



Puppet Patter

The Official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppetry Guild

A Quarterly Publication

September 2021

The 2021 CPG Puppet Picnic

by Silence DoGood

The 2021 CPG Puppet Picnic was FINALLY held on Sunday, September 5th at the home and studio of the Melikin Puppets, and we could not have asked for a better day. After more than a year of not being able to attend in-person events or get together, and the annual Chicago heatwave, the Guild was finally able to gather, see familiar faces, and catch up in person.

As the picnickers approached, they were greeted by Mini-Mel - the diminutive puppet version of Mr. Melikin. They made their way inside and there were more greetings by the host, Mel Biske, and members of the family; Jennifer (daughter), Sandy (daughter-in-law), Jeff and Neal (sons). Most everyone gathered in the backyard and began to catch up on their "goings-on" over the past year and a half. "How many puppets did you remake?" "Did you rehearse that show you were working on?" "How many times?" "I put together 32 puzzles! How many did you do?" By about 1:00 most everyone had arrived, Jennifer and Sandy had put out the dishes that people brought, and announced that that lunch was served. If anyone left hungry that day it was their own fault.

With bellies now full, some people continued conversations outside with desserts while others took the tour of the "Melikin Museum." You could see the amazed looks and hear the "Oohs" and "Ahhs" as they looked at the more than 50 year history of the Melikin Puppets. From the 12" puppets used in their original shows to current puppet actors, and mementos from other puppeteers and groups, this archive of their history is truly amazing.



By 3:00 people made their way to the "theatre." Of course it was the garage, but if you used your imagination you could envision a lavish 25 seat theatre. Host turned emcee greeted the audience and broke into his famous "Theatre Manners" routine. Realizing it was not a school show or library audience (old habits), Mel stopped himself and announced the Potpourri portion of the day. David Quesal and his puppet, Weasel, started things off with their rendition of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight". Chris Krawczyk presented a ventriloquist act, Susan Witek demonstrated her puppets from "Billy Goats Gruff", and Nitsana Lazerus discussed how puppets can be used as a teaching tool to young and old alike. Keeping in teaching vein, Kathy Valdivia and her cat performed a routine in Spanish. Steven Widerman and his scientist assistant talked about the 3D video

puppet presentation "they" have been perfecting and then brought out the Bil Baird "Polka Dancers" puppet(s). Dave Herzog performed a scaled down version of "The Teddy Bear's Picnic" - scaled down as there was no music.

The day concluded with the Melikin Puppets (Neal and Jeff) performance of "The Three Little Pigs Construction Company." Don DeFraud, the Friendly Puppet Show Story Teller, convinces the three pigs to build model homes in order to attract more customers, while guiding Wellington Wolf to get the pigs' lunches. In true Melikin fashion, there are twists in the story and audible groans from the audience at the puns and strange humor used throughout the show.

As Mel announced the conclusion of the days festivities, Jennifer popped in exclaiming there was one more thing to do. "Tomorrow is Mel's birthday," she said, "And we would like to sing happy birthday to him." At which point Sandy appeared with a cake and candles. Cue the singing, applause, and slight embarrassment on Mel's part.

Slowly people began to leave but not without lots of handshakes, hugs, and "I'll see you at Potlatch" thrown in from time to time. Throughout the day there seemed to be a feeling of relief as the puppeteers gathered again to renew friendships and see each other in person rather than on a computer screen. Ahhhh. That felt good.

More photos from the picnic can be found on pages 10 and 11

KuklaFest 2020

by Dave Herzog



The second KuklaFest, originally scheduled for May 2020, could not take place due to the pandemic. It was hoped that May 2021 would be the target date, but was then postponed to August 2021 with the event taking place virtually from the campus of Grand State University in Grand Rapids, MI.

Michael Schwabe, Larry Bascall and their creative team, which included Jason Yancy, Joe Emory and Erin Wilkinson, were joined by Kevin Kammerraad, Phillip Huber, David Alexander, and Steven Ritz-Barr to provide a weekend full of lectures, workshops, and performances.

Saturday began with an expanded and updated version of Jason Yancey's fascinating lecture on his extensive experience in teaching classical Spanish language theater to college level students through the use of puppetry. Jason's classes at Grand State University have provided rich community involvement in Spanish culture, language, and theater. I look forward to seeing one of their shows live in the future.

