

FALL and WINTER 2010 Issue #28

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



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*Puppetry International* is a publication of UNIMA-USA, Inc.



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UNION INTERNATIONALE de la MARIONNETTE

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### On the COVER

Scene from  
*¡Viva Pinocho! A Mexican Pinocchio*  
see page 4



This project is supported, in part, by an award from  
the National Endowment for the Arts.

## Editorial—

*Puppetry of North America—What does this really say to us? Does North American puppetry have an identity? Would a visitor from Tokyo, say, or Nairobi see a puppet show from Havana or Montreal and blurt: “It’s so...so North American!”?*

**North America** contains many cultures, languages and traditions, stretching north from the Colombian border (or the Panama Canal by some reckonings) all the way to the Aleutian islands and eastward to Greenland. In the following pages you’ll find articles from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, The United States and Canada. The identity that emerges will, we suspect, be something of a mosaic with many missing pieces. It will serve as the kick-off for a book by UNIMA’s\* North American Commission, which will fill in some of those missing pieces, allowing a true picture to emerge of our diverse, vibrant puppetry and its history.

After decades of planning, the *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts* finally appeared in 2009. It’s several inches thick and, with 864 pages, weighs nearly 9 pounds. There are over 500 plates, but the text is all in French. Steve Abrams (one of our board members) contributed over fifty articles to the massive tome, and sent me several that deal with North American subjects. As he points out in his entry for North America,\*\* everyone here came from somewhere else, beginning with the pre-historic migrations from Asia through Alaska and accelerating after the voyages of Columbus. Everyone brought their traditions and stories with them. Abrams puts things in perspective: “It seems extraordinary that 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish records of puppetry in “the New World” actually pre-date the first specifically named puppeteer in Great Britain and pre-date the creation of Bunraku in Japan.”

So, puppetry in North America has a significant past, and an active and “many splendored” present. Find a comfortable chair, read, and see for yourself.

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\*UNIMA, the Union International de la Marionnette, is the world’s oldest theatre organization and is chartered under UNESCO. It has national centers in 71 countries and functions as an international body for the furtherance of humanistic values through the art of puppetry. Puppetry International is published by UNIMA-USA.

\*\*For an English version of Abram’s North American entry, go to:

*-Andrew C. Periale*



### North America—What is it?

North America is a land mass made up of many countries and islands. While some sources consider North and South America to be a single continent, for our purposes it begins in the south at the border between Colombia and Panama, extends northward through all of Central America, the US and Canada. Greenland, the world’s largest island is, geographically, also a part of North America (being on the North American tectonic plate), although, politically, it is an independently governed country within the Kingdom of Denmark. North American islands include Puerto Rico, Cuba, Turks and Caicos, the Bahamas and others, though not Bermuda (which sits on a different tectonic plate and is considered an oceanic island).

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## *A word from the North American Commission*

Last summer, during the Puppeteers of America National Puppetry Festival in Atlanta, I organized and moderated a symposium about puppet theatre in North America. Among those arriving from Mexico, Puerto Rico and Canada were members of the North American Commission for UNIMA. The symposium turned out to be extraordinary, illuminating the wealth and diversity of puppetry arts within our region.

The idea to create a Commission for the North American region was put forth by Jacques Trudeau during the 2004 UNIMA Congress in Croatia. The Congress approved the resolution and a commission was formed that same year. At the Congress four years later in Perth, Australia, Jacques Trudeau was elected Secretary General of UNIMA; I was elected president of the young commission, with 13 members representing the countries of the region.

The Commission's objective is to advocate for the development and promotion of puppetry arts in North America through exchanges, special projects, publications and workshops, as well as by providing support to puppet festivals and the UNIMA national centers in our region.

Among its upcoming projects, we plan to publish a tri-lingual (English, French, Spanish) selection of articles about North American puppetry. This edition of *Puppetry International* constitutes the beginning of that project.



TERE MARICHAL

## Dr. Manuel A. Morán



**Several noteworthy exhibits** have come to our attention lately.

The Mikhail Zakin Gallery, in Demerest, NJ, dedicated the late summer to about a dozen contemporary puppet artists, including Elephant Tango (Boston, MA), Sandow Birk & Elyse Pignolet (Long Beach, CA) and Miss Pussycat and Quintron (New Orleans, LA).

In the spring, the Katonah Museum of Art in upstate New York mounted a major exhibit: "The Art of Contemporary Puppet Theater," which featured work by Roman Paska, Hanne Tierney, Dan Hurlin, Janie Geiser, William Kentridge, Ralph Lee, Julie Taymor, Basil Twist and others. This show was curated by Leslee Asch, longtime Executive Director of the Jim Henson Foundation and Producing Director of all five Henson International Festivals of Puppet Theater—who better to mount a truly world-class exhibit?

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# *Illegal Immigration, on Stage... and for Children?*

by Manuel A. Morán Martínez, Ph.D.

## Illegal immigration

Introduction –

**(Radio):**

Immigrants have taken to the city streets *en mass*. They demand respect and equality. Throughout the country there are reports of demonstrations in support of immigrant rights. Thousands of them declare that they are neither a hindrance nor an expense to the country. On the contrary, they are hardworking individuals who contribute to the country's economy. They demand recognition and..." *(There's a strange sound. The watchman gets up and turns off the radio.)*

Thus begins the one-man children's theater piece, *¡Viva Pinocho! A Mexican Pinocchio*, a new adaptation of the famous classic story, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, (1883) by Carlo Collodi (1826-1890). Narrated from the perspective of a young boy from Mexico who enters the United States illegally, this play addresses such immigration to the U.S. The immigrant population pays a high price, as they are uprooted from their mother culture. This is one of the social consequences of the worldwide immigration phenomenon, a theme not often broached with our children and youth. That is why I decided it was necessary to bring it onstage in children's theater.

I do most of my theater and education work in New York City. New York is an archetype of a city made up by immigrants. Sadly, even though it is considered one of the theatre capitals of the world, New York offers little by way of children's theater, apart from Disney film adaptations of classic European stories presented on Broadway stages.

The approval of Law SB1070 in the State of Arizona has ratcheted up the intensity. In April 2010, the Governor of Arizona, Jan Brewer, signed the toughest anti-immigration law in the U.S. This law authorizes police to detain any undocumented person that is an illegal immigrant, or that looks "reasonably suspicious" according to his/her race or origin. Many advocacy groups, along with President Obama, have denounced the law as unjust, emphasizing it goes against liberty and democracy.

In order to narrate and effectively dramatize the predicament of the illegal Mexican immigrant in the U.S., I decided to update *Pinocchio*. Originally written by the Italian Carlo Lorenzini (Collodi), the Pinocchio character was immortalized by Disney in its 1940 animated film, *Pinocchio*. Since childhood, I have been attached to this classic story about a boy puppet that wanted to become human (so much so, that in 1983, I interpreted the title role for the school theater in my town in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico).

Pinocchio's story is in many ways analogous to the immigrant experience. Pinocchio was a wooden puppet that aspired to be more; he wanted to be a boy of flesh and blood. He was looking for a place where "dreams come true." Such original traits led me to "Latinize" the

story, relating it to current themes and contextualizing it in the new environment of the Hispano-American immigrant. *¡Viva Pinocho! A Mexican Pinocchio* is about a puppet boy's journey, about his own understanding of himself while struggling to maintain his Latino heritage and find his home in a new land: the United States.

### *The analogies*

In the original Pinocchio story, a cat and a wolf (a coyote in some versions) trick the puppet as he makes his way to school, promising him a better life in the theater. That is how they arrive at "Pleasure Island," a place where everything appears to be fun. In my version, a coyote named Lobo tricks the puppet "Pino Nacho," building up his expectations that at "Al Otro Lado" (the Other Side) he can make fast money to help his father:

- Coyote:** Sure, that's what they tell us, but school is not for me. And what I need is to make some quick bucks. I know how to do it and where to find them.
- Pinocho:** Bucks, money? You know where to find money? I have to help Papa, because we have no money.
- Coyote:** Of course, I know, but not here. There's not even a place where you can drop dead here.
- Pinocho:** That's what I've heard. Papa hasn't been able to sell anything at his store...
- Coyote:** Without a job there's no money, without money there's no food. You poor thing. It's going to be rough for you and your dad.
- Pinocho:** But that's why I'm going to school.
- Coyote:** It will take you years! But not me! I'll make it fast. There are many who have gone to the Other Side and made money fast.
- Pinocho:** The Other Side? Where's that place?
- Coyote:** It's a beautiful and fun place. [Where] all your dreams come true.

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PRODUCTION PHOTOS:  
CHRISTOPHER AUGER-DOMINGUEZ

Like so many immigrants who abandon their home country to improve their economic situation, Pino Nacho agrees.

After Pino Nacho decides to go “Al Otro Lado” or “to the United States,” he begins to have fun. A reviewer writes:

In the original tale, the Land of Toys (*Paese dei Palocchi*) mixes the aspects of a morality tale with those of social critique. And so, too, is this the case in the Teatro SEA’s version of the tale. The Disney version of Carlo Collodi’s *The Adventures of Pinocchio* had changed the Land of Toys (the setting in the original novel) to Pleasure Island (ostensibly, an amusement park) in the animated US version. Teatro SEA’s version is similar in more ways to the Pleasure Island-amusement park concept. Both places are cursed. (Karen Smith, writer and current Vice President of UNIMA-USA)

Having forgotten his duties, the new stagelit surroundings soon blinded our small lead, who was then warned by constricted puppets that had lost their freedom.

**Marioneta 1:** Get out while you can, get out! Don’t be fooled. At least you are not controlled by strings.

**Pinocho:** What?

**Marioneta 2:** We used to think that we had no freedom, but we were able to move around and do what we wanted. But now all we do is work.

**Marioneta 1:** Not everything is the way it seems. We came here full of hope, and look how we ended up.

Pinocchio chooses to continue having fun so as to avoid thinking about what he had left behind. This situation dwells on the initial process of being uprooted, when hope still lingers. This is the experience of many Latin American immigrants. This new and more technologically saturated environment, fast paced life, and an altogether different lifestyle, not only shocks, but also captivates the recent arrival. This illusion of personal progress and the ultimate arrival at the famous home of what is commonly invoked as “the American Dream,” soon becomes their focus. But, like in the original story, Pinocchio soon becomes a donkey, something common among all children who refused to study. I associate this image with immigrants, because their biggest complaint is that they must work ceaselessly in order to survive in the U.S.

**Carni valero:** Freedom is not free. You have to pay for every-thing I’ve given you. You came here looking for what I had. Right? Well, now you have to pay for it. What’s that? You have no money? Then you must work to pay off your debt.

*¡Viva Pinocho!* employs familiar images, stereotyped visions of Mexicans as well as of North Americans: Uncle Sam and a Mexican “charro” with a mariachi hat and poncho. The adult public has reacted adversely to such portrayals, which I insist on in order to stress their ridiculous nature. They serve as “hooks” to call attention to and stress the contrast between both.

The Stromboli character and the children’s guide to “Pleasure Island” in the original story are now merged unto “El Carnivalero,” modeled after Uncle Sam. In this play, this character announces at the beginning that everything is fun, something Pinocho begins to experiment with. However, further on in the story, he discovers the harsh reality that not everything is in fact fun. According to Karen Smith:

...the play deals in two stereotyped images: the stereotypical poncho-sombrero-clad-dozing “Mexican”, i.e., the victim; and the Industrial-Military-Complex-and-Ugly American bigot-racist stereotype of the United States, i.e., the victimizer. While some adult audience members may have felt the portrayal was a little too simple in its stereotyping of Mexican immigrants and US persecution, for a 55-minute production, the play succeeds in broaching immigration issues with children and presenting the complex nature of the issue. And in the light of Arizona passing its recent controversial state law targeting illegal immigrants, a law that would negatively profile the Latino community, perhaps Teatro SEA’s “simple” depiction of victim and victimizer may not be too far off the mark. It is clear that intelligent and sensitive dialogue over such an important social issue is more needed than ever.

Another familiar icon, which turns up on stage, is the Virgin of Guadalupe. For us, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is immediately linked to the Mexican folklore and cultural tradition, thus becoming enormously compelling for our staging of *¡Viva Pinocho!* She assumes the key role of the Blue Fairy in the original story. As in the original version, she is responsible for granting wishes and dreams, starting with that of Gepetto (“Don G.,” in my version). It is she who grants him the life of his puppet. Guadalupe also acts as a saving conscience and teacher of important life lessons. Her appearance always evokes the memory of what has been left behind, or lost, a cultural memory.



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During his journey to "Al Otro Lado (The Other Side)," Pino Nacho meets with a Mariachi de Calaveras. They are skeleton puppets wearing mariachi hats that hold traditional musical instruments, attempting to play regional Mexican music to no avail. They sound out of tune, are uncoordinated and don't seem to remember the best-known melodies or songs from the mariachi repertoire. Pino Nacho helps them to remember the songs and is taken by surprise at how these mariachi music specialists have forgotten their own tradition.

Pino Nacho, still a recent arrival, has not yet lost contact with his immediate past, as he himself explains.

**Mariachi 1:** Look who's talking. It's happening to you, too. You're already forgetting.

**Pinocho:** No, no, *(to himself)* Oh no, this is what the marionettes were talking about. They all suffer from the "Forgetful Disease."

**Mariachi 2:** *(mocking)* Yes, Sir... mister know-it-all Pinoocchio is starting to forget things too.

**Pinocho:** It's Nacho, ¡Nachó!

**Mariachi 3:** At least we don't have those horrible donkey's ears. *(They laugh)*

**Pinocho:** Donkey's ears?

**Mariachi 1:** You are turning into an ass! *(They laugh)*

**Mariachi 2:** Into a working mule...

It is at that moment when all realize that they are losing their cultural essence. Even Pino Nacho has "fallen ill" with the "Forgetful Disease." He begins to turn into a beast of burden. Like every illegal immigrant, he must face the music. Survival becomes the epicenter of life; one must work and work in order to survive.

Rendering non-traditional and taboo themes in children's theater is an act of courage and responsibility. It has been interesting to observe how the staging provokes the spectators. This has been corroborated by the diverse reactions according to the different audiences: New York, Mexico City and San Juan. I've received responses ranging from "bravos" to tense applause, from "congratulations" to "how dare you?" from "this is not for kids" to "all children should see this."

With this adaptation I sought to achieve something different: not just a well crafted production, but also a foray into a thought-provoking theme, one that would initiate a parent/children, teacher/student or child/child dialogue. This is why I decided to give the play an open end, so that the public can arrive at its own conclusion. That is where the theater experience assumes the character of a total experience, since the spectator becomes a participant.



VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE BY DEBORAH HUNT

PHOTO: RICHARD MARINO

Our children deserve a children's theater that is fantastic, fun, but also profound, relevant and a total experience. We have had enough mindless children's theater that underestimates their capacity. If as creators we treat our public with dignity, it will dignify us with a response. The public deserves good art and has a right to know and to understand the reality that surrounds it.

Dr. Morán is the Founder and CEO of TEATRO SEA, NYC's Latino Children's Theatre. He is part of the Executive Committee of UNIMA and is the current President of UNIMA's North American Commission. He is an actor, writer, and puppeteer who lives in New York City and maintains a residence in Puerto Rico. [www.manuelmorán.com](http://www.manuelmorán.com)

## Lou Harrison: Sounding the Puppet Art

by Kathy Foley

Lou Harrison (1917-2003) was a multi-faceted California artist who has been recognized as one of the important American composers of the twentieth century. His music work has been detailed with attention to his study with Henry Cowell and Arthur Schonberg and his collaborations with Harry Partch, Virgil Thompson, and John Cage (who first chanced on the I Ching due to Lou's interests in China). In the world of dance Lou's work with luminaries like Jean Erdman of Open Eye Theatre, Bonny Bird, Bella Lewitsky, and Mark Morris have been lauded. But the puppet piece of his life has been overlooked—perhaps even dismissed. Major studies by musicians (Miller and Lieberman) and a 2007 revival of his most ambitious opera, *Young Caesar*, under the direction of Nicole Paiment in San Francisco in 2007 imply that using puppetry originally was only due to fiscal constraints and the use of puppets diminished the work. These statements come from a viewpoint that misinterprets his attraction to object theatre. While he considered actors, singers, and dancers perfectly fine, there was an aspect that drew him to puppetry and never was absent from his vision of music theatre, which increased after his encounters with Asia.

As a young and rather naïve puppeteer, I did not know who Lou was the night he came to one of my 1980 rod puppet performances that had an audience of only two. I learned that night that size is not an issue. Lou became a lifelong friend and wrote ravishing music for my puppet shows and his companion that night, composer Vincent McDermott, had me work on libretti for two of his operas.

Lou's vision of a performance where music, design and performance could intermesh had been formed as a youth in San Francisco watching Ralph Chesse's puppet theatre in the 1930s. When I interviewed him sixty years later, he vividly recalled Chesse's *Emperor Jones* as a transformative experience: the visual design of marionettes and setting, the narrative, lighting, and percussion ravished the young Harrison. Bruce Chesse (Ralph's son), in a 2010 interview about that production, remembered that the drums played by his mother became the beating heart of that *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Percussion and puppetry became a mix that Harrison would pursue. As Ralph took over puppetry for the San Francisco WPA, which funded the arts during the Great Depression, Harrison worked for the organization, studying Ralph's work at the same time he was developing his musical chops and interests in world music and instrument building under Henry Cowell.

By the 1940s, when Lou became a music critic in New York, he had the image of a theatre of puppets and music. *El retablo de maese Pedro* (Master Peter's Puppet Show, 1923) by Manuel de Falla was his model from early on. This short puppet work was first presented,



LOU HARRISON'S HELEN OF TROY

as were other works, at the puppet theatre of patroness Princess de Polignac in 1924. The fact that these puppet/mask works were part of the Princess's homosexually-oriented group may have drawn him toward her model, too. Dreams of soirées like the Princess's Paris salon would inspire him to build the pit for puppet performances in the middle of his great room in the Aptos, California hills years later. But lacking the Princess's Singer Sewing Machine fortune, Lou bided his time, enduring New York noise and cold before escaping into the more mentally peaceful and artistically fulfilling fusion of the arts at Black Mountain College and finally returning to his intellectual home in the Bay area by the 1950s where, through his interests in Asian music, he would become part of a new music- puppet scene.

It was the 1960s, and Sam Scripps—the Oakland-based heir to a newspaper fortune—was interested in dance, music, and

puppets of Asia. Sam was a technical and lighting designer for various California theatres. His wife, Luise, was a modern dancer who had gone to India and seen her dance nirvana in the *bharata natyam* of Balasaraswati. Sam's interest was inclined perhaps more toward Indonesia (I remember sitting next to Sam Scripps all the summer of 1974 as the two of us patiently carved our Indonesian puppets). Beginning in 1963, Sam and Louise Scripps established the American Society for Eastern Arts, a summer program that became the Black Mountain College of those interested in Asian art and their fusions. Lou, who was always looking West toward Asia instead of East toward Europe, was there along with composers Steve Reich and Terry Reilly and puppeteers Julie Taymor and Larry Reed, among others. At Center for World Music, Lou was able to study additional Asian musics. He would learn Javanese and, later, Sundanese gamelan with teachers from this program. At the same time, he taught workshops about composition incorporating Asian elements (Chinese and Korean) in the program. He found the world of shadows through the Asian connection as well and became part of the back-up band for Pauline Benton who had been in retirement from her career doing Chinese shadows. Collaboration with Pauline's Red Gate Players for performances in San Francisco and Ojai occurred as Lou lured her out of retirement. The presentation of *White Snake* turned him again toward puppet-music pairings.

