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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

issue no. 13

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ON THE COVER:
Naive Theatre
*(see profile by
Nancy Staub, p.6)*

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Photo by Richard Termine

Editor's Page—



*If a tree falls in a forest, do we care . . . if no one's there?
If a tree falls, listen. . . . Only air, if no one's there.*

As my wife and I earn our living from the theatre we create, we have often had occasion to feel that— particularly where our most original and heartfelt work is concerned—we have been laboring in obscurity. Perhaps you have felt the same way?

It isn't that we had any illusions that our chosen profession offered a clear path to glamour and celebrity, but only the conviction that there were audiences— lots of audiences—that would really enjoy our work, presenters who would love to have us as part of their season, foundations which would gladly fund our delightfully quirky yet insightful vision . . . if only they were aware of our existence.

. . . only air, if no one's there.

It occurred to us that there must be lots of other artists and small companies who find themselves in similar straits—and not just in the US, but all over the world. We put out the word and, though we didn't get the hundreds of responses we'd expected by our press deadline (see, that's the thing about laboring in obscurity—it makes you hard to find), we did learn of an interesting and diverse handful of artists who you have probably never heard of, but should have. We are here to right that wrong. In this issue of PI you can read about Tyen Teatr (p. 4), a Moscow-based husband and wife troupe who actually live in their tiny theatre so that they can afford to produce the innovative, genre-defying work they have become known for. Indonesian *dalang* Sukasman breaks all the rules in the ancient wayang tradition by creating his own genre— wayang ukur (p.12)— yet the very size of his troupe makes international touring (and therefor recognition) a daunting challenge.

**From "The Druid Song." Words and Music—
Richard Greene and Gunnar Madsen/ Best of Breed Music, ASCAP,
from the album Coaster by the Bobs: www.bobs.com.*

Puran Bhatt is a young Rajasthani artist who is carrying on the *kathputli* tradition into which he was born. He actually has toured to a number of countries, yet relatively few people have seen him perform outside his native India (p. 8). Another artist born into a tradition, Alfredo Mauceri, is doing his best to keep the traditional Sicilian "Opra dei Pupi" alive in Siracusa (p. 10). Jiun Yang Li is a young and visionary artist from Taiwan, now on a travel grant which is allowing him to work with New York's Basil Twist and others; perhaps his work will find a wider audience one day (p. 22).

There's lots more— companies from the Czech Republic, Chile, and a couple who spent a career battling the East German Ministry of Culture for their very survival, and only now, at the end of their long career, have outsiders been able to see their beautiful work. There are several book reviews: Ramdas Padhye attempts to bring Indian Ventriloquism out of obscurity, while Donald Devet has found a book of annotated fairytales which sheds new light on some old chestnuts.

A man is not a tree.

A tree is not a man.

A man can move around,

While a tree can only stand.

Yes, a man can move around (or a woman, says Bonnie) and with your help, they will. Let us know when, in your travels, you come across some theatre that should be known more widely. Don't let them shout their soliloquies into the wind, like a tree falling in some distant, uncaring forest.

—Andrew Periale

Tyen Teatr (The Shadow Theater)

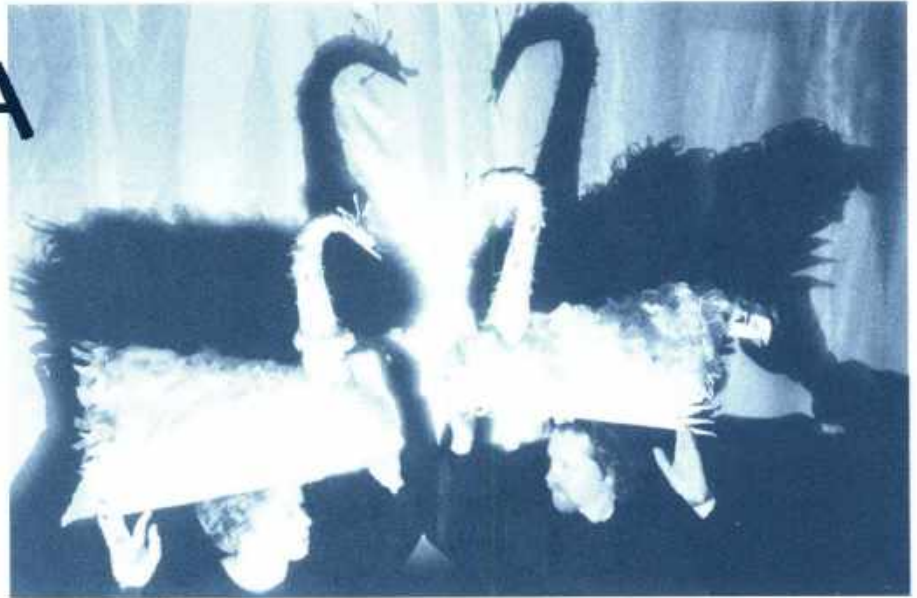
Ilya Epelbaum and Maya Krasnopolskaya, founders

RUSSIA

*Moscow,
Russia,
Founded in
1988*

The Moscow-based Shadow Theatre has created some of the most artistically innovative puppet theatre in Russia. In a *New York Times* article dated 31 March 2002, Ilya Epelbaum said: "This is not a puppet theater, an opera theater or a drama theater. It is theater as a way of life, a way of existence, a way of feeling." He and his wife and theatre co-founder, Maya Krasnopolskaya, take this approach literally. Their side-street, second-floor theatre is also their home; they live with their children in a room backstage and are constantly creating and performing new work. Despite the fact that the theatre is called the Shadow Theatre, their work is genre-defying, incorporating opera, live acting, visual art, video, and a multitude of puppetry styles.

This approach was reflected in their 1998 production of "P. Tchaikovsky. Swan Lake. The Opera." They wrote lyrics to Tchaikovsky's music, propagating the fabricated idea that a little-known opera had actually preceded the ballet. Performed be-



hind and in front of a giant white, flowing curtain, the production utilized mainly shadow puppets (some of which were consumed during the production by being torn up or even burned) and human silhouettes, but also included opera singers and a pianist who participated in the action. The opera was preceded by a *Petrushka* show (similar to *Punch and Judy*) in the theatre foyer; the Shadow Theatre is one of the few Russian companies to have revived the popular, nineteenth-century, hand puppet show.

Since 1998, their work has stretched the traditional boundaries of puppetry and live theatre even further. Their latest work features an invented country, language, and

www.theatre.ru/lilikan

miniature people, the Lilikans, just four inches high. The performances are viewed by audiences of five at a time (six in a pinch) through the windows of a miniature opera house. Inside are two thousand tiny spectators, a tiny orchestra, and a stage upon which a number of productions are performed. For occasional larger audiences, the performances are projected on a screen. The theatre performed its own version of *Hamlet* on this little stage, a production that intentionally contained very little *Hamlet*, and a great deal of *Don Giovanni* and *The Seagull*, among other works.

More recently, the theatre has collaborated with a number of renowned artists to stage several fifteen-minute works for the Lilikan Theatre under the title "The Lilikan Museum of Theatrical Ideas." The Moscow director Anatoly Vasilev staged a version of Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, Lilikan-style; and Tonino Guerra, an Italian writer who has authored screenplays for Fellini, wrote and staged an original work entitled "Rain after the Deluge;" both are for adult audiences. For

family audiences, a piece called "Two Trees" is currently performed. The theatre hopes eventually to have a series of fifteen-minute performances, each written, directed, or composed in collaboration with a prominent artist.

The Shadow Theatre has won several of Russia's prestigious Golden Mask awards in recent years, and has begun to receive international acclaim. The theatre has also performed in the United States in Vermont, Chicago, and Pittsburgh.

Thanks to Mikhail Krasnopolsky for providing information on the theatre. For more information in English, see John Freedman, "Drama at Golden Mask." *The Moscow Times* 29 March 2002; "Fest's Magical Shadow Show." *The Moscow Times* 5 April 2002; "Total Theater, Starring Puppets." *New York Times* 31 March 2002, sec. 2, p. 7.

—Dassia Posner

is a puppeteer, Ph.D. candidate and brand new Mom, living in Boston.



The Naive Theatre

Liberec, Czech Republic

Director: Stanislav Doubrava

Founded in 1949

For several generations, The Naive Theatre has enjoyed the reputation of the highest possible artistic standards in puppetry. From the beginning, there have been several artistic directors and designers with varied styles of productions, but there was always continuity in quality and purpose. The Naive Theatre has performed in several international festivals, but not in the USA. The elaborate productions and large company make touring across the ocean difficult in this time of lowered subsidies.

The mission of the Naive Theatre has been to open up the imagination of the child. In the 1970's, poetic work for very young children led to the creation of a festival, Materinka, for the City of Liberec. Dedicated primarily to puppet performances for children, the semi-annual festival has become international in scope and renown.

Among the most important and successful performances of the 1990's are four productions by author Iva Perinova: *The Headless Knight*, *Alibaba and the Forty Thieves*, *Alina or Petrin*, *Tower on the Other Side of the World*, and *The Animal Theatre*. They were staged by director Tomas Dvorak and set designer Ivan Nesveda from Pilzen, using the form of illusions of pure puppetry without live actors. The imaginative design, inventive techniques, and masterful manipulation make these productions truly magical.

The Naive Theatre produces shows for older children and adults as well. In 2002, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was directed by Michal Docekal, presently the artistic head of The National Theatre in Prague, and designed by Petr Matásek, well known for his work with Drak Theatre.

The Naive Theatre is a repertory theatre with a mature ensemble of actors and an interesting group of guest directors. Some young graduates of directing from Prague Theatre Academy—Alternative Theatre and Puppetry Department—get the opportunity to realize their artistic projects with the company. The artistic management encourages all kinds of creations, with or without puppets and masks.

It's past time for more Americans to experience the work of The Naive Theatre, which is flourishing under the artistic direction of Stanislav Doubrava.

by Nancy Lohman Staub

Ms. Staub is a former theatre director, an avid traveler and a frequent contributor to PI.

www.naivnidivaldo.cz





CZECH REPUBLIC

Aakaar Puppet Group

INDIA

Director: Puran Bhatt
New Delhi, India, Founded in 1991



Puran Bhatt comes from a traditional family of Rajasthani *kathputli* puppeteers that has performed the art of puppetry for hundreds of years. This ancient string puppet tradition demonstrates how simple techniques can be effective literally in the hands of a master. The strings are generally held in the hand or tied to the fingers of the manipulators.

After seeing a performance by Puran Bhatt at the Smithsonian Institution Folklife Festival in 2001, Miguel Romero described it as "a rare and impressive event in my puppet viewing life." Unfortunately, few outside of India have yet experienced Puran Bhatt's work, although he has taught and performed in Germany, France, and Japan. He also holds workshops in India that attract foreigners as well as fellow Indians.

Puran Bhatt's mission is to carry on his heritage. He began his career at the age of nine, over thirty-five years ago. His brochure states: "Puran inherited the talents of generations of puppeteers because, in accordance with tradition, puppeteers throughout the ages always intermarried. The children of Puran's family are also involved in the creation of new types of puppets as well as in the production of new and traditional puppet shows."

Puran Bhatt is well versed in modern as well as traditional puppetry. He has participated in several productions with his mentor, Dadi Pudumjee, an internationally renowned modern puppeteer of New Delhi. Music conceived by Puran Bhatt plays an important part in the performances.

The Aakaar Group, founded by Puran Bhatt in 1991, performs with rod, string and shadow puppets. It presents themes that deal with social awareness such as Aids prevention and family planning. The Aakar Group presented programs in a number of schools, at the Literacy Mission, and the Ministry of Environment, as well as on national television.

The last sentence in Puran Bhatt's brochure reads: "The art of the puppet permeates every aspect of Puran's life until today, from carving the faces of the puppets, to making their dresses, and breathing life into their bodies."



Puran Bhatt truly makes his puppet creations come alive. He overflows with energy and artistry. He is definitely a master puppeteer and is passing on his dedication and skill to the other members of his family, The Aakaar Group, and anyone fortunate enough to meet him.