Michal Schwabe and Larry Bascall also provided much expanded and enhanced version of their "Building Puppets With Felt" workshop. This workshop was greatly enhanced by having a camera placed directly above Larry's sewing machine so attendees could observe his expert sewing techniques. This is an incredibly helpful and inspiring workshop. It's gratifying that puppet artist of their caliber are generous enough to share their unique talents and techniques.

The first day of KuklaFest ended with a rare treat, a full performance by the world renowned Huber Marionettes and his production *Suspended Animation*. Phillip Huber is famous for his work in the films *Being John Malkovich*, and *Oz The Great*



and Powerful, as well as numerous theatrical shows including The Broadway Musical *Busker Alley* with multiple Tony award winning dancer Tommy Tune, *That's Christmas* with Sandy Duncan (produced here in Chicago at the Schubert theater) and *Darling Grenadine* both at the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut in 2017, and The Marriot Lincolnshire Theater in the Summer of 2019. Phillip also appeared for ten years in *Christmas with Friends and Nabors* Starring Jim Nabors in Honolulu, Hawaii. Phillip has also appeared for decades on countless first class cruise ships, and in many European night clubs, and as an opening act of many well-known stars including Phyllis Diller, Frank Gorshin, Donald O'Conner, and Carol Lawrence. (A review of *Suspended Animation* appears in this issue) Needless to say, the show was spectacular by anyone's standards, and included Phillip's signature flawless manipulation of his exquisitely designed figures in a world class performance. The performance was followed by a chance for virtual attendees to message comments and questions answered by Phillip.



Day two of KuklaFest began with a talk by Joe Emory on his efforts to restore several story shows built by Bob Brown to be produced at his Puppet Barn Puppet Theater in Whitehall, MI. The talk was accompanied by many examples of Bob Brown's unique felt and styrofoam marionettes manipulated by Phillip Huber, and a surprise visit by Bob Brown himself, who graciously answered many questions and gave commentary on his building techniques and his stellar career.

The second workshop of KuklaFest Sunday brought us a high-tech presentation by Kevin Kammerraad on using the streaming platform known as Streamyard to present live shows online. Kevin showed us his studio set up and discussed with attendees how the platform works. His technical prowess is evident, and his beautiful puppets and friendly performance style is a natural for this kind of video enhanced presentation. The proof is in the pudding as they say, and Kevin has been performing "live online" throughout the entire pandemic.

KuklaFest went International for its next presentation with the showing of Austrian based puppeteer Steven Ritz Barr's beautiful marionette film of *Joan of Arc*. This extraordinary film was produced over a period of eight years with a cast of 25, and incredibly detailed, 12 inch tall marionettes created by Russian puppet maker Eugene Seregin. Steven joined us after the screening for an interactive

question and answer period to discuss this monumental achievement in puppetry. This beautiful and moving film is available for screening on Amazon Prime.

KuklaFest concluded Sunday with a lively discussion of the future of puppetry among the online attendees and presenting staff with many points given, including Steven Wideman's passionate endorsement of 3-D video work as the venue of the future for puppetry producers.

Another exciting feature of KuklaFest was the presentation of scenes from the forthcoming Burr Tillstrom documentary during breaks in the KuklaFest schedule. This documentary will be one of the most important films to be presented on history of puppetry. It is hoped that it will receive national attention and screenings. We wish the staff much success with this important upcoming film.

To the entire staff of KuklaFest a huge thank you is in order. It is a chance to really study and discuss topics in detail with some of the leading artists in the field today. I wish the KuklaFest nothing but the greatest success and look forward to KuklaFest 2022, hopefully taking place live once again at the Oxbow Campus in beautiful Saugatuck, MI. I encourage all to visit www.Kuklafest.com where a gallery of photos of this year's event as well as last years event can be viewed to give a clear overview of the quality of this outstanding event.

Author's postscript. Due to the incredible generosity and hospitality of Joe and Jennifer Emory, Philip Huber and David Alexander were invited to Whitehall, Michigan to finally fulfill a much pandemic postponed contract at the beautiful Playhouse at White Lake. The Emory's hosted Dave Herzog, Travis McClendon, and Diane and Marty Boatman at their home for the weekend, along with Phillip Huber and David Alexander, Steven Wideman, and his wife Linda Bookheim, and her Sister Becky Bookheim. Saturday, a reception was held at the Emory's home after Phillip's first performance where we were joined by friends and neighbors as well as Guy and Christine Thompson and their Son Peter, better known as The Mousetrap Puppets, and longtime Detroit puppeteer and Potlatch founder Nancy Henk. Other CPG Members attending Phillip's shows were Jeff and Sandy Biske, as well as Tim and Rose Dunworth. All in all it was a wonderful weekend of puppetry and family fun for our extended family of puppeteers. Thank you again Joe and Jennifer Emory for your loving hospitality.

