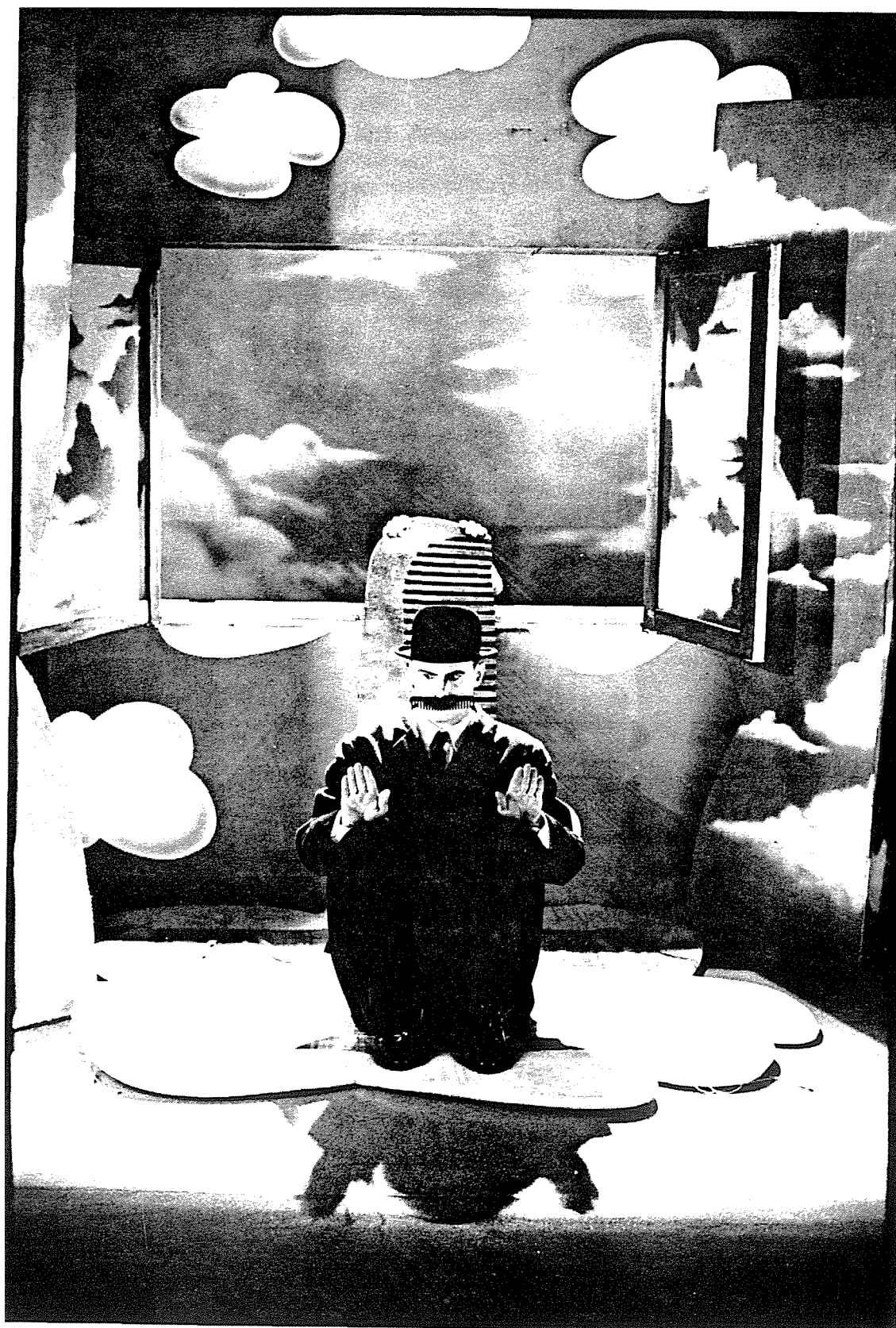


# UNIMA AUSTRALIA



**DEC'  
1995**



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**TAPTOE THEATRE:**

Roland Robin in  
"HEMEL!" by  
Freek Neirynck  
and  
Daniel Billiet.



**UNION INTERNATIONALE DE LA MARIONNETTE**

FOUNDED IN 1929. MEMBER OF IFI (UNESCO)

## EDITORIAL

This issue was originally intended to be a Variety special but, as you will see, there are only a few articles about Variety performance. There are several reasons for this, the main one being that Variety performers are by nature busy, hard-to-get-hold-of people. If anyone would like to broaden our collective knowledge on the issue in later magazine editions, please do.

Thankyou to everyone who responded to the letter about French nuclear testing in the Pacific. A letter has been drafted to the French and Australian governments, and will be sent soon, along with the one you saw for other UNIMA Centres. There was an overwhelmingly positive and thoughtful response to this action, as being an important symbolic gesture to make, and one that it is in the spirit of the UNIMA statutes.

As soon as we get this issue to the printers, I will be starting rehearsals for ***There's a Moon in my Room***, with Denise Rundle and Kym Tonkin (Duck & Co. with ONE TOE). We will be performing this play for 3-10 year olds at the Adelaide Fringe, in the Banana Room, in the old East End Markets (24th Feb - 3rd March, 5.30pm). Because I'll be in Adelaide for a month, Richard Hart and Jennie Pfeiffer have generously offered to produce the March UNIMA Magazine. To help them, could contributors please send articles to me as soon as possible for this issue.

I have received some information about South Africa UNIMA which will be published in the next newsletter. We now exchange information regularly with UNIMA centres in Britain, New Zealand, Japan, U.S.A. and South Africa.

We have been unable to agree on a name for the magazine, so please keep those suggestions rollin' on in. One year's free subscription, folks!

Welcome to all the new members; ex-MANIPULATION subscribers, and others. If we get 100 members by next June, we can have two voting members at Budapest! Thankyou to all the contributors to the magazine, and to Richard, Jennie and Kym for constant help.

Best wishes to everyone for a happy festive season.

Jenny

## PUPPETS '96 UPDATE

**Puppets '96** has received a \$40 000 grant from Festivals Australia towards the costs of the Festival. The funding is for public performances and community workshops conducted by Australian artists. As we go to press, we have found out that we did not receive any of the \$75 000 requested from Arts Queensland. Unfortunately we were also unsuccessful in our application to the performing Arts Board of the Australia Council for assistance towards the conference and masterclass programme. This will mean full cost recovery and greater underwriting for this aspect of the festival. The committee of management will be meeting with Festivals Australia and the board to decide on contingency plans for the festival in the next few days.

We have also received confirmation that Roman Paska is available to teach master classes at the festival. His visit was initiated by Peter Wilson of Spare Parts and will be a joint arrangement with Spare Parts in W.A. We plan to mail out Master Class enrolment forms as part of a Conference and Master Class Registration flyer in early February.

The Registration flyer will also provide accommodation booking options and airline travel

arrangements with the conference carrier. Accommodation choices will cover top end to budget, however for those who can arrange themselves into small groups of 4 or 6, many of the mid range unit offerings will provide a higher standard at the budget price. Air travel is available into Maroochydore although the number of flights is very limited. An alternative to consider is transit via Brisbane. There is a coach service from Brisbane City and Airport to Noosa six times daily which is currently \$18. The trip is approximately 3 hours.

There has been quite a lot of interest from across the Tasman. Two UNIMA members have been in touch to say that they have obtained grants from Creative New Zealand to attend the Festival. A number of others have indicated that they are coming anyway.

For further information about **Puppets '96** contact the office by telephone (074) 74 8188, Fax (074) 74 9378, or post E.T.C. Company Inc., PO Box 753, Noosa Heads, Qld. 4567, Australia.

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

I've taken a break from a flea circus tour of rural Victoria to have a short weekend in Melbourne to meet with our UNIMA editorial team and formulate the Subscription Renewal Form you find enclosed. The Form is our way of building up a profile of our members so please take the time to fill it out and post it in with your cheque.

We have a new Treasurer: Richard Hart was the sole nominee. He'll take over both the finances and the computer file. I first met Richard at the 1979 Puppet Festival in Hobart and later had the privilege of being involved in his Angler Fish Ballet. Welcome, Richard. Our thanks to Garry for his work as treasurer.

As UNIMA Secretary I applied to the Australia Council for partial funding of the costs involved in my representing Australia at the International UNIMA Congress next year in Budapest. I'm afraid I didn't have time to do any lobbying but I did send an itinerary. As far as I know no one from the Council came to a performance. In October came word that the application was unsuccessful. No specific reason was given for the decision. The amount involved came to approximately one half of one per cent of the total money allocated to Puppetry.

On to happier event of a more personal nature. I got a lovely compliment on my birthday, of all days. A woman was hurrying to leave just after my pre-school show but stopped long enough to quickly say, "I really enjoyed your show. In fact, I laughed so much my water broke!" Having once worked in an emergency room, I remained calm. I even had the presence of mind to ask her if I could quote her in my publicity.

Well, I must be off, back to the wilds of rural Victoria to exhibit fleas and channel Lady Hortense. I close with a quote from Sigmund Freud who once wrote, *"The most favourable condition for comic pleasure is a generally happy disposition in which one is in the mood for laughter. In happy toxic states almost everything seems comic"*.

Wishing you many happy toxic states in 1996.

Dennis

### UNIMA '96 BUDAPEST UPDATE

I have looked into airfares at the Flight Centre which has offices in all state capitals. To negotiate a special price with an airline, we would have needed at least ten people leaving on the same flight. The following fares are based on 3 to 4 people who may leave and return independently of each other:

KLM into Amsterdam. This will suit those wanting to go to the "MicroFestival" in Dordrecht, Holland. Approx \$2060 return.

