

# Australian Puppeteer

Summer 04-05



- An honour to honour -  
Lorrie Gardner  
Life Time Achievement Award

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## Editorial

## PUBLICATION OF UNIMA AUSTRALIA INC.

2005 has started with a bang and a glass of wine with many of us heading to the Blue Mountains to partake in the fabulous *One Van Festival*. As always, it was a delight and a joy to be involved with and be a spectator of the festival and I know I speak for everyone who attended when I offer thanks to the extraordinary Sue Wallace, Steve Coup and their team who put together the festival. This year, the festival was coupled with a puppet conference which explore many of the issues surrounding our artform. Headed up by David Collins and Sue Wallace, it was an extremely interesting two days chin-wag. Much of this issue is handed over to documenting some of what happen up in the misty town of Blackheath during January.

Many people have contributed to this quarter's magazine and deep-felt thanks to you. Special thanks must go to Jenny Pfeiffer who helped proof read the mag as well as contributing numerous articles and pretty much on the deadline too!

I hope you enjoy the first magazine for 2005.

Sarah

Please note: By submitting your letter or article to Australian Puppeteer's Magazine you agree that it may be edited for legal, space or other reasons and after publication in the magazine it may be republished on the internet or in other media.

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# FROM THE SECRETARY

The start of this year was overshadowed by the terrible devastation of the Asian tsunami, the scale of which made a train wreck killing over a thousand people seem like a minor statistic. Of course, the whole is made up of many smaller events. The destruction in Sri Lanka also included the puppetry museum and the community around it.

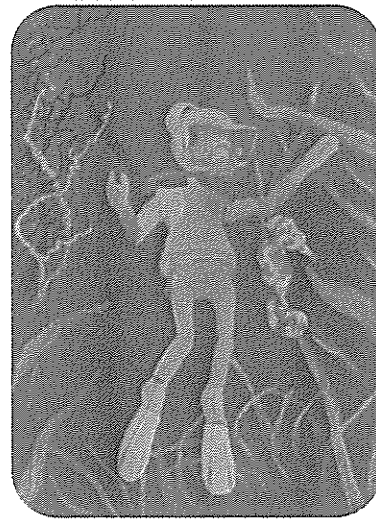
We received quite a few New Year greetings from UNIMA centres around the world, one being from Massimo Schuster, the president of UNIMA International. I sent one on our behalf to all known centres on e-mail and received a great response. It generated a stronger sense of connection with the rest of the world. We are now firmly on the world UNIMA map since the successful bid to host the 2008 congress.

I am very excited with our new executive and committee. We are a great team and many good things will come from it.

The Handspan Visual Theatre International Study and Travel Grant was awarded to Sarah Kriegler this year. Congratulations Sarah. Sarah's proposal included collaboration with Renaud Herbin and Uta Gerbet, who performed at One Van and Polyglot last year. She will spend some months in Berlin, no doubt absorbing lots of puppetry culture there.

Congratulations to Lorrie Gardner for earning the UNIMA Australia Life Time Achievement award. She is now among Axel Axelrad, Norman Hetherington and Richard Bradshaw in our hall of fame. She was given a surprise presentation at the One Van festival in January and was overjoyed. A special thanks to Sydney Puppet Theatre, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, Dennis Murphy and Richard Bradshaw for their donations towards the award and to Julia Davis for making such a brilliant sculpture of Lorrie. Julia made all the previous three awards.

The One Van Festival was a great success this year, thanks to the great work of Sue Wallace, Steve Coupe, Rowena McGregor



and the Blackheath Community. We need Puppet festivals to see where we are at and inspire the aspiring. I want to get back towards setting up a puppet festival in or near Melbourne. Anyone want to help?

Daylesford is a strong contender at this point. The Woodford Festival in QLD plans to include more puppet theatre and is interested in bringing out overseas acts. This would be more likely if there were gigs they could do in other parts of Australia, close together in time.

Neil Fainges has generously offered to be a Queensland contact for UNIMA Australia Inc. He will help organise some social events to bring members and hopefully new members together to share news and information. You can contact him at Dingbatz Puppets, P.O. Box 614, ADERLY, QLD 4051. Ph H: 07 3855 2206. mob: 0414 659 325. His contact details will also be included on our web site.

The VCA post graduate course had its first graduates at the end of last year. They produced some very interesting and diverse work and I am looking forward to seeing what the students come up with at the end of this year. If you are looking for formal training in puppetry arts you should consider this course and I have contact details for courses overseas as well.

May we all have a productive 2005.

**Richard Hart, Secretary.**

# A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT, RICHARD BRADSHAW

I want to begin by thanking both former President, Lorrie Gardner and former Treasurer, John McDonald for all they have done for UNIMA in recent years and especially for their work in getting the organisation properly incorporated. Lorrie was very appropriately awarded a UNIMA Life Time Achievement Award at the recent One Van Festival. It was great that she was there (with husband Harry) for the surprise presentation, having taken a welcome break from "chemo". [The previous three awards were given at the 2002 Summit in Melbourne.]

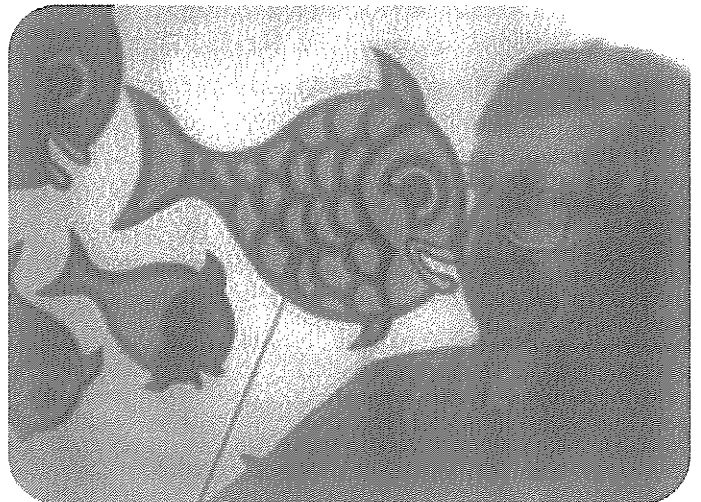
This year's One Van Festival, the 7th, and its preceding Conference (a new feature) were very rewarding events and we were delighted by the quality of exchange, and the standard of puppetry both by veteran performers and new talent, including graduates from the VCA's new Puppetry course. Special thanks are due to Sue Wallace (a former UNIMA-Australia President) who has been behind these One Van Festivals and has worked so hard to make them succeed (with the help of some praiseworthy back-up). Puppeteers from all Australian states attended.

How does one judge a performance? Some years ago a headmaster complained to me about the standard of some of the shows that were touring to schools. "You feel you could do some of the shows yourself!" he said. By that yardstick the Blackheath festival was a great success. I had favorites: Polyglot's wonderfully funny Muckheap, the hilariously successful Great Debate (what professionals!) and Jonathon Oxlade's six madcap minutes at the Cabaret. But there were other fine performances, and I couldn't have done any of them myself!

These are heady times for Australian puppetry. We are, moving inexorably but with growing confidence towards UNIMA 2008 in Perth, where the Festival and Congress will be organised by Spare Parts Puppet Theatre. Also we now have an Australian elected to the international Executive of UNIMA, and that I think is a first. This is Jenny Pfeiffer who was complimented at the Congress in Croatia for her work on UNIMA's Asia-Pacific Commission.

It is Jenny who will tell you of the disaster in Ambalangoda, Sri Lanka. [pls see Asia Pacific report pg. 34]

**Richard Bradshaw, President**





# TREASURER'S CHEST

As newly appointed Treasurer I thought I should introduce myself and thank the members for the opportunity to continue the great work the former Treasurer John McDonald has done, and to do whatever I can to help make UNIMA Australia Inc. a bigger and better organisation for us all.

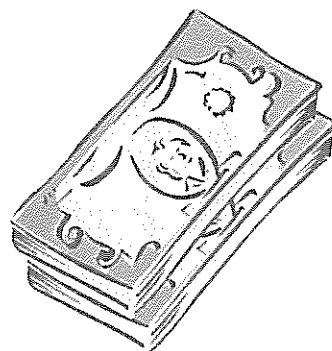
I would like to ask any members who's membership fees are now due to pay them promptly and to thank those of you that have already done so. Your receipts have been included with this magazine. Please call me if you didn't receive yours. The committee has been discussing some changes to the way dues are paid and a new membership card - but more about that further down the track.

I also ask all members to rally their friends and colleagues into becoming members of UNIMA. Membership applications are available to download from the web site:

**[www.unima.org.au](http://www.unima.org.au)**

or contact any of the committee for a copy. The more members we have, the stronger we are as an organisation and social network.

Off now to pull some strings,  
**Simon Bainbridge, Treasurer**



## Krinkle News by Lara Cruikshank

At present, I am part of an Arts program called REMIX in Brisbane QLD. This program has been set up in partnership with the Princess Alexandra Hospital and the Australia Council for the Arts, through Arts Access QLD and managed by Helicon Dance QLD.

Two Art spaces have been set up for people with a mental illness to be introduced to a variety of Art forms.

In this series of workshops, participants have learnt a variety of movement from Julie Chenery (Helicon Dance) and Multi Media possibilities for performance and camera, with Suzon Fuks (IGNEOUS)

My role in this workshop is to introduce the Art form of Puppetry. The puppets used are made out of materials from Reverse Garbage. We are also looking at clothes as Puppets and other objects moving and grooving.

These three Art forms will be brought together for a presentation of work on 14th and 16th of March in Brisbane.

REMIX is intended to run for 3 years and then independently after that, but with recent news with the CCD board at the Australia Council, things could be a little shakey.

