



# Puppet Patter

The Official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild

A Quarterly Publication

March 2022

## An Addendum to the Cole Marionette History Article

By Mel Biske



As the response to the article relating to, “How I got interested in puppetry” (December, 2021 and this issue of the Puppet Patter) a commonality was noted: Some members mentioned their interest was perked while watching famous professional puppeteers on TV. Named most were the early works of Jim Henson, Shari Lewis, Rufus Rose. Many people recalled professional school assembly touring companies performing at their school or going on a field trip to a theater. I mentioned in my response in the last Patter that while I attended Shield Public School in Chicago in the 1940s, I enjoyed being entertained by The Cole Marionettes every year until graduation in 1948! It wasn’t until I reached 5<sup>th</sup> grade that I realized I wanted to know how it all worked. I maintained a true interest and pursued professional puppetry (but that’s another story).

All grown up now, and married with two children, we rekindled an interest in puppetry and sought out other Chicagoland puppeteers. There were groups of us who took turns getting together at various homes and, I believe it was Hans Schmidt who was in contact with a puppeteer who was a member of the Puppeteers of America who could advise us on how to form a subsidiary guild in the Great Lakes Region. His name was George, of the now famed Cole Marionettes, and his wife, Lucille. We were overjoyed to meet them now as fellow members and soon became friends with George and Lucille. The Chicagoland

Puppetry Guild was Chartered in 1961 with Hans as the first president and George as Vice-President. That year the Puppet Patter began its journey, starting out as a monthly newsletter.

It had been approximately 30 years since I had any contact with the Cole Marionettes. They were a mainstay in the school assembly circuit and expanded the touring area in the Midwest by adding three road companies. Fay and Barbara Coleman, a husband-and-wife team, worked for the Coles for a few years then left to form their own company and create an identity of their own - The Coleman Marionettes. There were two additional married couples who joined the Cole Marionettes; Ed and Evelyn Merrington and Larry and Gladys Able. All three road companies were home based in Chicago and Maywood and managed to arrange their tours so they could our monthly meetings at the Chicago South side Douglas Park field house.

While sorting through the Cole Marionettes promotional material in this issue you will come across another facet of George and Lucille - They had a love of the circus, and stepped aside from the Fairy tale scene and created a circus extravaganza! George also had a musical talent. He was fascinated by the sounds of medieval music and formed a musical ensemble of four talented musicians who performed under the name of *The King Cole Pipers*. They were costumed in medieval dress and the instruments included a large harp, two stringed instruments and George played what was dubbed a horned flute. Unfortunately, we were never graced with a performance, but during visits to their home, we were treated to his horned flute solo.

Before the Coles’ moved to their “Cole Chester” residence in Lake Villa, IN, they resided in Southwest Palos Hills, IL. Nearby, there was an “Olde” English restaurant that the Coles’ patronized and each December the restaurant would present a medieval festive dinner called *A Yuletide Wassail Feast*. The Biske family resided in Burbank, IL, a short drive to their home in Palos Hills and our Cole neighbors invited us to the event and we gratefully accepted. It was an amazing experience.

The CPG was flourishing during the early years of the 60’s. We had expanded our membership to over 70 members and George was elected president for 1963-64. We returned to puppetry starting with a few variety acts. We produced two stories - *Hansel and Gretel* and *Rumpelstiltskin*. When we performed our works for CPG meetings or “Puppet Fairs” (now referred to as World Day of Puppetry), we sought critics input. Lucille was very good at that. One of her observations was with the music used to introduce the opening, short bridge pieces, and background selections to accompany the actors dialogue. She was surprised to learn that all the music for that production was from a variety of popular classical compositions and mentioned that she was considering having their music tapes worked over and asked if would be able to update them. The next thing I knew, one of her

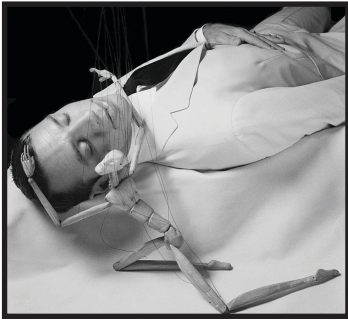
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The 2022 Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival took place January 20-30. This was the fourth iteration of the biennial event, intended to showcase puppet companies from all around the world. The usual challenges of mounting an international festival were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the bureaucratic restrictions placed on public gatherings by federal and local government guidelines posed a daunting threat to the viability of such an expansive venture.

## CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL PUPPET THEATER FESTIVAL

Restrictions on international travel made it impossible to bring any foreign-based companies or artists to the U.S. Instead, Artistic Director and Founder of the Festival, Blair Thomas, opted to feature domestic artists and draw upon the abundance of locally-based talent, thus foregoing the “international” aspect of the festival. Additionally, the opening night post-show celebration was canceled in the interest of public safety. However, most of the festival was



Basil Twist's *Stickman*

able to proceed, with a few cancellations, but also a few last-minute additions. One major casualty was the opening night cancellation of Basil Twist's production *Dogugaeshi*, which was delayed in shipment. Basil did appear, however, performing his balletically engaging *Stickman* solo act at one of the four late-night puppet slam evenings. The festival included more than a hundred performances, symposia, workshops, and other related events. Our Board Member, Paulette Richards, graciously hosted two of the four Ellen Van Volkenburg Symposia, which were converted from in-person events to on-line streaming in deference to the pandemic.

Among the many highlights of the festival were two outstanding productions that are recipients of UNIMA-USA Citations of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry: Robin Frohardt's *The Plastic Bag Store* and Nick Lehane's *Chimpanzee*. *The Plastic Bag Store* featured an installation component located in a storefront on the ground floor of Chicago's iconic Wrigley Building. It was open to the general public during most of the Festival.



Robin Frohardt's  
*The Plastic Bag Store*

Overall, the shows were surprisingly well-attended, with many sold-out and enjoyed by enthusiastic audiences. The staff proudly announced that the Festival would change from a biennial to become an annual event, now planned for the last two weeks of every January. Mark your calendars for 2023 - *Dogugaeshi* is already slated for the line-up.



Nick Lehane's *Chimpanzee*

Steven Widerman is currently on the Board of UNIMA-USA serving on the Citations Committee and as Chair of the Development Committee.

# The Joshua Show - Joshua Holden

by Dave Herzog



When I heard that performances of *The Joshua Show* were added to the Chicago International Festival of Puppetry, I knew this was a show I wanted to attend. I had seen this show, which actually premiered in Chicago in 2012, at an earlier Chicago International Puppetry Festival and was blown away, so on a snowy January evening, in the middle of a pandemic, that has kept me isolated, I ventured to the Chopin theater on Division Street in Chicago for another visit with this engaging production.

The Joshua Show debuted at Nasty Brutish and Short here in Chicago in 2012. It then was performed at the National Festival of The Puppeteers of

America where it voted best performance. The show has been touring internationally since. Joshua Holden himself is real quadruple threat as a performer; He is an actor, dancer, singer, and a puppeteer, who not only performs his own show, but works as a puppet wrangler for the Jim Henson Company, and was one of the stars of the National Tour of the Broadway Musical *Avenue Q*. He displays all of his talent to very good effect in *The Joshua Show*, which gives a great big nod to children's show hosts of the past including Mr. Rogers, Shari Lewis, Pee Wee Herman, Captain Kangaroo, Howdy Doody and more. Joshua Holden has an extremely charismatic stage presence, with striking good looks and a prodigious handlebar mustache. He is costumed in a blue suit with red suspenders, and bow tie. He is a bit Willy Wonka, with a tad of medicine show thrown in for good measure.

A day in the life of Joshua takes place in a nebulous place which could be a television set or in Joshua's imagination. Along with his human friend Jeb (the very talented New York based singer songwriter Jeb Colwell), Joshua spends a day guiding the audience through magical fun songs and dances and always positive interaction and activity. We meet many of the creatures of Joshua's imagination. Along the way we meet the cast of characters in Joshua's mind including delightful puppet form musical instruments, a snail who of course delivers Joshua's mail, the Wonder book who gives definitions, and encouragement, a piece of lint which is magically enlarged in a very clever bit of sleight of hand puppetry, and most important of all Mr. Nicholas, the worlds most depressed and grumpy sock puppet, who's dreary protestations make up most of the second and extremely funny second half of the show. (Not that the first part isn't a total delight. It is!) Mr. Nicholas, in a great shadow puppet sequence, buys a rocket ship to escape from it all. Finally Joshua, after much travail persuades Mr. Nicholas to turn his frown upside down and "Oh my goshua," Mr. Nicholas finds the joy in life, and is even awarded a miniature super hero cloak.

The show contains many instances of audience participation, which were perhaps a bit constrained due to the lack of children in the audience, but contains so much clever word play, song lyrics and high energy performance that the primarily adult audience was having a rollicking good time. Joshua even manages to turn the word of the day (which in this case was "contagious" - greeted with groaning laughter) into something positive for a COVID weary theater audience.

The New York Times has said of this production "An 'unabashed ambassador of Joy' Mr. Holden has dedicated his show to lightning the mood of all in the theater, puppets and humans alike. Assisted by the musician Jeb Calwell, he does this through physical comedy, odd ball props, wry commentary, and tap dancing." If you hear of the Joshua show playing somewhere near you in the future "Oh my goshua" just go. This is a combination of excellent puppetry and a charismatic performer you won't want to miss.



