



Puppet Patter

The Official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild

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Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control

That's probably a phrase many of you haven't heard since the days of antenna television. Remember? While watching one of the three tv stations available you would suddenly see static and then, in glorious black & white, a card is displayed that reads, "We Are Experiencing Technical Difficulties. Please Stand By." With that said...



2020 Great Lakes Regional Puppet Potlatch Cancelled

According to Dave Herzog, "The Great Lakes Regional Board of Directors has, out of an abundance of caution, and with great concern for the health and well being of the membership, decided that the 2020 Great Lakes Regional Puppeteers Potlatch must be canceled." Herzog also wants you to know that "If you already have room reservations please contact the Inn to cancel your reservation."

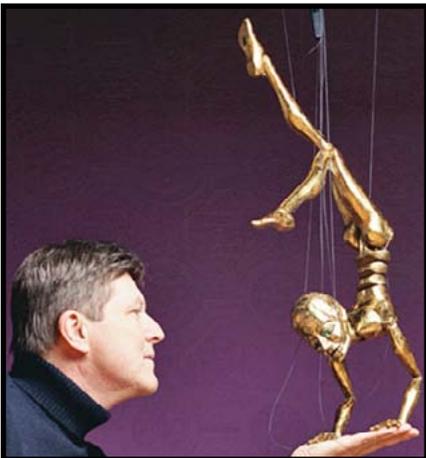
Since 1982 the Great Lakes Region has held this annual* event and this year would have marked the 34th time we have met at the beautiful Potawatomie Inn in Pokagon State Park in Indiana. According to Nancy Henk's History of Potlatch, "We've been at Pokagon in balmy 65° weather, chilly rain, and raging snow storms. We've weathered the expansion of the Inn and rising prices. We've had good meals and ones that sent us scrambling for the nearest restaurant." Of all the big things that could have stopped or postponed the event, it took a teeny-tiny-little virus to shut things down.

This is not the end, though! Not by a long shot. Next year (hopefully) Potlatch will return with everything we have come to expect from the event; The ice breaker, the workshops, the performances, the tradin' post, potpourri, and, of course, the Punch Brunch.

* Potlatch began in 1982 and was held every other year. In 1991 it became truly an annual event.

The Phillip Huber Marionette's "Suspended Animation" Rescheduled

The Playhouse at White Lake and My Air Productions had scheduled the following performance: The Phillip Huber Marionette's "Suspended Animation." Originally scheduled for April 25, 2020, it was rescheduled for September 26, 2020, and is now re-scheduled for May 15, 2021. Watch the CPG website for any updates and let's keep our fingers crossed that it won't have to be re-re-scheduled.



And while we're at it... Annual CPG Banquet Canceled

Yep! That's also canceled. But then again, you probably already figured that out.



We now return to our regularly scheduled Puppet Patter already in progress.

One Bizarre Birthday Bash: A Forty-Year-Old's Second Childhood

by Susan Bass Marcus

"Hello, Susan Marcus?"

"Yes, who's calling, please?"

"This is Karen Smith. (name changed to protect myself!) You're the puppet lady?"

"(Clears throat) Yes, I am a puppeteer."

"And you do birthday parties?"

"Yes and school shows, special events, but I'm booked up for a few weeks."

"Oh, that's OK. My husband's birthday is next month and I want to surprise him."

"Your husband?"

Mrs. Smith was calling to arrange a performance of my Punch and Judy show. Her husband was turning forty, a big milestone for the couple, and she was planning an elaborate dinner party in a private room of a North Shore restaurant. Every party needs some kind of entertainment, she said, and to impress her guests she imagined an adult puppet show would be the coup that would keep them talking for weeks.

I hesitated. My birthday party gigs usually were for children age eight and younger. Although most of my young audiences behaved well because my shows engaged them—most of the time—I worried that Mrs. Smith's guests would be less well-behaved in the absence of "grown-ups" to restrain them.

"Thank you for considering me, Mrs. Smith—"

"Call me Karen."

