
AUSTRALIAN PUPPETEER

Winter, Spring (and beyond...) 2001



Igor Hychka - Puppetmaster - 1914-2001

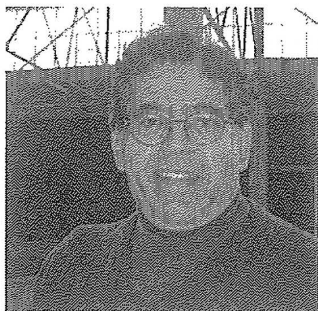
Also in this issue...
Puppet profile:
The Mess-ups

• **Puppet history:**
• **Mr Holland's**
• **Puppets.**
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• **One Van Preview!**
• **Reviews!**
• **Competition winner!**
• **and assorted other**
• **bits and pieces**
•



The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek presented by Spare Parts Puppet Theatre in 2001

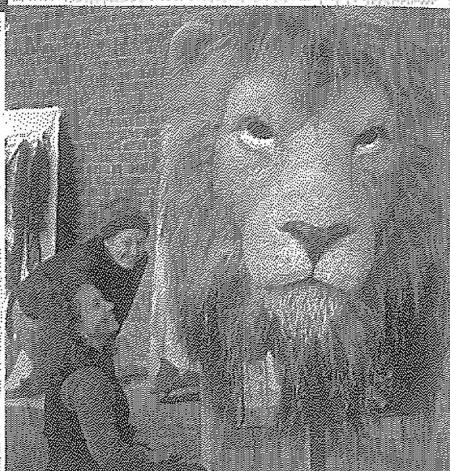


Al Martinez, recently relocated to Melbourne to be Workshop Manager for LWW



New UNIMA President Lorrie Gardner with dinosaur companion

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe occupied up to ten puppetmakers for a few months in 2001. Deb Berzins and Vanessa Ellis examine an almost complete Aslan while below, Bryony Anderson trims giant Rumblebuffin's eyebrows.



P u p p e t r a z z i

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

The Magazine of UNIMA Australia ♦ Most of 2001

Editorial

Now, seriously folks, this is it. As the mammoth gap between editions in 2001 has demonstrated, the magazine does not spontaneously self-propagate.

It has to be nurtured, gently coaxed out of a mass of emailed ideas, letters, scraps of paper burrowing away from the light in the bizarre eco-system that is my desktop.

Lorrie Gardner is our new President of UNIMA Australia. Congratulations Lorrie and thank you.

The next issue of Australian Puppeteer will be edited by Sarah Kriegler assisted by a small group of industrious individuals, Sarah and Jacqui and Lachlan have all contributed to this edition. Once again, Richard Bradshaw has sent in more excellent work and Dennis Murphy continues his unwavering support. My sincere and heart-felt thanks to all those who take the time to keep this little publication ticking over. To everyone else, please contribute in whatever manner takes your fancy.

I'm off to One Van in a few weeks, looking forward to catching up with many happy puppeteers in Blackheath. See you all at the UNIMA meeting.

Philip Miller

Best
wishes
for

2002. It's the same forwards and backwards and I'm sure that's a good sign.

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Letters

INTERNATIONAL PUPPETRY 'FESTIVAL 2002'

15th - 23rd February 2002,

Nairobi, Kenya

'Edu-Puppet Festival 2002' would like to invite you to attend the 1st International Puppetry Festival to be held from 15th - 23rd February 2002 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The festival will be hosted by CHAPS (Community Health Awareness Puppeteers) and Family Planning Private Sector (Kenya) FPPS (K), with funding from the Ford Foundation and other funders.

CHAPS is a registered organization affiliated to FPPS (K). It is committed to the promotion and use of puppetry as a means of communication, an extension of human expression and as an alternative medium of education for community development.

If you are interested in participating, attending or just in more information about the festival, please contact our offices in Nairobi.

Rita or Lawrence

Email: festival@kenyapuppet.com

or: fpps_k@net2000ke.com

Regards,

Gary Friedman

Festival Consultant

PUPPETBUSKERS FESTIVAL

The jury of International Puppetbuskersfestival 2001, which was organized by Europees Figurenteatercentrum from 15th till 22nd July, has given the 13th Luk Vincent prize to the company Moving People from United Kingdom.

The motivation of the jury was: Since they manipulate their puppets in a well controlled and technically refined way the audience may disregard the fact that there is a manipulator, though he remains perfectly visible.

Thanks to the combination of actors and puppets the performer clearly shows that he fully understands the present international evolution in puppet theatre.

Through the non-verbal character the performance remains nonetheless universally understandable for everyone. In addition, the performance gets a polyvalent character because it can be performed in a room, as well as in the open air and in the streets.

Nominations were given to Traditional Puppet Theatre Anton Anderle from Slovak Republic as the best traditional puppet theatre performance and to Heinrich Heimlich from Germany for the best performance in the shadow theatre special of the festival 2001.

The German puppeteer and festival organizer, Angelika Pauels, presided over the jury. The other members were: Eddy Levis (journalist), Freek Neirynck (festival programmer), Jean-Pierre Seghers (artist) and Olga Vujovic (journalist and collaborator of the Zagreb PIF Festival).

The festival counted 185 performances by 36 companies from 13 countries. The next edition of International Puppetbuskersfestival

will be from 20th till 28 July 2002. Companies from around the world that want to solicitate to perform during this festival, can send their schedules and/or a video tape of their entire production to Freek Neirynck, Europees Figurenteatercentrum, Trommelstraat 1 - 9000 Gent, tel. +32 (0)9 223 12 15, fax +32 (0)9 225 45 45, e-mail: eftc.gent@skynet.be

Europees Figurenteatercentrum
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B-9000 Gent
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fax +32 (0)9 225 45 45
e-mail eftc.gent@skynet.be

Daylesford Festival April 2002

Dear Philip,

I live in Daylesford, and recently I approached the local council about putting on a children's puppet festival in 2003 - they liked the idea so much they want to go ahead with it next year. Outwardly I was very excited, and inwardly, still excited but part of me went "Oh Shit!" So now I am frantically trying to make contact with puppeteers who would be interested in performing or running workshops for children. I thought with your experience and contacts, you may be interested, or know of people who would be interested in being part of the event.

I'll give you a few details - if you are able to pass them on, or could send me a list of contacts, that would be absolutely fantastic!

Dates: April 12, 13, 14, 2002

Where: Daylesford (1 hr, 15 mins from Melbourne, beautiful town, apparently Victoria's 2nd biggest tourism centre. Puppeteers might

like to indulge in a spa or massage after their show!)

Tentative schedule:

Friday night - opening "ceremony" with local kids, theatre groups and artists - all welcome!

Saturday and Sunday - shows and workshops, parent seminars, busking, exhibitions, etc.

Sunday twilight - family concert, with short acts in variety style, audience participation, prizes, general kicking up of the heels.

Age range:

Shows needed for children 2+, in age areas of preschool, primary and perhaps secondary school.

Workshops for children 6+.

Seminars for parents on developing creativity at home, parents as puppeteers, etc.

Artist-in-residencies (creation or performance) with the local schools leading up to the festival.

Who can be involved:

I would really like to involve any puppeteers who want to be involved. If there are puppeteers with only short acts, they may be able to perform in one of the local cafes as a busker, or on the sidewalk, depending on setup.

If there is a group with only adult puppetry, even though the festival is really aimed at kids/families, there is a wonderful venue - The Palais - that books performers at night.

They may be interested, depending on material. There may also be opportunities to work as an artist-in-residence with local schools. I am really open to anything. And I really need to get an idea of who is interested in the next few weeks.

If you have any suggestions or know of people who would like to help with the organisation of this event, I'd love to hear from you.

Thanks Philip!

Leanne Murphy (03) 5348 5731.

Update from Peter Wilson

The Theft of Sita

"The Theft of Sita", written and Directed by Nigel Jamieson, composed by Paul Grobowski and I Wayan Gde Yudane, has recently returned to Australia after a triumphant international tour to New York, London, Belfast and a UK regional tour.

The touring party headed to New York in early October after a successful two week season at the Opera House in Sydney. Sita was invited to be part of the BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music's) Down Under Festival along with other Australian Companies including Cloudstreet and Bangarra. The season, a sellout at the Harvey Theatre, a beautifully unrenovated early 20th Century theatre, received nightly standing ovations.

It was clearly an uplifting tonic for the bruised and saddened New Yorkers after the events of September 11th.

The UK tour was part of the LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) Festival touring program and included Coventry, Oxford and the music festival at Alderburgh, started by Benjamin Britten some thirty plus years ago. The success of the tour overall has ignited further interest for touring and negotiations are currently underway for a European tour in August of 2002.