# TIMBER! - Rootstock Puppet Company

by Dave Herzog

Mark Blashford of Chicago's Rootstock Puppet Company premiered his new show *Timber!* at the Chicago International Puppetry Festival. Message heavy puppet shows, especially those for a family audience can be a difficult task to bring off. After all, one must preserve the integrity of the message while entertaining a broad age range. I'm happy to say Rootstock Puppet Company has managed this difficult task beautifully.

On first entering the theater I was impressed with richness of the deep forest green color pallet used for the stage. It immediately set the tone for the show. Mark and his brother were seated stage right, playing guitar and banjo preshow music which was a very nice touch. Due to a brief hold, they even sang Happy Birthday to an audience member. Also, intermittently during the pre-show, a beautifully carved, very small eagle rod puppet soared majestically over the landscape of the upper part of the stage.

The play, which is told entirely without spoken word, tells the story of a battle between an artist and a friendly Big Foot seeking to preserve the forest, and a somewhat more sinister than usual Paul Bunyan seeking to destroy the natural beauty and habitat of the forest. It seems at first that Paul and the logging company win with an almost complete deforestation destroying both forest and habitat. In general, the forest creatures are represented by a Mother owl and her chick who are two of the most beautiful puppets in the show. The artist retreats to painting in his studio after the destruction of the forest and during his long life the forest grows back. He re-enters the forest to a landscape restored, and all is well again, with people hopefully a bit wiser.

The staging of the show is beautifully done, with the stage itself essentially an actor playing the part of a living breathing forest. There is a proscenium style marionette stage, with on stage scenery provided by folding screens. There is an area above the proscenium to provide an acting area for very brilliant tabletop style puppets, and another area above that using a very clever miniature bulldozer lopping down trees in the far distance. Even the side masking is adjustable to enact majestic old growth trees being chopped down. The bottom front masking is also used in the deforestation scene. The stage area in front of the puppet stage is utilized in the epic battle between the artist and Paul Bunyan. Literally every part of the stage functions in some way to further the storytelling.

*TIMBER!* features a cast of carefully crafted puppets - including marionette, rod and tabletop style puppets - beautifully carved in a somewhat rustic style with the costumes actually part of the carved surface of the puppets.

The puppets are very precisely jointed for excellent movement, and the manipulation is excellent. There is nothing crude in the construction of these figures, this is puppet making at its best. The figures all appear in different scales throughout the play, giving a wonderful sense of movement throughout the forest.

The original music and sound effects are provided live by Mark's brother, Turner Blashford, and Mark is ably assisted in the production by puppeteer K. T. Shvak. I recommend this show very highly and look forward to seeing it again, not only out front, but viewing from backstage would be a real puppeteer's delight.



# TIMBER! Program Notes

by Mark Blashford

This production is dedicated to Alberta Knause. It was inspired by *The Overstory* by Richard Powers.



Story, Puppets, and Set by Mark Blashford

Music by Turner Blashford

Second Puppeteer, KT Shivak

Scenic Painting, Hannah Moore

Lighting by Aaron Herschlag

## Creator's Note:

Forest ecosystems are vital to humanity's survival on this planet. They provide food, habitat, building material, medicines, even the oxygen we breathe. Forests are the oldest, most complex societies in existence, but we are only just beginning to understand their intricacies. In fact, we have recently discovered how trees are interdependent: how they communicate with each other, share resources, and continue underground connections through microbial and fungal relationships that have tremendous implications above ground.

For good reason or not North American industrialists began wiping out thousands of years of arboreal development at the turn of the century. To this day the timber industry continues to negotiate for fewer and fewer acres of untouched wilderness. TIMBER! addresses deforestation through the folk hero Paul Bunyan and the mythical figure of BigFoot with eight different species of wood: milled, upcycled, recycled, and hand carved into puppets. TIMBER! is a story about our insatiable appetite for environmental destruction and how artists and activists can push back against the drum beat of consumerism, the lustful advances of capitalism, and the temptation to meet the climate crisis with complacency.

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## How I Kept Busy During the Pandemic

by Dave Herzog

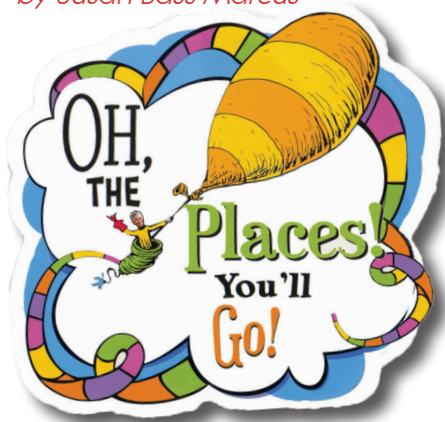


I helped Steven Widerman build six three quarter life size horse puppets for Citi Lit Theater's production of *The Virginian*. I refurbished my *Furry Follies* production and did 35 performances during the Summer of 2021. I built a half a dozen new marionettes for my own shows including Agnes the Gooney Bird, The Tandem Dutch Skaters, A balloon blower with a special trick I've never used in my shows, a sexy chanteuse for my senior citizen shows, a wacky new roller blade skating puppet named Luna Lollypop, a new tightrope walker, and I'm currently building Dude! The California Surfer Dude. I also built a set of fairy tale hand puppets for a friend's Grandchildren, as well as a dozen marionettes that were sold to people in the US, Canada, Italy, and Singapore. I also built 20 fully carved marionette kits for a class for Team Land Production in Las Vegas NV that will take place the weekend of May 22, 2022.

