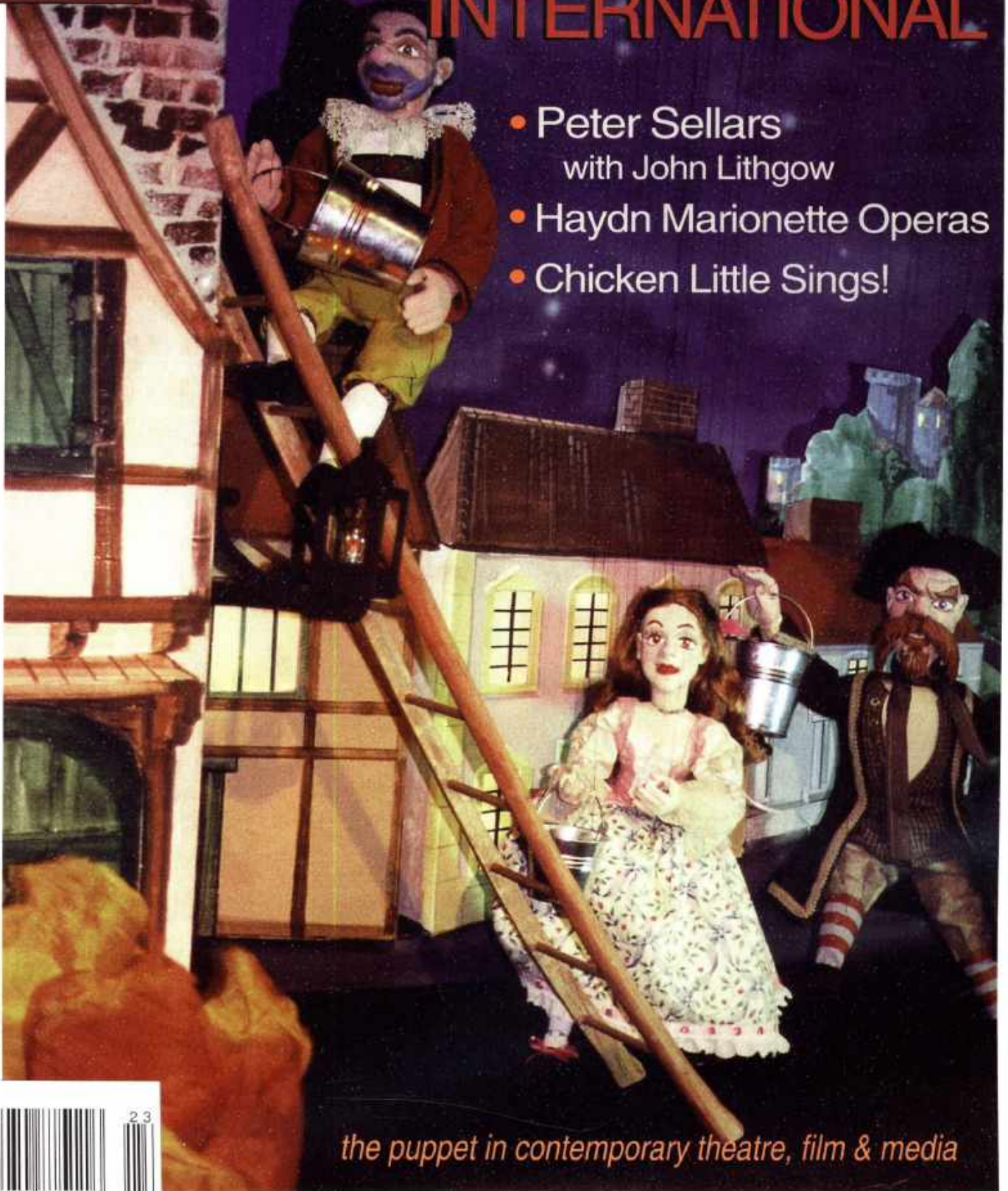


# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

- Peter Sellars  
with John Lithgow
- Haydn Marionette Operas
- Chicken Little Sings!



*the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media*



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# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

issue no. 12

## Puppetry and Opera

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**ON THE COVER:**  
Carter Family Marionettes  
(see article by  
Stephen Carter, p.14)

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## Editor's Page-



## Puppetry and Opera

*Maria Teresa: Ho pianto nell'ultimo atto. "La Forza del Destino" è un'opera così tragica.*

*Paolo: Io adoro la musica di Verdi in qualunque forma!\**

In preparation for my next trip to Italy, I have been listening to taped language lessons. I never hear that last line without wondering if Paolo had ever seen Verdi's work performed with puppets.

\* Maria Theresa: I cried in the last act. *La Forza del Destino* is such a tragic opera.

Paolo: I adore Verdi's music, in whatever form!

-The Linguaphone Institute, lesson 15



As for myself, I was exposed to opera through recordings and radio broadcasts at an early age; I was an Italian-American kid growing up in New Jersey in the 1950s— so what else is new?

I can't say that I was really engaged by this music— sung in a language I didn't understand for hours upon hours— but it certainly became a part of me. Even after realizing that I was hopelessly addicted to a life in the theatre, I didn't really *get* opera until seeing a production of *Tristan und Isolde* at the Met. Four hours of Birgit Nilson's powerful (if corpulent) Isolde, the climax of which saw her comforting the stricken Tristan as they sang their hearts out while rising (with the assistance of substantial hydraulics) to the height of twenty feet or so above the stage floor, until they appeared to be sitting on the edge of the planet, outlined against the Milky Way, well . . . it was dazzling. And dizzying. For a young man whose models in the theatre had been Grotowski and Schumann, the opulence of this production was unspeakably obscene, and yet deeply affecting: truly a guilty pleasure.

Historically, puppetry's relationship to opera has proven resilient [see Bell: *Puppets and Opera*, p. 4]. Both bring together many different art forms into a synthesized whole. Attempting to define opera is as tricky as trying to define puppetry. We generally think of opera as that which has evolved from the 16th century form of Italian theatre in which the text is sung rather than spoken. But is Peking Opera not also opera? The music may sound strange to



unaccustomed Western ears, but Kuang-Yu Fong and Stephen Kaplin have been working on a way of translating its tales, movement conventions and music into a genre which is accessible to an American audience [see *Fong, Kaplin: Bridge of Wings*, p. 22].

Today, manifestations of puppet opera seem to be everywhere. Among these are revivals of baroque and classical works written for puppets, such as those written by Haydn for the marionette theater at Esterhaza [see *Carter: Haydn at Esterhaza*, p. 14], or the hilarious folk opera mounted by the Forman Brothers concerning the mishaps of two bungling brickmasons. There are also contemporary works which seem to be popping up everywhere these days. John Luther Adams' second opera, *Young Caesar*, was originally written for puppets. Delfeayo Marsalis recently worked on the puppet opera *Jaz and Jazmine Meet the Jazz Band*, which was commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for 2002 performances. Barbara Benary (Ph.D., Wesleyan, ethnomusicology) has written a two hour score for *Karna: a Shadow Puppet Opera* based on Indonesian wayang kulit. There is even a recent Viking puppet opera, *Beowulf*, by Calgary's Old Trout Puppet Workshop [see sidebar, p. 7].

A film which Bonnie and I revisit from time to time is the 1944 *Bluebeard*, in which John Carradine plays Gaston Morel who, in addition to being a suspected serial killer, presents puppet operas with a large cast of beautiful marionettes.

There have been theatres which have specialized in operas performed as exquisite miniatures of their human counterparts. Chief among these are certainly the Salzburg Marionettes, with their own theater and full season of (mostly) Mozart operas. The Peterborough (NH) Marionettes modeled themselves after the famous Austrians and did well, too, until a fire robbed the players of puppets, sets and theater in a single night. Yet other theatres have eschewed imitation of the human opera, as in Susan Vitucci's *Love's Fowl*, the story of La Pulcina Piccola (Chicken Little) [see *Daniel: Large Role for a Little Chicken*, p. 10], or *The Red Beads* [see *Devet: The Chaos Factor*, p. 34] by Basil Twist and Mabou Mines.

The list of productions, not to mention the forms they take, is almost endless, and you'll find many more examples in these pages.

My own expertise on the subject would easily be outshone by any Italian you might stop randomly on a street in, say, Parma. But the final aria of *Turandot* inevitably makes me cry, while the Forman Brothers' brickmasons will always make me laugh—and in a deep, transforming way. This has led me to the inescapable conclusion: "Puppets and Opera? . . . Yeah, that works!"

—Andrew Periale

Photos, left to right: 1) Salzburg Marionettes, 2) Peterborough Marionettes,

3) Old Trout Puppet Workshop, 4) Opera in Focus, 5) 18th C. Pantalone [see *Carter*, p. 14], 6) Forman Brothers

## Puppetry and Opera

### WILLIAM B. FOSSER



Bill Fossler began working with puppets in 1939, and he is still at it today. His love of opera was certainly fostered by his early work at the Victor Puppet Opera under Ernest Wolff at Chicago's Kungsholm restaurant. Fossler worked there in 1947, and then again in 1950 under Fredrik Chramer.

Although he worked there again as its director in 1963, he had, by that time, already begun his own company—Opera in Focus. As the new owners of the Kungsholm lacked a passion for keeping the puppet theater in good repair, Fossler left the company in 1966 to resume a career in the film industry. His dream, though, remained his beloved puppets, and finding them a permanent home.

At last, on the grounds of the Rolling Meadows Park District, his exquisite rod puppets perform selections from operas in a wonderful little 65-seat theater. There is a small troupe of master puppeteers, with Fossler in command.

For more information, see the *Puppetry Journal*, Summer 1998, and May-June 1979, also a paper by Julie Morrison.

[www.sp.uconn.edu/~wwwsfa/Morris1.html](http://www.sp.uconn.edu/~wwwsfa/Morris1.html)

by John Bell

The spectacular promise of opera in the European tradition has been its full embrace of all the elements of western theater: the possibility that on one stage in one evening an audience could experience music, text, and image through the live presence of performers, musicians, sets, and costumes. The combination of all these elements produces a richness that wants to fulfill the potential of the proscenium stage, that innovation of the Italian Renaissance which sought to represent passion and truth by state-of-the-art stage technology and the alluring illusion of reality (or realization of fantasy) made possible by combining a framed performance space with an intriguing new trick of the eye called perspective. Opera, as developed by composers, performers, and designers from the seventeenth century to our day, has created one of the most long-lasting traditions of western theater because its potential to create a stunning—and live—"virtual reality" has, despite the onslaught of even further technological innovations, been unsurpassed. Because opera by definition wants to include all forms of live theatrical communication, it is not surprising that puppets, masks, and performing objects have been an important part of its history and contemporary potential.

When, in the mid-nineteenth century, Richard Wagner excitedly defined opera as a combination of all the arts (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), he was simply codifying, and attempting to define the future of, a form which had already succeeded in taking all the possible tricks of theater and putting them together on stage. The fact that Amy Trompeter should direct *The Barber of Seville* as a puppet opera at the Arts at St. Ann's in Brooklyn in 1983, or that Julie Taymor would choose to include puppets in her 1998 Houston Grand Opera production of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, seems natural because puppets and masks (and other objects used on the stage) have always been important tricks of the theater, not only in western traditions but performance cultures throughout the world. The combination of opera with puppets is not new. In fact, puppets and opera have enjoyed a close, if perhaps unheralded, relationship for centuries. What I would like to do in what follows is sketch out some elements of that relationship.

## The Marionette Opera Tradition

European opera was born in sixteenth-century Florence, an effort by a group of history-obsessed artists and intellectuals called the "Camerata dei Bardi" to revive (or reinvent) Greek tragedy, which they knew had been a theater combining music, song, over-life-sized masks, and splendid stage machines. Early Italian operas, designed by such artists as Bernardo Buontalenti, incorporated the marvels and technical skill of Renaissance court theater and street performance in thrilling baroque spectacles featuring frequent set changes, masks, and over-life-sized puppets of giants, dragons, sea monsters and other fantastic creatures.

While large-scale puppets were present at the birth of grand-scale opera, and in fact constitute a traditional element of the form, another aspect of the puppet-opera connection is the tradition of small-scale puppet operas beginning in the seventeenth century. Marionettes, the diminutive jointed figures operated through strings by puppeteers standing above and behind them, have been opera performers throughout Europe, at least, since a director named La Grille presented marionette operas in the Marais district of Paris in 1676. Marionette theater has long been intertwined with live theater in Europe, since the times when Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupes alternated performances of the same shows from life-sized masked performers to the smaller puppet stage, and a similar symbiotic relationship characterizes the traditions of marionette opera. The civic morals of Rome from the mid-eighteenth century, for example, dictated that large-scale theaters (including opera houses) be allowed to function only during the licensed mayhem of Carnival. But puppet theaters were permitted to operate all year round, and it was in these venues that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Roman audiences could see the operas of Rossini and others. But opera with marionettes was not simply a small-scale replica of a life-sized original. The most famous marionette/opera connection in Europe was that between Franz Joseph Haydn and puppet maker Pietro Travaglia, who both worked in the Hungarian court of Prince Nicholas Esterhazy between 1773 and 1780. There, Haydn wrote five operettas specifically for puppets, including *Philemon and Baucis*, *Genoveva*, and *Dido*. These were all performed on Travaglia's marionette stage while the singers stood behind the scenes. Throughout the nineteenth century, marionette theaters throughout Europe performed operas by Haydn, Mozart, Offenbach and other composers, in addition to their repertoire of popular stage hits and variety show spectacle. Although many operas were expressly written for marionettes, however, some puppet operas were very different from their life-sized counterparts. As John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik observe in their 1998 history, *Popular Puppet Theater in Europe, 1800-1914*:

A glance at the bills of bigger Italian marionette theaters of the late nineteenth century might suggest that they presented a large operatic repertoire, with *Aida* at the top of the list. In practice such shows cashed in on the success of popular operas, and were based on cheap fiction drawn very loosely from the libretti, perhaps with popular tunes from the operas as incidental music.

This marionette tradition of opera continued in the early twentieth century in many European cities and lives today in the resplendent productions of the Salzburg Marionette Theater. In the beginning of the present century, however, the possibilities of opera and puppets presented themselves in a somewhat different way to modern sensibilities as a new means of making modernist theater.

### University of Connecticut



The Queen of the Night, from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). Under the direction of Frank Ballard, The University of Connecticut puppetry arts program produced many operas, operettas and musicals.

## THE BAROQUE OPERA



is adapted from an 18th Century folk opera concerning a chimney built by two bumbling masons. It begins to fall down even before it is completed. Tiny marionettes play in an exquisite miniature of a baroque theatre (setting: Jan Marek), with the puppeteers and crew as life-sized doubles of the characters. The music, by Karel Loos, was newly adapted from string quartet to cembalo by Vitezslav Janda. Puppetry by Milan, Matij and Petr Forman. Of the Forman Brothers only two men are brothers, though all three men are Forman . . . men. As stated in their brochure: "It is not allowed to be performed when the number of spectators will be less than two, with the exception of family members, the dentist Mr. Maros, and Mr. President." A brilliant and rollicking good time!

(Ed.)

## Modernist Puppet Operas

Nineteenth-century opera, of course, was reshaped and redefined by Richard Wagner, who, not unlike the Italians who invented opera in the sixteenth century, declared that Greek tragedy, mythic heroes, and folk culture could provide the heady, aristocratic art of opera with a solid and searching base from which it could help define modern culture. Although, like Mozart, Wagner continued Italian traditions by using puppet dragons and other spectacular devices in his operas, Wagner did not proselytize for a puppet opera. His analysis of opera as a union of all the arts, and his call for a redefinition of European opera as a civic, even moral event rather than a "clinking, twinkling, glittering, glistening show" helped inspire an opening of European stage sensibilities to other forms.

For example, in the 1880s French playwright and novelist Judith Gautier began to present innovative performances with actors and with puppets in Paris. Her writing and theater work reflected an expanded definition of the world typical of the late-nineteenth century, a definition which could include Asian cultures as well as popular European traditions such as puppet theater. She met, was fascinated by, and had a long affair with Wagner, who gave her permission to present some of his works. For this reason, the French premiere of *Parsifal* was performed by puppets in 1898 at Gautier's Petit Théâtre in Paris. A reviewer wrote:

The public? Invited guests. The actors? Puppets made of wax. The work? Parsifal. Two performances only, perhaps three. For this, Mme. Judith Gautier has written a new introduction. For a year she molded her thirty or forty figurines with patient skill and fashioned joints and springs to move them. Illustrious artists anonymously painted the sets.[...] Literary greats coveted the honor of serving as stagehands; [...] a prince sang in the chorus and a noble lady [...] came to lend her talents to a wax puppet which moves but does not talk.

Gautier's production of *Parsifal* was part of a radical redefinition of European theater which began in the 1890s with the Symbolist movement in France and continues to this day in the traditional avant-garde work of such North American directors as Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage, Peter Schumann, Peter Sellars, Elizabeth Lecompte, and Julie Taymor. The avant-garde redefinition of European forms, as Judith Gautier's work suggests, meant that artists of all disciplines opened themselves up to be influenced not only by high-art traditions, but also by low-culture and folk traditions (of which puppet and mask



theaters have always been a major element); by Asian, African, and indigenous American culture; and by an understanding of machines and machine culture as legitimate aesthetic influences. An early and famous example of these avant-garde performance trends was the work of Edward Gordon Craig, an English symbolist who put fear into the heart of the European theater world by suggesting that puppets could function on stage just as well as humans, if not better. Craig's theories were based on his sense of Javanese wayang kulit puppet theater, Japanese bunraku puppet theater, and an appreciation of traditional European puppets like Punch and Judy, but his ideas were (and are to this day) derided by theater makers to whom any puppet or mask is a threat to the sanctity of the unadorned human performer. The critical view of Craig sees him as a theorist who could never make his strange ideas work onstage, but historian Christopher Innes has pointed out that Craig realized many of his ideas in a number of turn-of-the-century operatic productions. Craig turned to the seventeenth-century operas of Henry Purcell, and together with Martin Shaw's Purcell Operatic Society, he designed and directed Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with masks, and similarly directed Handel's *Acis and Galatea* in a stylized production featuring stage objects as dynamic theatrical presences.

### *Avant-Garde Puppet Operas*

The ties of twentieth-century opera to the avant-garde and to puppet theater are most apparent in connection with composers Igor Stravinsky, Erik Satie, and Manuel de Falla. Stravinsky's orchestral works, especially in productions by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, regularly included masks and puppets, and Stravinsky's radically different music for opera and oratorio inspired designers to try radical experiments in form which, unlike the marionette opera traditions, did not attempt to present small-scale versions of grand opera as much as create new works expressly for puppet and mask theater. Thus in 1918, Stravinsky's anti-war *Histoire du Soldat* was first presented by George and Ludmila Pitoëff at Lausanne's Municipal Theater in Switzerland in a production featuring masks by René Auberjonois, and then in Zurich with marionettes by Otto Morach. A landmark puppet opera production was the 1931 American premiere of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, which Robert Edmond Jones directed at New York's Metropolitan Opera with over-life-sized marionettes built by master puppeteer Remo Bufano. Bufano, who, together with Jones, had been strongly influenced by Gordon Craig,



## VIKING PUPPET OPERA

*Beowulf* is the new offering from Calgary's Old Trout Puppet Workshop. The show is based on the epic poem, *Beowulf*, composed almost 1,300 years ago.

