

MANIPULATION



AUSTRALASIA'S PUPPETRY MAGAZINE

SPECIAL SURVEY EDITION 1992

FEATURE: 'State of The Nation'

The puppet companies survey results



Jennifer Davidson, Founder & Artistic Director: TerrapinPuppet Theatre 1981-1991

PLUS: Terrapin farewells Jenny Davidson
and welcomes Annette Downs.

Contents

page 2	<u>editorial</u>
3	<u>features</u> Terrapin's Jenny Davidson, Annette Downs; Churchill Fellowships: Lou Chamberlin, Philip Millar; Bob Parsons in Czechoslovakia.
9	<u>company reports</u> Terrapin Puppet Theatre; Real Fantasy Theatre; Skylark Puppet & Mask Theatre; Sydney Puppet Theatre.
11	<u>individual reports</u> Peter J. Wilson in Brisbane; Mary Sutherland: Children's Museum; Ross Browning - On Tour.
13	<u>State of The Nation'</u> <u>survey results</u> Companies' Survey results.
16	<u>industry</u> Times are a changin; Snippets from the Grapevine; Environmentally Friendly Making; UNIMA Australia; Lift Off- Wrap; Between Wolf & Pig; International Events;
22	<u>reviews</u> Comment; Frozen Heart; Ask For The Captain; Charlotte's Web; Adelaide Festival programme.
28	<u>international</u> Festivals; contacts; dates.

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editorial:

by Susan Lintern Coward

We wondered how subsidised companies are faring in these recessionary times, and so sent out questionnaires. Thanks to all those who found time to answer them. In general, the mood was fairly positive - companies are surviving (so far!) and continuing to offer new shows as well as recycling. Some shows are securing sponsorship, mostly from government-funded organisations such as child accident prevention and health councils seeking a target audience.

One trend looks set to continue: That of employing makers and puppeteers on a project-by-project basis. This doubtless cuts costs, but will affect standards in the long term - nurturing new talent takes time and constant exposure to more experienced hands. "Everyone an apprentice and no-one a master" is not a new phenomenon. To quote an article from Manipulation of March 1986:

"...Rather than concentrating on the training of new puppeteers more effort should be employed in developing the more experienced ones"

(Noriko Nishimoto and David Collins)

The two are surely complimentary - do they really have to compete?

We had hoped to bring you the 'inside story' of "Lift Off", but contributions have been thin on the ground; puppeteers in Melbourne have experience an unprecedented flurry of work in the past 9 months, and writing articles just didn't get a look in ... Now as we go to press, everyone is twiddling their thumbs and wondering where the next crust is coming from...

On the subject of contributions, please take up your pen, boot up your word processor or whatever - almost all articles for this issue had to be solicited. Now admittedly there was no copy deadline, nor the next editing team advertised in the last edition, and the Manipulation mailing address to Handspan Theatre does not have a NSW post code ... but these trifles should deter none but the faintest hearts. We would still like to cover *Lift Off*, so please add your mite before the memories cloud over..



MANIPULATION

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features:

Imagining Jenny Davidson In Retirement

by Shirley Aplthorp

Hobart MERCURY 5 December 1991

The work of Terrapin Puppet Theatre has entertained, enthralled & delighted viewers around Tasmania, from the very young to adults, for ten successful years.

In December '92, the company's founder & artistic director, Jennifer Davidson retired to pursue private creative goals and give a new director the chance to work with the company.

During the past decade, Terrapin Puppet Theatre has grown from a three member, part-time company to an impressive full-time operation, and its reputation has grown along with it.

Jenny became interested in puppetry when she was a school student in England. As no formal training in puppetry was available, she attended the Old Vic Theatre School in London.

After a time working in weekly repertoire, an experience Jenny feels was extremely valuable, she was engaged to work on puppet productions for children with the BBC. When her husband, a school teacher, discovered in 1960 that his school had to move, the family decided to move to Australia.

After gaining a Tasmanian Teachers Art Diploma, she worked for 11 years as an art teacher, but maintained her theatrical involvement. She spent some time with the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre, and when that company closed down, she founded Terrapin.

"It seemed a pity not to have a puppet theatre, as there had been an interest in puppetry here for such a long time. I applied for some money, and was successful, so then I had to do it," she explains.

Initially, Terrapin had just sufficient funding to employ three puppeteers for six months of the year. Jenny lived on a widow's pension, and worked as artistic director, designer, administrator and publicist. Although the workload was heavy, she enjoyed it enormously, and carried the conviction that the company's work was worthwhile.

As funding support increased, Terrapin Puppet Theatre became able to operate full-time, and to

employ outside artists to work with the company. Constant contact with fresh and talented co-workers has been one of the best aspects of working with Terrapin.

The years have been intensely busy, and Jenny now feels it is time to devote more attention to her own work. She hopes to explore her own ideas, work in sculpture, write a play, and pursue the many the many interests for which she has had little time in recent years.

Annette Downs, the company's new artistic director, has worked as a director, dancer, choreographer, actor and lecturer. Jenny is confident she will give the company a new and exciting direction.

Jenny Davidson regards her retirement with anticipation of fresh opportunities and the satisfaction of a job well done. Under her guidance Terrapin Puppet Theatre has brought puppetry of the highest standard to thousands of Tasmanians, and has established itself on the national cultural scene.

For Jenny, puppetry remains a rich art form, and one with us as much today as at any time in its long history.

"The thing about puppetry is that you present something to an audience, and what they make of it really depends on their imagination," says Davidson. "There's not enough fantasy in people's lives - the sheer enjoyment of seeing & imagining. How can you set the world to rights if you can't imagine what it's like to be somebody else?"

"I think people who don't use their imaginations have cut themselves off from something which is immensely important. It's a great pity people don't treasure their imagination more, because it leads you into things which in this mundane, real world you might never otherwise experience."

editor's note:

On behalf of the many puppeteers who have worked alongside Jenny, I would like to say thank you for contributing your enthusiasm, encouragement, leadership, vision and commitment to our art form. I hope our paths continue to cross. Thanks Jenny.

Heather Monk

ANNETTE DOWNS

New Artistic Director -



Terrapin Puppet Theatre's newly appointed Artistic Director, Annette Downs, took up the position in early 1991.

Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Terrapin Puppet Theatre, Carol Hughes said, "Annette has brought to the Company new skills, a renewed energy and an expansive and exciting vision for the Company's future, which promises to enhance Terrapin's long-standing reputation for excellence and will undoubtedly increase the profile of the Company nationally".

As Artistic Director, Annette has a commitment to continue and build upon Terrapin Puppet Theatre Company's reputation for excellence in puppetry, design and training of skilled puppeteers. She plans an exploration and development of new forms of puppetry, to extend the potential of the art form, in particular in combination with movement and other mediums, with a strong artistic program at all times. Annette will

endeavour to increase the profile and status of the company by attracting artists of the highest standard, providing an environment that stimulates creativity, encourages innovation and supports skills' development.

Annette has a strong, informed movement and dance background as a performer, teacher, choreographer. Thirteen years of dance training and performance led to a choreography appointment as Contemporary Dance Tutor at the Brisbane College of Advanced Education.

Interests in broader forms of theatre saw Annette complete a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Directing and a move into a career in theatre. She has worked with the Royal Queensland Theatre Company, La Boite Theatre (Brisbane), and lectured in voice and movement at the Queensland University of Technology, University College of Southern Queensland, and the Darwin Theatre Company. In 1991 Annette worked as an Actor and Director with Salamanca Theatre Company, Hobart.

Annette's formal qualifications include; Bachelor of Arts Drama, major in Directing, Queensland

University of Technology, Associate Diploma Performing Arts; Kelvin Grove College, Associate Diploma Speech and Drama, Trinity college London.

● *Annette has developed the following draft vision for consultation with the Company and the Australia Council. As Artistic Director Annette aims to:*

1. Support development and exploration in the design and craft element of puppetry.
2. Seek out innovative subject matter, working toward the abstract rather than the literal.
3. Ensure the artistic product is informed by the political and social reality of contemporary Australia.
4. Create performance that is not only based on but informed by, the community or the people it addresses.

5. Develop an organisational culture and artistic approach which actively seeks and responds to community feedback.
6. Develop puppetry performance which reflects the cultural diversity of Australia, especially the Aboriginal people.
7. Actively support the "Arts For a Multicultural Australia Policy" and integrate this into the philosophy of the company.
8. Inject new movement and theatre skills to the expertise already in the company to allow the development of movement focussed work which Terrapin previously lacked the particular expertise to tackle.
9. Extend Terrapin's market beyond the confines of schools and into the broader community through creation of outdoor and flexible venue performances.
10. Use Terrapin's touring flexibility to make it a part of the various festivals and community events held throughout Tasmania. Work towards the company becoming a sought after feature at these events and increase our involvement with rural and isolated communities.
11. Generate relationship and cultural exchange between ourselves and the Asia Pacific region.
12. Tour a specific programme of performance, workshops and skills sharing to this area by 1993-94.
13. Initiate collaboration between the various Tasmanian performing arts companies, particularly in terms of human and physical resources and investigate the potential for script sharing with the national puppetry community.
14. Develop a programme unafraid of, and responsive to, appraisal, review and change.

Staff Development - And Equal Opportunity

15. Pursue professional development for artistic and administrative staff. Continue to produce skilled puppeteers plus empower the performers as individual artists.
16. Develop a company structure based on industrial democracy with regular company

meetings, team devised projects and group contribution to future planning.

A dynamic energy & innovative vision promises new & exciting directions for Tasmania's Premier Puppet Company. X

1992 Churchill Fellowship: Lou Chamberlin Reports

Lou Chamberlin is an art teacher at Eaglehawk Secondary College in Bendigo, and has been working with puppets for a number of years. She was awarded a 1992 Churchill Fellowship and between January and April she travelled extensively to study puppetry in education, visiting Vietnam, Japan, Italy, England and the United States. She has jotted down some of her responses to, and feelings about, the experiences that she had and the people and situations that she met with during her travels.

The experience in Vietnam was overwhelming. Much to my chagrin (and relief) I was met at Noi Bai Airport, Ha Noi, by Mr. Hong, the President of UNIMA Vietnam, together with a car, a driver, an interpreter and a couple of staff members from the University of Culture, and a bunch of flowers! I was feted during the week I spent with them, and discovered that they are very eager to share in cultural exchanges with Australians.

My schedule was very full, and I was fortunate enough to visit a couple of important water puppetry sites outside Ha Noi. If I had not had assistance, this would have been virtually impossible in the limited time I had and with the difficulties in gaining a permit to travel outside the major cities.

Due to decades of war and its aftermath, some elements of Vietnamese life and culture have suffered and many are still in danger. The West has introduced many modern ideas and goods to the country, yet it has failed to give the practical assistance to make them functional. So, although most houses have crumbling walls due to poor building materials and techniques, they also possess a television - that sign of western progress. Priorities have changed, and much that was intrinsically Vietnamese is in danger of being lost. The Government realises the precarious state of 'culture' and 'the arts', and although money is scarce, it is funding study and research in traditional theatre forms.

Water puppetry is certainly the main attraction for non-Vietnamese. The performance that I saw explained its appeal - the simply carved puppets came to life through skilful manipulation and the reflections on the water. Vietnamese puppeteers, as well as traditional dancers and musicians, would like to visit Australia to perform. The University of Culture in Ha Noi would welcome both students wishing to study traditional theatre forms, and professionals prepared to join the staff to teach specific courses. UNIMA Vietnam is interested in making contact with other branches, so if you are looking for penfriends...



