

AUSTRALIAN PUPPETEER 39

UNION INTERNATIONALE DE LA MARIONNETTE

DECEMBER 2009





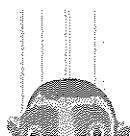
COVER: THE ADVENTURES OF ALVIN SPUTNIK. ARTICLE PAGE 28. PHOTO: MICHELLE ROBIN ANDERSON THIS PAGE: THE NIGHT ZOO. ARTICLE PAGE 30. PHOTO: MICHAEL BARLOW

EDITORIAL

It's that time of the year again! Time flies when you're having fun... Time certainly has flown by and you all seem to have been having fun too by the exciting selection of articles in this issue. Thank you to all our wonderful contributors!

Our president Jennifer Pfeiffer has lots to report on from the UNIMA Executive meeting, including the much anticipated launch of the *World Encyclopaedia of Puppetry Arts*. There's a piece of puppet history preserved by our political institution as told by Richard Bradshaw, and lots of puppet happenings from our Australian and international puppeteers locally and abroad.

Whether you're gearing up for a busy next few months, or you're heading off for a much needed holiday, may you have a safe and enjoyable Christmas and New Year!... We look forward to hearing of all your inspiring endeavours in the new year.



Leon Hendroff



Australian Puppeteer #39 December 2009
ISSN 1835-6567

Logo designed by Norman Hetherington

Submissions to Australian Puppeteer are voluntary. All information and opinion is the responsibility of the author. Inclusion is usually based on space available. Deadlines are based on the availability of the volunteer editor and is set by them so may vary. By submitting an article, you agree to publication in electronic formats and distribution.

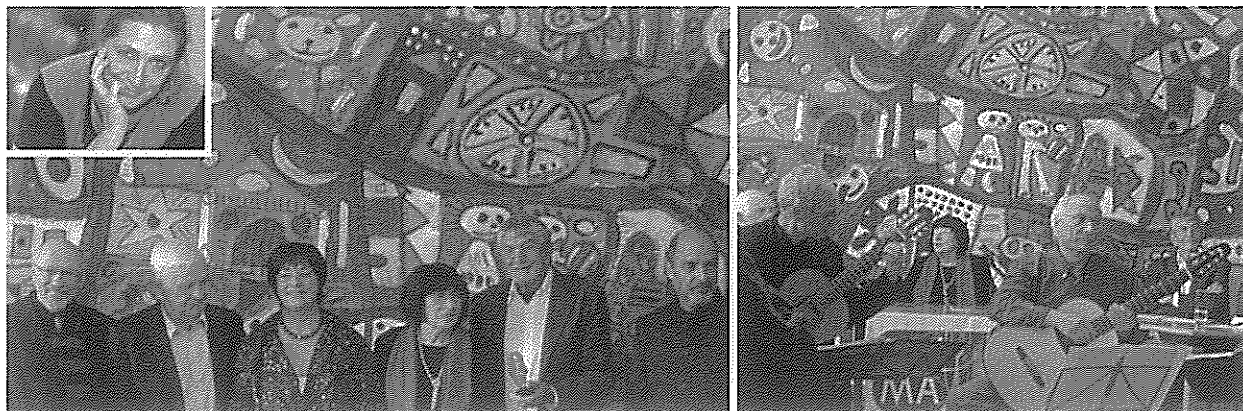
CONTENTS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT	1
SECRETARY'S REPORT	3
LORRIE GARDNER UNIMA AUSTRALIA SCHOLARSHIP	3
CREATING COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECTS?	4
RAY BARRETT (1927 – 2009) Richard Bradshaw	4
EXPLORING NEW WORLDS Leon Hendroff	5
LORRIE GARDNER SCHOLARSHIP 2009 Naomi Guss	7
PUPPET HISTORY Richard Bradshaw	8
REVIEW: BILLY TWINKLE – REQUIEM FOR A GOLDEN BOY Penelope Bartlau	12
CZECH DIARY Megan Cameron	13
PUPPETS ALIVE EXHIBITION Lenka Muchova	15
REVIEW: KEN HARPER'S PUNCH AND JUDY SHOW Sean Kenan	17
REVIEW: THE SEEWELL FAMILY CABARET Penelope Bartlau	18
ASPHYXIA AND THE GRIMSTONES Asphyxia	19
SPIDERS IN WANG – INVISIBLE CONNECTIONS PROJECT Penelope Bartlau	21
THE ADVENTURES OF ALVIN SPUTNIK: DEEP SEA EXPLORER Tim Watts	25
STATE OF THE ART: WA	27
THE NIGHT ZOO Leon Hendroff	27
THE WARRIOR AND THE PRINCESS Shirley Van Sanden	27
SPARE PARTS' ARRIVAL IN EUROPE Philip Mitchell	28
ROYALE DE LUXE	29
ADVICE TO THE ASPIRING YOUNG ARTIST Julia Davis	30
WHAT'S ON	31

CONTRIBUTORS: Jennifer Pfeiffer, Sue Giles, Vicki Jaeger, Richard Bradshaw, Leon Hendroff, Naomi Guss, Penelope Bartlau, Murray Raine, Megan Cameron, Lenka Muchova, Sean Kenan, Asphyxia, Tim Watts, Michael Barlow, Shirley Van Sanden, Philip Mitchell, Sanjiva Margio, Julia Davis, Sue Wallace.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

JENNIFER PFEIFFER



HONOURING UNIMA ELDERS PHOTOS: JENNIFER PFEIFFER

So much to tell. I have just returned from a trip to the UNIMA Executive meeting in Ekaterinburg, Russia, and to Charleville-Mezieres where I had been awarded a residency by the International Institut de la Marionnettes for archival research associated with my study.

My trip was made possible by the UNIMA Handspan Grant 2008. In case of query, at the time of my application I was not president of UNIMA Australia; even so the Handspan Grant, unlike our Lorrie Gardner Scholarship, is open for any UNIMA member to apply for; I am at present a full-time student on a Scholarship and in need of support for activities since the Scholarship represents around 50% of a basic wage; the grant was awarded on the strength of my submission to an independent panel. For the duration of my research study my professional activities and UNIMA activities converge. The trip was for the purposes of advocating for Asia-Pacific Commission projects at the UNIMA Executive meeting, (of which my research study is one), and for the residency at the International Institute of Puppetry in Charleville. This coincided with the Festival Mondial at which there were several significant UNIMA events.

LAUNCH OF THE WEPA

I am happy to report that the WEPA (World Encyclopaedia of Puppetry Arts), some 25 years in the making, is finally published and launched at this edition of the Festival in Charleville. It is an impressive looking volume with good quality photos and paper. Its weight (some joked around 5 kilo, but actually 3.5 kg is closer) prohibited me from bringing the UNIMA Australia copy home in my personal luggage, already at weight limit from paper collected at the Institut. It will be shipped to us. The proceeds from the sale of the book are to go into a pool of funds that will be directed to the Commissions for projects. It will be important to take our copy as sample to interest libraries, schools, and of course puppeteers. The tricky part is that this edition is published in the French language. Yet the book is certainly an historical artefact and an important emblem of UNIMA's history. We do not know exactly what form (or when) the English edition will appear – options are currently being explored. The unit price of the WEPA is 60 Euros (close to \$100 AUD); at a member discount, with additional costs for freight charges. It will be cheaper to create a bulk order and have one shipment sent.

HONOURING UNIMA ELDERS

Three important personages of the UNIMA legacy were honoured by the city and the puppetry community at a special ceremony in the

Municipal Building in Charleville. There was a good turnout and an appropriate sense of occasion as the assembly witnessed homage and testimonials. We celebrated the achievements of Margareta Nicolescu, director and prime mover in setting up the international puppetry school and Institut in Charleville, Professor Henryk Jurkowski, academic and puppetry theoretician from the eastern European tradition, and Professor Michael Meschke, director, teacher, and known for his work in Asia for traditional artists, and on ethics. All three have been influential for me, and for countless other puppeteers. Their honour, well deserved, extends well beyond their achievements to advance puppetry, with their dedication, advocacy, and their personal strengths and merits, including the tenacity that sustained their work.

UNIMA EXHIBITION

In the UNIMA office at Cours Briand, an exhibition detailing the founding, early days and history of the development of UNIMA was on display. It was an odd feeling to look at, in the aged black and white photographs, the gathering of people at the first UNIMA Congress in 1929, and to think about the history and legacy that followed, and which we are a part of. And to wonder whether they realised at the time how resilient and large the organisation would become, its reach all over the world. Even then a healthy attendance was evident. The exhibition consisted mostly images of these historical photographs of the UNIMA people and of important documents. Puppets were lent for display from Russia. A little more contextualising material might have been helpful for people who are not familiar with the UNIMA heritage. Now that the exhibition exists on disc it would be possible to mount such a display here, or anywhere in the world, very simply. This would be good to familiarise, not only our own membership with the history of UNIMA, but a general public. It would certainly be possible to build onto the display and augment it with an exposition of Australian puppetry, of placing Australian puppetry in a context of the larger body demonstrating how UNIMA, on behalf of puppetry, was one of the first global cooperative networks.

THE EXECUTIVE MEETING was productive and a positive attitude was evident. However it seems that there are increasing issues to discuss, and time to do this was limited. Time was taken to discuss the proposed changes to the UNIMA Rules and Statutes that were rejected at the 2008 Congress. I was one of the majority who didn't support the changes in their 2008 form. We went through these new amendments one at a time. I must commend the hard work of the



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IN EKETERINBURG PHOTO: COURTESY OF CITY OF EKETERINBURG, STUDIO FORM www.studiovid.ru

Statutes Commission, Knut Alfsen in particular for his extensive work and attention to detail. The new amendments will be presented to what will be an extraordinary session of the Congress scheduled into the UNIMA Council at Dordrecht in 2010, so that these can be put to the assembly and voted on once more. I think all the changes are now reasonable and do not compromise the goals and intentions of UNIMA. Changes such as creating a Treasurer position will assist the General Secretary and improve our accountability. Other changes represent more a reorganisation of our Statutes and Rules and Procedures documents. This means a rearrangement of the existing documents separating what is philosophical from what is procedural, and therefore more easily adjusted as our needs demand without compromising our core mission statements. Information will be circulated about these details prior to the Council. What is clear is that UNIMA, having finished the WEPA project will have more funds to direct to other things. We all agree in the wisdom of not becoming too dependent on any one governmental funding source, such as our generous benefactors, French governmental sources: State, regional and municipal. Therefore we seek municipal and governmental support for UNIMA outside of France. Strengthening national centres and making them credible entities within their own national boundaries is a good step toward this and one that I would encourage for the UNIMA Australia Centre, and which the committee have been talking about during the year. This means an expansion of our activity and bringing our profile up as a serious cultural entity. At the same time this reinforces puppetry as being considered a serious artform and valued practice by our own local, state and federal bodies.

THE COMMISSIONS

As mentioned, for the first time, we discuss funds being available from UNIMA for projects of the Commissions, due to the conclusion of the World Encyclopaedia of Puppetry Arts project, which has taken much of UNIMA's resources for many years. It is the first time we contemplate being able to seriously implement other projects, although the next English and Spanish versions of the WEPA must still take a high place on our list of priorities. Depending on which path we travel, we could still require significantly large amounts of funding for these needs.

What eventuated for the year 2009-10 was that of the funds available for the commissions, we lacked the time to debate the merits of 'this over that' proposal from the Commissions (of which the Asia Pacific

Commission has two solid researched and budgeted projects, while others have no project on the table as yet). It was decided to allocate each of the Commissions 2000 Euro each. This will not be as a grant but as reimbursements for monies spent on the projects. I regret that we did not have more time to discuss these matters in detail as I anticipate possible problems, because there have been no guidelines or criteria set.

Deferring to our hosts' needs, we made ourselves available for events organised by Ekaterinburg Puppet Theatre. It brought home to me exactly how important UNIMA is in many cultural spheres, especially in the traditional settings of far eastern Europe where it is taken very seriously as an organisation of gravitas. It was quite a revelation. Our presence in Russia was specifically for our endorsement for the city of St Petersburg to convene a new international festival which will be for students at Puppetry institutions. What a shame Australia will probably no longer qualify for an invitation to this major inaugural event. This endorsement, in turn, opened the doors to attract further municipal and State support.

I cannot imagine a situation, at the present, where the endorsement of UNIMA would create such a flow of support in Australia. But how to make it happen is something I've been thinking about for some time.

Apropos of the Handspan Grant acquittal, I undertake to make a report for the Australian Puppeteer about my time in Russia and France. Space prohibits me on this occasion, but for the next issue I undertake to write a more detailed account of the work I am doing as a research project and its significance, and of my time at the Institut. Being the most substantive collection of puppetry material in the world, the Institut represented a great opportunity for me to locate all that I seek. Leaving no stone unturned, basically I am looking for accounts/case studies of intercultural projects between puppetry artists from developed centres and traditional or indigenous ones (referring to the broad meaning of this word pertaining to 'of a specific location'). If members know of, or can point me towards accounts of such projects I would be very interested to hear from you. My contact details are listed inside the back-page of the magazine and many thanks in advance. ■

SECRETARY'S REPORT

SUE GILES

It's been a very active few months since the last magazine with fascinating projects all around the country from the puppetry sector. Several things have happened since the last report with the financial handover complete, new members Beth McMahon and Tamara Rewse becoming involved and several Unima members quietly ticking away with developments that will make our communications better and our connections stronger. It is wonderful to have so many members who are dedicated to helping the organisation serve its membership and its art form, giving time and effort freely. Naomi Guss is making great progress with the Website, Amanda Karo with the UNIMA OZ e-news and Vicky Philips with the updating of the membership data base. Thanks to Julia Davis for being part of the complex handover of information and always there to assist and consult. And a big thanks to Annie Forbes for working so hard on the financial handover and making improvements to our operations in that area. Thank you to all the new members and those who have renewed recently – it makes a big difference to the health of the sector to know people are actively engaged and interested. Keep sending your news to our state reps so we can have a richer and fuller picture of what is going on around the country. We still don't have a local representative from the Northern Territory so if anyone has connections in the top end please let us know.

To remind everyone, State reps are: **TAS** Kirsty Grierson, **SA** Gabrielle Griffin, **VIC** Tamara Rewse, **WA** Michael Barlow, **QLD** Mitch Humphreys, **NSW** Sue Wallace, **NT** no one as yet. ■

THE LORRIE GARDNER UNIMA AUSTRALIA SCHOLARSHIP

Lorrie Gardner of Gardner's Puppet Theatre was a long standing and active member of UNIMA Australia. She was president for 3 years until illness forced her to retire in 2004. In 2005 Lorrie Gardner bequeathed a substantial contribution to the UNIMA Australia scholarship fund.

SCHOLARSHIP AMOUNT: \$800

PURPOSE: To assist the development of puppetry in Australia by benefitting UNIMA Australia Inc. members. The Scholarship was set up in the spirit of assisting young or emerging puppeteers in Australia to develop their skills and to be further exposed to the art of puppetry through such things as attendance at workshops, study under a specialist teacher, or other related activities as the panel deems fit.

ELIGIBILITY: The applicant must have been a member of UNIMA Australia for the past two years.

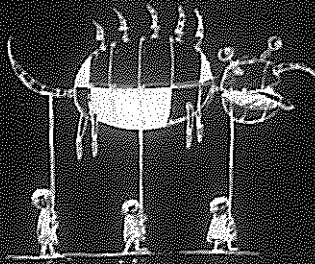
REQUIREMENTS: Please supply a CV, a short outline of how you intend to use the scholarship and information about any courses or mentorships that relate to the scholarship.