*Don't forget...*  
**World  
Puppet Day**  
**March 21st  
2005**

# ***One Man's Trash...***

## **at the Short and Sweet Festival**

Written and directed by Fiona Gentle  
Puppeteers, Dolly-Wagglers and Actors:  
David Collins, Virginia Weule  
David Attrill, Iain Court and Joan Rodd

### Thoughts of a first time director.

The conception of a creative idea is as conception should be, a largely pleasurable experience. After that, if you decide to see it through, it is a process of excited anticipation, fear, unknowing and endless possibility. This, of course slowly becomes, or in our case quickly, a process not unlike labour. The contractions begin as the deadline looms, you are frantically trying to get your "nest" ready; sets painted, puppet rods glued, not gaffed and of course there is the inevitable, "I thought you said you had your own set of blacks!". Sweat beads appear as the contractions are getting longer and stronger and the rest of the world seems blissfully unaware of your time constraints, especially in queues at Bunnings and you want to scream, "Can't you see, I'm having a show here!!!" Your partner is becoming increasingly concerned about finances and how you are both going to cope, after the show, with muttered comments of, "I didn't think we would need all this bloody stuff" and, "how can something this small be so expensive?". Throughout all of this, however, is the feeling that something amazing is happening and with the incredible support of the people involved who are deeply immersed in bringing this thing to life you feel slightly less terrified. That is until opening night where through sleep-deprived eyes you watch, fist in mouth, as the punters file in one after the other, after the other, after the... And seconds before you have handed your fragile baby over to the people who

know it best and who will teach it to dance, naked, in front of the world.

Needless to say I don't remember much of what happened after that, except to say that there was a fabulous mixture of feedback, lots of beer drinking and we were voted second place from the audience. What is learnt from this process is: 1) It's big 2) it's heart has a life line to all the creative team 3) It hurts 4) you can lose weight 5) The finished product is really just the beginning 5) Nature's trick: the minute it's born, you forget the pain and the thought lands in your brain...I wonder if you could do a show about...? Remedy: Go for a swim. Immediately.

### Basic synopsis

The play was a largely non dialogue piece with an intricate sound design, using actors, miniature rod puppets, shadow puppets and object theatre.

The story follows the last 24 hrs in the life of a homeless man. He has become a part of the inner city landscape. This is his home but he doesn't belong. Out of the bleak reality comes magic: illusion or delusion? We enter an underworld where the rubbish of the streets have their own character and play a part in the destinies of the characters in the story. Muses, guardian angels and companions, they accompany The Homeless Man on through the journey of his last night and recover the truth of who he is. Are they real, or are they the delusions of an ailing drunk?



Dear colleague's and friends,

Greetings to you all

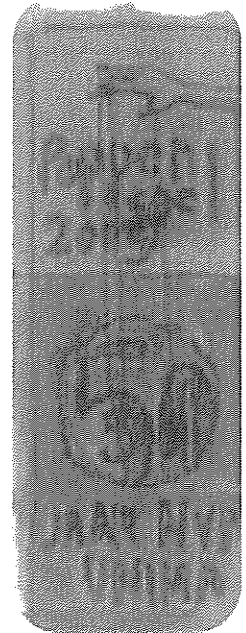
and best wishes for 2005

From the Dutch Unima Centre

Hans Schoen, president

From: Katharina Baker  
Subject: Greetings from Unima Ireland

*Greetings to you all and best wishes for  
the New Year!*



# Greetings



**VERY HAPPY  
NEW YEAR  
TO ALL  
UNIMA  
MEMBERS!**

*Massimo Schuster*

The puppet is by Peter Schumann

From: Divadlo v kufri <dvk@dvk.sk>  
Date: Tuesday, 21 December 2004

I wish you a Merry Christmas, succesful  
and happy New Year 2005  
Thomas Plaszky

Date: Thursday, 30 December  
2004 10:28 PM

Subject: Happy new year

BEST WISHES FOR THE  
NEW YEAR!

UNIMA ESTONIA  
Anna-Liisa Íispuu  
Secretary

# Greetings

Date: Sunday, 26 December  
2004 7:59 AM  
Subject: greetings from Unima  
Israel

Dear friends,

Unima Israel is sending to all of  
you Merry christmas and happy  
new year.

As the director of the puppetry  
school in Tel Aviv, I am looking for  
a puppetry festival to visit with  
our students during the summer  
time (June - September).  
If you have an information about  
such festival, please, let me know.

Many thanks and regards,  
Dvora Zafrir  
Tel Aviv, Israel

Dear Friends  
I Wish You All the Best in New Year 2005

Robert Waltl  
UNIMA Slovenia and Mini teater Ljubljana  
[www.mini-teater.si](http://www.mini-teater.si)

Date: Thursday, 30

December 2004 8:22 AM

Subject: RE: Happy new year

Siempre hay un momento para amar, otro para  
crear. Que nuestras manos alcen los títeres y  
dibujen una sonrisas en los ni-os, hombres y  
mujeres y que llenen de alegr'a a nuestros  
esp'ritus. Y Claro que tambien levanten una  
copa de pisco, vino, cidra, cerveza, etc. para  
celebrar el nuevo ano

Una abrazo en estas fiestas y lo mejor para todos  
en el proximo ano

Teresa Roca

Presidenta Unima Peru



# 7th International One Van Festival & Conference

*From January 19th to 23rd the one street town of Blackheath was overwhelmed with puppeteers, makers, designers, artists, directors, artistic directors, independent artists and puppets for the 7th International Puppet Festival. Preceding the festival was the two day in Puppetry New South Wales Conference. What follows is an overview of the conference, a copy of Dr. Margaret Williams paper, reviews fo shows, photographs, a festival overview, thoughts, wishes and dreams. What a fabulous five days it was and deep, deep thanks from all those who attended to artistic director Sue Wallace, Steve Coup, David Collins, Rowena McGregor and Leonie as well as the Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre for all their extraordinary work that resulted in this event.*

## PUPPETRY N.S.W CONFERENCE

*The Puppetry Conference N.S.W was a two day event focusing mainly on the state of puppet artists of New South Wales but also covering issues that concern puppet artists throughout Australia and the world. Each day different forums and some workshops were presented by various puppet artists, academics and educationalists. They included;*

***What's gone before*** - a highly entertaining history forum by Richard Bradshaw

***The Possibilities of the Puppet*** - a challenging and engaging overview of puppetry from audience perspective by Dr. Margaret Williams

***Writing for Puppetry*** - a writing workshop on narrative and children's literature from author and playwright Richard Tulloch (why was Harry Potter so successful Richard?)

***Designing for Puppetry*** - facilitated by renowned designers Garth Frost (N.S.W) and Byran Woltjen (W.A)

***Puppet-building*** - a workshop on all you need to know about fur, feathers, skin and glue facilitated by Philip Millar and Steve Howarth

***Puppets, social development and the Community*** - a fascinating forum on using puppets as "tools of communication" for social change in the community by Gary Friedman and Fleur Herscovitch

***Puppetry and Education*** - a forum on the power of puppets in the classroom by Anita Sinclair

***Film and T.V Puppetry*** - facilitated by the fabulous David Collins where discussions and dreams of puppet artists producing their own ideas on film and T.V were vented.

***Producers forum for stage and T.V*** - representatives of Australia Council for the Arts and N.S.W Arts talked about how best to apply for arts grants as well as Cate Fowler from Windmill discussing her role as a producer as well as T.V. producer Susan Oliver

***UNIMA*** - Jenny Pfeiffer talked us through the make-up and benifits of being a members of UNIMA Australia

# The Possibilities of Puppetry

## A Paper presented by Dr. Margaret Williams

I'll begin with a silly story about Nellie Melba on one of her endless farewell tours of Australia. To an adoring crowd she's supposed to have said, 'My true home is Australia -- I always like to say that I have one foot in Sydney and one in Melbourne' -- and a man in the audience called out, 'My God, I live in Albury!'.

I feel in this situation a bit like the man from Albury (we live in Bowral!). I feel very much a part of the puppetry community - many puppeteers are my friends, I have a puppet partner, I've spent a lot of my life time backstage in cold dressing-rooms. But I'm not a performer and don't want to be one. In relation to puppetry, I'm audience. So this is the Albury view of puppetry, from neither inside nor outside but somewhere in between. And part of what I'm going to say is that puppeteers and audiences don't see puppetry the same way. Perhaps you think, well, yes we all know that, but I want to put things rather differently from the way puppeteers sometimes do.

First, a bit of potted history. Richard has talked about puppets in the nineteenth century, which largely imitated other forms of theatrical performance. Before that, there were mainly trick figures (like circus puppets today) and satirical shows, and from the eighteenth century on, imitations of live theatre and opera. John McCormick in his book on nineteenth century marionettes points out that theatre then was mainly melodrama and pantomime, and the acting was so stylised that puppets could imitate it and be accepted as 'lifelike' even if they weren't. Audiences knew they were meant to see puppets as 'alive' and went along with it -- though the puppets were largely imitating human theatre rather than real human life. In Henryk Jurkowski's view puppets as stage characters in their own plays are relatively recent in western theatre. (I'll be quoting Jurkowski again, but since he's published at least a thousand times more about puppetry than anyone else in the history of the human race it's hard to avoid mentioning him.) Puppets as characters in 'serious' dramas specially written for them don't arrive till the late nineteenth century with the French symbolist playwrights. But - again according to Jurkowski - just at the time 'the puppet' seems to have come of age as a dramatic character in its own right, theatre itself blows up and all forms and conventions are tossed into the melting-pot. Dance, painting, acting, music are blurred together into performances that can't be classified as any specific thing.

Added to all that turmoil is the arrival of the cinema. John McCormick sees film in particular as affecting how puppets were (and still are) perceived. The acting style in naturalistic theatre and then the cinema meant that puppets could no longer imitate it closely enough to seem 'alive' in any realistic sense. Throughout the twentieth century further changes in theatre and drama such as the fragmenting of character and narrative and mixed media shows using projections, film, and a variety of relations between objects and performers all on stage together have made it increasingly hard to separate puppetry from actors' theatre, or rather from the 'mixed bag' that performance has become today.

Up to the mid-twentieth century it was fairly clear what a puppet was - a little human or animal figure that imitated human or animal actions - and the audience knew it was meant to be seen as alive. Even if it wasn't very lifelike in practice, the audience went along with

## THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PUPPET CONT.

the pretense. Many puppeteers today still see their job as bringing an inanimate figure to life. But I'm not so sure that audiences have always seen it quite that way. For this talk I began collecting examples of how puppets have been written about in newspapers and books. A couple by way of example: a reference in di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* to a dead body being dragged along 'so that the puppet's stuffing fell out again' - not very accurate since most puppets don't have stuffing - and a nice newspaper description of Bob Ellis as 'like an old glove puppet left out in the rain'. But it seemed a bit unkind to list them all, and anyway you get the idea. It's not puppets' life but their lack of life that's most often noted -- or their grotesque or bad imitation of life. This is not very flattering to puppeteers, but it's hard to avoid the fact that the way puppeteers see their figures is not necessarily how audiences see them.

