



Nutmeg News

Connecticut Guild of Puppetry

Chartered by the Puppeteers of America, Inc.

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Next Membership Meeting

“Animal Behavior” Screening

Saturday, January 16th, 2021

7:00 PM

Location: ZOOM, For more information,
please contact board@ctpuppetry.org

Jon's cats are trying to kill him. He's almost sure of it. His friends all laugh. But his cats, the charming and mischievous Tugger, and clueless kitten Ripper have, in fact, planned to do away with him. Why? Well Tugger is in love with Jon's girlfriend Brie. And Tug believes if Jon's out of the picture she'll take them in!

Join us for a screening of “Animal Behavior” as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Elmwood Productions. Elmwood founder, Jon Bristol and members of his crew will also be on-hand to talk about the film along with a few special guests.

This event is open to both members and newcomers. Please contact board@ctpuppetry.org for more information or call (860) 871-9065



The stars of Elmwood Productions “Animal Behavior” From left to right: Brie, Tugger, Jon, and Ripper. Photo courtesy of Elmwood Productions.

From the Proscenium

By Matthew Leonard

I can't believe this is the third newsletter released since everything went into lockdown. And while the outside world has made some aspects of organizing the Guild harder, in other ways it's made things a bit easier. Having moved our events online, we are no longer in the agonizing position of trying to find venues to host us. And since we now meet without most of us having to drive across the state, we're seeing an uptick in the number of faces at our meetings. We've even been able to increase the number of times we meet up. And while it doesn't replace being in person with one another, it has certainly opened up some possibilities for the future.

Personally, I can't help but chuckle a bit at the position the Guild is in right now. You may remember that many of my columns last year discussed the low numbers in our membership and the equally low turnout at meetings and our efforts to fix both. When the pandemic hit, I feared that it was another nail in the coffin and was unsure how the Guild would move forward. Or if it even could. Then came our Annual meeting. It was our first attempt at an online gathering and we were trying to figure out what to do next. As the conversation rolled on, I was reminded of something unique among our profession. Puppeteers, by nature are problem solvers. And that's what we did. We questioned. We analyzed. We deconstructed. We looked forward with both hope and concern. But most importantly, we stood together. And we stepped up.

Coming out of that conversation, I remain extremely grateful to **Karen Bruce** and **Chris Grande** who have handled all of the technical side of our meetings. I am also grateful to **Adelka Polak** who believed quite strongly, that this was not the time to do less but to do more. **Marilyn O'Connor Miller** reassured me that just the fact we were doing anything was a huge step and **Robin McCahill** remained, as always, a voice of possibilities. Longtime Guild Members **Michael Graham**, **Donna Mark**, **Jennifer Hunt** and **Eric Weiss** also each contributed their insights and experiences but most importantly their support and friendship. And Vice-President **Sandi Smith** texted me that night to remind me something I needed to hear “You're doing a good job. The Guild is lucky to have you.” But the moment that nearly made my heart explode was when (Continued on p3, “Proscenium”)

Jennifer Barnhart's Voice and Character Workshop

By Fergie L. Philippe

My name is Fergie L. Philippe. I'm a rather new member of the guild and it's because of Jennifer Barnhart. When I originally saw her masterclass was being offered, I was going to sign up no matter what just so that I could hear as much genius flow out of her as possible. She has a command and presence that has always captivated me and fans all over for eons. Back in May, I was lucky enough to get to interview her for my short-lived podcast "The Craft" and Jennifer has not only a grasp on a character like no other, but the nuances of what goes into a character are something that seems to come to her naturally on a casual conversation basis. It's a completely refreshing and different case when set in a workshop setting. This is why it's only fitting that a masterclass on just one element of puppetry was one handled with such detail and such attention. Jen not only broke down the way the voice influences the character (while very much emphasizing that the "voice" is only one part) but she also provided very tangible and useful exercises to help us further develop our repertoire of voices. There were also many moments where participation was not only encouraged but in many cases, (including my own) required. Here, I faced a deep fear. Even as a performer, being put on the spot to come up with a character/voice/idea in a matter of seconds is something that truly terrifies me. Even so, Jen's ability to establish a safe and fun environment for us to fail comfortably in provided us the space to be able to discover things within ourselves that many of us never had before. All the while, taking the time to answer specific questions about her past performances or about vocal technique with deeply kind attention and care.

Jennifer Barnhart's Voice and Character class was one of the best things I have taken as a puppeteer so early in my career. At the same time, it was a wonderful way for me to be introduced to the guild. We all here know very well of Jen's capabilities and her extensive and impressive career. But for all of us that attended that workshop, I doubt anyone would disagree with me when I say that Jen provided us with much more information about the vocal life involved in puppetry than many puppeteers or puppet creators discuss, and for that, I thank her profusely.

