

SPRING 1997

# AUSTRALIAN PUPPETEER



FACES OF AUSTRALIAN PUPPETRY

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

#### WHAT IS THE FASCINATION OF PUPPETRY?

"What is it, then, that an inanimate puppet can express and a flesh-and-blood actor cannot? What is its power? Strange as it may seem, its power lies in the very fact that it is inanimate.

On the stage, a man may portray another man but he cannot portray man in general because he is himself a man. The puppet is not a man and for that very reason it can give a living portrayal of man in general."

*Sergei Obraztsov*

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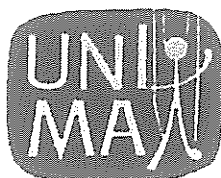
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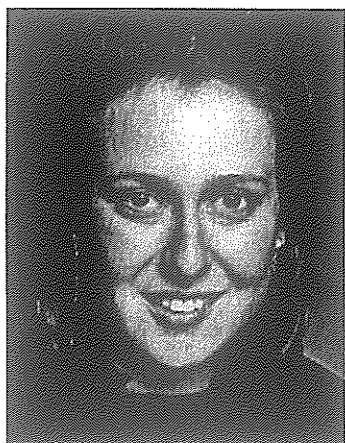


## CONTENTS

<b>FAREWELL</b> A Message From Our Retiring Editor Jenny Anderson .....	2
<b>AND HELLO</b> From the new Editor Anita Sinclair .....	2
<b>POSTCARD FROM THE PRESIDENT</b> From Mexico and Australia Sue Wallace .....	3
<b>SECRETARY'S REPORT</b> Home and Away in Australia and Lithuania! Dennis Murphy .....	4
<b>FESTIVAL REPORTS</b>	
International Festival, Mexico City 1997 Sue Wallace .....	6
Seoul Puppet Festival, Korea 1997 Richard Hart .....	7
The First Shri Lankan Puppet Festival 1996 Janet Macallister .....	16
Update on Proposed Canberra Festival Peter J Wilson .....	21
<b>REVIEWS</b>	
Gardner Puppet Theatre: Is That A Dinosaur's Egg? Denise Rundle .....	9
Luke Devery: Masks Anita Sinclair .....	15
Terrapin Puppet Theatre: Filth Eleanor Downes .....	14
Terrapin Puppet Theatre: Cool Magic Lucinda Watson .....	20
Denise Rundle: Esme: Duck Day Anita Sinclair .....	22
<b>BOOKS</b>	
Making Rod And Hand Puppets by Axel Axelrad Reviewed by four teachers .....	8
<b>HINTS</b>	
Puppet Builders share their expertise .....	10
<b>HISTORY</b>	
D'Arc's Marionettes In Australia by Richard Bradshaw .....	12
<b>WORKING FOR ART SKOWNSEL</b>	
Dennis Murphy .....	21
<b>IN MEMORY OF</b>	
Kay Littler .....	18
Percy Press Junior .....	19



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



## FAREWELL

As you can see, this is a new-look UNIMA Magazine, thanks to the new editor, Anita Sinclair. Anita is an experienced, published writer on puppetry whose involvement in numerous forms of theatre goes back many years. UNIMA is lucky

to have someone so capable to take over the magazine, and I'm sure it will reach new heights under her editorship.

The past two years have been very rewarding ones for me. I got to know a lot of puppeteers from all over Australia, and I hope that the magazine helped others to make contacts as well. I get a couple of UNIMA related calls per week, many of them directly related to the magazine, so it's gratifying to know that it is providing a service as well as general interest.

Thank you to all the people who have contributed to the magazine over the past two years. It has been heartening to receive more and more articles from new contributors, as well as having the continuity of regular articles, such as Richard Bradshaw's historical ones. It is good that members seem to be realising that the magazine is for them, and so can be filled with their own thoughts and interests.

We now have a regular Tasmanian correspondent in Lucinda Watson – a terrific development. There are also reviewers in most states now, which really helps to achieve Australia-wide representation. (If there are any regions who feel under-reported, perhaps someone there could offer to be the local correspondent.)

Lastly, I'd like to thank Kym Tonkin, Jennie Pfeiffer, Dennis Murphy and Richard Hart for their invaluable support, both practical and moral.

Good luck, Anita!  
Jenny Andersen

## AND HELLO

Thankyou, Jenny Andersen for the warm introduction. I think no-one understands better than you the nature and extent of the job I have inherited. According to Dennis Murphy's comments (page 4), you are responsible for the 'bumper' size of the magazine! It looks like you can take credit for the amount of enthusiastic contributing that has already filled my post box for this issue and got a head start on the next. Over your two years the magazine has developed from a journal that was a bit difficult to fill, to a magazine that attracts articles of great quality and interest, some of which it has been painful for me to cut at all and some that simply must wait for the next edition. I hope you are already enjoying the time made free for your performance projects and the LIFE you can now return to. Congratulations and Good Luck!

To the readers of the magazine: I hope I will be able to provide the service that you need and both hope and expect that you will advise me accordingly. Letters are very welcome; I really want to hear from you.

You have already seen the liberties that I have taken with the front cover: THE NAME of the magazine. I confess I took advantage of the changeover of editor in order to create a name for the magazine that is informative about its origins and content. I hope it helps new and prospective readers to recognise the nature of our work and the value of the magazine.

Jenny had asked me to give you a background on myself, which I must do, but it also can wait for the next edition; this is Jenny's goodbye, I will tell you about me later.

Thankyou everyone for your actual or implied vote of confidence, I will do my best. Keep me informed, offer help, it's needed! Offer items, offer illustrations, give till it hurts! I'll bundle your words and pictures up into something I hope we can be proud of,

Regards,  
Anita Sinclair





# POSTCARD FROM THE PRESIDENT



Steve and I have just returned from Mexico where we were invited to perform at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary International Puppet Festival of Mexico City. There were 13 visiting companies from 10 countries and 8 Mexican companies including Teatro Muf whose Artistic Director, Mihail

Vassilev organized the Festival.

Strangely, the visiting companies were not encouraged or given transport to see the Mexican companies. Keen to meet Mexican puppeteers I found my way to two 2 person performances by groups Palleti and Taueni. Over an entertaining lunch with these 4 performers we exchanged UNIMA info in broken Spanish and English. They only have about 30 members at the moment and their current organisation is a phoenix story with a new UNIMA growing out of one that declined under the weight of in-fighting and power struggles. They are very excited about the current state and potential of UNIMA Mexico.

There seems to be little government funding for puppetry companies in Mexico and most survive from school performances, festivals, local government functions and, of course, weddings, parties anything. School touring around Mexico City (a city of more than 20 million people) seems to operate something like the Queensland system where companies are approved, then given itineraries by the government. Palleti had just received their approval for this coming year and were breathing a large sigh of relief.

Following Mexico we were to have had 5 days in Japan including a good-will performance in Tokyo and a visit to the Puppetry Carnival in Iida to perform and to meet with UNIMA Japan. Our performance in Tokyo went as planned but not Iida. The traffic in Japan changed our plans. The normal 3 – 4 hour bus trip to Iida from Tokyo was taking 15 hours in summer traffic. Jetlag, fatigue, finances and good

sense contributed to canceling Iida and coming home a few days earlier. I was very disappointed not to have connected with UNIMA Japan to discuss any matters relating to the Asia-Pacific region.

Our hosts in Tokyo, Yoshio and Masako Hoshikawa of the Nyo-Dou-Go-Mo puppetry company took us to stay at their home for 2 days and indulged us with food and transport – 2 jet-lagged days of sitting for hours and hours in Tokyo traffic, sushi, beer, hot baths and standing in temple grounds talking on Yoshio's mobile to his English interpreter who lives in Florida. This graciousness and generosity is the essence of UNIMA and we will both be slow to complain about Sydney's traffic in future!

## Back to Australia

Firstly an enormous thank you on behalf of all the membership to Jenny Andersen (as editor) and her Melbourne team for their contributions in maintaining the quality of our magazine. This is the most demanding role to play within UNIMA and Jenny has donated many weeks of her life to ensure we received news of our art-form from home and abroad. As a small token of the membership's appreciation, Jenny has been presented with a book voucher from a performing arts book store in Melbourne.

Welcome to our new editor, Anita Sinclair. It is a privilege to have someone of Anita's knowledge willing to give of her time and experience to the publication.

Lucinda Watson from Tasmania also offered her services as editor. She has agreed to 'get her hands dirty' by being the Tasmanian correspondent for the magazine.

Sue Wallace

## THANK YOU TERRAPIN

UNIMA Australia thanks Terrapin Puppet Theatre for their generous donation of \$650 towards our operating account to support communication

# SECRETARY'S REPORT



First of all let me welcome on board our new Magazine Editor, **Anita Sinclair**. Anita is well-known in the Arts and Puppetry world. The success of her book, "The Puppetry Handbook" proves both her Puppetry and writing skills.

Many thanks to **Jenny Andersen**, our retiring Editor. (Though she will continue to help out.) Jenny was Editor for just over two years and brought a lot of energy and enthusiasm to the job as evidenced by the 'bumper' issues she became famous for.

