



O P e N

PART 2

AXEL AXELRAD REMEMBERED

Axel's workshops

Axel as President of UNIMA and other roles supporting Australian Puppetry

UNIMA awards

Tributes, Axel Remembered

Workshops, Lectures and Education

As well as developing the business of Lamont Puppets, Axel was involved in Puppetry education in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary colleges, including RMIT, Swinburne, Toorak College, and Burwood Teachers' College as a teacher and Artist in Residence. He presented lectures at the Goethe Institute, The Modern Languages Teachers' Association and facilitated regional puppetry projects. He produced notes and booklets which were invaluable resources for school usage.



UNIMA AUSTRALIA

Axel made a major contribution to Australian puppetry through his involvement in the Australian Puppetry Guild, Victorian branch, and UNIMA. (Union Internationale de la Marionnette.)

Axel was Treasurer and later President for the Victorian branch of the Puppetry Guild. In 1987 he was elected President of UNIMA Australia, succeeding from Norman Hetherington, the first President.

NEWSLETTER: JUNE 1987

Dear Members,

Mid-year greetings, and good wishes for your puppeting. We're now just a year away from the four-yearly UNIMA congress and festival, to be held in Japan, and details of costs are beginning to trickle through. You have twelve months to gather those shekles. Good luck!

- Lloyd

THANKS NORMAN

As a small token of all UNIMA members' appreciation for being our president since the formation of UNIMA-Australia, we have presented Norman Hetherington with a book on puppetry, 'Of Muppets and Men', by Christopher Finch. We hope he doesn't have it in his library already!

PRESIDENT ELECT: AXEL AXELRAD

Election results are now complete. The new office-bearers are as per masthead. You'll recall that secretary and treasurer were elected unopposed.

Annie reports that Axel received 20 votes from our 33 currently financial members. Congratulations Axel, and welcome to your new hat.

AXEL ADDRESSES THE NATION

'Thank you for voting for me to be the new President of UNIMA Australia. Norman will be a very hard act to follow; I can but try.

'If I can be of any assistance to any puppeteer, please contact me. I would like to see UNIMA as a strong representative of puppeteers in Australia. This can only happen when we do not think of UNIMA as mainly an overseas organization, but as an Australian organization which has connections with UNIMA International. It would be good if we could arrange meetings periodically in each State to exchange views and help each other, and with an ultimate aim of bringing out overseas puppeteers with assistance from overseas UNIMA organizations, many having connections with government cultural organizations.'

-Axel



Assistance?
I was wondering
about
'recurrent funding....'



UNIMA AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER 1987

Axel's Welcome Address



UNION INTERNATIONALE DE LA MARIONNETTE

MEMBER OF ITI (UNESCO)

Lament puppets

COONARA ROAD, OLINDA, VIC. 3788. TEL. 03-7511144

Axel was committed and actively engaged as Australia's leading representative of **UNIMA** from 1987 to 1992. He served as a UNIMA Councillor and as a Commissioner on the Asia Pacific Commission. Axel represented Australia in six UNIMA Congresses; Washington, Dresden, Japan, India, New Zealand and Indonesia.

He was prepared to fight for the status of Australian Puppetry as a significant art form.

In 1992, Axel resigned from all three of his UNIMA positions. Included with this article are the first and last reports he gave as President of UNIMA Australia.

You have had the Secretary's views of the rejection of the application made on behalf of UNIMA for a grant for the two UNIMA Councillors to attend the coming UNIMA 4 yearly Congress in Yugoslavia (if it takes place). Here is the President's view:

The request for a grant to help towards the cost of a UNIMA Councillor to attend the Congress was made for a UNIMA Councillor, not an individual. I suspected that our application would be put in with the rest of the applications, and I talked to Ben Stroud about this when he was in Melbourne in May 1991, and stressed that the funding was not given to an individual but to the organisation for the two World Councillors of Australia to attend. I have been trying to establish this for many years.

I quote from the letter received from Chris Mangin of the Australia Council 'The Board considered your application and perceived that the other applications had stronger claims for assistance from the limited funds at the Board's disposal', and further, 'Given the constraints imposed on us by our limited funds we are unable to support the majority of applications submitted. As one consequence of the shrinking budget, the Drama Committee believes that it should, as a priority, support practising creative artists develop their skills and extend their knowledge'.

I consider it is an insult to UNIMA that the Australia Council management and especially the 'peers', do not consider UNIMA worthy of their support, even with a shrinking budget. The Australia Council knew that the UNIMA Congress would take place in 1992 and we would be asking for assistance, but not the full amount. This grant is a very small amount of the Australia Council's spending on puppetry.

