



Puppet Patter

The Official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild

A Quarterly Publication

Special Potlatch Edition - 2025



by Silence Dogood

The word that was said - at least for the past few years - in seedy backrooms and dark alleys, is no longer taboo. That's right. We can now say, "Potlatch" freely and openly. If you remember, the December 2024 edition of the Patter mentioned that the name **POTLATCH** (oh it feels so good to say that) would no longer be used in polite society. It was now referred to as *The Great Lakes Regional Puppeteers Family Reunion*. Gosh. That just rolls off the tongue, doesn't it? At the regional board meeting Saturday morning, it was agreed that the name, The Great Lakes Regional blah, blah, blah, would no longer be used, and the Potlatch name would return. It was rumored that the board said that a potlatch is an event with gift giving and sharing and if the "the powers that be" don't like it... tough. So here we go: POTLATCH! POTLATCH! POTLATCH! Now on with the show.

This year's event began as they usually do. Check-in, greeting old friends, and gathering for the weekend's first performance. The Great Lakes National Puppet Theater performed *The Frog Prince*. Kudos to Vinny Polowy for his role in the presentation. It takes a real trouper to bounce back three months after a stroke and perform for an audience of puppeteers. This was followed up with more catching up with everyone and finally bedtime.

Saturday was workshops, workshops, and more workshops. Let's take a break for lunch before the buying and selling at the Tradin' Post. The afternoon performances included *Fido's Flea Circus* by The Fever River Puppeteers and That Puppet Company's presentation of *The Al E. Gator Show*. A brief Regional meeting was held where we all learned of the name change (YEA!) and voting for a "new" Regional President. Congrats to Vinny who was elected to another 2-year term. After dinner, the attendees were treated to two more performances. Puppet Pants Productions, from Atlanta, did his show *Puppet Pants Encounters*. One of the most beautiful and elegant performances I've seen in a while. And Phillip Huber left the audience spell bound with his variety show, *Suspended Animation*. As always, Potpourri wrapped-up the day's festivities.

Sunday brought a very special surprise. Four to five inches of snow. It's not the first time this has happened at a Potlatch. I guess we've been spoiled the past few years with pleasant weather. But the show must go on. It was time to start packing up cars, vans and other vehicles, checking out and attend the ever-popular Punch Brunch. Despite having to wait for the bacon to be replenished (several times) everything went smoothly. With full bellies, everyone moved (slowly) to the performance area and were treated to a *Punch & Judy* show by Parasol Puppets. It was now time to take the class pictures, pick up silent auction items and of course the saddest part, saying farewell to everyone.

So, another **POTLATCH** is in the books and now we all wait for the next one. If my calculations are correct, 2026 will mark the 40th Anniversary of this event. Just to let you know, the traditional gift for the 40th anniversary is rubies, symbolizing passion, loyalty, and devotion. How appropriate.

A Review of Potlatch 2025

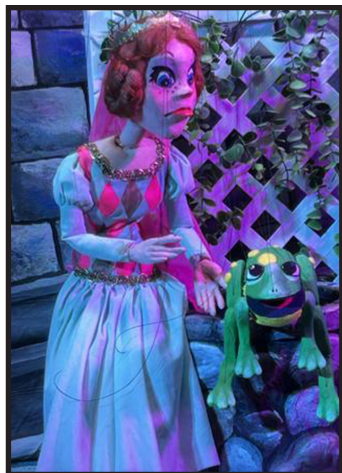
Performances

Friday, November 7th

The Frog Prince - Great Lakes National Puppet Theater (Vince Polowy and Jennifer Walker)

Original Puppets by Popinjay Puppets, Bob Vesely and Roger Dennis

Review by Dave Herzog



The show is performed on a marionette stage on which the two puppet performers are visible to the audience. The show is written by Jennie Walker, as no extant recording by Popinjay was known to exist. In addition to the refurbishment, a few new characters had to be built, including the witch's bat servant, plus new sets and stage. The story follows the usual tale of a Prince transformed into a frog by an old witch, but in a bit of a modern twist to the classic tale, the Princess is very disagreeable, impolite and untrue to her word. She justifiably does not end up

The Frog Prince was originally produced and performed by Cleveland's "Popinjay Puppets." The beautiful marionettes were created by Roger Dennis and Bob Vesely, back in the 1970's. Puppeteer, Vince Polowy said, "We were very fortunate to be able to purchase these puppets from an estate sale down in Florida. They were in extremely good shape, considering their age. There were some issues however. The frog puppet had two broken and missing front legs. The King's head was detached from the body and his crown was in several pieces. The other smaller marionettes, the dog and the log were in a tangle of other puppets that had to be cut from the controller and restrung."

happily ever after with the prince after the requisite kissing of the frog that transforms him back into himself. Traditional Renaissance music by the late Owain Phyfe, who was a friend of Vinny's from their days working at Renaissance fairs together, provided historically appropriate accompaniment. Joseph Emory provided exemplary lighting.