Nancy L. Staub



"El viajero en el tiempo"
Títere de Mesa

The Time Traveller, a table puppet

ITALO CARCAMO

ITALO Carcamo is one of a small but steadily growing number of prolific young puppet performers in Chile. Based in the metropolis of Santiago, Carcamo is primarily a solo performer, but frequently collaborates with other puppeteers, actors, and clowns to create collective performance pieces. Many of his puppets are figures intended for performance on a table top in café or cabaret settings ("café concerts" as they are called in Chile), and are manipulated by rods or direct hands-on contact with the figure. More recently, he has begun to add glove and big mouth puppets to his repertory. Though Carcamo began his career as a puppeteer without any formal training, he has spent much time in Argentina over the last three years, attending various schools of puppetry and workshops. Such opportunities are abundant in the many urban centers of that country, where puppetry

is a lively part of the theatre scene (thanks in large part to the work of educator and artist Mané Bernardo). He continues to call Chile home and frequently returns to give performances and participate in puppetry events across the country, but often returns to Argentina in order to maintain professional and educational ties. He locates the genesis of his interest in puppet performance with an admiration for the work done in the former Soviet Block countries of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech

Republic, as well as puppets produced in Russia following the second World War. He professes a deep personal connection to the themes of existentialism and the psychological and aesthetic techniques developed in those places at that moment in history. Carcamo also expresses a fascination with the work of Tadeusz Kantor, particularly with regard to his directing style and philosophy of forming performance groups. Following his experiences in Argentina, he also has a renewed interest in the folkloric and poetic traditions of Latin America, in particular the work of Federico García Lorca. His own recent dramaturgy and puppet-building aesthetic have increasingly reflected this interest in his Latin American roots. Carcamo's puppet and performance style lean towards a pensive and melancholy self-reflection, with occasional outbursts of whimsy and playful silliness. Most of his work is created with an adult audience in mind, but he also performs for school children, stating that he believes them to be far more sophisticated and capable of understanding complex ideas than most adults believe.



El papel de mi vida (historia de papel)

The Story of My Life (The Life of Paper)

Carolyn D. Roark

is a professor of theatre at Oklahoma State University, a puppet performer, and a generally useful person...and not necessarily in that order.



Brothers Alfredo and Daniel, the current generation of pupari

When we think of Sicilian marionettes— if we think of them at all—the tendency is to imagine them as a kind of living museum of an ancient tradition, which enacts the epic adventures of Charlemagne's knights (chief among them crazy Orlando). We think of Palermo, perhaps Catania. There is, though, a theater in Siracusa which is every bit as notable in its efforts to keep alive this ancient tradition. *

www.pupisiciliani.com/vaccaro_mauceri

ITALY

La Compagnia dei Pupari Vaccaro-Mauceri

The company grew first out of the work of Rosario Vaccaro (1911-1984). His much younger brother Alfredo (1924-1995) later joined him. They exploited the old material of Orlando's madness, chivalric honor and the battles between Charlemagne's Paladins and the Saracens. They maintained the traditional forms— costumes, armor, rigging, etc.— but they also strove to be part of their contemporary culture; if an innovation in theatre technology or materials would make a better show for their audience, well, why not use it?

The theater of the brothers Vaccaro also helped to revive a tradition which had fallen on hard times— so-called modern Italians of the mid-20th century rejected the traditional culture of which the "Opra dei Pupi" was a part, as an embarrassing reminder of a not-so-distant past of backward provincialism and miserable poverty. The mythic heroism of the epic story of Orlando Furioso has been reborn, and the theater is again populated by students, researchers and tourists, as well as by modern Sicilians proud to reclaim their past.

Though the brothers have passed on, the company is still very much alive as La Compagnia dei Pupari Vaccaro-Mauceri.

(continued on page 36)

by Andrew Periale



Company founder Rosario Vaccaro in the shop with daughter Antonella

*Indeed, it was a belief among some 17th century scholars that puppetry arrived with the Greek colonization of Sicily, particularly Siracusa, which should not be surprising, as we know the art of marionettes flourished in Greece since at least the time of Sophocles.

FRANCE

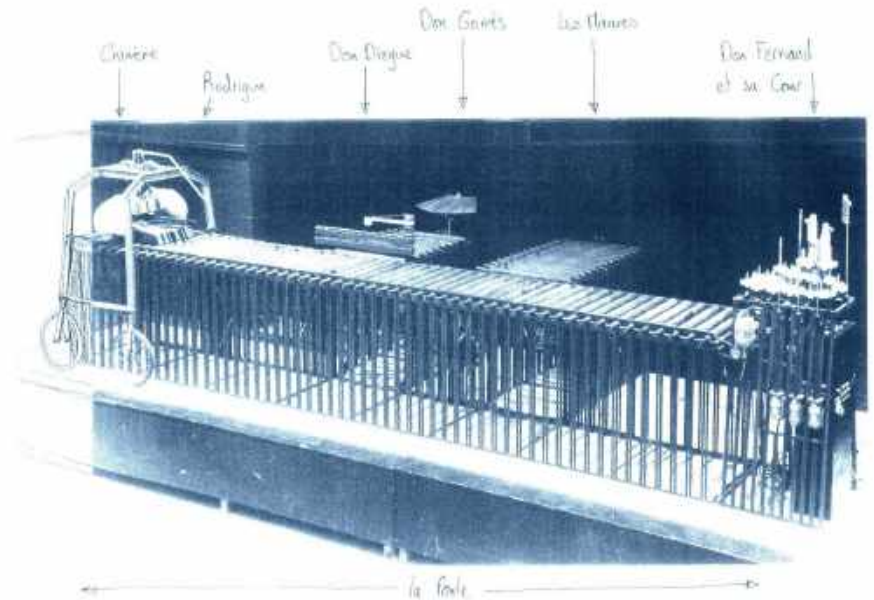
The *Théâtres Automatiques* of Denis Pondruel

The *Théâtres Automatiques* of Denis Pondruel stretch the definition of puppet theatre. They are large sculptural constructions representing theatrical plots. "The functioning is auto-regulated, that is to say each phase is directly conditioned and controlled by the way in which it develops from the preceding phase," according to its creator, Denis Pondruel of Paris. His automata differ from traditional ones in that they are not destined to repeat identical movements indefinitely. In the permutations lies the theatricality. It is like a game of chess as each move depends on the preceding one. These automata philosophically negate the idea of a transcendent global destiny, embracing the concept that only programmed personages exist. The course of events depends on their encounters.

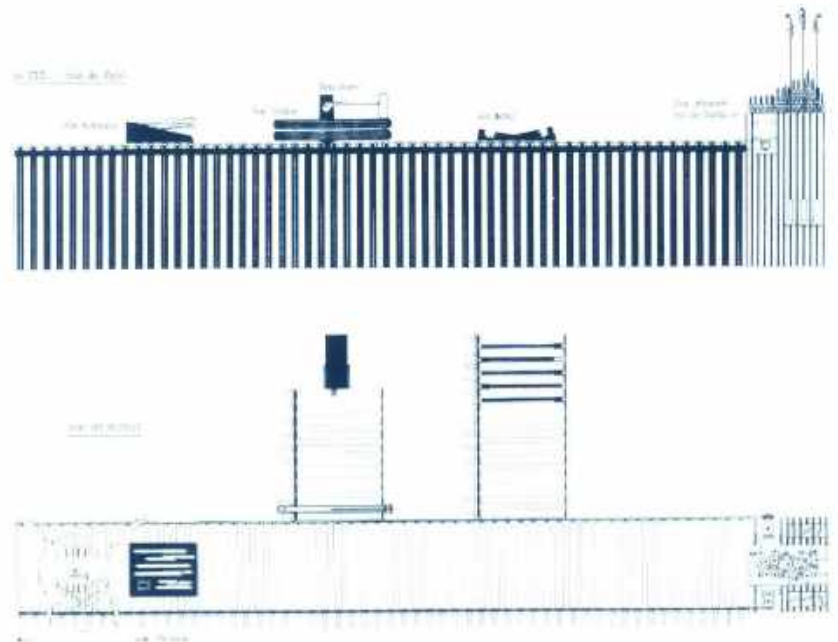
I saw his first fabulous apparatus, *Le Cid*, which retraces the tragedy by Corneille. Pondruel stated that he uses known texts as a focal point for the viewers. In the case of *Le Cid*, he drew on the first act only. Pondruel described it as a programmed electro-mechanical system including lighting and a sound track. The combination of spoken words and mechanical clacking was fascinating and sometimes frightening. The characters are represented by parts of the mechanism and are symbolic rather than representational. The sculpture is quite extensive and beautiful in appearance, but the impact comes from the movement, sound and lighting. The true intrigue comes from the profound philosophical implications of the mechanics.

(continued on page 36)

by Nancy L. Staub



designs for *Le Cid*



Wayang Ukur Group

Artistic Director: Sukasman Yogyakarta, Indonesia

INDONESIA

Seldom seen outside of Indonesia, the Wayang Ukur group includes over 40 dancers, puppeteers, musicians and technicians. This makes touring difficult. The group combines dance, puppetry, acting, live gamelan orchestra music, and modern lighting and stage effects. The performances appeal to all ages, but the sophisticated beauty is appropriate for serious adult theatre audiences.

The mission of Wayang Ukur is to develop and expand the art of wayang. The members of the group follow the artistic director out of devotion to the art and to his idiosyncratic vision, as the complicated productions never generated much income. Sukasman is a philosophical visionary, extolling human rights, love, and compassion through his original adaptations of traditional stories.

The Wayang Ukur production Sumantri Ngener was presented at the UNIMA 2000 Congress in Germany. The elevated shadow screen was framed in a beautiful multilayered set featuring fiberglass elephants that simulated woodcarvings. A dalang manipulated Sukasman's original wayang kulit figures in front of and behind the screen. Dancers appeared on both sides as well, interrelating with the puppets. The gamelan players sat on the stage to the right side of the dalang, leaving the center to the dancers. A separate narrator told the story, a touching variation of the traditional tale. In Sukasman's version, the king does not turn into a huge, raving monster who punishes Sumantri. Instead the king announces, "Determining one's true love is a most private, intimate right and must be respected." The stunning lighting and special effects, beautiful dance and puppetry, spellbinding music and uplifting story made this a memorable experience. Several invitations to international festivals resulted from this presentation.