I am also insulted personally as my peers do not consider that I am a 'practising creative artist'. What do they think I have been doing all these years? Because I have not been first in the queue for every available grant, I presume that I am neither a practising nor creative puppeteer. I also gather from the Australia Council letter that if I had asked for more money to continue on from the UNIMA Council Meetings to 'extend my knowledge', I would have been better considered by my 'peers'. The fact that I would have gone on to Europe at my own expense would not occur to such people.

Australia Council has given Peter Wilson of Spare Parts an individual development grant, which does not surprise me as he is first in line for any available grant, even getting a mention in the papers for the large sum of money given to Spare Parts and brought out in the WA Incorporate scandal.

It is remarkable that two similar organisations, ITI and ASSITEJ, which are both funded by the Australia Council, seem to be able to attend their international meetings without problems. Mr. M. Fitzgerald and Ms. A. Chaplin will be attending the next ASSITEJ Executive Committee Meeting to be held in Lyon in December.

If the bureaucrats of the Australia Council and my peers in puppetry, do not think UNIMA is worth supporting, I cannot see any point in continuing with the organisation in Australia - and certainly not worth my spending the considerable amount of time that I do, on the organisation.

(from Axel Axelrad)

Right: Letter reproduced in March '92 edition of the UNIMA newsletter.

Puppet maestro pulls few strings for more support

By JILL SHELTON

PUPPET making could well be called an obsessive creativity.

The puppet maker is a very rare, gifted artist and his work takes on quite an almost human dimension.

Olinda's Axel Axelrad is a puppet master, widely recognised as one of the nation's foremost exponents of this rare art form.

He is the creator of Ossie Ostrich, a star of the top rating Saturday night TV show, *Hey Hey, It's Saturday*.

His commercial success as an Australian puppet maker stems back to the 1950's, when he and his wife, Janet, started making puppets in their spare time to provide a second income.

What followed was unexpected. The Axelrads not only devoted their lives full-time to supplying the Australian market with their *Lamont* puppets, but also exported overseas.

"They all said we were mad, but then in the 1980's we were the only puppet makers in Australia and *Lamont* puppets were the first toy in Australia to be awarded the Good Design Label by the Australian Design Council," Mr Axelrad said.

In the 1950's, the business produced seven different puppets. By the early 1980's, there were 60 puppet types. But now after 30 years as a commercial puppet maker, Mr Axelrad is turning his energy to promoting puppet theatre.



PUPPET maker, Mr Axelrad with just a sample from his diverse collection of puppets at his Olinda home.

His hope is that puppetry in Australia will shift from being "trendy and dramatic" and mushroom into a more accessible art form.

"Money is spent on puppet theatre by various State arts councils and the Australian Arts Council, but unfortunately it goes to funded companies who perform experimental pieces," Mr Axelrad said.

"But this doesn't get puppetry to the grass roots level."

Mr Axelrad said he wanted to see many more puppet festivals in Australia and recognition of our puppeteers overseas.

The first Australian puppet festival was held in Melbourne in 1975, and was followed by Hobart in 1979 and in Adelaide in 1983.

atre of Australia, in Sydney followed by the Spare Parts Puppet Theatre in Fremantle, Western Australia and Terrapin in Hobart.

As Australian president of the Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), Mr Axelrad intends to lobby the government to send an Australian representative to the forthcoming UNIMA festival in Japan.

UNIMA was established in 1929 when European puppeteers got together in Prague and realised there was no forum where they could exchange ideas.

The group is affiliated to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and is a member of the International Theatre Institute.

"In a lot of countries, especially those behind the Iron Curtain, puppetry is state orientated and people get paid by the government to attend," he said.

"In the west, organisations who support such things offer people grants to go."

"In Australia, nobody cares."

Born in Berlin, Mr Axelrad was introduced to puppet making while at school.

When he moved to England during World War 2, he helped establish a puppet theatre which performed regularly at the International Club in Nightbridge, London.

The club he said was run by governments whose countries had been overrun by Adolf Hitler.

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"But this doesn't get puppetry to the grass roots level."



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INTERNATIONAL PUPPETRY ORGANISATION

UNIMA CENTRE AUSTRALIA

P.2.

8th January 1992

Type to
enter text

Michele Spooner
Secretary
UNIMA Centre Australia
201 George St
Fitzroy 3065

Dear Michele,

This is to inform you that I hereby resign as President of the UNIMA Centre Australia and also as a member of the Asia-Pacific Commission and a Councillor for Australia.