LUFTHANSA into Frankfurt. This means a change of planes in Bangkok and offers free stop-overs in both directions in either Bali, Bangkok or Hong Kong. Approx \$2050 return.

Both include two further flights within Europe, e.g: Frankfurt-Budapest and Budapest-Frankfurt. Book by late February.

Those going on to the "Puppet In My Pocket Festival" in Sarospatak, Hungary can catch a train there from Budapest. Hungary is so small that there are no internal flights. Sarospatak is 254 km Northeast of Budapest and very conveniently located in the famous Tokay wine region.

\* \* \* \* \*

The address for the Festival and Congress is:

Namzetkozi Babmuvesz Szovetseg, Magyar Kozpontja, 1062 BUDAPEST VI, Andrássy út 69. Hungary.

Dennis

**Lian Tanner**, writer of *Desires* and *Heroes* by Terrapin Puppet Theatre has received funding from Arts Tasmania to accompany Terrapin at the UNIMA Festival in Budapest, to further her professional development in writing for puppetry. She is looking for a place to stay there, so if anyone has any contacts for possible billets or other cheap accommodation options, could they please contact Terrapin and help Lian find somewhere to sleep in Hungary! (Terrapin can be contacted on Ph: 002-23 6843, or Post: 77 Salamanca Place, Hobart, TAS. 7000)

# INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## OVERSEAS FESTIVALS DIGEST:

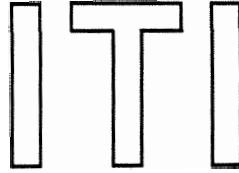
- MARCH '96 15-19 VII Eppelborner Figurentheatre-tage, Eppelborn, Germany  
23-30 8th Gernsbachewr Puppentheatrewoche, Gernbach, Germany
- MAY '96 19/5-1/6 Theatre in a Satchel Festival, Lomza, Poland  
3-5 Pupparium Spectaulum, Huergenwald, Germany
- JUNE '96 6-9 Puppeteers of America Regional Festival, Ontario  
6-10 Gala Internationala A Recitalurilor, Romania  
12-16 International Micro Festival, small international puppet theatre groups, Dordrecht, Holland  
13-21 Skupova Plzen, National competition for children aged 7-10 years, Pilzen, Czech Republic  
\*\* 23-30 International UNIMA Congress and Festival, Budapest  
TBA: Next Wave, Dance & Puppet Festival, Prague  
25/6-4/7 Buskers Fare, New York  
\*\*30 May to 9 June Festival of Puppetry and Visual Theatre, Noosa\*\*  
\*\*3 June to 31 August, Centre for Puppetry Arts Summer Festival in conjunction with Atlanta Cultural Olympiad, USA\*\*
- JULY '96 1-5 Puppet in My Pocket, soloists & small companies, Sarospatak, Hungary  
5-14 Semaine Mondiale de la Marionette, Jonquiere, Quebec  
21-28 Figueuro solo, Gent, Belgium  
26-4/8 Festival Internacional de Titieres, Mexico City  
TBA Loutkarska Chrudim, National festival of amateur companies, Prague
- AUG. '96 17-25 Festival of Traditional Glove Puppetry, Italy  
18-27 Arrivano dal Mare Int'l Puppet Festival, Italy  
27-4/9 Festival Du Parc Pasteur, Orleans, France  
30-4/9 PIF Int'l Puppet Festival, Zagreb, Croatia
- SEP. '96 5-8 Baden Figura Theatre Festival, Baden, Switzerland  
9-20 Bottroper Marchentage, Bottrop, Germany  
28-4/10 Rencontre Internationale, Performnces, workshops, debates etc, Charleville, France
- OCT. '96 1-8 The Golden Dolphin Int'l Puppet Festival, New forms and modern achievements in the development of the puppet art (held once every 3 years), Varna, Bulgaria  
10-20 Third Int'l Puppet Festival, Lahore, Pakistan  
22-27 18th Internationale Puppentage, Mistelbach, Austria  
23-2/12 Visions 96, festival of internatioanl animated theatre, Brighton, UK
- NOV. '96 23/11-2/12 14th Festival Internacional de Marionetas, Tolosa, Spain

*For details on any of the above, write to the Secretary*

## **NATIONAL SCHOOL OF PUPPETRY, FRANCE**

The school is advertising for its 1996-1999 full-time course, starting in May 1996. The course covers various manipulation techniques, building and general theatre arts (mask, acting, comedy, scriptwriting, history etc.) Students will work with visiting practitioners as well as the Institute's teachers. Candidates for the course must be between 18 and 26 years of age, and be able to speak some French. Entries close 29th February 1996.

Ed: It sounds like a very full and exciting course, which I can't do justice to here, but if anyone would like a copy of the brochure and entry form, please let me know.



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TEL: 61 (0)2 319 0718 FAX: 61 (0)2 698 3557

EMAIL: iti@peg.pegasus.oz.au

**Animation Film Festival:** 10-14 Jul '96. Zagreb, Croatia. A competitive festival open to works produced on film or video in the past 2 years. Running time 30 mins or less. Deadline-1/2/96.

**Royal Golden Jubilee, Thailand:** Handspan will be performing at the International Puppet Festival.

**Community Artists:** The CCDB of the Australia Council is seeking expressions of interest from artists to work in regional/remote communities with projects up to 12 months duration, in WA, NT, & far Nth QLD.

**Community Project Director:** The ETC Co. is seeking a director for the Puppets'96 community programme. 10 weeks full time from early Mar '96, to supervise a puppetry building project, parade & performance piece.

**Zoe Atkinson** is studying with Drak designer Petr Matacek & the dept. of design in the puppetry faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. She also visited the Norwegian Puppet Theatre Theatre Workshop.

**More Bread and Circuses:** A guide to seeking European funding.

**National Youth Arts Conference:** 27-29 Sep'96 Perth, WA. Theme: 'Steps into Asia'. Contact the steering committee with expressions of interest to perform.

**Adelaide Festival:** 1-17 Mar '96. Includes Handspring Puppet Co.(Sth Africa).

**Funny Business:** 23 Feb-17 Mar '96. A new international comedy festival which will operate under the Fringe Festival umbrella for the 1st year. Expressions of interest to director Gareth Lott.

Contact ITI for information on any of the above.

## PHILIPPE GENTY PRODUCTION TOUR DATES

This production has been a collaboration between the Philippe Genty company and the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust. Five Australian performers were chosen to devise and perform in the show.

Jan 29 - Feb 10: ADELAIDE - Adelaide Festival Centre Playhouse  
 Feb 14 - Feb 24: PERTH - His Majesty's Theatre  
 Feb 27 - Feb 28: KALGOORLIE - Goldfields Arts Centre  
 Mar 1 - Mar 2: BUNBURY - Bunbury Entertainment Centre  
 Mar 5: WHYALLA  
 Mar 7: PORT PIRIE  
 Mar 9: RENMARK  
 Mar 13 - Mar 16: HOBART - Theatre Royal  
 Mar 20 - Apr 6: MELBOURNE - Victorian Arts Centre Playhouse  
 Apr 12 - Apr 13: BALLARAT - Her Majesty's Theatre  
 Apr 16 - May 11: SYDNEY - Footbridge Theatre  
 May 14 - May 18: CANBERRA - Canberra Theatre Centre  
 May 21 - May 25: MELBOURNE - Alexander Theatre, Monash Uni.  
 May 28 - May 29: GEELONG - Ford Theatre.  
 June 18 - June 22: BRISBANE - Lyric Theatre, QLD Performing Arts Trust.

# NSW NEWS

First from Sue Wallace...

## WHAT HAS BEEN SEEN IN SYDNEY.- Impressions.

ALMOST A DINOSAUR - by Polyglot Puppet Theatre performed to packed houses at the Opera House for a week in September. As I walked along the forecourt of the Opera House two young boys bounded past yelling "I can smell dinosaurs!!!" You couldn't wish for a better anticipation factor. These children were determined to enjoy themselves and the show lived up to their expectations.

On first appearance the set was dwarfed on the Playhouse stage but once the performance started the action drew you into the world of Rosi the dinosaur. The three puppeteers - Sarah Young, Stephan Friedrich and Darren Carmichael worked very well in ensemble with strong performances from all. It seemed obvious that this show had been performed many times. It had the flavour of a performers' piece where there had been the opportunity for the puppeteers to play with the action in response to their audience - and it was still fresh.

PIERROT AND COLUMBINE - by Theatre of Image at the Wharf, Sydney Theatre Co. Sep 15 - Oct 7. This is a play for children - a drama augmented by puppetry. The puppets were not strictly shadow puppets - more silhouettes that were lit from behind and played against a backdrop. Designed by Kim Carpenter and made by Gareth Frost, the puppets were manipulated in a fairly rough-house style that suited this charming production. The puppetry lent a good change of scale to the action and was a very effective vehicle for showing a journey undertaken by the characters.

## SYDNEY PUPPET THEATRE NEWS

We have a new show performing at the Puppet Cottage - THINGS WITH WINGS - a simple story of a caterpillar whose primary concerns in life are eating and flying. The eating side of things isn't so easy; the flowers are determined to protect their leaves which have taken days to grow. Ever hopeful of flying, the caterpillar keeps trying and crashing. Eventually, tired and hungry, it falls asleep. Covered with a silk sheet, it has three dreams: all about things with wings - a pterodactyl, a dragon and a fairy. These images are created with many styles of puppets; shadows, marionettes, rod and hand. Finally, of course, a butterfly emerges from under the sheet.

