

Weekend

The New York Times

Off Broadway: Marathon of One-Acters (Page C4) and 'G
Bob Crosby at Roseland (Page C7) Choral Epic FromAudubon
Without
Feathers

By JOHN RUSSELL

JOHAN JAMES AUDUBON AND HIS SONS" at the Grey Art Gallery, 33 Washington Place, has a great deal that is fresh and unexpected to tell us about one of the great Americans whom we most take for granted.

Everyone knows in a general way that Audubon was a combination of painter and man of science who has had no equal in this country when it comes to the representation of birds. His work turns up everywhere in reproduction, and for the huge and ever-growing company of American birders he doubles as founding father and president in perpetuity.

But it's not always easy to get a fix at first hand on what Audubon actually did. One of the best-looking books of recent times is "Audubon's Birds of America," edited by Roger Tory Peterson and Virginia Marie Peterson, reproduced afresh from the Audubon Society's copy of the Audubon double elephant folio and published by the Abbeville Press. But that noble volume retails at \$150 (a copy of the original folio sold at auction not long ago for \$440,000, by the way).

The best way to see Audubon directly is still to go to the New-York Historical Society, where we can scrutinize his works in quantity any time we like. But even there we

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"Portrait of Mrs. Sarah Best" by John James Audubon is on view at the Grey Art Gallery.

Renaissance
Of Puppet Shows
For Grown-Ups

By ELEANOR BLAU

PUPPET shows for adults are hardly new; they date back to antiquity, when nobody distinguished between entertainment for young and old. But they have been undergoing a renaissance in recent years in this country and Europe. And this weekend in New York, they will abound.

Armor will clash and a head will fall when the Manteo Sicilian Marionette Theater brings to life the world of Charlemagne's court in a rare appearance Sunday at the American Museum of Natural History on 79th Street and Central Park West. For more than a century, generations of the Manteo family have carried on the tradition of performing adventures from the life of Roland with nearly life-size marionettes.

Bruce D. Schwartz, wearing a stage that fits over his head and torso, will present an Elizabethan farce and also work with rod puppets starting at 11 tonight at the Economy Tires Theater of the Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th Street. Mr. Schwartz is back in town after having gained popular and critical acclaim on his last visit.

Japanese bunraku puppets — manipulated by black-hooded handlers — will love and die in a natural setting in a film, instead of on stage, to be shown tonight and tomorrow at the Japan Society, 333 East 47th Street. The 1982 film is being brought back by request after its showing in March and may be included in the Cannes International Film Festival.

Such has been the interest in the form that New York now has a place dedicated to puppetry — the Puppet Loft at 180 Duane Street in TriBeCa, the triangle below Canal Street — where various performances are scheduled Saturday. The three-year-old gallery's intention is to present puppetry as a fine art.

The Manteo group is a family affair that has spanned six generations, and the man to talk about it is the voluble Papa (Mike) Manteo. When he relates an event — fact or fic-

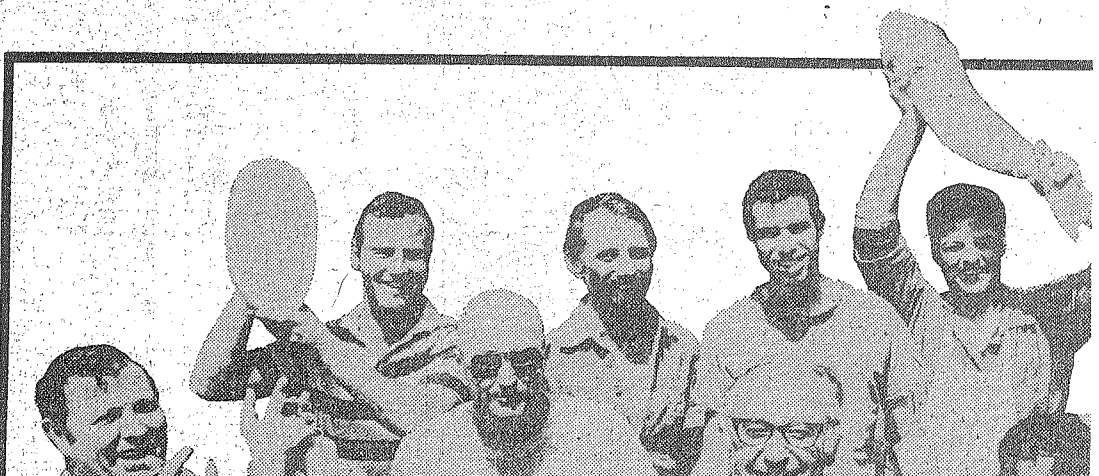
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WEEKENDER
GUIDE

