

The Newsletter of The National Capital Puppetry Guild

# Puppetimes

Vol. 55 #5

September - October 2019

A Conversation with

**Carolyn Wilcox**



Chartered by the Puppeteers of America, INC



## Coming Up at the Puppet Co

Starting September 20 Through October 6

in Glen Echo Park

7300 MacArthur Blvd, Glen Echo, MD

For Reservations (301)634-5380



### THE THREE BILLY GOATS GRUFF

"The 3 Billy Goats Gruff" is a marionette romp in which three brothers get the goat of a hen-pecked troll, in their attempts to trip-trap-tromp to where the grass is greener. Three variety numbers precede the performance, demonstrating the making of a simple hand puppet, and manipulation of rod puppets and marionettes, as an introduction to the Art of Puppetry.

**Recommended Ages: 3 1/2 - 9 years old • Show Length: 40 Minutes**

**October 11 through November 23**

Shows are Thursday and Fridays at 11:00am

Saturday and Sunday at 11:30am & 1:00pm



### Gen Piper's Pinocchio

A life-size marionette version of Carlo Collodi's classic children's tale, created in the 1960s by the father of the Puppet Co.'s co-founder, Christopher Piper. This production has been completely refurbished and adapted for the Puppet Co. stage. Performed in Hollywood and Hawaii, critics hailed the production as "A Masterpiece!" and raved, "The underwater ballet alone is worth the price of admission!"

**Age Recommendation: 5 y.o. - Adult • Running Time: 50 Minutes**

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Puppetimes is the official newsletter of the National Capital Puppetry Guild. Puppetimes is published bimonthly and is available to all members. Puppetimes is always soliciting your articles, opinions, advice, letters to the editor and other missives for publication. Please note that article submission deadline is roughly two weeks before publication date.

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Website [www.puppetimes.info](http://www.puppetimes.info)

Send all submissions to: [puppetimes@gmail.com](mailto:puppetimes@gmail.com)

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## The National Capital Puppetry Guild, Inc.

is a 501(c)3 non-profit charity dedicated to the education and practice of the puppetry arts. We were chartered in 1964 by the Puppeteers of America. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in puppetry.

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For membership information contact:

Jeff Bragg

64 Southall Court

Sterling, VA 20165

or email [puppetimes@gmail.com](mailto:puppetimes@gmail.com)

For information regarding membership in The Puppeteers of America, contact:

Puppeteers of America, Inc.

Exec. Dir. - Paul Robinson

310 East 38th St., Suite 127

Minneapolis, MN 55409

Ph: (612) 821-2382 email: [execdir@puppeteers.org](mailto:execdir@puppeteers.org)

or visit the P of A web site: [www.puppeteers.org](http://www.puppeteers.org)

Mid-Atlantic Regional Director -

Jeff Bragg

64 Southall Court

Sterling, VA 20165

Ph: (703) 424-5553

**The Next Meeting...** of the National Capital Puppetry Guild will be held September 29th at the Puppet Co after the 1pm performance of The 3 Billy Goats Gruff. We will be having a workshop with Barry Gordemer on making foam puppets. We will also be enjoying our customary potluck. Please give Sandy Feulner a call or drop her an email for details on what you can bring to the potluck at 703-897-9969 or email [puppetsandmore1@gmail.com](mailto:puppetsandmore1@gmail.com).

To make your complimentary reservation for the 1pm show, call (301)364-5380 and press 9 to go directly to voicemail or email: [boxoffice@thepuppetco.org](mailto:boxoffice@thepuppetco.org). Please remind the Box Office, that you are a NCPG member. Your tickets will be under your name at the Box Office window outside. Remember: seating starts at 12:45pm (You should arrive prior to 12:45pm).


# President's Note

by Jeff Bragg

First off, we forgot to wish Bob Brown a happy 80th birthday. Happy birthday Bob! We love you!

I've often commented on the great and good fortune that comes along with my job as editor of Puppetimes for the National Capital Puppetry Guild. No more so than the privilege of my visit with this month's interviewee, Caroly Wilcox.

To say that Caroly Wilcox has been involved with puppetry is just a little like saying Neil Armstrong had something to do with the moon. Her work with Jim Henson alone lasted over two decades and was marked with periods of intense building, staging, and performing, that would culminate in the body of work we all love so much. From the beginning of Sesame Street, all the way through the Jim Henson Hour, she was there, usually quietly behind the scenes, making sure everything worked.