**(Publisher's Note:** It's a shame that Dave spent all of his "pandemic time" just sitting around binge watching TV, and eating bonbons. C'mon, Dave! Do something for cryin' out loud!)

# My Life with Puppets

by Susan Bass Marcus



The gig probably took place during the winter holidays season. A department store in downtown Chicago hired my puppetry partner and me to perform in the Children's Clothing Department. At the time, I think we were touring a Bunraku-style version of *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Without a stage, we worked in what we thought was a designated space on the floor with human-scale puppets and masks. Customers had advance notice of our free performance; lots of children and parents surrounded our "stage," marked off by racks of clothing. We wrote the program to last about 10 - 15 minutes; and when we reached about the seven-minute mark, an odd thing happened.

While my partner's puppet was active and mine was "watching," an older woman came to my side, with a little girl in tow. Loudly she asked me, "Where is the bathroom?" I somehow kept my cool and focused on the active puppet, then moved to perform my part. The woman remained on stage and repeated her question. A clerk rescued us and escorted her away, I assume with directions the woman sought.

Other than enduring drunken heckling at a middle-aged man's birthday party while I performed *Punch and Judy*, (see Spetember 2020 Patter) I rarely experienced such ignorance or disrespect. Most of my audiences, including preschoolers and early elementary children were great audiences—oops, I forgot: the adults were another issue.

How many puppeteers for whom birthday party gigs support their craft can say that parents of the birthday child and the parents' friends or parent/guests refrain from loud conversations in the doorway of your performance space? How many interrupted the show to announce cake and ice cream would be served as soon as the puppet lady finished? Were they watching tv in the next room at #11 on the volume scale of 1 to 10? Over many years, I performed shows for hundreds of families and rarely encountered that kind of behavior, but when I did, my internal dialogue asked, "How do they think their children will respond to live performances appropriately if they don't?" I concluded that they treated not only me with disrespect, but also their child and their guests. The thought saddened me.

The last vignette I share took place in an extremely privileged venue in Lake Forest, Illinois. I rang the front door bell, and a courteous butler gave me directions to the kitchen door, the servant's entrance. The butler greeted me warmly and invited me into a kitchen more appropriate for a French chateau. He offered me some tea and a biscuit, which I politely refused, then brought me to a den where chairs and couches were set up for the birthday boy and his guests. I have suppressed most of my memories of that show, except the outrage I felt as the father continually interrupted my performance with commentary (albeit nothing insulting). He distracted the audience and soon the children were throwing things at each other. The butler rescued me, helped me clear my gear, gave me a substantial check - much more than my usual fee - and showed me out, while still offering tea and a cookie for the road. I thanked him and thoroughly bemused, I left Lake Forest, grateful for the relative tranquility of my truck cab's interior and the hum of my wheels on the road.



## 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 and a roster of active and newly added puppeteers, current and past issues of the Puppet Pater, and more!

Our address is:

[www.chicagopuppetguild.org](http://www.chicagopuppetguild.org)

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



# How I Got Interested in Puppetry or What I Want To Be When I Grow Up (continued)

**Publisher's Note:** You may recall from our previous episode (that would be the December 2021 Patter), there were tales from several puppeteers about how they got into puppetry. Well, We have a few more. It seems that the story is picking up right where it left off: These puppeteers are also influenced by other puppeteers and encouraged by family. Sometimes, those two people are one-in-the-same. Enjoy

## What Drew Me Into Puppetry?

by Steven Wideman

I had an interest in puppetry at a very early age. Because of the work I am doing now with 3D cameras, I suspect the three-dimensional aspect of the art especially intrigued me. Watching puppets on television as a toddler, I was exposed to many amazing talents, including Burr Tillstrom, Bil Baird, Shari Lewis, Rufus and Margo Rose via *The Howdy Doody Show*, Chuck McCann and the Paul Ashley puppets, early Jim Henson work, and many others. Through childhood, I had all sorts of puppet toys, which included a complete set of Shari Lewis characters, and many Hazelle and Pelham marionettes. My neighbor's father owned the local toy store and my friend and I staged puppet shows at her house as a way of playing. I began building my own puppets, starting with a dragon marionette as a summer arts camp project. I performed shows for friends and family which evolved into a business through high school, which facilitated me buying a van during my senior year.