"Karen. I will check my calendar. I'm not sure that date is open, but I'll get back to you as soon as I can. What's your number?"

Once I had her contact information and told Karen my fee, we ended the conversation and I stewed about the offer the rest of the day. I'd doubled my normal fee, but she happily agreed to it. So much for that disincentive. My calendar was open on the party's date; lying about my calendar would make me uncomfortable so that excuse was out. My Punch and Judy was a silly, raucous set of skits and I could not say it was unsuitable. My anxieties multiplied until I forced myself to consider the gig's advantages. Besides, it might bring me more business: most of the guests probably had kids in my audience demographic.

I needed some back-up. Stephen, my husband, listened to my woes that evening and suggested we hire a baby-sitter for our two children so he could accompany me and keep the audience under control. In effect, he'd be the party's grown-up. My anxieties melted away. With his help, I'd have no distractions while setting up and performing. Everything would go well and I'd add the gig to my list of successes. After a few days, I returned Karen's call and set the date for my show.

Over the next few weeks, I rehearsed with my adult audience in mind. Punch became especially mischievous and Miss Polly Peachum, a hussy if ever there was one, strutted and slunk her shapely self across the stage, to Judy's chagrin. I gave the Baby puppet more bawdy and disrespectful lines, and Punch's foes—the policeman, a judge, a hangman, and the Devil—succumbed miserably to Punch's tricks. By the date of Karen's party, the show was smooth, clever, and naughty but nice. I felt more than prepared for the event, especially with Stephen by my side.

We parked in front of the restaurant, a steakhouse with luxurious pretensions, and began to unload my cases and the eight sections of my stage. A flustered waiter rushed out as I piled my gear near the door.

"What is all this," he said. "You can't bring this into S___'s."

"I don't know what you mean. Mrs. Smith engaged my show for her private party here and all this gear is part of it."

The waiter—or was he a manager?—slapped his forehead. "Oh, Karen Smith? Of course. Sorry. Let me get a dolly and we'll bring you in around back."

"Thanks."

My husband and I exchanged "oh-boy" glances. The waiter returned with a dolly and together we stacked the stage's pieces on it—the base, proscenium, playboard, scrim, lights, and supports—and rolled them to the deliveries door, through the chaotic kitchen, and into the room reserved for Mrs. Smith's party.

Karen rushed to meet us and showed us where she hoped I would set up the stage. With a forced smile, she wished me good luck; bursts of laughter punctuated her guests' conversations and raising her eyebrows she added, "I hope they



pay attention." While we were putting the stage together and setting up lights and sound equipment, no one in the party seemed to notice us.

At last I was ready. Puppets were hanging upside-down on their hooks backstage, prepped so I could thrust my hands in quickly as one character exited and another took its place. Lights were focused and warmed the stage. My microphone was in place and the intro music primed. My husband gave me a thumbs-up and I walked around to the front of my stage to give an introduction.

"Hey there, pretty lady, when does the show start?" slurred one man seated at the end of the long table closest to the stage. "You're in the way. Tell the puppets to get going."

Momentarily, I was flummoxed, but soon countered his Royal Rudeness with, "They're busy getting everything ready and will start as soon as you all are quiet."

Silence. Not one burp or wisecrack from any of the 20 or so diners. Karen stopped wringing her hands as I smiled and waved to her before going backstage. Once settled, with Mr. Punch on one hand and Judy on the other, I hit the boombox 'start' button and the show began. Mr. Punch rose from below the playboard, the flat area used to hold props and give the puppets a base and in his squeaky voice he sang while prancing back and forth and banging his slapstick. The audience must have sensed his volatility and mischief because I heard their nervous laughter and "Uh-Ohs" accompanying his every prank and series of puppet-cides. Almost every scene in a Punch and Judy show ends with another character succumbing to the force of Punch's slapstick.

