

A PUBLICATION OF THE PUPPETEERS OF AMERICA



# PUPPETRY JOURNAL

SPRING 2022 VOL. 73 NO. 2



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Life, more or less, is like a  
kaleidoscope, with the same  
elements continually  
rearranged.



Cover: Pam Arciero and  
Grundgetta. Photo courtesy of  
Sesame Workshop. Arciero serves  
as artistic director of the National  
Puppetry Conference at the Eugene  
O'Neill Theater Center.

## The Need to Meet

After two-plus years of winter, is our hibernation over? Can we come out of our caves now? As I write this, I'm finishing preparation to teach marionette construction at the O'Neill Puppetry Conference, which will actually be in person at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut. Do I still remember how to behave in public? I am happy to report that in April and May, after two years of waiting, several guilds had their first in-person meetings (with online meetings as well).

The **San Francisco Bay Area Puppeteers Guild** had their first in-person meeting in May, which was also live streamed. Kevin Menegus and Samantha Lake of the Fratello Marionettes showed the marionettes from their new production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* and performed acts from *The Vaudeville Follies*. Kevin also discussed the restoration work that he does for private clients and museums all over the world.

My own **Twin Cities Puppeteers** met in April. Laura Krentz led a hands-on workshop to make a simple crankie. In May (back online, just as a convenience), there was a program about the guild library and new puppetry books.

The **Willamette Valley Puppeteers** met in Halsey, Oregon, a central spot for the guild's far-flung members. They provided hands-on puppetry demonstrations for the local library's summer reading program, followed by a free workshop for adults and teens to build giant puppets for parades and outdoor performances.

In May, the **Detroit Puppeteers Guild** met in person and Nancy Sander presented *The Renaissance Punchman*. Following the meeting, they headed to Brad Lowe's home for a potluck.

The **Puppetry Guild of Northeastern Ohio** had workshops in March and April. In March, resident artist Lisa Consolo led a session about drawing different types of heads using real models (the other attendees) and how to exaggerate to draw an interesting head. In April, Nancy Sander led a hands-on workshop on head modeling with plasticine clay. Following the meeting, they headed to a local Korean restaurant to continue talking puppets.

For the pent-up need to just get together with other puppeteers, in May the **Puppet Guild of South Florida** had a weenie roast guild meeting at the home of Ronnie Gerstel.

The **Los Angeles Guild of Puppetry** had their "May Mix n' Mingle" at the beach. Light refreshments were provided, and everyone was encouraged to bring a towel, a drink, and sunscreen. They also just finished a successful Pageant Puppetry Community Project, which began with an online informational lecture by John Bell. Guild president Rachel Burson's design was chosen, and Kate Katz and Eli Presser led the build. You can find video of their creation on Facebook as well as some "in-process" photos.

The **Puppetry Guild of Greater New York** had a "Pre-Puppet

Show Mingle" at HERE Arts Center in May before the Puppetopia programs. In March, they recognized Women's History Month with a presentation about Ellen Van Volkenburg by Jennifer Linn Wilcox at the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre.

The March newsletter of the **Puppeteers of Puget Sound** highlighted *Century of Progress: An Exhibition of the Tatterman Marionettes*, at the Northwest Puppet Center.

At the April meeting of the **Puppet Guild of Greater St. Louis**, Daniel "Digger" Romano presented some beautiful shadow puppets made by late member Tom Bonham.

The **Greater Houston Puppetry Guild** has taken advantage of online meetings by reaching past the guild's geography for presentations. In March, Mary Jo Huff from Indiana provided tips for using puppetry and storytelling in educational settings. In April, Carol Sterling from New York City performed an African folktale, *How the Turtle Got Its Shell*. In May, Jean Marie Keevins of Little Shadow Productions discussed the work of her company, including puppetry classes, wellness, dance,

coaching, and consultations.

In March, the program on Zoom for the **National Capital Puppetry Guild** was "Improv Is Fun and Easy!" with Stephen Major, improviser and president of The Puppet Company. In the May workshop, "The Object Itself," Rachel Gates explored the many ways that objects make a difference with the perspective that ultimately it is the objects that tell the story.