A good deal of puppetry in the later half of last century and today acknowledges that a puppet is not alive and takes that fact as its starting point. Roman Paska has classified puppeteers as either Illusionists or Primitives: those who try to make their puppets imitate living action and those who admit and use their inanimateness. (He means primitive in the sense of 'Primitive Art', and by Primitives he really means Sophisticates.) But once you stop 'seeing' or even pretending to see a puppet as alive, puppetry becomes a whole new ball-game.

It's a truism that today you can't tell what a puppet is any more. Here are a few things that have become the new stock-in-trade, even the new cliches of puppet performance:

- bits and pieces of puppets instead of whole figures
- puppets constructed and taken apart or destroyed in front of an audience
- effigies and dolls left lifeless on stage or tossed about
- puppets made out of other things, such as objects or junk
- bits of puppeteers' bodies used as puppets
- raw materials used just as they are -- objects, fabrics, abstract shapes
- even imagined objects (think of Dennis Murphy's flea circus)

Today, when a lump of rock, an apple, a feather, the left leg of the puppeteer (or any other bit!) can become a puppet, it's hard to say what puppetry is at all. Jurkowski writes in his essay 'Towards a Theatre of Objects' that for some people now 'being a puppet' means 'being transformed' -- so whatever can be transformed can be a puppet. For Jurkowski it seems that this is too wide a view, too much like 'anything goes', but it's as neat a definition of what the new puppetry has become as it would be possible to find.

Jurkowski's own massive book on twentieth century puppetry is entitled *Metamorphoses*, and he includes practically all forms of theatre that use physical matter, living or not, as a significant medium of performance. He himself doesn't regard all he writes about as belonging under the umbrella of 'true' puppetry but it's still not clear (to me anyway) exactly where he draws the line. He's concerned to assert the 'specificity of the medium', but what is it? That's difficult enough from the theoretician's perspective. From the performer's, the 'anything goes' view loses the idea of puppetry as a special skill, art, or mode of performance. The more that is included under the wide umbrella of puppetry, the more 'puppetry' just blurs into performance in general.

In many ways puppeteers have been lucky in the twentieth century. Theatre itself has often been less concerned with psychological characters played by actors than with the physical performer in a physical space. John Bell (an American puppeteer and academic) claims that twentieth century theatre has been the theatre of the performing object. Certainly it has been a theatre that explores new relationships between human beings and the physical world -

## THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PUPPET CONT.

something that should be right up puppetry's alley! In fact Jurkowski has said that today the human theatre has 'stolen' much of puppetry's territory. But (as he acknowledges) nobody owns anything in theatre - it's all up for grabs, and a matter of who gets there first and does something with it.

But then what *is* 'the specificity of the medium'?

Puppeteers have always wanted to define what makes their form of theatre different and special, and not to have it just swallowed up in theatre at large. This can often make puppetry very inward-looking. The puppetry 'world' is an inclusive community in a way that the music, painting and theatre worlds are not - a strange mixture of professionals, amateurs, enthusiasts, groupies, nut-cases.... We are a family - which has both an up-side and a down-side. Puppetry is a theatrical sub-culture, and as such often seems to see itself as something separate, almost sealed off from other forms of performance and creativity. If you look at the titles of many books about puppetry they often seem to confirm this self-containedness. Titles such as *The Complete Book of...*, *The World of...*, *Fanfare for...* are either cheering for puppetry or implying that it's a small enough medium to be encapsulated in a single book.

A great deal of writing about puppetry is still done by performers wanting to define what is special about puppet theatre. They express, often very evocatively and intelligently, their own views and feelings about performing, or their justification of what they are doing. But having taught theatre as an academic subject for many years, I can't help being aware of the difference between writing about puppetry and about theatre in general. Writing about human theatre doesn't keep endlessly asking 'what is an actor?'. As with writing about literature, theatre, art, and music, it explores the various forms of performance and what can express, suggest or illuminate. But writing about puppetry is still often preoccupied with trying to define what a puppet or puppetry is - with pinning down 'the specificity of the medium' as just one thing, if only we could say what.

Puppet theory loves playing with definitions, and without going into too much detail, I'll sum up the main ones. Most draw on puppets' historical 'ancestry' in magic and religion, and the metaphors of freedom/control, body and soul. They often assume the marionette as the archetypal form of puppet. Here is some of the speculative spin-off:

- the puppeteer-puppet relation as a metaphor for God manipulating Man (so the puppeteer is god - very flattering - or is the puppet manipulating the puppeteer?)
- the puppeteer animating the inanimate as like God breathing life into matter (again the puppeteer is god)
- the puppet itself as a kind of god or spirit (as in the famous essay of von Kleist)
- the puppet as a magic figure linked to spells and rituals of exorcism and shamanism
- the puppet as linked to death rituals; for some people, including Roman Paska, a puppet's territory is not life but death, so a puppet becomes a kind of ghost/spirit figure,

There's also debate about where the soul of the puppet is -- in the string or rod, or the puppeteer's hand - or 'in' the puppet - or perhaps the puppet itself is a soul.

The French writer Annie Gilles (one of the most intelligent and pragmatic of those who have tried to define the puppet, though I don't necessarily agree with all her conclusions) takes a Freudian view mainly based not on the marionette but on the glove puppet (which has always been a problem in terms of God's relation to man). She sees it as an extension of puppeteer's



## THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PUPPET CONT.

body and thus as a substitute phallus, and the 'jiggling' of manipulation as symbolic masturbation. That's why it's traditionally been done behind a screen.

It's obvious that many of these concepts are incompatible, even mutually contradictory. And it's a bit hard to say just what holds us together as a puppetry community -- is it spirituality, or necrophilia, or sex mania? Sometimes these and other contradictions are seen as 'paradox', a term which is central to puppet theory, but I think it might be truer to say that puppets (like other things) can be seen in many different ways and become the springboard for all sorts of interesting speculations if you want to think about them in that way. Many of these views validate 'the puppet' (as if there's only one!) no matter how well or badly it's manipulated, or what the shows are about or how good or bad they are as performance. Does there need to be any performance at all? In fact Veronica Nelson in her book *The Secret Life of Puppets* is concerned only with the idea of the puppet; real puppets on real stages just get a small credit from her for having 'charm'. All these views put together don't add up to a definition, and neither do they necessarily relate to anything that happens on a real stage anywhere, to anything an audience actually sees. Puppets might be written about as related to gods or spirits, but how often have you had a spiritual experience from a puppet show? (Not often.)

Of course within the puppetry community it's important to validate puppetry. It is a minor and misunderstood and underestimated form of performance. Moreover its specific skill apart from puppet-making, manipulation, is an invisible skill: the better it is, the less it's noticed, except by other puppeteers. It's bad manipulation that draws attention to itself -- good manipulation transfers its effect to something other than the performer. So of course puppeteers want recognition, acceptance of their skill, respect for their medium. But I'm not sure this is going to come about through trying to define and validate 'the puppet'.

That's the view from the world of puppetry -- from now on I want to take a view from somewhere in between puppetry and audiences (the view from Albury). Because it's only the shows themselves that will ever demonstrate, explain, or justify what puppetry is and can do to a G.P. audience.

One of our naughty friends, who has seen a great deal of puppetry, has a line she saves up for certain times she's forced to say something after a performance: 'We have seen a puppet show!!!' It's not a compliment. It's what you say when there's nothing else you can say about the show. As an audience member, I'd like to feel that I've seen something more than just 'a puppet show'.

There's a lot of debate in puppetry circles about 'serving' -- does the puppet 'serve' the puppeteer, or vice versa. As an audience member, I'd like to see more debate about what puppetry (puppets/objects and performers together) can serve that's beyond puppetry itself. A friend visiting from Poland recently said to me that the younger puppeteers in Europe are doing shows 'about such interesting things'. I'd like puppet shows to be about interesting things, not just about the clever things that can be done with puppets, or variations on the metaphors of 'the puppet'. That doesn't mean having to be deep and meaningful, or serious, or arty, or having a 'message'. But it means not relying on the mystique or 'magic' of puppets as enough in itself to carry a show, and instead discovering what interesting things a puppet's (or object's) mystique, magic and metaphor can serve that are outside 'the world of puppetry'.

The Spanish adaptation of Moliere's *The Miser* currently playing in Europe uses ordinary

## THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PUPPET CONT.

bathroom taps as the puppet heads. It could have been just a clever visual gimmick, but in this production the miser hoards water, which has become the most precious thing in the world -- something that resonates for us today as the Warragamba dam dries up!

One of the shows of the English solo performer Steve Mottram breaks up little skeletal puppet forms and reassembles them, recombining them in strange grotesque shapes. Breaking figures up into pieces or putting them together from bits and pieces has become almost a cliché of recent puppetry, but here it's used to explore the processes of evolution, and when Steve stands up at the end to take his 'call', it's as a man, one end result of the trial-and-error evolutionary process the show has demonstrated. It could not have been done with any medium.

One of our friends told us of a short item she'd seen in recently Germany, performed by a dancer-choreographer as part a dance program, in which she 'murdered' forty strawberries in twenty-five minutes. One strawberry was strangled or garrotted; one was bored through with an electric drill; one was torn apart with the 'teeth' of two butterfly clips taken from her hair; one was put between newspapers and pressed with a hot iron, producing a red smear like blood; one was suffocated with smoke from a casually-lit cigarette blown into a sealed jar; the last one was electrocuted with two wires attached to a battery, so that the strawberry sizzled up and disintegrated, giving off a sickly sweet smell.

It could have been a burlesque, to show forty clever ways of doing-in a bit of fruit (one of Jurkowski's reservations about Object Theatre is that it often just shows off the performer's inventiveness). But it was performed with precision and almost clinical detachment, timed very evenly and deliberately, so that it became truly chilling. Part of its effect was the physical quality of the strawberries -- their soft white flesh, their red juice like blood, and their sickly-sweet smell like death. Our friend saw it not long after the Abu Graib photos were published, and it took on all the evocations of torture and murder associated with real current events. Our friend (herself a performer and academic) said, 'I saw a bit of puppetry while I was away but I didn't realise it it was that until now'.