To the right..... are a couple of pictures that I really liked, that I didn't get in the interview. Caroly with Kermit Love and Jane Henson. I was also given a page of Faz Fazakas' quotes, which I've sprinkled throughout this issue. See how many you can find.

Our conversation with Caroly begins on page 6. Did I mention that we have a whole lot of unseen photos? Yeah.

In this issue, we would like to welcome another of our O'Neill grant recipient to our pages. Vanessa Spring-Frank took the workshop with mech expert extraordinaire Jim Kroupa, at this year's O'Neill Puppetry Conference. Her experience with Mr. Kroupa and his mad mechanisms begins on page 19.

We also have a great article on how the Army's top brass parties with puppets from Master Sargent Leigh Lafosse on page 22.

Plans have begun in earnest for next year's Homecoming to be held once again in Brattleboro and once again along with the fine folks of Sandglass Theater. Efforts to find lodging and event space are already underway.

Also, it's that time again. Our annual Board of Directors election is coming up in November. We're looking for new board members to guide our organization into the future. Our long-time treasurer, Pam McNaughton will finally be retiring. We are all so grateful so her selfless service to our guild. Although we have a candidate to replace her, we expect several seats being open in the near future. Won't you consider stepping up and making sure that there is great leadership for years to come? There's so much that you can do to promote the art of puppetry and education in the field. Make your ideas and influence known.

We are also terribly saddened to hear of the passing of Alan Cook and we offer our sincerest condolences to all who loved him.

That's about it. See you next time .



**PS.** Oh, and next time we'll have a wonderful talk with Craig Marin and Olga Felgemacher of Flexitoon Puppets fame. Stay tuned for more fun.



"And then I sank so low, I became a puppeteer."



# THE JUDY BARRY BROWN FUND

Providing Scholarships and Grants to Study the Fine Art of Puppetry



THE JUDY FUND

## *Once upon a time...*

There was an amazing and inspiring woman who made puppets and directed theater and made costumes and created art and raised children. She helped us in any way she could and we loved her and she meant the world to us.

She was indefatigable. She was infinitely creative. She took young puppeteers under her wing and often knocked the feathers off of them, figuratively speaking.

And the stories are endless, too!

And then one day, she was gone.

In honor of this remarkable woman's life and work, the National Capital Puppetry Guild has established the Judy Barry Brown Fund to assist deserving students in furthering their puppetry educations.

Under the auspices of The Judy Fund , we are now offering a college scholarship, a scholarship to help a young puppeteer attend their first festival, and a grant for a young puppeteer to attend the O'Neill conference.

Help us do this. You can make a tax exempt contribution or use Amazon Smile to make our scholarship programs successful.

Or help us do this by nominating a qualifying student. We are always seeking qualified applicants .

Do you want more great puppetry? Then help us make more great puppeteers.

Yes! I would love to help The Judy Barry Brown Fund propel the education of young puppeteers in our guild region!

Please take my money!

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# A Conversation With Carol Wilcox

Sitting down with Carol Wilcox is like sitting down with someone whom you've known forever. She is warm and welcoming, smart and kind. Her work for Jim Henson is the stuff of puppet legend. She witnessed first-hand a halcyon era in American puppetry, working in New York City with artists such as Bil Baird and Jim Henson, then ascendant in film and television. At one point, she had a hand in every puppet built at the Henson studio. Yeah, pun intended. She's made a more than a dozen Kermits and was a part of every production until her retirement in 1990. In mid-June, she and her partner welcomed me into their Chelsea loft for some lentil and turkey soup and an afternoon of looking through photo scrap books and spirited conversation. Best of all, I found out that we both love the Marx Brothers.



**PT:** Let's start with your childhood. You grew up in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

**CW:** Yup. My father was a college professor. I went to a private progressive, sort-of John Dewey (an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer whose ideas have been influential in education and social reform] school, which was great fun. It was on the edge of some woods. We'd get tadpoles and watch them change into frogs. We had guinea pigs and bantam chickens and goats. At the end of each year the kids would go on a camping trip: the youngest (3-4) for one night, the oldest for a 5-day trip. In eighth grade there was a biking or hiking trip on the Horseshoe Trail in the Pennsylvania Dutch area. Great learning experiences.

**PT:** And you went to Swarthmore College? The

school's philosophy is based on Quaker values. What was that like?

**CW:** Although I was raised as a member of the Society of Friends and I respect it a great deal, I am not active with it. I did go to some work-camps in Mexico that were affiliated with the Society. My first experience of a different life.