I am just back from remote Queensland (again). Along the way I had a delightful day and lunch with **Norman and Nancye Berg**, now retired to the hills behind the Sunshine Coast. I missed **David Poulton** (again). He was playing primary schools in one part of my secondary school territory but our schedules were incompatible. In Innisfail I met **Mary Snowball**, puppeteer and high school art teacher. Mary performs locally in her spare time and is currently trying to get a youth puppet group going in conjunction with the annual Innisfail 'Splash' Festival.

Just before I left for Queensland our UNIMA Treasurer, **Richard Hart**, passed through Sydney on his way to Korea. It made me reflect on how much Australian Puppetry is getting out into the world. Our President, **Sue Wallace**, has just been to Mexico. **Skylark** hit Canada and Europe. **Murray Rain** performed in Singapore over May and June. The **Poultons** are regulars in Canada and Taiwan. **Richard Hart** is already due to pass through again on a return visit to Korea.

## Australians Abroad?

It's great that so many Australians are getting seen overseas. And it's great for them to be able to take in some puppet festivals. Will we ever have a puppet festival in Australia or will we all have to go OS ??????????

From my UNIMA correspondence I find there are two frequent misconceptions that non-Australian puppeteers have about Australia. The first is that we are only the size of a European country. The second is

that we have an annual puppet festival like other countries.

I can cope with the size issue by sending a postcard showing a map of Europe with Australia superimposed on the same scale. But I can't explain our lack of puppet festivals.

I suspect it's a difference of Culture. This revelation came to me last year when Janice and I visited our sister company, The Kaunas Puppet Company, in Lithuania. A brief account: Our train was met by the Artistic Director who took us to our hotel, booked and paid for by the Theatre. We were taken to the best restaurant in Kaunas for lunch. (I remember the meal vividly because we have just come from a fortnight of Russian cafeteria food.) We were then given a tour of the theatre and its museum. We met the founders and were compelled to accept spending money.

Each day of our five-day visit we had an English-speaking guide to take us places. We saw the museums and art galleries of Kaunas including a special meal at the Folklore Museum. We had a picnic in a meadow, visited the Old Capital and saw (and ate) the lot. Janice and I had to beg for free time so we could do some exploring on our own.

Meanwhile, the publicity about my upcoming appearance was being churned out. Each day there was an article in the newspaper. We were mentioned on the radio. (I only recognised my name, "Australia" and "leliu" the Lithuanian word for puppet. Had they mentioned "alus" the word for beer my entire Lithuanian vocabulary would have been exhausted). The day before my show I performed and had an interview on TV. (Followed by that day's episode of "Home and Away" in Lithuanian - I kid you not). They managed to fill the 250 seat theatre for my performance.

Now, can you imagine my chagrin, should my Lithuanian colleagues suggest they visit ME? I'd be up for hotel charges, theatre hire, publicity, pocket money, guides, meals. Plus all the time and effort generating 'media interest'? All while I am doing two or three shows a day? You see what I mean about a cultural difference?

Another example: An Italian colleague, **Paolo Papparotto**, lives six km from the city of Treviso.

Last year he wanted to organize a one-day puppet festival featuring six puppet companies from the region. He didn't even drive the six km into Treviso. Paolo took the idea two km the other way; to the local village. There the council and library agree to sponsor the day.

Four months later they sponsored weekly performances over seven weeks with a different company each week. This year they organized a festival featuring 23 companies and a band!

I wonder what would happen if I approached my local council and library here with such a proposal? You see what I mean about a cultural difference? Still you never know . . .

Let's get out there and ask!

**Dennis Murphy**  
(as seen on Lithuanian TV)

## SUGGESTIONS

Lucinda Watson of Tasmania writes the following suggestions for the magazine. Thanks Lucinda; as you see some things are happening already.

It would be great to get more people submitting articles; perhaps from people in theatre who are involved with physical theatre and mime in relation to puppetry.

Perhaps in each issue you could approach a puppet company and ask for them to write an article on a subject regarding puppetry. It's difficult to predict the response with this as people are often so busy.

Why not have a page concerned with construction techniques? Or approach a designer from a company for each edition and ask them to write a short article on their favourite materials to work with or the most challenging puppet they have made?

## AFRICA/AUSTRALIA CONNECTION

Swanzy Ahaligah (letter to UNIMA Australia, March 1997) has written to Anita Sinclair, responding to the gift of her *Puppetry Handbook*. He is very keen to extend his knowledge of puppetry, having little opportunity to do so at home base. He has asked again for information about **training opportunities** in Australia, either with a company or as part of tertiary studies at university. Anita has his address if you are able to help with either information or an offer.

## NOTE TO AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMERS

Ray Da Silva's International Puppet Bookshop, UK

This is just to explain how easy it is for us to do business across the world. I have a bank account in your country, so I am happy to accept Australian dollar cheques. **PROVIDING THEY ARE MADE PAYABLE TO: M. PALMER.**

When you order books, I add up the amount in sterling and then convert it to dollars using the average of the banks 'Buy' and 'Sell' rates on that day. This procedure gives you a more favourable rate of exchange than you will get elsewhere and it also saves you having to pay the bank for doing it. I send you the invoice by airmail showing the above calculation and tell you the cost for sending your books by surface mail or airmail. You choose which service you would like and send me your cheque for the appropriate amount. I will mail the books to you on the day your cheque arrives. At the moment I do not add a handling or packing charge.

Ray provides more information, comparing Australian book prices. Also, he informs us that he has 'a cupboard full of back issues of puppet magazines from several countries'. These are available for sale.



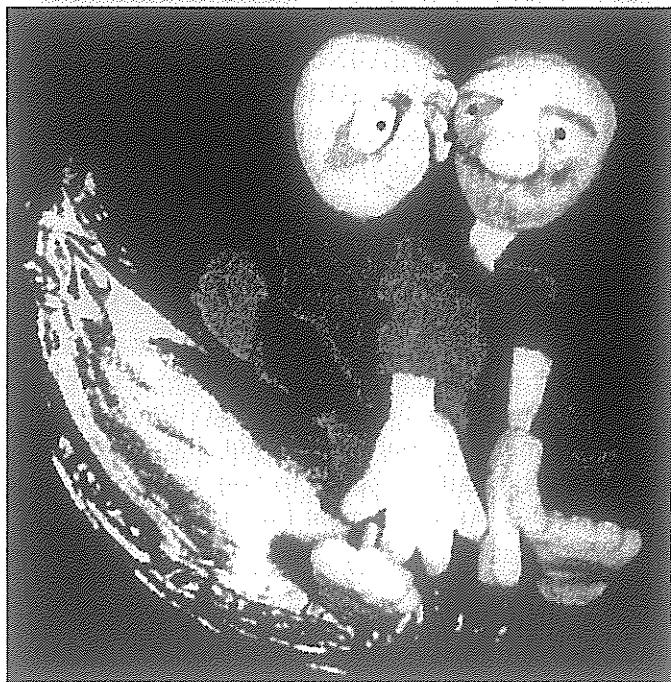
## NOTICE

Lucinda Watson, Tasmania, is offering to make available to readers a copy of *THE PUPPETRY STORE 1997 CATALOGUE* published by Puppeteers of America Inc. This lists books and information on construction methods, patterns, instruction sheets, religious education, the business of puppetry, scripts, video tapes, etc.

Phone: 03 63 268 195

email: lwatson@postoffice.utas.edu.au

# MEXICO CITY'S 10<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL



When I was younger and about to embark on my first overseas trip a fellow thespian, keen to talk me out of my adventure, told me with authority that there was nothing to be encountered overseas that I couldn't find in Australia. I'm very pleased I ignored his advice and have continued to broaden my horizons dealing with life in foreign modes.

Mexico City – big, hellishly polluted, attractive only in scant corners – cannot dull the spirit and enthusiasm for life that is inherent in the Mexican people. What an experience to perform to an audience that loves and respects artists and embraces each performance with an open heart and mind. This spirit is not generally encountered amongst Australian audiences. Maybe that is why, in general, our performance energy is so strong – we have to work hard to get a response, especially from our adult public.

The Artistic Director of this Festival was Mihail Vassilev of Teatre Tuf.

The Festival, run without government assistance, is huge, with 29 performances happening in the main venue, a 750 seat theatre attached to the National Institute of Fine Arts. This was not the only venue. Most international acts were contracted for 4 or more

performances with only 1 (or maximum 2) occurring in the main venue. Other performances were booked in various theatres around the city or in other towns 4 – 8 hours drive away. The performers were paid and food and accommodation were provided, but we had to pay our own air fares. As this was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary festival, the organizers invited their favourite performers from the last 9 years to return. We were one of 3 new groups invited.

If there is one word that could characterise the festival it is 'esperar' – waiting. In 4 languages we waited for information, for food and for transport but in the end we mostly always got to our destination and certainly were chauffeured to all our performances.

The great pleasure of the festival was sharing the bill with *Figuren Theatre Tübingen* – Frank Soehnle and Karin Erching from Germany. Of all the performances we saw in Europe last year, this company was the most outstanding. They brought 2 shows to Mexico, *Night Visions* and the new work *Flamingo Bar*. Each was characterized by exquisite set, forceful design and courage to test the art form. Those who have long hailed that the manipulation and acting skill, quality sound/mu marionette is dead should see these works. They will find themselves at a christening and not a wake.