George Latshaw, a noted American puppeteer and academic teacher, asks the question, 'Can puppets exalt?'. We know they can entertain and educate, he says, but can they do something more than that? He adds that it's the 'toughie' for all theatre -- and arguably puppets are even more fiendishly difficult to bring off well compared with other theatrical forms. The answer is Yes, of course, puppets can exalt -- take you out of yourself, transport you to an imaginative world, create another level of experience -- but Latshaw says that in practice they don't do it often enough.

I'd add another question to his: 'Can puppets relate?' Relate, that is, to the big real world outside the world of puppetry' Again of course the answer is Yes. This doesn't necessarily mean having a 'message' but exploring something with the medium, not just exploring the medium itself. In the end any performance has to either elate or relate -- it must take you on a trip and give you a high (not necessarily sky-high, but at least an inch or two above everyday life) or say/express something that matters. Of course puppeteers want their special skills to be noticed, acknowledged and respected. But in the end audiences don't over-much care what the medium of a performance is -- whether it's puppets, cartoons, actors, circus -- they just want a good show, one that gives them a lift of some kind, or a new perspective of some kind -- or if they're lucky, both!

## THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PUPPET CONT.

As an audience member I'd like puppetry to claim a bit more of the wider possibilities of theatrical territory for itself. If you hear a kid busking badly in the shopping mall at Christmas you don't write off all music because it's out of tune -- we're exposed to enough music of all kinds all around us all the time. But with puppetry there's not enough exposure of all sorts of puppet performance to establish the medium as something with bigger possibilities than just the odd individual good or bad show.

So what are the possibilities of puppetry?

Here are ten things off the top of my head that I think puppetry can do especially well, that might be seen as its home territory. You can add as many as you like to the list.

I'm not going to start with 'animating the inanimate' because animated cartoon theory, and theory of cinema in general, also claim that for themselves. Even J.M. Coetzee's recent book *Elizabeth Costello* has its central character saying that what she does as a writer is giving life to the inanimate. So perhaps that's not where 'the specificity of the medium' lies.

But puppetry has a special ability to:

- explore the relationship between human beings and the material world (which we are part of too)
- show that objects and physical materials have expressive theatrical and even dramatic qualities of their own. (The German puppeteer Enno Podelhl has written that the purpose of puppetry is to give dignity to the physical world.)
- make bodies and things break the laws of nature and physics (like stage magic) and transform one thing into another, showing that the world doesn't have to be put together the way we see it
- make bodies and objects do funny, surprising, ingenious, nonsensical things that stop you taking life and yourself too seriously
- create abstract or symbolic stage presences -- enigmatic, mythical, or superhuman beings -- and make them larger-than-life or smaller-than-life
- create horror and mystery through mixing animal, vegetable and mineral into the one entity, and literalise dismemberment and murder on stage, which it would be unkind to do to an actor
- send up people and situations and get away with it
- explore the unconscious (if you think it exists) and express through images what can't be expressed verbally
- create a trip to a fantasy world
- make adults feel like kids again.

## THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PUPPET CONT.

Does all that add up to a definition? No, because other forms of creativity can also do some of these things. But I'm not sure that there is a definition - or are there too many of them? Perhaps the specificity of the medium lies not just in theoretical definitions, however imaginatively stimulating, but in a range of performance possibilities that puppetry can do as well - or better - than anything else can.

Research from;

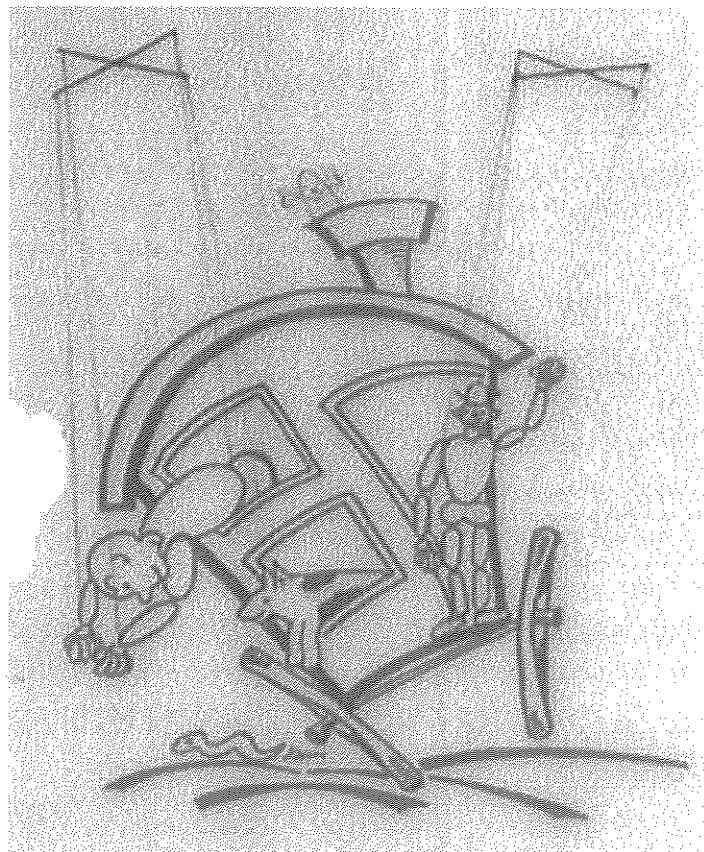
Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, a collection of essays;

*Metamorphoses* (a critical and theoretical overview of twentieth century puppetry, in French);

*History of European Puppetry* (in English).

The articles by Roman Paska and George Latshaw are both in the anthology *The Language of the Puppet*. Annie Gilles' book is entitled *Le Jeu de la Marionnette*.

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# PUPPETRY N.S.W CONFERENCE

CONTINUED

The Conference concluded with a Dreams and Vision discussion followed by a session on actions to achieve our dreams. Our visions were large and small and mostly exciting ideas;

## WE WANT...

A N.S.W Centre for Puppetry Arts

A new puppet icon

Legitimate adult puppet theatre

to raise the public profile of the artform

the Oz Puppetry Mag to be FULL colour

Regular puppetry activities

**More money from corporate sector**

Funded on-going puppet festivals

Education and training  
Database

Developed touring festival circuit

Traveling festival

Good O.H.S practice

Puppetry and literacy in schools and teacher training

Puppet exhibition in 2008

Arts as a buisness opportunity

National exhibition of puppet and set designs

National puppetry documentation service  
structured mentorships

Database of puppetry services

**SUPPORTIVE AND ACTIVE UNIMA OZ**

Weekly T.V. show

**SUPER PUPPET COMPANY!**

Ergonomic research of puppetry

# PUPPETRY N.S.W CONFERENCE

## CONTINUED

Just how do we achieve all these dreams? Well, in the planning session, we agreed many of them could be achieved through the establishment of a funded National Centre for Australian Puppetry Arts. And so, with little steps, the Australian puppet community is working towards establishing such a thing. Puppet artists in N.S.W have taken the bull by the horns and begun to investigate venues for such a centre. This does not mean the centre will definitely be in Sydney but simply that research is being done. N.S.W puppet artists are also meeting once a month to share skills and continue the momentum begun at the conference. If you are interested in joining them, please contact David Collins on 02 9560 6486 for details. For Victorian puppet artists interested in forming a working group to investigate options in Victoria please contact sarah Kriegler via email [sarahkriegler@yahoo.com.au](mailto:sarahkriegler@yahoo.com.au)

We encourage ALL puppet artists reading this magazine to add to the list of dreams and work towards achieving them. With the International Puppet Congress and Festival 2008 on it's way, now is the perfect time to raise the profile of our industry and it's individual artists and lobby government for a national centre.

Remember, an organisation is only as good as it's members.  
Through UNIMA Australia, (which includes YOU!) we have a opportunity to work towards achieving these dreams.

**Get active in your community.**



[www.unima.org.au](http://www.unima.org.au)

# One Van Festival

## Review

### HEY DIDDLE CIRCUS

Performed by Murray Raine

Reviewed By Lorrie Gardner

Murray Raine is an expert marionettist specialising in Club work. I believe this is the first show he has produced with young children in mind. He has done it very well - his personality with the children is very good and his expressions made them laugh. He interacted both with the audience and with the puppets, since his staging allowed him to be in view with the puppets.



Murray knows how long to leave a puppet on stage and his act moves along at a fast pace. The total length of the program probably has the 3 year olds in mind, however I do question the recommendation of "3 - 8 year olds" from the program. I would have said "from 3 on up" since it is the older children frequently who are most interested in marionettes and how they work. The older children appreciate the skill of the

performer as well as the skill of the maker, so why leave them out!

The puppets were made by Ann Davis and are her traditional marionettes. It is so good to see the traditional marionettes in use again and so well performed. Ann said Murray added more feathers and sequins to them and made them his own. At the end of the show, Ann said, with a smile on her face, "you can take the puppeteer out of the Club but you can't take the Club out

of the puppeteer!"

It was truly magical old-fashioned entertainment. Murray was on the side of the "Dolly Danglers" in the Great Puppetry Debate as to whether puppetry is an art form or dolly dangling. His side cleverly made the "Dolly Danglers" stand for entertainment and this show certainly was that.

# One Van Festival

## NOT A REVIEW

**MOONSHADOW (A SHOWING)**  
Performed by Sue Wallace and  
Steve Coup  
Thoughts by Sue Giles

Our Festival organisers Sue Wallace and Steve Coup not only ran around like blue arsed flies and pulled off a major miracle during the One Van, they also presented their latest experiment to us all as a work in progress.

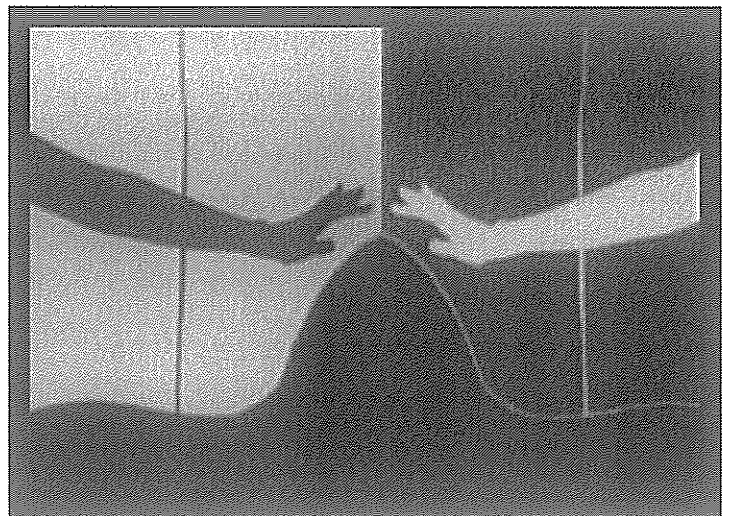
*Moon Shadow* was intended to be an outside performance but they set up in the Main Hall of Blackheath as the weather was just too unpredictable. In fact unpredictable could be the word for Moon Shadow.