**PT:** You are known for your puppet building skills. Did you acquire your skills early in life?

**CW:** I guess I took after my mom. I made dolls. I sewed. She taught art at the school I went to - we did all different sorts of crafts: plaster casting, etching. We didn't have a television when I was young. My dad got one of those big boxes with an 8-inch screen to watch the news: Edward Murrow, David Brinkley, Chet Huntley. But that was it. We would watch the news and then it was off. We

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**I just hit it so fortunately because Jim was hungry at that time. He needed puppet builders.**

---

would read, play games, sing. It never occurred to us to watch it for shows or anything else. Eight - inch B&W was not a very exciting format.

**PT:** What brought you from Pennsylvania to New York City?

**CW:** I had a college friend there. I was at a loss as to what to do. I had studied some education, but it was not a good fit.

**PT:** When was this?

**CW:** 1954. My mother had died and my father was working in Pakistan (with his new wife, a good lady) and my sister was up at Cornell and later in Indonesia. I tried this and that: waited table, worked in leathercraft making belts and bags.



**PT:** I found out that you were in a musical, "The Next President," with the political satirist, Mort Sahl. This was in 1958. How did that come about?

**CW:** I had dated a man who knew they were looking for folksingers. It was the weirdest show. The folk singing group with Mary Travers [Later of Peter, Paul, and Mary fame] and Erik Darling - six in all. Mort would do a set, then he would be supported by the singers or by the Jimmy Giuffre jazz trio, with a modern dancer (!!!). This bizarre combination only lasted a week and a half.

**PT:** Were you living in the Village at that time?

**CW:** Yeah. On Barrow Street.

**PT:** That was an incredibly exciting time to be in New York City in the Village with the folk music

explosion happening.

**CW:** People would be singing in Washington Square. I sang on two folk music records, too. The first was with Erik Darling, "Run Come Hear the Folk Singers" and the second with Tom Glazer and Sandy Bull [aka. Benjy Bull]. Sandy was the son of a jazz harpist [Daphne Hellman]. Tom did a lot of folksongs for children, had a nice baritone voice and played the guitar. Benjy played banjo. The

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**Frank would do Cookie's left-hand and his right-hand would be Cookie's mouth. Frank didn't really trust me, so every now and then he would, with his left hand, hold the right hand down, and talk and talk!**

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record was titled "The Samplers in Person." We did about four concerts and that was it!

**PT:** What were you doing before for work and then how did you become involved in puppetry?

**CW:** Odds and ends of jobs, waitressing in coffee shops. A friend said, "Well, you've tried all these different things, why don't you try puppetry?" She had a friend working at the

Park Department's Marionette Theater. So I interviewed and got in. I worked there for two years. There was a show called "Happy the Humbug" in which the hero was part turtle, part monkey, part giraffe. I made and performed Miss Pink Elephant for that show.





The methods of constructing the perfect Muppet .



The Marionette Theater had been set up during WPA days. The director, Ascanio Spolidoro had a good ear for music for the production - wonderful themes by classical composers. In summer we would perform in the parks from a stage built into a van that would be driven to various parks in the city. The Circus show was quite spectacular, with weightlifters, animals, and as finale, a giant. Huge Legs walked onto the stage, the top of the van opened up and the head and arms of the giant emerged! Good shtick! The kids would sit on the asphalt and sometimes it was too hot! We'd build a production in spring and fall, perform in schools in the winter. The "parkies" would assemble the stage and then the puppeteers would hang the marionettes and do the show. We'd eat the school lunches [laughs]. Brown bread, with cream cheese and marmalade.

**PT:** I think I would have left off the marmalade myself.

**CW:** It was on it! You didn't have a choice! While I was with this someone from Swarthmore College called to ask if I would like to do the puppets for their production of Ben Jonson's satirical play "Bartholomew Fair." In one scene the Puritan (and hypocrite) came up and scolded the puppets for being licentious, and he is answered by a puppet pulling up his robes and saying, "Here we are! We're just made of wood and cloth! How can we be licentious?!"



These puppets are at the Puppetry Center in Atlanta.

And then I got a job with Larry Berthelson's Pickwick Puppets. We did shows at Lincoln Center with Thomas Scherman's Little Symphony Orchestra. We performed De Falla's "Master Peter's Puppet Show," Mozart's "The Magic Flute" (in an abridged version by Oscar Hammerstein's daughter), and also Ravel's

"L'Enfant et les Sortilèges." I built and performed the Armchair in this last one. I also toured with Larry puppeteering on his smaller shows. I built small fold-up sets for "Rumpelstiltskin" and other shows. For "Scheherazade" I built the sets and Penny Jones did the puppets.

