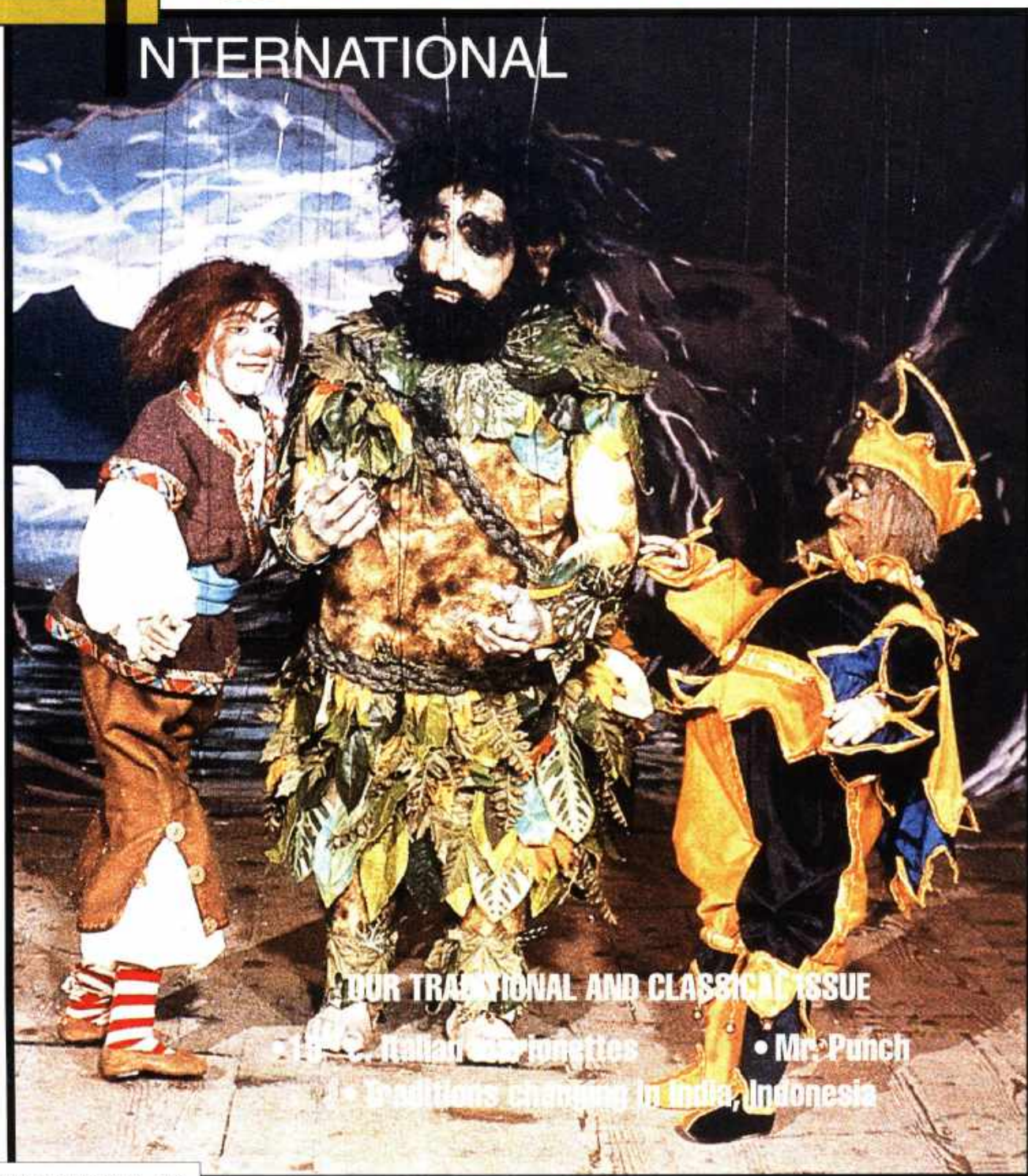


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# PUPPETRY

## INTERNATIONAL



OUR TRADITIONAL AND CLASSICAL ISSUE

• Italian Marionettes

• Mr. Punch

• Traditions changing in India, Indonesia



*the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media*



## An Indispensable Resource on Puppet Theatre!

### International Bibliography on Puppetry:

English Books 1945-1990,  
by Geneviève Leleu-Rouvray and Gladys Langevin.  
281 pp. Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993. 168 DM.

By John  
Semar

The increased interest in puppet theater in the past decade or so has drawn many of us to build and perform puppet shows, or include puppets as an acceptable element in theater pieces featuring actors. Such practical interests, in turn, fuel a fascination in the cross-cultural history, theory, and practices of puppet theater in different societies at different times. It is at the point of trying to find out more about puppet theater that the enthusiast might become frustrated, since books on the subject are often hard to find. Geneviève Leleu-Rouvray and Gladys Langevin's *International Bibliography on Puppetry: English Books 1945-1990* is a wonderful answer to this challenge: it is remarkably complete guide to finding out whatever you might want to know about puppets. Anyone at all interested in puppet theater will be enthralled paging through it.

Like the French bibliography Leleu-Rouvray and Langevin put together with Bernard Grelle, *Bibliographie Internationale de la Marionnette: Ouvrages en Français, 1945-1996* (reviewed in the last issue of PI), this one divides the works (1,056 English-language books) with Cartesian precision into over two hundred different categories—a myriad swirl of groupings which fits the wonderful complexity of this world-wide subject, but which might tend to confuse those less devoted to minute classification. Collections of puppet plays, for example, are not gathered together into one grouping, but several, according to region,

type of puppet, etc. The same goes for the vast amount of "How To" books in various genres. Sometimes the categorical differentiations seem inconsequential: books about Bread and Puppet Theater, for example, are in a separate category from books about the theater's director, Peter Schumann—a rather needless distinction. One wonders if bookish order might still have been maintained with a little bit less Byzantine articulation.

One can still find one's way around this great resource with ease, however, and there's a complete index in the back referencing subjects, authors, and titles. In short, this book is an indispensable resource for serious (or non-serious) research into the field of puppet theater. It lists all kinds of fascinating treasures, including a special 1976 issue of *Closeup* on "The Puppet Films"; fiction dealing with puppets from Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio books to an analysis of Carlos Fuentes's use of "dolls and puppets as wish fulfillment symbols"; choreographer Lincoln Kierstein's book on bunraku; Richard Barnard's autobiography of his life as an itinerant English puppeteer in the nineteenth century; a study of artist Paul Klee's puppets, sculptures, reliefs, masks and theater by his son Felix; and Edward Gorey's toy theater Dracula book, just to name a few.

*International Bibliography on Puppetry: English Books 1945-1990* might be hard to find in your local bookstore, but libraries should certainly be encouraged to purchase it. Perhaps the easiest way to get this volume is from Ray DaSilva's wonderful on-line puppet bookstore ([www.puppetbooks.co.uk](http://www.puppetbooks.co.uk)), which does carry it. •

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

issue no. 7

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### ON THE COVER:

Stefano, Caliban and Trinculo from Eduardo da Filippo version of *The Tempest*, company Carlo Colla e Figli (see page 4)

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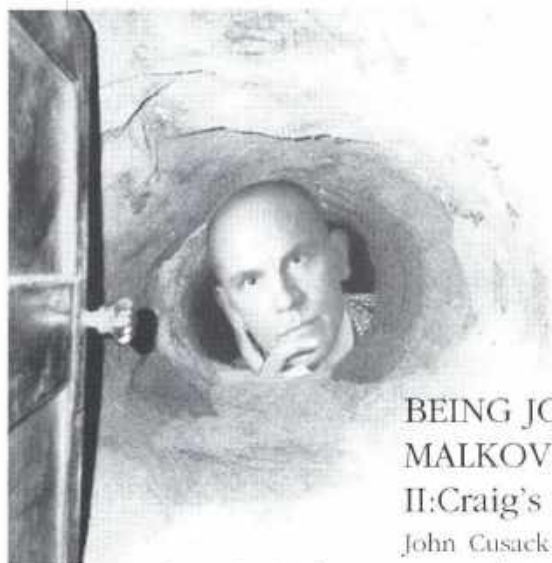
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## The Editor's Page —

Though it didn't do all that well when Oscar nominations were announced, the film *Being John Malkovich* caused quite a sensation when it first arrived in theaters across the country. It certainly sparked some lively exchanges on Puptcrit (puppetry's on-line answer to *Mad Magazine*). As might have been predicted, the sheer originality (if not critical success) of the film has already spawned more imitators than Elvis. Here are just a few of the homages which have either already, or are soon to be, loosed on an unsuspecting public:



### BEING JOHN MALKOVICH II: Craig's Revenge

John Cusack reprises his role as Craig, the puppeteer who is so inept, he is unable to make a living on the streets of the largest city in the country. Now, 20 years after Craig became trapped in the body of a young girl, the moment has at last arrived for John Malkovich and his sidekick, Charley Sheen, to appropriate her body as their next physical vessel. They re-open the tunnel, but just as they enter, Craig escapes! He wraps the young woman in duct tape and smuggles her (along with Malkovich and Sheen) into a NASA probe, bound for deep space. In an ironic twist, Craig finds that people still have no interest in his puppet shows. This is wacky, weird stuff!

### BEING MISS PIGGY

A hilarious adventure by those irrepressible Muppets®, in which Gonzo accidentally discovers a tunnel into Miss Piggy's mind. He finds the adventure exhilarating, until he inadvertently gets caught up in an amorous "romp in the swamp" with Kermit. He is then unceremoniously dumped back into his own body outside the gates of an unnamed Orlando theme park, and spends much of the rest of the film trying to make his way to the "Creature Shop" for gender reassignment. This cinematic *chef d'oeuvre* is enriched by memorable songs ("When a Boy in a Girl Meets a Boy like You") and snappy dialogue, as in this scene in a bar, where Piggy notices (apparently for the first time) that Frank Oz is sitting next to her—holding her, in fact, in a most intimate way.

Piggy: Bonjour, handsome! And what do you do?

Frank Oz: I'm a puppeteer.

Piggy: Check, please!

Frank Oz: I mean, a director!

Derivative, yes, but with a *Verfremdungseffekt* which will turn your whole *Weltanschauung* on its head!

## BEING EDDY

A script for the TV sitcom *Frasier*, due to be aired as a one-hour special later this season. The fun begins when Frasier's brother, Niles, discovers a tunnel behind the rack of Pouilly-Fuissé in Frasier's wine cellar. It leads him into the body of Eddy, his Father's feisty little terrier. His utter joy in the freedom he feels soon turns to horror as Eddy begins sniffing every "poochy posterior" in the park. Back in his own body, his tale is met with predictable skepticism from Frasier. Nonetheless, it is only a short while before Frasier, Niles AND their father are all in Eddy together. Their pursuit of a coquettish French poodle lands them in the dog pound and in danger of imminent neutering! Will Daphne arrive in time to save them? Stay tuned!

## BEING AL GORE

A recent Saturday Night Live sketch in which the talented cast of impersonators strut their stuff. Bill Clinton (Darrell Hammond) finds a tunnel into Al Gore (also Darrell Hammond), and realizes that this could be his way back into the White House. Soon Hillary Clinton (Ana Gasteyer), Liddy Dole (Cheri Oteri), Alan Keyes (Tim Meadows) and a host of others are all crowding into Al Gore in the hope of sharing the presidency. Only the show's guest host, Jimmy Carter, playing himself, refuses to go along

with the power hungry crowd and provides a voice of reason. Mysteriously, Carter disappears after the sketch.

In an unrelated incident, the actor who played Al Gore has left the popular show and moved to Georgia, where he is building houses for low-income families.

## BEING COOL

Even popular children's entertainer, Raffi, has gotten into the act. Here's a sample from his most recent album, "Honey Bee, be all that you can be, Honey";

*Wandering with Willie, walking home from school,*

*He offers you a cigarette, and says that smoking's 'cool';*

*Just tell him, 'Take that cigarette and stuff it in your ear!*

*I am not John Malkovich, I'm a puppeteer.'*

The concept of "puppeteer" as a metaphor for self-empowerment may arguably be a bit abstract for Raffi's young fans, but then again, the original film's lack of success with the Academy was blamed on its darkness and psychological complexity, so go figure!

This issue of *Puppetry International* is full of complexity of a different sort. Our focus is on traditional and classic forms of puppetry, from Indonesian wayang to American marionettes, from Indian itinerant storytellers to 19th century Italian puppetry and, inevitably, Mr. Punch! Where director Spike Jonze used puppetry as a metaphor for control, history shall bear out the puppet as a medium of myth-making, and as an art form in which the numinous is made manifest!

Andrew Periale





*Pinocchio, as currently staged by the Teatro del Drago (Monticelli), Ravenna*

## Traditional Puppets Today: Three Italian Companies

by *John McCormick*

The term "traditional puppetry" can be misleading. It carries implications of practice going back to time immemorial, but the terminology itself is a nineteenth-century invention and most of the surviving artifacts date from that period. Today it is also a convenient label for work that is not primarily "experimental" or "avant-garde," and in this context it often has negative connotations. Notions of "high" culture and "low" culture (largely a nineteenth-century development) led to a perception of puppets as poor-man's theater and a form of entertainment belonging to the subordinate classes. In practice it was the performance situation rather than any preconceived notion of "high" or "low" culture that dictated the nature of that performance. Most nineteenth-century showmen were concerned first and foremost with making a living out of their skills, and went wherever there was an audience. The street Punch-and-Judy performer collected

pennies from the populace, but also appealed to the generosity of the more affluent passer-by and could often be persuaded to give a show under the windows of a middle-class house for half-a-crown, and for a more considerable fee would come into the house and entertain adults and children (only by the mid-nineteenth century had Punch and Judy become the frequent appanage of the children's party). Because of its associations with the street and with busking, the glove puppet fell into a different category from the marionette theater. The former was associated with street entertainment, the latter with theater.