This was a shadow exploration and shouldn't be reviewed, as it was a work in progress, but was fascinating enough and enough of a departure for Sue and Steve to warrant discussion. This is not a review - just a response.

Deliberately non-narrative, *Moon Shadow* played with shadow and light effects, creating an abstract array of images that plunged the audience into a trance like state. The beginning was incredibly slow as patterns inched themselves down the huge screen - to slow down the audience, making us receptive to a dream. For two people who make strongly narrative theatre, *Moon Shadow* was a real experiment. Throwing all their instincts for engaging with an audience into the void, Sue and Steve gave us a glimpse of their darker side - full of confusion, rippling images, sudden characters and unreal landscapes. I sat with my comatose child on my lap, wandering in and out of my own stories and connections,

drifting at times and wired with flashes of recognition at others.

*Moon Shadow* was technically intriguing as I struggled to understand how certain effects were achieved. It was at times cold and alien, patterns on a screen. At times frustrating and at others amazing. I will be keen to see where it goes and what its life will be. Steve said afterwards they were both totally shattered doing it that night but the performance was slick and we certainly weren't aware of any weariness. It was a massive undertaking - especially presented during this Festival. I can't believe they don't have mobile phones.



As a post script, it was good to read the article in the latest Equity Magazine about Sue and Steve and the Puppet Cottage debacle. These two have made such a massive contribution to puppetry in NSW - and all on the smell of an oily rag - that the unfairness of their situation strikes hard. You don't know what you've got till it's gone.



# "One Van Festival"

## Review

### A QUARRELING PAIR

Performed by Caroline Lee & Sarah Kriegler for Aphids

Reviewed by Geoffrey Milne

*PLEASE NOTE, although this show was performed during the One Van Festival, this review was written in response to it's premiere season in the Melbourne International Arts Festival 2004.*

The 2004 Melbourne International Arts Festival was marked by some fine productions utilising puppetry and visual theatre in their structural fabric, including this little gem: *A Quarreling Pair*. Inspired by American avant garde writer Jane Bowles' mid-1940's puppet-play of the same title, the Melbourne-based but globally-produced mixed-media company Aphids and La Mama Theatre were it's co-producers and it is hoped that it will travel more widely.

The pair of the title (and of Bowles' original) are two fifty-something sisters living in separate rooms; their quarrel is about whose room in which to drink their ritualistic evening glass of milk. The meek but world-weary Rhoda seems forever destined to prepare this for her smug, domineering sister Harriet ('the stronger puppet' according to the text published with the production programme) but tonight Rhoda has other thoughts. In the event, Harriet brings the milk but it is spilled in an angry gesture by Rhoda. Clearly, there are hidden agendas in this complex little piece's subtext. The sisters were gorgeously made, naturalistically articulated and very tiny Czech marionettes, exquisitely voiced (with plausible 'New England' accents) and brilliantly manipulated by actor/puppeteers Sarah Kriegler and Caroline Lee, who also sang some of Paul Bowles' mood-affecting songs.

American-born Melbourne playwright Lally Katz ( whose plays mostly seem obsessed

with childhood issues) took the starting ideas - for little apparent reason or purpose - into the lives of two kids who decide to get inside the brain of their milkman, Mr Peterson, before flying off inexplicably into a piggy bank in the second piece *Mr Peterson's Milk*. The object manipulation (the lips as purses, for example and the piggy bank itself) was certainly fine but the piece failed to extend the original idea; yes, we had a milk reference but no real quarrel and no subtext.

Aphids member and project-initiator Cynthia Troup's *And When They Were Good* largely ignored the milk but gave us terrific old quarreling women with a rich subtext revealed gradually through a bizarre haircutting and beauty ritual. Surrounded outside by dead branches and dryness, and inside by dozens of bottles of soothing beauty treatments, P cuts Q's great mass of tangled hair (plucked from a thicket above the stage!) with a giant pair of scissors, while an ominous mosquito buzzes around them, before Q grabs the scissors and P smashes the bottles to the floor (spilling the metaphorical milk?) Here, the relationship between human actors and larger hand puppets was nicely blurred, and the relationship to Bowles' original was sharply intensified in a surprising piece of *trompe l'oeuil*.

Director Margaret Cameron staged the triptych with a mirror dressingtable as playshelf and ever-changing flexible set, its mirror being most effective in the final piece and its drawers providing extra playing spaces in the middle one. Amelia Roper's versatile, minimalist lighting worked superbly in the tiny space at La Mama. But the real stars of this show were the puppets and performers Kriegler and Lee.

# One Van Festival

## Review

### JAZZ MOUSE

Performed by AILIE COHEN

Reviewed by Victoria Osborne

A black draped stage flanked by bare bulbs over miniature sets (one black, one white) and a small wooden piano upstage. A lithe young sunglass bedecked woman dressed fetchingly in black 'Stephan Grapellis' her way across stage. With a grin and an acknowledging flourish of her bow she begins to weave her story telling magic. Ailie Cohen uses many theatrical styles and puppet ideas in her enchantment but by far the most powerful is Ailie's own sweet Scots charm. Her warmth and charisma immediately draw us in to a journey through Aunty's music lessons where Ailie performs all characters using puppets, glasses or hairpieces and sometimes voices off. She is supported by an unobtrusive and effective lighting and sound operator.

The little white stage is Aunty's front room, papered with sheet music and a little door apparently leads into the music room. Aunty is a paper maché creature with Dame Edna fly away glasses. The young Ailie puppet, also paper maché, wears plaits. Aunty has to take music lessons to pay the bills and no one enjoys her boring lessons at all. Finally young Ailie is her only pupil, because she's family.

Grown-up Ailie takes over the Aunty character with a nifty pair of wing glasses and a wonderful physical bend and dip. In the music room Aunty conducts an interactive music lesson with the audience singing 'la' to her grudging approval and hidden piano hands. Ailie swaps glasses for a pair of braids to become young Ailie and converse with the puppet Aunty when disaster strikes (wee brother swallowed Barbie's head) and young Ailie has to spend the whole day with Aunty.

Young Ailie can't get excited about watching paint drying so Aunty tells her to practice her violin (over at the black stagette) while Aunty goes out. That's when young Ailie meets Jazz Mouse.

Jazz Mouse is a French mouse transported within the piano into Aunty's house. His mum used to own a Jazz club and some of his friends include Bird, Thelonious Skunk and Dizzy Girl Espy. He knows about making music fun and on her return young Ailie shows her Aunty a delightful 'jam' on her supposed practice. Aunty soon stops all that nonsense, 'You're not meant to be enjoying it. You're meant to be getting it right!'

Luckily, Jazz Mouse discovers Aunty's deep dark past disappointment. Young Ailie wonders if Jazz Mouse can really help Aunty get over her failed concert? Deep in the depths of the piano, Jazz Mouse swings on an elastic stave and introduces his Notey friends. 'As long as you have fun when you play, you will be okay.' Gorgeous little hand puppet notes play (accurately) and sing their way around the stave in their different styles. There's a wee note swinging his kilt about, a Russian passion, Class (gosh I'm pooped), Pop - a glittery purple and red duo and a Jazz note - (let's rip it up!). This is tour de force puppetry musicianship. If these puppet notes and staves are not available for purchase for music teachers all across the world I don't know what is wrong with the merchandising market!

*Jazz Mouse* is ideal material for primary schools interested in inspiring children to find fun in their music. 'A Little Jazz Mouse is the Only Kind of Mouse to Be!'

# One Van Festival

## Reviews

### RUMPELSTILTSKIN AT THE FAIRYTALE LAUNDRY

Performed by Ailie Cohen

Reviewed by Victoria Osborne

Rumpelstiltskin is a scrummy show with that Ailie Cohen cheerful charm turned up to blaring full. Ailie plays the Laundry Mistress wrapped in lacy white. But Oh Dear! Little Red Riding Hood's cloak has dyed Snow White's dress pink, the Giant's knickers have shrunk and here's Mr Stiltskin in the laundry basket with no gear on! Ailie's soft Scots accent imbues the stories with a delightful chuckle and just watch the kids when she needs to get rid of some of those odd socks. The deal is struck, Mr Stiltskin will help her hang out the washing and the Laundry Mistress will tell his story.

Once upon a time... Yeah, yeah, get on with it. Each subliminal sock designed set piece hangs on the line, the castle wall reveals a grumpy, gouldie, greedy guts sock king who imposes pocket money tax on the audience. Which is not so good for the Miller - a fuzzy sock and tamoshanter puppet who loves his sock daughter so much he can't help but boast about her spinning prowess to the king. You all know the story - and you can all picture the tiny Miller puppet as he strides off in the upstage drop featuring a silken road zig zagging to the castle far far away to cut a deal with the king. The guards are pleased to see the daughter, 'we haven't chucked anyone off the roof in ages. We're looking forward to it.' The daughter cries when she realises she'll be spinning a room full of straw into gold all night in return for her life. 'Oh yes, that seems fair.'

Ailie's timing as she flips between characters is wonderful. She's been performing the show over three years and rallies between father and daughter (ya're the best spinner in the whole world, oooh, I'm nort!, ya are, I'm nort!, ya are, oooh put a sock in it!), Mr Stiltskin's earnest garbled song ('I didn't understand a word of that', asides the daughter) and laundry jokes (the baby poohs and the Laundry Mistress sighs, 'more washing') engage the story engine full tilt. The time comes for Mr Stiltskin to take the baby and the Queen must search for Mr Stiltskin's name. She tries, 'Paul, John, George, Ringo', and Mr Stiltskin sneers, 'What kind of name is Ringo?'



The Laundry Mistress flings socks out into the audience for a crowd scene. The kids enthusiastically become all the people in the land and cry out their own names as requested and the Laundry Mistress must search deep into the terrifying forest of socks and green things hanging from the line, (scary sound effects provided by the awesome audience). There is Mr Stiltskin, playing a tiny xylophone with his feet (losing his clothes yet again) and the audience loved it. The Queen looked the naked puppet up and down until Mr Stiltskin retorted 'I'm a bit hot, okay?'

