

AUSTRALIAN PUPPETER



AUSTRALIAN PUPPETEER ISSUE 1/2011

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THANK YOU

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& GILLY MCINNES

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WELCOME!

FROM THE PRESIDENT

I congratulate our new Editor, Robert Reid. Robert is an experienced editor, academic and puppeteer. Well known about town, he is also an award winning playwright. He is a director and founding member of Theatre in Decay, and a member of Terrible Comfort, a small visual theatre company performing in Melbourne. We are fortunate to have someone of his calibre dedicating his time to the UNIMA magazine. I also thank Jhana Pfeiffer-Hunt, graphic designer and cover artist for this issue, and who I think all will agree, has transformed the magazine to a new level as a smart and professional looking imprint. Jhana squeezes time to work on the magazine between her work commitments as an interior designer, her postgraduate studies in Museums and Cultural Heritage, and her business, Haptic Media, featuring her arts practice and performance forays. *Australian Puppeteer*, the only publication dedicated to puppetry in Australia, is still a work in progress. We hope it will continue to grow, and as it develops, that we can continue to expand and keep the improvements coming. We hope that you will love keeping it handy, in your studio, or on your reference shelf to look to for all manner of things 'puppetry'. This is the kind of publication we aim for *Australian Puppeteer* to be. We hope that you will contribute to it, and be represented in it proudly. We look to expanded distribution arrangements in Australia and overseas. I invite all to submit contributions for consideration. We also seek advertisers, so please consider that this may be a way to contribute to the magazine's development, and to get your information to the world via a smart 'soon-to-be' sought-after small publication.

Best wishes
Jennifer Pfeiffer
President
UNIMA Australia

EDITOR'S COMMENT

Welcome to the newly re-launched *Australian Puppeteer*. In this issue we have articles from around the world, and close to home, focusing on the many aspects and applications of puppetry and visual theatre on, and beyond, the stage. Among other things this issue we talk to the Little Angel Theatre in the UK about their fifty year celebrations. We also hear from Scotland on the use of puppets in aged care. And we pay tribute to the great Norman Hetherington who sadly left us late last year. The UNIMA committee dedicated themselves throughout 2010 to redeveloping our website and finding a new editor for the magazine. I'm honoured to have been chosen and look forward to delivering a high quality publication. We will, however, continue to rely on you, the puppetry community, to get involved and make the magazine great. Anything from personal recollections, book and show reviews, experiences working with puppet companies, historical reflections or academic analysis are all welcome.

Robert Reid
Editor
Australian Puppeteer

THE EXTRAS

MAKE IT!

Refer to the inside back cover of the mag!

It's possibly the simplest 'foldy' puppet imaginable, but we thought it'd be best to begin at the very beginning.

Paper puppets and construction modelling have been through several cycles of popularity and, in the last few years online, have once more come back into fashion. Websites such as papertoys.com and papermodels.net offer a huge range of models based on cult movies and TV series. Many of the techniques being used however date back as far as the Paper and Card toy theatres. To that end, Australian Puppeteer plans to offer basic models for paper constructions and puppets with each issue.

This 'foldy' bird requires no cutting at all. Simply fold length-ways down the centre line, then length-ways again, keeping the printed bird face on the outside. Follow this by folding along the centre line, and then complete by folding the two ends back on the centre, keeping the tongue on the inside and the eyes on the outside. Operate the puppet using fingers in the envelopes at the end, and you have one of the most basic paper puppets imaginable.

The real joy of these paper constructions is, of course, that they can be built on and improved by anyone. If you develop your own design we'd love to publish it.

Send designs as pdfs to editor@unima.org



PROOF READERS WANTED

A publication with the scope of *Australian Puppeteer* relies on many people to ensure it maintains a high standard of production. Everyone who contributes to *Australian Puppeteer* is an important part of the team and we in the editorial team extend our thanks to all those who have helped with this issue. We're very keen to expand our publications team and involve more of the puppet community in the production of our magazine. We're particularly looking for people with an eye for detail to contribute to the important task of proof reading and quality control.

If you would like to join the team, contact editor@unima.org

NORMAN HETHERINGTON

1921-2010

Richard Bradshaw
salutes and farewells a
giant of the Australian
Puppetry community,
Norman Hetherington.

"He worked with a professional conscience
to avoid the fumbling hobbyism that
can often mar shows of this kind."

The above comes from a review by Lindsey
Browne ("L.B.") the respected music-and-drama
critic in the Sydney Morning Herald of Monday,
22 June 1953. He was reporting on a show on
the previous Saturday afternoon by Norman
Hetherington's marionettes at the Mercury
Theatre, in the old St James Hall that later
became the Phillip Street Theatre, Sydney.

I believe this was the first public performance
by Norman's puppets but L.B.'s astute
observation would be valid for Norman's
entire career as a puppeteer. His work was
characterised by its very professional finish.

Norman was born in Lilyfield, Sydney on 29 May
1921. After Burwood Primary, he attended the
prestigious Fort Street High School leaving at
16 to study art at East Sydney Technical College
with the aim of becoming a cartoonist. It was
a remarkable decision for a teenager to make
at that uncertain time; the world had just been
through the Great Depression and trouble was

brewing in Europe. People working in "the arts"
were expected to have "a proper job" to fall back
on. The school principal opposed the decision
but it was supported by Norman's father who
clearly recognised his son's extraordinary talent.

As a teenage art student Norman's cartoons
were accepted by The Bulletin which was then
Australia's main literary journal and the home
of outstanding cartoonists including Norman
Lindsay. After World War II, from 1946-61,
Norman H. was a full-time cartoonist for
The Bulletin, signing his cartoons "Heth".

From 1941- 45 the young "Heth" was a lightning
sketch artist with an Army Entertainment Unit
performing to troops in Australia, New Guinea
and nearby island army bases. The detachment,
known as "The Islanders", included talented
professional performers such as George
Wallace Jr. and the actor Michael Pate. The
cover of Pate's 1986 book "An Entertaining
War" is illustrated by a Heth cartoon of the
group, and at the top right you can discern
a self-portrait of Norman with his identifying
rich black curly head of hair. There are two
photos of "Heth" in the book, one as the artist,



and one as a leader of community singing. With the notable exception of Kay and Allan Lewis puppetry was not then an obvious profession to follow in Sydney. In 1946 the Herald reported that "Puppetry, which has been suffering for years from neglect and artistic starvation in Australia is gaining prominence and public interest", but this was mainly referring to puppets made by schoolchildren.

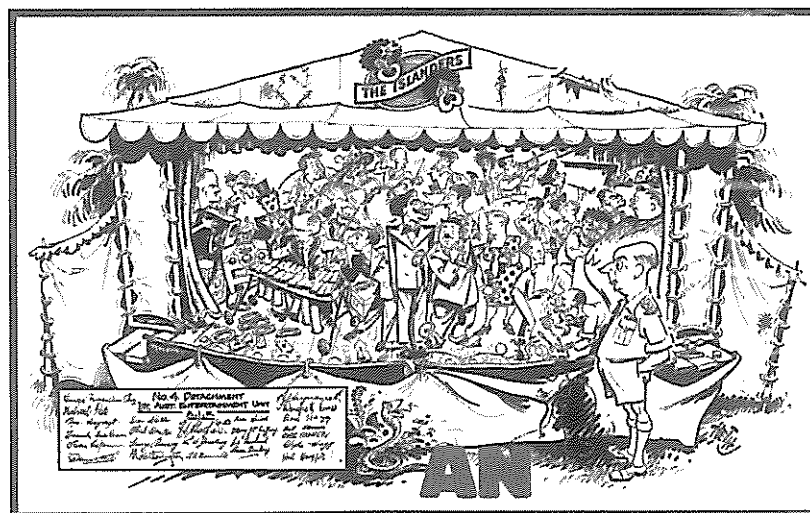
In 1949 Norman made his first puppet following instructions in a 1935 Popular Science Monthly from the U.S.A. which his father had given him, and he may also have then been influenced by the professional marionette show that Raeburn Griffiths and his wife Freda Crosher presented in the radio 2KY Auditorium three times a day in the basement of the Dymock's Block in George Street in the summer holidays of 1950-51. If so, he would have been aware of the risks involved in a career in puppetry - when I saw that show with my grandmother we were the only two in the audience!

With characteristic thoroughness Norman decided that he must first gain some experience

using marionettes. In 1949 The Children's Library and Crafts Movement [later known as the Creative Leisure Movement] had opened the Clovelly Puppet Theatre, under the direction of Edith Murray. There, in the cooler months (because it was a corrugated iron army hut) children and adults presented shows with glove puppets and marionettes at 2 p.m. on Saturdays. The first show I saw there in 1952 ended with a marionette play in which Norman was one of the adult puppeteers. It told, with rather simple marionettes, how the Moon was the eye of a bunyip that had been speared in its other eye.

Meanwhile Norman began making his own splendid marionettes in earnest, cautiously beginning with stock figures such as a contortionist and a dissecting skeleton (which glowed in UV light) and then giving free rein to his cartoonist's imagination. In 1953, using the name "Meryla Puppets" or "Meryla Marionettes" after the street he then lived in, and assisted by a couple of others including Hugh Anderson, Norman presented the show at the Mercury Theatre I referred to at the beginning that included a marionette circus and a play,

MICHAEL PATE



ENTERTAINING WAR

COVER ART BY NORMAN HETHERINGTON
FOR 'AN ENTERTAINING WAR'
AN ENTERTAINING WAR, MICHAEL PATE
[SYDNEY: DREAMWEAVER BOOKS, 1988]



"The Reluctant Dragon". In that play, when the dragon and Sir Giles compare their poems instead of fighting, a young boy enrages the dragon by saying his poetry is 'punk' until smoke comes from his nostril. It was the first blast of talcum powder from Norman's marionettes that continued through to Bill Steamshovel's smoke-filled laughter and the smoky blast-off of Mr Squiggle's Rocket! There were two puppets for Sir Giles. The leg strings to the armoured version were attached above the knee so that the lower legs hung straight down. The "civilian" version had the strings attached below the knee so that the lower legs were lifted forward slightly, and so appeared lighter than the ones with armour.