For the World Puppetry Day celebration of the **Boston Area Guild of Puppetry**, the special guest was David Lane, a founding member of The Old Trout Puppet Workshop. He discussed his adaptation of *The Pigeon* by Patrick Suskind, for the Ko Festival of Performance in Amherst, Massachusetts. In May, Andres Periale, long-time editor of UNIMA-USA's magazine, *Puppetry International*, presented "Writing FOR and ABOUT Puppets," discussing the challenges of both.

With guilds persevering and re-emerging, I would love to hear what you are doing. This column depends on you. Your puppetry guild news is always welcome at [kurt@huntermarionettes.com](mailto:kurt@huntermarionettes.com).

**Do I still remember how to behave in public? I am happy to report that in April and May, after two years of waiting, several guilds had their first in-person meetings**



# Making the World a Better Place Through UNLIMITED IMAGINATION

"My hope is to leave the world a little better for having been there." — Jim Henson

By Danalynne W. Menegus



Jim Henson with puppets from *Fraggle Rock*. © The Jim Henson Company. Courtesy The Jim Henson Company/Museum of the Moving Image

Imagine a world where incredibly diverse characters of all colors, shapes, and sizes come together to share their hopes, fears, and dreams, teaching and learning from each other every day. Acclaimed puppeteer, cartoonist, and director Jim Henson did that and more, bringing his imagination to life with a focus on diversity, inclusivity, and making the world a better place.

From puppet productions on *Sesame Street* to the Muppets and *Fraggle Rock*, films like *Labyrinth* and *The Dark Crystal*, Henson's art is beloved by countless people all over the world. *The Jim Henson Exhibition: Imagination Unlimited*, on display at San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum through August 14, takes visitors on a journey through Henson's prolific works.

The traveling exhibition is a curated version of New York City-based Museum of

*continued on next page*

continued from previous page  
of the Moving Image's *The Jim Henson Exhibition*.

### From Early Works to Unrealized Dreams

The exhibition follows a chronological arc, grouping objects by the period in Henson's life and painting the picture of how he moved from one project to the next, building upon a foundation of creativity and innovation.

Upon entering, visitors are greeted with scripts and clips from Henson's first television show, *Sam and Friends* (1955-1961); TV commercials; and Rowlf the Dog, a puppet built by Don Sahlin. Rowlf had a recurring role on *The Jimmy Dean Show* (1963-1966) before hitting the big time as a main character on *The Muppet Show*.

There are also opportunities for interaction: visitors are encouraged to "build" a puppet through the use of a variety of wigs, eyes, noses, and mouths. In a small alcove, visitors can practice their own puppeteering skills and see themselves from a television audience's viewpoint.

Turning the corner, one sees a variety of short films—classified as experiments—that showcase Henson's creativity and love of combining images and music. And then, *Sesame Street* (1969-present). Beloved characters including Bert and Ernie and The Count are on display, along with storyboards,

drawings, and the 11 seminal counting films from season 2, just to name a few.

Favorites from *The Muppet Show* (1976-1981) also get their due. Beaker and Dr. Bunsen Honeydew are displayed in the same case (one can only imagine the anxiety this might provoke among both characters), along with a set of Miss Piggy's gloves, Scooter, a Muppet Theater mockup where visitors can have their photo taken, and of course Kermit the Frog.

*The Dark Crystal* (1982), *Fraggle Rock* (1983-1987), and *Labyrinth* (1986) are grouped together. Figures including Jen, Kira, and Aughra from *The Dark Crystal* are displayed, showing the level of detail and intricate sculpting and costuming required for these film and television-ready characters.

Bonnie Erickson, designer of beloved characters including Miss Piggy and Statler and Waldorf, says *Fraggle Rock* may be the best illustration of Henson's educational storytelling optimism. The Fraggles, Doozers, and Gorgs all fundamentally need each other, but their communications, shaped by their various cultures and beliefs, often result in misunderstandings.

"The whole ecosystem and the environmental message were important to Jim," she says. "It's the idea of getting along with everyone. It's about how everything works from the Gorgs down to the Doozers. He was definitely an optimist, and he truly did

want to make the world a better place."

