



Puppet Patter

The Official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild

A Quarterly Publication

June 2024

Meet The Clark Family

by Mel Biske

In 2019 our Melikin Puppets National Touring Company was honored by the P of A with a Certificate of Recognition for 50 years of service as a professional touring company. Four years later, in 2023 when we officially retired our adventure in our chosen field, the Art of Puppetry, which we loved and respected, and are now restfully satisfied. At the onset of the computer age our son Jeff, in addition to being a Melikin puppeteer, is also a web site creator, he produced and maintained our web site for many years. It has served as a successful benefit in booking many of our performance dates.

Although we are no longer actively performing, we have maintained our web site for two reasons; One, when receiving an inquiry regarding a booking we respond by explaining our retirement and make mention that we can be of assistance recommending other professional performing companies. We then refer them to neighboring web sites. We alert those companies to the possibility of receiving a contact. No fees are involved for either party. Reason two; We often receive inquiries from individuals seeking employment or about discussing, entering and investigating the merits of what the field of puppetry has to offer as a career. Reason two has also resulted in establishing some new friendships. Which leads us to meeting the Clark family.

The opening line from an email we received from Michelle Clark on July 16, 2023 read, "Hello. My seventeen-year-old daughter has recently made a rod puppet in the style of Jim Henson's Muppets and she has been involved in researching puppetry." Mrs. Clark went on to inform us that her daughter would like to see one of our performances and talk with us about our passion for puppetry. "She loves performing as an actress in school and community plays and musicals." She also inquired if there might be any puppet-making or puppet-performing jobs available for her with our business. She concluded with a polite "Thank you for considering these requests. Michelle Clark."

After reading through Michelle's email, it contained an obvious attempt to support her daughters' interests in puppetry. I later learned that together, mother and daughter had scanned our web site and decided to contact us. In the process of deciding to favorably accept a request to pursue an interest with the Clark family I replied by mentioning our current status as being retired from performing but would consider a home visit to discuss any possible opportunities where we could be of any assistance. Also, mentioning that we have maintained a Melikin Puppet Memory room with a collection of our puppet works from our repertoire. I also requested a photo of Michelle's daughter with her puppet creation and her name.

A few days later we received this photo of Angela with her puppet creation, "Sprout!" It was obvious that there was a basic talent there. In an exchange of emails, we agreed on a date for Mrs. Clark and Angela to "tour" the Melikin Memory room. Michelle asked if we could include two more family members - Mike (the Dad) and Andrew (Angela's younger brother). "Of Course!" I said. When I mentioned "getting acquainted arrangement," to my daughter Jennifer, she happily agreed to attend as well.

When the day arrived for the Clark family to meet the Biske family, all went extremely well. Both families knew almost immediately there would be a bonding friendship. Upon their arrival we got acquainted and chatted a bit in the family room before retiring to the Melikin Puppet Memory Room in the lower level. It is always rewarding for us when first time visitors, namely puppeteer aficionados, become immediately involved in the surroundings and appreciate the many aspects to be shared in the world of puppetry.



continued



Angela, Mr. Melikin, Andrew, Michelle
with the Gooney Birds



Sprout, Angela, Andrew, Michelle, Jennifer

To lighten the mood a little we sometimes offer a demonstration for our guests, with the only five marionettes that are included in our exclusive hand puppet productions. They are the simplest four string marionettes we call the Gooney Birds. We use them with younger children who volunteer to be a puppet performer in the *Melikin Puppet Circus*. Of course, marching music is provided to make it official. Our visit with the Clark family came to a close and a good time was had by all.

A few days later we received another email from Michelle graciously thanking us for the visit and mentioning “We truly enjoyed marching the marionettes in the musical parade amidst the puppets in your memory room. Unforgettable joy!” She added, “We would like you to be our guests at Angela’s performance with the North Riverside Players production of *Spamalot*. She will be making the rabbit puppet for the production. Please let us know which performance you could attend and we will provide the tickets.”

While being long-time fans of Monty Python, and now fans of the Clark family, we accepted their offer. Here are a few photos of the events that evening.



Mel with the bunny puppet Angela created for Spamalot



Mel, Jennifer, Mike and Michelle Clark, Angela,
Andrew, King Arthur and Grandma Mary (Michelle's Mom)



Mel, Angela with the “star” of Spamalot - the bunny - and the actress who portrayed the life-size, costumed bunny
(who replaced the puppet bunny in a crash of thunder, flashes of lightning and a large puff of white smoke, carrying a sword while attacking King Arthurs Guard!)