Puppetry Curriculum:

A proposal to establish the first full time Puppetry curriculum in Australia, proposed to the Victorian College of the Arts earlier in 2001, has begun to be developed by Peter Wilson in association with a VCA and an industry steering committee.

It is intended the 2 year post-graduate course, the first of its kind in Australia will be available for the 2003 academic year.

National Puppetry Summit.

The first National Puppetry Summit, currently underway in its development, is proposed to be included as part of the Melbourne International Festival of Arts in October 2002 .

Robyn Archer, Director of MIFA 2002, has wildly embraced the idea of the summit to be umbrellated as part of the festival. A National Steering committee has been formed, and an administration base in Melbourne under John Paxinos and Associates have contributed thus far with an Australia Council application for support to develop the summit. Results of the application known in April 2002. For further enquires, please contact Peter Wilson at peter-pann18@hotmail.com

Peter Wilson

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer's Statement for year to 31 May 2001

Starting Balance:

1625.85

INCOME

New members 1,043.00

Renewals 1,445.00

Total Membership

2,488.00

Advertising in Magazine

145.00

Bank Interest 1.66

TOTAL INCOME

2,634.66

EXPENSES

Magazine:

Postage & Envelopes

699.26

Printing 1,094.17

Stationery, etc 89.50

Total Magazine

1,882.93

Unima International Fees

818.15

P.O. Box 250.10

Bank charges, FID...

12.63

Misc: 8.50

TOTAL EXPENSES

2,972.31

Final Balance

1,288.20

Our bank balance has dropped by \$338- in the 12 months to 31 May 2001. Our financial position is ok if we keep our membership numbers up, and can increase advertising revenue a bit. We still need some extra volunteers to help with the magazine to be able to do this. John McDonald, Treasurer.

PO Box 208

Elsternwick, VIC 3185

03 98187514

john.mcdonald@acslink.aone.net.au

Unima Membership

\$30- for a year for new members

\$25- per year for renewals.

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

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

Lost contact...

The following members have moved and we no longer have contact information for them. Kirsty Boyle, Clare Everett, Joseph Papa, Denise Rundle and Sol.

If you see them, please ask them to contact John McDonald, (03)98187514

ASIA-PACIFIC NEWS

Prof. J. Tilakasiri has recently published *The Asian Shadow Play* and has requested UNIMA Australia to purchase 15 copies at a cost of around \$15 Australian dollars plus postage. The book is A5 (14cmx 21cm) 280 pages with 90 colour and 30 black and white pictures. Professor Tilakasiri is a senior academic at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. He has researched and studied puppetry for over 50 years and contributed many books and articles on the subject. He has also worked with both traditional Sri Lankan puppeteers and pioneered the introduction of new forms of puppetry, creating a new interest in modern puppetry in Sri Lanka. This volume contains a forward by Henryk Jurkowski (President of Honour, UNIMA) and an Introduction by Sirppa Sivori-Asp (President of UNIMA International) It is a comprehensive study of shadow puppetry in its various forms from seven Asian countries. FYI he visited Sydney in 1996

If any UNIMA members are interested in purchasing (or distributing) *The Asian Shadow Play* forward an expression of interest to myself via my e-mail or mails to 4 Illawarra Road,

Flemington, VIC 3031. I am assuming that the price quoted is for the volume of fifteen and, if enough people are interested, that we can bulk buy. Otherwise I will find out how much a lesser number of copies will cost.

The next Asian-Pacific Commission will be held in Chennai, India in early march, 2002. I have made a commitment to go there, although at this point I do not know how I am going to pay for it. Any suggestions or contributions would be welcome and stay tuned for news of a benefit function. Any person/s who would be willing to organise a benefit function, please contact me ASAP. I need to update my information about individual and company work, so please forward me an update of you and your company. I will also be researching organisational and institutional support for the work of the AP Commission before I go. One of the items on the agendas of the AP meeting is the profile of UNIMA and how we might be more active and effective as an organisation. If anyone wants to raise other issues that they think it imperative to discuss at the Commission please contact me.

Jen Pfeiffer

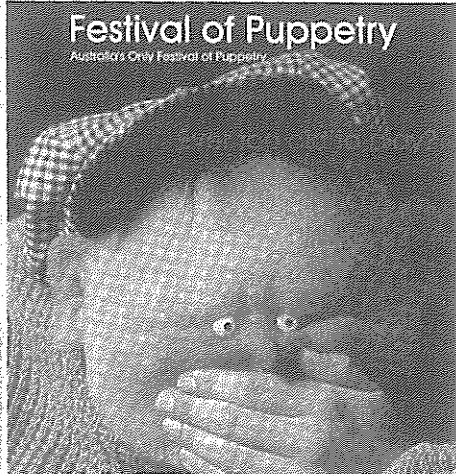
Tickets: 02 4787 7770 Acccom: 02 4782 2857

2002

5th "One Van" International

Festival of Puppetry

Australia's Only Festival of Puppetry



January 24 to 27 2002

Blackheath, The Blue Mountains NSW
The friendly, affordable, family festival
www.bluemts.com.au/puppet/

Highlights in this year's festival

Flamingo Bar
figuren theater tubingen

Dreamer in Space
Richard Hart's Dream Puppets

Tightrope
Krinkl Theatre

Have you seen a Dog?
Foley Bergere

1,2,3 Sterntaler
Figurentheater Hautnah CH

Dragon dance
The Finger Players

Z for Giraffe
Sydney Puppet Theatre

Broome

Dear Philip,

I was delighted to receive your recent note and copy of "Australian Puppeteer." My subscription has lapsed in recent years because I've not been actively involved in puppetry due to illness. The magazine arrived with exquisite timing as (husband) Paul and I were rehearsing our first show for some time.

Paul's (other) work took us to Broome in August 1999. There, in the most remote town in Australia, we found a fascinating community with endless stories about its rip-roaring past. The early pearling industry attracted workers from Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Japan. Their descendants, many of whom have Aboriginal and European ancestry as well, form much of Broome's present population.

On the full moon each August, the annual Shinju Matsuri (Festival of the Pearl) is held.

The theme of the festival each year is taken from one of the cultures represented in the town. This year's festival celebrated Broome's Japanese culture. As we have a couple of Japanese folktales in our repertoire, we decided to build a show around these for the Festival.

The performance venue was fantastic - a walkway beside two magnificent pearling luggers at a small interpretive centre. Our stories, chock full of fishing boats, fishermen and pearl divers, were performed in the open air on a moonlit night with the luggers behind us. Pure magic!

As part of the show, the venue's management asked us to develop a piece to tell the story of how the Japanese came to Broome in the late 1800's. This led to our first adventure with shadow puppetry. Now, we're hooked! Paul's dazzling array of puppets were made from cardboard, balsa wood, plastic sheet etc. A few puppets are simple cutouts, but most of

Shadow



them have intricate moving parts.

Paul manipulated the puppets while I changed the coloured lights, played background music on keyboard and tin whistle and recited the narration.

The show took its name - "Red Sun, Red Sand" from this new piece. It had local references which only Broome people would understand, and they responded warmly.

"Red Sun, Red Sand" has been one of our most rewarding experiences in puppetry. We can't wait to delve further into this intriguing form. It was a great way to return to the fold!

Paul's (other) work now takes us to Bowral, NSW. Next week we embark in the indefatigable "Toad Haul" on the journey to Bowral, via Perth and Adelaide. "Toad Haul," a converted '69- model Bedford passenger bus, has been our home in recent years. We look forward to keeping in touch.

Pat Mitchell

The Carlo Colla

Ramsay Everingham Interviews Artistic Director Eugenio Monti Colla.

Interpreter: Ilaria

Note: The interview took place backstage at the Everest Theatre, Seymour Centre during the Sydney Festival, 2001

RE: What are your impressions of Sydney and the Sydney Festival?
EMC: I really like the audience because they let themselves go while watching this show, which is something probably totally new for an Australian audience. So it is a good experience. I really like the fact that the audience gets so involved in the show that they forget it's a puppet show. They are very gullible.

RE: Puppets encourage people to believe ...
EMC: Puppets encourage people to believe that theatre is a metaphor for dreams. Even a puppet can transform dramatic theatre into something positive. For instance, we performed a version of *The Tempest*, translated into Italian by Eduardo de Phillipo, and even *The Tempest* became something positive.

RE: There is a Commedia argument for a production, dated about 1550, describing a very similar play to *The Tempest*. Maybe Shakespeare saw the production?

EMC: Shakespeare did this a lot. He knew a lot of Italian novellas. He mixed a few of these to write some of his plays.

RE: Is this a normal touring set up?
EMC: Sometimes it can be a bit more complex. Sometimes we tour

with a full company of singers and musicians. So the company of fourteen performers expands to a Company of thirty two.