For the UNIMA 2000 performance publicity, Marc Hoffman the tour organizer, wrote:

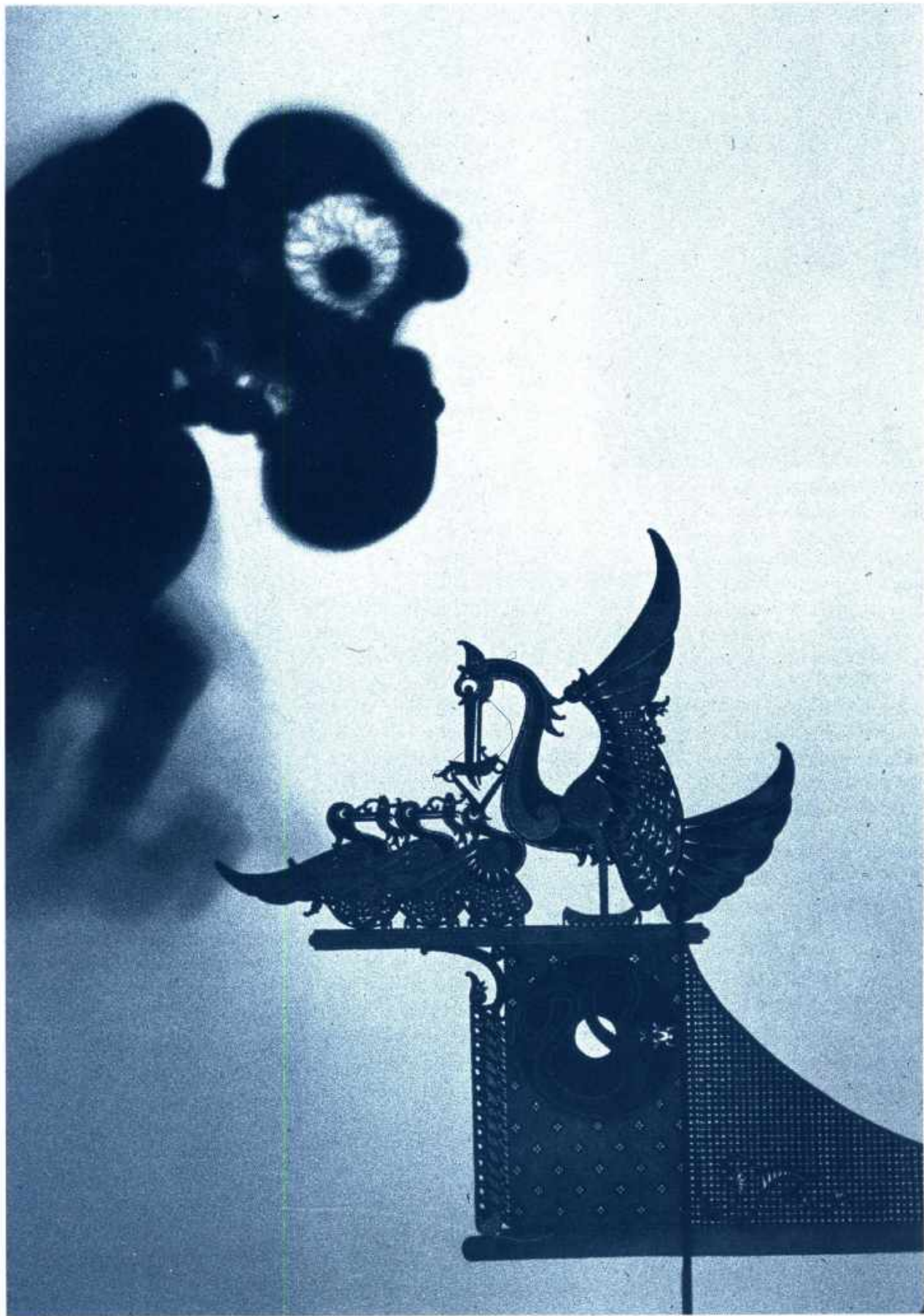
In order to keep his unique vision alive through the last thirty years, Sigit Sukasman has had to be stubborn, resisting others' vision of what wayang is and isn't, and the pressure to conform. The broader public has not heard much about him, but among wayang lovers in Indonesia, he is well-known, a senior artist who has transformed traditional puppets into his own version, Wayang Ukur. Although many people have attempted to develop their own wayang puppets such experiments are usually failures or peter out after a few attempts. Sukasman has kept on tenaciously, systematically, enabling him to develop a range of characters so that his work deserves to be called an entirely new style. Hopefully, with the new openness in Indonesia, he will now be able to get the recognition he deserves.

by Nancy L. Staub

Email: wayangukur@yahoo.com



photos: B. Pollitt



On the Road by Caravan GERMANY



Roswitha and Kurt Dombrowsky, 1958

Hansel and Gretel, or I played a little animal. That was my very first role. Later *Little Red Ridinghood*. It was with such children's parts that we began.

I was born in the caravan, and that's where I grew up.

Kurt Dombrowsky— I was 15 years old before I saw my first marionette show. I was unbelievably enchanted. I wanted nothing more than to do something like that. Up until that point I was familiar with *Pole Poppenspeler*, which I had read. Whenever there was an opportunity to see a puppet theatre, I

would go there. One day, after a performance, I got to know a young lady who had also attended the performance, but who belonged to another Marionette theatre. This woman is still my wife. That was a stroke of luck. We were happy, because we liked each other so much. In this way I became— in very complicated times, to be sure— a puppeteer.

How were the times complicated?

KD— In 1951, shortly after I had married into the puppetry family Kressig, my new Father-in-law's very way of life was threatened. That was when the so-called cleansings began, coupled with orders to cease and desist, against which we were able to lodge appeals, though others could not.

He, in fact did lodge an appeal, and had to take an examination, during which time I had my first speaking part (which was all I could do at that time) and received a temporary performance permit. Easter '52, we started up again. When my permit ran out, he applied to the regional government in Saxony for an extension. This, however, he did not get. And the Burgermeister of the spot where we were engaged as guest artists

would not allow us to continue our engagement without the official permission. We then traveled to Dresden and Fräulein Hartig— the worker who was assigned to us. She told us that my father-in-law was too old (he was 48), incapable of changing, and therefore there was no sense in his continuing. He suggested giving his license to his daughter. She didn't want to do that, because the daughter, in her opinion, would still be under her father's influence. She did mention in passing, though, that she would give the the permit to Mr. Dombrowsky. So that is how I got hold of my first license, before I even knew how to work the marionettes.

Which is to say, the right to perform where you wished was taken away, and you had to get a license from the appropriate institution, in order to perform at all?

KD— It was exactly so. In 1953, the doling out of licenses became centralized, and we got them (or not) from Berlin. The examiner there was Frau Genthe, Lotte Genthe.

After June 17, '53, I used the uncertainty which reigned, and took great pains to get a permit for our own theatre. In the meantime, we had received our Grandfather's stage. The transition was seamless. Fourteen days later, I had (with friendly official greetings) the permit in hand, without the authorities ever having seen a single performance.

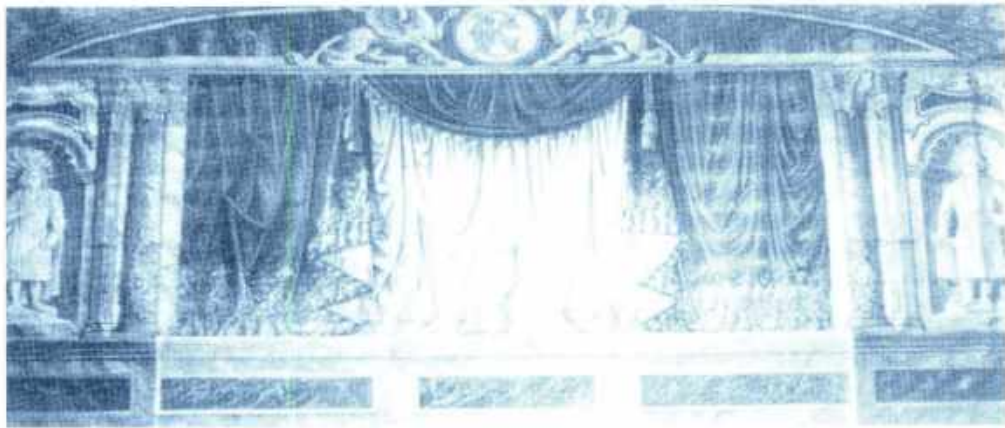
RD— I am sure that there was a list on which was set down who was permitted to perform and who was not. One need only have an old painted proscenium, and that would suffice to close a theater. For that reason, we had our old proscenium cleaned up and a fresh coat of paint laid on. We didn't have the money to buy new material, but we knew we wouldn't make it through the examination with the old stuff.

The traditional marionette theatre Kurt Dombrowsky is one of the theatres which survived the cultural/political "cleansings" of the early 1960's in East Germany. The theatre (Max Kressig had founded it in 1900) was operating for four decades in Saxony and Thuringen, thereby keeping not only a very special theatre form from demise, but also preserving a way of life which was contrary to state prescribed doctrine.

The following is Silvia Brenden's 2000 interview with Kurt and Roswitha Dombrowsky. It was originally published in *Das Andere Theater* #41, the official publication of UNIMA Germany, and is reprinted, with permission, in original translation by A. Periale.

When did you start down the artistic path of being a traditional puppeteer?

Roswitha Dombrowsky— I perform because I was born into a family of traditional puppeteers and I don't know anything else. I've played with marionettes for as long as I can remember. As soon as we children were able to see above the rail, we had to perform. It began with the "bit parts," for example, in



So it was not until you had the paperwork in hand that you set off on tour?

KD- Yeah, after receiving our own performance permit we took off on our first tour. Our first engagement was in Burkensdorf, near Freiberg.

But you had not yet cleared the final hurdle—the wandering caravan theatre continued to be a thorn in the side of the East German Ministry of Culture.

KD- In 1962, the Group of Professional Puppet Theaters was founded. Once again they came up with something on which we had not reckoned. Among other things, we were confronted with the "wisdom" that it was impossible to perform marionettes as a duo. We were therefor stripped of our license. For quite a while, then, we performed with a colleague. This was financially very difficult for two families. We had to travel quickly, as our children were already going to school. There was nothing else to do but unload the caravan and see to it that we found other work.



RD- Throughout, we were also performing illegally, simply in order to survive. In places where we had performed in the last few years, no one asked for our license.

KD- As things loosened up, I renewed my efforts in Karl-Marx-Stadt at getting a license. I could only get it, though, if I were a member of the Group of Professional Puppet Theaters, and I could only become a member of the Group of Professional Puppet Theaters if I had a license. Again, therefor, temporary performance permits, again the fees to take the examination. Which I did not take, because no one would take responsibility for administering it.

After one of the performance permits expired, and we continued performing anyway, we were caught by a colleague of the regional council, who then informed the local council. I was invited to see Frau Jäger, who told me that I had bumped up against the East German legal system. There was an end to it once again. That was in November, and December was, naturally, full of contracted shows.

One of the loopholes (enabling us to perform), was to have amateur status. Which is to say, I let myself become employed in the profession in which I had apprenticed, merely as a formality, and performed as an amateur theater. In order to get a license, we moved (on paper) to Döbeln. This was in the region of Leipzig, and there licenses were more easily obtained.

The struggle for your livelihood was therefore really a struggle for survival and ate up a lot of strength and energy.

RD- We were unflappable, and therefor we were quite busy chasing after these papers. But they were also important, because our livelihood depended on them. By the end of the '70's, things were somewhat more peaceful. From the moment when the East German puppeteers began to remember their tradition, it occurred to them that we might somehow be a part of it.

KD- In 1972 we were invited during a colloquium to perform at the heritage reception of Karl Stülpner. We mulled it over for a long time, whether or not to do it. This was not just a personal matter, but was about all our colleagues as well. We knew that if this went well, it would better the lot of all of us. What, though, if it did not? We were lucky. All in all, it went well. From that moment on, our situation calmed down considerably. What did not change, though, was that every year we still had to obtain the performance permit. Every year. My last license is from 1990.

What sustained you? How were you able to continually motivate yourselves to keep going?

RD- Our audiences loved us. They were happy when we arrived. What was there for culture in these little towns? Once a week they had a government film. If the audiences hadn't sustained us so, we might not have made it through.



KD- It was really remarkable, that while the official assessment of our work was always that it was a pile of manure, the public liked our performances. Our shows were always well attended. If they were too full, we would move on. That would have meant that we were competing with the government film, and that film had a long arm. The audiences naturally did not understand why we moved on.

What was daily life like? Where and what did you perform?

KD- We trod the boards in Saxony, Thüringen and Eichsfeld. We never exhausted our repertoire— it was too extensive. Normally, we played three times a week, sometimes afternoons, sometimes evenings, and always a different production. Afternoons, we would play something for the children, evenings there would be an adult presentation. As an example, we might play *Rumpelstilzkin* in the afternoon, and then a folkloric piece in the evening, in order to tease out the audience's taste. Once we had a feeling for what it was they enjoyed, saw how they reacted to things, we would arrange the program for the following evening. The Freiberg audiences, for example, couldn't get enough of comedies, whereas those who attended in other places preferred the serious works. In addition to which, we had to have a program which conformed to our performance permit. And the

plays which we knew would not be permitted were not written into the program, which, in any case, did not stand in the way of our performing them.

RD- One time, we had a wonderful experience. We performed, although it belonged to the forbidden plays, *The Mill in the Black Forest*. The very next day, the Licensing Board arrived. During the intermission there were ten or twelve people who interviewed audience members, asking how they liked our show, and what we had been performing. No one— not a single person— mentioned *The Mill*; they all sensed what was going on.