Wrapping up the exhibition are scenes from some of the many film and television projects Henson worked on in the few years before his untimely death at age 53 in 1990. A special focus is given to the innovative digital technologies Henson employed on shows such as *The Jim Henson Hour*, including an episode that features the first all-digital puppet character, Waldo C. Graphic.

### Continuing to Make a Difference

Erickson says the Contemporary Jewish Museum's layout lends itself perfectly to the Henson exhibition. "This venue is so beautiful because wherever you stand, there's a huge image of what you're about to see, whether it's *Fraggle Rock* or *Sesame Street*. And Jim is the inspiration for all of this."

If my experience reflects that of others, Henson exhibitions bring people together, encouraging a sense of friendship and nostalgia. "People talk about the fact that they watched [these programs] with their family," says Erickson. "Jim brought them together. I think that was one of his real talents."

She adds, "Another thing I hope people will get from coming to this show: It shows that if you stick to it, follow your dream, and practice, practice, practice—eventually practice makes perfect. If you can hang in there long enough, all the others drop by the wayside and you're left in a really good place."

# SCENE BETWEEN

## By Monica Leo

I first heard of Brant Bollman and Uplifting Puppet Company when he sent me a message asking if we had a bilingual show for the Latin Fest he was organizing in his town of Oskaloosa, Iowa, just 90 miles from our West Liberty location. I couldn't believe it! A puppet company in Iowa that I hadn't heard of. Since then, I've gotten to know Brant. He is a believer in social activism through puppets, and he creates a whirlwind of activity in his little town, home of William Penn University, a Quaker institution with a history of community involvement.

Oskaloosa has an Arts Roundtable: the local arts council, community theater, public library, and the Nelson Pioneer Farm all plan and work together on community projects. They facilitated the Latin Fest, extremely well attended for a first-time event. Brant and some friends are currently organizing a march against gun violence. Giant puppets always play a role when Brant is involved. For the gun violence rally, he's planning a puppet of a teenager with a beer in one hand and an assault rifle in the other (which hand holds the legal item?).

Like most of you, Brant grew up on *Sesame Street* and *Fraggle Rock*. His mother sewed and believed in making your own fun. She had him make toys instead of buying plastic action figures. He's never stopped. He enrolled at the University of Iowa with an art major, wanting to be an abstract painter. One day during the 1990s, he found an old *Geo* magazine in the trash, planning to cut it up for a collage project. Inside was a message from the universe: an article about Bread and Puppet Theater. He devoured it, and it changed his life. The combination of social justice and giant puppets was an irresistible inspiration, and he began making enormous puppets. He got his master's degree in community art at Eastern Illinois University, completing a project on Bread and Puppet Theater.

In 2016, Brant made a puppet of Martin Luther King and began taking it to diversity rallies. After ICE raided a southern Iowa meatpacking plant, he made a giant Our Lady of Guadalupe, which became the symbol for marches staged by the Families Belong Together organization. During the term of the previous president, his response was to build a big orange bogeyman.

Brant has been teaching K-12 art in a small rural school for 15 years. Like many art teachers, he spent countless hours

on extracurricular work, organizing school plays, making parade puppets for spring festivals, you name it. In 2016, he moved from his rural home to Oskaloosa and immediately got involved in the local arts scene.

When Brant talks to business and community leaders, he emphasizes the power of art as an economic driver and not just a frill. He brings up Oskaloosa's lighted Christmas parade, a 25-year-old event officially dubbed the Best Holiday Cultural Event in Iowa. The parade, which Brant joins with lighted giant puppets, brings in tourists from around the state.

As of now, Brant's K-12 teaching days are over. He's spending the summer working with kids through the George Daily Youth Theatre. Are giant puppets involved? Need you ask? The kids are making black light wetland animal puppets for a play about the marsh.

At summer's end, Brant will start a new job as theater director and drawing and painting teacher at William Penn University. His activism helped him get this job! William Penn University has a history of advocacy. The college was never segregated, even in its earliest days. Madeline Clarke Foreman, the first black professor to lecture to white students in the United States, did so at Penn in the 1940s.