The Guild Files

by Dave Herzog

Over the decades there has been no more loyal and involved CPG member than Fred Putz. He has served as Guild President, board member, festival director, director of outreach and so much more. He has also been the author of many Patter articles titled *Lest We Forget*, which highlighted puppeteers of the past. Most CPG members may not know that Fred has kept meticulous files on practically every puppeteer that has come across the path of the Guild or performed in the Chicago area.

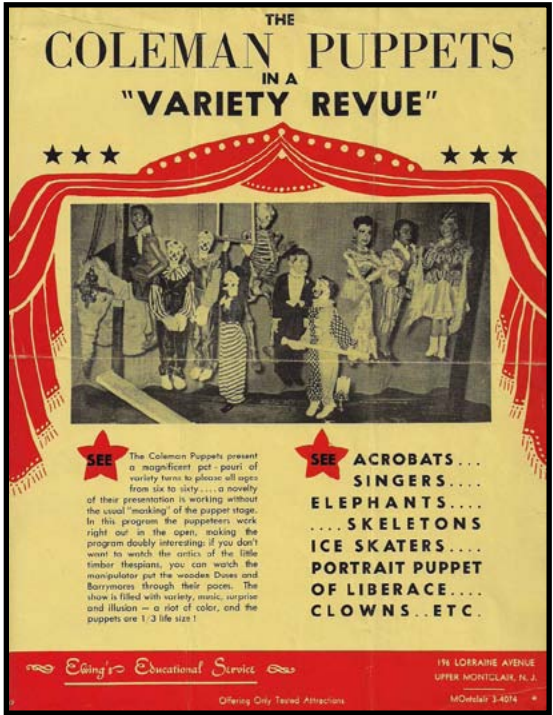
I was honored earlier this Summer when Fred asked me to take up the torch and take over the extensive Guild files. Three trips to Fred’s home, has yielded and unbelievable treasure trove of puppetry materials as they relate to the CPG. The files are extensive and exhaustive even including some materials from the earliest days of organized puppetry in Chicago. As I have moved the files into my home I am carefully going through each file, which is a daunting but very rewarding and educational task.



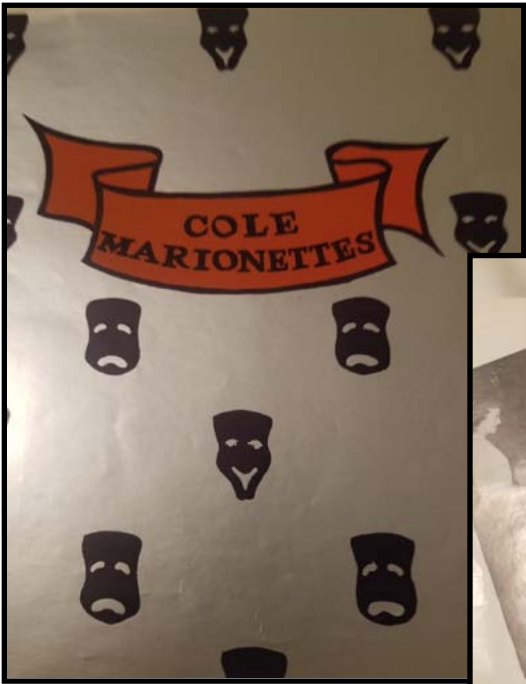
Barbara and Faye Coleman

Since the CPG has had a long-time association with the professional puppeteers in the area it is no surprise that the files pertaining to the careers of the professional companies are among the most extensive, and contain not only newspaper clippings, but quite a few of the very fine publicity materials used by these companies. The most extensive files are those of long time CPG members Barbara and Faye Coleman (The Coleman Puppets), George and Lucille Cole (The Cole Marionettes), and of course Mel and Laverne Biske (The Melikin Puppets). Other Chicago companies are featured in the files including, Dave Herzog’s Marionettes, Hystopolis Productions, The Roberts Marionettes, Red Moon, The Dunworth Puppets, Creventive Puppet Company and many more. Fred has also kept files on puppet companies from the Midwest and puppeteers nationwide.