SEND TO: All members of the Lorrie Gardner Scholarship Committee -
Sue Wallace - spuppet@ozemail.com.au
Joanne Foley - foleybergere@bigpond.com
Philip Miller - philip@puppetvision.com

ANNUAL CLOSING DATE: 15th March 2010
ANNUAL DECISIONS ADVISED: 30th April 2010
Projects must start no earlier than 1st May 2010

ENQUIRIES: secretary@unima.org.au
For more information on this scholarship please check -
www.unima.org.au

CREATING COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECTS?



The Queensland Arts Council (QAC) is delighted to announce the launch of *Artsyakka*, an online resource of practical tools and templates, information and ideas to take some of the 'hard yakka' out of creating community arts projects. Not just another weblink site, it's filled with practical ideas, tried and tested templates, made by community arts champs for community arts champs. It's also a place to have a yak yak yak with other like-minded people. The site is a QAC initiative, which was made possible through the Australian Government's regional arts program, Regional Arts Fund (RAF), which gives artists and communities throughout regional, rural and remote Australia better access to opportunities to practice and experience the arts. The foundation information for the site is from Ideas Into Action, another RAF funded QAC initiated project. Visit Artsyakka at <http://artsyakka.com> ■



RAY BARRETT (1927-2009)

VOICES FOR MARIONETTES IN ENGLAND AND AUSTRALIA

BY RICHARD BRADSHAW

Obituaries for Ray Barrett who died in September mentioned that he provided voices for some of the marionette characters in the British children's TV series *Thunderbirds*. This was in 1965 when he was approached by the series' creators Gerry and Sylvia Anderson. He visited the studio in Slough where he was introduced to the puppets and accepted to be the voice of John, the villainous Hood and the dowager Duchess. He based his voice for the Duchess on that of Dame Edith Evans!

What escaped the attention of the obituary writers was that Ray Barrett had also provided voices for Peter Scriven's *Tintookies* in 1956. In his autobiography he describes how he had been obliged to call the NRMA when he had locked his keys inside his brand new car in Sydney. The NRMA man was very suspicious so to prove his ownership he indicated the script for the *Tintookies* lying on the back seat and, in the middle of Phillip Street, proceeded to sing *The Emu's Lament*:

"Boo Hoo, Boo Hoo
You're never quite a bird if you're an emu."

There is a little problem here in that there was no Emu in the original *Tintookies*. The Emu belongs in the later Tintookie show, *Little Fella Bindi*, for which Ray Barret also provided voices. This show toured extensively in South-East Asia in 1966-7 and the Emu clearly made an impression. In 1976 when the M.T.A. re-visited Burma, one of the officials... I think it was the Minister for Culture... remembered the Emu from a decade earlier and imitated the sound it made!

This was related to me by Grame Mathieson who was a puppeteer on both tours. ■

EXPLORING NEW WORLDS

2008 LORRIE GARDNER UNIMA AUSTRALIA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT MAY/JUNE 2009



BY LEON HENDROFF

I would like to start with a big THANK YOU to all who have made this scholarship possible. Special thanks to Noriko Nishimoto for sharing her vast knowledge and experience, also to Michael Barlow who generously gave of his time to aid Noriko and myself being an extra pair of hands and creative mind during the workshops.

The experience has been invaluable and has opened up a whole new world for me to explore! I have learnt so much over the seven Saturdays spent in one-on-one tuition with Noriko (former artistic director of Spare Parts Puppet Theatre) that it would be near impossible to relate it all to you as even more concepts are beginning to settle while I am writing this report. Noriko even said that though she was teaching me, she herself is learning through the process, and really we never stop learning. With that in mind I shall attempt to relate a few key concepts which I have gained from the workshops, with which new doors have opened for me to explore the expansive world of puppetry.

Though I have had an interest in puppet theatre for many years, it is only recently that I have started to pursue it more seriously. That plus being given a personal collection of puppets by retired marionettist Peter Hartland, found me needing foundational training in order to continue with integrity to the artform. Hence the workshops with Noriko in the areas of creating puppet theatre and technique across a range of puppetry forms based in Noriko's concept driven philosophy.

My background as a graphic designer/illustrator and lack of experience in theatre made it new territory and a challenge for both Noriko and myself from the start, but we worked through the challenge using as a basis two short story ideas I had and one developed during the workshops with a selection of Peter Hartland's marionettes, to explore different aspects of creating puppet theatre from directing, manipulation and design points of view.

Each workshop started with warm-up exercises, a stretch for the body before the stretch of the mind! Shifting from storytelling on the two dimensional page to the three dimensional theatrical world was a stretch for me, but it was the hands-on experience and Noriko's skill as a teacher to convey concepts and nurture skills which enabled me to make the transition.

For one of my story ideas we experimented with different materials, objects and puppets to tell the story. From a director's point of view we had to decide what was to be expressed and find the best way to express it. At first I found it easier working with a constructed puppet rather than objects and materials, but through different experiments, an appreciation and ease with both styles was developed and by the end I could see the strengths between them, and was able to objectively choose the better way of expression. This ability to enter the creative process puppetry-wise, and experiment with an open and objective mind was a key to open a new door of exploration for me, as I had previously favoured more traditional forms of puppetry, placing style over content, restricting scope for expression.



THIS PAGE / OPPOSITE:
LEON HENDROFF IN WORKSHOPS WITH
NORIKO NISHIMOTO EXPERIMENTING WITH
DIFFERENT OBJECTS, MATERIALS & PUPPETS
IN PUPPET THEATRE CREATION & TECHNIQUE.
PHOTOS: MICHAEL BARLOW

From the beginning it was established that the puppet's world is a fantasy world, non-naturalistic and surreal. It does not aim to copy the real world, but rather is a symbol of it, expressing its essence and creating new realities. Another turning point for me happened when we addressed the concept of 'separation' and the essence of puppetry. With just my hand(s) separated from the rest of me by a space we called the 'puppet's world', I had to express different characters and emotions. There was a point at which I began to see my hand appear to take on a life of its own and this illustrated, for me, the essence of puppetry and manipulation. The simplicity of the exercise in bringing up life with the essence of expression, without the need for extra, complex, devices was also a refreshing reminder of the human energy behind the puppet, giving it life. The expressive use of a human hand also became a strong design element for two of my story ideas, building on this key exploration.

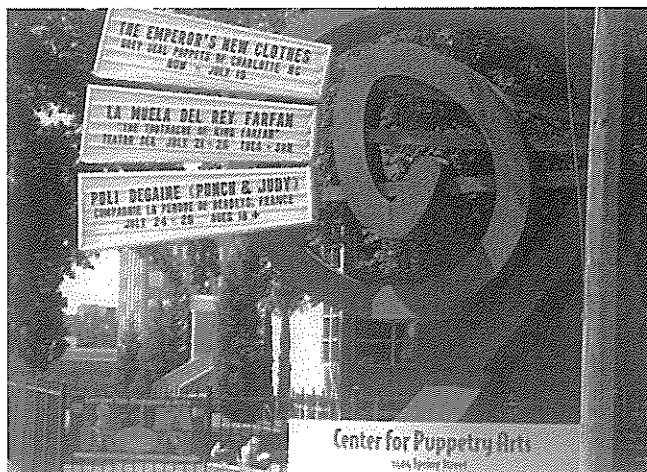
Design concepts learnt during the workshops probably weren't as challenging for me, having some sort of design background, but rather clarified other more abstract concepts like 'essence of expression', in a more material way. As Noriko's approach to puppetry creation is strongly concept driven, design in its use of space, scale, choice of materials and style played an important role in the storytelling. Simplicity and not having decoration is important. I realized that every element – whether prop, puppet or set – is an important character in itself. There is a relationship between them all. By distorting natural scale, elements can be brought to desired levels of importance.

"Small things with big expression" was something Noriko said. A concept which I can now see is at the heart of puppetry.

Another design concept which I am excited to continue exploring is a puppet with a neutral face that has character 'built into' it, but not emotion which is added through manipulation and therefore is able to change, allowing once again for that all important 'big expression'.

These are just a few of the valuable foundational keys which I have gained from my workshops with Noriko, and believe me, there has been so much more quality lessons learnt from such a master of the artform. The UNIMA scholarship was made available to help newer artists in puppetry further their training and knowledge in the artform and this is definitely what it has accomplished for me. I set out to gain a strong foundation to build upon in my venture into puppetry and feel I have gained so much more. The process has been challenging at times, but always inspiring and I now have strong concepts to use for further exploration, experimentation and expression. A learning process has not just finished but has begun! ■

LORRIE GARDNER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT 2009



TEXT AND IMAGES: NAOMI GUSS

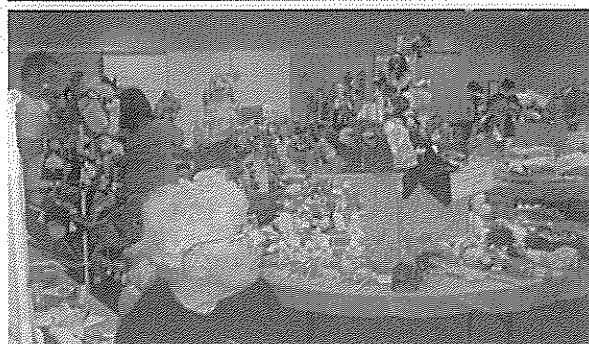
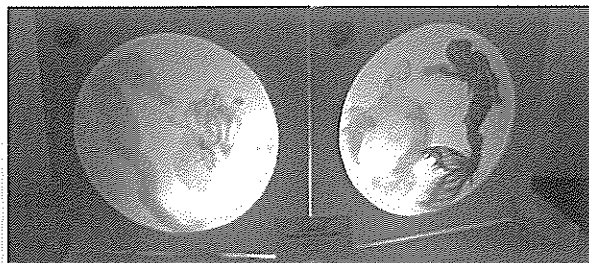
I am the lucky recipient of the 2009 Lorrie Gardner UNIMA Australia Scholarship, and used it to help pay the expenses to attend the National Puppetry Festival in America. This festival, a biennial event, is run by the Puppeteers of America organisation. Over four days in Atlanta, Georgia, there were workshops, performances, films, a puppet store and an exhibition.

The festival was split thus: two workshops in the morning (of your choice), and four performances in the afternoon and evening. I wanted to attend workshops which would either introduce me to new areas of puppetry, or extend my skills in areas which I am greatly interested. To that end, I attended three on shadow puppetry, one on marionette building, one on script writing and one on costume puppets and a forum. As each workshop only runs for one and a half hours, there was little time for in-depth instruction, and I was disappointed to come out with very little learned (even more disappointed not to have built anything!).

The performances were likewise disappointing: although a few gems were in the mix, the majority of performances could hardly have been called the cream of the crop. It did however, showcase well the diversity of ideas and techniques used in America; from operetta to abstract, from toy theatre to marionettes. The films that were showcased were likewise diverse, and included many shorts commissioned by Heather Henson, along with documentaries and filmed performances.

As mentioned above, there was also a puppet store – where I felt quite guilty buying so many items. It was wonderful to see so many puppets on sale from independent sellers, along with books, CDs, patterns, videos, puppet making materials and much more. I came away with a few prize items not easily found in Australia. The exhibition was great, although I'm biased: I had submitted some of my shadow puppets to display. There were all sorts of puppets to see, but I'm afraid nothing beats the Million Puppet Project at the UNIMA 2008 festival last year.

Although I may suggest the festival sounds bad, there were many highlights. Meeting other puppeteers in a supportive environment was one. Seeing many well-known puppeteers perform: Nana Projects, with innovative shadow puppetry more like hand-drawn



TOP LEFT: CENTRE FOR PUPPETRY ARTS, ATLANTA, GEORGIA TOP RIGHT: NAOMI GUSS
SHADOW PUPPETS MIDDLE RIGHT: PUPPET EXHIBITION BOTTOM RIGHT: PUPPET SHOPS

animation; Hobey Fords' foamie puppets; and Paul Mesner's take on the three little pigs. Additionally, I had the opportunity to take part in a momentous event, when the City of Atlanta announced the 18th July to be forever known as Jim Henson Day sitting in the Centre of Puppetry's theatre (the Centre was something Henson had helped establish). I also did a lot of sightseeing whilst in the area, and have many highlights from that. Most notably, I got a backstage tour of the famous Fox Theatre in Atlanta, which, as a technically minded person, I absolutely adored.

Although I didn't learn as much as I would have liked, attending the festival did leave me with one very overpowering thought: that it's clear the National Puppetry Festival is an important part of the American puppetry community's life. It is a place to meet others, catch up with old friends and see what is happening from a diverse group of people. It is an opportunity to not just be part of the community, but to feel part of the community. And it left me wishing that our Australian puppeteers got together more often. UNIMA 2008, in comparison to the National Puppetry Festival, was of a much higher quality. I would love the ability to trot off to a similar local festival every couple of years, and see what you are all doing. But alas, our events are few and far between. In the meantime, I will make do with attempting to make myself more involved in UNIMA Australia's activities, and hope that we continue to strive towards making our community more vocal and more tightly-knit.

Those who wish to read more about my trip can do so at my site. I 'liveblogged' the whole thing here at:
<http://www.puppetsinmelbourne.com.au/npfidiary.php> ■

PUPPET HISTORY

PUPPETS IN THE PRIME MINISTERS' GALLERY AT OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE



THE DISPLAY AT THE MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY IN OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA PHOTO: RICHARD BRADSHAW

BY RICHARD BRADSHAW

In mid-February Jennie Pfeiffer forwarded me the following e-mail which had arrived in the President's mailbox.

"Hi Richard,

I have been given your contact information by Russell Emerson regarding a show from 1980 put on by the Marionette Theatre of Australia called *Captain Lazar and His Earthbound Circus*.

I am a part of a team setting up the Museum of Democracy at the Old Parliament House in Canberra, in particular a section that exposes the humorous elements of politicians and political life.

I have been given the task of making a scene encasing two puppets made by The Marionette Theatre Company in 1980 that were a part of this show which played at the Adelaide Festival in 1980, the Sydney Opera House Recording Hall from 19th March, 1980, and the Melbourne University* Theatre afterwards.

The show was special not only because it was unashamedly offensive, colourful and hilarious, but was the product of a series of cartoons by Patrick Cook and the music written by Robyn Archer, two fantastic Australian talents.

Would you be able to direct or inform me to any recordings that may have been made at any of these performances of the show?

I am endeavouring to recreate the atmosphere from the show in the display, and this likeness would be far more reproducible if I could see some recording of the show.

Looking forward to your reply,

Linda Davy"

**that should be the Universal Theatre, but the show didn't get there*

Sadly I couldn't help out with any recordings, but I was able to send Linda one of the posters designed by Jenny Coopes (with Patrick Cook) for the show. Since then I have recently been able to see Linda's bright and colourful installation which is on "permanent" display near the entrance to the gallery of the Prime Ministers in Old Parliament House. It is here because one of the puppets, the koala-tamer Morton Barman, may resemble a former prime minister, Malcolm Fraser. His offside, The Great Orlando, is reminiscent of a former Governor-General, Sir John Kerr.