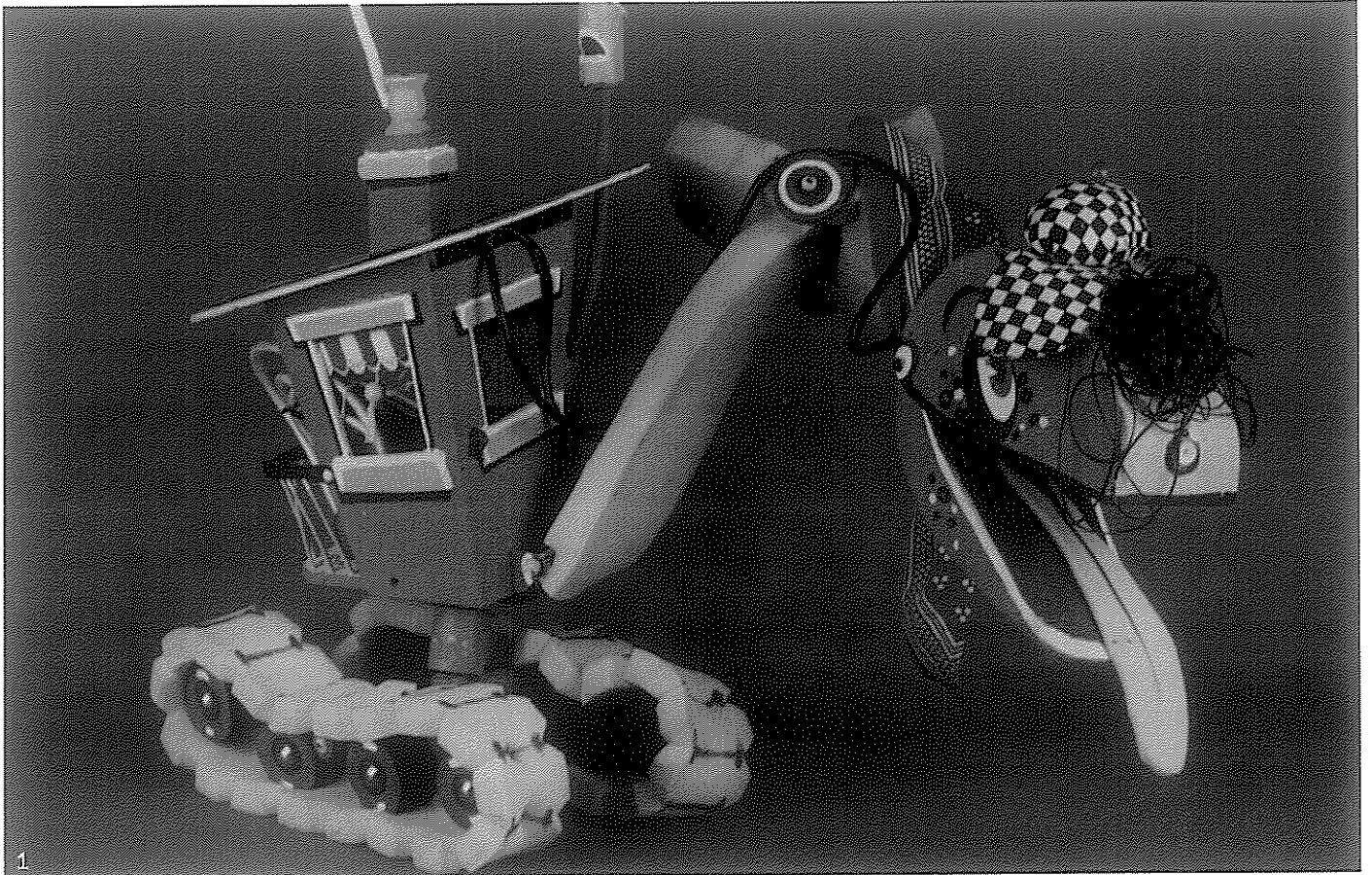
For me, a budding young puppeteer at the time, to witness the appearance of such a talent was inspirational. Norman was setting a professional standard of puppetry that would be a bench-mark. Mr Squiggle was already on his way from the moon and it was a privilege to have been around at the time.

That was an exciting era for puppetry in Sydney. The Laurey Puppets from England had had a long

season as a support act for the mind-reading Piddingtons at the Empire in early 1951; The Hogarth Puppets of Jan Bussell and Ann Hogarth had filled that same vast theatre in 1952; the fantastic marionettes of Walton and O'Rourke (who had made the puppets for the M.G.M. film "Lili") were an act at the Tivoli in 1953 and 1954; at the end of 1953 Peter Scriven presented a marionette season at the old Theatre Royal; and the celebrated glove-puppeteer Walter Wilkinson came in 1954. Wilkinson was able to see a performance of Norman's next theatre show, "The Magic Tinderbox". A memorable moment in this play was when Norman used the "Grand Turk" principle to transform the king: his arms became owls, his legs became frogs, and his body became a big purple pig.

Norman continued at the Bulletin until it became a quite different journal in 1961 but also began presenting school holiday shows in department stores which continued until 1985. He was reticent about self-promotion and felt that the puppets should be able to sell themselves. In this his approach contrasted strongly with that of the entrepreneurial Peter Scriven.

SIR GILES AND THE DRAGON
THE RELUCTANT DRAGON, 1953
PHOTO COURTESY THE
HETHERINGTON FAMILY



1 BILL THE STEAMSHOVEL
PHOTO COURTESY THE
HETHERINGTON FAMILY

2 NORMAN AND MR SQUIGGLE
WHO WEEKLY, JULY 1999
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY THE
HETHERINGTON FAMILY



One night, at a Puppetry Guild meeting in Erskineville, Norman did something quite different. He used his hands and bits of card to make an amusing series of shadow sketches. I particularly remember the swan, whose neck and head were his own arm and hand, and whose body was Norman's head. I remember the audience's delight when the swan's head turned to preen the "feathers" on its back, Normans curly head of hair. He had to stop doing this great little show when a chisel he was using to carve a puppet slipped and cut into his forearm, seriously damaging a tendon to his thumb which lost flexibility. Nevertheless in 1988 he wrote "Hand Shadows" with his wife, Margaret.

Television didn't arrive in Australia until late 1956, in time for the Olympic Games in Melbourne, despite the fact that the Griffiths had advertised themselves as "Australia's First International Television Stars" in 1950. When the Bussells came with Muffin the Mule in 1952 Muffin was already a star on BBC TV – arguably the world's first puppet star. [Norman did a caricature of Jan with Muffin for the Bulletin in Sydney...although it was Jan's wife Ann Hogarth who actually manipulated it!] Jan had been a very early TV producer."

TV was eagerly anticipated by puppeteers here but they were soon to discover its ravenous appetite and penetrating eye. A year before it arrived in Australia, Norman attended an ABC television training school with his future ABC "producer" Beverley Gledhill. Norman's puppets appeared on the first ABC Channel 2 broadcast on 5 November, 1956. That performance was the first in the "Nicky and Noodle" series following a boy and his dog, in which Norman was assisted by Annette Macarthur-Onslow. In 1957 he also worked for ATN Channel 7 on a syndicated show from the U.S.A., "Jolly Gene and His Fun Machine". The show had a "cartoonator" on which cartoons, drawn by an unseen hand behind, could appear.

Norman was interested in making a puppet that could do the drawing and built a marionette with a pencil for a nose and a tall hat disguising the rod to its head from the control above. It's first appearance on TV in 1959 was as a "filler" but, as we now know, Mr Squiggle took off ... and not just to the Moon. He became a favourite character on TV for over 40 years. Mr Squiggle combined all of Norman's talents and experience, but also possessed much of Norman's own gentle, fun-loving character.

Norman married Margaret Purnell in 1958. Their son Stephen, who is now a professor of Philosophy at UNSW was born in 1959 and daughter Rebecca, who became Squiggle's last "presenter" in 1989, was born in 1962. Margaret wrote scripts for Mr Squiggle, Bill Steamshovel and Gus the Snail, who came later. For the Dental Health Foundation in 1968 they created "Smiley's Good Teeth Puppet

Theatre" which toured in schools for 18 years. Norman did designs for a Sydney university production of Lorca's "Dona Rosita" and also for three Marionette Theatre of Australia productions: "The Mysterious Potamus" (1978), "The Wind in the Willows" (1986) and "Pinocchio" (1987). The Potamus show was the only one he and I worked on together and in retrospect I kick myself for not inviting Norman to do more while I was with the M.T.A. because it was by far the most attractive show I directed.

He was for many years President of the Puppetry Guild of N.S.W. and its successor, the Australian Puppetry Guild, and was the first President of UNIMA Australia, for which he designed the present logo. He dutifully attended every puppet show he could get to and, with the help of Margaret Hetherington, he wrote "Puppets of Australia" (1974), a survey funded by the Australian Council for the Arts.

A year after Mr Squiggle finished at the ABC, an exhibition of Norman's puppets and cartoons initiated by Sue Wallace was an outstanding success at the One Van Puppet Festival in Blackheath, NSW and paved the way for a big retrospective at the Mosman Art Gallery in 2005". Some local puppeteers were invited to perform during the season and Norman himself performed with a rod-puppet version of Squiggle operated from below ... so that he had a rigid neck rather than flexible neck we know from T.V. One of those invited performers was the talented marionettist Murray Raine, for whom Norman became a mentor in retirement.

In 1990 Norman received an OAM and at the 2008 Congress in Perth he was made a Member of Honour of UNIMA. In 1999 Mr Squiggle featured on a postage stamp and in 2003 Nick Stathopoulos was a finalist for the Archibald Prize with his portrait of Norman with Mr Squiggle, postcards of which were sold at the Gallery. [J.F. Archibald, incidentally, had been a co-founder of the Bulletin].

Looking back at Norman's full life it looks almost as well planned as his puppets. Few in Australia have been as famous as Mr Squiggle, and fewer so fondly remembered.

Kenneth Grahame wrote the original story for "The Reluctant Dragon" (1898) and the English actor/producer Harcourt Williams wrote a dramatised version (1934). [Walt Disney produced an attractive cartoon of the story in 1941, with a very different dragon.]

"The Art of Television" by Jan Bussell, [London: Faber & Faber, 1952]. In 1937 Jan directed a BBC telecast of "The Ghost Train" by Arnold Ridley who played Godfrey in "Dad's Army".

"September- 9 October, 2005.
Curated by Jan Hook & John Carter

50 YEARS AN ANGEL

Robert Reid interviews Lynette Shanbury, General Manager of the leading puppet company in the United Kingdom.

Since 1961, when a troupe of enthusiastic puppeteers under the leadership of South African puppet master, John Wright, took over a derelict temperance hall in Islington, the Little Angel Theatre has been the self proclaimed home of British Puppetry. Australian Puppeteer's editor had the opportunity to catch up with the Little Angel's General Manager Lynette Shanbury, one grey and grizzling Islington afternoon in February.