Friday

'AGAMEMNON' IN CHELSEA

The "Agamemnon" of Aeschylus, which spans the Greek king's return from the Trojan War to his murder by his queen, Clytemnestra, is being staged at the Greek Theater of New York, 120 West 28th Street, under the direction of Jonathan Ringkamp, a Franciscan brother, who was co-founder of street-theater productions with Geraldine Fitzgerald and who is also a playwright. He has



Puppet Renaissance For the Grown-Ups



Papa (Mike) Manteo with a puppet of the Manteo Sicilian Marionette Theater. He and his charges will perform Sunday at Natural History Museum.

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tion — he acts out all the parts. So it was that the burly 72-year-old enacted a joust the other day in his shop in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn, where he works as an electrician and crafts the marionettes that are central to his life.

"TA, TA," he boomed as he stamped his feet, holding a puppet knight by the rod emerging from its head and pulling a cord to move its shield. Mr. Manteo was recounting a puppet battle and demonstrating his art. "It's all in the twist of the wrist," he confided.

Like his father, grandfather and great-grandfather before him — and like his own son and grandson — Mr. Manteo is steeped in a Sicilian tradition dating back at least as far as the 16th century. Using marionettes weighing as much as 125 pounds, the Manteos have presented adventures from the life of Roland (Orlando in Italian), the swashbuckling medieval knight who fought for Charlemagne. Some of the marionettes made by the first Manteos are in a collection of the Smithsonian Institution and others reside in Mr. Manteo's shop.

Operated with rods and cords by manipulators hidden above the puppet stage, the figures — feet swinging free and moving by their own weight — battle violently, argue raucously,

with this show at the Dance Theater Workshop in the fall of 1980; Mel Gussow, reviewing his show in *The New York Times*, said he had a "startling gift for theatrical transformation."

The puppeteer, who is 26 years old and began his work at age 9, makes his own puppets and writes his own plays. He's wary of moves to establish puppetry's fine arts credentials.

"Historically," he agrees, "it has been neglected, at least in the West; it's always been considered something sort of trifling, one of the lesser arts. But because of that there is tremendous freedom for experimental work and new ideas. I don't have to study five centuries of technique, and there's no one to tell me what I'm doing is wrong." Mr. Schwartz links the new interest in adult puppetry to Off Off Broadway's interest in experimental and intimate theater.

In addition to the walking stage, he performs in full view of the audience with rod-controlled puppets, presenting vignettes from different periods in varying ethnic styles. Some are dance, including a piece that evokes Victorian windup toys and a Japanese piece in which the dancer becomes possessed. There's also a Pierrot suicide done to a Chopin nocturne, an enactment of a Scottish ballad and a piece about a young woman in the early 19th century writing a letter to her estranged lover.

Performances all at 11 P.M.

love. Accompanying all this is dialogue improvised in Italian (program notes explain the action) with live music — piano and singing.

At the turn of the century, groups like the Manteos flourished in several cities in the United States, but the tradition is dying; new customs have altered the enactments back in Sicily, and the Manteos, who haven't performed regularly since the late 1930's, are said to be the last of their kind in the city if not in the country.

The Manteos first performed in Sicily more than a century ago, then took their art to Argentina in 1900 and to New York in 1919. From about 1923 to 1938, Mr. Manteo said, they performed every night on Mulberry Street, taking 13 months to tell 394 episodes, then starting the cycle again.

Helping with the shows at night and with electrical tasks by day, he worked 18 hours a day and received only a dollar a week. "People payed 25 cents to see us," he said. "It went down to 20 cents during the Depression. How did we stay in business? It was a family affair. My father paid nobody except the pianist."

