

The Puppet Patter
The Official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild
July 2010
Page one



**KICK UP YOUR HEELS AT THE CHICGOLAND PUPPETRY GUILD PICNIC
SUNDAY JULY 10, 2011 2:00 P.M.**

WHERE: PROGRAM YOUR GPS 16 HICKORY ROAD, OAKWOOD HILLS [NOT CARY] IL. 60013-1106 CALL 815-529-1715 OR 815 451-7107 , OR EMAIL GODSLOVESTORIES@COMCAST.NET FOR MORE INFORMATION. REMEMBER TO OBSERVE SPEED LIMITS AND SPOT SIGNS IN THIS AREA!!!!

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BRING YOUR LATEST PUPPET, OR ACT TO SHARE.

PAGE 2 MEMBER SHIP NEWS

"Thanks for your support of the Guild and its many effort to promote puppetry events and connections!

We'd appreciate your help in letting us know of any of those among your friends, family, or community who might like to join the Guild? We are out to "honor and promote the art of puppetry in all its forms" in a very large regional area, and the more the merrier, ...and the more effective our work can be!

Memberships received or renewed this summer, in celebration of our 50th anniversary, will be extended by the CPG Board to run through **August 31, 2012!** So it's a great time to join the Guild, get your name or group in the new CPG Directory, and tie in to the many events we're already programmed for the months ahead.

Please just drop us an e-mail at: chicagolandpuppetryguild@yahoo.com or give Tom Lang a call at **773-715-8108** and we will send your friend an invitation!
Many thanks!

"The Man Who Planted Trees" Review by Fred Putz and Tom Lang

Instead of a monthly Guild meeting, it was arranged for members of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild to attend the May 7th performance of Edinburgh's Puppet State Theatre "The Man Who Planted Trees." at the Museum of Contemporary Art. These "field trips" both to local and visiting performers, give us a chance to "meet and greet," and to share the pleasure of puppetry, this time at the invitation of the Chicago wonderful staff at the Chicago Humanities Festival.

Their remarkably simple set provides a stage of many effects, from toy theater to use of "special effects," while allowing the puppeteers to maintain a relaxed feeling with their audience. This was a very special show, not least for its having remained fresh over five years in many cities!

The years between 1910 and 1950 two world wars trashed much of the central European landscape, with environmental degradation across much of Europe. Richard Medrington and Rick Conte tell French author Jean Giono's 1953 story "L'homme qui plantait des arbres" as a charming and absorbing 60 minute tabletop and hand puppet drama designed to delight both children and adults. The simple setting is a 6 x 8 foot backdrop with two 4 x 2 x 2 foot portable stands covered with a tan burlap-like material. The two stands used as the hand puppet stage were connected to the backdrop by more tan material, and when separated create the illusion of hills and valleys. The stage pieces included large leaves on poles that were painted tan on one side and green on the other.

Precariously placed between the two stands is a desolate looking miniature village consisting of a clothes line hanging between two shabby houses with a dead tree. Richard Medrington, as both the narrator and actor in this play within a play, describes the events that took place between 1910 and 1950 on the deforested hills of Provence, France. Medrington

enters to sit on a chair looking contemplatively into space. His quiet time is interrupted by Rick Conte, carrying a basket containing a scruffy looking hand and mouth puppet "Dog" (made from burlap with two faceted black button eyes). We soon found Dog (voiced and energized by Conte), was to be the very outspoken and sometimes over-the-top star of the show.

We're told the only thing that could grow in that deforested landscape was the hardy but unusable plant, lavender, followed by a sudden aroma of lavender as Conte fans the audience with a huge leaf soaked in lavender scent. After a few jokes with Medrington and Dog, (such as Dog's confusion between a 'vegetarian' and a 'veterinarian'), the narrator begins a story of his travels to Provence. On a long hike in the dry and dusty hills, he's befriended by a shepherd named Elzeard Bouffier, (a tabletop puppet) who offers the desperate Medrington a drink of water from his well. (Illustrated through the use of a large metal bucket with a crank handle and a small bucket on a string.) Bouffier, it turns out, sorts baskets of acorns in the evenings, for he's set for himself the task of planting 200 trees a day on the barren hills!