Janet and I will not renew our membership of UNIMA Australia.

This action has been taken because of the recent decision of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council not to give a grant to the UNIMA Australia President (and Councillor) to assist in attending the 1992 UNIMA Congress, held every four years. The Management and Board justified their decision with the most inane reason which can only be put down to the fact that they are either moronic or only give grants to their mates who appear to be members of funded companies. On checking the list of puppeteers who received grants according to Chris Mangin, they are: Michele Spooner, Katy Bowman, Jindra Rosendorf, Peter Wilson (Perth), and Jane Davies, who are all members of, or attached to funded puppet companies, proving my point. This does not include any people who have applied for the second date of funding. Of course, in the opinion of Chris Mangin I am not a 'practising, creative artist' who deserves their support 'to develop my skills and extend my knowledge' !!!

The action of the Australia Council was the last straw as I have been slowly getting disillusioned with the members of UNIMA Australia for some time. It is my opinion that most puppeteers and most UNIMA members in Australia seem to be a self-centred group who do not act in the spirit of the UNIMA Constitution. They are full of ideas but never do anything and make out they haven't the time.

In these circumstances, when the major Government Arts Organisation does not give support or recognition to the International Organisation of UNIMA, it is not worth my time, effort or money to stay in UNIMA Australia.

Yours sincerely,



Axel Axelrad
Axel Axelrad

UNION INTERNATIONALE DE LA MARIONNETTE
FOUNDED IN 1929 MEMBER OF ITI (UNESCO)

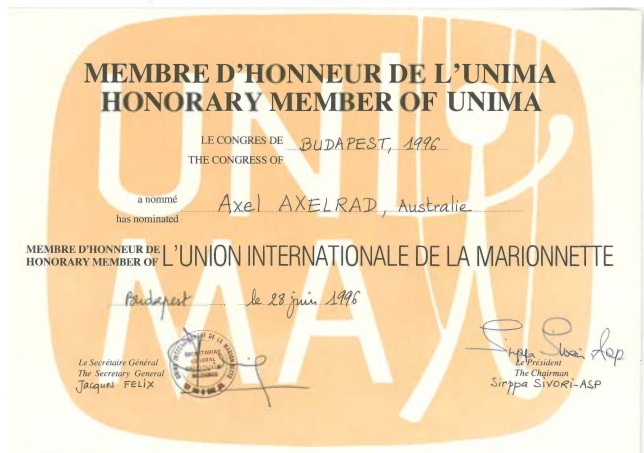


Photo: Axel's certificate of Honour
UNION INTERNATIONALE DE LA
MARIONNETTE.

Axel's Resignation letter 1992

However, Axel took on the role of the editor of **Australian Puppeteer**, post retirement .

SPRING 1998

AUSTRALIAN PUPPETEER



THE MAGAZINE OF UNIMA* AUSTRALIA
*UNION INTERNATIONALE DE LA MARIONNETTE

In the 1990's, Axel was made a Member of Honour, UNIMA International and Life Member of UNIMA Australia. At the UNIMA Puppetry Summit in 2002, he was awarded a UNIMA Australia Lifetime Achievement Award for his outstanding contribution to Australian Puppetry Arts, together with Norman Hetherington and Richard Bradshaw.



Photo: Trophy Likeness sculpted
by Julia Davis

AXEL AXELRAD REMEMBERED

Tributes :



In late 1987, Axel was President of UNIMA Australia.

He received a hand written letter in the post from a West Australian UNIMA member, posted from France.

This 24-year-old woman had been accepted into a new, three year, puppet theatre arts school in France.

She was seeking assistance to find possible scholarships to cover her living costs while studying.

Axel took a personal and professional interest in this matter,

enquiring as far the French Embassy. There, he discovered that the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs had three Scholarships available for Australians.

He wrote a letter back, telling her of this scholarship, and asking her to send him an application. Which she did.

When he received her letter and application, he drove to Canberra and delivered the application personally to the Cultural attaché at the French embassy.

She got a scholarship.

What a wonderful introduction to the beautiful UNIMA connection that was for me.

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to meet Axel since then.

I will never forget that gesture from a stranger.

What a kind and generous man he was!