Given a commission with an opportunity to do what *he* wanted (rather than the commissioner's specifications) in 1971, he decided to do an opera that would have puppets, narration, and percussion score. Musicians were drawn from collaborators in Benton's group. KQED art director Bill Jones designed rod puppets that became the youthful Caesar and refined Prince of Bithynia, object of Caesar's

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affection. Lou created an exquisite rolling scroll (now at UCSC special collections) where the backdrop would change from court to vista. It was "rather like a *wayang beber*," (an Indonesian scroll puppet theatre) noted Lou. Robert Gordon's libretto was of star-crossed lovers. But it was not your mother's "all Gaul is divided into three parts" Caesar. The episode based on history showed young and ambitious Caesar in a loveless marriage losing his heart and dallying in the East as the lover of Nicomedes IV. Musical modes of east and west intertwined in the composition. Artists from the San Francisco gay community and their supporters embraced the project as an opportunity for being artful and out. Gay poet Paul Mariah directed, longtime Harrison collaborator and former student Robert Hughes conducted. Original instruments were built by Lou's partner Bill Colvig. "Gay Caesar" caused a tizzy among some parents who brought children for the "puppet show." Audience member Alan Cook remembers winged phalluses flying through the air as one effect. (There are some things theatre can do *only* with puppets.) Though the image flew over the heads of some, musician Richard Dee remembers, "A little old lady came up after the show saying: 'We especially loved the butterflies!'"

The project re-whetted Lou's appetite for puppetry. He would host the San Francisco Bay Area Puppet Guild crowd in his great room to discuss music and puppets. In the 1980s Lou did his puppet version of *Puss and Boots* at Mills College, taking the principles he learned doing Javanese shadow puppetry performances with *gamelan* and applying them to a "just intonation" American gamelan that he and Bill were inventing, and a folk story. Script was by gay activist Carter Wilson and the wonderful wrought-iron images of Whittington and cat were by Oakland artist Mark Bulwinkle who, after the production, presented Lou with a smaller puppet set called *Bill and Lou's Excellent Adventure* that showed Lou and partner riding their battered Volkswagen bus, canoeing, and smelling the flowers. These puppets were only first performed, alas, at the celebration of life following the death of Bill Colvig. Lou's loving partner of over thirty years. I was the puppeteer and Lou and his friend and assistant Charles Hanson provided the music.

Lou gave me Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, hoping we could do a production. I countered with the idea of *Faust* for an 1985 production at UCSC. I was doing *Faust* with actors and some puppetry and planned to then shrink it into *wayang golek* to tour with my musicians. The idea was to create American *wayang* with western narrative and mood songs in my vocal range. We agreed that the music would be playable on my small gamelan with the addition of flute or harp. Before I knew it I had a score that ranged from the stratospheric soprano to the bassiest bass and required a full *gamelan*, a Western contemporary percussion ensemble (provided by Willy Winant), and a baroque orchestra. Lou did not think small.

While we did eventually figure out how to make the beautiful score work with a smaller group, I never quite managed to hit the high notes. Still there was our *Hamlet and Faustus at Wittenburg* where Hamlet (not yet returned to Denmark) is Faust's student hanging out with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Gretchen, torn between her magical seducer and the melancholy prince, in the end, abandons both. Lou's mood songs were just right for puppets—the beautiful Helen wafted through the air. Emotions that drag humans to bathos, puppets can pull up and pull off.

I watched a new production of *Young Caesar* in its lavish mounting for Yerba Buena Center in San Francisco in 2007. It was being advertised as the end of the "Long March" from a mere puppet show to something that had finally reached apotheosis: a fully staged grand opera. I looked at the costumes, which might have worked for a drag show, and saw the actors giving themselves over to melodrama, and I knew how much better it would have played if kept with puppets.

Puppets are, as Kleist pointed out, a superior medium for something that is bigger (as this was) or smaller than the everyday. They meet the music and their movement materializes sound. Those puny singers on stage could hit all the notes but they looked maudlin as they cast themselves to the floor to portray that pathos of youthful first passion or longing for other worlds. Puppets would have been truer to the piece.

I believe it is this ability of puppets—to be pure truth for emotion otherwise too raw—that caused Harrison to gravitate toward the puppets, build his gamelan, and teach people how to play for shadows or figures. As a composer, he could hear music that was playing in his head that was not yet sounded and as a creator see images that were waiting to be. Puppets were just closer to that world he could envision. While he wrote for symphonies and ballet companies and appreciated those collaborations, if he had been born, as might have suited him, as a Princess de Polignac he would have written a raft of puppet operas to mount with his friends in his great room on his California hill overlooking the Pacific.

As I closed a book he had given me, and that I was using for research for this piece, a flyer slipped to the floor. It read "*Il Girello: Drama Musical, Venice 1682*, featuring the Carter Family Marionettes in a Giacomo Melani Opera"—the note on the flyer, inscribed in Lou's breathtaking calligraphy, sent love and hugs and told me to see this opera, "A wonderful romp! With superbly performed music, too." Work in which puppets and music mixed, he embraced with enthusiasm.

We never did our *Metamorphoses* or our *Master Peter*, but from time to time since his death I have come across the Karen Blixen puppet play he gave me, *The Revenge of Truth* and read: "When we first began, no one knew what his role was like. Indeed, we

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ourselves didn't know, for who can know what a character will look like on the stage? But now we have said those lines we had in us, we haven't kept a single one back, and when the curtain falls, no one can have any doubt what we really were." There is no doubt that Lou Harrison—musician, gay activist, visual artist, and world soul—was a puppeteer.

## Phone Interviews

Chesse, Bruce. 8 July 2010.

Cook, Alan. 11 July 2010.

Diamond, Jody. 11 July 2010.

## Book

Miller, Leta and Fredric Lieberman. 1998.

*Lou Harrison: Composing a World*. Oxford & NY: Oxford University Press.

Kathy Foley's scholarly pursuit of Southeast Asian puppetry has taken her through most of that region. She is a professor of theater arts at UC Santa Cruz, the editor of *Asian Theater Journal* and has performed as a dalang of wayang golek rod puppets and wayang orang dance drama for more than 20 years.

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*Casteliers:**Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*

by Louise Lapointe

Quebec is known for the diversity and dynamism of its cultural scene. For more than fifty years, since the "quiet revolution," all art forms have witnessed extraordinary invention and creativity. One may assert that puppetry art has certainly been an important actor in this ongoing expansion on stage, television and in the new media. We must insist that it is the professional artists, along with a very few amateurs, who have opened and led the way to the vitality and radiance of our milieu today.

In the forties, Madame Micheline Legendre brought puppetry its first "lettres de noblesse." A learned artist, she produced innumerable shows and organized the first international puppet festival in Montreal, during the world exhibition, Expo 67. Her work influenced the way we would consider puppetry: a true art form, to be studied, practiced, mastered and taught. Several of her apprentices became excellent artists, devoted to creating their own companies, or teaching their métier at the university and provoking a first outburst of interest for puppetry art.

Felix Mirbt has also been a major influence for the recognition of puppetry as a true art form. In the seventies, his designs and directions transformed the way we consider manipulation. The impact of his creations still resonates in several contemporary performances.

In the fifties, we opened up to the world. L'AQM (Association québécoise des marionnettistes) made a major leap forward onto the international scene and promoted the Quebec companies. La Semaine mondiale de la marionnette, an international biennial festival held in Jonquière, introduced us to foreign creators. In the first decade since 2000, we witnessed a booming development of young companies, many offspring of senior ones, and also bright new young graduates from theatre schools. We noticed a renewed interest in the art of puppetry for adults. Also, artists from other disciplines started to use puppets in their performances, and new media invaded the workshops.

*Casteliers*

Thus, the time seemed ripe in 2005 to create Casteliers in Montreal, where so many puppeteers are living and working, and so many artists from other disciplines are interested in knowing more about the art form. The number of new creations far exceeds the capacities of theatres' regular seasons. The offer of excellent foreign performances is expanding,

also, so we must widen the opportunities to present these extraordinary shows to the public.

Since 2006, Casteliers has organized an international annual festival Les trois jours de Casteliers, as well as smaller scale seasonal activities. For example, each summer, we plan with Puppets Up! and La Maissonette des Marionnettes, a tour of a foreign family performance. Each fall, we co-present with La Chapelle, an adult performance. Last spring, we inaugurated Ciné-Casteliers devoted to the projection of documentaries or animation films devoted to puppetry.

Les trois jours de Casteliers constitutes our main event. Organized in collaboration with the arrondissement d'Outremont, we create a snapshot of contemporary puppetry during the four day festival. It takes place inside one theatre, on three different stages, through a program of remarkable performances for family and adult audiences, short forms, exhibits, workshops, roundtable discussions and films.

Here again, it is the professionals who first gathered and made the festival come to life. Casteliers owes the artists a great debt of gratitude for their passionate support and immense generosity. Over the years, Casteliers has acquired increasing public recognition and, last year, the festival welcomed full houses!



MARCELLE HUDON PHOTO: ESABELLE CAUCHY



L'ILLUSION PUPPET THEATRE

### *A collaborative approach*

The idea and realization of Casteliers' activities are made possible through the collaborative approach we have favored from the start. We plan several of our projects in collaboration with other partners: the AQM, l'École supérieure de théâtre at l'UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal) and a number of presenters around the city of Montreal. We also collaborate with presenters from other provinces, from New Brunswick to Alberta, and from the United States. Respecting each other's mandate, we join our efforts in order to invite international artists to teach, give a workshop, perform and tour. This cooperation makes many projects possible, which would otherwise be impossible to achieve as solo ventures.

### *Next step... a doorstep!*

In May 2010, the arrondissement d'Outremont offered Casteliers our first office. Their incomparable longtime partnership, along with the support of the arts councils of the federal, provincial and municipal governments, shows the recognition puppetry art is

gaining in our community. The response to Casteliers' endeavors confirms the importance of providing opportunities for young and old companies to perform, and for the public, children and adults, to discover new artists and new facets of puppetry.

Looking towards the next five years, Casteliers shall pursue its mission, organizing the festival and seasonal activities. Also, we will involve our efforts, in close collaboration with the AQM, to transform an old vacant and charming building of the arrondissement d'Outremont into an international center for puppetry arts. Hopeful to finally turn into reality this longtime dream of the Quebec puppeteers, we will build it with them in mind, and with them in our hearts.

Louise Lapointe is the founding director of Casteliers.  
[www.casteliers.ca](http://www.casteliers.ca)

# *MONTREAL: The new professional training program in the arts of puppetry*

by Marthe Adam

translated by Andrew Periale

In September of 2007, the College of Theater at the University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM) opened a new program—a second rotation based on puppet theatre. This program, called DESS (Advanced Specialized Study Degree) in the theater of contemporary puppetry, lasts two years and includes ten courses. In addition to the ten courses, students benefit by traveling to Quebec for visits with working puppet masters there. The students admitted to the new program must have previous knowledge of puppetry through participation in training workshops or practical work experience in the field.

## *A little history*

From the time of the opening of the theater program at UQAM in 1969-70, the presence of the course of study in puppet theater has contributed to the emergence of this still misunderstood art form in the theater of Quebec. Thus the focus of instruction encompasses the history, theory, construction techniques, the play, as well as pedagogy and the various stages of production. The students learn the rudiments of the puppetry profession within their training in directing, acting techniques and theatre education. Although there were initially only four courses in puppetry, with three more added over the years, the College of Graduate Puppetry Studies at the University of Quebec at Montreal has contributed to the professional development of many puppeteers. Graduates now work on stages of professional companies in Quebec, as well as elsewhere in Canada and in other countries. Furthermore, many of these puppeteers have worked in a good number of film and television productions. There have also been companies founded and run by our students, passionate about the art of puppetry.

The impact of this new program of puppet studies, and thus the training, is reflected in the evolution of contemporary puppetry.

## *Profile of today's puppetry artist*

Students combine many functions in their creative teams. Contemporary puppeteers often specialize and only play a specific role in the creative workgroup. They might be author, dramaturg, director, set designer, puppet designer or builder, musician or composer. They might also interpret as manipulator (giving movement or rhythm to the puppet), puppeteer (who also provides a voice for the puppet) or actor/puppeteer (who might become the puppet's protagonist). They also work with new technologies, with lighting and costumes, with video and virtual imagery as well as with the theatre of shadows and light. Despite this tendency toward specialization, we believe that each of them must develop an interdisciplinary understanding and a vision of the puppetry arts.

## *Pedagogical orientations*

It would be appropriate to pose two questions: What are the foundations of the art of puppetry, and what are its interactions with other disciplines or fields of study? For twenty years, puppetry has been an emerging field; it is, in part, through its practices that the theater is undergoing a veritable revolution. "The puppet theater distances itself from Aristotelian drama, preferring other literary genres, especially of the epic theater form. It did the same with the fiction of dramatic art, which it replaces with a presentation of the creative process, leading to the interplay of reality and illusion. It views the puppet differently— a material actor, situated among things and objects. It inscribes the animator within theatrical writing and performing experiments in which a character's image ends up fragmented, deconstructed."<sup>1</sup>

Henry Jurkowsky has also said, "We could describe these operations as the actions of a man who repeatedly lifts up and then sets down an object in order to learn the rules of its operation."<sup>2</sup>

It is precisely here that we find some of the foundations of the art of puppetry in 2007. Its speech and form are closely linked to the analysis that its creators made of its specific nature as well as the dialogue they establish between the puppet theater and other art forms.

In this perspective, we have developed a training that enables students to investigate the contribution of new art forms to their creation and also to experiment with new creative avenues. Contemporary creations in Quebec and internationally turn around the axis of these processes and it seems to us absolutely imperative that we train our students with this in mind.

The scope of the studies at DESS is oriented towards such pivot points: the interrelationship between the puppet theater and other art forms such as visual arts, dance, mime and movement, the integration of new technologies in the art of puppetry, the use of puppetry in performance and installation art; exploring the current shadow theater and theater of the object. Methods of research, experimentation and production permit coverage of this field of study from the creative intent proposed by students at the beginning of their studies.





MARIONETTES MICHELINE LEGENDRE



MARIE-FRANCE THIBAUT

### *The theory of practice and the practice of theory*

One of the primary concerns of puppeteers is to assure the field of puppetry artistic status through the creation of its own theory, through both a true integration into the larger theatrical culture and a willingness to acquire professional training. These include, among other things, knowledge of the best current practices of puppetry, acquired through the rigorous pursuit of the puppet's many facets, from understanding of its mechanisms to the processes that govern its creation.

Among the ten courses offered in the framework of DESS, "The History of Artistic Trends in the Puppet Theater." Aside from the great artistic movements that have characterized the historical practice of puppetry, students familiarize themselves with the ways in which the puppet has been used in the theatre: The interaction of puppetry with mime and with dance, the encounter of the puppet and its sculptors, with the theater of small forms and the theatre of shadows (both traditional and contemporary), with the dramaturgical consequences of the arrival of the actor on the puppet stage and with practices centered around the use of video and virtual images.

The nine other courses are the practical studies of set design and puppet construction, playwriting and the dramaturgy of the play. The artist-professors are puppeteers from Quebec and beyond. The students thus get to work with Claire Heggen from Théâtre du Mouvement, with Michel Fréchette and Patrick Marte, Marthe Adam and Marie-Pierre Simard, Fabrizio Montecchi from Teatro Gioco Vita, with Mark Sussman of Great Small Works. In 2011 Neville Tranter from the Netherlands will offer a course in performance. The course in directing designed by Irina Niculescu, director and educator, covers both theory and practice – all the tools of the director.

In 2010, three years after the program began, sixteen students have received degrees (2009), and twelve students are currently pursuing their studies. In May, 2011, the College of Graduate Puppetry Studies will be welcoming a new group of students.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jurkowsky, Henryk. 2000. *Métamorphoses : la marionnette au XXe siècle*. Charleville-Mézières, France, Éditions de l'Institut international de la marionnette, p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> Jurkowsky, Henryk. 1990. *The Mode of Existence of Characters of the Puppet Stage*. Vancouver, WA. In: Laurence R. Kominz and Mark Levenson (ed.), p. 36.

## Teaching Directing in the Puppetry Program at UQAM

by Irina Niculescu

The theatre director is a conceptual artist, an architect and a poet. His/her work is to build live performances and performative events that express important notions about life, about ourselves and our world. In the contemporary puppet theatre the possibilities are limitless. How do we choose our means of expression? What kind of theatre? What techniques? The course at the UQAM is a five-week intensive. The principal goal is to work on the development of the *directing concept* and all the elements which are involved in this process. It is not so much about teaching an unquestionable truth but about transmitting the means that allow the students to affirm their own truths. It is about initiating the students into the practices that will enable them to express their subjectivity in the field of puppetry arts. The first week is a theoretical introduction focusing on the *dramatic territories*\* in puppet theatre: we explore the essence and structure of each territory. After the first week of theoretical exposés, we continue by engaging concretely in the creative process. From that point on, orientation meetings and conceptual discussions focus on the students' projects. The students are guided to learn through doing, and thus develop their own concept of directing.

The course establishes that there is a basic knowledge common to all directors and encourages the professional expression of the artists' subjectivity. We distinguish the pluridisciplinarity of the profession: the students learn the tools of the director and the main questions a director must answer. During the course, they function as directors, designers, performers and technicians. The guiding idea is to continuously bring together the concrete and the reflexive in a permanent relation with the professional realities of the contemporary puppet theatre.

\* *"Dramatic territories"* is a term borrowed from Jacques Lecoq, *"Le corps poétique."*

Irina Niculescu is on the Board of Directors of UNIMA-USA.



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## *Cuban Puppeteers in the Republic: Renovation or Dream?*

by Rubén Darío Salazar  
translated by Miguel Trelles



CARUCHA CAMEJO

The fact that Cuban puppet theatre is currently associated with the most interesting aspects of our scenic arts is the by-product of a vital artistic movement. The legion of creators that envisioned the grandest of possibilities for the puppet stage began to sow the seeds for its plenitude from 1949 to 1959, achieving its full potential with the triumph of the Revolution. The turnaround in the culture of the country decentralized the artistic hub that was the capital. Taking place in the sixties, such artistic blossoming attested to the key role played by professional puppeteers active since before the Revolution. Since then, the professional practice of the art of the little stage continues to be inextricably linked with post-revolutionary theatrical renovation in Cuba.

### The Beginning

The road to a professional puppet theater was cleared in 1943 by the student Modesto Centeno, whose version for a staging with puppets of Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood* won a contest at the municipal Drama Academy (*el Concurso de Dramaturgia de la Academia Municipal de Artes Dramáticas*). From that moment on, Centeno began leading the development of a theater that concerned itself with text, stagecraft, design, music, animation and acting. The artists involved took a special interest in their professional development. Many of our founders participated in ADADEL, ADA, Grupo Escénico Libre (GEL; Free Scenic Group) and the Teatro Popular, whether as actors, playwrights, designers or directors of plays based on texts by Zorrilla, Moliere, Giradoux, O'Neill, José Antonio Ramos, Virgilio Piñera or Nicolás Guillén. Even Modesto Centeno himself, as well as Paco Alfonso with his ephemeral "Retablo del Tío Polilla" (Tío Polilla's Little theatre), along with Vicente Revuelta, often cast their glances at the marvelous world of puppets. Some remained there forever, while others proceeded to specialize exclusively in theatre with live actors.