RE: How much do you tour?

EMC: We tour too much!
Normally we play three and a half months in Milan, and we spend the rest of the year touring.

RE: Can you give a brief history of the company?

EMC: We are confused as to how exactly it began. It was not a family of puppeteers. They were an upper middle class family with a big house in the middle of Milan. And following the fashion of the times, they had a room in the house which was used as a puppet theatre. The first document we have dates back to 1690. The documents found were basically scripts from comedies in the tradition of the Commedia del Arte. They didn't have everything scripted.

The family was a family of merchants, and they were trading in wood and horse food for the Austrian army. Then Northern Italy was invaded by the French army, and the family took up business with them. So that when the Austrian army re-won Northern Italy the family was exiled because they had traded with the enemy. The Austrians took everything from the family, they were left only with tables and chairs, and when they left, they managed to hide the puppets and the theatre between the tables and the chairs. The army sent them to Piedmont and to make a living they became puppeteers. From March 1835, they started to document everything they did. The show they put on-stage, where it was performed, and what

kind of money they took. As a touring company it has existed since 1907. We went back to Milan, and were Artists in Residence at the Geroma Puppet Theatre for fifty years. So, they stayed there for fifty years, when uncertainty arose around the building itself.

RE: How often do you create new work?

EMC: We try to write a new show each year. This year we have created three new works. For instance, the Berlin Festival has commissioned three new works, and we always have to produce a new show for Milan.

RE: What is the process then, about how you create new work?

EMC: I write everything. First of all I have to find something I like. Then I start writing it. We have meetings. And I explain what direction I would like the company to go in. Then we start discussing and describing characters, the set, the scenes, the general tone and atmosphere. Then we start designing.

RE: Are the puppets constructed traditionally, and what are the materials used?

EMC: The puppets used in *Around The World In Eight Days* are all new. There are no historical puppets involved. The idea is that, philosophically, they have to be the one. The puppet is considered to be an actor. In the workshop, they are dressed, they have their make up put on, painted, just like a human actor. With new puppets we can take

Marionette Theatre

advantage of advancements in puppet making technology. For instance, in the old puppets, they don't move their mouths or their hands. All of our historical puppets are on show at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan as part of some celebrations. Not in a museum but in a theatre. All the puppets are made with wood. The eyes are made with glass, and the arms are made with fabric. This is a philosophical point. I believe there is a relationship between the puppeteer and the wood, the material used. Also, wood allows every puppet to be different. The weight is different. And so it is not really the puppeteer who moves the puppet, but the puppeteer who follows the puppets movements.

RE: So puppeteers are keeping alive the art of carving wood?

EMC: It is a philosophical point to watch a sculpture come to life, then to grow old.

RE: What are the origins of the control?

EMC: It dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Before that all Italian marionettes had a metal rod running upwards from the head and had strings on the arms. I like to maintain the form we use because of its simplicity. The one used in Central Europe and the US is too mechanical ... You just have to move the rod, the cross-piece, and the puppet just moves its hands and feet. What we do is we play an instrument, like a harp.

RE: In performance, when you pick the puppet up, what do you focus

your mind on? What is your technique?

EMC: I try to think as little as possible, cause all the energy should just trickle down the strings. I find it distracting if somebody is whispering next to me. I try to play a lot, and to follow what the audience is doing, how they are reacting, to establish that complicity with the audience. It can be quite stressful, because you have to transmit to the puppet all your memories and how you are feeling.

And so it is not really the puppeteer who moves the puppet but the puppeteer who follows the puppet's movements

RE: How do you see the future of your company?

EMC: We will start work on a new show, *Sleeping Beauty*. We will develop and perform a new production, by Brecht, a musical, a cantata.

RE: What about the future of puppet theatre in general?

EMC: I don't like it. The nature of the puppet, as we know it, has become clouded. Now it has become a show, a novelty, instead of being a symbol, a metaphor. It normally targets children, and therefore it has become pretty trivial. And there are no serious schools teaching the philosophy

of the puppet. For instance, if you decide to become a puppeteer, or if you are one already, I wouldn't teach you how to move a puppet, according to how I move my puppet. But I would try to teach you the general philosophy of puppets, so that you can work to express yourself with your own puppet, not with my puppet.

It is a bit like cavemen sitting around a fire, and reality is projected onto the walls of the cave. Puppets are these shadows.

RE: We agree puppets are potentially the strongest theatrical form.

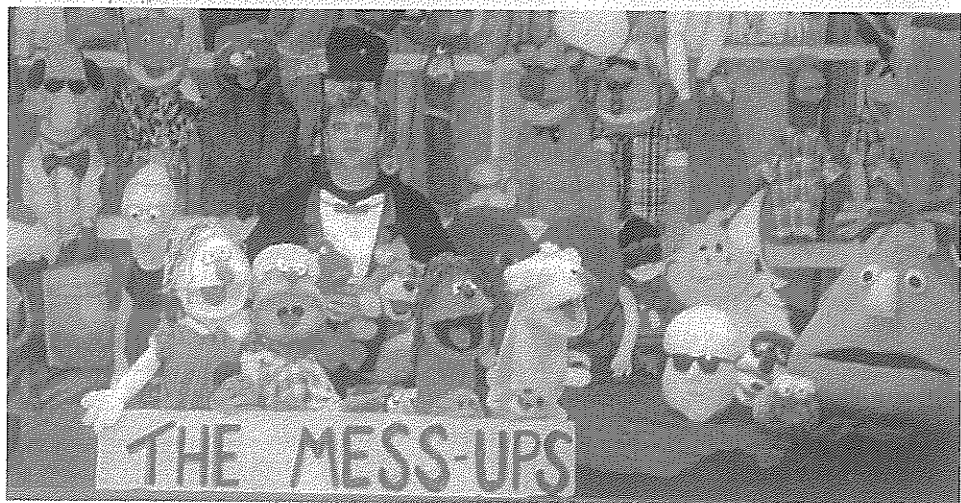
EMC: Yes.

RE: So, as theatre creates a future for itself, and ceases to compete with film and TV, puppet theatre will re-evolve into a strong form?

EMC: Yes! Yes! Human actors in Italy just bring themselves on-stage, and they just act themselves.

Puppets can actually be. The role. The part.

The Mess-ups



Adapted from material
supplied by Dallas Atkins

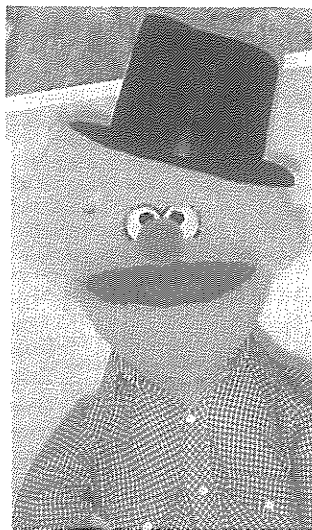
Dallas Atkins, creator, producer and puppeteer of *The Messups* describes his furry, family-orientated shows as "*The Muppet Show-The Wiggles-Hey, Hey It's Saturday* – all rolled into one"

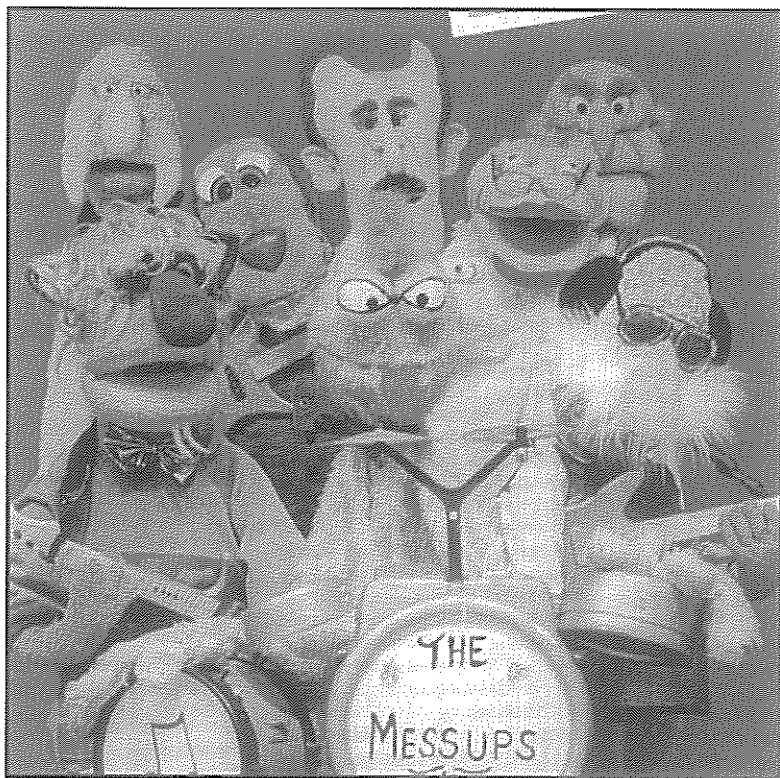
The Messups have been in existence since 1991, performing throughout New South Wales in festivals, schools, shopping centres as well as various national television performances.