"No, I'm not a puppeteer," says Shanbury after a tour of the theatre, back stage and the chaotically cluttered workshop next door, where a rubber cast prototype of Caliban for the Little Angel's up coming work, *The Tempest* with the Royal Shakespeare Company, had come to life in her hands. "No, no. Administrator. Management is the route I came to theatre through. I've learnt a bit of puppeteering," she laughs shaking a mass of tight curls out of her face, "but I wouldn't say I was a puppeteer."

"John and Lyndie Wright came over from South Africa" Shanbury says, recounting the history of the place for me, "and they were looking to set up a puppet theatre and they found this deserted, run down old hall, and decided they could transform it. So they got in all their friends, and put themselves to work, put the roof back on, dug out a rake, put on the back stage area, built the marionette bridges, and opened on the 24th of November."

Opening originally as a specifically marionette theatre, the bridges back stage were naturally a significant element to get right. They remain rock solid back stage to this day despite the intimate theatre's more malleable approach to space now, which accommodates a variety of styles of puppetry and visual theatre.

"Lyndie and John kept it going for the first thirty years. John sadly died in 1991, but Lyndie then carried on with Chris Leith as Artistic Director, and it was only in 2000 that the theatre became an independent charity."

"Then in 2002 the theatre actually went dark for a while because some of the funding from the council was removed, and since then we've been rebuilding things. We're now in a position where we fund raise about 200 000 pounds a year to keep going, which is quite a lot of a small organisation. And the rest comes from box office."

Though Shanbury isn't likely to disagree when I describe the Little Angel as the UK's premier puppet company, she does make sure to mention some of the other leading companies that work out of their own venues. "There's The Puppet Theatre Barge in Paddington" she tells me, "which is actually on a barge and is an amazing little space and The Norwich Puppet Theatre has been open since the seventies I think. There are quite a lot of companies that use puppetry in the UK, particularly children's companies, but they wouldn't necessarily call themselves dedicated puppet companies. There's only really a handful of those."

There's a tendency, of course, to equate puppetry with a children's entertainment form, both in the UK and in Australia of course, but the Little Angel maintains two distinct programs of work, one aimed at children and one delivering more mature work.

"John always said that he wasn't making work for children he was making puppetry theatre. And that's always been our ethos. We've never done anything that's pandered to children. We shy away from those Disney endings. So we've always done work that's for everyone. It's just that there's this common preconception that puppetry is particularly for kids. And it's true that probably seventy per cent of the work we do is for families but increasingly we're doing more work for adults."

A good example of that commitment to adult puppet work is the *Suspense* festival, launched by the Little Angel in 2009.

"It's a London puppetry festival basically, show casing work that's specifically for adult audiences. That's a biennial festival, so it's on again this autumn in 2011. In 2009, we had seven venues, including ourselves, all London based. I think we had 25 companies performing and also running workshops, seminars, lectures. This coming autumn we've got ten venues so we're hoping to get thirty companies involved from all over the world. That's the idea. In 2009 we had companies from France, America and Holland, so we're hoping to go a bit further abroad. We're still building up support for the festival; it's all dependent on funding, of



- 1 CLOWN MARIONETTE (DETAIL), 2009
LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE, UK
PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT REID
- 2 CALIBAN MODEL (FROM THE LITTLE
ANGEL AND ROYAL SHAKESPEAR COMPANY'S
PRODUCTION OF *THE TEMPEST*) (DETAIL),
2011
LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE, UK
PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT REID
- 3 LYNETTE SHANBURY WITH FULL SIZE
CALIBAN PUPPET HEAD, 2011
LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE, UK
PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT REID



course, but we're hoping to bring over some companies from Asia or America again."

"Last time we had everything from marionettes to some very avant garde hand puppetry."

Being resident in such a beautiful old building for such a long time must have established strong long standing links with the local community; links that must play a vital role in keeping the company going. What are some of bonds the company has forged with the community, I wonder.

"We work with a lot of local schools and community groups. We hold a summer party every year which is a free event where we do loads of stuff and people can come and join in with puppet making classes. Actually, last year for our summer party we had Wild Theatre come over from New Zealand, they did a little installation piece in the garden, which was fun. We've got a very strong following in the local community because we've been around for so long. In fact, at the moment we're up for a nomination for a green plaque on the building for John Wright (the equivalent of National Trust plaques in Aus - ed)"

That community involvement also runs to a heavy involvement in education and skills development too. "We run workshops for kids and adults. On Saturday mornings we have our Crafty Kids, which is ages 2 to 5 with their parents. Then after that we have the Saturday Morning Puppet Club, 6 to 10 years, and our Youth Theatre, which is 11 to 16. They're all working on productions to perform at the end of term. The youth theatre's working as part of the National Theatre's New Connections programme at the moment, which will be performed here and at The Soho Theatre, which is quite exciting. Our adult classes we run during the week on the evenings. The adult classes have grown up in the last two years and we've had a lot of interest particularly from actors who want to get new skills, and people who are just interested because of the rise of puppetry being used in theatre in this country."

"We also have a Puppets For All scheme whereby we give free tickets to community groups, disadvantaged groups, in the local area. "

It's a phenomenal amount of activity and I get a sense from talking to Shanbury that we've only really scratched the surface. Is the show output at the same frenetic level, I ask?

"Pretty much, yeah."

How many shows a year?

"We aim for between three and five a year and we're touring shows six months of the year. We also have the visitors' seasons, which is a couple of months where we invite companies to perform. We don't hire out the

space. We offer a week or a day or whatever it is we've asked to come and perform."

"It's pretty full on."

No kidding.

Mention of a resurgence in puppetry and a rise in interest speaks of a prior waning of interest. Shanbury agrees that puppetry in the UK has passed through such a regression – slump was her word – so I wonder what she thinks might have been the catalyst for puppetry's return to favour.

"Things come back into fashion, people start using them more. Suddenly we're seeing puppets being used in all kinds of different theatre from The National to the Old Vic to the RSC, and a lot of new and upcoming companies doing experimental work. Ronnie, for example, who's one of the puppeteers we've worked with the longest, Ronnie le Drew, he was up working with Theatre 503, which is a really on the edge up and coming fringe company. So everyone is engaging with it. It just seems to be catching a mood at the moment and I think War Horse had a lot to do with that. The rise of War Horse, people thought that was amazing and looked at puppetry in a new way, and then we had Avenue Q in the West End. A lot of big companies started using it and everyone started thinking, oh, that's interesting."

"Everything's cyclical isn't it," Shanbury offers as a final thought and it's hard not to agree. Fifty years, after all, is long enough to have seen all manner of fashions rise and fall and rise again. The key to such long term success however may be to keep from being distracted and stay true to your practice. The Little Angel must surely be evidence of that.





IT'S ALL
BUNK

Australian Puppeteer talks to touring shadow puppeteer and clown, Jeff Achtem

Street performer and shadow puppeteer Jeff Achtem is perhaps better known as his alter ego, the silent clown Mr Bunk. Based in Montreal, Jeff has made regular appearances in Melbourne for Fringe and Comedy Festival. Jeff's handmade aesthetic and innovative approach has its basis in traditional clowning techniques, having trained first at l'École de Mime Omnibus and then later in the Lecoq style, with the veteran Cirque de Soleil clown, Rene Bazinet. Jeff's work in his shadow puppet shows combines his clown and mime background with his training in shadow puppet techniques with Neville Tranter and the Australian shadow-master Richard Bradshaw. Australian Puppeteer spoke with Jeff before his Comedy Festival 2011 show, Swamp Juice.

AP: Tell us a bit about Swamp Juice.

JA: Swamp Juice is my second solo shadow puppet show, following on from 'Sticks Stones Broken Bones'. In both shows I am developing techniques for front projection shadow puppetry, where the audience can see both the puppeteer and the puppets, as well as the images on screen. Nothing is hidden behind a screen. In Swamp Juice, I'm playing with some nifty new electronics that push a cinematic style to the puppetry. Using multiple lights, I can create 'close-ups' and 'wide' shots, much like people see in film. I'm also trialing a lighting system that creates a 3D shadow puppet experience for the audience. Very trippy, and much better than Avatar!

AP: What was your introduction to puppetry?

JA: I fell into puppetry by accident really. I have been working as a clown for years, and really enjoying the direct interaction that clowns can have with an audience. It's alive and real. You can look the audience in the eyes, and you

have the privilege to SEE them. A great clown is just an effective, exaggerated side of your own personality. So, the puppetry that I am performing is just a hyper-developed side of my own personality. I sat down and explored what can come from spending thousands of hours making silhouettes that emote. The clown on stage is in full view of the audience, at all times. He is sharing his play, just as he might juggle or play music. I try to create the same atmosphere of my workshop on stage.

AP: What drew you to the art of shadow puppetry in particular?

JA: I love that shadow puppetry, and puppetry in general, draws on so many different skill sets. There is the storytelling and dramaturgy, the making and puppet creation, the engineering side of the mechanical bits, the electronics of the lights and then the creative 'entertainment' element that glues it all together into an enjoyable experience for the audience. It was a year or two into puppetry when I suddenly realized how many different experiences in my life have gelled to push me in the direction I am heading now. The experienced master puppeteers that I have met along the way are such humbling fountains of wisdom on a million intersecting topics. Shadow puppetry can be very geeky, and very stimulating because there are few rules. The puppets can fly, die, have brain surgery, grow a second head with only a few quick motions. This is trickier in other forms of puppetry.

AP: What's your process for developing your shows?

JA: At a point early in the process, I outline the limitations and the parameters in very pragmatic terms. For instance, at the top you might have something like: "50 min show, all ages, needs to be travel ready in 2 suitcases or less and one performer (two arms, two legs, one head, one mouth)." I also need to work with a deadline. Right away with that, the project can begin to come alive, because you are excluding the unnecessary and the undoable. By accepting the overall parameters, I then focus on the individual steps to fill in the blanks. The process from there is quite personal and hard to articulate. One useful technique that I've been taught is to make lo-res versions of ideas. For instance, say for a show you need a koala puppet that hops on one foot. Don't spend 5 days trying to carefully draw and plan it. Better to grab some cheap materials and make a quick mock up. I hardly EVER sketch or draw. Play with the mock up, then go back and improve the design. Once you think you have the movement as you want it then think about making a nicer prop with the better materials. This mock-up revision process is so crucial to my workflow, mostly because you always discover wonderful accidents and gems when playing with the mock-up. You might discover that it looks funnier wiggling his butt than hopping on his foot, as was intended. Or maybe this design makes a better crouching kangaroo. I'm sure

others out there have articulated this process better. For me, mock-ups are the cornerstones of the daily workload. This is how I design 99% of my mechanical stuff. Design with your hands, not your head. Movement is hard for me to visualize, I need to have a physical sample. The other great feature of this approach is that you don't fall in love with your designs before they are made. You give them a chance to come alive, and emerge, in your control. They are better than you envisage, just in ways that you don't know.

