



Characters

Doctor Balanzone

The mask of the Doctor in the *Commedia dell'Arte* (which was a satire on the learned pedant who graduated from the University in Bologna, his native city which was considered to be a centre of intellectual and cultural excellence in the xvi century) evolved into Doctor Balanzone in the puppet theatres of the county of Emilia. The origins of Doctor Balanzone are still a matter of debate: some critics think it was invented during the xvi century by the author Luzio Burchiella, who is said to have derived it from a barber in the village of Francolino, Mr. Graziano delle Cotiche, while others maintain that the character evolved from performances which exaggerated the figure of the pedant. Before acquiring his definite name of Ballanzone, the mask was also called Doctor dei Violoni, Doctor Forbizone, Graziano delle Cotiche, Bombarda, Scatlòn, Graziano Scarpazòn, Campanari, Francolin, Partesana, Lambròn ch'an guares incion (dialect: Lambrone who heals no-one).

As far as the origins of the name are concerned, some scholars think that Balanzone – or Ballanzone – derives from the *balle* (colloquialism: lies) he is telling all the time; but this theory has been opposed as, in fact, the Doctor does not tell lies he just uses pompous, rambling and complex speech. A most probable etymology is *balanza* (dialect: scales), the symbol of justice, which Balanzone, a doctor in law (but also a philosopher, an astronomer, and a physician), is so proud to represent. His costume is all black, apart from his white collar, cuffs and the handkerchief which is hung on his belt; his *tirate* (rambling speeches enriched with baroque expressions, nonsense, and quotations) are a mixture of Italian, Latin, Bologna dialect, and unique dialectal expressions such as «Uhà, uhà; mo busicàta, mo bubbla; gnacchera madona Fleppa; mol, bismol, zarandol!» (untranslatable)

Head of Sandrone

According to the Ferrari family, the head here on show seems to have been used during World War I, when puppeteers were often recruited for performances at the front. Archive photographs show that these performances were attended by a large public, consisting of both private soldiers and others. Gimmi Ferrari sustains that the hole in the forehead of this item was caused by a bullet fired by an Austrian sharpshooter; in fact, the diameter of the hole does correspond to the calibre of the arms in use at that time.

Puppeteers



Gaetano Viani

Gaetano Viani (Borgoforte 1888 – Mantova 1949)

This puppeteer is said to have been a great interpreter of Fagiolino and Sandrone. As a boy he started to construct puppets and soon took his travelling shows around the provinces of Mantua, Brescia, and Verona as well as in the county of Friuli. His repertoire included such pieces as *Un nuovo Caino* (A New Cain), *Fasolino barbiere dei morti* (Fasolino the Barber of the Dead), *Fasolino nell'isola misteriosa* (Fasolino in the Mysterious Island), *Fasolino buon soldato ovvero i doveri di una sentinella* (Fasolino the Good Soldier or a Lookout's Duties), *Fasolino e Sandrone girovaghi* (The Nomads Fasolino and Sandrone), *I principi di Salerno* (The Princes of Salerno).

Guerrino Fattori

(Parma 1897 – Lesignano Bagni 1969)
Gaetano Fattori grew up in the family of the puppeteer Leopoldo Amaduzzi, who taught him his job and made him perform for the first time in a pub in the village of Tizzano. Fattori took his shows all around the province of Parma; at first he used to travel by bicycle, but then he changed it for a horse-drawn caravan, which allowed his wife Maria Contini and his children to go with him. For a period he cooperated with the puppeteer Enzo Baroni. Guerrino sculpted his puppets himself and continued this activity even after retiring from the stage in 1958.



Guerrino Fattori



Enzo Baroni

Enzo Baroni (Brescello 1893– Soragna 1973)

At the age of 17, Enzo Baroni left school and started his career in the theatre by joining the Olivieri brothers' company in Guastalla. Ten years later, he left them and entered the Serrachioli company in Bologna. He seems to have first approached the puppet theatre because of a bet made with some friends; the success he obtained was so great that he left the prose theatre for that of animation. For almost 15 years he performed his travelling shows in theatres, cinemas, courtyards, schools, hotels and clubs all around the provinces of Parma, Piacenza, Reggio and Mantua; Carlo Baroni was always with him, and sometimes they were joined by other puppeteers and marionette operators such as Guerrino Fattori, Otello Monticelli, or the Salici family. The masks he most often performed were those of Sandrone and Fagiolino. During the winter, a part of his activity consisted of "school performances", special shows he organised for schools. *La luna del 13 marzo* (*The Moon on 13th March*), *Pia de' Tolomei*, *La sepolta viva* (*Buried Alive*), *Brescia e Venezia*, *Sandrone medico per forza* (*Sandrone Physician by Force*), *I 3 gobbi di Damasco* (*The Three Hunchbacks of Damascus*)