My welcome in Japan was no less warm. Staff at the UNIMA centre arranged appointments and served as interpreters, always with a smile, and always promptly! Without a doubt the best puppet theatre that I saw in my four months away was in Tokyo. A performance by Hitomi-za (Deaf Puppet Theatre) was spectacular in its use of actors, puppets, masks, sign language and traditional Japanese stage conventions (such as the *yoruri* reciter and the stylised *Noh* walk). Yuki-za's production of 'Othello' was just as exciting in its juxtaposition of modern and traditional techniques and in the most unusual relationships built up between puppet and puppeteer. No matter that I didn't understand a word being said - the visual and aural experience left no doubts about the meaning of the action and the subtleties on stage.

Talking now about work for children, I saw performance by Puk, Mashubi-za and Ohanashi Caravan. The very young audiences participated well and were very involved in the action on stage. It was disappointing, but not really surprising, to see that frivolities such as puppetry are generally not offered to teenagers. The pressure of school work and *juku* (cramming school) attendance leaves little time, interest or

enthusiasm for 'non-essentials'. Thus there appears to be a void with theatre for adolescents and young adults in Japan. (Did you know that not only do teenagers attended *juku* up to four nights a week, but that they even have *juku* for three year olds, so that they can get into the right kinder, so they can get into the right primary school so they can get into.....?)

The Kodomo Gekijo movement (The Children's Performing Arts Association of spectators) is doing wonderful things to make theatre arts accessible to children in Japan. The nation wide project is enormous and is responsible for 4500 performances annually throughout the country. Their organisation is interested in hearing from Australian groups and individuals who would like to perform at the Tokyo Children's Festival in 1993.

My six weeks in Italy culminated in a week spent in Venice at the height of *Carnivale*. Spectacular! The Italian sense of taste and poise and dignity is every bit as strong as their love of exhibitions - a combination that makes for some excellent visual stimulation. The buzz wasn't only visual - there were Vivaldi concerts, performances of the *Commedia dell'Arte* and street performances of booth puppet theatre to keep the other senses reeling.

I watched puppet maker and performer Mariou Mirabassi in action in Perugia. He is working as part of a council-funded enrichment programme in primary schools in the region, and as such is working with teachers and students in twelve schools doing some great stuff there, and performing in 'white theatre' out of school. He's great with kids and would love to do some workshops in Australia. Anyone interested? Mariou also organises a large puppet festival in the wonderful medieval city of Perugia during the last week in August each year, and he's prepared to organise accommodation and vino for any Australians who would like to be involved. Met two other Italians who would like to visit on working holidays. Guissepina Volpicelli, of Nuova Opera dei Burattini, works with students and teachers as well as performing. Giancarlo Santelli is one of the few makers of traditional leather *Commedia dell'Arte* masks in Italy today, and when he's not working with leather, he's touring Italy with an exhibition of puppets and masks and performing.

I loved the Latin approach to time - would drive the Japanese to distraction! All performances begin late and most about half an hour late. For

one memorable play, I was the only member of the audience there on time!

An interesting point - a strong thread in both Japanese and Italian puppetry is that the puppeteers remain on stage visually during performances. In fact both interrelate openly with the puppets they manipulate - it makes for some powerful performances.

And so to England, where in recent years puppetry has suffered financially, along with most of the arts, due to the political bias of various funding bodies. In many cases puppetry is thought to be socially irrelevant. Funding continues to be withdrawn from a number of large companies of long standing, while others are having their material 'controlled' if funding is desired.

I haven't yet seen a copy of the Gulbenkian Report on "The State of British Puppetry" which was due to be published last month, but there were hopes that it would recognise the problems and suggest practical means of setting improvements in action.

There are a number of very positive things currently happening in puppetry in schools in London. Good funding has been made available for politically 'correct' projects. I visited four schools, both primary and secondary, in the Docklands area and watched some great co-operative learning and integrated arts activities in action. With funded professional help the puppetry being introduced to students was exciting and relevant. Much multicultural material, and projects for disabled children, and some great funding by the Home Office for an extended project (top reach 60 schools) about "Safer Cities". Gets community policing officers into the schools and really discusses the issues with the major input coming from the children. Much work being done in the Celebratory Arts, too. With the cultural make up of today's English cities (especially the Caribbean and African contribution), there is much scope for multicultural input into the performing arts. Very exciting, although there is a danger of tokenism if the community involvement is not sought. England is about to inaugurate its first accredited course in puppetry. Despite the scepticism of many professionals, it will be interesting to see what direction it takes.

New York was one long buzz, adrenalin pumping non-stop! Very excited, enthusiastic people doing very exciting work. Puppetry for children is increasing greatly in popularity. In the last ten

years it has been one of the fastest growing areas of the performing arts presented to children. There are short and long-term puppetry residencies in primary schools and there are puppets for children at risk (and there are plenty of them). I was very impressed by the work being done by Kids on the Block, a commercial concern that markets kits that help children feel more comfortable with their disabled peers and begin to understand and appreciate their disabilities.

I was very excited by the reality of the magnet school system, as I saw it in New York. I visited a performing arts junior high school in Harlem, and watched a team made up of a professional puppeteer, a director, a choreographer and an actor, work with the staff of the school and the Year 9 students towards an imminent production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Really heady stuff for an arts educator who can see the value of an integrated arts approach, especially one where the whole process is legitimised by the rationale of the school.

The down side of the performing and visual arts scene in New York is that many elementary and some junior high schools have no trained art teacher or arts education programme. Since the politically and economically influenced funding cuts in the seventies, lost ground has not been completely recovered in this area. Arts educators fear for the quality of life of a whole generation of children, especially those of minority groups, who have not been sufficiently exposed to theatre to develop their creative, expressive and appreciation skills about the performing and visual arts.

District school boards have funding targeted for the arts, but many schools do not take advantage of it. Perhaps there is so much happening in the schools where the students are at risk that there isn't the time or the energy to think about such 'peripheral issues' as the arts. Perhaps there is an element of discomfort about bringing white specialists into minority schools and the perceived danger is not worth the risk.

Before beginning my trip, I was lucky enough to be able to talk to a number of Australian puppeteers who suggested companies and people to visit. UNIMA Australia, in the form of Axel, was wonderful. In fact, I found whilst travelling that UNIMA people everywhere were most helpful and supportive, but nowhere more so than in Asia.

If you would like to follow up any of the people or programmes that I have mentioned, or if you'd like

any further information about anything that I mentioned in passing, you can write to me at:

• 29 Graham Street, Quarry Hill, Bendigo, 3550.

X



Philip Millar Awarded 1993 Churchill Fellowship

Congratulations to Philip, co-artistic director of Polyglot, on gaining a study grant to travel to the USA and London, looking at high-tech puppet making techniques for film and TV. We hope that he has a wonderful time and returns with many ideas to contribute to the development of a local industry. X



Bobbing Up In Czechoslovakia

by Bob Parsons

In a downtown theatre in Prague Divadlo Rokoko, the final year students of the "Alternative Theatre & Puppet Dept." of the Prague Performing Arts Academy had their premiere of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*.

After a six month rehearsal period - a trifle excessive by most people's standards - the first performance, while trying to be objective, appeared to be a great success. Numerous curtain calls, flowers, kisses, handshakes, nibbles, and copious (sic) quantities of that wonderful Czech brew were the order of the evening.

And enjoying the post performance festivities with his student comrades was one Australian puppet player, trying desperately to understand what was being said to him, in between mouthfuls of cheese, salami & Moravian wine. I got the general gist of it, although not every word... "Well done!", "Congrats", etc, etc. Even after nearly one year, the Czech language remains for me a nightmare!

When I first arrived at this school last year, it was really difficult for foreigners to find a place for themselves, because the school was simply not

ready to accommodate us. While eager to receive our hard currency, they did little to inform us of what was possible to be involved in. No information in English, not even the choice of subjects available. The administrative staff were downright cold, and the teachers were a little scared of us and tried to pretend we were not there.

So after about 6 weeks of doing absolutely nothing, waiting for teachers who never arrived etc, I began to shoot off my veteran democratic mouth, (it's a developing talent), and we slowly came to an understanding of each other's needs.

The performance that I elected to take part in was billed "Clown Study" at the beginning of the semester, so I hurried off to my first class eager to whack on the white stuff and red nose. I find out that our overseer, Karel Kriz, Director of *Divadlo Realistické*, had a broad view of what the term "clown" meant. I witnessed a heated debate between him and the students as they tried to come to terms with his definition of a clown. He was saying that "clown" is the extremes of our everyday emotions, and that Hamlet is a clown, Macbeth, and really any role you choose to name. This troubled my student friends, whom I believe also had their funny shoes and wigs tucked away in their bags.

After a week of discussions and watching videos of different genres of clowning, our student director proposed that we perform Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, in the genre of 'clown', the script (in Czech) was table read for a week or so, and then cut to suit our needs by a student dramaturge. A student designer offered his ideas that the stage design would have the flavour of Super Hero comic, (Captain Marvel, etc) which was accepted, and everything was underway!!

During all this time I was completely ignored. Incapable of communicating very well, I resigned myself to sit quietly and wait for some acceptance, rather than butt in and appear to be some rich know-all foreigner on holidays. No-one at school had taken the time to introduce me to the class, to let them know that I would be here for two years, and that I was an experienced performer. I would go everyday, sit quietly, and try to follow what was happening. Gradually curiosity got the better of the students, and upon discovering who I was and what I was doing there, they quickly took me under their wing. Also by this time, I was speaking Czech enough to be able to speak basically with them.

I was given a couple of small speaking roles in Czech - sheesh? - but mainly I was providing

music. A didgeridu, heavy metal guitar, and Aztec drum don't seem quite appropriate instruments in a Shakespeare play, but there you go, we're "Alternative!" Small traditional Czech marionettes were used for some narrative and links between scenes, but it was mainly theatre for actors.

The rehearsal period was extremely slow and suffered many problems. Lack of rehearsal space, lack of ideas being offered by the students and the directors, petty student quibbles wasting days, our overseer suffering a heart attack, which left us working completely by ourselves, more quibbles!

The date of the premiere was put forward three times, twice because we weren't ready, and once because one actor "broke his leg" (literally) the night before the premiere!!

With all that time at our disposal, (and we disposed of a lot of the time), ideas did develop and things did come together. A smiling *Josef Krofta* (our principal) came, patted backs all round and congratulated us on our work, after the show. He seemed happy, but you never know with these bloody Czechs!! No, they are really wonderful people, and I am looking forward to continuing work here, now that I've found my place in school and that I can say more in Czech than "Yes waiter, I will have another beer!"

Keep wiggling those dollies and AHOJ!! ☘

company reports:

Real Fantasy Theatre

by Julie McNeill
Kyneton

Many Happy Returns:

Written & Performed By Roy McNeill
Puppets By Richard Hart And Roy McNeill

1992, the year we embrace modern technology with the use of a video-camera, (thanks to the financial benefits of working for TV. in the new series, "Lift Off").

For a small, professional venture such as ours, it is a great way to record shows and projects for posterity; where normally since shows are off the road, the puppets and sets are packed away on shelves, and as the dust gathers so the original dynamic performances are lost too.

Also valuable is the aid to rehearsal, when the puppeteer can evaluate the efforts made and improve the performance techniques. Roy has

recently finished re-rehearsing *Many Happy Returns*, for tours in Queensland.

The show was originally sponsored by the recycling unit of the Environment Protection Authority in 1988, and has been performed in Victoria, South Australia, Northern Territory and N.S.W. since. Obviously it has a strong curriculum-based attraction and is often followed by "rubbish" puppet-making workshops.