Co-creator Judd Palmer says that the production is the company's first attempt to get at some sort of beauty through puppetry, "but it's definitely going to include the crazed hallucinations and grand metaphysical themes traditionally involved in our shows."

The group originally discussed writing a story about the Viking discovery of North America. The more Palmer thought about it, the more he realized that what he really wanted to tackle, was the heroic tale of the Swedish prince.

"We're doing this thing partly because it's kind of hip right now—because of Seamus Heaney's new translation. Also, we're in a time of war, and it's a deeply penetrating poem about [that]."

*Beowulf* is the earliest known Anglo-Saxon poem, and was resurrected during the First World War as a rallying cry for British troops. The two-part poem tells the story of a brave prince who rids a Danish kingdom of an evil monster and succeeds to the throne before fighting one last battle with a fire-breathing dragon.

Palmer is finding that, despite its age, the poem still resonates in today's society: "The thing that's fascinating about it, is that the damn thing is 1,000 years old and yet, it's still within us," he says. "It's still in the way we bomb the caves in Afghanistan, the way we conceptualize our enemies."

[adapted from a piece in *The Calgary Sun*, 8/11/02]

The Old Trout is in Calgary, Alberta: [www.theoldtrouts.org](http://www.theoldtrouts.org)

## PHILOMEN AND BAUCIS IN NEW YORK

It was in the 1970s that the Orchestra of St. Luke's (NYC) had Haydn's libretto for *Philomen and Baucis* translated into English. For a cast, they relied on Nick Coppola, who supplied a full crew of marionette actors. Over 20 years later, they remounted the production. This time, they tapped UConn alum Barbara



Pollitt for the directorial chores. Pollitt designed the puppets and masks for the show as well. She also did a great deal of work on the libretto— the original translation had been incomplete— though this work was not credited. She assembled a wonderful production team, notably set designer Clarke Dunham. The production which I saw (on videotape, alas) was from 1999. Singers, actors, puppeteers and musicians were all first rate. Pollitt's understanding of puppetry clearly informed the way she coached the actors' movements, and this really paid off in their effectiveness; with the large masks and the large hands (extending beyond the actors' own hands), the actors essentially *became* puppets.

Though receiving training at the UConn Puppetry Arts program— a place where (in those days) opera flourished—

Pollitt says that opera was never taught there, and that puppetry students who didn't already have a background in the art form were left to fend for themselves. Greater influences were Albrecht Roser (visiting professor at UConn), Joan Baixas and Leszek Madzik (both at the IIM in Charleville-Mézières). A real connection between puppetry and music was made during the bunraku training Pollitt received while working on the *Warrior Ant* with Lee Breuer and Yoshida Tamamatsu.

Pollitt says that the fact that Haydn wrote this opera with puppets in mind made her job a little easier: Immortals toss lightning bolts, animals elude their masters and disembodied souls fly through the ether before they are brought back to life.

This production of *Philemon and Baucis* was remounted in 2002, with certain improvements. There is even talk of mounting the production again— and why not? St. Lukes already has a substantial investment in the puppets, costumes, scenery and script. I, for one, hope they do. [Ed.]

suspended his puppets in the air over the heads of the singers on stage. Puppeteer Bil Baird was one of the operators, and he wrote that he had to run ten feet across the stage wings just to raise one puppet arm in a graceful arc.

*Oedipus Rex* has continued to inspire puppeteers. Julie Taymor directed a version of the opera in Japan, with Jessye Norman as Jocasta, and dancer Min Tanaka performing lithe acrobatics onstage. In this production (for which Seiji Ozawa conducted the Tokyo Philharmonic), Taymor placed puppet heads on top of the singers' own heads, producing a simultaneous presence of puppet and performer later echoed in *The*

*Lion King*. In addition, Taymor populated the stage with a giant moving disk, and with over-life-sized rod-puppet birds reminiscent of the work of puppet director Peter Schumann. Schumann himself, who by starting the Bread and Puppet Theater in 1963 redefined American puppet theater as "serious," politically active theater for adults as well as children, directed *Oedipus Rex* in Stuttgart in 1995. He used life-sized and over-life-sized masks, cardboard cutout figures, and fourteen-foot-tall puppets in a production comparing Oedipus's tragic struggle with fate to that of imprisoned American black activist Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Like Stravinsky, Erik Satie also sought a radical re-definition of European music, but Satie's works had a sly effervescence different from the Russian composer's radical frontal assaults. Perhaps this was related to Satie's 1880s work as a pianist at the Chat Noir cabaret in 1880s Paris, where he accompanied lithe and lyrical shadow puppet pieces created by symbolist artists. Satie wrote *Geneviève de Brabant*, a short opera for puppets which took its melodramatic story of a mistreated wife from one of the most popular puppet shows in Europe. *Geneviève* was given a production in Paris in 1926 by the avant-garde Mascotte workshop, with marionettes designed by Manuel-Angeles Ortiz. Many consider Satie's masterpiece to be *Socrate*, a "symphonic drama" based on Plato's dialogues about the death of Socrates. Satie's rich, heady work was presented in 1936 at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum (where the Gertrude Stein/Virgil Thomson opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* had premiered two years earlier) in a ground-breaking production designed by sculptor Alexander Calder. During his 1920s stint as an avant-garde American sculptor in Paris, Calder had built and performed a miniature puppet circus with wire figurines (now in the collection of the Whitney Museum in New York), but for *Socrate*, Calder chose to populate the stage with over-life-sized figures. However, these were not puppets in any traditional sense of the word. Instead, they were abstract moving sculptures: gleaming, rotating hoops; a brilliant red disc rising and turning; and a monumental flat column black on one side and white on the other. During the length of Satie's music, these moving sculptures slowly played across the stage. "The whole thing," Calder wrote, "was very gentle, and subservient to the music and the words."

A fascinating and concentrated effort to make small-scale modern puppet opera was undertaken in Spain by writer Federico Garcia Lorca and composer Manuel de Falla. In the 1920s and thirties, the pair collaborated on a number of puppet opera productions combining traditional stories and puppet forms with a symbolist sensibility. In 1922, de Falla wrote *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, an opera based on the puppet show described in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The following year de Falla and Lorca produced a series of short operas for hand puppets or flat cut-out puppets, including more works based on Cervantes, as well as a traditional Christmas play (*Misterio de los Reyes Magos*) and classic work from Calderon de la Barca (*The Constant Prince*). *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* was soon after presented in Paris and Zurich, and in 1925 received its American premiere in a production by Remo Bufano in New York City's Town Hall. Bufano's production, in collaboration with the League of Composers, and an orchestra featuring Wanda

Landowska on harpsichord, used life-sized marionettes (including a figure of Cervantes) who watched smaller puppets perform the play-within-a-play excerpt from *Don Quixote*. The *New York Times* called the production "an occasion of uncommon interest," which "packed Town Hall with one of the most brilliant audiences of the season."

The twenties and thirties trend of producing new, modernist puppet and mask operas in the United States was reinforced in 1932 by performances of Carlos Chávez Ramirez's *H.P.* at Philadelphia's Metropolitan Opera House, in a production designed by Mexican artist Diego Rivera. The title of the opera stood for horsepower, and it coincided with Rivera's industrial murals for Henry Ford in Detroit. Leopold Stokowski conducted the orchestra for this production for which Rivera, according to his autobiography, designed masks, puppets, sets and objects depicting "a coconut tree, a bag of money, horsepower, downtown New York, a girl and a boy from Tijuana, a banana, an American girl, a pineapple, sailors, sugar cane, a captain, tobacco, and cotton."

In the above I have tried to show how intertwined puppets and opera have been over centuries of opera history. In our century, the United States especially has been a place where puppet operas have found sporadic support in remarkable, if perhaps little-noted, productions. The forms of puppet opera undertaken by Bufano, Calder, and Rivera (perhaps their productions are too unique to label a tradition) were continued after World War Two with the development of avant-garde work by such designers as Robert Wilson, who was influenced by a 1970s revival of Calder's production of *Socrate*. Wilson always seems to have worked on the scale of opera, but with such unconventional material (Philip Glass's music for example) that the tradition-bound New York opera world basically ignored his work for decades, forcing him to more receptive European opera stages. Now, as some recent productions show, adventuresome arts organizations and opera houses are once more embracing the possibilities of puppets performing opera. This development may seem like a new invention to some, but it is in fact a return to a tradition that is as old as opera itself, a tradition that for better rather than worse seems to require periodic renewal and re-invention.

*A version of this article appeared in the Fall, 1998 issue of Opera Cues, a publication of the Houston Grand Opera.*



## GOODFOLK PUPPETS

*Handcrafted Puppets  
for People at Play*

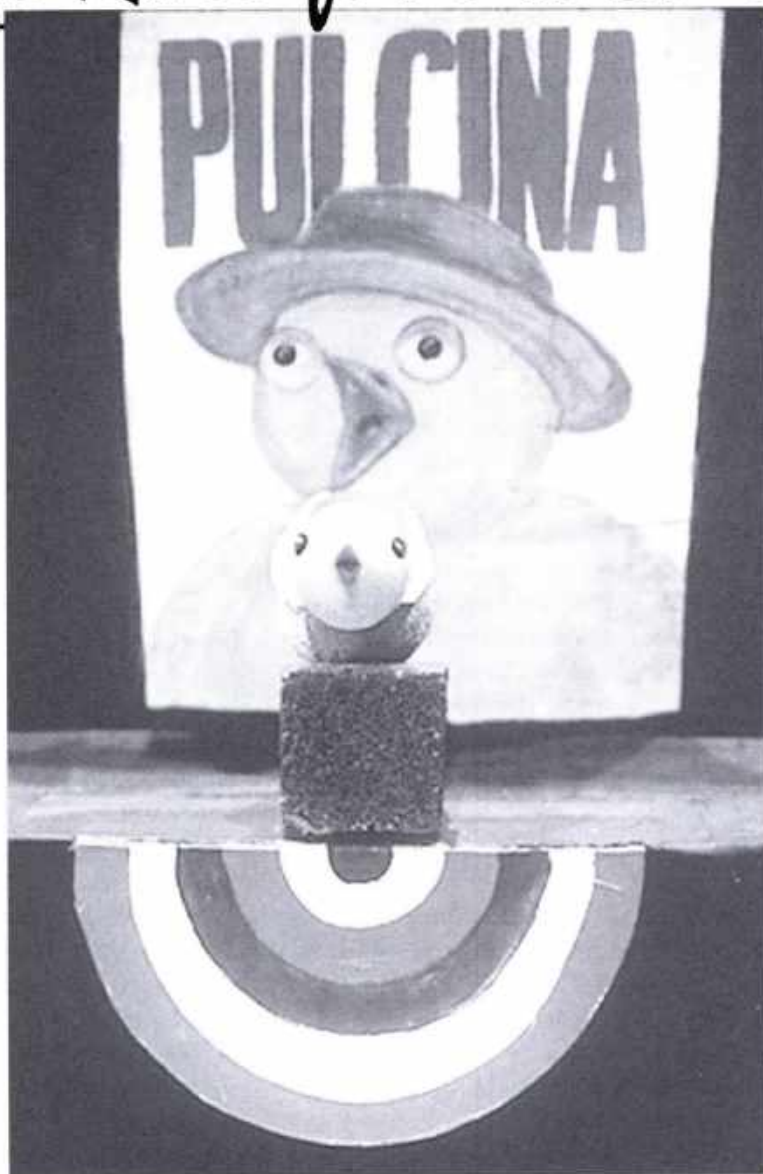
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# Large Role for a little Chicken

by  
Meg Daniel

In 1984, Susan Vitucci decided to create a puppet show as a birthday present for her five year old nephew. A colleague's penchant for chicken jokes led her to choose the story of Chicken Little as the subject, and her mother's collection of clothespin Christmas ornaments from church bazaars suggested a simple means of construction. Once she began, however, the piece quickly took on a life of its own. Vitucci's nephew got Legos that year, and the birthday present he never received became *Love's Fowl*, a miniature grand opera that has garnered critical acclaim and a devoted following.

The ingenious piece, which plays with and pays tribute to the conventions of Italian opera, is based on the "apocryphal but true" secret diaries of Chicken



Little, now known as La Pulcina Piccola. Her exploits are re-enacted by Il Teatro Repertorio delle Mollette (The Clothespin Repertory Theatre), a versatile cast of puppets made of styrofoam balls, felt, and wooden clothespins. The libretto is written and performed, in Italian, by Vitucci, who also manipulates the puppets on a table top stage in full view of the au-

dience. *Love's Fowl* features an original score by award-winning composer Henry Krieger, whose credits include the Broadway shows *Dreamgirls* and *Side Show*. Krieger accompanies Vitucci on the piano and lends his voice for the male roles and crowd scenes. A screen above the stage supplies the English supertitles, and two large screens on either side of the stage carry live video of the puppet performance.

## Love's Fowl

*Love's Fowl* begins with the incident that first made La Pulcina Piccola famous. When an acorn lands on her head, she believes that the sky is falling and decides to warn the king of this calamity. Several feathered friends accompany her, but only La Pulcina survives the journey and reaches the king. She learns that she is mistaken, of course, but life in the barnyard does not hold the same appeal after such excitement. And so, she embarks on a search for love and adventure that includes triumphant forays into politics, academia, and even the theater, where she is celebrated for her portrayal of Shakespeare's villainous Richard III. She travels to Egypt, where she naturally makes a major archaeological discovery, and she shares her experiences with adoring crowds on a lecture tour of the United States.

La Pulcina encounters tragedy as well, repeatedly finding herself in "a fine stew for a tender chicken." An early affair with a brawny cock fighter in the big city ends badly. Her true love, Cock Robin, is murdered by a jealous sparrow, and she nearly perishes herself when her boat sinks in a storm on the South Seas. She finds solace in the arms of the pirate king who rescues her, and later with a cowboy in the American Southwest,

but these affairs do not last. Through it all, what sustains her and charms the audience is her unfailing optimism. She accepts the good and the bad with equal aplomb, always remembering that "my luck in life and my luck in love wax and wane like the moon above."

When the audience first meets La Pulcina, she makes a spectacular entrance worthy of such a heroine, emerging fully-formed, like Venus, from the sea foam on a scallop shell. *Love's Fowl* did not come into being quite so easily, growing from a seven minute lark into an elaborate hour-long production over the course of eighteen years. After realizing that this was more than a charming birthday present, Vitucci wrote the text for the show in English and set it to music by Ken Beltrone, whose obsession with chickens had suggested the idea in the first place. This first version of Chicken Little's story was designed for video, with 4 inch tall puppets that appeared to be life scale within the proscenium arch of a 19-inch color television. It was conceived as a spoof of the high-toned fictionalized biographies seen on public television, although this miniature Masterpiece Theatre included an elaborate disco number. It required nine people to perform and was staged by and for their friends as a sort of parlor entertainment.

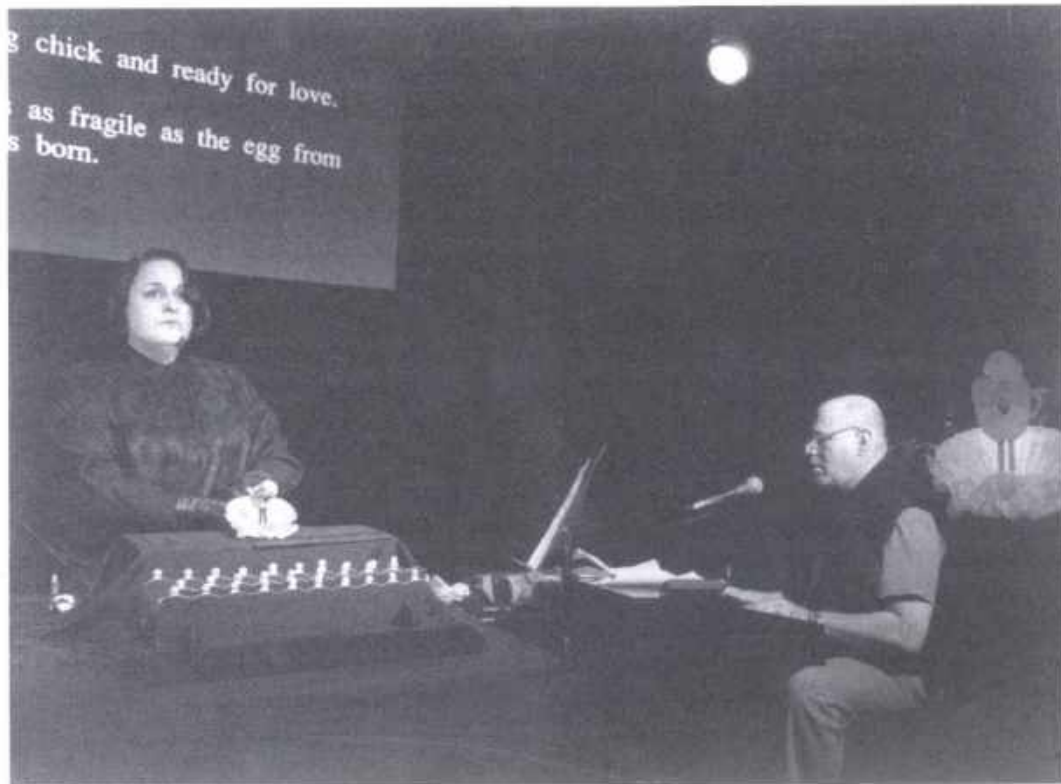


photo: S. Berger 1995

Although it was great fun, the piece had become too complicated to perform easily, so Vitucci set Chicken Little aside for the time being. She continued to work with Beltrone on several other musical theater pieces. These were designed for people rather than puppets, though they experimented with mask work and the stylized use of objects. Then Vitucci decided to learn Italian and took an intensive language course that culminated in a ten minute presentation. Presenting a book report or telling the story of her life did not appeal to her, so Vitucci pulled out her clothespin puppets, rechristened Chicken Little as La Pulcina Piccola, and performed the story for her class on top of a cardboard box draped with black cloth. Because her Italian was still limited, she kept the dialogue simple and used sight gags to convey much of the plot.