# PUPPET FESTIVAL

The other outstanding production was *Visual Poems* by **Compania Jordi Bertran** from Barcelona. An hour long, table top show without text, based entirely on the manipulation of alphabetical letters cut from sheet foam. This is a series of connected vignettes that has apparently been playing for some years. New pieces are continually replacing old and are first tested on the audience as encore pieces. They will play the new piece 20 or 30 times before it finds its way into the show proper. Again the manipulation was superb and the concepts well rounded. They incorporated both live and recorded music and continually reminded the audience that superb puppetry can be created from the most simple of materials.

We learnt our show *Oh Rats!* in Spanish. The show is written with us asking direct questions of the audience and to our wonder and surprise they answered us – Spanish and we understood them – in Spanish! We were told that our Spanish was very understandable, although with an English accent (oh rats!). It was such a pleasure to perform. Our show is a comedy and the audience was with us every joke of the way.

In general the quality of performances at this festival was higher than many of the 50 plus shows we saw in Europe last year.

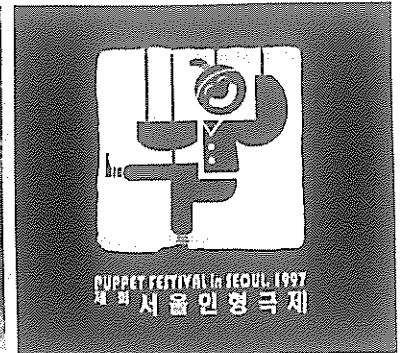
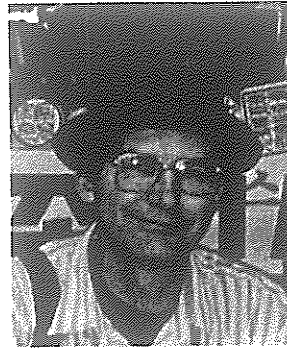
Sue Wallace

## Oh Ratas!



*Sydney Puppet Theatre*

Photographs on facing page: Top left, Mexican Group Palleti; Bottom right, Compania Jordi Bertran, Spain.

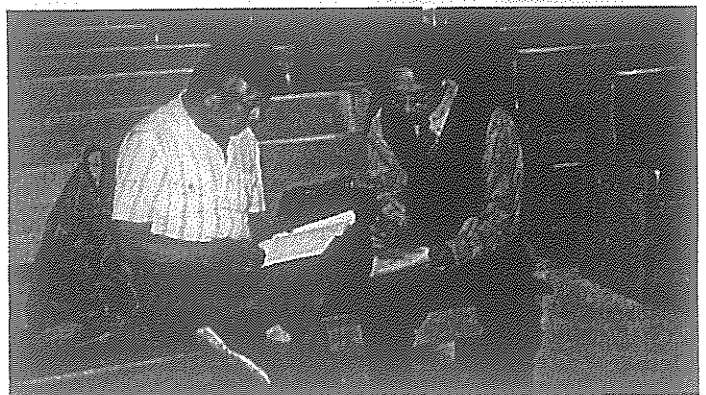
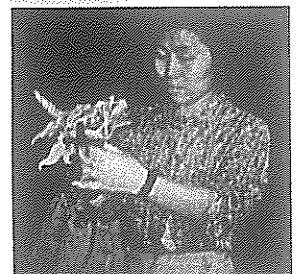


## HART IN SEOUL

**Richard Hart** attended the 8<sup>th</sup> Seoul Puppet Festival in May 1997. His black light theatre puppet show, *Dreamer*, was so well enjoyed by his audiences that he has been invited back to Korea this year and to Russia in 1998. Congratulations Richard.



*Above:* Korean puppeteers examine Richard's puppets.  
*Right:* Studying Devil puppet from USA Punch and Judy.  
*Below:* Mr Ahn, Festival Organiser, in his brand new theatre.

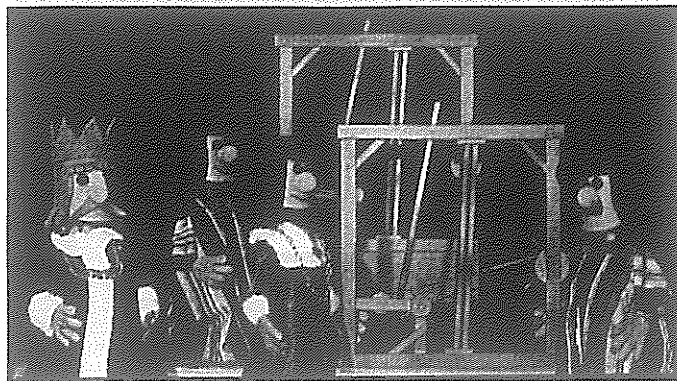




# PASSING THE TEST

Four Teachers review Axel Axelrad's book *MAKING ROD AND HAND PUPPETS*.  
Order direct from Axel Axelrad: \$19.95 plus postage,  
151 Coonara Road, Olinda, Victoria 3788.  
Phone: (03) 9751 1144.

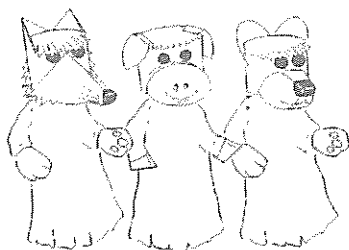
Axel's book has been examined for us by his potential customers, the teachers in the schools and colleges. These are some of their comments:



'These simple, interesting and easily understandable instructions have a wide application to the following areas of children's services and education: child care workers, kindergarten teachers, outside school hours workers, primary and secondary teachers, and children in the upper primary and secondary years.'

'From the information Axel has shared, children and those who work with children, will have many hours of enjoyment and the opportunity to bring "language alive" through the making and using of rod and hand puppets.'

'What a fantastic idea to create inexpensive cardboard puppets using readily available materials.'



'As a primary teacher I have limited preparation time. The simple instructions, clear diagrams and photocopyable blackline masters make this a 'no fuss' resource. It provides a great variety of effective ideas for construction and staging for novices or experienced puppeteers.'



'A wonderful, easy-to-use guide for any teacher wishing to develop childrens' language through puppetry.'

'Using safe and accessible materials students will be able to achieve results following these simple instructions.'

'With patterns to photocopy and suggestions to vary the plans, teachers would need little other preparation.'

'Also a valuable source on how to stage a puppet play.'

'A cheap, easy resource guaranteed to spur creativity and ensure loads of fun!'



Contributors: **Bronwyn Egan**, Secondary Drama & English, Xavier College, Beaconsfield, Victoria. **Amanda Lee**, Primary Arts & Drama, Beveridge Primary School, Victoria. **Robin Bell and Cheryl Crosbie**, Tertiary Lecturers, Family & Children's Services, Holmesglen TAFE, Victoria.

Thanks, folks!



"Axel Axelrad, through writing *Making Rod And Hand Puppets*, has shared his passion and vision for puppet making with the reader, in a concise, step-by-step descriptive text."

# REVIEW

## IS THAT A DINOSAUR'S EGG?

Written and Directed by **Lorrie Gardner**

Performed by **Lorrie Gardner and Ralph Baker,**



### Gardner Puppet Theatre

Reviewed show performed in a kindergarten to 25 four and five year olds and 4 adults.

*Is That A Dinosaur's Egg* is one of 5 shows that Gardner Puppets perform for pre-school aged children. The story is about a girl, Jackie, who finds an egg and, with her imaginary friend the Professor and his space-time machine, they travel back to dinosaur time in order to discover what sort of dinosaur will hatch. Back in real time where the egg is left, Horatio Egghead the dinosaur egg collector tries to steal it.

The puppet style is hand and glove, above the head booth style with the puppeteers unseen. The two performers are experienced and skilled at this style and the puppetry is slick. The compact set enables three scene changes. The costumes are black with a sleeveless dinosaur vest on top which looks great. These are experienced performers who know their audience well and respond in a real and friendly manner to them.

The performance begins with Ralph and Lorrie greeting and seating the children and then introducing Filbert the Dinosaur. An accompanying song that the children have learnt is sung about Filbert being sick and has to go back to bed. There is slapstick humour about bodily fluids – a winner with the children. However, I found Filbert difficult to relate to as I could not see his eyes very well and not at all when he looked face on.

The transition to the puppet show was very clear with the use of lights and music. This convention was used successfully throughout the performance, with the children responding appropriately.

The story did not build to a climax and I think this was due to the convention of restating what had occurred to each character when they appeared or re-appeared. This held up the action and the narrative became repetitive in parts. I was confused as to what Jackie and the professor were doing in the dinosaur nursery (but I loved the baby dinosaur puppets that emerged from the eggs) and the resulting dilemma of whether Jackie would lose her dog or not did not appear to engage the audience on an emotional level. The story finished very quickly, with important information being delivered in the last five minutes.

The telling of the story is also affected by the style of performance, in the way the puppets address the audience. The puppets verbally respond to most of the children and encourage them to tell the story.

The formal show broke in the middle for an opportunity for the children to physically participate. What is in essence a chance for the children to move around became an opportunity for the children to create and participate in dinosaur time. This was enhanced by the adults enacting "the dinosaur meeting" and the professor transforming to a life size character and joining in. However, having created this reality, when the characters and the children returned to the real world, the dinosaur puppets were still visible which was distracting for some of the audience.

Overall, *Is That A Dinosaur's Egg* is a well-rounded, traditional puppetry performance for children aged 4 – 8 years. The production values are good and the performers are professional and skilled. The audience certainly enjoyed it and most were eager to participate. However, I feel that the children mostly responded intellectually and did not appear to be engaged in the performance on an emotional level.



