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With Shadow Puppets, Federico Garcia Lorca's Poetry Comes To Life

BY [WILSON SAYRE](#)



Julia Miller (left) and two other puppeteers create a scene in "My Soul's Shadow."

Credit Wilson Sayre / WLRN

Behind two white screens on a concrete loading dock with no air conditioning, six overhead projectors hum away. People quietly dart around, picking up what look like small cutouts of faces and figures. They place them on the projectors and with almost imperceptible motions move them across the hot screens.

Sometimes a person stands in front of the projectors, his crisp profile forming a silhouette on the other side of a white screen. He interacts with the shadows of these various cutouts - opening a drawer, taking the bite of a giant apple or falling out of a boat.

It's with these simple tools - paper, plastic and light - that [Chicago-based Manual Cinema](#), a shadow puppet company, manages to create a world that makes the absence of light look alive.

Click [here](#) to listen to the audio version of this story, which includes some of the show's original music.

The group is in South Florida to present their show, “My Soul’s Shadow,” as part of the O, Miami Poetry Festival. For the month of April, the festival has put poetry in unusual places including on popsicles, kayak tours and now in the shadows.



Some of the acetate images on transparency Manual Cinema uses in the performance.

Credit Wilson Sayre / WLRN

The performance is based on the life and work of early 20th century Spanish poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca.

The writer spent most of his life in Spain, influencing the likes of Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, before he was assassinated by fascist militiamen during the Spanish Civil War at the age of 38. Today, Garcia Lorca is known as one of greatest Spanish writers.

In the performance, Garcia Lorca is represented in the show alternately by a live-actor and with puppets. He acts as our guide on a surreal journey through the imagery and characters that are featured in his work.

“We had this giant collected poems of Lorca book, and as we were reading back through his poems we were so struck by the progression, by the imagery and imagination,” of Garcia Lorca’s work, says Sarah Fornace, director of the show.

She says the group generally works on shows that are driven by a strong narrative. For this show, they approached the source material differently.

“We’re not illustrating full poems or going line by line with any poem but rather drawing every character and every image that is inspired by some piece of text,” Fornace says.



A moment during the shadow puppet show.

Credit Wilson Sayre / WLRN

They pieced that imagery together, pinning it very loosely on the arc of Lorca’s short life.

Like in silent movies, the music shoulders the responsibility of conveying the tone of the scenes and adds a kind of color to the mostly black and white images.

Fornace says the music, composed by Manual Cinema’s own Kyle Vegter, helps propel the story from image to image.

The recently formed Nu Deco Ensemble performed the work under Vegter’s direction.

“There’s kind of like no rules in Lorca,” he says, “anything can morph into the next thing. Nothing is what you think it is. And so that’s really useful in music.”

Like Garcia Lorca’s work, the show weaves between fantasy and reality.

<http://wlrn.org/post/shadow-puppets-federico-garcia-lorcas-poetry-comes-life>



Nu Deco, a recently-formed chamber orchestra in Miami, scores a scene of "My Soul's Shadow."

Credit Wilson Sayre / WLRN

Take the “parentheses” scene in the first act: The Garcia Lorca character has just been saved from drowning by a giant hand. The hands flank him in parentheses and words engulf him. He dances in this space and among the words.

Within this parenthetical statement, the character seems to talk directly to the audience as the writer frequently did in his poems.

“In the parentheses section, we see him sort of reading his own work and trying to make sense of his own work,” Vegter says. “Musically, it’s like a ballet between the parenthesis and the hand and Lorca.”

The show draws you into Garcia Lorca’s world, a work Sarah Fornace hopes you’ll revisit and in it, imagine some of their projections.

“We’re always interested in the work raising questions,” she says.

Manual Cinema will perform “My Soul’s Shadow” Friday and Saturday at 7:30 in Little River.