
AUSTRALIAN PUPPETEER

Summer 2002 - 2003



**Scholarships Announced
Reviews
Puppet History
What's On
Strings and things
National Puppetry Summit
Summary
and more...**

Front Cover photo, Trophies presented to
Axel Axelrad, Norman Hetherington and Richard Bradshaw
for Life Time Achievement at the National Puppetry Summit

Trophies designed and constructed by Julia Davis



A U S T R A L I A N P U P P E T E E R

The Magazine of UNIMA Australia
Summer 2002 -03

Editorial

The latter part of 2002 seemed filled with puppet stuff - the National Puppetry Summit - which saw puppeteers, makers, designers and teachers from around the country and world discussing the artform, occurred, The Snuff Puppets and Polyglot Puppet Theatre toured internationally and Malcolm C Cook and Associates massive production of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* opened to name only a few goings-on.

In this edition, I have included some of the keynote addresses from the Puppet Summit and well as Summit summaries and reviews. As we were swamped with information from the Summit some of the articles will be carried over to the March edition.

A special thanks must go out to Jenny Gardner and Julia Davis who put together the last edition of the magazine and surprisingly enough, it didn't scare Julia off who has agreed to share the editorship with me for the following year. This means your Autumn and Spring editions will be edited by Julia and the Winter and Summer editions by me. I cannot thank Julia enough for taking on this role as four editions a year is extremely difficult for one person to achieve. Please note the email address for the magazine has changed. (see back pg.)

Thanks again to all those you contributed to this edition. Please continue to supply us with what is happening in your state and I hope you enjoy the Summer edition of the magazine. Sarah

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Contributors

Julia Davis, Lorrie Gardner, Peter Wilson, Richard Bradshaw, Nigel Triffet, Sue Giles, Lachlan Haig, Rod Primrose, Richard Hart, Anita Sinclair, Ken Begbie, The Age Newspaper, The Australian Newspaper, Philip Millar, Sue Wallace, Joanne Foley, Victoria Osborne, Polyglot Puppet Theatre, Terrapin Puppet Theatre, Jim Murphy, Martin Bell

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.

Strings and things

"Strings and things" is a dedicated to the goings on and smaller gigs undertaken by independent artists around the country. No matter how small or large your project is, let the magazine know - we think it's important for your work to be documented. Contact details on pg. 39

MUDGEERABA MARIONETTE THEATRE

About 30 marionettes from the 1950's Melbourne Troupe "The Dynamis Marionettes" have made their way to the Gold Coast in Queensland to undergo a full restoration and become incorporated into the newly formed "Mudgeeraba Marionette Theatre".

Ken Begbie, one of the original "Dynamist Marionettes" puppet creators and manipulators, now directs the "Mudgeeraba Marionette Theatre" which was established in 1998, and performs regularly at Kindergartens and Schools on the Gold Coast area. Ken also conducts Marionette Workshops for 7 to 14 year olds, and has trained over 100 children on the Gold Coast, each making their own marionette.

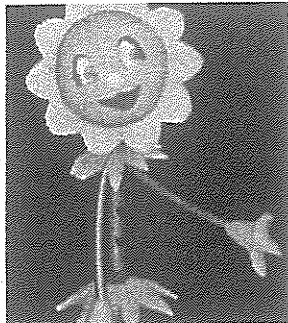
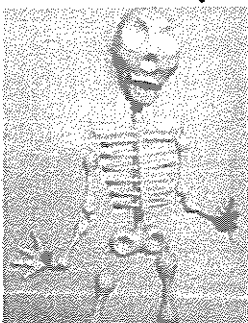
The marionettes from Melbourne performed regularly in the late 1950's on Channel 9 in the TV Series "Candy Cat". The marionette cast included Candy Cat, Goo

Goo the baby Caterpillar, Popsy Possum, Giddy Goose, Perey Parrot, Slippery Sam the Spider, and Walru; Waf the Policeman. The puppets are all carved out of wood with traditional locking joints and papier mache heads. Vertical controls were used with wire rods to move the hands and rocking bars were used for walking. Many of the puppets have specialised features like moving eyes, eyebrows, and mouths. Most were still in excellent condition even after 40 years of inadequate storage and inactivity. The durability and longevity of the papier mache heads has proved quite remarkable. These puppets are nearly 50 years old, and now perform daily with little sign of wear or deterioration.

Another marionette that was recovered and restored was a Graham Kennedy look alike. This puppet appeared in the 1950's "In Melbourne Tonight" show many times doing cigarette commercials with Graham. The puppet could puff smoke from his mouth or his ears.

The Queensland Mudgeeraba Marionette Show includes many "traditional" characters, including a Pianist, Violinist (with trousers that fall down), Trapeze Artist, Expanding Clown, Penguin (playing an accordion), and a Disjointing Skeleton. More recent additions to the troupe include Coppelia the Ballet Dancer (inspired by a recent visit to the Salzburg Marionette Theatre), two Dancing Sunflowers (mother with baby attempting to follow), King Neptune with his Sea Horse, and a Juggler who can catch the ball with either hand, his foot, his nose, or on his stomach.

The Mudgeeraba Marionette Theatre has recently been awarded an accreditation by Education Queensland and the Queensland Arts Council to tour the State Primary Schools in Queensland. However, many of the theatre's performances and workshops are conducted at the numerous Private Schools on the Gold Coast.



Strings and things



Rod Primrose and Company performed *Micro Gravity Mayhem* at Scienceworks Museum, Melbourne throughout January 2003

DREAM PUPPETS

DREAM PUPPETS is busy preparing for a very big year in 2003. Julia Davis's ambitious and quite extraordinary version of *MACBETH* will be ready for launching around June. *IN THE DEEP*, a new production about the ocean, is due for launching in March 2004.

In the meantime, Richard Hart is taking *DREAMER* to Singapore for a two week season this March and will be touring *DREAMER IN SPACE* to schools in every state and territory on the Australian mainland throughout the year. This includes the big combined tour of WA and the NT. This is DREAM PUPPETS' year of going troppo. Cheers all and have a great 2003!



Children at Birregurra Primary School who created a large scale street parade puppet with Anita Sinclair, October 2002

National Puppet

The National Puppetry Summit was a three-day event in Melbourne that brought together puppetry artists from around the country and from overseas. Following are a number of the keynote addresses, speeches and people's summaries of the various forums held throughout the conference. Further publications of summit material will appear in subsequent editions. If you feel inspired or outraged by any of the following material, we encourage you to put pen to paper and submit it to the next edition of Aus Puppeteer.

Opening Keynote Nigel Triffet

About ten days ago Pee Wee rang me to ask what this talk was about.

I said it was about.. half an hour long. Apparently the press had been in touch. 'Will he be controversial?' they asked. 'Of course' said Peter. My spirits sank. Controversial. Sigh. Again.

I'm 53 years old. I earnt my first pay cheque when I was 12. One pound, twelve and sixpence for playing The Young Boy Whose Voice Had Not Yet Broken on ABC radio schools broadcasts in Hobart. I played that part for a couple of years till puberty put a stop to it. Makes me realise that I've a 40 year span of what passes for career - 40 years of stumbling around stages,

raging at the dark. I sound like Captain Ahab.

I've been many things - Child actor, Talented Young Thing Who Should Be Supported (despite his complete lack of discipline) - Boy Wonder, Hippie Expatriate, The Bad Boy of Australian Theatre, Wunderkind, Enfant Terrible - I don't know what came next.. Complete Pain In the Arse probably.

I shot my mouth off from the minute I started doing serious press in '71 and barely stopped for breath until the mid nineties. Every adolescent lurch of my psyche was chronicled. 'Motor Mouth' John Truscott called me and he was right. But you can't be a forty year old enfant terrible. I passed the crown to Barry Kosky with great relief a long time ago -and he did a very

*40 years of
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dark ..*

good job of it during his time on the roundabout. I wonder who holds the poison chalice now? I hope someone has grasped it - it's quite fun for a while - but you do make a lot of enemies. Not everybody forgets. I'm not a bad long-term 'hater' myself. The only problem with leading a life 'on the edge' is that you will, inevitably, fall off.

Suddenly, I was the oldest one in the rehearsal room and the stakes had changed. I'd left the art house circuit behind and gone commercial. It was all TV stars and big theatres. I was The Director, Regista, He Who Must Be Obeyed. Cecil B De Triffitt. Heady territory. Scary stuff.

Times change. I've been working, on and off, with a group of gumboot dancers in Soweto over the last three years. Its a long story. We've done a show called 'Gumboots' that's been running in Edinburgh, the West End, across America, in Asia and now Germany ever since '99. It's in Hamburg tonight. They have a name for me. 'Madala'. Ahh, I thought, isn't that nice. Till I found out it means 'old man'.

You see, right at this moment, I haven't the need to be controversial. I'm not that person any more. Wish I was. Funnily enough, when Pete mentioned controversy I just laughed and said 'how can I possibly be controversial about a moribund art form, drip fed and kept alive only by government subsidy and the strange enthusiasms of most of the people in this room - that not one member of the adult general public gives a rats arse about?'

So I'm sorry to disappoint you on matters controversial.

At this point in my life I guess

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I have a few options available to me - I can go the bitter and narky, tragic 'seen it all before' route - perhaps just become a total public embarrassment, that's always fun - do the audition for 'Boring Old Fart' - or maybe take another road. I rather prefer the Avuncular Eminence Grise. Benign Tribal Elder.

So it's in this latter, newly adopted role I'll talk.

We're a disparate group of people here from all parts of the industry and beyond. I don't know half of you and I'm sure half of you don't know me. I can't hope to talk for you all. By the nature of who I am and what I've done I needs most concentrate on the live theatre this morning so if you're deep TV or film bear with me OK? I know it'll 'get better' but, for your collective sins, I'm first cab off the rank.

I can't talk for all the subsections of this industry, but I can talk to you as individuals. In my mind, keynote speech implies - opening - unlocking the door - interpreting - (well, it also implies music too - but I ain't gonna sing) so I thought I'd take this opportunity to, at least, attempt to shove us all through the same door simultaneously.

I say 'the same door' quite deliberately. 'Cos I have a feeling that, while we all think we know what it is we do, I

suspect that we all interpret 'puppetry' in a different way. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Quite the contrary. It's only less than acceptable if we haven't periodically re-examined that interpretation in light of the fact that 'the Times, they are a'changing'. I used to talk about 'Theatre of the Impossible'. Good line then, good line now. But in the light of all the myriad impossibilities we see every day on the TV and in the cinema, courtesy computer animation, now, I'm not so sure. Perhaps we need to be tackling a different set of impossibilities.

The only topic I'm truly expert at - is myself. I've always

*I suspect that we all interpret puppetry in a different way.
This is not necessarily a bad thing*

found myself a source of endless fascination. Masturbation is not just a genital fixation. So forgive me if I dredge down into my own detail for a moment to make a point or two. I'm all I know.