Prior to this performance, the team performed the show in a Cleveland library where a granddaughter of Bob Vesely came up afterward and said she appreciated seeing it. Although Vesely is deceased, Roger Dennis currently resides in Bradenton, Florida.

Vinny suffered some health issues earlier in the year but was determined to perform *The Frog Prince* at Great Lakes Regional Potlatch. He even had his physical therapy tailored to enable him to perform, and we can all be thankful that he was able and we had the opportunity to see this beautiful production.

Tribute to Diane Boatman



Before the Saturday night's performances, Potlatchers viewed a video tribute to Diane Boatman. She was a mainstay of Potlatch and member of the Detroit Puppeteers Guild. Diane was often seen hanging with the grandkids and "sitting" watch over the DPG table during the Tradin' Post. She was such a lovely lady and always willing to jump in and lend a hand with just about anything. Our hearts go out to Marty and the entire Boatman family. Potlatch just wasn't the same without her smile.



Saturday, November 8th - Afternoon Performances

Fido's Flea Circus - Fever River Puppeteers (Chuck and Sanye Voight)

Review by Dave Herzog



At the conclusion of Chuck and Sanye Voights' (The Fever River Puppeteers) delightful *Flea Circus* show at Potlatch this year, I had to pay it one of my highest compliments, in that I wish I had thought of it first. What a brilliant idea for a completely different take on a marionette variety show delightfully performed by two of Potlatch's most loyal puppeteers and supporters.

The Voight's always give great care to the content of their shows, and *The Flea Circus* was no exception. The show starts with a great big (twice life size Grand Pyrenees if I'm not mistaken) shaggy dog needing a trip to the vet, played by Chuck, to see what's causing the itching. Since it's such a big dog the vet brings out a giant microscope to examine the big fellow only to discover that not only does he have fleas but they are performing a flea circus hence the source of the itching. The giant microscope provides

the proscenium for the show, and the dog's fur becomes the skirting for the stage, so the fun can commence.

A flea Ringmaster provides the introduction for each act, which includes a lot of the standard marionette variety turns performed by delightful Czech style "Rod Marionettes". Tightrope walkers, trapeze artists and acrobats abound each performing an insectoid, version of circus acts. There are some delightfully "buggy" transformations, and a couple of delightful surprises and intentional mishaps.



I wish I could remember everything that happened during the show, but it is a fast-paced production, and I was so filled with delight by the production that I wasn't really thinking about a review - just enjoying the heck out of proceedings. All I can tell you is there is no need for flea collars, flea dips, or flea powder this is fun at it's finest.

The Voight's perform, beautifully together and often coordinate their efforts in duet acts during the show. One can see why this show was a such a delight at Wisconsin libraries a couple of Summer's ago. Thank you, Chuck and Sandye, for bringing the flea circus all the way to Potlatch from Wisconsin. A truly delightful time was had by all. Especially me!



The Marc Dunworth Foundation for the Performing Arts

The Marc Dunworth Foundation for the Performing Arts, is a non-profit organization founded to promote and encourage the performing arts, especially the puppet arts, through grants, scholarships, performances and education.

Any help you can provide to this cause, whether monetarily and/or spreading the word would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you

Please visit our web site for more information
<https://www.dunworthfoundation.org>

The Al E. Gator Show - That Puppet Company (Steven Widerman)

Review by Dave Herzog (Updated by Editor, Mel Biske)

(Editor's Note: When the opportunity arose for me to write the review for the production of "The Al E. Gator Show" by Steven Widerman, I recalled that another review for this production had already been written by one and only, Dave Herzog. The archived review, from the December 2018 issue of the Puppet Patter titled "The Glen Town Center Puppet Theater Series - The Al E. Gator Show, The Puppet Company". As I read through it, I decided, if I tried, I could not create another review to match or come near the standards of Dave's review. I contacted Steven and he assured me the current entire show then was the same as the presentation at Potlatch. So here is Dave's original 2018 review and my updates thrown in.)