### A Brother and Sister Arrive at the Academy

In 1947, the distinguished artistic director Francisco Morín registered two siblings at the *Academia Municipal de Artes Dramáticas*: Caridad (Carucha) Hilda Camejo and José (Pepe) Ramón Camejo have since then become key figures of history of puppetry in Cuba. That institution would stage *A Comedy of Errors* by Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and *El chino*, by Cuban author Carlos Felipe. A three-year course of study included Playwriting, Cinematography, Radio Technique, Stagecraft and Acting. According to well regarded intellectual Mirta Aguirre, that was the place "where the most restless and interesting theatre was performed, possessed of ... an unimpeachable artistic purity."<sup>1</sup>

Carucha Camejo recalls that it was in an amusement park, sometime in the 1920s, where she and Pepe attended their first puppet show. "It was a small booth as tall as the puppeteers with a little house from whence a black couple engaged in conversation and then began fighting."<sup>2</sup> However, what really struck the siblings was the 1949 staging of the *Retablillo de Don Cristóbal* (Don Cristobal's Little Theatre), written by Federico García Lorca and directed by Andrés Castro with the GEL group. Vicente Revuelta infused the main character with life: "I believe it was Andrés Castro who directed *Retablillo* and Titón (referring to well-known filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea) fabricated glove puppets out of carved balsa wood. I helped him, but did not have his ability."<sup>3</sup> Immediately thereafter, the Camejos, very enthusiastic over the puppet version of the Lorca text, began fabricating their own puppets. Their first performance took place in their living room, meant as a Christmas gift for Perucho. One can imagine the mirth of the ten-year-old Camejo sibling, as well as that of Pepe and Carucha (twenty and eighteen, respectively) animating the rag and flannel puppets for *Little Red Riding Hood*. After this first performance, others ensued, but the puppets improved and went from rags to papier mâché. The first puppet stage, initially designed by their father, was then redesigned by Pepe to be more functional. Thus was instituted, after the parents' joint decision, "el Guñol de los Hermanos Camejo" (Camejo Siblings' Guignol). In accordance with the street puppet tradition, they offered performances in public and private schools, as well as at parties and parks.



CARUCHA CAMEJO ON TV, 1950

The Academy did not remain oblivious to such an important moment. On July 4, 1950 they had a presentation there, staging *Little Red Riding Hood* by Centeno, as well as *Chinito Palanqueta*, another text by this author written specifically for them. Included as well was *La tinaja* (the Jar), an anonymous French farce. Julio Martínez Aparicio, director of the Academy, wrote in the program:

We stress the marvelous effort of the Camejo siblings in creating their Little Guignol Theater. She is still our student. He just graduated. Both possess extraordinary artistic gifts and have managed, in barely two months, to infuse a lovely small stage with life. With great talent, Carucha acts and fabricates the puppets, while Pepito illuminates decorations that are projected on the stage.

Along with their puppeteering labors, the Camejos soon appeared as guest actors among other groups in plays by Cervantes, Tirso de Molina, Moliere, Wilder, Sartre, Gorostiza and Pirandello.

## Puppets in Cultural Missions

In 1950, when Aureliano Sánchez Arango was Minister of Culture and Raúl Roa was Director for Culture at the Ministry of Education, Julio García Espinosa spearheaded the Cultural Missions. The Missions sought to spiritually mobilize the provinces in order to incorporate them into the cultural life, urgently striving for national improvement.

If culture constitutes the most precious flower of the soul of a people, its fruits must invigorate and enrich the conscience of the masses, liberating them from shadows, prejudices and superstitions. In our countryside, mountains and villages, there are vast zones that, due to their isolated location and to sloth, remain secularly marginal to the noble and fertile joys procured by theater, music, dance, painting, film and science. And when in the most remote



1961

areas any spectacle is sporadically staged, it tends to be organized with only profit in mind, causing grave disservice to the sensibility of the spectators. It is not for nothing that up to now Cuba has lacked a cultural policy.<sup>4</sup>

It was through this arduous endeavor that rural populations were exposed to a sampling of the various artistic disciplines, thanks to the arrival of such artists and personalities as Ramiro Guerra, Odilio Urfé, Antonio Núñez Jiménez and the Camejo siblings, among others. This island-wide exchange with farmers and villagers allowed artists to consider how their work could impact the future.

After the Missions, they turned to drama programming for children, initiating it in the newly created national television, but without abandoning their puppetry or their acting work in adult theatre. Cuban puppetry in the fifties also found diverse expressions in the valuable contributions of Dora Carvajal with "La Carreta," Beba Farías and her "Titirilandia," María Antonia Fariñas and Nancy Delbert with puppets. Even in the former Oriente Province, in the Central Prestón at Mayarí, the Teatro de Títeres de Pepe Carril was established. Carucha still remembers the visits of "el Caballero de París" to the Guignol performances by the Camejos in the "Cinecito" or little movie house in San Rafael Street, where they established their first quarters, from which they would later move to Retiro Odontológico, always pursuing the dream of a permanent venue for children's theater. The puppeteers went as far as the Museo de Bellas Artes in their effort to promote puppet theatre. There, thanks to the support of director Guillermo de Zéndegui, first cousin of Carucha Camejo's husband, they combined international films dedicated to puppets, with texts by Lope de Rueda, Javier Villafañe, Arkadi Avershenko, Sergei Prokofiev as well as classic story adaptations by Pepe Camejo, Modesto Centeno and a very young Pepe Carril, who joined them to become the lead in the trio that in 1956 created the "Guignol Nacional de Cuba."



TEATRO NACIONAL DE GUIÑOL, 1957



LITTLE RED RIDINGHOOD, GUIÑOL DE LOS HERMANOS CAMEJO

## A Guignol Manifesto, a Puppet for the Island

On March 28, 1956, the emergent Guignol Nacional de Cuba issued a work manifesto calling for the consolidation of a national puppet movement, stressing the rescue of national cultural traditions, and the propagation of this art form for all, not just for the young audiences. They stressed the pedagogical possibilities of this kind of theater and proposed shows and didactic talks for teachers. It is worthy of note that the artists chose the word “guignol” to name their group, as its definition not only relates to the popular style of puppetry, but also to the meaning ascribed to it by José Martí in the story “Bebé y el Señor Don Pomposo,” from the children’s magazine *La Edad de Oro*: “...and let us go to the Paris Guignol, where the good man wallops the bad man.” Love for the nation and an interest in developing and strengthening a very ancient art evidence the seriousness with which the puppeteers considered their profession, imbuing their practical work with progressive ideas and with a sense of the future. They created “Revista Titeretada,” the first magazine in Cuba to promote the world of puppets through articles, brief dramatic compositions, the history and the theory of puppet theatre. From 1956 to 1959 they published three issues. They staged over thirty titles by foreign authors such as Manuel de Falla, Roberto Lago and Angeles Gasset as well as by Cubans such as Eduardo Manet, Conchita Alzola, Paco Alfonso, René Potts, Clara Ronay, Vicente Revuelta and Dora Alonso. They organized contests and issued puppet playwriting calls, which provided for an ample and varied repertoire that is still employed today by different theater companies in the country.

The work with Dora Alonso, one of our essential authors, through the creation of the texts *Pelusín y los pájaros* and *Pelusín frutero*—written especially for them—constitutes the origin of the creation of Pelusín del Monte (and others), the most genuine representation of Cuban childhood, smiling, keen, noble, always quick with a popular saying or a lively reply. He was born in Matanzas, just like his author. With his guano hat\* and a handkerchief around his neck, Pelusín always accompanied his grandmother Doña Pirulína and soon became a member of the huge cast of world puppets. His charm and authenticity still endures today through television, radio, literature, visual arts and theatre.

\* Cuban slang for “straw hat”

Towards the end of the 1950s, they performed the beautiful poem *Los zapaticos de rosa* (Li'l Pink Shoes) by José Martí, resorting to technical books from Argentina, Mexico and the United States to fabricate the controls needed to manipulate the puppets. The following years find the puppeteers working in Coney Island Park, at the Tienda Flogar, and finally at the Jardín Botánico, where they would install themselves up until after 1959, transforming that place into a “must see” for the children of the capital.

The triumph of the Revolution expanded the repertoire and the aesthetic ambitions of the group, renewing their manifesto and enriching the itinerant aspect of their artistic creation, something they had never ceased to practice, not even when in 1963 they settled in the air conditioned Fosca Hall as Teatro Nacional de Guignol. From that time on, they learned to connect with the world and with the whole Island; just as they corresponded with Argentinian master Javier Villafañe, they would also host a provincial artist interested in learning more about puppetry. They never failed to take into account the authentic roots of this art form. They drank from the best sources of universal and national drama. All the acquired experiences were bequeathed to “their magical world of puppets,” as it was referred to by professor and critic Rine Leal. The team made up of Camejo and Carril not only contributed to the renovation of our puppet theatre, but also helped to create the future national school and its artistic, pedagogical and theoretical objectives.



TEATRO NACIONAL DE GUIÑOL, 1957



## A Guignol Manifesto, a Puppet for the Island

On March 28, 1956, the emergent Guignol Nacional de Cuba issued a work manifesto calling for the consolidation of a national puppet movement, stressing the rescue of national cultural traditions, and the propagation of this art form for all, not just for the young audiences. They stressed the pedagogical possibilities of this kind of theater and proposed shows and didactic talks for teachers. It is worthy of note that the artists chose the word “guignol” to name their group, as its definition not only relates to the popular style of puppetry, but also to the meaning ascribed to it by José Martí in the story “Bebé y el Señor Don Pomposo,” from the children’s magazine *La Edad de Oro*: “...and let us go to the Paris Guignol, where the good man wallops the bad man.” Love for the nation and an interest in developing and strengthening a very ancient art evidence the seriousness with which the puppeteers considered their profession, imbuing their practical work with progressive ideas and with a sense of the future. They created “Revista Titeretada,” the first magazine in Cuba to promote the world of puppets through articles, brief dramatic compositions, the history and the theory of puppet theatre. From 1956 to 1959 they published three issues. They staged over thirty titles by foreign authors such as Manuel de Falla, Roberto Lago and Angeles Gasset as well as by Cubans such as Eduardo Manet, Conchita Alzola, Paco Alfonso, Reneé Potts, Clara Ronay, Vicente Revuelta and Dora Alonso. They organized contests and issued puppet playwriting calls, which provided for an ample and varied repertoire that is still employed today by different theater companies in the country.

The work with Dora Alonso, one of our essential authors, through the creation of the texts *Pelusín y los pájaros* and *Pelusín frutero*—written especially for them—constitutes the origin of the creation of Pelusín del Monte (and others), the most genuine representation of Cuban childhood, smiling, keen, noble, always quick with a popular saying or a lively reply. He was born in Matanzas, just like his author. With his guano hat\* and a handkerchief around his neck, Pelusín always accompanied his grandmother Doña Pirulina and soon became a member of the huge cast of world puppets. His charm and authenticity still endures today through television, radio, literature, visual arts and theatre.

\* Cuban slang for “straw hat”



**LA TITERETADA**  
the annual celebration of  
World Puppetry Day in Puerto Rico  
(see article on page 26)



CARUCHA, PEPE CAMEJO AND PEPE CARR

## Renewal or Dream?

The question places us face to face with the legacy of artists that assumed culture was a destiny and sought to spread the light that endows nations with strength and sovereignty in order to overcome ignorance and slavery. This renewal encompasses numerous contributions to the nation's cultural patrimony. The dream entails a direct route to the human spirit, eternal caretaker of the multiple colors of the world, of its secrets and highest aspirations.

<sup>1</sup> Magaly Muguercia. **El teatro cubano en vísperas de la Revolución.** Edit Letras Cubanas, 1988, Pág. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Liliana Pérez Recio. **Diálogo con Carucha Camejo.** Revista Tablas 2/03.

<sup>3</sup> Rubén Darío Salazar. **Una conversación sin nada de particular.** Entrevista a Vicente Revuelta. Anuario Manita en el Suelo No 1, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> **Misiones Culturales.** Mensuario, La Habana, Año I, No 1, dic 1949, Pág. 17.

Rubén Darío Salazar is a writer, actor, puppeteer and the Artistic Director of Teatro de las Estaciones in Matanzas, Cuba. He is the current General Secretary of the newly created national center of UNIMA-CUBA. He is also a member of UNIMA's North American Commission.

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## The North American Puppet Slam Scene in 2010

by Theresa Smalec

Based on an informal sampling of my academic and non-academic friends, most people do not know exactly what a “puppet slam” is. No, it doesn’t involve smacking puppets against a wall. And no, it doesn’t necessarily replicate the competitive structure of the poetry slams that emerged in the mid-1980s. In August 2010, I interviewed nearly a dozen curators and artists who organize and/or perform in puppet slams across Canada and the United States. Whereas the poetry slam genre has often been criticized for its “lack of stylistic diversity,” puppet slams are remarkably heterogeneous. Aesthetic, political, generational, and regional differences abound, and this movement seems headed in new directions.

Because puppet slams tend to emerge as discrete, autonomous entities that take their shape around the needs and resources of a specific community, there is no fixed consensus on what a puppet slam must encompass in order to bear that title. Nevertheless, I spoke with several artists who offer provocative accounts of what the term means to them.

Marsian De Lellis<sup>1</sup> is a co-founder, along with Heather Henson, of the Puppet Slam Network: an online resource that connects puppet artists, venues, and audiences. Partly due to a background in the G.L.B.T. community, Marsian believes puppet slams should be as inclusive as possible. Yet precisely because the Puppet Slam Network “aims to catalogue, connect, support, and raise awareness for the Puppet Slam Nation,”<sup>2</sup> Marsian has recently published a loose description of the genre online:

Underground puppet slams [...] feature contemporary short-form puppet and object theatre for adult audiences, often late at night in small venues, nightclubs, and art spaces. Puppet slams exist at the nexus of vaudeville, burlesque, and performance art [...] as a viable alternative to the culturally homogenous digital mass media.<sup>3</sup>

Marsian adds that “experimental theatre, art, music, and dance” often complement the short puppet works presented. In short, not every slam limits itself to puppetry.

Whereas Marsian outlines possible content, venues, and performance styles, Roxanna Myhrum focuses on what a slam should achieve at the level of audience. Myhrum is Artistic Director of the Puppet Showplace Theatre in Brookline, MA, where she curates The Puppet Showplace Slam. Myhrum proposes that “slam connotes high impact—more than you would usually see in a night of



BRIDGET ROUNTREE AND MARY-MARGARET BOUWMAN AS “MADAME MANDIBLE”  
CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS FOR “PUPPET-E-OKE” AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION PLAY.



ANIMAL CRACKER CONSPIRACY'S: ADULT PUPPET CABARET  
JUNE, 2010 SECRET BARRIO LOGAN WAREHOUSE PHOTO: CRAIG BRAYTON



BRIDE OF WILDENSTIEN - THE MUSICAL

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PLOP (OLYMPIA, WA)

performance.” She relishes the format’s intensity and its inspiring effect on spectators: “Personally, I want to walk away feeling like any object in the world could now become a character if I were to put effort into it.”<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Gretchen Van Lente—who founded the Brooklyn-based company Drama of Works in 1999—defines the slam genre as cabaret-style experimentation:

Anything goes. You can try out really serious stuff, or comedic stuff. You can try out three-minute pieces, or excerpts from full-length shows. No judgments. No one’s allowed to say, “Boo—that was horrible.” You’re just allowed to get up and do whatever you want.

Van Lente associates slams with artistic freedom. By contrast, David Higgins views the term as a “misnomer” for *Blood from a Turnip*, the series he curates in Providence, RI. Higgins says *Blood from a Turnip* is billed as a *salon* to sidestep the slam’s competitive implications. Morgan Fitzpatrick Andrews, founder of Philadelphia’s Puppet Uprising, also rejects what he perceives as the term’s winner-take-all commercialism: “At a lot of puppet slams, you actually have to pay to perform, and sometimes there is a cash prize. I want to get away from that idea of competition. We’ve always used the term *cabaret* for Puppet Uprising since our founding in 2000.”

## 8 Puppet Communities, 8 Slam Models

Historically, it makes sense to start with Great Small Works (GSW), a collective formed in New York in 1995. John Bell, a founding member, notes that “after the puppet slam phenomenon became established, people thought of what we had been doing with our spaghetti dinners as a kindred form, which is true.” Now famous, the dinners originated in a storefront on East 9th Street in the late 1970s. They were founded by veterans of Vermont’s Bread and Puppet Theater, and sought to “make a connection with the block, which at that time was a combination of hippie artists and Puerto Rican folks. There were also older Ukrainian and Polish people.” Bell likens the early dinners to a low-stakes block party where people shared food and concerns: “The performers were not trying to find backers in order to move to an Off-Broadway theatre, but were really trying to reflect what was going on in the community.”

GSW took over the spaghetti dinners in the 1990s, staging them monthly at P.S. 122. They still maintain this practice, though the venues and frequency now vary. The next Great Small Works Spaghetti Dinner will be at One Arm Red during the DUMBO Arts Festival, in September 2010. Today, Bell directs the University of Connecticut’s Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, where he recently began hosting slams



THE PUPPET SHOWPLACE SLAM  
PHOTO: ANDREW SWAYZE



A SONG TO PUPPETEER NIKYTA PALMISANI BEGINS A CUPCAKE FIGHT AT THE FINALE OF A SHOWPLACE SLAM. PHOTO: CRAIG BRAYTON



DAVID HIGGINS AND VANESSA GILBERT, *BLOOD FROM A TURNIP*, c. 2005

with support from the Puppet Slam Network. Participants include the university's puppetry and visual arts students. Mark Sussman, another GSW member, teaches at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. He directs *Café Concert*, an experimental puppetry cabaret based on the spaghetti dinner model. There is always live music. Dance, theatre, film, spoken word, and food served with the price of admission are also staples.

Some puppet slams spotlight live puppetry. At Puppet Showplace Theatre (PST), a theatre for all ages, Roxanna Myhrum curates slams that are "accessible, entertaining, and varied," so that they speak to multiple audiences as much as possible:

Because we own our venue and because we are New England's only full time puppet theatre, we make a special effort to make sure that our slams represent the puppet art *well*. Our slams showcase variety, but they also showcase quality, and craftsmanship, and dramaturgy, and effort by the performers—so that audiences come away from the theatre feeling like they want to see more puppetry, or learn more about puppetry, or maybe go home and build puppets.

To illustrate, Myhrum notes the work of Jim Napolitano, who performs excerpts from his family show, *Father Goose's Tales*, at puppet slams: "Just the fact of him doing a family show in this more casual, intimate environment with a primarily adult audience takes on a whole new meaning. [...] It's not like he starts using the F-word or anything. He just has a really enjoyable show and connects it with a different audience."

In addition to developing and promoting local excellence, another of Myhrum's priorities is to stay connected with the national puppetry community. To foster this goal, she coordinates with Rhode Island's Perishable Theatre, booking most of PST's slams a day *after* *Blood from a Turnip*, "so that performers who are appropriate for both slams can continuously go from Providence to Boston, and do the slam circuit."