According to Vitucci, this translation "revealed Italian to be the true language of La Pulcina's heart." The piece had not yet become an opera—the words were now spoken, not sung—but, suddenly, it demanded to be taken seriously. Vitucci believes that the use of Italian "gives us the distance we need to open our hearts and go into this world." Perhaps it plays upon the audience's notion of what constitutes "high culture" or conjures romantic notions of the old country, or maybe we just assume that what we cannot understand must be profound. Whatever the reason, the language makes it difficult to dismiss the work as merely cute and dispels any preconceptions that a piece using puppets to recount a fairy tale must be solely for children.

After this epiphany, Vitucci performed *Love's Fowl* as a salon piece at parties and small spaces around the city. In preparation for the 1992 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, she staged a preview performance at the West Bank Cafe. Henry Krieger was in the audience, and he was so moved that he offered to compose music for the piece. A collaboration by fax and answering machine ensued, and at long last, La Pulcina found her true voice through song. Vitucci says that the use of the music further broadened the possibilities of the piece: "It made it possible for me to say things quickly and efficiently, and relay something in the character's heart that can't be said any other way." With the addition of supertitles and video projection, *Love's Fowl* became a full-fledged puppet opera.



The resulting work is a pastiche of styles and references, making it accessible both to opera buffs and those unfamiliar with the genre. In addition to the rousing choruses, searing laments and rapturous love duets typical of traditional Italian opera, there is a scene between La Pulcina, the Pirate King (whose name is, of course, Chicken of the Sea) and his band of roustabouts that is eerily reminiscent of the famous "I am a Pirate King" number from Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*. The cast is introduced with an elaborate scene that calls to mind Busby Berkeley and the Ziegfeld Follies, with tiers of clothespin kicklines, a bevy of wooden chorines descending a grand staircase, and a crane shot achieved by gluing clothespins to a turntable. Sight gags and sly cultural references are sprinkled throughout the piece in the spirit of the old Warner Brothers cartoons that parodied operas like Wagner's *Ring* cycle.

While the piece is frequently funny, Vitucci and Krieger perform their roles with complete seriousness. Vitucci describes both opera and puppetry as highly stylized forms that can convey heightened reality, but only if the performer stays committed to the truth of the character: "If I laugh, the audience stops trusting the world that I've created." For her, the most important aspect of the piece is its tight narrative structure, which allows La Pulcina to lead an enviably full life in just over an hour. She cites Teatro Hugo & Ines as puppeteers she particularly admires because "with virtually nothing, they create little silent movies with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and they don't go any longer than is necessary to tell the story."

Vitucci and Krieger have performed *Love's Fowl* at venues including the West Bank, the Ensemble Studio Theatre, Los Kabayitos Puppet Theatre (as part of the Toy Theater Festival), and P.S. 122 (as part of the Henson Festival's Late Night Cabaret). In 1998, New York Theatre Workshop presented an extended run of *Love's Fowl*. Both adults and children responded to the show, returning repeatedly with friends and family, and critics applauded it as well. The New York Times praised its "canny and clever libretto" and "sprightly music," calling the piece "wacky and wise, melodic and mischievous." Producer Bruce Yeko saw the show, which led to the recording of a cast album on Original Cast Records. La Pulcina also reached audiences across the country through the popular National Public Radio show *This American Life*, which featured *Love's Fowl* in a segment called "Chicken Diva" that has aired repeatedly.

In fact, La Pulcina's following has grown to such an extent that she has her own international adoration society, *Gli Ammiratori della Pulcinina*. Fans donate money to the cause, subscribe to *Clotheslines*, the semi-annual newsletter, and visit her web site to get the latest news and read excerpts from her diaries, which detail episodes between the adventures related in *Love's Fowl*. Vitucci also receives repeated requests for merchandise bearing La Pulcina's likeness. The first item in La Pulcina's signature line, a refrigerator magnet, is distributed to fan club members. Vitucci plans additional items for the line, which will soon be available through the web site [www.pulcina.org](http://www.pulcina.org). What is most striking about all of this is the fact that many of her admirers have never even seen the show. They have fallen in love with La Pulcina sight unseen, which is a testament to the power of Vitucci's creation, "an indomitable character who comes to life with an open heart."

Although opportunities to see La Pulcina live on stage have been rare in recent years, *Love's Fowl* was presented last July at the Stonington Opera House in Maine. Vitucci is currently working to find a venue in New York City where it can be staged several times a week, in addition to collaborating with Krieger on a new puppet theater piece. In spite of the challenges she may face, La Pulcina Piccola is no tragic heroine like Medea or Tosca. She has more in common with Odysseus, embarking on, in the words of Susan Vitucci, "a journey where the forces of the universe and the forces of the gods intervene, and you have to deal with it." Wherever her travels take this plucky heroine, her fans will be waiting.

*Meg Daniel is on our board of advisors. She works for the Jim Henson Foundation.*

from the libretto—



CHICKEN LITTLE

I am a young chick  
and ready for love.  
My heart is as fragile  
as the egg from which I was born.  
Treat me gently  
and so will I treat you;  
together from earthly love  
we will reach for the divine.

From the original cast recording of *Love's Fowl: A New Musical*, available on Original Cast Records.  
© 1999 by Susan J. Vitucci and Henry Krieger

To join the fan club and receive a subscription to the newsletter, send an email to: [mailbox@pulcina.org](mailto:mailbox@pulcina.org)  
or write to *Clotheslines*, 250 West 85th Street #15G, New York, NY 10024

# HAYDN and the Prince Esterhazy Marionettes



by Stephen Carter

Although the operatic works of many composers have been adapted to the marionette stage, few can be said to have been specifically composed for puppets. The prolific Franz Joseph Haydn [1732-1809] was for thirty years in the exclusive employment of a princely estate with an active and elaborate marionette theater. The story of his marionette operas emerges only slowly, for they appear and vanish throughout history as mysteriously as the composer's own head, which disappeared from his grave for over a hundred years. Let us pursue these mysteries further.

Readers will be familiar with the Viennese Court from the film *Amadeus*. King Joseph II, who complains of "too many notes," is the son of the Empress Maria Theresa. This was the Habsburg Dynasty that in the eighteenth century controlled Hungary through subservient members of the Magyar nobility, of which the Esterhazys became one of the most dominant and affluent families. Haydn was employed by several generations of Esterhazy Princes, beginning his role as Kapellmeister at the Eisenstadt Palace, and relocating after 1768 to the summer palace at Esterhaza under the patronage of Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy. Nicolaus was the most ambitious and cultured of his patrons, sparing no expense in an effort to rival the splendors of the French court at Versailles. After years of neglect and decay, the still standing palace and grounds are now being restored and can be visited near the town of Fertod, Hungary.

The palace opened at the rear onto an enormous formal garden with avenues, fountains, a "Chinese" Pavilion, orangerie, the music hall where Haydn and his orchestra lived, an opera house and, facing it across the French garden, the marionette theater. The exterior of the marionette theater was said to be identical to that of the opera house, which had a footprint of sixty by two hundred feet. An anonymous report dated 1784 offers an authentic description of the interior which is quoted in translation by authors including Henryk Jurkowski:

18th century marionettes,  
housed in Casa Goldoni



The Marionette Theatre is situated *vis-a-vis* from the Opera House, and is quite large but without boxes and gallery. The whole pit looks like a grotto, in that all the walls, niches, and opening are covered with steps, stones, and snails; and when it is lighted, it presents a very curious and striking appearance. The theatre itself (i.e. the stage) is rather large and the puppets are very well made and the costumes magnificent. – Not only farces and comedies are played, but also *opera seria*, as for example when the late Maria Theresa graciously applauded the opera *Alceste* and admired the instantaneous and imperceptible changes of scene. They have also performed the *Siege of Gibraltar* with much ability and military array. – A theater which is perhaps unique in its kind. The performances in this theatre and in the Opera House may be enjoyed free of charge by everyone.

A painting of the Opera House proscenium and orchestra pit remains, but no depictions of the marionette theater have survived. While the building still stands today, years of subsequent use as an armory and later storage for fodder or firewood have obliterated any clues as to the format and size of the marionette stage. Puppetry histories tend to offer a list of three or four Haydn marionette opera titles, often with a degree of confusion and contradiction. For

more exhaustive research, we must turn to the musicologists. Hungarian researcher, Matyas Horanyi provides a thorough account of the Esterhaza Estate and its personnel, architecture, and festivities. A closer examination of the marionette theater, its operators, and repertoire is the essay by H.C. Robbins Landon in the 1962 *Haydn Yearbook*, a scholarly periodical. HCRL, as I shall refer to him, is a treasure trove of information, being the leading world Haydn scholar, and indeed the champion for the authenticity of the only existing score of Haydn's marionette opera, *The Burning House*. The marionette music was largely believed to have been lost, except for a few fragments, until 1935, when a Parisian antique bookseller, Arthur Rau offered at auction, from the library of a French countryhouse, the scores for *Philemon und Baucis*, and *Die Feuersbrunst*. The first was purchased by the Paris Library of the Conservatory, and the second by Yale University Library.

## Haydn's Marionette Opera Repertoire

HCRL painstakingly examines the existing libretti, scores, and other archival material. He then lays out a plausible list of Haydn's marionette operas which I summarize and annotate as follows:

*Der Gotterrath* (Council of the Gods), 1773— companion piece to *Philemon und Baucis* in which the Greek gods glorify the Empress Maria Theresa. The libretto exists, but only the first number from the music is extant.



*Philemon und Baucis*, (Philemon and Baucis), 1773 & 1776 versions. Synopsis: Jupiter, enraged by man's wickedness, creates a fierce thunderstorm, nearly destroying the village where the pious couple, Philemon and Baucis, reside. The couple pray and are spared. Still testing the mortals, Jupiter and Mercury, disguised as travellers, seek shelter for the night. The generous old couple invite them to share their food and their home.



*Philemon and Baucis,*  
David Smith's Marionettes

was widely popular in European marionette repertoire. The falsely accused Genoveve is spurned by her husband Siegfried, who has been misled by the evil Golo. Wandering in the forest with her infant son she is miraculously protected by the Virgin Mary who induces a doe to give milk to the starving child. The epic was often divided into parts for dramatization. Haydn's part four likely featured the punishment of the evil Golo, the reconciliation of Siegfried and Genoveve, and concluded with her saintly death and ascension to heaven accompanied by angels. Parts one to three were also performed by the Esterhaza marionettes, but Haydn is thought to have composed only for the fourth installment.

Mercury recalls that, one year ago, to that day, one of Jupiter's lightning bolts struck down the couple's only son, Aret and his bride, Narcissa. Philemon decides to serve the travellers a special goose they had planned to sacrifice to Jupiter. Jupiter is delighted and touched by the goodness of the old people. He spares the village and returns the young couple, Aret and Narcissa, to life. Jupiter transforms the humble home of the old couple into a golden temple, and Philemon and Baucis become priest and priestess of the temple dedicated to Jupiter. Historic libretto and music exist in two versions. Modern published scores: Barenreiter-Verlag, Kassel, 1959 and Henle-Verlag, Munich. Recordings: A 1951 Vienna performance was issued by Vox. Marionettist, David Smith of Ontario conducted and recorded a private archival tape.

*Hexenschabbas* (The Witch's Sabbath), 1773— a familiar theme for marionettes, but we have no details on Haydn's. An Italian version, *Il Consiglio delle Streghe* is cited by Michael Byrom from the seventeenth century marionette opera repertoire of Filippo Acciaiuoli. In Italian versions, Pulcinella sees a hunchback miraculously relieved of his hump by a circle of dancing witches who are chanting the words "Sunday and Monday." Pulcinella tries his luck but adds "Tuesday, Wednesday." He suffers additional humps or is transformed into a goat in consequence. Music and libretto presumed lost.

*Genovevens Vierter Theil* (Genoveva Part Four), 1777. No libretto or scores of Haydn's version remain, however subject

*Didone Abbandonata* (Dido Abandoned), 1776, and revival 1778. Synopsis: Dido was a legendary princess of Phoenicia who fled to Africa, where she founded the city of Carthage. Virgil in the *Aeneid* adapted her story further, having her make love to Aeneas in a cave, but later be abandoned. In her despair, she commits suicide. Music and libretto presumed lost.

*Die Feuersbrunst*, also known as *Das Abgebrannte Haus* (The Burning House), 1776 or '77— probably based on a popular stage play by the Berlin actor, Grossman. Synopsis: Hanswurst, a chimneysweep, loves Columbina. Columbina is infatuated by a visiting court dandy, Leander. Her father, Odoardo, a greedy estate manager, is eager for acceptance in high society, and encourages the liaison. Odoardo has recently foreclosed on debts owed by Steckel's deceased father, taking possession of the family house. Steckel and Hanswurst enter the cellar to search for a family jewel buried in the cellar and, startled by a cat, set the house on fire. Columbina is despondent by the loss of all her pretty dresses in the fire, but Hanswurst successfully wins her love through a series of improbable disguises and, in the process, restores Steckel's fortune, and sends the dandy packing. Complete manuscript music score at Yale Library. No libretto extant. Modern published scores: Schott & Co., London, 1961, a piano reduction score, with reconstructed dialogue added by HCRL. Henle-Verlag, Munich 1990, full orchestrations, no connecting dialogue. Recordings: Library of Congress has one aria on an old LP with a selection of German theatrical

music. Carter Family Marionettes (with improvised connecting dialogue) made an archival recording, Seattle, May, 2002.

*Die Bestrafte Rachbegierde*, (Vengeance Achieved), 1779—sometimes referred to as *Vendetta*, or *Die Bestrafte Rachgier*, instead. This work exists only as libretto with no music extant. Only known copy is owned by University of California at Berkeley. The work has been inexplicably confounded by scholars, and by Haydn himself, with *The Burning House* sometimes given as an alternate title. The libretto clearly represents a completely different storyline, featuring the characters of the *King of Utopia*, an evil fairy, also including Hanswurst. It concludes in a glade with fireworks, and is presumably of the "fairy-opera" genre. I would love to get it translated.

*Der Krumme Teufel*, (The Lame Devil), early 1750s, in Vienna. This work was composed in Haydn's youth before he went to work for Esterhazy. It may have been more along the lines of incidental music, rather than a complete opera. Commissioned by the showman Francesco Bernardone at Kärntner Tor, Vienna. Only fragments of the music are extant. The story is drawn from a novel by Alain-René LeSage (1668-1747) in which a necromancer makes a pact with an impish devil, and embarks on a grand tour. LeSage also compiled the *Théâtre de la Foire*, transcriptions of marionette-opera parodies played in the Parisian Fairs using popular melodies known as vaudevilles.

Opera and Singspiel Opera was essentially an Italian artform from the 17th and into the 18th centuries. Among the aristocrats, French was the language of courtesy and manners, Italian the language of music, and German or other languages employed for talking to the common people. Of Haydn's operas, practically all are in Italian, except for the marionette operas, which are a mixture of High German and Viennese dialect. *Opera Seria*, the baroque Italian Opera, usually based on mythological themes, consisted of arias and duets connected by recitativo, stylized half-sung speech over a sparse underlying rhythm on harpsichord or bass viol, known as the continuo.

The success of John Gay's *Beggars Opera* (1728) in London using popular melodies and English language began to shake things up in the opera world. Soon after, the Austrians were developing a form of comic, German language operetta known as *Singspiel* in which popular accessible melodies were interspersed with improvised vernacular dialogue.



## AMERICAN PUPPETRY PREMIERE OF THE BURNING HOUSE

Boston, 1984

The Boston Premiere Ensemble, led by John Adams, claims the honor of having been the first to perform this Haydn Opera in America with puppets.

Though the figures in question were hand and rod puppets, they were quite striking, and were designed and built by Caleb Fullam and Karen Larsen. They also performed the figures, with the help of Windle Davis and Irene Hartford.

The single performance was in Harvard Square, in Sanders Theater. Despite the participation of such well-known singers as Robert Honeysucker and Susan Larsen, the premiere was poorly attended. For those who did attend, though, it is fondly remembered. [Ed.]



Columbina and Hanswurst from *Die Feuersbrunst*,  
Carter Family Marionettes

Woodcut of Josef Martin Menninger  
as "Hans Wurst"



## The Puppets & the Players

Traditions of theatrical comedy were also heavily Italianate. Arlecchino and his *zanni* colleagues swept the world stages from Rome to Copenhagen. Around 1720, Josef Anton Stranitzky, a puppeteer and comic actor, adapted the dress of Viennese peasantry and the character of Hanswurst was born. A lowbrow comic, Hanswurst was deplored by one writer as "a national disgrace." Even Max von Boehn echoes this sentiment in his 1929 history, *Puppets and Automata*, saying:

Hanswurst is a dull wag who thinks he is witty when he wallows in the mud of vulgarities and double meanings." The people, of course, loved every bit of it. Hanswurst may have been obliged to exercise more propriety at Esterhaza. In one incident, Prince Esterhazy ordered an actor to be whipped for lifting the hem of an actress' skirt with the tip of his cane on stage. Nevertheless, Esterhazy's actors and puppeteers relied heavily on improvisational skill and wit. They were obliged to provide constant and varied entertainment on a daily basis. The scores that remain from the period notate only the cue lines for the orchestra; the actors were expected to invent and vary the dialogue *ex tempore*. The singing was done from the wings by the opera singers, while actor/puppeteers did the connecting spoken dialogue. As HCRL snipes, "opera singers acted no better than they do now.

that him from Vienna where he had previously produced the marionette opera *Alceste*. Nothing of them remains. Our best guess is that they resembled other 18th century marionette casts designed for the pleasure of nobility, such as the set in Venice, now housed in Casa Goldoni.

Pauersbach seems to have been the prime mover of the marionette activities, and he is listed as director during the period of its greatest activity from 1776-78. Most of the presentations by the marionettes were adaptations by Pauersbach translated from French or Italian into German. The occasion upon which the marionette theater was first used at the Palace of Esterhaza was for the visit of the Empress Maria Theresa on September 2, 1773 when she viewed *Philemon and Baucis*, and *Der Gotterath*, followed by spectacular fireworks in the garden. On this occasion it is also noted that Haydn conducted a separate concert with the orchestra clad in Chinese gala uniform, while the palace was lit by twenty thousand Chinese lanterns!

A fifteen to twenty member theatrical troupe, under the direction of actor Carl Wahr, was in the employ of Esterhazy, as was the French mime, Bienfait. The Bienfait family was

The Necromancer's atelier, from  
*Der Krumme Teufel*



for several generations previous one of the most famous of marionette troupes active in the Parisian Fairs. Mistress of the wardrobes, Frau Anna Handlin made costumes and additional puppets as needed. Italian scenic artist, Pietro Travaglia was responsible for the décor and lighting of the marionette theater, as well as the Opera House. He was a disciple of the Brothers Galliani who are credited with freeing theatrical design from stiff baroque convention, introducing a new and sweeping romantic spirit. The court librarian, Philipp Georg Bader made contributions to dramaturgy and direction. When "extras" were needed, they were drafted from the palace grenadiers, which was convenient as many productions involved the use of gunpowder. Only a few marionette productions were mounted after the departure of Pauersbach from the court. One of the last in 1783 was the *Siege of Gibraltar* which required extensive rehearsal and consumed a great deal of gunpowder.