Rods and Foam – Written & Directed by Angela Clark

by Mel Biske

After reading the article, “Meet the Clark Family” you have no doubt surmised that Angela, along with her family, are enjoying her adventure into the world of puppetry. Since that mid-October evening in 2023, appearing in the production of *Spamalot* by creating the bunny puppet and appearing in the ensemble as a singer and dancer, she has advanced her talents to now include Writer and Director. In early May, 2024, I received an email from Michelle, Angela’s mom, inviting Jennifer and me to attend an evening performance at Naperville Central High School. Each year the current graduating class receives an assignment to write and produce an original One Act play - six plays, fifteen to twenty minutes long. They are assigned a writer-director and between two to eight to twelve students as actors. The subject matter is at the discretion of the writer-director.



The subjects and titles varied, from *The Wedding Party*, *Superhero Group Therapy*, and other titled subjects involved to include added student participation. Director-Writer Angela Clark titled her One Act play, *Rods and Foam*. The story-line takes place in a college classroom. There are eight students and a College Professor, by the name of Chamberlain, who is in complete charge. As the story proceeds, it is discovered that, as a prerequisite for graduation, every student must take this class to be eligible to graduate. The professor is the only qualified instructor to teach the subject of... wait for it... “PUPPETRY”, and the importance of how it’s means are applied in everyday life.

After the very utterance of the word “puppetry” is made, Angela wrote into the story line for the eight students in the class to discuss, approve or disapprove a subject dealing with what is associated with “child’s-play.” Puppets are like dolls with creepy eyes, some responded with a remembrance of watching Jim Henson’s puppets on Sesame Street for little kids. In that approach of the conversation, we get to meet and become acquainted with each cast member’s character. While the students selected for parts in the play did not necessarily have any experience in acting, it became evident they did adhere to any direction that may have been suggested and was applied to each character follow-through with results that were presented in a believable fashion.

Once each member of the class had their opinion, pro and con, she proceeded to regain the class attention with a firm explanation stating, “Today, you will begin your journey of learning how to bring movement to the still and bring life to the lifeless.” A stunned silence fell over the class. An outspoken Michael broke the silence by stating, “Are we sure this isn’t a Necromancy class?” (a form of magic in which a person communicates with the dead) During the discussion the Professor leaves the scene and moments later returns with an ornate chest and places it on the floor in the center of the class. She then instructs her class that they will, one at a time, open the chest and carefully select a puppet that closely resembles them. Angela created the Henson-style “Rod and Foam” puppets for each class member to match their character image.

She continued her instruction stating, “Dress the puppet on your arm, place your hand inside the area of the mouth of the puppet and get acquainted. Get to know it as well as you know yourself and allow your puppet to talk to you.” When student Sam reached into the chest, he discovered it was empty! Professor Chamberlain stated, “Well that is an issue. I will be right back.” When she returns, she presents Sam with a brown paper bag puppet (created by Nithya Augusthy), hurriedly decorated to simulate a puppet. Sam responds, “Thank you. It looks just like me.”

In the final portion of the play the class actors banter with each other with closing approval remarks regarding the puppet class. Professor Chamberlain comments to the class that “It looks like we are out of time for today and remember, this may be the most important class you will ever take”. She looks around, noticing everyone has left, and says... “Great” and the stage goes to blackout.

After a three-day run, Saturday evening was the last performance. This was the long-awaited Awards Night! Three judges were named in the program notes but were not present that evening but were there the prior evening for the judging. At the conclusion of the Saturday evenings’ performance, the NCHS stage manager had each of the six One Act troupes return to the stage, all lined up from one end of the stage to the other. There were six categories of awards to be presented, one for each One Act troupe. Each category award was for a variety of unusual accomplishments: i.e. who did the best laugh, who shouted the loudest, who overcame a costume malfunction, who recovered a dropped prop... I’m sorry, I do not recall the fifth one. They all received a well-deserved round of applause as they received their awards.

Oh wait. I do recall the fifth award: BEST SHOW! That award was presented to Rods and Foam; Writer and Director, Angela Clark! The entire Rods and Foam troupe received a well-deserved ovation from an appreciative audience, the other five performing One Act student competitors and especially from the Clark family.

Speaking in the eyes of this reviewer, in the relatively short time of having the privilege of sharing in the lives of the Clark family, it became obvious that Angela has both feet on the road to success in life. On the evening of the NCHS One Act presentations I personally met with her family of supporters on her quest of discovering the true art of puppetry. There were uncles, aunts, close friends and fellow classmates, all understanding Angela's vision. I admire the possible insight of the three NCSH judges recognizing Angela's selection of the art of puppetry as a personal vendetta. It is also my belief they could have also read into the story that the lead character, Professor Chamberlain, is the alter ego befitting Angela's knowledge of, once again, a true art form.



*The Clark Family
Mike and Michelle, Angela, Andrew,
and Grandma Mary*

Her main supporters, of course are mom and dad. Michelle had encouraged her by searching web sites seeking offers of employment and any contacts that could offer additional support. In a conversation with Angela, I asked her how she first became interested in puppetry. Watching Sesame Street growing up fascinated her, then in 1986 a movie written by Jim Henson and produced by George Lucas was released. Her dad insisted that they watch the movie together. She became a Jim Henson fan and followed with another film, The Dark Crystal. Current plans are to continue her education working with mom and dad locating a college with a major in Anthropology, the subject of what makes us human. Another question presented to Angela, "What is your eventual goal in puppetry?" She replied, "Wherever I eventually go in life, I will always bring with me the art of puppetry. Puppetry really grounds me."