AP: Your work is so inventive, utilising all kinds of mechanisms, and yet at the same time so lo-fi, what's your inspiration for it?

JA: One of my principal limitations is that I tour internationally, and alone. To make that possible, I need to keep my shows within certain luggage restrictions. (Boring answer, I know.) There are probably great effects I could do with bowling balls, tall ladders and crystal glass. But at the moment I don't bother because it would be a nightmare to try and tour with these items. This forces me into a corner, and I can work efficiently from there. It's a bit like a parent saying to child "go play in the corner and only use the toys you find in the little box." It pushes me into a lo-fi design, because of portability and replicability of parts. My materials of choice are beer box cardboard, glue guns, zip ties, velcro, tube aluminium and scrap fabric. In most cases, these cheaper items are the best materials for the job: light, cheap, strong, glueable, flat and tough. Of course, with shadow puppetry, the colour of the puppet doesn't change the shadow so why not make them more junky looking, to contrast with the well defined shadow? I guess it helps add to the 'magic' of the transformation from junk to shadow character.

AP: Where's your favourite place or venue to perform?

JA: Ouch. Loaded question. I have had wonderful experiences in many countries. My favourite place is one where the audience is willing. They know a bit about what they are going to see, and so are prepared to take the leap with me. I have been in environments where the audience would rather be watching a stand-up or a more mainstream type of entertainment. Finding the right people is the main focus of marketing my shows.

AP: What's your advice to young puppeteers starting out?

JA: Watch every non-puppet show you can that relates to the type of mood you want to create in your own performances. Get influenced by ideas, imitate them quietly on your own and then change them and dump them and run off on your own. Listen to the audience and change and develop your material accordingly. It's shocking how many performers don't notice what the audience is telling them. Know when an idea or show is still young and in need of your protection, and when it is ready for some feedback from mates. Get the feedback and

ignore half of it. People, especially friends, often give meaningless feedback. Rather, listen to the notes of other performers that you respect. Good puppetry is good editing. Does the Princess really need to blink both eyes independently, twist at the hips and drop the magic toad from her grasp? My early designs are ridiculously complex. In puppetry, making an inanimate object come alive is the goal. That's it. The single most memorable performance in puppetry that I have seen, was of an old woman reading a book. That's all. Just reading to herself, not saying a word out loud. She held the audience riveted for about 15 minutes as the puppeteers made her cringe, sigh and react with the storybook drama as she read it. It was breathtakingly simple.

AP: Your last show in Melbourne, Sticks Stones Broken Bones, was a collection of short sketches. Do you prefer sketch work or have you worked in longer narratives?

JS: I don't agree with the mantra that a proper puppet show needs is a good, tight story. Tidy stories don't interest me at the moment. I feel that audiences are phenomenally tired of moralistic tales, archetype fables, blatant narrative conventions and the rest. I say go make films if you want to create intricate, delicately crafted stories. The medium of film and animation is much more suited to that level of control. For me, puppetry is about creating characters. You create them physically in the workshop, and then give them a heartbeat on stage. There is a primordial magic in the illusion of an inanimate object being 'alive' on stage. It's gripping. The audience goes with it, and they suspend reality to actually feel something for the bit of foam and glue you have stuck on your hand. I have a cabaret friend who performs a routine using her naked feet as puppets. Her feet meet, fall in love and have a baby (her hand). It's a great bit, and the audience often 'ahhh's at the end. I could spend a lifetime just exploring this wonderful phenomenon that audiences offer us. For Swamp Juice, what I am interested in is creating more of a context for the characters - to create a coherent world with the characters within.

AP: What's your impression of Australian audiences?

JA: There is a lot of exciting puppetry happening in Australia recently and that can only be a testament to the growing thirst of audiences here for puppetry. I think just in the past few years there has been a favourable shedding of puppet stereotypes, especially of the classic 'puppets are just for kids'. It's great and very encouraging.

AP: What are you working on next?

JA: I'd love to work on some new ideas that amp up the junk factor in the show. Maybe making the puppets directly onstage, with the daily paper or something. I never set out to be so minimalist, but that seems to be the direction at the moment.

BALI AGUNG — THE LEGEND OF BALINESE GODDESSES

Penelope Bartlau gives a detailed review of the epic Bali Agung

Bali is an island rich in culture and ritual. The people live communal, village lives, with a family shrine in every family compound and in each village. Steeped in religion and ceremony, spirituality and superstition are centrepieces of Balinese life. Bali Agung – The Legend of Balinese Goddesses (Bali Agung) is a major work, produced in Bali, which reflects a part of the rich spiritual history of Bali, created and produced with the talents of an exceptional line-up of Australian and Balinese artists.

In one of the most colossal theatre spaces I have ever encountered, situated in the Bali Safari & Marine Park, Bali Agung is a spectacle on a grand scale. The story was inspired by the historic and legendary 12th century accounts of King Sri Jaya Pangus and his beloved wife, Kang Ching Wie, the daughter of a Chinese Merchant. The couple, after many years, are unsuccessful in producing an heir, so the King, in the vein of Ulysses, takes to the seas, in this case though to find his 'taksu' – 'divine inspiration'. Like Ulysses, the king is distracted by temptation, arriving on an island and unable to resist the charms of Dewi Danu, the water goddess. Meanwhile, after years of yearning, unlike Ulysses wife Penelope who stayed home faithfully awaiting Ulysses, a gutsy Kang Ching Wie commands a ship and sets forth to find her husband, only to discover that he's has fathered a child, a son now 3 years old, with Dewi Danu. As the legend goes, all hell then literally breaks loose. Kang Ching Wie sets guards against her husband the King, further enraging the now jealous Dewi Danu, who initiates a series of natural disasters and sets hideous monsters upon the King and Queen. Dewi Danu is the battles' victor, concluding it with a grand and magical gesture: turning the King & Queen into stone statues, a fitting act of vengeance: the strength of their love has enraged her.

The people from King Sri Jaya Pangus' lands have lost their beloved King & Queen, but embrace their new young King. Dewi Danu, mother of the young King, is present for his crowning – conducted by the spirits of King Sri Jaya Pangus and Kang Ching Wie. The story concludes with the origin of 'Barong Landung' that is presented ritually as the living embodiment of their former King & Queen up to this day.

The show really begins as the audience are entering, with a large gamelan band, sitting stage left, playing the haunting and familiar music of Bali. When the house lights go down, we are treated to a procession of innumerable cast members ranging from about 8 to 80 years old, clad in extraordinary historic Balinese dignitary costumes, either leading, following or riding elephants, (and there are about 10 elephants), and passing right in front of the audience. The cast wave to us, as we become a village through which they proceed. A very large screen, (concealing the bulk of the stage), hangs from ceiling to floor downstage, in front of which is a pond that runs the stages' length (30 metres). After the procession, the tree of life appears on the large shadow screen, and shadow animals burst out. These animals then become life-size puppets (beautifully crafted out of twisted white bamboo) revealed from under smothers when the screen is lifted - (the same animals re-appear in different forms throughout the play, as reoccurring motifs). The stage then transforms into a Balinese village and we are treated to a snapshot of Balinese village life, complete with a paddling of 40-50 ducks, a couple of cows, goats, rice paddies – children running around – and even a cock fight (don't worry – not fought to the death). Stage right sits a traditional Balinese shadow screen, but to begin with we see the screen from the Dalang's (the puppeteer's) point of view – a lovely device from which the Dalang then narrates the story of the Bali Agung to his young apprentice (& us) as he operates the shadow puppets. This design also enabled shifts of scale throughout the performance, as the story moved from the small shadow screen to the large shadow screen (that was easily lifted & dropped at various times throughout the performance) and to the live action on stage.

And live action it was. The animal cast was phenomenal – For example, when the Chinese Merchant ship arrived, for the young Kang Ching Wie was yet to fall for the King, we saw a leopard (albeit a little stage-reluctant), a very big python, and an eagle – each brought from the ship as a gift to the Balinese King. The elephants made several more appearances during the show as well: at one point two of them, walking side-by-side, delivered Kang Ching Wie to the King by knotting their trunks together creating a swing seat for her to ride on. There was a glorious moment on Dewi Danu's island that cannot go unremarked, when three large birds of prey swooped over the audiences' heads (from a position behind us), to alight on perches on stage, as simultaneously as synchronised





1 BALI ANGUNG - PERFORMANCE, 2010
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY BALI THEATRE,
INDONESIA

2 BALI ANGUNG - PERFORMANCE, 2010
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY BALI THEATRE,
INDONESIA

3 BALI ANGUNG - PERFORMANCE, 2010
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY BALI THEATRE,
INDONESIA



swimmers. Breathtaking. The puppetry was beautiful, and woven throughout the entire show (various forms), and always successfully adding to and supporting the story visually.

The 1200 seat theatre was built last year hand-in-hand with the production of Bali Agung. Peter Wilson arrived at the site the end of 2009, and all that existed of the theatre at that stage was a concrete shell and four walls surrounding the interior. The team built the theatre from scratch from end of February, in preparation for a soft opening late August 2010. The proscenium stands at 30 metres wide, with an additional 15 metres to either side: 60 metres in total-wall to wall. A huge space to fill. The show was created simultaneously from late January to the opening in August. The grand official opening was October 16th: an incredible undertaking by the team.

Bali Agung is theatre of spectacle, with great attention and care to cultural detail, giving a Western audience a short-cut "in" to Balinese village life. It is a great achievement I think, to have a show of such scale encompass such rich detail, as often big-arena works only achieve the broad brushstrokes. Likewise, the puppetry was excellent. I saw hints of the old Handspan days married seamlessly to the Wayang Kulit. The large Monster puppets were perhaps a little less successful – although impressive to look at – as they seemed to lack a flexibility in their design, rendering their few movements repetitive. In the scheme of things, with such an array of visual business on stage, this was not a big deal.