The Al E. Gator Show by Steve Widerman's The Puppet Company is. very much a joy to behold. While very much old school puppetry, this variety show has a slick, hip feel to it that was quite a different vibe from many of our presentations. Performed by Steven Widerman and Honey Goodenough (Mark Blashford in 2018) this well-rehearsed and fast paced show was very well received by the Potlatchers.

Performed primarily on a small black velvet curtained stage the audience's attention is well focused on the marionettes, which range from traditional to some very, very innovative rod assisted marionettes. The action is occasionally expanded with marionettes coming out from behind the curtains to visit members of the audience. Each act is introduced by Al E. Gator himself, a dapper punster of a flexible faced latex hand puppet with a "live arm". Al E. Gator's hosting duties also involved a liberal sprinkling of groan inducing pun filled commentary on each act. One of Steven's signature acts, Rocket the Roller Skater, was also on hand to wow the audience. Rocket is one of the best thought out marionette acts I have ever seen. This gorgeous puppet is a brilliant throw back to the 70's disco roller scene. Not only is it a finely crafted marionette, but Steven's manipulation and choreography is puppetry at its very best.

Other standout acts in this show were two delightful Gnomes performing a well-coordinated teeter board act, with hilarious misadventures ensuing, and a brash, hip presentation of Ghostbusters

Another standout was a hand puppet opera performed by Wagnerian rubber balls with mouth slips cut out that were articulated by simply squeezing the sides of the bodiless singers. Steven's mass knowledge of puppetry and performance styles is very much apparent in every aspect of the production. I can only think that Steven's mentor, Bil Baird, himself would have been very pleased with Steven's ongoing work in puppetry.

One other comment I would like to note; Steven, as Al E. Gator, when introducing the next act would bid the rapt audience by shouting out, "See ya later..." and the audience, now all cued up would answer, "Alligator!!"

Steven was assisted this time by a very talented young lady who played a very successful part in the production of Al E. Gator by the name of Honey Goodenough (yes, that's her real name). Steven Widerman always depends on a reliable assistant puppeteer, especially for Al E. Gator. When his assigned assistant had to bow, he checked the Roster for Potlatch attendees and discovered Honey would be attending. She certainly has the field of entertainment covered as a professional puppeteer, magician, clown, costume designer and educator. She has the experience of working with marionettist Kevin Frish, as well as Steven Widerman, when she worked as his assistant for a performance of Al E. Gator. A perfect replacement, she was familiar with the show and only had to learn the newer musical arrangements. Did I also mention she was a musician as well? Steven could now relax. The evening's performance ran very smooth. May I suggest to learn more just Google, Honey Goodenough.



Editor's Note: In 2018, Mark Blashford was the assistant puppeteer working with Steven in the production. Mark is also a fine performer having honed his skills at UConn's puppetry program. Shortly after the 2018 performance, Mark left for Iceland to study with renowned puppeteer, Bernd Ogrodnik. One can only hope that Mark will return to the Chicago area to join our community of puppeteers. It will be very exciting to see the direction this fine young performer takes his puppetry career. Thank you, Steve, Mark, and of course Al E. Gator for a truly satisfying puppetry experience. How lucky we are to have this fine company now based in Chicago. An Editors follow-up to Mark Blashford - Mark did return to Chicago and has established himself as a Chicago based actor, musician and puppeteer. He specializes in traditional puppet performances, including marionette, shadow, rod and hand puppetry. Google Mark Blash, Puppeteer.

Saturday, November 8th - Evening Performances

Puppet Pants Encounter - Puppet Pants Productions (Adam Clarke)

Review by Dave Herzog

I was very happy to hear that Adam Clarke would be attending The Great Lakes Regional Puppeteers Potlatch this year thanks to one of the scholarships provided by The Marc Dunworth Foundation. I was doubly thrilled when it was announced Adam would be performing for us. I first heard about Adam a couple of years ago after Phillip Huber had seen him perform at the Southwest Regional Festival, at which time Phillip told me he had tremendous potential. I began to follow Adam and friended him on Facebook and soon became fascinated with his work.