I was wondering just how I got here. What combination of elements, accidents, destinies led me to this point in time, right here, right now. I've already noted the bizarre time

span - well, bizarre to me anyway - I can suddenly swoop across looking for clues. So just how did I get here? I owned the Australian cast album of 'Little Fella Bindi' by Peter Scriven's 'Tintookies' when I was ten. This may have been what did it. They say childhood trauma lasts a lifetime.

Was that first exposure to puppets in the Hobart Theatre Royal the key? I could show you where I was sitting to this day. I could sing you the chorus to the 'Tintookies' song. But I want you to stay till the end. Certainly it's indelibly etched in my mind. Living proof, nearly 45 years later, of the power of children's theatre. But that was a different age. There wasn't even television.

Were my futile efforts to make my Lamont String Puppet do anything but jerk drunkenly and tangle the real reason I've never once used a string puppet in any of my shows? Or was it Thunderbirds that did the damage? (gesture)

Mr Jolly Squiggle was a childhood fixture once TV came to Tasmania. (we got it later than the 'Mainland') I still don't know how he drew those pictures. That giant pencil err a nose' I blame for every deviant sexual act I have ever committed - and that's saying something - but perhaps not a topic for 10.00 am - in Melbourne. Was Norman

National Puppet

Hetherington the Magus - the magician who changed my life? He deserves to be - that man has brought countless hours, days, weeks, years of pleasure to generations. He's a national treasure. But I don't think he was the one.

The Black Theatre Of Prague was a clue. I saw them in 1966 in Hobart in a world where black light was a sideshow novelty, not a dance floor staple. I don't think I'd seen it before. My first glimpse of the impossible. Things flew and changed shape, merged and disappeared. And it was a European impossible at that. A whole other sensibility. Double hit.

In London I saw The Bread and Puppet Theatre. Hid under their long Chinese
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dragon on a sunny spring afternoon in Sloane Square in 69, the height of the hippie era in London, as we wove our way through the streets to the back stage door of the Royal Court Theatre and onto the stage, from there into the stalls to see (for free) puppetry transformed into politics. The original Street

Theatre - as we know it. The pure roots of the bowdlerised trash that passes for community celebration these days. If I see one more person with a white bird on a pole with a candle up its bum I'll throw up. The Living Theatre were there too. Anarchy and the unexpected. I just wanted to run off and join the counter cultural circus. Maybe I did.

And, still in London, first room on the right after the stairs in the National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, there were the Impressionists, that first moment in art history where the real became the instant, where the world was captured as shimmering, lucent light. Another glimpse of the impossible.

And the Impressionists led me to the Futurists, those nihilist loons in Moscow and Milan, Marinetti and Tristan Tsara, and the idea that anything was up for grabs. Not just the visual arts but all of them, that art could and should be a melting pot of ALL the arts. Scrambled, disemboweled, turned on their head, reduced to their pure essence. Including the theatre.

They had the idea of the 'sintisi':- that is - short play - literally a synthesis. The plays were often only 90 seconds long. Sometimes less. I staged a whole heap of them with Yellow Brick Roadshows in the mid Seventies (with Andrew Hansen in them - say

hello Andrew). And those damn Futurists even did away with actors after a while (something I've considered on many occasion). One of their sintisi featured a blue triangle and a square. In conversation. In 1915. Consider this for a moment, for within this little bit of theatrical anarchy there's a very big idea emerging.

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The Futurists led me into Dada and the Surrealists - all things were plastic, elastic, had a life of their own.

The object was personalised. Transformed. Transforming. Seeking an inner language - a new way to express secret thoughts. The political, the anarchic, the secret world was colliding in my head - creating new impossibilities, constructing an individual reality - or, more to the point - a choice of realities. I think vast quantities of marijuana and the emerging counter culture may have had just a tad to do with it too.

Above all, I was being introduced to forms of theatre and styles of art with a healthy

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cynicism, an uncaring deconstruction of what was there before, an anger and a politics, a muscularity, dare I say it, a 'masculinity'. It wasn't limp. It wasn't effete. It wasn't precious.

It was odd. Bent as buggery. But it was pro-active theatre that made you wanna go back for more. Brains were scrambled, ideas were challenged, realities questioned. And if you're thinking, at this moment, while I ramble on - just what has this got to do with me? Think again - it has everything to do with you..

Now I'm sure that none of this is rocket science to you, but to me as a green 21 year old Hippie Expat. stumbling through (and about to be thrown out of) my second drama school in as many years, it was all transforming, life altering stuff. And you don't know what on earth I'm talking about, then shame on you - go and look it up.

The Australia that I emerged from was a drab, brown place, seared by a servile conservatism, still smarting from its convict history, with little room for art and artists. I returned to a place just beginning to be affected by the giant cultural and philosophical swings of the late Sixties and early Seventies elsewhere in the world. Simultaneously, and largely unaffected by anything

other than his abiding dream another Peter Wilson was starting a company called the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre. I was in my post hippie expat/ boy wonder period, with five or so years of shows under my belt, when, sometime in 1976 he called with a show he thought I might be able to fix.

'Mommies Little Horror Show' was the title. It had a script and a soundtrack and some puppets and I think was based on something by Ann Jellicoe. It was his pet project. He'd tried, and failed to get anywhere with it. It wasn't hard to see why. It was awful.

I accepted immediately. I started work in Tasmania, Salamanca Place, with no idea of what was going to happen, Peter gratefully

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jumped ship and flew to England at the start of rehearsal leaving me 'on my todd'.

Never a good move. By the time he got back there was only the title left. And I only kept that because the ads were already in the papers. The title, three old people puppets and the first half of what became a kind of legend

in Australian puppetry annals. The first Australian show, I think, to take puppetry - or rather my expanded concept of puppetry to a larger, adult, general public, commercial audience. And - more or less - succeed. John Pinder, my dear dear friend, picked that show up and in a stunning act of good faith put it in 'The Last Laugh' playing for months to an audience of over-emotional drunks. It was a big hit. I was launched as 'Enfant Terrible'

Because in throwing out the script and soundtrack and any pretense at sticking to the themes presented me I unwittingly placed myself, and the rest of us in the rehearsal room, into a state of 'theatrical grace' The space to genuinely go where no man had gone before. I knew nothing of puppetry really till then - and, as it unfolded to me, so I carried the revelation over to the audience. The great thing about being thrown in the deep end with a new discipline is that you never know any of the rules, until you unwittingly break them. In the breaking lies the sweet accident of creation when, faced with a looming opening night and limited resources - and the stark raving terror of imminent public humiliation - everything becomes a potential puppet, every accident a potential sequence, each new piece of music you hear a gold mine of opportunity. I plundered and raided the art form with glee.

National Puppet

Let me tell you about Ross Hill. He was a master puppeteer and maker in Hobart. Dead now, died ten years ago of the plague. Great loss. One day, as I was watching, very early in the Momma rehearsals he began to sculpt some polystyrene in front of me. I watched in stops and starts as hands, arms, legs, feet, shoulders, a torso, finally a head all emerged out of this crumbling white block. Over the hours I kept returning as he varnished and sawed and sand-papered and covered and drilled these random shapes. There was a face, a wistful imagined face in the contours of the head, the thin arms and legs were joined, then joined again to the torso. Black rods, arm moving things, wrists movers... then the head. She lay in his lap as he attached the neck and inserted the black control at the back of the head. He looked over, his eyes twinkling, directly into mine as he picked up the controls of one arm and the head - and then he did 'The Thing'.

The magic 'Thing' we all take for granted. He gave it life. He gave the inanimate life. Gave her heart and soul, a personality. She reached out and touched me, flinched away in fear, tenderly returned to her master. I watched, enchanted, astounded - I can still feel it now.

Ross gave me the biggest gift of all. He was the alchemist. Because he showed me into the heart of the art, into its core. Every instant of that moment was in the play. Because, as he called in two other puppeteers and they joined forces - head/arm, - arm/back - legs - to manipulate this simple Bunraku puppet, the next delicious explosion, the next giant cog clicked into place. The puppeteers. The visible manipulators. The dance of those black demi-gods, cosmic ninja with the power to give

He looked over, his eyes twinkling...as he picked up the controls ... and then he did 'The Thing.'

life - and conversely take it away. I already had a dynamic within a dynamic. Who controlled the ninja I wondered?

The MC we called him but he was more than that. Magician, magus, monster - all of the above. I gave the role to Peter Wilson to suck up to him - but he was me of course - or me one step removed. Wave your arms - create the magic. He was the 'metteur en scene' - quite literally. Mastermind. Controller. Not so benign dictator.

I had a tendency, in my megalomania, to devise, design and direct. I love the

hidden art of structuring a show. I choose to think I'm quite good at it. This gives me a kind of God view. I often have the image of a giant hand moving the scenery when I watch my shows, my designs that I have known since they were baby models, in a giant theatre. Its my hand. I am the manipulator. I'm manipulating the puppeteers who are manipulating the puppets and all of us are manipulating the punters. AND charging them money to do it. What would you call this? Puppetry of the Public.?

And just what was a puppet anyway? While we're in the mood for deconstructing. Well, just about anything is the answer to that. Think back to the Futurists. Anything with resonance. Any inanimate object that can be given life. I note that even the humble penis -still warm and apparently attached - qualifies. God, I wish I'd thought of that one. OK - but what if the WHOLE SHOW is a puppet? What if the audience is a puppet? It's all manipulation. What if what we refer to as 'the set' is a puppet? What if every scene change is seen through those eyes?

I was led to the notion of slowly building the image then deconstructing it. Probably because I couldn't work out how to get it all On - and Off - in time. But mostly because, as a designer, this is what I

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see as I make it - an image forming - bit by bit.

Start with nothing - an empty stage - and build it, reveal the picture, piece by piece. Then if you're lucky, knock it down again. I've done a whole lotta shows using that theory. But I digress. Now comes the hard part.

Grown up stuff happens to us all eventually, it's just a matter of time for most of us before we are catapulted into death and destruction of one sort or another. Marriages collapse, kids are born, parents die. We fail, we succeed, we fail. We move from one state into another and glimpse the continuity of life. For me this process began in 1980 when my Dad died and reached one of its many zeniths in 1982, where at age 32, I discovered I was adopted. And, coincidentally, entered the Handspan rehearsal room to create 'Secrets'.

I dredge up this unfortunate personal stuff to make a point. When one is in extremis, when one is hit by the psychic truck, when one is wrenched and reduced one is in a state of tortured grace. It's an empty landscape, a black stage. There are no normal methods of communication to explain it, there is no way to express it. One searches, unwittingly perhaps, for a higher language, a lateral, different language of signs and symbols, of tiny detail and

broad swoop of image - to try and encapsulate the moment - to speak when words are no use. Its the principle behind opera for example - poetry, jazz, ballet.