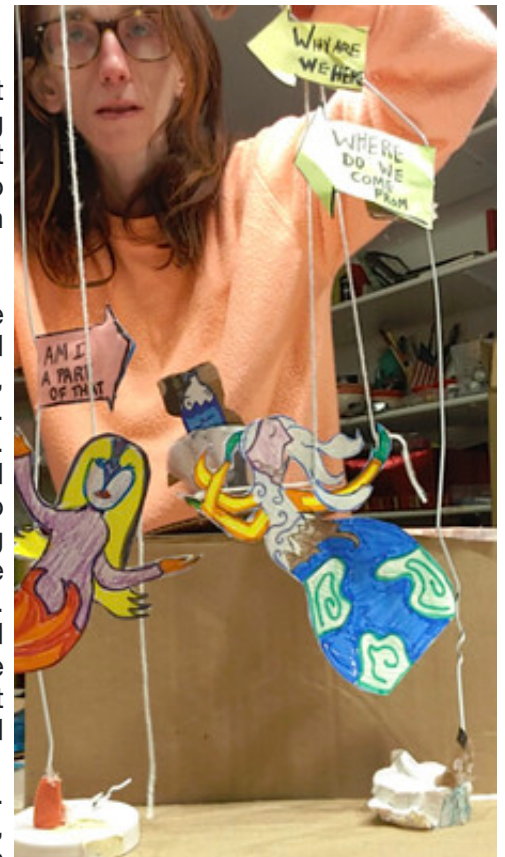
What do Shadows Mean to Me?

By Amy Oestreicher

I must admit, that I'm new to the formal "craft" of puppetry, but I've never lost my childhood sense of wonder, curiosity and imagination. I grew up assuming my life was a musical. For me, singing and acting were ways I could connect with the world around me. I could make believe by inserting myself into characters from every era, situation and mindset, while still expressing my own individuality.

Since I was a kid, the interplay of shadows and light in nature also filled me with wonder. The highlight of a Friday night was walking in my neighborhood and finding a street lamp that was perfectly nestled inside of a tree branch, being illuminated from the inside and watching the shadows being projected. I've always been deeply inspired by nature, and trees were my best friends. Life felt magical when I pretended everything around me was enchanted, and filled with an inner spirit I could sense, but not see. This pretending felt real to me. I never outgrew my early days of discovering endless wonders playing with a simple cardboard box. Daydreaming was an aspect of my homemade spirituality—it made managing work and life a thrilling process of discovery. But it reminded me that there was a spirit everywhere and things that could extend out of myself, physically and spiritually. I couldn't wait to find the "spirit" in everything from ancient Greek myths to the newest food layout at the grocery store. Finding spirit in everything meant that I belonged to a world I was fascinated by but knew so little about - that's what shadows were to me.

I only recently discovered puppetry and now I've dived in full force. What an amazing way to bring all the artistic mediums I love together! Art, theatre, music, dance, stories, and bringing the invisible to life in order to spark a larger conversation. Now that we've all been affected by the pandemic, a skill I am very unsavvy with – technology- has become increasingly important. As I find more of a home in puppetry and create more performances, committed to making puppetry (Continued on p3, "Shadows")



Amy Oestreicher performs "The Sound of Water", a toy theater piece she developed as part of Kate Brehm's Toy Theatre Intensive course. Photo courtesy of Amy Oestreicher

(Continued from p.2, "Shadows") my vehicle of storytelling, I've been asking myself many questions. How we can engage an audience through a digital platform. Can technology itself be used as a prop? What do we decide to let the audience see within the framework of a camera? We can activate all of the senses just through our relationship with the object- breath, smell, by giving the audience space to empathize with the puppet and object being moved. Many things get lost when communicating through a screen. However, this invites new ways of creating online performances by giving us immediate and intimate access to others like we've never had before, and I was hoping to learn more about how to utilize this as the virtual puppet con. This is also a great time to give access to people that usually have barriers to accessing these forms. We can touch on these larger issues with people from all over, and use the chat feature to hear how these issues are affecting everyone else. As a survivor of severe medical trauma, creativity was my roadmap where there was none, my anchor when times felt uncertain, my lifeline back to myself, and an empowering tool to feel as though I were co-creating my circumstances along with the universe. Through reassembling my identity into a mosaic after many life detours, I learned that the human spirit feeds off of hope: a product we must create ourselves. Art empowered me with the resourcefulness, curiosity, and generosity of spirit to transform adversity to personal growth, resilience, and joy, not only making new meaning from catastrophic events, but interweaving my story into a universal narrative that unites us all, and celebrate life's ordinary miracles. Once I discovered puppetry, this brought everything to fruition. We can tell larger stories through the use of a simple object. We can bring untold or undiscovered stories to light, giving audiences the gift of a new awareness, or a call to action to tune in a bit deeper to our surroundings – which is what I think all great theatre does. Through puppets, we can also become multiple roles – not only performer, but witness, creator and facilitator. We can show the big stories through the smallest of actions – and show that everyone everything – has a story – the possibilities are as wide as your imagination can go. They are also a great way to collaborate and show how collective voices of a community can come together. Puppetry can explore the idea of belonging, even with our own unique "quirks" through the simplest, tiniest of objects or life-forms.