For a less violent interlude, I brought up Miss Polly Peachum. Punch flirted with her, eyed her décolletage, the appreciation of which he shared with the audience, and pleaded with her for just one little kiss. Outmaneuvering her suitor, Polly managed to snatch away his slapstick and smack him not with a kiss but a blow before exiting stage left.

The show ended with Punch paying for his sins in the belly of an alligator. Karen's dinner guests applauded with great enthusiasm and when I came front of stage to take a bow, some of them were sober enough to give me a standing ovation.

With relief, I thanked them. Karen introduced me to her husband and I wished him happy birthday. Tucking the check she handed me into my jeans pocket, I said good-night and went backstage to break down my equipment and pack up the puppets.

"Polly-ee. Oh, Polly. Come up. I want to see you." A slurring male voice accompanied a fist banging on the

playboard. "Polly, you are so pretty. C'mon. Gimme a kiss."

Did the voice belong to Punch in the flesh? I called from backstage, "Polly's asleep now. She can't come up." I bent below the scrim and, looking up, saw the same forty-ish man—with curly brown hair, his tie askew and his collar open—who heckled me during my intro. The playboard bounced each time he hit it with his fist.

"I want Polly," he bellowed. For the first time, I was encountering an audience member who was a true believer but not a little kid.

My husband, an accomplished trial lawyer, in calm, measured tones, reminded him now that the show was over, the puppets were gone. Polly wasn't alive; she was packed away with her troop, resting in a box until the next show. The man became thoughtful, then quietly walked away, muttering, "Polly's dead. Polly's dead."

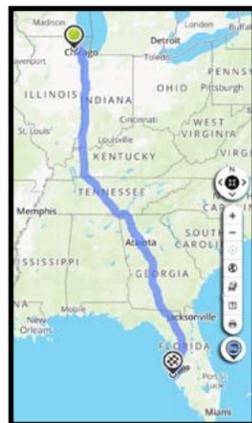
I can't recall packing and transporting my gear back to the car, but I do remember vowing never again to perform for an adult birthday party, not even with my husband-protector, where the audience could be just as unpredictable as Mr. Punch.



The Dutch Tandem Skating Marionettes

Or How Rick Morse and I Built Two Puppets Together Even Though We Live 1,212 Miles Apart

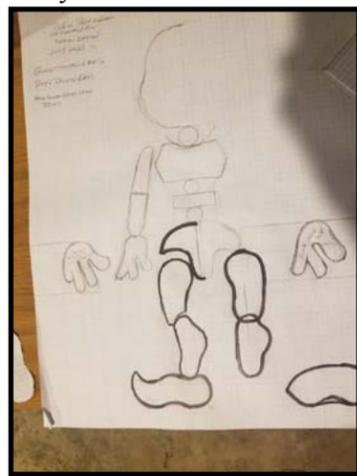
by Dave Herzog



According to MapQuest, Chicago, Illinois and Ellenton, Florida are approximately 1,212 miles apart, but that did not stop Rick Morse and me from team building a set of Dutch boy and girl tandem figure skating marionettes together.

On Monday, July 20th, I called Rick to see if he had any good ideas about what marionette I could build next, as I was pretty much at a loss. I told Rick I needed a new project, preferably for my production *The Snow Show*, that was unlike anything else I had done in my shows.

After discussing several ideas, Rick said, "I know you've done tandem dancers before, but have you ever done tandem skaters? How about a Dutch boy and girl skating couple?" I told Rick that I had thought about doing a Dutch boy skater, but wow! A Dutch boy and girl tandem skater was a great idea. I had done tandem roller skaters years ago but had broken up the set and donated the individual puppets to various puppet festival fund raisers, so the idea really appealed to me. I knew there was an illustration of Dutch dancers in Edith Flack Ackley's *Marionettes! Easy to Make! Fun to Use!* (Rick, of course, immediately knew it was on page 54) so I began the research. Though published in 1929, the book still is so useful and such an inspiration today.