I joined the Puppetry Guild of Greater New York at about age eleven as the only junior member, shortly after that organization was first chartered. At the meetings, I was exposed to all sorts of puppetry and became part of the New York City community of puppeteers. I loved music, theater, dance and engineering, and puppetry allowed me to be creative in all of those disciplines. At one particularly memorable Puppetry Guild meeting, Jim Henson brought a movie projector, which he set up and screened his commercials, industrial shorts and the short film *Time Piece*. He was not very well-known to the public at the time, but he was already a big celebrity to us, and that was my first time meeting him.

I kept my puppet business going through college, and upon graduating with a degree in Music Composition and History, I got word that Bil Baird's Marionettes was auditioning puppeteers. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity I could not ignore. I had seen shows at the Baird theater and had met Bil briefly several times. My audition for Bil was very enjoyable, and he seemed far more interested in having me play a small pipe organ, which was built in his shop by a guy named Faz, than in my lifetime making and performing puppets. And he seemed absolutely thrilled that I could play Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* on the piano in the rehearsal studio. I later became aware that the piece was the signature number for his popular, piano playing, rod puppet character, Slugger Ryan, who was based on the popular jazz pianist, Hoagy Carmichael. I started work in the shop as they were finishing up the build for a new production of *Alice in Wonderland*. I got to spend some quality time with Bil, finalizing construction of the "Alice" puppets in the shop, and on the marionette bridge, practicing manipulation. Joe Raposo and Sheldon Harnick were the composer and lyricist, and I can still play their *Lobster Quadrille* from the show on the piano. It's a great unknown hit by Raposo with Lewis Carroll's words, danced in the show by two lobster and two turtle marionettes. Olga Felgemacher, a veteran star of Baird's company, generously indoctrinated me into the "Baird style" of marionette manipulation, and I spent that summer performing a small show, *The Dragon and the Dentist*, with her and Bil's son, Peter Baird. The company rented my van to move the show around.

Not long after Baird's theater closed, I focused back on my own company and opened a puppet theater on Union Square West in Manhattan, writing musicals and building shows for puppets to perform. Now living in Chicago, I am still immersed in puppetry - building, performing and filming it in 3D, and loving everything about it.

# My Journey to Puppetry

by Dave Herzog

How does one become a puppeteer? Well for me at least it was a combination of several happy circumstances. Puppets of all kinds were rather prevalent during my childhood. Puppeteers such as Bil Baird and Shari Lewis and Burr Tillstrom were well known and Howdy Doody was a hit. Puppets appeared in TV ads, and a young man named Jim Henson was starting to make his mark on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Soon we would be seeing imported British TV show filmed in *SUPERMRIONATION!*

In 1958, when I was four years old, my father took my whole family on a trip to Mexico. At age 67 my memories of the trip are getting a bit vague, but one instance stands out in my mind. As I recall, to keep my brother and I quiet while a tour guide droned on about the Aztecs, my father bought a Poncho Via five stringed marionette for my brother and I to entertain ourselves. After we got home the tangled Poncho was relegated to the closet for few months, but one day I remember taking it out of the closet and soon Poncho and I became firm friends. It seemed after that whenever an occasion for a gift rolled around, I requested a puppet. I remember a beautiful Steiff boxer dog named Sooty, a set of plastic Lamb Chop and Hush Puppy hand puppets, and soon Hazelle Puppets from Marshall Fields joined the crew.

In second grade The Stevens Puppets of Middlebury, IN, came to present *Sleeping Beauty* at South Central Grammar School in Dixon, IL, and I remember the puppeteers who may have been at that time, Steve and Margie themselves talked about the show, demonstrated the puppets and told us that this was how they made their living. That was it, I was hooked, I loved puppets, I was going to grow up to be a professional puppeteer, period end of sentence.

Let's fast forward a few years. By fifth grade, The Cole Marionettes had performed *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* at my school, further cementing my determination to be the world's greatest professional puppeteer. And I had discovered Pelham Puppets after a trip to England. But the best was yet to come. I had discovered the book *Marionettes Easy to Make Fun to Use*, by Edith Flack Ackley, at the Public Library and I was bound and determined to make my own marionettes. One big problem! My Mom didn't sew. But my cousin Ellen did! Another big problem. Cousin Ellen lived in Indiana, so my dreams of sewing machines would have to wait until my summer visit that year.

Let's fast forward a bit more. A few years later, during my annual summer visit to the cousins in Indiana, it became apparent that I was absolutely mad about puppets and my interest was intensifying. By that time, my Aunt Liesel had discovered that Martin and Margie Stevens lived in Middlebury IN (my Aunt and Uncle's Farm was on RR1 Middlebury, IN). So, a visit to the Mousetrap was arranged. Cousin Ellen\* (still my biggest fan and supporter) had recently gotten her driver's license and off we went for a day at the Mousetrap, that was just the first of many visits.