Vanessa Gilbert and Jeremy Woodward founded *Blood from a Turnip* in 1997. David Higgins, who presently curates that salon series, identifies its commitment to object performance as a defining feature:

Perishable Theatre, where it's hosted, is a theatre that looks at theatre beyond plays. And *Blood from a Turnip* looks at puppetry beyond puppets. If it's object-oriented, if it's the manipulation of objects, then this is the place to do it!

Higgins also names Evan O'Sullivan (whose stage name is Evan O'Television) as pushing the limits of what puppetry can be: "He uses a prerecorded tape of himself as a puppet, and then performs along with that. He calls it video puppetry."

PST and Perishable Theatre are professional theatres that consistently host their slams in their own venues. Most other slams discussed here use multiple, shifting venues. I've already introduced Gretchen Van Lente. Five years ago, she inherited a puppet slam called *Punch* from someone who could no longer curate it. *Punch*'s original home was Galapagos Art Space in Brooklyn. That theatre started *Punch* and named it. But this snug relationship abruptly changed when Galapagos came under new management and moved from Williamsburg to DUMBO—where *Punch* was no longer right for the space.

After adopting *Punch* as her own, Van Lente resolved to find a suitable structure. She wanted to host eclectic theme nights, but this required a new approach: "As opposed to putting ourselves in one space, we decided [...] it might be nice to move around. Our fans would follow us to different venues, and people who patronized those venues would get to see puppets, even though they might not normally come to *Punch*." In 2009-10, *Punch* utilized four different spaces: Dixon Place (for larger, tech-heavy slams); a small theatre in Williamsburg called *The Brick* (for more intimate slams); 92Y Tribeca (for puppets on film), and Jimmy's 43 Pub—a "little backroom bar situation" where viewers can get up close to miniature-sized pieces, and really appreciate their details.

For 2010-11, Van Lente has secured most of the same venues to offer audiences a sense of consistency, even if it is nomadic. Aesthetically, she embraces *Puppet Uprising*'s "do-it-yourself" approach after performing at four of their slams. Morgan Fitzpatrick Andrews founded Philadelphia's *Puppet Uprising* in 2000, the tumultuous year of George W. Bush's contested election. During our interview, he explained two intersecting features of his local scene: "People in my community come from a somewhat anarchist tradition of political art, but also from a do-it-yourself aesthetic of doing things out of cardboard and paper mâché. People make things quickly to get the message out."

*Puppet Uprising* challenges many preconceptions people have about slams. For example, Fitzpatrick Andrews rejects the drinking bar as a suitable venue:

I've done puppet shows at bars and they've gone badly because there's too much thinking involved in the materials I present. When I went to a national festival of puppet slams, someone asked who serves alcohol at your puppet slams, and I was the only person who didn't raise my hand.

Instead, his collective uses performance spaces, churches, basements, warehouses, and even parks. He cites Kate Brehm's *Slutty Puppets* slam (staged at New York's defunct CBGB's Gallery from 2003-2005) as an example of "a great series" that nonetheless "relied on a raunch factor." *Puppet Uprising* cabarets focus heavily on local sociopolitical issues, and avoids content that may offend diverse audiences. Inspired by *Great Small Works*, Fitzpatrick Andrews also incorporates a lot of independent rock.

On the west coast, Bridget Rountree and Iain Gunn founded San Diego's *Animal Cracker Conspiracy* (ACC) three years ago.

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

Uniquely enough, their slam began in their living room. Since then, ACC hosts the San Diego Slam in venues “ranging from an underground warehouse where you are not given the address until the night of the event, to the Museum of Photographic Arts in Balboa Park” (Rountree, email). ACC also stands out due to its hands-on approach. Rountree and Gunn set up tables and invite audiences to create their own puppets for use in the evening performances. Finally, ACC collaborates with a surrealist circus! Their slams always include puppetry, but are cross-pollinated with acrobatics, surrealist skits, juggling, and fire-breathing. With the power of spectacle and the lure of subversive spaces on their side, it’s no wonder ACC has cultivated a following of over 150 people per slam. Politically, Rountree and Gunn are concerned with advancing community, cooperation, and the slow food movement.

Eric Brooks’ Playhouse Puppetry Slam! is the final slam I discuss here, though dozens of others exist.<sup>5</sup> Brooks is based in Maryland—specifically the Washington DC Metropolitan area. He launched his slam to remedy that region’s “isolation from both the northern and southern puppetry industries” (Brooks, email). “People are not moving to DC for the vibrant puppetry scene,” Brooks joked in an email, but he is serious about developing a local community. The Playhouse Puppetry Slam! happens twice a year at the Puppet Co. Playhouse in Glen Echo, MD. It combines the “local pool of talented puppet artists in the DC area with pieces by non-local puppeteers from up and down the East Coast, folding them together into one presentation to help bridge the gap between the North and the South.”

Brooks’ vision of performers who can travel from region to region and showcase their work is one shared by the Puppet Slam Network. The fledgling tour circuits that Brooks, Myhrum, and Higgins are striving to develop is part of what the future holds for North American puppet slams. Marsian hopes puppet artists can also “think outside the box” in terms of fundraising and garnering corporate sponsorship.

Marsian, Janie Geiser, and Susan Simpson will launch a slam called Cabaret Automata in Los Angeles this fall. Through this project and the Puppet Slam Network, Marsian envisions “more of a renaissance of adult puppetry.” It’s about “showing puppeteers that puppetry can be sexy—it’s not just for kids,” (interview).

As far as the future goes, we can’t forget the millennial generation. This summer in a West Philadelphia community garden, I witnessed the work of Puppetyranny, a company of 22-27 year olds. Aligned with Puppet Uprising, Puppetyranny did not host a slam, per se. Instead, they staged a full-length work called *Peter Pan in Kensington Garden*. Darkly funny, erotic, and magical, it combines do-it-yourself moxie, superb storytelling, and a range of puppet arts. What Puppetyranny lacks is a moralistic ideology. Twenty-five-year-old founder Leslie Rogers explains: “A lot of political work I’m familiar with [. . .] has to function on the basis that, as the artist, you’re not doing any wrong. I think you can’t really say that about a lot of our work—and we like it that way [laughing].” “No messages,” adds puppeteer John Sinclair. “Our generation, we have no solutions. We know these puppet shows we do aren’t going to have much of an impact in the grand

scheme,” concedes Zac Palladino, the company’s director. “We know we *don’t* know, and that’s partly where the rejection of political work comes from” (Rogers).

Whether you seek sexy puppets or wholesome fun, whether you want clear-cut political answers or moral ambiguity, whether you expect polished quality or highly improvised experiments, the North American puppet slam scene promises to take you on a multi-regional journey through diverse communities and systems of belief.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Marsian (pronounced “Martian”) De Lellis prefers to go by first name.

<sup>2</sup> Marsian includes this mission statement at the bottom of the online announcements sent out on behalf of the Puppet Slam Network.

<sup>3</sup> See De Lellis, “Puppet Slam Network August 2010 Events.”

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from interviews conducted between 7 July 2010 and 28 August 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Due to my research schedule and the fact that I undertook this project in the summer, I was unable to contact a wider range of puppet artists. Readers interested in the puppet slam movement should utilize the Puppet Slam Network to find out what slams are coming soon to a venue near you.

Theresa Smalec recently accepted a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at Bronx Community College/CUNY. Her dissertation from the Department of Performance Studies, New York University—“Body of Work: Reconstructing Ron Vawter’s Performance Career”—won her the 2009 Monroe Lippman Award for Distinguished Doctoral Dissertation.

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*TITERETADA and SOBRE LA MESA:  
The phenomenon of adult puppetry in Puerto Rico*

by Deborah Hunt

I don't pretend to thoroughly know the history of puppetry in Puerto Rico. I have, however, instigated and been part of an informal collaboration of certain groups that have opened and developed the field for adult puppetry and have witnessed the eagerness of the public who have filled to capacity the events produced here.

I am originally from New Zealand and, after performing in different parts of the world for 15 years, Puerto Rico became my base in 1990. For the first 10 years here, I worked in non-theatrical spaces presenting my productions and workshops in a nomadic fashion. Since 2000, I have administered voluntarily Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja. It is the only independent, non-commercial, unsubsidized theater in Puerto Rico— a humble space open to experimental theatre in general. It is the base for my company, Maskhunt Motions, dedicated to experimental mask and puppetry work. My productions have been directed to adult audiences, but a proportion of children have always come with their parents (*Baba Yaga, Arquearse, i, Ubu Rey, Punch*).

Since establishing a permanent laboratory in 2001, I have offered workshops in the construction and manipulation of glove, rod, shadow, humanette, marionette, and tabletop puppets along with masks and cabezudos [big head puppets, similar to the Mexican Mojigangas, Ed.]. These workshops have mostly been directed towards adults, and so a new generation of puppeteers and mascareros have presented work in Maskhunt Motions events: the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Festivals of the Theatrical Mask, the 1<sup>st</sup> Encounter of the Performing Object, and the Encounter of Light and Shadow. From my workshops have emerged and/or developed groups such as Y No Habia Luz and Papel Machete whose utterly distinct work features both puppets and masks. We now collaborate (along with Teatro Aspaviento) as companies and individuals in the projects of Titeretada and Sobre la Mesa.

The Company Y No Habia Luz was formed in 2003 with the "purpose of forging their own space of artistic creation as a collective. They weave diverse disciplines such as music, the plastic arts, body movement, the creation and manipulation of objects, masks and puppets, and film to construct their own language that allows them to portray a clear and diverse message through image and metaphor."

Papel Machete was formed in 2006 as a "worker's street and community theater collective employing puppetry, masks, and performing objects in educational and agitational performances as a means of supporting the struggles of the working class and marginalized communities of Puerto Rico. Their work is generated collectively by 13-15 active members through facilitated creative processes and construction workshops using papier mâché as their medium and exploring a wide range of forms and styles that include toy theater, cantastoria, shadow theater, table-top puppetry, humanettes, cut-outs, masks, and giants."

**La Titeretada**, the annual celebration of World Puppetry Day in Puerto Rico, began in 2008. I had been invited by Spare Parts Puppets in Perth, Australia to work around the area as part of the 20<sup>th</sup> UNIMA Congress and Festival, and Jorge Díaz (Papel Machete) was determined to celebrate World Puppetry Day in Puerto Rico during this time. The original organizers were Jorge, Francisco Iglesias (Y No Habia Luz), Sugeily Rodriguez (Teatro Aspaviento), Mary Anne Hopgood (Fe y Coraje), Brenda Plumey, and I. We determined the Titeretada would consist of an exhibition of puppets, a series of cabaret nights (a slam of 8- minute works), and a day of children's performance. I was able to help mount the exhibition (which featured as wide a variety of puppets as possible) in the historical Museo de las Americas, and then went to Perth. The Titeretada was a great success, with hundreds of school children visiting the exhibit and full houses for the other events. This particular ball had begun rolling.

Later on in 2008, Manuel Moran and I (Manuel had asked me previously to become a member of the North American commission of UNIMA) worked to establish some kind of unifying group, inviting all puppeteers of Puerto Rico to join "Titiriteros de Puerto Rico." The first meeting had quite a diverse turnout and we (the Titeretada folks) established contact with the other groups who had been working for many years in the field of children's puppetry. Later meetings were not successful and the strange divide between "them and us" has unfortunately continued. However, our initial contact with El Mundo de los Munecos and Teatro SEA has deepened to one of mutual respect, collaboration and friendship and these two groups are part of the Titeretada team.



TEATRO ASPAVIENTO

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



GEROME ON THE PHONE, MASK HUNT MOTIONS



OJOBUSCO MEDLEY, MASK HUNT MOTIONS



Y NO HABÍA LUZ

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

**La Titeretada 2009** grew substantially. I don't know why we are given to exaggeration here, but in 2009, our program grew, along with the organizing nucleus. The exhibition was dedicated to the groups (and individuals) of puppeteers working in Puerto Rico and included the works of El Mundo de los Munecos, Teatro SEA, Papel Machete, Y No Habia Luz, Maskhunt Motions, Aspaviento, Agua, Sol y Sereno, Gabriel Soto, Tere Marichal, Fe y Coraje, Brenda Plumey, Magdame Quinones, Judith Rivera and Edward Cardenas. This Titeretada included performances for children in outdoor arenas (organized by Javier Ortiz of El Mundo de los Munecos) and a five-week Puppets in Cinema series. This was curated by Julio Morales (Y No Habia Luz) and myself, and opened with the showing of Volumes 1 and 2 of Handmade Puppet Dreams, thanks to the generosity of Heather Henson of Ibox Puppetry. Each following week, the films shown featured a specific type of puppet, and we organized short, interactive performances around the showings. Our celebration of World Puppetry Day had blossomed to a five week marathon. Once again, all events (largely free of charge) were filled to capacity.

**La Titeretada 2010** reflected the times in which we live. Up until now, we had only charged for the Cabaret Nights to create a modest fund for the following year. All other costs were covered (barely) by selling advertisements in the program. Everybody worked for free. But with funds drastically cut for many people working in the arts, everybody was hurting and so we resolved to share the door equally among the performers. We opened the Titeretada with a Puppet Bazaar, providing an opportunity for puppeteers to sell their puppets and related items. We did not have an exhibit this year but the performance program grew to include an edition of Sobre la mesa. The Puppets in Cinema program was shorter and, in fact, we managed to compress all events into three weeks. The organizing nucleus had shrunk as everybody was struggling to make ends meet. Still, all events were full.

So the festivals mentioned before and the cabaret nights of the Titeretadas had opened and widened the field for an interest in adult puppetry. This process has been accelerated by a project called Sobre la mesa.

In 2007, I was facilitating a nine month workshop of masks and miniatures called "Bestia." We were in the last stages of mounting the final production when I found by chance a small, miniature wooden table. I bought 11 of them and suggested "an assignment" to the participants and invited guest performers of Bestia; that we each create a five-minute piece on a small TV dinner table, using as a point of departure the miniature wooden table. We created a labyrinth of cloth that divided the space into 11 kiosks, each kiosk large enough to fit 6 members of the public. Once all members of the public (66) were lead into their respective kiosks by the puppeteers, we began. At the end of the five minute pieces, the public, in the small groups, would have a minute and a half to travel to the next kiosk, their movement triggered by music. (This was explained to them before the performances began.) This gave each puppeteer enough time (generally about 30 seconds as the next group always comes in early) to reset their show and begin again. Each puppeteer repeated their performance 11 times, so that the public got to see everything.

Since the first Sobre la mesa, we have performed 6 editions, roughly 2 editions per year. For each new edition one of the puppeteers brings to a meeting a new and identical object that each

puppeteer is given. Using this object as a point of departure, each puppeteer goes away and works on their piece. We have 2 "show and tells" to receive feedback, a dress rehearsal to run the pieces, and then the performance nights. Below are the different editions so far, with the object in parentheses.

Sobre la mesa 1: (a miniature wooden table); Sobre la mesa 2: "HD" (a piece of electronic mother board); Sobre la mesa 3: "Macabron" (a mousetrap); Sobre la mesa 4: "En Pelotas" (a small penis or small breasts); Sobre la mesa 5: "Encendido" (a small parafin tealight); Sobre la mesa 6: "A las millas" (a coaster wheel). The core group of puppeteers is Yussef Soto, Mary Anne Hopgood, Julio Morales, Sugeily Rodriguez, Jorge Diaz, Yari Helfeld, Carlos Torres, Francisco Iglesias and Deborah Hunt with the guest puppeteers in different editions Brenda Plumey, Judith Rivera, Chemi Gonzalez and Jose Enrique Rivera.

Produced without subsidy by Maskhunt Motions, the editions of Sobre la Mesa have been publicized largely through private email lists and Facebook. It is the only show for which we take reservations and they are generally completely booked in two days. The adult public is diverse. Some are regulars and come to each edition offering solidarity and feedback and witnessing the development in skills and dramaturgy of each puppeteer. The word has spread and for some members of the public, it is their first theatrical experience.

So there is now a public intrigued by and eager for the diversity of the puppets we create and who return again and again to witness the liveliness, the satire, the politics, the poetry, and the range of material and events we produce. There are also puppeteers who are willing to experiment, hone their skills, and participate in and create performance opportunities. Adult puppetry is here to stay.

Deborah Hunt is originally from New Zealand but for the past 20 years has resided in Puerto Rico. With her company Mask Hunt Motions she offers performances and workshops in mask and puppetry from her studio and theatre Teatro Yerba Bruja in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. She is a member of UNIMA's North American Commission.



TEATRO ASPAVIENTO

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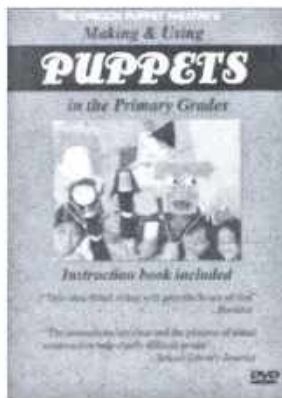
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## DIARY OF A DOLL WIGGLER:

A Boy's Eye View into the Magic & Wonderful World of Puppetry



Bob Nathanson





## An Overview of Puppet Theatre in Puerto Rico, Past, Present and Future

by Manuel A. Morán Martínez, Ph.D

Theatre has been an artistic manifestation that has undergone tremendous development in Puerto Rico, particularly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through great effort and hard work, this development was wrought by several people and institutions dedicated to establishing a theatrical tradition in Puerto Rico. Three institutions were crucial to this development: the University of Puerto Rico's Drama Department, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and its Division of Theatrical Promotion, and the Department of Education's Teatro Escolar Program. As Lydia Esther Sosa stated in her book, *The Development of National Theatre in Puerto Rico*, these institutions carried out "the greatest contribution in the evolution and development of our theatre."

Puerto Rican children's theatre and puppet theatre also emerged through these initiatives. Puerto Rico lacked a tradition of children's theatre—especially puppet theatre. Even though puppet theatre was unheard of in Puerto Rico before the 1960s, some theatrical performances employed puppets, whether as an artistic element or for educational purposes in schools, or by the (primarily European) theatre companies that visited the island.

### *MIR – Genesis of National Puppet Theatre*

In 1965, Santiago Lavandero himself initiated a movement to establish a puppet theatre tradition in the country. Through the Teatro Escolar Program and US Title I, funds were secured that allowed him to establish an experimental project, *El Minitheater Infantil Rural (MIR)*, or Rural Minitheater for Children.

This innovative project trained itinerant puppetry companies that toured the island with the purpose of providing "cultured recreation to all the children in rural and urban zones, public and private."

In August 1966, an American Master-Puppeteer named George Latshaw was hired as puppeteer specialist, to train the personnel. Those being trained were young high school graduates. The four chosen to staff the MIR were Víctor Adrián García, Antonio Pérez, Rafael Ruiz and Rafael Luis García. On November 9, 1966, they left on tour. Culebra Island was the site for the formal inauguration of *Minitheater Infantil Rural de Puerto Rico*. [For more on Latshaw's work in Puerto Rico, see "George Latshaw: establishing a tradition of puppetry in Puerto Rico," *Puppetry International* #21, 2007, or go to [www.unima-usa.org/publications/Latshaw.pdf](http://www.unima-usa.org/publications/Latshaw.pdf). Ed.]