Reviewer: **Denise Rundle**

# GET THE HINT



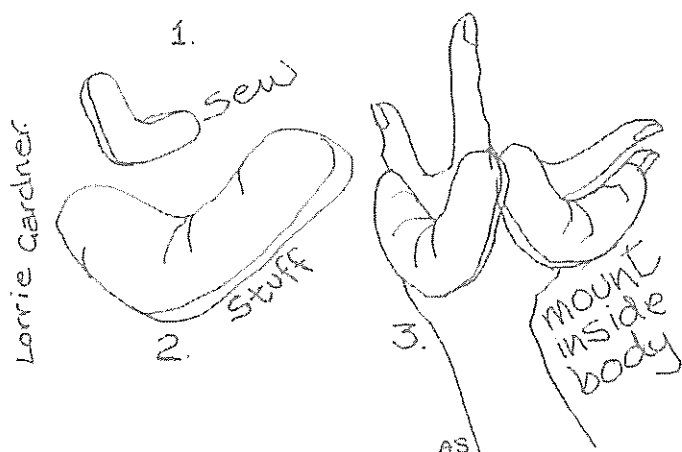
Some useful puppetry supplies and suppliers:

Luminous white paint (for Black Light) – Turner Poster Colour (201) from: Dean's Art, Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Victoria. Cost: \$16.20.

Black Jazz shoes, or boots. Both with divided sole for extra flexibility from: Bloch for Dancers (various stores around Australia). Cost: around \$40.00-\$50.00.

Black gloves from Dent's Gloves, 331 Swan Street, Richmond, Victoria. Cost: varied.

Jenny Andersen, One Toe Puppets, Victoria.



A good tip for Shadow Puppetry ...

Beautifully textured backgrounds for shadow screen work can be created very simply from sheer fabrics such as silk chiffon and transparent materials such as plastics, tissue, nettings and interfacing. Another technique worth exploring is photocopying onto acetate. The acetate and materials can then be placed on the top of the overhead projector and the enlarged image will create new space on which shadow puppets can play.

Hanna Parsinnen Terrapin Puppet Theatre Tasmania



...these techniques are passed on to children and adults alike; the puppeteer takes a plastic bottle, cuts a mouth, adds string and the bottle speaks, wondering what its use will be. The addition of a body to the bottle and an answer to the reason for its existence comes during a song (just like an ad) and this makes the audience laughs, but there is no joke if once the bottle is drained it can't be filled again ... and it becomes waste ... a fun, cheap way to reinforce waste management goals.

Julie & Roy McNeill, Real Fantasy, Queensland

A little hint that I have used with some of my hand puppets, is to make a false shoulder piece to give the hand puppet a bit of a shoulder.

The idea is to make a false shoulder piece of the same material as the costume, then stuff it. Now make another. These shoulders are tacked to the neck and arm of the puppet. The new shoulders will have some movement as the puppet moves its arms.

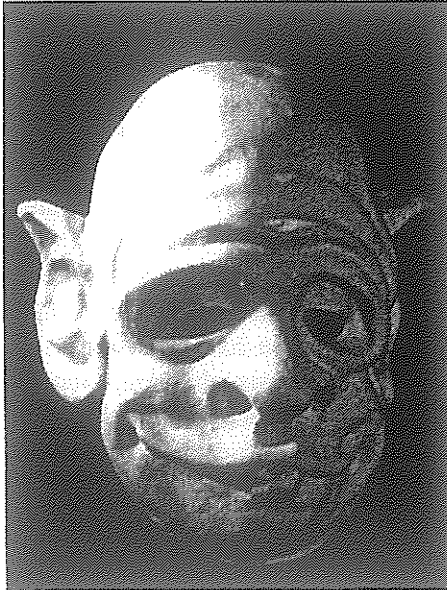
Lorrie Gardner, Gardner Puppets, Victoria.



# PUPPETRY RELATED ARTS

## REVIEW OF EXHIBITION

'MASKS' by Luke Devery. August 1<sup>st</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup>, 1997



Luke Devery has brought his latest mask designs and constructions together in a exhibition at a small café/gallery in Williamstown, **Provisions Café**, 62 – 64 Ferguson Street. The setting is informal, yet elegant and effective.

Immediately noticeable is the superb finish on hand made masks presumably laminated into negative moulds. Presumably, since no naming of media or technique appears in the pamphlet material available and the painted or decorated masks do not betray the method used. However, the finish I see on most of the masks could be recreated if one used laminated paper or cloth and/or a plaster mix/sanded finish. Perhaps the medium is not as critical as the result, as long as the masks are very durable for future use in performance – will they survive the 'drop-kick test'?

A range of mask types has been presented: some **Commedia del'Arte/Zanni** style half masks, some full face **Universal**, some **Basle** mask derivations, **embrionic**, and some **orientally inspired** pieces.

There is a controlled, contrived use of texture in the form of added natural fibres; these, and such colours as have been used, often operate within the 'decorative' area and therefore sacrifice something of intensity where messy or disorderly improvisation

might be called for in performance. The masks are likely to be just a bit too gorgeous for believable scallywags. Relevant, also, is the use of low gloss finish on the masks. This can create a problem under lights, particularly for film and television. However, it is a small thing to alter them to a matt finish.

I repeat, the masks are visually stunning and superbly constructed. As objects they are close to flawless.

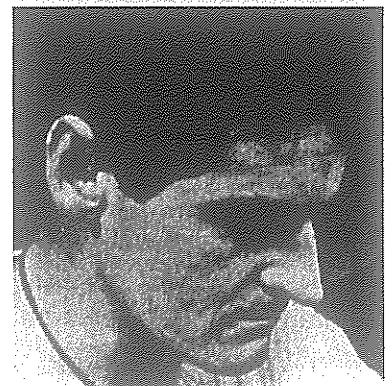
Mask making is a sculptural medium. This has not escaped Luke Devery's notice. His masks are excellent sculpturally and will stand up well at all distances and angles in performance. The integrity of expression on each mask has been well attended to, with the emotion of the mask echoing through the face. Luke has carefully limited the colour on each mask, although I have reservations about his use of red, yellow and blue in turn on each of three **commedia** masks. Once again, the issue for me is credibility – is the character believable in performance?

Luke Devery's exhibition is of a beautifully presented collection showing great skill in the handling of materials, very much understanding of the function of mask and in most cases, subtlety in the use of colour, shape and texture.

In Luke's own words: 'The true art of mask lies neither in the mask itself, nor in the performer. Rather it occurs in the reaction of each to the other.'

**Anita Sinclair.**

*Note: the exhibition is over, but the work lives on!*



# D'ARCS MARIONETTES IN AUSTRALIA

## HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN PUPPETRY

By Richard Bradshaw



Lambert D'Arc, one of the most important figures in the nineteenth century British marionette world, is buried on Thursday Island, at the northern tip of Australia. He

and his six children had come to perform in Australia in 1892 but they lost almost everything in a fire in Cooktown, on the North Queensland coast.

Much of the background information I have on the D'Arcs has been supplied by John Phillips, of London, who has written extensively on this family of puppeteers. However, some of the information here is the result of very recent research.

According to the information provided by his son George on the death certificate, Lambert D'Arc was born in Reims, in France. It is believed that he moved from France to London to make wax figures for the original Madame Tussaud. He married Ann North in Bath in 1865 and presented his own waxwork exhibitions in Cheltenham, Cardiff and then Dublin.

The marionettist for the first shows in Dublin, *The Babes in the Wood* and *Blue Beard*, was R.C. Donnelly, who had presented plays by these names in the same hall in Cheltenham two months after D'Arc waxworks had closed in 1866, so there is little doubt that he was an important influence. (In 1873 Mr and Mrs R.C. Donnelly were working for Springthorpe's Marionettes with Mr and Mrs Charles Webb, who were soon to come to Australia and New Zealand.)

In 1872, at the Queen's Hall in Liverpool, D'Arc sold his show to the lessee, W.J. Bullock who then created the Royal Marionettes, which went on to tour in America. So the show that the Webbs toured in Australia and New Zealand had its origins with D'Arc (and probably Donnelly). D'Arc had introduced *Little Red Riding Hood* to his repertoire in Dublin in 1871.

D'Arc continued to tour in Britain, finally settling in Cardiff in 1884, exhibiting waxworks at Victoria hall. There, in 1885, he presented marionettes in *Blue Beard* and *The Babes in the Wood*, with a harlequinade, court minstrels and fantoccini. Many other plays followed, as in Dublin. Later that year he took the marionettes on tour to Belgium and France, in competition with Thomas Holden. In 1890 he had a very successful tour of South Africa.

In 1892 Lambert D'Arc arrived in Australia with *Mons D'Arcs Fantoches Francaise*. He had apparently been touring in India, because he had joined the ship in Calcutta. With him were his six children, George, Emily, Nellie, Mary, William and Ethel, their ages ranging in that order from about 26 down to about 12. Their mother presumably stayed home in Cardiff to mind the Waxworks.

The first shows were at the Royal Standard Theatre in Sydney.

Lambert D'Arc seems to have remained in Sydney while his children toured Queensland. They took a ship to Brisbane where the city was impressed by the size of the wagon which carried their equipment to the Gaiety Theatre. After Brisbane they had seasons in Maryborough, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Townsville, Charters Towers, and Cairns.