Atkins began his performing arts career as a songwriter. In the early 80's, he won a national song writing contest and soon after formed his own travelling music and drama group *The Message*. *The Message* travelled around Australia performing in a multitude of venues for seven

years. With a desire to create a more family-orientated show, *The Messups* were born, incorporating the old format of the *The Message* and introducing the furry, Muppet style characters that have become Atkins' particular style of puppetry.

As well as performing live, Atkins has recently filmed *The Messups Video*. The video is styled in the format of a variety show incorporating musical numbers, interviews, many gags and short skits.





For more information on *The Messups*, contact Dallas Atkins at 10 Kavel St. Torrens, ACT. 2607.

Puppet History : Mr Holland's Puppets, Sydney, 1842

by Richard Bradshaw

In 1842 Governor Sir George Gipps proclaimed that the Town of Sydney had become a City, and that same year is also marked by performances in Hyde Park, Sydney, of marionettes and Punch and Judy by a puppeteer named Holland. Here is the background to those shows.

In an article on Thiodon's Wonders in the Autumn/Winter 2000 edition of *Australian Puppeteer* I wrote of George Peck who exhibited a mechanical theatre or "Theatre of Arts" in Launceston during 1833 and in Hobart during 1835. This show had been influenced by the original Thiodon's Theatre of Arts in London.

In 1838 Peck moved to Sydney where he worked as a violinist at the Victoria Theatre. The next year Peck's Theatre of Arts was exhibited

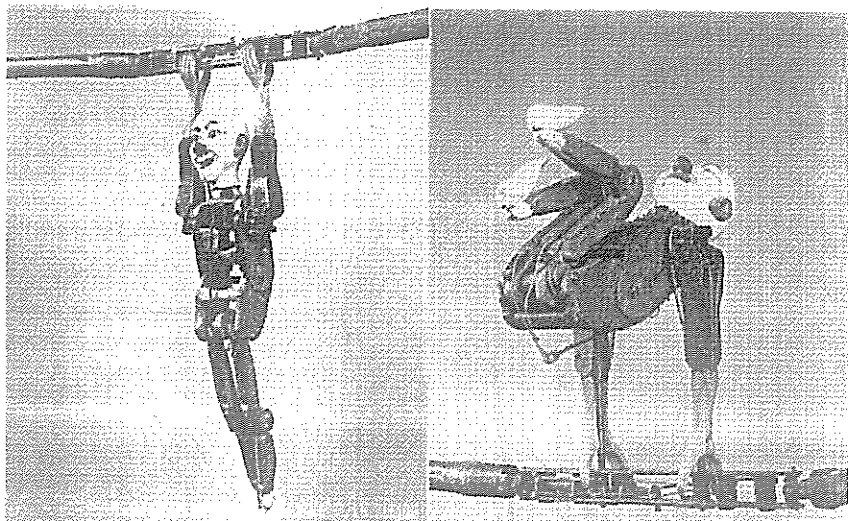
by Edward Barlow in his print shop in Bridge Street, and included the celebrated *Storm at Sea*. In advertisements, Barlow claimed that the mechanical figures had been made by the same artist who had worked for Thiodon. In her recent book, *Visual Ephemeria* [Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001, Anita Callaway suggests that this artist was not the multi-talented Peck, but Edwards Shribbs. From 1833 to 1835 Shribbs had worked as a scene painter and mechanist with Samson Cameron's theatre company in Van Diemen's Land before moving to Sydney in 1836. In 1840 Barlow organised performances. After some difficulty a theatrical licence was granted by the Governor, and performances (accompanied by music) began on the night of Thursday, 17 March, 1842, *St. Patrick's Evening*.

Part One was "The Marine

Spectacle of Her Majesty's ship *Alligator*, at anchor off Victoria, Port Essington, when she will fire a grand salute, while numerous steamers, boats, and vessels, pass and repass, forming a lively and interesting scene."

Part Two was "The rural tragedy of the Sportsman and the Death of the Hare After which a medley of men and animals." [Readers may recall that Peck had advertised such a scene in Hobart based on Thiodon's original.]

Part Three was "Phantachina, Comprising the wonderful feats of Notaguste, from Constantinople, on the tight rope. The Sailor's Hornpipe, by Sam Jones of H.M.S. 'Success' Comic Dance by Sigor in the character of Clown Flexible. To conclude with the extraordinary performance of the Italian Scaramouch, who will perform many



A "Two-armed turner" made by Christian Tschuggmall in the 1840s. The figure is 60 cm high

wonderful feats, among which he will eat his own limbs and swallow his own head!"

This third part was surely provided by marionettes, although the word "marionette" had not yet entered the English language. Low's word "Phantachina" is clearly a corruption of "fantoccini" which was "fantoccinist" then used to describe such string-puppet acts.

Some readers will recognise the Scaramouch puppet, which was a regular trick marionette. It usually had a series of successively smaller heads, each able to nestle inside the previous head ultimately inside the body cavity from which they could surprisingly appear! It seems likely that this particular puppet also had limbs which could concertina and so be drawn into the body, or "eaten". (There was a Scaramouch in the program which McDonough and Earnshaw's Royal Marionettes brought to Australia from the U.S.A. in 1875.)

In the early advertisements the puppeteer is not named. However, month later Low was advertising that he had engaged "Mr. HOLLAND, the celebrated Fantocinnist". [He spelt it that way but a report in The Australian had the correct spelling, "fantoccinist"] Parts 1 and 2 of the program were as before, with a donkey race added. Part 3 was "Fantocinni [sic]", with the Tight Rope Dance, the Clown, Young Sailor and the Highlander. There was no mention this time of Scaramouch.

For Part 4, "That Prince of Puppets, Mr. Punch, with his favourite Judy, and the rest of his Family, will go through their wonderful exploits, which will conclude the evening's amusements."

The program was advertised as "Innocent Amusement for the Juveniles"

With Holland in charge of the performances, Low was able to continue work on the model of Sydney which already comprised upwards of 3,000 buildings and could be viewed daily, with the glasses provided, for one shilling.

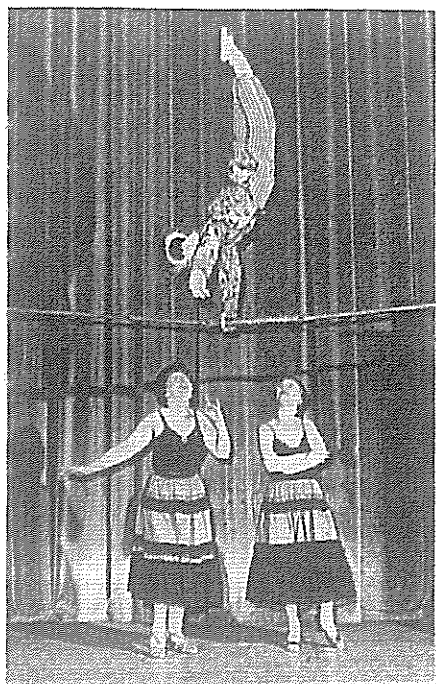
In August 1842 Low wrote a long letter to The Australian in response to a letter from "Apex" who had written to find out what was happening to the apparently neglected model of Sydney to which he had subscribed. Low reveals that he has had to declare himself insolvent, although he still hopes one day to finish the model.

In the course of relating his troubles, Low tells how when he was first promised a licence for performances in the Pavilion he had engaged a young man who had recently arrived from England with the necessary equipment for a Theatre of Arts. This show was concerning an application for a theatrical licence by Signor Dalle Case. This would probably have been in late 1841 when Dalle Case's plans were interdicted. By the time Dalle Case got his licence, and Low could get his, the young man had found other work.