Roswitha, you were able to live through all this because you liked your job. Was there a particular character, a role that you particularly loved?

RD- I liked all the roles which I performed. No, there was one which I didn't like, and that was Geierwally, although the audiences always liked her. Maybe it was because of my fury that I played the old wretch well.

And you, Kurt?

KD- My favorite role was Kasper, and it makes sense. That is the figure with whom I most identify. I didn't much like playing Stülpner, although I had to perform him so often. I didn't enjoy it, though.

A few years ago, you decided to stop touring, and moved out of the caravan. Here in Magdeburg, with a performance of *Genoveva*, you said goodbye to your puppeteer friends from all over the world. How does this farewell to theater feel?*

KD- The decision to give this up was not easy. Thank God my health is so poor that we really have to quit. There is simply no other way. Today, we perform now and then with our children, who have their own stage. Uwe has one of the family theaters, the proscenium of which was painted by Chemnitz, of the Central Theater.

So, no final good-bye? The boards of the marionette stage still have you under their spell?

RD- Now and then we'll play our variety show, if anybody wants us. So we're still at it. But going on tour, we just can't do it any more. The work involved is simply too hard.

I wish you both many good things to come, and thank you for all that I have learned from you of both theater and humanity.

**This interview took place at the 2000 UNIMA festival in Magdeburg, in what was formerly East Germany.*

Silvia Brendenal is the artistic director of Schaubude Puppet Theater, in Berlin.

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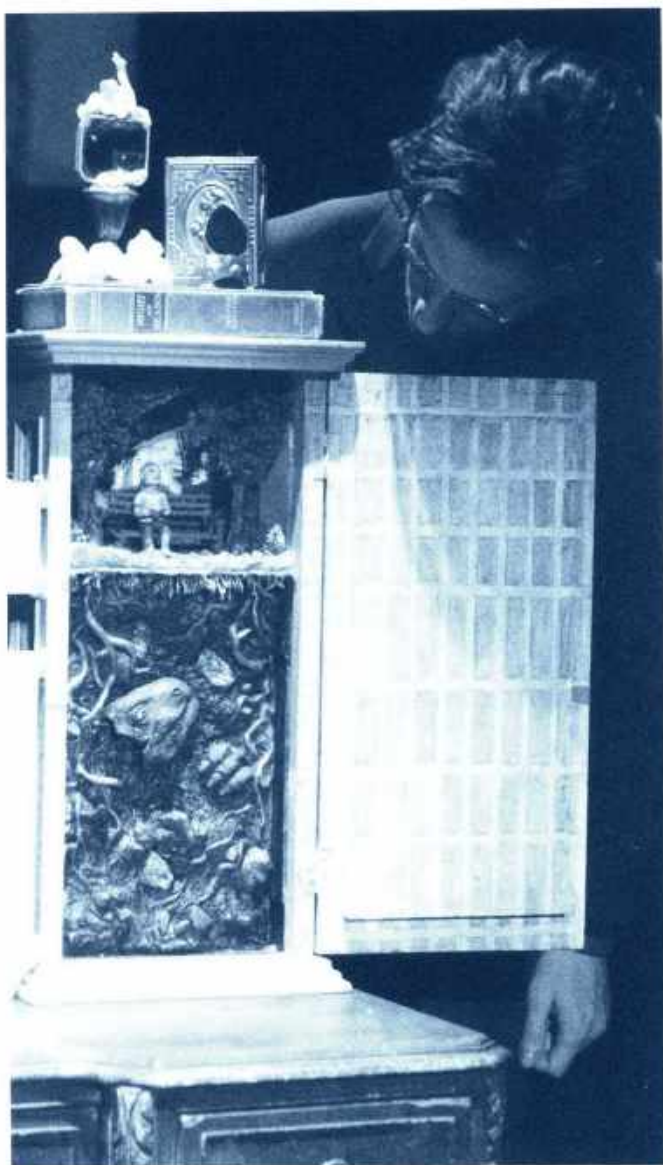


photo: R Termine

Brian Selznick

U.S.A. *Brooklyn, New York*

During the past year, Brian Selznick has been turning heads on the currently very vital New York puppetry scene. A protégé of Basil Twist, Selznick served a brief apprenticeship as a performer in Twist's *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Petrushka*, and in Dan Hurlin's *The Shoulder* and *Everyday Uses for Sight #3 and #7*. But the award-winning illustrator first began generating a "buzz" with his own gorgeously crafted puppet projects during his time as a member of The Puppet Lab at Arts at St. Ann's, where he created two works, *The Wild Queen* and more recently *The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins*, under the tutelage of Janie Geiser, Dan Hurlin and Theodora Skipitares. In January 2003, *The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins* (based upon his own Caldecott award-winning book, created with Barbara Kerley) was featured in Great Small Works' Sixth International Toy Theater Festival in New York, and proved one of the festival's most dazzling successes.

Based on the true story of visionary British scientist Waterhouse Hawkins, this miniature spectacle takes place almost entirely upon a Victorian desk. Waterhouse Hawkins built the first life-size sculptures of dinosaurs in 1854, at a time when almost no one knew what dinosaurs were or what they might look like. He built his monsters out of brick and iron and concrete, and although later proven to be partially incorrect, the dinosaurs still stand in a park in Sydenham, England. Later invited to build dinosaurs in Central Park, Waterhouse came to America only to have his American creations destroyed and buried somewhere in Central Park, where they remain to this day. Told almost entirely through

images that appear in books and cabinets that open by themselves, the performance is scored to the music of Robert Een.

One reviewer wrote "Selznick doesn't say a word but nevertheless commands attention through his dancing eyes and magnetic stage presence. Like an expert magician, he leads the audience through the story, miniature placards or scrolling screens of text adding to the narrative. A live video feed projected on a white screen behind the puppeteer blows up the action, so it isn't really necessary to use the supplied binoculars to appreciate the fine detail work that Selznick has put into his miniature designs."

Selznick is a celebrated illustrator of many books for children, including *Frindle* by Andrew Clements, and his own stories *The Houdini Box* and *The Boy of a Thousand Faces*, among numerous others. Originally from New Jersey, Selznick graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design before emigrating to New York, where he worked for three years selling books and painting windows at Eeyore's Books for Children. He now lives in Brooklyn, and is engaged full-time in his various creative projects.

by Norman Frisch

Terrapin Theater

Artistic Director: Jessica Wilson

AUSTRALIA

This distant island of Tasmania, off the southern coast of mainland Australia, has developed into one of that nation's hotbeds of innovative puppetry. At the center of this thriving performance community is Terrapin Theater.

Terrapin describes its work as "a combination of skilled traditional techniques with a dynamic contemporary focus. Productions are developed collaboratively by puppeteers, designers, writers, directors, composers and trainees. Works by Terrapin have incorporated a wide variety of puppetry styles including shadow puppetry, black theatre, object theatre, stilt walking and mobile interactive performances. Committed to artistic excellence, innovation and audience enjoyment, Terrapin has evolved from a small school touring company into an Australian export success story. In recent years audiences in Hungary, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Korea and throughout Australia have experienced Terrapin's visual energy. Terrapin's repertoire includes work commissioned from leading Australian playwrights, group devised productions and adaptations of popular books. From Roald Dahl's "The BFG," to the erotic "Desires," Terrapin creates imaginative productions for all ages. The troupe's design workshop and office are located in a magnificent sandstone Georgian warehouse at Salamanca Place, a vibrant part of Hobart which is home to many artists studios, galleries, shops, cafés and the famous Salamanca Market."



The Princess with the Echo, 1985

photo collection, Bruce Patterson, Hobart



Terrapin Puppet Theatre's *Silent Movie*, 1985

"Terrapin's artistic vision is driven by: focusing on highly visual productions, shaped around strong thematic concepts; exploring contemporary possibilities while maintaining the strengths of traditional puppetry; exploring language through artistic collaborations; experimenting with collaborative processes for the development of new work; exploring the vocabularies of form, material and style with designers in order to integrate the functional necessities of puppetry within an overall shared aesthetic; prioritizing professional development and training for company artists; and providing a repertoire of inspirational works for national and international touring."

Upcoming productions include "The Dark at the Top of the Stairs" (April, 2003) and "My Sister's an Alien," from Gretel Killeen's irreverent and enormously popular book. In addition to its performance projects, Terrapin hosts an annual training program for puppet artists, "Hobart Junction," which in May 2003 will feature three workshops: Writing for Puppetry, Animation Incubator and Animating Light. The theater welcomes contact and exchange with other puppet and experimental theater artists from around the world.

by Norman Frisch

Web: www.terrapiin.org.au

Mr. Frisch has directed numerous theatre festivals and currently lives in NYC.

The puppet troupe Payasiteres (a combination of the Spanish words *payaso*-clown, and *titere*-puppet) is composed of the husband-wife team Sergio Herskovits and Elena Zuñiga, and their adult children (two have recently left to form their own independent puppet company). The group has performed in their home country of Chile for over 30 years. Based in the metropolitan center of Santiago, Herskovits and Zuñiga have performed together for most of their married life, creating puppets for both children and adults. Working with glove puppets, marionettes, and rod puppets, Payasiteres divides its time between creating educational material and crafting entertainment-centered performances. They have produced more than 25 puppet-centered educational videos in cooperation with the country's Ministry of Education, focusing on a variety of topics from public health issues to drug abuse prevention to ecological conservation. Herskovits also wrote scripts for the Chilean children's television program *Patio Plum* during its run on *Canal 13*, public television. In addition to performing, Payasiteres also has created a series of workshops and seminars intended to introduce children to the puppet arts and help them learn to create and use their own puppets. Traveling extensively with their two-person performances,

PAYASITERES

www.payasiteres.terra.cl

CHILE



Elena and Sergio, with a puppet named BERJAMIN VERGARA, part of the "Cabaret Abierto"

Herskovits and Zuñiga have participated in more than 20 international puppetry festivals over the course of their long career. Most recently, Payasiteres has been working on expanding its repertory of adult-centered puppetry, including a new piece entitled "Triple X," which features three individual performance pieces presented as a group. Playing with a pornographic connotation in the title, these pieces are bawdy, humorous, and playful. The group also gives frequent public displays in plazas and parks, participating in the longstanding Latin American tradition of street performance. Herskovits indicates that these informal performances *en la calle* have often been a means of surviving by art during difficult financial periods. Another recent project of the group is a *titere-bus*—a passenger van, that the family is remodeling as a mobile puppet theatre. Photographs of the van along with updates on its progress are available on the Payasiteres website, which also includes a detailed history of the group, photographs of Payasiteres in performance, and a summary of their repertory.

by Carolyn Roark

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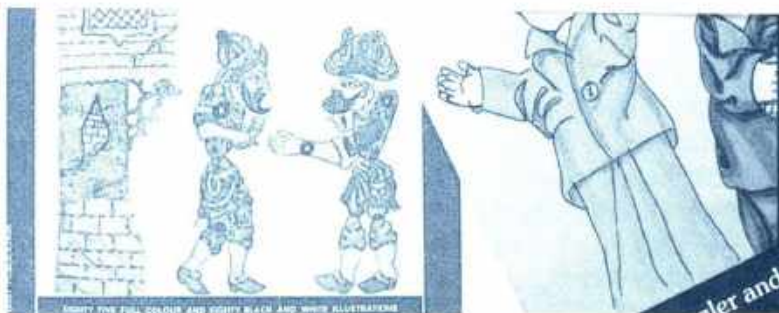
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CHINA

Jiun Yang Li

He showed up suddenly at HERE on a bitterly cold New York night-- a thin, stoop shouldered young man in a flimsy jacket and an overstuffed, grubby daypack. He had been given a travel grant from the Asian Cultural Council to come to the United States and study puppetry for half a year, all expenses paid. So here he was, with a letter of introduction to Basil Twist, the guiding light and resident genius of the Dream Music Puppet Program at HERE.