The stage and scenery and about 350 marionettes were destroyed in the fire.

The program the D'Arcs gave in Australia began with fantoccini (variety and trick acts), then 'court minstrels', and finally *Blue Beard* which ended with a 'Grand Ballet' and harlequinade. The fantoccini included a female tightrope-walker, a drunken stilt-walker, 'magnetic' skeletons, a Grand Turk which broke down to become a judge and half-a-dozen barristers, an aquarium scene with wonderful fishes, etc. Later in the season might come *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *The Babes in the Wood*, or a piece called *Poor Jo*.



**The pantomime ended with a spectacular transformation scene which used limelight effects.**

Late in 1892 the Town Hall of Cooktown was crowded for the D'Arcs' opening performance, and everyone had "so far enjoyed the performance immensely". At about 10pm just before the transformation scene, the marionette stage caught fire, in turn setting fire to the Town Hall which was burnt to the ground. The cause seems to have been an upset kerosine lamp. Only a few things, including chairs and a grand piano were saved, but fortunately there were no injuries. The Hall was insured for £1,500, but damage to the marionette equipment was estimated at £2,000 or more!

In fact, the D'Arcs lost almost everything except their wagon. Two circular mirrors which decorated the puppet proscenium were saved, and some sailors who helped fight the fire managed to save a few of the marionettes. But the stage and scenery and about 350 marionettes were destroyed.

A few days later the people of Cooktown organised a benefit concert in a store at the wharf for the unfortunate D'Arcs, under the patronage of the Mayor; the D'Arcs themselves took part.

While all this was happening, Lambert D'Arc had been sailing up the coast from Sydney. He was approaching Townsville when the fire happened, and didn't arrive in Cooktown until the day after the benefit concert. One of the D'Arcs took the coastal steamer that Lambert had arrived on back to Townsville, returning by another ship six days later. I suspect his purpose was to buy materials.

The D'Arcs stayed in Cooktown for six months, rebuilding their show. Cooktown was then the port for the goldfields and had a much a larger population than it has today. The town was built where Captain Cook had spent 48 days in 1770 while the Endeavour was beached for repairs.

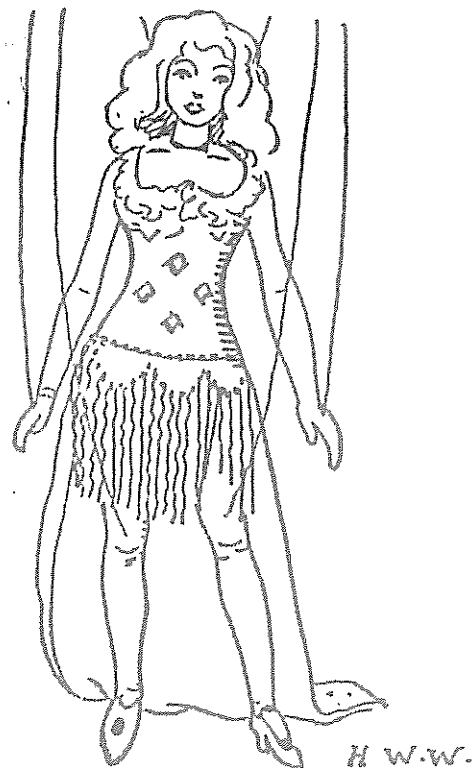
The D'Arc family organised another concert in April, 1893, to raise more money and then in June they gave a week of well-attended performances with their rebuilt marionettes, before finally leaving Cooktown to perform on Thursday Island. From there they intended to go to the Straits Settlement, India and China.

But two weeks later, on 28 June, 1893, Lambert D'Arc died at the age of 69. He had been suffering from Bright's Disease, a kidney complaint. He was buried in General Cemetery on Thursday Island. It is almost as if Cape York is pointing to his final resting place!

**H.W. Whanslaw described D'Arc's Marionettes as "one of the greatest troupes of marionettes that have been seen" in Britain, and as recently as 1996, in his History of European Puppetry, Henryk Jurkowski refers to Lambert D'Arc as "one of the greatest puppet masters".**

Despite Lambert's death, D'Arc's Marionettes continued. Companies by that name later appeared in Japan, New Zealand (1903), and Australia (1912), and will be the subject of a further article. D'Arc's waxworks continued in Cardiff until 1930, and D'Arc's widow died in that city in 1936, at the grand age of 90.

(I am grateful to John Phillips of London, and Lynn Meyers, Reference Librarian at the John Oxley Library, Brisbane, for help with information for the above. R.B.)



*Illustration of D'Arc Marionette from H.W. Whanslaw's "Everybody's Marionette Book"  
(Was this puppet made in Cooktown?)*

## REVIEW



### 'FILTH' BY TERRAPIN PUPPET THEATRE

'*Filth*,' devised by Terrapin Puppet Theatre and directed by the company's Artistic Director Annette Downs for secondary schools, is touring throughout Tasmania to halls and gymnasiums. Along with the director, the team who created '*Filth*' were: Designer Greg Methe, Trainee Designer Hanna Parssinen, Dramaturg Valerie Foley, Musical Director Don Hopkins, Production Assistant Leesa Nash and Performers Kirsty Grierson, Melinda Mills and Phillip Mitchell.

The production is designed not for a traditional 'theatre' space or, as in many school touring productions, to try to recreate such a space in the school environment, with audience in one place and performers in another. '*Filth*' has been defined as arena theatre, the performance taking place in, on and around the audience. The audience also moving through the space following the performers, keeping out of their way, watching or not watching, choosing one performer in one area over another.

At this performance I saw them often talking amongst themselves, perhaps about the show or perhaps not. It was evident that students could and did move in and out of focusing on the events that were taking place around them and that this was part of the experience that Terrapin was trying to create for them.

'*Filth's*' Teachers' Notes describe this process as being essential to ensuring: "that we were working on a series of accurately sourced perceptions of young people, their concerns, their dreams and their challenges."

It may be that I am not part of the target audience age group and am therefore unable to pinpoint those dreams, challenges and concerns from the production, but they did not come through strongly for me.

My major criticism of the production was that the images were not strong enough and lacked a lasting impact. I left feeling a little unsatisfied, the experience was one 'in the moment' but not one to take away with me and draw meaning from.

The structure of the play is likened to a series of video clips, with each scene a small play within itself. It has no through narrative and does not attempt to create characters for the audience to identify with in any ongoing way. The performers are vehicles creating images and moving on to the next scene in an almost perfunctory way. This is not meant as a negative criticism as this was a deliberate stylistic choice and helps to create the tension and level of intrigue that I found exciting during the performance.

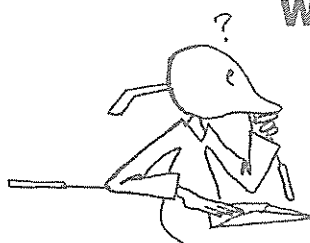
I am reminded that I am writing for a puppetry journal and should at least mention the art form in this discussion. '*Filth*' is probably best described as visual and physical theatre using elements of object theatre and puppetry throughout to create its spectacle. It is this spectacle that did not quite reach its mark for me. That is not to say there were not moments where the design and visual aspects produced attention-catching imagery. The initial scene of the production, created through black fabric and faceless silver masks similar to those worn during fencing matches, was one of these. The students enter the space to find six shrouded and faceless forms in the centre; the music is loud and dynamic surrounding them.

Dolls and other toys were used as puppets in a variety of scenes and a bunraku-style, large skeletal puppet dramatically breaks apart into three pieces, each piece undertaking its own investigation of the audience. Again I would have to say that many of the images were not strong enough, after the initial response there was not enough to take you further. Particularly using items such as large pieces of clear plastic hurled around at a fast and furious pace and three long poles attempting to play and dance with the audience.

My experience at the performance was only one of approximately 120 students and I felt their response to the performance was positive and appreciative. I am sure there was much for them to take away from '*Filth*' if only in terms of discussion on theatrical forms and styles, use of space and imagery. The music and soundscape of the play was loud, confronting and energising, occasionally using contemporary tracks that the students would be very familiar with. As an attempt to speak to young people at their level, to compete with the pace of music video and computer imagery '*Filth*' should be successful. I can see the potential for Terrapin to take this style of work even further in the future and I certainly hope they do.

Reviewer: Eleanor Downes

## WHERE ARE YOU?



Please notify UNIMA if you have changed - or are about to change - your mailing address or phone/fax/email details.

Contact **Richard Hart**, The Treasurer, on:

Phone: 03 9489 8337.

Post: 20 Coleman Street, North Fitzroy, Victoria 3068.

## SEVEN STATES!

UNIMA has members in each of seven states, in large, small and solo performance troupes. Your editor is determined to represent you and to communicate the news from around the country. To this end, I am soliciting offers from persons willing to gather and send information, gossip and trivia - all levels - from each state. **Lucinda Watson** has agreed to do this for Tasmania, thanks, Lucinda!

