

Vietnamese Water Puppetry



The brief history of the Vietnamese Water Puppets

Each year, when the rice harvest time arrives, farmers in the region of the Delta of the “Red River”, would gather to sing traditional folk songs, and dancing, at the village. The first plays of the water puppets were apparently located in the middle of the rice fields, where they could be filled up with water, to replicate the perfect stage. It is discussed, what time did this theatre genre start, but, just to indicate, how old this genre is, in the 12th century, under the Lý dynasty regime, the best water puppet actors were selected all across the country to entertain highly ranked personnel. Many centuries later, this is still a very popular and entertaining form of theatre, and it is one of the cultural heritages of Vietnam.



The stage

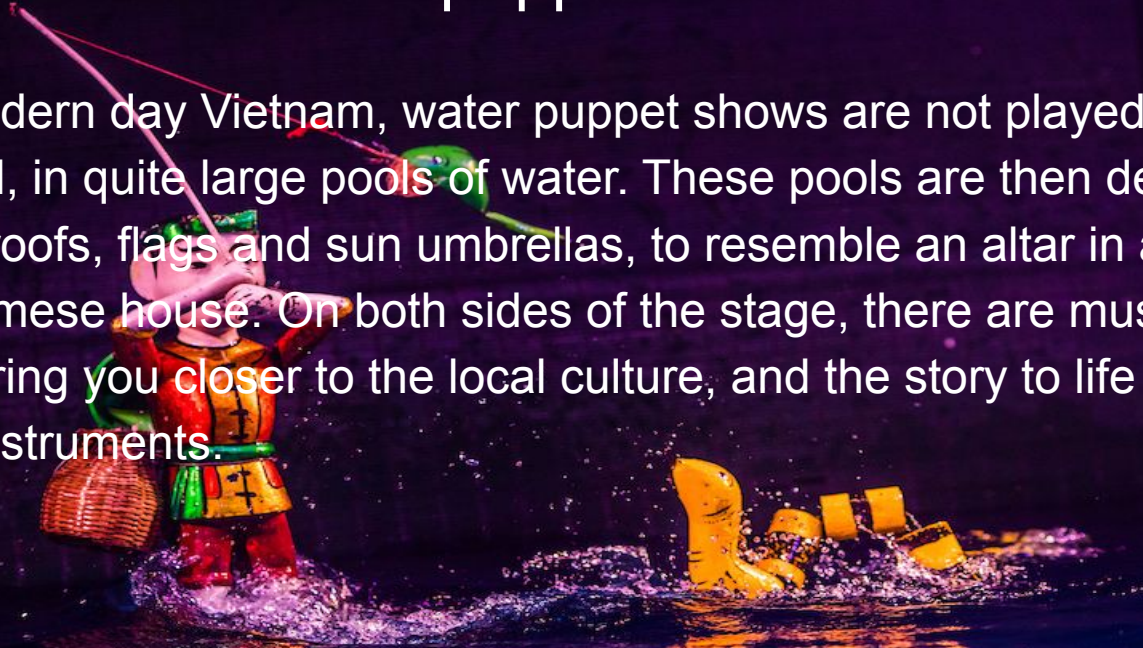
Water Puppetry first seems a bit complicated, but it is also very physically demanding. Throughout the whole play, the water puppeteers need to stand in water, which is around waist deep. They can make use of that water, and with their abilities, they can create drama, but most importantly - tell a story.

One of the secrets of the puppeteers is the material, from which the puppets are actually made of. They mostly use fig wood, that is painted with lacquer. The arms are usually made of bamboo sticks and strings.

It is very hard to become a master puppeteer, and it may actually take decades.

A water puppet show

Nowadays, in modern day Vietnam, water puppet shows are not played in rice fields, but instead, in quite large pools of water. These pools are then decorated with red colored roofs, flags and sun umbrellas, to resemble an altar in a traditional Vietnamese house. On both sides of the stage, there are musical teams, that will bring you closer to the local culture, and the story to life using their voices and folk instruments.



How does the show look like?

By the images, these shows, when professionally presented, may be played in a quite dark environment, but also, it can be also played outside, with the sun as the provider of the light. A traditional show usually starts with the introduction of a comedic host - Teu. Teu is an iconic character and a storyteller, that will lead you through the scenes and will explain it to you precisely.

These puppets recreate a daily Vietnamese life in the Northern villages.



Video

Before I end this presentation, I would like to show you an example of Vietnamese Water Puppetry.

Thank you for your attention.

<https://youtu.be/8oQaMYuOqf4?t=200>





Sources in MLA format

Vietnam Ethnography Museum, Ha Noi. "The cultural strings of Water Puppetry" VietNamNet Bridge, 14 Aug. 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081223071727/http://english.vietnamnet.vn/vniden/2003/08/219962/>.

"Vietnamese Water Puppets." YouTube, uploaded by Gary Friedman Productions, 18 June 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxlff980XyM.

Vietnamexpo. "All about Vietnamese Water Puppets." Vietnam Pavilion Expo 2020, 4 Nov. 2021, <https://vietnamexpo2020dubai.com/vietnamese-water-puppets/>.

Useful Resources

Thang Long water puppetry Theatre

<http://thanglongwaterpuppet.com/>

The Vietnam Pavillon at the Dubai Expo 2020:

<https://vietnamexpo2020dubai.com/>

Water Puppetry performance

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oQaMYuOqf4&t=200s&ab_channel=JaqS