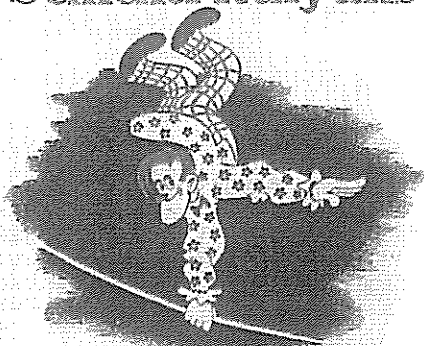
When Low succeeded in getting a licence he opened a show with material borrowed from Edward Barlow and mechanical figures and machinery he had made himself. This would seem to be the time of the ads of March 1842 when Low advises that "having been, by the kindness of His Excellency, granted a license, he has constructed (not engaged) a select corps automata and this suggests it is the time when he has borrowed material from Barlow. It is a bit confusing, but as far as I can see at present, Mr Holland was not the young man involved with the show that was stopped. I could be wrong! But now there seem to be two people about whom I would like to know more, the puppeteer Mr Holland and the young man from England with his Theatre



A four-headed Scaramouch from Barnard's Marionettes. (Richard Barnard was a cousin of the Australian based puppeteer Charles Webb.) Photo from Charles Speight's *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*.



Professor Schichtl-Rulyans



Der Welt größte und schönste Marionettenschau

Die Roboter; automatische Ballett (Mensch oder Maschine)
Die künstlichen Lilipulaner
Humoristische Blitzverwandlungen
Illustionen in reizender Darstellung

STEINTOR-VARIÉTÉ

vom 1. bis 15. Mai 1949

Photos and a poster for a "one-armed turner" made by Hans Schichtl Rulyans.

of Arts! (it is too early for Merlin who didn't arrive in Sydney until the end of 1846.)

Francis Low's letter was located by Richard Neville at the Mitchell Library for Robyn Lake of Launceston, to whom I am again indebted for leading me to the above information.

A NOTE ON THIODON'S ROPE-DANCER

In Australian Puppeteer of Spring 2000 I speculated that the "rope-dancer" in Thiodon's Show was a marionette. A visit to the puppet collection in the Town Museum of Munich last November has changed my thinking.

The museum has on show a large figure, almost life-size, which hangs by its hands from a thick horizontal "rope". It was built by Hans Schichtl Rulyans in 1947, and he helped to restore it in 1990. (Schichtl Rulyans lost his hearing in the bombing of Dresden.) The curator of the museum, Manfred Wegner, kindly gave us a demonstration. By turning handles at one end of the rope he made the figure perform. It was able to raise its body, lift up its legs and go over the rope. Meanwhile its eyes looked from side to side, its eyebrows were raised, the eyelids closed and the figure smiled! The acrobatics on the rope were striking enough without the added effect of the changing facial expression.

On a video nearby Hans Schichtl Rulyans could be seen operating a

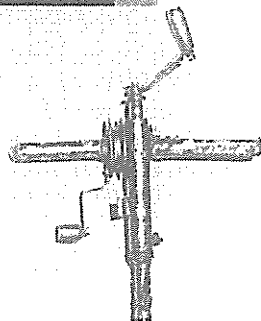
similar figure, without the facial expression, which could hang by one hand and swing on and above the rope with amazing freedom. In German these figures are called "Turners", which means "gymnasts", although the English meaning almost works better. They are classified as either "two-armed Turners" or "one-armed Turners".

The Schichtls were a famous family of puppeteers, especially renowned for their trick figures. As Schichtl's Marionettes members of the family performed in Australia in 1929. Some of us have seen one of their famous marionettes of a pilot which transforms himself into his aeroplane in England.

Manfred Wegner showed video of an earlier surviving example of such a figure dating back to the 1840s, and constructed by the Austrian automata-maker, Christian



The "two-armed turner" on view at the Town Museum in Munich during restoration in 1990. Hans Schichtl Rulyans is on the left. The figure is 150 cm high. The figure is controlled by the two handles at one end of the rope. The facial expressions are determined by the position of the body.



Tschuggmall (1785-1845). Now Aspinall Thiodon claimed that his rope-dancer was superior to made by Maeizel. This Maeizel's rope-dancers had amazed Edgar Allan Poe when he presented them in America.

Although he finally settled in Philadelphia, Johann N. Maeizel (1772-1838) had been a showman

appointed to the Austrian court so it does not seem unreasonable to think there could be a connection between his rope-dancers and the gymnast made by his contemporary and his compatriot, Tschuggmall.

I was astounded by the Schichtl figures in the same way that Australian

audiences of the nineteenth century were astounded by Thiodon's "rope-dancer". I now suspect that Thiodon's figure was a similar puppet.

UNIMA Masterclass at Charleville-Mezieres

Report by Lachlan Haig.

After a long and arduous flight from Australia via Ho Chi Min city and Bahrain I finally arrived in Paris. Here I was laden like a pack horse with everything I was going to need for 6 weeks in Europe from socks to moustache wax. The only thing I was lacking was how to speak French! J'Australie, parlez vous Anglais?

I arrived at my hotel in Paris with a sigh of relief: I'd made it & my arms didn't fall off! It's amazing how so little can weigh so much. O.K. so I could have left that second tube of moustache wax at home. Then just when I thought the only exertion left was to turn a key in a door. "you do realize that there's no lift? This building is 500 years old. Well you'll see, ah your room is on the 5th floor. Merci. Oh and be careful on the stairs." It was the smallest, steepest, windiest spiral staircase I had ever had the misfortune to come across! 'Merci!' It had to get better and did. I had a very relaxing 3 days in Paris, walking, eating, drinking, & sightseeing, after getting over my shy attempts at French. I found them not as hostile toward Anglophiles as I had thought. Although after observing the general demeanor of other

English speaking tourist's I understood the general attitude toward non-French speakers.

Well now onward to my real purpose for being here – Charleville-Mézières & the Master class at U.N.I.M.A. with Philippe Genty & Mary Underwood.

Well after a very pleasant trip by train to Charleville-Mézières I found the Institute and the town to be very relaxed and picturesque. Quite a change from the hustle and bustle of Paris. I arrived a day earlier to settle in and for the cheaper accommodation prices! We were accommodated at a beautiful old Villa that the Institute had purchased for the students at the school to stay at, and as they were all on summer holidays we were all accommodated there. It was very comfortable with a beautiful garden and patio area. The Institute building too was very old as was the town.

Then the next day all the participants started to arrive, including one familiar face Simon Rann, I never thought I'd be so glad to see another English speaking person. Later I found that the dominant language was English amongst the others. There were several French, one Swede, two Americans, one

Spaniard, one Vietnamese, not to mention three Australians! Quite a diversity of cultures.

So now the Master class, the first day was like the first day at school awkward and strange and rather than a slow working into the workshop, we were dropped straight into the deep end, which I found out later was quite Philippe & Mary's style, Chaos! The main direction of the first week was exercises & improvisations with objects (brown paper, cous cous, eggs, clothes, spaghetti, etc. etc.) and, 'souvenirs,' (emotional memories) as Philippe called them. We worked with these and Philippe's concept of 'polygramme soluble' a term which I think was created by him. A term which all of us in the first week grappled to get our heads around! A 'Polygramme Soluble' according to Philippe was, in the simplest terms, opposed concepts in the same image or overcoming the impossible or actions or words that were juxtaposed to the original souvenir or emotional memory. In short, words fail to explain the concept of 'Polygramme Soluble' as do they for "the sound of one hand clapping, grasshopper!" The first week was a great exercise in getting out of performance comfort zones and into the chaos of Philippe & Mary's process. We were lead

down windy paths without any idea of where we were going!

The second week things started to gel a little more, not to mention after a few evenings of eating and drinking (Belgian Beer & French wine) so did we as a group. We continued our previous weeks' objective of improvisations and exercise with objects and the 'Polygramme Soluble.' We started exercises in manipulation with puppets or 'characters' as I noticed Philippe preferred to call them. These were very beneficial as simply but succinct exercises in manipulation and they continued until near the end of exercise shop. Simple rules which are universal to all puppetry and manipulation. Mary Underwood started the day with a warm-up which included a lot of movement and dance-based exercises designed to get us listening to our bodies more and that of the group.

By the third week we concentrated on more exploration of the improvisations that we had all created individually to create a work in progress to be performed for the public at the end of the workshop. This included instruction in fabrication of puppets and props that we were going to need. Along with individual time with Philippe & Mary to help suggest direction for the individual projects that we were working on, which were to be weaved into one piece for the final performance. It was proving to be quite a challenge for all, especially considering the long days and amount of infor-

mation being digested! It reduced a number to tears. Philippe and Mary work together in an interesting dynamic, pushing each individual to the edge, and over if possible, of their abilities which created a sense of chaotic exploration which produced some interesting results.

It was proving to be quite a challenge for all, especially considering the long days and amount of information being digested!

By the third & fourth week most of the focus was on developing the individual pieces we were creating and fabricating all the puppets and props we were going to need. A lot of the pieces were movement and object based with a little bit of puppetry in some. Although we still continued exploring manipulation techniques, movement and dance with Mary (which culminated in a piece we performed), and improvisation techniques.