The audience chucked their socks at Mr Stiltskin with gusto and the King grew a lot kinder because that's what love makes us do. And Mr Stiltskin helped hang out the washing at the end.

Ailie Cohen has created a whimsical laundry world that's entirely logical and beautifully structured. Again, her charm surrenders the audience to her lovely humour immediately but it's the consistency of the world and the fun of the story that keeps them there.

Sock it to them, Ailie!



*Jazz Mouse*

## KRINKLE THEATRE THE TRIALS OF PAPER AND RAIN

Late last year we received our first ever direct Arts funding from the Australia Council for the Arts and the NSW Ministry for the Arts for our new project "Suit Yourself". This enabled us to have a longer and more focused rehearsal period with our puppeteers. "Suit Yourself" began mid last year, with a creative development process as part of the NORPA Creative Laboratory in Lismore NSW. We conducted a showing and feedback session on the last day and from this, we further developed the show for the 7th 'One Van' International Festival of Puppetry.

Rehearsals resumed in December last year and began with a single sheet of newspaper (the base of our work).

We arrived in Blackheath one week before the festival started and were greeted by the usual warmth of BANC staff. At first, our arrival at the shop front window shocked us, as we were anxious about the size. It was smaller than we imagined. We soon adjusted to the space and the reduced size worked for the better.

There was less newspaper needed to fill the shop front and the Puppeteers as characters, were physically and mentally impacted upon, fighting for space, (reflecting impact of city life, the whole point of the show)

Our Premiere performance at 6pm was in the middle of a down pour. With the audience positioned outside, this was tricky, but with the help of the Krinkl team and Super Ted, some more builders' plastic was added for cover.

Our audience was very patient with the weather conditions and around 80 people attended (no more would fit in). As the show progressed, umbrellas popped through the gaps in the plastic, people bathed in waterfalls and Sue Giles (Polyglot) received a lap full of water in one great gush.

All that aside, the audience was taken into our newspaper world. We received positive feedback and various thoughts from our peers, mentors and audience for us to reflect upon. All our hard work paid out in the end and we thank you all who were part of that. - Paddy Bolliger

# One Van Festival

## Diary by Jenny Pfeffer

### SETTING

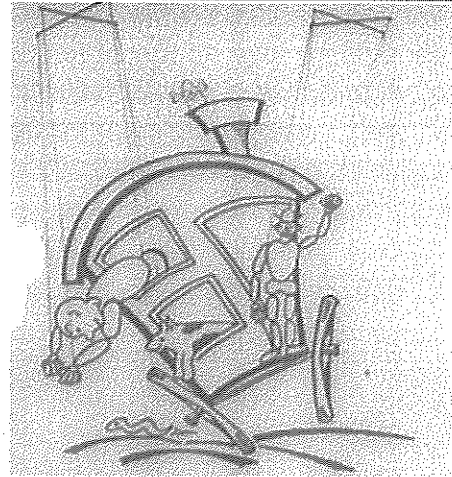
Blackheath, for those who do not know, is situated around two hours west of Sydney in the Blue Mountains, and a fourteen-hour drive from Melbourne. A tourist mecca and place of colonial Australian historicity, it is a site where the privileged used to take the waters and admire the spectacular bush scenery. This was my first Blackheath experience, and the ambience of the place was striking, most particularly in the diversity of passing moments: storms, heat, sun, but most especially with the mountain-top town suspended in clouds, eerily still, the perfect mysterious setting.

I do not have the space to write of the whole experience, the interesting, (or not), things that I saw. I have written about Moonshadow and Lynne Kent in *I Pur Si Muove*, so I shall not repeat here, but the following are, not reviews *per se*, but a commentary about things that particularly resonated for me.

### CONTAINMENT

Krinkl Theatre performed *Suit Yourself* in a shop front window on the main street. Designed to be performed in a repeating cycle and watched in fragments by passers-by *Suit Yourself* was a self-contained play, using newspaper, lots of newspaper, some fashioned into a number of characters held together with sticky tape. Into this mix add four be-suited actors/puppeteers. The piece was a wry take on the corporate world and its demands, making use of every appropriate metaphor such as, 'oceans of paper'. Their production overheads must be extremely low making an entire production out of the detritus of the everyday.

Their play is accompanied by a small newspaper-like publication "The Krinkl Chronicle, which is an amusement in itself, introducing the company and adding to the performance on display. "STARVING ARTISTS RESORT TO EATING PAPER" it headlines,



which is in fact what occurs in the performance. It could do with a good copy edit to give the entire concept that added bit of polish, but perhaps that is being too picky. On the whole, the physicality of the performance was tight and I found that the tension created by the extreme business in such a confined space effective. The performance was without its soundtrack due to a technical glitch on the afternoon I saw it, but I'm pleased to say that it held up, was readable and well-paced without the need of, so their soundtrack adds to rather than relies upon. Based in Kyogle and directed by Lara Cruickshank, the group has been in existence for five years. I'll be very interested to see what they come up with next.

### REFLEXION

The fabulous Jonathon Oxlade, who presented a very simple and whimsical piece that I found compelling and hilarious. Presented as part of the cabaret, what I found most fascinating about this work was the defiance in its basic premise. [Forget about intention. I'm writing about my reading; consider "death of the author", the infamous term coined by Roland Barthes].

When I first learned puppetry formally in a performance course at Swinburne (Victoria College then, Prahran Campus), the first and fundamental thing learned was that puppet consciousness is conveyed through the eyes; it is head first. And this has remained the drill, through most puppetry workshops and



masterclasses ever since, whether with companies, individuals or in academic settings. This is a heritage of western philosophy, Cartesian dualism, "I think, therefore I am".

However, in this simple piece of puppetry we saw a body searching for a head, perhaps a circle of polystyrene, maybe a grapefruit or a lemon. This headless body was articulate, and made perfect sense, a little disturbing though it was. One could argue that the head was perhaps an invisible fixed point, (as one would gather from Joanne Foley's masterclass), and this interpretation is 'not wrong' according to everything our 'western' commonsense tells us. However, in the theoretical domain there are a number of people working towards breaking down this notion of mind/body dualism. There are whole alternative belief systems, such as many eastern philosophies deliver that suggest a more holistic vision, of mind and body being more inextricably related, (see *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz, who launches such a discussion but appropriates it for a feminist cause). Not necessarily taking all of Grosz's arguments on board wholeheartedly or without further interrogation, still I applaud a release from being a prisoner of western pedagogy, and that even within these institutional frameworks fabulous challenges to The Canon appear. Why not "I am, therefore I think". All that from a simple headless puppet. Thank you, Jonathon, for the laughter, for the beautifully timed performance and for your headless puppet.

The cabaret presented a fabulous variety of offerings: the allegorical with the Genti-esque blacklight images by V.C.A graduate students, metaphors of knitting, boats, lines, and an unraveling moon that all resonate as images beautifully, and yet seem in need of further development, of finding a thread, (pardon the pun) connecting the metaphors. Still it held me watching as a spectator from one moment to the next.

### POP

In contrast, the anarchic *Men of Steel* (also a VCA student work) a chaotic bit of fun, that I think worked better the first time I saw it when I was able to look down upon from a raked

seating. Labour-intensive in the bumping out department; those who have seen it will understand why. *Caravan*, pulp fiction meets multi-media and puppetry. Delicately crafted puppets in small scale. I have always wanted to care about what happens to these characters. They seem to invite it, but so far on the several times I've seen this piece of theatre, or portions of it, I have found myself too distanced from them. I'm not sure why. Perhaps I shouldn't care about them. Perhaps that is the point. But there is obviously some kind of satisfaction I'm not getting from this piece. It seems to continually develop, change, because it has been different on every occasion I've seen it, adapting to venues and situations. This flexibility works in its favour, to think on one's feet and rearrange a show to adapt to a venue rather than trying to force 'THE SHOW' badly into a space that doesn't suit it, particularly when time and resources are limited. Perhaps the day will come when I do find myself connecting to these characters in the strange underworld they inhabit.

### HONOURS

Lorraine Gardner, President of UNIMA Australia from 2001 to 2004 and who first expressed the desire to bid for the 2008 Congress, was the first woman presented with a lifetime service award to puppetry in Australia.

For small works this festival lived up to every promise. It incorporated a two-day conference preceding the festival, and an historical exhibition of marionettes by Ygor Hyczka, one of the founders of the 1950s Tintookies fame at a local gallery. Several community puppet events in the park were colorful and well executed. Performances included over 14 groups and individuals presenting shows, including the International representative, Ailie Cohen from Edinburgh, the cabaret. I must make particular mention of Sue Wallace, Steve Coupe, Leonie Cameron and Rowena McGregor from the Blackheath Neighborhood Centre who worked tirelessly to make the One Van Festival a notable event with an audience that are increasingly puppetry literate, something that is to be treasured and encouraged.



# Puppet History

## by Richard Bradshaw

### FANTOCCINI PART 2

At the recent One Van Festival in Blackheath, NSW, Murray Raine presented "Hey Diddle Circus" using marionettes most of which had been made by veteran puppeteer Ann Davis O.A.M. (who was in the audience). The sequence of acts was very much the kind of thing the nineteenth century marionettists presented as "fantoccini", and many of the acts have their Victorian counterparts. Where the Raine-Davis show differs is almost certainly in the lively pace of the acts, the glamour of the figures and the bright recorded music.