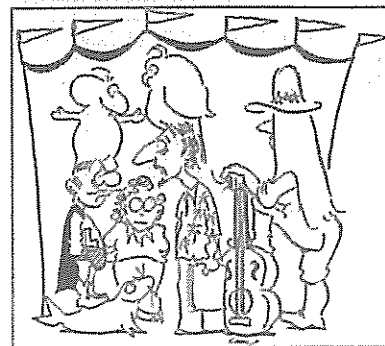
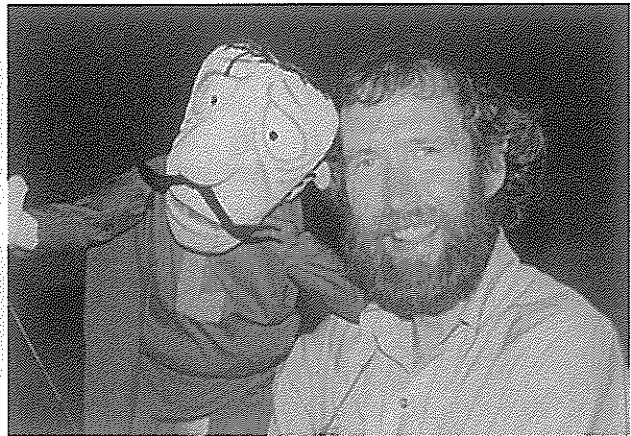
Most of you probably don't even know of this show unless you are lucky enough to have access to the splendid Vella-Rickards book "Theatre of the Impossible" [1989].

I had been Artistic Director of the Marionette Theatre of Australia since 1976 and wanted to try doing a puppet show for an adult audience in 1980. In this I had the full support of the Administrator, Stuart Thompson [now of Stuart Thompson Productions, Broadway, New York]. Stuart had engaged Di Manson as the M.T.A.'s Publicity Director. She was Robyn Archer's business partner and both were friends of Patrick Cook.

Captain Lazar and his Earthbound Circus was originally a comic strip Patrick had created for the National Times. We felt it had potential for a lively puppet show and Robyn offered to write the songs and music. We looked for someone to write the script and eventually persuaded Patrick to write it himself. Well, that's not entirely true. He dictated it, I wrote it down, and our wonderful secretary Jennie Peters typed it up, filling the office with giggles as she did so.



PRIME MINISTER MALCOLM FRASER WITH MORTON BARMAN ALONGSIDE THE SYDNEY SAILORS' HOME IN SEPTEMBER, 1982. PHOTO: OLIVER STREWE



TOP: JIM HENSON WITH CAPTAIN LAZAR AT THE SAILORS' HOME IN 1982. [THIS WAS JIM'S FIRST VISIT TO THE SAILORS' HOME. HE WAS BACK IN 1984.] PHOTO: RICHARD BRADSHAW

BOTTOM: A PRODUCTION MEETING FOR CAPTAIN LAZAR'S EARTHBOUND CIRCUS CONCERNS THE CAPTAIN, THE WRITER PATRICK COOK, DIRECTOR RICHARD BRADSHAW, ROBYN ARCHER WHO WROTE THE MUSIC, AND OTHER CIRCUS STARS

CARTOON: PATRICK COOK - FOR THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD 6/4/1980

The first act began with Lazar's birth... there was a loud pop...and childhood, with two of Robyn's great songs *Lazar! Lazar!* and *The Puzzlement of Childhood*. The adult Lazar then began recruiting the cast for his proposed circus: The Great Orlando (ringmaster), The Flying Cantaloups, Brian the Giraffe King, a Cockatoo that sang Gilbert & Sullivan. Little Hiatus (the naked snake-dancer who 'danced for men'), Morton Barman and his koalas, conjoined clowns, Trevor Wittgenstein (a ventriloquist who worked with a whale), The Mighty Quinn (an Eskimo) and Mother Bojangles (who tap-danced on the heads of seals). The imposing Hand of God also appeared.

The second act was set in the town of Outskirts, which was about to hold its annual Oxalis Festival. There were the various townsfolk including Flo and Vera, two cake-shop ladies, and a returned WW2 soldier reduced to a rather angry head on a trolley. [We tried very hard not to be politically correct.] Barman and Orlando had teamed up to undermine the circus and when it finally opened in Outskirts the show was a succession of disasters culminating in a nasty mess when Quinn fired his dogs and sled from a cannon.

Except that a parallel may have been drawn between the two 'villains' who undermined Lazar's circus and their counterparts who did similarly for Gough Whitlam's enterprise, the show was not overtly political. Patrick once described it as a secular version of the story of Christmas. The name of the koala tamer was originally to have been Martin Bormann, after a famous Nazi, but it was decided that this was a bit unkind. One board member pointed out that the P.M. had Scottish ancestry and that this name was German.

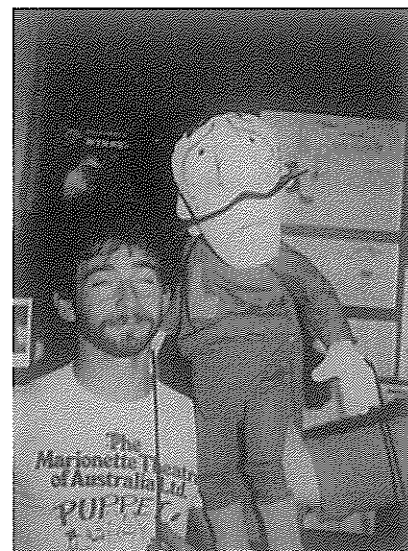
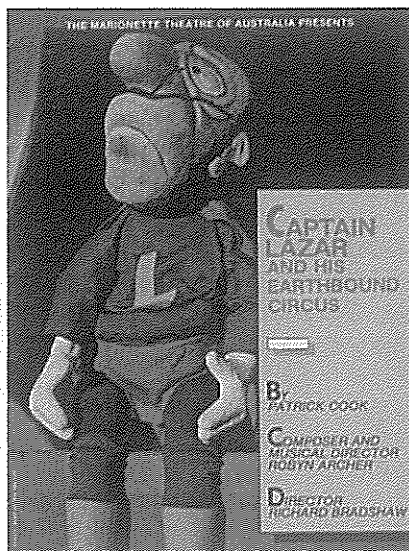
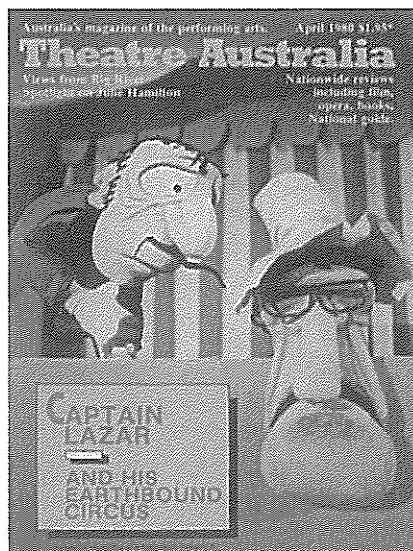
At the M.T.A. I could almost identify with Captain Lazar as he tried to get his circus on the road, and the resemblance didn't escape Patrick. 'Indistinguishable', he told the Herald. At the end of my term there were even a couple of people who could be my equivalents for Barman and Orlando! But unlike me, Lazar would have tried to get another show on the road. And he would have been unhappy because of it.

The show was staged with large rod-puppets in a puppet booth. There were five puppeteers: Allan Highfield (Lazar etc.), Geoff Kelso (Morton Barman etc.), Gary Kliger (Orlando etc.), Jude Kuring (Mother Bojangles etc.), & Linda Raymond (Little Hiatus etc.). We had a live four-person 'Captain Lazar' Band: Terry Darmody, Andrew de Teliga, Peter Deane-Butcher & Sue Bradley (tuba etc!). Stage management was by Tim Gow assisted by Michael Creighton.

The set was designed by Russell Emerson (whom Linda Davy had first contacted) and the superb puppets were made by the great Ross Hill (1954-1991), assisted by Anne Smith. The audience were seated at tables and could buy drinks.

Di Manson did a wonderful job with publicity. We had good press coverage and Captain Lazar and Morton Barman were featured on the cover of the April 1980 *Theatre Australia*, which included a 12-page program for the show as a supplement.

I think what pleases me most about the Old Parliament House display is that a sample of Ross Hill's work is now on permanent show (alongside prime ministers!). Ross's brilliant puppet-making had been pivotal to most of my M.T.A. shows. Earlier this year there



TOP LEFT: COVER OF THEATRE AUSTRALIA, APRIL 1980 TOP CENTRE: PROGRAM WITH THEATRE AUSTRALIA, APRIL 1980 TOP RIGHT: ROSS HILL (EYES CLOSED) WITH CAPTAIN LAZAR PHOTO: RICHARD BRADSHAW BOTTOM RIGHT: JUDE AND MOTHER ('FLO') BOJANGLES (CIRCLED) AT NATIONAL STAGE CRISIS DAY, SYDNEY, 1981 [TAKEN FROM OCTOBER PAGE OF THE 2004 EQUITY CALENDAR]



had been a temporary exhibition of Norman Lindsay's designs for Peter Scriven's 1960 production of *The Magic Pudding* at the State Library of N.S.W. Also on display were marionettes from Peter Baley's 1970 M.T.A. production and three of Ross's rod-puppets for my 1980 M.T.A. version. The public were able to see Ross at work in Michael Creighton's award-winning documentary on the making of the show which was continually screened during the exhibition. [Those puppets are now back in storage in the Seaborn Trust's collection in Botany.]

'Lazar' is nowhere near as important to the development of puppetry for adult audiences in Australia as the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre's earlier production by Nigel Triffitt of *Momma's Little Horror Show* [1976]. 'Momma's' was without script, used a full stage and presented a fascinating (if not entirely comprehensible) theatrical event. It inspired new directions for the Handspan group and has a continuing influence. 'Momma's' had been a great success at John Pindar's Last Laugh in Melbourne. Pindar had initially been interested in 'Lazar', but did not like the final show at all! Some people didn't, but others did. Contrasting opinions in the Press demonstrate this.

"....wacky and wonderful...Sophisticated political cabaret...'Lazar', with its bad-taste jokes, throwaway lines and its stunning puppets, is the unexpected surprise of the Adelaide Festival so far." Helen Covernton, *Financial Review*, 14/3/80.

"I confidently predict much clamouring for it to be taken on a national tour." Neil Jillet, *The Age*, 13/3/80.

"This is an amazingly funny show, visually and intellectually.... It is

indeed an adult puppet cabaret." Jill Sykes, *Sydney Morning Herald* 7/3/80.

"A good part of last night's audience seemed to think it was hilarious. Personally, I didn't enjoy it, which makes writing this review difficult." Maureen Lloyd, *The News*, 11/3/80.

"As a marionette, he is a masterpiece, but as a show, 'Captain Lazar' needs more work." Tim Lloyd, *The Advertiser*, 12/3/80.

So we clearly managed to alienate people named Lloyd! Another Adelaide critic was aggrieved that the Outskirts Oxalis Festival seemed to poke fun at Adelaide's big event.

There was one mighty problem for me. The puppeteers spoke and sang for their puppets, and text was of great importance. We were unable at that time to give our puppeteers radio mics and instead we tried to catch their voices with well-directed 'shotgun' mics. These presented problems of their own, with sound reflected from the floor, so the gain was limited. The band was to one side, but even then it was a challenge for the puppeteers to rise above the music. [I often wonder about the old-time puppeteers who played out-of-sight to quite large audiences using their own unamplified voices. Could the audience hear them?]

Sound and the size of the cast were problems, and the Recording Hall of the Opera House was too cavernous a space for a cabaret atmosphere but, nevertheless, as director I have to accept responsibility for the fact that the show did not continue. It could have been a much better show if we had been able to develop it through

'workshops' with input from the performers. We may even have used an open stage. This was the approach we were able to use for the highly successful *Smiles Away* (1981-3) which used the full width of the Opera House Drama Theatre stage, as well as the extensions at each side. That show did tour and was taken up by Spare Parts Puppet Theatre using the M.T.A.'s puppets but with a new cast and director.

Shows at the M.T.A. had usually been created along similar lines to those used for live drama: script first, then puppets, performers, rehearsal (4 to 6 weeks), performance. It's not the best approach for puppet shows, but a longer period of working with the performers and developing the script with Patrick was beyond our budget. We were only able to do it for *Smiles Away* because the Australia Council had given money for performers to work with a number of tutors who all contributed to the show. This approach paid off. Colin Menzies in the Sun-Herald of 6/9/81 wrote of *Smiles Away*: "The best adult show in town at the moment is one for kids."

While 'Lazar' didn't continue as a show the experience with rod-puppets was helpful in the 1980 production of *The Magic Pudding*, and Patrick Cook went on to supply character designs in other shows: *Smiles Away* (1981), *General MacArthur in Australia* (1981) and *Aussie Rules*, which opened the Sailors' Home Theatre in 1983. Ross Hill had an extraordinary knack of quickly rendering Patrick's designs in three dimensions.

Geoff Kelso did a wonderful job giving life to the puppet of Morton Barman, and, as sometimes happens, the audiences sided with the villain, encouraging his dastardly cruelty to the poor little koalas. But the magical moment came on the afternoon of Sunday, 26 September 1982, at a fundraiser for the M.T.A. in the grounds of Cadman's Cottage alongside the Sailors' Home in The Rocks. The event was hosted by Bobby Limb and the guest of honour was Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser himself. He generously agreed to be photographed holding his puppet counterpart and the photograph appeared in papers around Australia. Tamie Fraser quipped: "The mouth is wrong. He usually smiles when he is in farm clothes."

I had last seen Morton Barman and the Great Orlando in December 1990 when they were sold in an auction of puppets when the M.T.A. folded. Morton Barman went for \$150, but the Great Orlando fetched \$340. They were both bought by Alan Prowd who was pictured with them next day in the *Sydney Morning Herald* saying: "I didn't want to see them broken up". (At the same auction Captain Lazar fetched \$380 [that's a long story!], Bill Barnacle \$1,050, and Bunyip Bluegum \$1,000. The last two puppets were from Michael Creighton's 1988 production of *The Magic Pudding*, puppets not made by Ross Hill. The auction of about 300 items netted approximately \$50,000.)

Mother Bojangles had a life beyond the show. She became inseparable from her puppeteer, Jude Kuring who called her Flo. Jude and Flo would turn up at public demonstrations, such as the 1981 National Stage Crisis Day. If you look very hard at the photo of the demo in Sydney used for the October page of the 2004 Calendar, created to celebrate 65 years of Equity, you can find Jude and Flo in the crowd. Jude now lives in Tasmania, so I guess Flo is with her there.

'Lazar' has retired to Bowral, N.S.W. where he spends his time sitting on top of a bookcase alongside Trevor Wittgenstein.

In retrospect I probably should have revisited the 'Lazar' story while I was at the M.T.A. with the idea of remounting the show, this time letting the puppets move into the audience, especially now that radio mics are better. We have learnt that when the puppetry is strong enough the puppeteers become unobtrusive, almost negligible. The "villains" would probably need to be based on different personalities to keep the show topical.

Social satire is something that puppets can do very well, but these days a great deal of puppetry has moved in the direction of 'visual theatre' and I sometimes wonder how much this has been influenced by what the puppeteers are best able to do. Don't get me wrong. I am a great fan of wordless puppetry...especially at international festivals! But let's not forget that it was the arrival of speech in the evolution of our species that revolutionised our ability to communicate ideas.