With page 54 of "Edith's book" on my workbench, I pulled out my drafting tools and pad of graph paper and went to work on a design. Since they were to be tandems and weight would be an issue, I decided to make the marionettes only 18 inches tall. My marionettes usually have a slightly larger-than-scale "caricature" size head, so

the bodies were only about 13 inches tall. I sent a picture of the design to Rick and after some discussion it was decided that the girl would have carved legs, but the boy would have legs made of dowels since they would not be seen. We also decided the joints of the dowel stick limbs would be done with Stevens/Rose-style cord joints.

I should point out that Rick is an authority on the construction techniques of most American and Canadian marionette artists of the 20th century, so when we confer about matters of construction our conversation is peppered with talk of Stevens/Rose-style cord joints, Sarg-style hip joints, Stevens-style ball and socket knees, and Beaton-style bodies. With body style and jointing methods selected I began the process of making patterns for the carved wooded body parts.

I started creating the wooden bodies by cutting out the parts. Each carved body part has two patterns: a side pattern and a top pattern. The legs are laid out on the blocks of wood, so I have both a right and left leg. I sent a picture the cut-out parts to Rick and learned I had made my first error. I had not showed Rick the patterns before cutting out the parts. It seems that Dutch wooden shoes do not have a marked indentation of right and left arches, so the top foot pattern was adjusted and made to look more authentic.

The first part of carving, known as the rough-out, is very messy, since I don't carve by using chisels or files, but rather I am a member of what Rick fondly calls "The First Church of the Belt Sander." Years ago Rick learned this technique from New York puppeteer Ron Herrick and, more recently, shared it with me. It works especially well for me as my aesthetic favors more rounded and flowing shapes. I was heavily influenced in this by the lines of Bil Baird's Marionettes.

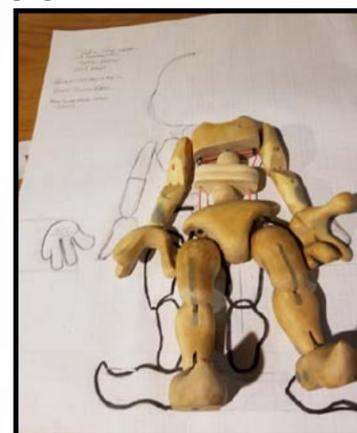
I made sure to show Rick the roughed-out parts and got the official thumbs up before I continued with the fine sanding. I used to do all the fine sanding of the parts by hand before I switched to a "mouse" or triangular-shaped corner sander. I now do almost all the sanding, except for the hands, using the mouse sander.

Carving wooden hands is no easy task. I have been doing it for decades and I still get nervous each time. More than once, one wrong cut and opps! it is time to start over. The hands for the Dutch children would be a bit easier as I decided that due to their small size, they would have cartoon-style three fingered hands with a thumb, rather than four fingers. Again, I start by creating a top and a side pattern. The top pattern is cut with a band saw, then the pieces re-assembled on the block before the opposite



pattern is cut. With a simple shape--a leg, for example--you end up with a piece that needs only rounding; hands, however, result in a confusing array of double fingers and thumbs. Using a combination of coping saw, chisels, and X-acto blades, I cut away the excess digits until the hand is in a basic pose, then I go to town with a miniature Dremel sanding drum. I carved each hand with a raised index finger and the middle and little fingers sloping down. The thumb is also in a lowered position. It took the better part of eight hours to carve and smooth all four hands. Eight hours was fast for four hands, but the fact that they were three fingered also saved on time. I suppose having done this hundreds of times helps as well.

Before I began jointing the figures, I sent a picture of the carved and sanded parts to Rick just to make sure I was on the right track. A phone call discussing the final details of the joints ensured that Rick and I were both on the same page.



I won't go into too much detail but, as stated before, I used Stevens/Rose-style cord joints at the elbows and knees of the boy, and for the girl's legs I used my own version of a slotted joint using trunk fiber for the tongue. All four ankle joints were made of trunk fiber as well. The torso is jointed Herrick-style with a spinal column made of wooden balls and cord. This method is very flexible, and I felt it would serve the skaters well, especially since they will be doing some figure skating lifts in their routine. After filling in the cuts for the joints and re-sanding, I dip each part in shellac and let it dry overnight. This seals the wood, and after a final sanding with 400 grit sandpaper the finished piece is extremely smooth and ready for final assembly.