This culminated in a performance of the work in progress for the public (of about 100 people) at the Institute. Considering the lack of time to rehearse with lights and music

in the performance space the performance was received very well. Roman Paska & Jacques Félix attend along with members of the public, U.N.I.M.A. members & invited guests. Like a lot of opening nights we flew by the seat of our pants! That's Theatre!

Overall it was a very challenging month of exploration of myself and the concepts of Philippe Genty & Mary Underwood. It has left me with mental indigestion! Food for thought!

I'd like to thank all those people who helped me financially and in kind for their kindness and generosity in getting me to France and the Masterclass with Philippe Genty & Mary Underwood! It's inspiring to have so many people who believe and encourage me in my own dreams! Thank you! See you all soon back in Oz!

Igor Hychka Obituary



by Richard Bradshaw

Igor Hychka, who was Peter Scriven's puppet-master for the famous Tintookie shows, died in Sydney on 10 March 2001, 10 days before his 87th birthday. Igor was born in Lvov, Poland, to Russian parents, and attended art school and ballet classes in Warsaw. His mother was a writer and producer of plays for children's theatre, and an uncle and two cousins were opera singers. When he was about seventeen the famous Italian marionette company Teatro dei Piccoli di Vittorio Podrecca (1883-1959) played in his home town and inspired him to one day become a puppeteer.

During the second World War Igor was a soldier in the Free Polish Army, at one time sailing via Africa to land in Italy. Bruce Rowland of Newcastle remembers Igor telling how he was once travelling in a hot, stuffy tank and wishing for fresh air. His wish was suddenly granted when the top of the tank was blasted off!

Demobbed in England, he and two Polish companions investigated countries they could emigrate to.

They considered Australia, but it was simpler at the time to go to Argentina.

Podrecca's company had played on Broadway in New York in 1940, and throughout World War Two had been based in South America. Igor became a member of the company, touring with it, mainly in Argentina, for four years until Podrecca returned to Italy in 1951. He then spent a year in Brazil helping to establish a puppet theatre in Belo-Horizonte.

Meanwhile Igor's sister had emigrated to Sydney from Europe with her husband and Igor decided to come to Australia in 1953. Both his parents came here too. His surname was initially rendered as "Hyczka", but he eventually chose the spelling "Hychka" which Australians found easier to handle. (Pronounced "Hitch-ka".)

About this time Peter Scriven was hatching plans for a big marionette production. He had already performed with his own, smaller scale

company in the Theatre Royal in Sydney, but this was to be a large, original, Australian musical show using an overhead bridge and several manipulators. Peter had no experience of marionette work on this scale but the arrival of Igor on the scene took care of that problem!

"The Tintookies" opened at the Elizabethan Theatre in Newtown, Sydney in 1956. The Elizabethan, which had opened in the previous year, had formerly been the old Majestic Theatre and, in its later years, a rather gloomy picture theatre. Podrecca had travelled with live singers and musicians, but the invention of the tape recorder made this part of the show easier.

Igor had supervised the construction of the marionettes, their controls, their manipulation etc. Several Australian marionettists still use controls based on those used by Podrecca, thanks to Igor.

In 1957 Igor joined a tour of Edith Murray's "Moonahwarra Marionettes". This was a tour organised by the N.S.W. Division of the

Arts Council, and the only professional's tour Edith undertook. Edith's marionettes had none of the "panache" of Podrecca's, but the two of them struck a rapport, and Igor introduced items based on Podrecca's into the show. I remember Igor once saying of Edith, quite affectionately: "I like this old bag of bones!"

In 1958 he worked on Scriven's "Little Fella Bindi" and in 1960 on Scriven's version of "The Magic Pudding". Norman Lindsay was not in complete tune with Peter Scriven's approach to his story but had great confidence in Igor!

In 1963, in the absence of Peter Scriven, the Elizabethan Theatre Trust created a marionette company with Igor in charge of the puppetry. This began with a double bill of "Puss in Boots" and "Little Red Riding Hood" at the Palace Theatre in Sydney and later toured as "The Variety Puppet Theatre". There seem to have been two sets of puppets. I've seen photos of the "Red Riding Hood" puppets being used by prisoners in Long Bay Jail, and sets were lent by the Trust to the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre in its early days.

In 1965 Scriven formed the Marionette Theatre of Australia with the Trust and the Arts Council (N.S.W.) and, with Government support, "Little Fella Bindi" toured for this new company to over a dozen Asian countries in 1966-7. Both Peter Scriven and Igor Hychka were part of this tour, as were Graeme Mathieson, Tony Gould and Bruce Rowland.

There was a "deep" side to Igor, and at times he considered the monastic life ... Christian and Buddhist. More than once it was Peter Scriven who lured him back into the "real" world of puppetry. They had complementary talents, but eventually Igor became exasperated with Peter. He found employment in the props department of the Opera, making such things as John the Baptist's head for Joan Sutherland as "Salome"!

When Jan Bussell, who was at the time world President of UNIMA, came to advise the M.T.A. in 1972 he was astounded to find this living connection with the great Podrecca tucked away in the Trust's building making props for the Opera, the same building which was at that time home to the M.T.A.

But Igor was a great asset to the Opera. He was a superb craftsman. His flat in Darlinghurst was decorated with his copies of great works of art in superb frames he had made himself. When he lived in Buenos Aires a local dealer used to put Igor's copies up for sale with a label saying something to the effect of: "it may be genuine, and it might not be!"

In later years Igor did work for Phillip Edmiston, a former M.T.A. puppeteer who had created the Queensland Marionette Theatre. Many other puppeteers were inspired by his work. I hesitate at calling Igor an "icon" of Australian puppetry, his Orthodox background was reflected in copies of genuine icons that he made, which can now be found in Sydney churches, and

he was frustrated by the new use of the word.

Bruce Rowland who is now Head of Art in Newcastle has continued his interest in puppetry. He maintained contact with Igor and painted a nice portrait of him which he entered for the Archibald Prize. Igor is seen sitting with a serious, contemplative expression. And in Peter Oldham's video of "The Puppet Masters" Igor appears in a similarly solemn attitude. However, Igor could be great fun, and had a "wicked" sense of humour.

In later years Igor had trouble with his legs which was a problem where he lived because the lift was a bit unreliable. With his sister's help he moved to the Cardinal Freeman Retirement Village in Ashfield. Igor knew several languages and was pleased to find people there with whom he could speak Russian and Spanish. Some of his copies of great paintings still hang on the walls of the dining room there. He had had a "pacemaker" installed, and towards the end of last year had a stroke which stopped him walking. He was an elegant man, with natural dignity. Small, almost weightless. Those of us who knew him feel privileged.

He is survived by his devoted sister, a retired doctor who lives in Marrickville (who has also been an asset to the Australian community) and also by a cousin in Newcastle and extended family.

Writing for Vent

Dennis Murphy

Thanks to the Federal Government I have had a chance to concentrate on a particular branch of comedy writing – writing ventriloquist skits. (No, it wasn't a grant, it was their GST-induced recession that gave me the extra free time.)

Being a solo performer, more and more often I need to play a character myself alongside the puppet so I've had to develop some vent technique to pull it off. Like most people I thought of ventriloquism as lip control but it's quite complicated psychologically. I found it much harder than operating two puppets unseen and immensely more difficult than being a visible puppeteer manipulating just the one puppet "bunraku-style."

Here's how Frederic MacCabe described it in 1875 when figure-work first came to prominence: "The ventriloquist has ... the double character to play of identifying himself with his hearers in their curiosity, acting as their inquirer or spokesman, and on the other hand, responding without appearing to respond: acting without appearing to act."

Apart from the difficulties of performing, books on writing specifically for vent are almost non-existent so I began by reviewing "Comedy Writing" in general. Humour is a very personal sense: what's funny to one person leaves another cold. It's the same with books on writing comedy. Some inspire, some seem to go nowhere.

Gene Perret's book, *Comedy Writing Step by Step*, begins with the author establishing his credentials for some 65 pages. From page 66 onward he does lay down very practical exercises but never goes into much theory. (His book, *Successful Stand Up Comedy*, is a very good intro to that field.)

Melvin Helitzer's book, *Comedy Writing Secrets*, is big on theory and

gives very clear analysis. One-liner examples make it great fun to read but it doesn't get down to basic writing exercises.

Then, I heard about a set of American booklets on writing specifically for Ventriloquism! But I was disappointed to find that instead of focusing on vent, the author, Judy Buch, was quite unfocused and often vague. She is a motivational speaker and her writing style reflects the enthusiastic vacuity of that genre. "Just do it!"

Here, for example, is Buch's own definition of her work: "I give audiences permission to unlock their own inspiration and challenge them to rise to a new level of thinking, giving and living." The booklets were obviously self-published and desperately needed an editor.