We set out to create a lyrical piece. This is a risk in an environment like the Puppet Cottage where you don't have the advantages of a darkened theatre and lights. We are very pleased with the results.

THINGS WITH WINGS was written by Sue Wallace, music compositions and recording by Steve Coupe, set & puppet construction by Steve & Sue.

Sue was asked to join Kim Carpenter at the Australian Opera for a one week workshop of a new opera for children called GRANDMA'S SHOES. The workshop was a huge success and it promises to be a very special production.

Steve Coupe, (via the magic of video and special effects) will appear as Blackbeard the Pirate in a mirror in his cabin at the National Maritime Museum, Sydney.

Sue is currently co-ordinating a launch of A WINDOW IN HEAVEN, the latest CD release by the Cafe at the Gate of Salvation. The launch (9&10 Dec) will feature visuals designed by Sue.

## WHAT WON'T BE SEEN IN NSW

To my knowledge, the Australia Council did not provide funding for any puppetry projects or research or masterclasses in NSW in their last funding rounds. This included a rejection of a request for \$865 to have Noriko Nishimoto take a masterclass with 12 professional puppeteers who usually work solo or in duos. We will fund Noriko's fares etc ourselves. I feel this rejection indicates a lack of respect for the individual working performer and a lack of support for training. Each year when we hold these workshops we encourage young performers to come. There is no other training like this on offer in NSW.

## And now from Dennis Murphy ...

The Rocks Puppet Cottage Festival opened the last school holidays and there were two outdoor venues and two indoor. OZO Puppets did a shadow show. Though I only got to see a bit of it, it looked very cinematic with a large screen flanked by each side by smaller screens. Michael Cohen was a sensation but it's hard to describe his act. He works inside a lycra bag and with two masks and a puppet presents a lot of images from a large face walking around to a standing emu that suddenly materialises from a struggling lump of material.

The Australia Puppetry Guild held their Puppeteers' Picnic at Darling Harbour presenting two Guild-devised shows. It is the first time the Guild members have ever worked together as a group to mount a production. They rehearsed every week and presented a very good first effort. They will now build on that over the next year.

Grasshopper and Lynda Buxton returned from a marathon 3 and a half month tour of the North and West. They each clocked up 22,000km: The equivalent of a return flight to London as the crow flies. They flew out to a couple remote areas: Lynda flew into Useless Loop. Many of Grassie's performances were presented in 39 degree heat under the school tree. He has this year performed in every state and territory of Australia.



Puppet Cottage Festival, Sept. '95. From left-Dennis Murphy, Sally McNally\* (nee Bustle), & her husband, Sue Wallace, Richard Bradshaw (standing), Bill & Joan Jackson. (\*Sally performed with her parents in Australia in the 50's or 60's. The Bustles were English puppeteers.)

Prof Tilakasiri from the University of Sri Lanka visited Australia in October. He is the author of "Puppet Theatre of Asia" and "Puppetry in Sri Lanka". Prof Tilakasiri is a retired Sanskrit scholar whose interest in Puppetry dated back to his study of the term *sutra-dhara*, meaning string holder. He has produced modern puppet shows that toured internationally and now serves on the Arts Council of Sri Lanka working to preserve Sri Lanka's traditional Puppetry.

Also in Sydney is traditional Thai rod puppeteer, Pasakorn Intoo-Marn, who is studying for his Masters degree in Theatre Studies with Dr Williams at the University of NSW. He hopes to eventually teach drama and theatre back in Thailand and form a traditional rod puppet troupe to tour religious festivals. Pas learned puppetry from Chusri Skulkaew who began learning from her father when she was 8. She is now in her eighties.

#### **WHAT'S ON in the holidays:**

The Rocks Puppet Cottage, Kendal Lane, The Rocks:

Weekends: Sydney Puppet Theatre

18 to 22 December: Harlequin's Puppet Theatre

26 to 29 December: Murphy's Law of Puppets

1 to 5 January: Allenby's FAMOUS Flea Circus

Fairfield City Farm, Darling Street, Abbotsbury:

8 to 14 January: Allenby's FAMOUS Flea Circus

22 to 28 January: Jungle Bob's Wild Animal Puppets



# AT THE COAL-FACE

## HAND EXERCISES Part 2

### 7. GENTLE WRIST STRETCH

With the elbows straight out to the sides and forearms parallel to the floor with fingers up, place the heel of the right hand in the pad of the left hand. Press and release slowly for a count of eight. Repeat with your other wrist.

### 8. FOUR FINGER STRETCH

Using the same position as above, place the right hand around the fingers of the left and press back, hypothetically trying to bend the fingers back towards your forearm. (Don't overdo it!) Press gently for a count of eight. Shake your hands out after this exercise. Relax your hands.

### 9. SECOND JOINT FINGER-BENDS

Hold your left hand palm down, fingers stretched and held together. While holding three fingers and thumb straight, bend your smallest finger at the second joint from your fingernail. Return it to the flat position. Repeat this with each finger one

at a time, while keeping your other fingers straight. (You may use your other hand to hold the remaining fingers straight in order to get started but soon this will be unnecessary). Repeat with the other hand.

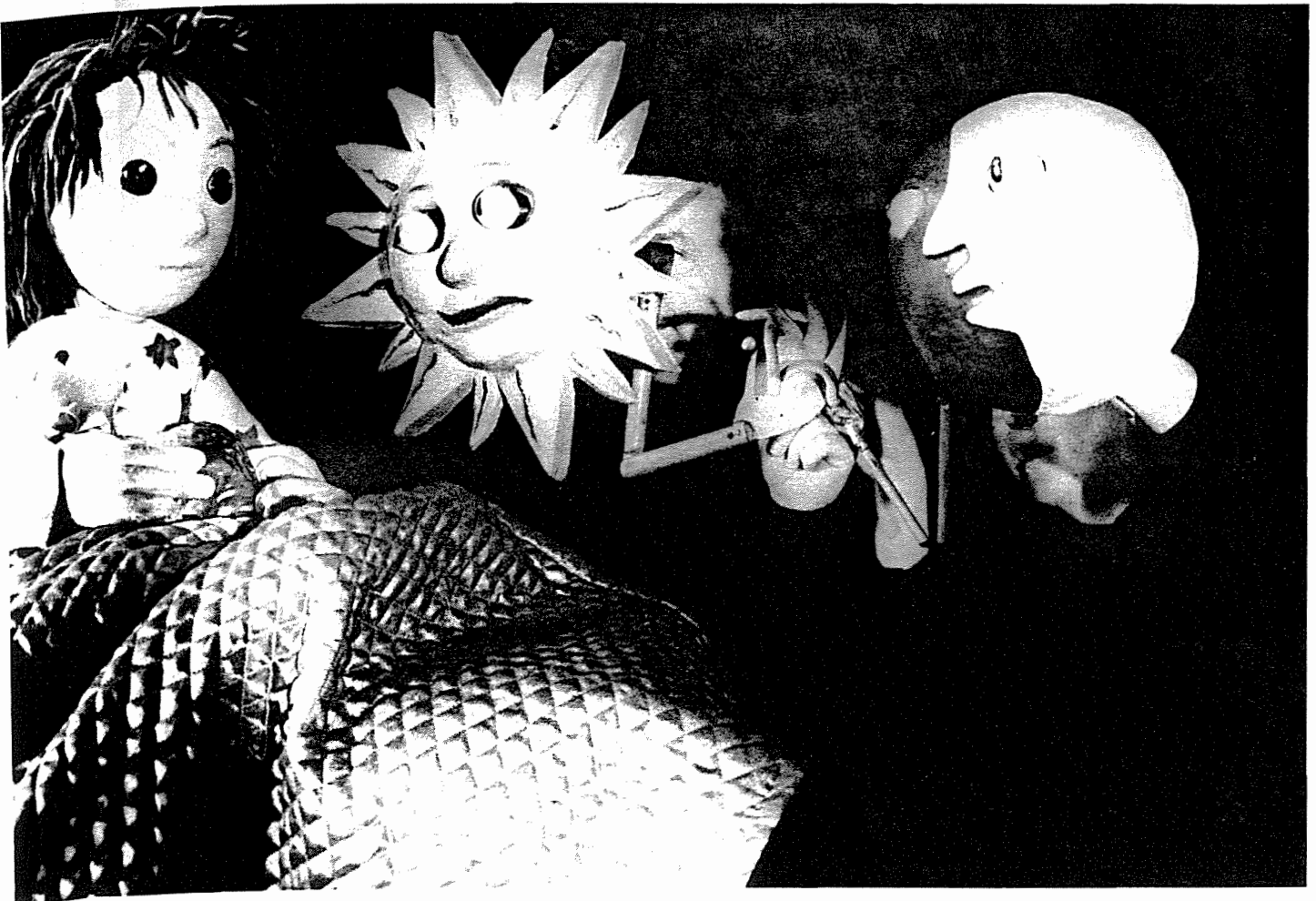
### 10. FINGER AND THUMB ARTICULATION

Inscribe an imaginary figure with each finger and thumb. Repeat eight times. Keep your other fingers still as you work each finger.

### 11. HORIZONTAL ISOLATION MOVEMENT

Starting with each hand in a flat (pallet) position separate each index and middle finger from the ring and little finger then close. Separate each little finger and index finger from the ring and middle finger and close. Alternate eight times each.