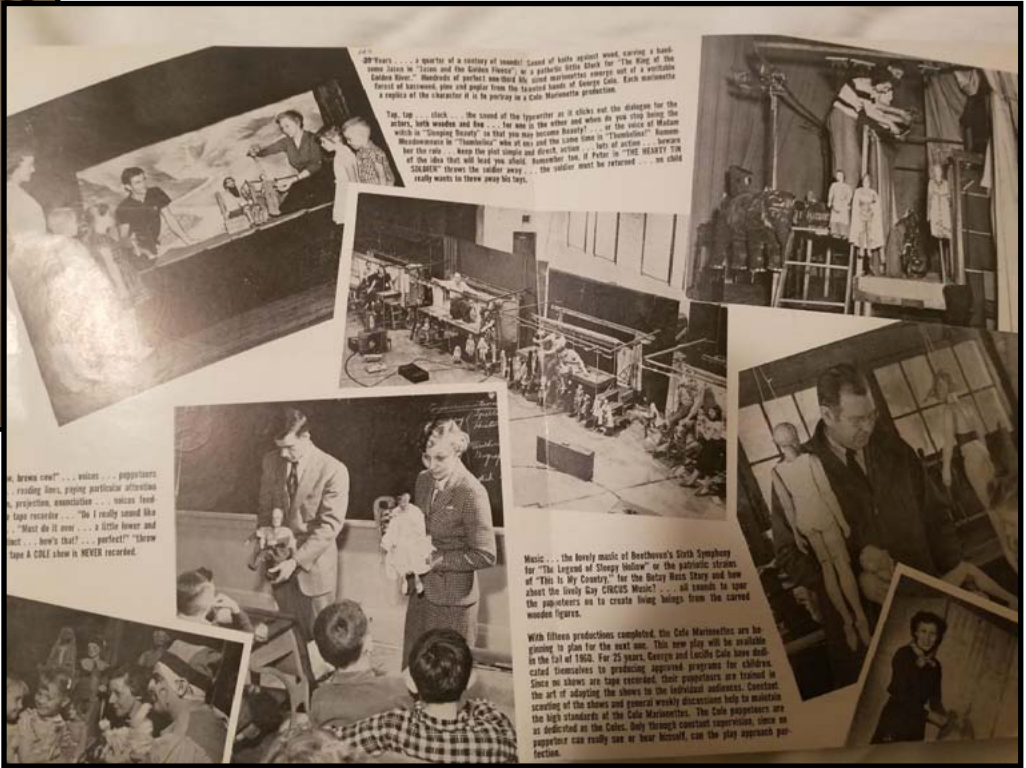
The task of digitizing the files is extensive and has only just begun. These files are literally a labor of love from a man who has served us most loyally and with selflessness. It is a honor to become the keeper of this history. In this article I have included a few shots of some of the materials included in the Guild files. From time to time as the files are digitized, I will share more of the rich history of the CPG as compiled by Fred Putz.



Poster for the Coleman Puppets “Variety Revue” show



(top) Cover of the Cole Marionettes brochure and (right) inside brochure



Publicity shot for the Coleman Puppets “Ali Baba” show

"Suspended Animation" - The Huber Marionettes

by Dave Herzog

I need to preface this review by stating that it's actually rather unfair for me to review the Huber Marionettes performance of "Suspended Animation" for several reasons. First, I've known Phillip for fifty-six years ever since we were boys together in Dixon, Illinois, and second, I consider Phillip Huber simply the finest marionette variety artist working today. So, it's a little hard for me to be objective.

After over a year of pandemic related delays, Phillip Huber was able to appear for two performances at the newly renovated Playhouse at White Lake in White Lake, MI on August 14, 2021. Notably, these were Phillip's first live performances after being sidelined by the pandemic. The Playhouse at White Lake provided an almost perfect venue for The Huber Marionettes, and Phillip gave two fantastic performances to enthusiastic audiences of the general public with a very healthy sprinkling of puppeteers at each performance.

Suspended Animation is not your usual marionette variety show. It has been developed and refined by The Huber Marionettes for nearly four decades into an almost perfect presentation of sophisticated puppetry for a discerning adult audience. Philip's performance can be varied from venue to venue, and he chooses the acts carefully to fit a wide variety of tastes.

Phillip opened the show with his trapeze artist "Louisa". As with all of Phillip's takes on the traditional marionette variety acts Louisa is presented in a well-choreographed routine that include far more tricks than usual, including a spectacular head stand.