Following a successful tour in the Bundaberg region last year, the Queensland Arts Council have booked TERM 1 in Cairns and outer areas, followed by Roy's great adventure into the remote communities of the Cape York area, in a light aircraft. Unfortunately, spouse and offspring can't fit in, this time, though we will be able to receive video letters!

TERM 3 will hopefully see Roy developing a new adult puppet show, with a team of Victorian puppeteers, based on his script, *The Arrival Of The Travellers*, part of a larger project, based on the works of Max Ernst, the surrealist painter.

Many Happy Returns will then be performed in Brisbane schools at the end of the year, with new ideas for another original and progressive school-based show from Roy, but more of the later! ☘



T.P.T.'s show 'Gammer'

Terrapin Tales

A long time ago when Tasmania was a cultural desert, there came a woman in sarong & thongs named Jennifer, a master of puppetry, design & management, and so emerged **Terrapin Puppet Theatre**. It is now some 10 years on, and from the grassy green pastures of Salamanca Theatre Company, Annette Downs pranced, plie'd &

pirouetted into the artistic thongs of her predecessor.

It was a time of tumultuous turmoil for tormented turtles, grieving the loss of our illustrious leader, and our Lizzie Lorikeet spreading her wings & flapping her feathers into a frenzied future.

Gregory our pillar of pine, turned his circular saw in and the keys to the van went 'In Cahoots' with Ruth our dyeing ferrous phosphate Queen of Fabric. Mighty Margaret packed her pencils & eraser and left and Michael Field left with his funding. But even in the darkest night, someone may strike a match.

Old Terrapins never die, they just go on shorter contracts.

First to return was Jennifer with script & puppets in hand, then came Lizzie & Astrid as a two person band. From far away fields, just next door, came Greg & Ruth ('In Cahoots') are still available for consultation. And Pam presses on, with precision & flair, sewing & stitching 4 Caramello Koalas & 5 Freddo Frogs.

But wait, there is more in store for you, our captivated reader, Eleanor Downs, (no relation), our Casino of administration, is cashing in and talking a gamble on a European adventure. Our brave & daring director, Jindra flies too, to the Continent, back to familiar territory, to see what's left of Yugoslavia, travelling onwards to her previous nest in Czechoslovakia, leaving her 3 little turtles paddling frantically on their own, waiting for her safe return.

From a far distant city, of big buildings and smoke, it is David Sheehan, who duck walks into Terrapin. It is a far cry from the University of Western Sydney where he strutted the boards, to our humble turtle nest where he is learning to swim.

It is David that joins Kirsty & Philip on their quest for perfection, performing *Gammer*, a recycled, reused, reduced & revitalised and environmentally friendly show, (except the puppets that are made out of King Billy Pine).

But it is in *Another Space, Another Place* that the skills & expertise is tested, two puppeteers play - an emu, a goanna, a sugar glider, a kangaroo, a joey, a bower bird, a platypus & an echidna while Kirsty plays twelve years old Sarah & a wand & a ball & a string.

The time of parting is just around the corner, when the 3 little turtles must swim and wander the unknown wilderness of Tasmanian schools. Christine our newest turtle, is breaking all records for bringing in bookings.

She is better at manipulation than the puppeteers - assuming every school has already booked, and she merely confirming their intent.

It is in the fall, the merry month of May that Ruth Pieloor joins the company as our newest trainee turtle. It is in September that all the turtles face the biggest challenge - a devised show inspired by the workshops given by Jacques Templeraud - *Merci Mate!*

From then, the turtles travel deep into new uncharted oceans, searching, seeking and finding a new & exciting future. X

What's Up With The Sydney Puppet Theatre?

by Sue Wallace

We spent most of Jan. 1992 recovering from a very hectic 1991 that engaged us in a seemingly never ending stream of work. We completed about 20 weeks of school touring with *Roald Dahl's Shorts*, built a new show for Australia's Wonderland, moved workshops, rehearsed and performed in *Marina, Journey To The End* [produced by Dasha Blahova for Carnivale at the Seymour Centre] and completed a creative development grant project [Australia Council funding] for a new in-theatre show for children currently titled *Snake Magic And Other Tails*. We were also able, thanks to Susan Lintern Coward and Rob Matson, to catch up with some friends in Melbourne over sausages and vege-burgers.

1992 does not seem nearly so imposing yet. We spent time in January cleaning our new workshop space from rafters to floorboards and painting walls. We are planning a series of puppet making workshops for adults and introducing monthly "salons"- creative evenings of fun...but more about that in the next issue! We have three new shows for adults on the drawing board and are waiting on news about Australia Council funding to produce *Snake Magic*.

I was also very fortunate, in Jan. this year to attend a mini summer -school [organised by Jonquil Temple] in a beautiful, large old house in the Blue Mountains. Here we shared ideas, made and experimented with masks and constructively criticised works in progress. Apart from that we strengthened friendships with our peers, ate, drank and we were merry except for the proliferation of dreadful puns! ☘

Skylark Report

This year 1992, **Skylark Theatre Company** is experiencing major changes. Shelley McDonald, who founded the company with Marie-Martine Ferrari in 1984 is going on to new adventures in Sydney. We thank her for her dedicated and invaluable contribution to Skylark.

There is new blood in Skylark making the company larger than it has ever been. Elizabeth Paterson has joined us as Creative Assistant. Elizabeth is a visual artist of great originality whose previous involvement with Skylark was as an actress in the original 1989 *Charlotte's Web*. The position of Administrative Assistant has gone to Amalia Matheson, a University of New England Theatre Studies graduate. Finally Tania Gristwood has joined us, straight from Patch Theatre Centre, as Production /Tour Manager of our first 1992 production, *Charlotte's Web*. Marie-Martine continues as Creative Director, and Mark Soulsby as Administrative Director.

The 1992 program has been decided and kicks off with the revival of an old favourite, *Charlotte's Web*. This production, however, is not only revived but also revised with a new script by Gilly Farrelly and a new set design by Caroline Jones. *Charlotte's Web* will tour nationally throughout the year.

The second production is another revival - the broadly acclaimed show *The Inside Story* - a journey through the human body. The *Inside Story* is to be directed by its original star, Leonie Fletcher, and will also be touring extensively.

The third show, *The Sounds Of The Seasons*, is for very young children and is written & directed by David Atfield. It is a visually exciting exploration of the vowel sounds of the English language.

Exciting things are happening at Skylark. Contact Mark Soulsby for further information. ☘

individual reports:

Peter J. Wilson, In Brisbane

by Ellen Appleby

Five Brisbane artists and one Cairns artist were funded last year through the Educational Theatre Collective for 5 weeks creative development with master puppeteer **Peter J. Wilson**. Peter, previously the co-Artistic Director of Handspan Theatre is an innovator in puppetry & visual theatre. The six women, Pat Zuber, Ellen Appleby, Kath Poirill, Pamela Harris, Florence Teillet & Donna Touissant were from a variety of backgrounds and experiences in performing arts. Peter came to Brisbane for a week in March, followed by four weeks in June.

During the introductory week in March, Peter showed us some of his work with Handspan Theatre. We began to learn isolation & manipulation exercises for puppeteers, as well as object theatre & black theatre techniques. Peter was the puppeteer in the Playbox Theatre's production of *Cho-Cho-San*, and was able to bring with him the



Baby & the Butterfly puppets used in this production. The Baby puppet gave us the opportunity to learn to manipulate a bunraku style puppet with three puppeteers.

The four weeks in June saw further development of the skills we touched on in the first week. Bunraku training techniques using bamboo sticks, fixed point and isometric exercises were developed every day. Manipulation of the Baby was a useful & demanding experience involving extreme concentration, awareness of each other, and the refining of the small movements the puppet makes. It took many hours of practice for

the puppet to work meaningfully and maintain its focus.

Animating inanimate objects such as chairs, newspaper and balls were also explored and developed. Short pieces were devised using logistics, dynamics and movement. We rehearsed using black theatre techniques as we had two days use of the Cremorne Theatre towards the end of the project. This enabled us to use a light corridor.

A black theatre piece inspired by a poem was group devised, involving 5 puppeteers. Working this piece in the Cremorne Theatre, we were able to refine it. Techniques of revelation, working in corridors of light, moving and locating objects in the dark, timing, pace, etc. were all explored and developed.

Simple bunraku puppets were constructed and an amusing short piece was devised which involved handing over the puppets from fully seen puppeteers to unseen puppeteers, much to the disgust of the puppets!

One of the outcomes of the project was a 'work in progress' presentation at the Cremorne Theatre, followed by a lively discussion with the audience. The audience consisted of interested theatre workers, teachers, artists, performers and two members of the Compagnie Phillipe Genty. The work was received with great interest and encouragement to take the work further. Many of the audience members had not seen this type of theatre in Brisbane before.

The work was documented on video to become part of the Queensland Performing Arts Trust's 'Statewide' educational broadcast on puppetry, which were shown in November 1991. They were broadcast via TSN11 satellite receiving stations throughout Queensland.

The group will continue to meet and hopes to receive further funding to develop a theatre piece for Brisbane audiences involving puppetry & visual theatre in 1992.

This project was funded with assistance from the Queensland Arts Division and the Australia Council. X

Shadow Puppet Workshops at the Children's Museum

by Mary Sutherland

I was invited by the Museum of Victoria, children's Museum to run shadow puppet making workshops in January 1992.

The workshops ran in conjunction with the display of some beautiful traditional Greek Karagiozis shadow puppets donated by the puppet master Dimitris Katsoulis.

I am grateful to Margo Hobba and Judy McKinty of the Children's Museum for the excellent arrangements made, the acquisition of all my sometimes unusual materials, and the supply of equipment.

I took groups of up to twelve children at a time aged from about 4 to 14 years. Each session went for two hours and I took six sessions throughout January. As an introduction I gave a brief historical show and tell, using my portable screen and actual puppets from Turkey (similar to karagiozis) and a beautiful example of a Wayang Kulit, Javanese shadow puppet. I varied the content of this introduction according to the ages of my group. The older children and parent helpers especially enjoyed the history and asked many questions. I also showed various puppets that I have made myself, as an inspirational starting point.

With the smallest children we made some very effective butterflies from doilies and cellophane. Those able to use scissors made caterpillars from a chain of circles joined by paper fasteners with a head and tail attached to rods. We found that most of the children between 4 and 7 needed almost constant supervision and the participation of their parent most helpful. There are always exceptions and I particularly remember the brilliant understanding and art of one five year old girl.

The older children were sometimes more promising but often more difficult. My intention was that the older children would draw their own designs up, looking at how the examples worked. A few lovely original puppets were designed and made, to 8 year old boys made knights in armour complete with moving sword arm and shield. Two girls of 11 and 12 made some very original monsters but on the whole it was very difficult to get many of the children to design a puppet in the short time available and with so many different levels going at once. My alternative was to supply some basic templates and encourage the children to vary the designs to suit themselves. I would have preferred to have had time to help each child make their own expressive individual design but I also wanted to give everyone the

satisfaction of achievement. I succeeded in helping each child to make the best puppet he/she could then, these basic puppets were surprisingly innovative when decorated in individual style.

At the end of the session or when each young puppet maker had to leave, each child went behind the screen and displayed his or her creation. Sometimes small groups played a scene together though these were mostly rather violent, eg. butterflies battering each other. There were also many questions from parents about making a screen at home, which can be very simple.