Perhaps YOU can be approached to perform this essential function for us. It's a big country and your editor is stuck in Victoria. This is not a request that the volunteer gather ALL information, since many contributors send material direct; it may merely mean that I can contact a specific person for updates on state news items where a deficiency exists. *Ed.*

## DEADLINES

Due to the change of editors immediately preceding this Spring edition, a great deal of leeway has been allowed both for the brand new editor ( thank you for your patience ) and for a few late contributors. It's turned out well for me, as lots of good things turned up in my mail box, but I guess we can't get away with this forever. So would you please apply yourselves diligently to the job of getting contributions to me early! The upcoming deadlines are:

Summer issue deadline: **November 24<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Autumn issue deadline: **February 24<sup>th</sup> 1998**

Feel free to send too much. Copy can always be saved for the next issue. *Ed.*

**If I do not already have your photograph, do send one to me. We want to know what you look like!**

# FIRST SRI LANKAN PUPPET FESTIVAL

Held in Colombo under the auspices of the Ministry of Cultural and Religious Affairs in December 1996.

The Festival was held in a very large hall; the John da Silva Theatre, just out of the main business area of Colombo, near the university. It was not really the ideal venue for such an event, as much of the audience was seated a long way from the stage.

On opening night the first play, using hand puppets, told a popular story which the audience obviously knew and loved. This and other glove/hand puppet performances during the festival benefited from being presented at the front of the stage. I found these figures a little grotesque and the manipulation rather ponderous.

**following tradition, the characters commented on some of the 'important' people in the audience.**

The second play on the 'official' performance night, was a story based on the historic events of the last king of Sri Lanka. It told of Royal devotion and bravery with much weeping and finally blood and violence, all of which appeared to be very dear to the heart of the audience. It was interesting to see how the small puppets, the royal children, were made like little adults, but could be lifted and carried by the larger mother. Each one was separately strung.

In this production the costuming was particularly sumptuous and followed very much the traditional royal style, as seen in pictures and illustrations of the ancient Singhalese kings.

The first night's string puppet performance used the traditional stage, consisting of a large central area, and two smaller side stages which interconnected with the centre. A front curtain divided into three parts was dropped when the action moved from one part of the stage to another. This enabled scenes to be changed without full curtains, or blacks; thus not interrupting the story.

Formerly, the Sri Lankan puppet theatre based most of their plays on the Nadagamba, a form of nineteenth century folk opera. This is no longer strictly followed,

but traces can still be found in some of the stock characters.

One night one of the younger troupes presented a combined shadow and pole puppet play which was entitled *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*. This was done with interesting and imaginative use of shadow puppets, modeled on the Chinese style of shadow puppet. The technician sat in what could have been the pit at the front of the stage, with a very simple lighting board, changing light colours and projecting shadows onto a white sheet. Again, much of the appreciation depended on the dialogue, which I think was in Singhalese!

Puppets can usually convey much of their story without depending too much on dialogue. This was obviously not the aim of the Sri Lankan puppeteers; most of their puppets were rather static and depended very much on dialogue.

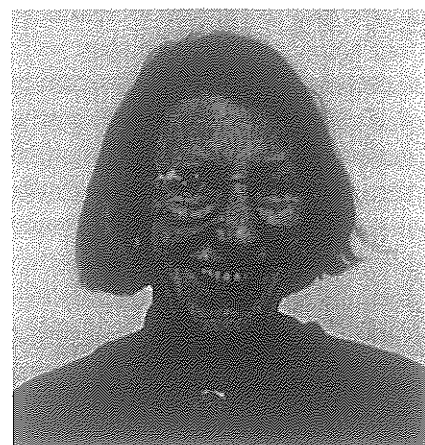
I understand the usual method of presenting these puppet shows is for the manipulator to also provide the voice. During the festival, dialogue was pre-taped and played over rather a distorted sound system.

The lack of live music was a loss, as traditionally in the Nadagamba texts the music plays an important role. Had there been musicians sitting in the front of the stage, the performances would have been greatly enhanced.

Traditionally the faces of the puppets are carved by skilled wood carvers, many of whom have learnt their skills within the family.

I have attempted to summarise a unique cultural event. Considered in the context of the state of the violence and upheaval in Sri Lanka at the moment it is amazing that it occurred at all.

Janet  
Macallister





## UPDATE ON PROPOSED 1999 CANBERRA FESTIVAL

Following is an update for the proposed Festival of Puppetry and Visual Theatre for Feb/Mar 1999.

I have submitted an application for funding to the Cultural Council of Arts ACT for consideration of support towards administration costs in setting up a festival here in Canberra. There has been considerable interest shown by the Canberra arts community for a puppetry event to take place in 1999.

I await the funding decision which will happen sometime late October. If successful, the first stage towards setting up such an event will be put in place. I have spoken to the Australia Council with regards supporting this event and will push for funding in that area.

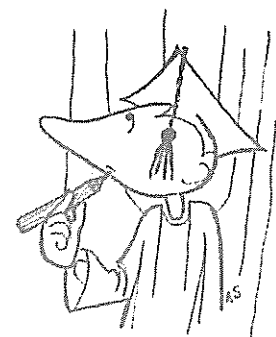
I will keep you all informed through the UNIMA newsletter of any further developments.

Wishing you all a sunny Spring and a successful run up to the festive season.

With best wishes,

Peter J Wilson

Contact through **Company Skylark:**  
PO Box 983, Civic Square, Canberra. 2608



## TRAINING INFORMATION

Polyglot Puppet Theatre, Victoria has offered, from August to early September, three Saturday workshops in basic manipulation, bringing the puppet to life, mouth sync, creating character, object manipulation and the development from simple ideas to performance. These have cost participants \$35.00 each or \$100.00 for all three. For enquiries about possible future workshops ring Polyglot on 03 9827 9667.

**Please Note:** Since many readers express interest in training opportunities, would any reader (all states) who has training information please inform us through the magazine.



THE FIGURE OF MAHAUSADHA PANDITHA FROM THE PUPPETRY AND CHILDREN'S MUSEUM, SRI LANKA  
PHOTOGRAPH: D A BALASOORIYA, SRI LANKA

**"The costuming was particularly sumptuous and followed the traditional royal style"**



## KAY LITTLER: 1904 - 1997



### Letter to Secretary from Margaret Hymus Treasurer of Queensland Theatre of Puppetry

50 Horizon Ave, Ashmore, Qld 4214 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1997

Dear Dennis,

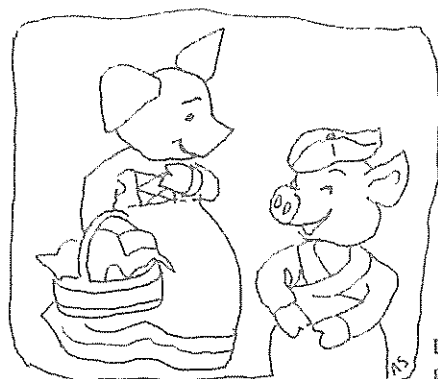
I have been requested by Gerda Pinter, the Director of Queensland Theatre of Puppetry to advise you of the death of Kay Littler, the co-founder (with Gerda) of QTOP. Gerda is at present overseas and she delegated this responsibility to me.

Kay passed away two weeks ago at the age of 93 yrs (end of June 1997, Ed.) – she was involved with the design and creation of puppets for many years until the establishment of QTOP 27 years ago. She remained President and Designer up until a year before her death – truly an icon of the world of Puppetry.

We in QTOP will miss her input and enthusiasm enormously and we will think of her at all times with great love and respect.

Yours Sincerely,

Margaret Hymus



Drawing based on photograph supplied by QTOP

### LOOKING BACK

My first contact with Kay Littler and Q'TOP was in the seventies, at a festival of puppetry in Melbourne. I was relatively new to puppetry, but mad keen and using it in my teaching at Melbourne State College. It was a revelation to me at the time, to see Kay and the Q'TOP team perform *The Three Little Pigs*, especially to see the use they made of the bodies of the performers as the set, with the little, plump pigs walking up over them. The puppetry was bunraku-style, the puppeteers in black. The puppets themselves were the best thing I'd seen in fabric over foam-rubber. That festival also featured a booklet compiled by the late Greg Temple for Christie's Beach High School – made available to festival delegates and including an article by Kay Littler, 'with instructions of exactly how she used her foam-and-fabric technique.

Kay came to puppetry suddenly, by surprise, on seeing nothing more momentous than a newspaper item about a school teacher using puppets. From that day on, she made puppets, starting with natural materials and soon developing a glove puppet construction method for 'fabriKAYshions', her own teaching system.

Q'TOP was formed on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1971, and its first production was staged in the following June. Puppets were made under Kay's direction, and, to quote from their 1988 news sheet, 'our plays are all self scripted and loosely put together during a workshop where suggestions are considered and written into shape . . . Kay then gets to work constructing..'

Kay and assistants also held regular workshops for children. Indeed, in 1994, Kay was still reported as keeping in touch with the 'current crop of children' and their needs, and still active making puppets in her retirement home.

Kay Littler has worked in film making, written scripts for ABC children's programs, written for children in the Sydney Morning Herald, She gave talks on television and wrote the first Australian puppet book which the Red Cross published just after the second World War. She remained President and Designer of Q'TOP up until a year ago.

An impressive contribution indeed both to puppetry and the sheer joy of living.

Anita Sinclair

## PERCY PRESS JUNIOR

Another sad loss to puppetry is that of **Percy Press Junior**, who died August 11th, this year.