But there is always something to gleaned and I did start to put together an overview of the principles most often repeated. Then I came across John Vorhaus's 'The Comic Toolbox.' The author blends theory, analysis and exercises in a way that really clicked with me.

His focus is on creating character first, then writing through the character. He points out that comedy comes from the basic gap between Reality and the character's concept of Reality. He calls it the "Comic Perspective" and by exaggerating that you have a premise to start writing with (eg a relentless optimist). Then add a flaw so that the audience feels distanced from the character and can laugh at him (hopeless organizational skills). Then balance this with some humanity (a dominant will to succeed).

This makes the audience identify with him and care about what happens to him.

Apart from the usual discussion of tension, reality, conflict etc, Vorhaus also comes up with some very helpful concepts like the "Jokoid" - a weak joke that you leave in for now so as to keep up a flow then go

back later to rework. His "Comic Throughline" is a nine-step formula for a comic story and there's another for sketch comedy.

Vent acts have physical limitations on action making them reliant on verbal humour and that's okay if the material is strong. As Steven Connor points out in his book, *Dumbstruck, A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, "It is the voice which seems to colour and model its container. When animated by the ventriloquist's voice, the dummy ... appears to have a wider range of gestures, facial expressions, and tonalities than it does when it is silent."

But putting more movement into the act will get more laughs and this is where puppets outshine the less flexible vent dummies. To help get away from a static duo-act I came up with the idea of using vivid verbal descriptions that make the audience "see" some action that didn't physically take place in front of them ("I flew up into the air and came down SPLAT on top of the jelly!").

Drawing on some of Vorhaus's suggestions, bits I picked up from the other books and my own experience, I put together an "Acid Test", questions to ask about a vent script (or any comedy skit) to see if it contains the points that the authors have found important.

I've been working on two new pelican characters, Gunther and Gertrude, so I ran eight of their scripts through the Acid Test. I found that the sketches that best passes the test were the ones that had been the most successful in performance. By the same token, the sketches that were weak in performance also scored weakly on the test. Now I can see what's lacking in them and hopefully improve them.

I'd be happy to send a copy of "The Acid Test" to anyone wanting to try it out. I can be contacted on (02) 9631-0613.

"High Rise"

Polyglot and the Carlton Flats Community

I will not attempt to review this production since I saw it on the Sunday evening when, due to high winds, all the large effects could not be used and what was to be a spectacular out door production had to move into a small hall.

The hour wait while this reorganisation took place did not dampen the enthusiasm of both audience and performers. There was not space for all the audience but they crowded at doors and windows and the show began. Sue Giles did a narration to explain to us what we could not see. There was an orchestra for the specially composed music of keyboard, percussion, violin and four saxophones as well as a choir of both adults and children. The puppeteers were all children - children of all different races working together! The puppeteers had to listen to Sue for their cues in these changed production circumstances.

The special atmosphere in the room was what made the event so memorable - the togetherness of audience with performers. The plot of the piece centres around a child - a puppet worked bunraku style - who appears at a high window of the High Rise Flats and is called by her friends below to come out to play. She cannot come out - but as she leans out the window her scarf blows off. This starts her on a magical adventure following the scarf as it goes to various windows of the High Rise. The scenes of the windows are enacted on puppet stages and these were moved into the room so we could see these scenes.

Real life stories of some of the residences are told by the people on tape while children illustrate them

with rod and hand puppets that they have made themselves. Two of these windows were Jack Dempsey, a resident, talking about his gardening and the old days when the area was market gardens and then there was the Somalian woman and her troubles coming here.

The audience loved the large group of brightly painted pigeons with flapping wooden wings that the children flew around at the start and finish of the show. Also boats to represent boat peoples were used - the large boat we did not see but had to be content with some smaller ones.

The list of volunteer involvement was impressive - Carlton Primary School children, Carlton Children's Centre. Hot Rats Drama Club to name a few.

From Polyglot came Sarah Krieglger and Sue Giles, Vanessa Beck was visual artist and Geoff Kennedy was Community artist with Jennie Swan as musical director and I still have not given credit to everyone! It was a huge joint effort.

At this point please forgive me but I cannot help but to think back

to the early days of Polyglot's birth in 1977 - I was there at the birth. Naomi Tippet wanted to do puppetry for migrant children to help them realise their worth to the community. Naomi was not a puppeteer herself so she looked at what was happening in schools and liked my work as Gardner Puppet Theatre and asked me to produce a puppet production to run in schools for six months. She asked Dorothy Rickards to write a script and Patricia Mullens to make puppets. The concept was to have about five little ten minute stories each in a different language (recorded) linked together by a star child talking in English. The idea was to make children in the audience who understood the language feel important to their mates and be able to translate to them later. Since I was still busy with my own theatre - Ian Cumings had just joined me in

1977 - I asked Ricardo Pietropaoli who had worked as a puppeteer with me in 1976 and who I respected as a director to join me in the Polyglot project as director. We hired the three puppeteers (of which one was Peter Wilson of Skylark fame!) for the project, rehearsed them, sort out speakers in different languages for the taping and the show went on. I went out to some schools with the show at first and was delighted to hear and feel the importance of the children in the audience as their language segment was spoken. Others must take up the history of Polyglot from there because I faded out of the picture to do my own programs!

But with this history in mind I had a very warm glow at "High Rise" as the children said the word "home" in many languages - I felt Polyglot had gone back to its roots and this time not doing puppetry for migrant children but having the children, the children of many different nations, themselves involved and doing the puppet production! Congratulations Polyglot.

by Lorrie Gardner

I was fortunate enough to see the production on the Saturday when the show went ahead with the full complement of effects and puppets. The show was a triumph of joyful puppetry and performance, hugely ambitious and rewarding.

The setting was simultaneously surreal and commonplace, a giant imposing block of flats neatly reinvented as an amphitheatre.

Very enjoyable family entertainment.

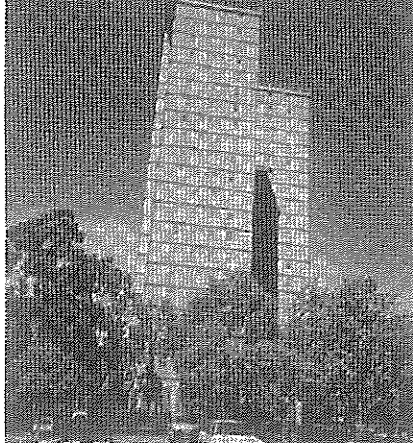
Philip Millar

HIGHLIGHT ON THE HIGH RISE

New directions for Polyglot Puppet Theatre

They say that, if you walk into someone's bedroom, you can tell a lot about the person.

Reprinted courtesy of Lowdown magazine



Cotton High Rise flats where the performances will be held

Armed with disposable cameras and the freedom for people to express what is important to them, Polyglot Puppet Theatre is exposing some weird and wonderful rooms – and people – who live in the high-rise flats around Melbourne.

Polyglot specialises in visual image and puppetry that captures the world of imagination. In its latest project cameras were distributed to anyone who had an interest in capturing images of things,

places, people or environments that were important to them, images that reflected who they were and where they lived.

These photographs contributed towards generating material for the High Rise Project, a long-term community based project built around the high-rise communities. Artists are working with the kids, young people and adults who live in the high-rise flats, creating huge inflatable sculptures, puppets, big fabric installations and intimate puppets for theatre – generating images that reflect the stories and lives of the individuals and communities who live in the high-rise flats

The culmination of this work is a large-scale event in November, which will be more like a festival than a production. Spread over three nights, the show will include giant images mixed with small-scale performance, performances in shadow puppetry, flat relief, bunraku and projection. A core performance involving young people from the high-rise flats will be the centre-piece of the three day festival, with other performances, installations, multimedia presentations and performances filling the event with unpredictable vitality.

The project has three focal areas: Music (live, samples, voice and a weave of eclectic cultural styles from Lebanese to a Fijian choir); Video and Slide (documentary style, self portrait, urban landscape); and Puppetry (grand-scale, shadow).

The High Rise Project was launched at the Carlton flats in April, providing a first taster for the large-scale event. Artistic Director Sue Giles and her artistic team mustered

a large group of kids to design and make puppets, prepare a performance and contribute to the visual images and sound in two short sessions – and then repeated the performance at the Flemington and Kensington high-rises. The images created a raw, real and gritty backdrop to the performance and gave a glimpse of what is to come. Shadow puppetry created a picture of the hundreds of people who live in the flats, whilst gorgeous life-sized puppets designed by the kids mixed with multimedia slides and a soundscape.