In the 18th century, there are plenty of cases of aristocratic marionette theaters performing miniaturized versions of opera and, by the end of that century, a solid middle-class following had also developed. By the 1860s,

many travelling marionette companies in Europe were transporting complete dismantlable theaters with them, and some of these portable theaters could contain several hundred spectators. Like the actors' theaters, they had several prices, with comfort varying between the good (padded) seats for the middle-class spectator and the cheaper places for the poor. They offered a real alternative to actors' theater and were sometimes the only theater seen by poor urban audiences or more rural ones. Many were also attended by more sophisticated urban audiences, who appreciated their miniaturized imitation of the mainstream theater of the day, whether direct or in parodic form. By the early 20th century, much of what might be thought of as "traditional" puppetry had been relegated to children's amusement, and the performers, to earn a living, adapted their productions accordingly. Like actors' theater, puppet theater had to face the onslaught of cinema, and the slender economic basis of many troupes meant that they gradually ceased to be able to compete, and the puppeteers themselves chose more lucrative employment. In Britain, the demise of "traditional" puppetry after 1914 was rapid and most companies had vanished by the 1930s. Italy presented a rather different picture, though a marked decline took place in the later 1950s. Some companies managed to survive in one form or another, and some (such as the Sicilian *puppi*) were revived before the tradition had quite disappeared. One should remember, of course, that Italy became a country relatively late (1861). Before that, it was a collection of states ruled, or at least controlled, by the great powers of the day— Spain, Austria, France and the Papacy. Even today, Italian politics are affected by regionalism. There is often little in common between a Milanese and a Palermitan, or even a Florentine or a Bolognese, and independence movements often lie only just below the surface. Up to the late nineteenth century, the notion of an Italian language did not exist— people spoke Tuscan, Sicilian, Venetian, Piedmontese and a host of other dialects or sub-dialects. The *Commedia dell'Arte* of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries had been profoundly affected by this regionalism— every area had its own mask or masks with their own dialect. The most important were Arlequin, Brighella, Pantalone, Pulcinella and the Doctor, and these same masked figures were to be found on the puppet stage. In the last years of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, new local puppet characters began to

appear. They usually served as spokespersons for the leader of the puppet company, both playing a role within the piece and addressing the audience directly. In Milan, there was Girolamo, in Turin Gianduja, in Bergamo Gioppino, in the Veneto Facanapa, whilst in Reggio Emilia, Fagiolino (Bologna) and Sandrone (Modena) became extremely popular. Florence could boast Stenterello, Rome Rugantino, whilst in Southern Italy and Sicily, Pulcinella was, if not supplanted, at least accompanied by a host of new characters .

Before the twentieth century, the majority of companies performed and travelled almost entirely within their own region. Three major north-Italian companies were Lupi of Turin, Colla of Milan and Monticelli of Emilia Romagna, and all three are still active today. The purpose of this article is to compare these initially very similar companies, and to chart their development over a period of nearly two centuries. The Lupi company originated with Luigi Lupi, who arrived in Turin in 1818 as assistant to an itinerant glove-puppet showman, Jacoponi. By 1823, he was running the company and moved into the San Martiniano Theater, where the company remained until 1883. During this period, they moved from the glove puppet to the marionette and built up a repertoire which reflected the huge development of the entertainment industry of the time, with a notable emphasis on spectacular sensation dramas and major musical shows and revues such as were staged in the actors' theaters. The theater was up to date in every way and by now catered to a fashionable public. Whilst the juvenile component of audiences was of significance, performances were by no means geared for children.

Pietro Micca, *Teatro Gianduja* (Lupi), Turin





*I Promessi Sposi (The Betrothed)*  
staged by Carlo Colla e Figli, Milan

In 1884, the Lupi company moved into a very elegant 1,200-seat theater in the Via d'Angennes, which soon became known as the Gianduja theater, after the main comic figure of the troupe. Gianduja, always operated (and spoken for) by the troupe leader, had come to replace Harlequin as comic figure and announcer of the troupe, though for a long time he simply alternated with him in the same function. Initially, the comic figure had been Gerolamo, the countryman in the city who is able to comment satirically on life and manners, but, during the Napoleonic period, when Napoleon's brother Jérôme had been placed in control of Piedmont, the authorities refused to tolerate a puppet which had, effectively, the same name as the Emperor's brother. In Milan, Gerolamo remained the comic figure of the Fiano company, but in Turin, he changed his name to Gianduja. Reflecting the social changes of the period, both Gianduja and Gerolamo became more urbanised, but, as they began to attract more middle-class audiences, they also began to rise socially and the gap between them and the bourgeoisie they were entertaining became less and less perceptible. Gianduja was turned into an emblem of the city of Turin

and, as audiences became more juvenile in the early twentieth century, his name and picture began to appear on sweet-wrappers and on lump sugar. The Via d'Angennes theater flourished until shortly before the Second World War when the Lupi company, unable to compete with cinema and a declining interest in puppet theater, moved out of the Via d'Angennes theater, which was sold to become a cinema. The Lupi company was now without a regular theater and their performances were almost exclusively for young audiences. Eventually, in 1961, a more permanent establishment was found for them in the vaults of the church of San Teresa, and this also provided them with display space for some of their puppets and scenery, though a great deal of their immense collection simply went into storage.

The Lupi family possesses one of the richest collections of material in Italy. Their museum has been a fascination and a delight for over 30 years, but is now difficult to maintain, and the bulk of their extensive collection is stored



under very poor conditions and under serious threat of dispersal or simply irretrievable deterioration. It comprises several thousand puppets, about 1000 backcloths and assorted wings and borders (many by well-known scene-painters of Turin's Teatro Reggio), some 800 handwritten scripts, going back to the second decade of the nineteenth century, and literally mountains of costumes, shoes, weapons and countless other accessories.

Today, the company continues working with its nineteenth-century scenery and puppets, sometimes refurbished, sometimes added to. However, they do this out of love and an almost religious desire to prevent a long family tradition from dying out, and there is no question of the activity providing a real source of income. In addition, they now work with a troupe composed preponderantly of non-family members. In terms of repertoire, origins, type of company and a tradition of working in a large fixed theater, there are strong parallels between the Lupi company and that of Carlo Colla e Figli. The Collas, a prosperous Milanese family, one-time arms suppliers for the Austrians who trimmed their fortunes to the Napoleonic Cisalpine Republic (1797), later "Kingdom of Italy," were ruined after the fall of Napoleon in 1814 and had to leave Milan for Piedmont. The first professional puppeteer in the family seems to have been Antonio Giovanni Carlo, known as "Giuseppe" (b. 1805), and family tradition holds that he began by using the family's own amateur puppet stage and figures in order to earn a living. He travelled in Piedmont and the main character of his troupe was Famiola, a Piedmontese peasant who, apart from the accent, closely resembled Gerolamo of the Fiando company in Milan. The earliest registers of the Colla company date from 1835 and give a good idea not only of the places visited but also of the repertoire performed. Notable were a number of dramas adapted from the popular theatrical repertoire of the time, such as *The Prisons of Lamberg*, *The Innocent Parricide*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Attila*, *the Scourge of God* and the popular Italian subject, *Guerrino Meschino*. The last of these pieces, with its popular chivalric theme, owed more to retellings of medieval romance than to the theatre and featured in virtually every Italian marionette (and *pupi*) repertoire from Sicily to Lombardy.

At the death of "Giuseppe" in 1861, his son Carlo toured the small towns and the countryside of the north of

Italy. He added more contemporary historical plays to his father's repertoire, including ones dealing with the recent battles of Magenta and Solferino (June 4 and June 29, 1859), French victories which had contributed to the final liberation of northern Italy from Austria. His son, Carlo II, took over the company at the age of 17 and turned it into one of the great marionette companies of the second half of the nineteenth century. Like the Lupis, he developed a new and spectacular repertoire. Among his greatest productions were *Excelsior* (1894), based on a vastly popular stage show, *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1897), *Christopher Columbus* (1898) and the patriotic *Pietro Micca* (1906). The latter was based on a real-life Piedmontese soldier who, with great heroism, helped save the city of Turin in 1706 during the Franco-Spanish siege. The nationalism of a united Italy made him into a national hero in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and, in 1875, Luigi Manzotti put him on the stage as the hero of a spectacular musical show. Carlo Colla II, with his family company, known as Carlo Colla et Figli, first moved into the Gerolamo theater, Milan, in 1906. In 1911, they became the theater's resident company and remained there until 1957, when it closed down, as the city planned to demolish it.

They presented Milanese audiences with a number of fantastic musical productions, plays, operas and musical fables: *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots*, *From the Earth to the Moon*, *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*, from Manzoni's classic novel—a piece to be found in many marionette repertoires), *The Last Days of Pompei* (almost on the scale of a Cecil B. de Mille epic), as well as occasional topical pieces and revues with such titles as: *The Centenary of Gerolamo*, *Gerolamo*, *King of the Aviators*.

The loss of the Gerolamo theater meant a temporary abandonment of the Colla's activities, but the city of Milan offered storage to the material and in 1965, under the vigorous management of Eugenio Monti-Colla, the company was reconstituted on a more commercial basis. With the introduction of new members, it ceased to be a family troupe, although much of their mode of operation maintains something of the notion of a community working (and eating) together. Old productions were tidied up and some new ones created. Conservation was important, but so was the continuance of traditional skills, especially in such areas as carving, painting, puppet construction and costume. The company has an impressive range of skills in these fields and the craftsmanship of their new figures is of a very high order indeed. They have sought exposure on film and



*Le Cinque Giornate (The Five Days),  
as staged by Carlo Colla e Figli, Milano*

television, principally as a way of promoting their activities rather than as a form of expression in itself, have toured both nationally and internationally, have become much occupied with education and training and have also created an important resource centre. Their economic viability depends at least in part on regular performances for school groups, which give their work a further educational justification. The Colla company members have become virtuoso performers of the large-scale marionette theater. They generally use two high bridges (as does the Lupi company), with sometimes as many as 14 manipulators, magnificent scenery in the nineteenth-century style and up to 250 figures in one performance. *The Last Days of Pompeii*, vaguely based on Spontini's opera *The Vestal*, includes Roman triumphs, gladiatorial combats in the arena, and the final eruption of Vesuvius. This is a re-creation of an earlier production of the

Gerolamo theatre and is in some ways comparable to a classical ballet company of today trying to re-create a Tchaikovsky ballet in the grand manner of the later nineteenth century. The Colla company has also created new works in the grand style, and these include Eduardo de Filippo's version of *The Tempest* (1985).

Of the three troupes studied, the Colla company has been the most successful in creating a highly marketable product, and it is impossible to come away from one of their productions without being extremely impressed. They have recreated, in a tidied-up way, a type of production which has all but vanished. It is rather like a theatrical theme-park, evoking a nineteenth-century theater that many modern spectators lack the historical knowledge or imagination to access.

The Monticelli family offers a rather different profile today, despite rather similar origins to the Colla and Lupi companies. The original troupe began with Ariodante Monticelli (1825-1910) from Piedmont, who toured northern Italy with marionettes. His son, Vittorio, later moved to Emilia performing in Modena, Bologna, Ferrara, Rovigo, Padua and the region. His children, most notably Otello (1905-1978), gradually turned to glove-puppets, working particularly with the well-known figures of the Emilian repertoire: Fagiolino, Sandrone, Brighella and Doctor Balanzone. Otello founded his own marionette company in 1927, but in 1934 he and his wife joined the Yambo (Enrico Novelli) company, with which they stayed for 9 years. After this he had his own group and played with both marionettes and glove-puppets. Between 1955 and 1961, he worked with Vittorio Podrecca's *I Piccoli* and toured abroad with them, and after this he turned his attention exclusively to the glove-puppet. Otello's children continued the tradition, but the real renewal came with his grandsons, Andrea (b. 1958) and Mauro (b. 1961), who formed a new company in 1979, Teatro del Drago (Dragon), based in Ravenna. Mauro follows Otello in the glove-puppet tradition of Emilia Romagna and performs with such popular local figures as Sandrone and Fagiolino. This work is mainly presented locally, often to schools, but has also had considerable success at festivals with little plays such as *The Abduction of Prince Carlo*. However, they have also made a decisive move into a more contemporary type of puppetry which involves a combination of puppets, shadows and actors. (Andrea is trained as an actor.) For these productions, they are usually a small group of three performers, and in this are very different from the Colla or Lupi companies. The nature of their work is also very different. Myth and narrative material are a starting point of nearly everything they do, but there is little sense of a novel or play being adapted for the puppet stage. What they offer is a piece of performance, devised and created using the most appropriate theatrical means, including a variety of forms that might be construed as puppetry. In 1983, they presented a trilogy of pieces adapted from the work of J.R. Tolkien, and *The Glass Mountain* (1988) was inspired by tales by the Brothers

Grimm. *Pinocchio* (1990) took Collodi's text as a starting-point, but unlike the marionette theater of the nineteenth century where the dramatic repertoire was led by the text, however attractive the scenery and scenic effects might be, this was conceived as a piece of visual theater, scarcely dependent on language, though possibly requiring a familiarity with Collodi's book (which every Italian knows well). Part of its interest lies in the way in which it deconstructs the book, turning it into a series of episodes, not necessarily sequentially linked, playing with the metaphor of the puppet and drawing the onstage and costumed manipulators in and out of the action as appropriate. *Pinocchio* is still one of their most popular pieces, especially abroad. Teatro del Drago constantly looks for outside contributions in the form of directors, designers, writers, composers and other artists, and this allows their work to develop and avoid the risk of becoming bogged down in any single and restricting style. They have also collaborated with other companies, notably the vastly influential shadow theatre company Gioco-Vita, known for the way in which they have liberated the shadow theater from the limitations of the single and fixed screen and turned it into one of the most exciting forms of puppetry today.