Since Dog is a sheep dog, his herding talent was illustrated by six small marionette sheep attached to a paddle control who he chased energetically across the burlap hills between the portable stands. World War I interrupts Medrington's trips to Provence, but he later returns to find a young forest of trees grown up in his absence (helping us use our imaginations to fill in the new forest). The Old shepherd Elzeard and Dog are still there, and still planting their 200 trees a day! A new table top puppet, a pompous government official, sees the forest for the first time and proclaims that it's a "natural forest" and "belongs to the people". Now the story is interrupted by World War II. The official realizes that the war creates a need for fuel, lining his own pockets with German Marks by selling off the timber to the Nazis. When the war is over, the people deal with him harshly for his crime.

Our narrator takes us on an imaginary postwar journey back to Provence, and this time amazed to find the hills and valleys completely covered with a beautiful and mature forest of maple, oak and a myriad of other tree; ...each of which had been planted one seed at a time. The forest has grown so big that the cutting had only taken a small portion of the trees. The valley is lush with new growth, dried up springs brimming with water, and streams full of fish and birds (several marionette birds on a long pole) sing and fly about. A mist covers our valley and a light rain falls (Medrington circles the audience with a spray bottle giving everyone a sprinkle of fresh "rain.") Not only does the forest grow, but also the little town. A cheerful new miniature village with a fountain in the town square was placed between the two set stands... carefully filled by Conte to make a small water show.

To his amazement, the traveler finds that despite 40 years of toil, the Shepherd is still alive, but moving slowly. At the age of 89, Elzeard, The Man Who Planted Trees' job is done and his body placed at the top of the backdrop to lie in state. But, what about Dog? At 40, Dog (now a grayed with two white feathers over his eyes) has managed to survive (that's like 280 people years!) and gently places the Shepherd's crook on his body, closing the show on both a somber and joyful note.

In our visit with the puppeteers, we also met Elspeth Murray, who assures things run smoothly on the road. Rick and Richard graciously showed us how all the elements of the show (thanks to the genius of puppet-builder Allie Cohen back across the water) fit into three suitcases for worry-free airline connections. The technical care and thought what went into this show, now in its fifth year of performances over the world, is belied by its simplicity.

The Guild presented an "Urban Survival Kit" for Dog; a rubber CFD fire hydrant, a fine stuffed

squirrel, classy new red lead and collar for Michigan Avenue, and some small plastic bags just-in-case. Richard mentioned that many of Dog's movements and mannerisms were inspired by an earlier squirrel puppet from another show.

We're grateful for this show, for the puppeteers' endless humor and improvisation, and for the energy of the Chicago Humanities Festival that brought them to us! You can still see the show with a fine segment (about 7 min) on the Humanities web site:

<http://www.chicagohumanities.org/en/Genres/Arts-And-Architecture/2011-Puppet-State-Theatre-Man-Who-Planted-Trees.aspx>

Or visit the Puppet State site at to keep track of their further adventures at:

<http://www.puppetstate.com/index.html>



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FURTHER MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Hi All,

Thanks for being a member of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild this last year!
If you get this then it's almost time to whip out the checkbook (we hope!) to renew your membership in the Guild!

Though the new member year runs from September 1, we'll publish a new *CPG 50th Anniversary Directory* *late this Summer, and would like to ask memberships be renewed by August 1 to save last minute gee-I-thought-I-was-renewed omissions.

So if you are coming to the picnic at Fred's & Dee's next week on July 10, please consider bringing your check along for Harvey.

Rates for membership are unchanged:

Individual **\$20** / Couple **\$30**/ Performing Group **\$30** (up to two names with votes) / Senior or Student rate is **\$15** made payable to "CPG" or to the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild if you like to write. This renews you 'til Sept. 1, 2012.