My first thought, literally, once I had poured my tearful mother into a taxi after she told me - and had a moment to examine my inner landscape, was that I had been here before. I knew this place. I had staged it. Momma's Little Horror Show. I had intuitively tapped in to the space, the language - the secret language. All live puppetry happens in this same space, it all involves a conjoined journey, performance and public together, into a magic space where disbelief is suspended from the outset, an empty space in which anything might happen - because, in the very nature of puppetry - anything can.

Secrets rehearsal passed in a blur. I told none of the cast what was going down, all the time in the same state of white hot grace I found in the Momma rehearsal room, conjuring pictures to sound in a 'despair' of creation. It ran five years on and off, travelled the world playing the art house circuit and still, even at the end I could barely stand to sit through it - so accurate was the recreation of that pain. But it was some of the best work I've ever done.

One moves on, of course, I

barely think of that adoption time now - in comparison to some of the other stuff that's come my way to deal with lately it hardly seems a ripple - but it concreted what I had somehow known. That there is a language - a secret language - that this art form, more, I think, than any other, can speak in. A language of great profundity - provided you have a profound story to tell, the language of sign and symbol, the unwritten core of it all.

*[There is] a
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We possess this great gift. I've been wondering why we don't use it.

It's as if we're on an aeroplane, somewhere high above the ocean with the most magnificent sunset turning the ether into an extravagance of colour - and we turn away, pull down the blind and watch the movie. Anything but walk into that magical light, anything but take in the true awe of your surroundings. We're still doing Sesame Street when we could be tackling Proust.

National Puppet

We can have it all, you know. I'm not advocating any reduction in the children's theatre you do (although I would recommend some of you observe it's 2002 not 1952) nor making any particular comment about the quality of the work - I'm attempting to recarve the path through the jungle I thought I had cleared all those years ago. I have a garden now - I know that nothing is stable, everything grows, overgrows, needs pruning, changes, dies, emerges again from the soil. Its in us. But there are weeds. I'm trying to plant a tree here.

The Next person will eventually walk the lonely road. I want them to be sitting here, now, watching me. I hope they are and soon there's The Show. The show that will take this art form back into territory that it naturally inhabits - and to an audience with an average age of more than nine. I'm just wondering where this solitary traveller might go for lodging. I don't see many places in Australia right now.

You can do the best kids shows in the world and nobody will care. Nobody will notice. Don't fool yourself. Unless you can take the art form back to some grown ups and provide them with insights and images of quality, depth and meaning puppetry will eventually disappear. It needs a public profile - and, with the best will in the world - if all your work is for kids, it wont

get one. That's why I say the adult general public don't give a rats arse about it. Cos they don't. It's an invisible, subsidiary art form - like anything, unless you stick your nose in their face they won't notice. And yet it's all over the place. The opening Ceremony of the Olympics had puppets crawling all over it - courtesy Pee Wee here, and Nigel Jamieson and Meryl Tankard -

*You can do the best
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and me. The Lion King is about to open and claim credit for every trick we've been using for years - and it will succeed - because we have no profile.

All you need is product. There's a giant network out there to take your show. I've been observing it for nearly 8 years with 'Tap Dogs'. The Dogs have been running continuously over that period, 34 countries, up to four cloned companies simultaneously, earning nearly 250 million bucks along the way. It shows no sign of stopping. Tonight it's in Reno in a casino, and simultaneously, somewhere in Spain. It's there for the taking. All you have to do is give the punters something they didn't know they liked. If there's a rarer, more acquired taste to it then there's the art house circuit,

the festival roundabout. All desperate for 'the goods'. If you got 'em, they'll be at your door. Trust me. They're like circling vultures.

But you can't be precious, you can't be small minded. It won't work. If ever a profession has more than it fair share of divas it's this one. It's because you exist in this small enclosed world, devoid of real critical comment and assessment, a world of awe-struck children, I'm sure, but lacking the rigour that exposure to the grown-up world provides. I mean that both critically and within the profession.

Someone coined the collective term - 'a minge and grizzle of puppeteers' - not an inappropriate one, I've observed. And it's because of years of frustration, at not being given the recognition you deserve, at the eternal ignominy of being hidden, or in black or, if you've really succeeded at your job - invisible.

There's a handful of people that have kept this art form going over the last thirty years - and some of them have been megalomaniac assholes while they did it - but they did it. They persevered. Without them none of us would be here. We should be damn grateful. But the world moves on.

Let's try and enlarge our sights for a while, cos I think

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the profession (and that's what I'm suggesting you concentrate on for the next few days) needs us to do that right now. Try not to just follow your agenda for your company or your career, or whatever correct line political 'enthusiasm' you have at the moment - but spare a thought for the umbrella, 'cos it's sick and needs your help.

And please, god please, try not to go on and on about funding. Nobody owes you a living. If you ain't coming up with the goods don't expect to be subsidised for doing it. They've only got you on the drip-feed 'cos they need you for the zoo. One of everything. Don't minge and grizzle about the details, stop obsessing about history, it's gone, it's over, it's mostly forgotten, it doesn't matter - move on - shoot for the sky - look at the Big Picture.

I observe, with some pleasure, that someone has. This Summit door, that I've nearly unlocked for you, has been created, lock stock and barrel by Pee Wee Wilson. You should be on your knees in gratitude. Yeah, I know he had a bit of a hand from Tim here, and Robyn -but I don't think they'd mind if we let it be Pee Wee's day today. Not bad work for a boy from the bush. What matters is that someone is looking holistically at the industry for once. And if his

ambition and drive is mixed up in all this, so much the better. It's not a time for altruism and limp, well meaning banality any more, it's a time for a business plan.

So make one. I'm not gonna tell you what to say, what to do. It's obvious, if you could but see. Big Picture. Let us all be parents of the industry for a couple of days. How do we nurture it? How do we bring new people into it? How do we train them? Where do they go once trained? What options are open artistically for them? Where is our focus? Where's the National company? I could go on.

Change our collective destiny. Go on - do it. I've just about done my dash, events beyond my control seem to have spirited me away and dropped me on a tropical sun deck in Far North Queensland - so now it's your turn.

And let me turn - the key - and open the door to your empty stage. Like all empty stages, it will have the ghosts of all those who have played there before. Embrace the ghosts, feed off their energy, learn from their mistakes - and take their blessing - then turn away. Make your own show.

Have fun, surprise me.

Tinker's New Dress
Written and performed
by Ronnie Burkett

Reviewed by Victoria
Osbourne

As part of the Melbourne International Festival, Canadian Puppeteer Ronnie Burkett performed part of his puppet Trilogy "Tinker's New Dress". Delegates of the Summit received discounted tickets to the performance.

Imagine sitting in the same seat for two and half hours. Imagine. Two and a half-hours non-stop, no break and what's more you're going to come out the same place you went in. You haven't been on a plane or a bus or a car. You've been in the theatre. But you've travelled.

'Tinka's New Dress' is an astounding piece of theatre. It is sensual. It drives the intellect into morality, history and existentialism. It plays into corners of your heart you thought had been closed for years.

'Tinka's New Dress' is a puppet play performed by Canadian Ronnie Burkett. Burkett is an exquisite performer.

At most he's half lit. He may be shadowy but his energy fires a presence that lives way beyond the puppets. His voice showers into a multitude of characters, each as consistent, recognisable and believable as the next.

The pace of conversation is incredibly fast. The show has apparently been going for eight years and the vocal

fencing between characters races along a well-run groove. Keep up. This is actor's jazz for the new millennium. He'll go outside but he's got that solid script waiting like a trampoline.

Continually Ronnie Burkett makes wonderful choices. Sometimes he faces off two puppets, manipulating and vocalising in puppetry tennis. At other times he crouches between two characters swaying silently in their thread sculpture and he voices their duelling intensity without touching a control. You do not doubt him or his personalities for an instant.

You cannot forget this puppeteer and nor should you. What a mind the man must have to forge this story out of our collective history and his collection of expressions.

The politics are barbed and hit home locally with pertinence. His face is sweet and innocent, his humour bawdy and did he really go that far? His timing is musical and his movement muscular.

The set is a Merry Go Round of creatures, bearing a cavalcade of marionettes: a carousel of dreamers, fanatics and friends.

And the puppets? They are divine. They are sculpted into likenesses of your relatives and folk you've met at parties. They shriek reality. Each character is dressed in more than mere clothing. Each costume, each hairstyle, each make up, is completely correct.

You know when you see a film

based on a book you've really enjoyed? Like 'Birdie', or 'Catch 22' or 'Schindler's List' or something and you come out of the cinema and you say, 'but it wasn't the book and it wasn't like I imagined it' - you know that feeling? Well, with 'Tinka's New Dress', you can't read the book (okay maybe you could read the script but that's not the point) but it was just like you would have imagined. The story flowed unstopped by critical knowledge. Only ever increasing admiration. When that occurs you can relax and enjoy yourself. When's the last time you really relaxed in the theatre?

For a historical play 'Tinka's New Dress' is contemporary. For a puppeteer, Ronnie Burkett is decidedly human. If you didn't see it, you're too late.

Tinka's New Dress has been destroyed. Better make sure you catch Burkett's next show. It's bound to be a journey you won't want to miss.



National Puppetry Summit Overview by scholarship recipient Julia Davis

AN INSPIRATION

What? Three days jawing about puppets? Are you mad?

But what a privilege to devote this time to exploring the possibilities of this "superior art form", to hang up the puppets and step back and regard them - gravity defying, limber shapes, capable of arousing huge emotions.

During my three days at the summit I regarded the puppet from various angles:

as a computer generated virtual construct (in Ramon Rivero's fascinating session about the optical motion capture systems used in The Lord of the Rings and again in a presentation by the makers of Farscape);

as an evocative piece in a visual design (in the Design Concept to Realisation forum);

as a vehicle for political satire (in Roger Law's screening of his Spitting Image work) or social and political change (in Gary Friedman's impassioned presentation);

as "the signified" in a critical discourse or review (in the forum about the Vocabulary of Criticism);

and I grappled with the nitty-

gritty of constructing a universal joint (in Philip Millar's Makers' Masterclass).

With fellow enthusiasts I listened to and participated in discussions about building networks with other artists, heard suggestions about marketing and funding and support for emerging artists and developing training courses. We examined issues concerning the status and lifting the profile of puppetry as a legitimate art form. We investigated developing a language to talk about puppets and considered new directions for the puppetry arts. We talked about the problems of "being a lowly puppeteer".....

The summit experience for me was inspiring, inspiritory and inspiring. It was inspiring as a celebration, especially witnessing the 'elders of puppetry', Norman Hetherington, Axel Axelrad and Richard Bradshaw, being honoured for their rich contributions over many years.

It was inspiritory. Ronnie Burkett told us how he "inspires" by breathing with his audience so that the audience breathes as one!

And finally, it was inspiring. Just as we must let the puppet characters be who they are, Ronnie Burkett urged us "to do what (we) want with this

limitless form and to do so

hopefully" 1

Just as the puppet can defy gravity, we too can hope to take off.