The only sore point I have with Bali Agung is dramaturgical. The show ran for an hour – a perfect length for a family show, but the first 40

minutes were spent in set up of the world of the play. I looked at my watch at the 45 minute mark wondering how were we going to have the main dramatic action take place in 15 minutes: but 15 minutes it took. I think, had the play been developed to allow for more time to play out the great love and battle scenes, and the final showdown and conclusion, it would have been more dramatically satisfying. The live gamelan orchestra was a magnificent choice, but the pre-recorded music underscoring the main sections of the play felt like a jump to the West in style. It made sense to pre-record though, with the amount of choreography and volume of traffic on stage, the cast would have had to learn to a soundtrack to keep the show tight.

I hope that Bali Agung has a long run. It is a world-class big arena show, which deserves plenty of audiences: as much as audiences should see Bali Agung. It is a stroke of genius to create a venue such as this, for a show such as this, in a zoo – bringing culture and new perspectives to a different audience, and it makes it a no-brainer for families – the zoo and a show all in one day!

If you're heading to Bali, take the time to see Bali Agung. It's a rare opportunity to see work of this scale done so well.

Creative Director – Peter Wilson
Production Designer – Richard Jeziorny
Lighting Designer – Phillip Lethlean
Balinese Choreographer – I Made Sidia
Composer – Chong Lim
Choreographer – Ian Knowles



HANDSPAN REPORT

2009 – Institut International de la Marionnette Residency, Charleville

Writing a PhD is a long road, an often solitary journey, and one that requires constant self-examination. My interest in cross-cultural work is long held, enriched by my involvement with the UNIMA Asia-Pacific Commission. In 2008 I was awarded a MacGeorge Scholarship by the Potter Trust and the University of Melbourne for travel to India to investigate how I might select a suitable collaborative partner and set up a project for a cross-cultural research study. I always knew that the project was going to be about reciprocal cultural exchange, and attaching to the topic was a cluster of questions. In continually refining and honing down the parameters, of circling the questions like a hunter, so to speak, was to identify the crucial question, the question central to the whole endeavour, and to therefore also understand how to best develop the methodology needed to test the question.

Generally in a PhD one does a literature review; you are supposed to be aware of the existing body of work and then to address this in reference to your own approach, particularly if deviating from the tested paths. The most comprehensive collection of literature about puppetry anywhere in the world is held in the archives of the Institut de la Marionnette in Charleville. It was for this purpose that I was awarded a Handspan Grant for travel to Charleville-Mezieres in September 2009 for a residency offered by the Institut. The collection contains books, magazines, articles, journals and AV material, and includes proceedings from major UNIMA events such as those held at World Congress, and conferences. It also holds copies of theses and reports that have been placed there by other residents and puppetry researchers. What I sought were accounts of the challenges and struggles that cross cultural work presents, and how these challenges were met, case studies. I hoped these accounts of 'others': of work conducted in a similar vein, of methods and outcomes, and of experiences to help me narrow down my own project parameters, to determine its inclusions and exclusions in how to set up, or simulate, an environment where the best chances of testing the questions could be affirmed. The central question buried at the core of all

my questions was beautifully simple, and yet philosophically difficult. "Puppetry transcends cultural divides". We have all heard this statement somewhere in our puppetry world, agreed with it, and even watched it in action, and yet it remains one of our treasured assumptions. We know how diverse, even strange to each other, all our different 'puppetries' are. So my project was about examining this a priori statement: Does puppetry really transcend cultural divides, and if so, then how can it do this?

Many people undertake cross-cultural work, and conduct it well, with respect for different cultural values, particularly when they work with traditional or indigenous artists. However it was valuable for me to discover that few people were approaching, documenting or theorising the process and practice in quite the same way. Much literature about puppetry is about its representational functions, speaking of the puppet as a medium in a system of signs and symbols. In a cross-cultural setting I felt that this approach was not adequate, as so much of a puppetry practice is specific to the local, or national, culture it is indigenous to—I use this term broadly here—especially with puppetry forms in Asia. This makes the representational approach a clumsy analytic tool that fails to achieve its universal aims, or at the least to do this simply. Neither did I hope to assemble another ethnographic study; it was not my aim to study and write about another puppetry form, as useful to the world as these documentations are. What I was interested in was how artists from radically different backgrounds could work together, creatively, when cultural barriers existed; I planned an action study based in puppetry practice. So it was the process as well as the final result that was the focus. I sought to approach the project from the perspective of phenomenology. Emerging in the late 19th/early 20th century phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that focuses on everyday life and embodied experiences and looks to the very functioning of human perception. At the Institut library I learned that a few have recently been taking up phenomenology as a topic for puppetry research, although these studies look at other topics within the field [interest in phenomenology is resurging in a number of disciplines, including drama and theatre studies]. My feeling is that phenomenology is very useful in the cross-cultural domain.

In retrospect, having now completed the practice component of the study working with an Indian shadow puppeteer, I look back and say it was rich and rewarding, as well as a difficult and fraught experience. But it is one that has provided not only the means to advance some deeper perspectives on discourse about puppetry, but also on the work-in-progress known as phenomenology. The study may have implications for fields beyond puppetry arts, in community cultural development for instance. The residency at Charleville was most valuable for my thinking and for fully refining my research plan.

[I do not have the space here to proceed further but will elaborate on the outcomes of the project in a further instalment, and as I am presently still writing up the findings].

My residency at Charleville was split into two parts. The M^ondial Festival cut through my dates at the Institut, and activities there changed during the festival period. Of course, this gave a chance to experience the Festival, my first time. The transformation of the City of Charleville in the days leading up to the event was something to behold. From a sleepy city where one could while away the days reading and writing, it transformed into 'standing room only', especially on the weekends. I can see why Charleville at festival time is an essential magnet for puppeteers. It was incredibly exhilarating and stimulating, where by the end of 10 days one comes away fully sated of all things puppet after expositions, exhibitions, wandering installations, seminars, demonstrations, and many in-theatre and outdoor shows, in main, alternative and street programs. My advice for travellers to Charleville is: do some homework about the shows you might want to see and book tickets early. Also organise accommodation early as even the camping ground fills.

There were a number of UNIMA activities scheduled during this time, of which I wrote about in my report in the magazine prior to its hiatus. But I would like to re-visit the UNIMA exhibition. **GHOSTS ON THE WALL - COURS BRIAND**
I think back to the earliest days of UNIMA, in 1929, to members involved in the influential Moscow and Prague Circles, seminal intellectuals and contributors to the birth of the field of theatre semiotics. The exhibition, a collaboration with the Museum of Chrudim, Czech Republic,

and Central Puppet Theatre of Moscow, was a modest display in the UNIMA office. It contained information and photographs supplied by Czech curator, Dr Jaroslav Blecha, who has organised similar exhibitions in Liberec for editions of Materinka Festival, and for the Windows into Czech Puppetry exhibition at the Titirijai Festival in Tolosa, 2007. It was enlightening to discover the intellectual heritage that early founders and members of UNIMA were involved in. Petr Bogatyrev and Roman Jakobson's discussion of Russian and Czech folk puppetry theatre fed a movement, born of Saussure's linguistics, that came to be known as semiotics, and that now presents the accepted teleology in strands of the humanities and social sciences through a discussion of codes of language, symbols, signs, and communicative systems, (the very discipline I just labelled as 'clumsy' for cross-cultural work!). However the world has changed much since these marvellous people first wrote about puppetry. Puppetry practices today are often multi-genre, multi-media and hybrid, and draw multicultural audiences. Semiotics has never accounted for the cross-cultural very well, and, the present world of rapidly changing global conditions makes semiotic analysis about communicative architecture dense and multifaceted.

But it is satisfying to remember that it was the compelling complexities and properties of puppets, and puppet theatre, which inspired such intellectual interest and led to an enduring contribution.

In the next issue of the magazine, I expect to focus on the last several UNIMA Executive meetings: Ekaterinburg in 2009, and the 2011 meeting in Charleville. I hope there will be space to speak further of my research.



INAUGURAL ASSEMBLY OF UNIMA, 1929
UNIMA ARCHIVES EXHIBITION,
CHARLEVILLE, 2009
PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER PFEIFFER



PRAGUE PUPPET PILGRIMAGE

Wez Champion recounts his experiences traveling to Prague to carve puppets with Michaela Bartonova of Tineola Theatre.

Why is it, when you arrive home, that your experiences only seem like dreams (despite having photographic evidence). How can you ever know if the connections and relationships you form will ever climax in ways you can only dream of?

Here I sit, two days after landing, jet-lagged and still trying to grasp the reality of what I experienced and the potential of what lays ahead for me. In order to explain myself more clearly and shed light on what relevance the above has to do with anything, I will need to take you back to early 2010.

Michaela Bartonova, a Prague puppet designer, carver and performer, perhaps best described as a "Master" arrived in Australia. As I had long been inspired by her work, I simply had to meet her. Michaela and I got together for what I call a "Puppet Chat" and, to my surprise, Michaela was not as I had expected. She was warm, welcoming, open and very willing to share.

I am a puppet builder. My position as a Youth and Children's Pastor might not suggest it, but puppets are indeed a major part of my work and life. Up until that day, all the puppets I had built were either "muppet style" or carved out of wood using machinery.

The day I met Michaela however, things changed for me...

Not only did Michaela introduce me to the principals of hand-carving, she took time to teach me, guide me and advise me. Who could have known that those few hours would be the beginning of a new world of puppet building for me?