The audience gathered outside, sitting on carpet at the entrance of the 460 Lygon Street flats to watch the show. There was no doubt that the curious who wandered out of their front door and down the elevator to check out the activity – and who were soon dancing to the live music in their slippers – are all a part of the broader vision of what this project is really about. And, although the screen was not as big as desired, it still had the kids squealing with giggles of recognition as they and their friends were projected on the big (enough) screen for everyone to see.

The High Rise Project started in April with Housing Week and will continue with workshops run by the wide range of artists involved, including a sound designer, a visual artist and puppetry maker. The aim is to establish a strong enough base within the community to have a longer term outcome, with on-going workshops shaping the project into a third phase of performance that can be taken to a traditional theatre. Performing in a venue such as Carillon's La Mama may mean a visit to a theatre for the first time for many high-rise dwellers.



The project was initiated at the Carlton flats, but has spread rapidly to encompass the Kensington and Flemington flats. Sue already has her eye on how to include the Prahran flats, close to Polyglot Theatre. The response that the project has already received from people connected with the high-rises has reflected a recognition of the need for these types of community based projects. Various community organisations attached to the high-rise have come on board offering their support, providing the artists with an opportunity to become fully integrated into the community. The High Rise Project has also received support from the City of Melbourne, VicHealth and the Myer Foundation to augment Polyglot's triennial funding from Australia Council and an annual grant from Arts Victoria.

Under Sue Giles, Polyglot is about diversity and challenging the puppetry art form, incorporating the ideas and aesthetics of children and young people and engaging in lasting ways with the community. Sue has a deeply contagious passion for what children and young people create. The visual element to the show has a childish delight, relishing the art, colour and style of a child's imagination. Polyglot is conscious of opening up as many opportunities as possible for people to get involved, and High Rise Project targets young people from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

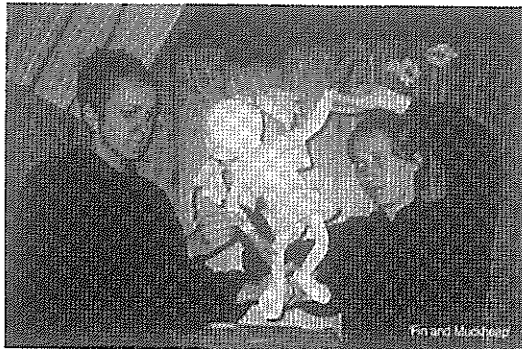
The project aims to be inclusive of the communities that live in Melbourne's high-rise developments. With a large number of the high-rise population being Muslim there are a number of challenges developing the process and content of the show. One of the project's major challenges is to work with the needs of the communities and find ways to tap into the diversity of the smaller communities living in the flats.

The project is immersed in the community, with the performance deliberately placed in, around and on the walls of the flats. Audiences will be taken into the spaces where stories live. One piece to be workshopped will take the audience into an empty flat where a performance is staged. In utilising site specific performance there is a very real motivation to maintain a connection with the communities from the flats. By presenting the work in the environment of the high-rise the stories maintain a clear point of identity, and opportunities will exist for people to recognise the wonderful diversity and sense of community that

exists on a larger scale.

Consequently the High Rise Project is more than an expose of lifestyles. There is a recognition of life and vitality in the high-rise, and the project creates an opportunity for the community to have a sense of belonging, to share their stories and to present a very different image from the stereotype. There is a certain aspect of isolation experienced if you live in a high rise - isolation from the broader community that is - but what Polyglot found inside the high-rises was an overwhelming sense of community. Some of the families had been there for generations. A self-confessed community theatre worker, Sue says it is the place she wants to be, talking with the people who own the stories, such as the fabulous Turkish man who makes great French pancakes.

The launch also functioned as a test run for processes in developing the next phase of the project. Sue found that, 'Most important was to just be there, at the flats, as much as possible - to talk to the people and gather a sense of what stories they want to tell'.



Polyglot is reaching out to audiences in a vigorous program of public events designed to explore and challenge the visual art and puppetry forms, and engage a wide variety of people in their aesthetic. Polyglot aims to be as accessible as possible, creating theatre experiences which go beyond elitism or exclusion. There is a commitment to providing opportunities for young people and the wider community to get involved. Studio Polyglot is an ongoing project which brings emerging and experienced artists together to get their new work and ideas on stage. It is eclectic, funky and sometimes wild.



Children from Carlton High Rise Flats

The High Rise Project captures the essence of the new directions for Polyglot and their promise to transform the ordinary things into the extraordinary. Polyglot is building artistic alliances, having just completed and toured a production of 'Fin and Muckheap', and are currently working on a new production with Terrapin Puppet Company, 'The Mighty How'. The High Rise Project is also a collaboration, with inflation artist Mark Guthbertson making large sculptural shapes and puppets, Vanessa Beck working with large scale fabric imagery and puppetry and Jennie Swain, as Musical Director, generating a soundscape from the voices, stories, music and laughter of the people from the flats.

Like so many of these projects, the response from the community has shown that the hunger to celebrate and recognise themselves as an identity is well overdue to be satiated. Having taken up the position in September 2000, Artistic Director Sue Giles is itching to get the company out there. Tucked in beside a church in South Yarra, Melbourne Polyglot has a gorgeous theatre space, a big workshop and a loaded-to-the-hilt storage room. It is only a stone's throw from the Prahran high-rise, but most of the people who live there would not know Polyglot even exists. That's something that Polyglot is planning to change.

The High Rise Project is on November 15, 16, 17 on site @ Lygon Street Carlton High Rise Flats.

ELENA VEREKER

Winner!

Congratulations Barbara-Rose Townsend!

Dear Philip,

I've received Australian Puppeteer for the last two years and with this last edition I had to write in. Since I loved those word find puzzles as a kid I just had to write a scenario which uses pretty much every word and although having seen it I still don't own a copy of Anita's book! Now I want to get to work making a velvet lion rod puppet and an old man marionette! Here it is:

Athens. Noir.

Tap, tap, tap, lit the shadows. It is a man in old pants and one glove on. A velvet lion, red nose in a web of fur, is his ears. The man then pats his ears. It's late, no beer led him here. No. The marionette sags. This show has no rehearsal. The term of an old man and the son he is to her. She is his playboard. As his joint cracks, so turns a page on him. "It is I, Herr Bonghler's lot - to love her pan of soy and not to eat."

A rod for his art. A puppet to manipulate. An ant to her bee. We hear Bradshaw hone his shadows. Genty naps. Noir in Athens.

My life as a puppeteer started at age 30 when I received an OZ Council grant as an emerging artist. I learnt design, construction, manipulation, storytelling and performance from a Newcastle based puppeteer and mask maker Ross Brown. That was the kick start I needed to see myself as a valuable artistic asset to the world of performing arts. To this date I have developed that first show and performed it at local festivals. The set was inspired by a trip to the Southern African nation of Lesotho where I saw huge channels of erosion in the agricultural areas. Beauty's Song is the story of the four elements and how they work together to save the planet from pollution and destruction.

Although I am still a beginner, having been doing this irregularly for only two years and learning as I go along, I love taking puppetry into other theatre productions that I do. This included using shadow puppet designs in a production of Hannie Rayson's *Falling from Grace*. Also recently taking a theatre piece to The Southern Cross Players One Act Festival in Canberra and winning best actor. The two large papier mache eyes that followed the actor around the stage must have helped the adjudicators see that success....

I would be very happy receiving more regular newsletters, even on e-mail to cut down on administrative costs. Information about conferences, events, workshops and performances around the country or world would be great. Thanks

Barbara-Rose Townsend
Puppetry apprentice

Thanks to all those who had a crack at the competition, the mailbox was bursting with entertaining and intriguing responses.

The wonderful poetic winning entry scores a signed copy of Anita Sinclair's superb *Puppetry Handbook*.

And for the next one, a new challenge!

As Peter Wilson has recently announced the establishment of a puppetry curriculum at the Victorian College of the Arts, I thought that some suggestions for subjects might be handy.

Top Ten Things every puppeteer should know or Stuff they never teach you in school or whatever the heck title takes your fancy.

Neatest correct(?) entries will receive a lovely bottle of the official "One Van" International Festival of puppetry plonk, Vino de Puppetino, designed by Garth Frost.

Off you go, get to work, thinking caps on.

Runner up entry

Sue Bradshaw has taken her glove puppets Yanse the Gent and Buppo to rehearsal at the new Lion theatre.

To 'play the boards' in the new joint is natural for the puppeteer, as through the ages to manipulate puppets has developed into a fine art.

Ernie Lawton

Pre-show chat at Kindy



Based on a true conversation cartoon by Dennis Murphy

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D E A D L I N E S

Who am I trying to fool here. Just send stuff in and we'll see how we go.



Mr Tumnus(assisted by Leighton Young) looks appropriately shocked when he discovers he won't debut until Christmas 2002