I enjoyed doing these workshops very much, it is exciting showing children a new art. The children and parents all seemed happy and satisfied and as every group was different and I discovered new ideas and techniques each time. This series of workshops is the first I have done with children and after this experience I'll look forward to any future opportunities. X

Ross Browning

Last year I spent 27 weeks touring my primary school show *Puppetease* with my partner Jane Pape so *Puppetease* was a two-hander. This year Jane was elected to return to her former career as an interior designer and adventurer.

So alas, I've become a one man travelling showman with bookings all over Australia coming out my ears. I'm currently touring *Puppetease* to primary schools in Perth for 2 months. However one of my touring highlights this year includes a 4 week tour of the Northern Territory for the NT Arts Council; starting in Alice Springs, working the schools up to Darwin, then flying across Arnhem Land to the Gove Peninsula and Groote Eylandt. For this exotic tour Jane joins me again so the two-hander format will apply here.

Later in the year I'll be touring Canberra, Adelaide, North Coast NSW and Tasmania. It's a challenge and a buzz for me to work solo. I can recommend it to those of you who have not yet been tempted in this direction. In my show the music (live and recorded) features heavily from the moment the audience walks into the performance space.

I've had some wild and woolly experiences too! Last week (here in Perth) I visited a school that didn't have a covered performance space. I set up in the shade of some big leafy trees, ran a long

power lead across to the gardeners shed, and performed to nearly 300 kids outdoors in the shade! All was going extremely well until the wind that I've come to expect, Perth's Fremantle Doctor, decided to make itself fully felt. Having toured Perth's schools last year, I was well aware of this city's windy, undercover venues. I rebuilt a more robust set to accommodate this. However I hadn't brought my tent pegs, sand bags, and French braces for outdoor performances! To cut a long story short, the set gave in to a rather large gust and for a split second looked as if it was sailing toward my audience.....! Fortunately I was standing between the set and the audience so my set took it out on me instead.

AH, TOURING! Best to be prepared for anything when you are 4000+ kilometres from home. I reckon it's a wonderful freedom to be performing solo to primary school children. Tremendously rewarding, and I'm seeing most of Australia at the same time. Australia really blows me out! X

cover story:

State Of The Nation:

Survey Results Company Information 1992 Questionnaire

Australia is currently experiencing the 'recession we were told we had to have'. What is happening out there? What is Australian Puppet Theatre still able to achieve under these financial constraints?

To find out, Manipulation editors distributed a questionnaire, on a range of topics, to various companies throughout Australia and New Zealand. The topics were:

1. PLANS & PROGRAM 1992
2. FUNDING STATUS & SOURCES
3. EMPLOYMENT
 - Administration
 - Production/workshop
 - Puppeteers
 - Other artists (performers, musicians, writers etc)
4. TRAINEESHIPS
5. TOURING
6. MASTER CLASSES & VISITORS

The results, listed by company, are as follows:

TERRAPIN PUPPET THEATRE

1. PLANS & PROGRAM 1992

Gammer by Heather Nimmo

Gammer is drawn from the traditions of "1984" and "Brave New World". A mask, rod and hand puppet production, it examines a possible future Australia where freedom is oppressed and truth is found in the "telling" of *Gammer*, an elderly Aboriginal woman.

For: secondary schools, matriculation colleges, throughout Tasmania.

Another Place, Another Space by Jennifer Davidson

For: Primary schools & Non-English speakers - 1992

Then It Starts To Happen by Mary Blackwood & Jennifer Davidson

This is a new work for kindergartens & under 6's, based on the book 'Derek the Dinosaur' by Mary Blackwood.

For: Term 3, 1992, Tasmania

Dolphin Story by Martin Thomas

Terrapin has commissioned Martin to develop his short story into a puppet play

For: upper primary/lower secondary students.

Creative Development:

In June, Terrapin & the 'In Cahoots' company (Greg Methe and Ruth Hadlow), will collaborate on a work that focuses on the relationship between body & object, spatial interaction and the animation of known objects.

For: upper primary & lower secondary students - September.

2. FUNDING STATUS & SOURCES

Australia Council,	
Performing Arts Board	Annual Grant
	\$ 156,681
Literature Board	Commission
	5,455
Arts Tasmania	Annual Grant
	72,000
Trainee Puppeteer	5,000

3. EMPLOYMENT

THE COMPANY 1992

Full time:

Artistic Director Annette Downs

Administrator Andrea Taman

Director/Tutor Jindra Rosendorf

Puppeteers Philip Mitchell, Kirsty Grierson, David Sheehan;

Trainee Puppeteer Ruth Pieloor

Part time:

Bookings Co-ordinator Christine Woodland

Contract Staff:

Designer/Construction/Writer

Jennifer Davidson

Designer/Technician Greg Methe

Fabricator Pam Daniels

Designer/Construction Ruth Hadlow

Musicians/Composers Liz Ertler, Astrid Folvig

Writers Mary Blackwood, Martin Thomas, Lian Tanner

4. TRAINEESHIPS

Ruth Pieloor will be employed as a Trainee Puppeteer for 6 months from July 1, 1992. The Company gratefully acknowledges the support of Arts Tasmania in providing us with funds to employ Ruth. An application to the Australia Council for additional support is still outstanding.

Ruth will work with Annette Downs and Jindra Rosendorf on *Then It Starts To Happen*, as well as workshops designed to introduce secondary students to puppetry.

5. TOURING

All touring for 1992 will be within Tasmania

6. MASTER CLASSES & VISITORS

Terrapin began the year with 2 weeks set aside for training. During this period Corporeal Mime artist, Designer & Director Pierre Thibaudau, Artistic Director of Sydney's Entracte Theatre conducted a movement/mime workshop with puppeteers & other interested theatre workers.

The Company took part in *Labour of Love*, a long-weekend workshop directed by Robyn Archer, culminating in a performance for the Tasmanian Labour Day Picnic. If this opportunity comes to your state we suggest you...DO IT! Robyn was an inspiration & the opportunity to develop a work with the general community proved invaluable.

We are also bringing out Joseph Krofta in early 1993, (pending funds). He will direct a production for primary schools. The rehearsal process will be open to observers.

If anyone would like to arrange workshops with him on the mainland, please call Annette at Terrapin on: 002.346.086.

POLYGLOT PUPPET THEATRE

1. PLANS & PROGRAM

Tadpole by Helen Lunn & Philip Millar

For: Prep - Grade 2, March - July

Digger's Mate by Helen Lunn

For: Prep - Grade 2, July - Dec

Sponsored by the Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre

Almost A Dinosaur by Jill Morris
For: Prep - Grade 6, June - August
Star Monstar by Julianne O'Brien
For: Prep - Grade 6, May - August
Sponsored by the Royal Children's Hospital
Safety Centre

Creative Development:

A workshop for a new production by Helen Lunn,
and directed by Elena Eremin. November 92

2. FUNDING STATUS & SOURCES

Australia Council,
Performing Arts Board
Victorian Arts Ministry
Vic Health
Trusts (occasional)

3. EMPLOYMENT

In total, 35 puppet workers will be employed in
1992. Our company is based on full time permanent
employees for administration & 2 co-artistic
directors.
Australia Council,

Workers are employed on a show-by-show basis
depending on the production requirements.

Administration: 2 full time
2 co-artistic directors (on a
shared retainer)
Production: approx. 5 per show
Puppeteers: 13
Other Artists: 17

4. TRAINEESHIPS

No, traineeships so far. Once we have our new
premises we hope to implement a traineeship
programme.

5. TOURING

Tadpole - South Australia and Tasmania
Almost a Dinosaur - South Australia
Digger's Mate - South Australia

6. MASTER CLASSES AND VISITORS

No master classes are planned so far. We hope
we will have some visitors. Australian puppet
theatre workers are invited to visit us at any time,
so please ring us if you are coming.
(Naomi: 03.826.1937)

NEW ZEALAND PUPPET THEATRE

1. PLANS & PROGRAM

Out Of My Mind - Directed by Peter Wilson
(Spare Parts Puppet Theatre).
For: 6-12 year olds
June - Dec; Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington;
1993 - Possible Australian Tour
New Mask Show - Directed by Nick Blake

Exploring the style of 'half mask' performance
based on a High School text such as *The
Crucible*.

For: 13 - 18 year olds

Sept - Oct; Auckland

New Adult Show - Directed by Peter Wilson
(Spare Parts Puppet Theatre)

The development of a new single-hander with
actor/puppeteer Nick Blake

For: Adults

Oct - Nov; Wellington, Auckland

1993 Possible Australian Festival tour.

Museum Show - Directed by Warwick
Broadhead.

Using our entire puppet collection. Cast of more
than 100; Auckland Town Hall.

For: Family

Dec.

New Pre-school Show - Over the past 6 months
our existing pre-school show involving shadow
puppetry and music has been very
well received. We performed at the Aotea Centre
for a 2 week season during May, and will be
developing a new show in October 1992, for
kindergartens and lower primary schools.

2. FUNDING STATUS AND SOURCES

(All funding is on a project by project basis only)
Queen Elizabeth 1st Arts Council of NZ.
Aotea Centre
Health Sponsorship Council
Auckland City
Various Trusts, etc.

3. EMPLOYMENT

The NZPT employs a full-time General
Manager/Artistic Director who in turn employs
Directors and Puppeteers on a contract basis.
The theatre also has a part-time curator of the
Museum Collection, which is housed in the Aotea
Centre.

In 1992 the theatre will employ:

3 Directors

7 Puppeteers

Set-builders; Lighting Designers, etc.

4. TRAINEESHIPS

Most of the Puppeteers working with us are
untrained, and we are slowly building a skills
base, through doing class at the beginning of
each rehearsal day. Due to the contract nature of
employment we do not have any ongoing
traineeships.

5. TOURING

The cost of touring in the past has been prohibi-
tive, but the theatre is now looking at coming to
Australian and other overseas festivals to

exchange skills, and see other work. Locally we will be touring to the South Island this year, and hopefully coming to Australia next year with several of our shows, to tour both schools and festivals.

6. MASTER CLASSES AND VISITORS

At the beginning of 1992 NZPT brought John Bolton over from Melbourne for a 2 week workshop in half-mask.

Peter Wilson (Spare Parts Puppet Theatre) has been teaching at the New Zealand Drama School

We welcome other Australian puppeteers to come and teach with us where appropriate.

SKYLARK PUPPET & MASK THEATRE

1. PLANS & PROGRAMS

Charlotte's Web - Adapted by Gilly Farrelly
For: Family audience; throughout Australia - 1992
The Inside Story
For: Primary schools and family audiences - 1992
The Sounds of the Seasons by David Atfield
For: Very young audiences

HANDSPAN THEATRE

1. PLANS & PROGRAMS

Ask For The Captain by Ljiljana Ortolja
For: General public; Victorian Arts Centre March
Lunatic Soup by Gilly Farrelly
For: secondary schools, Terms 3 - 4, Vic
No Right Angles In Paradise by Ken Evans & Gilly Farrelly
For: festival audiences, Australia, Japan - 1992
The Immaculate Contraption by Michelle Spooner with -
The Therapeutiste by Rene Magritte & Katy Bowman
For: festival audiences, Yugoslavia, Australia - 1992
Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift & Andrew Bovell; in collaboration with the Melbourne Theatre Company
For: adult audience, June - July, 1992
The Reading Boy by John Romeril
For: family audience, Queensland tour, June - 1992
Hand Made - Puppetry lectures, demonstrations, workshops & events - 1992
Creative Developments
Assorted projects; Oct - Dec.