Haydn's orchestra consisted of fifteen to twenty players. A complete ensemble of singers was also under his direction. His sound management of the musical household earned him the title of "Papa Haydn." He once composed an amusing symphony in which the players leave, one by one, until only a single violin is left. This was a hint to the Prince that his overworked staff desired a vacation. In 1799 the already pensioned-off scenic artist, Travaglia was charged with packing up and shipping off all remnants of the puppets and staging to Countess Klutsewsky (or Klutscheszky) who had purchased the lot for 1000 gulden. That is the last that is known of them.

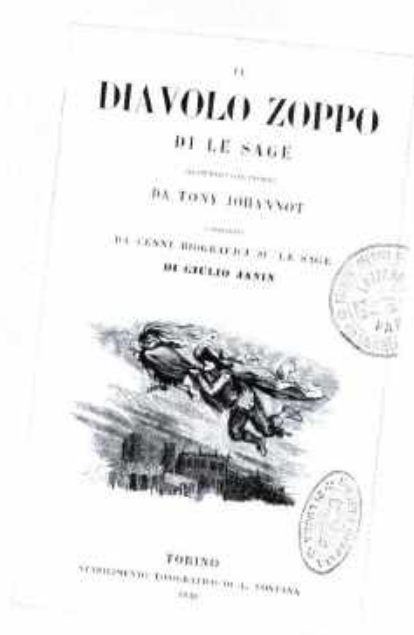
Revivals since have necessarily been limited, only two scores being available after 1960, and none prior to that. *Die Feuersbrunst* has been staged by Puppenteater der Stadt Halle, which may be the same as an October, 2001 production for a Vienna Festival, directed by Brian Michaels, by an unnamed Boston group [see sidebar p. 17] with handpuppets in the 1980s according to Karen Larsen, and

by the author's company—the Carter Family Marionettes—in Seattle, May 2001. *Philemon und Baucis* has been staged by Nick Coppola's Marionettes in New York in the 1970s, and by David Smith's Marionettes in Ontario Canada, in 1987. These are the productions I am aware of, but surely there have been others.

And what about Haydn's head, you ask?

In 1809 when Haydn died in Vienna, an acquaintance of his—Mr. Rosenbaum—crept into his grave during the night and removed his head. Rosenbaum's wife had been a singer in the Esterhazy opera company. They kept the skull in a glass case in their home. Years later, Prince Esterhazy wished to move Haydn's body back to the palace in Esterhaza, and discovered the theft. Secret service were dispatched to the Rosenbaum home, but Mrs. Rosenbaum hid the skull under her night gown. The skull circulated as a novelty among Viennese salons until 1954, when it was reunited with the rest of Haydn's remains.

FINO



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photo of devil from Bernardone's troupe included in their on-line museum.

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photos of the Esterhaza Palace and Haydn's living quarters.

**Stephen Carter** is the Artistic Director of the Northwest Puppet Center in Seattle Washington. He and his wife Chris are well-known in puppetry circles as the founders of the Carter Family Marionettes.



Cast from the Carter Family Marionettes' production of *Die Feuersbrunst*

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## Euridice y los Títeres de Caronte

*Opera for mezzo-soprano, baritone and puppeteer,  
premiered at the Summer Festival of Barcelona July, 2001*

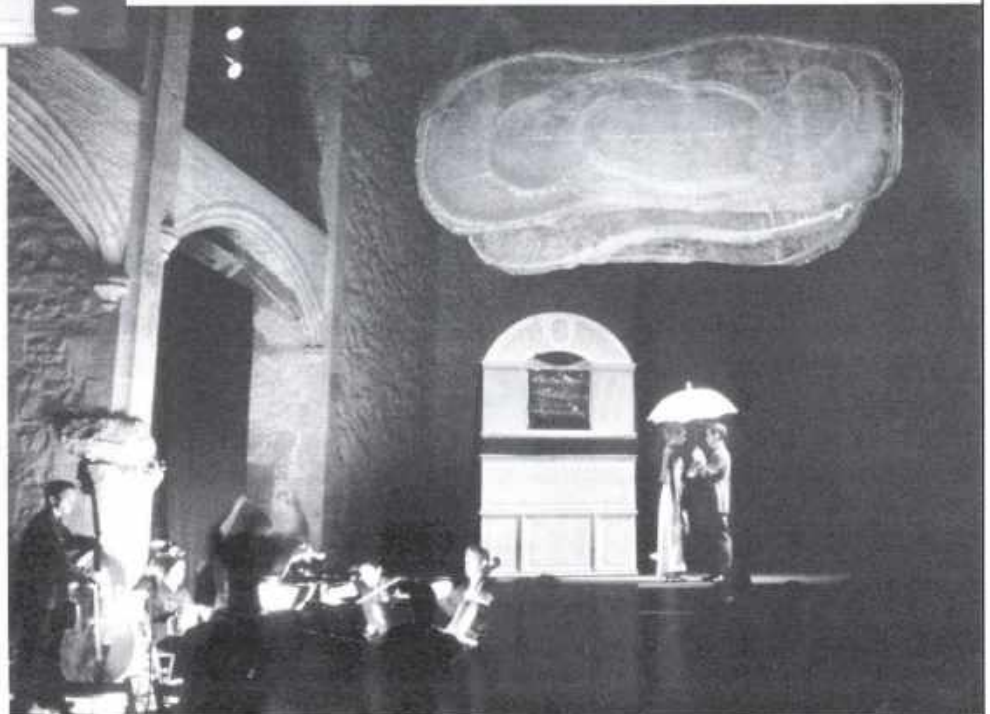
The story is very simple: Sofia, a respected opera singer, faces a terminal illness. Oscar, who is both her good friend and the director of the orchestra, wants to distance her from this horribly dramatic reality, by getting her to concentrate all her efforts on *Euridice*, the opera by Peri they are rehearsing which should launch them into international fame. But the appearance of Polchinela and of a mysterious little puppet theatre on the street, with its traditional and histrionic roles— full of energy and passion for life— captivates Sofia. They represent the magic, unconscious projection of the singer's inner voice— her desire for life and her confrontation with the reality of her own death. Oscar, seeing Sofia fully enter into the unreal and absurd world of the puppets, remains trapped by his jealousy, thus setting up a rather classic "love triangle."

*—Libretto by Toni Rumbau and music by Joan Albert Amargòs.*



This description of the opera is adapted from an essay by Toni Rumbau.

*Many thanks to Beckie Kravetz for securing photos and information.*



# Bridge of Wings

by Stephen Kaplin and Kuang-Yu Fong



One side-effect of living on an archipelago like New York City is that you learn a lot about bridges. On the eastern shore of the East River, in a neighborhood called Dumbo, is a small tight cluster of blocky old factory buildings and warehouses where Chinese Theatre Works and Great Small Works share a studio/rehearsal space. The landscape is defined by the two titanic suspension bridges—the Manhattan and the Brooklyn—that loom above its rooftops. The word "bridge" is an exceptionally rich one in the English language. It is a card game, an object used in billiards, a musical convention, a dental device and an electrical apparatus. A bridge can be a part of a ship, a railroad engine or an industrial furnace. As a verb, "to bridge" refers to an artificial connection across an impediment or obstacle. It has been a favorite pastime for human beings since the dawn of time. Something in our bones responds to the challenge of a blocked path or a body of water and makes us want desperately to find a way to the other side. Since we are not graced with wings as birds are, we've been forced to invent a wide array of artificial objects and techniques to help us across.

My wife and performing partner, Kuang-Yu Fong, and I have chosen puppet theater as our "bridge," using it as a medium to translate and interpret classical forms of Chinese opera performance for American audiences. We arrived at this solution, in part, to find a common ground for our very different artistic backgrounds—Kuang-Yu's training is in traditional Chinese Opera, while mine is in contemporary puppetry technique (we met performing together in a Bread and Puppet Christmas Nativity Play at Judson Church in 1984). Our collaborations together, first as Chinese Theatre Workshop and later as Chinese Theatre Works, began in 1994 and continue to the present. In this short essay, we wish to present some reflections on our experiences of blending Chinese Opera performance with contemporary puppetry.

This melding of performance genres is not such a stretch as it may initially seem. It is not nearly the formidable barrier that cultural and linguistic differences can be. The traditional forms of Chinese puppet theater, including string, hand, rod and shadow genres, are closely modeled on the classical Kun and Beijing Opera performances. They share literary sources, visual



styles, iconic languages for face painting and costuming, so that anyone familiar with the conventions and repertoire of one would have no difficulty in identifying it in the other. Puppet performances even mimic the live stage's tour-de-force acrobatics and martial arts displays. So an understanding of the basics of the Chinese opera forms are important to this discussion.

All traditional genres of Chinese opera combine text, music, dance, pantomime, martial arts and acrobatics into a unity. It is a kind of synergy not often seen on Western stages, where the primary focus is on the playscript, or the director's concept. In contrast, Chinese Opera is predominantly a performer's art. In metaphorical terms, western theatrical performance can be likened to an orchestra concert: each performer follows their own portion of the score under the arch, directorial gaze of the all-seeing conductor/director/*auteur*. The audience focus is on the presentation of the musical text, the composition. They are there to hear Beethoven or John Cage, not necessarily to see a particular soloist. In contrast to this, a Chinese Opera is structured more like a jazz concert— not in the sense that the artists improvise, but in that the audience goes to enjoy the individual performers and compare their techniques for rigorously presenting the standard repertoire. They will respond directly to the star-turns of their favorites, shouting "Good! Good!" at their appearance and during pauses. They do not necessarily go to see this or that particular play.

Chinese Opera performers train rigorously from their youth in academies under the strict discipline of masters to specialize in just one type of character role. These roles fall into four main character types: "Shen" male roles, "Dan" female roles, "Chin" painted face characters, and "Chou" clowns. These are further subdivided: young or old male lead roles; refined or coquettish female roles; and both sexes have martial arts roles that specialize in spectacular stage combat choreographies. It is possible for men to portray female roles (this is what the great Mei Lan Fang's specialty was) or for women to play young male roles. No matter which role the actor performs, the elaborate costumes and stylized facial makeup follow strict rules for each type of role and help to identify the essential nature of each character, as do specific movement and vocal patterns.

With roots in the Ming Dynasty (15th-17th century), Kun Opera is the oldest Chinese opera form still extant. The musical orchestration is different from the younger and more popular northern or Peking Opera— the lead instrument is the reed flute, the tempo slower and the melodies richer. The dramatic texts are of the highest literary quality. Written by and for members of the scholarly upper classes, the plays are full of poetic metaphor, complex wordplay and allusions to the classical canon. They were often exceedingly long. Kun opera is extraordinary in that the choreography and the

staging techniques have been preserved unchanged for so many centuries. Imagine if we in the West had preserved not just the texts of Shakespeare's plays, but the choreography, blocking, costuming, makeup and singing styles, and musical accompaniments as well.

The origins of modern Peking Opera can be traced back to an exact date— the eightieth birthday of the Emperor Chin Long in the late 18th century. On that historic occasion, the greatest local opera companies from all over the empire were invited to the capital to give performances. Among these companies were four of the most popular troupes from the Anhui province. After the birthday celebrations were over, they decided to stay in Peking. They absorbed the best of what they saw of other troupes' performances, and incorporated it into their own style, presenting it in the local Peking dialect. It was a much more flamboyant and flashy performance style, driven by a quicker tempo and a more percussive musical sound. The cumbersome literary language and meandering arias were stripped away to make room for exciting dance and fiery martial arts displays. This new style of performance caught on quickly at the imperial court, and with official sanction, the Peking Opera style soon became widely popular on the streets of the city as well. Gradually, its influence spread across the rest of China.

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Today, nearly every province has its own local Peking Opera troupes, in addition to companies specializing in regional styles. The Chinese Opera Academy in Beijing takes in the best young actors from across the country and gives them top professional level training. But even as academies turn out hundreds of professional artists, the popularity of the traditional Chinese opera has been in sharp decline over the last few decades. Many trained artists among the younger generation have found that it is easier to leave China and settle in the West. Through an oddity in US Immigration guidelines and codes (because they do not threaten the jobs of Western Opera artists), many of these artists have recently landed on our shores. As a result, New York City now has dozens of Chinese opera companies, at all levels of artistic proficiency.

Yet even with an influx of artists, the Chinese opera's influence in the West has been oblique and spotty. Bertolt Brecht's fascination with Chinese acting techniques came after seeing the great interpreter of female "Dan" roles, Mei Lan Fang at a theater symposium in Moscow in the 1930s. It's not even clear if he saw an entire performance, yet the experience of watching Fang was enough to provoke Brecht into using Chinese Opera as a model for an alternative to the

"realistic" acting techniques that were (and still are) prevalent in the West. He devised his theory of "alienated" acting based on what he perceived of Fang's technique—that the actor fully acknowledge the artificiality of his stage presence and exploit that awareness as a tool for shaping the audience's response to the performance.

Puppet theatre in its contemporary forms, where the manipulator is in full view of the audience (or at least an acknowledged presence) has a great deal in common with this Brechtian concept of "alienated" acting. The separation between the puppeteer and the puppet parallels the psychic detachment of the live actor from his or her role. It is but one step beyond the highly stylized graphic face painting and exaggerated costuming that opera performers use to forcibly project their characters beyond the frame of their bodies. The separation of the puppet figure from the manipulator gives a flexibility of form and scale which live human-based performance generally lacks, making it possible to dramatically multiply the number of figures on stage, and to include non-human-styled creatures—animals, spirits and deities.

In our productions, we try to balance traditional Chinese and contemporary Western aesthetics. It is not always an easy trick. In the traditional Chinese theatre, there is no need to transmit plot details, because everybody knows them already—and they don't expect to see an entire story anyway. But playing for predominantly English speaking audiences who don't have the same cultural background, we must present an entire story, complete with footnotes and explanations. We use the English texts and dialogue to bridge between musical selections and arias in the original Mandarin, to present the main stem of the often convoluted storylines. While this makes for a fundamental change from tradition, it makes the theater more accessible to those outside those traditions.

Our first attempt at this manner of hybrid Chinese opera was *Toy Theatre Peony Pavilion*. The original opera was written by Tang Xien Zu in the Ming Dynasty, and is roughly contemporary with Shakespeare's plays. The complete work spans 55 acts (about 22 hours of performance time). It tells the story of Lady Du, the young daughter of an upper-class family, who falls asleep in the family garden, and dreams of a young scholar, Liu Meng Mei, and falls in love with him. After waking, and with no chance of ever finding him again, she pines away and dies. But her love carries on beyond the grave. As a ghost, she meets the Judge of Hell, and convinces him of the sincerity of her passion. He gives her a chance to come back to life and consummate their marriage, if within three years she can convince her lover to find and dig up her grave. She returns to earth as a wandering spirit and manages to do just this. The scenes of their eerie courtship mark one of the great



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high points of all Chinese dramatic literature. Recently this gem was performed in its entirety by Lincoln Center, the first time in over 400 years that a complete performance had been produced.

CTW's truncated version of this otherworldly romance clocked in at under an hour. We presented excerpts from the original kun opera's score of song, text, dance and music, alternating with English narrative sections performed with the western styles of mask and puppetry, particularly, toy theater.

Although *Peony Pavilion* is a high point of Chinese drama, it is not part of the traditional puppetry repertoire. So we felt free to exploit other forms of puppetry. We chose model or "toy" theater—an extremely popular style of entertainment in Europe and America during the 19th and early 20th centuries. We liked the fact that the toy theatre was an archaic form (like kun opera itself) and that it had often been a medium for presenting redactions of European opera or popular stage hits of the day. In addition, the small table-top proscenium stage gave us a practical means for having just three performers handle all the dozens of characters and scenic changes. It also gave us a technique of layering our performance space to allow for dramatic shifts in



Kun/Shadow Whitesnake

scale like cinematic far and close shots, breaking down the realistic illusion of space when the live actors appeared together with the tiny cardboard figures. The designs for the flat figures were based on paintings by one of Kuang-Yu's teachers at the Chinese Cultural University in Taipei, Mr. Da Xie Zhang, who was a master performer of the energetic "painted-face" martial roles. He was also a brilliant brush and ink painter, who illustrated many books detailing costumes and accessories for the Chinese opera. We took the two lead characters, Lady Du and her lover, the young scholar Liu Meng Mei directly from one of his books. At our request, he provided additional designs for other characters.

Music was an extremely important element of this production. We had to reduce the hours and hours of original opera score to just a few choice passages and arias. We chose three of the most famous arias in the play—"Stroll in the Garden," "Shock From the Dream," "Calling the Painting"—to play almost fully. From other arias, such as "Romancing a Ghost," we only performed small excerpts. We also had to scale down the traditional orchestra of about a dozen instrumentalists to only three musicians. Our musical director, Baogang Liu accomplished this task admirably. The small ensemble was scored for reed and transverse flutes, sheng (mouth organ), percussion and keyboard synthesizer. In our second production, we eliminated the synthesizer and added another flutist/wind player (who also played the musical saw). Through all these complexities of production, we wanted the

focus of the piece to be on the actors' performance—not just on the traditional skills of singing, dance and pantomime, but also puppet and mask manipulation and swift costume changes.

For our second production in this hybrid performance style, we chose the legend of the Whitesnake. Unlike the highbrow literary pedigree of *Peony Pavilion*, *Whitesnake* has been a popular fixture in the puppet theater and live opera repertoires. It is easy to see why. The story follows the adventures of the mythic "Bai Su Jen"—a snake spirit who chooses to take on human form. She falls in love with and marries a young scholar, but their idyllic life together is disrupted by fierce struggles with a Taoist Monk, who objects to the intermarriage of animal spirits with humans. Whitesnake's vigorous defense of her love forms the core of the legend that is unique in Chinese litera-

ture in presenting a woman who is at once a strong, enterprising figure, a romantic lover, a powerful magician and a fierce warrior.

In creating *Kun/Shadow Whitesnake*, we had two starting points. The first was the kun opera score, from which we borrowed excerpts from the best and most well-known arias—"Strolling Next to West Lake," "Borrowing the Umbrella," "Stealing the Heavenly Grass," "Gold Mountain Temple," "Fighting in the Water," "By the Broken Bridge." Here, instead of scaling down the orchestration as we did for *Peony*, we decided to make digital recordings of a full opera ensemble. All the arias were presented with full choreography and singing, in traditional costumes, makeup and head dress.