*Pinocchio, Teatro Gianduja  
(Lupi), Turin. Here, Gianduja  
is cast as Gepetto*



An examination of the state of the Lupi, Colla and Monticelli companies today shows ways in which companies have attempted to cope with radical changes in audiences and performance conditions, and the impact that this has had on their work. A comparative failure to develop such strategies has led to the difficult situation of the Lupi company. If one remembers how tenuous is the thread between survival and disappearing for many a puppet company, the value of these companies can be fully appreciated. The notion of preservation and conservation is important to both the Colla and Lupi companies, and both depend partly on nostalgia appeal. With both companies, one can see a mastery of the techniques of the marionette stage. With a much higher degree of organization, the Colla company has entered into the more commercial world of the late twentieth century, whereas, if the criterion for "professional" work is the ability to earn a living, the Lupi have dropped into a category which might need to be defined as "amateur." Despite this, however, the Lupis have managed to

maintain a much greater feeling for a continuous, if declining, tradition, whereas the Colla theatre has all the hallmarks of a revived one.

For the Monticelli family, the marionette stage is a part of their past, but the very healthy glove-puppet tradition of his father and grandfather is much to the fore in the work of Mauro Monticelli, and the traditional puppeteer's ability to convey a story to an audience has taken on a new value in the larger productions of Teatro del Drago. It is in the tradition of travelling theater, but instead of roaming around the Italian countryside in search of audiences, they now have an extensive schedule of travelling to specific engagements, many of them abroad.

In the case of all three companies, the continuation of traditional practice, with a greater or lesser degree of adaptation to the later twentieth century, is of considerable importance as a living source of inspiration and reference for the modern puppeteer. •

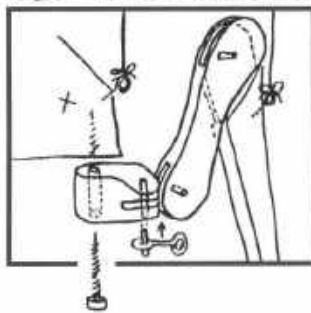
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for the gorgeous,  
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Illustrations for Ian Cuming's  
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were based on drawings by  
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author/illustrator of the delightful  
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# "Once Were Warriors"

*The struggle to preserve tradition in Southern India, in a changing world*

*by Theodora Skipitares*

Long before I came to India, I was fascinated by the ancient Sanskrit term *Sutradhara*, which has several meanings; literally "string holder," it also describes a puppeteer, stage director, and even is a word for God. In India, puppetry is both an ancient and a sacred art. This evening, I'm in a temple courtyard<sup>(1)</sup> in the coastal village of Bhatakal on the Arabian Sea, in Southern India, waiting to see a marionette show by the Ganesh Yakshagana Gombeyata Troupe of Uppinakudru, directed by Bhaskar Kamath. I'm with S.A. Krishnaiah<sup>(2)</sup>—a folklorist, puppeteer, and Senior Researcher and Deputy Coordinator of Folk Performing Arts in Udipi, in the state of Karnataka.

T S: Krishnaiah, you've done extensive field research on the puppet artists of this region, Karnataka State, for the past 20 years. What first interested you about puppets?

S A K: I was fascinated by puppetry as a child. Later, in 1978, after I finished my undergraduate work, I saw an advertisement in the daily newspaper, written by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Performing Arts Center). The center was offering fellowships to revive the dying art of puppetry. At that time, I was involved in experimental theater, basically as an actor. But I felt that there were already people out there set up as producers, actors, and directors to do this kind of theater, whereas folk art had flourished for genera-



Manishasura

tions and had nourished people, and was now decaying. I felt I could learn about these arts and present them for people to see again.

So, I began to perform as a storyteller<sup>(3)</sup>—there were still a couple of itinerant narrators in Karnataka State. This style of

performing consists of 3 people— one has a small harmonium, one has a percussion instrument and cymbals, and one is the main singer. The singer wears a monk-like robe and a conical hat. He simply narrates folk tales and the other two accompany him musically and constantly ask him questions about the story. This is a way of performing all the characters of a story, usually stories with religious and ethical themes.

So that's how I began, I joined a troupe, playing one of the musicians. When there was no leading actor available, I performed the leading role. So, there we were, urban artists, taking rural folk tales and presenting them to rural communities. In one village called Kalaparamela, we started at 10pm and stopped abruptly at midnight because we had run out of material (stories) to tell them. Because, you see, we were not "the real thing." Then the audience began to howl, "No, no, no, don't stop! You must continue!" And then I said, "Why? We are from the city. We are not the itinerant performers." "No, no, no, where are we to go? We have nowhere to go. It's midnight. If you stop now, there are 300 of us who do not have anywhere to go, to sleep."

So that's how I came to realize that over the years, traditional theater forms were presented all night because there were not any facilities to put up the audience. That's why performances ended at daybreak. The villagers said, "You actors can stay at hotels, but we have to drive our oxen and carts back home for a long distance." I added some funny stories, but eventually I ran out of material once again.

That night, the village did not pay us. They said we didn't do our job.

Discouraged, I gave up that kind of work. But when Mel Helstein, a UCLA theater professor, started coming to Southern India to do puppetry research, he needed someone to go with him to meet people and speak with them. I took that job. One day, I said to him, "Look, you're always sitting in the hotel and writing and collecting information, but you must come and see life in the field. Then you will understand the context of the puppeteers— how they are suffering. He agreed, and we



*Sita detained in Ashokovana*

went one day in an oxcart to one village. There we found out where a shadow puppeteer lived, but he was not at home. Only a few children were there. We asked if we could at least see any puppets. They said, "The puppeteers have taken all of the puppets for a performance. There is only one puppet left here." We asked why they left one puppet behind. We were told that the puppets are like family members. They are also the guardians of the family. This one left behind guards the children or the old people against any disaster.

Around this time, I was admitted as a student of shadow puppetry at the Fine Arts Academy in Bangalore, under a master named Hombaiah, who died very recently. Shadow puppetry has always been the art of a particular nomadic people, whose tribal name is Killekyata. At first, they refused to teach us, because this was a private family art. They felt that if they taught young people, those students could surpass them and take away their income. So we told them, "We are not your competitors. We only want to understand the ways of puppet performance and techniques and to explore this with rural audiences." Finally, they began to tell the story of how they used to perform, and what their present circumstances had become. During a year, they would go 6 months on the road as puppeteers. The other 6 months they went hunting, fishing, and did tattooing and quiltmaking. During this time they would go collect grains from each house as their payment for performing. Each puppeteer family had their own geographical district and they could not perform beyond this area. This was

all determined by the community chief. Whenever there was a conflict, groups of puppeteers would assemble and come to a judgment. Perhaps a penalty would be paid. In one village, I found an inscription in stone which marked the boundary of one puppeteer family's district. It was a drawing of a male puppet character with a tuft of hair.

T S: In the late 70's, were these boundaries still in effect?

S A K: They still are. Let's say a performing family has 100 villages as their "turf." When the head of the family dies, if he has 4 sons, each will each inherit 25 villages for his district.

T S: Do these rules apply to the marionette troupe we are about to see?

S A K: No, this applies only to leather shadow puppets, not to string puppets. The string puppeteers are not nomadic. They make up an elite community, called Vishwakarmi. Wherever you go in Southern India, most of the marionette performers, 90% of them, belong to the "smith" community—they are carpenters, jewelers, bronze smiths, blacksmiths. Coastal Karnataka, where we are now, is an exception..

T S: So it's not just this troupe that is an exception. It's the whole coastal region?

S A K: In the coastal region, puppetry was in the hands of carpenters. However, the Kamath family was recruited as singers and musicians for the performances. When the carpenters got jobs constructing houses or other big projects a while back, they left dozens of puppets in the hands of the Kamath family, saying they were coming back the following month, and they never did. So gradually the Kamath family became more in-

involved with this art form. After a show, they would go to each house and collect areca nuts—the substance which goes into the folded up paan leaf and is chewed as a stimulant. This was considered as a kind of money, just as coconuts were. Other kinds of performers, dancers, actors, were paid in this way as well.

T S: You have made a map of where all the puppeteers of Karnataka live. How did you get such detailed information?

S A K: In 1982, I was preparing an assignment for my post-graduate thesis on puppetry. I took a friend's bicycle and set out to meet these nomadic performers, who travel from place to place with their horse or donkey. When I reached the first village, my bicycle tire got punctured. I fixed it and went toward another village. I didn't have anywhere to stay, so I slept at the bus stand. Finally, I reached some puppeteers. I asked them where their relatives were, and they told me. In this way, again and again, I collected information, and a few puppets as well. Since I didn't have any money, I used to give, as a means of exchange, some areca nuts, as a ritual of good will. Or sometimes I had cigarettes. Eventually, I covered 1000 kilometers and learned where every string, glove, and shadow puppeteer lived.

T S: So what did you find out about this nomadic tribe of shadow puppeteers?

S A K: They had a long history. Their tribe had come from Maharashtra, in the north, and had once been warriors. They were honored as royal guards and offered a seat on the right side of the King. Their hunting and their pursuit of puppetry went hand in hand— from their hunting they got the leather which they used for their puppets. Sometimes they were employed as spies in the enemy's kingdom because they could gain entry into neighboring regions in their garb as puppeteers.

In the villages, the shadow puppeteers were invited to eradicate epidemics, especially of the domestic animals. The puppeteers would take rice and mix it with the blood of a sacrificed goat, and spread this mixture around the village, around the houses. And often, the epidemic would end.



*The divine bird, Jatayu, obstructing Ravana, who is kidnapping Sita*

Even today, when there is a drought, puppeteers are brought in to bring rain. They are very confident that they can do this and they say, in a dramatic tone, "If it doesn't rain, I will give up all my puppets—I will throw them away." In some districts, they also perform exorcisms of spirits. The person who is possessed is asked to sleep under the puppeteer's box, which is always hung like a cradle, or else a puppet is placed on a mat under the bed. And it's good if the puppet in the box or on the mat is the Killekyata, or jester character, which is a totem for the puppeteers. It used to be placed onstage at the beginning of a show to ward off any evil spirits.

T S: Are string puppets brought in to help the community in any way?

S A K: When a woman desires to get pregnant, she can commission a string puppet performance of a particular episode of the Ramayana when Sita, wife of Lord Rama, is abducted to Lanka and bears twins. Should the woman get pregnant, in her seventh month, she and other women who desire children bring fruits and green sarees as offerings to Sita.

T S: Has there been innovation in this tradition of folk art?

S A K: Yes. Traditionally, for example, puppets, especially shadow puppets, were fixed in one place while a lot of speaking and singing went on. Now, they have a lot of animation. Puppeteers say that people demanded this change.

But, one of the saddest things that happened to puppeteers over the past several years is that puppets came to be seen as beautiful objects, as commodities to be sold to affluent westerners and easterners alike. Dealers would come to certain villages and trick the puppeteers into selling their puppets for a tiny price. These puppets are lost to us.



As we are speaking, the courtyard is filling up completely. Two hundred children and mothers are inside, and outside, where the wall of the courtyard meets the street, 200 or so men have crowded together to watch. And behind the back wall of the courtyard, yet another group of men and women are waiting.

The show begins. It is an episode from the Ramayana called Lankadahan in which the monkey king Hanuman flies over the ocean to the evil Ravanna's kingdom of Lanka to see if he can find Sita, Lord Rama's kidnapped wife.

The marionettes, about 2 feet high, are beautifully fabricated—carving, painting, and costuming are integrated in a very re-



efined way. Most of these well-balanced puppets have 6 strings—2 for the head, and 1 each for the arms and legs. Hanuman and his monkey warriors each have an extra string for animating the tail. One of the most wonderful features of these puppets is their feet. Not only are they beautifully carved, but they stand and move in a very solid, precise way. These are rhythmic, DANCING feet. Which makes sense because they are known as Yakshagana puppets, after the vibrant dance form of this region of the same name.

The production lasts 2-1/2 hours and is performed by 16 singers, musicians, puppeteers. It is full of humorous, moving, and truly theatrical moments. This troupe presents a powerful, traditional story in an authentically traditional style. At the same time, the work is very sophisticated. The monkey warriors can't help but play pranks with each other while Hanuman gives them their orders; Gods dramatically jump on to chariots and drive away; Hanuman's tail is set ablaze and, in turn, he sets the entire kingdom on fire, which we witness as a miniature metal cutout in flames. Not one of these dramatic devices or special effects is lost on the audience, who cheer each time one of these magical moments appears.





*What follows is an interview between myself, Krishnaiah, and Bhaskar Kamath conducted the following day.*

T S: As artistic director of your group, how do you balance innovation with tradition, especially in developing new episodes and works?

B K: This is a very good question. We have a particular tradition of our own, which began more than 350 years ago— and is still going on— called Yakshagana-style puppet theater. This Yakshagana art tradition is in the Northern style. The artists in my troupe have traveled extensively, but they are attuned only to traditional styles. If they were trained, they would adapt to innovations and experiments. We need our own centers, or schools. But right now, we don't have proper institutional support. My house is the center now— all the hundreds of puppets are kept in boxes and when we receive invitations to perform, all the artists go as a team and present the episode. We cannot concentrate on innovation in this house— we need a separate place.

I have personally experimented with an eye-winking device for my puppets. Also, I have prepared a physical exercise puppet capable of demonstrating gymnastics for youngsters.

I would like to be able to experiment more.

T S: What is the ideal daily practice for a puppet artist? How do you personally balance that ideal against the realities of working to make a living?

B K: My grandfather survived in this art, but not my father. He had a small job in a tile factory and he balanced that with

mounting puppet shows. Our family has retained the puppetry tradition, but the social structure has changed since my grandfather's time. It is not possible for me to make a living from puppetry because at my house I have a number of dependents. In earlier days, puppeteers had the confidence that they could survive by means of their art, but today it is not possible.

S A K: How was the situation during the time of your father's father, Devanna Kamath?

B K: My grandfather lived by this art, but economically he remained very poor.

T S: In Europe and North America, there are very few full-time puppet companies. Most are free-lance and they come together for a particular project or tour. How is your company set up?