Some Post-Show Picts



*Cast & Crew - Rods and Foam
(standing left to right) Meera Duller (Rods and Foam Stage Manager),
Nithya Augusthy (Professor Chamberlain), Grace Beardsley (Jude),
Josh Holman (Jeremy), Joris Jankauskas (Sam), Paige Bottarelli (Stacy - Best Duo Award)
Chloe Lauderback (Willow- Best Duo Award), Angela Clark (Writer-Director)*

*(kneeling left to right) Peter Kroll (Michael- Best Male Actor Award),
Kate Vest (Rey), Ally Wolf (Emily)*



*Angela describing to Mel
puppetry concepts she wrote
into her One Act show*



*Angela excitedly handing over the
twin puppet to Mel
"Do you know how this works?"*



Creating the *Sensational Clockettes*

by Steven Widerman

In the mid '90s, I was the proud owner and operator of a children's puppet theater on Union Square in Manhattan. The circumstances allowed for a lot of creative freedom. I had long wanted to build a set of tandem marionettes - multiple figures under the control of a single puppeteer - that were inspired by the Bil Baird's Marionettes. I had seen the Baird company's performance of a group of tandem dancing girls when I was a youngster and was fortunate to work for the Baird company early in my career. I was fascinated by the perfectly synchronized movements of multiple puppets under a single control.

While shopping for materials at Canal Plastics, I noticed a wide variety of plexiglass shapes and wondered if I could build alarm clock puppets out of the prefabricated plastic. I designed legs and feet using the pieces found in the many bins at the store. With a viable design, my company began work on building with a lot of help from the many volunteers at our theater. Many were students at Parsons School of Design, which had five floors of dormitories in the building where our theater and shop were located. Notably, artist extraordinaire, Russell U. Richards was a student volunteer. He labored tirelessly on the 28 pairs of legs we required for the 12 tandem clocks (one for each hour), plus one standalone marionette and one rod puppet version.

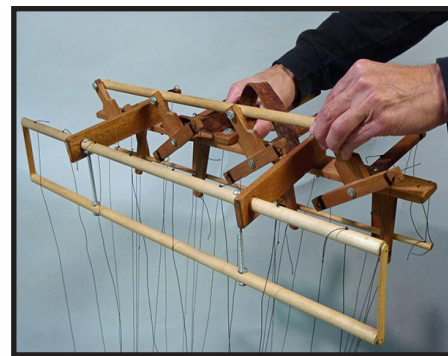
The plexiglass proved to be a difficult material to machine, often cracking or splitting during the construction process. However, a special liquid adhesive is available to fuse plexiglass pieces together. With care and patience it could be made to work and look spectacular. The bodies of the clocks were made from empty tuna fish cans, so we had to consume a lot of tuna to get the 14 cans we needed. There was also a lot of intricate work on the face mechanisms, which all have articulated eyes and mouths and can be operated singly or in tandem.

While the controls appear complicated, they are actually very intuitive to the operator and relatively simple to learn. Three performers could work all twelve clocks in a single row. A clever part of the design allows a side-to-side rocking motion, which also moves the legs and feet in unison. A swinging leg bar on the front of the controls allows for the signature high kicks. Swinging forward works the right legs while swinging back works the left legs. This facilitates a kick-line of 12 alarm clocks performing synchronized alternating high kicks in a style reminiscent of the famed Radio City Rockettes.

I composed the words and music specifically for the act I had in mind. I had some creative input for the lyrics from my cousin, David Perlmutter, and my sister, Susan Widerman Blog, but it is basically a counting song of the twelve hours. Each clock has a distinct voice and personality as it introduces itself. For the musical foundation, I opted for a mechanical music box sound and rhythm and was able to incorporate the famous Westminster Chimes of London's Big Ben as a musical element.

The melody is intentionally repetitive and memorable, arranged with a modulating sequence that builds up to the kick line climax. The vocals were recorded in a professional studio with five singers including myself, my wife Linda, sister Susan plus a couple of others. You can hear the recording on Youtube.

Is the entire piece an anachronism now that most clocks are digital and alarms are merely apps on our phones? Regrettably, present-day phone alarms no longer have acoustic bells like the classic night stand items of the past. Telephones originally had real bells in them, too. But the piece has great charm and rings true.



Naming the act the *Sensational Clockettes* was an intentional bit of P.T. Barnum salesmanship. As we were submitting publicity listings to newspapers and magazines, featuring an act with "sensational" in the name forced them to list it that way, implying that there had been some review or endorsement even though there was none. It also referenced the famed Rockettes without mentioning them.