Years later, on what would be my last visit to the Mousetrap, Steve and Margie remarked that they new the day of my first visit that I would grow up to be in the business. I had stopped to visit them on my way back from a summer as an amusement park puppeteer. I will be forever grateful to these kind people for the encouragement they gave me. One other lucky circumstance would come into play at eleven years old I convinced my Father to let me present a puppet show of *Mr. Rabbits Easter Jamboree* at his department store. The show was utter dreck, but after the show a woman came up to me and introduced her son who was several years older to me. That kind, shy, fourteen-year-old boy was named Phillip Huber. Phillip and I soon became fast friends, and the rest, as they say, is history. All though we took somewhat different roads and career paths all these many years later, Phillip and I are still fast friends and still both performing as professional puppeteers. Small world, isn't it?

Phillip and I have shared so many significant puppetry moments together but one that stands out was traveling together as kids to the 1969 Puppeteers of America Festival. There we would see both Bob Bromley, and Frank Paris perform both men were early proponents of performing the cabaret style marionette show, a style both Phillip and I adopted as our chosen performance style in which we still both work in today.

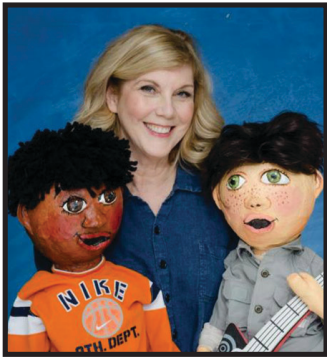
\*An interesting note about my Cousin Ellen. Thanks to me her life seems to be full of puppeteers. We still see a lot of each other. Ellen and her husband Dan own a thriving souvenir business called Penrod Hiawatha in Niles Michigan. A few years ago, Guy and Christine Thompson, of the Mousetrap Puppet Theater, became the general, and office managers of Penrod Hiawatha "Potlatch," Scott Beam, has become a sales representative for the company, and recently, Ellen and Dan met Dave Roz, of the Roz Puppets, at Scott's retirement party from the parks service. I think Ellen has already adopted Dave into our family. Ellen and Dan needless to say will be attending the next Potlatch. For some reason they love puppet shows. Go figure.





## Sometimes, The Kids Are to Blame

by Jean Vanier



About 14 years ago my children were opening a music studio. They were interested in attracting children to sign up for music lessons. I was a theatre major who had designed costumes, built props and just did everything you could do to put up a show. I told the kids that I would put on a puppet show. It was my first time creating a puppet. I also wrote all the songs for the show.

The show was a huge success and from that point on people started asking me to do more shows. I got gigs to create *Alice in Wonderland*, a Christmas show, and pre-school shows. I also had the good fortune of knowing David Herzog who was very generous in advising me about lighting and set design. We were on our way. It has been a learning experience from one show to the next and I have loved every minute. My fellow puppeteers are some of the most genuine and wonderful people I have ever met. I also am grateful to Susan Witek who has always kept in touch with me and helped me when I needed it most.

I have traveled to New York, China, Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and continue to pursue puppetry.

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## It's Not My Fault

by Jeff Biske

“What do you do for a living?” is a question many of us are asked over the years. There’s usually no reaction when the answer is, “I’m a banker,” or “teacher,” or “chef.” However, eyebrows go way up when the reply is, “I’m a puppeteer.” The usual response is, “No really. What’s your real job?” Followed by, “How’d you get into that?” I was asked that question on September 7, 2016, and my repose elicited some laughter and, of course, raised eyebrows (more about that later). But how did I really get into this odd profession?

When I was about 5 years old, Dad (Mel) quit his real job and he and Mom (LaVerne) decided to make professional puppetry their occupation. At that age everything that we did just seemed normal to me. I thought, “Doesn’t everyone’s mom and dad travel around ‘performing for young theatre audiences,’” as Dad would say in his introduction? At about 9 years old I was “dragged” to Studio One recording studio in downtown Chicago to play Tiny Tim in the Melikin’s production of *A Christmas Carol*. Yeah, I performed next to some Chicago based actors. Whatever. At about age 16, I was pressed into service as Mel’s assistant puppeteer. Ahh, all the wonderful memories. Outdoor shows for Arlington Heights Frontier Days (in 90° heat), Irish Fest at Gaelic Park in Oak Forest (in 38° drizzle), counting wayward balloons at the the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, and I can’t forget the 6 week Artists in Residence gigs for the DIA Youth Theater in beautiful Detroit. This all seemed normal to me. There are dozens of stories I can tell about the people I’ve met or the exotic places I’ve been to (like Cherokee, Iowa) that are connected to my parents’ decision to quit their jobs and get into this interesting career. But, the question is, “How did you become a puppeteer?”