The Virtual PuppetCon was an amazing experience for me. I had no idea that puppeteers were all trying to think of different ways to bring everything together through a screen. Not only were there tutorials, there were all day performances, puppet slams, breakout rooms for discussions, and online workshops. As someone who feels very

new to puppetry, I was honored to perform in the Puppet Slam, a toy theatre piece I had created for the Women's Suffrage Movement, as well as have one of my original shadow puppetry performances shown, "Finally Soar." I also had the opportunity to take some wonderful webinars and tutorials. It was such an amazing experience and I learned so much! I especially loved the Diversity in Puppetry talk, as well as the Mask and Movement online workshop.

As a multidisciplinary performer who is accustomed to having an audience to work from and a physical space to engage with, I've learned to explore other ways to create a dynamic alive space, playing with location, lighting, movement while filming, and incorporating other forms of media. So much thanks to the PuppetCon for this opportunity and I hope they hold something again next year – pandemic or not!



Amy Oestreicher performs her shadow show "Finally Soar" as part of the Shadow Puppet strand at the National Puppetry Conference. Photo courtesy of Amy Oestreicher

(Continued from p.1, "Proscenium") **Jennifer Barnhart**, in her usual elegant and matter of fact way, raised her hand and said "I'll do a workshop!" Jennifer's workshop brought with it an influx of new memberships. A plan to piggyback a quick origami workshop on top of Jennifer's talk got reshuffled into an evening gathering to just hang out and have fun. And an innocent and heartfelt comment made by me to our other Board Members resulted in a virtual gathering to celebrate the holidays. These things could not have happened without the love and support of our membership and Board and I want to thank them all publicly for their contributions that day.

So here we are looking at the calendar for our third meeting since everything went into lockdown. **Jon Bristol**, of Elmwood Productions, has wanted to do something with us for a while and it looks like the quarantine has finally given us that opportunity. We'll be hosting a screening of his "**Animal Behavior**" web series on January 16th to help kick off the 20th Anniversary of Elmwood. Jon has a few fun surprises in store for us that night and I love watching Jon share his work with others. We have a few other ideas for the rest of the year too, but I don't have any of those details locked at this time. I'm hoping that we'll do some more virtual gatherings too but so far, all of those have been planned in a very loose and spur of the moment kind of way. I hope that you will be able to join us at one

**September 9th, 2020
Membership Meeting
Location: Zoom**

Present: Christopher Grande, Karen Bruce, Matt Leonard, Adelka Polak, Marilyn O'Connor Miller, Jen Hunt, Jennifer Barnhart, Robin McCahill, Sandi Smith, Amy Oestreicher, Keri Horn, Fergie Phillipe, Katayoun Amir-Aslani, Rob Cutler, Mackenzie Doss, Maryanne Feyer, Michael Graham, Melissa Perenson, Arthur Poore, Eric Weiss, Emily Leonard

Meeting called to order at 1:24PM

1. **Welcome** - Matt welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Minutes June 28, 2020:** Karen made a motion to accept the minutes as reported. Jennifer Barnhart seconded. Unanimous. Abstentions: Amy Oestreicher, Keri Horn, Fergie Phillipe, Katayoun Amir-Aslani, Rob Cutler, Mackenzie Doss, Maryanne Feyer, Melissa Perenson, Arthur Poore, Emily Leonard
3. **Treasurer & Membership Report:** Karen reported the Guild is doing very well. A current influx in membership due to this membership meeting.
4. **Meetings:**
 1. **January** Screening of Animal Behavior
 2. **April** Workshop with Eric Weiss
 3. **November 6** gathering and workshop.
5. **Announcements:**
 1. **Eric Weiss** reported on the **Virtual Puppet Con** (puppetconnect.com). October 2 - 11. Each day will have new content. Some things will be live, some will be recorded. You will be able to go back and watch things you missed. The last 3 days will be used for the annual Board meeting and for you to catch up on things you missed over the first 7 days. There will be advertising opportunities and a sponsor page. Registration will start Monday the 14th. Price will be \$30. If anyone wants to do a workshop contact Eric and they should be able to fit it in.

Meeting adjourned at 1:36PM

Origami Workshop Recap

By Sandi Smith

What better way to spend a Friday evening home alone than virtually with members of the Guild! For the first of hopefully many more Puppet Socials, our Treasurer, Karen Bruce, led a small group of Guild members in making a very fun paper frog puppet. With just one sheet of paper, a small piece of tape, and patience for following directions, we each made one or two frog characters—with moving mouths! Everyone then was able to decorate their own character with colored pencils or markers as they wished. Aside from enjoying learning a craft together, we shared some company and some laughs in what was a great diversion in a relaxed, and socially distanced gathering. We hope to host more such informal gatherings in the interim of larger events as way to stay connected and continue to spread the joy of puppetry.



Origami puppet made during our November 6th gathering. Photo courtesy of Sandi Smith.

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