Blessed with the talents of skilled marionettists Mark Blashford and David Herzog, the Clockettes performed at the Nasty, Brutish & Short puppet slam as part of the 2024 Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival, where they were a big hit. You can see the entire act on Youtube. Begins at 1:04. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drG5AUWdGG4&t=3863s>

Exit Pursued by a Bear

by Dave Herzog

Shakespeare's most famous stage direction from *A Winter's Tale* teaches us that stages must be capable of fulfilling the needs of a play's text, or in the case of puppet stages allow the puppets to be seen easily by the audience and make the job of presenting the show as easy as possible for the puppeteer. These days puppet stages can be and often are almost anything from an open space with or without a stage, to Punch booths, proscenium stages fashioned for marionettes, hand or rod puppets, or a combination there of. The most elaborate puppet stage I ever saw was in The Little Angel Marionette Theatre in London. In order to present Oscar Wilde's *The Fisherman and His Soul*, the company's permanent stage was rigged to allow for bridged marionettes, a rod and hand puppet pit - both fore and aft of the marionette stage - and shadow screens in the back. It also had a beautiful stage lighting system producing dramatic effects.

I've performed on many types of puppet stages over the years, but my favorite is naturally my own marionette variety stage, which I have been using for the better part of 25 plus years. Marionette stages have a problem unique in the world of puppetry in that they are designed not just to display the marionettes they also must hold up the puppeteers, so by the very nature of the beast they tend to be somewhat heavy and bulky. When I first built my stage, it was six feet wide by four feet deep, however it was modified after a few years to a width of five and a half feet by 42 inches deep. The stage is comprised of two stage floor boxes that hinge together to form two smaller boxes that are two and three quarters feet by 21 inches and about three inches thick. The boxes when unfolded are supported by two wooded theatrical parallels that are very strong but relatively light weight. The stage has a backdrop supported by aluminum poles which provides hanging space for up to fourteen marionettes. In addition, there are poles on each side of the stage which provide two foot long "wings" that help hide the entrances of the marionettes. The whole shebang folds down and for the last 12 years has fit very nicely in the back of a Honda Fit hatch back.

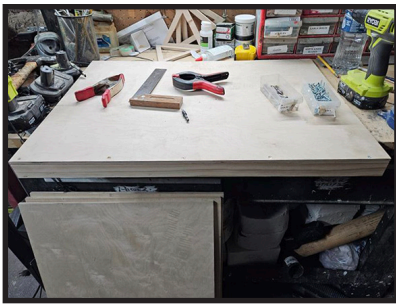


The original stage

I've used the stage in a bit over 6,000 performances and while it has been repaired and maintained it has become apparent in the last few years that I would need a new slightly lighter and smaller stage going forward as my 70 something year old body ain't what it used to be. For one thing I'm convinced the only thing holding together the burgundy crushed velvet curtains is dirt, and the parallels are becoming increasingly rickety leading to comments from more than one client worrying about my safety. Let the record show I've only fallen off the damn thing once, 20 years ago, in front of 250 kids at Goudy Elementary School in Chicago. Also let the record show that the blood thirsty little monsters found it highly amusing. But I digress.

The first step in designing a new marionette stage for me was numerous phone consultations with my brother in puppetry Rick Morse, who is really a remote company member of Dave Herzog's and adviser in all things technical. Let it be stated for the record Rick knows pretty much everything about every touring stage used by any America puppet company of any note touring for the last 100 years or so. Over the last fifty years Rick has in fact owned an astonishing collection of puppet stages. I wouldn't call it obsessive behavior just because Rick knows just how many pieces of hardware and of what type that Martin Steven used in every puppet stage, he ever built! But once again, I digress. But seriously folks, Rick and I discussed the pros and cons of my current stage, my performance needs going forward as well of the merits of this or that type of construction, and material. Finally, a stage five feet wide by 42 inches was chosen that would fold down to boxes 2 and a half feet wide by 21 inches making them lighter and easier to load and handle. Instead of pine 1" x 2" the new parallels would be one half inch best quality birch plywood. The advantage of building the stage parallels of plywood is there are no joins in the wood therefore the finished device is far sturdier.

In order to assure the best quality wood as well as the most accurate cuts I went to Owl Lumber in Des Plaines rather than a home improvement store for plywood. Owl Lumber, with locations in Des Plaines and Lombard is the Chicago area's premier supplier of hardwoods and high-quality construction materials. I bought four sheets of 1/2" birch ply and had them cut into four equal pieces four feet wide by two feet, less the width of the saw blade. The milling staff at Owl Lumber are excellent, with equipment far superior to what you will find in a big box home improvement store, and I have always very pleased with their precise work. I also purchased four 3/8" birch plywood cuts four feet by two and three quarters feet that I was able to cut on my table saw to the correct size for the stage boxes. A hardware run or two later and I was ready to begin building.