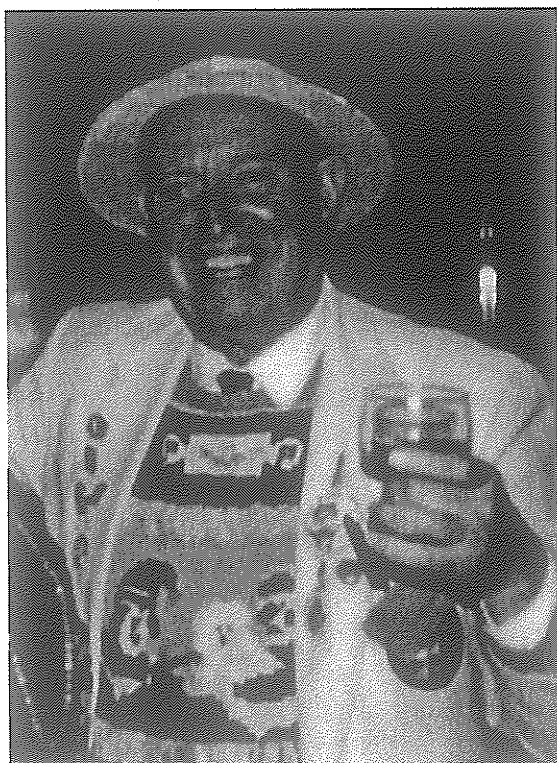
Many Australian puppeteers will remember him from festivals; I myself met him in 1979 at the festival in Tokyo and very soon afterwards in Washington, Charleville and London. More recently, **Richard Bradshaw** saw him in the USA and has offered us this cheerful photograph of an eminently cheerful gentleman (note the Punch and Judy jumper).

I remember Percy, having learned Japanese for the Tokyo festival, rattling away convincingly as Punch, then switching to accented English to protest, '...and if I don't hurry up and find his baton, I'm done for!', and back to Japanese.

**Percy Press Junior** was a highly skilled puppeteer, an indomitable spirit and a generous sharer of technique. In Washington DC, he responded willingly to the (puppetry) crowd's request that he perform for us in the massive foyer of the Kennedy Centre with no cloth cover on his booth..

**Percy Press Junior** learned from his father, the late **Percy Press Senior**. They traveled the world together; their work adhered closely to the 300 year old British tradition. Punch and Judy will miss them.

Anita Sinclair



## AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

The Australia Council has put out a pamphlet promoting the use, by businesses, of contemporary Australian artists. This is a glossy fold-out intended as material for artists themselves to offer any business organization whose patronage they wish to attract.

For information regarding this pamphlet, please contact: THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL'S PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMISSIONS PROGRAM, FreeCall: 1800 226 912



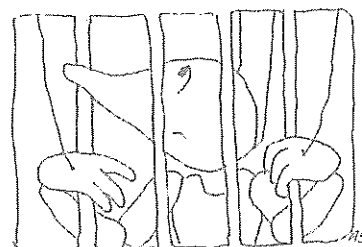
## BIENNIAL AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING ARTS MARKET, ADELAIDE 22 - 27 FEB '98

Described as a "unique showcase of all that's hot and ready to tour, a chance for artists, companies and presenters to show, shop and shake their hands".

For information, contact: Arts Project Australia Phone: 08 8271 1488, Email: [apa@peg.apc.org](mailto:apa@peg.apc.org)

## OVERSEAS

Too late for you to go, but perhaps of interest: an International Conference 'Puppets in Prison', as part of the World Festival of Puppetry in Charleville-Mezieres, France, 22 September, 1997; an international conference to explore the educational, developmental and therapeutic uses of puppetry in prisons around the world. Among the stated aims is the intention: to develop strategies that assist prisoners to take pro-active measures to improve the quality of their lives, during and after incarceration.



(source: the world wide web)

## REVIEW



**COOL MAGIC BY TERRAPIN PUPPET THEATRE** Director: **Phillip Mitchell**, Artistic Director: **Annette Downs**. Reviewed at **EAST DEVONPORT PRIMARY SCHOOL, TASMANIA**

Puppets skateboarding through the air, tops of heads being lifted off and memory clumps pulled out, 'grooflunts' creatures from out of space and dance-like rituals are all part of Terrapin's *"Cool Magic"* performance, currently touring primary schools in Tasmania.

*"Cool Magic"* explores the relationship between 'Omar' and his grandfather 'Bluepa' after moving to earth from planet 'Bluef'. The show focuses upon a collision of cultures when Bluepa wants to return to Bluef for a festival of the nine square suns. Omar wants to remain on earth with his skateboarding friends, failing to see the relevance of his heritage. The performance is inspired by the book *OLD MAGIC* by **Allan Baillie** which concerns the story of a young Asian-Australian and his migrant grandfather.

The show explores themes of respect, culture, creativity, language and understanding between generations. These are explored through a variety of media including hand held foam puppets, shadow puppets, song, dialogue and even puppets performing their own puppet show.

The combination of rod puppets, shadow puppets and the amusing performance of the puppets' own puppet show adds variety and interest to the entire show. It strengthens the narrative of the performance by reinforcing the themes of the show and adds diversity for the audience. There are continual surprises that help maintain the audience's attention and heighten the level of energy of the show. The puppets are well designed, in good condition and move well.

Influenced by the likes of *The Simpsons*, *Mambo*, *Rene Magritte* and street comics; designers **Greg Methe** and trainee **Hanna Parssinen** have created a colourful and effective set. Primarily constructed from wood, comprised of simple but economical lines, the set incorporates a wave shaped playboard, a 2.5 metre central shadow screen, and two black flats. The playboard acts as a skate ramp where the puppets can weave, dance and dive over each other. It also provides a variety of levels for the puppeteers to work with. The skateboarding puppets have one foot permanently attached to the skateboard to allow the puppeteers greater control. Bright oranges, yellows, blues and the shape of the set contribute to give an animated, cartoon feel to the performance.

There is clever use of the shadow screen to mirror and magnify the actions and dialogue of Omar. Whilst Omar explores Bluepa's memories of planet Bluef, they are lived out through visual images on the shadow screen behind. It surprises the audience as the screen is thought to be for decoration of the set. It is also another means of communication – emphasising the theme of storytelling. One problem however with using a shadow screen are the effects of natural light in the performance space. At times the shadow puppets were a little pale.

Composer **Don Hopkins** has managed the challenging job of creating a musical score that unifies the entire show. Use of original music contributes by not only being a creative statement but by providing an element of surprise and originality to the performance. The music works as a sensory memory device – characters become associated with certain melodies. It also adds

to the rhythm of the show and helps progression of the script. The dance tune to 'Festival Of The Nine Square Suns' obviously proving popular by the number of heads I counted nodding along in the audience (and yes, mine was one of them!)

The narrative is clear throughout the entire performance. The relationship of Omar & Bluepa developed and strengthened throughout – each learning about the importance of accepting and respecting each other's beliefs. Although this is the first school based puppet performance I have viewed, I was very impressed with the fact that the puppeteers spent time with their audience after the show. This involved explaining how the puppets were made, discussing issues and meanings in the performance and answering any questions from the students.

**Philip Mitchell's strength in directing is noticeable through the clean changes, coordinated movements, clarity of the narrative and characterisation of the puppets.** The puppeteers: **Kirsty Grierson, Melinda Mills and Philip Mitchell** show skill of manipulation through the natural movements and stature of the puppets, added to this were strong vocals and attention paid to team work and choreography. Dedicated performances with energy levels and concentration held throughout.

Overall an enjoyable performance that explores some very relevant issues and provides a mixed medium of creative communication devices. Well timed, well performed and well worth seeing.

Reviewer: **Lucinda Watson.**



## DENNIS MURPHY

### WORKING FOR ART SKOWNSEL

Puppeteers who haven't toured Queensland schools may never have heard of **Art Skownsel** but mention his name up there and doors will open.

The school secretary looks at me blankly if I say, "Hello, I'm Dennis Murphy, Murphy's Puppets. I'm performing here today. Sara Gibbons has organized it."



But should I say, "Hello, I'm Dennis Murphy; Art Skownsel." Then her face lights up, the penny drops and she says, "Right. Arts Council! You're always in Mrs O'Brien's room."

Since 1963 the **Queensland Arts Council (QAC)** has been touring artists to schools ensuring that all students statewide get access to performance programs. Considering Queensland's massive geography and wide population spread, that's a tall order.

**The school secretary looked at me blankly . . .**

It's accomplished through a unique system. All artists wanting to perform in state schools must audition and be approved by the QAC in conjunction with the Department of Education. The QAC then employs those approved on contract for a weekly salary for a set period of time for performances in a set territory. Every primary school is offered four shows a year, one each term. High schools get three a year. The performances are allocated by the QAC according to many factors; what that areas had last year, ensuring a mix of artforms, etc.

That works out to some 1,000 artist-weeks employing up to 100 artists in approximately 50 productions each year. The QAC Artistic Policy gives preference to Queensland artists who usually get about 70% of the work.

*(continued page 23)*



## REVIEW



### ESME: DUCK DAY

Performed by **Denise Rundle**. Presented by **Polyglot**

I went to see *Esme: Duck Day* early in August at the Richmond Primary School in Victoria. The Infant Department provided an age group that varied over the recommended 'under five' range. Also present was a group from down the road: little ones from the Australia Greek Welfare Child Care Centre, the perfect age group.