Our second starting point was a remarkable set of antique leather shadow figures that were part of the Pauline Benton Collection. Benton is a unique figure in American puppetry. She fell in love with Chinese shadow theater during some of her travels there in the 1920s and 30s. She bought some of the fine old figures that were on sale in Peking and delved into their study with a local shadow master, Mr. Tuo Cheng Li. From Li, Benton learned the repertoire and techniques of making and manipulating the small leather figures. She had sets of figures made for her by traditional craftsman in the local Luanchau style, only larger (14"-18"). Returning to America, Benton founded the Red Gate Players and performed English language programs of the traditional Chinese shadow theater for over three decades. One of her most



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popular programs was the Whitesnake legend. When her company disbanded in the 50s, the entire collection of several hundred leather shadow figures, the musical instruments, shadow screens and accessories were packed away into large steamer trunks and forgotten for forty years.

Benton's performances had inspired a young woman named Jo Humphrey to start her own theater devoted to the preservation of Chinese shadow puppet performance. This company, the Yueh Lung Shadow Theatre Company, later expanded into the Gold Mountain Institute for Traditional Shadow Theatre. It followed Benton's model in creating "authentic" English language adaptations of traditional shadow repertoire. After Benton's death, the trunks containing her treasures were inherited by GMI. When Humphrey opened them up she found that during the forty years in storage, the viscous tung oil, which was spread over the leather to condition it and make it more translucent, had extruded and gummed together the tightly packed figures into a solid block. Humphrey spent years devoted to the arduous process of restoring the figures. She patiently pried them apart without shredding their delicate perforations, stripped off the tung oil and the gunk of time with solvents, resealed them with fresh oil or varnish, rejoined them and attached control rods. In 2001, GMI merged with our own company to form Chinese Theatre Works. Suddenly this wonderful collection of Chinese shadows was dumped in our laps and we felt it imperative to find a way to use them in performance. That is how, after a forty-year slumber, Benton's *Whitesnake* figures found their way onto the stage again. However, we found that balancing the puppet figures with the live performers was not so simple. The shadow screen was not as easy a frame to breach as *Peony's* toy theater stage. Somehow, despite the brilliance of the colorful shadow figures, the live performers in their equally brilliant costumes overwhelmed the poor two-dimensional images on the screen. There was no way for the actors to interact directly and pick up and handle the shadows, so it was not as simple a matter to slip back and forth between the two. We solved this problem by using an overhead projector as a light source for the shadow figures, which allowed us to project huge blow-up of the shadow images. While not a perfect solution, it gave enough visual punch that the shadow figures could balance the live actor presence.

One of the difficulties in trying to create hybrid performances such as these is finding performers with both traditional Chinese opera training and the capacity to work in Western modes of acting and puppetry. Most Chinese actors, however skilled and disciplined they may be within their own form, have no experience in improvisation or playmaking. Nor do most western-trained actors have the skills and discipline for mastering the complex choreographies and vocal calisthenics of a Chinese opera score. We were most fortunate to have working with us several unique artists who were

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At the same time that we seek to build understanding between ourselves as creators and our artists as collaborators, we also seek to foster change in our audience— which is made up predominantly of English speaking Westerners (although we also have a large Chinese following among middle-class families with children). Many of these kids have already begun to be assimilated into the Borg-cube of American popular culture. Our productions give them a deep view of Chinese culture, far removed from the glib Kung-Fu stereotypes on TV and Hollywood films.

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is an alumnus of the Puppetry "Connecticut. He is a frequent national. Kuang-Yu Fong is a Chinese Theatre Works.

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able to make the perilous crossing between performance styles seem effortless. Richard Cheng is a Malaysian born, British trained actor who has a background in Shakespearean theater as well as modern dance and some classical dance training. Although he had no training in Chinese Opera, the various performance disciplines that he had studied intensively had given him the means to study and learn Chinese opera choreography relatively easily. Mentoring him in Chinese opera technique and teaching him the intricate choreographies and arias was Yuhang Wen, a truly extraordinary young Kun opera master, who had performed the male lead role in Lincoln Center's unabridged *Peony Pavilion*. Wen later joined us as a performer to play the male roles in both *Toy Theatre Peony Pavilion* and *Kun/Shadow Whitesnake*. Although a consummate performer in the Chinese idiom, he was next to hopeless when we first handed him a puppet and a mask and asked him to speak English text. But the discipline of his training gave him a tremendous edge in acquiring new skills. Within a few months, he had become a competent puppeteer, and had even managed to learn his script, syllable by syllable so that he could present it with a natural, relaxed delivery.

The melding of ancient and modern, Asian and Western theatrical forms has many pitfalls. There are the language barriers, anxieties over needed INS documents, and other deep cultural rifts to navigate. And that's all before you even get to the rehearsal hall. But the process of overcoming them is a valuable and necessary pilgrimage which we felt we must take as artists and as individuals. The understanding of each other that we have gained in our cross-cultural marriage helps considerably in meshing together two very different systems of doing theater. But aside from the personal reasons, our goal has been not just to preserve the old forms (although they do deserve to be protected and conserved). We are equally concerned with finding new directions for the traditional forms to evolve, and for our artists to evolve. The works are a means in which the Chinese artists can get beyond the fixed rigidity of their training, picking up on the others' skills in improvisation and spontaneous creation. The Western artists meanwhile absorb some of the discipline and consummate technique of the Chinese performers. Together, both Eastern and Western artists make the same journey from opposite directions.

At the same time that we seek to build understanding between ourselves as creators and our artists as collaborators, we also seek to foster change in our audience— which is made up predominantly of English speaking Westerners (although we also have a large Chinese following among middle-class families with children). Many of these kids have already begun to be assimilated into the Borg-cube of American popular culture. Our productions give them a deep view of Chinese culture, far removed from the glib Kung-Fu stereotypes on TV and Hollywood films.

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It is important that our work acknowledge and nurture forms of performance rooted in traditions centuries old. But in the field of folk-art performance, funders and presenters are always telling you not to change, to keep faithful to the forms as they have been passed down. A folk-art tradition passed down unchanged, though, is like a puppet pinned to the wall of museum. Every traditional and classic artform must evolve with time and place. Even Mei Lan Fang created new operas that responded to the radical social changes of his day. Our own modest productions also respond to the social environment in which they are conceived and performed. It would have been impossible for us to have made them were it not for the influence of Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre or for the Spaghetti Dinners and Toy Theatre Festivals organized by Great Small Works.

There is an old Chinese legend that best exemplifies the need for bridges. Two Starspirit lovers, Vega, the Weavergirl and Altair, the Oxboy, were kept apart by gods by the Silver River, the Milkyway. But on the night of the Seventh day of the Seventh Month, a living bridge of birds forms across the gulf of stars and allows them to meet for one night.

Our work, too, is a bridge of wings, conceived in the shadow of those two great suspension bridges between New York (present) and China (past).

*Stephen Kaplin is an alumnus of the Puppetry Program of the University of Connecticut. He is a frequent contributor to Puppetry International. Kuang-Yu Fong is a director and performer for Chinese Theatre Works.*

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## Snails Surround the Stage:

### *Opera Director Peter Sellars Recalls his Years in Puppetry*

*In May, 2001, I accompanied my friend Peter Sellars to Harvard University to receive his alma mater's Medal of the Arts. Peter is widely known as a director of theater and opera, but few people are aware that his career began as an apprentice at Pittsburgh's Lovelace Marionette Theater. During the course of the weekend, Sellars and actor John Lithgow (a fellow Harvard alum) engaged in a public dialogue before an audience of undergraduates, in which Sellars reflected on his early theater training. I was struck by the fact that Peter spent most of the hour recalling his years as a teenage puppeteer. Here is a partial transcription of that conversation.* —Norman Frisch

**Peter Sellars:** My whole career started out outdoors, because as a child I was very interested in amphibians and reptiles. I had a huge snake collection. And then when I was 10, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a really cool person in the eighth grade named Cary Stickney— he was the older brother of my best friend Morgan Stickney— was moving with his whole family to Alabama. Cary was really cool, by far the coolest person I had ever met, and he apprenticed at this local marionette theater, The Lovelace Marionettes, on Ellsworth Avenue. I had no idea what apprenticeship was. I didn't know what a marionette theater was. I just knew that it was what Cary Stickney did, and he was cool. And so I said, when the family was ready to move to Alabama, "Cary, can I apprentice in your place?" And he said, "Sure, I'll tell them about you."

So on my tenth birthday, I went and knocked on the door of this marionette theater and said, "I am here to apprentice." And I had no clue— at all!— except that it was cool. They did shows every weekend— Hansel and Gretel, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rumpelstiltskin kind-of-things. But it was the Midwestern commedia dell'arte tradition [laughter from audience], and you learned by doing— not in a room with mirrors, but in a room with audiences. I packed popcorn and cleaned toilets for the first four years, and I watched every show like a hawk. And then in my second year, I was

allowed to start pulling the curtain, and I spent two years pulling the curtain. Which is why curtains in my shows now are very, very important. You know, there is a very subtle science of it all, and a lot of my shows are merely very elaborate discussions of "the curtain." [laughter from room] The theater did one adult show every year— like Pinget's *Architric*, and Cocteau's *Eiffel Tower Wedding Party*— they were doing the French surrealists! So the first plays I ever read were Beckett— because Pinget and Beckett were really close— and basically anything published by Grove Press.

**John Lithgow:** *Who were the people in charge of this theater?*

**Sellars:** Well, they were just extraordinary. The woman who ran it, Margo Lovelace— of course she would be named Margo— would travel every year to some new part of the world. So every summer, she would go to the Yucatan Peninsula, or to Moscow to the State Central Puppet Theater to study with Obraztsov, or to Osaka to study with the Bunraku. And so I was learning bunraku puppetry when I was 12. My first images of theater were Javanese shadow puppets, because the Lovelace Theater itself was a garage painted fuchsia, covered with puppets and masks from all over the world. And I entered this magical world of theater as a ten-year-old, where the whole world was really there in this Pittsburgh garage.

And so at ten, my favorite play was René Daumal's *En Garçon*—he was one of the French surrealists, who wrote a great, profound book called *Mount Analogue*; although his little play is somewhat less serious and involves such immortal moments as the stage direction "Snails surround the stage and begin to slobber." [laughter from audience] Now that's a pleasure, learning to be able to stage something like that. And those were some of my earliest theater challenges. It was not until I was 25 that I saw or read an Arthur Miller play—I had no idea that kitchen sink drama existed. I was simply totally into theater as the miraculous, the magical, the transformational, the astounding, the everything that exists just on the edge of consciousness, everything that is metaphysical and infinite. And I learned that theater was the way to touch that. And that was very cool by me.

And then, after a while, I began to learn a lot of very intense lessons that you can only learn by performing in department store windows—during Christmas season. Probably as a kid, my most intense lessons were around Punch and Judy. You know, Punch and Judy is extremely violent. It's a big subject now, of course—violence on television—how many murders a day kids see, kids and the movies. Kids on average see a lot of deaths each day on TV—I forget how many. 200 or something like that. The question is, does Hollywood create violence in the society? This is a really one of the most important questions in front of the country right now. And of course I learned about that really firsthand playing Punch and Judy on the streets.

Punch and Judy is really nice show. His wife comes out, and Punch beats her up with a large stick. Then the baby comes out, and he throws it out the window. Then the next door neighbor's dog comes in and he kills it; and then the neighbor; and then the policeman; then the hangman, and he does the same. And then finally the Devil. And sometimes a crocodile, too. Anyway, it's a very basic plot [laughter from audience] and the action is pretty straightforward—or so I thought. But of course, I didn't know. So at 11 or 12, I began performing my first Punch and Judy shows just imitating what I had seen, and the children cried. They were horrified. I mean it was horrible! And Margo Lovelace had to call me into her kitchen and give me a lesson or two, because I had gotten it totally wrong.

When you're apprenticing, you watch what the theater company does—and the whole time you are telling yourself that when *you're* in charge, it'll all be different. [laughter from audience] And then you go and do a show that's exactly an imitation of what you've seen. And then, as Balanchine says, after a while you cease to know the moment when you've stopped imitating and suddenly it's your own voice. But at first, you're just imitating things you've seen, and I got it all wrong. I did not get that the humor comes from deliberately acknowledging things: from the collusion between Punch and the audience, about the things that we all know to be true or not true. I really did not get at first that the humor is really based on Punch coming out and saying [in Punch voice] "This is a really, really ugly audience. Judy, you really don't even want to come out and see them. They are so ugly!" And so Punch goes on and on about different people in the audience being so ugly, and about how lovely he is himself—and of course he has a hunchback, and a giant pot belly, and a hook nose with a huge wart on it. And the whole thing is about beauty and ugliness. And this supremely ugly stump of a puppet talks about his Judy—Judy the Beauty, with pearly white teeth, or curly white teeth—and he goes on and on. And it becomes about the ugliest person in the world talking about ugliness, and beauty—and ends up going to this really extraordinary, double place, where you are deliberately seeing double, and everybody is suddenly given permission to acknowledge things that they themselves are, in this weird way.

And of course it's a total fantasy, and the puppet himself is a block of wood, and the baby actually needs to be a bowling pin wrapped in a handkerchief. And only then can you throw it out the window into the audience, and it's fine. And when you get the right balance of the humor, you get that the best Punch puppet is just a block of wood with a blotch on it. I began by carving the puppet very realistically. But you learn that the realism of it is exactly counter-productive, and the life of it comes from the way you move it. And the more



beat up and hopeless the puppet itself is, the more exciting the performance can be. And this was really my first big lesson in theater: Carve a realistic face on Punch and the kids cry. But if you can allow it to be art, it becomes an act of liberation. And that if Punch and Judy is done correctly, you have a group of screaming, freaked-out, neurotic children— [laughter from audience]— who leave the performance 45 minutes later in a state of such calm and bliss with the world, because you have actually, in a shamanic way, purged all of this violence from their systems. But if you do it wrong, you have added all this violence to their system. And you come to learn artistically which strategies purge the violence, and which strategies actually deepen the violence. And so that was intense stuff to be dealing when I was, like eleven.

**Lithgow:** *At that age, were you already looking ahead to a life in puppetry? Or a life in theater or opera? How did you imagine your future?*

**Sellers:** I still wanted to be a professional herpetologist. [laughter from audience] I still had like fifty snakes at home— a really great, great snake collection— and I was pretty obsessed with that. But then I went to boarding school, and of course I wanted to keep doing shows— but it just took too long to teach people how to work the puppets. So after a while I gave up, and I just started doing shows with people in them. And I started doing all those plays published by Grove Press— because those were the plays I knew.

And I had one really great German teacher who had just come back from Berlin, where he had seen the first performances of Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience*, the early Fassbinder work, the first Peter Stein productions at the Schaubühne— it was a really amazing period in German theater. So while a lot of kids in high school were doing *Kiss Me, Kate* on the mainstage, we were doing Peter Handke's *Self-accusation* at my school, in a tiny little room for an audience of twelve, and feeling very proud of ourselves.



**Lithgow:** *Did you have a lot of accomplices?*

**Sellers:** I did. One of the really great things that happened to me was that there was an official drama instructor whose name was Francis Bellizia. I remember him well. And it's fair to say that he really hated me, and in the one theater course that I ever took in my life, he gave me a C. [laughter from audience] So I decided: OK, that's enough for theater class. I'm just not going to do that anymore, ever. And so, after dealing with this high school drama instructor, I ended up at Harvard precisely because there was no theater department.

In high school, I did about forty productions: big ones on the mainstage, and little ones like *Self-accusation* just tucked in somewhere, and big multimedia spectacles. Stravinsky's *History of a Soldier* was a big deal for me; I spent six months rehearsing that, because it was huge and difficult. And I did a huge production of Shakespeare's *Tempest* with puppets and people that was really wild. And a whole lot of obnoxious Chekhov one-acts, and lot of other obnoxious things as well— which you have to, in high school.

And in the summers, beginning in my sophomore year in high school, I was running a children's theater company on the streets of Denver, Colorado— with my sister Juliet— doing six shows a day in Larimer Square in downtown Denver for shoppers. And when you're doing six shows a day, on the pavement, in the hot sun, you learn to make your show better than it was. The urge to self-improvement is tremendous, because you will not eat that night if your show does not get better soon. And so that aspect of my craft was developed working in front of audiences who were incredibly critical. And you had to learn how to make people stop— that's a very big deal— watch the whole show— which is also a very big deal— and then at the end, put money in the hat. And that's serious discipline, especially for a 15-year-old.

If nothing else, you learn how to command an audience, how to just grab people's attention and keep it. That was very powerful training, being out there on the pavement with America every day. You know, you hear artists condescending to the American audience all the time. "Well, what do you expect, that's America." But you know if you actually spend your time out there, on the pavement with them every day, that's a big cure for talking down to an audience, ever. Because the audience is so much smarter than you are, and is so tired of being insulted by you, and by having their intelligence lowered by your inadequacy. You learn very quickly. I would be doing some wild show very successfully on the streets of downtown Denver; and then eventually I would bring it here to Harvard, where people would say "Oh, it's just too avant-garde" and *The Crimson* would attack it vi-

ciously. And I had just done it all summer for housewives and their kids in shopping malls in Denver—no problem! In fact, the real public is not stupid. You just need to be with them, and respect them, and listen to them, and be prepared to engage in real dialogue, and you'll learn a whole lot. So growing up in puppetry was great. It had to be popular theater. So I'd grown up with that discipline, and I always felt, from the time I joined the Lovelace Marionette Theater, that I was working professionally. I never experienced the usual moment of transition from student to professional work, so it was no big deal. When I graduated from high school, when I graduated from college, I just kept on working.

**Lithgow:** *When you were in high school and began directing all of these productions, did you know that you were good?*

**Sellars:** I knew that I was having a good time, which was the main thing. My family has always lived in Pittsburgh, western Pennsylvania, and a little bit in Ohio, but one day my mother got tired of that and decided that we would move to Paris. My mother is a high school English teacher. She did not speak one word of French. But when I was 18, after high school and before coming to Harvard, we moved to Paris: my mother, my younger sister, and I. And I began seeing five shows a week. This was when Peter Brook had just arrived in Paris, Patrice Chereau was doing his early work. I went to Berlin and to the Schaubühne for the first time. It was 1976, an incredible moment in European theater. I went to museums all day, and read, and wrote in my notebooks.

And of course I wanted to see puppetry. So I joined the French Union Nationale de la Marionette—which is the French puppetry union, allied with the international puppetry union (UNIMA). And that union has a worldwide conference every four years, and that year it was in Moscow. So I went to Moscow at the end of my year in Paris, and found that the Soviets had stacked the festival with seven shows from around the world, seven from the Soviet Union, and seven from the Soviet satellite nations. So that meant that we saw puppet shows from Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia—*incredible work!* And you know in most of these places, Russian had to be the language of performance in the official state theaters. But in most of these puppet theaters, performance could still be in the local dialect, and so the puppet theater became the theater of liberation.



And I'm not kidding, these theaters were overwhelming. The Mongolian puppeteers wore these bands around them with the bullets—artillery belts—and the puppet characters were these fierce freedom fighters from Mongolian legend. And you could feel the Mongolian language just tearing through the room with a rage that no actor was permitted during that period—but a puppet could get away with it. And the same, I remember, with the Rumanian theater, which did a show about the horror of the Ceausescu years, but in a form which the puppets were allowed to express.

