman

Frederick

Play

Fable written and illustrated by Leo Lionni (Amsterdam, 1910- Tuscany, 1999)

Plot

It tells the story of five mice. While four of them work endlessly picking up supplies for winter, Frederick spends his time picking up rays of sunlight that he will turn into colours and words. The main difference from Lionni's story is that the other mice do not rebuke him but welcome his tales during the harshest winter days

First performance

1984 2nd International Puppet Festival of Tolosa (Spain)

Main performances

Cycle of performances from 1984 to 1994.

2nd National Puppet Festival, Tarrasa. Spain. (1985)

5th International Puppet Festival, Seville. Spain. (1985)

Figures exhibited

Frederick, Spring mouse, Summer mouse, Autumn mouse and Winter mouse

Date of creation

1984

Technique

Rod puppets with levers. Covers crocheted by Matilde del Amo