B K: In other countries, puppet shows are often mounted with a minimum number of artists, or as "one-man shows." But here, we have to maintain the whole team. It's not just my problem; similar problems are faced by my colleagues too.

There are 19 company artists. Many of them have their own jobs. Some run a vendor shop, some are farmers, and a few are college graduates. For a standard show, the minimum number of artists is 9. On the average, 14 members make up a show. The play can be as short as 35 minutes in length or as long as 2-1/2 hours.

S A K: How many performances do you do per year?

B K: We are invited to do about 150 shows, but we are accepting only 60 to 70. 20 years ago, we used to perform 150 shows. Yesterday's episode has been performed more than 1000 times.

S A K: Who are the senior artists in your 19 member team?

B K: There are three. One has been there since 1959. The other two have been there since 1964. A new member was taken just last year in 1998. The company is giving training to youngsters, whenever needed,



*Kamath's puppet store  
and workshop in the attic  
(left and opposite)*

The "Ganesh Yakshagana Gombeyata Mandali" of Uppinakudru, near Kundapura, is the best known puppet theater group in Karnataka (Southern India). It has the credit of introducing the Yakshagana puppet theater tradition to several foreign countries. The tradition was supported by the late Devanna Kamath and his son, Kogga Kamath. Kogga Kamath's son Bhaskar has joined the tradition in its third generation. Of course, the tradition had an earlier history when Devanna Kamath's ancestors practiced it, but it was the late Devanna Kamath who revived it after a lapse of several years when the puppets had almost been ignored. The troupe has traveled to France, Belgium, Holland, Greece, and Australia.

*The address of the troupe is:*

Sri Bhaskar Kamath  
 c/o Kogga Kamath  
 Sri Ganesh Yakshagana  
 Gombeyata Mandali  
 Uppina Kuduru- 576 230  
 Kundapur Taluk, Udipi District  
 Karnataka, India  
 telephone: 91 8254-21402

at my house without fees. I want to run the puppetry training in the "gurukula paddhati" or residential school system. I take youngsters to train them, but they should come with our troupe while we mount shows.

T S: What are the spiritual associations connected to your puppetry?

B K: Artists need a spiritual mind, a pure and constructive workmanship in presenting the shows. With concentration of mind and dedication, the puppeteer can bring the puppets to life.

Often, audiences connect with our puppets in a spiritual way. For example, while performing the "Lankadahana"

episode (the one we saw last night), we introduced an elephant puppet in Udupi. Udupi is a famous pilgrim center with a Lord Krishna temple, where two live elephants are maintained by the temple trustees. The devotees give money to the elephant. The elephant receives the coins and, with its trunk, blesses the devotees. When the audience in Udupi saw the elephant in the puppet show, they began to throw coins at the stage. Once, a member of the audience went directly back stage and put 25 rupees into my pocket and went away. Another time, a member of the audience made garlands with paper currency and presented them to a puppet while the puppet show was going on.

In the past, people had spiritual feelings towards puppet shows. For auspicious ceremonies like marriages, or the coming up of good crops, a puppet show would be commissioned. This commissioning of a play was named "harake gombeyaata." People vowed to commission a play if they succeeded in some venture. Several decades back, villagers looked upon puppeteers as the gods' divine guests. All this happened in my grandfather's time (Devanna Kamath, 1888-1971). Now, each year 10 to 15 shows are put up as "harake gombeyaata." In return, the artists are paid in kind, but not in cash.

Spiritually, we maintain our puppets as children. Our family worships wooden puppets of Ganesh to ward off evil. No puppet is discarded even if it retires from active life. The disfigured puppets are kept separately and preserved as antiques. I don't believe that retired puppets should be burnt or dropped into the river, as many puppeteers do. In our region of Coastal Karnataka, this ritual is observed only in respect of wooden idols.

We follow certain restrictions (taboos) while erecting the stage, as in live Yakshagana Folk Theater. It is said that "raahu chalane," a bad energy, passes by us on each day. A schedule is maintained to avoid this bad energy. It is believed that the stage should not be placed or built in front of "raahu chalane." So the direction of the stage building may be changed. "Raahu" moves towards the east on Sunday and Thursday; towards the west on Tuesday; towards the south on Monday and Friday, and towards the north on Wednesday. If there is already a stage or community hall, then the troupe manager, to eradicate any evil, breaks a coconut or pumpkin outside of the stage before the show begins. If we feel inconvenience on the stage, or if any disturbance happens before the performance, then we break a coconut or pumpkin outside the stage.

If we are performing on the premises of any Hindu temple the first invocation, songs are rendered inside the temple and then we come back to the stage and the performance will continue.



"Karapaala Meela"— traditional artist,  
Mr. Karapaala Siddaiah, and his troupe.

T S: Your puppets have very distinctive feet compared with other marionettes. They complete the balance of the body and they dance very well. How did these feet develop?

B K: In about 1920, my father's father modified the foot of the puppet so that it had a joint at the ankle. This enabled the feet to dance in a more dynamic way. Later, my father modified it a bit more.

A puppeteer is not just a manipulator. He should be aware of the traditional live theater movements. Yakshagana is a folk dance theater form in our region. Our puppet performance is in the style of Yakshagana. The manipulator should be able to understand rhythms and footwork, just like a dancer. In our training program, we teach the traditional dance steps. The manipulator himself dances and keeps the rhythms, expressing feelings through the movements.

T S: You have spoken of starting a training center for your puppetry art. What would such a school be like? What courses would be taught? Would it be connected to a theater school or dance school?

B K: We have dreamed about starting a center for a long time. In this school, courses would be more practical than theoretical. We

would introduce different kinds of puppetry skills, and a history of this art form. There would be an archival center, with photo, audio, and video documentation. If we have our own center or training school, we can run summer camps and long-term or short-term courses. The courses may be of either 6 months or 10 months. We can invite advanced students, as well as school children, teachers, researchers, and teach them to experiment with available materials. In the beginning, courses will be offered to 10 resident students, and a few outside students. I believe that education can be improved through the medium of puppets.

We need to develop a puppetry museum. With this, we can explain to the trainees different kinds of puppets and techniques. Many of our students know "Yakshagana Gombeyaata" (puppets, Yakshagana style), but students are not aware of the puppets of other parts of our district, let alone the rest of India. A museum can act like a reference library. A room will be provided for experimenting with sound and lighting techniques.

The production and marketing of images is also part of our school. Paper pulp artifacts, models, paintings, and puppets can be produced with the help of students and trainees. The products may be sold in various venues and help support the institution.

S A K: What is the estimated budget?

B K: If I have 30 lakhs (about \$70,000), I can use 20 lakhs for infrastructure and 5 for video, audio, computer, lighting equipment. The remaining 5 lakhs will be used for administration, and teachers' and artists' payment. If we are able to set up the school of my dreams, I will build a repertory troupe that can take puppet shows all around India.

#### FOOTNOTES:

<sup>(1)</sup> Sunkadatte Vinaayaka Temple

<sup>(2)</sup> S.A. Krishnaiah authored a comprehensive book called *Karnataka Puppetry* (1988), published by Regional Resources Center for Folk Performing Arts, MGM College, UDUPI-576102, India. Krishnaiah's book is out of print, but he can be contacted at the same address— if a few people write to him he will make reprints.

<sup>(3)</sup> This storytelling form is called "karapaala meela."

# Sara Goldsmith-

by Robert Rogers



*Goldsmith as "Susan Starr," with Carmen Miranda and friends*

Six years ago, on a cold, snowy December day in Hempstead, New York, I discovered a diminutive, elderly woman named Sara Goldsmith sitting in the audience after one of my performances. The theater facility had not been the best, the audience too young and too noisy and trying to pace myself during a busy season, I was anxious to get home. But there she sat, quietly hopeful, as her companion on that day—actually, her physician's receptionist who had given her a ride—introduced her to me and mentioned that she had once been a puppeteer. She also said that Sara would be grateful if I would follow them back to her home for a visit and to view her collection. Apparently, she was housebound and no one else ever came to call. I was also asked if it would not be too much trouble to keep an eye on Sara while I took down my equipment as this other woman—Josephine—had errands to run.

So here I was with a smiling, nervous, ninety year old woman, waiting patiently all bundled up in a blue woolen coat and an old pill box hat, watching as I packed things up.

Of course, I did go for that visit. And another and another. And we became friends. And eventually she became part of my family.

Sara had devoted her life to marionettes and dolls. Not as a hobbyist or a collector but as a creator. Her one bedroom apartment was filled with work neatly arranged and displayed in glass cases which she herself had also built. Labels even described each and every one— when it was made, and for what purpose. In fact, the whole place was so overwhelmingly jammed that it wasn't until years later when I helped her box it all up, that I noticed she had owned only a few cheap pieces of furniture.

Sara never tired of looking at her collection. She loved acting as a tour guide and I know that, when no one else was there, she gazed at them still. Her marionettes and dolls were her life. Otherwise, she was quite lonely, a condition brought about partly by circumstance and partly by choice.

Sara never married, had no children or nephews and nieces, had outlived her relatives and had only two long-distance friends with whom she occasionally spoke on the phone. What I learned of her life came only from her, and when she reminisced, her memory could be selective.

She was born in Syracuse, New York and then raised in East Orange, New Jersey. Of her two brothers, the eldest, Herman, found a career working in a commercial photography studio. The other, Lewis, somehow one day got the idea to create a touring marionette theater company, and decided that his sister would help. He was the playwright, scene designer and director; Sara was the marionette maker and costume designer. They rented a small studio and became the "Goldsmith Marionettes."

It is hard to say how long it took them to get from being a pair of obscure hopefuls to successful producer/performers. Sara's papers and records are voluminous but they were never given the same orderly treatment as the puppets themselves. But the piles of newspaper clippings, letters and photos suggest that opportunities were not hard to find. They appeared in theaters mainly in and around New York City, sometimes as the main attraction, sometimes as the "double bill" in a movie house.

In the space of ten years, starting in 1935, Lewis and Sara staged versions of *Treasure Island*, Moliere's *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, *The Story of Moses*, *Hansel and Gretel* and dozens of Vaudeville-type variety reviews.

Sara's marionettes were typical of the time. Made of wood and plastic wood and dressed in the most detailed costumes,

they were people in miniature. Sara always told me, "My marionettes *were* life. Marionettes of today are an imitation of life." Even when talking about the great Bil Baird, who she knew and admired, there was an element of disdain in her voice. She disliked and disapproved of exaggeration and would never have dared distort the realistic look of her puppets, let alone move them in a cartoonish manner.

Visit after visit, I would marvel at the exacting detail she gave her marionettes. Their clothes had working button holes and zippers. Some had underwear and a few even had wigs made from her own hair! When I asked why she spent so much time on parts of costumes that no audience member could ever see, she said, "I wanted my costumes to have the same high standards and to be just as fine as those worn by singers at the Metropolitan Opera."

World War II brought a halt to the ambitious Goldsmith productions. Lewis went into the Army, but, with his theatrical experience was detailed to entertain the troops here at home. At his request, Sara made him a special set of marionettes which he then operated when appearing as a soloist, to the accompaniment of various Army bands. These marionettes were, again, typical and traditional— the funny pianist, the clown acrobat, the exotic dancer, the skaters.

During this time, Sara struggled to make ends meet. She found work as a bookkeeper and also took on the responsibility of looking after her ailing mother. Then, after the war, when Lewis came home, to Sara's surprise and disappointment, he announced that he was going to continue performing, but only as a soloist. He took the stage name "Little Jack Horner" and Sara was left in the lurch.

In the next few years, Sara lost both her brothers to illness— "weak hearts," as she put it.

She tried to pick up where Lewis left off, working as "Susan Starr." But she was so attached to his memory and so dependent on his guidance that she gave up. Then her mother died.

Somehow, and I don't know when, she became certified to teach elementary school and was assigned to one in Harlem. She threw herself into her job staging elaborately costumed pageants with lots of kids. In the annual classroom photos, she always looked happy and proud. But her private life continued to be a solitary one and she needed something new to fill her time.

She discovered the world of dolls. Not baby dolls; not toys. Portrait dolls. And for the rest of her life, with typical devotion and zest, she created a body of work and a reputation that surpassed her accomplishments with marionettes. In

photo: J. Fox



*Gerante and friend, from Moliere's A Doctor in Spite of Himself*

fact, with her dolls in private collections and museums across the country, she came to be regarded as one of the first and finest doll makers of the twentieth century.

She researched and duplicated figures and costumes from throughout history, scouring fabric and notions stores for just the right cloth, buttons and trim. Cleopatra, Queen Elizabeth (both I and II), Nefertiti, the singer Carmen Miranda, the skater Sonja Henning were all her subjects. She made portraits of and worked with model Candy Jones and radio personality Mary Margaret McBride. Again, she was featured in newspaper articles and magazines, this time as a respected member of the community of doll makers and collectors.

She made many friends, admirers and customers, as her collection of correspondences shows. But she never seemed to have a close personal relationship with anyone—one that had nothing to do with her art. I suppose that when "push came to shove," she preferred to be somewhat emotionally isolated. How else could this talented, cultured, insightful person have wound up, late in life, dependent on her doctor's receptionist for the occasional trip to the post office or supermarket, when I met her that day six years ago?

Though she lived on her own, she had endured two strokes which sometimes made it hard for her to put into words what she wanted to say. She seemed to live on rice cakes and canned sardines. But whenever I visited, there was always a plate of cookies and tea.

She dyed her hair black and always dressed for the occasion. Sometimes she forgot my name and always referred to my wife Debby as "your wife." But she always remembered my daughter Mariana, who took to calling her "Great Aunt Sara."

We shared many long conversations which lasted from mid-day to after dark. I was thrilled to hear her talk firsthand about people in the world of puppetry who I had only read about, and she was equally happy because I was the only one in her life who could talk to her about them. She was quite critical of contemporary puppets and puppeteers. She felt that the Muppets were ugly and did not understand their appeal. And she thought that most young puppeteers of today, by evidence of their productions, had turned their backs on the history of their art and suffered because of it.