2. FUNDING STATUS & SOURCES

Australia Council

Performing Arts Board \$146,660
Victorian Arts Ministry \$104,650
Vic Health \$20,000

3. EMPLOYMENT

Full time:

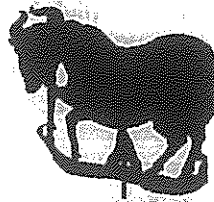
General Manager Vivian Hickman

Artistic Director: Ken Evans

Part time:

Admin Assistant Melissa Harrison

Proprietal membership: 31 performers, makers, designers et al - employed as required.



industry:

Snippets From The Industrial Grapevine

by Janet Dalglish
28 April 1992

Birdies are on the wing muttering about the possibility of a new forum for puppeteers who do it for a living to air their views. I refer to the hopefully soon to be formed Equity Puppeteers Sub-committee (Victoria).

If Victorian puppeteers decide it's a good idea & vote for its existence, we will be able to use Equity's contacts throughout the entertainment industry to educate our fellow performers (actors, dancers, singers, mimes, stand-up comedians, fire-eaters), about how valid & unique our skills are.

It will give us an opportunity to voice our concerns over non-performers operating robotics & puppets in TV commercials (have you seen some of the awful things going on out there)?! We will be able to contribute in the future to our own award conditions (I know many puppeteers & TIE workers aren't happy with the current award, which is really geared to theatre actors). We will have the opportunity to make a direct contribution to any recommendations to where future funding for different kinds of training should go. We will also be able to get useful information from Equity about things like how to run a cooperative without getting hurt, what kinds of contracts are appropriate to what kind of situation and so on.

We are hoping the first meeting will be happening very soon, but if you are a Victorian puppeteer & you want to know more, contact:
Howard Manley (03-) 417-1055 or
Janet Dalglish (03-) 482-3098

»

UNIMA Australia

Since the resignation of Axel Axelrad at Christmas, UNIMA has sought and received nominations for the position of president. There are two candidates; Jenny Davidson and David Poulton.

The problem Axel experienced with his applications for assistance with travel costs both as councillor for Australia at UNIMA congresses and as a member of the Asia-Pacific Commission may be resolved by UNIMA'S intention to seek membership of UNESCO. In this event the Department of Foreign Affairs would become the obvious source of funds, not the Australia Council. We urge those of you whose membership has lapsed to join up and be counted. It is important that Australia should have a representative with a strong mandate, both at home and abroad, and we should seize this opportunity to push for recognition with the government.

On the home front, we need a stronger UNIMA centre - it is the only mechanism that connects us all, and its information network needs to be fed and invigorated by all members. We trust that the new president will be able to inspire fresh enthusiasm for the organisation within Australia as well as continuing to keep open a window onto the world.

Environmentally Friendly Puppet Makers

by Mary Sutherland

It seems that every material we use in puppet making has some harmful side effect either to our fragile environment or to the sometimes equally fragile health of our puppet makers.

It was with this in mind that my two puppet making friends and I explored the exotic shelves and stacks of The Woodsmiths of Ivanhoe. In the murky depths of that purveyor of fine timbers there were sights and textures and woody aromas to tantalise and tempt even these would be "greenie" puppet makers. After long deliberation, and with apologetic mutters of "it's probably plantation grown" and "I don't think Jelutong is endangered anyway" we succumbed and joyfully

carried off our treasure, of a piece of the best carving timber available, soft, light and short grained.

We returned to the workshop and triumphantly marched up to the side door of the house to show off our prize. At that moment who should come strolling around the other side of the house but a young woman with a clipboard announcing, "Hello! I'm from Greenpeace would you like to" I didn't hear the rest as I was one of the ones that ran and hid in the workshop with the Jelutong. We left our friend standing like a shocked statue. Who know what the Greenpeace rep. thought? We collapsed into embarrassed, hysterical giggles.

We do care, we felt guilty, I'm a member of Greenpeace myself, but it's very difficult to follow your conscience, look out for your own health and safety and still work quickly enough to make a living. »

'The Times They Are A'Changin...'

by Susan Lintern Coward & Rob Matson

Once Upon A Time there were such things as puppet companies with a stable core of: Director, Designer, Puppetmaker(s) and Puppeteer(s) who developed many works together over the years, and thus came to a mutual understanding about what the process of putting a piece of puppet theatre onto a stage should be. This didn't always work smoothly to be sure - even well-oiled machines emit the occasional grinding noise, but on the whole, it was possible to assume a consensus among people who knew the Art form, each other and each other's work.

Something has happened to the traditional ways - Companies now often only have a stable administration, with all other positions in a state of flux. The Freelance life is more the norm than the Salaried. Indeed, we are even seeing collaborations between Theatre and puppet Companies, with a sharing of personnel as well as of ideas and technique.

It seems that we need to examine and redefine the respective roles in these changed circumstances: A lack of understanding has developed among some people working on different areas of the same 'coal-face', coupled with a fatalistic willingness to suffer the consequent problems time and again: Communication, or lack of it, bedevils all too many productions and turns them into a frustrating experience for many concerned. But

rather than saying...."We should all talk more", in a business more characterised by talkers than by listeners, wouldn't it be more efficient if we took the trouble to agree on some ground rules?

We are going to look at just one of the areas where problems occur: Design, because the cutting edge - on stage - where performers and puppets, the result of design decisions appear together, all too often performers feel hampered by the inappropriateness of the puppet for the task and the puppetmaker is sickened to see the real potential of their creation wasted. How many times have puppeteers cried, "Oh, if only the puppet would do a, b, or c"? How many times have puppetmakers thought, "If only I'd known that's what you wanted, I'd have made it so that it could". Or, more bitterly, "If I'd been given the necessary Time, it would have been made differently"...

Looking at that thwarted performer and that unfairly accused puppetmaker it is clear that there is what we shall call a 'Design Gap' which both are uncomfortably straddling. Is this really a recipe for a successful show? What has happened to the vitally important collaboration between Direction and Design? It has been tested and found sadly wanting.

In these, the 'Salad Days' of increasing (and invigorating) cross-over between Theatre and Puppet Theatre personnel, when it is becoming unreasonable to expect a Director to have a thorough acquaintance with a puppet's potential in performance, let alone a cursory one with their workings, how unrealistic are the expectations we still have of a Designer? It may be that in the past when each company specialised in one style of work or had a resident Designer, he or she was familiar with particular joints, materials, ideal centres of gravity, weighting, etc. Now we all expect to use the full range of construction techniques, experiment with newly-discovered materials and devise new mechanisms to solve (and complicate) old problems! Unless a practising puppetmaker themselves, what Designer could hope to keep up with this? After all, they have other areas of responsibility as well.

So, it is increasingly probable that neither Director nor Designer will be fully acquainted with the medium of Puppet Theatre, and in these circumstances it is foolish of us to go on behaving as if Designers are as capable of designing Puppets as they are Sets, Costumes and Props. You may say, "Of course we don't, it would be absurd", but it is effectively what happens if the Puppetmaker, with his or her superior knowledge,

is not given at least the same amount of input into the decision-making process from the very beginning - which includes setting an appropriate Budget and Time-scale. Otherwise you have 'the partially blind leading the sighted'.

Design problems which put a scowl instead of a smile on puppeteer's face seem particularly acute in work which does not fall into the fully-scripted, predictable-in-performance category. It seems that in the heady process of creating a new work, discussion and agreement on the fundamental requirements for successful puppetry are often neglected.

Yet we have the perfect forum for this collaboration: For shows which can be roughly termed 'experimental', it is the good fortune of Puppet Companies here to enjoy that imaginative and well-targeted fiscal advance from the Australia Council, The Creative Development Grant. This gives a number of weeks in which to ask questions, find out the answers and leave everyone with a clear idea of what to expect when the 'real' build and rehearsals start.

To be plain, while the work itself may be more ambitious and 'difficult', the Creative Development should tighten and channel it into those tried and tested grooves that we expect at the beginning of a 'normal' production; including, among other essentials, a fairly definitive list of everything that needs to be built and workable designs for puppets - to a Realistic Budget. But how often is the process followed in the optimal way so as to give everyone the best possible 'launch-pad' into the production?

At the very least, Writer, Director, Designer, Puppet maker(s) and Puppeteer(s) need to be present during the process. Designer and Puppet maker to be sure will move between workshop and rehearsal studio, but for both of them not to be actually engaged in helping to decide how the show is going to work is asking for trouble later on, when there is no time to fix it. While the Writer and Director have to concern themselves with the 'why' of the show, it is vital that the Director, Designer, Puppet maker(s) and Puppeteer(s) sort out the 'how'. This is not the time to be fixing the final look of things, but to deal with the Engineering, or much precious time in the final build will have to be spent solving those problems which should have been dealt with experimentally.

Whatever category of production process the show falls into, there are certain questions that the Puppet maker will always need an answer to

before he or she can make the best possible puppets:

1. What is the puppet going to be asked to do?
(Basic specifications: eg walk, fly, crawl, talk, dance dismember.
2. What movements are vital and what desirable?
3. What size? What style? What materials?
4. How many people are going to be working the puppet most of the time?
5. What is the relationship of puppets to the set?
6. What is and isn't possible in the build time, for the budget? So, what compromises need to be made in the design?
7. What are the priorities and what are the 'if time permits' items on the final list?

If the show is to be subject to the Creative Development then acceptable solutions to all the above have to be negotiated sufficiently before the end of that process for them to have been tested and agreed on.

As performers, we would expect to use this time to demonstrate to the Writer and Director what the possibilities are - actions initiated by them or by ourselves, and for subsequent decisions to be made what to develop further or what to drop altogether. Why should the Puppet maker not work in the same way?

Surely the best, if not the only method of arriving at satisfactory answers to the first 3 questions on the list as by the building and rebuilding of mock-ups during the development period, for the performers to work with and experiment. By mock-ups, we do not mean prototypes of external design, but Skeletons... Good puppets for skilled Puppeteers are built from the inside out - mechanics first, surface last. The reverse method of construction results in puppets that will not do what is required of them. This is in no-one's interest.

It is often wrongly assumed by inexperienced Directors that these mechanical problems have been solved in some form or other in a previous production, or that they are very simple to deal with. In fact, unless you are asking for an exact replica, each puppet is a different problem; something as basic as size variation alone affects movement enormously, not to mention the materials to be used in construction. Mechanisms

have to be specifically designed or at least adapted to suit the puppet, and this can easily double the build time. It is all very well to talk airily of making a puppet 'versatile'- it's like ordering a 'vehicle'; Wings, wheels or fins? Solo or passenger? Self-propelled? Collapsible? All of these? Move over James Bond. Do we really have a film budget to play with?

We have to accept that most Designers are concerned purely with appearance. They may be quite happy with a puppet that looks like their drawing despite its internal workings (and hence the quality of movement) having to be seriously compromised to fit the frame. Angelic looks have concealed many a hellish contraption. This is not to say that they shouldn't decide the style of the show, just that where the Designer only has the skill to deal with the aesthetics, design for the Puppet Theatre should be an equal collaboration with the Puppet maker. Form and Function have to be complimentary. A Puppet that looks good standing still but moves badly, is badly designed. The Puppet maker must be fully empowered in the creation of the work and not subject to handed-down decisions part way through.

This 'empowerment' has just as importantly to extend to decisions about Time and Money. After all these years, companies are still trying to pretend that Puppet making isn't the time-consuming and expensive business that it really is. They wish to make full use of technical advances without admitting that increased sophistication means more Time and therefore more Money. All too often, both are seriously underestimated in the planning process and the result is too-hastily made, disappointing puppets, and what frankly looks like exploitation of the makers factored into the build by the unwillingness to acknowledge Reality. The majority of puppets take between 2 to 4 weeks from start to finish. I wish that Puppetmakers would not agree to do more than they can do well in the time allowed - Puppeteers will not thank them for their heroic effort in building a 15 day puppet in 5 days when it doesn't work very well and needs constant repair. As for Directors, they have remarkably selective memories...