are some titles from his main productions; these, as happened during the 1970's, were followed by some farces which constituted the second half of the show: *La Fischiata* (*A Woman to Whistle At*), *Amore e polenta* (*Love and Polenta*¹), *I tre rivali in amore* (*The Three Love Rivals*), and many others with Sandrone as the main character such as *Sandrone al mercato della Montagnola* (*Sandrone at the Montagnola Market*), *Sandrone cameriere burlato* (*Sandrone the Tricked Waiter*), *Il telegramma sandronifero* (*Sandrone Writes a Telegram*), *Sandrone di ritorno dall'America* (*Sandrone is Back from the USA*), *E' arrivato il bel Sandrone* (*Handsome Sandrone Is Here*), and so on. The name of the company varied according to its members: Compagnia Marionettistica Mantovana (Mantua Marionette Company), Compagnia Burattineide (Puppet-land Company), Compagnia dei Fantocci Lirici (Lyrical Puppets Company), Drammatici e d'Arte Varia Salici – Baroni (Salici – Baroni Dramaturgy and Art), Mondiali Fantocci Drammatici Enzo Baroni – Bianca Minozzi (Enzo Baroni – Bianca Minozzi World Dramatic Puppets). His passion for the prose theatre never died and that is why sometimes the final farce was replaced with a performance by human-actors. On 22nd November 1942, in the village of Torrile, in the province of Parma, he put on stage his last puppet show – *Carlo V Re di Castiglia* (*Charles V King of Castile*) a "human-actors" farce he performed with the Anselmi couple. On the following Thursday he went back to the prose theatre joining the Compagnia Sociale (Social Company) and performing pieces such as *Otello*, *Il Cardinale* (*The Cardinal*), *Le due orfanelle* (*The Two Little Orphan Girls*), *Morte Civile* (*Civil Death*). Later on he formed a company of his own; this consisted of about twenty actors who performed works by Pirandello, D'Annunzio, Niccodemi, and others on a "travelling stage". In St. Vincent a cyclone destroyed the "carro di Tespi" (travelling stage) so that Baroni had to disband the company and he went to live in Soragna, a village in the lowlands around Parma.

¹ Maize porridge; a typical dish of Northern Italy.

Demetrio Presini (Nino) (Bologna 1918 – 2002)

The nephew of Gualtiero Mandrioli, he put his first show on stage in 1930, when he performed in front of his schoolmates with the help of his friend Angelo Viti: their success led them to perform again in various parish halls and courtyards. At the age of 17, he started playing the guitar and joined a band which used to sing serenades under women's windows in Bologna; he went on playing even during his military service and in 1941 he joined a company which performed for the troops as part of a longer show which included live songs by the young Nilla Pizzi. In 1945 he went to visit his uncle Gualtiero Mandrioli, who performed in town squares; one night the puppeteer asked for some "occasional" help and made him operate Sganapino; it was enough for Demetrio's old passion to re-emerge with force and, between 1950 and 1956, he worked in his uncle's company. Demetrio started to carve the heads of his puppets and soon became a sculptor much in demand. He was particularly appreciated for his interpretation of Sganapino as he managed to make the character even funnier; unlike Mandrioli – who preferred the "serious" genre – he mostly performed comic shows and included in his repertoire such pieces as *Fagiolino e Sganapino servi di due padroni* (*Fagiolino and Sganapino Servants of Two Masters*), *Sganapino mago* (*Sganapino the Magician*), *Sganapino Re di Terradoro* (*Sganapino the King of Golden-land*), *Sganapino cameriere milionario ovvero Sganapino invisibile* (*Sganapino the Millionaire Waiter or the Invisible Sganapino*).

In 1957, together with Sara Sarti and Romano Danielli, he founded a company called *La risata* (*The Laugh*) which performed in the provinces of Bologna, Ferrara, Florence and Siena as well as in Romagna. When in 1962 Romano Danielli left the company, he performed with the old puppeteer Umberto Malaguti. In 1971 he acted "as human" in *Fagiolino barbiere dei morti* (*Fagiolino the Barber of the Dead*) playing the role of Sganapino under the direction of Franco Cristofori. Between 1972 and 1983 he used to spend the summer months performing in Trento Square, in Bologna, with his wife Maria Ferné and his son Patrizio as assistants. In 1976 he founded the *Teatrén di buratén* (dialect: Puppet Theatre), a permanent puppet theatre which he followed for 14 years. In 1991 he was rewarded with the Golden Campogalliani prize.



Demetrio Presini