(From *Movement in Puppetry Performance* by Nikki Tilroe)



*There's a Moon in my Room* - Denise Rundle, Kym Tonkin and Jenny Andersen  
We will be having a public launch of this show in early February. If you would like to come, please give Jenny a call on (03) 9482 3292 & we'll put you on the mailing list.

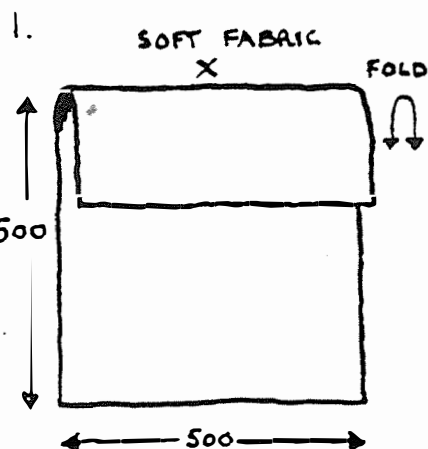


Ed: The following instructions (from Jenny Davidson) for a simple string puppet, begins what I hope will be a regular section on puppet construction. I would like to include a mixture of easy designs and complicated ones for people with more advanced building skills. Any short hints about materials, tools etc. are also most welcome.

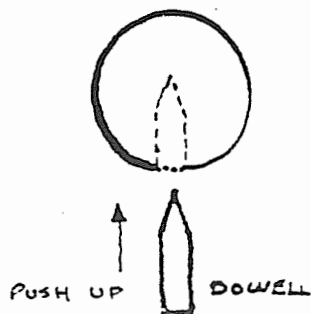
## A SIMPLE STRING PUPPET

### MATERIALS

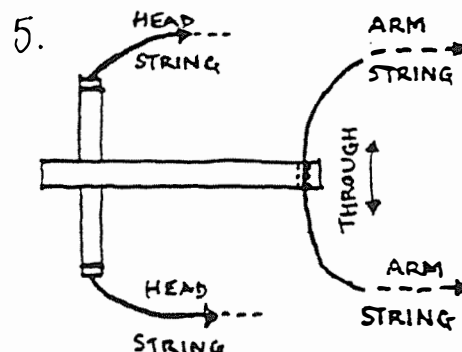
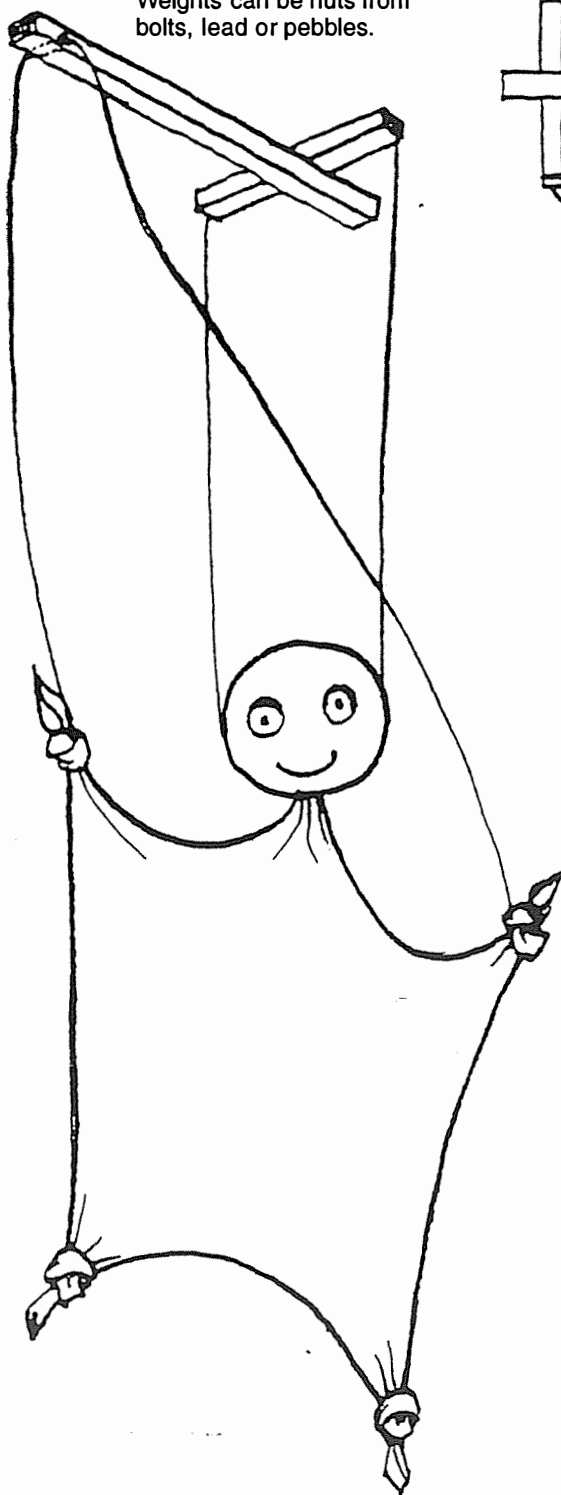
Styrene ball  
Soft Fabric 700 x 500  
(size can vary in proportion)  
Wood 1 x .220  
1 x .150  
Dowell 1 x .080, tapered at  
one end  
String or linen thread  
4 weights  
2 drawing pins  
Wood glue



2. Make a hole in the styrene ball with the tapered dowell.  
3. Place dowell inside centre of fabric fold X. Push dowell and covering fabric firmly into the hole in the ball.



4. Knot the weights into the fabric on each corner. Weights can be nuts from bolts, lead or pebbles.



Drill a hole through the long arm of the control near the end for the arm string.

The arm 'through string' enables the manipulator to raise either one puppet arm or both by pulling on one side only.

Pin head-strings to each side of head with drawing pins then tie to control.

Thread arm string through hole in control. Then tie the ends to the two top corners next to the weights. The length of this string should allow arms to just hang relaxed at the puppet's side.

For a nodding head movement add a nose to the head and a string from the nose end to the control next to the arm string hole.

Length of strings is variable and depends on the height at which the puppet will be worked.

Start by working the puppet while you stand on the floor. Hold the control at a comfortable height and string the puppet to stand with its feet on the floor.

## TEXT OF PRESENTATION FOR THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CREATIVE THINKING, JULY 1995, MALTA by ANITA SINCLAIR

*In July, 1995, delegates from very diverse professional areas and clearly different cultural backgrounds gathered to consider Creative Thinking; how it has been done, how it might be done. The venue, the University of Malta in Msida, is home to the Edward de Bono Programme for the Design and Development of Thinking.*

*As I made my plans, for the talk and the accompanying visual support material, I came up again and again against my own value system, particularly that of offering material especially relevant to the given audience. This was to be a very special audience. With all their differences, each was there with an abiding interest in their own thinking and the thinking of others.*

### **BRINGING IDEAS TO LIFE** **CREATIVE THINKING IN PUPPETRY**

Bringing ideas to life! In puppetry this must be taken almost literally. When puppetry is good, the life created seems to be real, to live, to breathe, to have thoughts and feelings. The artist who works in puppetry must have the rare ability to dream, and then to translate that dream into tangible reality.

Those of us who work in any of the areas referred to as 'the arts' have very many freedoms of choice, endless possibilities open to us. Not only can we more or less do as we please, but also, we are effectively obliged to. Not only are our wildest dreams free to be realised, but also, nothing less will be considered adequate.

The pressure brought to bear on the artist in this world of vast and detailed communication to produce new, exciting, stimulating and informative ways of looking at life can be very great, very daunting, very immobilizing. Were it not for the robust egos involved and the disproportionate love of the work, many artists might well give up and 'get a proper job' as they have all been directed to do at some time in their careers by some more 'stable' soul.

Since 'inspiration' is commonly assigned to the artist, not to mention marginal insanity, sometimes even genius, it is easy to assume

that all these assets take care of the 'ideas' side of things.

Myths, of course, have their uses. Maybe people get a kick out of designating areas of 'divine madness' to eccentric artists and mad scientists. Perhaps the illusion is comforting that somewhere, someone lives in a different world with different rules. However, in the real world, the successful artist, no differently from any other 'ideas' person, scientist or management person, must put time, organization and effort into creating and then accomplishing his or her goals; from 'idea' to realisation. The artist must WORK to seek out an idea, then WORK to put it to use. Without some form of commitment to organization and process, not even the most inspired artist will see a result.



The artist who has the skill of summoning up ideas on command, rather than depending solely on fickle inspiration, is the professional who will always have the ideas to 'bring to life'.

In the case of the Theatre artist, 'life' takes on more than a metaphorical meaning. In Theatre, ideas, situations, characters, conflicts and conversations must live and breathe for an audience. To accomplish this is the task of the Theatre writer, the Theatre director, the Theatre performer. This is the job also, of every puppet designer and controller, every mask maker and wearer

***Where do new ideas come from in puppetry?***

***What are the opportunities, where are the pitfalls?***

***What areas of conservatism exist? Is anything new possible?***

In a world well saturated with the wonderful, incredible works of the late Jim Henson and his peers, it may seem odd to turn our attention to 'areas' of conservatism in puppetry. The smallest children now are au fait with pigs that wear false eye-lashes, frogs that compere variety shows\* and wooly worm/dogs that fly through the air\*\*. The APPEARANCE, though not necessarily the NAME of

each puppet type is known to most movie-goers or television viewers - HAND, ROD, STRING, SHADOW PUPPETS, LARGE BODY PUPPETS, BLACK THEATRE PUPPETRY. Have not the puppetry crowd shown incredible versatility? Have they not proven themselves free of all barriers and restrictions?