Puppetmakers will be judged by results alone - they will be blamed for failings not of their making, so it is in their interest to create the conditions they need for success. Companies have to learn either to fit the Design to the Budget, or the Budget to the Design. All too often as things stand we end up accusing people rather than reviewing the process. If the process is not right then the best makers and puppeteers in the world

are not going to be able to overcome that initial handicap.

Puppeteers and Puppetmakers should be one another's best ally in making sure the Design Gap is bridged - they develop as much through the other's skills as theirs - just as a competent violinist will improve remarkably if they pick up a Stradivarius, or a talented instrument-maker would stretch their abilities to the very limit if commissioned by an Oistrakh, so it is with us.

Surely too, the reputations of Writer, director, Designer, and Company can only be enhanced by a happier creative relationship on stage between puppeteer and puppet. X

Lift Off It's A Wrap.

by Susan Lintern Coward.

3 years in the planning: A "concept for the nineties" involving "Australia's most creative and talented writers, artists, performers, film makers and educators", to create "26 hours of high quality television using all styles and genres" in a "quantum leap forward in quality, style and content" to be "the most innovative children's television program Australia has produced." (Australian Children's Television Foundation)

Gosh! Leaves you breathless. But could it ever live up to the hype?

When Lift-Off hit our screens in May, what impression did we get? Well, it's certainly a class act - high ideals matched by high production values (ie. money) is a rare state of affairs in children's television and a joy to behold. Does the skin fit comfortably on the skeleton of educational and social theory? Yes, -on the whole it does; each episode is thematic with the different 'sections' ie. the central families; the philosophical 'munch kids'; the encyclopaedic elevator; the Wakadoo Cafe puppets and Rocky the Lizard-behind-the-camera all contributing a view from a different perspective to give a wide angle picture illuminating that theme.

Mostly, the medium adorns the message, but regretfully I have to say that the exception is in the puppet segments, Wakadoo Cafe and the Lizard Cave, where we get whacked over the head with it.

It seems to me that in all those months of planning, the Foundation might have thought to look for writers who had worked with puppets before, or sat down with them (with a fizzy drink

and fairy bread to help recapture childhood) in front of a few episodes of The Muppets or Sesame Street to analyse what works best, and put them in good humour. As it is, the scripts are leaden and wordy, and almost defeat the best endeavours of some of our top puppeteers. Frankly, a homily sung is still a homily. All praise to the performers who give 110% to their work, but here was a lost opportunity to add a note of...well, creative silliness to the programmes.

To quote Jocelyn Stephenson, of the Muppets team:

"The most exciting thing about writing for puppets is working with the puppeteers...writing for puppets is necessarily collaborative."

I wonder if the puppeteers and writers were even introduced?

To have done all that groundwork and then skimped in the final stages seems strange logic indeed; Peter J. Wilson who is credited as Puppetry Consultant does not appear to have been consulted very much at all during this critical period.

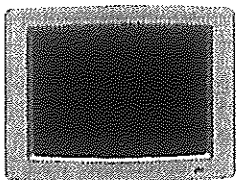
I can only wish that the promise of quirkiness and fun inherent in the name 'Wakadoo Cafe' had been fulfilled, instead of opting to use the puppets as vehicles for worthy sentiments in an adult-world-writ-small.

Nevertheless, the puppeteers do top quality work with the material they are given, and manage to sneak some good bits of puppet business under the guard of the producer.

One gratifying success of the series is the puppet-doll EC, who is confidante and comforter to all the younger children in their times of trouble. EC is a poignant creation - his vulnerability would touch all but the hardest of hearts - muteness concentrates his eloquence of look and gesture. Again, a lovely performance, but this time unhindered by the script.

All reservations aside, Lift Off is to be warmly welcomed as a shining example of stimulating television for children and will rightly deserve whatever awards the industry heaps upon the series.

N.B. This is just one viewer's opinion - others may think very differently. If so, do please write your comments either in a letter-form or as an article for the next Manipulation. It would be good to hear the experiences of some of those who worked on the series.....



...BETWEEN WOLF & PIG

Two of the 'Wakadoo Cafe' puppeteers, David Collins and Hugh Simpson responded to our call to tell us about themselves and their characters.

WHO: David Collins
AGE: 37
CHARACTER(S): Norris Pig, Dippisak
 Scruffsak, assorted guest characters on Wakadoo.

WHERE FROM: Brought up in Queensland, led a nomadic life since then, following the work through Sydney, Perth, and now Melbourne.

TRAINING: University degree in Drama for the theory; puppetry was trained on the job from various master puppeteers: Philip Edminston for marionettes; Noriko Nishimoto for Bunraku and rod; and Phillipe Genty for object theatre.

STYLISTIC INFLUENCES:
 My experience with Noriko at Spare Parts taught me a lot about the difference between Eastern and Western puppetry; I tend to favour the Eastern styles in my own approach to puppetry - more minimalist and less overblown

OVERSEAS INFLUENCES:
 The Japanese technique as passed on by Noriko. Also Phillipe Genty for the more modern, European theatre. And of course, one can't forget Jim Henson - he showed us all the potential of puppetry - that it does not have to be limited.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS I don't like to limit myself; I like the directions to evolve naturally. I'm interested in all aspects and will go where the opportunity arises.

ABOUT MORRIS PIG: Morris is the twin of Doris; if he wasn't a performer, his true vocation would be as a used-car salesman. He's glib, sneaky, self-serving - he could, and most certainly would, sell his own grandmother. He enjoys lording it over Doris, and Boris, but especially Wolf - when he can.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LIFT OFF:
 Can't think of any...

STAGE VS TV: Difficult to say - this was my first, real TV. experience; that is, the first time I got to create the whole character - voice as well as movements. I would like to explore TV. more, but my first love is still theatre. I love live audiences.

FILM/ TV. BACKGROUND:
 I did a forgettable TV. series called 'Kaptain Kookaburra'. I moved various badly made puppets to a hastily made sound tape. There were a few other bits and pieces Friday News Review occasionally - but nothing else major.

WHO: Hugh Simpson
AGE: 30
CHARACTER(S): Mr Wolf (Wakadoo), Rapsack, Gabblesak, several guest characters in Wakadoo.

WHERE FROM: Northern Ireland - Belfast.

TRAINING: 2 years at the West Australian Institute of Technology (Theatre Arts course); 3 years with Bustop Theatre; 3 years at Spare Parts puppet Theatre.

STYLISTIC INFLUENCES:
 Tony Nicholls (W.A.I.T.); Noriko Nishimoto; Bustop Theatre - we all learned from each other and developed our own style of performing, much comedy/pantomime and mime.

OVERSEAS INFLUENCES:
 None so far.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:
 TV writing and performing - comedy and/or drama, but not necessarily with puppets. Just to have a job!

ABOUT MR WOLF:
 He kept getting cut! A suave, sophisticated, backstabbing theatrical has-been.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LIFT-OFF:
 Lunch and home-time! The 2 week Backsak shoot was fun because we had a smaller team - and my characters didn't keep getting cut!

STAGE VS. TV: TV is more enjoyable - not so boringly repetitious, and better paid. And no 7 month tours!

FILM/TV BACKGROUND:
 Written and acted in one episode of "Blinky Bill", acted in "The Bill" (UK); puppeteer on "The Ozlets" (Perth). x

Polyglot Puppet Theatre Moves

Polyglot has taken over the old premises of Arena Theatre Company in South Yarra, Melbourne and is the proud possessor of an auditorium where school holiday shows (to begin with) can be offered as well as their regular touring shows. It is only two years since Polyglot gained general grant status from the Australia Council and it is good to see them expanding the scope of their work in response to this vote of confidence. They have gone from strength in recent years and we wish them well in their new home:

POLYGLOT PUPPET THEATRE:

27a Cromwell Road, South Yarra 3141

PHONE: (03) 827 9667 and (03) 826 1937

FAX: (03) 816 9620

Puppeteers In New Zealand...News

PINZ representative Rose Beauchamp keeps Manipulation readers informed and updated on the work of New Zealand's Puppet Theatre workers:

..."We had a large NZ contingent to Adelaide [consisting of] Maori Dance Drama; *Hen's Teeth* (Women's Comedy); *Red Mole in the Book of Life* and *The Big Blue Planet Earth Show* (winning a weekly award in 'Best Fringe' event)."

NZ Puppet Productions:

Theatre: Peter Wilson of Spare Parts (Perth) to work on a production with NZPT this year.

Film: (Wellington) - *Brain Dead* - a film Jonathan Acorn worked on recently as a puppeteer.

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Comment: A Bigger Splash.....

by Susan Lintern Coward

As a member of the Manipulation editorial team as well as a puppeteer who occasionally chances her arm making comments on the work of others, I would like to encourage more readers to jump into the pool of reviewers.

I know it feels presumptuous to express in a few paragraphs one's opinions of a work that has taken months to create; which you know everyone sweated blood to bring to life and which probably has half your friends appearing in it...but the fact is that the other 50% live interstate. Your review is the only way to give them a taste of what you had the good fortune to witness. Reading company publicity is no substitute for vicarious experience!

Description is of course the easy part - the problems occur when you start expressing your own opinions. Unless you maintain a convincing semblance of objectivity, the company concerned has every excuse to dismiss everything you say as biased. For instance, if you were Bruce Schwartz or Phillippe Genty reading a review by a critic whose credo is clearly "I don't ever want to see the operator", it would be hard to believe that you would take notice of their legitimate criticisms. Everything must be reviewed on its own merits, not in the light of your prejudices.

Q: Does a company want to hear an 'informed' opinion of their work?

A: Yes, if it is complimentary. No, if it is not.

This may be a glib answer, but unless you can persuade them to take your comments seriously, the more difficult purpose of the review will not be fulfilled; ie. maintaining a high level of vigilance about the quality of the experience that we offer in our chosen art form. Without wishing to suggest that audiences are uncritical, many of us perform to children; it takes the comments of our peers to remind us that there are certain disciplines that always need to be watched. Seeing them pinpointed by a reviewer is a reminder to be vigilant ourselves.

If you have doubts about the worth to the general public of a review in a specialist journal, please remember that this is one way that you can make a contribution to the overall good of Puppetry.

After all, how do we know if - let alone, why - an unseen, unheard theatregoer never returns to see another show because something wasn't quite right with the first one?

We are fortunate to have a receptive audience - both adults and children - for Puppetry in Australia. If they accept what they are being offered now with such good grace, how much more would they appreciate the new 'improved' version.

So come on in to the reviewers' pool: there's plenty of room and the water's really quite warm.

✂

THE FROZEN HEART

GARDNER PUPPET THEATRE

by Mary Sutherland

Performers: Lorrie Gardner, Ralph Baker

Writer: Lorrie Gardner

Director: The Company

Puppetmakers: Ralph Baker, Lorrie Gardner, Richard Hart

Sets: Janice McBride

Costumes: Greta Clarke

Songs & music: Matthew Bissett Johnson, Janice McBride

I recently had the pleasure of seeing the Gardner Puppet Theatre's *The Frozen Heart*. It is a T.I.E. targeted for all primary aged children, and will tour Victorian schools in 1992.

This lively, puppet variety show takes a humorous approach to the serious subject of preservation of our environment, especially the fragile ecosystem of the Antarctic.