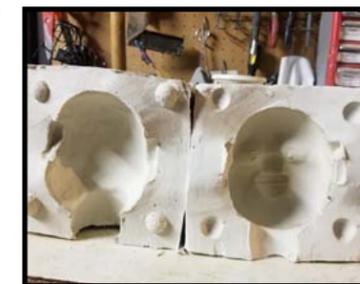
With the bodies assembled it was time to set them aside and begin sculpting the head in modeling clay. Rick and I decided to sculpt one childlike head that could be used for both the boy and girl. With differences in the paint and hairstyle they would look like fraternal twins. Rick suggested that I not sculpt these heads to have my usual animated eyes and mouths. Instead he asked that I sculpt them so that buttons could be glued on for eyes. I liked this idea and felt it would add a

level of innocence to the faces. It would also save me about a week of work animating the features and that was fine with me too.

Sculpting heads for me is not easy; I tend to make them too large, as I need to allow for shrinkage of the neoprene rubber I use to cast them. I spent an afternoon doing a preliminary sculpt, getting an approximation of the shape I would need. Conferring with Rick confirmed that the head was too large, so I used clay tools to scrape the clay down to a usable size. The next morning found Rick and me on the phone for about three and a half hours as I sculpted, sent photos, and conferred. It seemed to work best sending individual photos. We could study the pictures, I would make the changes, and then send another picture. Many changes were made to the sculpture as Rick kept guiding me in a more simple and childlike direction. The final sculpt is quite simple and appealing and, in the end, served the characters very well. It did prove the adage that two heads are better than one.

The next step was to make a plaster mold of the head sculpture. I decided to make a two part rather than three-part mold. Since the neoprene head is still flexible when the mold is first opened, I did not worry too much about undercuts in the sculpture. This way there would be no line down the middle of the face to repair and sand as in a three-part head mold. The completed head mold was put in my oven on low for two days to thoroughly dry out. When liquid neoprene rubber is poured into the mold the plaster sucks out moisture forming a skin on the inside of the mold, thus producing a hollow head. About four hours in the dry mold and the neoprene was the desired thickness. Once I had the two heads cast in neoprene, I put them in front of a fan to dry for about twenty four hours before sanding the side seams and inserting a wooden neck plug. While I was waiting for the heads to dry, I painted the parts of the wooden bodies that would show.

Painting the heads was relatively simple. Using a stipple painting technique, I gave them two coats of acrylic gesso, followed by two coats of a light flesh base coat. I used no blending even though I normally use three or four values of color. I wanted them to appear exceptionally clean and innocent looking. My mantra for this was KISS (keep it simple, stupid). Rick approved the paint job, so I placed



the buttons in position and after Rick agreed that they were correct, I used five-minute epoxy to glue them in place.

I had two skeins of yellow yarn in different shades on hand for the hair and, conferring with Rick and using a bit of my own methods, and following a bit of Edith Flack Ackley, simple and appealing yarn wigs were created, again following the KISS principal. The boy has traditional “Dutch boy” cut and the girl simple braids with bows made from her skirt material.

With the marionettes assembled and painted it was time for costumes. During the pandemic I have been doing my best to use what materials I have on hand, but it soon became apparent that some fabric shopping was in order. Because I am a senior citizen with pre-existing medical conditions, I decided to shop for the fabric on Joann Fabrics’ website. This is not the way I would normally work at all and selecting fabric from pictures on a website is not easy. I selected three fabrics that I thought would work, a lovely darker blue cotton print with a light blue motif of flowers and butterflies that reminded me of Delft China, a lighter blue grey that seemed to match the pattern in the dark blue, and a white dotted Swiss. We ended up supplementing that fabric with some I had on hand. Lots of pictures and phone discussion of design followed. Rick also had sent me numerous illustrations of Dutch costumes; I downloaded many others. We discussed various combinations of fabrics and I was not at all sure the color combinations were going to work, nor was Rick. Rick’s big concern was that the colors were too muted and would not be bright enough for children. We decided to start with the girl’s costume. I always start undergarments so began with the girl’s bloomers and petticoat. I knew for sure that the white dotted swiss was correct for those two garments.



the boy’s pants.