If you are not coming,... but would like to save us a stamp on the incredibly persuasive renewal reminder in the mail, just send your check along to:

Chicagoland Puppetry Guild
c/o Harvey Kahler
2041 W. Birchwood Ave.
Chicago IL 60645

We expect to have 2011-12 Membership Cards on the way in about two weeks.

Thanks also for your ideas and suggestions for Guild activities and events, and for your support of puppetry arts!

Best to you!

Tom Lang and the Board members

* if you don't want to be shown in the *Directory* just let us know.

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PUPPET SLAM WRAP| UP

CORRECTION TO SLAM INFO IN THE LAST PATTERN, ALL INFORMATION CAME FROM KAT PLEVIAK, NOT FROM SUSAN WITEK. WE APOLOGISE FOR THE MISUNDERSTANDING.

OMG!!!!!!!!!!!! Was that not so awesome!!!!!!!!!!!! We all though so.

I can not begin to thank you enough for causing this to happen. Though we wanted to do this we would not have done it unless you had asked us to and supported us, both financially and as a cheering section.

So here is the technical assessment from our end.

1) Financially- We sold out and got a check for \$247.72. They cut it and gave it to me last night. I will distribute the funds where the need to go.

2) Technically- Things went great. Everyone showed up on time to both their tech times and the show. No one fell down and everyone seemed to have a good time.

3) Artistically- We loved it. The shows covered a wide range of subject matter, puppet styles, and lengths. We also felt that every piece met at least our minimum requirements for quality control. Over all the audience feedback led me to believe that at least someone liked every piece. The only one that really did not go over well was the "Good-For Nothing Lover". We were bummed as we all really liked the piece, but it was clear that the piece was too abstract and long for this show. A good thing to keep in mind for the next one.

4) Issues with Gorilla Tango- The only bad thing that happened was we went over by 20 whole minutes. I will not lie this was bad. The crew discussed it and came to the conclusion that it came from three primary places. 1) we started late due to the show before us being late (this is not Gorillas fault though. Our idea to have a band made prep-time performance time. So by their standards we were able to start on time). I would say we lost about 8 minutes. 2) The band - We let them run about 3 minutes long at the start and then they went 5 minutes long over intermission (8 min total). 3) Transitions- I think these over all ran about 5 minutes longer than we planned. It was our speeches and closing the curtain back and fourth. Wow it really adds up. The only good thing I can say about this was we saw it coming and asked the house if we could proceed with Larry Potter or if we needed to cut it during the Larry Reed video. They gave me a severe frowning but approved the piece and did not charge us for the extra time. So even though we screwed up, we were as respectful as possible and I do not believe we damaged our relationship with the theatre in any way. Yeah!!!!

5) Needs Improvement- The only real travesty of the evening from our perspective was the lack of curtain call and proper thank yous. Due to the time problems things got hectic and no one corralled the cast during the last piece and then the audience was dismissed abruptly and hectically. We really regretted this and now that we have a better idea how things run, will be sure it never happens again. To make up for this we have E-mailed the performers an apology and will be putting a page up on our web sight with their pics and bios. When the page is up we will announce it on Facebook. We also have asked the performers to give us feedback both good and bad so we can improve for next time.

6) Our dreams!!!!- We would love to do this again next summer and hope you would recycle the money you invested and made back, into the show again next year. If you agree we will also apply for a grant from the puppetry network so we are able to offer the performers a more substantial performance fee.