*New stage construction in progress
Stage box frame up*



Bottom stage boxes



Stage parallels



Parallels



Stage and pipes

The first step in construction is framing up the stage floor pieces in finish quality one by two pine, this is followed by hinging together the pieces to form the folding stage boxes. Once the boxes are complete, 2 inch by three and a half inch pieces of oak with a one-inch hole drilled through the center are screwed in place to support the round aluminum poles that support the drapes. The stage boxes are completed by joining them with piano hinges creating two stage floor boxes for transport. Next the six pieces that form each parallel are measured and cut. Each piece is measured and cut separately to allow for variances in the stage boxes caused by minute differences in construction, there are also cuts made so the parallels can fit over the oak pole wells. The parallels are then hinged to fold in on themselves when removed from the box. Once the boxes and parallels are complete, they are given a good coat of flat black latex. The aluminum poles for the stage are the same one I have used on my old stage for 25 plus years. Although they will eventually be replaced in order that the old stage be kept as a separate unit which can still be used, or possibly sold.

I've used burgundy crushed velvet masking drapes on my stage for years with a black crushed velvet back drop. I wanted a change of pace for the new masking drapes, so I decided to order royale blue crushed velvet for the new stage. To my horror the supplier I had used for years has discontinued crushed velvet, fortunately for me Keving Menegus of The Fratello Marionettes in California gave me the name of a company that specializes in velvet and two days later 20 yards of Caribbean blue velvet arrived by UPS ground. You may say to yourself, "Self, why crushed velvet? Isn't that a bit much? Isn't that awfully expensive?" I can't tell you how many times I've been setting up a show, and a client will walk into the room, and say "WOW! I wasn't expecting anything this elaborate, boy that's impressive." Or as an audience is walking into the room, I'll hear, "WOW! Look at that stage, isn't that something?" Even before I bring a puppet out onto my lovely stage, I've got them on my side. Liberace once said in an interview "I could perform in the middle of a corn field as long as I have my piano, the costumes and the candelabra they are ready to be entertained" Those drapes are my "candelabra" The stage creates my performance space. It doesn't matter if I'm set up on a proper theater stage or in a daycare center with all the plastic playthings pushed to the side, the stage focuses the audience attention to a fixed point on which I present my show. As Mel Biske says, "Look as good loading in and setting up as you do when you are ready to perform." I'm happy to report that as of the time of publication I have used this stage successfully at several venues, and not only does it look great, but it is also rock solid, with nary a wobble.



The new stage. Finished and show ready!

The Chicagoland Puppetry Guild Files

by Dave Herzog

The Chicagoland Puppetry Guild files were meticulously kept by Fred Putz for decades. While perusing this amazing collection of Chicago, national, and international puppetry ephemera, I continue to discover files of historical significance or special note. I am fortunate to be able to share my findings as a regular feature in each quarterly issue of The Puppet Patter. Appearing in this Issue...

The Melikin Puppets

In this issue I am proud to present pieces from the extensive selection of materials about The Melikin Puppets, or as I refer to them “The first Family of American Puppetry.”

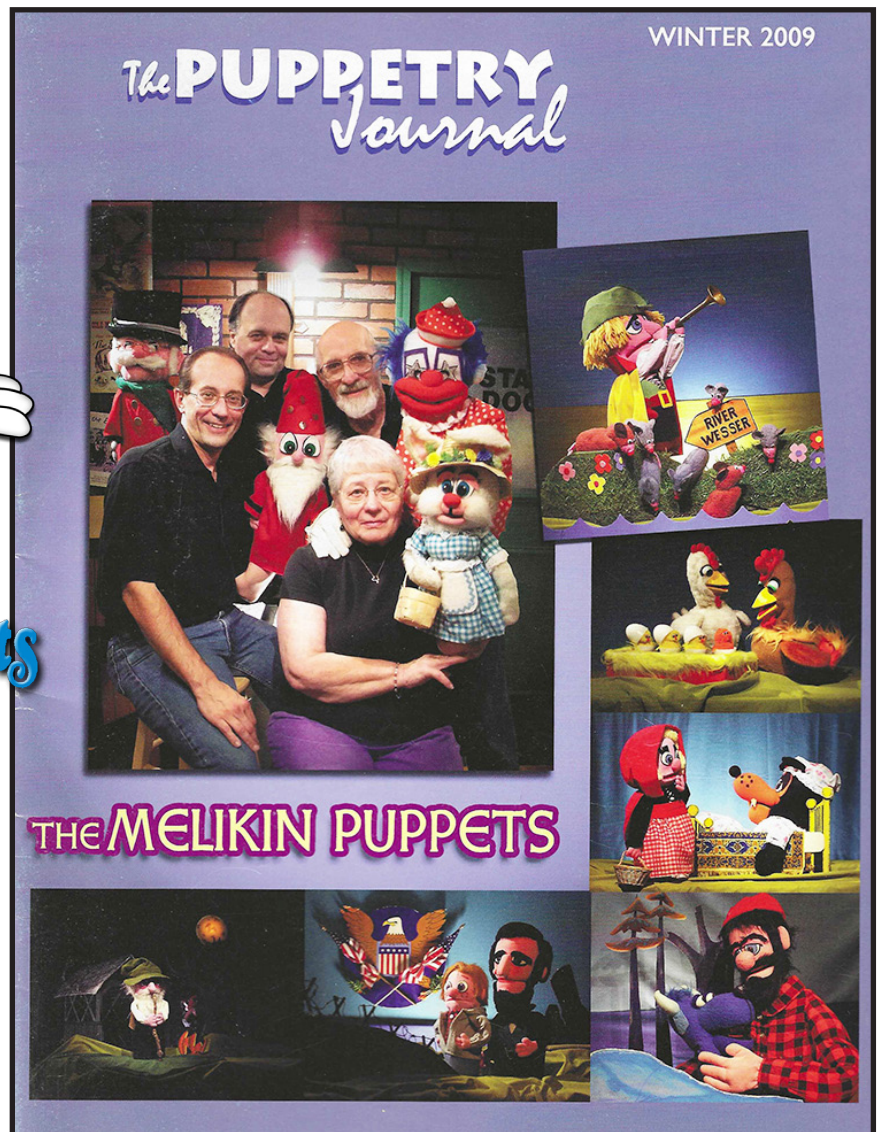
In a career that spanned over fifty years of active touring to schools, libraries, museums, puppet festivals and theaters, Mel and LaVerne Biske forged a reputation for excellence in puppetry that stood the test of time. Along the way they educated several generations of school children about classic American folk tales, Aesop’s Fables, famous poets and poetry, American History, Native Americans, and classic tales from King Arthur to Rip Van Winkle.