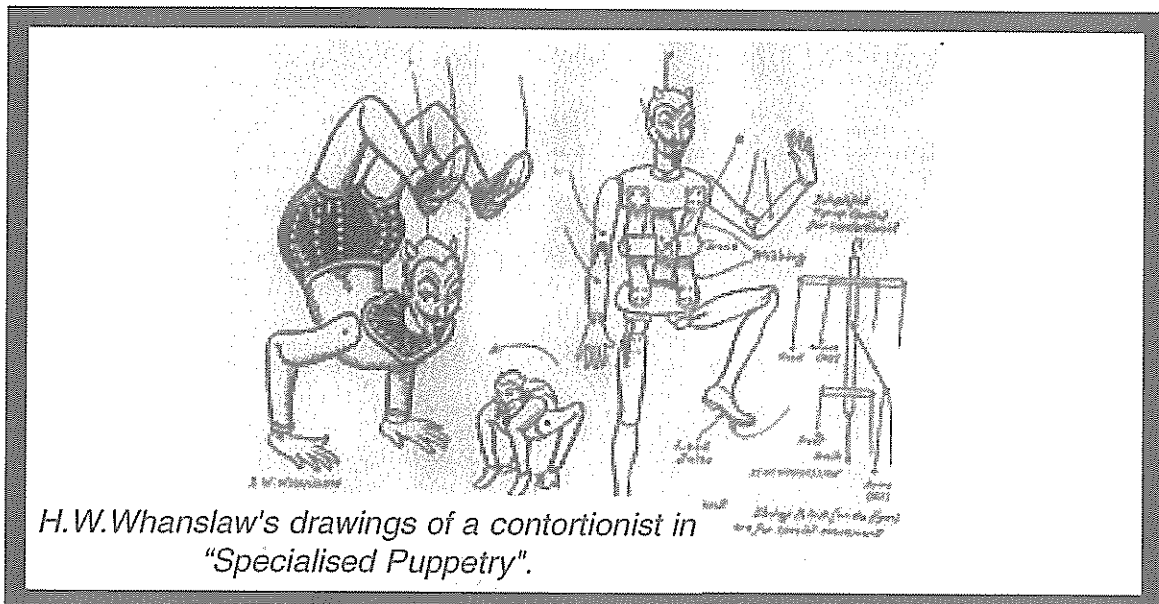
Murray works in view, cabaret-style and, unlike Victorian audiences, we can see how the puppets are manipulated... if ever we are able to tear ourselves away from the puppets themselves! We sat in an audience of transfixed adults and children leaving little doubt that the old-time fantoccini can still entertain.

You can find a wealth of information on Victorian marionettes in a recent book *"The Victorian Marionette Theatre"* by John McCormick, published in 2004 by the University of Iowa Press. The book is

available through Ray Da Silva\* and with airmail postage to Australia comes to just under \$60.

Ray writes: "This new, easy to read work is an in-depth study of the marionette theatre of Victorian Britain and serves as a companion volume to the author's comparative work *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe 1800-1914*, (with B Pratasik). There are several illustrations including 27 colour photos of figures ? some quite small - from Clowes-Tiller, Delvaine, Clun Lewis, D'Arc, De Randel, Middleton, Barnard, and Holden.

Here revealed is a rich cache of information, both historical and technical, laced with anecdote. It looks at the touring proprietors and the venues where they performed, how they parodied the human theatre, the design of the figures, the fantoccini trick figures and variety turns, the staging, scenery, lighting, costume, and music. A final chapter considers the gradual decline and changes after the end of the 19th century. The 272 pages include detailed notes, a glossary and an excellent index. Softbound version. £18.50 " [There is also a hardbound edition.]



McCormick is a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin and directed Ireland's first university theatre department. He has served on the Executive of UNIMA and he and his wife Clodagh, who provided technical drawings for the book, are practicing puppeteers. (We were fortunate to have spent a lot of time in their company in Dublin and Turin in 2003.) A good part of the material on which this book is based comes from the research of the late John Phillips who died in London in 1996

In an earlier *Australian Puppeteer* (Autumn 2004) I gave some background to fantoccini, and paid special attention to the dissecting skeleton. Here I will begin looking at some of the other acts.

The program for McDonough and Earnshaw's Royal Marionettes on their Australian tour lists the following fantoccini acts from which a selection would be made. (Ten of these acts were in Charles Webb's repertoire in Australia and nine of them in the D'Arc's Marionettes show brought to Australia and New Zealand in 1902-3 by F.T.Barrass.)

This is the list as it appears in the program printed in Melbourne:

### SELECTIONS FROM THE MARVELLOUS FANTOCCINI.

1. - BLONDIN'S TIGHT ROPE FEATS.
2. - THE SCARAMOUC.
3. - THE WONDERFUL CONTORTIONISTS.
4. - THE PERFECT CURES.
5. - THE COMPOUND TURK -  
"Multum in Parvo."
6. - THE GREAT GLOBE PERFORMER.
7. - THE COMIC MULES - Pete and Barney.
8. - THE WONDERFUL SKELETON.
9. - THE STILT PERFORMER.
- 10.- JACK'S THE LAD, with a Hornpipe.
11. - THE CHAIR EQUILIBRIST.
12. - THE MAN AT THE WHEEL AND  
JUGGLER.
13. - PAT AND BIDDY in their "rile Irish Jig."
14. - THE POLE BALANCER.  
A Perfect Wonder.
15. - TOMMY AND SARAH,  
the Comic Duettists.
16. - THE CELESTIAL DANCERS AND BELL

RINGERS, with New Song and Chorus.

### 17. - OLD MOTHER SHIPTON

#### THE TIGHT-ROPE WALKER

Most marionette tight-rope walkers were named after Blondin, whose real name was Jean Francois Gravelet (1824-1897). He came to Australia in 1874 and again in 1875, while the Royal Marionettes were also here. On that visit he earnt £18,000! Blondin was especially famous for walking blindfolded on a tight-rope across Niagara Falls pushing a man in a wheelbarrow.

[Some years ago Margaret and I were walking in Kensal Green Cemetery and chanced on Blondin's grave, with its headstone revealing that he had lived in a house in Ealing called "Niagara". A day or so later we visited the Theatre Museum in London and there, hanging in the foyer, was Blondin's wheelbarrow.]

The McCormick book suggests how the prominent English marionnetist, Thomas Holden, manipulated his figure. (Holden, who had once worked with Blondin himself, was notoriously secretive about the way his puppets were worked.) In addition to two operators above the figure there seems to have been a third operator below the stage holding strings to the feet which passed over the wire so that the figure could jump up on to the wire and once there upward tension on the legs was countered by the understage operator so that the figure's feet could stay firmly on the tight-rope.

Whether McDonough and Earnshaw's Royal Marionettes' "Blondin" was worked this way is not known. However, Thomas Holden had worked with this company in the U.S.A. prior to its Australian tour, along with Charles Webb who came with that tour and stayed on in Australia. (Both Webb and Holden played independently in Russia in 1882-3.)

A drawing by H.W.Whanslaw in "Specialised Puppetry" shows a tight-rope

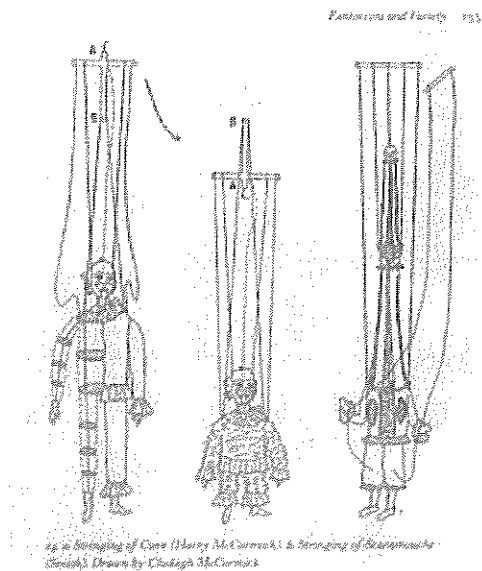
walker he saw in Leipzig in 1937 which could apparently toss the balancing bar up into the air and balance it on its head. Instead of a rope this figure walked on a wide "tape" patterned to make it look narrower. Whanslaw owned a figure (by Rozella) on which he (i.e. Whanslaw) had curved down the sides of the sheet-lead soles so that it could walk the rope more easily. Edith Murray's female version had a hole in one foot through which the rope passed.

### THE SCARAMOUC

In a 2001 issue I wrote about Scaramouch puppets. Mr Holland had exhibited such a figure in Hyde Park, Sydney in 1842 as well as a tight-rope walker called Notaguste "from Constantinople". The illustration from the McCormick book gives an idea of such figures, and McCormick tells how, with the aid of a "bum-string", the extended figure could turn a Scaramouch into a strange 4-legged beast!

### THE CONTORTIONIST

Whanslaw provides information for a contortionist puppet which could stand on its hands and bring its legs over the shoulders. Such figures need to be fairly stable when they rest on their hands. The shoulders have a simple pivot joint with no sideways movements, the wrist joints allow only up-and-down movement, and the hands are fairly flat. (It is perhaps worth noting that Victorian marionettes usually did not have solid upper arms.) The body needs to roll up on itself so a special construction is need for that. Finally strings to the feet allow for the legs to go vertically up before dropping over the shoulders.



### THE CURES

The Perfect Cures (D'Arc's figures were called the Komical Kures) belong to an old family of extending trick marionettes which had sometimes been called "giant-dwarves". Their name comes from a popular song, "The Perfect Cure", introduced to England by an American entertainer, J. H. Stead, in the 1860s. It was accompanied by a lively dance and told of a poor young man accused of being the father of his rival's baby. The tune and beat of the song seems to have been ideally suited to the extending and shrinking puppets. [See illustration from the McCormick book. The Harry McCormick mentioned here was performing in Ireland until 1974 and I believe he was a distant relative of John.]

To be continued...

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You can pay with Australian cheques made payable to M. Palmer.

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**Autumn edition deadline; May 13th**

Subject to change, please see UNIMA website for updates

**[www.unima.org.au](http://www.unima.org.au)**

# Asia Pacific Report

I have recently been officially voted President of the UNIMA Asia-Pacific Commission although I have been working unofficially in that capacity for a number of months. The next Asia-Pacific Commission meeting looks likely to be hosted in October this year in Singapore.

## TSUNAMI

Unfortunately we have received news of a new Puppetry Museum being destroyed by the Tsunami in Abalangoda, Sri Lanka. The Museum had only been officially open since September 2004. It is a sad loss. The program of the Museum included a proposal for a bi-lateral volunteer residency program set up with UNIMA centers from other countries, and that was to include homestay for participants with local families from the host country. Other proposed activities included: Puppet making, puppetry training in forms of the host country, learning of the historical and contemporary fine and folk arts contexts of the host country, learning to play traditional drums and musical instruments of the host country, understanding indigenous characters of the through puppetry, and recording a video filming of narrative songs, dialogues and performances.