That’s the question I was asked on that warm September afternoon in 2016 as I sat in a Federal courtroom in downtown Chicago. Yep. I was being questioned by a Federal Judge as a perspective juror in a federal case when, after several hours of questioning all 16 of us, he called my juror number and said, “I see on your questionnaire you’re a... puppeteer?”

“Yes, sir.”

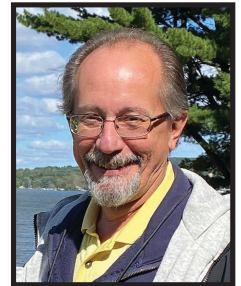
“Really?” said the judge - seeming not to believe me.

“Yes, sir.”

He then asked that question puppeteers are almost always asked, “How did you get into that?”

I thought for a moment - Here I am in a Federal courtroom, being questioned by a Federal Judge, with Federal Prosecutors sitting 6 feet from me, *and* I was under oath. I *had* to tell the truth. “I was forced into it,” was my reply.

There is some truth in that. I was brought up with all that craziness around me and it all seemed so... normal, so when Mom and Dad asked do you want to perform, what else could I say? Sure. I could have said no but then I wouldn’t have gotten off jury duty. If you don’t believe that story, check out the link below for the Sun-Times article.



<https://www.pressreader.com/usa/chicago-sun-times/20160908/281586650045325>

continued from page 1

puppeteers, Danny Goldring, arrived with an armful of records and a script with the cues marked and a copy of their reel of tape.

Over a long period of time, LaVerne and I had been discussing the possibility of forming our own full time puppet touring company. We had strong encouragement from two reliable, professional guild members, Jay Marshall and Hans Schmidt. We had been working on two new productions, *Dickens Christmas Carol* and *Rip Van Winkle*, adapting them for elementary school presentations. We invited George and Lucille for dinner at our home explaining that we had an announcement to make. Lucille made mention that they had an announcement to make as well. When they arrived there was very little time for small talk and Lucille blurted out with something like, "Alright! What is your announcement?" We replied by explaining that we have decided to form our own school assembly touring troupe named The Melikin Puppet Company and we intend to launch in the Spring of 1967. After a short period of congratulating comments, Lucille mentioned that their announcement wouldn't top ours. Then she explained that George and her were going to offer us an opportunity to join the Cole Marionettes and perform for them. We enjoyed our dinner. The next day George phoned and offered three of their schools in Oswego, Illinois and would put in a good word for us. We did book those schools and returned year after year thereafter.

# 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 puppetry ephemera, I continue to discover files found to be of historical significance or special note. We are fortunate to be able to share our findings as a regular feature article in each quarterly Puppet Patter publication. Appearing in this issue...*

## The Cole Marionettes



The Cole Marionettes, were a Chicago based troupe founded by George and Lucille Cole, circa 1934. They also had several companies touring schools throughout the Midwest from the 1930s through the late 1980s. Programs were usually based on famous fairy tales and myths. Typical productions included *The Tinder Box*, *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* and *Jack in the Beanstalk*. George and Lucille, through The Cole Marionettes, affected the lives of many current members.



Pictured above is "Colechester", the new home and studio of the Cole Marionettes. Situated 4 1/2 miles east of Lake Village, Indiana, in the wooded countryside, here George and Lucille Cole continue to create marionette versions of old classic and popular fairy tales, for which they are world famous. Here, too, plays are produced and presented for the approval of their young audiences.

The Coles extend to all principals and teachers an invitation to visit their studio. Arrangements for class field trips may be made by phone or letter to the address below.

**COLE MARIONETTES**  
Colechester  
R. R. 1,  
Lake Village, Indiana 46349  
Phone (219) 992-3052



The construction and handling of marionettes is explained to a recent group of young visitors.



The Coles bid farewell to their guests.

**Cole Marionettes**  
Colechester  
Box 253  
Lake Village, Ind. 46349

**Did you know** — that the Cole Marionettes have been presenting their marionette plays as a part of the school programs in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin?

**Did you know** — That since 1934 today's children, their parents and even grand-parents have seen the Cole Marionette productions?

**Did you know** — that all Cole Marionette Productions are personally supervised and that all bookings are made directly with the producers, thus eliminating costly agent's fees?

**Did you know** — that the majority of this season's dates have been re-scheduled? To be included in the coming season, it will be necessary to get your date set as soon as possible?

**Did you know** — that in addition to the Cole Marionettes plays, the Musical Group, "The King Cole Pipers" will be appearing in the schools for their 10th consecutive year? This is NOT a marionette production. Four accomplished and talented musicians appearing in Medieval costumes demonstrate and play musical instruments of the past?

We, the Cole Marionettes, thought you would like to know!