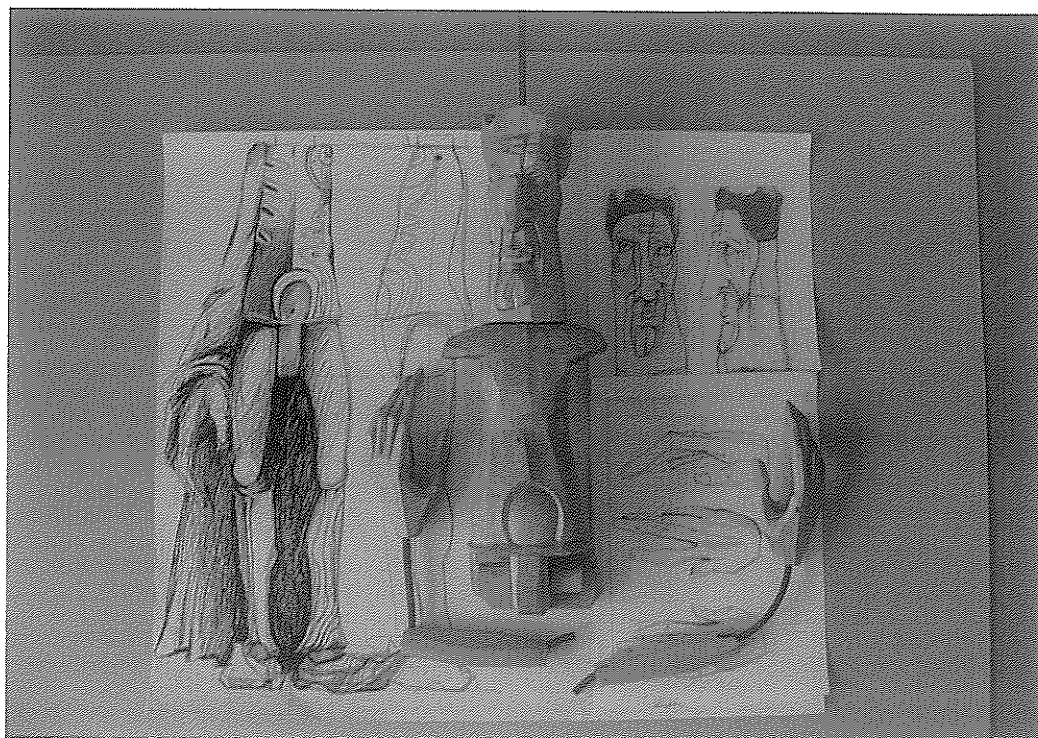
As the year progressed, Michaela and I became friends. I would hone my carving skills, send photos to her and she would enlarge my understanding and knowledge by providing great feedback to every chisel stroke. Soon, my wooden puppets began emerging in my day-to-day role. As I told stories, my marionettes and table-top puppets gave life to my words.

I had once thought wooden puppetry was lifeless and dead, but through Michaela, I was exposed to a world of freedom, expression and creative outlet. It was obvious that hand-carving was now my new preferred medium.

This story might have ended right there and my life return to normal (apart from the wooden puppets emerging from my now 'set up' workshop) and life, kind of, did... until one night a message came my way online from Michaela. "Wez, we need to talk seriously about you coming to Prague as a carver for 2 months".

Those typed words still echo for me and send shivers down my spine...

KING IN PROGRESS (DETAIL), 2010
PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAELA BARTONOVÁ,
TINEOLA THEATRE, PRAGUE



Incredibly, all things seemed to fit into place. Both my wife had 6 weeks leave approved, and we gratefully received financial assistance from both our parents, who recognised that this was one opportunity not to be turned down.

Just one month later, we were on a plane heading for Prague and what an experience it was!

I was one of ten carvers, who mostly came from all around Europe, working on a massive project. Michaela was the designer, manager and supporter of the carvers working on life sized puppets. Let me repeat that; LIFE SIZED! The project was a massive one!

A man in Holland purchased a floating, working replica of Noah's Ark. He had contacted Michaela to create biblical characters in her unique style that would be placed into the Ark, and used as tour groups came through it as it sailed from town to town.

I was on the team to create a character. I had never tackled anything like it before. Such large characters required new understanding and a willingness to learn. Really, the willingness to learn came easily - when one is amongst some of the greatest carvers, designers and puppeteers in the world, the willingness to learn simply engulfs you.

Step by step my character began to take shape. Day after day I would carve. In the late nights we would discuss the design principals and concepts, and I would learn new carving skills. I began taking pages of notes on everything I saw and learned.

The Prague Puppet community were so willing to share, so willing to assist, and so warm

and welcoming. I am still trying to unravel the intricate details of all that I experienced working along side these great craftspeople.

Eventually, after six weeks of complete immersion in puppet carving and its community, my character was complete.

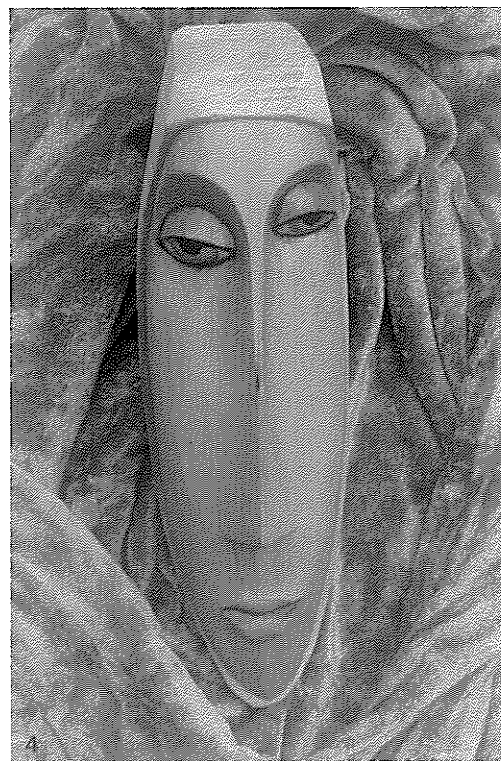
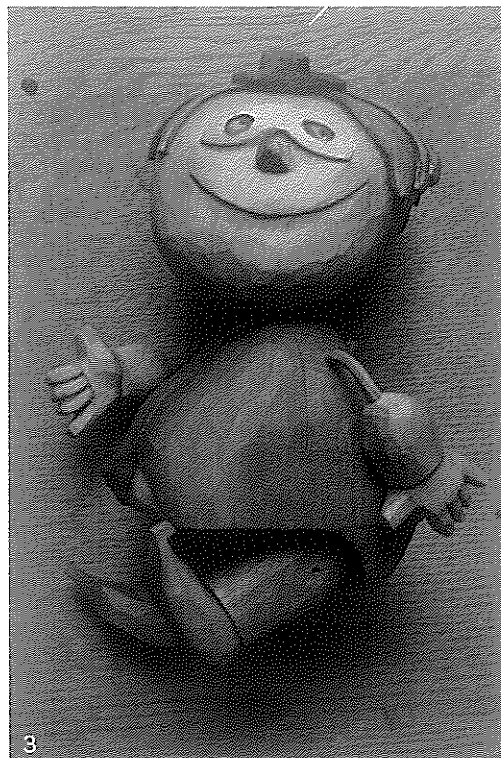
Puppet carving is a direct translation of your heart and attitude. When you are hesitant and fearful of making a mistake, your character begins to lose its living qualities. When you relax, enjoy and simply desire to create a character...your character begins to reveal itself in new, unexpected ways!

I am by no means a master in carving and I probably never shall be. I am always willing to learn new techniques, new skills and new insight from those around me, but one thing I know for sure...Puppet carving is a part of me, and taking what one learns and practising it brings new light to any skill gained.

Perhaps some day I will get the chance to sit and chat over a hot cup of tea with other puppet builders, share our skills and experiences with each other as the puppet community does in Prague. Until then I sit and ponder why it is, when you arrive home, that your experiences only seem like dreams (despite having photographic evidence). How can you ever know if the connections and relationships you form will ever climax in ways you can only dream of?

Here I sit, two days after landing, jet-lagged and still trying to grasp the reality of what I experienced and that potential of what lays ahead for me.

Anyone for tea?



- 1 *KING*, 2010
 PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAELA BARTONOVÁ,
 TINEOLA THEATRE, PRAGUE
- 2 *WEZ AND MICHAELA*, 2010
 PHOTOGRAPH BY WEZ CHAMPION
- 3 *LITTLE JOKER* 2010
 PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAELA BARTONOVÁ,
 TINEOLA THEATRE, PRAGUE
- 4 *SHE* 2010
 PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAELA BARTONOVÁ,
 TINEOLA THEATRE, PRAGUE



THE JOY OF PUPPETRY FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Karrie Marshall, writer and puppeteer with Scotland's Zenwing Puppets shares the inspiring work her company is doing with dementia patients.

A gentleman, sitting in a wheelchair is calling out for help. The care home staff tell him everything is all right, but he is clearly upset and agitated. Rocky, a cheeky mouth puppet arrives beside the chair and simply looks up at the gentleman. They exchange glances. The gentleman sighs. Rocky, with his big pink head and bright red lips, sighs as well. Together they sit sighing and breathing, in solidarity.

Ten minutes pass. The gentleman is calmer. He takes a sideways look at Rocky. The puppet glances back, then looks down. The gentleman reaches out to touch the black fluffy eyebrows. He smiles and sits up more. Maggie, a second mouth puppet arrives. She is welcomed with a gentle wave. He does not once look at the puppeteers. His focus is purely on the puppets as they begin to interact with him in a prepared sketch about the best way to grow vegetables.

We call this process of engagement 'Puppet Breathing'. It is an effective way of tuning in to

someone. We create a space in which something creative can happen, a connection is made, and communication occurs, with or without words. This is the beauty of puppetry. This is the work we have been developing for several years using puppetry and narrative work with people in care settings.

Puppets have universal appeal, and their innate humour and innocence create a sense of safety. It is this safe space that can paradoxically take us into the stark and unmistakable portrayal of human life, personal narrative, hopes, fears, and imagination. The pieces of work that people produce are often stunning. Puppetry connects on an emotional level. It offers an effective means of communication to people who may experience disconnection.

A person with dementia may struggle to take on board new information, and find it more difficult to recall words, but often their imagination and creativity remain in tact. Dr Gene Cohen noted

- 1 MEETING BETWEEN MAGGIE PUPPET
AND A KITTEN ON PARTICIPANTS LAP
ZENWING PUPPETS, SCOTLAND
PHOTOGRAPH BY KARRIE MARSHALL
- 2 POMPOM BIRD MADE BY ONE OF THE
PARTICIPANTS
ZENWING PUPPETS, SCOTLAND
PHOTOGRAPH BY KARRIE MARSHALL
- 3 ROCKY WITH GENTLEMAN
ZENWING PUPPETS, SCOTLAND
PHOTOGRAPH BY KARRIE MARSHALL

in his book about positive aging, that creativity continues to develop throughout life'. Another prominent Dr in this field is Bruce Millar who has done a lot of research about how the brain is affected by degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. He says 'even though our brains age, it doesn't diminish our ability to create.' "

With our strong belief in creativity, and a grant from Puppet Animation Scotland, (plus a lot of voluntary work), we developed and piloted an original puppetry and dementia programme. My professional care background helped understand some of the issues people in care might experience. We also shadowed Hearts & Minds practitioners who use subtle clowning to build connections. Another aspect of our development included studying dementia textbooks, and attending conferences to hear about people's challenges and experiences.