It was a few days after Christmas, '02 and Great Small Works was in crazed production mode, leading up to the opening of our Toy Theater Festival and Exhibition. Only too happy to take a break from the manic work of preparing the exhibition, I sauntered over and introduced myself. He's from Taiwan? So is my wife, Kuang-Yu. This led to a half an hour and more of intense conversation in broken English; demonstrations of several of his traditional hand puppets, whose heads he had carved; and a journey through his portfolio, which revealed an extraordinary breadth of interest and style. I led him about the gallery where dozens of toy theatre stages were in the process of being set up. He noted each but he was especially caught by a piece by the miniaturist, Jane Free-

易歲定新
九天新來一僊
降
後
陽
畫



painting by Jiun Yang Li

man. Entitled "Gizmo," it was a cluttered assemblage in a rough gray, confined space, like crumbling concrete, arched over with curved model railway track-- sort of a cross between an abandoned subway station, an alchemist's underground laboratory and an exploding hardware store. Jiun Yang spent some time exploring the rich collection of flotsam that coated every surface and then remarked, "It looks just like my studio!"

Who is Jiun Yang Li? Even after talking to him for hours, going through his portfolio and watching several hours of his videos, it's hard to say. Clearly he is not a traditional Chinese puppeteer, nor is he an art student temporarily infatuated with folk forms. His gentle, self-deprecating manner hides a truly

ferocious concentrated energy and his seemingly cavalier and informal demeanor masks a focused discipline. He was born and grew up in Hualian in the middle of the beautiful and rugged eastern coast of Taiwan. His father was an artist and intellectual from the Ke minority. He died when Jiun Yang was still a young boy, leaving behind boxes of journals, sketchbooks and photos that became a constant source of inspiration. His mother was a member of a local, indigenous people, who was sold or given as a young girl to be wedded into his father's family. Thus embodied in his very skin and blood were all the tensions and dichotomies of modern Taiwanese politics and culture. As a child he remembers seeing traditional puppet performances that were part of every local

religious festival, including hand puppets and the large parade figures that would process on the occasion of Buddha or Mazu's birthday.

The death of his father, and the difficulties caused by his outsider, half-caste status, bred in the young man a fierce self-reliance and a determination to make his way as an artist. He did not receive any formal training, but learned his craft by painting the exuberant decorations on the roofs of Chinese temples and also painting billboard advertisements for movies. Unlike most Chinese puppeteers, who usually begin apprenticing and studying the craft as children, Jiun Yang came to puppetry late in his career, and he never learned from any master. When the urge struck to begin creating puppets, he bought traditional hand puppets, dissected them, researched their construction methods and then copied them on his own. As a result, while his hand puppets look superficially like traditional Chinese style hand puppets, a closer inspection reveals a quirky personality to each one that defies the very rigid formalities of the folk puppet genre. They have an idiosyn-

cratic individuality that goes beyond the traditional roles and types. When he carves a face, he performs the characters, learning how they move and behave. He becomes so deeply absorbed in that character that he begins to take on the character's energy in his own face. If he's making an Emperor, his eyebrows will arch imperiously, if he's making a clown, his mouth will twist into a grotesque, toothy grin. Once, when he was carving a bird deity, his mouth had become fixed in a beak-like rictus. When someone interrupted his work, he found he couldn't open his mouth to talk.

To date he has carved several hundred heads and made dozens of wonderfully expressive hand puppets. Although they have been exhibited at the Dao Do Chung Puppet Museum/Theater, his creations are seldom used on stage. He built a set of puppets to tell the story of Li Ten Yu, a Robinhood-like rebel and brigand who captured the hearts of the Taiwanese when they were colonized by the Japanese in the late 19th and early 20th century. But he has yet to find a company to work with him on performing the piece. He once performed a solo puppet show, and he was in the middle of creating a larger show with a company when a great earthquake struck his home city of Taichun. In the light of such tragic destruction, he felt that theater making was selfish and that he needed to find a way to help people directly.

He got a chance to do this when an enlightened local official in a town near Taipei decided to organize an outdoor arts festival in order to counter the development plans of several large corporations. Jiun Yang contributed half a dozen fanciful abstract versions of the traditional religious pageant figures. These were ten-foot tall psychedelic deities with immense rainbow hearts, festooned all over with eyes and ears, accompanied by smaller figures, like the lion masks that are featured during New Years festivities. After the earthquake's

upheavals and the social dislocations threatened by the corporate redevelopers, Jiun Yang's response was to harken back to the ancient shamanic roots of Chinese puppet performance. The religious ceremonies were meant to transcend the deep geologic, cultural and political fault lines that run beneath the Taiwanese landscape.

No matter what project garners his obsessive attention, puppets are never far from his mind. If not carving them, he paints them again and again in the traditional Chinese water and ink style. His vigorous brushwork creates a feeling of life and movement in his painted figures, as though they were reluctant to sit still on the page. Whether carving, painting or manipulating puppets Jiun Yang feels his central concern is an exploration of the human spiritual condition. The puppet is a metaphor for the relationship between the divine force and the physical body. The weakness and emptiness at the heart of every human being is the same empty void at the core of a hand puppet, into which the controlling spirit slips its fingers. Like the puppet, the puppeteer must have this empty core. This is the Tao of the puppet. He says he often feels the presence of the gods and demons as he works shaping them in wood or painting them on paper, fighting battles inside him. But he can keep carving with a peaceful mind. He has never been defeated.

by Stephen Kaplin
with Kuang-Yu Fong

Mr. Kaplin is an alumnus of the puppetry program at the University of Connecticut. He is a frequent contributor to Puppetry International.

Ms. Fong is a director and performer for Chinese Theatre Works.



Gongju Monodram Festival in KOREA

by Sha Sha Higby

This fall, I arrived at the Seoul airport late one night, and was whisked away for a two-hour taxi ride into the dark. I stayed in a little artist residence by a lake. The landscape was dotted with large sculpted figures. There are several of these private museum residences in South Korea, but this was the main one that had a performance festival linked to it. What had fascinated me about Korea was their shamanism. I hoped to see—or at least catch a glimpse of—what it was.

The next morning, all the artists gathered over pickled kimchee and salted nori and eggs. I could see there were many artists from Japan.

The Gongju Asian Monodrama Festival is in its 7th year and in the past has primarily presented solo artists, providing a venue for display and development of new work. They also keep a comprehensive library of those works in their museum. They jury their artists

every year, but if there is ample space they will also give a chance to any solo groups that can come on their own. They have in the past been very selective about the fact that their artists were Asian with Asian style performance, but now they wish to open their doors in order to represent other Mono dramatists. "Mono-dramatists" in this case means solo artists. There were quite a lot of puppet and mask actors from Korea.

The founder, Sim Woo-sung, is a shaman-like performer who uses doll-like figures and the metaphorically symbolic imagery found in shamanistic rituals to convey an immensely personal yet strong political message that is also spiritually uplifting. Sacred music from all different cultures was used. He expressed the pain and healing of his country and the injustices done to Korea. He



Handpuppets from Japanese performance

asked everyone to join him as he prayed for the healing of the Motherland. It was done so beautifully, with paper puppets and straw-bound creatures. Wrapped white paper ghosts, married figure-spirits with fruits, were delivered as offerings. The stage was filled with all kinds of symbols that he pulled out of a suitcase. While the music soared, our hearts felt that this play went beyond Korea and spoke of healing for the whole world.

The festival took place in the central part of Korea. Because of its location, the audiences were primarily Asians. Annually, only about 10 artistic groups are represented: there was a musician from the British Isles, several Butoh dancers from Japan (the best of which was Ishide Takuya), Sound artist Masaaki Takano, and "word theater" from Korea and Mongolia were represented. An Indian dancer was scheduled to perform, but had to cancel at the last moment. Gregario, an American puppeteer with a warm demeanor, lives in Japan. He performed to children. There were three performance venues: a black box theater for about 100-150 people, an outdoor open theater and a grassy spot in front of their museum. This last was where all the traditional performances were held, and I would happily have performed there with its bonfires for evening performances. The property also houses a large folk museum of masks, puppets from around Asia, and a



Sim Woo-sung, festival founder



photo: Albert Hollander

Sha Sha Higby

shamanistic ritual study center. They had a few technicians and a translator. Some of the support staff were student volunteers. They all did very well considering the vast number of performances presented.

I would say the audience size was on average 75- 100 for both indoor and outdoor performances. There are always piles and piles of shoes in the aisle in a Korean theater, because people shed them to climb into their chairs or just to watch anything. Of course, the traditional dances attracted larger audiences, and there were at least ten groups performing in this style, as well as classi-

cal-style groups. I was able to meet with all kinds of dignitaries and professors from the University of Anthropological Shamanism.

The festival provided everything promised— round trip airfare (I was the first from across the Pacific), very hot and spicy food for all meals (which they tried to make “unspicy” for us, and which was incredibly delicious), lodging and transportation to and from the airport. They have their own cultural center with a museum and classes in the performing arts. After I saw that they were really a one-family operation, I really wanted to help them. Artists who

live in nearby countries come year after year at their own expense in order to support the festival. In fact, they also sparked my desire to contribute a show. Another artist, Ishide Takuya, and I stayed on a few days after the festival was over and donated a performance for the high school children. They asked questions of all kinds afterwards. For me, this was the most important part of the engagement.

Ms. Higby is known for her evocative and haunting performances using the exquisite and ephemeral body sculpture she meticulously creates and moves within.

Review:

AH! The Hopeful Pageantry of BREAD & PUPPET

by Jerome Lipani

A film by Dee Dee Halleck and Tamar Schumann

Perhaps the scope of this film is best captured by the first word of its title, a word that has become as iconic in the theater of Peter Schumann as cardboard clouds and humble-dragon-slaying- babushkas. As Schumann said in a recent interview, "Ah is the opposite of all pragmatic thinking. It is the most open sound that the human voice can make. It is stemming from paradise."

Asked about the meaning of hope, he quotes Hölderlin, the early 19th C. German visionary poet, a lifelong inspiration, and his spiritual progenitor:

**WO ABER GEFAHR IST
WÄCHST DAS RETTENDE AUCH.**

English might have it as:

**YET WHERE DANGER LIES
GROWS THAT WHICH SAVES.**

He then points out that *Gefahr* is the strongest word for danger in German, and that really it should be translated as mortal danger. He said that *Gefahr* is the best word to describe the kind of fear that the Iraqi people have experienced on awaiting the terror of an American invasion.

Because of its position in the gun sights of cross-cultural "conflict", Hölderlin's metaphysical concept inhabits an ironically political position.* It is about life spontaneously finding its opportunity through disaster. Polite bourgeois society is always in need of maintaining denial about this kind of unseemly opportunistic impulse. "Civilized" people are not supposed to give in to such base instincts as jackals. The idea is so rooted in phenomena of the natural world that it could even be accused of being Darwinian. It in fact more accurately or acutely mirrors the (Hindu) Shivaic mystical concept of the simultaneity of creation and destruction. It is also pure Dada. If hope is something that springs from hopelessness, or from nothingness, then a decisive moment has arrived, the moment of the predominance of intuition. It must be a pre-cognized thought because "that which saves" is simply dwelling there- growing there- as a precondition, and is simply waiting to be realized. The realization springs to us as naturally as the next breath we take after being hit by the shock of imminent annihilation. It has all of the impact of a glittering cruise missile that appears out of a darkened sky.

AH! reveals this sense of heroic—even ironic -- inevitability throughout. It becomes absolutely clear that, were the issues that are raised in the film to be assimilated deeply in the core of our individual and collective humanity, everything would change. Everything would change instantly, automatically, as naturally as taking our next breath. As a piece of spirited political art activism, *AH!* clearly intends to be a catalyst for social and individual change. Despite some interesting imperfections, it succeeds in this.