The audience ate during performances on Mulberry Street, he continued, and everybody got caught up in the tales. An old woman once hurled her shoe at a puppet villain, then attacked him when he wore it, Mr. Manteo remembered. Another day, a butcher enraged at a mean puppet whipped out a gun, and the next day, detectives, hearing only that there had been a shooting, watched with disbelief and then disgust as Mr. Manteo displayed the bullet-ridden victim.

Mr. Manteo creates and costumes new marionettes and repairs old ones using, chiefly, junk that he finds in the street. He and his sister do the dialogue for shows these days; his son, brother, brother-in-law and grandson do the manipulating. He remembers wistfully, though, how it felt to "put my whole body into the marionette; you incorporate it."

"You cannot be taught," he said. "You got to be there every night. You got to live the part."

Presented by the New York City chapter of the New York Folklore Society, in the museum's Education Hall, the Manteos will perform at 12, 2 and 4, followed each time by a film about the family. Tickets are \$6. For reservations, call 836-7644.

Dance Theater

At the Dance Theater Workshop, Eleanor L'Amour, a bawdy little old lady who laughs a lot, will be seduced by a Rat of Huge Proportions as Bruce D. Schwartz presents a show he put together in the style of an Elizabethan farce, inspired by an illuminated manuscript. Only his legs are visible under a stage worn over his head and upper body.

"Walking stages," Mr. Schwartz explains, were traditional in many parts of the world, partly because "it was unlawful to have a permanent puppet theater in many periods of history. For one thing, the church thought it smacked of idolatry."

Mr. Schwartz, who lives in Los Angeles, won popular and critical praise when he made his New York debut

Fridays and Saturdays through June 5. Admission is \$5. Reservations are recommended; call 924-0077.

Bunraku Theater

In the Japanese bunraku puppet theater, which flowered between the mid-17th and mid-19th centuries, nearly life-size dolls are controlled by hooded operators in black, usually three for each doll, who operate devices on the figure. One of the foremost writers of this form was Monzaemon Chikamatsu, whose "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," first produced in 1703 in Osaka, was recently made into a movie in which a natural setting was substituted for a theatrical one. The film maker was Midori Kurisaki, a former actress, most of whose previous films have been documentaries.

"Sonezaki" will be shown at the Japan Society tonight at 7:30, and tomorrow at 2 and 4 P.M. It's a story of thwarted love between a merchant and a courtesan. The young man, betrayed by a friend who refuses to return or even acknowledge a loan, and the young woman, indentured to a brothel, flee together to a forest where they kill themselves to escape further shame. Tickets are \$4 and go on sale at 5:30 for tonight's showing and at 1 P.M. for tomorrow's matinee. For information, call 752-0824.

The Puppet Loft

The Puppet Loft has two events scheduled this weekend: performances by four companies for adults tomorrow at 8:30 P.M. (\$3.50; 431-7627), and for children on Sunday from 1 to 5 — both in the gallery (\$2 contribution) and outside (free) in Duane Park. Also free is a gallery exhibition featuring more than 100 puppets as well as puppet posters. The figures are hand-carved and come from all over — China, Bali, Burma, India, Java, Japan, Germany, Turkey and Czechoslovakia.

Judy Caden, a puppeteer who is the director of the loft, explains that, in fostering the image of the art, "instead of isolating it, we try to show it with other art forms." Visual artists who perform as well as exhibit often are featured, with or without puppets.

Tomorrow's program will include Phyllis Bulkin and dancers, who use visual art and animation. Payton Wilkinson and Timothy Siciliano will combine cartooning and puppetry, using masks, visors, sets and props. Alex Hahn will mix visual art and performance in a science-fiction piece that uses toys but not puppets. And Sandra McGee will offer a "sarcastic chant about civilization" with maracas.

Puppetry is a wide-ranging art, with room for kiddy shows and polished productions and for looking forward and looking back. Where Mr. Schwartz values his freedom to experiment, Mr. Manteo values his past. "If I had a theater — for a million dollars, 10 million, whatever," he said, "I'd build one like they had 100 years ago. I would put cobwebs in the corners and have a wooden floor, with sawdust on the floor, and wooden chairs, not those soft kind. I do not change nothing. I keep the old way."