Thank you to UNIMA for granting me the scholarship which assisted me to attend The National Puppetry and Animatronics Summit.

Julia Davis

1. The closing words of Ronnie Burkett's address.

National Puppetry Summit Overview

by Artistic Director of Polyglot Puppet Theatre

Sue Giles

The Polyglot touring company flew back from Singapore and went straight to the Puppet Summit at the Victorian Arts Centre. The foyer was starting to fill. Old friends were there, hugs and exclamations, everyone doing that foyer thing with eyes flicking from face to face. People we haven't seen for years. We were there for a few days and no one was quite sure what to expect. Sure we knew the program but what was really going to happen? After a hilariously provocative start by Nigel Triffet and a more gentle, generous contribution from Penny Francis, you could feel the minds buzzing in the room. With a gleam in the eye the summit had begun. It felt good to be there, in the middle of the Melbourne Festival, talking up puppets big time.

The overwhelming feeling from the summit was one of positive enjoyment. The positives of networking, of feeling that we were part of a healthy and vibrant art form that was recognised internationally and that Australia was keeping our puppetry end well up.

Some of the responses I received by email and phone:

- People loved it - networking, being inspired.
- There was some frustration at not being able to contribute to discussion - or at having no point of discussion available at panel sessions.

- That there should be more workshops available.
- There should be more performance and a greater emphasis on physical presence of puppets in space.
- Expense was a barrier to many.

The first Puppet Summit was like putting a show in front of an audience for the first time - one of the most important things that emerged about the Summit is that it gives us all room to improve and extend the event. The organisers must be congratulated for making the 2002 summit happen so well. Peter Wilson, Alex Prior and John Barcham did a great job. At the end of the three days the gathering at the Plenary Session decided unanimously to have another one.

Words that emerged

*Inspiration, Status,
Recognition, Professionalism
Ideas, Puppetry is the superior
art form (Ronnie Burkett)
Hope, All forms are valid,
Limitless
No rules, nothing is impossible
Self-determination*

Some personal favourites among the speakers were Penny Francis, whose combination of calm good sense and fervent love of puppetry put the world scene into perspective. Ronnie Burkett, of Tinker's New Dress

fame, wooed the room with no effort at all and gave us that lovely word Hope. Gary Friedman, who works for justice and a better world through his art and reminded us that as artists we can and should make a difference. Pauline Cady of Snuff Puppets who simply and exquisitely stripped everything away, revealing the point that people are the basis of theatre. Richard Bradshaw, Shadow King, whose gentle and irrepressible humour twinkled through every conversation he took part in and showed us up for the stolid, grim, fools we are.

I loved the "Emerging Artists" panel [Phillip Mitchell, Pauline Cady, Heath McIvor, Chaired by Sarah Kriegler] for their generosity in accepting such a term considering two of the panel run triennial companies and have been working in the arts for years. We agreed with Phillip Mitchell of Spare Parts when he said that he was glad to be "emerging" because if he had emerged he would have stopped. We all loved puppeteer Heath McIvor's enthusiastic blurtings because none of us are in it for the cash and he reminded us of sheer delight. This session was particularly enjoyable because for the first time we broke ranks and sat around and had a lively discussion, ending with a snapshot "where would you like to be" session. Philip Millar wants a

Centre for the Puppetry Arts, here in Melbourne, where people can drop in, use the library, do workshops, gather to talk and network. Rod Primrose wants a creative development summit - where we all form groups and develop ideas for a week. Pauline Cady wants a Puppet Off at the MCG - WA against NSW. Lets do it!

As good as speakers were, there were a lot more excellent people in the room who have fascinating takes on puppetry. I would have like to hear from more working Australian artists, to have had a chance for small group discussion, to be more informally involved. I'd like to have known who was there and what they were doing. Some of these things were suggested at the steering committee level but were sadly not followed through.

It was great having the animatronics and animation sector as part of the Summit - certainly an eye opener and a strong reminder that this is where most people see puppetry for the first time. Fascinating stuff from Ramon Rivera and some juicy goss from backstage of Farscape.

The opportunity is there for us to shape the next summit - we must make sure that those who could not be part of it through financial restraints are

included. We must make sure we support those who take on the organisation of such an event and that the voice of the arts community is heard. One of the suggestions at the end of the Summit was that we

***Inspiration, Status,
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have everyone's contact details - this underlines the need the delegates felt to remain a group.

Puppetry is a powerful form, a delightful and surprising and immensely flexible form. We have the advantage of scale, of emotional connection with all ages and cultures, of working in a huge range of venues and styles, of reaching audiences through television and film, of making community art significant. We have a loud presence in the public arena; puppets are the first to go in any protest march because images can be instantly subversive. We can create magic, do the impossible, galvanise a

crowd. We can keep art alive in Australia as an essential part of inventing ourselves and celebrating our history and diversity. If future Summits can unify and inspire, then its all good.

National Puppetry Summit Artistic Director

Over the three days of 25-27th October, The National Puppetry and Animatronics Summit played out at the Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne, by the Yarra River. The success of the event wetted the appetite of some 180 delegates, coming together from all corners of Australia, New Zealand and other parts of the world.

The event clearly demonstrated the hunger for practitioners and followers of puppetry to gather en masse to dissect and discuss a range of issues around the art form.

Back in mid 2001, a national steering committee was formed to begin the task of setting up a framework for the summit. The committee was made up of members from Spare Parts in WA, Sydney Puppet Theatre, Terrapin in Hobart, Polyglot in Melbourne and other enthusiastic members of the puppet fraternity.

In November of 2001, applications were made for funding support to the Australia Council and Arts Victoria. Further submissions were forwarded to Australian Film Commission and Film Victoria. With the support of The Melbourne Festival and Victorian Arts Centre in place, the program of speakers and events began to take shape.

John Paxinos and Associates agreed to the management of the summit.

The steering committee met regularly throughout 2002 to shape and program the event. As the program began to unfold, so many coincidences kept falling into place; the short visit to Australia of Gary Friedman from South Africa and his excitement about being invited to speak to the summit. Roger Law appearing out the blue and thrilled at the opportunity to present his take on puppetry. We had Ramon Rivero from New Zealand and Nigel Triffitt agreeing to present key papers. Meeting up with Penny Francis in London in October, 2001 and her overwhelming support to be part of this landmark event.

A serendipitous sequence of events began to unfurl and give the summit a strong framework to build upon. With the success of funding and a program highlighting key areas for discussion, the summit program began to take shape.

The Australian Centre of Moving Image gave full support to a film component to the summit under the direction of Janette Dalglish. By August, the program was fully in place and in readiness to be printed and distributed to a data base of in excess of 5000.

Over the previous four months, the database had constantly been informed with updates of how the development of the summit was progressing. We felt confident; the summit would be supported with a strong delegation.

Mall out, although later than anticipated, took place in mid-September, five weeks out from the actual event. Registrations slowly trickled in, gradually increasing to a rush in the final week. The final count of delegates registered for the puppetry summit, was upward of 175.

A gathering of Internationals and national panelists gathered on the Thursday prior to the three day event to kick off with refreshments and chat.

Summit Summary

Director Peter Wilson

On the Friday morning, the delegates gathered in the ANZ Pavilion of the Victorian Arts Centre to listen to the opening address by Nigel Triffitt. His brilliant opening presentation set the mood for an exciting and challenging weekend ahead.

Penny Francis followed with her views on puppetry in the UK and across Europe and the need to address the issues of standards and training in the industry. The afternoon break out sessions offered delegates the chance to do Master classes with national leaders in the field and sit in on forums discussing key areas of the art form. An address at the Australian Center for Moving Image by Roger Law, talking about Spitting Image and other things in the evening followed by the Summit Club, carried us through to the end of day 1



National Puppetry by summit artistic d

Day 2 began with the speaker David Kemper, Executive Producer of Farscape. He was supported by Andrew Prowse, Director and actor, Gigi Edgley. We were offered a brilliant look behind the scenes of this highly successful Sci-fi television series.

Perhaps one of the highlights of the summit followed, with the generous and brilliant presentation by Ronnie Burkett. Many of the delegates had seen his glorious performance in Tinka's New Dress as part of the Melbourne Festival. Ronnie spoke from the heart and soon won over the delegates.

An afternoon of master class and forums followed with plenty of discussion and debate on issues important to puppetry.

Duong Le Quy, a surprise speaker, talked about the traditional Vietnamese Water Puppets. Librettist and Puppet Director for the Chamber Made production, Motherland, part of the Melbourne Festival, Duong talked about the process and technique of the water puppet, used in the production.

The Saturday evening had been allocated to an honoring of Australia's puppetry elders. An audience of close to 200 gathered in the pavilion at the VAC around 8pm to acknowledge the contribution made by 3 of our most celebrated masters of puppetry in Australia. Norman Hetherington, Richard Bradshaw and Axel Axelrad were honored and recognized for their contribution to UNIMA and puppetry in Australia over the past 50 years. A moving celebration indeed. Following the presentations, the summit club rocked on till late with performance from a number of artists attending the conference.

The puppet summit presented in the Spiegel tent on both the Saturday and Sunday, a delightful and entertaining program to packed houses.

Delegates staggered out of bed on the Sunday, an hours less sleep due to the change over of clocks to daylight saving.

The final day began with a discussion on the need and value of the art form to speak from the heart, followed by a fascinating presentation on the Politics of puppetry, from Gary Friedman of South Africa. The afternoon followed a similar pattern from the previous 2 days with forums and master classes, with a final wrap up with an opportunity for delegates to present concerns and issues.

It was a tremendously successful and enlightening event for a delegates attending. As for what the summit achieved or may have set out conquer, I believe many success evolved over the weekend and will continue to do so for months to come.

There was opportunity for colleagues to re acquaint with old friends. New friendships were forged. Deals were discussed and done behind closed doors. Many new and young emerging artists, perhaps interested in finding out more about what puppetry had to offer, were exposed to a wide range of established practitioners.

The summit offered many solo performers the welcome to feel part of a wider arts community willing to embrace

Summit Overview

Director Peter Wilson

Recommendations presented at the plenary to commit to another summit in 2 years, was overwhelmingly supported. The need in the next 3 years to have an international puppet festival, somewhere in Australia seemed an important outcome.

The legacy of Handspan Theatre lives on in the form of Fellowships at Swinburne University. A \$12,000 fund for UNIMA, known as the 'Handspan Visual Theatre International Study and Travel Grant' for study travel to artists wishing to further their careers. The grant will be awarded annually in the amount of \$2000 for each of six years, beginning in 2003 and concluding in 2008. A \$5000 contribution from Handspan Theatre to Swinburne Library for Puppetry books was made available.

The announcement of a 2-year post graduate curriculum at the Victorian College of the Arts, to begin in 2004, created great excitement.

Helen Rickards, co founder of Handspan Theatre, is currently writing a book on the History of Handspan, published mid 2003.