AH! represents the essence of 200 hours of video documentation of Bread and Puppet summer events shot from 1990 through 1998 by DeeDee Halleck with occasional assistance from 5 other filmmakers. Edited down to a vital 87 minutes by Halleck and Tamar Schumann over five years ending late this spring, it includes much footage of the Circus and Pageant of 1998, the last of that period's gigantic pageants, which had an audience of from 30- 40,000 people. Despite these epic proportions, or maybe because of them, the camera sustains an easy and warm intimacy of informed and humorous engagement as it records swaths of theater philosophy, rehearsals and morning meetings, backstage scene-building, print-making, food preparation and definitive moments of performances, major and minor. Taken together, these scenes open the viewer's psychic doors and windows to an experiential understanding of the sweep and flow of a dynamic creative communality. *AH!* depicts the collective creation as the true alternative to the capitalist paradigm -- and to the domination of the many by the rapacious few. Many scenes show children whose non-ideological spontaneity accounts for much tenderness and warmth throughout. And it does this while incorporating clips of varying length from almost 100 performances.

For all its inherent theatricality, *AH!* gives us a purely cinematic experience. It avoids becoming didactic since it virtually dances the meaning of the work it is documenting. Like a visual form of free jazz, with intuitive clarity and grace transcending its own fabulous discontinuity, the spirit of Bread and Puppet arises whole from the chaos of the creative process. By simply (and generously) allowing each moment-- each person -- to speak in authentic voice, *AH!* actualizes the essence of collective creation. Halleck and Schumann edited their material inventively and lyrically, and without sentimentality. Rhythmic editorial precision maintains the urgency of the political, cultural and spiritual messages of the theater by

allowing seemingly disconnected fragments to elucidate one another. The mystery of the creative act is left unmarred even as it is revealed.

This is archetypally true in the sideshow sequence, where jaunty opening and closing puppet-theater curtains disclose quick-witted moments of smaller theater pieces. These singular moments occurred over years, but instead of confusing us as to their meaning, Halleck's and Schumann's edit offers a revelation of precise (and funny) philosophical and political unity—exploiting the unique ability of film to realize a meta-theatrical meaning.

The rightness of this approach becomes abundantly clear within the documentation of longer pieces as well, where fugue-like superimposition stands in for real-time dramatic transitions within the works themselves. This technique creates an art statement of its own, providing an overview as it reveals the psychology, logistics, and process of the work. The film is a revolutionary act that shows the cyclical nature of the creative process in order to subvert a result-oriented approach to making art.

An impossibly good humor throughout even the darkest or most tragic passages continually refreshes the underlying complexity of the ideas in the film itself: Humor helps the viewer to bear the emotionally-shattering nexus of actual political and ecological threats to existence that are the base-line of all Bread and Puppet productions, large or small. In this way, and in many others, *AH!* is in consummate union with the original artistic intention of the pieces we see. This point of departure allows the fragments to emerge as if in a *fluxus* of creative agitation.

AH! is almost encyclopedic in its portrayal of the organizational strategies that have evolved to serve the development and performance of the epic communitarian theater that reached an apogee of scale over the nine years covered here. It is unfortunate, though, that there is no footage which shows the bare beginning of a work in a simple conversation among two or three persons, expanding to eight or nine persons, and finally becoming an epic involving hundreds. Do the ideas come from only a few persons, or does the entire community contribute? How are the ideas shaped exactly? Who makes what choices, and when? Nor are we privileged to see the ultimate selection or rejection of the component pieces of the

Circus or Pageant, or how a part that doesn't work can be transformed into something that does. We are also frustrated in the question of just how communitarian the direction ultimately is. If the non-ideologically socialist theater is a working example of a visionary society that can exist without laws and election campaigns, or a court system, and in which issues that could be utterly divisive (and self-destructive) are somehow modulated into creative and energizing action, it is of ultimate importance that the public be allowed to evaluate its intimate methodology of creation. We need to see how this process works.

The collective creation has undergone a number of operational forms under different directors, or actors' collectives, from the Living Theatre, for example, to the Polish Lab Theatre of Grotowski, to many lesser known theaters in many countries throughout the First and Third Worlds since the 1960's. The underlying questions of acute importance concern the particular methodology of transcendence of the director, or whether a theater can do without one entirely. Because of the importance of the experimental and socio-political theater as a microcosm of, or as a projection towards, a future society in which war is abolished, the public must be permitted to witness an unveiled process of creation. The ultimate relevance of a socialist/spiritual theater depends upon that. The process must be able to be replicated when successful, and worked on if it doesn't quite make it. In *AH!*, these questions could probably be resolved with the addition of one or two scenes.

Schumann freely admits to having the final word about what's in, and what's not. He changes his mind from performance to performance of the same piece. And yet he is no dictator. As well as many shots of sub-directors conducting individual sequences of the larger shows, *AH!* does include a jump-cut sequence of Schumann doing the director's dance *par excellence*. From this sequence, one can glean what he originally meant by dance more than 40 years ago when he started his work as an artist. It is very free, very open, funny, energetic, sensual, showing a through-line between the human being and all other animals, very much in the tradition of Indian hatha yoga, and other ancient cultures, including those with a less formalist approach than was developed in India.

It is certainly the case that the records of performance right from the beginning (evident for example in Stefan Brecht's definitive two-volume critical study, *The Bread and Puppet Theatre*, which ends in the mid-70's) show that there has always been a very high level of (controversial) transcendence at play throughout the history of Bread and Puppet. In speaking about the role of director in the collective creation, we are of necessity talking about the ability of one person to orchestrate the unique creative solutions of diverse personalities. It is a gift. In fact, when Schumann was asked about this, he said that actually there was no Bread and Puppet "method": that sometimes pieces are inspired by friends, sometimes by enemies, even, some emerge almost whole from the head of Zeus, others are evolved slowly, or collectively. So, perhaps the clues that do emerge throughout the film will have to be enough for now lest we trample on the mystery.

Amid all its concentration of images, *AH!* breathes deeply and widely. In so doing, it encourages its audience to take a deep breath, also, in cultivating its ability to accept and assimilate the complexity of the issues raised by the multiple theater pieces shown. Participants of all ages and levels of skill are given space to express themselves fully as individuals even as the

philosophical intent of the theater is made explicit. For example, a three-year-old percussionist on improvised gong and cordwood gives gleeful ancestry to a scene in which Peter Schumann appears, accompanying himself on the scratch-violin, and intoning these words, which are superimposed in B&P linoleum-block style over the images:

**THE THINGS
THE PICTURES
AND SCULPTURES
WHICH ARE THE MEAT OF PUPPETRY,
ARE ORDERED BY A STRANGE AMBITION, NAMELY,
TO PROVIDE THE WORLD WITH AN UNFRAGMENTED
AND UNCONTROLLABLY LARGE PICTURE OF ITSELF:
A PICTURE THAT ONLY
PUPPETRY CAN DRAW;
A PICTURE THAT PRAISES AND
ATTACKS AT THE SAME TIME.**

And then:

**SCULPTURE IS NOT EXEMPT FROM
EARTHQUAKES, NOR MUSIC FROM VOLCANOES,
AND BY THE SAME TOKEN
NONE OF THE ARTS IS EXEMPT FROM POLITICS.**

In one very painterly sequence, a girl with a demeanor we might recognize from a portrait by Renoir and wearing a 19th C. style of dress, is off-centered in the camera's eye, standing next to a deep orange curtain erected in purposeful and surreal isolation in a field of grass. She plays a liltily energized violin, the sound of which carries through the next several sequences of building and moving a huge puppet made out of wooden lathe, which—instead of leading us to a performance—becomes a rainy day and several sequences of oddly comforting rainy day work. As sun breaks through clouds, a child splashes delightedly through a puddle. As blue-flowered sail drifts across blue sky, we hear a chorus of hallelujahs. It is the huge "We Are All In The Same Boat" ship of fools which sails through the same grassy sea in which the sequence began—the unruly openness of the field now serving as ironic contrast to the political inequities that threaten its very existence.

As one of the puppeteers stands next to an earthen bread oven, she says, in an articulately offhand way, that good theater-making is like making good bread! "It's not like Wonderbread—which is all there already. All the answers are not there in our theater. It takes the same amount of hard work to watch it as to make it. When it's good, you feel like all the work was worth it. If it's not, you wonder, what was that all about?"

One of the few smaller pieces shown in relative completeness, "The Triumph of Capitalism," is a grandiloquently miniaturized version of the entire history of Capitalism in light of its Marxist critique. The performance is located at La Scala Opera house, and features an enormous—puppet-scaled, that is—stairway that fills the entire toy theater stage. The script cuts straight to Adam Smith's romanticization of greed as source material,

dramatizing the "invisible hand" of commerce as a hand made of wire—semitransparent and yet dominating the onstage scene. Finally, sparing neither side of the ideological debate, this Persian Miniature of epic political theater wields humor like a surgeon's scalpel (in the hands of an operatic tenor), using the cloudblade of Surrealist and DADAist technique to eviscerate any possibility that either system will prevail.

AH! succeeds as a paean to the collective creation, and as tribute to the emotional and spiritual acrobatics necessary to the immense works which Schumann has created consistently over his career. The philosophical scope was always grand, but it seemed that in the period of the early to late 60's, the narrative meaning of the large-scale puppets was often subsumed within the context of the anti-war demonstrations and other environmental and political actions in which they appeared. This has given way, since the Schumann's move to Glover in 1974, to the internal development of an epic content which has come to define the very meaning of that word.

Schumann speaks simply of the term as an act of theater which "makes sense for everyone," as a counterweight "to organized religion which exists outside of everything else, outside of the real lives of people." He refers to ancient literature as an attempt to advise people about their lives, which has devolved in modern times into attempts to merely entertain or divert people. He wants B&P to lead a resurgence of the ancient function of the Word, which is all but forgotten now. Bread and Puppet's heroic mythic performances speak the world into being, following the folkloric and oral traditions of many cultures now extinct, or threatened with extinction.

It would seem that Bread and Puppet has assimilated two great poles of theater-making. On the one hand lies the cathartic function of the Greek tragedy, which always included a broadly embracing and specific depiction of extra-worldly power. On the other, the social purification theater of Bertolt Brecht: decidedly irreligious, agnostic, if not atheistic in its attempt to arrive at a clear ideological position, one based in a cold-eyed analysis of mankind's all too easy inhumanity, and the resultant injustice of modern economic and political systems.

There are several songs by Brecht in the film, including one delivered with epic strength by a chorus of puppeteers, in clear testament to the communitarian outlook of Bread and Puppet, in which the chorus goes:

**ONE MAN CANNOT RESCUE ANY
BUT MANY CAN RESCUE MANY
FOR IT'S ALL OR NOTHING
NONE OR EVERYONE.**

In a recent interview, Schumann said: "Brecht's advice gives real substance to people. His sense-making is like cold water, which awakens people forcibly from their own willful denial of the true condition that they are living. This is necessary because people fail to see that the disconnect between themselves and nature is the basis for politics."

What is of warming importance in Bread and Puppet is that the theater's dynamic working cohesion and anti-neurotic integration of earth, sky, and human hand is limited neither to the Schumann family nor to a particular production. The "Bread" sequence is virtually Tolstoyan (in relation to his ideas about education, breaking through class barriers, the mysticism of assimilation with the land, and the deft blending of fiction with historical fact) in its depiction of the extended family of puppeteers at harvest. In fact, maybe it is just this radical break with nuclear family exclusivity that propels the sense of joyous freedom and generally infectious enthusiasm that is evident throughout the film.

AH! brings us inexorably to the Circus, the comic introduction and preparation for the archetypal imagery of the Pageant to come. The film seeks to illuminate the humanistic spirit that is responsible for the size of the puppets, for the absolute need to create spectacle of such large scale, and for the daring attempt to incarnate the power and vision of archetypal ideas. The scale of Circus and Pageant is at once deeply vulnerable and heroic. This dual quality reflects the intensity of its desire to inspire a politically potent spiritual energy. There is a seeking for a kind of indomitable universality, a dogma-transcendent impulse via direct connection to a warming and primal interconnectedness with all life! The ephemerality—and power—of this mere "vision" is all we have in our personal and collective struggle against infamy, betrayal, greed, wage slavery, xenophobia, corporate hegemony, militarism, and narcissism, finally! It is the power of this desire, and its potential realization in the collective political action of the present moment, and of the future political actions which it will inspire, that hurls the audience to its feet with total abandon at the entrance of the Circus. *AH!* shows that the Circus doesn't let anyone down.