The capabilities of puppeteers vary, and there are fine manipulators who do not manage voice work well, but this is no reason why scripted puppet shows should be sidelined. Can you imagine Ronnie Burkett's shows without dialogue? Scripted shows became a problem for me at the M.T.A. when I decided to move away from the recorded soundtracks. It meant that sometimes I chose to use regular actors who displayed some ability with puppets rather than puppeteers whose voice work wasn't strong enough. Actors who worked as puppeteers with the M.T.A. include Geoff Kelso, Paul Blackwell, Tony Harvey, Ben Franklin and Jude Kuring.

Avenue Q is a puppet show of a kind, but not all the "puppeteers" have previous experience with puppets, although that would surely have helped. When we saw it in New York the parts of Kate Monster, Lucy & others were played by Jennifer Barnhart, whose excellent voice work was matched by outstanding puppet-manipulation. She had originally played lesser parts and had been understudy for the parts she now had. Jennifer is a graduate of the puppetry course at the University of Connecticut with some live-acting experience. It may also be worth noting that the actor Mitchell Butel who played Princeton in the Australian version did the puppetry elective while at UNSW.

So what comes first, the puppet or the puppeteer? For solo shows it is the puppeteer, who must capitalise on his/her strengths and avoid his/her weaknesses. But for ensemble shows I suggest the puppets must come first, and if the puppets are to speak then the puppeteers must be able to provide voices...good voices. ■

[The promised account of traditional Taiwanese puppetry has been deferred.]

BILLY TWINKLE – REQUIEM FOR A GOLDEN BOY

3 - 20 SEPTEMBER 2009 FAIRFAX THEATRE, VICTORIAN ARTS CENTRE, MELBOURNE



RONNIE BURKETT WITH BILLY TWINKLE

BY PENELOPE BARTLAU

Billy Twinkle – Requiem for a Golden Boy is Master Puppeteer Ronnie Burkett's latest work in a long line of productions that have rated as nothing less than extraordinary. Although something of a sidestep from his usual darker themes, Ronnie has once again stayed true to form and created a work of substance that is simultaneously funny and provocative, expansive in vision and meticulously detailed – and accessible to a general audience.

Billy Twinkle, played by Burkett, is a middle-aged cruise ship puppeteer who dazzles audiences with his *Stars in Miniature* marionette night-club act. His saucy burlesque stripper Rusty titillates the tourists; octogenarian Bunny surprises us all with his comic-tragic performance involving a pink inflatable balloon in his pants; Bumblebear – a beautiful bear marionette – juggles and roller-skates; and society dame, Biddy Bantam Brewster brings a bit of highbrow hilarity to the high seas with her drunken aria. Billy is the best in the business, but is becoming jaded and bitter with his lot. He is beginning to detest his audiences, (even calling a man at a cruise-ship smorgasboard a fat pig), resent his peers and in a moment of high angst, bursts with the confession that he hates puppets. His contempt for his audience and fading passion results in his being fired by the cruise-line.

Next action? Billy Twinkle contemplates suicide at the bow of the ship – with an amusing homage to *Titanic*, but is abruptly called back to reality when his dead mentor Sid Diamond appears as a hand puppet. Sid literally will not leave Billy's side (or hand) and then forces Billy to re-enact his life as a marionette show in order to remember and rekindle the passion Billy once had for puppets and people – and this is where the main body of the play begins.

We are treated to the genius and detail of a marionette operating marionettes. We see the beautiful reflection of the self-damned Billy Twinkle dealing with his life playing out in front of him, almost tortured by the hand puppet Sid Diamond. Burkett plays with the form most deliciously, as we witness and question the notion of sanity as Billy is either guided by a hand puppet or fallen prey to his inner demons. We are cleverly led by Burkett to oscillate between suspension of disbelief in the Sid Diamond character and his just being a hand puppet. The violence, both physical and psychological, inflicted by the Sid on his manipulator is beautifully executed and darkly comic. The moment at the end of the play when the hand puppet character Sid leaves Billy forever is poignant: the very real make-believe friend, or is it the spirit of Sid, that has been dreamt up or has manifested to the puppeteer, shows us all our own vulnerability and humanity, in the child-like moment of loss that Billy experiences.

Throughout the play we meet many characters, each of whom is a complex and well defined personality, and as a puppet, each has been crafted with extraordinary detail. Burkett shows a great love and compassion for people in his creation. Characters are flawed, but never judged – even when their actions and beliefs are questionable. For example, 'Doreen Gray' is a religious zealot, crap puppeteer, and performs a rap song with a Jesus hand puppet before running off to a flocking workshop at a regional puppet festival. She is hilariously funny, yet ultimately a sympathetic character. Another example is a predatory male character simply named 'The Man', who seduces the 15 year-old Billie. As his motives are revealed it is very confronting: (as is Billie's response to the seduction) but somehow, Burkett has rendered The Man character sympathetic, in a very tragic, desperate way. With all his characters Burkett lets us in on his own understanding and forgiveness of people and of humanity.

The show was very dense: a very rich tapestry has been created. It's like watching *This Is Your Life* on speed, with puppets. The work was very brave. While not autobiographical, (I am assured that the dialogue between Billie and his 'significant other' Brian was not created from Burkett's own experience), there was a great vulnerability Burkett had as an actor and as a writer in putting on a work dealing with the mid-life crisis. There is incredible honesty and self-effacement in the comedy and tragedy of aging that Burkett has presented.

Billy Twinkle – Requiem for a Golden Boy is again proof that Ronnie Burkett is an exceptional creator and one of the world's foremost theatre artists. We can look forward to Burkett's next work *Penny Plain*, which promises to be an elaborate affair, though very dark and wonderfully provocative. ■



LEFT TO RIGHT: RONNIE BURKETT, MURRAY RAINE & NORMAN HETHERINGTON BACK STAGE 14TH OCT 09 - BILLY TWINKLE, DRAMA THEATRE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE PHOTO: NEIL RAY

In the last issue of *Australian Puppeteer* we published an article by Megan Cameron on her mentorship with Bela Schenkova and Divadlo Anpu in Prague. To follow on from that, here are a few diary extracts from Megan's experience...

CZECH DIARY

By MEGAN CAMERON



DAY 1

Began rehearsing today. Bela is a completely different person as a director. She is extremely tough and unforgiving. This is very confronting at times but very good for me. It makes me see the attention to detail is primary even at this early stage. I was incredibly frustrated as I was reading text in Czech stuck to the back of the flat and operating a puppet. The Czech began to do my head in. Bela explained that I must become so aware of the puppet that I can be doing ten things at the same time and the puppet should always be grounded and alive!!!! Not being a Czech speaker was not an excuse. Can you imagine how hard this is to hear at my age and experience? Hahahahaha! Of course I know this, but of course at home we forgive so much more in the beginning of rehearsal. I think this is a really really good lesson in perfection. So tonight I came home and studied the text.

My pronunciation she insists must also be perfect. So today it was as if Bela stood over me with a stick and whacked me with it when I mispronounced even slightly or moved the puppet just a tiny bit wrong or yelled instead of projecting my voice or dropped the character. Phew. Intense.

So far the set is amazing and the puppets of course are a collection of wonderful antique marionettes. Barka has created some incredible flat heads of the king and Dora, and the flats that these puppets appear on are hand painted by Barka and are exquisite. I am excited by this show so much, but also so scared of what I have taken on. Bela works from the tiny intricate detail. Everything matters. She is also very open to me looking from the outside too. As she is Director and performer she will send me out to the front to watch her work. She is really good. Also, to be fair she will have a laugh and gives me a hug sometimes. But she will only say something is good when it is. I am exhausted!!!!!!

DAY 2

It is like I am starting puppetry again. In Australia it is so soft and gentle the way we create theatre. Bela is so strict. Even though I have no Czech I must operate the puppet whilst trying to remember the script in Czech. There is no forgiveness here, no excuse. The marionette is held like a bird, this I know but no sound must be made as it moves. No clunking of the puppet as it lands on stage. No movement that is jiggling unless for a joke. My hand must move from close to the controls to scoop the strings in one to gather the limbs to leap. The movement should be smooth and God help me if I fumble. Still it is like she holds a stick above me and metaphorically hits me with it when I make a puppetry mistake or a pronunciation mistake. Bela is a fun joking person in social life, but in rehearsal she is a demon. But an amazing one with which I hold so much respect. I feel I must revert to a young student again. Black out the past 20 odd years of performing and begin again. Nothing of my experience seems to hold here. I am drowning. If I try to put a character voice to the puppet I am told not to because no one in the world will understand my Czech!!!!

Bela has strong ideas of the way the production will look. The structure is there, but as we go from scene to scene. Barka is there and they form the exact look and possibilities. Then Barka will disappear upstairs and create the most beautiful canvas. So really the creative development and rehearsal are the same. In some ways she reminds me of Wesley Enoch (Director of headhunter) but a devil. She has a standard to begin with in her head and first I must meet this and then we can grow. She is I think perfect to teach Australian puppeteers this art form, but many of us will cry.

DAY 3

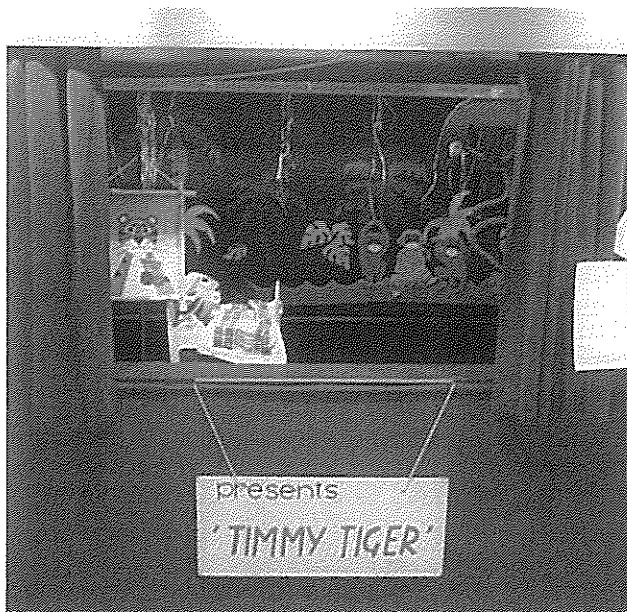
I have studied all night until I could not keep my eyes open any more. Czech text and marionette. I drill myself and yet, today I go to do it and I still fall short!!!! Barka tells me in her halting English, "don't worry, this is Bela's way". She is abrupt and harsh. I am glad we have 7 weeks of rehearsal as opposed to the 3 in Australia. But really, this style is not seen in Australia and it will be I think worth it. The production to me is quick and exciting. If only I will speak the text with fluidity!!!! I feel more confident with the puppets. I think I should work with my hands and the puppet and become so clever with this that it will be second nature. Some puppets have the moving mouth and my instinct with lip sync take over at this I think. But I must take one puppet and put it down and then take another. She is doing this more than me. She takes on the larger role as I think she does not have the confidence that I can learn the text with exact pronunciation. But we say that when we take the show and translate to English, I will take some of her roles. I am in Deep water here. I am afraid at every moment. I am also incredibly inspired. Hooooah!!!! This is why I am here!!!!

To be continued...

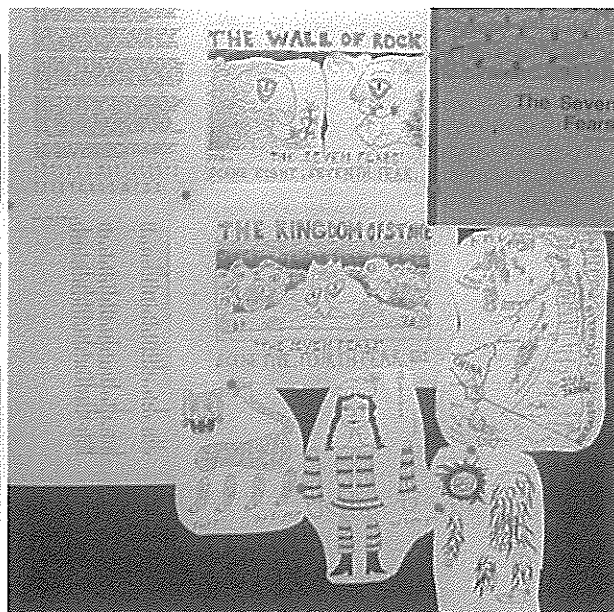
PUPPETS ALIVE EXHIBITION

AUGUST 28 - SEPTEMBER 11, 2009 KU-RING-GAI ART CENTRE ROSEVILLE NSW

For one month the Ku-ring-gai Art Centre in Sydney's north hosted a free exhibition of puppets and related material co-ordinated by Lenka Muchova. Participating artists were Lenka Muchova and Jimmy Willing, puppet play scripts by Karel & Eva Rehorek, a hand puppet stage by Frank Popovsky and tin toys by John Cervenka. The exhibition showcased contemporary and historic works.



FRANK POPOVSKY'S HAND PUPPET STAGE



SCRIPTS BY EVA & KAREL REHOREK

TEXT AND IMAGES: LENKA MUCHOVA

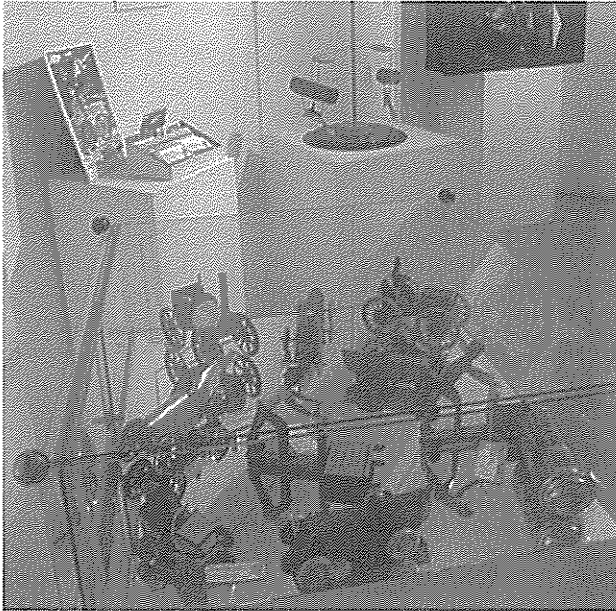
FRANK POPOVSKY – Sydney Magic Puppets designer, inventor, constructor and pilot Frank Popovsky arrived in Australia in 1968. He designed and made a puppet stage for hand puppets for the Sydney Magic Puppets company. The first performance the company presented was *Timmy Tiger* in 1971 at the University of Sydney; the second *Clown in the Toy Circus* was presented in 1972 at Bankstown Square. Impressed by the puppet stage design, The Marionette Theatre of Australia asked Frank to design the set for their production of *The Magic Pudding*. Soon after, Frank invented a converter (from miles to kilometers) for all types of cars and concentrated on this business. While in Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic) in 1962, Frank invented the screw plug for bottles of the then popular spirit Jelinkova Palenice. The screw plug is now used worldwide and most spirit and especially wine lovers appreciate it. Recently Frank developed another invention known as the automatic operated retractive syringe.

Only a few months ago while Frank was flying his light plane, its motor stopped. Frank successfully landed but sold his aircraft shortly after. Frank's only regret is that he did not continue his work with puppet theatre which he loved dearly.

EVA & KAREL REHOREK – The Paper Bag Theatre Company, Eva and Karel, are university graduates from the Chair of Puppetry of the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Musical Art in Prague (Czech Republic), which is the only university in the world offering a full-time, four-year course in children's theatre and puppetry. Among compulsory subjects are acting, producing, design, puppet plays, dramaturgy, child psychology, history of world theatre and more. Karel and Eva met while studying at university and always worked as a team. They worked at Laterna Magika and toured extensively with the world famous Black Theatre of Prague. Karel collaborated with internationally known filmmaker and animator, surrealist Jan Svankmajer on his first short film *The Last Trick*.