The Puppetry Seminar trained the staff during the summers. Participants were trained in the various areas of puppetry, from puppet making to creating material for the performances. In Rafael Ortiz's book, *Notes about Puppet Theatre in Puerto Rico*, he states that, on average, 20 people were trained annually. Those training sessions and seminars were combined with other seminars in order to train teachers for school theatres. In the presence of Latshaw, and later of Ángeles Gasset from Spain and after that of Bruce Chessé from the U.S., a generation of native puppeteers was educated. This generation continues to dominate the puppet theater stages of Puerto Rico.

Between 1969 and 1980, MIR also traveled to sites in the Caribbean and the United States, including the Dominican Republic, Hartford, Atlanta and to the UNIMA World Puppetry Festival in Washington, DC.

After 13 years of developing and showcasing the art of puppetry throughout the country, the Teatro Escolar Program limited its activities due to lack of funds and personnel. Among its achievements, MIR consolidated the use of puppetry as a resource, which facilitated teaching/learning processes. It positively influenced students' interest for the theatre accounting for a proliferation of puppet clubs in schools. Children and teenagers designed, fabricated, and staged shows attesting to the impact of the program. Today, the employment of puppets as a resource in Puerto Rican schools has diminished. The lack of training and supervision has forestalled its further evolution.



PEDRO AND MASKS, COMPANY AGUA, SOL Y SERENO

### *The Pioneers*

After MIR's disappearance, professional groups predominantly promoting puppet theatre in grade schools began to emerge. According to Rafael Ortiz, the first generation of Puerto Rican puppet companies were: *Titeres Cibuco* (Germán Colón-1968); *Titeres de Mario Donate/Teatro Nacional de Sombras Chinescas* (Mario Donate-1968); *Titeres de Puerto Rico* (José Álvarez-Zayda Ruberté-1972); *Titeres de Borikén* (Francisco Torres-1975); *La Coal/Publiccoop* (Ángel Domenech-1975); *Titirimundi* (Filipo Tirado-1975); and *El Mundo de los Muñecos* (Rafael Ortiz-1978). This last company was the first Puerto Rican company to win UNIMA-USA's "Citation of Excellence" (*Pinocchio*, 1985).

All of these companies work with different puppet styles, but the "bocones/muppet style" puppets, glove puppets and rod puppets are the most common. Most of these companies remain active.



COMPANY ASPAVIENTO

### ***New Generations***

New companies emerged after the original MIR members trained youngsters on the *Escuela Técnica de Artesanía Teatral* (ETAET). This project, which lasted from 1972 to 1982, wasn't a specialized puppetry school, but it incorporated a significant puppetry component, since many of the faculty members were former MIR members.

### ***Puppet Theatre for Adults***

Master Puppeteer and Mask Maker, Deborah Hunt, has been a key figure in developing puppet theatre in Puerto Rico, especially in puppet theatre for adults, a novelty on the island since the majority of existing companies primarily produced shows for children.

Pedro Adorno is another important figure in the puppet and mask theatre movement for adults. He worked and trained for many years with the famous American puppet company, *Bread & Puppet Theatre*. He returned to Puerto Rico in 1993 and founded his company, *Agua, Sol y Sereno*, with which he participated with his theater projects and workshops in several international festivals, most recently experimenting with film.



TEATRO SEA

### ***Festivals in Puerto Rico***

Since its creation in 1955, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) has been the governmental agency entrusted with promoting the arts in Puerto Rico. With a combination of federal and state funds (National Endowment for the Arts), it promotes and subsidizes the arts through festivals and/or other programs and artistic projects. In 1977, the ICP initiated the Puppet Theatre Festival. The majority of the pioneer companies listed above participated in that first festival. Four festivals were carried out from 1977 to 1981. After the last one, ICP combined the Puppet Theatre Festival with the Children's Theatre Festival, annually celebrating them up until 1987, continuing them through annual editions of Children's Theatre Routes, traveling throughout the entire island. In 2002, ICP re-installed the Puppet Theatre Festivals and now holds them every other year. The eighth edition of the festival was celebrated in December 2009.

The ICP Festivals are national in scope, encouraging pioneer Master-Puppeteer Mario Donate to initiate and organize the International Biennial of Puppet Theater. This festival showcases both local and foreign companies. Ten editions of this festival have been organized, drawing companies from countries such as Spain, The Dominican Republic, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica and the United States. It is the only international puppet festival in Puerto Rico.

In addition to the above-mentioned festivals, The Caguas City Puppet Festival (1987 - present) is organized in a city that has become "the capital of Puerto Rican puppet theater." Besides this festival, Caguas offers free puppet theater classes, has a resident puppet theatre company and is considering opening a puppet museum.

Another festival initiated by a group of puppet companies, now called "*Titiriteros of Puerto Rico*," is the *Titeretada*. This festival, which includes expositions, movies, cabaret, bazaars, and shows, has been held annually since 2008.

### ***Puppet Theater Schools***

After the puppet theater seminars offered by the Teatro Escolar Program and by the Escuela Técnica de Artesanía Teatral (ETAET) ended, no further formal education in this art form was made available. Existing companies offered only sporadic workshops relating to the creation and manipulation of puppets.

Recently, Noelia Ortiz, a graduate of the Masters Degree Program in Puppet Theater at IPPA/Connecticut College, taught some courses at the University of Puerto Rico's Drama Department, Río Piedras Campus. The Fine Art Schools of Caguas and Carolina also offer classes.

### ***Publications***

There are few publications about puppet theatre in Puerto Rico. At the time of MIR, the Teatro Escolar Program published educational materials on puppet theatre, along with curriculum guides for teachers and scripts to be staged in schools throughout the country.

Addressing puppet theater history in Puerto Rico, Rafael A. Ortiz wrote *Notes on Puppet Theater in Puerto Rico*, (2002).

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

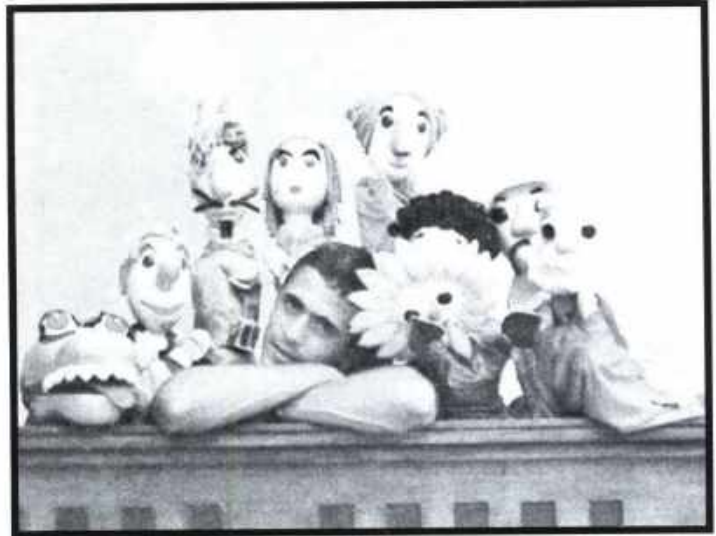
This book offers a summary of the history of the puppet theater movement, but from a personal perspective that privileges the author's own experiences as part of this movement. He offers valuable information on the main puppet companies, most specifically on *Mundo de los Muñecos*, his own company.

Gladys Ruiz's historic preservation efforts must also be mentioned, as well as the work of puppeteer, playwright and actress Tere Marichal.

## *Puppets in Puerto Rican Television*

The use of puppetry emerged in Puerto Rican television during the seventies. From then on various children's television programs began using puppets influenced by various foreign programs such as *El Topo Gigio*, *Plaza Sésamo* (the Spanish version of *Sesame Street*, produced in Mexico) and, in the 1980s, *The Muppet Show*.

Puppets have also been featured in adult programs. One of the programs with highest ratings in Puerto Rican television is *Super*



ANTONIO PÉREZ

## *Conclusion*

Puppet Theatre in Puerto Rico has evolved in a slow, yet continuous way. More research and publications on the historical development of this theater genre is needed in order to continue promoting the art of puppetry there. New initiatives, creative projects, puppeteers and collectives are evolving, yet there is scarcely any exchange between these emerging groups and the pioneers. It will be necessary to join forces, set aside differences and share knowledge in order to unify the puppeteers. This is the only way to continue nurturing the art of puppet theatre in Puerto Rico.

For a longer version of this article and more images, go to:

[www.unima-usa.org/publications](http://www.unima-usa.org/publications)

MIR



*X-clusivo*. A full-body, loudmouthed puppet named La Comay (formerly La Condesa), originally created by Master-Puppeteer José López and manipulated by Kobbo Santarrosa, comments on the daily news as well as show business gossip. Another famous puppet created by López was *Burbujita*, which starred in a children's television program of the same name, created by the television commentator, Millie Cangiano. José López has won several awards for his work of construction and design, including the two UNIMA-USA Citations that Puerto Rico received. He designed and built the two award winning productions in 1985 and 2010.

Filipo Tirado's puppets were also very popular in several television programs: *Kilate and Pirita*; *Los Políticos*, caricatures of the country's government candidates. David Álvarez's puppets are another example of puppets that have been integrated into television. He began with a segment in the now discontinued *Show de las Doce* at Telemundo, and eventually produced a sitcom with puppets titled *Radio Mostro*, which only lasted a season.



EL MUNDO DE LOS MUÑECOS PUPPET COMPANY

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

Manuel Morán is a current member of UNIMA-USA's Executive Committee. At the time of the "pioneer companies," a young student of the Teatro Escolar Program, he founded Society of the Educational Arts, Inc. or SEA in 1985. In 1991, he moved to New York City to attend graduate school in Musical and Educational Theatre at NYU, where he studied with Ralph Lee. SEA has operations in Puerto Rico, Florida, and New York, where it runs a puppet



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## Corrections for PI #28

### *John Bell's History Column*

Bell implied that Philip Huber was the lead puppeteer on the film *Team America World Police*. While Huber was involved in the project early on, Tony Urbano is, in fact, the lead puppeteer of record.



### *Robotic Pygmalion:*

*The caption on page 24 should read:*

DANCERS FROM BROOKS & COMPANY DANCE RECORDING THE CHOREOGRAPHY USING A MOTION-CAPTURE SYSTEM. DATA WAS THEN USED TO PROGRAM ROBOTIC ACTUATORS TO CONTROL TRADITIONAL WOOD AND STRING MARIONETTES.

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## A Brief History of Puppetry in Mexico

by Francisca Miranda Silva  
translated by Miguel Trelles

The puppet theater was an artistic manifestation that was born and developed in parallel on different continents. There have been traces in Mexico of this ancient art from the pre-Columbian era found in action figures and dolls used for ritual offerings, religious celebrations, processions and dances.

In Spain, puppet theatre was born as an informal show in public spaces for entertainment. These spaces were used for public entertainment such as, gymnastics, balancers, tumblers, tightrope walkers, acrobatics, exotic animals, singing, and invisible man/time machine acts.

The puppet shows were among the first to be presented and mentioned in Spain as far back as 1524, and were developed during three colonial centuries. The groups that presented the puppetry also traveled abroad to cities and towns of the viceroyalty. These groups acted at fairs, marketplaces, inn backyards, households, plazas, and streets—generally, any place where they could set up their puppet theatre, also known as “Máquina Real” (Real Machine).

Aside from the public interest towards this artistic form of expression, conditions of representations were difficult. Due to communication efforts with National Royal Hospital administrators (who had a monopoly on the capital’s special events), the best acrobatic or puppetry companies were permitted to present in the Coliseum during Lent, when the regular company was inactive, but the rest were prohibited from acting within the capital. It was feared their presence might decrease attendance at the Coliseum.

This was one of the obstacles puppet theatre faced, but still another more difficult task was at hand—puppetry was categorized as excess, damaging to the town’s morale, which led governing authorities to prohibit it. The church and inquisition were also attentive to the content of puppet comedy. The first victims were comedic puppets followed by trapeze and acrobatic acts.

In the following decades, administrators became more tolerant of this form of artistic expression. They became aware that, if too severely repressed, the street performers would perform at parties in private households which would be more difficult to monitor or effectively control.

In the early nineteenth century, puppeteers established themselves in the city. Fences and tarps were later developed into circus tents for public viewing, as they are known today. New shows were established for public attractions.



ANTONIO PATIÑO Jr.

DEL

# NOPALITO.

CALLE REAL DE SANTA ANA NUM. 6.

COMPANIA MEXICANA.

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PARA EL DOMINGO / 8 DE 1865.

Llego por fin el feliz dia en que lleno mi corazon de la mas profunda gratitud de dar unas funciones para que el público de este lugar tenga algunas distracciones, teniendo el gusto de anunciar, que se presentará en este patio la antigua compañía, y para el efecto, he dispuesto esta funcion bajo el siguiente

**PROGRAMA**

1. Desde las doce de la mañana se oírán una música militar a tocar bombos y escopadas piezas para recibir a la concurrencia.
2. Al presentarse la compañía para saludar al público, la música tocará una hermosa marcha.
3. Bailes muy difíciles por el Sr. García.
4. Juegos de platos por el Sr. Gomez.
5. Posiciones académicas por el Sr. Serna.

1. THEATER PERIQUITO, 1936

2. THEATER COMINO

3. NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST ILLITERACY, SOLEDAD ETLA, OAXACA, 1934

4. POSTER FOR NOPALITO, MEXICO CITY. CITRU, INBA, 1863

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

In Mexico City, in the year 1860, puppet theatre had not yet reached the level of institutional art. However, the puppeteers continued to struggle to be recognized, in order to access the main square plazas of the city at the same level of its "other brother, the classic theatre." They continued their work under tarps on a smaller scale, including the areas surrounding the city, such as alleyways and empty streets. The authorities continued exercising censorship, tarnishing the shows' themes as morally dangerous and politically sensitive.

To counteract censorship, the Mexican puppeteers were able to create a solid society. This would establish the basis for continuity and puppet history. To achieve their goals, these young entrepreneurs decided to lower show prices, pay taxes, establish order, and even add security if necessary.

Like other parts of the world in past decades, the beginning of popular theatres influenced Mexico's public life, creating a necessary counterpoint of visual and cultural expressions promoted by their establishment.

Fortunately for the puppet companies, the logic changed drastically toward the second half of the nineteenth century. The republican takeover eliminated the remains of the previous viceroyalty and delineated, in cultural terms, a different destiny for the country.

The puppet acts in Mexico that had been condemned for more than a century got a new lease on life in the second half of the nineteenth century. Puppets became a valuable asset of republican life; it was one of the first cultural expressions that was passed on to the new nation as it reinvented itself.

Among many puppeteers in the era, the Aranda brothers stood out for their artistic creations, in the year 1835, in Huamantla, Tlaxcala (far from Mexico City), with small handcrafted puppets. By the year 1880, the works of the family got stronger and stood out for being the best in the country under the direction of Leandro Rosete Aranda, who changed the name of the company to "Empresa Nacional Mexicana de Automatas Hermanos Rosete Aranda" (Rosete Aranda Mexican National Enterprises of Automated Puppets). With the artistic quality, he received collaborated assistance to write the history of 5,107 stringed puppets as well as a dramatic presentation of 250 works of art throughout three generations, 107 years old. In the end, the brilliance of the enterprises decayed. Years later, Carlos Espinal Vallejo re-showcased the puppet collection in post-revolutionary Mexican life.

5



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5. LOLA CUETO, FRANCISCA CHÁVEZ AND ROBERTO LAGO, AND CREW, CAMPAIGN AGAINST ILLITERACY, 1946

6. THEATER RIN-RIN, "THE WINTER OF THE ANIMALS," 1934

PHOTOS 1, 2, 3, 5, 6- PROPERTY OF DOLORES VELÁZQUEZ DE CUETO

7. TOURING THEATER GILBERTO RAMÍREZ ALVARADO (DON FERRUCCO) FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL ACTION OF THE FEDERAL DISTRICT GOVERNMENT c. 1940-1950

PHOTO 7- PROPERTY OF ROBERTO LAGO SALCEDO

8. PROGRAM FOR THEATER FRIJOLITO, UNDER THE BIG TOP "TITIRIGLOBO" (PUPPET WORLD), 1984

Concerning the puppets, the handcrafted and realistic style, which captivated the Rosete Aranda's audience, began fading when faced with the new production technology. Performances with broader meaning and more universal themes expanded the locals' perceptions. Carlos Espinal suddenly inherited the art that represented one era: "muñecos de hilo o autómatas" (the automated and string puppets) as they were known.

By 1900, the popularity of puppetry, which had been on the rise, began to decline. The repertoire's characteristic originality wandered, lost in repetitive picturesque allusions. No new ideas were generated nor were visible on the horizon. Other manipulators or employers, in addition to the Rosete Aranda, brought new energy to the puppet show. At the same time, imitators proliferated, who copied these larger companies and used their names or even posed as them as a way of ensuring success.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, puppeteer Julián Gumi from Catalonia, Spain, suddenly appeared. In 1906, he was using sleeved hand puppets that differed from the French version. It wasn't until 1929 that a true movement of guiñol (hand in head) theatre was initiated, which even today informs much of puppetry.

New groups that made presentations with the guiñol techniques were the Theater Periquillo and La Casa del estudiante indígena, under the management of Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano and the collaboration of de Julio Castellanos and Juan Guerrero. These men became an active part of the educational history of the nation and made possible the new era of the "teatro guiñol" in México. The group theme was about health and alcoholism. It gave presentations in streets, parks and gardens in the Mexican cities as a part of popular theatrical activities, organized by the newly created Dirección de Acción Social of D.D.F.