"Otto Halfminder" is a delightful Tyrolean accordion player and yodeler who delights with his playing and singing. The manipulation of this act is masterful and comical, and you'd swear Otto is actually playing his Tyrolean Squeeze box. His yodeling is accompanied by a hysterical moving Adam's apple. Otto's act ends with an arm stretching final flourish.

"Anna Fibbion" is a frog ballerina who appears out of a lily pad in a red tutu much to the delight of the audience. Anna imitates many a classical ballet moves in a delightful parody of classical ballet. It's all very tongue in cheek and completely delightful, right up until the end when Anna's three-foot long froggy tongue shoots out to consume an annoying fly. Classical ballet may never be the same.

"Eduardo", is a marionette I've been waiting a few years to see perform, this punk rocker kid is a real treat to see. With his leather jacket, red shorts, hysterically hairy bowlegs and punk rock boots, Eduardo sings a punk version of "I Feel Pretty" from West Side story. This puppet is full of attitude with his unique side moving jawline, posterior wiggling twerking, and a very funny original soundtrack especially recorded for The Huber Marionettes. Even the guitar gets into the act singing part of the song much to Eduard's consternation. While a slight tangle hampered Eduardo during his afternoon performance (yes it even happens to Phillip Huber) Eduardo was spot on during his evening performance.

"Pierrot" is Phillip's take on the classic tightrope marionette variety act. This act is performed with great skill, and one feels Pierrot working to defy gravity. Throughout the act there is a sense of actual skill on the part of the marionette, and true sense of the marionette being alive and in the moment.



"Florica Dansator" is a Gypsy beauty who dances with all the grace and skill of a gypsy princess. Dressed in truly authentic looking gypsy style this act is one of my favorites in the Huber marionette repertoire. Each pose, each turn of the head, is so carefully executed that the character seems to move on her own, first being playful, then seductive and then with all the fire of a traditional gypsy dancer. The beautifully sculpted head seems to change expression with each pose, even though there are no facial animations. This is marionette manipulation at it's very finest, being performed by a master at the top of his game.

"Nicole" is arguably the most sophisticated act in the show. This stunning marionette is a portrait of the late singer Natalie Cole and is truly a lady of "glamour and soul" Dressed spectacularly in a seductive yellow gown festooned with bugle beads, Natalie performs the song "Paper Moon" in a seductive style playing off Phillip himself as if he were a supporting dancer. This act is pure class and shows why Phillip deserves his place on the night club stages of Europe.



"Manuel Dexterity" is a gypsy violinist who is a true virtuoso. Marionettes that play an instrument can be incredibly boring interludes in a show. Not so in the hands of Phillip Huber. Manuel really seems to be playing the violin. Due in part to Phillip's extensive study of violinists combined with a beautifully designed marionette (he even has moving fingers to pluck the strings) Manuel delivers a virtuoso performance with a few very funny tricks along the way including the splits and a great blow off where he removes his own toupee with the bow of the violin.

"Pricilla Pipes" is a classic marionette variety Opera Singer with a heaving bosom and stretching neck. But of course, in Phillip's hands the old schtick is taken much farther. What makes Pricilla so unique is the most extensively animated head on any marionette I've ever seen. Her eyes move from side to side, have lids that close, and can even go cross eyed. Pricilla has a unique mouth animation that allows for not only upper and lower jaw animation but allows her mouth to twist and turn creating a myriad of amusing expressions. A bit of a joke that only audience members more familiar with Broadway musicals may know is that the rich contralto voice singing "There's a little bit of Good in Everyone" taken from the original Broadway cast recording of "Chicago" is actually that of a man.

"Taffy" is Phillip's signature act known around the world for decades. Taffy is a playful Terrier puppy who has won heart all over the world. Taffy has even appeared in a Broadway musical playing a real dog. Once seen, Taffy is not soon forgotten.

"Oskar" is a 24-karat star. I mean this literally as the puppet is covered in 24 karat gold leaf. This contortionist is as sophisticated and skilled as some of the world's best circus performers evoking the sophisticated moves of a Cirque du Soleil performer. This marionette captivates the audience with a sense of mystery and a real sense of the "aliveness" of the character. What's more, these incredible moves are accomplished with only eight strings.



"Shirley U'Jest" is a portrait marionette of the late great singer and actress Nell Carter. This character is all bombast and pure jazz, with a face full of personality and coy playfulness. As described in the program she is a "full figured gal full of razzmatazz" and she leaves us thoroughly entertained.