I turned to Edith Flack Ackley again for patterns for the girl’s petticoat, which was simply a gathered rectangle of fabric. I used Ackley’s method of making the blouse (or waist as Ackley called it) and the sleeves as separate pieces. I enlarged a Pelham Puppets sleeve for both the boy and girl. The girl’s sleeve I gathered at the wrist to create a bit of a ruffle. The boy’s sleeves were given a separate cuff.

I used the dark blue pattern for the skirt which, like the petticoat, was a gathered rectangle of fabric with one seam up the back. A gathered piece of white dotted Swiss formed the apron which was sewed onto a piece of white seam binding I created. A bit of lace I had on hand turned out to be the perfect little accent for the apron. A red vest in fleece from an enlarged Maynard pattern completed the costume.

I had intended to use the same print for the boy’s shirt, but Rick was not so sure he liked it or whether it was too much print. So, after some searching through my fabrics, we ended up using a burgundy colored cotton for the boy’s shirt decorated with two rows of brass buttons. Rick felt that the original pants were the wrong shape and too large around the ankles, so I went back to the drawing board and re-drew the pattern making his suggested alterations. I knew when I showed Rick the new pants and he said “that’s it” I had it. Rick approved each costume piece before I moved on to the next. While not totally authentic I think we ended up with a very pleasing “story book” version of traditional Dutch fashion, with one important exception: the hats.

I was really dreading the hats. The boy’s was not too difficult as all I had to do was enlarge the Maynard Dutch Boy hat patterns. I got the boy’s hat right, made from the same red fleece as the girl’s vest, on the third try. Then came the girl’s hat. I used three different hat patterns as my guide. I spent an entire afternoon and pretty much the whole next morning trying pattern after pattern with no luck. Numerous phone conversations with Rick got me a bit closer but not quite right. I finally realized that I was sewing the seam in the wrong direction, and the little turned up wings needed a completely different pattern. Finally on about the tenth try (I was running out of white fleece at this point) I got it, as they say, close enough for jazz. Rick feels the girl’s hat is a bit Smurf-like, so we put a picture on Facebook as we had been doing all along, and if anyone said anything, I would change it yet again. Let’s just say I won and leave it at that.

I had made the skates two weeks back out of trunk fiber and plywood so after the costumes were finished it was just a matter of screwing them to the feet and the puppets were



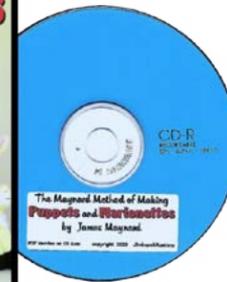
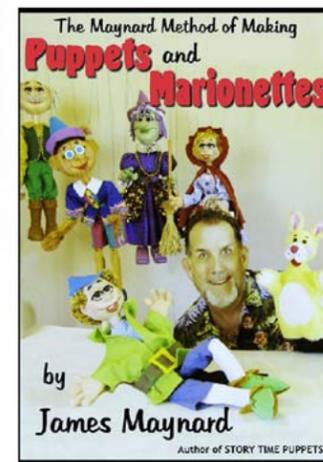
ready for a control and strings. I created a variation on the double airplane control I use on my tandem dancer marionettes and strung them in a similar fashion. This control will allow them to do several different kinds of skating moves as well as pairs skating lifts. All that remains at this point is finding the right piece of music and choreographing the number. To call the project complete Rick decided that the names Willem and Wilhelmina would be good for stage use. Sadly, they will not appear onstage until the pandemic is over. Only time will tell when that will be.