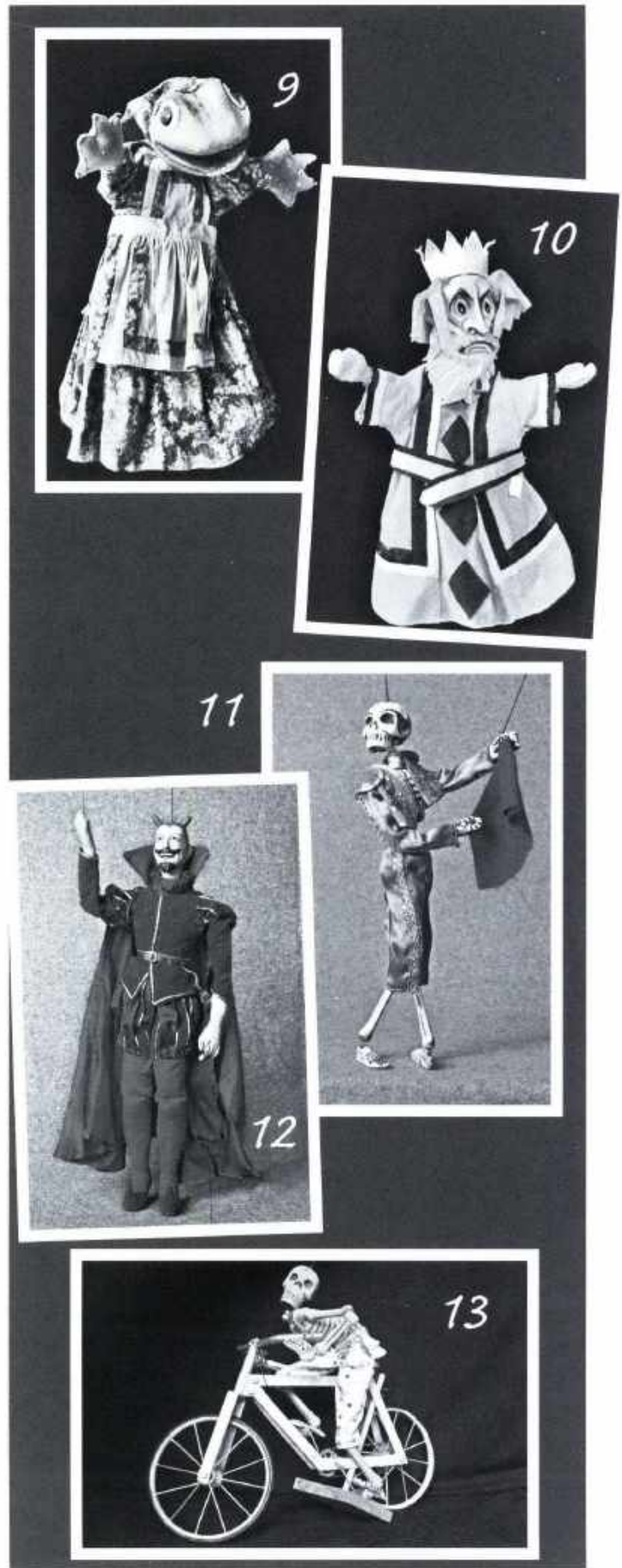
Together with the Theater Periquillo was the other new project sponsored by S.E.P. under the supervision of Ezequiel Padilla, Secretary of Public Education and Fine Arts, and Ortiz de Montellano as coordinator for La Casa del estudiante indígena. The main target for the new project was "to instruct the country- and farm-kids" through the recovery of indigenous legends and myths, and the promotion of theatrical scripts made by the same native students. This was part of a search for a true national identity through the indigenous roots long subjacent to the dominant Hispanic culture, and their subsequent incorporation into contemporary society and its cultural life.

**TEATRO GUIÑOL DE BELLAS ARTES (FINE ARTS GUIGNOL THEATER):**

- 9. MAMA FROG
- 10. KING VENTRIPÓN

**COLLECTION CARLOS V. ESPINAL:**

- 11. SKELETON BULLFIGHTER
- 12. DEVIL
- 13. SKELETON ON A BICYCLE





In the decades of the forties and the fifties, there appeared a new artist with a new very important character: Gilberto Ramirez Alvarado and his puppet, the famous "Ferruco Temboruco Piripitín" and his traveling group of guiñol theater. Their school presentations were didactic and favored labor. Shows for the general public were educational as well. Hired by the Dirección de Acción Social del D.D.F., it promoted the government political view of World War II, and was renamed Puppet Theater for the Defense.

With the new productions and scenic designers, puppet theaters took a new breath and gave an opportunity to the activities promoted by S.E.P. and the cultural institutions like the I.N.B.A. Those were the roots of the guiñol theater of Bellas Artes (National Institute of Fine Arts) with the groups of Comino, Nahuatl, Periquito that served a didactic and pedagogical function and had a mission that promoted the educational, artistic and ideological tendencies of the new Mexican society. A moment had arrived when two concepts that had always been distinct—education and culture—were united as a way of defining and reinforcing national identity.

The final curtain closed on the teatro guiñol. Crefalito, Teatro Petul, Teatro Guiñol Sanitario and the groups of the INBA (Chapulín, Frijolito, Piruleque, Chipote, and Colibrí y Frijolito) were working even as recently as 1985. In its final decades, the guiñol theater developed in tandem with institutional activities particular to the INBA. Throughout the seventies, the INBA create the Titiriglobo—a tent designed to develop a guiñol theater season. The important achievements of Titiriglobo ended by reviving the company of Rosete Aranda, though the Titiriglobo itself faded in the eighties.

In the twenty-first century, after 200 years of Mexican independence, we can see the historical legacy that all those artistic families and groups have left to all the new puppeteers, organizations, and institutions that still work to create puppet theater. All of them create new techniques and productions throughout the Mexican republic with their nomadic puppet theaters, showing up in tents, church entrances, homes and theaters, presenting scripts of historical characters, fantasy, optical illusion and variety for the enjoyment of the young and old, just as their predecessors did.

*BIBLIOGRAPHY AND MORE IMAGES ON P 52*

Francisca Miranda Silva is originally from Nicaragua but now lives in México. She is a writer and researcher who specializes in puppetry.

14. LEANDRO ROSETE TOURING THE U. S. WITH MUSICIANS  
PHOTO: DANIEL ALVA AND FAMILY, TOLUCA, MEXICO  
PROPERTY OF ARMANDO DE MARIA AND CAMPOS

15. BIG TENT THEATER, COMPANY OF "AUTOMATA," ROSETE ARANDA,  
PROPERTY OF CARLOS V. ESPINAL AND FAMILY

**COMPANY DON CARLOS V. ESPINAL**  
16. DON CARLOS V. ESPINAL AND FAMILY  
17. COMPANY MEMBERS

14



15



16



17



*Puppets in Mexico and the New Generations*

by César Taveras translated by Miguel Trelles

The history of puppets in Mexico can be divided into several major time periods, starting with pre-Hispanic rituals involving clay figures from Teotihuacán and Cacaxtla—mere dolls or figurines to some but already puppets to others. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, in his book *Historia General de las cosas de la Nueva España*, writes about a person in the main square who “. . . shaking his back pack would call upon those inside . . . then some figures in childlike dress would emerge. They would dance, sing, representing what his heart would dictate. Afterwards they would go back in, placed into the back pack . . . for that, he who brought them out to jump about or represent the gods, was gratified.”

Along with the conquest at the hands of Hernán Cortes, two puppeteers named Pedro López and Manuel Rodríguez arrived, as the conquistador enjoyed that sort of entertainment. Cortes himself asked Charles V to convert the natives and this proselytizing was carried out by staging religious plays with dolls.

In the so-called Colonial era, puppets were employed after a license was obtained to perform with them in yards, house patios; still others were deployed clandestinely and the more fortunate ones appeared in theaters. Representative puppets such as Don Folías, “el negrito,” and Juan Panadero began to appear.

It is in the XIX century that the representative era of Mexican puppet history begins. The Aranda brothers began exploring this format around 1835 in the city of Tlaxcala. Later on they formed the Rosete Aranda Company, which soon gained popularity and subsequently earned them fame as they toured the Mexican Republic, spending long seasons in theaters all over the capital. By 1900 they reportedly had approximately 5000 puppets.

After the 1909 death of Leandro Rosete, this Company declined until years later, when one of its puppeteers, Carlos Espinal, acquired the name and, until his own demise in 1961, achieved even greater fame under the name “Titeres Rosete Aranda, Empresa de Carlos Espinal.”

In 1929 Bernardo Ortiz, Juan Guerrero and Julio Castellanos started the first puppet theater with glove puppets. The so-called Golden Era of Mexican Guignol Theatre took off in 1931. Then, artists such as Angelina Beloff, Leopoldo Mendez, Juvenal Fernández, Germán List Arzubide, Lola y Germán Cueto, Roberto Lago, and Gilberto Ramirez (Don Ferruco) created a puppet movement employed by literacy and health campaigns. Fine Arts and the Secretary of Education both created companies up until 1965, when a

cycle ended. These are the roots of the current puppeteers.

In the mid-seventies, Mexico hosted a great influx of South American exiles fleeing the numerous military dictatorships taking power in their countries. Among these exiles, a number of puppeteers with a different puppet aesthetic arrived and reinvigorated the national puppet theater. Among the arrivals were Nicolás Loureiro, María Cespedes, Cecilia Andres, Roberto Espina, Carlos Converso, Lucio Espíndola, Claudio Prudhome, and Leonardo Kosta.

The drive to become organized took hold at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, starting with the UMTAC (Unión Mexicana de Titiriteros A.C.), where collaborators such as Virginia Ruano, Roberto Lago, Patricia Ostos, Carlos Converso Leticia Colina and Mireya Cueto edited a bulletin titled “Don folias” and organized a nine-day puppet theater event in Guadalajara, Jalisco. In 1978 this group became consolidated as the “Asociación Civil.”

UNIMA Latin America was created in 1980 and shortly thereafter, in 1981, a constituent congress carried out in Queretaro established the Mexican Center for UNIMA. A Civil Association was formalized in 1983. Its adherents included Lucio Espíndola, Raquel Barcena, Patricia Ostos, and Mireya Cueto, who struggled to project a broader appeal through the creation of new festivals, a dedicated site, governmental support and travel abroad. In almost thirty years there have been multiple meetings of the minds, disagreements, highs and lows, as well as a consolidation of various regional groups in order for puppeteers to obtain support for specific projects in their own states. Throughout this time, organizational cycles as well as members have fluctuated; backing for the institution was not unanimous.

The creation of festivals did spur puppeteer activity, which led to the 1978 creation of the first International Puppet Week. Organized by the IMSS in collaboration with the then active UMTAC, this week later became the permanent IMSS international festival, which lasted until 1992.

The Festival Internacional del Títere de Tlaxcala, celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary this year, traces its origins to a puppet week first organized by Alejandro Jara and Guadalupe Alemán. In Mexico City, the Muf Festival has taken hold and gradually several festival organizations have become integrated, allowing for Tlaxcalan neighboring states such as Veracruz, Morelos and Hidalgo to host extensions of the Tlaxcalan event.



ROSETES EXPO 1996 PHOTO: ELVIA MANTE

In 1993, the Festibaúl de Títeres was first organized in Monterrey. This festival has already been held twelve times. Sinaloa witnessed the emergence of a new festival in 1997, named after one of the region's most emblematic puppeteers: Don Pedro Carreón. The group, Marionetas de la Esquina organized the Titerías Festival in 2003, the first of its kind in Guanajuato, and later moved to the capital. Other recent festivals worthy of note are: Festín de los muñecos in Jalisco, Festival de San Miguel Allende, Festival de Chihuahua, Festiterando Mexico City, Festival Nacional de Morelia. Each year the same puppeteers compete to organize their own festivals.

Adultiteres, a festival organized by Francisco Beverido exclusively for an adult public, deserves to be singled out.

Regarding the spaces dedicated exclusively to puppets, the venues have been scarce, most notably Titiriglobo, an INBA space located in the forest at Chapultepec, which operated briefly during the 1970s.

In Mérida, Yucatan, the little theater Pedrito constitutes the reference point for Yucatecan puppets. Run by the Titeradas group since 1972, even scant support has not managed to close this small theater, which continues operating intermittently to this day, thanks to the enthusiasm of its creator Wilberth Herrer.

Museo Nacional del títere opened in 1991. Located in Huamantla, Tlaxcala, this space for puppet preservation has been the site of a festival for many years and constitutes the first museum dedicated to this art in the country.

A second museum opened its doors in Monterrey in 1994 under the management of Baúl Teatro A.C. Referred to as La Casa de los Títeres (The Home of the Puppets), this private space without government subsidies has exhibition halls, a theater, an archive and also serves as the site of the annual puppet festibaúles.

In the mid-nineties, Marionetas de la Esquina opened its Cuernavaca, Morelos installations. They closed after the group relocated to Mexico City. Other groups with sites include La Rana de Guanajuato, which opened a forum for 30 people and which continues despite financial difficulties. Carlos Converso in Xalapa, Veracruz opened the first school for puppeteers: CEAT, AC. This space was run for four years and was forced to shut down when its space was taken over. It has recently obtained support from the state of Veracruz to open a site elsewhere.

Also in Xalapa the Merequetengue group opened a space in 2009. Known as El rincón de los títeres (Puppet Corner), this forty-seat theater carries out Sunday programming.

In the City of Queretaro, Franco Vega created La Carterera space, where puppets

and children's theater are staged. Luz Angelica Colín has carried out various efforts to create a puppet museum in that city, even though the outcome is still pending. The most recent effort is an initiative to create a puppet school in said capital.

In 2008, Heie Boies opened a space in Guanajuato named Casa Simurgh and it continues offering weekend shows. The space exhibits the founder's significant collection of puppets from all over the world.

This year, Marionetas de la Esquina opened a new space in Mexico City, La Casa de la Titería. Other efforts by groups such as Acercarte in Puebla, Contarte in Tlaxcala, and Dragón Rojo in Veracruz have not been successful.

The country boasts 26 publications devoted to dramaturgy, 16 publications devoted to puppets and puppeteer history, and 13 periodicals which include a number dedicated exclusively to puppetry, 12 publications address manipulation techniques, 5 contain essays on the craft, and 3 catalog puppeteers or museums.

Even though the contemporary aesthetic has evolved, techniques have remained pure. String puppets succumbed to gloves, the gloves were overtaken by the *bocones* (big mouths), the black light theater arrived and the shadow theater experimented with changes but continued with shadows. Currently, visibly manipulated table-top shows are on the rise. The actor leaves the *teatrino* (booth), shows him or herself and manipulates the puppets, but narration prevails in many spectacles where it is not clear where the oral narrative begins and where the puppets end.

New generations, fortunate to be able to see so many puppets, stand on the shoulders of this history. They can also experience festivals where national and international projects are performed on stage. These relatively new advantages prove to be a vast improvement over past conditions, where puppet exchanges were jealously guarded affairs due to the necessity of traveling vast distances to meet other groups. With a click of the mouse, the "You Tube generation" can watch, analyze and copy (which, fortunately, does not occur frequently). Small tableaux and simple short stories are the most frequently observed throughout the cities in Mexico.

What has been missing is formal schooling. There have been attempts to establish it, but it usually remains at the course level or diploma program where practice laboratories are a luxury. Institutes for scenic arts in the universities still have not opened their

CONTINUED ON PAGE 52



PRE-COLUMBIAN FIGURES

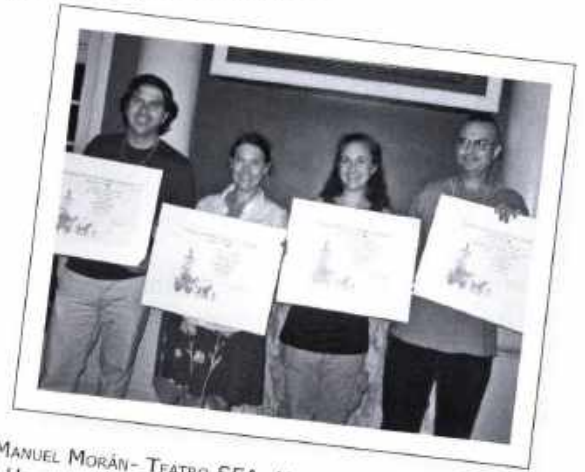
\* Descubrir el hilo negro is a phrase that seems unique to Mexico. While it is used in many contexts, it has its origins in the marionette theater, where to try and "find the black thread" might be seen as exposing the mechanics of the performance—particularly apropos to the plea Mr. Taveras makes, for puppeteers to turn this to their advantage! [Ed.]

*UNIMA-USA Citations of Excellence*  
 by Marianne Tucker, Chairwoman, 2010 Citations Committee

The UNIMA-USA Citation of Excellence is a one of a kind award in puppetry. Some international festivals have "best of the festival awards" but no one else honors an individual production occurring anywhere at any time in North America.

"The movies have their Oscars, the theater its Tonys, but for puppetry, there was no such award." (Mark Levenson, Winner's Circle) That is until 1973 when Jim Henson founded the Citation of Excellence. He wrote in a letter to Allelu Kurten in 1988 "... if three people you trust all recommend a particular show, then you definitely try and see it. In other words, you have a "cited" show ..." This was the procedure adopted to determine which production receives a Citation. Reviewers from all over the country nominate shows that, in their opinion, demonstrate excellence in writing, lighting, music, staging, performance, manipulation and touch their audiences in a profound way.

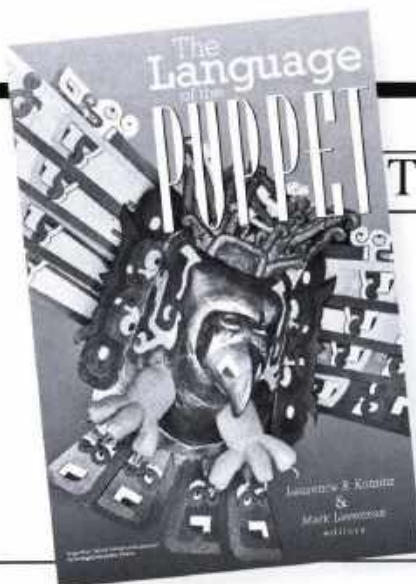
Reviewers are from different walks of life, ages and have as many different opinions as there are reviewers, thus the Citations are awarded to many different styles of show, from the huge theatrical production employing many puppeteers and actors to the one woman show intended for small, young audiences. Some reviewers have literally hated a show that was loved by enough of a different opinion that it received an award. This is actually a wonderful feature of the Citation of Excellence; that many different people volunteer their time to go out and see shows and send in a review and so many different shows are represented in the roster of winners.



MANUEL MORÁN- TEATRO SEA, MOLLY ROSS- NANA PROJECTS,  
 HEATHER HENSON- IBEX PUPPETRY, JOHN LUDWIG- CENTER FOR PUPPETRY ARTS

In 1993 the Citations were expanded to include puppetry in film and recorded media, and in 2010 we had our first performance for the internet only award. With the inception of our web site ([www.unima-usa.org](http://www.unima-usa.org)) requests for reviews and nomination forms are available online, making it easier for the reviewers and performers to bring productions to the attention of all.

UNIMA-USA will continue to evaluate the Citations of Excellence Award and the procedure for review. Changes will come, but the UNIMA-USA Citation of Excellence will continue to be a coveted award and an honor for all those who receive it ... and only those in North America can receive it!



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*Two and Only* by Jay Johnson

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*Cinderella* by The Great Arizona Puppet Company

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*Entertaining a Thought* by Leslie Carrara-Rudolph

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*Panther and Crane* created by Heather Henson (Ibex Puppetry)

*Rainbow Bridge and other Tales* by Hobey Ford  
and Golden Rod Puppets

*Little Pirate Mermaid* by Jon Ludwig and  
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*Fantastic Mr. Fox, Coraline*, produced by Henry Selick

*Ode to Joy* produced by Muppet Studios

*Quixote* by Steven Ritz Barr Classics in Miniature



GOGOL PROJECT



PANTHER AND CRANE

## *Native American Puppetry*

by Nancy Lohman Staub

Researchers have discovered that finger, hand, rod, string, body and even found object puppets played varied roles in the religious and social life of some Native American cultures. Historically shamans used masks and puppets to aid their role as liaisons to the spirit world, to influence the spirits, and in some cases, to convey an illusion of magical powers. Puppets continue to appear in some contemporary religious and social ceremonies. Examples of Native American Puppets can be found in several museums including the National Museum of the American Indian (home to the Heye Foundation Collection) in Washington, D.C. and New York City, The Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, and the Provincial Museum of British Columbia are among the others.

The term Native American refers to the people who migrated to the Americas from Asia across the Bering land bridge during the Ice Age. Archaeologists debate the dates, with the earliest evidence of migrants estimated in a range from 12,000 to 40,000 years ago. The indigenous population has been estimated as high as 90 million in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. By 1990, one census claimed only 2 million and 26.3 million Native Americans lived in North America and Latin America respectively. Europeans discovered over 2000 distinct languages in the Americas, but more than half have disappeared, with many more endangered.