They arrived in Australia in 1969 and co-founded the Paper Bag Theatre Company in Adelaide in 1972. Karel concentrated on acting and Eva on designing sets and puppets as well as scripting. They have received many innovation grants from Canberra and have toured schools, mainly in South Australia. Through the art of puppetry they also used their exceptional skills to teach children many languages including German, Japanese, Indonesian, French and Russian. Now retired, Eva concentrates on writing books and Karel occasionally performs at Adelaide Festivals. In 2007 and 2008 Karel Rehorek and Lenka Muchova performed together at the popular Adelaide Fringe Festival.

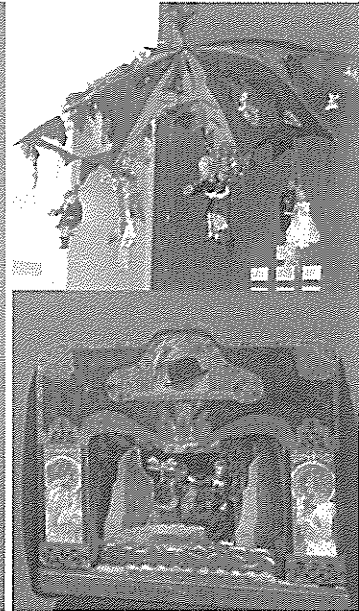
JOHN CERVENKA – Tinplate toy maker, Blue Mountains resident, John Cervenka has been making unique handmade tinplate toys, toy boats and automata since 1980. A professional theatre stage designer, John worked many years for drama and opera companies in Australia and overseas preparing models of sets and props. He became curious to explore the making of toys to his own designs. John Cervenka originally created toys for himself, however interest from collectors encouraged him to make more examples for sale. "I consider toys as objects d'art", he says, "so much imagination and technical know-how is involved in their creation". According to many world experts in toy collecting, he is possibly the only toymaker working in this field using 19th Century hands-on techniques and methods. While John's remarkable toys are inspired by the Golden Age of toys of yesteryear, all are his original design and crafted entirely by hand using basic hand tools and hand painted with quality enamels, while boats are painted with rust resistant paints.



HAND CRAFTED TIN TOYS BY JOHN CERVENKA



JIMMY WILLING PUPPETS



RUSALKA PUPPETS BY LENKA MUCHOVA

JIMMY WILLING – Jimmy Willing's *Von Tramp Family Puppet Show* is ring mastered by Satan the Devil with a twisted live sound track. This outrageous show was originally performed from his horse-drawn gypsy cart. Jimmy crisscrossed the far north coast of NSW countryside, living under stars and around campfires. Becoming known as 'The Puppet Man', it was a romantic lifestyle that involved long hours of travelling with the horses from one town to another. In between shows and travelling, Jimmy carved marionettes and the side panels of his Silky Oak cart. Starting out playing at country fairs and markets, bush halls, agricultural shows and rodeos, the show's reputation soon earned itself a place on the bill of some of Australia's biggest music and art festivals. At the end of the nineties, Jimmy put his herd of horses out to pastures on a remote farm. He began building an art studio out of recycled materials from demolished churches, lumber mills and houses. In true Willing form, the studio is an elaborate and intricate piece of art. He calls his architectural style, 'Bush Gothic'.

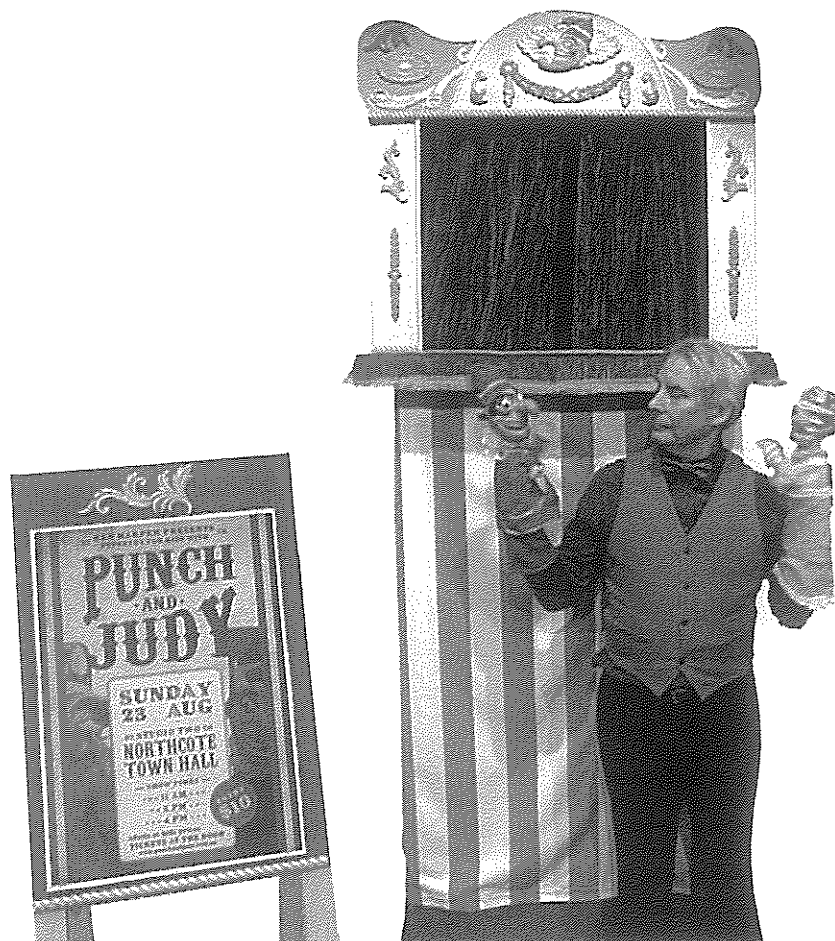
In the naughties, *The Von Tramp Family* was to ride again but no longer horse drawn. This time joining forces with Czech born puppeteer Lenka Muchova, the show became a cornerstone in Willing's new venture *Hell Is A Cabaret*.

LENKA MUCHOVA – Lenka was born into a life where the backstages of the famous Estate Theatre of Prague (where Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* premiered) and the National Theatre were her playground. Her mother Ludmila Muchova, worked as a costume designer in these establishments for more than 40 years.

Her stepfather, Pan Tau, who was a famous movie character, puppet and magic man, certainly had its impact upon her life as well. Puppet making was a family tradition – a form of entertainment instead of TV. Lenka makes puppets for sale (sold at Sydney Opera House Store) and has performed at many festivals (Sydney Festival, Australia Day Festival, Woodford Folk Festival, Peats Ridge Festival, Adelaide Fringe Festival etc.) She also runs puppet making workshops for children and adults. "No matter where your puppet fetish comes from, Lenka's traditional Czech puppet making will leave you with desire to populate your world with quirky little Casanovas, dainty ladies, devils, water spirits, witches and powerful magicians..." (Quote from a student of Lenka.) ■

KEN HARPER'S PUNCH AND JUDY SHOW

23RD AUGUST 2009 NORTHCOTE TOWN HALL



TEXT AND IMAGES: SEAN KENAN

Ken Harper is a puppeteer who first performed Punch as a tent show in 1980 called *Punch's Opera*. He is former head of Drama and Theatre Studies at Melbourne's University High School and now divides his time between teaching and performing.

A real puppet show on a Sunday afternoon for \$10 really appealed to me. I saw mention of the show in an email newsletter I receive as a Melbourne UNIMA performer. The Northcote Town Hall Studio 2 has a small theatre space ideally suited to puppetry. The booth was placed close to the seating and visibility was good from all sides, even from side seating. About twenty people including children and adults made up the audience. There were plenty of comments to keep the puppets in dialogue with the audience. Ken uses a traditional fabric covered booth that is very light and can be broken down and re-assembled quite quickly. The proscenium is wood that is highly decorated and little velvet curtains add to the mystery. All of Ken's puppets are glove but the baby was on a rod and could be moved around the stage at high speed. The characters were all from tradition: Punch, Judy, the baby, Joey the Clown, the Doctor, the Policeman, Crocodile, the Devil and Death. As in true Punch and Judy style all were killed, even Death.

Punch and Judy has a long history in England where it originally was an Italian marionette show with Pulcinella as the original Punch. The actual English script has its roots in the Morality Plays staged in village squares in Medieval times. The Church banned all theatre performances with anything other than a religious theme. The Morality Plays of the time had a lot in common with the traditional *Punch and Judy* script that is still performed today. The older plays had the defeat of the Devil and Death as the closing scene. Ken Harper's show uses the traditional script outline and Death urges Punch to look into his eyes. If Punch does so he will be immediately killed, so Punch gets a mirror and Death is killed by his own reflection.

The show has beatings with the 'slapstick' which is displayed to young children who make up the audience. Ken does not use a swizzle for Punch's voice. Punch has a gruff English voice in this show. Ken's manipulation was skilled and well rehearsed and he even did a 360 degree rotation during a torrid kiss between Judy and Punch. Judy finally agreed to kiss Punch but only if the audience didn't watch. The Crocodile scene was exciting and moved all over the stage in a smooth flowing manner.

A beautifully presented booth and puppets that were 'easy to read' combined with a good rehearsed show made for a pleasant afternoon. ■

THE SEEWELL FAMILY CABARET

SEPTEMBER 2009 - GRANT ST THEATRE, VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS



PHOTOS: GEOFF ADAMS

BY PENELOPE BARTLAU

Beth McMahon's Master of Puppetry show *The Seewell Family Cabaret* is an ambitious work, sprung out of the mind of creator and tour-de-force, McMahon. The work is essentially a warped cabaret using live performers and musicians, and employing various forms of puppetry.

When the audience entered the foyer of Grant Street Theatre, we were immediately taken into a colourful and seedy world, with the place decked out floor to ceiling in detailed and well thought-out shabby-chic. Characters (performers, not puppets) erupted into the foyer, singing ballsy, comic, in-your-face songs, introducing the world into which we were about to be plunged.

Once inside the theatre and seated, we had time to enjoy the very beautiful and again, very detailed set: much to feed upon visually. The live band accompanying the performance was incorporated not only into the aesthetic, but also on one or two occasions into the show itself – dragging characters off the stage and at another point the band members disappeared altogether. The band and music were a strong supportive element to the production, transforming from bright and brassy, to dark and dangerous as the narrative required.

The play itself was high in energy: not a beat was missed nor a dead moment on the stage – impressive for a student production. The three main actor/performers were for the most part very strong, although the lead actor playing the ring-master of what was essentially a perverted magic cabaret, needed to seduce the audience more for the drama to grab us. The puppetry was lovely – magical, predominantly employing black-light and corridor work. There was a spectacular moment when a male puppeteer (donned in his bee-keeper blacks) pawed the female chanteuse, who was performing a sassy number with some fabulous feather fan puppetry, and she dragged him into the light, de-hooding him, kissing him and leaving him knocked out. Puppets ranged from dancing feathers, to an eerie ghost-like dress, to bathroom objects transforming into creepy-crawlies, to a decapitated baby-bear, and a weird embryo in a glass jar. There was much to be enjoyed.

The narrative however, was not the play's strength. The set up was a dominant male ring-master, lording over and physically abusing his two female performers: one of whom was his sister and both of whom were pregnant to him. There was a theme of entrapment woven throughout the narrative. The 'caged bird' symbol played out visually through the use of a recurring motif of feathers and the placement of birdcages throughout the set.

The two women were bound to the manipulative and dominating ring-master and, for the most part, had little or no control of their lives, but seemed, for some un-indicated reason, unable to leave. We witnessed the abuse of unborn children through violence inflicted upon the pregnant women (kicking, binding, stabbing, punching etc). We witnessed the de-capitation of a baby (a bear) in front of the distraught mother, at the hands of its father the ring-master. Both women had 'disappeared' (presumed dead) by the play's end: one in an iron maiden, and the other after being bound and then electrocuted. My question is: Why?

We were not given any insight into what it was that the author was trying to say: if this was meant to be irony, then the work failed – we did not receive the 'message'. The treatment of women, and violence against children, both born and unborn, was given no context – we did not get the author's opinion on these actions. Unfortunately, we were left with a superficial spectacle – as pretty as it was, and inclusion of material that appeared to be shocking for shock's sake.

The night I went (Thursday 24th September) audiences were divided about the play. Some loved it – taken away by the puppetry and beautiful images created. Others hated it, for the lack-lustre narrative and inexplicable violence. I had a foot in both camps for both reasons, but at the end of the day I think the hallmark of great work is for it to have success on many levels, including sincerity of intention, that allows an audience to feel and to understand what the work is, what it means, and why we are watching it.

The Seewell Family Cabaret was visually wonderful. The energy and the effort put into this Masters production – unfortunately one of the last we shall see coming out of VCA / Melbourne University – was standout. The Masters year is a tough one. Despite unresolved problems with the narrative, to create a work this visually accomplished in such a short time frame is nothing short of remarkable. ■

ASPHYXIA AND THE GRIMSTONES



BY ASPHYXIA

I have never been particularly interested in puppets. I've always seen them as lifeless creatures with flat mouths that open and shut while someone else does the talking. Lip reading puppets is impossible for me – I am Deaf.

Also I hadn't had much exposure to puppets, aside from Jim Henson's Muppets when I was a kid, or the occasional encounter with a rather too-verbal puppeteer.

But five years ago, on the streets of Guatemala, everything changed. I came across a dreadlocked man manipulating some grungy papier mache marionettes. The aesthetic caught my eye immediately. The puppets and their miniature furnishings looked achingly real; not in the pretty, perfect way of dolls but with well worn clothes and belongings. When I looked carefully, however, I realised the marionette characters were quite roughly made – with blockish hands and feet – but I completely believed they were "real" because they were so life-like in the hands of Sergio Barrios, their expert maker and performer. Sergio conveyed every emotion, an entire story, without speaking a single word.