Flashback time ...

If I had asked you in 1965, "What is a puppet?", chances are, your hand would have risen up in front of you with the index finger pointed skyward and the thumb and middle fingers directed forward, clapping. In 1995, however, the word 'puppet' is likely to be followed in your mind and that of immeasurable numbers of people by what word? - MUPPET! The image is that of a hand operated, opening and closing, large, wide mouth.

Puppetry, like any other field, can be limited by the current view of it. The 1965 puppet was 'thus'; the 1995 puppet is 'thus'.

The puppeteer, no less than anyone else, notices his market. The puppeteer, no less often than anyone else, can be subject to the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality. "Everyone likes moppets\*\*\*, lets do more moppets". "Talking animals work; let's do more talking animals". Puppet companies that have been rewarded by large, faithful audiences by always dealing with 'issues' or by always presenting a theatrical version of the latest popular children's book are not likely to rush at the opportunity to change their material. The puppetry script writer who all her life has written for children, possibly won't even THINK of writing for adults; or, having thought of it, will go cold at the prospect and lose interest soon after.

Here we have an art form in which the sky is truly the limit. Here we have thinkers as habit ridden as in any other field.

### ***What conventions exist in puppetry?***

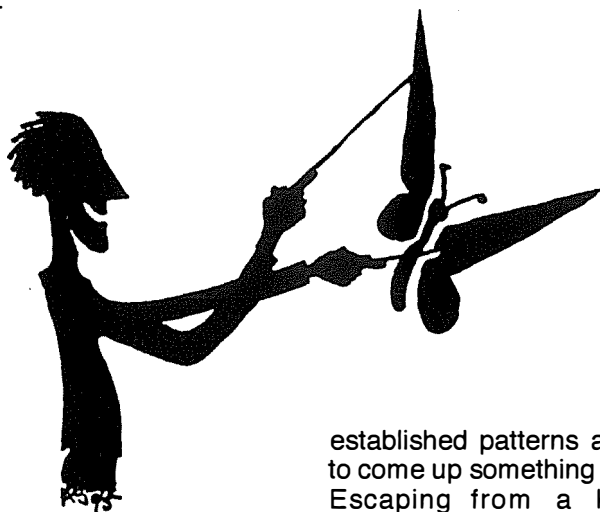
It very much depends on who's looking. In the East the expectations of both performer and audience differ dramatically from those in the West. The basic requirement - that a puppet appear to be alive - is likely to be met by quite different methods from one country to another. But if, for convenience, we look only at the forms familiar to Western audiences, we can select out a few 'conventions'. These will of course be statements of the obvious.

presented in an appropriate space. The show is likely to be repeated. Payment is received for performance.

These are the conventions and restrictions within which the puppet artist works. There are others; some imposed by the medium, some by the artists themselves.

### ***How do puppeteers escape the habits, the conventions and the restrictions and still end up with viable shows that attract audiences?***

Some don't. Some never escape the conventions at all, staying with the known ad infinitum. Some escape their own



The puppet show is a piece of Theatre, and as such, must have a beginning and an end. The show will take a controlled amount of time. Puppets must have puppeteers; these may be concealed or revealed. Puppets must be designed, then built. The performance will have some content; this will be communicated clearly. The audience will want to physically see the action. The puppeteer will need to achieve what is asked of him physically. Some-one must write or at least devise the show. The performance is

established patterns and fail to come up something better. Escaping from a known (reliable) pattern in theatre carries with it all the risk that it must in every field.

The greatest guarantee of success lies with the creative artist's ability to identify appropriate goals and to recognize the difference between good and useful creative thinking targets and those which are more likely to lead them astray. Even if we truly believe that every aspect of our work is worthy of creative thinking, we can probably agree that, with deadlines in operation, we cannot deal with every item as a first priority.

### **Targeting areas for creative thinking in puppetry.**

Puppeteers are not like each other. Consequently, it is not possible to lump puppetry people together and happily describe the ways in which they target their creative thinking. The best I can hope for here, is to indicate likely places SOME puppeteers might choose to direct creative energy. I can also identify what I would describe as misguided targeting.

Puppeteers need ideas for shows. Of course! The frequency of need can be influenced by the policies of the company, say, to rehearse up a new show every six months. What to do? We all know we want to use puppets. This is the very point at which targeting the creative thinking will be the 'make or break' action.

In Theatre, in painting, in song-writing, the project can only ever be: the *i n t e n t i o n*, the communication, the thing that you wish to SAY to your audience. Otherwise the game is lost before it begins. The first creative thinking target in puppetry must be the MESSAGE, IMAGE or COMMUNICATION GOAL. This will arise (after reflection) from the ethics or morality of the artists concerned. You can be sure that every theatrical presentation reflects the view of the world held by its creator, including those views that are muddy or uncommunicative.

### **Targeting the message, image or story line of a new show.**

This cannot be done without first targeting an audience. The easiest example for me to use is the presentation I must do today.\*\*\*\* If I design my presentation without first making my best guess about who YOU will be, sitting and

listening to me and watching me, I can hardly work out an offering that will interest you. Some talks and some performances suit all comers. Some, not many. Having made my best guess, I must now decide WHAT I have that might be useful to 'say' to you; whether that 'saying' is t h r o u g h speech, demonstration, slides, questioning or performing with puppets in a way that might be new to you. (Ed: Anita ended up getting her audience to perform improvised shadow and hand puppetry pieces, within clear parameters that she had set down. They were a huge success, and demonstrated to the 'non-artistic' audience that "they could and did experience creative thinking as a playful activity and puppetry as a medium for serious communication or nonsense as required".)

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### **Effective puppetry is effective communication first.**

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Effective thinking in puppetry demands that the artists have something definite to say to someone for whom the experience of listening will be enjoyable, stimulating or useful, maybe all three!

Effective puppetry is effective communication first. The effective puppeteer will actually ABANDON puppets in favour of other communication techniques the minute that some other medium promises to work better for the message or story. The adventurous puppeteer will not often need to do this! Puppetry is an extraordinary medium in that it can be altered to fit almost every circumstance. Puppets can be made that are three

metres tall, a tiny ten centimetres, flat, round, glow in the dark; portable, collapsible, even edible if need be!

The audience is targeted; the aim and content are targeted; now the designers can dig into vast quantities of artistic resource material, including that outside puppetry, to create and perform a piece of living art.

They can concentrate on the working process that will bring their dreams and ideas to life!

\* The Muppet Show

\*\* The Never-ending Story

\*\*\* The term 'Muppet' belongs to The Muppet Show. You will note that it is fast becoming the word for puppet. A muppet is a type of hand puppet.

\*\*\*\* At The Second International Conference on Creative Thinking.

#### **Note:**

I wish to acknowledge that some terms I have used are derived from the works of Dr Edward de Bono, for example 'Creative Thinking Targets' or 'escaping from established patterns'.

### **PUPPETEERS IN THE UNION**

In the coming months the Equity section of the Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance Union will be holding focus groups to assess the specific needs of puppeteers, particularly those working on their own individual shows.

In March 1996 the union will conduct seminars for puppeteers, to provide information about your rights, and how the union can help

If you would like more information about these events, please call Janet Dagleish or Daphne Stitt at the Equity Office in Melbourne. Ph: 03 9279 0500

# REVIEWS

## Chuck Wood, Ted E. Bear and David Strassman

David Strassman is a ventriloquist. That is to say, he is an illusionist, a stand-up comedian, a puppeteer.....and he doesn't move his lips. Watching someone do all this at once is an exhilarating and humbling experience.

Strassman is performing at the Comedy Club in Carlton, Melbourne doing both adult and children's shows. I saw the adult show, starring (mostly) the very rude Chuck Wood and the very dim Ted E. Bear. Both are highly endearing in their own way.

After the audience had been warmed up by two good comedians (David O'Neil and Christine Basil), Strassman and Chuck Wood appeared. Right from the start they played on the theatricality of their act with a series of choreographed head 'snapshots'. It is this silly, playful touch which makes the show so enjoyable.

Chuck is a standard wooden-boy ventriloquy doll who is uncomfortably aware that he is only a doll. To console himself, he spends a great deal of time making rude jokes and insulting the audience, particularly 'Rick' who had been singled out previously by David O'Neil. Chuck is fitted with a couple of deluxe-model details such as glowing red eyes (for his *Exorcist* routine), and the ability to spit and vomit. These are used sparingly, and to great effect.

What really sets Chuck apart from other similar looking vent. dolls is that he plays with voices himself. He has an inexhaustible gallery of impersonations from Hollywood movies and popular culture. These are thrown in seemingly ad-lib, to threaten, cajole or simply to raise a laugh. Fleeting and accurate local references were also successful. When a more obscure comment was missed by the audience, David and Chuck made an exaggerated routine out of jokes roaring past like cars, crickets chirping, and the audience's slowness. This demonstrated an admirable commitment to the audience's engagement in the show. Strassman began his career busking, and performing in stand-up comedy venues in New York, where holding the audience's attention is the foremost skill required of a performer. This shows - there is a momentum and spontaneity to the 'improvisations' which have been selected and polished from years of performing, mixed with truly new material. David and his wife Tina (who also does the lights and sound) review the show each night, looking for new moments to keep in the show, and jokes which have had their used-by date

Strassman's microphone technique is

skillful and unobtrusive. He exploits the range of effects a mike can offer, while maintaining the illusion that it is the puppet who is leaning forward to use it. This is emblematic of the entire show, where Strassman's own stage persona is much less important than that of his puppets. He acts more as a catalyst, guiding the conversation like a skillful interviewer. He is planning to devise a new show which is more plot-centred, involving a more complex character for himself. It will be interesting to see what new interactions with Chuck this results in.