Puppets were documented as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Mexico among the Mayans and Toltecs. The Hopi of the Southwestern United States, the Kwakiutl and others of the Northwest Coast of North America, and the Yup'ik of western Alaska still perform ceremonies with puppets. There is some evidence of puppetry among the Zuni and Navaho of the Southwest, as well as among select Native American cultures of the Plains and Woodlands of the United States.

In South America, documentation of Native American puppetry is slim. Andreo Rodolfo Sirolli attributed some archaic clay heads from Northwest Argentina as puppets, having observed Indians playing with similar ones on their fingers. He theorized that many clay figures found in South America might have been used as puppets, based on puppet traditions observed in several cultures around the world including Central America and Mexico.

*Popol Vuh* or *El Libro del Consejo* (The Book of Counsel), a mid-16<sup>th</sup> century document from the Quiche Mayan culture, includes an allegory describing men as manikins made of wood who had no wisdom in their heads "...before their manufacturers, their builders, their procreators, their animators." Spanish writers in Mexico observed puppetry among native populations as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Bernal Díaz del Castillo described puppets in his accounting of the Cortés expeditions, *Historia Verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (True History of the Conquest of New Spain, 1632). In his *Historia de las cosas de la Nueva España* (*History of Things of New Spain*), Friar Bernardo de Sahagún, who died in 1590, reported a performance by a Toltec shaman who made a tiny figure dance in the palm of his hand, apparently a success as some of the marketplace crowd were trampled in the rush to see it.

Some bas-relief sculptures depict men that may have been manipulating puppets. A panel from Chinkultic, Chiapis, Mexico (c.800 C.E.) shows a standing man with a doll hanging from his forearm. Alejandro Jara-Villaseñor conjectured that the scene represents puppetry or ventriloquism since there are "speech scrolls" as if the priest were speaking to the onlooker. Jara-Villaseñor also described a fire serpent from the Mexica Aubin Codex (1300-1521 C.E.) as made of feathers and paper, with a tongue that was moved up and down.

Archaeological sites revealed clay dolls with articulated limbs dated as early as 300 C.E. These figures represent Mayan, Totonaca, Teotihuacan, Tlaxcalteca, Cholteca, and Mexica cultures and range from 2 to 20 inches in height. Natural fibers connected the separate limbs, arms and/or legs, to the body. One figure ascribed to the Tonaca Culture has a hole in its head, possibly to insert a cord or rod to manipulate the doll. The movable limbs of these dolls provoked the theory that they were used as puppets in ceremonies, but they could have been simply children's toys.

In the Southwestern United States, the Hopi Indian pueblo dwellers still hold religious ceremonies with masked men personifying kachinas, who are spirits. The men carve dolls representing the kachinas and present them to all women and girls, and very young boys. The dolls, like kachina masks, are made from cottonwood. These dolls are safeguarded, because they bring benefits associated with the kachinas.

There are Hopi puppets, which like the dolls, resemble and retain the essence of kachinas. Examples of this tradition are the Corn Maiden puppets. They are designed to look like the kachina dancer S'alako. Their manipulators hide behind a screen and control the puppets with strings to grind corn in a special ceremony. At one point, the manipulator grabs a brush with his own hands to sweep the stone, but maintains the illusion that the puppet is doing it. The Corn Maiden Puppets are given artificial hearts and are considered to be living and feeling beings. Before each performance, the puppets are renewed and given new hearts.

Because the Hopi are farmers living in an arid climate, they hold a Water Serpent Ceremony, documented as early as 1881, to bring rain. According to the report, the manipulators hid behind a painted screen while poking water serpent hand puppets through holes in it. Kooyemesis (Mudhead Clowns) comically struggled to overcome the serpents. Another type of kachina dancer used one arm to wrestle with a puppet serpent worn on his other arm. A fake arm attached to the serpent completed the illusion. In the Water-Vase Serpent Ceremony, water serpent puppets emerged from pots. Concealed manipulators controlled the puppets by strings hung over rafters as the Mudheads subdued the serpents.

In both the Corn Maiden Ceremony and the Water Serpent Ceremony, sandpiper puppets scurried back and forth along a rod at the top of the screens, controlled by strings. Their heads nodded as if pecking the corn meal fed them by kachina dancers. Reportedly, the puppet ceremonies still take place in the Hopi kivas, which are underground ceremonial chambers.

The nearby Zuni, inheritors of the same culture as the Hopi, carve kachina dolls. Although the dolls' arms are articulated, there is no evidence they served in any performances. Existing illustrations document Shalakos (Zuni dancers hidden by cloth costumes while carrying masks on long poles), which may be classified as body puppets.

The Navaho is a neighboring culture of the Hopi and Zuni. In 1882, a Navaho Ceremony was reported in which an eagle feather danced upright in a basket. A manipulator synchronized the feather with a boy dancer's movements using concealed strings. A similar dance was reported to take place among the Hopi. An animated feather could be considered a found object puppet.

The Northwest Coast Native Americans inhabit the Pacific shoreline from the Alaskan panhandle to Puget Sound. The most common ceremony of the Northwest Coast Native Americans was the potlatch, which is documented as early as 1792. The potlatch validated the host's rank and privileges, which included the right to use certain masks and perform special dances and legends. A potlatch would last several days including performances, lavish feasts, and donation of gifts to the witnesses. The Canadian government banned potlatches in 1884, because officials and missionaries criticized the vast expenditures of wealth. Some, particularly among the Kwakiutl, defiantly continued their practice. The law was finally rescinded in 1951, and the United States Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978 making potlatches legal. Among others, the Lelooska family in Ariel, Washington State currently performs Kwakiutl potlatches.

Some North West Coast Native American puppets were mounted on carved wooden masks, which the masked dancers controlled with concealed strings. An octopus, a dogfish, a two-headed snake, a heron, and an owl as well as articulated human figures are among them. Figures with movable parts were worn as headdresses including some representing corpses. One corpse puppet was worn on the dancer's neck with the head of the puppet attached to swivel easily giving it incidental movement. Some articulated whales were

worn as headdress masks, and there is one type of huge articulated whale "mask" that was strapped to the dancer's back.

Other puppets were independent of masks. Puppet birds flew through the air with strings hung over rafters, and others were lowered through the smoke hole. In one ceremony reported, a bird puppet stole a person puppet's head and then returned it. A frog with rollers was pulled with strings along the ground, as was a crab that has hinged claws and legs. A salmon puppet was seen to jump out of water and a whale puppet was pulled by a canoe. With control strings hidden underground, human puppets buried in boxes popped up on cue. Some incredibly beautiful large human figures, with sophisticated movable joints, could stride across the performance area. One such figure has flaps that open to reveal an inner image hidden within its chest.

The flickering fire in the center of the huge ceremonial room left shadowy corners to hide the manipulators and make the strings virtually invisible. Underground tunnels facilitated miraculous appearances and disappearances. Because shamans used puppet trickery to enhance their power, the mechanics of puppets and masks were jealously guarded. In the past, anyone who revealed the secrets could have been put to death.

The Inuit inhabit the Arctic area of North America. Carved wooden mechanical figures were found among most Inuit groups and are still seen today among the Yup'ik speakers of Western Alaska. As early as 1842, a Russian navy lieutenant witnessed puppets near St. Michael in a village ceremony. He described owls with flapping wings, sea gulls diving for fish, and ptarmigans pecking at each

other. Descriptions by others tell of human replicas that moved, talked and even walked across the room illuminated by oil lamps and candles.

Ceremonies to celebrate important occasions and ensure successful hunting were held in community houses. One carved ivory model depicts a ceremony in which a person is manipulating a whale that was raised and lowered, attached to a string over a rafter. Figures like this would qualify as puppets, although some museum publications describe them as dance objects. Other examples include an owl with movable wings, a bird with human legs, a flying man, and a man in a kayak.

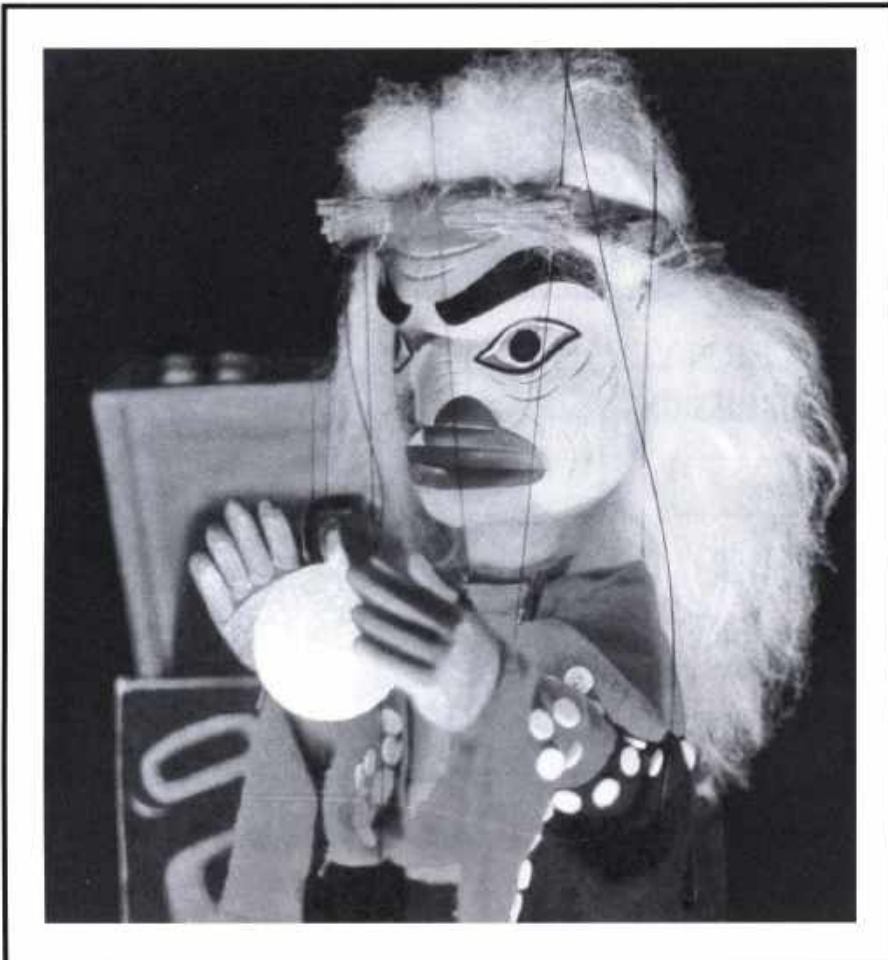


FIGURE BY GEORGE DAVID FROM NUU-CHAH TRIBE, VANCOUVER ISLAND FOR CARTER FAMILY MARIONETTES PHOTO: DMITRI CARTER

One photo of a contemporary ceremony includes a fully clothed, life-size manikin controlled by strings. One dancer was seen manipulating an animal bladder with a painted face as if it were a hand puppet.

One Yup'ik contraption, named the "pretend" or "model universe," may be called a puppet. It consists of a number of rings connected to each other with rods. Decorated with feathers and down called snowflakes, it was shaken by cords suspended from the ceiling, to the rhythm of the songs and drums. Various wooden figures, some of which were animated, decorated the rings and also appeared on their own.

Some large masks were worn vertically, including full body carvings of whales. Other large masks including one of a salmon were hung from the rafters and dancers moved behind them. One five by five foot loon was described in which the dancer moved in the center of the suspended "mask." These masks could be considered body puppets. Women danced with small masks on their fingers to enhance their movements, and these could be called finger puppets.

In other cultural areas of North America, only a few objects collected might fit the category of puppet. Among the plains Native Americans, the Sioux had horse dance sticks that were carried by dancers to represent horses ridden into battle. Among the Woodlands people, the Ojibwa had "juggler" dolls, and the Menominee had some human figures attached by strings to sticks.

These examples enumerate a few puppetry traditions found in the multiplicity of Native American cultures. Only a few Native Americans had writing systems, and puppets often disintegrate, but we can conjecture that more traditions existed. Some Native American puppetry, particularly among the Hopi, the Kwakiutl and the Yup'ik of North America, has endured to this day having reached a high level of artistry.

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Nancy Staub was the Artistic Director of the 1980 UNIMA World Puppetry Festival in Washington, DC. She has been a theatre director, and is a consultant to the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta.

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# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

*From the Collection at the Center for Puppetry Arts, Atlanta GA*

THIS PRE-COLUMBIAN FIGURE, AND THE FIGURE ON PAGE 44, ARE TWO OF THE OLDEST OBJECTS IN THE COLLECTION AND ARE PRESUMED TO HAVE TAKEN PART IN SHAMANISTIC PERFORMANCES DURING RELIGIOUS RITUALS. THEY HAVE A HOLE ON EACH OF THE SIDES THAT WOULD HAVE HELD ARMS THAT COULD BE ARTICULATED.

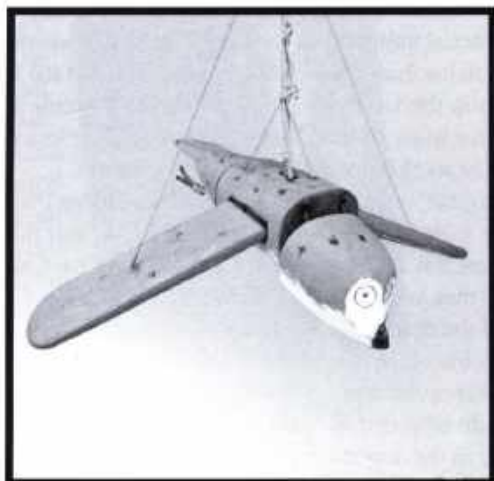
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NUU-CHAH-NULTH  
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YUPIK OWL, HAND CARVED BY AN  
ESKIMO ELDER  
FROM EMMONIK, AK  
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PHOTOS: MELISSA MCCARRIAGHER

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## FRANK BALLARD and the American Puppet Renaissance

by John Bell

The death of puppeteer Frank Ballard on June 4, 2010 marked the end of one of the strongest influences on American puppet theater in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jim Henson and his colleagues have revolutionized the possibilities of puppetry as a film and television medium, and Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater has shown how puppetry can be a medium for "serious" and/or political performance. Over the 50-year period of his work at the University of Connecticut, Frank Ballard's development of a conservatory-based puppetry program not only produced well-respected and influential puppeteers for television, film, and all forms of live performance from Broadway to school assemblies, but also (and perhaps more importantly) established puppetry as a legitimate area of theater training and, consequently, theater practice.

Ballard had come to Connecticut in 1956 as a set designer and technical director, even before UConn's Dramatic Arts Department had been established. Always interested in puppetry (he had been performing puppet shows since the age of five), Ballard started the university's puppet program in 1965, while the acting chair of his department was on sabbatical (as the story has it), so that by the time the chair returned, the Puppet Arts Program was already in place and attracting students. The sketchy nature of the program's founding is not simply another aspect of the popular image of puppeteers as wily survivors who exploit any available opportunity to stay alive, but also a measure of the highly ambiguous status of the United States's only university-level puppet program (until the creation of the Cotsen Center for Puppetry and the Arts at the California Institute of Arts in 1998) during Ballard's entire career. By this I mean to say that Ballard's success in establishing the UConn Puppet Arts Program was eternally accompanied by doubts about its cultural legitimacy and value, even among Ballard's own colleagues. Ballard's UConn puppet program appeared to announce to the world that the United States had joined the ranks of the prestigious puppet schools of Prague, Barcelona, Charleville-Mézières, Moscow, and Berlin, but while those institutes generally enjoyed a European understanding of puppetry as an art form with a substantial tradition and undeniable legitimacy, and thus also could count on institutional support for faculty and facilities, Ballard's program in the United States was basically a one-man operation, housed for most of its life in the basement of a UConn dormitory, far from the workshops, classrooms, and rehearsal spaces of the more "legitimate" aspects of theater study.

At a memorial service for Frank Ballard in Storrs last June, a retired UConn Facilities Operations manager told me that, when the fledgling puppet program was given its first home in the dormitory basement, Ballard asked him to come over to help install lights. The underground space designated for Ballard's workshop, storage, classroom, and rehearsal space had only one lightbulb mounted in the middle of the basement, and there was no money in the department budget for more fixtures. The Facilities manager told me he secretly installed lighting throughout the space, a sign not only of

the adverse conditions under which Ballard created and nurtured his puppet program, but also the wide-ranging popular support he cultivated for it throughout the university and in the larger community of Storrs. Astonishing as this story now may seem, one cannot be surprised by the challenges posed by Ballard's own institutional colleagues, because they simply reflect the status of American puppetry in the mid-60s—a low-culture art form with a murky past and, from the perspective of most academics, not worth much value as a subject of study or instruction. By dint of his tireless energy and ability to inspire those around him, Ballard made the puppet program thrive, but it appears that many of his university colleagues never really understood it, and simply tolerated it instead as a quirky and colorful oddity.

Forty-five years later, the situation of puppetry has changed, and the Puppet Arts Program Ballard started, now under the direction of Bart Roccoberton, has its own substantial facilities, a technical supervisor, a sister program in the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry (where this writer works), and strong support from the School of Fine Arts and the University of Connecticut as a whole. And yet the status of puppetry as an art form is still contested in academia: a challenge to traditional concepts of theater and drama.

How did it happen that Frank Ballard managed to have sufficient confidence in puppetry to withstand the challenges he faced in establishing it as an academic discipline? Born in 1929 in Alton, Illinois, next to the Mississippi River, right across from Missouri, and not too far from St. Louis, Frank started making puppets at the age of five, with the encouragement, he said, of his Aunt Margaret and the assistance, according to some newspaper articles, of his brother Irwin and his sister Alice. In the Frank Ballard papers at Ballard Institute there is a small hand-written note to him, signed by two puppeteers: Romaine and Ellen Proctor. It just says "best regards" from them both, but Ballard kept this in his scrapbook to commemorate that meeting, which could well have taken place after one of Ballard's marionette shows in the early 1940s, during the war, when he had already created his own marionette company as a teenager. (Or did the meeting result from Ballard visiting the Proctors' Puppet Institute at the Peoples' Art Center in St. Louis in 1944?) We don't yet know the details, but this connection to the Proctors is important.

Romaine and Ellen Proctor were from Springfield, Illinois, not too far from Alton, and they toured all across the Midwest in the 1930s and 40s with marionette shows like *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Little Black Sambo*, *Punch and Judy*, and *Hansel and Gretel*. They had converted a Springfield movie house into a puppet theater in 1935, and they taught children's classes in puppetry through the Springfield Art Association. In other words, they were successful, they were professionals, and they were good examples for a young puppeteer. The Proctors were an important part of the birth of modern American puppetry, which had started in the Midwest in the first decade of the last century at the Chicago Little Theatre,

and had then spread to Cleveland, Detroit, and other Midwest cities and towns large and small, where young artists had just started to understand the wide array of possibilities that puppets could offer American audiences caught in a time of economic trouble and war.