How I wish I could have seen her in performance. She would never fully explain what her puppets actually did or how she manipulated them. Sometimes because she didn't want to, but mostly because she couldn't remember. However, when I got out her old Victrola and played the old 78 rpm records that accompanied her shows (custom cut in a sound studio) I could look in her eyes and watch her drift back into time. She'd sing with the music, let go of her walker and move her hands as if still holding her marionettes' controls, going through the motions she had perfected so many years ago.

One day she called and said tearfully, "You must come over. I have something to discuss with you." Inevitably, the time had come for her to move to a nursing home. "I don't care about myself, but I want to protect my marionettes. You must take them. Use them. Sell them. Do what you want."

Sara died last March at the age of 96. I promised never to break them up and to preserve them as best I could. And so I have.

I've even tried to reconstruct some of her shows and performed with her marionettes on occasion so as to keep them before the public eye. But they are in such absolutely perfect condition that I want to spare them the rigors of the stage.

As I conclude this article, of course I feel a terrible wave of loss. But on the other hand, my life was made so much richer for having known her, that I'm much more grateful. And, of course, because of our chance meeting, my family and I brought her some comfort and friendship in the waning years of her life.

*Robert Rogers is a longtime puppeteer. He directs his own eponymous company in Danbury, Connecticut.*

# PUNCH AND JUDY, CRUIKSHANK AND MAYHEW

BY JOEL SCHECHTER

Punch and Judy has survived for centuries as a popular entertainment. Its professors, as the showmen and women are called, can still be seen performing the puppet play in London's Covent Garden district, and in other cities, when they're not inside their puppet booths.

Several documentations of Punch and Judy performances have been quite popular, too. George Cruikshank and Henry Mayhew created two different, innovative performance histories of the play in 19th century London. Their projects, like the puppet play, reached a wide audience, and did so with a theatrical boldness that rivals Punch's own.

Punch is bold, no question about it. The hunchbacked puppet character murders his wife, Judy, and their infant son, beats a doctor to death, hangs a hangman and kills the Devil during the course of the action. Punch has little respect for marriage, family, medicine, law, religion. His language is as farcically self-centered and blunt as his action. "Oh, dear! Oh, Lord! Help! Help! I am murdered! I'm a dead man! Will nobody save my life! Doctor! Doctor! Come, and bring me to life again. I'm a dead man. Doctor! Doctor! Doctor!" he calls out after falling from a horse.<sup>(1)</sup> The doctor arrives, self-pitying Punch revives, kicks the doctor in



*The first cover of Punch, by A.S. Henning*

the eye, sings and dances. When the doctor "physics" Punch by hitting him on the head with a stick, the blows are returned until "the Doctor falls down dead." (in Leabo, 1983: 21-22)

Deaths in Punch and Judy are not particularly tragic. Traditionally, the characters don't look or suffer like humans—they are glove puppets, wooden-headed dolls, toys whose knockabout comedy appeals to adults and children. We know from accounts of money paid to Punch and Judy presenters that the play's slapstick anarchy attracted countless audiences on the streets of London, spectators from all classes who paid for Punch's holiday from law and order, and cheered it. As Michael Bakhtin said of clowns in carnivals, so Punch in front of the crowd is one of the "constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday

life out of carnival season." (1984:8)

That carnival spirit is kept alive in the pioneering performance documentation of Cruikshank and Mayhew, two 19th century London men who separately created exemplary studies of Punch and Judy. Mayhew's interview with an anonymous "Punchman" (as the play's presenters were called before they became "professors") survives in a text which would make a wonderful monologue for an actor. Cruikshank's 1828 en-

gravings based on a puppet play performance have been accepted as small, visual masterpieces in their own right. The books these two men published also included complete play texts of *Punch and Judy*, which their own special documentation enhanced.

Both these projects represent popular approaches to performance history which deserve reconsideration. In our age when academic interpretations of performance are often addressed primarily to specialists, to other academics and artists, Cruikshank and Mayhew provide models for what could be called "a popular history" of a popular entertainment. Their studies of *Punch and Judy* reached wide audiences—through newspapers and an innovative book in Mayhew's case, through often reprinted engravings in Cruikshank's. There are now newer technologies through which to document puppet plays and practices; but I think these 19th century models still hold great attraction as texts enlivened with the energies and colorful images of the *Punch and Judy* shows they document.

George Cruikshank captured the ferocious humor of *Punch and Judy* in twenty-four engravings first published in 1828. He based his book illustrations on a live performance of the puppet play by John Piccini, England's first Punchman. Piccini's puppet show for Cruikshank took place after the engraver was commissioned to illustrate a book now usually known as *John Payne Collier's Punch and Judy. With Illustrations Designed and Engraved by George Cruikshank. Accompanied by the Dialogue of the Puppet Show, An Account of Its Origin, and of Puppet Plays in England*. The show was presented privately for Cruikshank and his collaborator, John Payne Collier, who recorded Piccini's *Punch and Judy* dialogue and published it with some interpolations as "The Dialogue of the Puppet Show," (Collier was the transcriber of this dialogue, not its author; but he is billed as the book's author, largely because he wrote a history of puppet plays in England as part of the 1828 volume.)

Cruikshank briefly describes Piccini's performance in a note he wrote for an 1863 exhibition catalogue:

Having been engaged by Mr. Prowett, the publisher, to give the various scenes represented in the street performance of "Punch and Judy," I obtained address of the Proprietor and Performer of that popular Exhibition. He was an elderly Italian, of the name of Piccini, whom I remembered from boyhood, and he lived at a low public-house, the sign of "The King's Arms," in the "Coal-yard," Drury Lane. Having made arrangements for a "Morning Performance," one of the win-

dow-frames on the first floor of the public-house was taken out, and the stand or *Punch's Theatre* was hauled into the "Club-room." Mr. Payne Collier (who was to write the description), the publisher and myself, formed the audience; and as the performance went on, I stopped it at the most interesting parts to sketch the Figures, whilst Mr. Collier noted down the dialogue; thus the whole is a faithful copy and description of the various scenes represented by this Italian, whose performance of "Punch" was far superior in every respect to anything of the sort to be seen at the present day. (in Stead, 1950: 86-7)

It is not incidental that Cruikshank chose to interrupt the performance of the play that day; he also disrupts the play through his engravings. Piccini was stopped and started again "at the most interesting parts." Judging from the engravings, those "most interesting parts" are the moments before or after a violent act. We see *Judy*, the wife, wielding her stick, about to hit her husband. In the next plate, we see *Judy* just after *Punch* has hit back; her head is down on the edge of the puppet frame, *Punch* still holding his stick aloft. The movement from one sketch to the next is discontinuous, abrupt, with reversals and sudden shifts in action, all quite fitting for a portrait of characters who are also abrupt, quick to recover from a beating or die in one. Instead of complete sequences with beginning, middle and end, moving from lifted stick to blow to fall, causality is not shown in these images, and its absence adds a sense of the absurd. The battles seem to stop and start without any particular reason.

Even with a more detailed account of the action's genesis, provided by the accompanying stage directions and dialogue, the characters' resorts to violence remain extravagant and cruel, though not completely unwarranted. Some of the blows are struck in self-defense; some, struck in anarchic defiance of authority figures (Constable, Hangman). Some blows, like *Punch's* assault on his wife, make more sense later on in the play, after we see him confess his love for another woman, *Pretty Polly*. But are such puppets capable of love? The drawings, and by extension Piccini's puppetry, present violent actions and professions of love in a visual style not consonant with emotional and psychological realism.

Cruikshank's images of Piccini's grotesque puppets show them sporting exaggerated features—long noses, large round eyes with black dots in them. With lines of the artist's hatching on their faces, they look far more like cartoons than humans. The departure from realism in the drawings and in the design



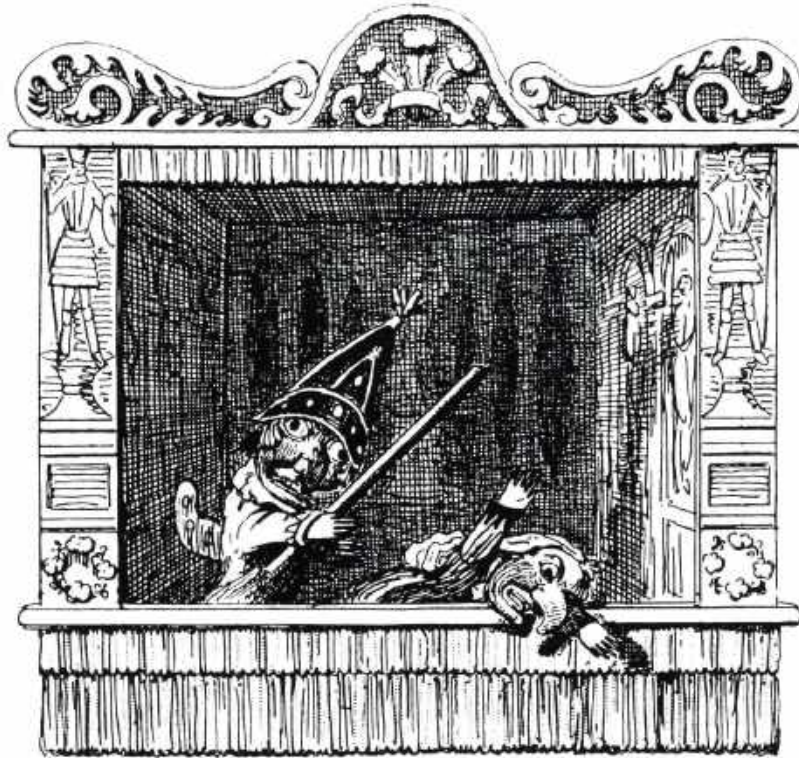
of the puppets allows spectators to enjoy the violence, as we do today watching an animated cartoon, knowing Roadrunner will bounce back to life after his fall off a cliff.

Cruikshank set each of his black and white scenes inside the frame of an ornate curtained puppet booth, beyond which there is nothing but the white of the page. In this regard, too, his scenes are removed from the everyday, peopled world, and located in a different, violently comic universe of Piccini's creation, a sort of malice in wonderland, where those who wield the slapstick (Punch and Piccini) and the pen (Cruikshank) rule.

Of course, there is more to the world of Punch and Judy than the puppets. While Cruikshank's frames vividly portray in *media res* how the scenes were staged, and display the furious energy and grotesque extravagance of the battles, almost none of the illustrations show spectators. One exception is a woodcut which portrays the backstage area of Piccini's puppet booth. We see the Punchman's back (no face), and the spectators in front of him; it is far sketchier than the fine-lined engravings which focus on the puppets alone. Perhaps the crowd around the booth moved faster than George Cruikshank's pen could when he was outdoors. He could not very easily ask spectators to stop while he sketched their movements, as he asked Piccini in the public-house. (2)

My colleague John Bell reminded me there are many 19th-century illustrations showing the Punch performers and their audience in the street. Cruikshank and Collier took a new, different approach in their day. Bell quite rightly notes, "by paying attention to the show itself, not simply seeing it as a colorful aspect of London street life." At the same time, the

crowd's cheers and jeers were an integral component of any street performance, almost inseparable from the spirit of the play. The crowd is very much a mirror of Punch and Judy in one finely detailed scene drawn by George Cruikshank's



brother, Robert, also a graphic artist. His 1825 illustration titled "Mr. Punch in All His Glory" depicts a city crowd as unruly as Punch. Many people in the crowd are watching Punch with fascination, and fail to see a pickpocket among them move his hand through someone's coat. A porter is so enthralled with the puppets he doesn't notice a dog drinking from his pail. The lamplighter watching the booth while pouring oil spills liquid on a gentleman under the lamp. Seeing the show from an apartment window, a mother enjoys the puppets so much

she forgets she is holding her young daughter by one foot; the child dangles out the window. The hunchbacked puppet's disregard for everyday conventions and order has spread to the audience. They would rather watch a puppet show than watch their children or even their pocketmoney. Punch's capacity to move the audience's attention from daily responsibilities may be his greatest and most fully realized threat to social order.

Robert Cruikshank's drawing comically affirms that for a society like London's in 1825, puppeteers and buskers provided the crowd with a holiday from daily life, whatever day of the week it was. Removed from the crowd and the street, Punch and Judy becomes a different kind of art, more like George Cruikshank's engravings. The glove puppets, presented in book form, are allowed very few visitors. Their acts have to be viewed privately, and the spectator becomes a "lonely crowd," much as Collier, Prowett and Cruikshank were when

they sat in Piccini's nearly empty public-house and watched his 1828 performance. The engravings remain quite provocative, and widely circulated among readers, but the performance experience they represent is more solitary and quiet than that on the streets of London:

By contrast, an innovative, highly accessible documentation of street life and the Punchman's profession was created by the pioneering oral historian, Henry Mayhew. In the year 1850, Mayhew published a series of newspaper interviews with London laborers; his massive survey was subsequently printed in book form as *London Labour and the London Poor*. Among the interviews with "Street Exhibitors," he features a long monologue by a nameless Punchman who bought John Piccini's show from him. By including this colorful self-portrait in the series, Mayhew gave new dignity to Piccini and his anonymous successor, along with other popular entertainers. They are shown to be hardworking laborers and artists, and are no longer hidden inside their booths, as Cruikshank's illustrations left Piccini. Punchmen are not actors, and may not care whether they are seen; but Mayhew adds considerably to our historical understanding of their art in 19th century London, and lets us see them through a fascinating text.

While Collier copied Piccini's performance text, and Cruikshank copied (with his own grand style) the immigrant Italian's puppet scenes, Mayhew constructed the biography of a Punch and Judy performer in the man's own language for publication in a widely circulated newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*.