Adam is a breath of fresh air to those of us who have practiced the art of the marionette variety show for many years. While his show is based on and contains many of the classic marionette variety turns like the tight rope walker, trapeze artist etc., Adam's unique take on the art sets him aside from your run of the mill variety show. While young and hip Adam's style is a bit of a throwback to the showman of several generations ago, I'm talking late 19th early 20th century here. I think Adam might have been comfortable traveling with the

likes of David Lano in a horse drawn wagon. Adam takes

the classics of marionette variety and turns them on their ears in a wonderfully wacky, atmospheric, ethereal and at times a little bit delightfully creepy sort of way. Adam also composed, played and recorded his own wonderfully weird music for the show, which immediately sets him apart from all others. This is not your highly polished slick nightclub style show, but something completely unique, and totally engaging.

Adam has created well-made marionettes that move beautifully, but they are seemingly purposely a bit crude in appearance which adds to the atmosphere of his very well performed show. As I stated earlier, Adam's show has most of the classics including a break away skeleton, tight rope walker, and trapeze artist. The tight rope walker and trapeze artist following the usual type of choreography, but it is the character of the marionettes which set them apart from the everyday. One has a feeling that these are down on their luck old time mud show circus, and carnival types who have all seen better days and maybe get their courage from a hip flask.

One of the highlights of the show for me an old backwoods sort of witchy wise woman type of character who painted a picture. I have seen this done by a lot of street performers but usually with a rod attached to the marionette's arm which Adam dispenses with and was a very impressive feat of marionette manipulation indeed. While not apparent to the audience the witch's necklace is made of racoon teeth that Adam found in the woods. To me this speaks volumes about Adam's involvement with his characters developments and provides a subtext that adds to the reality of his creations.

An extortionary organist whose organ pipes produced objects and spirits was very engaging and quite unique, and along with a puppet portrait of Adam manipulating a smaller marionette as a finale rounded out this memorable performance.

We were very fortunate to have Adam with us this year, not only his he a major up and coming young talent in our art form, but he is an incredible friendly and well-spoken intelligent young man, who I am glad to say is developing a good following and is sure to go far in the world of puppetry. Keep an eye open for Adam. He is a puppeteer whose career you will want to follow.

A big shout-out also should go to Joe Emory who provided technical support for the shows at Potlatch as well as his marionette stage. I don't know how we would cope with out "our Joe". No one works harder at Potlatch supporting our gifted performers.



Suspended Animation - The Huber Marionettes (Phillip Huber)

By Dave Herzog

For over two years Phillip Huber has devoted his career to The Broadway musical *BOOP! The Musical*, not only creating Pudgy the dog for the show performing the part in both the initial Chicago tryout, but also as a member of the original Broadway cast. Since returning from New York Phillip has turned his attention to the rehearsal of his own solo show *Suspended Animation* which he has not performed for over two years. Phillip very graciously consented to perform for his puppet family at this year's Potlatch to get the show back on its strings as it were. What a joy for all of us in attendance to witness this world class performance of a master at the peak of his skills.

For his performance at Potlatch, Phillip chose some of his most popular acts opening as usual with his trapeze artist Louisa. Most marionette variety artists perform a trapeze number, but absolutely no one does it like Phillip. His method of stringing the figure is unique among puppeteers, allowing an astounding array of movements and poses not achieved by anyone else. His method of manipulation for some of the poses defies convention in that he drops the control bar in such a way that you are sure the marionette will be a tangled mess, but through his artistry all is well with the act concluding with a head stand on the trapeze, a trick I have never seen another puppeteer perform. The act is the epitome of show biz pizzazz. It's not hard to see why it has been featured across the globe in world class venue.

Phillip is a master of mood change and choose acts for the evening that would allow the audience to experience different emotions. His very funny Punk Rock character was a big hit with his wacky rendition of *I Feel Pretty* featuring a guitar that joined in the song. Pierrot charmed the audience with his exquisite performance on the tight rope. The portrait marionette of Natalie Cole singing *Paper Moon* was masterful with Phillip interacting with the marionette with classy dance moves allowing to strike poses supported by Phillip.

I would be remiss here if I did not mention Phillip's performance costume for the evening. After spending two years wearing a neutral jumpsuit during *BOOP*, Phillip was wearing a loose-fitting shirt and pants made of a very soft thin velvet and wearing a pair of matching velvet formal shoes. This ensemble created a beautifully neutral background, and yet during Nicole's act when Phillip interacts with the marionette as if part of the star's dance ensemble, the fabric beautifully enhanced the marionette's poses and highlighted the beauty of this portrait marionette. It all just shows that special attention to detail that makes the Huber Marionettes world class.

Phillip also performed with his contortionist marionette, Oskar in a display worthy of Cirque de Solie. This gold leaf encased marionette is a marvel of sophisticated marionette construction and performance. Phillip has performed with world class contortionists in his many European night club appearances and Oskar, manipulated with a deceptively simple paddle control can hold his own with the very best of them.