7) A Request- Over the course of the Meltdown Sea Beast put in about \$150 for the screen and rigging, posters, programs, and a few other things, plus each member put in over \$20 in parking. We decided before this started to assume these charges so as not to add pressure to the number of tickets we needed to sell. We know that the guild put in an extra amount of money for publicity. If I am correct it was between \$40-\$60ish. We would like to ask that the guild assume these fees. We were upfront with the performers that profits would be split between 11 groups so I am sure that no one did it for the money. But each group had quite a few people in it and put in a lot of work and we really want to show them our appreciation so they will continue to participate in future events. I overheard some talk back stage and based on the very full house (even though they all know the deal) I think a few folks may have gotten their hopes up about what we took in. It's a small gesture but sometimes small

gestures make all the difference. If this is not possible please don't worry. Just let me know how much you need and I will take it out for you before I pay the performers. Your consideration in this matter is greatly appreciated. (on a side note, if you are worried about these fees becoming a trend, based on the audience I saw last night I do not think it will be necessary for future events to be advertised in print. I believe word of mouth and internet advertising will suffice)

So that's it for now. Let me know what you think about everything and thank those of you that already sent me E-mails. We had fun and hope you did to. Thanks so much!

LEST WE FORGET JULY - AUGUST 2011
By Fred Putz Chicagoland Puppetry Guild's Historian

WHO WERE PAUL MCPHARLIN / MARJORIE BATCHELDER? PART VI

This article (a summation of Howard Ryan's book *Paul McPharlin and the Puppet Theater*) is a continuation of a numerical outline listing those events that led to McPharlin's involvement in the forming of The Puppeteers of America and his relationship with Marjorie Batchelder:

The reason for this series of articles concerning Paul McPharlin is because this year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Puppeteers of America and if it were not for McPharlin and his efforts in trying to organize American Puppetry, the P. of A. would probably not exist.

1936- 1937 Age 32-33

21. The May-June segment of these articles left off with McPharlin becoming the first Honorary President of the newly formed Puppeteers of America. He also took a position as supervisor of the Index of American Design in Michigan and resumed work on his Masters degree hoping to improve his teaching skills and add to his credentials. (Pg. 106)

Now, let's catch up with Marjorie Batchelder and her activities during the years of 1931 to 1936.

While teaching at Florida State University at Tallahassee, Batchelder arduously studied everything available about the art of puppetry and also carried on a lively correspondence with McPharlin. Being a very independent young woman she drove to New York where she met with Sue Hastings, Pauline Benton and Charles Searle, an associate of Tony Sarg. (Pg. 106) Batchelder organized a puppet troupe from her theater students at Florida State calling it the Flastacowo Puppeteers' Studio-Theater. Unfortunately, since the puppets from these productions were made by the students who claimed them as their own, none have survived. A listing of the Flastacowo productions includes: *Rumplestiltskin*, *Dr. Faust*, (a shadow show), *The Gooseberry Mandarin*, *The Wolf at the Door*, *St. Cyprian and the Devil* and *Fame and the Poet*. (Pg. 107) Utilizing both marionettes, hand and shadow puppets as well as experimental materials, Batchelder's productions were unique.

Through their correspondence McPharlin, had a great deal of influence upon Bathcelder's productions. She once commented that, "she could not always remember which ideas were his and which were hers." It should be noted that their approaches to puppetry differed greatly; McPharlin stressed the theoretical while Batchelder was more interested in the technical aspects of puppetry. (Pg. 111)

In 1933 Bathcelder moved to Columbus to begin work on her Master's degree at Ohio State University with the goal of using a full-scale puppet production as the basis of her thesis. (Pg. 107) Wanting a play that would be appropriate to puppets, she selected Aristophane's *The Birds*. She began work on the play in the fall of 1933, taking over a year to complete it. The original play was rather long and included over fifty characters, Bathcelder shortened it and cut the cast down to twenty-seven marionettes which were constructed from cypress wood. (Pg. 108-9) She received her Master of Arts degree and was appointed to the OSU faculty in 1934. *The Birds* first full performance was held in March of 1935 at the University High School building in Cincinnati with a cast of four puppeteers and two musicians. (Pg. 109) It was so successful that it became "one of the better known American puppetry productions of the first half of the century." (Pg. 109) While at OSU, Batchelder formed her own puppet company, "Marjorie Batchelder's Puppet Players" which performed marionette productions throughout Ohio. These productions included, *August Fantasy* and *The Moon for a Prince*. She also began to experiment with rod puppets which would become one of her greatest contributions

to the art of puppetry. (Pg. 111)

