

Kaputte, a Brancoli Drama

In *them thar hills* there's more going on than just olives, potatoes and grapes.

As you drive the Brennero (SS12) towards Modena, you look up at the mountains and the tiny villages nestled in the hill-sides, and wonder what it might be like to live there under the cross of Brancoli and away from the Lucca plain. The ancient vil-lages have foundations from Etruscan times, when for safety and health reasons this civilization chose to live in these mountains.

The Italian government encouraged these established communities to continue, by providing passable roads, with bus transportation to take the children to schools and to provide passage for those without cars to the towns on the plain. Learning the stan-dard Italian language was encouraged in schools, and the population was supported by programs that gave women funds so they could care for their families and el-derly relatives. Men and women could choose to work off mountain if they wished, as well as making oil, wine and veg-etables. Their days were filled with labor.

Today young students are bussed to study at Lucca-area schools; older ones make connections to the universities of Pisa and Florence. Their families have all the technological toys, broadening their spheres of experience, offering them a quality of life which is not just the hard la-bor of the fields – which they still have to pay service to. When they aren't working, they help with family chores. They form associations. In each village, the church is a central point. The people care for it,



working together for the festivals and other events that are joyful and very well prepared.

This year the *Amici di Piazza di Brancoli* took it upon themselves to per-form Giacomo Paolini's play *Kaputte* (written in 1989), which describes the war-time conditions of the little communities in Tuscany and elsewhere. Paolini, who was born in Lucca, writes theatrical pieces inspired by situations in this area before and during World War II, using the Lucchese dialect with irony and human warmth. These plays are performed not only in theatres, but also in piazzas and courtyards. *Kaputte* has even been per-formed in California (1994).

The war in 1944 was nearly finished, yet the Nazi soldiers still in Italy were creating many problems for the residents of these villages. Paolini created *Kaputte* from his knowledge of the situation of terror that ex-isted under these hostile soldiers, who thought they had won this war and that Italy was theirs. Of course, the *Partigiani*, who were citizens of these communities, thought differently and wanted to rid their country of the foreign soldiers who were distorting and ruining their way of life. The *Partigiani* hid in the woods and crags of the mountains, then struck with incendi-ary equipment, killing some of the Nazi soldiers and provoking revenge by those who were not killed.

In Piazza di Brancoli the Nazi soldiers took over the Buchignani villa behind the church. The soldiers also lived in the Buchignani house on Via Redola. Fosco Picchi was eight years old and lived in this house with this grandmother, mother and uncle – and the play talks about them. Because the older folks had lived in the

U.S. and been naturalized, the war situa-tion was difficult for them. They were citi-zens of both America and Italy.

At one time, a downed pilot was hiding in the mountain above their house. He needed food and help, so Fosco's mother helped him. She hid him in their house, cre-ating a very tense situation because shel-tering an enemy soldier was cause for death to the family. Other families in the village experienced similar problems. The Nazi military was very dictatorial and de-manded obedience from all citizens, under penalty of death. The people who are now the *Amici di Piazza* were young children then; they saw and felt their parents' fear and anguish.

Paolini writes a very humorous play, but there is more than a bit of truth in it, with the names and situations changed. It was a most fearful time for these people, and those who play the roles of the besieged family present their characters realisti-cally, as they knew them from watching the terror in their homes, And they play their roles brilliantly.

Tropo Stroppia was the Amici players' first production some years ago. It was in vernacular and they really made it a hit. I videotaped it to enjoy it again later. *Kaputte* has been professionally video-taped, and the group has had requests to perform in other communities. Their pro-duction in Saltocchio near Ponte a Moriano was incredible, with the hall of San Andrew full to overflowing.

So you never know what you will find *In Them Thar Hills*. They are also our church chorus, and prepare dinners at *Festa* time. Their cuisine is fabulous. They are an amazing group of people! They are Fosco's family. Bravissimi, tutti!

Special Little People™

Aromatherapy for the little, and not so little, ones in our lives



A natural way to improve harmony and well-being

www.speciallittlepeople.co.uk