Mayhew's Punchman speaks at length about his predecessor, "Porsini," and provides a much more detailed backstage tour than Cruikshank. The interviewee recalls how the old Italian Piccini "was the first original street Punch," how "[he] died in the workhouse, and, in course, I shall do the same." The Punchman continues: "Porsini always carried a rum bottle in his pocket ('cause Punch is a rum fellow, ya see, and he's very fond of rum), and dranked out of this unbeknown behind the baize afore he went into the frame [booth], so that it should lay in his power to give the audience a most excellent performance. He was a man as gave the greatest satisfaction. ...Everyone in London knowed him... His name is handed down to prosperity among all classes of society in life." (1861: 43-9) Piccini may have died in poverty, but his name prospers in memory to this day, thanks largely to Mayhew and other puppetry historians who rely on his labors.

The anonymous Punchman interviewed by Mayhew expected to die poor, like Piccini. Both had seen better days, and more generous audiences, earlier in the century. In lan-

guage Dickens (a contemporary of Mayhew's) might have given one of his characters, the Punchman explains: "People isn't getting tired of our performances, but stingier ....Everybody looks at their money now afore they parts with it." (1861: 46) Despite the hard times, many of the Punchman's statements are cheerful, comic. Unlike Punch, who melodramatically asks, "Will nobody save my life?" the puppeteer had the sense of humor to tell Mayhew that "the Punch-and-Judy business was better than starving." He provided supporting details about daily earnings, performance sites, his diverse audiences. He also dictated the text of a puppet play (*The Dominion of Fancy; or, Punch's Opera*) which Mayhew published.

His colorful description of the Punchman's profession, while not dictated as a performance text, might well hold the stage today; it could be performed as a one-person show titled "Punchman without Judy." Mayhew's interview possesses this theatricality in part because the historian chose to absent his own voice from the final text. Like a Punchman inside his booth, Mayhew cannot be seen; he is heard only through the street performers's colloquial answers to his questions. But his art, his expert questioning, transcription and editing of the interview gives shape and lasting vibrancy to the Punchman's language.

One of Mayhew's admirers and successors, Studs Terkel, recently noted that the 19th century historian "lent voice to [the] groundlings, who were so often seen but, like well-behaved children, seldom heard. The Respectables of London, Manchester and Birmingham, in reading their morning newspaper, were astonished. They had no idea these etceteras, [chimney sweeps, street criers, shoemakers, street exhibitors] who have for so long submissively and silently served them, thought such thoughts." (1998:1) It is as if Punch's own outspokenness had been taken up by a large but neglected segment of society, including a Punchman.

George Cruikshank's engravings and Collier's recording of Piccini's play text made a great 19th century popular entertainment accessible to multitudes of later spectators who could find the puppet play in printed, illustrated form. Mayhew heard and recorded the voices on the street, Punch's allies, the otherwise unknown "etceteras" of history (to use Terkel's phrase), including a Punchman. Punch and Judy probably would have survived in some form without such imaginative historical documentation. But several of the finest examples of the puppet play might have been lost through the alteration and forgetting to which performances in the oral tradition are subject, if Cruikshank and Mayhew had not documented the play's iconography and its presenter's language, and preserved them in popular forms.

## NOTES:

1. Punch's call for a doctor is taken from the Leabo's version of Punch and Judy. There are many other versions of the text; Punch performers usually develop their own, based on one passed on to them. There is no single, authoritative text.

2. Puppetry historian George Speaight notes that Cruikshank portraits of Piccini and Collier may be found in the original rough sketches, now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum; but these were not published in the 1828 book, or any later edition, as far as I know. (1990: 303)



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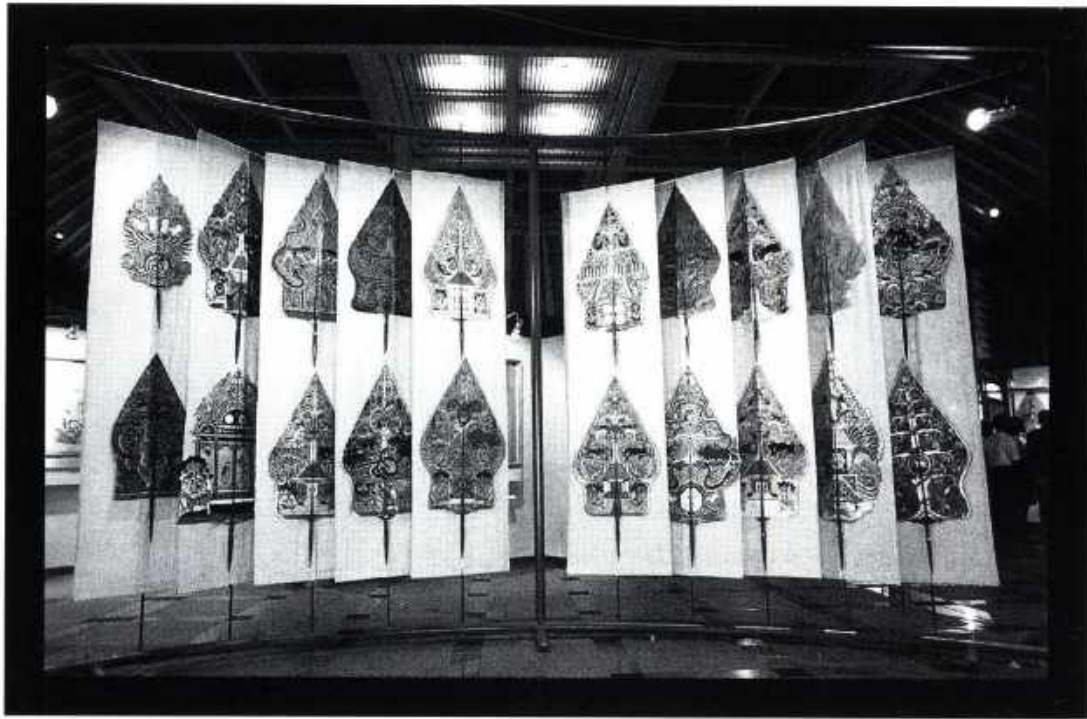
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*Trees of Life*

## International Wayang Festival

*August 7-14, 1999, Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, Jakarta, Indonesia*

For eight days and eight nights, Jakarta was host to a feast of fifty wayang performances by Indonesian and international dalang masters and students and gamelan orchestras. Audiences were dazzled by the various forms of wayang, both classical and modern: wayang kulit from Surakarta, Yogya, Banyumas, Cirebon, Bali; wayang kancil, wayang gedhog, wayang sasak, wayang jegdong, wayang banjar, wayang sandosa, wayang ukur, wayang legenda, wayang kulit khusus, the Sundanese wayang golek, the human dance-drama wayang orang (or wayang wong), and the scroll storytelling of wayang beber. Through the older wayang forms the Hindu epics are told and retold in a distinctively Javanese manner. Islamic stories, many of Arabic origin, and Javanese folk tales and fables are also illuminated through the art of Indonesian puppetry.

During the festival, the beautifully crafted leather wayang kulit puppets and the host of wooden wayang golek puppets, from the elegant to the outrageously grotesque, dazzled the eyes. The magical gamelan orchestras entranced the audiences, their percussion music accompanied by soprano female voices and male chorus. And, of course, the singing, narration, and character voices of the master dalangs, with the distinctive punctuating sound of the bronze plates (kepyak in Yogya, keprak in Solo) which the dalang strikes with his bare foot to create dramatic sound effects, and the wooden tapper (cempala) which he raps against the side of the puppet box to produce different tonal effects, to change tempo and signal new tunes, control the whole performance. This was certainly a week-long festival of master puppeteers and glorious music.

Held at the new wayang building, Gedung Pewayangan Kautaman, adjacent to Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, a cultural theme park in Jakarta, the festival celebrated the seventh Pekan Wayang Indonesia, the Seventh Indonesian Wayang Festival, an event that has been held every five years since 1969. As part of the festival, a wonderful exhibit of wayang puppets and paintings based on wayang was mounted in the Gedung Pewayangan Kautaman. There were also demonstrations of wayang kulit and wayang golek puppet making, a wayang puppet making contest, and a number of stalls and bazaars selling puppets and related items. The festival was put on by Sena Wangi, the Indonesian National Wayang Secretariat, which held meetings during the festival. During the week, Indonesian representatives were joined by others from several ASEAN

nations to form a working committee for an ASEAN Puppetry Association. There was also an all-day international seminar, with special emphasis on the development of wayang in the third millennium.

Indonesian dalangs performed one to two hour wayangs during the day and evenings, followed by the seven-hour performances that began at 9:00 p.m. and ended no earlier than 4:00 a.m. Throughout the eight days, busloads of school children erupted into one of the three performing spaces and watched their national heritage with great enthusiasm. During the evenings, up to two thousand Jakartans gathered under the large tent-enclosed Open Stage and followed their favorite noble and comic characters with familiarity and delight. The eight master dalangs who performed throughout the night during the festival represented some of the great names of this venerable dramatic and esoteric form. To be part of the night-to-dawn performances was an experience of a lifetime.

In conjunction with the Indonesian Wayang Festival, the International Wayang Festival component this year boasted eight dalangs from outside of Indonesia and three Indonesian dalangs who reside, perform, and teach overseas. All three dalangs gave one and a half hour wayang kulit performances in English, performing in the Surakarta style. Ki Widiyanto teaches and performs in the U.S. He charmingly performed episodes from the Ramayana, where Rahwana (Ravana) expels his brother Wibisana (Vibhisana) from Alengka (Lanka) and Kumbakarna. Ki Sumarsam, also a gamelan and dalang teacher in the U.S., took characters from the Mahabharata Cycle, principally the ascetic, but elegantly perfect hero, Arjuna, where he battles against forces of evil. The punakawan (clown-companions) Semar, Bagong, Petruk, and Gareng are Lord Arjuna's hilarious advisors. Ki Joko Susilo, who teaches and performs in New Zealand, took his story from the Ramayana, focussing on the abduction of Sinta (Sita) and Hanoman (Hanuman) as Rama's emissary to the beautiful captive. The comic elements of wayang, notably in the punakawan scenes with Hanoman, were very funny. (Being a non-Javanese speaker, it was a delight to be able to follow the dialogue and understand the humor.)

by Karen Smith

all photos by **Constantine Korsovit**s

These were eight foreign wayang dalangs. Marc Hoffman, who resides in Indonesia, performed an hour-long wayang kulit on opening night. His story was taken from the Mahabharata, culminating in the Game of Dice and exile of the Pandawas (Pandavas). Besides performing as one of the international dalangs, Marc Hoffman helped organize the International Wayang Festival. Kathy Foley, theatre professor and wayang golek performer from The University of California at Santa Cruz, presented scenes from the Ramayana. Matthew Cohen, an American scholar from the International Institute for Asian Studies, The Netherlands, performed beautifully in impeccable Javanese an Islamic story in the Cirebon style of wayang kulit. Helen Pausacker from Australia also performed wayang kulit in Javanese. She, too, wowed the Jakartan audiences with her command of the language, her topical comments on women's reform, as well as her comic extempore asides to the gamelan orchestra and audience. Tamara Fielding, a Dutch-Indonesian puppeteer who lives in New York, works primarily with school children, introducing American youth to the magical world of Indonesia and wayang kulit. She performed in English the abduction of Sinta (Sita) from the Ramayana. Gaura (G.J. Davidson), an Australian student of wayang kulit, performed in Javanese in the Surakarta classical wayang kulit style. Sarah Bilby, a Masters degree student from the U.K., gave her audience a very pleasant wayang kancil performance, featuring the mouse deer of Javanese traditional fables as protagonist against exploitative land speculators. As a departure from the other dalangs who performed stories from the traditional Hindu-Javanese or Islamic repertoire of wayang, the Australian musician and teacher of gamelan and guitar, Mike Burns, created his own shadow puppets and used them in combination with traditional Javanese puppets in presenting the story of Australian folk hero, Ned Kelly, the nineteenth century Robin Hood of the island continent. With eight students and a teacher-parent from a Perth school providing the Irish-Australian music on western and Javanese instruments, and accompanied by several Indonesian gamelan musicians, this original performance was appreciated for its attempt at combining diverse traditions. These eight international dalangs performed one to two hour performances scheduled during the days and evenings.



Wayang Kulit Purwa- Ki Manteb S.

Puppeteers from the ASEAN nations Malaysia and Singapore also took part in the performance events. Dalang Hamzah Awang Amat from Malaysia showed a videotape of his wayang performances. Professor Chua Soo Pong from Singapore presented a charming students' performance of episodes from a Ming Dynasty classic novel, *Journey to the West*, in the Hainanese puppetry style.

Without doubt, the highlights of the festival were the masterful performances of the Indonesian dalangs. These were as varied as the regions and styles they came from. Most wayang performances, however, during the "clown" scenes, included topical references to current events within Indonesia, which were greeted with enthusiasm by the audiences who can now more openly discuss their society. During the night-long performances, food vendors plied their trade among the people who sat or stood on the dalang side of the screen or lounged on the shadow side. People chat during much of the long narrative sections of the performance, eat steamed peanuts and other "fast foods," drink ginger tea, laugh with the clowns, sing along with the vocalists, and cheer the heroes or Semar and his sons when they touch on the right topics, be they sexual or political in nature. This is all part of the all-night wayang experience.

In contrast to the puppet forms of storytelling, the one performance by Ki Sarnen of the scroll-narrative wayang beber, perhaps the oldest wayang form (dating back to at least the thirteenth century), had a calming, yet intensely spiritual, quality. The reverence in which the scrolls are held by the dalang and musicians was very apparent. The majority of the puppet performances were performed in the classical or purwa style, with stories (lakons) drawn from the four oldest cycles of lakons based upon Javanese prehistory, folklore and mystical beliefs, Indian post-Vedic literature and Buddhist thought ("stem stories" or lakon pokok), as well as from Javanese creative inventiveness in the "branch stories" (or lakon carangan) emanating from the two Hindu epics. The popular clown character of Semar, the mythical Guardian God of Java, and his sons/companions appear in most lakons.