The story follows Lu, the puppet girl (there is a line where she says "But I'm only a puppet!" which drew a good laugh from the preview audience, though some may disapprove of the demystification). We meet Lu at the Penguin Parade at Phillip Island where she rescues a penguin from the villain, Oily Oildrop but has her heart stolen literally, and must pursue him to Antarctica, where she learns much more about penguins & conservation of the environment as a whole. She even meets aliens who have fallen through a hole in the Ozone Layer, & can't take off for fear of melting the ice. After a number of adventures everything is resolved happily

The Frozen Heart has a mass of content, a convoluted plot & numerous changes of scene, which kept it interesting, although I found in a couple of places I was lost. One such was when suddenly a trio of tiny penguins appeared in evening dress to perform 'Singing in the Rain'. I was stunned! This was later revealed to be the effect of the heroine being KO'd. The effect of the whole scene was a little bizarre but very funny.

I also found the Spirit of Antarctica a little weird, with her deep sexy cabaret voice & a glitzy get-up, still she certainly had a queenly presence.

There was a large number & variety of attractive puppets, including many traditional glove puppets. Oily Oildrop appeared in rod & marionette forms, the latter using the traditional dissecting skeleton technique, to allow him to stretch & tower menacingly. The Spirit was operated as a large stately rod puppet, while the 'aliens' were a very simple duster used to great effect. Some of the penguins were very appealing, and the humour & movement of the seals was delightful. Ralph's character roles of Ranger & Tour Captain were amusing & entertaining. The audience participation was well integrated. I particularly enjoyed the part where there were puppets enough for 11 child volunteers to make a crowd scene in the penguin rookery.

The Frozen Heart was self directed, and could be improved by tightening up. The soundtrack was also slightly erratic.

I enjoyed the show and laughed a lot, and would like to congratulate Lorrie, Ralph, & all their company. ✂

Images Probe Depths Of Eliot's Psyche

by Peter Weiniger

Theatre Review, AGE 1992

Ask for the Captain, by Ljiljana Ortolja, directed by David Baird, designed by Paul Newcombe (Handspan Theatre, George Fairfax Studio, Arts Centre)

Like so much of Handspan's work, 'Ask for the Captain' is an ambitious undertaking, breaking away from text-based drama into the realm of visual/puppet theatre.

Over the years Handspan has evolved from a highly stylised puppetry into a more multi-faceted performance theatre comfortably integrating the spoken work with music and acting as well as puppetry and mime.

At the same time it has broadened its appeal and accessibility, enabling it to tackle more challenging issues and themes. In 'Ask for the Captain', the writer-dramatist Ljiljana Ortolja interprets the internal journey Eliot embarked upon as he wove "The Waste Land" from the soul and substance of his own existential experiences

Central to her theme is the relationship between Eliot and the poet Ezra Pound who championed Eliot's cause and edited the text of "The Waste Land" from its original 1000 lines down to 434.

In scenes of dreams and allegories, we engage Eliot's often tortured psyche as he grapples with his soul-destroying job in a bank, the disintegration of his marriage to the seriously disturbed Vivien and the demands of his art.

The production traverses this terrain with richly textured imagery" Pound in the pub pleading Eliot's case to the avant-garde poets; Eliot on the beach at Margate succumbing briefly to the mystical territory between fantasy and reality; Eliot recuperating at a clinic in Lausanne; and the most brilliant sequence of all, where the entire cast perform as if beneath the ocean.

This scene, "Death by Water", is a mesmerising example of what this company can achieve creatively and what distinguishes it from other performance groups.

The director, David Baird, has integrated the various streams of presentation so that puppetry and performance, spoken and visual images all link into a challenging, yet cohesive whole.

'Ask for the Captain' makes demands on the audience and, like "The Waste Land", takes a while to penetrate. But the rewards are well worth the effort.' »

Ask For The Captain

HANDSPAN THEATRE

by Susan Lintern Coward

Performers: Susan Bamford, Paul Judd, Rod Primrose, John Rogers, Lisa-Marie Syron, Hugh Wayland, Annie Wylie.

Writer: Ljiljana Ortalja

Director: David Baird

Composer: David Baird

Designers: Paul Newcombe

Puppetmakers: Mary Sutherland, Rob Matson, Phillip Millar, Ingrid Maganov.

Costumes: Gursel Ali

Set Builders: Paul Newcombe, Harry de Wijze, Tim Millar, Ken Evans.

Ask For The Captain charts the spiritual journey of T.S.Eliot whilst he was writing *The Wasteland* - termed "the quintessential 20th. Century poem by the Director.

The play gives us a visual realisation of a literary work by dramatising the poet's consciousness under the extreme stress of his marriage collapsing as he wrote. The density of symbols and images that he used is fertile ground for the

playwright, she re-turns these mythological and literary analogies to reflect on the Eliot's relationship, and to follow Eliot's recovery from breakdown. The progress of the poem itself is marked by brief readings of letters from Eliot to his colleague Ezra Pound, played by an actor. We also see Pound manipulating the Eliot puppet in Act 1.

The staging chosen for this realisation was with actors and puppeteers-in-full-view, with a raised promenade lengthwise along the back wall of the Studio Theatre, which doubled as the public bar of a London pub, a sea-wall, the Thames Embankment and a pavement and/or railway platform. The stage was also blacked out for an underwater sequence and brightened up by mountain views from the windows of a Swiss Clinic. All these transformations were achieved with mobile, painted 2-D flats; sometimes sets and sometimes cut-outs of people, full-sized to compare with the actors. 3-D pieces were scaled to fit half-human-sized puppets, which were designed to be operated Bunraku-style.

Seven actors dressed in drab monochromes of postwar England both took parts and operated the 4 puppet characters: Eliot and wife, Vivien; the latter appearing in the guise of a Sphinx; (but referred to in the programme notes as 'Harpy', which was a bit of a riddle.), Madame Sosostiris, an enigmatic clairvoyant who descends in style by plane onto the beach; and a small child - innocent observer of adult behaviour.

As actors, performers regaled us with some excellent, highly stylised choreography, using a 'freeze-frame' technique, whether to create a low-life scene in a pub; to push identical cut-out panels of bowler-hatted gents in a well-drilled simulation of a London rush-hour; or to parody a bevy of psychiatrists 'treating' Eliot by re-arranging his limbs with judicious prods from long sticks.... A strong sound scape of music and effects helped create a variety of palpable atmospheres throughout.

In the first pub scene, the puppet Eliot was framed in a window overlooking the actors - in the detached role of observer of humanity. However, when we left town for the beach at Margate, he was thrust into centre-stage participation in a broad panorama with actors and the other puppets. Here the essential illusion of puppet reality never managed to establish itself. There were three main reasons for this:

- 1: The use of full stage width demanded sharp focus in both action and lighting - both were far too diffuse.
- 2: The appearance of the puppets aimed at 'realism', making their half-human size compare grotesquely with the actors giving them the intense look of midgets.
- 3: To be allowed to work, the imagination must not be tripped up by the imperfections of an attempt of an outward copy - it is surely the expressive inner life that has to engage our belief. Of this third and most vital ingredient, Director and puppeteers offered very little.

Occasionally a puppet would come to life; Rod Primrose's encounter with the child was all too brief. But for the most part, either there were insufficient hands, or the available hands were insufficiently skilled to animate and give character. Nor was much attempt made to do anything inventive with the puppets when the occasion offered; Performers playing the part of parents didn't need to be seen huddled in a simian crouch to walk the child - and couldn't somebody have used a creature with wings to open up a different operating level? The 'Harpy' didn't leave the ground once. Pedestrian puppet direction contrasted sadly with the piquant fare given to the actors. Why use puppets, if this is all you are going to ask of them?

The Director's creed, stated in the programme; "I hide nothing, I make the audience privy to all the processes". That is fine, as long as it is accompanied by a commitment to seize every opportunity to create "the magic" of illusion for your audience. Meticulous rehearsal and co-ordination practise have to back this up - these are not "tricks" to be removed along with the other concealed mysteries of the Art. Untrained puppeteers need strong direction if they are not to bore the audience - Open-stage Bunraku-style demands more, not less of a Director and Performers.

I felt the most powerfully realised image in the play, occurred when puppet and actor realities were effectively separated by splitting and freezing one half of stage time from the other: Looking in one direction, Eliot hallucinates a procession of knights passing behind the sea wall; while the actors and puppets on the beach are looking out another way, riveted, watching something unseen by the audience. This was one point in the production where all the ingredients came together and the audience experienced something through a puppet's consciousness. It was a real shot in the arm.

Elsewhere though, the failure of the puppetry to engage us left a large dramatic hole in the play - the visible relationship between Eliot and Vivien was too weak for us to care much when the Harpy-wife is finally shut in a cage so that Eliot can free himself. He is henceforth seen as a masked actor, having thereby inexplicably also been freed from Ezra Pound. To suddenly discard a device begs the question why it was there in the first place - to have portrayed Pound and Eliot as Manipulator and his Puppet, a "spontaneous whim" according to a programme note, now seemed merely meretricious and a serious underestimation of the power of the relationship between puppeteer and puppet. In general, I thought that in an intellectually challenging piece of theatre, this exhilarating but perilous arena was entered very carelessly - actors and puppets can't just be thrown together onstage in the hope that they will interact and create magic; thorough analysis is required to ensure that you know exactly what you are trying to achieve, when, and how to do it.

The fundamental question of "Why use Puppets?" should have been asked at an early stage, because the answer was not apparent from the production. To have sacrificed what they can do well, on the altar of what they cannot...betrays a surprising misjudgment.

Nevertheless, congratulations to the company for the rest of the show, and to the writer for an ambitious and complex dramatisation. ✂

Charlotte's Web

SKYLARK THEATRE

By Janet Dalglish

Adapted by Gilly Farrelly from Stephanie Hayes' adaptation of E.B.White's novel; directed by Shelley McDonald from Peter J. Wilson's original direction.

Set/Costume design: Caroline Jones

Puppet design: Marie-Martine Ferrari and Shelley McDonald

Puppet realisation: Marie Martine Ferrari, Shelley McDonald, Elizabeth Paterson and Vesna Zuzek

Lighting design: David Longmuir

Music: Jeff Evans

Stage manager: Tania Gristwood

A.S.M: Christine Schloithe

Cast:

David Collins: Wilbur
 Hilary Taylor: Charlotte & Goosey
 Hugh Simpson: Templeton & the Official
 Justine Fitzgerald: Fern
 John Davies: Avery, Sheep & Mr Arable

I was fortunate enough to see several runs of this production, from its technical week & opening night in Canberra, to a recent performance in the Alexander Theatre, Melbourne. I'm glad to report that despite some early problems with the script, which the cast had happily ironed out by the time they got to Melbourne, this show is a charming & entertaining demonstration of what can be achieved with puppets for well-balanced & powerful theatre, replete with drama, emotion & humour.

That the drama is indeed powerful is due in no small part to some exquisitely wrought performances. David Collins' Wilbur is naive, exuberant, loving & warm, without ever sliding into maudlin wimpery. David's manipulation is immaculate as usual, despite a couple of unwieldy & heavy puppets, & his ability to draw such a complex character is the lynch-pin that holds the show together.

His performance is admirably balanced by Hilary Taylor's Charlotte. It is a difficult character to play (good guys are always harder than villains), & Hilary brings to it an ability to underplay which is absolutely correct for the part. Her other character, Goosey, has evolved in leaps & bounds since the opening of the show, & although her manipulation is unpolished, the over-the-top lunacy of the character is so much fun, it doesn't matter.