Joanne Foley 03/01/19

Foley Bergere

I had met Axel when I was working at the Alliance Française, in 1990 (a while ago!) At the time I had just arrived in Australia and was thinking of starting puppetry in Melbourne, performing for schools. I told him about my project and we also discussed his work here as a puppeteer and the time when he arrived in Australia. I had some puppets that I had brought back from France, but my concern was that I didn't know how to make a portable theatre that I could easily assemble and dismantle. He came back the following day with two different plans that he had drawn, of portable puppet theatres. He even told me where to buy the parts. I was amazed and very appreciative of his consideration. He was a very kind-hearted man and also very artful and witty. I liked very much his personality. Even though I didn't see him that often, I will always remember him as a true gentle man, with a fantastic sense of solidarity. Farewell Axel, you will not be forgotten!

Anne-Marie Peiffer

Carroussel Theatre

I remember being a member of the then Victorian Puppetry Guild in the mid to late 70's, which the late Lorrie Gardner first introduced me to.

At that time most meetings were held at Handspan's headquarters in Gertrude Street. There was a time when we had a get together at Axel's home to also play host to Philippe and Mary Genty who were touring Australia. I was so lucky to spend time with Axel, as he talked about his life before coming to Australia and the achievements he had, not to mention his workshop and displays of puppets. I actually had quite a few Lamont Puppets as a child too. I visited him a few times since that first meeting and we would chat about his Lamont Puppets and what made them so popular (in

my mind particularly) and how to create a simple character from an idea, and puppets I was working on.

Being in my late teens I would often ask him questions about mechanisms that he thought might work with some of the puppets I was creating. His patience and willingness to help really inspired me at that time and extended my fascination with the world of puppetry.

He was an absolute treasure. A gentle kind man who was also humble about the impact he had on many people. God bless you Axel and thanks for the great memories.

Darren Varley
UNIMA Australia member



I met Axel for the first time at a UNIMA AGM meeting held at Polyglot.

Around that time UNIMA was planning the 2002 Puppetry Summit at the Victorian Arts Centre. Lorrie Gardner, who was UNIMA president, asked me if I would sculpt likenesses of Norman Hetherington, Axel Axelrad and Richard Bradshaw who were to be the recipients of the first Lifetime Achievement in Puppetry Awards to be presented at the Summit. The likenesses were to be affixed to an inscribed trophy. I accepted the challenge as I had been making celebrity puppets and politicians and enjoyed moulding faces in 'Sculpy' and clay. I had access to numerous pictures, but meeting 'the subjects' in person would assist me to capture the personality in the face. So Richard and I travelled to Olinda with the Gardners to enjoy a lunch with Axel and Janet and to be treated to a tour of his wonderful collections of puppets, many of which I had seen on television as a child. (I also had a Lamont string puppet (policeman). This was the first of many of our visits to Olinda during the next decade and a half.

In 2003 Janet died, and we visited Axel while he was living by himself. We would share some weekend afternoons with Axel, marvelling at the puppets and eating chocolate cake while Axel regaled us with stories of his life and shared his puppet-making knowledge. Axel loved to talk and he reminisced at length about establishing Lamont Puppets and about his early years, when he fled Germany and lived in England and his years in an internment camp, working long hours in a factory.

Axel was always generous and welcomed visitors and young puppeteers who wanted to learn from him, and view his collection. He was also very self sufficient and still drove his car when he was in his nineties. He attended one of Richard (Hart's) shows at an Olinda primary school only a couple of years ago. and he used email until he was well into his eighties, but lost patience with it. He appeared to be very active and agile. When we visited he would squat on the floor and riffle through his store of boxes of memorabilia, to show us magazines, posters and newspaper cuttings he had saved.

About 5 years ago Axel asked us if we would be prepared to relieve him of some of his 'stuff', so many of these boxes ended up in our workshop - records of the history of puppetry and Axel's commitment and love of the art form, all carefully preserved. Axel also entrusted us with some of his stages; some were constructed out of pvc piping and were easy to assemble, so we were able to use these for school workshops. Later, he bestowed boxes of fabrics from the 60's and 70's, printed with floral patterns of orange, yellow and brown, samples of workshop puppets made from recyclables, foam or paper, puppet posters, calendars, magazines, scrapbooks and thousands of his mass produced cardboard puppet kits.

Axel was very fond of Richard and often rang late at night, "Is Richard there? It's Axel," Of course, I would recognise his voice because he always spoke with a smile. We will miss him.

Julia Davis

A few years ago, Axel left me with boxes of material, old magazines, newspaper clippings, etc. This article about his contribution to puppetry is based on my search through this material and talking with one of his daughters, Christine Axelrad, who also provided extra material, including old family photos,

He was described in a newspaper article as: “A small bubbling man, he has a happy face which reminds you of the puppets he makes”

Richard Hart.

This issue was compiled by Richard Hart and Julia Davis, Dream Puppets 2019