For bookings: Call collect:  
**GEORGE L. COLE**  
219/992-3052

**COLE MARIONETTES**  
LINDA ROBERTS  
11731 - 87th Street  
Hinsdale, IL 60521  
323-7493

## The Cole Marionettes

George and Lucille Cole, co-producers of the Cole Marionettes hold a unique position in the school assembly field today. They have produced and presented more marionette plays than any other professional puppeteers. In the past 25 years 15 complete plays, five stages and countless properties have emerged from their studio and Little Theatre.

Since the Cole Marionettes plays are produced for school assembly only, all plays are carefully selected and adapted from stories that will appeal to all age groups. A new set of marionettes is hand-carved, painted and costumed for each separate play. Each marionette is one-third the height of a person, but in any auditorium they appear life sized—an optical illusion due to perfect proportion between marionette and scene. The two puppeteers presenting the play are selected for their fine dramatic talent and manipulative skill. Five companies of the Cole Marionettes are presently appearing in schools all over the United States and Canada.

The Cole Marionettes are proud to be a part of the school assembly program. They feel a deep sense of obligation to the young people who see their plays. They have dedicated themselves and their work to the education and cultural entertainment of our future generation.

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### Comments and Reviews

Well pleased—Program was well executed. Voices were good—should be heard in all parts of the auditorium.  
High School, Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

Enthusiastic—Enjoyed by all, Kindergarten to 12.  
High School, Van Hornville, N.Y.

Enthusiastic. Well received and given in tricky professional manner.  
D. O. Demarens, Colinet, Mich.

We are still hearing wonderful things about "Dick Whittington and His Cat" and are very anxious to have you appear on the program again.  
Robert E. Freidel, Supervisor of Drama and Music  
Milwaukee Public Schools.

... for your splendid performance. It was indeed fascinating and the puppets were outstanding in color, character parts and performance.  
Vivian J. Nische, Assistant Sup't of Schools,  
Cook County, Chicago, Ill.

Cole Marionettes      Box 73      NEW ADDRESS      Pales Park, Ill.  
COLECHESTER      COLECHESTER  
COLE MARIONETTES      LAKE VILLAGE, IND.

Thank you for making the show please come again.

Mik Jack come down this instant.

I liked the Show I hope every one else did too I did any way

COLE MARIONETTES  
Box 253  
Lake Village, Indiana 46349  
Phone 219-992-3052

I love the Show It was very pretty

But here is this show

Jack and the Beanstalk

I can't wait to see your next show

Lucile Cole with Shorty Star performer with The Cole Marionette Circus

The Legend of

# SLEEPY HOLLOW

PRESENTED BY

THE COLE MARIONETTES

The Cole Marionettes  
PRESENT

# Beauty and the Beast

# By the Way

by Ann Onymous

STOP THE PRESSES! We have a late entry to be included to the “How I Became Interested in Puppetry” article. The June, 2019 Puppet Patter, page 1, headline reads “Joan Wittenberg, A Tribute to a Special Woman.” The event was to celebrate her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and the presentation of the 2019 CPG Presidents Award. We contacted Joan recently asking her how she became interested in puppetry and she related her story of how she met Marion Fisher - an active puppeteer who presented a series of variety shows and short stories. She was the creator of Joan’s collection of hand and glove puppets. Joan happened to be present at a venue where Marion was performing and became entranced with the puppets and the audience response. She met with Marion, chatted a bit and mentioned how delighted she was watching her performance. It was the start of a beautiful friendship. Marion worked with Joan teaching her how to create her own puppets. Although Joan’s interest in puppets occurred later in her life, she sought out other puppeteers. Marion introduced her to the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild and attended their meeting as often as she was able. When she retired, she took up residence in an assisted living facility in Northbrook, IL, and brought her collection of puppets - her own as well as Marion Fishers. Now in her retirement home she is known as “The Puppet Lady”! She performs walk around shows conversing with fellow guests and delights any visiting children as well. Seventeen CPG members were there to celebrate with Joan.

Excuse me, but the following is an addendum to the addendum regarding the Cole Marionettes. Specifically, a mention of the puppeteers who performed their road companies. Once again, referencing the Puppet Patter; December, 2021, page 7. Linda Roberts wrote how she teamed up in 1970 and toured for 12 years, performing the Cole’s complete program repertoire. In her article she mentioned her friend, Fred Sauers. She recalled in a recent interview, that they did work a couple of shows together, *Dick Whittington’s Cat* and *The Cole Circus*. Fred was “lucky” to manipulate the 20-pound (or could it have been a 40-pound) elephant marionette. Linda got to manipulate a very tiny (and very light - too light) figure who instructed the elephant which trick to perform. She worked the *Circus* in an enclosed red and white stage that George built for use in shopping malls. Linda has retired after actively performing with her own “Linda Roberts Marionettes” company for two decades.



## Leave 'em Laughin'!

**THE FAR SIDE** by Gary Larson



Dog ventriloquists