1935-1936

1935 saw Batchelder planning a series of Christmas plays using rod puppets. She “bombarded” McPharlin with questions about construction and manipulation. The Christmas show did not work out so, she decided to produce *St. Geroge and the Dragon*, which was written by McPharlin using the Christmas play puppets. (Pg. 112) The first performance was held in January of 1936 and according to Batchelder, was so successful that from that day on she continued to explore the possibilities of the rod puppet and studied its historical and aesthetic significance. (Pg. 113) In another 1936 production, *Columbine's Birthday*, written by Grace Stearns, Batchelder used the Russian invented hand-and-rod puppet. She defined this style of puppet as a “variation of the hand puppet with rods controlling the arms“. (Pg. 113) As opposed to the Russian hand-and-rod puppet in which the rod was connected to the puppet's elbow and was concealed the costume's long sleeve, Batchelder's rod was connected to the puppet's hand and not concealed allowing for greater flexibility and realistic movement. Thus “the American hand-and-rod puppet was born“. Another puppeteer of the 30's who used rod puppets was Ernest Wolff for his puppet operas at the famous Kungsholm Restaurant in Chicago. (Pg. 112) (A remnant of the Kungsholm Puppet Opera still exists at Bill Fossier's Opera In Focus in Rolling Meadows, IL.) According to McPharlin, Batchelder did not introduce rod puppets to the USA, but through her lectures, demonstrations and publications challenged the supremacy of the marionette. (Pg. 112)

Batchelder took her hand-and-rod *Columbine's Birthday* to The First American Puppetry Conference in 1936 where she “introduced this type of puppet to many of the delegates for the first time“. This introduction made Batchelder's contribution to the conference an important moment in the development of American puppetry. (Pg. 116) This first Conference set challenging standards by which all future P. of A. conferences would be run. There were, according to McPharlin 300 registrants. The performances and seminars were open to the public which added to the number. Tony Sarg estimated that 250 to 300 persons attended the banquet. Six major performances were scheduled as well as symposiums on puppet making techniques and theory. (Pg. 116) On Page 117 Howard Ryan commented; “In spite of the marionette's prominence in the spotlighted performances of the 1936 conference it may have been the humble hand puppet that had the most remarkable effect: the eighteen-year-old Burr Tillstrom, who came from Detroit as one of the puppeteers in Don Vestal's marionette group, and demonstrated his own marionettes during the variety program, discovered hand puppets at the conference, according to George Latshaw, and returned home to create Kukla and Ollie in that same year.” (Pg. 117) During the conference, the Batchelder/McPharlin relationship continued to grow and “she spent the weekend at McPharlin's home” in Detroit. (Pg. 115)

This story will continue in the next *Puppet Patter* with McPharlin's written contributions to American Puppetry and the Batchelder/McPharlin relationship.