And so it was seeing these puppet theaters in Moscow that really left its mark on me—theater that mattered, and that meant everything to people in societies that were so closed that the puppet theater was the only true voice left to them. These companies were into wild, surrealist imagery. Like Punch and Judy: in order not to be run out of town, you had to cloak everything in metaphor. You had to translate it once or twice—it couldn't just sit there in the open, but had to be transformed into something mythical, something airborne that the censor could not just nail down on the spot. And so it was a truly poetic theater, and was overwhelming to me.

**Lithgow:** *Peter, you have just described an extraordinary education in international arts and politics by the age of 18. How much of this was your own doing, or how much of it did your parents expose you to?*

**Sellars:** This is just what happened. All these things were more-or-less totally accidental. That's what's so cool. I didn't go out in search of any of them—they all found me. So by the time I got to Harvard, I really wanted to know about all those things. All these things I had just seen in the Soviet Union in these puppet theaters was referring to stuff that I didn't understand. So I arrived at Harvard with a lot of questions, and I skipped most of the introductory courses and just went straight to the professor who I thought could answer a question for me. I had just seen all these Central Asian

puppet shows and didn't understand a word of them, but I desperately needed to know, "What is going on here?" I spent my undergraduate years just trying to understand all the things I had seen in France and in Russia during the year before. I ended up studying with Jurij Striedter in the Slavic Department, specializing in the Russian avant-garde: Meyerhold, Eisenstein, the poetics of the Russian Revolution, Mayakovsky, all of that— all of which became a big filter for me, artistically. And architecture and visual arts also became very important to me, since as a puppeteer I had trained in that also, through building my own stages, carving the puppets, painting the backdrops, and so on. I felt I needed to keep that up. So I took all these courses in psychoacoustics, space perception, an amazing Hitchcock seminar, the early films of D.W. Griffiths (the two-reelers— unbelievable— the beginning of film narrative), Cezanne watercolors— all of these courses that related to my puppetry.

**Lithgow:** *When did you first connect with opera?*

**Sellars:** Well, in the puppet theater, you learn fast that kids don't like talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. And as soon as there's music in a show, the kids get excited. And so, you just learn to stage everything to music. And in those days, I was doing really really elaborate things: I was taking Beethoven's Sonata Op. 31, No. 2 and staging Rapunzel to it. I was attracted to these super-elaborate pieces of music, and I would make the drama fit the music. And the kids thought that was really cool. So I was working with music all the time, because music is what makes the world go round in puppetry. And eventually, I discovered that music could be live, and that you could meet and collaborate with real musicians . . . so it just followed.

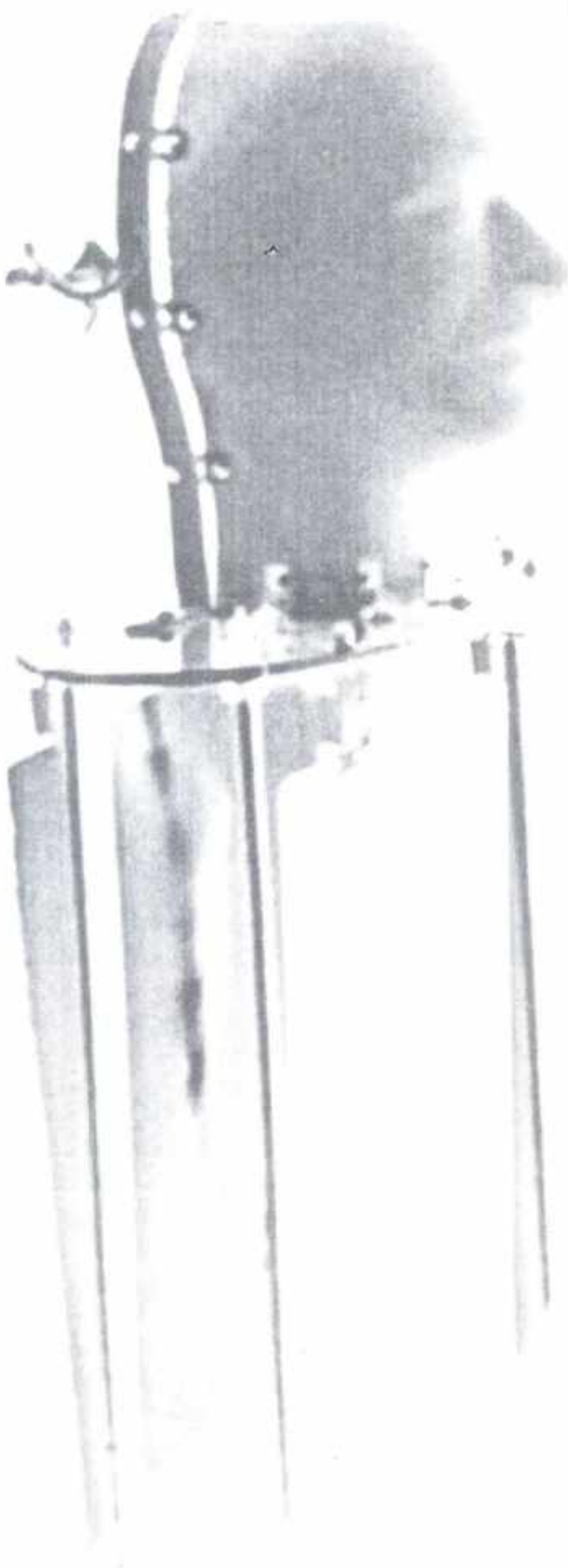
The other thing that happened to me as a puppeteer was that I got plugged into the wall. The big thing in puppetry at that time involved recording the script on tape, so that you could concentrate on working the puppets to the voices that were on the tape. And the audience was supposed to just think that the show was miked, when in fact it was on tape. I mean, it was a little canned. But what it did do was make me request from my parents the heaviest Sony reel-to-reel tape recorder on Earth— unbelievably heavy and huge, that I had to carry to my shows. But it was stereo! So I could record the music on one track and the voices on the other— oh, my God! I got into multi-tracking when I was 12! So when I arrived at Harvard, I ended up living in the Electronic Music Studio headed by Ivan Tcherepnin, where I ended up creating all the soundtracks for all my shows, but also eventually became seriously interested in electronic music and video and other electronic art forms. And that all flowed from that aspect of puppetry which is just plugged into the wall.

During my final year at Harvard, in the summer following my graduation, there was a gap in the programming of the big theater space— the old administration of the Loeb Theater had gone away and Bob Brustein and the new A.R.T. operation had not yet arrived. So for a few months, I ran the Loeb with a bunch of students, and we ended our summer season with a production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, staged to all the great recordings with a cast of people and puppets. And it was a spec-tac-u-lar! It was a very big deal. It pulled together everything I had learned in high school, in college, on the streets in Denver, in the puppet theater, in Europe— and a lot of the people who would turn out to be my future collaborators came to see it. So I guess that was the beginning of my "grown up" career.

This conversation between Peter Sellars and John Lithgow was presented on May 4, 2001, at Adams House at Harvard University, sponsored by Learning from Performers, a program of the Office for the Arts at Harvard. Thanks to Thomas Lee, Program Manager, for providing the audiotape from which this text was transcribed.

**Norman Frisch** has worked far and wide as a producer of theatre festivals, and as a director of programming. He is currently at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center on Staten Island, NY.





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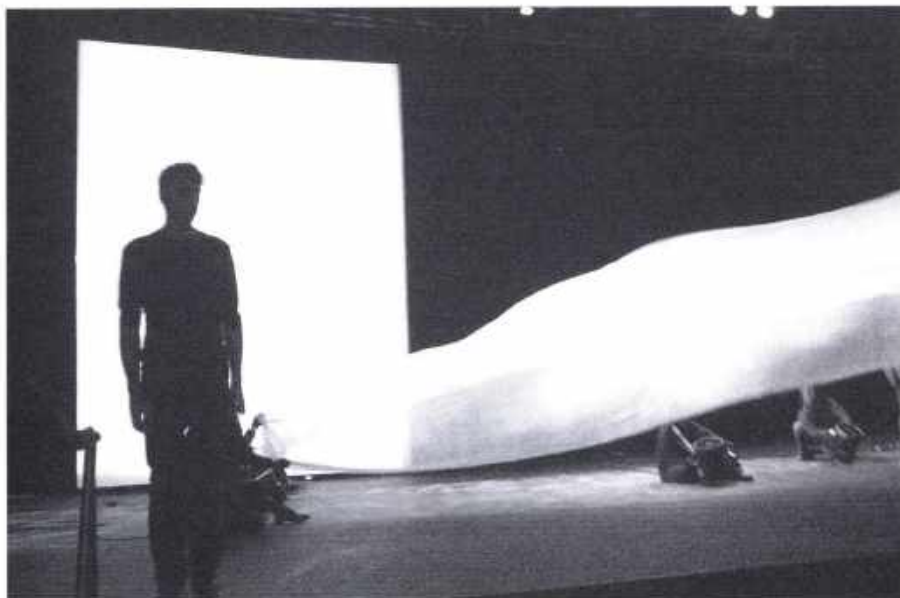
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## The Chaos Factor: A preview of the Avant-Garde Opera, Red Beads



by Donald Devet

Basil Twist takes great pleasure in attempting to defy gravity. *Symphonie Fantastique*, his award winning visual interpretation of Hector Berlioz's music, took place entirely in a giant aquarium where feathers and fabrics hypnotically undulated. Now Twist is again attempting to keep objects afloat, except this time rather than using water as his medium, he is using the very air we breathe.

Lee Breuer, co-founder and co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, saw *Symphonie Fantastique* during its record breaking run in New York in 1999 and wanted to use the same visual concept for telling a story that he had been working on since the mid 1970s. *Red Beads* is loosely based on a traditional Siberian folk tale—a coming of age story. As a daughter approaches her 13th birthday, her father promises her the "sacred beads," a metaphor for menstrual blood. The girl's mother is dead but her spirit still haunts the family. In Breuer's latest version, which has been called a "*Nutcracker* for Halloween," the mother is a witch who hides behind a closed door. When she does appear, she is incarnated by yards of fabric.

Breuer first directed the story on a small stage using three actors reciting dialogue. Thirty years later, *Red Beads* has morphed into a huge production in terms of staging and personnel. Twist (handling the puppetry) and Breuer (han-

dling the directorial chores) have teamed up with composer Ushio Torikai to produce an avant-garde opera with no less than twelve musicians, twenty-nine technicians, a half dozen dancers and singers, and as many volunteers as it takes to operate the huge fans and fabric. In this production, even the simplest of effects requires ten people; the trick is to let nothing touch the stage floor. Everything is kept aloft including dancers in flying rigs, and eighty-foot pieces of imported Japanese silk blown by a score of electric fans.

Before the final workshopping of *Red Beads* in late August at MASS MoCA, Twist discussed the challenges of collaboration. No stranger to teaming up with other artists, he's collaborated in many productions, but most of them have been accom-

plished within predetermined boundaries of time, space, and materials. *Red Beads* is proving to be a different kind of collaboration. Besides the challenge of mounting an immense production, Twist is finding that there are few boundaries when it comes to what can be done on stage.

No longer working within the four walls of a fish tank, he's enjoying what he calls "the chaos factor." "There are times when you let the chaos loose and that's when you get something magnificent," he says. "That is the ultimate. When you just let it rip. Let the fans blow a huge piece of fabric and you have no idea of what it's going to do. You know it will go up. It will become a flame of energy. It's endlessly fascinating. There's a wildness you can conjure up. If you try to tame it or shape it like a wild beast you lose a lot." No date has been set for the public premiere of *Red Beads*; there's still a lot of work left to do. Now that Twist has found the right fabrics, though, and the right fans (variable speed so as not to drown out the singers in the orchestra pit) he can get down to figuring out how to most effectively use these elements to connect with the story. It sounds like a lot of work, but there's joy in the process. As Twist says, "You can look at the fabric moving forever. It's like watching a flag in the wind or clouds."

*Donald Devet is a director in New York. He is a past president of UNIMA-USA, and was for years a member of Grey Seal Puppets. He is Media Editor for Puppetry International.*



## El Retablo de Maese Pedro

*(Master Peter's Puppet Show)*

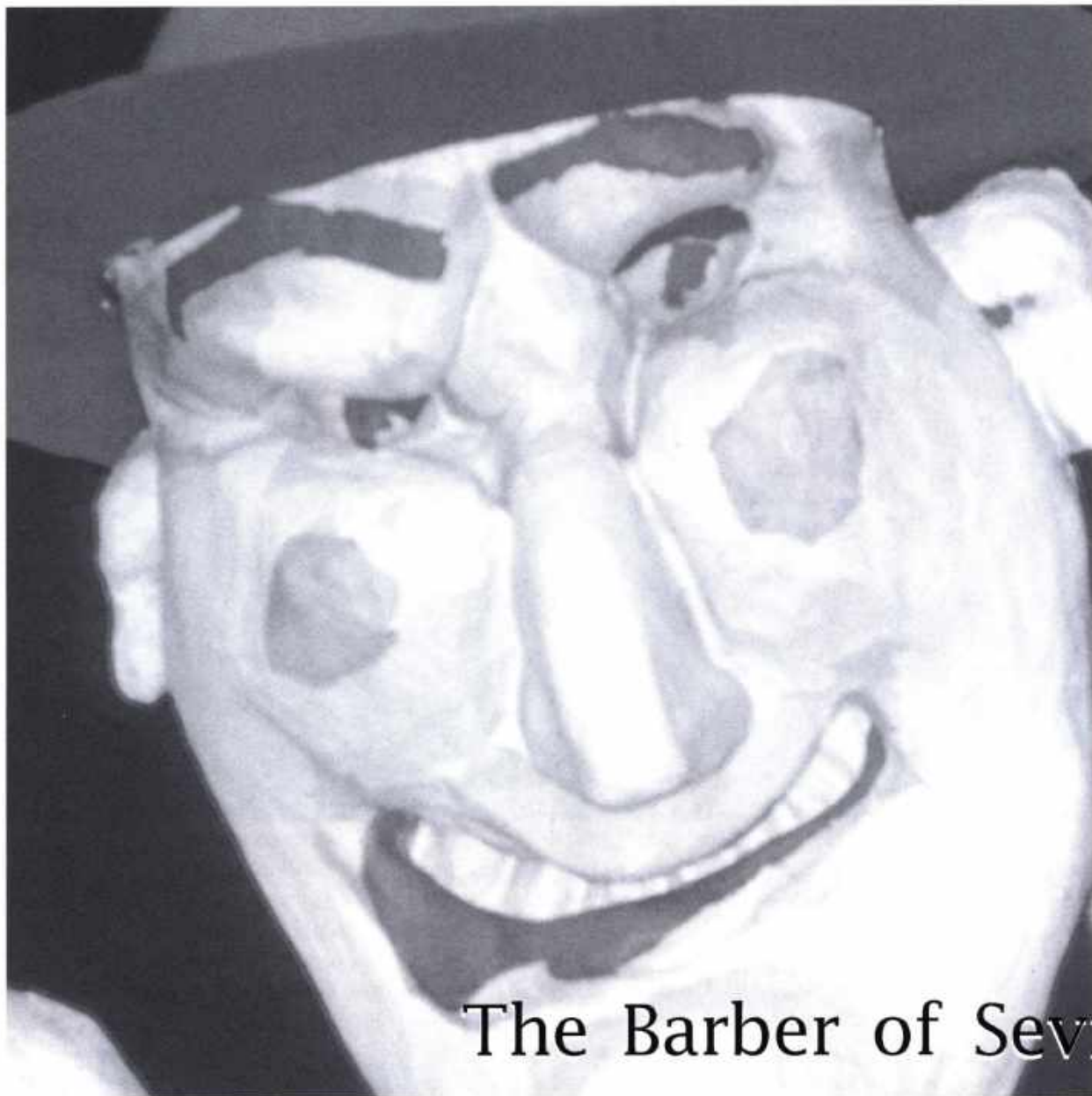
by Spanish composer Manuel de Falla

This production was written in 1923 in response to a challenge by the Princess de Polignac. Manuel de Falla eventually had it performed at de Polignac's residence in Paris, having beaten out both Stravinsky and Satie for the honor. The production pictured here is by La Tía Norica, Cadiz, Spain, 2001.



The idea for the story comes from the Cervantes classic in which Don Quixote, watching an outdoor puppet show, becomes so swept away by the action that he forgets he is watching a puppet show, and rushes in to aid the heroes in their battle.

*Many thanks to Beckie Kravetz for securing photos and information.*



## The Barber of Seville

by Amy Trompeter

Twenty years ago, Susan Feldman, Artistic Director of Arts at St. Ann's, and Rinaldo Tazzini, President of the Brooklyn Opera Society, invited me to build and direct large puppets for an opera buffa, *The Barber of Seville*. Susan and Rinaldo hired me, on faith, after seeing a fifteen minute performance of my one-woman Punch and Judy hand-puppet show with a skirt as stage. Michael Feldman of the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted the musicians and singers from the Met and NYC Operas. The production received favorable press and was produced in both '83 and '84 in St. Ann's Church in Brooklyn Heights.

Rossini's opera was not written for puppets, unlike Haydn's operas which were conceived expressly for marionettes with literal character representations. Relishing the invitation to create a visual interpretation of the libretto and to let the words convey the actual storyline, I built fifty roughly-styled papier-mâché puppets, masks, reliefs, and non-articulating figures.

Everything in our opera was made from one material: paper. The puppets were papier-mâché over clay molds. The coloring was from colored papers rather than paints. The set was made of cardboard-covered with black paper, and

operated as a series of panels that moved into various configurations to represent the town square or the interior of a house. The set was composed of rectangular panels which suggested the architecture, rather than fleshing it out in detail. These same panels were versatile enough to indicate the slanting shoulders and torso of a dominant image of Figaro in the finale.

The singers gave voices to the puppets from the sides of the stage. They sang in English using a translation from the Italian by Goldovsky and Sarah Caldwell. Two large papier-mâché hands held the singers, who were always visible on either side of the stage. The audience was free to look from the singer to the puppet and back again. The puppeteers were dressed in black and were visible as operators who threw the focus back to the puppets.

Occasionally a puppet and singer acknowledged each other in a scene together. The baritone, Alan Glassman, who was cradled in a giant hand, stage left, mirrored the moves of a life-sized Figaro figure cradled in a large hand stage right. Alan's introductory aria boasted that Figaro knew everybody's business in the town, since he was the factotum of Seville. Multiple puppet images appeared simultaneously, and several pairs of Figaro's busy hands opened to let loose a miniature Figaro at the culmination of this aria. At the end of the entire opera, a fourteen foot mask of Figaro popped up and the audience saw that it was Figaro who had been manipulating the world of the play, while holding the singers and the puppets in the palm of his hands.