"Charlie Crowstomper" is Phillip's take on the traditional break-away marionette and, as expected, he flies apart and comes back together. Of course, in Phillip's version he does this in more ways than anyone would think imaginable. It's the best take ever on this puppetry classic.

"Liza" is a portrait of the superstar singer Liza Minnelli. Liza starts off in the guise of a little old lady and soon removes her country garb to reveal a dazzling red jumpsuit, dripping with bugle beads and rhinestones. From then on is all pure showbiz and Bob Fosse choreography in a complete show stopping number. This is one of Phillip's older numbers and the choreography has been perfectly refined over many years. This act leaves the audience almost breathless and thrilled.

"Mo Sho Long" is Phillip's Chinese magician and closes the show with a mind-boggling array of illusions. Literally years in the planning and building this marionette, it is the fitting finale to a spectacular evening of entertainment. In the finale, Mo Sho Long transforms himself into a smoke spewing Chinese dragon leaving the audience almost speechless. This is puppetry virtuosity at it's very best.



The performance was followed with a "meet the artist" session and Phillip graciously answered the audiences many questions.

There is an unseen presence behind the stage who must be acknowledged. This is David Alexander, Phillip Huber's business partner and manager who also, as a trained dancer, choreographed much of Phillip's show. David also is the "master manipulator" who for years has taken care of all the myriad details of Phillip's international travel arrangements, dealing not only with travel companies and airlines but international embassies to provide visas and travel documents.

This performance was arranged by Joe Emory in conjunction with the Playhouse at White Lake. Many thanks to Joe the Playhouse and The Huber Marionettes for making this performance possible despite all the pandemic delays.



"The Furry Follies" - Dave Herzog's Marionettes

by Jeff Biske

They say it's like riding a bike and Dave Herzog's Marionettes proved that to be true. On June 5th at the Dunee Library Dave was ready to do something that he - and almost all live performers - haven't done in more than a year... perform in front of a live audience. No Zoom videos, no FaceTime. LIVE!

At 10 am on this warm Saturday morning, the audience was in place, the stage was set, and the cuddly collection of furry friends were ready to entertain. When Dave was introduced, it was as if there hadn't been a 14 month hiatus as he came out from behind his stage and made his way to the raised performance area. He greeted the audience and asked them, "Does anyone know what a marionette is?" He started to explain, but he couldn't do it alone. So he enlisted the help of Timothy, the Fluffy Tufted Talking Turtle. The two went back and forth with witty and silly banter talking about how marionettes work. Then it was on with the show.

This musical marionette variety review strung together (pun intended) a series of acts starting with a song and dance by a nearly two and a half foot tall poodle, aptly named Poodle Garland. June Bug, a bright green furry bug, made attempts to blow up a balloon, finally succeeding and floating away. Barbara O'Strieswan, a prima ballerina ostrich, who elegantly strutted her stuff. The Lovely Miss Kitty Litter had the crowd gasping as she came apart at the seams (a break away style marionette). Heloise Hippopotamus gingerly and somewhat reluctantly walked the tightrope, then Bernard the Bunny expertly juggled. He even managed to balance a ball on his foot a time or two to the amazement of the audience. Raja, the Most Talented Baby Elephant astonished the crowd as he balanced on a barrel and danced around. Mouse-chelle Quan, a roller skating mouse, skated her way around the stage. Taking the stage next was Clara Cluck and, fortunately, she was the only one that laid an egg that day. As it turned out, the egg hatched and out popped a tiny marionette named Eggbert. Ted E. Bear seemed to foul up a beautifully laid out teddy bear picnic as he magically picked up sandwiches and wound up sitting on a birthday cake. Wally the Dog wagged around the stage followed by Chimperella, a trapeze act that had the audience spellbound. A small furry ball came out next, followed by another one, and then another. That's right, three marionettes on stage at one time. (spoiler alert- They were attached at the control) But it didn't stop there. Another furry little ball complete with two eyes and antenna completed the set and formed Comfort the Caterpillar.

If you have ever seen a Herzog Marionette show you know the elegance of his performance and the beautiful craftsmanship of the characters he puts on stage. On occasion there is "audience participation" as he brings his puppets from the stage to the crowd to the squealing delight of the younger set and sometimes the parents, too. When asked later, Dave said that he had been rehearsing the show for a week. He also confessed that the marionettes were a bit heavier than he remembered. Guess he felt the pain the next day but the audience felt his joy that morning. Welcome back, Dave, and here's to more reviews from more performers and live performances from all our CPG members.