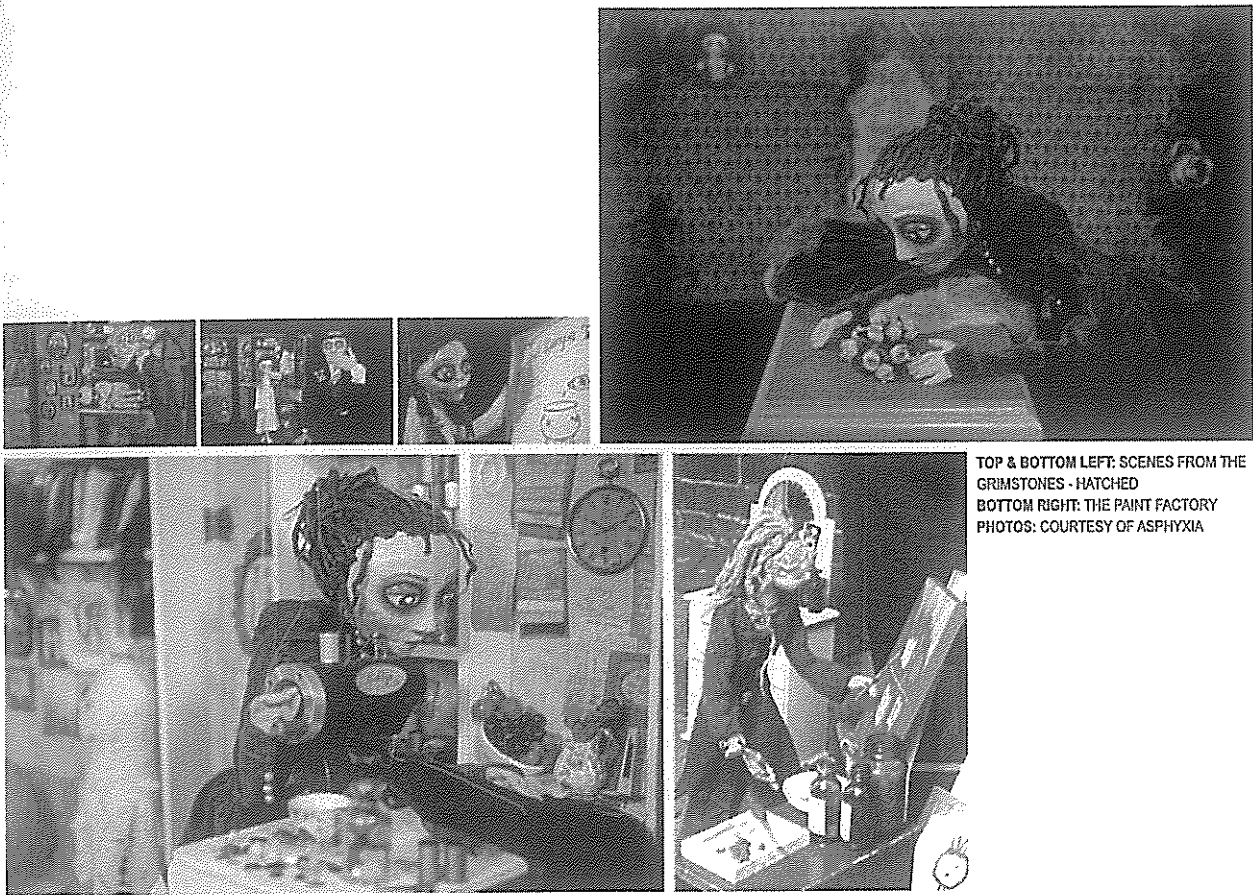
That was the moment I fell in love and knew that I wanted to be a puppeteer. Happily for me, Sergio was not at all dismissive of my ambitions, and took the time to teach me the basics in marionette articulation and construction. I came back to Australia bursting with

inspiration, which fuelled my first puppet show *The Paint Factory* featuring a marionette called Bronwyn who looks rather like me. You can watch a video of this on my website, www.asphyxia.com.au. As I made Bronwyn and struggled to get the hang of performing with her, I longed to see Sergio again and ask him my mountain of questions. How do I know when the string length is right? Why does she look so utterly ridiculous when she walks? How do you know when the head is the right weight? How do you decide the precise position to string the puppet's hand?

I searched for marionette puppeteers in Australia. After extensive Googling and asking around I did hear of two marionette puppeteers but was only able to track them down much later. Instead, I ordered books from the internet, hoping to discover more of the secrets for making and articulating marionettes.

But I muddled my way through and though far from being polished or skilful, I got my articulation to a point where I felt I could go public. Performing with Bronwyn turned out to be just like playing with dolls, only I was getting paid for it. I started dreaming of another show, something bigger, an entire story rather than a street act.

I began making a family of puppets that would later be called *The Grimstones*. I spent 18 months in my tiny attic studio creating the puppets and building the giant books that would become the set for



TOP & BOTTOM LEFT: SCENES FROM THE GRIMSTONES - HATCHED
 BOTTOM RIGHT: THE PAINT FACTORY
 PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ASPHYXIA

the show. I gathered a fabulously talented team of people around me and we developed *The Grimstones – Hatched*. The show's been on tour pretty consistently since its Melbourne launch in May 2008. (For more information see *The Grimstones*: an artist journal by Asphyxia available from <http://fixiefoo.typepad.com/thegrimstones/journal.htm>)

In July 2009 the show toured to France. On the way I had the incredibly good fortune to find the answers to my marionette questions. We flew via Italy where Sergio's now based. Miraculously we arrived the weekend of the annual puppet festival in his small town, Pinerolo. Sergio introduced us to the festival directors who own a tiny marionette theatre which presents shows year round. We met hundreds of puppeteers, all of whom were amazingly friendly and warm. Feeling a little embarrassed to be 'young upstarts' in such an established community, we were astonished to discover that Sergio had already shown many of the puppeteers our YouTube video of *The Grimstones* and we were treated like celebrities!

The highlight for me were the hours spent in Sergio's 'workshop' (a small room in a two bedroom flat) where he gave me private demonstrations of his myriad of exquisite marionettes, all of his own making. I learnt the secrets for making a marionette play a stringed instrument – making music really sound while the marionette plays. I saw a skateboarder, a sweet little cheeky dog, and a family of tiny

mice. Sergio even has a marionette sitting on the back of his bicycle, on its own miniature bicycle. When Sergio pedals, the marionette pedals too. My mind was ready to explode with new information, and I scribbled as fast as I possibly could, filling page after page of my notebook with details of strings, controls, puppet construction and tips for articulation. Ahhh... if only I could stay for a month! Perhaps next time – yes they invited us back to perform at the festival next year!

I have recently received a Creative Development grant from the Australia Council to develop the next show in *The Grimstones* series, *Mortimer Revealed*. This show will be ready to tour late 2010 after the company tours *Hatched* internationally. If you're interested in our progress stay posted through my blog <http://fixiefoo.typepad.com/> For more about *The Grimstones* visit www.asphyxia.com.au ■

SPIDERS IN WANG - INVISIBLE CONNECTIONS PROJECT

BY PENELOPE BARTLAU, BARKING SPIDER VISUAL THEATRE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR PHOTOS: SARAH WALKER

SEPTEMBER 2009

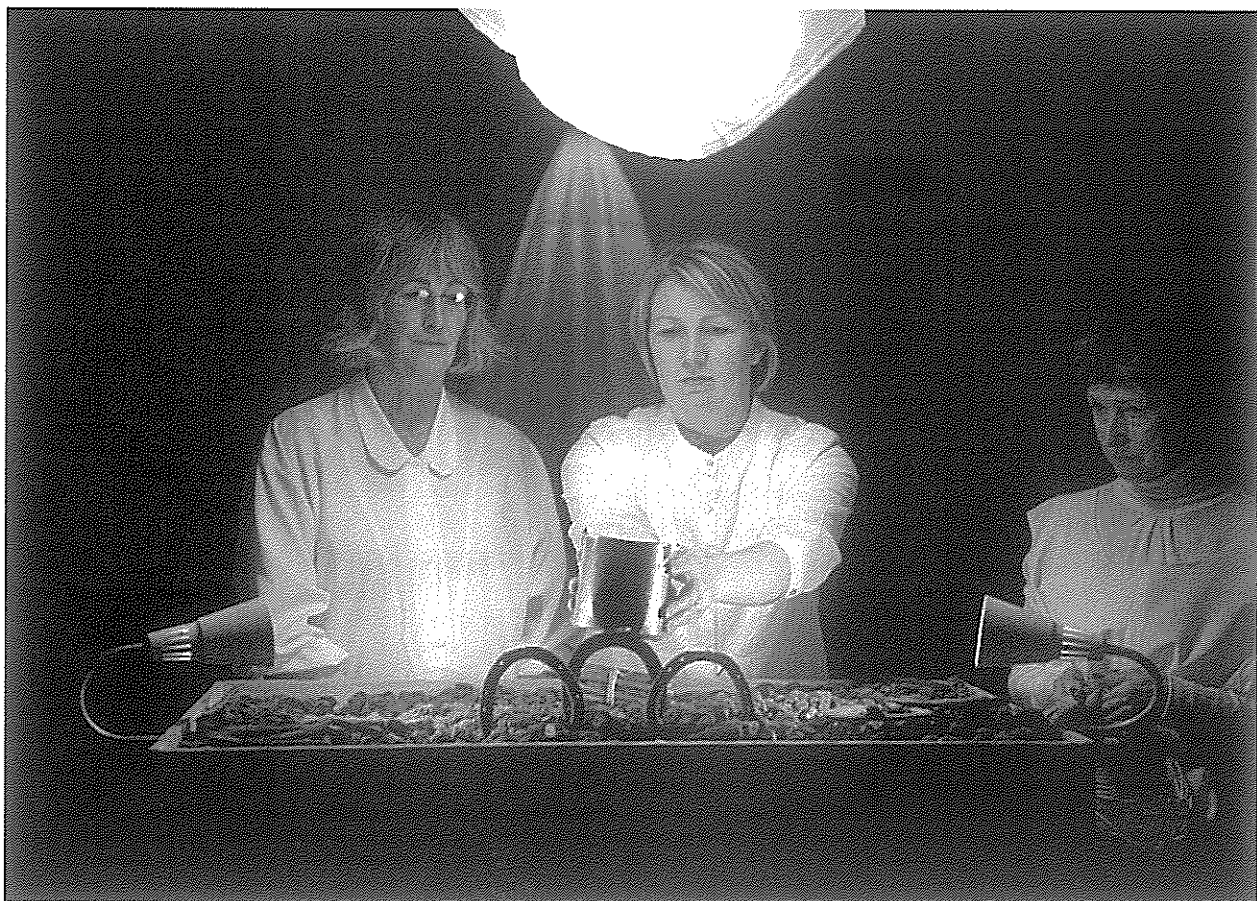
In January this year, Maz McGann, the Cultural Development Officer for the Rural City of Wangaratta, approached Barking Spider Visual Theatre (BSVT) about a project idea she was hatching. In 2008 Maz had created another project called *Heritage Idol: the Search for Our Oldest Things*, which aimed to challenge the community's traditional experience of local heritage. This 2008 project encouraged people to acknowledge heritage through a range of activities and initiatives. As a part of this, Wangaratta locals were invited to enter their heritage items into the Heritage Idol Quest. The follow-on project, planned for 2009, was *Invisible Connections*, and it was for this that Maz contacted us.

The brief was for BSVT to come up to Wangaratta (Wang) to research, develop and present *Invisible Connections*, and to create a work that combined heritage objects and stories. BSVT was asked to create a multi-dimensional artwork installation, which was to remain in situ for seven days, emulating the museum experience of static displays, and then this was to be transformed into a performance site with shows using object theatre and traditional puppetry.

In early August the work began, and the BSVT team headed up to Wang for the first days of research and a reccy. The team consisted of myself as writer and director, Dan Goronszy as installation and puppet builder, Jason Lehan as lighting and set designer, and Sarah Walker as photographer. Later we were joined by Jessica Window, Victoria University theatre-arts student, who came to observe, but wound up working with us. We were treated to a tour of the El Dorado Museum, and had a good poke around Wang itself, looking at various

locations for the installation and performances. The locations we fell in love with (but became impossible for Maz to wrangle) were: a huge old vacant shop front in the main street; an empty, disused swimming pool at the local primary school; and (my favourite) an old four-storey water tower (1854 I think), which is currently tenanted by the local gunzel enthusiasts and their miniature railways are set up on all four floors. After about three weeks of doors shutting on these locations, we ended up at the Workshop Space, an exhibitions and performance hall located in the centre of town next door to the new performing arts centre. This is a fairly traditional, but recently renovated, old hall with a proscenium arch stage.

A week after our first visit, I headed up solo for three days to get into the nitty-gritty of the research. I was like a pig in the proverbial: one of my favourite things in the world is to sit and chat to people and listen to their stories. Maz had set up a "show & tell" lunch in the Workshop Space for anyone and everyone in the town to attend, on the proviso they brought objects and stories. Wang is full of all sorts of amazing characters, curious objects and fascinating stories. After the lunch I trotted off (with a full head and empty stomach as I was too engrossed to bother with lunch), I went to the Wangaratta Family Historical Society (where I was introduced to the resident ghost), followed by The Wangaratta Museum and Wangaratta Library the next day. My head was stuffed with stories, my visual diary with images and notes, and my camera with pictures of bizarre and wonderful objects.



Back in Melbourne I had the task of deciding which stories and which objects. Going over the material I'd gathered, I found themes that kept repeating: the experiences of isolation, deprivation and hardship, and of unity through community and family. With this in mind, I selected five stories to tell in object theatre and to present in the installation. Additionally, I had discovered a marvellous local identity Jack Dick, (deceased), who had been the teller of many extraordinary tall stories and instigator of all sorts of pranks. His name kept popping up everywhere – he'd died in the 1990's so he was still in living memory. The thing that made Jack Dick's tales so compelling was that I'd hear the same anecdote, but with completely different facts, again and again. It was clear that *Invisible Connections* would not be complete without the inclusion of Jack Dick. So, while the main body of the installation and performances involved objects and object theatre, Jack Dick was a traditional full-bodied hand puppet, who sat on his armchair centre stage, and kept audiences amused with his stories during each performance. We were lucky to have Mary Anderson, a Wang local, offer to make the Jack Dick puppet. With Dan's steerage, Mary made a beautiful puppet.

My brief had been to create between five and eight stories. I had five stories, and I had Jack Dick, but it was impossible to stop there: the material was so rich. One of the locals, Margaret Pullen, at the show & tell lunch, had dressed up in 1940's garb, and presented a whole character, story and with objects. I used Margaret's material to create an interlinking character for the show, who had come direct to us from 1949. I found a talented young actress, Lexi Aivaliotis, from the local players (where I'd run an object theatre workshop) who was

perfect for the part. Her job was to guide the audience to each of the five stories, presented on five different playboards in the main area of the Workshop Space, and to interact with Jack Dick as he told his tall-tales, and all from the perspective of a young lady from 1949.

The five stories presented on the playboards were: *Billy the Puntman – the Wildman Grouch of the Ovens 1856*, about a surly puntman turned lousy bushranger; *The Murray Cod Monster & the Two Little Graves of Three Mile Creek 1870*; a cautionary tale for children, *Walking the World Alone: Mary Jane Milawa – The Last Pangerang 1888*, about the last indigenous person in Wangaratta; *The Doll Story 1953*, a story of the experience of post-war immigration; and *The Greta Craft Group 1972*, about the creation of a community through the endeavors of local women.

Informed by the Workshop Space aesthetic – it was essentially a big white-walled room with a stage at one end – and considering what we wanted to present, Jason Lehane came up with a very sympathetic overall design for the space and the lighting. The performance was to be promenade style.

Each story was played out on a tabletop playboard / shallow sandpit Jason constructed out of fence palings: Each was filled with a different element: scoria; river-mud; earth; sugar; and wheat grain – relevant to the stories played out on each. For the performance, each playboard was also covered by a large white fabric curtain, suspended from high above and attached to a pulley system. Within each curtain was hidden a light which faded up when the curtain



up and the story was played out. When the audience entered the hall for the performance, the curtains veiled the playboards, so the room looked like part of a grand old house that had been closed up and had great dust sheets over the furniture. Everything was shrouded in white. As the play unfolded each curtain was drawn up and remained suspended like a great luminous cloud. Throughout the performance the room gradually filled with colour from the objects and materials on the playboards. During the installation-viewing week the curtains were left up so people could freely view the works.

In terms of the puppetry and puppeteers, it seems that Wang is brimming with hidden talent. I was fortunate to find three wonderful women to manipulate objects: Trish Gallagher, Margaret Pullen and Jackie Creek. As for Jack Dick, a week out I was panicking I'd not found someone to operate him. Enter Nick Creek (dragged in by his wife Jackie), very reluctant and adamant that he was not a performer. Nick had never touched a puppet, had never learnt lines – nothing – and he was extraordinary. He was a natural lip-syncher, had a beautiful voice, and was a gem at script interpretation. The Polyglot guys were in the theatre next door setting up for *The Big Game* and came to one performance, and the question was asked: "Who is this guy – he's great! Where'd you get him? We haven't seen him in Melbourne." We got lucky to find someone so naturally talented.