A communication from Sri Lanka to Europe, and then Australia from Mr Lal Emmanuel, Secretary of the National Sri Lanka UNIMA centre requesting assistance arrived. After a series of communications UNIMA has since determined that humanitarian aid must be a decision made by individuals, but that UNIMA will lend assistance as possible. To formally undertake such fundraising, (for emergency aid) specific requirements need to be addressed, and the administration and delivery of funds and/or goods proved to be problematic. Each country must make their own decisions about actions taken and any ensuing accountabilities. I have heard from Mr Emmanuel recently who has said that the immediate needs of his community have been provided for by the aid agencies in the area. I expect there will definitely be some fundraising activities in the future to assist in reinstating the Puppet Museum in Sri Lanka. My best wishes go to him and the community of around 600 families who lived in the near locale of the Museum.

I am presently researching more of the situations for communities having close puppetry ties in the Asia-Pacific region. So far I have had news of a Mr A.Selvaraja, (Tol Bommalatam) of Tamil Nadu, a shadow puppeteer, a resident from Chennai who has

# by Jennie Pfeiffer

lost everything including his dwelling and all assets in the recent Tsunami. It was a miracle he and his family escaped alive. The worst damage was that all his puppets of nearly fifty years old were washed away and therefore he cannot carry on his traditional profession.

He took part in the Putul Yatra as part of the Swarna Jayanti celebrations in March 2003, New Delhi, organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi and Dadi Pudumjee. To replace his puppets he needs to outlay Rs 1000/- per puppet (around \$30 AUS ) which includes the cost of the special leather, colours, painting etc. No Government agency is able to help him. So he is appealing for help to replace the puppets and carry on his traditional art and livelihood. I believe he needs around 50 puppets. If anyone want to assist this puppeteer in the first instance please contact me and I will forward you the details of how you can provide help. I expect this will be through an NGO in the Chennai region, probably the NFSC (National Folkloric Support Centre) who like UNIMA have good networks but no direct funding available for such purposes.

*A benefit concert for Tsumani victims of short puppet pieces will be put together during April 2005 in Melbourne. We are hoping, administered by the Red Cross, to put all proceeds towards the puppeteers of Asia who have suffered such losses. Interested in being a part of the program? Contact [sarahjkriegler@yahoo.com.au](mailto:sarahjkriegler@yahoo.com.au)*



*The last set of puppets that Peter Scriven crafted were made in Ambalangoda. This was for "The Tintookie Man", which he toured in Sydney schools in 1977*



# What's On

## Western Australia

### SPARE PARTS PUPPET THEATRE

Spare Parts Puppet Theatre's 2005 Program - A year of infinite possibilities

To start the year Spare Parts Puppet Theatre in association with PIAF presents...

### AQUA SAPIENS Mission Inconspicuous

Just when you thought space was the final frontier, comes an expedition of converse proportions. Mission Inconspicuous is the ground breaking research project by advanced intelligent sea creatures on a mission to discover if there is intelligent life in the above-water world.

But the expedition springs a leak, an intelligence officer (sharp as a tack - even on lunch break) has seen through their clever disguise and becomes the ultimate threat to the success of Mission Inconspicuous.

We have been discovered!

Award winning children's author and illustrator Shaun Tan teams up with Spare Parts Puppet Theatre and the Festival to bring this 3D sci-fi marine adventure to the streets of Perth.

For performance place and times, refer to [www.sppt.asn.au](http://www.sppt.asn.au) or [www.perthfestival.com.au](http://www.perthfestival.com.au)  
While at the same time roaming through the eastern states with...

### GRANNY IS AN ALIEN - NATIONAL TOUR

Grandparents and their grandchildren share a unique relationship - but their worlds are completely different. Granny is an Alien! celebrates the differences of generations and the bonds that tie them together. Suitable for children 3-8 years and their families.

New South Wales: Fri 18 Feb - 22 Feb

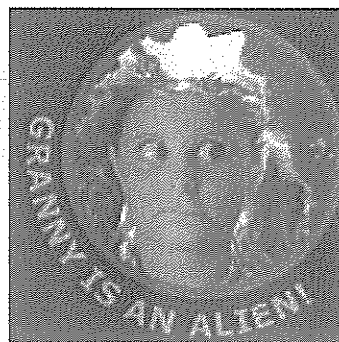
Victoria: Wed 23 Feb - Fri 25 Feb

South Australia: Mon 28 Feb - Thurs 29 Mar (Come Out Festival)

West Australia: Tue 29 Mar - Mon 11 April

Return season, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre  
Public Season: Wed 13 April - Sat 23rd April

Venue: Spare Parts Puppet Theatre



We are hopping mad in June with the premier of...

### THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

An enchanting story where anything is possible if you invest it with enough belief and love. Based on the classic children's story by Marjory Williams, the velveteen rabbit is the much cherished toy of a young boy. To his family it was merely a plush toy, in amongst many, but the boy (and the

# What's On

rabbit) knew he was real. Was it just imagination or can the bond of love make something real? Suitable for children 5-12 years and their families

School Season: 22 June - 1 July 2005 10am & 1pm

Public Season: Sat 25 June, 2 -16 July 2005 11am & 2pm

Venue: Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, 1 Short Street Fremantle WA 6160

September sees us hitting the waters with...

## BLUE BACK

After sell-out performances through eastern Australia, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre is proud to present Terrapin Puppet Theatre's production of Tim Winton's BLUEBACK for a limited season only.

Able Jackson was ten and he could never remember a time when he could not dive. His mother said he was a diver before he was born; he floated and swam in the warm ocean inside her for nine months, so maybe it came naturally. He had lived by the sea at Long Boat Bay his whole life. Every day was special.

Adapted by Peta Murray, Blueback is full of underwater imagery and exquisite puppetry. The story centres around the young boy and his mother's life, their relationship with the land and their desire to protect and preserve the natural habitat of the place they call home. An evocative story, capturing the mystery of the sea and majesty of the old fish which Abel calls Blueback. This is Abel's journey from inquisitive boy to that of a man prepared to stand up for what he loves and believes in.

Blueback is an adaptable production developed for spaces of all kinds and for

families and people aged 5 - 12.

School Season: Mon 12 - Fri 23 September 10am & 1pm

Public Season: Sat 24 - Sat 8 October 11am & 2pm

Venue: Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, 1 Short Street Fremantle WA 6160

Across the rest of the year we are touring to schools in WA's regional southwest, presenting workshops for schools and general public, will have two new works in creative development and a corporate and festival performance program that is gathering strength. Alongside our performance program - it is all go in the planning and development for UNIMA 2008 - stayed tuned!

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## PUPPETRY AUSTRALIA

[www.puppetryaustralia.info](http://www.puppetryaustralia.info)

Have you checked the site out recently?  
Are you a puppeteer or company that is not linked to the site?  
Do you have any ideas or news to add to the site?

It's easy to do. Just head to [www.puppetryaustralia.info](http://www.puppetryaustralia.info) and go to the contact page and send an email. If you don't have a webpage for your performance or

# What's On cont.

puppet related business then just email one page of photo's (small) and info and we can link it to your name in the relevant listings, but please keep in touch to keep it up to date.

New ideas in the pipeline are an Egroup dedicated to Australian puppetry and keeping people informed, new pages dedicated to specific types of puppetry and more links to useful overseas sites.

Would really like to see the materials page fill right up with links to useful materials and their uses.

Don't forget that the site is maintained on a voluntary basis and relies on input from interested people to keep it fresh and up to date.

Sean Manners  
(webmaster)

## Victoria

### POLYGLOT PUPPET THEATRE

Polyglot is pleased to announce their success in receiving funding from Arts Victoria. Polyglot will receive \$100,000 in 2005, which will assist us in our commitment to creating innovative, fresh and quality work that resonates with kids from a diversity of backgrounds.

Polyglot's community project **Hissy Fit** will take place in February/ March 2005. A community project involving kids from a local school, Hissy Fit explores fears and misunderstandings and challenges our perceptions of a most feared creature- the snake. This fabulous community

performance comes to light at the Pets in the Park Festival, inviting Stonnington locals to take part in a writhing adventure with a most unusual pet.

The Australia wide tour of **Baggy Pants** also kicks off in March. When his best friend Singlet is whisked away from their Island by a menacing wire hanger, Baggy Pants follows - rescue on his mind. The odds against his success are enormous. After all what can a little pair of trousers do against the Evil Model Monster, the all consuming City Creature and the perils of the Sad Dump? Meeting many characters on the way - enemies and allies - Baggy Pants and Singlet have adventures, excitement and sadness before they are reunited.

Taking in venues all over Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, Baggy Pants is an evocative and unusual performance that combines dance and puppetry in a classic tale of friendship and loyalty.

Polyglot is also excited to be touring **Muckheap** to various venues throughout the ACT. Muckheap is a tale of two people trying to clean out their shed for hard rubbish day. In the process they find everything that they thought was junk is too interesting, useful or too full of memories to throw away. When memories and characters take over, the audience is swept up with the junk into a fabulous storytelling frenzy. While the "keep" pile gets bigger and bigger, they find themselves telling the story of Jacky and the Beanstalk - with a twist. In the end, all good intentions are joyfully discarded in favour of a rich and exciting life. Junk will

never look the same. Slipping from throwing out junk to creating characters with consummate ease, this show displays the awesome power of the puppeteer. It also invites children to become their own story makers and encourages imaginative play through whatever you have at hand. For more information please call Jigsaw Theatre Company on 02 6293 9900.

## International

Summer (June- Sept)  
Workshops in Charleville, France

The summer workshops are organised on a yearly basis by the International Institute of Puppetry with the goal of providing advanced professional level training courses. The courses are aimed at young professionals, who are selected through a proposal and on their previous work. The participants in these courses are chosen from all over the world. The choice of tutors and students creates a mix between diverse artistic disciplines, to explore puppetry in relation to other art forms. A show is organised at the end of each residency.

These workshops are widely open to professionals : puppeteers, actors, mimes, dancers and lyric singers.

**The Object, its Sounds and its Rhythms** : Summer workshop directed by Dominique Montain and Henri Ogier (Au Cul Du Loup company). Monday 4 - Friday 22 July 2005

**The Actor and His Double** : Summer workshop directed by Neville Tranter (Stuffed Puppet Theatre). Tuesday 16 August- Friday 2 September 2005

Deadline for applications : 15th April 2005  
Do not hesitate to contact us if you need leaflets and application forms by post ; they

can also be downloaded from the IIM website [www.marionnette.com](http://www.marionnette.com)  
<<http://www.marionnette.com>>

We would be grateful if you could spread this information to whom it may be of interest and through any channel of communication.

With many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Wathlé  
Head of communication

Institut International de la Marionnette  
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**New; \$45**  
**Renewal \$40**

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