

Cu'Fu?

by Terry Brackett

To teach my children about prejudice, I often told them of the terrible injustices practiced against Italians who settled in Toronto during the 50's. One of my favourite uncles, Rocco D'Onofrio, born in Sicily with a Grade 5 education was scorned by many members of my 'mange cake' family when he married my aunt Margaret. Uncle Rocco went on to become a very wealthy and successful restaurant owner.

Over the years, my husband and I have been honoured to be welcomed in many Italian homes where the love of family came first and foremost. Their zest and love of life was apparent with continuous celebrations, always with music and tables laden with wine and food. Nothing brought back those memories more than a play we recently attended - *Cu'Fu?* (pronounced Koo Foo) which is a Sicilian's touching and hilarious response to life's perplexing moments.

In the rich tradition of bygone storytellers like Giovanni Boccaccio and Mark Twain - as well as contemporary storytellers like Spalding Gray - Charly Chiarelli elevates the spoken word into a spellbinding journey. He explores the joys and struggles encountered by a Sicilian family adapting to Canadian, urban life. The scenes are vivid and engaging. It is a brilliant blend of storytelling, acting and musical creativity.

Cu'Fu? (which translates into *who did it?*) is a Sicilian response to everything from a bad salami to the origin of the university. "Who stole my purse?" "Why is my son smoking Mario Lanza?" "Who plugged me into these machines when I was ready to die three days ago?"

Though this work is intensely personal, it resonated with universal themes - there is a hook for every hat. Charly magically transforms himself into family members, the welfare lady, the doctor and many more characters that influenced his life in the 50's and 60's. The stories he tells are woven with threads of traditional blues music, original songs and haunting Sicilian times.

Charly (Calogero) Chiarelli was born in Sicily and grew up in the industrial north end of Hamilton, Ontario (where in the 1950's 10,000 fellow Sicilians settled in one neighbourhood all from the same town of Racalmuto!). He got to skip school when a family translator was required to deal with major purchases or confusing new-world bureaucrats.

As well as having mastered the lost art of being a 'pin-boy' for downtown bowling alleys, Charly has a Master's degree in Social Work. But Charly does not let these credentials get in the way of his true love of writing stories and songs, harmonica playing and performance art. Though he has directed his talent to everything from children's stories to a Hollywood movie, he refers to the performance of *Cu'Fu* as his primary mission.