The other element to the production was a series of interactive dioramas we set up on the stage area. There were so many stories and histories to tell, that we decided to create an old post-office storeroom, filled with unclaimed parcels and packages, each wrapped in brown paper and string. There were around 70 in all.

Sarah Walker created the dioramas, with Jason's design input, and Jessica's assistance. The dioramas – five in total – were made up from old photographs that Sarah doctored and had made 3D. Each was inserted into a different box and then wrapped as a parcel, with a peephole inserted for viewing. Jason had created a method for changing the view through the peephole, using magnifying glass attached to a sliding device. Some dioramas also used slot-puppetry mechanisms or had other movable parts for the audience to play with. Each diorama had a surprise "reveal" through the employment of these devices. In a moment of genius, Jessica took a bundle of the parcels on a trolley to a nearby home for the elderly, and they scribed their old addresses: so the parcels had lovely old-fashioned handwriting (and old stamps I'd sourced) to complete the aesthetic. The five dioramas were each interior lit with hidden light source. The descriptions for the content of each diorama was delivered as a letter. Each diorama parcel had a personal letter attached to its exterior, so the viewer could enjoy details of the story behind the pictures with a sense of period language and culture.

The post-office storeroom was presented as part of the installation and integrated into the end of the performance.

For the performance itself, the five tabletop stories were told in voice-over, with accompanying ambient sound tracks of bush, river, farmland etc, (designed by Nick McCorriston), with the three puppeteers manipulating objects and creating the images. The puppeteers were dressed in simple white period costumes – as were the BSVT crew, unifying the aesthetic.



PHOTO: PENELOPE BARTLAU

The last of the five object theatre stories was about the Greta Craft Group. The three puppeteers took coloured balls of wool that were preset, on the floor at the edges of the room, with the loose ends attached to the junction of the wall and ceiling. They unraveled the balls of wool, drawing the strands to the room's centre where the story's playboard stood, and connected the wool to the miniature gum tree standing at the installation's centre. At the close of the performance, the room that had been simply white, with secrets hidden under white curtains, was filled with colour and centrally unified by these coloured strands of wool. These strands were like the little histories that were played out: what was invisible was now seen, connecting past to present.

The overall result for the installation and the three performances was very satisfying. The performers did a beautiful job, and the Wang support team likewise. The audience's response was very positive. Local people came to understand and interact with their history in a completely new way – which had been Maz's intention: the aesthetic and dramatic choices paid off. My hope is that, for the future, more possibilities open up to present history in unique ways and forms. There is great potential to further strengthen local identity and culture, and to do so imaginatively. ■



JACK DICK



THE ADVENTURES OF ALVIN SPUTNIK: DEEP SEA EXPLORER

BY TIM WATTS www.weepingspoon.com PHOTOS: MICHELLE ROBIN ANDERSON

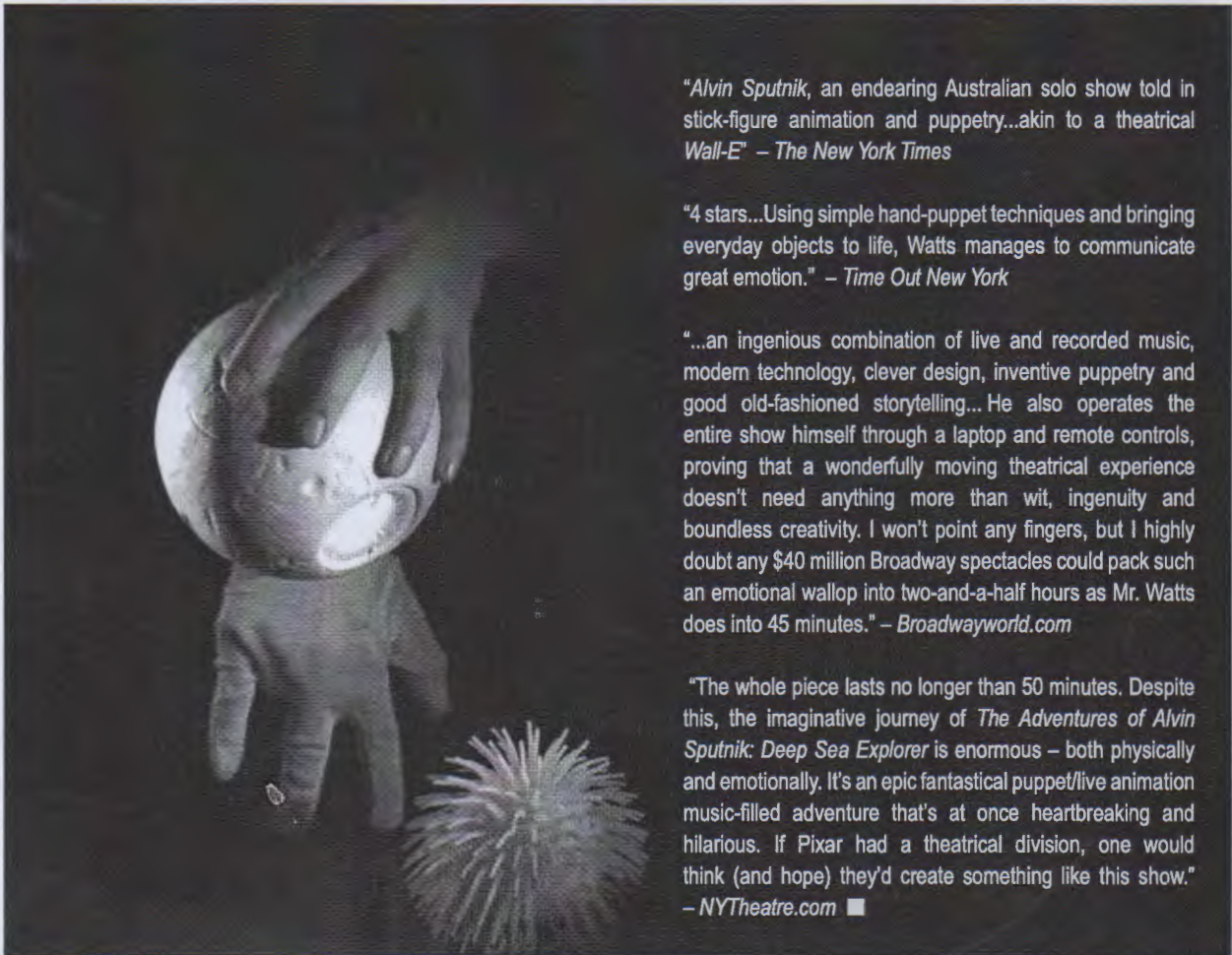
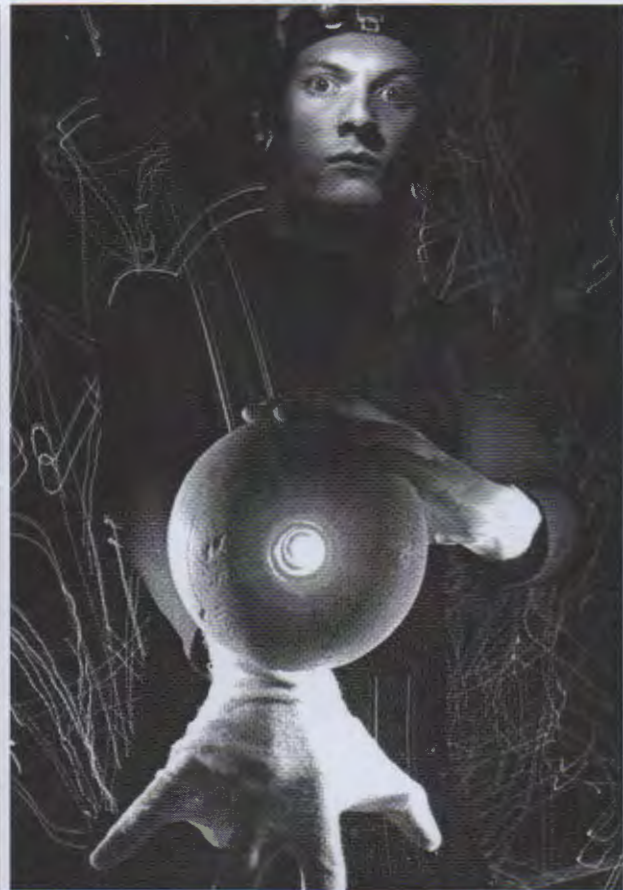
Tim Watts is a young Perth based puppeteer who has recently returned from a sold out season of his new solo show *The Adventures of Alvin Sputnik: Deep Sea Explorer* at the New York International Fringe Festival in August 2009. The show was a great success receiving rave reviews from the *New York Times*, *Time Out New York*, *NYTheatre.com*, *Broadwayworld.com* and many others. He also picked up an award for "Outstanding Solo Show" and has had offers for a return season in 2010.

The show began its life in Perth, Western Australia, with a sold out season at the Blue Room Theatre. All the lights, music, projection, and puppets are operated by Watts (and a Wiimote). The show blends technology and multimedia seamlessly into a touching story of enduring love and the end of the world. The seas have risen, billions have died and those who are left live on farms atop skyscrapers, atop mountains. There is a last ditch effort to save the human race, and it requires journeying down through the mysterious depths of the deep blue sea to find a new place for us to live. Alvin Sputnik, who has just lost his wife, joins the effort so that he may follow his wife's soul down into the underworld so that they might be together again once more.

Perth Theatre Company will be helping and producing the prospective regional, national, and international tours. Watts hopes that the continuing exposure of his new show will spark interest and enthusiasm in Perth as a city that has an exciting and vibrant emerging independent contemporary theatre, and puppetry scene. *Alvin Sputnik* was only one of four solo shows at this years New York International Fringe Festival, with all four shows doing exceptionally well.

"Perth is a great place to base yourself as a young artist, there is loads of support from artists and companies like PTC, Blue Room, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre etc. There is a good amount of funding available, and a lot of fantastic emerging artists who are interested in work across all platforms" says Watts.





"Alvin Sputnik, an endearing Australian solo show told in stick-figure animation and puppetry...akin to a theatrical *Wall-E*" – *The New York Times*

"4 stars...Using simple hand-puppet techniques and bringing everyday objects to life, Watts manages to communicate great emotion." – *Time Out New York*

"...an ingenious combination of live and recorded music, modern technology, clever design, inventive puppetry and good old-fashioned storytelling... He also operates the entire show himself through a laptop and remote controls, proving that a wonderfully moving theatrical experience doesn't need anything more than wit, ingenuity and boundless creativity. I won't point any fingers, but I highly doubt any \$40 million Broadway spectacles could pack such an emotional wallop into two-and-a-half hours as Mr. Watts does into 45 minutes." – *Broadwayworld.com*

"The whole piece lasts no longer than 50 minutes. Despite this, the imaginative journey of *The Adventures of Alvin Sputnik: Deep Sea Explorer* is enormous – both physically and emotionally. It's an epic fantastical puppet/live animation music-filled adventure that's at once heartbreaking and hilarious. If Pixar had a theatrical division, one would think (and hope) they'd create something like this show." – *NYTheatre.com* ■

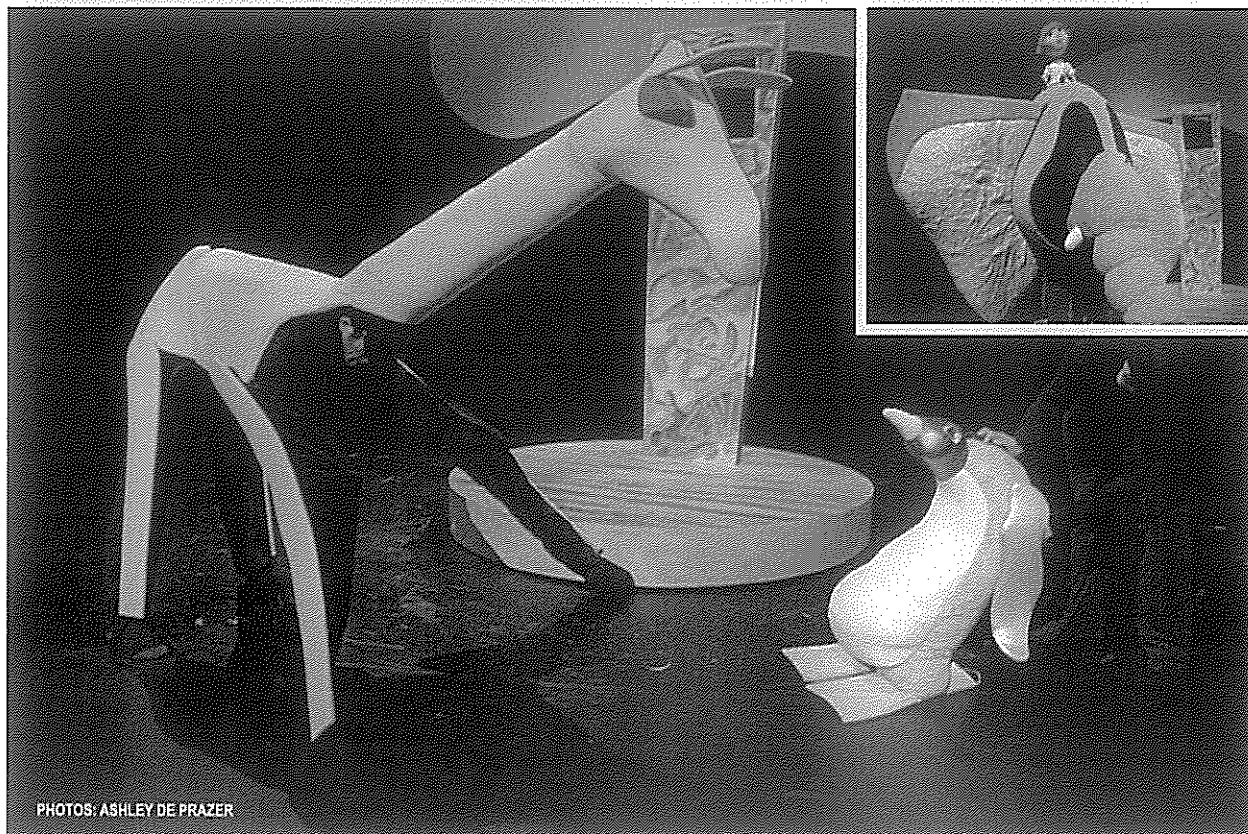
THE NIGHT ZOO

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009

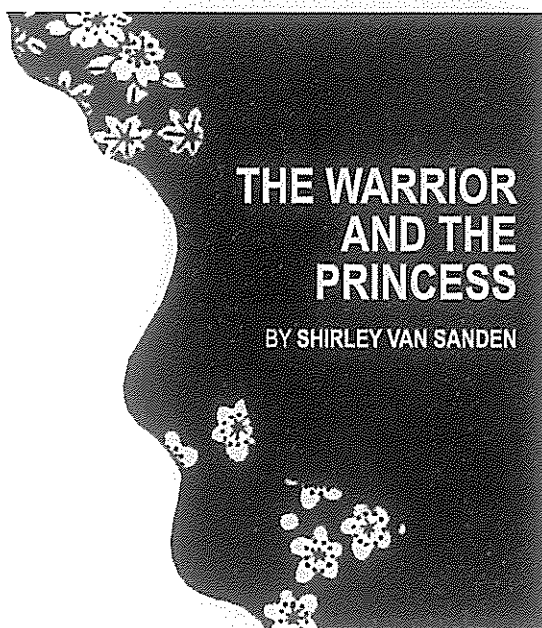
BY LEON HENDROFF

Spare Parts Puppet Theatre's new production *The Night Zoo* has had an encouraging response from Perth audiences with a sold out season and glowing reviews. Written and directed by Michael Barlow, *The Night Zoo* is brought to magical life with an impressive variety of puppet forms, masks, music, dance and Barlow's own whimsical animations. The story tells of a little girl named Jamie who dreams of having a pet to call her own. One night while her family and rest of the city soundly sleeps, Jamie receives an unexpected visit from a very special zoo! A simple story about the friendship animals give us, together with beautiful puppetry, made this show a delight for all ages, igniting the imagination in its dream-like atmosphere.