We juxtaposed objects and puppets in shifting combinations to liberate the scenarios from the details of the plot, and to illuminate the inner dynamics, power struggles and desires of the characters. We refrained from premeditated decisions about the uses of the puppets, and enjoyed inventing scenarios through improvisation during the four week rehearsal period. In every case, we strove to demonstrate the overriding essence of a moment, rather than to reenact the literal detail of a sequence of events already expressed by the text. We strove for independence and separation of the elements of image, music and text.

*The Barber of Seville* follows a typical commedia dell'arte plot in which the clever servant outsmarts his stingy master in order to enjoy some of life's happiness, in this case a marriage for two age-appropriate lovers. Beautiful Rosina is trapped in the household of her lecherous, old guardian, Doctor Bartolo. He is desperately plotting to marry her that very day. In our puppet opera, a large figure of Rosina is not only held captive in a tower with a balcony, she is the tower and the tower is her torso. A flat papier-mâché panel with ornamented relief acts as both the tower and the body of Rosina, the object of the Count's affection. Set and character are interchangeable.

A miniature figure of Count Almaviva walks on a tight-rope up to the tower's balcony window with his heart in his hand, as the tenor delivers his first aria. The balcony shutters remain shut, Almaviva cannot deliver his love, and he falls off the tightrope demonstrating the violence of love rejected. When Almaviva sings again, Rosina's giant limbs float, until he arrives exactly in the center of this erotic arrangement of arms and legs. She is large and in control of this seductive moment. Later, her intimidating guardian, Dr. Bartolo, is a large mask with giant hands in pursuit of a little, guilty Rosina who is at his mercy. In this way, size illuminates the shifting power relationships.

When Bartolo accuses Rosina of deception by writing a letter in secret, Rosina gains the upper hand through the multiplication of the image of three "Venus" reliefs. When Bartolo scolds her too harshly, these white reliefs are flipped to reveal a black interior with a thin outline around the rim. This fragile white outline is trembling as she cries.

Bartolo must act quickly to thwart the advances of Count Almaviva, who must also act quickly. The Count hires Figaro to help him deceive Bartolo, and while Figaro sings of his attraction to money, the Count praises love. Giant masks and hands of Figaro and the Count juggle hearts and dollars respectively. Figaro disguises the Count as a student, as a soldier and then as a music teacher, outsmarting the real music teacher Don Basilio, who is the dull-witted friend of Doctor Bartolo. Mistaken identity is an opportunity for disguising a mask in a mask.



Don Basilio proposes ruining Count Almaviva's chances by spreading false rumors and destroying his reputation. A puppeteer pulls a cloth tongue from the mouth of the life-sized figure of Don Basilio. This long tongue shows exactly how to ensnare and defeat a household as it wraps itself around each papier-mâché figure and pulls it down. While not a literal gossip session, this action with the vile tongue enmeshing the household demonstrates the consequences of slander.

Later in the opera, Figaro upsets Bartolo's household while shaving him, arranges an elopement full of mishaps for the lovers, and succeeds in uniting Rosina and Almaviva in marriage. Cardboard shadow puppets, easily introduce the many props of ladder, ring and pistol needed for this final scene. In order to hide from the notary hired by Bartolo, the lovers and Figaro disappear in a flash by turning the cardboard puppets perpendicular to the shadow screen.

The elusive yet anticipated happiness of the wedding finale, and the clever deceptions needed to achieve it, drive the opera. Western opera is in love with elongated emotional moments, while puppetry delights in expressing lengthy his-

trionics with terse metaphors. My own raw aesthetic cuts through the sophisticated ornamentation of high opera. The tensions between the two forms enhance each other.

•••••

The fifty papier-mâché puppets of the original *Barber of Seville* puppet opera burned in 1987, while in storage in Newark, NJ. Ms. Trompetter is building new puppets at Blackbird Theater's workshop and performance space in Rosendale, NY. The revival of the *Barber of Seville* puppet opera is slated for the spring of 2003 at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn's DUMBO, with music by Kristjan Jarvi's Absolute. Performance dates are in early May. Check website for updates: [www.blackbirdtheater.org](http://www.blackbirdtheater.org) or [www.artsatstanns.org](http://www.artsatstanns.org)

**Amy Trompetter**, director, scenographer and puppeteer, creates visual theater including outdoor pageants, giant puppet operas, and hand puppet shows. She is a Senior Lecturer at Barnard College/Columbia University, and is a founder of Blackbird Theater.





A Column by John Bell

## *From Übermarionettes to Television Puppetry:* Percy MacKaye and Remo Bufano

A favorite pastime of puppeteers is to ponder (or complain about) the persistent perception of puppet theater as children's entertainment, a perception which had particular currency in twentieth-century American culture. Puppeteers know that this misperception is peculiarly modern and particularly western, and that for most of human history, puppets and masks have been key elements of central cultural performances. The idea that puppets were better suited for children rather than adults seems to have grown in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and certainly came into full effect in the early decades of the twentieth century. But at the same time there were voices in an opposite camp (foremost among them Edward Gordon Craig), heralding masks and puppets as forms which could be central to an emerging modern art theater. In other words, the development of a modern (or postmodern) artistic puppet theater for adults has persisted over the past hundred years, in constant parallel to the idea that puppets are best understood by kids. But who was doing what when? That's an interesting question, in part answered by the work of Percy MacKaye and Remo Bufano.



Cahokia in Saint Louis.

Marion MacKaye with "super puppet"

### *Percy MacKaye's "Übermarionette"*

Percy MacKaye is famous in American theater history mostly for inventing the modern historical pageant, in which a town performs its own symbolic history, using mostly amateur actors and a wide-ranging language of visual imagery. For MacKaye, these theatrical events were in fact the performance of democracy itself. MacKaye's first pageant was in an artists' colony in Cornish, New Hampshire, in June of 1905, and it started a craze for such theatrics throughout the United States. The American Pageant Movement even had an international effect, especially in Soviet Union, which took MacKaye's innovations as a model for revolutionary communal spectacles.

MacKaye, like so many alternative theater makers of the early twentieth century, was willing to consider all sorts of theater techniques, and for his St. Louis Masque of 1914, he decided to include an over-life-sized marionette named Cahokia, who would symbolize the spirit of Native Americans whom European settlers found already

living in Missouri. (The subject of Native Americans, like the subject of African Americans, was always interestingly problematical in the histories created by these pageants.) There's an intriguing photograph of this giant marionette in Arvia MacKaye Ege's *The Power of the Impossible: The Life Story of Percy and Marion MacKaye* which makes one wonder how exactly it was operated, and with what success.

According to Arvia MacKaye, the St. Louis Masque "depicted the struggles and goals of social civilization as it is focused on the history and development of the city of St. Louis." The Masque began with stories of "the ancient American mound-builders, symbolized by the colossal figure of an Indian, Cahokia," who was a "huge movable super-puppet, some 25 feet in height, seated upon a great Indian mound at the rear of the stage." Other elements of this Mound Builder scene included the appearance of constellations of stars and "the gigantic sculptured figures of Hiloha and Noohai, representing the elements of Heat and Cold." Over seven thousand St. Louis

residents performed this show, for an audience of 100,000 at each of the four performances.

MacKaye's 1914 masque was typical because of its idealistic ethos. The St. Louis Masque concluded with "Imagination and Love finally subdu[ing] the chief adversary Gold," while "a league of brotherhood, the League of Cities, is evoked."

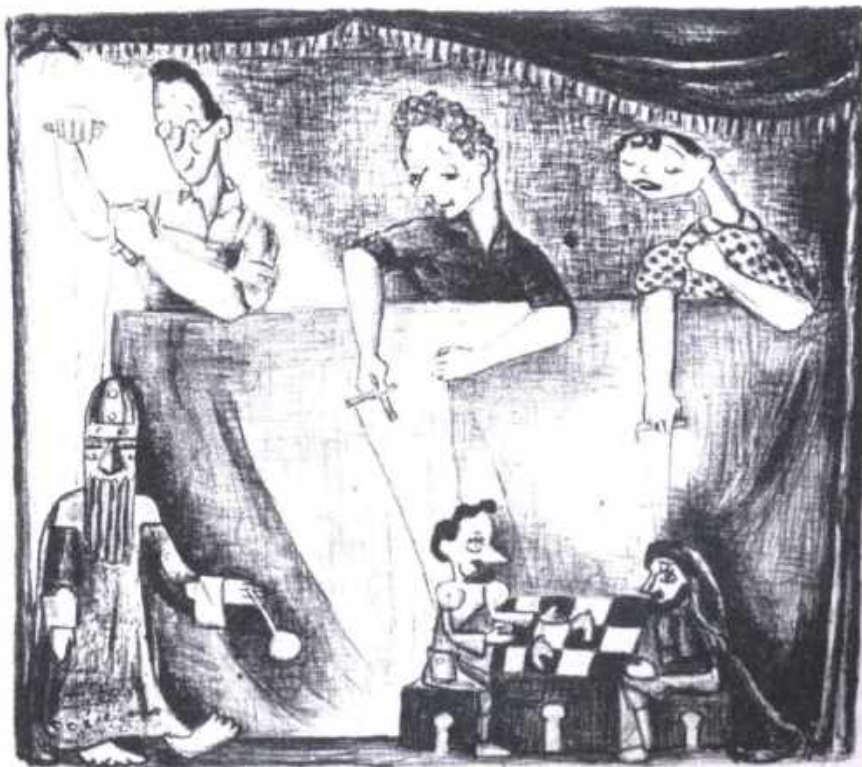
MacKaye, like many innovative directors and designers of the early twentieth century, was heavily influenced by

Edward Gordon Craig. The MacKays had met Craig in Paris, and Percy corresponded with him. Cahokia was clearly inspired by Craig's 1907 essay "The Actor and the Übermarionette," which proposed the radical idea that puppets could do things actors couldn't. MacKaye thus joins a select group of Midwestern American theater makers (the others are Michael Carmichael Carr and Sam Hume) who were directly influenced by Gordon Craig, and who made modern "art" theater with puppets (for "adults") in the U. S.

## Remo Bufano, from Avant-Garde to Television

The most interesting of the early "art theater" puppeteers was Remo Bufano, whose work with the Provincetown Playhouse was mentioned in the last Puppet History column. Bufano is connected to MacKaye because both worked with Robert Edmund ("Bobby") Jones, another Craig-o-phile who is considered one of the greatest and most innovative scenic designers of the twentieth-century American stage. Jones designed MacKaye's Shakespearean pageant *Caliban*, another large-scale work which, among other things, included oversized masks, and was presented in Harvard Stadium in 1916. Jones was also active in early Provincetown Playhouse productions, and had designed *The Paterson Strike Pageant*, an I. W. W. (International Workers of the World) political spectacle performed in Madison Square Garden in 1913.

Bufano, who had grown up with the influence of New York City's Sicilian marionette theaters, had begun to develop a repertoire of avant-garde puppet shows for adults, particularly linked with music through the support of a new-music organization called the League of Composers. It was through the League that Bufano, his wife Florence Flynn Bufano and others presented Manuel de Falla's *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* (goofily



translated as Master Peter's Puppet Show), an interpretation of Don Quixote's comically disastrous encounter with a puppet show from Cervantes's famous novel. In her memoir *Making Faces*, caricaturist Aline Fruhauf relates her encounters with Bufano and his wife in the late twenties and thirties, and includes an interesting sketch she made of the Bufanos and a third puppeteer rehearsing the de Falla piece in 1930. Her drawing is a rare image of Bufano at work, and captures nicely the simple intensity of his puppets.

Because of productions like *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, Robert Edmund Jones asked Bufano to design giant marionettes (once more, the influence of Gordon Craig's *Übermarionette!*) for a production of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1931. Jenna Soleo, a graduate student at City University of New York, has recently examined the Bufano-Jones correspondence at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and has found interesting exchanges between the two men about making modern theater with puppets. In one 1934 letter, Jones calls the *Oedipus Rex* production "one of the most important things I have ever had anything to do with." He and Bufano discuss other puppet projects, including marionette scenes for a production of *Hamlet*, and a puppet production of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas and Mélisande*, and Jones tells Bufano how much he was impressed by a Bufano puppet play (*The Infanta on a Holiday*) performed by a Los Angeles "Little Theater" in a Hollywood garden.

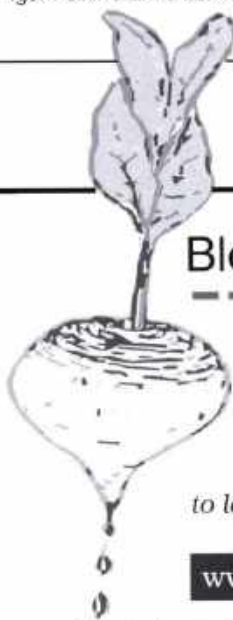
Interestingly enough, the Bufano-Jones letters show that Jones assisted Bufano's early experiments with television puppetry by introducing Bufano to producers at NBC television. We should note that this was in February of 1940, very early in the history of television puppetry. Jones was quite optimistic about the possible combination of Bufano's puppets and television, and wrote to Bufano: "I said [to Alfred Morton of NBC] that, given the proper circumstances, you might become the Walt Disney of television!" That, of course, never came to be. Bufano died in an airplane crash in 1948 as he was returning east from California. But by that time he had already made experiments with television puppetry, and it's clear that he had at least eight years to consider and develop his work in that direction. What would he have done in the new medium? Would his experiments have included the kinds of puppet art theater for adults which characterized his earlier work?

It's an interesting trajectory from MacKaye's Cahokia puppet and Bufano's avant-garde marionette spectacles to the dawn of television puppets. And in fact, that particular moment when puppet innovation turned to television was an important step in the development of puppet theater as children's entertainment. It's fascinating that these two strands of modern western puppetry— avant-garde art theater and children's entertainment— have been so closely and persistently related.

*Oops! In Dussia Posner's excellent article on vertep (PI #11), we ran the wrong photo on page 27. This is how it should have looked:*



Vertep of the Wooden Horse Puppet Theatre, St. Petersburg— the scene of Rachel's lament. Note the numerous slits in the floor along which the puppets were guided. You can also just see puppeteer Igor Folkin's arms behind the set.



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# THE SECRET LIFE OF PUPPETS

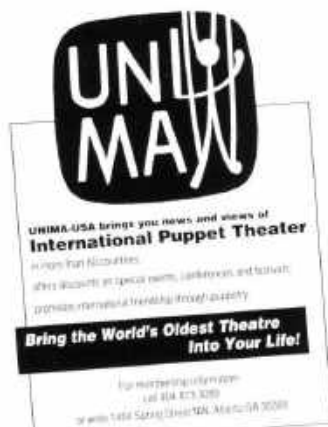
by Victoria Nelson

2001, Harvard University Press

Let's be clear from the start. This is not a book about puppets. Or, rather, it is not a book about puppets as we know them in the physical or theatrical world. It is a book about how the idea of puppets and other human simulacrum—idols, mummies, mannequins, golem, robots, etc.—fit into the author's broader thesis (puppets play a part in four of the twelve chapters) that, for the last 300 years, western man has lacked a legitimate outlet for a sense of the sacred—the supernatural—that used to be a quality of religion. Instead, we now find it popping up in depictions of puppets, science fiction, and other "fantastic" forms of literature and entertainment.

Why is it that when our puppets are depicted in the popular culture, they are almost always portrayed as evil or demonic? From the evil ventriloquist dummies in the films *Dead of Night* and *Magic* to the homicidal puppets and dolls in the *Puppet Master* and *Child's Play* series, there are many examples of the idea of puppets casting fear in the mind of the general public. Ms. Williams argues that we have a need to imbue these puppets with a sense of the supernatural harking back to the days when we needed a belief in the life of idols.

"Why look at discourses about puppets and other human simulacra rather than puppets in performance?" the author states. "Because even as puppet shows retain their timeless theatrical charm, imagined puppets carry a stronger charge of the 'uncanny' or suppressed holy."



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Beginning with Socrates' allegory of people receiving their knowledge of the world through seeing the shadows of a puppet show cast on the wall of a cave, Ms. Nelson traces the representation of puppetry from idols through golem to the puppet show in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. She pays particular attention to depictions of puppets, dolls and mannequins in the writings of Heinrich von Kleist, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Giacomo Leopardi, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Bruno Schulz (whose stories *The Street of Crocodiles* were the basis for the film by the brothers Quay). She finds in these disparate authors the common need to encapsulate a soul in the inanimate being, no matter what the consequences might be. The book then expands into the realms of supernatural and fantastic literature in general, from H. P. Lovecraft to Philip K. Dick, returning to puppets toward the end to follow their progression in popular film from puppets to robots and on into the cyber realm.

From a puppeteer's viewpoint, it's fascinating to follow an academic's perspective on the depiction of our art form and to see her use of it in her thesis on "our need for the supernatural." Ms. Willams has done an amazing amount of research and followed the roots of puppetry in a multitude of fascinating directions. My one small complaint is that, perhaps, she should have watched more actual puppet theatre. In her interpretation of Kleist's essay "On the Marionette Theater," she decides that his description of the grace of the marionette dancer is purely metaphorical because, as she states, "'Real' puppets, of course, do not operate more gracefully than humans." As a puppeteer, I would beg to differ.

—review by Preston Foerder



# The Puppet Giants of London

## GOG and MAGOG: *The Giants of Guildhall; Their Real and Legendary History with an Account of Other Giants at Home and Abroad*

by F. W. Fairholt. 152 pp. Escondido: The Book Tree, 2000. \$16.95.

Ah! There's so much we don't know about the history of puppet theater! For instance, in the time of Shakespeare, we do know from Ben Jonson's drama *Bartholomew Fair* that there was a lively handpuppet scene in London's fairgrounds, and probably throughout the rest of England. But, in addition, there was also by that time a vivid and long-lived tradition of English giant puppets (just as there was in Spain, France, and Belgium). In London, two giant puppets in particular had by Elizabeth's time become the symbolic mascots or representatives of the city. These puppet giants were Gog and Magog who, when they weren't being paraded around London streets during practically every public festival, lived in Guildhall, the center of commoner power in London.

F. W. Fairholt's *Gog and Magog: The Giants of Guildhall* is an early nine-

teenth-century history of those giants, and by some miracle The Book Tree publishing house in Oregon recently decided to print a facsimile paperback version of this nineteenth-century classic. Fairholt's tome is interesting not simply because it sheds light on the roots of what is now a popular form of modern puppetry, but because the book's original 1859 publication was part of the beginnings of the modern recognition of puppet theater.



The Tailor's Giant, Salisbury

We all know that puppet theater has often (especially in Europe) been a bastard, low-culture art, chronicled more often in police records than theater histories, as Peter Schumann has pointed out. However, it was in the early and mid-nineteenth century that German and English academics invented a new subject called "folklore," and people who began to call themselves "folklorists" started to explore the history of popular theater in Europe and the rest of the world. Of course, they ran into puppets and masks everywhere they turned, and thus began a new western analysis of puppet theater as social, cultural, and artistic phenomenon. Fairholt's account is a great example of how this process proceeded. It seems appropriate to term it "a classic in its field."