Instead of late nights after work, Brant's art will be created as part of his job. If you're interested in giant puppets and their use in advocacy, you can have the chance to meet Brant and take two workshops from him! You can learn different construction techniques and advocacy concepts. You can even work on designing your own puppet!

All you have to do is attend the Great Plains Puppet Train in West Liberty, Iowa, September 8 to 11. This will be the third time we've hosted this festival, and we have our town well trained! Every day, locals ask us when the puppeteers are coming! We'll have events all over our little downtown, all within a few blocks. You can see 13 shows and choose up to six workshops, including the two Brant is offering. Shows will include many US favorites and the Krystal Puppet Theater from Kenya. See all of the information as it unfolds at [www.greatplainspuppettrain.com](http://www.greatplainspuppettrain.com). And remember to contact me at [monica@puppetspuppets.com](mailto:monica@puppetspuppets.com) if you have an idea for my column.



Giant puppets by Brant Bollman, Uplifting Puppet Company, Oskaloosa, Iowa. Photo courtesy of Brant Bollman

## News from Puppeteers of America

### Festivals

After a three-year break because of COVID, the Puppeteers of America (PofA) National Puppetry Festival is scheduled for July 18 to 22, 2023, at University of Maryland. There will be 15 main-stage performances. You don't want to miss this.

### 2022 Regional Festivals

- Puppet Power: Festival of Ideas, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, May 23 to 29, 2022.
- Pacific Northwest Regional Festival, Left Coast Puppet Love Fest, Seattle, Washington, August 3 to 6, 2022.
- Great Plains Puppet Train Regional Festival, West Liberty, Iowa, September 8 to 11, 2022.
- Southwest Regional Puppet Festival, Spring (Houston), Texas, September 15 to 17, 2022.
- Northeast-Mid-Atlantic Regional Festival, Puppet Homecoming, Coney Island, New York City, October 6 to 9, 2022.

### Board of Directors Election Results

- Many, many thanks to Aretta Baumgartner, Alex Griffin, Ayhan Hulagu, Lyssa Troemel, and Ken Martinson for their service on the board, ending their terms in July.
- Returning to the board are Dustin Curtis, Liz Joyce, Edna Bland, Chris Heady, Katy Williams, and Brandon Kirkham.
- Welcome to three new board members: Adam Kreutinger, from Buffalo, New York; Kalob Martinez, from Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Katrin Blucker Ludwig, from San Antonio, Texas.
- *Puppetry Journal* has a new team member, Katie Phoenix, who brings expertise and enthusiasm to her role as our contact for advertising.

### Puppeteers of America Office

- We welcome Sarah Seldon as the office administrator for PofA. Sarah, a Twin Cities-based freelance arts manager, consultant, curator, and producer, started her service in January 2022. In 2012, Sarah, with several others, founded Gamut Gallery, a community and experiential-focused arts organization, where she discovered and developed her talent for managing events, operations, staff, and artists. Before 2012, she worked as an editorial and commercial photographer. She self-published a book, *Dreamscapes: Landscapes of the Imagination*. Sarah is passionate about organizing, communicating, and building bridges between art, community, and business. Sarah has loved getting to know PofA. She immediately felt a sense of open arms from "a welcoming, friendly community."
- We want to thank Karly Bergmann, who served as PofA administrative officer from 2019 to November 2021. She left the part-time PofA job to run away and join the circus in a full-time administrative role at St. Paul-based Circus Juventas. Her positivity, empathy, and self-motivation to figure out how to do things that needed to be done were the "trademark" underpinnings of all her great PofA work. We are grateful to Karly for helping us define and refine this position.
- Kathleen Conroy has served PofA in many roles. From November to March, she stepped up to help make the transition from Karly to Sarah as smooth as possible. Her attention to detail, ability to see the bigger picture, and institutional knowledge of PofA have been invaluable. Kathleen was the director of the 2019 National Puppetry Festival. She served as member of both the PofA Development and Budget and Finance Committees. From 2005 to 2009, she was the artistic director of the Puppet Showplace Theater.