Lingering memories of the rollicking afternoon slapstick of the Circus create violent contrast to the sunset solemn-

nity and agonized scream of the portrayal of ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide in the 1998 Pageant, which is shown in great detail, and which concludes the film.

Short clips of Pageants from 1990-1997 help build the momentum. Documenting a tradition that began in 1992, when the entire public was invited to partake in the event as actors, *AH!* shows the post-Circus rehearsal prior to the 1998 event. Hundreds participated. Superbly paced in classic Greek tragic grandeur, yet free of hubris, unfolding slowly, yet with an internal rigor always evident, the Saturday performance partook of a mystical profundity that may be unsurpassed in theater history. It seemed that day that the Pageant was the collective waking dream of its public, imaginatively lit by the great natural forces of the universe, as if in reflection of the Tibetan Buddhist concept of the One Mind. A certain inexplicable transparency and transference between audience and actors took place. The huge crowd was silent, breathing the sunset. No one had to ask any questions as to the meaning of specific symbols.

AH! succeeds only partially in its attempt to capture the spatial and spiritual immensity of that performance. I doubt whether 10 cameras shooting simultaneously from the ground and the air could replace any actively engaged member of the public. The Bread and Puppet Pageants are unique in the annals of world theater. They are environmental in outreach and in intention, operatic works whose impact depends so much on the landscape from which they emerge and into which they seemingly merge with the psyche of the spectator.

At twilight, the immense chorus sings words of Brecht set to the chorale of the St. Matthew Passion while erecting the words themselves on a huge wooden scaffold. This extreme moment—20th C. existential objectivity merged with Bach's sublime reach—is achingly appropriate in the context of this Pageant. The verses say, in part:

**THE GREAT INDUSTRIAL CAPTAINS
NEED YOU FOR THEIR VAST PLAN
YOU HAVE NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN
THEY WANT YOU, LITTLE MAN.**

**HE WHO DEvised NEW CROSSES
ON WORKING MEN TO LAY
HE'LL FIND A WAY TO BUTCHER
YOU, TOO, SOME SUNNY DAY.**

When the great Mother Earth figure, peopled by hundreds, comes in solemn procession over the hill and sets fire with its torch to this brutal icon of political sado-masochism, it is as if to illuminate the words of the Dalai-Lama: "Hope is built upon hope."

That night, in the campground, some five hours after the conclusion of this performance, two young drunks got

into a fight. One of them was pushed backward and cracked his skull on a stone by their campfire, dying not long after of a cerebral hemorrhage. This event of gratuitous violence became the definitive moment for a parallel ten-year development to the Domestic Resurrection Circus weekend, in which increasing thousands of campers inundated the tiny town of Glover, VT with drugs and alcohol. Often their revels had very little to do with the events which had become a pretext for their presence. Apparently, the campers were often unaware of the theater which was happening uphill from where many of them were partying. It had developed over ten years that too many came to exploit the crowd-gathering power of the theater, using the intense creative energy of the puppeteers for a commercial revel of their own. What instantly became known as "the murder" became the reason for ending the internationally renowned Bread and Puppet weekend.

Thus, the scale of the performances documented in *AH!* is of historic significance, partly because the film could be the ultimate record of theater events which may never again approach the immensity shown here. In reflection of an enduring commitment to nonviolence, and in acknowledgment of the fact that its public had become more and more unmanageable, the decision was made that August to end Our Domestic Resurrection Circus. Later in the year, an entirely new concept emerged, which includes smaller-scale performances throughout a summer season. The work continues, having gained intensity and breadth of meaning in part, no doubt, through having made this painful and difficult decision.

*Rather than something which comes to us passively through the received wisdom of religious dogma, Hölderlin redefined hope as an active principle, an instinctual reflex emerging from mortal threat, and free from any established religion. As it cuts through our conditioned belief in hierarchical power structures, as expressed pervasively, if subliminally, through organized religion, politics, and economic privilege, it is certainly not less of a mystical truth. In fact, this idea refreshes self-reliance and confidence in one's own perception, which is essential to any creative experience. It seems more closely related to the Buddhist or Hindu yogic principle of the illusionist nature of what we take for reality, than to the generally unquestioning idea of reality so passively accepted in the West.

AH! THE HOPEFUL PAGEANTRY OF BREAD & PUPPET

is available by contacting:

The Bread & Puppet Film Project, Box 89, Willow NY 12495
dhallick@weber.ucsd.edu (845) 679-2756

Jerome Lipani is a multi-media agent-provocateur whose career has been largely devoted to collective, non-violent, guerrilla art activism around critical environmental causes. He is currently helping to develop an artist-collective/interactive website called WarAgainstWar.

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INNER VOICE

World of Ventriloquism in India and Abroad

Ramdas Padhye, Dimple Publication, 2002, India.
88 pp. \$8.

www.vpuppets.com

Ramdas Padhye's *Inner Voice* may be overly ambitious in scope given its limited page count, but it should be of interest to fans of the history of ventriloquism and, perhaps to a lesser extent, researchers in the field of Asian theatre.

What I found especially intriguing was Padhye's opening "soliloque," in which he refers to "Aakasvani"—the "voice from the sky." There are many instances in Hindu mythology when voices appeared to emanate from trees, animals and so on. These divine voices proved important in directing the affairs of humans. Was this a sort of "divine ventriloquism," or an illusion created by priests gifted in the art? This puts a new light on certain types of prophecy and miracles, and might deserve the attention of scholars.

The section on the history of ventriloquism in India was also interesting, though brief—the art form has had only a handful of practitioners in modern times. Padhye's thumbnail sketches of other ventriloquists, mostly Americans, is of less interest, I would think, to Western readers who would already be acquainted with most of them as pop-culture icons (Edgar Bergen, Paul Winchell, Shari Lewis, and so on).

Sections on ventriloquial sound production and dummy handling give some insights into Mr. Padhye's particular method and techniques. He places a greater emphasis on breath than we find in Edgar Bergen's primer, for instance, though I'm not sure this book adds much to the literature already available.

Clearly, Mr. Padhye has been involved in all sorts of interesting stage productions, as well as film and video work. He has employed a variety of puppetry techniques: bunraku, Chinese Double, black light, half-body humanettes and so on. Judging by the photos, he has also met many interesting people over the course of his 30 year career: Indira Gandhi, President Giri, Indian film star Amitabh Bachchan, and American vents Ronn Lucas and Jeff Dunham, to name a few. Expanding these sections would, I feel, make this a more valuable and interesting volume. Nonetheless, this is a very different and distinct voice, and I imagine that those devoted to the art form will want to add this to their collections.

review by Andrew Periale



The Evolution of An American Puppeteer

The Marionette Actor

by Ralph Chessé

69 pp. Fairfax: University Press of America, 1987.



Ralph Chessé's reflections on his life as an American puppeteer are an amazingly rich resource for those interested in the history of puppet theater in America. Chessé's long career touches on many of the most important aspects of United States puppetry: from the 1920's, when the idealism of the Little Theater Movement had inspired scores of Americans to attempt puppet theater as art, not simply business; to the 1950's, when television inspired new methods and contexts for puppetry; and finally to the 1970's, when Chessé returns to his original inspiration to make serious drama with marionettes.

Chessé's high aspirations for puppetry are ultimately founded on the similarly lofty goals that Edward Gordon Craig articulated in the early twentieth century. Epigraphs by Craig grace each of Chessé's sixteen chapters, reminders of the unlimited potential both Craig and Chessé saw in the puppet theater. Born in New Orleans, Chessé was an aspiring art student who loved the Shakespeare performances by Robert Mantell that he witnessed as a child, but it wasn't until he met Blanding Sloan in San Francisco, in 1924, that he started to conceive of a puppet theater capable of performing great works of drama. During a brief


stint in New York, Chessé worked with Aline Bernstein at the dynamically innovative Neighborhood Playhouse, and also got to know Remo Bufano, a gifted puppet artist, whose goals for the form are equally high.

Returning to San Francisco (with his new wife, Jo), Chessé reconnected with Blanding Sloan, and began to design, sculpt, and direct marionette shows, starting with *Hamlet*, but then continuing with a radically new expressionist play about race

and psychology, Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*. Chessé's choice of material for his marionette productions continued in this wonderfully classic vein with *Macbeth*, Molière's *Don Juan*, Humperdinck's opera *Hansel and Gretel*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, an adaptation of Wagner's *Siegfried* (!), and numerous other dramas and stories, certainly establishing Chessé's Marionette Guild, and San Francisco in general, as the West Coast center of innovative and challenging puppet theater.

The Depression brought an abrupt end to Chessé's puppet art theater, but, in the form of the Federal Theater Project, offered him a way to continue his work, if in a decidedly different manner. As the FTP Supervisor of Puppetry for the State of California, Chessé put scores of unemployed to work, most of whom, he writes, were unskilled in puppetry. Despite the challenge of working with neophyte puppeteers, Chessé mounted a variety of ambitious productions, including works by Chekhov, O'Neill, and Shakespeare, but also more accessible and widely popular works such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Rip Van Winkle*, which, together with a marionette variety show, were popular hits at the 1938 Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco. However, a conservative Congress terminated the Federal Theater Project in 1939, and Chessé was once more challenged to respond to the times.

The next chapter in Chessé's work began after World War Two, when he pitched a television puppet show for ABC, *Willie and the Baron*. Chessé became very successful in this new performance medium as well, making numerous commercials, and eventually coming to develop a bumblebee character named Brother Buzz as the centerpiece of a weekly fifteen-minute children's television program sponsored by the Latham Foundation for the Promotion of Humane Education. Chessé once more rose to the occasion, creating scores of new puppet creatures for the particular requirements of the television camera. But he also chafed at the Latham




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Foundation's control of the content of *Brother Buzz*, and the necessity of creating new animal characters every week. However, Chessé's *Brother Buzz* show continued for fifteen years.

The extensive photographs, poster reproductions, and sketches which Chessé's book includes are quite marvelous, but for this puppeteer it's startling to see Chessé's dynamic early designs for his Shakespeare and O'Neill productions give way to the television cuteness of the *Brother Buzz* puppets (although

even there, Chessé's puppets have a wonderful artistic integrity). In this trajectory we can see the give and take between the two main strands of American puppet theater: kids television shows and the elusive challenge of puppet theater as serious art form.



Towards the end of his career, Chessé returned to the world of art-theater puppetry, producing the de Falla opera *Master Peter's Puppet Show* (which his old colleague Bufano had done in the twenties), and—back to the master—*Macbeth*.

The Marionette Actor is not a new book, but it's such a worthwhile contribution to our understanding of puppet history that I wanted to review it here. Chessé was at the center of the creation of modern puppet theater, and it is fascinating to get a sense of what he was thinking about, and what he was doing.

review by John Bell



The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales

Edited by Maria Tatar

W. W. Norton & Company, 2002

At first glance, 26 stories doesn't seem to be a very comprehensive collection of the world's most famous fairy tales. Hundreds of stories from all parts of the world aren't included in this lavish publication. But after browsing through the selected titles and assorted biographies of authors, collectors and illustrators, I concluded that Maria Tatar has performed an admirable job of zeroing in on the most famous and most told tales in western culture from Germany, France, England, Denmark and Russia.

I've been waiting a long time for just such a book. Other annotated versions of children's stories are available by the same publisher- *The Wizard of Oz*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Huckleberry Finn*- but this is the first book to cover a wide range of folk tales that have evolved from an oral tradition, tales that are readily available for adaptation by fledgling and seasoned professional puppeteers alike. What better place to start researching your next show? Say you want to do a production of *Rumpelstiltskin*, as Drew Allison of Grey Seal Puppets and I did some 27 years ago. What a great resource this book would have been back then when so little was available to guide us in a fresh approach to this Grimm tale first published in 1857.