If the Proctors had seen one of Ballard's performances, which one was it? The one covered in an Alton newspaper as "Puppet Show Given At Little Theater"? Or was it the one described in an article titled "Young Puppeteer Shows the Ropes To Rotary Club"? (In this article, Ballard is 18, and he's already doing *Aida*!) It is not clear when exactly it could have happened, but there must have been a moment of connection—marked by the note that Ballard saved all his life—when he saw that his puppet shows, which were already enthralling his family, friends, teachers, and neighbors, were part of a larger world of performance, including not just the Proctors, but Martin and Olga Stevens from Indiana, Marjorie Batchelder from Ohio, Paul McPharlin of Detroit, Helen Haiman Joseph of Cleveland, and Fredrik Chramer in Chicago. The larger world also extended to the special effects in movies from Hollywood, and the very unusual performances in Java, Japan, China and beyond that Americans could find out about if they were interested. The "beyond" brought Frank out of Alton, and lead him to higher studies (an MFA from the University of Illinois in 1953), acting and directing, teaching positions, television work, set design, and then finally to UConn, where it occurred to him sometime in 1961 to start a program devoted to teaching the art of puppetry.

Frank Ballard made this happen because back in Alton in the 1940s he had had a glimpse of what the puppet possibilities were, experiencing first-hand the initial wave of the American puppet renaissance. Drawing strength from that, he ran with the idea all the way to Storrs, where, despite the indifference of some of his peers, but with the help and support of his family, neighbors, friends and colleagues, he began to change the way puppetry was understood in the United States.



FRANK BALLARD, WORKING ON MASKS FOR *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS*



DR. BEGRIFFENFELDT, *PEER GYNT*, 1973



THE QUEEN OF THE NIGHT, *THE MAGIC FLUTE*

*UConn Puppeteers (abridged)*

by Rolande Duprey

While many of the puppetry students that studied with Mr. Ballard went on to become puppeteers in their own right, others became teachers, engineers, or business people. Some of the teachers that took Frank's summer courses for teachers used puppetry in their classrooms. One of them, Tom Fogarty, served on the board of Puppeteers of America, and is President of the Connecticut Guild of Puppetry. John Mayer, having received his M.A. in puppetry (he performed in *Babes in Toyland*) went on to teach and administer at area schools – eventually hiring other UConn puppetry graduates. Steve Brezzo, who was the first M.F.A. in puppetry in 1974, worked for years as the director of the San Diego Museum, and is now on the Board of Directors for the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry. Tom Keegan has started up a UConn Puppetry Alumni page on Facebook.

Eileen Packard, now a kindergarten teacher, was in the cast of *The Mikado*. She had her own production company, Peanut Butter Jam, which featured live music and puppetry. Michael Michanczyk, (performed with Frank in *Samson and Delilah* and developed a puppet theatre in Plantsville, Connecticut called Puppets and Other Things. Bonny Hall and Jamie Keithline, who met at UConn, perform as Crabgrass Puppet Theatre.

Brad Williams and Bart Roccoberon began Pandemonium Puppet Company during their time as graduate students. Brad went on to work on projects both on the stage and in television. Bart Roccoberon, hired to teach puppetry when Frank retired in 1990, continues to do projects under Pandemonium's banner.

Others that developed their own puppet theatres include Leslie Weinberg (*Magic Flute's* Assistant Director) with Puppetsweat; Sandy (Bellock) Listorti (another *Magic Flute* alum) with Merry Tales Puppet Theatre, and Valerie Scott (*Fantasticks* builder) with Choices: An Educational Puppet Program, hiring former student Elizabeth Wadsworth (*Magic Flute*). Spring Burrington Reiss developed her own Spring's Puppets, becoming perhaps the only marionettist ever to perform on stilts doing walk-around marionettes (to the live music provided by husband Martin).

Deb and Tony Petzold, who worked with Frank on three of his last productions (*The Magic Flute*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *H.M.S. Pinafore*), now live in Washington State, where Tony teaches at Centralia College.

Several students went on to work on various projects for other companies. Steve Kaplin worked with Bread and Puppet and now works with Great Small Works and Chinese Theatreworks. Barbara Pollitt has worked for directors George White and Julie Taymor, among others. Lisa Sturz's resumé is a veritable *who's who* in puppetry.

Roger DuPen, who performed in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, ended up as Artistic Director for the ill-fated New England Puppet Opera, based in Keene, NH. Norma Chartoff, who worked on *Peer Gynt*, continues to design for theatre in New York City.

Richard Termine, Jan (Rosenthal) Stefura, Pam Arciero, Heather Ashe, Tim LaGasse, among others, worked for [Jim] Henson Associates after graduating from the program.

Other students returned to the University to help in the department. Janibeth Johnson, one of the first puppetry students, worked long after graduation developing overhead shadows for Ballard shows. In the eighties, she spearheaded the movement that had been talked about since the seventies.

Susan (Doyle) Tolis, her freshman year highlighted by her performance in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, now supervises the Costume Shop at UConn.

As an undergraduate in technical theatre, Jack Nardi designed and built the bridge for *Peer Gynt* (1973). Later hired on as Technical Director for the Jorgensen Theater (Frank Ballard's original post), he designed and built the double bridge for *The Magic Flute* (1986), also used for *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1989).

The University, and the Department of Dramatic Arts, has grown since Frank was hired in 1956. The Department now has three theaters, a new library, and several buildings at the Depot Campus, where the Puppetry Complex and the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry are housed.

There are many more people who have put a great deal of energy, toil and sweat into making UConn a center of puppetry. I do not know them all. They are like stitches in a quilt – you cannot count how many there are. But each participates in making it stay together.

Rolande Duprey earned both her BFA and MFA at UConn. She is the founder and Artistic Director of Purple Rock Productions. Purple Rock performers include former UConn students Matt Leonard, Sandy Bellock Listorti, Elizabeth Wadsworth, Robert Laughlin and (director) Drew Scott.

*Rolande Duprey has had a long association with the University of Connecticut puppetry program. For her complete article on Frank Ballard and the effect of the UConn program on American Puppetry, go to:*

[www.unima-usa.org/publications](http://www.unima-usa.org/publications)

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SANDY BELLOCK LISTORTI, TONY PETZOLD AND HEATHER ASHE  
OPERATING ROD PUPPETS IN *H.M.S. PINAFORE*

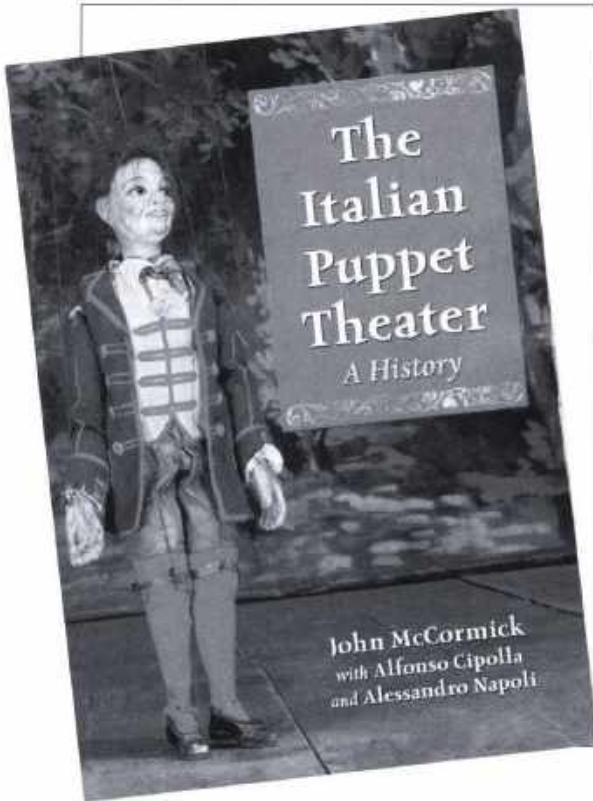


MR. BALLARD SHOWING THE AUTHOR HIS DRAFTING  
FOR THE WHALE IN *H.M.S. PINAFORE*, 1989

DEB PETZOLD WORKING ON THE LARGE PLANT FOR  
*LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS*, 1987



## The Italian Puppet Theater: A History



by John McCormick,  
with Alfonso Cipolla and Alessandro Napoli  
302 pp. McFarland & Company, 2010. \$49.95.

The emergence of a substantial body of good writing about puppet history has long seemed like a slow, hard slog, marked by a few tantalizing works here and there every few years, and long dry spells in between. Charles Magnin's 1852 *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe* was a remarkable start; Paul McPharlin's *The Puppet Theatre in America: A History* in 1949 was a promising first step in the New World (that has never been followed up); George Speaight's 1955 *History of the English Puppet Theater* was fascinating and idiosyncratic; and Charles Fournel's *L'histoire véritable de Guignol* in 1975 was noteworthy because it drew so much of interest and value from a single puppet tradition. But otherwise, especially in comparison to the ceaseless regular rhythm of new tomes about mainstream theater history, the development of puppet history can seem to be a desultory affair.

John McCormick has changed all that, at least in terms of European puppet history, with *The Italian Puppet Theater*, a majestic and complete analysis of puppetry on the Italian peninsula that is stunning in its richness and insights. McCormick's earlier puppet histories—*Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914* (a 1998 effort, written with Bennie Pratasik) and *The Victorian Marionette*

*Theater* (2004)—have also been valuable contributions to our understanding of the puppet past, but his new study of Italian puppetry is more focused than his continent-wide collaboration with Pratasik, and on the other hand more diverse than his 2004 focus on string marionettes in England. *The Italian Puppet Theater* takes on a subject of great diversity and richness, and with impeccable skill explains its variations, developments, contrasts, and connections to other performance forms in a compact but rich prose style.

Starting with the rough knowledge we have of the subject from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, McCormick traces the development of Italian puppetry into its rich "Golden Age" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and through the massive cultural challenges all puppeteers faced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the present when, surprisingly enough, Italian puppetry has survived in a variety of old and new forms. The broad strokes of the study are differentiated by geography—the richly different cultures and languages of northern, central, and southern regions of Italy; and form—marionettes and glove puppets for the most part, until shadow puppets and object theater began to take hold in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

McCormick's writing brings to mind the magisterial style of E. K. Chambers, the British historian whose two-volume history *The Medieval Stage* (1904) is equally grand and detailed. The tone of this kind of writing is confident and assured, and with an expansive but nonetheless personal point of view, you are taken on a journey with a knowledgeable guide who fills you in on the details and background while maintaining his focus on the grand themes of the story.

It is all here: the emergence of traveling, family-based puppet troupes; and then the establishment of permanent puppet theaters in both northern cities (the Colla and Lupi dynasties in Milan and Turin respectively) and the south (the Napoli family of Catania and the Cuticchios of Palermo) during the 1800s. McCormick deftly marks the importance of Italy's many regional dialects and their relation to such popular comic characters as Gianduja, Pulcinella, and Peppiniù; and the fluid popularity of different techniques—the large-scale rod marionettes of the *opra dei pupi* in the south and the string marionettes of the northern companies; and the development of regional styles of handpuppetry. The analysis of puppetry is different from "normal" theater history because it constantly demands a multi-faceted approach to the different aspects of the form: sculpture, painting, movement, music, text, elocution, and dramaturgy, not to mention cultural and economic contexts. McCormick covers all these subjects with a deceptively fluid grace. For example, his discussion of the complex connections between puppetry and the *commedia dell'arte* traditions of masked performance is deft, economical and sophisticated; likewise his understanding of the relations between puppetry and mainstream actors' theater.

Most illuminating is McCormick's sense of Italian puppetry as a whole, and its development as a compact spectacle form representing literature, popular culture, politics, and regional identity to audiences caught in the throes of modern cultural and political upheavals as Italy made its rough transition from a collection of independent kingdoms to a unified nation state. Because of this strong sense of larger contexts (which never overwhelms McCormick's basic love of the puppets themselves), we understand with new clarity how and why Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio emerged in print in the 1880s (and



NINO INSANGUINE AND TWO OF HIS SONS. CATANIAN MANNER OF OPERATION.  
 ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPH. (COURTESY MUSEO INTERNAZIONALE DELLE MARIONETTE, ANTONIO PASQUALINO)

soon took to the stage as a puppet hero); and how Maria Perego's table-top rod puppet Topo Gigio emerged from Italian puppetry traditions in 1958 to conquer the television medium. Other broad strokes emerge: how the appearance of Thomas Holden's famed marionette company in the late 1800s prompted an almost immediate shift from rod marionettes to string marionettes in northern Italy; how northern marionette theaters were an important element in the popularity of mainstream operas by Verdi and other composers; and how the development of the classic *opra dei pupi* in the South, with its focus on chivalric epics of Charlemagne's court, came to reflect complex regional identity and pride in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then, because of its conservative aesthetics, faced almost fatal challenges in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In all of this, McCormick never loses sight of larger contexts: for example, the pressures of the church and state on puppet satire which always tended to push up to and sometimes beyond the bounds of respectability. (Fascists in the 1920s and 30s, for example, disliked the Sicilian puppet theater's love of brigand stories that promoted defiance of the police and the state.)

A difference between puppet theater and actors' theater, McCormick notes, is that puppet forms, as "popular" theater, are far more resistant to change. As a result, Italian puppet companies persisted with traditional stories, characters and techniques throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, even as actors' theater and newer forms such as film and television irrevocably changed the cultural landscape. While such traditionalism made Italian puppetry appear somewhat backward, it also gave the form the strength to survive, and, paradoxically, offered puppeteers from the early 20<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the confidence to explore new forms of live performance.

McCormick does an admirable job explaining how the avant-garde influences of the Italian futurists (Fortunato Depero, Enrico Prampolini, and F. T. Marinetti himself) connected with mainstream puppeteers like the Podreccas and Maria Signorelli to produce fascinating hybrids of modernist and traditional styles.

*The Italian Puppet Theater* is also full of extras: wonderful diagrams by Clodagh McCormick comparing the structure of north, central, and southern Italian marionettes over three centuries; a useful glossary; thorough bibliography; and two extra chapters, by Alfonso Cipolla and Alessandro Napoli, respectively covering the Lupi family of Turin and the Napoli family of Catania. These two chapters are interesting addenda because they offer a specific focus on two important Italian puppet companies. Napoli begins his analysis of his family's puppet history from a linguistic and semiotic perspective (a highly useful scholarly approach pioneered by Umberto Eco, Janne Vibaek, and Antonio Pasqualino), but the jargon-laden and often clunky prose of this style above all makes one appreciate the richer and more welcoming writing of McCormick.

One of the dangers of the all-embracing approach to theater history taken by McCormick is that a full recounting of a rich past can become a series of lists of performers, characters, play titles, and cities. McCormick sometimes falls prey to this urge (perhaps it is unavoidable), but more than redeems himself by creating a broad understanding of a wide-ranging story, an approach that allows the reader to understand deep connections and developments in moments of immensely satisfying revelation. *The Italian Puppet Theater* is a triumph and an inspiration; a wonderful fulfillment of the promise of puppet history.

review by John Bell

*Puppet Theatre in Mexico*

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*Puppets in Mexico and the New Generations*

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doors to puppetry, with the exception of the University of Veracruz, where only one course is offered. The efforts of Titerías lab was cut short by lack of government support. Even though it is necessary for youngsters to learn the craft, it is just as necessary for them to experiment with new materials, new tendencies and storytelling techniques, always cognizant of history, so as not to try and discover the black thread, but rather to learn and sew with it.\*

Another missing link has been a festival that takes a chance with groups of new directors in order to provide for new paths; or perhaps there has been a lack of young directors, or there are a limited number of them, especially those with a vision to change how puppets are made and to experiment with storytelling.

When referring to new generations, we must also consider that what we need are puppeteers with a history, who are willing to break with

convention and transform their work in order to join the younger generation in generating a series of new possibilities.

The time is over for family companies that do everything; it is now time for organized professional companies that can assign tasks in order to participate in a more competitive market. For that, it is necessary to continue with the drive towards professionalization, updating of skills, discipline, work, and more work. Young people and people with a young attitude shall speak.

César Taveras is the Director of Baúl Teatro, a puppet theatre troupe in Monterrey, Mexico. He produces an inter-national puppet festival, FestiBaúl, and runs a puppet museum, Casa de los Titeres. He is the current president of UNIMA-México and is part of UNIMA's North American Commission.



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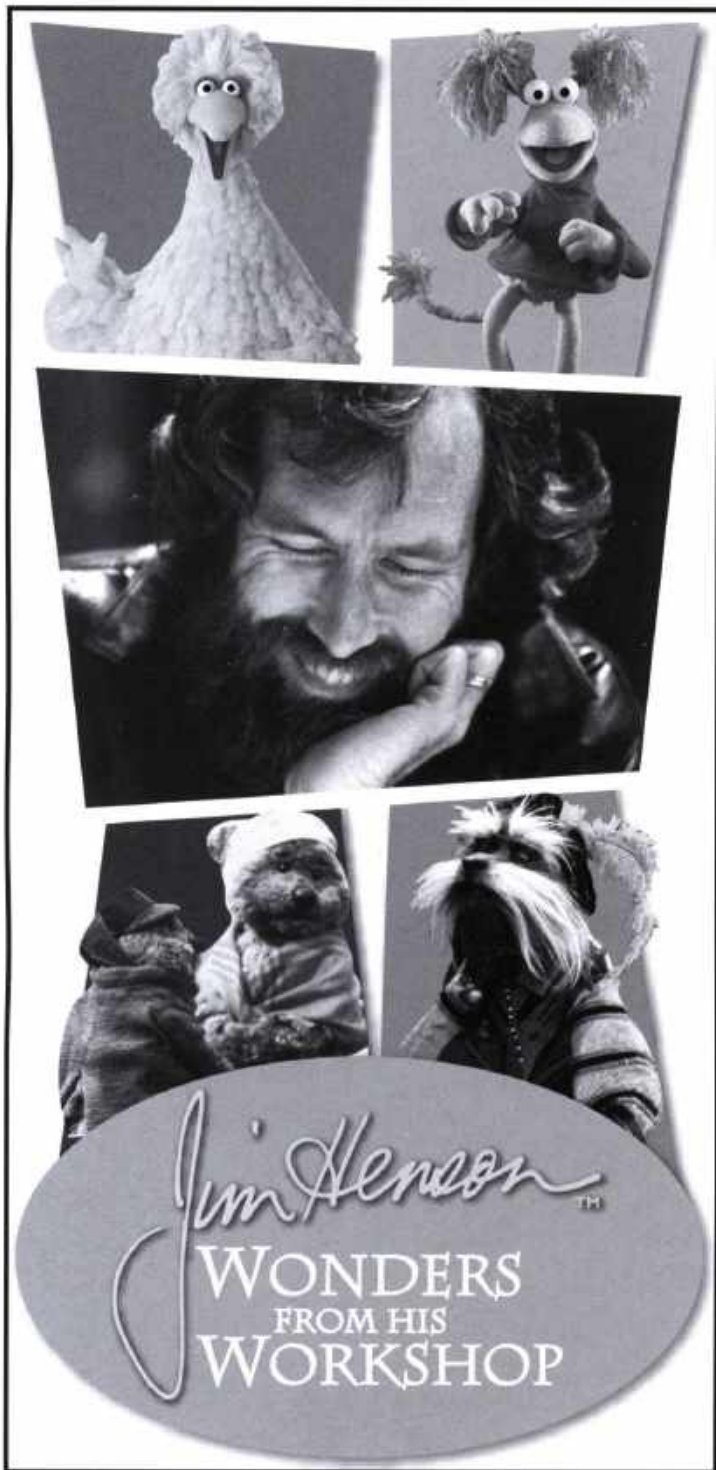
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