(left)
Dave and Poodle Garland greet new fans Sadie Biske and her Mom (Laura).
Yep. Mel's Great-Granddaughter and Granddaughter-In-Law

By The Way...

by Ann Onymous

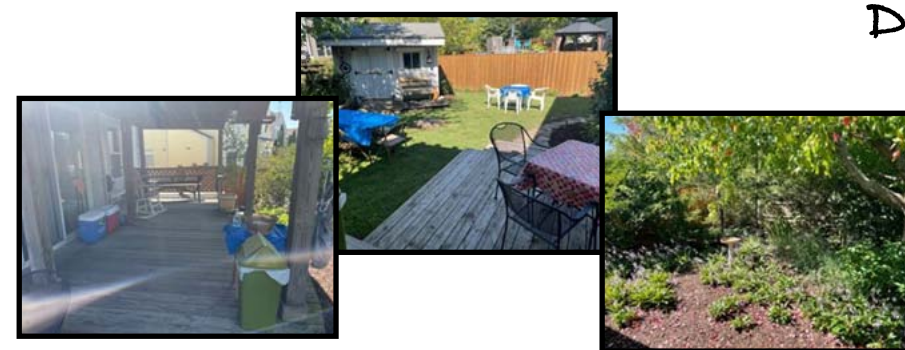
After a long hot Summer, it seems.....What!? Hey wait!

Ann, please excuse the interruption. This is your editor, Mel Biske. I think I know what you had in mind for your column for this issue and after thinking it over, I thought it would be more appropriate for me to write it myself. I would like to open the column in the first person (me) by writing about feelings of gratitude to all who contributed in making the idea of the CPG Reunion Picnic a resounding success.

It began with presenting the picnic idea to my family. Their full support would be needed to accomplish what would amount to a four-hour gathering of loyal CPG members. They all agreed. "We did it before, and we could do it again!" The general idea was published on the front page of the June 2021 issue of the Puppet Patter. Dates were suggested for consideration. As it turned out the general consensus for the date was Labor Day weekend, Sunday, September 5th.

Jeff worked up the official picnic invitation and it was emailed on August 10th. We received seventeen RSVP replies. Our family was delighted to learn of such a favorable response and final plans were put into action. Neal utilized his landscaping skills to get the yard in order - plantings, weeding, cutting, and mulch... LOTS of mulch. After two days of rain, on Sunday morning we were blessed with a perfect day of sunshine. The front page of this issue best summarized the day by making it a CPG event that will be long remembered. A very big THANK YOU to all who attended with their contributions to our menu and providing much needed socializing and potpourri entertaining.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my "kids", Jennifer, Neal, Jeff and (kid-in-love) Sandy for their assistance for both before and after the picnic and for their love and understanding.



Dad

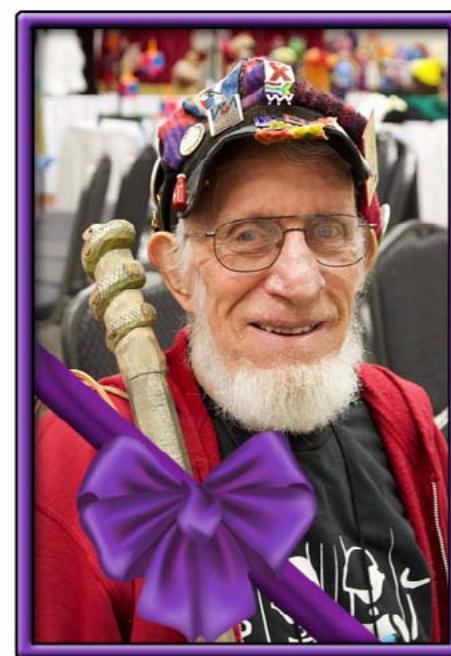


In Memoriam

Rev. Fred A. Berchtold

September 19, 1936 - June 28, 2021

It is with deep sadness that we report the passing of fellow Chicagoland Puppetry Guild member, Fred Berchtold. He served the guild well as president for three consecutive two year terms. Fred guided the CPG by actively participating in the annual World Day of Puppetry and represented the guild at Potlatch, Great Lakes Regional Festivals, as well as P of A National Festivals. He was also the founder of the annual "Presidents Award" presented to guild members in recognition for "Enthusiastic Support of Puppetry."



More Than 150,000 Words!

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. There were more than 150 pictures taken and submitted during the picnic and here are just a few. Thanks to David Quesal, Jennifer Mantia (daughter), Sandy and Jeff Biske for snapping their brains out.