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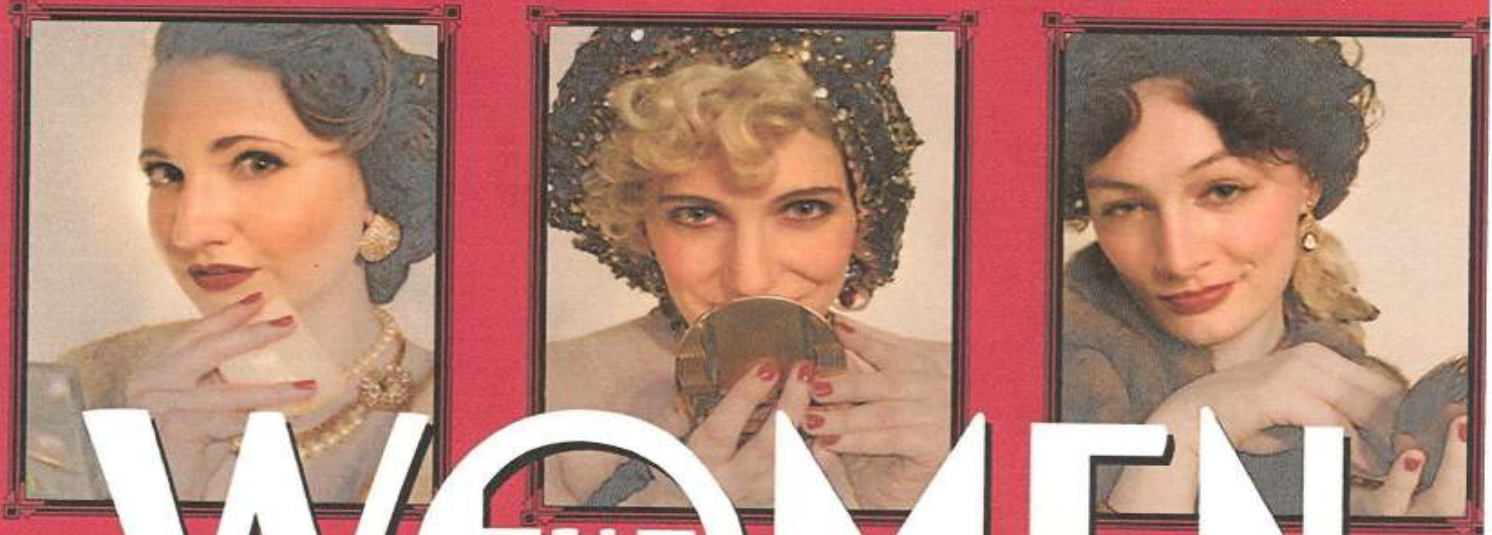
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Summer Update

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In a nutshell:

We are in the midst of an exciting 2011 summer at VOP!

Thank you to **everyone** that has inquired about classes, shows, independent studies, internships - it feels great!

Here is what we have planned...

The Joffrey Ballet:

The bulk of our summer will be dedicated to building puppets for The Joffrey Ballet's Fall production of Don Quixote!

Keep an eye on our blog for development updates.

Opening October 12, 2011

www.joffrey.org

Classes:

We anticipate offering the



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In This Issue

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Saturday, June 4 & Sunday, June 5
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Quest's 10th Anniversary Season

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AN ITEM ON INTEREST FROM FRED PUTZ

Fred Putz suggested we send along this short item in case it's of interest.

Our Guild has adopted an informal policy of doing "meet 'n greets" with all visiting puppeteers to welcome them, as well as attendance on "field trips" to local performers to demonstrate support and schmooze a bit.

We try to get somebody from CPG to most events, using our FB page to plug and promote all of these, and it's proving helpful to have become a source for "what's going on" around town. Fred Putz is tireless in reviewing even out-there fringe work, and an even-handed reviewer, too!

Our Guild stands for now at only 23 members, but we have hopes of renewed growth. The networking with younger urban puppetry artists has not yet produced new members, since our core group is mostly in the Social Security range, but the idea is to keep "trying something new" and planting seeds. An April head-sculpting workshop had 21 people, half of whom we'd never seen before...even a news reporter among them sent along by his Editor to learn about the urban puppet scene!

Our next big move is the "Puppet Meltdown" June 24th, where we've got an evening "slam" programmed by Sea Beast Puppetry's Kat Pleviak and her creative team...couldn't be in better hands! We have been in touch with Puppet Slam Network and attended their (first ever we think) Chicago slam this Winter, with plans to co-op and help one another with seasonal slams.

We hope you will find some of this of interest, and invite you to use the information as you will. Guilds are not growing, it seems, but we are studying up and keeping up, and hope to find our new role in the social/puppetry networking that's become the new model.

We appreciate the energy and support P of A provides to keep the puppet-pot on the boil!

Best to you from all of us in Chicago!

Tom Lang
Secretary-CPG