A few performances were experimental in style, such as the STSI Surakarta Wayang and Music Institute's performance, where colored lighting was used for dramatic effect, and more than one dalang— as many as nine puppeteers and four narrators— manipulated puppets during the furious battle scenes.



*Wayang Ukur- Ki Sukasman*

Another experimental or modern wayang shadow performance—of wayang ukur—was created by Ki Sukasman. The performance was based on the fateful story of the ambitious Bambang Sumantri, his ogre-dwarf brother, Suksarana, King Arjuna Sasrabahu of Maespati, and Princess Citrawati of Magada. This was a lyrical, romantic performance, framed in a beautiful, multi-level set, surrounded by carved wooden panels and figures of elegant elephants. Effective use of lighting, color filters, a scrim, and screen transparencies highlighted the mood and drama. Human dancers in front of and behind the scrim lent an ethereal element to an already delicate performance. This production was acclaimed by many of the audience members, and considered to be a brilliant modern adaptation of wayang suitable for first class international performing arts festivals.

Opening night concluded with the "devil dalang," Ki Manteb Sudarsono, a famous commercial wayang star. His performance of the rarely performed Dewi Lara Amis was one of the great moments of the festival. The night was thronged with thousands of avid fans. This remarkable performer kept even the non-Javanese speakers transfixed until the climactic conclusion. Ki Anom Suroto the following Friday night kept his thousands of fans equally entranced with his deep, sonorous sing-

ing voice, finely developed characterization, and masterful manipulation. His fifteen-year-old son, Ki Bayu Prasetyo, was a virtuoso in the battle scenes. He seemingly effortlessly manipulated his puppets with flashing dexterity. His characters moved and fought like lightning, performing the most amazing gymnastics. When his characterization evolves to the delicate nuances of his father's, he will indeed rival his teacher and parent. Two other young dalang performers, fourteen-year-old Ki Yoga Awaludin, and Ki Nugroho Wisnu, performed at the festival. The school audiences were very impressed by the younger generation of dalangs. Other wonderful wayang performances included wayang sasak, a style performed in Nusa Tenggara Barat, East Bali, and on the island of Lombok. The stories are Islamic, often based on Arabic legends, and the clown figures are Wayan Tengki and Haji Beko. The festival performance of wayang sasak had a throaty, earthy style of musical and narrative delivery, with more rambunctious comedy than the classical styles of wayang kulit. The wayang kulit from Bali performed by Ki Made Gianyar was likewise a more gutsy, vibrant form of puppeteering, singing, narration, and musical accompaniment than the elegant style of the wayang kulit purwa. Episodes were taken from the Ramayana,

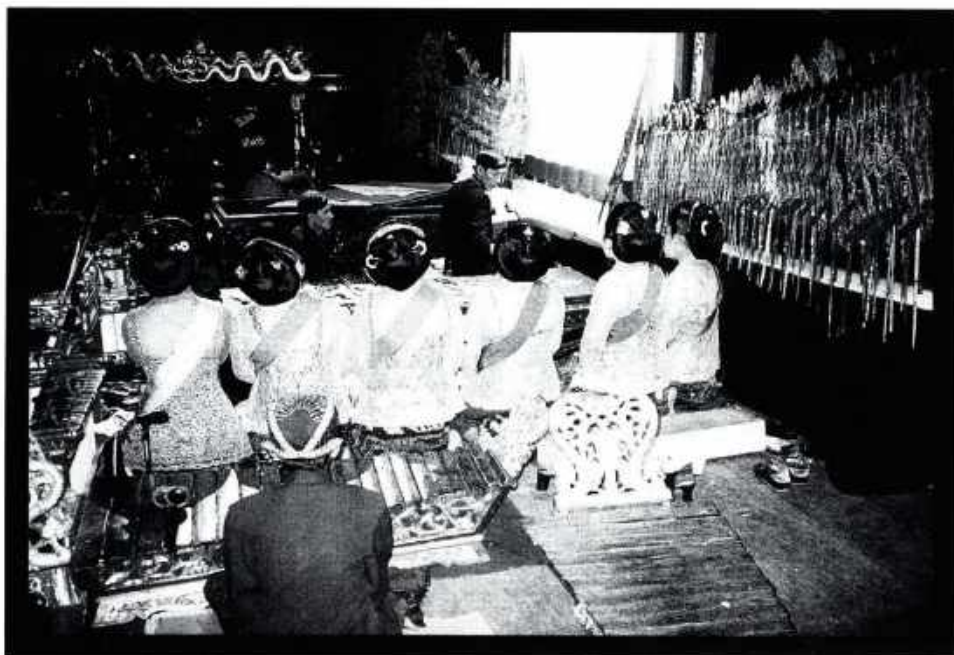
ending with Hanoman burning Rahwana's city. In expected Bali tradition, Hanoman's host of monkeys were particularly pesky and mischievous. Ki Asep Truna's three hour wayang golek performance from the Ramayana climaxed with the protracted death of Kumbarkana. Wayang golek puppets can be very graphic in their death agonies and mutilations, and the giant Kumbarkana's dismemberment was no exception. The audience shared his agony and felt compassion for this more lovable member of Rahwana's family. The presentation style was also very earthy and very comical. The array of increasingly more ugly and unreal characters, especially the comic characters, with their head-jerking, tongue-splaying antics, delighted the audience, children and adult alike. The Sundanese style of singing, particularly of one of Ki Asep Truna's female vocalists, was throaty and sensuous. During the high moments of this wayang golek performance, one could feel one's blood surge with the drama created by puppet master, musicians, and vocalists. This was an exhilarating performance by a master puppeteer, gamelan orchestra, and accompanying vocalists.

There were too many dalangs and performances to individually cite, so I will briefly mention the dalangs who performed during the eight nights. Ki Warseno Slenk, who performed the second night-to-dawn performance, was popular among the young men of his large audience for his suggestive innuendoes and commentaries on current events. Ki Citut Turmanto, who has been performing wayang kulit since 1978

and has become popular since 1983, performed the story of Begawan Kilatbuana in the Banyumas style on the third night. Ki Hadi Sugito, performing wayang since he was a child, was selected as Jakarta's Favorite Puppet Master in 1986. He performed Wahyu Songsong Agung Cahyo Kencono in the Yogya style of wayang kulit on the fourth night. On the fifth night, Ki Sugito Purbocarito performed the story of Parikesit Lahir in the Banyumas style of wayang kulit purwa. He performs on an average of ten times per month; in 1956 he performed every night, non-stop, for six months. Hailed as one of Indonesia's top ten shadow puppet masters, Ki Sukron Suwondo performed on the sixth night the story of Begawan Panji Pamungkas.

To conclude the festival, Ki Asep Sunandar Sunarya delighted the thousands who thronged to see and hear his Sundanese wayang golek performance. Here is a puppet master of the first order. Since 1975, he has been performing approximately 120 times a year. He has performed and taught abroad, receiving many awards both locally as well as internationally. His comic genius, both of the slapstick and more subtle

forms, is legendary. His puppets breathe! And you know exactly what they are thinking and feeling! He truly takes an inanimate object and injects it with life. Indeed, his puppets have more life and guts than most humans! A festival that can boast of the virtuoso talents of Ki Manteb Sudarsono, Ki Anom Suroto, and Ki Asep S. Sunarya, to name just the tip of the wayang tree, is a festival worth keeping awake through eight wonderful days and eight magical nights. •



*Wayang kulit- Ki Anom Suroto*



# A NEW CLASSIC ON WAYANG

## LEATHER GODS & WOODEN HEROES: JAVA'S CLASSIC WAYANG

BY DAVID IRVINE. 360 PP. CITY SINGAPORE: PUBLISHER TIMES EDITIONS PTE LTD, 1996. \$49.95

David Irvine is an Australian diplomat who spent much of his career in Indonesia, where he apparently found a great deal of time to compile the material for this encyclopedic discussion of Indonesian puppet forms. Whatever problems befell Australian/Indonesian relations due to Irvine's shirking of his government duties no doubt will be made up for by the publication of this book, which honors Indonesian theater and gives it the stature it deserves.

Clearly, Irvine has read everything written on the subject, and much of the book repeats information found in obscure academic texts. For example, his chapter on the design and construction of puppets owes a great deal to R.L. Mellema's book on the subject, which in turn owes a great deal to a book by the Javanese dalang, Sukir. However, never has so much information been so accessible and concentrated in one beautifully illustrated volume. This book is now the ideal starting point for anyone interested in the subject, knocking James Brandon's "On Thrones of Gold" off the top of the list of books to read on the wayang.

The book has excellent chapters on the ancient origins of the shadow puppet theater, as well as synopses of popular wayang stories. Also useful for anyone who has seen a collection of wayang puppets is a 125-page illustrated glossary of the principal characters, giving their names, personal attributes, and describing their role in the Javanese versions of the story cycles.

It seems a bit strange that, given his proximity to Indonesian politics, Irvine does not discuss or even mention the effect of Indonesia's oppressive military government on the wayang - any observer during the 70's and 80's would have had ample opportunity to witness the devastating effects of Suharto's "New Order" regime on artists. One hopes that with the fall of Suharto, western academics will be able to discuss these matters without having their visas revoked.

This book successfully manages to merge the styles of both academic and "coffee table" books, containing accurate information coupled with beautiful layout and pho-



Photo: C. Korsowitz

Wayang exhibition,  
1999 International Wayang Festival

tography. Still, it cannot convey the quirky, "masarakat" (an Indonesian term for populist) and often ribald humor of a real wayang performance. For that, you should turn to the Lontar Foundation's 1999 publication of five translations of complete wayang performances. And no book can capture the atmosphere, elegance, and evocative power of an actual all-night wayang. For that you'll have to fly to Java, find your way to a village at sunset, light up a clove cigarette, and watch while the ancient Gods and heroes are conjured down to earth by a great puppeteer.

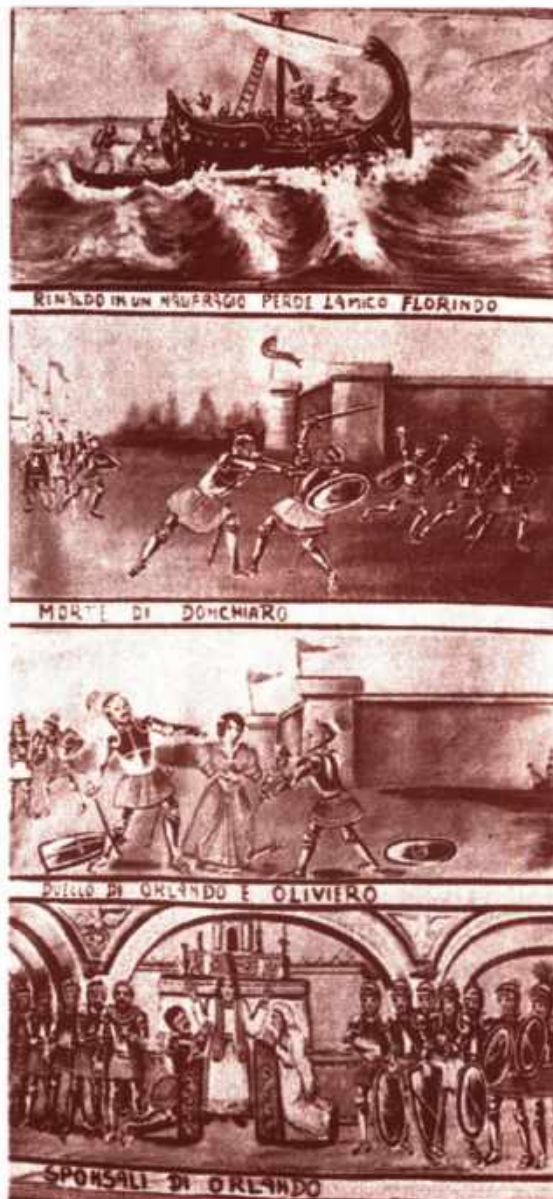
REVIEW BY DANIEL MCGUIRE

## The Grand Tour of Europe's Puppet Theater, with a Vigorous Guide

# *A History of European Puppetry, Volume One: From Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*

by Henryk Jurkowski. Collaborating  
Editor: Penny Francis. 427 pp. Lewiston:  
The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996.

Henryk Jurkowski's two-volume *History of European Puppetry* is a great event at our turn-of-the-century moment, for it's the first time since the 1850s that a thorough review of the practice of puppet theater in Europe has been written. Jurkowski's first volume (the second volume will be reviewed in the next issue of *PI*) has a wonderfully vast and inclusive scope, ranging from the Greeks' use of puppets in the same theaters where Aeschylus was performed, to the emergence of puppet theater as a recognized art form in late nineteenth-century France. It's essential reading for anyone interested in understanding why the ancient art of puppet theater can still captivate audiences in the age of film, television, and the computer, and a clear invitation for other historians to continue investigating the vast reaches of this rich cultural history.



Jurkowski is fearless in taking on the big picture. Basing his work on existing studies of specific puppet traditions in Eastern and Western Europe, as well as some unusual and more arcane sources, the omni-lingual author puts together a fascinating story of how the marginal, low-culture forms of puppet theater alternately struggled and thrived on the fringes and sometimes in the centers of European cities and towns as they metamorphosed from medieval Christian culture through Renaissance innovations, Enlightenment refigurings, and Romantic revolutions, to the almost familiar urban, increasingly industrial culture of the 1800s.