A new book on puppetry and visual theatre in Australia, covering the past 30 years, written by Geoffrey Milne and Peter J Wilson will be published mid 2003.

We have a wide range of activity and initiatives to look forward in the near future.

An event like this summit would not have happened if it had not been for the brilliant vision of the Victorian Arts Centre to create a Fellowship for an artist to undertake a program of activity over a twelve month period.

The National Puppet and Animatronics Summit was just one part of the fellowship program presented. And I can't stress nearly enough, that by placing the summit at the Victoria Arts Centre, puppetry has been given a new and refreshing view in the public face. The art form is given greater visibility and dare I say it, a sense of legitimacy by the public.

I know the value and importance of puppetry as part of the broader performing arts community. But are we certain the wider public does. The Victorian Arts Center's embracing of Puppetry over this twelve month period has already moved the public's awareness forward.

The press coverage for the summit received 34 separate comments on radio or in main national papers. That is rare indeed. Perhaps there is a new maturity in our approach to convincing the press of the importance and value of this great art form.

I'm overwhelmingly convinced that there was a need for the puppetry community to gather together over these three days for all the reasons above.

Let's keep alive the great leap forward made by all over this weekend. The need of support for colleagues. To assist our emerging artists to discover there is the potential to make a career out of this delicious art form. And to continue to honor and celebrate in the development of puppetry by the wide range of artists practicing their art.

I thank you all for attending the summit and wish you well in the world of dolly waggles.

Puppet History

by Richard Bradshaw

MANTELL'S MANIKINS IN AUSTRALIA IN 1926 AND 1929.

In 1999, when the National Festival of the Puppeteers of America was held in Seattle, an exhibition called The Art of Puppetry was presented by the Arts Council of Snohomish County in the industrial town of Everett WA. Everett is on Puget Sound and about 30 Km north of Seattle on the way to Vancouver BC. The puppets exhibited belong to Alan G. Cook of Los Angeles. Alan has an enormous collection of puppets and I understand it is soon to be displayed in a permanent home in the LA area. Some of the Jewell Manikins (which came to Australia in 1918-9) were also displayed at the Everett exhibition.

There was a special reason for having the exhibition in Everett. It was here that the famous Mantell Manikins began, and the catalogue for the exhibition was called 'The Mantell Manikins Return Home to Everett'. Some of the information which follows has been gleaned from the exhibition notes researched and written by David Dilgard of Everett Public Library. The Mantell Manikins toured in Australia in 1926 and 1929.

Mantell's real name was Leonard B. Ayres. His parents had moved their family to Everett in 1901 when young Len was about 16. His father found work as a bill poster at the Central Opera House while his mother did dress-making from home. Young Len Ayres had jobs with a coffee company and in a cigar store, with extra work as an usher at the Central. (The coffee company, Bargreen's, helped to fund the 1999 exhibition catalogue.) At that time Len was set on becoming a magician, and had thought of using the stage-name 'Mantell', borrowing it from Robert Mantell, a well-known Scottish-born actor who died in the U.S. in 1928. By a quirk of fate he was a star of the film 'Under the Red Robe' which was showing in Melbourne when Mantell's Manikins were first there. Bill Farleman, the stage-manager at the Central, encouraged Len to build a marionette show and allowed him the use of the theatre's prop. room. Both David Dilgard and Paul McPharlin agree on this point. According to McPharlin (in The Puppet Theatre in America) Farleman and Ayres became the joint owners of what were first called - with a startling lack of originality - The Royal Marionettes, but after three years Farleman dropped out.

However, according to Dilgard, it was a young friend Will Lamb who, over a year, helped Len put together The Royal Marionettes, and Mantell and Lamb's Royal Marionettes (in about 1902, with Len about 17) set off on a tour of western U.S.A. and Canada, returning to play in the Central, Everett in June 1904. (Dilgard has the advantage of being able to refer to Everett newspapers of the time, so the involvement of Lamb seems certain.) At this point Lamb seems to have parted company with Len Ayres who was still



The Bull-Fighter Photo by James Arrabito for the Everett catalogue

interested in concentrating on conjuring.

McPharlin has a curiously brief mention before his piece

on Mantell: 'Waiter Lamb played from 1902 to 1922,' but he makes no connection, and no other mention of Lamb. According to notes in a program for Mantell's appearance at the Tivoli in Sydney in January 1926 Mantell started out as a 'small boy' to become a magician but was influenced by a small touring puppet show to work with marionettes. With a partner he set off out on tour to find disaster. His partner left him

[sometimes 'Mannikins']. In time the length of the show was severely cut down from an hour to about twelve minutes so that it could be included as an act on the burgeoning vaudeville circuits.

Mantell toured throughout the states and in 1912 he also played in Cuba, Central America and Mexico. His parents moved to Lake Stevens where he met Esther Van Valey whom he married in 1923. According to the the

ordered a copy of the photo and may be able to get permission to reproduce it in a later issue.]

As a boy the great American puppeteer Bit Baird saw Mantell's Marionette Hippodrome when it toured to the Midwest. In *The Art of the Puppet* he recalls fast-paced music, dancing and trick marionettes. Boxes at either side of the stage contained the puppet audience which applauded the acts. At one side was a man



The Russian Ballet Dancers. Photo by James Arrabito for the Everett catalogue

It would seem that partner was Lamb. As with other shows of the day (e.g. Waiter Deaves' Marionettes which visited Australia earlier in the century) The Royal Marionettes took the form of a show-within-a-show, with its own puppet audience. It had about 40 figures.

It was variously billed as Mantell's Mechanical Midgets and Mantell's Marionette Hippodrome but finally Ayres settled on Mantell's Manikins

literature, Len and Esther Ayres, with an additional puppeteer, toured the world together: Europe, South Africa, Asia and Australia.

So far I have found no mention of Esther in Australia. A Tivoli program says that 'Ayres Mantell' is assisted by Arthur Johnson. I have found a good backstage photo of the 1926 show in Australia and only two puppeteers are shown, presumably Len Ayres and Arthur Johnson. [I have

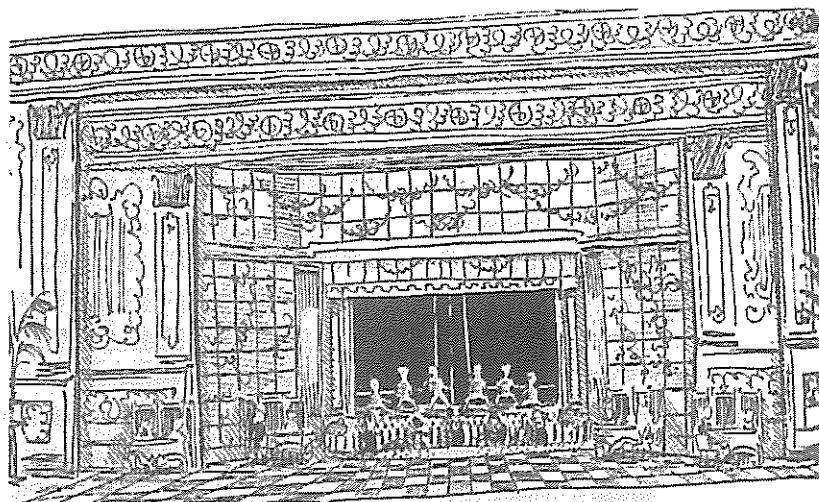
whose neck would extend when the shimmy dancer appeared; his wife would then clobber him on the head with her handbag. The orchestra ... worked with one wire ... was conducted by a very lively conductor who was worked from the side.

The loosely-jointed puppets were operated using two simple bar controls, but the show was very polished. Bit was especially impressed by the mop-headed pianist, 'the

most hilarious I have seen', who attacked the piano, even diving at the keyboard from a distance, and finally danced on the keys. Bit also remembers the finale of 'eight' Russian dancers who were on stage for all of fifteen seconds. (in fact there seem to have been only six.)

Bit is describing a show which seems pretty much like the one McPharlin talks of as playing in Texas in 1925, under the title *La Petite Cabaret*, although the puppet audience is seated at tables (as in the Australian photo mentioned above). Almost certainly this is the show that came to Australia in 1926-7 when the bad French was corrected, in Sydney but not in Melbourne, to *Le Petit Cabaret*. McPharlin records an announcer, Fatima the humorous oriental dancer, a boy who changed the placards announcing the acts, a dissecting skeleton, the pianist, the Dixie Duo cakewalkers, a bull-fight, a comic crash of two planes, and the Russian dancers.

Certainly the 'uproariously funny' bull-fight was in the Australian show, as was a balloon episode with a puppet of Ben Turpin, a cross-eyed, moustached comedian from silent films. (The Ben Turpin figure, in a striped suit, is in the Australian photo.) Other figures at the 1999 Everett exhibition, which may have been appeared in Australia



A sketch from McPharlin of Mantell's "*Le Petite Cabaret*" [sic] On stage is probably the "Russian Ballet". The puppets at the table, not marionettes, were possible manipulated through holes in the front-drop concealed by the small standing screens.

were a trio of marching toy soldiers, an Hawaiian dancer and a trick juggler.

While some of the puppets look a bit naive and doil-like there can be little doubt that the show was topclass entertainment. Bit Baird described Ayres as 'pure American folk artist.' In 1936 a puppeteer wrote: 'good vaudeville manikin stuff - moves like lightning - snap snap snap and the shows done. Tricks mostly, some automatic.'

The Mantell Manikins first toured for the Tivoli circuit in Australia in 1926, opening in Sydney on 28 December 1925 for a 3-week season in a vaudeville show, playing twice daily, at 2:30 and 8 p.m. One of the printed programs has a piece headed 'PLAYING WITH DOLLS'. It begins: 'It may seem strange to the average public to find behind stage at

the Tivoli Theatre a man between thirty-five and forty playing with dolls... .' In a country which had lost so many young men in war a decade earlier, keeping up masculine appearances was clearly important.

The Manikins finished on a Saturday night in Sydney and opened the next Monday afternoon in Melbourne, presumably travelling there on the Sunday night 'sleeper' train. After a week there was a break (Adelaide?) then it had a return season in the Melbourne Tivoli, transferring to His Majesty's to appear in the pantomime 'Aladdin' from 10 February.

Len Ayres was back in Australia in 1929 as part of a tour which also took in South Africa and some Asian countries. Once again the tour began in Sydney, this time at the Haymarket, a cinema in

George Street, where the marionettes appeared with two films. It opened there on Saturday, 12 January, 1929, the day of a fatal shark attack at Bondi Beach.