Ted E. Bear is a much more simple puppet than Chuck, and therefore highlights how much successful ventriloquy relies on strong characterization and manipulation. I am certain that Ted's button eyes widened as he solemnly nodded that yes, Chuck had indeed pushed him out of a plane recently. Innocent, dumb Ted provides the perfect foil for Chuck's deviant personality. The resulting three-way conversations are spontaneous and hilarious.

After presenting three more minor characters, who are relatively new to his repertoire, Strassman 'conducted' three dinosaurs singing Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Initially the animatronics were a surprise, but they were not sufficiently refined to maintain this long song on their own. The piece relied on Strassman's skill as an illusionist to direct our attention to the relevant figure, as sometimes it was hard to tell which one was supposed to be singing. This section is probably very popular in the children's shows, which Strassman says he loves to perform.

Unfortunately, once the animatronics had been revealed, Chuck's greatest moment was slightly weakened. After an argument, Strassman abandons him on stage with the taunt that Chuck is nothing without him. Although I expected Chuck to move by this stage, his independent routine was still funny, as Strassman manipulated him from the wings with a remote control. This perhaps gave more scope for spontaneity, which would have been difficult with the choreographed, pre-programmed piece. Strassman designs, partly builds, and maintains all his puppets. This direct design influence from the puppeteer is reflected in their realism and economy of movement. Not that I was noticing this when the entire 'cast' joined in for a chaotic, daffy, boisterous finale. I was laughing too hard. It's a great night out.

Jenny Andersen

# GILDA UNDER GLASS

by GUYS WITH DOLLS

Concept, design and puppets by Rod Primrose

Music by Hugh Wayland

Puppeteers: John Rogers, Rod Primrose, Hugh Wayland.

Scenic art by Chris Mooney.

I was walking past Myer in Little Bourke St. Melbourne when I noticed some colourful movement through a gap in a covered up shop window. It turned out to be an exquisite bunraku/rod style puppet about 40cm tall moving delicately and rhythmically by the hands of two puppeteers. In a phone call that night I discovered the what and the when.

What I saw the following afternoon was a unique, skilful and captivating piece of puppet theatre played from inside the shop window to a small crowd on the footpath and street.

The window theatre consisted of a tastefully painted proscenium complete with cherubs and miniature spotlights. The stage looked to be about 1.3 meters wide. Sound speakers were mounted outside the window a short while before the performance commenced. The audience had the rare option of being able to view themselves as well as the theatre, due to the reflection, which added extra interest rather than a distraction. Despite the novelty, this seemed oddly expected of Myer given the history of its Christmas displays in Bourke St.

The music starts, building up the expectation with a slightly circus/surreal flavour and John Rogers entered with a very eccentric look on his face, using a tiny bunch of flowers to sweep the stage. Synchronisation of action and sound effects was very tight here and throughout the performance. I'm assuming it was all pre-recorded sound but in some spots it had me guessing. The music was excellent, weaving the atmosphere and carrying the plot very well.

Soon after John's entrance Rod Primrose appeared looking just as eccentric, holding a male doll's head. John brought on a beautiful little lounge chair and the two started to play with the objects like not so innocent children. This particular segment could be shortened a little, or more interesting things could be happening between the two objects, but this period of disengagement was never total or for long, probably due to the music. All performers used very entertaining and appropriate facial expressions through to the end.

What really worked for me with this production was the skilful way the performers interacted with the puppets and objects. They started a game as characters with toys and the game soon took on its own life, pushing them, (the puppeteers), into the roles of captive observers, co-players with the puppet character or adoring fans at the end. When they were clearly visible, it was more of a sense of them watching the puppet character with the audience, rather than controlling what's happening.

The background, throughout the performance was plain black, with various evocative and interesting sets gliding in and out of a gently defined light corridor. The use of different light colours worked well to enhance moods and atmospheres. The puppeteers wore black with head and hands exposed.

So, now we get down to the real star of the piece and that's the 40cm tall puppet I'd seen rehearsing through the gap; Gilda. Yes, Gilda is a drag queen, that much is pretty clear, flamboyantly dressed, a number of different costumes and should do well as a nightclub singer. Gilda started off as a not so innocent man, entering from what could have been the gates of hell or a prison, wearing only a tea-chest. He is seduced by our two puppeteers into dressing up in gorgeous gowns and the rest is history.

This puppet is beautifully manipulated by Rod and Roger. Subtlety, attention to detail, good movements and co-ordination were all there. My only criticism would be that near the end of the songs, despite the wonderful portrayal of a night-club singer's movements, the puppet reaches its limit of interest with that activity and my attention wandered. Maybe there could be a bit more variety or the songs could be shortened a little.

The design of the piece is very strong with some delightful images and beautifully made objects. Eg: A grand piano flies with the aid of small balloons and in an extraordinary sequence a white clad Gilda (?) floats/dances in real water, (a disguised fish tank).

As for what the piece was really all about left me guessing. Roger mentioned after the performance that it could do with a synopsis, as in a theatre program, for people to read. I tend to agree, it would give the whole experience more meaning to me than only mysteriously visual and musical. Despite this, the audience stayed captivated for the 20 minutes it lasted, distracted only by the occasional threat of being run over by passing cars.

If "GILDA UNDER GLASS" or its non-street theatre version has a season again, it is definitely worth seeing. It will gladden the heart of many a puppeteer.

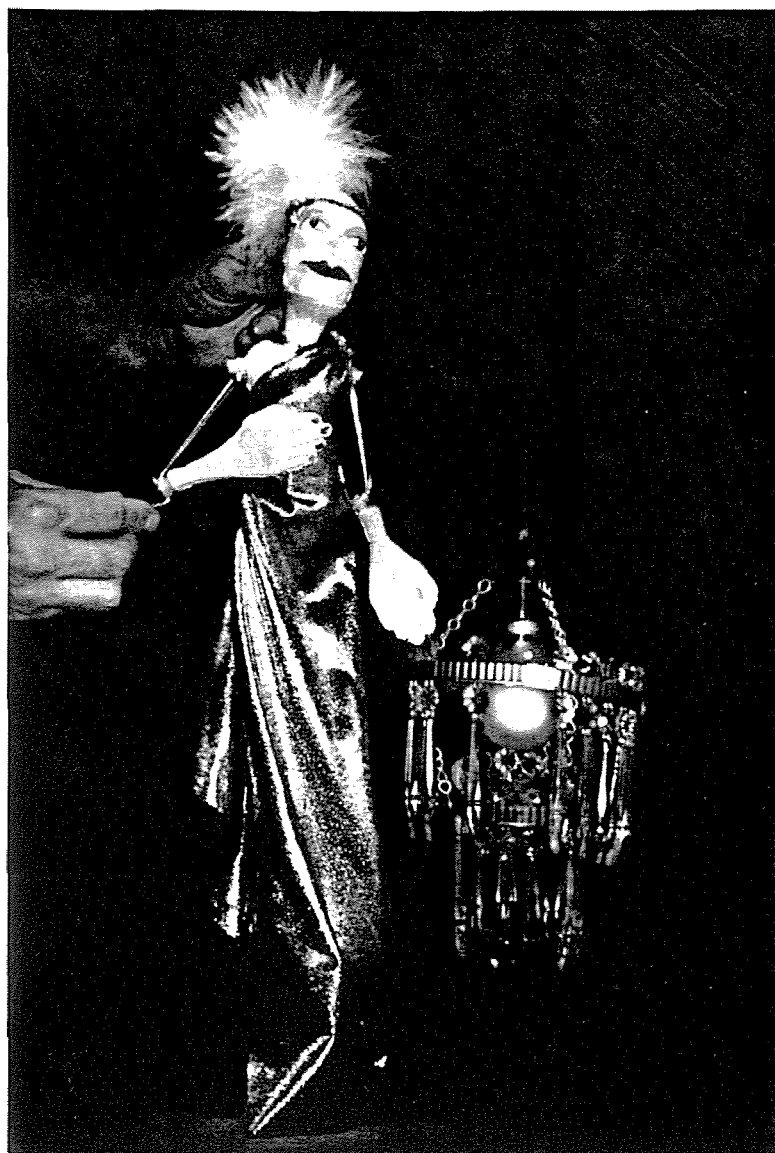
by Richard Hart



## THE FLOATING WORLD

This production of the play by John Romeril by the Japanese Company **Black Tent**, in collaboration with the Japanese Puppet Company **Yuki-za** was quite brilliant. It told the story of an Australian couple who were on a Japanese cruise ship to Japan for a holiday. However, the man, Les Harding, had been on the Burma railway during the war and the connection with the Japanese on the ship brought back his wartime experiences to him.

The acting was superb and I could hardly take my eyes off the actors - and certainly not off the puppets. - to read the subtitles in English on the wall. I did discover that a quick read would fill in my understanding for quite some time and I soon relaxed into the play and subtitles.