Mel and LaVerne also influenced and inspired fledgling puppeteers along the way, including the late Marc Dunworth, Connor Asher, and myself among many others. I often say I didn’t learn puppetry from Mel and LaVerne but, I learned how to be a **professional puppeteer** from them, and how to be a better person. Their friendship, mentorship, and just knowing this wonderful family has been one of the blessing of my life.

An extensive article on the life, career and family of the Biskes written by the Guild File creator Fred Putz is featured in the Winter 2009 edition of The Puppetry Journal. A copy of that Puppetry Journal is now a part of our Guild Files.



The Melikin logo



Puppetry Journal cover featuring the Melikins

The Legend of "The Sword in the Stone"

Through the art of the puppet, Arthur and Camelot come alive again! Written and produced as an introduction to a great literary legend for young audiences, it provides a nostalgic return to Camelot for avid fans. Arthur of course is the star, but the scene stealer is Merlin the Magician. His magical misadventures turn smiles into laughter as time after time he saves Arthur from the villainous Sir Sagramore.

Arthur helps Sir Kay prepare for the big tournament under the watchful eye of...

Runapelestitskin

A classic tale by the Brothers Grimm. The miller's wife boasting about his daughter's talent to spin straw into gold is challenged. A mysterious gnomish to the rescue! He magically spins the gold, but there is a price to pay. One of her troubles just vanishes in a puff of smoke!

Aesop's Fables

In this collection, six of Aesop's favorite fables are presented. Each story ends with a moral that has survived and has held true for more than 2,500 years.

We've opened the "Stacks" of our extensive repertoire of major productions

"Dragon Puppets"

featuring "How Long" an authentic Chinese Dragon Dance

"Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax"

Poetry comes alive in an entertaining, educational way through the imagination of the Dream Peddler

PLUS - Six additional major productions are available

A variety of productions are available for specific grade levels, general audiences, and family fun.

You can mix and match from our collection of Short Stories to create a 45 minute program

The Circus Goldilocks? and The Three Bears
Chicken Little
Little Red Riding Hood
Hansel and Gretel
The Beatrix Potter Collection
The Night Before Christmas

For more information or to schedule a performance call - 630-578-9003
E-Mail - melikinpuppets@gmail.com
Visit our website! www.melikinpuppets.com

Or... **You can mix and match from our collection of Short Stories to create a 45 minute program.**

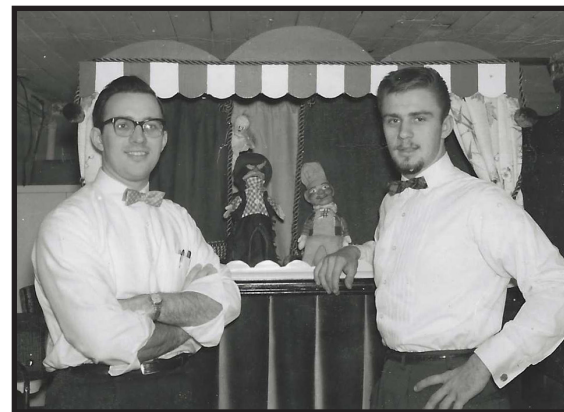
The Circus Goldilocks? and The Three Bears
Chicken Little
Little Red Riding Hood
Hansel and Gretel
The Beatrix Potter Collection

Thinking Ahead?