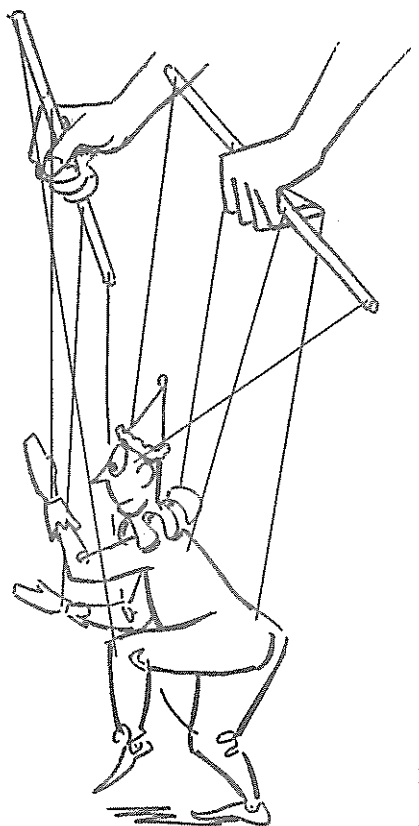
The Everett catalogue has a faintly printed montage of posters on the inside cover, and one is for shows at the Bungalow, presumably a cinema somewhere in Australia, under the management of Birch, Carrol and Coyle. This was a company for exhibiting films but the dominant partner, E.J. Carroll (1868-1931), was a highly respected and trusted entrepreneur who also sponsored live entertainment, and it seems likely that the whole 1929 Australian tour was under this management.

The show was billed as Mantell's New Manikins, 'One of the Greatest Acts in the World' and the marionettes were on for thirty minutes. The show now included Xingsford Smith's Pacific Flight' (no doubt a spoof). [The actual flight had begun in the U.S.A. on 31 May 1928, and ended in Brisbane 83 hours later.] There was also 'A Day at Randwick Racecourse'.

Thanks to the Everett catalogue we have a description of the horse-race. The backdrop rolled across to give a sense of movement. The horse's tail would spin around as the jockey whipped it, talcum powder gave the impression of steam from its nostrils, and when it crossed the finish its eyes rolled and the tongue stuck out. Another

horse, Spark Plug, didn't even start.

From about 1940, when the show was called the Puppet Revue, Len and Esther Ayres would only perform for special occasions. Len Ayres, was 82 when he died in his home at



A sketch by Bill Baird showing how the Mantell puppets were manipulated

Moses Lake WA in 1967. Alan Cook had bought the surviving Mantell Manikins from an associate of Ayres in 1962.

Postscript: According to one local report, Mantell had studied the history of puppets 'as far back as 600 B.C.' in China. He claimed they arrived in Europe when small dolls were used on a miniature stage 'by an Italian named Marion, after whom the marionette of today is called.'

Perhaps the man's name was really Marionetti?

WARM UP EXERCISE

*Exercise for putting
sound into an
object*

Each person takes a rod or a length of dowel.

In pairs, balance a rod between you, each holding it lightly in your right hands.

The "sound maker" of the pair, makes an "ahhh" sound. Transfer the "ahhh" sound into the rod by transferring sound down the arm into the rod. This occurs when you focus on the rod. This focus allows the rod to be filled with sound.

Repeat the exercise with the other person putting sound into the rod. Your partner should be able to feel the sound vibrating in the rod when the exercise is done correctly.

REVIEWS

**THE STRAITS TIMES,
Singapore
MONDAY 21 OCTOBER 2002**

*The Silence of these lambs
isn't child's play*

By Suhaila Sulaiman

If performing for adults is tough, performing for children is an even greater challenge.

For one, they are fiercely unforgiving when it comes to anything that bores them. Put up something that lags behind in pace and timing, and they'll declare their disapproval by fidgeting and talking.

Which is why one can only be impressed with the silence and stillness at the Esplanade's packed Recital Studio during *Fin*, the first performance of the doublebill *Fin And Muckheap* by Australian company Polyglot Puppet Theatre.

Without words, hand-puppets took the centre of a miniature stage to tell the heartwarming tale of a Hand who plants a flower which later transforms into a little boy.

The magic of puppet theatre is in the intricacy and precision in manipulating the props and manipulating the objects believable as characters. Polyglot's two performers Sarah Kriegler and Megan Cameron - delivered.

And while the children looked to the details of the performance, adults would have appreciated the positive messages in the story about determination, love and independence

The lively *Muckheap*, a tale of two people trying to clean out their garden shed, proved to be an even bigger hit with the children.

Using the junk that the characters were considering throwing away, an elaborate story of *Jacky And The Beanstalk* funnier and funkier version of *Jack And The Beanstalk* - was whipped up.

Again, the Polyglot players displayed deftness of hand as minds as monsters were fashioned out of old watering cans and little girls out of newspapers.

Energetic throughout, the half-hour interactive story-telling session drew squeals of delight and peels of laughter proof that the highly-demanding young audience was thoroughly satisfied.



**THE AGE, Melbourne
January 2 2003**

Mythical, magical puppetry

By Jim Murphy

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

*Dramatised by David Parker,
music by Ian McDonald, lyrics
by Philip Judd.*

Directed by Nadia Tass.

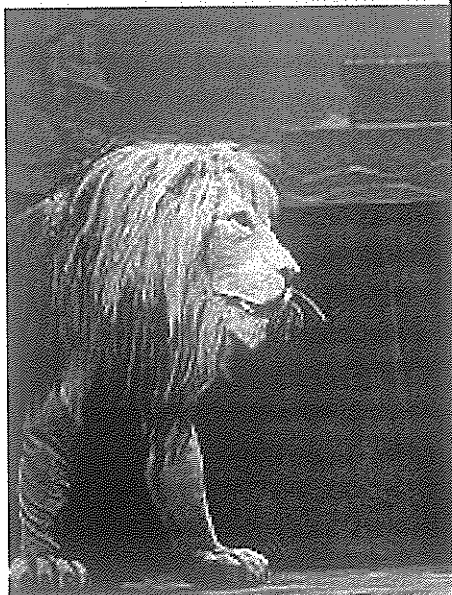
*State Theatre, Arts Centre,
until January 31.*

Just as Lewis Carroll did for the children of Victorian England and J. M. Barrie did for the young Edwardians, C. S. Lewis fired the imaginations of post-World War II children with his stories of youngsters spirited away to adventures in the magical land of Narnia. In common with Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan, Lewis' stories allow young readers to identify with the children in the story, but engender the secure feeling that whatever dangers may be encountered in Narnia (or Wonderland or Never Never Land), there is always the comforting warmth of home when it is all over. It is a classic precept of children's make-believe.

Lewis, however, wrote in a more serious vein than Carroll and Barrie, and his allegorical fantasy *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, with its evi-

REVIEWS

dent Christian subtext, does not transform easily into a light-hearted family musical. There is its rather somber tone, for one thing, and the difficulty that many key characters are creatures of mythic proportions that dwell in Narnia, the fabled land where it is always winter (but



never Christmas), thanks to a spell cast by the wicked White Witch.

This handsome world premiere production tackles that problem by the ingenious use of puppets - small, life-size and gigantic. Some have people inside them, but others are moved around the stage by actors dressed head-to-toe in black. Puppetmaster Philip Millar and his team are to be congratulated for the way they have put the Narnian creatures on stage - timid Mr Tumnus the faun, the cheerfully domestic Mr and Mrs Beaver, the nasty wolf Maugrim, the irascible dwarf, the centaur, leopard, fox and

assorted flying critters are well conceived and deftly performed. Yes, you can see the manipulators if you care to look, but the puppets are so persuasive that after a bit you forget there are people behind them and just enjoy them as characters.

Quite magnificent is the huge lion, Aslan, the Messianic lord of the forest who allows himself to be sacrificed to save the children, then rises from the dead to triumph over the machinations of the White Witch. This marvellous creation with such expressive eyes is operated by Nicola Fearn and Warrick Williams and voiced by Dennis Olsen. Spectacular, too, is Rumblebuffin, a giant so massive that you scarcely credit there is only one actor (Bruce Paterson) inside.

Nadia Tass' direction and the adaptation by David Parker stick rigidly to Lewis' book. The sole innovation is an imaginative opening sequence depicting the London Blitz in a style reminiscent of early German impressionist films. This dramatically sets the story in the testing times of the Second World War, when siblings Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy (Joseph Connell, Yolande Brown, Brian Rooney and Meaghan Davies) are evacuated from London and billeted at the large country house of a wise and understanding old professor (the very model of avuncular

austerity in the person of Dennis Olsen).

While playing hide and seek, Lucy and the other children discover that an old wardrobe is a portal to Narnia, where they come to the aid of the downtrodden animals and take up arms against the evil, self-proclaimed queen.

As the White Witch, Amanda Muggleton plays to the flamboyant hilt in a style that - perhaps because the memory of her Master Class triumph is so vivid - suggests nothing so much as Maria Callas in pantomime.

With vim added to the Narnian ensemble by Kim Walker's troupe of acrobats from The Flying Fruit Fly Circus, director Tass and designer Hugh Colman create a gratifying spectacle, but the human side of the show really doesn't sweep you away as a fantasy should. The jolly-hockey-sticks exuberance of the four young adults playing the children seems closer to an Enid Blyton parody than to C. S. Lewis, and the script never quite escapes the pull of the written page.

Musically, it is disappointing. The songs are an undistinguished bunch that, instead of advancing the story, tend to stop it dead. Only one - Peter's act two solo, *Fire in My Soul* - seems truly germane to the play.

REVIEWS CONTINUED

And the show cries out for some decent singing. Any musical deserves at least one good voice. Unfortunately, this one is vocally underequipped and overamplified - not an ideal combination.

**The Australian
Friday 3 January 2003**

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

By Martin Ball

FIFTY years after they wrote some of their most famous books, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis are still doing good business. The second installment of the former's *The Lord of the Rings* is in cinemas everywhere, while Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has come to life in a stage show that premiered in Melbourne on New Year's Eve.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe has recently been staged in London by the Royal Shakespeare Company with a large cast and orchestra. This Australian production cannot boast the same resources but it doesn't lack for imagination. Produced by Malcolm Cooke and William May - the same team who made Tolkien's *The Hobbit* a few years ago - the show uses puppetry to conjure the strange beasts, and songs to carry the drama forward. Lewis's story is set in England

during World War II and tells of four children who are sent to a large house in the country to escape the bombing in London. They stumble through a wardrobe into the land of Narnia, where animals can talk and a wicked witch rules, making it "always winter and never Christmas". After many adventures they become kings and queens of Narnia, before returning home to England. This production has a lot of strengths. The four children are all good, especially Meaghan Davies as Lucy. Amanda Muggleton is a suitably threatening White Witch, imperious but with the right touch of melodrama. Denis Olsen doesn't really have to try as the wise and kindly Professor.