We have developed a ten-week programme (1/2 day to 1-day a week) for people with dementia in care homes. We ask staff and relatives to engage with the process, as we gradually build the sessions. It is important to allow time for participants to find their way into the programme. After several sessions with the gentleman at the beginning of this article, he called out 'Excuse me... I want to join the party, but I don't know the words.' This was a profound request, and we were able to establish a way for him to 'join the party.'

We explore ways to reach the place where a person seems to be. One lady, for example, seemed to be disengaged from everything around her. Her eyes stared into space, as though looking beyond the ceiling. There was concern that she was very unhappy, and not connecting with anyone.

We gently floated up a scarf into the space above her. After a few billowing and fluttering movements, the lady focused on the scarf. She smiled and soon began laughing. She turned and nodded. We connected much more quickly on subsequent visits, using various puppets, with a deep sense of joyfulness and communication without words.

Sometimes we explore a fragment of narrative, or create something in the moment. Perhaps we learn that the participant was a fisherman, or that someone likes owls. These aspects can be woven into the puppetry. An earlier programme involved a man who had been a lighthouse keeper. Members of the group created shadow-puppets depicting his experience. There was much laughter and eagerness to perform.

In order to ensure the sessions are achievable and accessible, we do a vast amount of preparation. The initial weeks use various puppet-making activities, to discover preferences and levels of participation. Pom-pom and Sock Puppets can be excellent making activities. They are non-threatening and easy for relatives and staff to contribute to. The sock puppets have huge capacity for group singing.

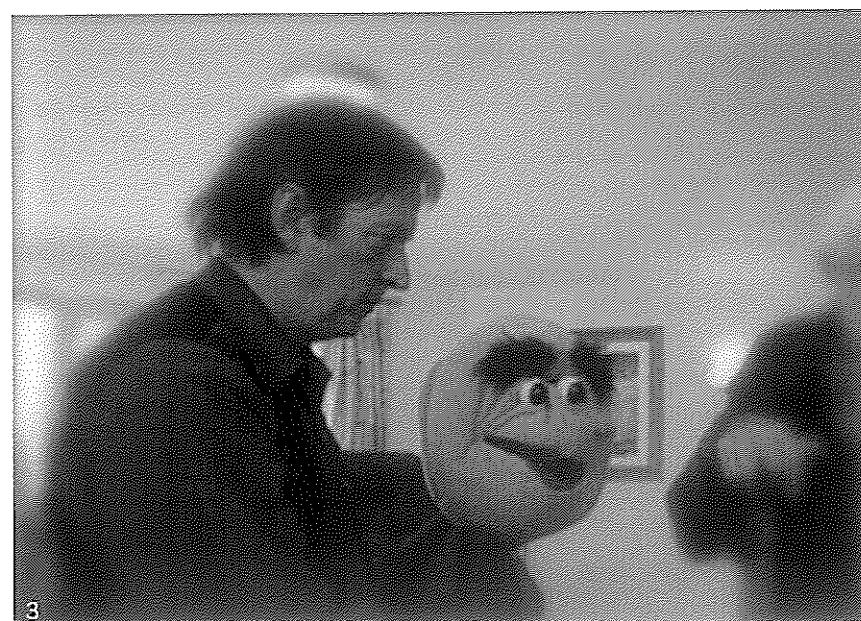
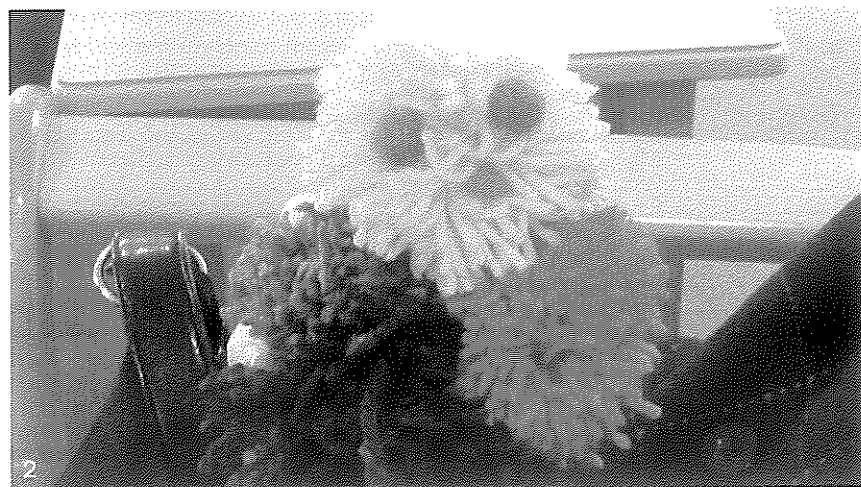
Some people prefer the sophistication of working with wooden, jointed puppets, which we prepare with people in stages. It is important to ensure that each session has some sense of completion, for that feeling of satisfaction. Although a person with dementia may forget they have just created a puppet, they still experience the feeling of satisfaction or joy, or connection. This is important because it enhances a sense of well-being.

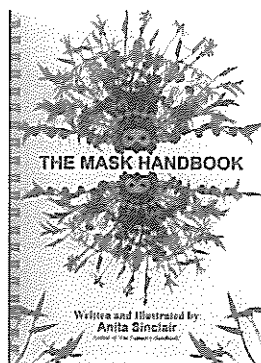
Our work is underpinned by a set of principles that aspire to ensure respect for individual creativity and well-being. Feedback from participants, staff and relatives reflect what we witness ourselves... the puppets enable people to express or communicate, with or without words. Puppetry is a powerful and effective way to share experiences. Creativity is all-inclusive. There are no boundaries. Puppets have a magical quality and we are deeply committed to continuing this work.

If you are interested in learning more or discussing this article please contact *Karrie@zenwingpuppets.com* Zenwing Puppets is a professional touring puppet company who also specialise in puppetry in care work.

' Dr Gene Cohen (2006) The Creativity and Aging Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults Final Report: April 2006 Publisher 'The American Society on Aging' volume XXX pages 7 to 15

" Dr Bruce Miller (2004) Director, Memory and Aging Center, University of California, San Francisco. Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/allinthemind/stories/2005/1500008.htm> (accessed May 2010)





THE MASK BOOK
ANITA SINCLAIR
PRIVATE PRESS, 2008

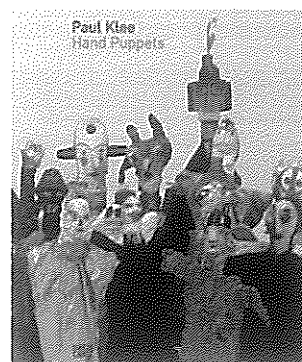
The division between forms of live performance is a porous one at best, as at their most basic they share important commonalities rooted in the contract of observation that exists between performance and audience, which animates the live event in contrast to the pre recorded one. Anita Sinclair's work *The Puppetry Handbook* has been an invaluable resource for practicing puppeteers since it was first published in 1995. Comprehensive, filled with common sense and written with a naivety that gives confidence to the beginner, as much as it belies Sinclair's years of practice and experience.

Working as maker and performer while teaching Drama in suburban Melbourne, Sinclair encountered the Mask work of David Lander, a student of the legendary Keith Johnston, which gives Sinclair's work a significant pedigree. Lander established a performance ensemble, Mad Hat Theatre, for whom Sinclair made masks using techniques she lays out in easy to read detail in her latest published work, *The Mask Book*.

The book is written in the same engaging but plain spoken style as her earlier work and accompanied by the same charming hand drawn illustrations (including several full colour plates in the centre.) She covers construction techniques as basic as folded flat card through to face and full head casting, wire, foam rubber, latex and even woven grass.

The book also goes into Sinclair's thoughts on performance which focus mainly on practical issues, costuming, staging and so forth, touching only lightly on the complex symbolic, trans-possessive and shamanic depths mask performance engages.

The Mask Handbook is an indispensable addition to the puppeteers library, a valuable resource for drama teachers and would also find an important place on the must read list for visual and post dramatic theatre makers.



HAND PUPPETS
PAUL KLEE
HATJE CANTZ PUBLISHERS, 2007

It's a puzzling fact that puppets are largely ignored by the art and fine craft worlds. It's nice then to occasionally come across an artist for whom creating puppets forms a significant element within their body of work.

Paul Klee (1879 – 1940) is well known as an influential painter within a number of art movements. Less well known is that over a span of 9 years he also created 55 hand puppets for his son, Felix. He used a variety of materials from his studio and around his home, including bits of old suits, discarded clothes, beef bones, electrical sockets, brush bristles and nutshells.

The puppets were inspired by a visit to a Munich flea market when Felix was a young boy. While Klee went on the hunt for picture frames for his work, he used to leave Felix in front of the Kasperl and Gretl (Punch and Judy) booth. Felix was so enthused by his visits to the show that he begged his father for some puppets of his own to play with. In 1916, on Felix's ninth birthday, he was presented with a set of 8 puppets. These were Kasperl and his wife Gretl, his friend Sepperl, Death, a Devil and his Grandmother, a Policeman and a Crocodile. Over the years Klee introduced other characters, sometimes his own inventions and sometimes at the suggestion of Felix. These included a Crowned Poet, a Buddhist Monk, a German Nationalist, a Self Portrait puppet, the Ghost of a Scarecrow and an Electrical Spook.

The book is filled with colour photographs of the surviving 30 puppets along with detail shots of some of the characters. This is a beautiful book that you can spend hours pouring over, and then come back time and time again to revisit favourite puppets and discover something new. Perfect for a gift or to expand your puppet library.

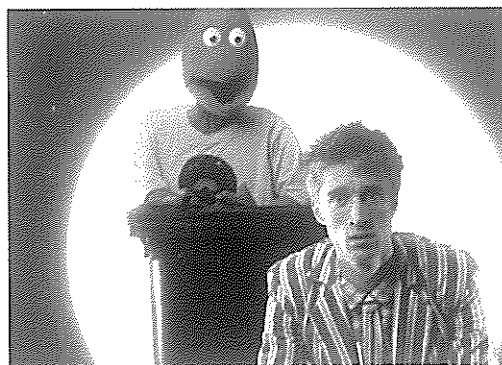


THE BABY SHOW

DONNA JACKSON

AT THE CARLTON COURTHOUSE 2011

While Donna Jackson is perhaps best known as a facilitator of large scale community theatre works such as *We Built This City* and the works of *The Women's Circus*, she is also an accomplished solo performer. Alison Croggon calls Jackson's previous solo offering, *Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love*, a "minor classic" and so it is. *The Baby Show* demonstrates much of the charm and inventiveness of its predecessor but still feels very much like a work in development. In *The Baby Show*, Jackson explores concepts of family, sharing her own life experiences both as a child and self-declared "spinster", as well as taking a historical look at unwanted child-birth and the origins of adoption practices. Jackson is no stranger to physical and visual theatre, coming from an early background with *West Theatre* in the 1980's, and these skills translate into charming, if crude, stage devices such as the manipulation of fuzzy felt and simple shadow puppetry to tell the story of her birth. Though the puppetry skills are rough to say the least, precision is not the aim so much as immediacy and charm. It's also hard to be too critical of a show that features two live appearances from Jackson's own pet puppy.