October 2005
December 2005
"The Night Before Christmas"

For more information or to schedule a performance call - 630-578-9003
E-Mail - melikinpuppets@gmail.com

Two of the many promotional pieces from the Melikins.



Mel (left) with little brother Brad and some of Mels first puppets. Brad voiced many characters for the Melikins over the years.

Meet the Melikins...

Mel, LaVerne and sons Neal and Jeff Biske, known as the Melikins, live just outside Chicago in Bolingbrook, Illinois. They have toured the country from coast to coast and border to border. Mel has been "puppeting" since his Cub Scout days. The interest grew into a profession when, in 1967, Mel and LaVerne formed the Melikin Puppet Theatre. Since then they have been presenting educational and entertaining programs for schools, children's theatres and libraries. In addition, they provide a wide variety of programs for local groups, organizations and shopping centers.



Alice and Fumblers the Clowns from the Melikin Puppet Circus

The Art of the Puppet

Each production has its own cast of original Melikin creations. They are hand crafted using the polyfoam technique. The puppets are large, colorful and designed to portray a specific character. The puppet population numbers well over 375 characters and vary in size from a 4 inch bird (Fidrick) to a 35 foot long authentic Chinese dragon! The Melikins have conducted seminars and workshops for puppeteers at national puppet festivals.

The World of the Puppet

The Melikin Puppets come to life on a striking arena stage style. It is equipped with theatrical lighting and a sound system to overcome the most adverse conditions. The stage can be assembled and "show ready" in 30 minutes. Strike time is about 20 minutes. The Melikins arrive one hour prior to showtime to provide ample time to be ready before the arrival of your audience. A sound check is made and room lights are adjusted to set the mood. The puppeteers would be happy to suggest a seating arrangement for the best sight lines and sound coverage.



One scene from "The Night Before Christmas" One of the many seasonal productions



The Melikin Puppeteers: Neal, Mel, Jeff and LaVerne with puppets from "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"

The Voice of the Puppet

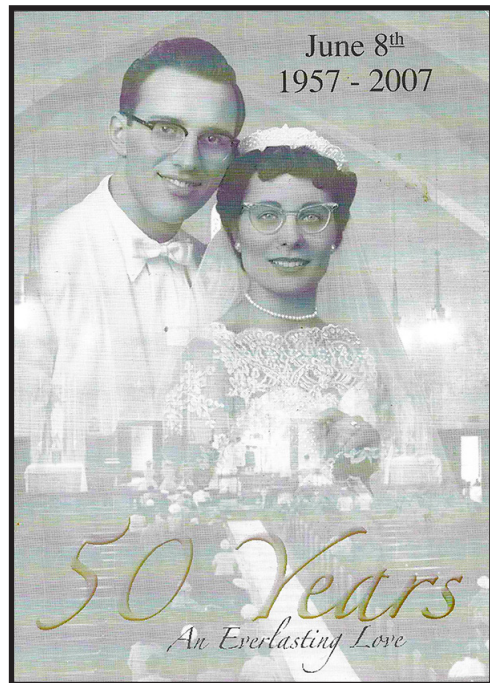
In addition to articulate manipulation, the puppeteers have maintained a high degree of language awareness in their scripts. For specific portrayals they have selected character voice interpretations from professional actors, tops in their field. Most notably are the voice talents of Brad Bisk, Don Kennedy, Diane Dorsey, Jack Reilly, Ellory Bisk and others.



Scene from "Little Red Riding Hood" "Red", Gramma and Wellington Wolf

Productions Available

Two major productions are rotated each year and available for local dates and road tours. Please inquire for grouping and availability for short stories and seasonal programs.



Program cover from Mel & LaVerne's 50th wedding anniversary celebration.

The Melikin Puppets
A NATIONAL TOURING COMPANY SPECIALIZING IN SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Present

THE FABLED MR. AESOP

With an ALL-NEW production of his FAMOUS FABLE FAVORITES including:

Featuring LIFE-SIZE Hand & Rod Puppets!

Androcles and the Lion
The Dog and his Shadow
The Stout Man and the Fly
The Grasshopper and the Ants
The Tortoise and the Hare

Our 16th Season of EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT

Posters from The Fabled Mr. Aesop and Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax.

The Melikin Puppets
A NATIONAL TOURING COMPANY SPECIALIZING IN SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Present

Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax

A delightful collection of Poetry comes alive through the imagination of "THE DREAM PEDDLER"

Featuring **The Pied Piper of Hamelin**

Special Guest Appearance by **EDGAR ALLAN POE**

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND! "WOOFER" and "FIDRICK"

PLUS "CASEY AT THE BAT"

Our 16th Season of EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT

Copyright 1977 melikin puppet productions

A Remembrance of Rick Morse

September 29, 1954 - May 20, 2024

by Dave Herzog

Rick Morse passed away suddenly at his home in Ellenton, Florida on May 20, 2024. Rick was a good friend to many of us in the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild and was especially close to me and the Biske family. He was well known to others as a mainstay of the Detroit Puppetry Guild, a recent Great Lakes Regional Director, and a former President of The Puppeteers of America.