The real stars are the puppets designed by Philip Millar. They evoke the world of Narnia so aptly, it is as if Lewis imagined them. We first meet Mr Tumnus, the faun. In the hands of puppeteer Leighton Young, Mr Tumnus is wonderfully expressive and delightfully dainty on his little goat feet. Not so dainty but equally appealing is the 4m giant Rumblebuffin, played by Bruce Paterson. The various hags and ghouls of the White Witch's army are likewise fascinating, dancing and flying across the stage in spectacular fashion. And not to be forgotten is the lion Aslan, played by two puppeteers perched atop a moveable cradle. Aslan's glinting eyes and great shaggy mane are impressive,

though his rear is a bit wrinkly. David Parker's adaptation is respectful of the book and includes all the key scenes and dialogue. There are moments, however, when this fidelity seems to make the show drag. But, like a Harry Potter movie, this show must cater to an audience that knows the story backwards and in this regard it does not disappoint. The Christian allegory at the centre of the story is handled deftly - as in the book, you can take it or leave it.

Ian McDonald's musical score picks up Turkish themes that crop up throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It is characterful but with a sameness to much of it. Philip Judd's song lyrics are rather clichéd and his vocabulary is too obviously different to Lewis's stylised discourse. Hugh Colman's set and costumes are all beautiful - it's just a pity that the stage seems a bit empty at times for want of a larger company. Such criticisms aside, the show has a broad appeal to all ages and received a rapturous ovation on opening night.



In Memory of a Dear Friend

Janet Lamont Axelrad

14 February 1926 - 24 January 2003

It is with great sadness that I am writing to tell the puppetry community about the death of Janet Axelrad, the much loved wife of Axel Axelrad.

Axel and Janet met in the late forties in England while Janet was the manager of the airport facility for Hawker-Sidley, now British Aero Space. Axel was working as an engineer instructor at the same facility airport. Axel migrated to Australia in 1950 and Janet soon followed him here where they were married. They had two children, both girls, Chris and Robyn, and there are now two grandchildren.

They began to make puppets part time. As their business grew it was named Lamont Puppets, after Janet's maiden name. Janet's accountancy and business skills were of great value to the growing puppetry venture. The quality of their work was immaculate and they were soon exporting puppets around the world.

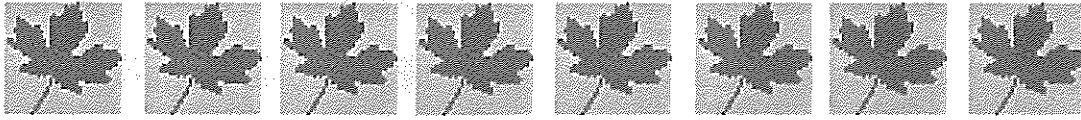
When Axel became treasurer of UNIMA in the early 1980's it was Janet who took the books in hand and sorted out UNIMA's accounts. Janet loved to entertain puppetry visitors in their home in Olinda, She will be sorely missed.

We send our sympathy to Axel and his daughters and their families.

written by Laurie Gardner

The Jonquiere World Puppet Week Festival

Quebec, Canada, 28 June-7 July 2002.



By Joanne Foley

Jonquiere is a 5 hour drive north of Montreal, up in the Saguenay region of Quebec. This is a region of forests, mountains, lakes and rivers. It was mostly hot, T-shirt and shorts weather, and hard to imagine the place covered in snow and ice in the winter. It was the first time the Festival had offered UNIMA scholarships and I was a fortunate recipient. The scholarship gave me entry to all Festival events, accommodation and a food allowance. I had to get myself there. This 7th edition of the Festival was programmed in association with the Festival Marionnettissimo, Toulouse, France. Many of the productions, Quebecois, French and others were/are on both Festivals' programmes. Marionnettissimo is also biennial and takes place this November. On arrival I was warmly greeted by the Festival organisers, given a cash food allowance, a room in a share apartment, and the Festival programme, with the task of organising a diary for the duration of the 10 day Festival.

The Festival included 18 indoor shows, 4 outdoor shows, Canadian and French animation/puppet films, demonstrations, forums, a documentation centre and a Festival Club. My 2 favourite shows were 'Les Histoires de la Petite Charette' (Stories of the Little Cart) by Brazilian company A caixa do Elefante, for children and family audiences, and 'Certaines Aventures de Madame Ka' (Certain Adventures of Madame Ka) by French company Aerostat Marionnette Kiosque, for adult audiences. They were very different one from the other, but both were full of humour. 'Les Histoires de la Petite Charette' was a series of 3 stories each presented by the master of ceremonies, a charming, talking dog with a mischievous, detachable tail. The puppets were gloves, animated by 2 puppeteers behind a playboard with minimal set. The stories were based around encounters of the good and bad, with good triumphing over evil ie. bumbling ghosts and a devil are thwarted by a girl and a boy. Just the construction of the ghosts' wobbly skeleton jaws in that story was enough to make me laugh. The show had a fresh, spontaneous, improvisational feel. Any difficulties the performers had performing in a foreign language, French, for the first time, only added to the humour. I imagine that this improvisational feel is always present and would be even more so when performing in Portuguese, especially after a World Cup win. Brazil won the World Cup the day before I saw the show and the baker puppet character in the second story was duly called Ronaldo and sported the players' jersey. It was simply good fun. 'Certaines Aventures de Madame Ka' was complexly good fun, with an emphasis on complex(es). The performers' adaptation and interpretation of the text was raw and efficient. The puppets and set were table top and, aesthetically, were appropriately distasteful. The piece followed a day in the life of Madame Ka, a middle class Parisienne woman about 50, whose dysfunctional life followed a very functional, punctual schedule. Laughing at the ridiculousness of someone else's life may seem cruel, but it was a fictional life. However, it was no doubt the closeness to a non-fictional life reflecting back that made it work so well. The 2 performers' young company discovered a wonderful new text and found a delightful way to share it. Their show, 'Certain Adventures of Madame Ka', is a great recommendation to read the full text 'Madame Ka' by Noelle Renaude, editions Theatrales 1999. I must get it to read about her other adventures!

The cinema programme was on at 10pm 5 nights of the Festival and was a free, mostly outdoor event. This part of the programme was not only a nice way to unwind at the end of a day, but was also stimulating. There were many films, mostly short, using a variety of animation techniques. Two film makers, veteran Co Hoedman and a younger maker, Patrick Bouchard, were at the Festival. A documentary on Co Hoedman and his work and an exhibition of the puppets, props and set for Patrick Bouchard's 'Les Ramoneurs Cerebraux' (The Brainwashers) gave a good insight into their animation work. The crossover between live and filmed puppet theatre is complete when you start thinking of which productions in one or the other medium you would like to play with in the other.

Marcelle Hudon, from Quebec, presented a demonstration of her work and research on automated puppets which are animated by the vibration of speakers. Different frequencies regulate the vibrations transferred into suspended figures. Some of these automated puppets appeared in one of the Festival films. Marcelle is continuing to develop these 'orchestral puppets' and I hope I have the opportunity to see where she goes with them. It was a particularly interesting project.

The afternoon forums held during the Festival included the following topics: sensuality and puppet; death; the hero; cinema of animation and the solo puppeteer. I attended several of the forums which were informed and casual discussions on the subjects between interested professional artists and general public. I especially appreciated the one on death: how does this character manage to stay eternally young? The use of the character of death is more prevalent in some cultures than others. It was good to have a Brazilian and a Mexican, in whose cultures this character is prevalent partaking in the forum. The discussion focused on the character of death, which is different from the word death itself, however it was also interesting to talk about the meanings of associated words such as death, dead and the dead. Comments such as: death is scary because we can't see it, but by showing it, it's less scary; people still live as long as they're remembered; death makes us think of life; we can think of death to live better and that the character of death is life...were amongst the many thoughts shared. Some of my work is as a clown doctor, mostly in a children's hospital, but also in nursing homes. Although I haven't yet, clown doctors are also working in palliative care. I began thinking of a mould of a skull I made that's been sitting in my shed for years. Time to finish it and bring it to life?

There were several puppet festival programmers at the Festival and I managed to present promotional material to most of them, as well as to other interested people. Three of the programmers would like to see my latest show 'Have you seen a Dog?'live. They will be at the World Festival of Puppet Theatres in Charleville-Mezieres, France next year, where I hope I'll have the opportunity to show it to them. So I did do some practical work!

As at most Festivals, one of the highlights of the Jonquiere Festival was the people I met. Although the programme schedule was very busy, there was still plenty of time, over a bite to eat or a drink at the Club for conversation, contacts and friendships to be made. My article on the Festival would be incomplete without mentioning the Association Quebecoise des Marionnettes, Quebec's UNIMA Centre. Its members' involvement in the Festival was considerable. They ran the documentation centre, hosted and literally animated the forums, and a 20th anniversary celebration of their organisation during the Festival.

Quebec is a francophone province and it's culture is quite different from the rest of Canada. It would be misleading if this article presumed to reflect Canadian Puppet Theatre as a whole. This was very much a Quebecois Puppet Theatre Festival. The artform is certainly alive and kicking there. Special thanks to Louise Lapointe, Artistic Director and Denise Lavoie, General Manager of the Festival and to Alberto Cebreiro from the UNIMA Commission for Cultural Exchange, who, through the UNIMA scholarship, made my trip to the Festival possible.

What's On

VICTORIA

Polywork - Wrapped

A new play from the creative energies of Polywork which is a series of workshops for practicing artists from a variety of art forms. Wrapped is an abbreviated evolutionary tale of obsession and retribution, entirely made of paper. Big Brother becomes Big Bunny. Wrapped is part of Qfusion for Midsumma Festival and Studio Polyglot.

Dates: Jan 21 - 25
Times: 8pm
Venue: The Black Box, Victorian Arts Centre
Cost: \$19 & \$16 conc.
Devised and performed by ensemble: Amanda Armstrong, Nick Barlow, George Filev, Michael Firth. Director Sue Giles

Studio Polyglot - 10 Minutes Max

An eclectic night of new short plays in puppetry and performance from an inspiring team of independent artists. Each play lasts only ten minutes maximum and the program is incredibly diverse. This season includes a shorter version of "Wrapped" by Polywork. Puppetry entertainment for the whole family - Warning! Little children may be scared...

Dates: Feb 5 - 8
Times: 7.30pm
Venue: Cromwell Road

Theatre

27A Cromwell

Road

South Yarra

Cost: \$15 & \$10 concession

Artists: Graeme Davis, Joe Blanck, John McDonald, Amanda Armstrong, Jai Hartnell, George Filev, Michael Firth, Nick Barlow.

Stop That House - stage 2 - script and puppet build.

Partnership between Polyglot, City of Stonnington and the National Trust property of Como Historic House and Garden.

This is the second stage of development from this exciting site specific show. This year we work on the script and build the puppets, ready for rehearsal and performance in 2004. Don't miss twilight at Como with Polyglot puppets on two days only. Ticket price gets you in to Como for 2 hours - bring a picnic, see the house and meet the puppets for Stop That House.

Dates: Sat May 31 & Sun June 1

Times: House and garden opens 3pm - 5pm.

Roving starts at 3.30

Venue: Como House.

Lechdale st, Toorak

Cost: \$12 (\$9 health

card concession only)
Puppet Design Philip Millar.
Director Sue Giles.
Dramaturgy Julianne O'Brien.