DESIGNER: Iona McAuley ASSISTANT DESIGNER: Matt McVeigh LIGHTING DESIGNER: Romi Poonosamy COMPOSER: Lee Buddle
PERFORMERS: Katya Shevtsov & Jacob Lehrer PUPPET MAKERS: Jirka Zmitko, Sanjiva Margio, Lyndell Darch, Iona McAuley ■



PHOTOS: ASHLEY DE PRAZER



In late August, Stages, the WA Playwrights' Consortium funded a weekend workshop on a new script that uses actors, puppets and projection in the storytelling. *The Warrior and the Princess* which had Richard Tulloch as dramaturge, is aimed at an audience 8 years and older and is loosely based on the story of Chiune and Yukiko Sugihara who helped save the lives of thousands of Jewish refugees during the early years of World War 2. Monica Main directed the workshop with Sandra McKendrick as puppetry adviser. In the cast was experienced puppeteer Joanne Foley as well as Katya Shevtsov who has appeared in several Spare Parts Puppet Theatre productions. The workshop enabled playwright Shirley Van Sanden to clarify some of the visual and design aspects of the narrative and take the script from 3rd to 4th draft stage. Shirley hopes to do a reading of *The Warrior and the Princess* with a view to eventually producing the play. ■

SPARE PARTS' ARRIVAL IN EUROPE

TEXT AND IMAGES: PHILIP MITCHELL

On 18th September 2009 Spare Parts Puppet Theatre opened the World Festival of Puppetry in Charleville, France, with the award winning show – *The Arrival* – being invited by the Artistic Director, Anne Francoise Cabanis, as one of the first in the new curated Charleville Festivals. After many challenges in getting the performers safely to France, the show was enthusiastically booked out and adored by the just under 3000 people who saw it! The exciting news, is the set has been left in Charleville ready for performances in The Tbilisi International Theatre Festival, and due to strong interest from several other European countries.

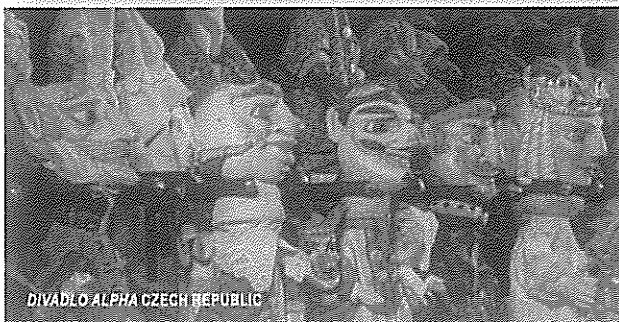
In his role as one of our Councillors representing UNIMA Australia and a member of the UNIMA Festivals Commission, our Artistic Director, Philip Mitchell, attended meetings, launches of puppetry encyclopaedias, drank French champagne and joined tributes to dedicated UNIMA people, more of which will be in the next issue! ■

A SCENE FROM *THE ARRIVAL* PHOTO: NIGEL HETHERINGTON



THE ARRIVAL SET

AKI & BLUE



DIVADLO ALPHA CZECH REPUBLIC



WORLD ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF PUPPETRY ARTS



French company Royale de Luxe's latest creation which was unveiled at the Estuary 2009 arts festival Nantes, France.

PHOTO: SANJIVA MARGIO

ADVICE TO THE ASPIRING YOUNG ARTIST ☆

BY JULIA DAVIS

If you want to be "an artist" and haven't yet found your little niche, consider embarking on a career in the grand old Art of Puppetry. Simply follow this program of instruction and it will be yours: recognition, reputation, critical acclaim (and perhaps even an invitation to share a split with some ageing ex-puppeteers, who will regale you with tales of the heyday of puppetry in Melbourne in the 80's.....)

The good news is, you don't even need puppets. In fact, you are advised to avoid the use of figurative 'puppets' altogether (or you might find yourself performing for schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, libraries, children's festivals, holiday programs or, god forbid, birthday parties!, and no one will take you seriously as an artist.) There are some exceptions, of course; naked and genitally enhanced puppets in human form have some value, especially for turkey-slapping your audience.

You might consider how many puppeteers' reputations have been established by the handling of kitchenware, liquid-filled rubber gloves, toilet brushes, newspapers and even flexible parts of one's own anatomy – although even these are becoming a bit old hat. Venture into exploring the qualities of food (cauliflowers, cornflakes, golden syrup, sausages and any other meat), the malleable properties of mud and clay, the metaphoric possibilities of livers and offal. You can manipulate ageing carcasses, and even excrement, so as to offer your audience a rich experience of the senses. You might even achieve notoriety for your dark, edgy, innovative and confronting theatre and win an award or two.

Some advisable themes are: perversion, self-mutilation, cannibalism and dying children, possibly all these combined, to make for a controversial and courageous comedy.

Never, ever attempt to 'do' Shakespeare with puppets. Leave it to the drama graduates who have a far greater repertoire of grimaces and rounded vowels. (Although, it must be admitted, the idea of 'King Lear – the musical' performed with kewpie dolls does have considerable appeal).



GETTING STARTED

If you are under 30 and have no experience of puppetry or any other art form whatsoever, you can call yourself an 'emerging artist' and get a grant. This may involve a physical makeover (multicoloured hair, some facial studs, retro clothing, an arty tattoo or two) and a change of address to Northcote, Melbourne. Carry a diary full of grant application deadlines and study it with furrowed brow as you sip your macchiato in Brunswick Street cafes.



THE GRANT APPLICATION

If you are a 5th generation Australian, you will have nothing worth saying, which may put you at a disadvantage in formulating your proposal for a worthwhile creative project (although you might fare better if you can produce a relative who once had a neighbour who knew an indigenous person). Nevertheless, acquiring a facility with phrases like 'cross cultural dialogues' and 'cultural diversity' and 'multicultural identity' and 'cultural inclusiveness' will ensure your application is considered seriously. You may also need to expand your vocabulary to include words such as 'synergy', 'fusion', or 'modalities' or impressive neologisms such as 'meta-dramaturgical'. This will prove you know something about art. And you can also brandish these words around in theatre foyers to good effect.



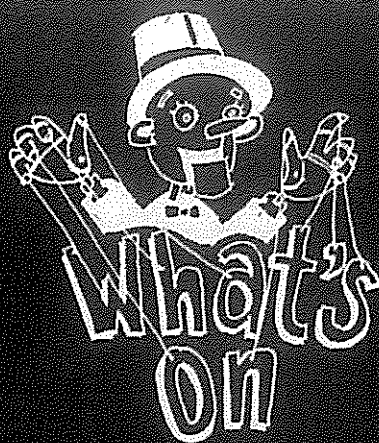
SELF-PROMOTION

Be seen in the Malthouse foyer (you don't need to see a show), loudly proclaiming that you are "in creative development" for "an exciting new project", "a collaboration with" (drop a name) and a working title of 'Vomit', or 'Elbows' or 'Exhuming' (single word titles are best – check festival programs.) Place a small advertisement for your venture in a major daily newspaper entertainment supplement. This may set you back a bit, but it's worth it because you can quote your own superlatives: "The most stunning and original piece of puppetry you'll see this year" – The Age. Be present at high profile festivals and find an opportunity to busk somewhere, even if it's in a quiet alleyway to an audience of three. Then you can truthfully claim, "As seen in Charleville-Mezieres" or "as performed as a one person show at UNIMA 2008 in Perth." It's all good for your CV.

In summary: No 'puppets'. (That you travel light will also open doors to overseas festival invitations.) Never, ever use the words "puppet show" to describe your art; try "dynamic visual and kinetic theatre" or "dialogues in object theatre" or "installation", (which will cover you for productions lacking direction). Tackle taboo topics so as to appall and disgust your audiences (at least they're responding!). Get the 'look' and the right vocabulary. Think 'outcomes', not process, promote yourself, equivocate, intimidate and manipulate. Voila! You may call yourself: A Puppeteer.

[Julia Davis is a Melbourne puppeteer who has performed in schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, children's festivals, libraries and holiday programs, but has only ever 'done' one birthday party.] ■





**MELBOURNE:
19 DECEMBER 2009**

UNIMA AUSTRALIA AGM

2pm, at the Cromwell Road Theatre –
27A Cromwell Road, South Yarra.

**BANGLADESH:
4 & 11 DECEMBER 2009**

A CHRISTMAS STORY

CASA CATORCE – Road 12 House 38b Baridhara
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Time: 4pm

**PERTH:
1 DECEMBER 2009
- 30 JANUARY 2010**

THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

MARGARET RIVER: Cultural Centre, Wallcliffe Rd
Tues 1 Dec: 1.00pm & 6.00pm / Wed 2 Dec: 10.00am

MANDURAH: Prendville Baptist College, Lakelands
Fri 4 Dec: 6.00pm / Sat 5 Dec: 1.00pm

FREMANTLE, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, 1 Short St
Mon 14 Dec - Wed 23 Dec: 10.00am & 1.00pm
Mon 18 Jan - Sat 30 Jan: 10.00am & 1.00pm
(No shows Sundays & Public Holidays)

www.sppt.asn.au

**SYDNEY:
4 - 14 JANUARY 2010**

**INTERNATIONAL 2 WEEK INTENSIVE
PUPPETRY FOR TV & THE WEB COURSE**

Wesley Institute, Sydney Australia

www.puppetrynews.com

**MELBOURNE:
JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2010**

SCHOOL OF PUPPETRY

Dates: Saturdays 23rd, 30th Jan; 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th Feb 2010.

Times: 9am – 4pm

Venue: Meeting Room at Northcote Library,
32 – 38 Separation St, Northcote.

www.schoolofpuppetry.com.au

**MELBOURNE:
12 - 14 FEBRUARY 2010**

THE GRIMSTONES - HATCHED

Victorian Arts Centre

www.asphyxia.com.au



PHOTO: ASHLEY DE PRAZER



PHOTO: COURTESY OF GARY FREDMAN



PHOTO: NAOMI OLIVER



PHOTO: COLIN BRYAN

UNIMA Australia Inc.

No. A0045823T ABN: 22 431 881 810

www.unima.org.au

Webmaster: webmaster@unima.org.au

Postal Address: P.O. Box 121, Oakleigh VIC 3166

Executive:

President: Jennifer Pfeiffer – president@unima.org.au

Secretary: Sue Giles – secretary@unima.org.au

Acting Treasurer: Annie Forbes – treasurer@unima.org.au

Management Committee:

Jennie Pfeiffer, Sue Giles, Annie Forbes, Sean Manners and co-opted members: Beth McMahon, Tamara Rewse

Membership Secretary: Julia Davis

Public Officer: seeking a volunteer

Webmaster: Naomi Guss, Sean Manners, Hilary Talbot

Australian Puppeteer Editors:

Vicki Jaeger, Leon Hendroff, Jhana Pfeiffer-Hunt,
Penelope Bartlau – Editor & Reporter

UNIMA Oz Newsletter: Amanda Karo

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE TO UNIMA AUSTRALIA

One year's subscription: New Members \$45, Renewals \$40

Couple's subscription: New Members \$60, Renewals \$55

Companies: \$90

UNIMA membership is from 1st July to 30th June the following year regardless of the month of joining or renewing.

UNIMA membership includes your subscription to *Australian Puppeteer*, *UNIMA Oz* and on-line *What's On* updates.

Please make your cheques payable to UNIMA Australia and send to The Membership Secretary, UNIMA Australia Inc., P.O. Box 121, Oakleigh VIC 3166.

Deadline for Australian Puppeteer #40: Check *UNIMA Oz*.

Please note: By submitting your article or letter to *Australian Puppeteer* you agree that it may be republished on the internet or in other media.

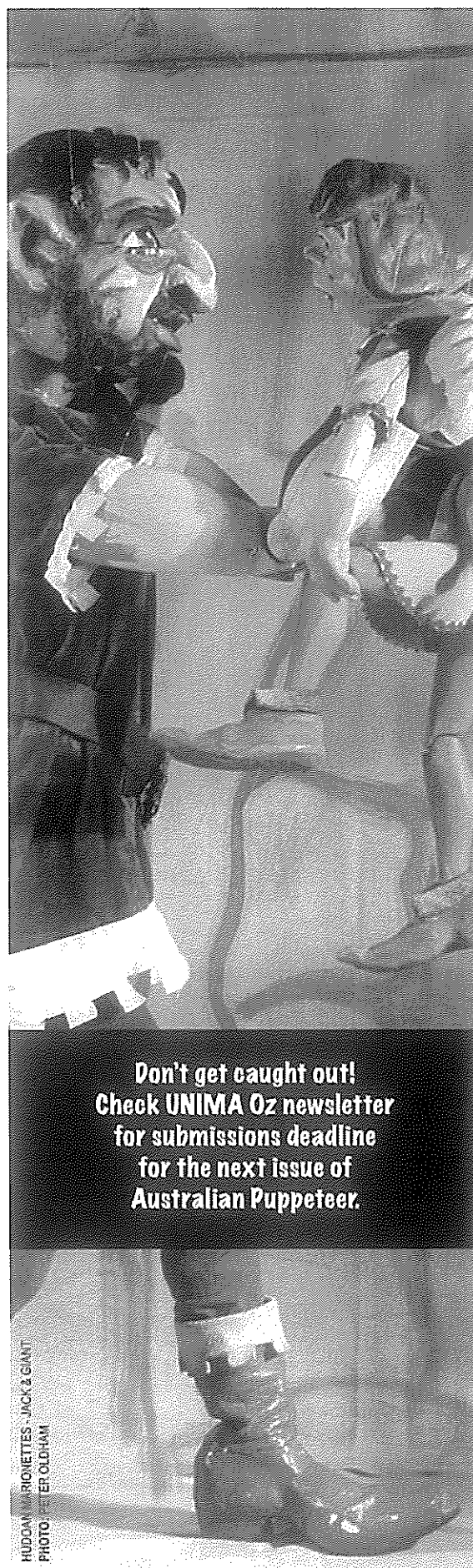
• UNIMA •



AUSTRALIA

Australian Puppeteer #39 December 2009
ISSN 1835-6567

Logo designed by Norman Hetherington



Don't get caught out!
Check UNIMA Oz newsletter
for submissions deadline
for the next issue of
Australian Puppeteer.

HUDON MARQUETTES - JACK & GIANT
PHOTO - PETER OLDHAM

*Season's Greetings
and Best Wishes
for the New Year!*

HUDSON MARRINETTES - PAN PHOTO: PETER OLDHAM