Even though Rick Morse was not here for the physical labor we really did build these puppets together. The whole idea was Rick’s. Rick provide 99% of all the research, and most importantly Rick constantly kept me on the right track and provided an eye for design, and frankly a better taste level than I would have used. We ended up creating a much better set of puppets than I would have done on my own. It was an amazing project for us both, and I think the end result speaks for itself. Thanks Rick! We did good!



A Review The Maynard Method of Making Puppets and Marionettes

by Dave Herzog



For many years when people have asked me what books I recommend on puppet construction I have always listed, Marionettes Easy to Make Fun to Use by Edith Flack Ackley, Marionettes a Hobby for Everyone by Mable and Les Beaton, and The Puppet Theater Handbook by Marjorie Batchelder. I am now going to add a new fourth 2020 book to that revered line up. The Maynard Method of Making Puppets and Marionettes. Available on CD via eBay list price \$19.95

At 334 pages The Maynard Method of Making Puppets and Marionettes is a treasure trove of creative ideas. What sets this 2020 publication apart from its predecessors is that this is truly a puppet making guide for the 21st Century. Wisely, James decided to publish his book as a CD. This gives it a distinct advantage over other how to books. Not only does James give a clear concise description of each step of puppet building, but he illustrates each step with a clear color photo. James goes one step further, in that, for each process he also includes a pattern that downloads in full size. For example, the section on heads not only includes beautifully illustrated examples of puppet heads easily fashioned from Styrofoam, but also patterns for the individual facial features can all be downloaded in full size.

Nothing is left to chance with this format, the basic lesson is fully complete from head, hands and body construction as well as costumes including such items as hats. This makes it possible for even a first-time puppet maker to get a pleasing result. All the materials listed can easily be found in fabric and craft stores. The simple tools used in the book can for the most part be found in any home improvement or hardware store at relatively low cost. Many are tools that most households have on hand.

James includes sections on hand puppet as well as marionettes. He also offers patterns and instructions for both 18” and 22” marionettes. In addition he has an excellent slightly more advanced section of variety “trick” marionettes. Covering classic variety acts such as the tight rope walker, and trapeze artist. James also includes full size illustrations of marionette controls. This is a real boon to novice puppeteers.

The section on animal puppets is perhaps the finest moment of this book. Here James’ many years as puppeteer, costumer, and theater designer really shine. What is often an afterthought in other construction manuals is given the full treatment. James covers everything from making puppets from stuffed animals, as well as a section on making many different animal puppets on your own. The chapter covering the making of an anthropomorphized Big Bad Wolf will allow the reader to create a really first-rate marionette.

Sections on, puppet stages and scenery construction are also included, in this handy easy to use format. One can even save the PDFs to your hard drive. It’s very easy to print out sections of the book as well for easy reference.

I recommend this book highly to both beginners and pros. I think teachers and those that work with young people will find The Maynard Method of Making Puppets and Marionettes will be a must have guide on the art of puppetry for years to come. Thank you, James, for creating a modern classic guide to puppet construction.

Have You Checked Out the CPG Website Lately?



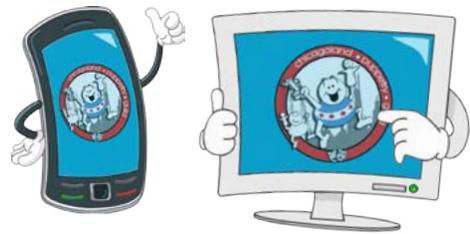
Be sure to visit our guild's web site on a regular basis for the latest postings on what's happening in the Chicago area, the latest on the Great Lakes Regional Festival and a roster of active and newly added puppeteers. Events and Shows page has the latest posting of local performing companies, their current production and a link to their web sites, current and past issues of the Puppet Pater, and more!

Our address is:

www.chicagopuppetguild.org



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Leave 'em Laughin'!

FRANK and Ernest by Tom Thaves