The finale of the evening's performance was Phillip's absolutely one of a kind Chinese Magician. This extraordinary act, over three years in the making, has astounded audiences all over the world. Never has one puppeteer built in so many astounding tricks into one marionette act, the finale with the magician disappearing as a smoke breathing Chinese Dragon is produced boggles the mind and never fails to have the audience jumping to its feet in a standing ovation.



continued



We are really blessed to have Phillip Huber and David Alexander as part of our Potlatch family, as many of you might know, Phillip and I grew up together in Dixon, IL, and have been friends for sixty years. Phillip and David are truly part of the Potlatch family and contribute so much to the Potlatch experience for all of us. Thank you so much for being with us again this year.



Sunday, November 9th - Punch Brunch

Punch & Judy - Parasol Puppets (Prof. Peter Allen)

Review by Jeff Biske

I'm probably going to get some grief about this but, I'm not a fan of Punch & Judy shows. However, over the past several years we have been treated to some very good Punch & Judy shows. Yes. Even I enjoyed them. This year's performance was no exception. Peter Allen, of Parasol Puppets didn't do the traditional show: Punch with Judy, Punch with the Baby, Punch with the Policeman, Punch with Joey, and so on. Of course there were elements of the established presentation, but he put a spin on it that had the audience laughing hysterically.



Peter began the performance by introducing the show and trying to coax Mr. Punch out on stage. "Now when I count 1, 2, 3, you all call for Mr. Punch." He counted and the audience yelled, "Mr. Punch!" Silence. After a few attempts, Peter finally went back stage to get him and engaged Punch in a brief conversation. Peter returned and said that Mr. Punch had to put his shoes on. This went on as Mr. Punch had to put on his socks, coat, and everything else until he finally made his entrance. Each time Peter would go back stage and have discussions with Mr. Punch.



These shows are traditionally done live (no pre-recorded track) and for good reason. The puppeteer needs to engage with the audience and respond to their reactions. Peter did this magnificently. His improv had the audience in stitches. At one point during the performance someone tipped over a glass. The puppets stopped and looked in the direction of the noise. Laughter. Then Punch said, "I think someone lost a glass eye." Which sent the crowd into a belly-laugh. Another "interruption" as a cell phone chirped. Again, the show stopped and the characters looked at the audience. I've said it before; You can do 100 shows flawlessly, but when you perform for other puppeteers, something will go wrong. At one point a prop fell and one of the characters went to retrieve it. "Oh dear. It fell all the way to the floor." Both puppets slowly disappeared from the stage and one commented, "Oh why is this thing so small. Help me with this." More laughter.



If there was one criticism of the show (and it is a very minor one), it's the use of the swazzle. Although traditional for Mr. Punch's voice, it's difficult to understand him at times. As I said, it is a very minor critique. This was a brilliant presentation.

Workshops - Saturday, November 8th

(*Workshop description not available at time of publication)

SESSION ONE - 9:30 AM

Debbie White
Puppet Camps and Clubs



Anne Newman
Scripting ala Judy Brown



Sandy Voight
Making Puppets to Sell



Joe Emory
Lighting



David Herzog
Using a Dremel Tool



SESSION TWO - 10:45 AM



Phillip Huber
*Backstage at a Broadway Show:
BOOP! The Musical*



Linda Sigismondi
Using Czech Marionettes

David Quesal
Puppet Character Development



Kurt Hunter
Mechanical Stuff for Puppeteers



Honey Goodenough
Build Your Own Jumping Jack Puppet



Nancy Sander
Handpuppet Manipulation

2025 Potlatch In Pictures

Relive the fun of this years Potlatch with these beautiful pictures courtesy of Tih Penfil and Guy Thompson. And for even *more* pictures, visit the Great Lakes Puppet Potlatch Facebook page.



(below) A rising star and established puppeteers show off during Potpourri. And of course Nancy being Nancy!



CPG - Class of 2025



40th Annual GREAT LAKES REGIONAL



PUPPETEERS
POTLATCH

November
6, 7, 8, 2026

And it will be here before you know it! Whether you're a "first-timer" or a seasoned pro, Potlatch is *the* event to attend. Keep up to date on Potlatch happenings and registration procedures at the Potlatch website. And check it out on Facebook at Great Lakes Puppeteers Potlatch.

greatlakespotlatch.org