Jurkowski's book shows that some aspects of puppet theater are amazingly consistent: its constant connection

*"Cartelloni": posters outside of  
a Sicilian theater of "pupi"*

to a wide variety of theater forms, its persistent (and often dangerous) willingness to function as a social critic, and its assiduous connection to religious content, even as European culture as a whole became more and more secular. Equally important, European puppeteers rarely limited themselves to only one form of puppet manipulation, or even to puppetry itself. In other words, puppeteers were always mixing their handpuppets and marionettes with mechanical devices, animated tableaux, picture performances, peep shows, magic lantern slides, animated altarpieces, shadow figures, masks, music, acrobatics, trained animals, and commercial hucksterism. The "mechanical" aspects of European puppet performance alone have great relevance to our own time, when electronic machines are so central to the culture we experience. Jurkowski's history shows that the performing machine was always central to the art of the puppet. In the 1870 program of Munich, for example, puppetmaster Johann Schichtl, which, together with a marionette redaction of Faust, advertised "Knowledge of Mechanics or Life through Machines, Artificial-Figures that are not presented as Marionettes on strings or wires but due to their mechanisms they will appear as a human."

Professor Jurkowski, long revered as one of the great historians of puppet theater (the UNIMA encyclopedia of puppet theater he edited should appear soon), has an old-school approach to history as grand, authoritative narrative—which I find refreshing. No postmodern deconstructions here, or furtive re-positionings along the complex webs of contemporary academic cultural critiques. Instead, we are continually aware that Professor Jurkowski is our colorful, opinionated guide, leading us on his tour. This might be the best way to follow puppet theater through many centuries, languages, and



photo: Josef Pláček

*Mephisto, in a Czech  
version of Doctor Faust*

lands, although it also makes one yearn to break away from the relentless narrative of the tour to look more closely at the particular aspects of some of these performance forms, even as our guide hurtles inexorably and with unblinking certainty to his goal: that moment when the funky old puppet theater becomes modern.

In Jurkowski's view, there is something called "true puppet theater," a relatively realistic, literature-based form which follows, a step behind and in constant response to, the European actors' theater. This leaves some traditions unmentioned in Jurkowski's book, such as the extensive use of giant puppets, hobby horses, and other performing objects in civic and religious rituals across Europe. These are practices whose descendants flourish today, but they weren't imitations or responses to text-based actors' theater—apparently not "true" puppet theater. On the other hand, there's also no room in this history for toy theater, the mass-produced cutout paper theaters that swept across middle-class Europe in the nineteenth century and were slavish imitations of actors' theater. Toy theater probably didn't qualify as "true" puppet theater because it was performed by amateurs.

One of the fascinating aspects of Jurkowski's book is that, despite his unswerving pursuit of a "true" puppet theater, he constantly (and happily, in fact) finds himself documenting the "untrue" puppet theaters: those rough, impure, and indecent forms of puppetry with which the "true" puppet theater was always enmeshed. It's as if the puppets and puppeteers of the fairgrounds, marketplaces, and unlicensed theaters themselves bridle at the prospect of respectability proffered by Jurkowski. Peter Schumann, thinking of a recent German history of nineteenth-century puppet theater, once pointed out that puppetry is "easier researched in police records than in theater chronicles." Jurkowski's study shows that, to the contrary, there is a wealth of material about puppet theater in those chronicles; and yet the gist of Schumann's statement remains true. Persistently an outsider art, puppet theater seems to revel in thumbing its nose at social propriety and governmental authority. Jurkowski shows quite wonderfully how this was part of puppetry's incredibly tight connection to the traditions of Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, through the development of Pulcinella, Punch, Petrushka, Hanswurst, Kasperle, Guignol, and the many other local, regional, and national characters who seemed to capture the spirit of their respective communities.

There are vast developments afoot over the centuries: animated altarpiece figures are succeeded by handpuppets, which are then joined by marionettes; travelling companies range across Europe, intermixing styles and stories; permanent theaters rise, fall, and reappear in the growing cities. Every so often, intellectuals and writers such as Henry Fielding, Heinrich von Kleist, or Théophile Gautier are inspired to define something magical and unique about the lowly form. The growth of the middle class in the eighteenth century inspires a new range of puppet theaters focused on that audience, and in the early nineteenth century the Romantics seize upon puppet theater as somehow rough and true, an antidote to the purported rationality of modern industrializing life. By the end of that century, puppetry seems poised to enter the next as a recognized art form.

One of Jurkowski's great insights (and there are many in this book) is that puppet theater persistently lagged behind the cultural developments taking place in more respected realms of theater, art, and literature. While European theater, for example, became more secular and realistic, puppet theater clutched onto its Bible stories and mystery plays.

Jurkowski tends to see the roughness of traditional puppet theater, its constant joking about its own fakeness, and its propensity to indulge in anachronisms as faults, which they could be, if we considered realistic theater as a kind of benchmark. For example, Jurkowski mentions a 1793 Polish *szopka* (a rod-puppet nativity play) in which the "first news of the French Revolution encouraged a priest, Panuzzy, to present the revolutionary French army struggling against the forces of Herod." Jurkowski himself can't help admiring the wonderful disjunction of this historical messiness, especially since the puppet show was quite popular. There is, however, no indication in his analysis of these



*Tillers Excelsior Marionettes,  
England, 19th century*



*Puppets from a 19th century,  
English variety show*

puppet practices that such disjunctions might not only be popular in the eighteenth century, but also be the kind of performance which would make perfect sense to the twentieth century's notions of Surrealism, Dada, the Absurd, Epic Theater, and Postmodernism.

It must be said, unfortunately, that the Mellen Press does not do justice to Jurkowski's rich material. The feel of the paper, the fonts, the page layout, and the numerous glaring typographical errors all bespeak a certain inattention, as if other projects were engaging more of the editors' interest. There are a great many wonderful illustrations grouped together in the middle of the book, but absolutely no mention of them in the text, which is a shame because Jurkowski's descriptions often cry out for some kind of visual referent. It is possible

to publish a beautiful book on puppet theater which artfully combines text and image—numerous recent examples abound. It's too bad that the Mellen Press couldn't rise to the occasion with Henryk Jurkowski's fascinating work.

The occasion, nonetheless, is a great one. Jurkowski's study opens the door to a world of vast riches, and invites us in to understand how and why puppet theater has come down to us in all its intense glory. I think the best way to enter this book is to prepare one's self for a great journey full of interesting sights and ideas. There's a strong-willed guide leading us (at a brisk pace! Don't dawdle please!) on his tour, and you may feel inclined to stop and argue with him along the way. He would probably relish the exchange.

review by John Bell

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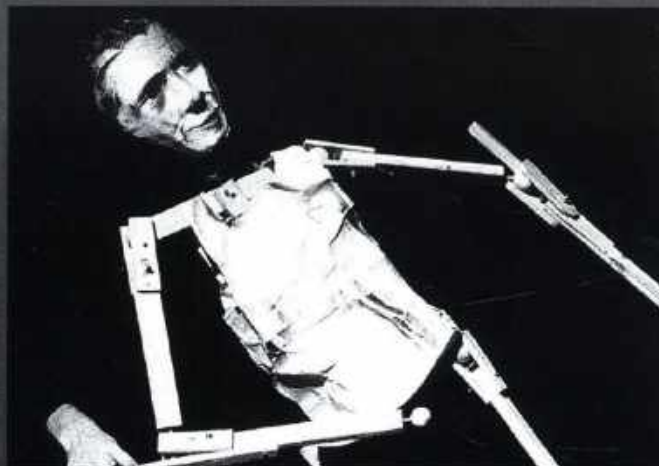
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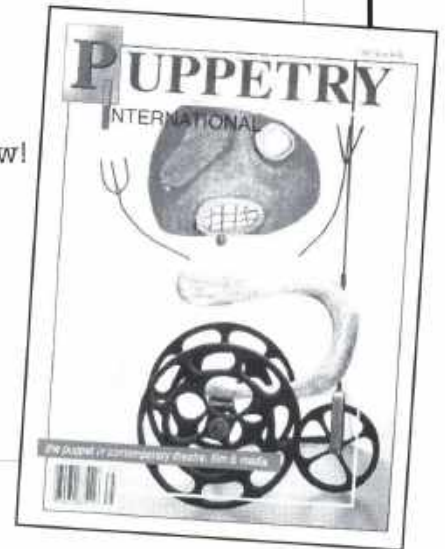
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## *Successful Punch & Judy*

by Glyn Edwards, 135 pp. Great Britain, DaSilva Puppet Books, 2000

reviewed by Donald Devet

Reading Edwards' *Successful Punch and Judy* is a wonderful way to begin a new century. The book is a reaffirmation of the three-hundred-year-old endurance of the UK's national puppet, and of the world's most famous trickster, Old Red Nose. Punch, according to "Prof" Edwards (practitioners of Punch and Judy are traditionally referred to as "Professors"), is far more famous than any performer of a Punch show will ever be. "Punch is too old to die" is every Punch Prof's motto. No matter how well or how poorly he is performed, Punch will persevere as long as there is a need to stand logic on its head or to provoke hostility toward authority.

No novice to Mr. Punch's world, Edwards has forty years of performing experience. As well as teaching a course on the subject, Edwards was instrumental in the founding of two Punch and Judy societies and the publication of a quarterly journal, *Around the World with Mr. Punch*, that serves to link Punch enthusiasts everywhere. You would think that with all those years of experience and credentials, Edwards might take this opportunity to pontificate. But Edwards' *Successful Punch and Judy* doesn't preach to the choir. Quite the opposite. His book is well suited to those curious souls who have never performed the show but are willing to give it a go.

The book is intelligently divided into well organized topics—cast, plot, puppet and stage construction, performing techniques—and even includes a starter script. Thoughtful quotes and helpful performance tips pepper the side bars of every page. There is also a smattering of Punch cartoons and drawings to remind us of Mr. P's illustrious history. The spiral wire binder makes the book easy for someone to handle with one hand while presumably manipulating Mr. Punch with the other.

According to Edwards, performing a Punch and Judy show is synonymous with playing in a long-running soap opera. The drama started long before you were ever born and will continue long after you are gone. The best a Prof can do is stay true to Punch's indomitable spirit of anarchy, a spirit that, unfortunately, has been politically tempered over time. Sure, Punch has been relegated to the nursery. But that doesn't mean he has to stoop to leading a sing-a-long. Punch is far too roguish for that. Punch is a wooden opportunity to poke fun at the world, no matter where or when you live.

## *Successful Punch & Judy* by Prof Glyn Edwards

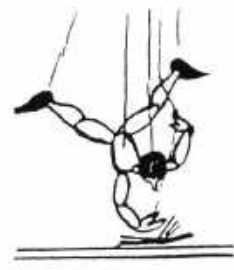


Edwards  
likens per-  
forming  
Punch and

Judy to performing jazz. Any P&J script is only a rough guide. Like musical notes, the words on the page are just jumping off points for your own personal riffs. If you decide to become a Prof, Edwards advises that you give Punch your unique personal style while at the same time staying true to centuries of tradition. No easy accomplishment, but certainly a worthwhile goal. Edwards balances Punch theory with loads of practical advice, everything from what to look for in a good swazzle to what to wear while performing. There are only two thin chapters devoted to the actual construction of puppets, props and stage. But that's all right. There are plenty of puppet construction books already available. It's Edwards' down-to-earth, no-nonsense approach that makes this book so charming. You can tell that the Prof has experienced many a puppeteer's nightmare—stages blowing over, crying babies, apathetic audiences—and has lived to tell about it with humor and grace.

Edwards warns that if you decide to bring Old Red Nose to life, you should be prepared to be criticized by your audience. Those unfamiliar with the Punch tradition may question the violent elements of the show. Edwards offers a thoughtful retort: "Mr. Punch's little wooden universe is as far removed from reality as the kingdom of the clown—where assault by bucket of water and custard pie is never mistakenly cited as an encouragement to violence in society."

*And that's the way to do it in this century.*



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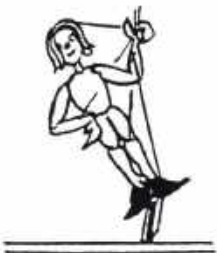
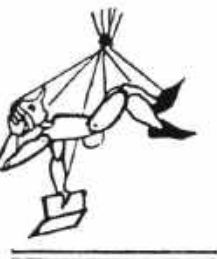


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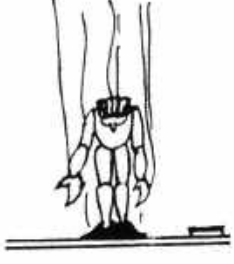
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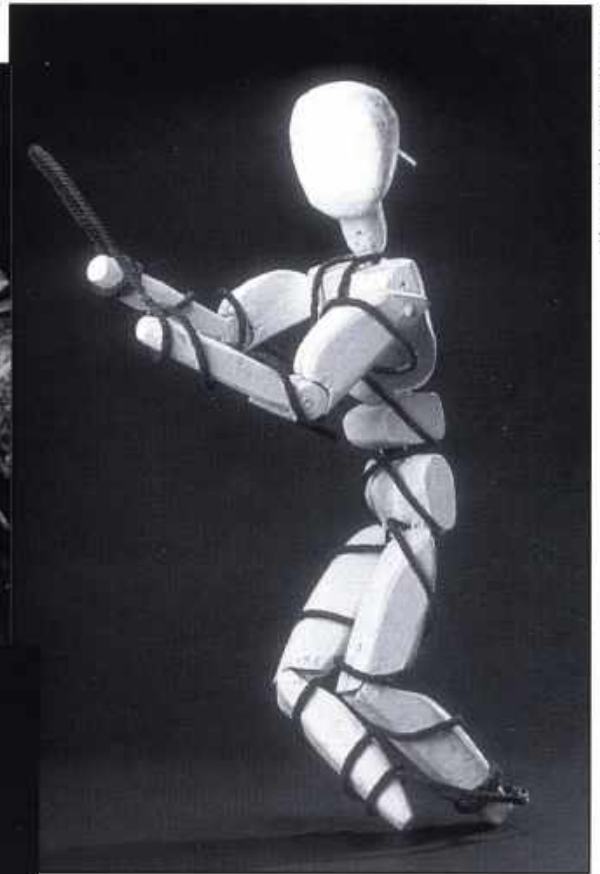


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