The Book Tree publishers categorize the work as "Social Science: Folklore and Mythology," and one wonders if they think they have on their hands an arcane text about magical giants. Nowhere do they seem to realize that they've published a book about over-life-

sized puppets. F. W. Fairholt does indeed begin his work with a mythical history of the characters Gog and Magog, to show how these characters were part of a larger British myth which held that the Britains were all descended from Brutus, a refugee from the Trojan Wars. As Fairholt writes, "it became part of popular belief that the original name of London was New Troy, and that it was founded by Brute or Brutus, the younger son of Anthenor of Troy." In other words, the English of the Renaissance were engaged in the creation of a wistful epic

history which fancifully connected them directly to the greatest conflicts and the greatest literatures of the classic world: the Trojan War. The classic world of the Greeks, of course, was extremely important to Renaissance Europeans, and was articulated, examined, and celebrated especially in the arts, through which connections could be made between contemporary European cultures and their classic Roman and Greek predecessors. The connections were especially clear in Renaissance Italy, and to lesser degrees in French and German lands; but the British isles had been outposts of the Roman empire, not seats of classic culture. However, with the Brutus myth, Britons could claim a proud Trojan ancestry. Gog and Magog were thought to be native English giants who were defeated in battle by Brutus, and then led in captive procession through the streets of London. Therefore, whenever Lord Mayor's Pageants, royal processions, midsummer watches, and other public street events took place, the giant puppet versions of Gog and Magog appeared, and Londoners were reminded of the combination of native and foreign powers which combined in a proud mythic history.

Fairholt's book not only covers the London giants, but also makes connections to giant puppet traditions of Chester, Coventry, Salisbury, and other English cities. Fairholt also reviews the history of the slightly better-known continental giants of northern France and Belgium— for example Gayant and his family, from the French city of Douai, and Antigonus of Antwerp. English puppet dragons and Saint Christopher backpack puppets also come under Fairholt's purview.

*Gog and Magog* is wonderfully old-school: lots of long quotations from earlier sources, and not much social analysis or abstracted reflection. The book is nevertheless a landmark analysis of popular theater. It is illustrated with Fairholt's own fine period drawings of the giants, some of which reveal their structure: basket-woven structures covered with cloth and sculpted heads and hands. Since the appearance of this book in 1859, hardly anything has been written in English about giant puppet traditions. Let me reiterate that point: for over 140 years hardly anything has been written in England or the United States about the history of European giant puppets. The almost miraculous appearance of Fairholt's book now is a great opportunity to catch up on the roots of one of the most popular forms of contemporary puppet theater. (The Book Tree: 1-800-700-TREE, or [www.thebooktree.com](http://www.thebooktree.com))

—review by John Bell



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*A Fresh Approach to Wayang Golek*

## VOICES OF THE PUPPET MASTERS: *The Wayang Golek Theater of Indonesia*

by Mimi Herbert with Nur. S. Rahardjo

252 pp. In the U.S.A.: Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002. In Indonesia: Jakarta: The Lontar Foundation, 2002. \$49.00, cloth.

At first glance, I expected this book to be a coffee-table version of a standard history of the Indonesian rod puppet tradition known as *wayang golek*. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that, while the book is filled with useful historical information, this information is presented in the form of ten engaging interviews. Author Mimi Herbert has been careful to provide readers with as wide a range of opinions as possible by including interviews by both traditional and contemporary West-Javanese *dalangs* [puppeteers], carvers, historians, a shaman, a superstar, and even an American puppeteer and scholar, Kathy Foley, whose work is inspired by *wayang golek* and its shadow theatre cousin, *wayang kulit*.<sup>1</sup> This variety is the greatest strength of the book. The result is a fresh approach to the history of *wayang golek*, one in which oral history is given primacy, and in which conflicting opinions and interpretations are presented side by side. Most importantly, one gains an understanding of the diverse paths that a so-called traditional theatrical form can take. For example, one interview speaks firsthand about a family that has been performing a highly traditional *wayang golek* for twenty-two generations, while another, in contrast, speaks admiringly of modern innovations such as fiberglass heads and puppets that can perform tricks such as smoking real cigarettes.

In all of this, Herbert shows a sensitivity to the spiritual aspects of *wayang golek*. While she does not always understand the mystical specifics of the form, she shows a clear respect for the fact that shaman and superstar alike view the puppets as "the path to God."<sup>2</sup> *Wayang golek* is accompanied by centuries of tradition, and comes from a place in which the *dalang* has been, and to varying degrees still is, a spiritual leader. Additionally, art is recognized as having philosophical, religious, and cultural meaning,<sup>3</sup> even if that meaning is sometimes imposed by the government in the form of puppeteers being asked, for example, to include material on "family planning."<sup>4</sup> The interviews in this book all reveal the interplay, and often overlap, be-



tween Hindu and Islamic traditions, spirituality and commercialism, magic and everyday life.

In addition to the interviews, Herbert presents introductory information on

*wayang golek* in a moderately informative but somewhat confusing section on its origins and related theatrical forms, followed by several more valuable sections on the repertoire, puppet construction, puppeteer, gamelan music, and current social function. Other sections in the book include a detailed glossary of *wayang golek* terminology, a glossary of all the characters from stories listed in the book, and short biographies of the interviewees. Additionally, each interview is concluded with one or several of the favorite stories of each interviewee as engagingly told by that performer. Herbert also provides useful summaries of four of the most common Hindu and Islamic source materials for the *wayang golek*: the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, a Panji tale, and the story of Damarwulan. These stories give a great deal of insight into the structure and morality of *wayang golek* performances.

This beautiful book also has color photographs of exquisite *wayang golek* puppets, both antique and modern, on nearly every page. These photographs are well-chosen and are as informative about the theatrical form as the text. Herbert and her collaborators have been careful not only to visually document the puppets used by each interviewee, but also to photograph a wide variety of puppets that inform one as to the appearance of most of the major characters, as well as the sometimes vast differences in puppets based on region, story, and time period.

Herbert does make the mistake of letting the documents speak for themselves with insufficient commentary; the book could have benefited greatly from more detailed explanations to complement and clarify points made in the various interviews, more careful documentation in the introductory section, more information on the context in which she met and chose each of the interviewees, as well as conventional scholarly opinion in the cases where the interviewees provide conflicting information. Even so, the valuable and carefully-compiled information in the book as a whole overcomes the minor lack of cohesion.

As with most high-quality books that deal with puppetry, this book will be of immense interest to the puppetry community, but will also appeal to a broader audi-

ence including historians, those interested in Asian theatre and culture, and those simply interested in understanding world artistic traditions in a broader context.

—review by Dassia Posner

<sup>1</sup>See Kathy Foley's article in the last issue of *Puppetry International*.

<sup>2</sup>Letter by Mimi Herbert to John Bell, 17 May 2002, p. 1. The rise of *wayang golek* in West Java is almost universally associated with the rise of Islam and as a major aid in its dissemination.

<sup>3</sup>*Voices of the Puppet Masters*, p. 211.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 74, 114.

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## PUPPETRY: *Worlds of Imagination*

2001, 44 minutes, \$99.95, Speckled Koi Productions, available through The Cinema Guild, 212-685-6242, ISBN 0-7815-0917-3.



Ralph Lee's *Psyche*

The late Lenny Suib loved to tell the story of a woman who called his puppet theatre, asking if that weekend's performance would be suitable for her child. "That all depends," Lenny responded, "on the age of your child." When the woman said that her child was one year old, Lenny tried to be diplomatic. "Well," he said, "perhaps one is a bit young for puppets." "What do you mean?" the woman snapped indignantly, "I brought him to your theatre last year and he had a wonderful time!"

That story used to epitomize the state of puppetry and the regard—or lack thereof—with which it was held by audiences. But the tide has definitely turned in the last few years. Broadway producers work puppets into mainstream hits including *The Producers* and *Into the Woods*. International celebrations from the Olympics to the Times Square millennium celebration are best remembered for their giant puppets. Television shows—sometimes with a disappointing lack of taste—turn to puppets when they want to be "edgy" and provocative. Whatever contemporary puppetry is, it is not your father's *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*.

Which is the point made and explored by *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination*, a new video documentary by the team of Michael Malkin and Joshua Malkin. The video is unique in providing a contemporary view of puppetry, defining what makes today's puppetry different, and taking the viewer backstage for insightful comments by and about today's master

puppeteers as we watch them at work. This video is an important addition to any collection on contemporary theatre.

And that's not just puppet theatre. As the documentary makes clear, puppetry has escaped the pretty little box of the Punch and Judy stage and is now an integral element of human theatre productions. It is, as Michael Curry—puppet builder for the Olympics, Times Square and *Disney's Lion King*—points out on the video, another tool of theatre along with lights, music, costumes and makeup. It's a tool especially helpful when theatre artists want to cast off the confines of theatre realism to explore fantastic, stylized or gigantic ideas.

The documentary provides a well-rounded set of proof points, including visits to a diverse set of contemporary artists. In addition to Curry, who offers the largest and most pageant-oriented work seen on the documentary, the viewer visits theatre artists Basil Twist, Ralph Lee, Janie Geiser, and others.

Twist, the New York-based artist behind the highly acclaimed *Symphonie Fantastique*, based on the music of Hector Berlioz, talks candidly about how he came to create and develop his absolutely original work, in which fabrics, mirrors, mylar and other materials, moved through an enormous tank of water, become puppets in a show that is abstract, kaleidoscopic, constantly surprising, and like nothing the puppet world had seen before. The show is the theatrical equivalent of an ink-blot test, in which audiences use their imaginations to complete the animations that Twist provides, thereby becoming collaborators in the theatrical process. The documentary identifies influences including Miro and Kandinsky, and Twist explains the ties between puppetry, music and dance that inspired him. Where the mechanisms of puppetry have typically included strings, hands, rods, and, now, electronics, Twist adds another: water, showing us how he pushes water with plexiglass to, in turn, push his aquatic puppets.

Meanwhile, Ralph Lee, director of The Mettawee River Company, demonstrates an extraordinarily rich mixture of tradition and innovation. His works are based in the narrative tradition of the theatre and typically take up classical, especially mythic, themes. Unlike countless others mining this material, Lee and Mettawee use inventive, stylized puppets

and production designs that mix people and puppets in unexpected ways. They present their polished productions to outdoor audiences throughout upstate New York, passing the hat after the performance much in the manner of old-time traveling shows. The venue and the format may be traditional, but the productions employ a dialect of the language of the puppet that is completely contemporary.

A visit to the Jim Henson International Festival of Puppet Theatre— with commentary by Festival organizers Leslee Asch and Cheryl Henson— provides a broad range of glimpses into contemporary puppetry, puppetry that is both shaping the tastes of today's audiences and inspiring many of today's artists to produce tomorrow's works. New York City's Greenwich Village Halloween parade— for which Twist, Lee and Curry have all worked— provides yet another window into the wonder of the art. And artist Janie Geiser allows us to enter her classroom at the California Institute of the Arts to watch the next generation of puppeteers as they train.

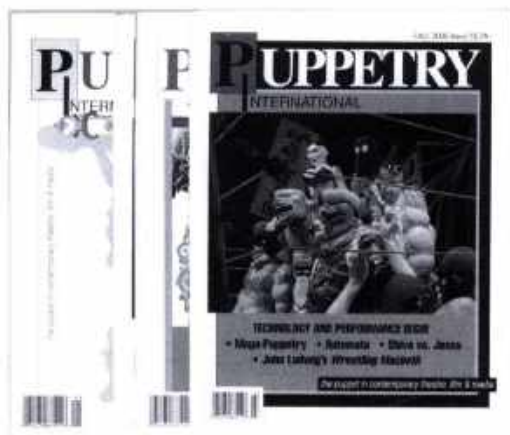
Skillfully conceived, written, directed and produced, *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination* is a joy to watch: a feast for the eyes, food for mind and soul. It is a necessary statement on the state of puppetry today.

—review by Mark Levenson



Michael Curry

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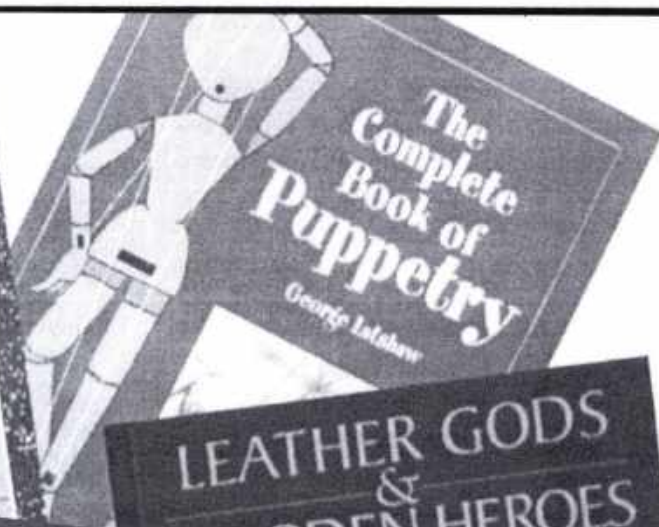
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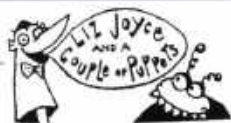
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 Donald Devet, UNIMA-USA Web Master

## LESLIE TROWBRIDGE

Born Wroxeter, England, January 13, 1929. Died Riverton, New Zealand, January 3, 2002.

After an epiphany at around the age of forty, Leslie devoted the rest of his life to puppet opera, pouring every available cent into creating his productions and travelling to puppet festivals all around the world in the hope of performing them. On his travels, he bought beautiful pieces of fabric, silks, brocades and items of jewelry which he lovingly hand-stitched together to create garments for his "performers," the choicest pieces being reserved for the sumptuous vestments of his beloved Leading Soprano. At one point, inspired by the Water Puppets of Vietnam, Leslie purchased the remote Forks Lodge, in Westland National Park near Franz Josef Glacier, where he hoped to combine his interests in tourism, opera and water puppets. His idea was to perform his puppet operas in the spa pool to lodge guests.

In 31 years Leslie created 77 operas and he made private videos of 35 of them. He made a video of *Rigoletto* which he sent to the Scott Base in Antarctica. His puppets are in collections around the world—a fact of which he was very proud. He travelled to festivals in Australia, China, Mauritius, Kenya, Pakistan, Iran, Poland, Japan, South Korea, Portugal, Croatia and the UK, sometimes being accepted to perform. The last major festival he attended was the UNIMA 2000 World Puppet Congress in Magdeburg, Germany where he performed *Absalom & Etery* at a local cafe.

**FELIX MIRBT**, theatremaker and internationally-renowned master of the art of puppetry, passed away at his home in Sutton, Quebec on July 15, 2002, at the age of 70.

Mirbt is probably best known for his landmark productions of Büchner's *Woyzeck* (1974,1988) and Strindberg's *The Dreamplay/Le Songe* (1977). Both productions originated at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and have toured Canada and Europe, including the Edinburgh Festival. His productions of musical theatre include Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat*, Brecht/Weill's *Happy End*, Frederic Rzewski's *Antigone*, de Falla's *Maese Pedro* and Timothy Findley's *First Fable*. Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* (1980) opened Festival Canada at the National Arts Centre (1997).

His most recent works were a collaboration with German composer Gerhard Stäbler, *Uferlinien-Shorelines-Rives* (Germany, 2000), and with Quebec composer Alain Trudel, *Le Chauffe-O* (Place des Arts, Montreal, 2001). Felix Mirbt's work has frequently been exhibited and has received a nomination at the Dora Mavor Moore Awards, an UNIMA Citation for Excellence, and first prizes at Radio Canada (l'Heure du Point) and the Quadrennial in Prague.

### In Memoriam

A fanatic of all things puppet, opera or Shakespeare, Leslie subscribed to many magazines and organizations. He was a member of UNIMA for over thirty years. Leslie was a lovely, kind man— if not a little eccentric— who will be remembered by his puppetry colleagues for his passion for his craft and his mischievous sense of humor.

Leslie led an isolated existence not only in his choice of occupation but the location of his home in Riverton which is a small township in the farthest south of New Zealand. Few people understood or appreciated Leslie's unique vision for puppet opera nor his enthusiasm in sharing it. His weekly routine consisted of one day mowing his 1/4 acre of lawn, one day making cakes and jam, one day letter writing, a day in town shopping, visiting the library and attending to business, and three days working on his latest opera production. On his final day, he had just finished mowing his vast lawn and indicated to his next-door neighbor that he felt unwell and went inside to rest. The neighbor checked on him a short time later and found that Leslie had gently expired in his armchair, surrounded by his beloved puppets and vast collection of opera CDs.

—obituary by Anne Forbes (excerpted)

His career, starting at the age of ten in his native Germany, spanned six decades and produced an extraordinary body of work. He was a master of his craft. In the words of a colleague, "He could make a pencil cry." But it was his vision and startling originality of thought that carried him on a life-long quest to break the boundaries of conventional theatre through the use of structure, image and what he termed the "totemic object."

His work is astonishing in its scope, starting from the traditional string puppet and enlarging to the use of abstract sculpture. From large scale opera to intimate fairytale, his work carried a dark strain through which a light shone, an ambiguity that often puzzled, but always sought completion through his audience.

He will be remembered by his many friends and colleagues for his integrity and his uncompromising vision, for the challenges he demanded of himself and others and for his very great generosity of spirit.

Felix is survived by his wife Almut Ellinghaus and his sisters Hildemarie, Marianne and Barbara and their families.

# What's new at the center for puppetry arts?

The New Directions Series offers diverse works to enthrall the imagination and engage the mind. Join us May 16-18, 2003, as Blair Thomas presents for your consideration *Drum-sticks, Fiddle-sticks: 3 Works*, which includes "The Little Altar of Don Cristobal," inspired by Federico Garcia Lorca and the Catalan puppet tradition.

Photo by Stephanie Howard



Photo by David Zeigler

With classic tales like *The Velveteen Rabbit* and innovative productions like *Weather Rocks!*, the Family Series provides a wide array of puppetry experiences. Take a leap back in time and trace the pre-historic steps of Triceratops, Ankylosaurus, and other colossal creatures, as Jon Ludwig directs *Dinosaurs*, April 10 – June 22, 2003.

*Puppets: The Power of Wonder* presents over 350 puppets from around the world. This Indian shadow puppet, made of goatskin and nearly five feet tall, is from the great Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*. In January 2003 *Puppetry in Focus: Treasures from Our Global Collection* opens with a talk by museum founder Nancy Lohman Staub.

Photo by Richard Termine



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# La Pulcina Piccola

*Susan Vitucci's puppet opera, Love's Fowl  
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