Gilda Under Glass

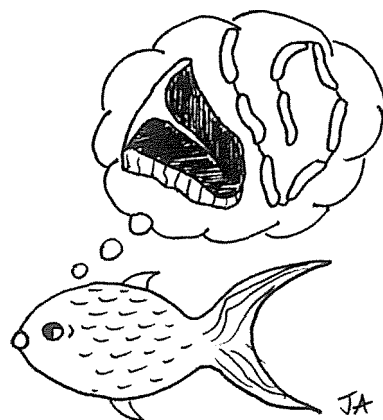
Les Harding referred to the Japanese as "little people" and so all the Japanese on the cruise ship were played by marionettes. The Japanese in the nightmares of Les Harding from the war were also marionettes.

The marionettes were quite small - about 18-20 inches I would say. The control bar was a wooden square with strings on all four sides. In the centre of the square were two rocking bars, probably for the arms and legs. It was possible for the puppeteer to put the puppet down quickly and pick it up again. The actor who operated a puppet spoke for that puppet and was frequently dressed like the puppet character. The actor sometimes quickly took on the puppet's role. For example, in one scene Les Harding kicked the puppet steward, the puppet fell on the floor and the puppeteer exchanged a few blows with the Australian. Then the puppet was picked up again and the puppet left, bowing his apology. In another scene the puppeteer came on stage carrying plates in each hand with the puppet around his neck! The plates were put onto the table and the puppet then took over. I felt that all this made for very fast action and at no time did the puppets slow the pace of the production.

Some puppet characters were seen only once - such as the entertainers on ship, the musician, the dancing dragon, and the trick marionettes in the scene where Les Harding attacks his nightmare Japanese soldiers with a knife and cuts to pieces in different ways four trick marionettes. However some puppet characters, such as the steward on ship had real character, personality and depth.

It was a delightful performance. The only show I could get to didn't start until 9pm on a Thursday and finished at 12! Not good for work the next day. I had made up my mind to leave at interval but I couldn't! This speaks for itself!

by **Lorrie Gardner**  
(Gardner Puppets)



JA.

## REVIEW

## NOT THE END OF THE WORLD

*Not the End of the World* is a re-staged version of a puppet play originally written by Victoria Osborne. It is a Polyglot Puppet Theatre production and this version was directed by Janet Dalglish. It was performed by Craig Gillespie, Denise Rundle and Paul Doogood. Essentially it is piece about conservation of the environment and it has toured South Australia this year as part of a For Schools programme.

Having been asked to present a review of this work I had a long think about how I was going to do it. So I asked my daughter, Jhana, to collaborate in writing this review as I think that her comments might be pertinent. All the news isn't good, but I hope you take these comments as the constructive criticisms they are intended to be.

**I am 11 years of age. I do well at school but even I found the performance difficult to understand. The age group, I heard, was 7 to 13 yet some children there were only five and listening to an almost lecture about a kind of cold war between the people and economy and the animals(some of which are extinct) and the green economy (environment). There were a pair of girls sitting near me and they couldn't stop talking and whispering to each other.** In other words, they were not engaged by the stage action.

It was performed in a modified booth that at first glance didn't look very exciting. Considering how it was used and how the objects looked operating in it, it came up very well and I think it was very appropriate and effective. The opening was delightful - three flies, bumble-bees or dragon flies - Does it matter? because they were totally mesmerising. Nothing like good opening!!...Except that it sets a standard that needs to be maintained for a good portion of the time.

On came string bags, who appeared to be a species of woodland creature and who were animating beautifully - until they started to speak in words.

**"Oh, where art thou string bag?" - Why call an interesting puppet made from a string bag,... 'String Bag'? Why couldn't you have called them the echidnas or the wallabies'? Or Woofamagoofas. Why call a bar of soap a Bar of Soap? Why couldn't they be called the butterflies?** It brought the story out of the realm of a symbolic or allegorical order and into something that seemed far too literal.

The puppets were an eclectic collection. The Tasmanian Tiger, a glove puppet that looked rather like a bull terrier, seemed unwieldy and for one reason or another had quite a limited range. The hamburgers worked for me because they anthropomorphologised unselfconsciously. The characterisations were clever. I found relating to Bulldozer and Chainsaw more problematic - perhaps not person-like enough. Perhaps they could have had good old ocker names like Bazza and Bluey. It's obvious that we can see what they are. I wanted to know more about who they are. **I liked the idea of having hamburgers representing people, but...the idea was spoiled when one of the animals, I think it was the Tasmanian tiger, referred to them as being-'Hamburgers'**

The voices? We concur. Give us the earplugs. **The voice of the Tasmanian tiger nearly made my ears drop off. Some small words I could not understand because of the unbearably irritating high pitched tinge in the voice.** For me, it's kind of an aesthetic thing. I prefer to see puppets relate through gesture and action. Not only that, but I have a particular pet hate about stupid voices for puppets. I have this naive idea that like any other theatre, that voices should be appealing, easy to listen to and suit the character. Otherwise I am going to be instantly bored and I won't care what happens to the character. But that's just me. Still, that voice must have been very hard to sustain and quite hard on the throat and it's easy to do some permanent damage. I'd be tempted to go back to your basic voice training and start from there to re-invent the character voices.

I think that this show is perhaps trying to convey too much information or information that is too complex. The body puppet with 3 human face masks in it called Greenback seemed to be giving sort of an overview of the way that the capitalist system is economically driven in relation to the environment. Sorry - but I didn't really get it either. But it begs the question: Just who are the intended demographic and how sophisticated do their language skills need to be? Perhaps it's necessary to target it towards a more specific age group. My biggest criticism of the play is that I found in it a conceptual order that was confusing. Do you want it to be an allegory or the straight transmission of information? I think that to answer that question is to go a long way towards working out how to achieve it.

I think that it could do with another serious re-write. I think that some very imaginative ideas died through a script that was too literal. The objects themselves are a realistic enough representation. Children are imaginative and don't need everything spelled out. It spoiled what might have been a good yarn. However, the language was complicated in places and should be tailored around the expected skill level of your intended audience. Maybe you could confer with some teachers about this.

**Overall, I say: kill the voices, simplify the story line(meaning the 'big words' such as the economy, greenback), think of some creative names for your creatures, but keep the stage as it is!**

I rate it Good, 5/10

Jhana Pfeiffer and  
Jennie Pfeiffer

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **The Marionettes of Barcelona - Harry Tozer and his Tricks of the Trade** by Ray DaSilva, published by DaSilva Books, 1995.

There seems to be a renewed interest in marionettes lately, and for amateurs or professionals this book is a must. If you work with other kinds of puppets you will still find useful ideas in this book. And even if your interest in puppetry is a spectator's one the account of this man's life is interesting reading.

H.V. Tozer is a 92-year-old English marionettist who has lived in Barcelona for most of his life. Although not a professional showman he has been a respected and influential figure in puppetry whose work is up there with the best. In more recent years he has taught students in Barcelona's Institute of Theatre.

Ray DaSilva was one of many puppeteers who was inspired by Tozer's technical articles for the British journal *The Puppet Master* in the 1950's. In 1990 he travelled to Spain to meet Tozer for the first time with the idea of writing a book about him and his work, bringing together these early well-illustrated technical articles. He has been able to augment them with information provided by Tozer, including sketches of special stringing schemes for certain puppets that Tozer made for his own reference.

The first quarter of the book is a lively and nicely

written account by Ray DaSilva of Tozer's life, especially as it relates to his puppet work. So many puppet books leave you wanting to know more about the puppeteer's life, but here curiosity is satisfied! There is even a recent photo of Tozer on the cover.

Tozer's repertoire was wide-ranging; a circus, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *St George and the Dragon*, a sombre ballet to Sibelius's *Valse Triste*, *Montmatre Cemetery* a ballet in which the devil conjures up skeletons of figures from the seamy side of life, and the disturbing futuristic *Robot Revolt*. There are sketches of some of the figures in the book, but unfortunately no photos.

The technical section begins with marionette construction and controls (upright) then gives valuable information on how special effects were achieved together with descriptions of acts and scenarios given in detail. With characteristic generosity, which contrasts to the secrecy of the marionettists of last century, Tozer reveals all.

The article on the performing seals act could be required reading for any puppeteer. We are led from the first unsatisfactory attempts through to the final construction, with an explanation of "why" and "how". Even the material of its skin, its problems and how it was attached, is discussed. This illustrated article occupies eight pages. I compared it with a brief description of performing marionette seals in another marionette manual where a rather unhelpful diagram makes me think the author of that book was drawing on his imagination rather than experience! That's certainly not the case here.

Similarly the performance of an acrobat on a hoop is given in full detail, with 30 sketches of the actual sequence along with stringing and construction minutiae.

There is information on stages including an elegantly simple Punch booth and a double-bridge marionette stage which does not need great ceiling height. (In the past I have benefited from referring to the hinging plan Tozer used for a folding hand-puppet stage. That's included here too.)

Buy this book and find out how Tozer avoided getting the two boxers' controls tangled with each other, how the iron bar in *Robot Revolt* appeared to go from red-hot to cold, how the giant from *Jack and the Beanstalk* emptied the dish in one gulp, etc., etc.! (And in reading this book you might incidentally find a clue as to why letters written by Tozer's father in Paraguay are in the Mitchell Library in Sydney!!!)

The cost of this book to Australian UNIMA members is \$39.48 by air and insured, or \$32.41 by surface. Send a cheque made out in Australian dollars to Ray DaSilva, DaSilva Puppet Books, 63 Kennedy Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX68BE, UK. PH/FAX 1869 245 793. (This is a new address.)