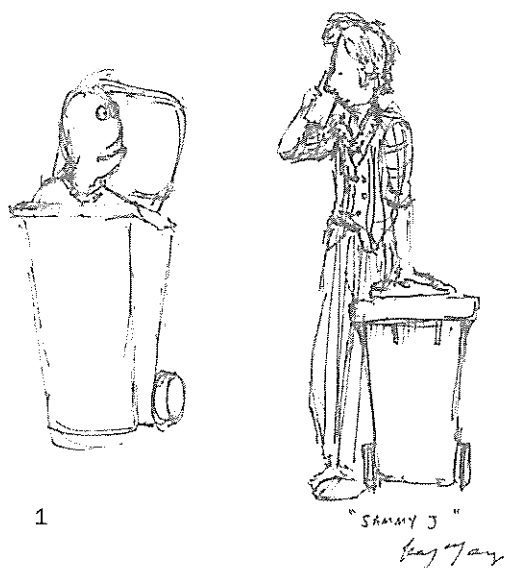


BIN NIGHT

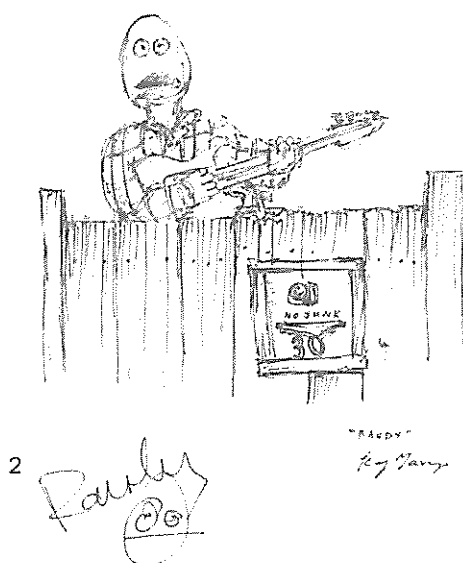
SAMMY J & RANDY

MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL COMEDY FESTIVAL 2011

Back for their third installment of the ongoing hilarity that is Sammy J and Randy's triumphal race to the upper middle of Australian light entertainment. Sammy J and Randy (and particularly Randy) are fantastically funny. Even a simple premise, a stake out of the garbage bins to catch the neighbor who has been secretly putting his garbage in their bin, can take the sweetly gawky muso and the, it has to be said, increasingly skanky felt face, into wildly surreal and murderous situations. I'll admit being a bit hesitant to see how the boys would stretch a full show out of the premise but was quickly reminded that it's not about the narrative with these two, it's about the incredibly catchy and clever songs and the chaos that ensues when one loses his place in the script and the other delights in taunting them until he gets back on track. Never missing an opportunity to see Sammy J and Randy, we didn't see anything else this comedy festival and it was still totally worth it.



1



2

1 SAMMY J, 2011

BY KAY YASUGI

PUPPEROOS, SYDNEY

2 RANDY, 2011

BY KAY YASUGI

PUPPEROOS, SYDNEY

ASK DR PUPPET

This issue Dr Puppet explains how to get hands and feet moving by crafting perfect rods and handles every time.

Q: What kind of rods should I make for my puppet? I want to have both hands connected to rods so I can gesticulate with either hand. An option is one hand and the other in a static position.

A: Depending on the size of your puppets body, arms, hands, claws, etc., you may look at different materials. You want something neither too weak nor strong. A good rough guide is the Victorian Heritage's restoration rule of thumb - "As little as possible and as much as needed". Suggested materials are mild steel wire such as coat hangers, which come in a range of thicknesses and fencing wire which usually comes in rolls of various lengths and two strengths, regular and high tensile (High tensile means the wire has more strength in staying in what ever shape you bend it to.) You can also purchase "spring" or "piano" wire at hobby stores in a variety of thicknesses. These are sold in 36-inch lengths and imperial thicknesses. These are all ready straight and much stronger. The disadvantage is their reduced capacity for bending due to the wire's strength. Wooden dowels come in a range of thicknesses and types of timber. The type of timber is a factor in strength for diameter of the dowel cross section. Look for straight grain dowels when you select. A grain that 'runs' off the edge will snap when stressed. Bamboo rods are often found in the garden section about 6mm in diameter and approx. 600 to 900mm in length. Bamboo is very flexible and strong for it's diameter but not uniform in thickness.

Q: I want the handles of my rods, which are wire, to be comfortable and easy to use. What material should I use?

A: Depending on your facilities and making skills, I would choose a timber of adequate thickness that feels comfortable in your hand. If the length of your rod is short and the wire is thin, you may choose a smaller cross section, as you don't need much force to hold or move the rod. If the rod is longer and the wire is thicker, you may choose something you can grip to add more force to the movement. If you choose to have rods on more than one appendage, you may want smaller handles to hold simultaneously. If you have the facilities available to cut your handles with either a bandsaw or table saw, you can 'rip' the handles in long lengths and cut to size as you fit them. I generally cut or route the corners to make an octagonal cross section and soften the corners with sandpaper. The facets of the shape make rod control easier with less force to hold.

Q: How is it best to attach the wooden handle to the round wire so they don't spin when using.

A: As you are trying to secure a round hard material into a softer material, there are a couple of tricks I use. One is to file the cross section of the wire that fits into the handle square. You may get away with about 25mm of square section on the wire. Then measure the thickness of the square wire, which should be thinner than the diameter of the round section. Drill a hole the size of the square wire to a depth just a bit more than the length of the square section. Say you have 25mm of square filed wire; I suggest you drill the hole 30mm deep. Fixing the wire into the wooden handle has a couple

of options. I have tried heating the wire over a gas flame and shoving it into the hole. The heat if not too hot will harden the wood as it burns the resins in the timber. Primitive techniques burn the ends of wooden spears and scrape away the charcoal to leave a hardened point of the wooden spear. I also saw this technique in an old movie called "Birdman of Alcatraz". He would burn the ends of the wooden dowels to make his cages joints stronger. It works. If the timber is not too hard, you should have a good strong joint. You can also smear liquid contact cement on the wire before tapping onto the wire. Be careful not to force the wire too far as you may split the timber. Another technique is to double over the end of the wire tightly so you have two thicknesses side by side. Now you can drill two holes of the diameter of the wire side by side and again carefully tap the handle onto the wire. This is easily secured, as the cross section in the timber is rectangular, not round. The trick on this method is getting the fold tight so it enters the hole without making it bigger as it is forced to it's depth.

Q: How do I get wire as straight as possible if using coat hangers of fencing wire that comes in a roll?

A: If you have a steel-jawed vice, place the wire in the vice and bend the exposed end to straighten the wire. Do this for the entire length to get the wire pretty straight. Now you can use a steel faced hammer to take the wiggles out to make it much straighter. I find using the end of a 2x4, either in the vice or clamped next to your bench, a good wooden anvil. The timber will allow you to hammer out the 'bumps' and not dent the wire. Gentle taps

will straighten out the wire. It takes a bit of learning this but works a treat once you learn it. A steel surface will work just as well if you hammer lightly. The trick is to hit just hard enough to pound the 'bump' down but not in the opposite direction. The hammering on either wood or steel also hardens the steel wire for more strength. If you have "spring wire" or "piano wire". The steel is much harder to change in shape and in fact, your hammer may acquire dents from the spring wire. As spring wire is already hardened it may snap if bent too quickly beyond its point of memory.

The main thing is an understanding of the properties of your materials and using them to create results. If it doesn't work as expected, try something a bit different.

Every issue of Australian Puppeteer, Dr Puppet will offer advice from professional puppeteers and puppet makers on the best solutions to the practical problems posed by the artform. If you have a question for Dr Puppet don't hesitate to email editor@unima.org.au Ask Dr Puppet was inspired by Phillip Miller. The part of Dr. Puppet this issue was played by Al Martinez.

MARGOT SIEMER AND HER AUSSIE PORTA-PUPPETS

Margot's introduction to Puppetry's potential began in 1957 at Kindergarten Training College. As an Early Childhood Educator, Margot grew up on an outback South East farm so it was perhaps inevitable that her talent lay in environmental and animal focussed puppetry. It is however the fun, creating glove puppets and writing their stories that this happy grandmother of nine, with her three great grandchildren, still shares with her audiences in her hometown of Esperance.

Enjoying over 50 years with her extended puppet family, Margot is amongst the growing list of successful cultural exports from Australia. Outback touring gave Margot plenty of long solitary hours travelling to think of ways to take Australian animals and environmental issues to the world. It also taught her the need to be light and portable when you only have two hands! So her ukulele and Ernie Emu travelled in her backpack.

This quiet achiever travelled solidly one year showing for two months in New Zealand, three in Canada and Alaska, four through the U.S.A., and three in the U.K. and Ireland. She conducted tours of The Channel Islands, Germany's British Military School, Scotland, Oxford and Banbury's U.S.A Defence Schools, and a stint in Hong Kong before returning home. She received return requests from Canada, Alaska, Japan and Hong Kong and concluded her touring with trips to New Zealand and the U.S.A for international festivals there. Then followed six more years of W.A. outback touring before her aging father needed Margot's care.

Just prior to the UNIMA Festival in Perth, at which she also exhibited, Margot contributed to the Festival of the Winds in Esperance, providing street audiences with huge airy puppets designed to draw audiences attentions to environmental issues such as the wind farms in Esperance.

If you know a puppeteer or visual theatre maker who should be profiled in Australian Puppeteer, please submit a three hundred-word bio along with suitable pictures to the editorial team. Check the submission guidelines as to requirements.



1 AUSSIE PORTA-PUPPET BANNER
UNIMA DISPLAY PERTH CONCERT HALL
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY MARGOT SIEMER
2 MARGOT SIEMER AND PUPPET
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY MARGOT SIEMER