Baggy Pants Creative Development

Sponsors Australia Post and The City of Melbourne
This show involves kids from several schools and groups in the research and development of the style and story. Told with puppetry, dance and masses and masses of clothing, Baggy Pants will take the audience on a strange and delightful adventure. Venturing into dark places at the bottom of cupboards, transforming the space and creating a brave new world. Rehearsal and performance in 2004 - watch out for this one!

Dates: March 24 - April 12

Design - Vanessa Beck.
Writer/director - Sue Giles.
Choreographer - Philip Adams. Composer - Jennie Swain. Puppeteer - Colin Sneesby. Dancer - Gerard Van Dyck. Puppet Maker - Graeme Davis. Lighting design - Phil Lethlean

TASMANIA

Terrapin Puppet Theatre

Touch the Air is Terrapin's latest puppet theatre work. It has been a very special project that explored contemporary Aboriginal values and perspective's. It toured to 35 schools around Tasmania in October and November, including performances on Cape Barron and Flinders' Islands.

The project was the product of an extensive consultation and development period. Starting almost 2 years prior to the first performance, a reference group helped the company by advising on artist make up, content and consultative approaches. Jadah Milroy was engaged to write the piece and came to Tasmania on a number of occasions to research, consult and collaborate with the other artists. As she is not Tasmanian Aboriginal, it was decided that she would write a story that reflected her own values but that resonated with Tasmania . She was particularly inspired by Cape Barron Island in her research.

Jadah's brief was to write a piece that explored Aboriginal values and perspectives with a particular interest in spirituality. The narrative she generated follows Tilly, a young girl whose mother recently passed away. Tilly faces the challenge of leaving her island home and moving

to the mainland with her father. The final work is a multi layered piece, shifting between combinations of music, songs, voice over, puppet characters and object work. Around a central set element of a circular net, characters interact with the natural habitat of their island home. Tasmanian wildlife such as the mutton bird, fish, crabs, octopus and the paper nautilus shell feature. Throughout the piece a collection of shells and objects from the sea are built up on the net reflecting, among other things, the mobiles and collections that are so popular with the children on the islands.

A number of trainees worked closely with the project. Megan Robinson was trained as a performer and then continued on to tour with the work. Ruth Langford worked closely with the composer and wrote all of the songs whilst coordinating the voice overs by Aunty Phylis Pitchford and Tamika Burgess. Joselle Brewer and Brooke Robinson worked closely with the project in its early conceptual and creative development stages. In response to this experience, Joselle has written her own puppet theatre script which we hope will eventually be developed with mentors and produced with Tasmanian Aboriginal artists.

NEW SOUTH WALES and ADELAIDE

Well here we are on the edge again in down town Parramatta! This is the first leg of the "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Fish" tour before tripping off to Montréal and New York!

The show is a production of Windmill Performing Arts Company the new Australian Performing Arts Company for Children and Families based in Adelaide.

Based on the illustrated books of Eric Carle the show is a montage of his work using puppetry and visual theatre. His most well know story of course being 'The Hungry, Hungry Caterpillar' The piece was directed by Simon Phillips with puppetry direction by Peter Wilson. Parramatta being the geographic centre of Sydney was was a successful choice by the Sydney Festival to present the performance. It was received well and we average approximately 500 - 600 per performance. The show will then be performing in Montréal at the 25th Annual International Showcase of Performing Arts for Young People. Followed by the zenith in February of a three week season at 'The New Victory' theatre off Broadway in New York!

It's great to see Australian productions, performers, and companies taking the international stage! That's all for now!

Lachlan Haig

INTERNATIONAL Sydney Puppet Theatre in Seoul

In September, 2002 a brand new theatre opened in the middle of an 8 story building in a very ritzy area of Seoul, Korea. Known as the Latt Children's Theatre, it has been built with the express purpose of presenting theatre for children in English with native English speakers. With the new theatre comes permanent artistic, production and administrative staff. This venture is Korea's first truly professional theatre with shows purpose built for the space. It shows a real respect for creating theatre for young audiences.

Korea has a population of 50 million, 15 million people live in Seoul. An ability to speak English can now mean the difference between getting a promotion or not. Parents are keen to give their kids the very best possibilities in life.

The company at the head of the project, Unibooks, is principally involved in publishing English teaching books and tapes. They also have a very large network of tutors who work one on one with their students via the telephone. The President of Unibooks, Mr Park, is a forward thinking and dynamic man who believes that learning should be fun and engaging. Hence the formation of an English speaking theatre company to produce works in English that will stimulate the audience's desire to speak the language.

To achieve this he has gathered a team of very well respected theatre practitioners from Korea and Australia.

Using Australian artists for this project is a very interesting and adventurous move since American English is most predominant in Korea. The Artistic Director of the theatre is Roger Rynd of REM, an Australian theatre company which has worked on and off in Korea for the last 9 years. The company of performers is comprised of 6 Australians and 2 Koreans, all multi-skilled artists with a mixture of talents including puppetry, acting, acrobatics, dance, music and singing. The musical director, Peter Winkler and dramaturg, Catherine Pease, are also Australian.

The first show is called "The Little Dragon". It is loosely based on a series of books (designed for English language acquisition) written by a now elderly American woman, Mrs Ferrar, who has been living in Korea for over 40 years. She still works 5 days a week at Unibooks and is now in her 80's.

Creating a show with the express purpose of language acquisition has been quite a challenge. Of primary importance, the show must be theatrically exciting and satisfying for the audience. It is teaching by stealth. The language chosen and the way it is augmented during the performance has to be carefully plotted. Too much English could isolate the audience. It can neither be

too simple nor too complex. The show is followed by a 10 minute workshop with the audience, teaching them some of the songs with simple movements. This is very successful and children and adults alike willingly stand and participate. This show is intended to have a long run (6 months) and to stay in repertoire so there will be the opportunity to constantly fine tune.

Some of Korea's best designers have been engaged for "The Little Dragon" including Shim, Yun-Jeong (lighting), Yee, Tae-Sop and Yun, Shi-Jeong (set), Sau, Young-Barm (video) and Choe Suyon (costume). The theatre has abundant state of the art facilities so the show has been able to incorporate video, fabulous sound, gorgeous lighting, smoke machines and a flying harness for the little dragon himself.

Getting the puppets made was a bumpy ride with the designer and the builder being less experienced in the art form than the puppeteer performers. It took some convincing that the puppets not only had to look good but had to move well. Thanks to good will on all sides the puppets were made and are now performing.

Along with the creation of the new theatre, a new rehearsal studio and recording studio have been built on the floor above the theatre. Incorporating the computer based recording studio into the rehearsal space was a

stroke of genius. During rehearsal and more importantly during tech week in the theatre, the musical director could make changes within minutes.

Briefly, "The Little Dragon" is about a little dragon that arrives from outer space in a dragon egg. He is born and immediately befriended by the dragonflies (rod puppets). The Dragon's quest is to find a dragon just like him. Unbeknownst to the Dragon, he is being pursued by the Collector whose quest is to add a dragon to his collection of animals. With the help of the friends he meets on his quest, the Dragon defeats the Collector and sets his collection free.

While the 2 major characters (the Little Dragon and the Collector) are actors, many of the other characters are puppets. There are also miniature puppets of the 2 major actors which are used in scenes where the action is too big for the human scale in a small theatre. For example, when the dragon goes to the sea, there is a mini dragon in a mini boat with a mini collector swimming after him in pursuit. They are used again when the Dragon breaks free of the Collector's trap and learns to fly. The Dragon frees himself from the Collector's hold and flies into a smoky spotlight.

The various environments visited by the Little Dragon (the cave, forest, on and under the sea and the city) are achieved with a series of

sliding flats. Under the sea, the lighting changes to UV and the puppeteers wearing fluoro diving masks operate schools of fish (multiple rod puppets), the turtle and the octopus (large hand puppets), the eel and the enormous, beautiful fish. The stage floor and the costumes are all patterned. There is no puppeteer black in sight!

The whole style of the performance is quite open. The audience can see the cast moving flats and putting on masks. The puppeteers are never hidden. There is a lot of singing in the show and at times members of the cast act as chorus singing backing vocals and watching the stage action.

There are over 70 musical cues in this 65 minute show. Two sound operators juggle 8 radio mics, a 24 track, 2 CD players and a mini-disk player. The play is underscored like a film with different atmospheric music for every environment and each major character has its own theme. There are 10 songs sung live to recorded music. Also on stage, in view of the audience, one of the actors is working with about 10 percussion instruments for added sound dimensions. For example when a character knocks on something this is augmented by a live percussion sound.

Dealing cross culturally has been a joy in many respects and very frustrating in others. Sometimes, Rynd directed the cast unconsciously using Korean phrases. It didn't take

long to understand these instructions. In general, English has been the language used for communication with the help of translators where necessary. This slowed things down somewhat at times and sometimes we all thought we agreed on some point and found we'd agreed on different things. Health and safety was also an issue. Standards and expectations are obviously quite different between Australia and Korea. Again both cultures worked hard to understand the other way of working and to reach agreement on a safe work environment.

The cast and technical staff now meet regularly to discuss problems and give feedback about the show in a really positive and lighthearted way

The Australian puppeteers on this project are Steve Coupe and Sue Wallace (Sydney Puppet Theatre and "One Van" International Festival of Puppetry) and Melissa King. The other performers are David Vivian Russell, Kurt Duval, Sophie Martin, Choi, Eun-a and Kim, Song-Pyo.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Unima Membership

Membership fees have been increased from the start of 2003. We had held the fees constant for many years, but printing costs have increased, exchange rates changes have increased the cost of affiliation with Unima International, and membership fees were no longer covering costs.

Fees are now as follows:

\$35- for a year for new members

\$30- per year for renewals.

This includes your subscription to Australian Puppeteer.

Please add \$5- per year for postage to New Zealand, Asia and the Pacific, or \$15 per year for postage to Europe, America and Africa.

Couples who both want to be full members of Unima but want to share a magazine, please add \$10- to the normal membership fee.

Company membership is available for \$75- for the first year, and \$70- per year for renewals.

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Free Gallery Space

Polyglot Puppet Theatre newly painted foyer space is
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Exhibit your paintings, drawings, etc.

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AUSTRALIAN UNIMA EXECUTIVES

Treasurer

John McDonald
PO Box 208 Elwood
Elsternwick 3185
johnmcd@melbpc.org.au
03 9818 7514

President

Lorrie Gardner
72 Heathwood St
Ringwood East, 3135
Ing@labyrinth.net.au
03 9870 8998

Editors

Sarah Kriegler & Julia Davis
PO Box 208
Elsternwick, VIC 3185

Sarah Mob: 0402 853 119

Julia Ph: (03) 9570 2568

Email: austpuppeteer@yahoo.com.au

Secretary

Mary Sutherland
1/31 Broadway
Elwood, 3184
03 9525 7595
msuther@ozemail.com.au

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