**By Richard Bradshaw**



## **I Can See Your Lips Moving, The History and Art of Ventriloquism**

Valentine Vox, Plato Publishing, California, 1993

This book, first published in 1981, gives a detailed history of ventriloquism. The illustrations alone are worth the price of this new enlarged edition. Here is a full review of vent from shamanistic utterances through demon possession and eventually onto the stage. It covers vent dummy horror films and radio ventriloquism.

The book abounds in quotes from ancient texts and the Bible describing the ambiguous groans that predicted the future. There are descriptions of the vent. acts from before this century when vocal illusions and mimicry were the name of the game. *Distant voice ventriloquism* and vocal sound effects made up the act without any need for props. It was a classy act and included songs and recitations.

Sometimes a screen would be used to mask the 'polyphonist' as he created a whole 'scene'. Samuel Honeyman in the 17th century was famous for imitating the sound of a calf being dragged in and slaughtered by two butchers. He did the lot; the voices, the bleating, even the knives being sharpened. And when the screen was removed, he stood alone and without props.

In 1750 an Austrian, Baron von Mengen, embellished his act with a small doll figure and became the first ventriloquist to blend ventriloquism and puppetry. But the innovation didn't catch on until the latter half of the 19th century. The use of 'automatons' was opposed at first on the grounds that they reduced ventriloquism to a side-show amusement.

As figures gained in popularity the 'row' was introduced. Multiple figures were operated through various controls, wires and pneumatic devices. At the turn of the century the single figure using *near ventriloquism* came into vogue. The resulting fast-paced double act became the ventriloquism we now know - more visual and less vocal. TV close-up work later made lip control crucial.

We are lucky in Sydney that we still have a distant voice ventriloquist. Cecil Parkee, now in his seventies, performs both distant work and vocal illusions. He does a platoon being called to attention and marched off into the distant. Just as their footsteps are about to go out of earshot, you hear the order "Reverse March" and they troop back. Then there's 'George' up on the roof calling for 'Fred' in the cellar to send a ladder. Cecil does the telephone voice and a radio voice complete with static. It's amazing.

Getting back to the book, it contains the inevitable stories of people being unnerved by ventriloquist's prank. Several heart attacks have been brought on over the years and vents have been charged with various crimes up to and including murder. The latter happened in 1810 to Lee Sugg billed as 'Professor of Internal Elocution'. As a publicity stunt, he rushed into a baker's with what seemed to be a crying baby. In an apparent rage, he threw the baby into the oven. He was acquitted of murder but was given a large fine for being a public nuisance.

**I Can See Your Lips Moving** is thorough, well-researched and has a very good how-to section. This enlarged edition is a gem. Another book worth comparing with this one is Australian Robert Ganthony's **Practical Ventriloquism, being A Thoroughly Reliable Guide to the Art of Voice Throwing and Vocal Mimicry-by an entirely novel system of graded exercises.** Published at the turn of the century it is an outrageous example of self-promotion in which Ganthony not only points out the wrong way to do things, he even names his erring competitors. His directions are hard to follow and I suspect they were probably meant to be so. Three paragraphs are used to apologise that 'you' and 'your' will be used in the text instead of the more polite 'one places one's tongue'. It's a hoot.

Dennis Murphy

## **THE VARIETIES OF VARIETY**

by Dennis Murphy

This issue looks at VARIETY and as a flea circus proprietor I couldn't be more pleased. I see Variety as the 'public face' of Puppetry. You wouldn't believe how many people come up to me after shows and say what a shame it is that Puppetry seems to be dying out.

I have to explain that Puppetry is very much alive. It's just that it is not seen much by the public. The majority of puppeteers now are working in Theatre-in-Education (TIE). School children are seeing lots of Puppetry but the general public is seeing far less.

In fact, Ann Davis fears that Puppetry is coming to be seen by children as just another school subject because school is the only place they see puppets anymore. It tends to be the Variety Puppeteer who gets seen by the public.

Variety and Outdoor Puppetry do not appeal to every puppeteer, of course. It's a specialised art. I have seen TIE shows presented at Festivals but the wind blows the set over and the TIE style of presentation just doesn't work in that situation anyway. It calls for colour and movement: **VARIETY**.

With the tightening of the economy Marketing has become an all-important skill for Variety puppeteers looking for 'public' work. But when a puppeteer's marketing skills outstrip his/her Puppetry skills, it produces low quality shows. They get booked once on the strength of their sales pitch but don't get return bookings. It turns venues off Puppetry altogether, making it impossible for other puppeteers to get work there later.

I have also seen, at least in Sydney, that this marketing-led Puppetry invariably leads to odious business practices. As the puppeteer gets more and more desperate for work, ethics go out the window. Undercutting the award rate is only one problem; there are others.

I cite two recent examples; a puppeteer rang a shopping centre looking for a booking and was told "No, thanks. We always have The Murray Raine Puppets." The puppeteer then went on to denigrate Murray's show and reputation. It didn't work because the centres are so loyal to Murray that they immediately rang him and warned him about what was going on and who was doing it.

Another puppeteer chasing work was told "No, thanks. We always have Murphys Puppets". To which the puppeteer cheerfully

replied, "Our work is very similar to Murphys Puppets!" This is the same guy that was caught paying an 'apprentice' \$20 per show and claims to have won awards for his Puppetry. He offers to match any other puppeteer's price and do 15 minutes longer. Discount Puppetry - not unethical, just desperate.

But the problems go beyond just two desperados: too many non-puppeteers are using slapdash puppets to pad out their clown or magic act. The current fad for costume characters has meant that shopping centres, once a rich source of employment for variety puppeteers, feature less Puppetry. Local dance students are employed to bounce around disguised as Bugs Bunny dressed up as 'Children's Entertainment'. (How's that for a sound bite?)

I hate it when people compliment the show with a surprised tone of voice. It means their expectations were obviously very low. They were genuinely surprised that they enjoyed a puppet show. I don't think I'm being melodramatic in saying that Variety Puppetry is in peril.

If we can raise the public's expectations of what Puppetry can do, the mediocre puppeteers will eventually get less and less work. This has already happened in the TIE system so there's hope.

### **CABARET IN MELBOURNE**

While we're on the subject of variety, Richard Hart and I are currently performing our "cabaret" puppet creation Grater Thing at The Stage in Smith St, Fitzroy. It's a short piece which evolved from an Objectivity workshop earlier this year. Since then we've added a soundtrack and adapted the show to suit venues with poor sight lines and audiences with other things in mind than the subtleties of visual theatre (ie: eating, drinking, sex...).

The current season is a mixed bag of stand up comedy, puppetry and music. Johnneen Keir, another Objectivity participant, will be performing her puppetry piece Just in Case on some nights and singing (as herself) on others. Objectivity is having a Christmas BBQ on Sun 17th Dec. If you'd like more details about any of these events, ring me on 9482 3292.

**Kym Tonkin**

**Note:** Objectivity is a group which originally came together through some puppetry workshops with Noriko Nishimoto in Melbourne earlier this year. We have been meeting once a fortnight to develop skills and explore new ideas, and have had one small showing of our progress so far.

## CHIRAC IMPRISONED FOR MORAL OUTRAGE

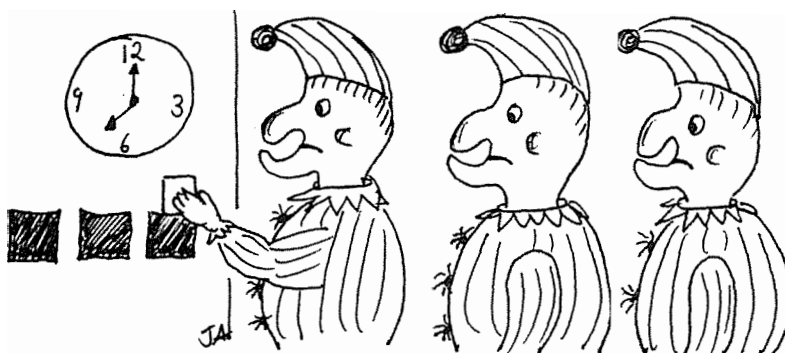
In 1892 a French pornographer by the name of Chirac was sentenced to fifteen months in prison for "outrage à la morale publique". Théodore de Chirac was a writer who acted in his own plays and died in 1906 during one of his performances.

This information comes from the preface, by Gilbert Sigaux, to a book *Le Théâtre érotique du XIXième siècle*. The book contains texts of humorous erotic plays performed by puppets in *L'Erotikon Théâtron* in Paris in 1862-3. (They are not exactly the kind of plays that would be chosen for schools touring ... unless the audience had a say in the matter.)

Although Chirac's plays were not for puppets, his *Théâtre Réaliste* of the 1890's is seen as a poor successor to the earlier one. In 1906 Chirac was described as "a maniac of pornography, scientifically sick".

Any resemblance between this Chirac and any other is, of course, probably coincidental.

Richard Bradshaw



## ANIMATES

Animates is a new group in Western Australia which brings together artists from all backgrounds who have an interest in puppetry. Animates aims to provide information about puppetry and puppeteers, explore new ideas (especially in cross-artforms), to act as a lobby group for puppetry and to raise its general profile.

After an initial fundraising performance night, Animates has formed separate groups to tackle these goals. (eg: a workshop-programme committee, a public relations committee, etc.). Everyone meets to report back to the whole group once every 2 months.

If you would like to become involved, please call Ulli Keck on (09) 332 2071 or (09) 335 5044.

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