Hugh Simpson's Templeton is another example of manipulation at its best. It is good to see him create a genuinely nasty character - so different from the buffoon with a stock-in-trade of cheap toilet jokes which Templeton had been in the original script. All three puppet performances have overcome some major technical problems with the puppets & the set to make the characters look convincing, while making it all look extremely easy.

Justine Fitzgerald is consistently good, given that her character of Fern is no longer the quiet observer of the book, but has become almost annoyingly talkative. Her affection & enthusiasm for Wilbur is infectious, & she sustains the energy of the child very well. John Davies' Avery is a lovely performance to watch, & succeeds in the difficult task of making us believe in a boy whose

jealousy of Fern makes him vindictive early on, but who is eventually won over to become supportive.

I found the set design sadly mediocre - although there is a comfortably large playing area centre stage, most of the set suffers from terrible sight lines, & I understand is not particularly "puppet-friendly" (the only playboards are narrow, wobbly bits of fence). There were unnecessary points of conflict between the designs of the set & of the puppets - the puppets, with their muted, realistic colours, were easily lost amongst the primary yellow of the set (which in itself was visually tiring); & the lovely three-dimensional texture of the puppet characters was at odds with the flat look of the painted scenery.

The use of "apricot jam" lighting didn't help either - I would have preferred open lights to the constant blaze of amber & gold that washed over the stage.

I don't subscribe to the philosophy that children's theatre has to be intensely more colourful than it is for grown-ups. The lighting design also had some problems in the black theatre segments of the show - although the puppeteers successfully disappeared on one side of the stage, on the other there was so much spill, they were thoroughly visible (& this was true in two different venues, over several performances).

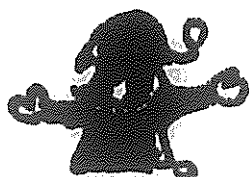
Having said all of this, I must repeat my opinion that despite the odds, this production does achieve what it sets out to do. I had tears in my eyes when Wilbur was dragged away from the dying Charlotte, & I was filled with joy when the babies were born - in the end, this is what counts. It would just be nice if the cast could have achieved it with support from the technical aspects of the show, rather than in the face of them.

NB

Brick bats to the administration of SKYLARK, who have yet again forgotten to credit everyone involved with the show. Despite a well-produced programme, with photos & biogs of almost everyone involved, I searched in vain to find out who actually designed & built the puppets for the show. There was no credit given to the writer of the 1989 production of the show, on which Gilly based this production's script. And finally, the press release that went out before the opening made much mileage of SKYLARK's gathering of the best puppetry talent to perform the show, then mentioned everybody involved with the show & the company - except any of the cast!

editor's note:

On Janet's behalf the editor's would like to make it clear that this review was written prior to Janet's joining the production. x



ADELAIDE FESTIVAL PROGRAMME 1992

by Sue Wallace

The Adelaide Festival this year had a significant amount of Visual Theatre - 7 shows from 5 companies, out of 23 in the main Festival programme. *Handspan's No Right Angles In Paradise* was the only selected Australian production.

Steve Coupe and I had the pleasure of attending the Festival for 10 days and were able to see 4 of the shows. Our pre-arranged touring schedule meant we had to be 400 kilometres away when *Handspan* and *Neville Tranter* opened their shows. What follows are not so much reviews but impressions of the shows I was able to see.

METAMORPHOSES

FIGUREN THEATER TRIANGEL, HOLLAND

Performers: Henk Boerwinkel, Charlotte Puyk-Joolen

Metamorphoses is a compilation of etudes from 25 years of Henk's work. It is an engrossing booth style performance that uses hand, rod, string and body puppets. The staging is simple with minimal lights. The sound is mostly live using voice, harmonica, bells, etc. Henk and Charlotte work the booth from above and below, often simultaneously

Each of the 20 vignettes is a psychological study performed with superb precision. The subject matter is pared down to the essential and poignant elements. Within minutes and sometimes moments the audience was drawn into an emotional response to the characters, many of which draw from archetypes and traditional images of horror that must resonate deeply in us all (eg. the giant, the holy man and the spiders).

JD

The giant, a fully masked human, provoked gasps from the audience as he rose from the depths to fill half the booth. Since we were currently engaged in the life of a little rod puppet, the giant's entry provided an impressive change of scale.

The etudes are often surreal, sometimes horrific and occasionally comic, but they are always engaging. In Henk's words (from the programme notes) "these acts have to do with life and death, they have a surrealist atmosphere... Adults can suddenly see something they had forgotten about, something from when they were children. This can be very emotional." AND IT WAS. x

APPEL D'AIR

VELO THEATRE, FRANCE

Performer: Charlot Lemoine

Velo Theatre [the bicycle theatre] is the creation of Frenchman Charlot Lemoine and ex-patriot Australian Tania Castaing. They presented two shows: *Enveloppes Et Deballages* [Wrapping and Unwrapping] and *Appel D'Air*.

Both shows are voyages of the imagination. Using everyday objects, miniatures and magical effect, *Velo* take you on a journey into someone else's dream; but that dream could be yours.

Appel D'Air is the more serious and ambiguous of the two. The set is a bed, below it starry darkness and behind, a window through which are revealed the city of the everchanging earth in orbit. From the bed, Charlot Lemoine as a solo performer [greatly assisted backstage by Tania Castaing and Benoit Fincker] manipulates his environment. We know he is alone. We know he is not content, at times desperately controlling the objects in the world around him. Somewhere between heaven and earth he creates new worlds. The bed becomes the cabin of a ship or a penguin populated ice-scape that is invaded by war. A white feather appears in almost every scene, one is not sure of the intended symbolism but attaches one's own.

In the form of a childish game he surrounds himself with symbols of escape - ships, aeroplanes, the Statue of Liberty with wings! Finally he finds the courage to jump into the void. He doesn't know, we don't know if he will fall or fly but he had the courage to jump.

The elements of Object puppetry, lighting, stage effects and sound were beautifully orchestrated. The staging is very intricate. There is so much detail in the show, the set-up time must be enor-

mous. The bed is equipped with little pulleys, hooks, lights and much more. A model city, like the one revealed through the window, lives under the bed. Lemoine, godlike, manipulates this miniature symbol of modern life.

It is a fairly dark, concentrated play that I didn't fully follow. I could make sense of some of the scenes and in others remained bewildered trying to piece together the sequence. But then again who can thoroughly sequence a dream?

In *Enveloppes Et Deballages*, Lemoine as a postman, cycles on stage with a pile of packages and connects another load to the back of his bike. This bicycle and trailer will form the playing area. The postman cannot resist reading a postcard. He is delighted. Behind him a parcel starts emitting smoke. Finally he opens the parcel revealing a volcanic, tropical island with miniature trees and the smoking volcano that he extinguishes. Lemoine then engages us in a game around this island that extends to an ocean voyage, a visit to the circus and back to the island. All this is performed with miniature objects - boats, cars, little men, birds, a dragon/dinosaur, circus performers, a mini townscape and tiny islands. The objects (puppets)? really are like toys - each specific to its purpose.

A postman opening up his dreams as he opens up parcels is an enticing premise for a show. It is a fairly flippant story but acted with delicacy, humour and a sense of childlike adventure. X

PROMISED LAND

THEATRE DE LA MARMAILLE

Canada with,

TEATRO DELL' ANGELO

Italy.

The collaboration between these two companies to create Promised Land began in 1986 and premiered in Italy in 1989. This is Theatre of Image, where the emphasis is on objects and the human relationship with these objects. The objects do not assume anthropomorphic identities; they remain as they are - dirt, rocks, plants, golf club, knife and rubbish.

It is a documentary of life on earth, or as the publicity poetically puts it "charting the story of man around a single rock standing as a silent witness and repository of the planet's memories".

A brief synopsis is essential. We are taken on a journey, from time without man to the present. This journey is symbolised by the rock from its

discovery to pounding wheat, scrubbing clothes, scaling fish, sharpening a knife, having graffiti written on it, being involved in war and finally dumped in the ocean and rediscovered and displayed in a museum. The actors do not assume identities nor characters, until well into the play.

The most startling aspect of the performance is that for the first 30 minutes or so the front curtain is only a metre off the ground. Imagine a long and low playing area that is also only 1 metre deep! There is a black curtain that is over a metre high behind the main curtain. This acts as a black backdrop and masking for the activities behind. In this space the dirt and rocks are revealed as are naked legs and arms which eventually represent prehistoric man. Such narrow vision gave the impression that the bodies were harnessed and were lowered into the space. Eventually you realised the actors were simply putting an arm or leg over the masking curtain.

The curtain was raised at times during the play when the action required more space. There was no language and the play was accompanied by a live musician playing synthesised music and very clever sound effects.

I found the story line ambiguous at times with some seemingly unimportant elements of the rock's 'life' taking up much stage time. The ending revealed that humans were in control, proudly exhibiting their discovery (the rock). For me, it did not propose a "where to from here?" nor did it emotionally engage me. However, the clever staging, the litany of movement, the humour and the flow of action made for brave and engrossing, if at times bewildering, theatre.

X

international:

International Puppet Magazine

TEATRE MALIC - BARCELONA

It's a great year to be Latino. 1992 sees the Olympic Games in Barcelona and, from that Spanish city - **Malic, Marionette Magazine**.

Australian puppeteers, Neville Tranter of Stuffed Puppets from Holland and Joan Baixas are contributors to this annual bilingual (Spanish/English) magazine. The editors explain in their eloquent letter:

"We requested an article from each of a whole series of European puppet artists whose work, for one reason or another, strikes us of being of particular interest. Henk Boerwinkel, of

the group Triangel from Holland; Carlos Lopez Garcia of La Deliciosa Royala, Madrid; Loelle Nogues & Georges Pupella from France; Pepe Otal of the Grupo-Taller de Marionetas; Mayse Badiou & Xavier Fabregas from Barcelona; Fabrizio Montecchi of the Gioco Vita group, Italy; and Tony Rumbau of La Fanfarra all express their points of view, some concerning their own work, others concerning puppetry in general, and by doing so, create a highly interesting and representative mosaic, as you will be able to appreciate.

The Editorial sends copious salutations to Australian puppeteers, through Annie Heitmann, retired UNIMA secretary. »

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Festivals & Events

U.S.A.: - San Francisco State University
PUPPETRY '93 - Puppeteers of America National Festival
July 11-17, 1993
Performers include; Frank Oz, Henk Boerwinkel, Richard Bradshaw, Dick Meyers and Faulty Optic.
For further information;
PUPPETRY 1993
2060 CASA GRANDE, BENICIA CALIFORNIA
94510-2309
FAX; 1 (415) 284 - 2606



Births, Deaths, Marriages

DEATHS....

Sergei Obratsov, founder of the Moscow Central State Puppet Theatre, died 7/5/1992 aged 91.

WEDDINGS....

Phillip Millar to Victoria Osborne married 18/4/'92
Paul Newcombe to Fiona Sweet married 17/7/'92

BABIES.....

Born 30/5/1992 James Edgar Matson. Son of SUSAN LINTERN COWARD and Rob Matson

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PUPPET THEATRE HAVE SECONDED
WINSTON APPELYARD FROM MELBOURNE
TO JOIN THE COMPANY FOR A CO DEVISED
PRODUCTION UP THE DOWN ESCALATOR -
AN OBJECT THEATRE PIECE, DIRECTED BY
..... ANNETTE DOWNS.
&
KEN EVANS, A FOUNDER-MEMBER OF
HANDSPAN THEATRE, HAS BEEN
APPOINTED THEIR NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
CONGRATULATIONS!

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