Having Lunch and Catching Up



And Then Touring the Melikin Museum



Potpourri and a Puppet Show



A Birthday Surprise and the End to a Long Day



Have You Checked Out the CPG Website Lately?

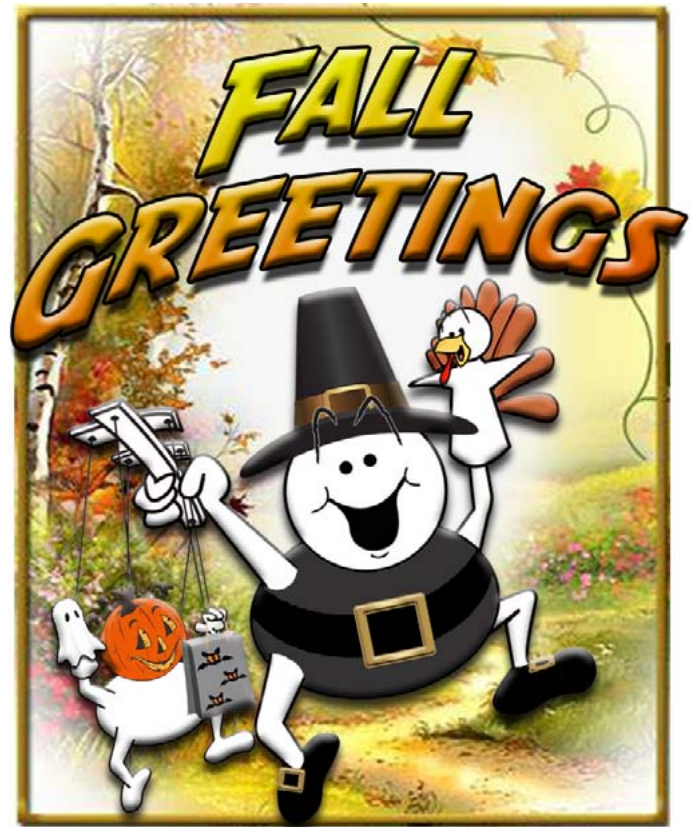


Be sure to visit our guild's web site on a regular basis for the latest postings on what's happening in the Chicago area, the latest on the Great Lakes Regional Festival and a roster of active and newly added puppeteers. Events and Shows page has the latest posting of local performing companies, their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

Our address is:

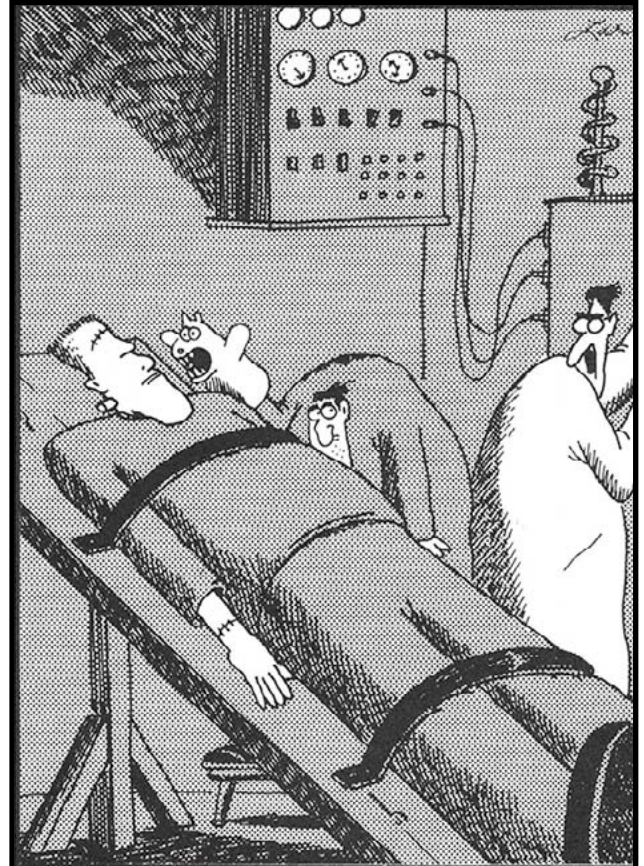
www.chicagopuppetguild.org

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



Leave 'em Laughin'!

The Far Side by Gary Larson



"Igor! Get That Wolfman puppet out of his face!
Boy, sometimes you really are bizarre."