Rick grew up in Flint, Michigan and lived there, or in Flushing, most of his life. He moved to Ellenton, Florida about eight years ago. As a grammar school student he saw the Meredith Bixby Marionettes perform many times, and this was part of what sparked his lifelong interest in puppetry. Rick joined the Puppeteers of America at age fourteen and soon began attending regional puppetry events where he met Nancy Henk, who became a lifelong friend and mentor. Rick loved working at the Puppetry stores at Regional and National Puppetry Festivals where he met and became friends with many well-known puppeteers including Ron and Jane Herrick, Greg and Marie Samansky, Mel and LaVerne Biske, Ellenore Boyland, and his dear friends Bob and Judy Brown, as well as many others.

Rick had a bachelor's degree in English, and a master's degree in library science. He taught High School English, speech, and drama, and worked as a media specialist (AKA a school librarian). He also was a Librarian in the Flint Public Libraries.

But Rick's real passion in life was puppetry. He was a true historian of the great midwestern puppet companies from the golden age of school assembly touring including Meredith's Marionettes, The Ed Johnson Marionettes, The Stevens Puppets, The Melikin Puppets, The Cole Marionettes, The Merten Marionettes, The Coleman Puppets, and The Proctor Puppets. Rick was a student of the minutia of marionette construction and was familiar with all of the major building techniques. To say Rick's knowledge of puppetry was encyclopedic is putting it mildly.

Rick and I often worked on puppetry projects together, and as I was building marionettes we often discussed aspects of the construction. I sent progress shots to Rick by text, he would give advice or remind me to do this, that or the other thing. He was often my advisor, especially when it came to costume choices, good taste, or correct period dress. The last project we completed was my new marionette stage. You can read about that project in full in an earlier article in this edition of The Patter (or maybe you already have).

Rick unfortunately was struck with Rheumatoid Arthritis in his early twenties, and his health was always fragile, which limited his ability to work as a touring puppeteer. He often performed on his summer breaks from teaching and was equally adept at hand puppets and marionette manipulation.

Rick had an extensive collection of puppetry books, and a fully bound collection of Puppetry Journals, along with an impressive collection spanning many years of puppeteers' publicity. If you needed an obscure fact about a puppet company Rick was your go to source. He also was an expert on everybody's puppet stages and puppetry staging technique. Rick was, in short, a living encyclopedia of puppetry.

Most of all, to me Rick was the very best of friends. We thought of each other as brothers, which we were in every sense of the word, and could always depend on each other. We spoke almost every day for 30 years. Rick and I were separated by three months of age, I was the older brother, but Rick was by far the wiser. I was traveling when Rick



Photo courtesy of Tih Penfil



Photo courtesy of Tih Penfil

passed but I spoke to him on the Sunday afternoon before his passing. Little did I know that Rick would be gone by the time I called again on Tuesday.

Our final talk was as usual about puppetry. We spoke for about a half hour and discussed some particular of marionette building and about Midwestern puppetry touring in the golden years, and about how I should costume my latest marionette. We were all richer for having had Rick in our presence. I apologize in advance for any inaccuracies in this remembrance. Normally I would have sent it to Rick to fact check. I guess somewhere in the great beyond Rick will proof read it and somehow let me know how I did.



Photo courtesy of Tih Penfil



*(above) 2014 Detroit Guild Class Picture
(right) 2022 Detroit Guild Class Picture
Photo courtesy of Tih Penfil*



Photo courtesy of Tih Penfil



*The "classic" nun photo (l to r) Nancy Henk, Rick Morse, Dave Herzog
Photo courtesy of Tih Penfil*



*Mel presents a gift to Rick from Jennifer (Mel's daughter).
Kind of an inside joke*

This could be the next Puppet Patter!



That's right! The Puppet Patter could be completely blank. We need your help. Do you have a great story to share? Do you have an average story to share? Are you doing something the guild might want to know about? Please share it with us. It's true, the Patter is available on-line, but is also printed and stored in the CPG archives for future reference. In addition, a copy is placed in the Newberry Library's archives for anyone to read. Don't wait! Submit an article (and maybe some photos) and we'll do our best to get it in the Patter. Publications are March 1st, June 1st, September 1st and December 1st. Send submissions to Mel Biske any time. Thanks.

The Puppet Patter Editorial Staff.

Our address is:

melikinpuppets@comcast.net

The CPG is on Facebook, too!
Be sure to check us out!



Happy Summer!



Leave 'em Laughin'!

OFF THE MARK

by Mark Parisi