*'Esme: Duck Day... combines the elements of a formal puppet show with aspects of a group time experience at kindergarten/child care. It aims to create a verbally interactive experience for the children ... Denise and Esme interact with each other and display a range of emotions. Some are quite obvious for young children such as angry or happy, but some are more complex to identify, like sulky or insulted.'*

*Esme: Duck Day is unabashed didactic theatre. It makes no apologies for its intention to teach. Support material accompanying the show develops the theme of learning possibilities, assisting group leaders themselves to realize what had occurred during the performance and, importantly, why it had been included.*

The following are some of the communication skills that the presentation hopes to address: non-verbal communication skills; storytelling; problem solving; exploration of alternative behaviours.

Devices used during the performance include: repetition; rhyming; frequent verbal exchange with the young audience; singing with the children. At all times, the images created and the interactions that occurred operated at a level that little kids can relate to, such as the drama and humour about a lost hat and the horrors of snail icecream! Esme and Denise tease the children with 'mistakes' such as describing the sound made by a cow as 'miaowing'.

The aims of the show are very clear, the devices employed are tried and true, with little children responding to them on cue. Those children in the audience who were very likely to be only now catching up with spoken English were given substantial assistance by the actions of the puppet and Denise's movement, facial expression and voice. Denise made a point of bringing in Greek words later in the show.

Esme as a puppet performer had the advantage of size, being a rather large hand puppet. The arm-through-neck-to-moving mouth made manipulation an easy, therefore wise option. Esme could look everywhere, at everyone. So for me it was disappointing that Esme had 'bobble-eyes'. These drive me crazy in theatre as they flash under lights and move madly – not maddeningly, though that too – but dementedly. I noted also a tendency for Denise to play to her own left, so that much eye contact was missing stage right.

I have mixed feelings about the latter part of the event, which moves closer to 'workshop' and away from 'show'. This is a segment devoted to the perusal of Esme's photograph album. I expect that this is where the age group matters a lot. Very small children, in small, creche groups, would no doubt gobble this up, bringing in all the language and conceptual experiences that Denise is seeking for them.

**To sum up: a very valuable experience for young children, with long lasting benefits. Buckets of follow-up potential, both in language development terms and puppet building .**

I took the time to gather a couple of quotes from Claire Stathis, the Vice Principal of the Richmond Primary School: 'A very creative language presentation', 'The children responded very well.'

Reviewer: **Anita Sinclair**



The beauty of the system is that shows in large schools subsidize shows at remote or small schools. For example I had a primary school territory in eastern Brisbane. One school I played was so big it took me six performances over two days. The QAC made a good profit there.

The QAC organizers know the areas well. Artists are given a sheet of touring tips for their area; recommendations and warnings from artists who have gone before. The venues vary tremendously and add spice to the tour. I've had auditoriums that I suspected were used as aircraft hangars at weekends. I've had tinder-dry wooden community halls, tin huts, fully professional 350-seat theatres and most things in-between.

**I thought maybe he wanted to go into the QAC and stuff envelopes**

Sometimes you are referred to directly but in the third person. On my first QAC tour a student asked me, "Does Arts Council need help?" I thought maybe he wanted to go into the QAC office and help stuff envelopes. When I questioned him further I discovered he wanted to know if in my show I called for volunteers from the audience. Did I want help.

Puppetry has always been strongly represented.

Dave Poulton has been touring for well over twenty years. Other puppeteers who have toured include Norman Berg, Kit Bergin, Ross Browning, Carousel Theatre Company and Ozo Shadow Puppets.

Working for QAC has advantages and disadvantages. I've done Mount Isa in February but also had Cairns in August. I like having weekends off and I enjoy doing just the one production for weeks on end. But the best aspect of QAC tours is that you know up to 18 months ahead that you are going to have a fixed income for a month or two.

To enquire, write to the QAC  
GPO Box 376, Brisbane 4101

Dennis "Arts Council" Murphy

SANTA ANA, California – Being mugged in Disneyland's parking lot was bad enough, but her three grandchildren seeing Mickey Mouse take his head off was the last straw.

Billie Jean Matay was returning to the car with her daughter and grandchildren in August 1995 when a gunman, who never was caught, robbed them of \$1,650. During the questioning, her grandchildren were kept backstage, where they saw cartoon characters removing their costumes. Matay sued, saying that Disneyland's security was inadequate and that workers traumatized the children – ages 5 to 11 – by exposing them "to the reality that the Disney characters were, in fact, make-believe."

Source: Daily newspaper, Austin, Texas.  
Our correspondent: Thom the World Poet.



## WORKHOUSE PUPPETS

Performing at the Workhouse Theatre in Melbourne: Richard Hart with three presentations for Fringe of *Dreamer*, his superb Black Light show. Also part of Fringe, Ian Cuming with *Crocodile Tears*, a non violent (!) Punch and Judy. Recently, Gardner Puppets presented *Is that a Dinosaur's Egg*. The Workhouse looks forward to more and more puppetry.

## MORE FACES OF AUSTRALIAN PUPPETRY

Now that the magazine has shown you what some of our members look like, how about sending us a GOOD, clear photograph of yourself, head and shoulders with plenty of light and half tones.

Contributors of written material will be especially pressured for this sort of thing - please be prepared!

Send photographs to: Anita Sinclair  
Box 581, Richmond, Victoria 3121

Phone: 03 9417 1211

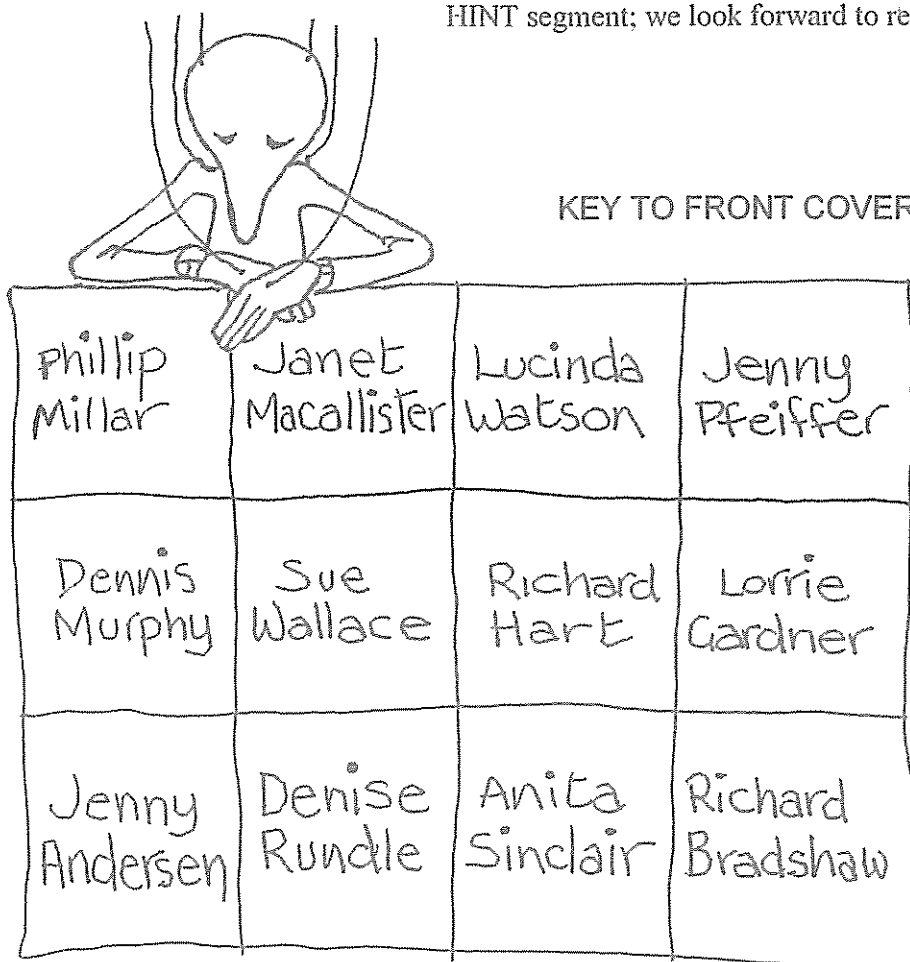
## NEXT ISSUE

Phillip Millar with the technical secrets of The Hobbit mechanisms - under GET THE HINT.

Two radio interviews. One with Richard Hart and the other with Lori Gardner from 'The PRODOS Connection' on 97.4 FM.

Christof!! the Clown, interviewed for our PUPPETRY RELATED ARTS segment, talking about the art of performing to children.

... Plus YOUR OWN contribution to our GET THE HINT segment; we look forward to receiving it.



THIS MAGAZINE HAS BEEN CREATED ON A PC USING MICROSOFT WORD

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ON FLOPPY DISC COMPATIBLE WITH THIS SYSTEM WOULD BE APPRECIATED. HOWEVER PLEASE ALSO INCLUDE A 'HARD COPY' PRINT-OUT OF YOUR WORK.

THANKS TO PRODOS FOR WORD-PROCESSING THIS ISSUE - INCLUDING THIS THANK YOU NOTE.

## HOW DOES A PUPPET COME INTO BEING?

"Out of an urge for the artistic freedom of his creative will man invented puppetry. By this invention man freed himself from his belief in an inescapable fate; he created a world of figures determined by himself and thus consolidated his will, logic, and his aesthetic - in short, he became a little god ruling his own world."

*Dr Henryk Jurkowski*

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