If we had had this book in hand back then, we would have learned that *Rumpelstiltskin* goes by many names- Titeliture, Purzinigele, Batzibizili, Panzimanzi and Whuppity Stoorie. We could have had a field day with the names alone. Maria Tatar provides an informative introduction to each of the 26 tales that reveals all kinds of juicy facts like this. Along with providing loads of trivia, she also gives valuable hints on the stories' morals and characters' motivations. According to Tatar, *Rumpelstiltskin* is filled with characters driven

by greed, deception and cruelty. They are neither clever nor resourceful nor quick-witted. In fact, Rumpelstiltskin proves to be the most compassionate of the lot. In the end he demonstrates humanity by allowing the miller's daughter a chance to get out of her verbal contract to him- the exchange of the firstborn child for spinning straw into gold.

And here's another interesting tidbit associated with *Rumpelstiltskin*: the story is best known in cultures that depend on spinning to make their garments. Spinning is not just a utilitarian method of producing cloth but also the breeding ground for the "spinning of yarns." The tedium of spinning encourages storytelling as a way of passing time. Domestic labor can be turned into golden tales: that's why a spinning wheel is visible in many of the illustrations in the "Scenes of Storytelling" section of this book. These colorful reproductions of paintings and line drawings represent the best of classic children's literature illustrators- Maxfield Parrish, George Cruikshank, Walter Crane, Gustave Doré, Arthur Rackham and more. These visuals alone can lead the way to a fresh visual interpretation of your next production. And while we're examining illustrations from children's literature, let me also recommend another book, *A Treasury of the Great Children's Book Illustrators* (Abradale Press, 1983). This is another comprehensive collection of 13 illustrators' work that can get your design wheels turning.

As puppeteers, we turn to illustrations and stories as a source for our storytelling for several reasons- our own childhood memories of enchantment, our practical considerations of picking a "well known title" to sell to potential sponsors, and the comfort of knowing that, should we choose one of these old stories, we will safely tread on royalty free ground. No publisher or author is going to hunt us down demanding payment. At the same time, we are traveling through territory that has been well trodden. For goodness sakes, how many times has *Cinderella* been performed as a puppet show? What could possibly be done differently to make this story feel new not only to your audience but also to you? Well, by reading Maria Tatar's book, you might find that fresh edge



on a seemingly stale tale. By examining the original versions of some of these not so genteel tales- full of murder, mutilation and cruel stepmothers- you might find the key to telling an old story with a new bent. Consider reading this book as doing your homework. What respectable puppeteer would go out and rent a tape of Disney's *Cinderella* and call that research?

Even though this book has the word "annotations" prominently displayed in the title, the annotations themselves do not take center stage. They rest adjacent to the text in a subtle shade of purple. In fact, the whole book is laid out with generously wide, light tan pages and plenty of breathing room between text and illustrations. This book's a beauty and should be in your library.

The only quibble I could possibly raise is Tatar's inclusion of a few obscure stories- *Molly Whuppie* and *Kate Crackernuts*. These seem to be eclectic selections on the part of the editor. Still, after reading these, I could see how a resourceful puppeteer might find them fertile ground for adaptation. Don't tell anyone about these stories. I want them all for my own.

review by Donald Devet

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(continued from p. 10)



Alfredo Vaccaro

Alfredo Vaccaro's grandson (and namesake) Alfredo Mauceri and his younger brother Daniel have brought the company into the new millennium. While the company Vaccaro-Mauceri maintains a puppetry museum dedicated to the memory of the Brothers Vaccaro, the performing company is anything but a museum. They perform often, both in Siracusa and elsewhere in Italy, providing as before, a bridge between the epical past and a hopeful future.

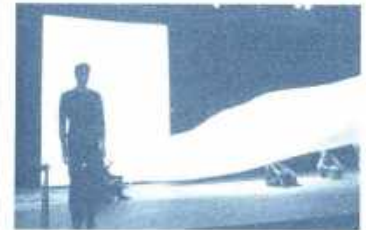
Thanks to Alfredo Mauceri for permission to use the photos from his book *I Fratelli Vaccaro: un sogno chiamato "Opra dei Pupi."*

We apologise for neglecting to properly credit the following artists in *PI* #12:



Joan Marcus, for the photo of La Pulcina on page 10

Susan J. Vitucci, for the illustration in the same image



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(continued from p. 11)

Pondruel expressed his priority: to explore metamorphosis. His *Théâtres Automatique*, *Le Cid*, truly has the power to transform and transfix its viewers. After receiving a diploma as an engineer in 1973, Denis Pondruel became a professor of mathematics. In 1978 he began to create mechanical sculptures. His large *Théâtres Automatiques* including *Le Cid*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as little automata, have been shown in prestigious theatres, museums and galleries in Europe. He has been praised as *un ingénieur ingénieur* (ingenious engineer).

from Pondruel's *Le Cid*



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The Savage Nursery
by Erin Eagar

Katherine Greco

Sunhild Edith Hampson

July 29, 1914 – November 17, 2002

Sunhild was trained in puppet theatre by the Hohnsteiners Puppensiele, Max Jacob (1888-1967) and Friedrich Arndt. She told us she had been refused admittance to the troupe many times, as they did not want to deal with women. She persisted, though, and they succumbed. She enhanced her carving skills with them. These were skills she had learned in the mountains of Austria carving little people and animals to be sold by the basketful in order to make money. Her handpuppets were all carved and costumed in the Hohnsteiners style. Philpott, in *Dictionary of Puppetry*, says that the Hohnsteiners' "... style and technique became the criterion for all German Hand puppet players." For Sunhild, there was only one way to perform with a hand puppet— her way, the Hohnsteiners way. Although narrow minded in this regard, this attitude served Sunhild, and later her husband Charles, well. She also mentioned to us that she had cut minor scene pieces and puppets for Lotte Reiniger. This I can believe, as the style of her shadow figures, most with some sort of cantilever action, would have blended seamlessly with Reiniger's figures.

Immediately following WWII, Sunhild arrived in England sponsored by the Quakers (with much help from a Mr. Jack Catchpool), wearing a Tyrolian costume made of old army uniforms and embroidered to help cover the holes. In August of 1948, she married Charles Clayton Hampson, someone she had met hiking in the forests of Austria before the war. She taught him everything she knew. In November of that year, she joined the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild. Among "things puppet"



given to Debbie and me are letters from Arthur Peterson and Harry (Whanny) Whanslaw remarking on the wonderful shows that Sunhild did. She created both hand *and* shadow puppet shows. Whanslaw was most interested "... I wonder if you'd mind giving me a rough sketch to show how you fit your roller scenes for the shadows?"

They performed at many Guild exhibitions. Rumor has it that Sunhild also performed at Buckingham Palace. Learning that a Captain or Major Somebody was doing a show there, she decided to show up and help out. As with the Hohnsteiners: she persisted, they succumbed.

In 1952, Sunhild and Charles headed for New Zealand and Australia aboard the SS Akaroa. There, they performed many shows at schools and department stores. During this time, they toured in a small caravan that Sunhild had decorated with her folk paintings.

In 1962, Sunhild and Charles arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii (with a period in Seattle, Washington in 1965-66). Sunhild loved Hawaii. She and Charles performed shows for schools, the State Library System, and so on. After Charles's death in 1990, Sunhild cut back on performing. In her youth, she had been taught to perform as part of an ensemble. Although she did do some small private performances for hospital patients, she never performed with hand puppets again. Charles had always played "Punch" for their performances (although using the Germanic "Kasperle" without sticks and violence). I suppose that without her leading man she just didn't have the heart to carry on. She did paint— canvasses and lots of Easter eggs. She played her squeeze box for hospital patients every week, making the staff help with simple puppets.

The last time we saw her was in 2000. She saw one of our Christmas shows at a library in Hawaii. Her only comment afterward was, "Oh I want to be that kangaroo!" She had strong opinions about puppet theatre. Many was the time that we had to physically hold her back from telling various performers we'd taken her to see exactly what she thought of their so-called "performance." She was most concerned that performers should be paid for their services, and that the services they provided should be good. We will miss her opinions, her careful guiding words, and her sound critiques of our shows.

by Peter Allen

The author would love to hear any stories you might have about Sunhild. Reach him at 32529 State Highway E, Jamesport, MO, USA, 64648.

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Photo by Bradford Clark



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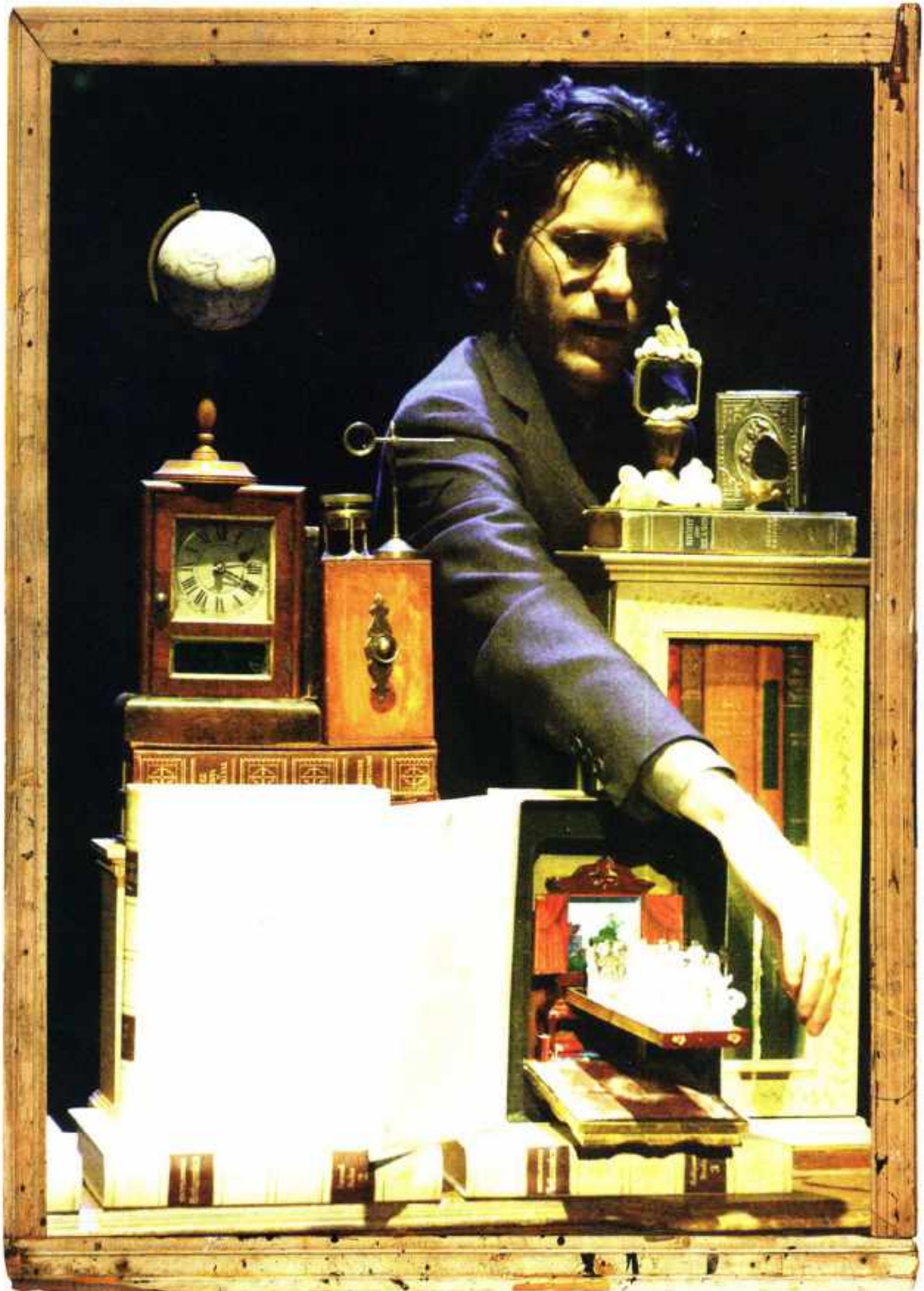
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BRIAN SELZNICK in his production,
The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins

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