Later on I worked on "All Join Hands", a local CBS-TV children's show (it fulfilled the public affairs requirement). Beryl Bernay created the show. Each week we would focus on a different country. I would research

folk tales and customs to find what would be interesting to present. I would phone the consulates to see about props. For Switzerland I got to blow an alphorn. There were big drawings of village life and small magnetized figures would walk down the streets. I also made many quick hand puppets with rubber ball heads for this show.

Larry passed on to me a job with Project Arise - educational experiences for high school kids. So I went to Berlin, New Hampshire, and in two weeks we built and performed "Peter and the Wolf." They did a great job. In 1965, I worked in the

World's Fair. The Chrysler pavilion, Bil Baird's mari-  
onettes with a crank-case torso and sexy legs - a  
Rockette kick chorus.

**PT:** So, you kind of learned on the job. How did you  
get to Sesame Street?

**CW:** I read that Joan Cooney was starting the show,  
so I wrote to them about my TV and puppet experi-  
ence. And they said, well, eh. Then I read that Jim  
Henson was going to do it, so I went to Jim.  
He was looking for puppeteers and I am not  
a great puppeteer - or rather, I am good at  
mime, but absolutely cannot ad-lib. Jim real-  
ly is happy with free ad lib creating charac-  
ters. Fortunately, he also needed to expand  
his puppet-building staff, which consisted of  
only Don Sahlin at  
the time. So, I joined  
at the very beginning  
of Sesame Street  
production.

**PT:** You were in-  
volved in a lot of the  
early commercial  
work, too.

**CW:** I remember go-  
ing on a shoot to  
Staten Island. I guess  
it was an ad for nutri-  
tion, with Cookie  
Monster. I was there

to take care of the puppet and to do the right hand.  
Frank Oz would perform the left hand and the  
mouth of Cookie. The bit was fun. First it was eat  
peas, eat carrots, eat meat. Then finally it was eat  
cookies - and a whole payload of cookies dumped  
down on Cookie!

**PT:** Weren't you Ernie's right hand for a little while,  
off and on?

**CW:** Only occasionally the first year. The other

Muppeteers were Frank Oz and Jerry Nelson. With  
many characters, even the director, Jon Stone was  
drafted. No one really knew that it would be such a  
hit in the 69th street building.

**PT:** How would a construction assignment go?

**CW:** Sesame Street was great because so many new  
things were needed. The writers would, say, give you  
a germ. What does a germ look like? So, I would in-

vent a germ. A nasty,  
sort of hairy thing  
that was lots of fin-  
gers and angry eyes.  
It was great to be  
able to invent things.  
The educators would  
ask for something,  
the writers would

write, and we would create a visual puppet of it. I  
had great fun making Bert's bottle cap collection.  
Talking French toast and peanut butter sandwich-  
es. I made a whole set of teeth, too. I loved mak-  
ing the animals. That's one of the things I miss  
most on retiring was not inventing. I do not miss  
making budgets for movies. That was a nightmare.  
We'd get a movie to build. We always knew that  
the main characters were needed, so we could  
start with those. There were about eight or nine  
versions of Kermit the Frog.

**PT:** You also used to clean up Jim's sketches and  
sort of translate and annotate them.

**CW:** When Jim was around, he would give us a quick  
thumbnail sketch of a creature. If he was there, he  
would come by and critique how it was developing.  
Whatever we produced, even if it was not what he  
had dreamed or fantasized in his head, it was as  
close as we could get to what he had verbalized his  
dream was, he would work with it and make it work.

**PT:** Was this when Henson had space up on 67<sup>th</sup>.

**CW:** 67th and 3rd Avenue. At first we rented the





Carolyn with Alice Snuffleupagus.



fourth floor, and then added the fifth floor, then the third floor. We had the whole building, except for the storefront.

**PT:** It's interesting to see how the different puppet's look evolved over time.

**CW:** Yes. The first Big Bird was sort of ugly compared to later developments. They had quite long toes and they would trip up Carroll Spinney, so we shortened the toes. The first feathers were what they called hackle pads, made from chicken neck hackles glued onto a pad Kermit Love had started with those, but he had the aha to switch to the long body feathers from a Tom Turkey. The feathers took a lot of work. First the feather merchant bleached them white, scraped the spine halfway down the feather to make them supple, and then dyed them, two-tone. When the Muppets got them, we had a labor-intensive job of steaming them fluffy, and ironing a little sort of



Gould, Natural History May 1979 - <https://archive.org/details/naturalhistory88newy/page/n487>].

Mickey's Nose got shorter, his pupils larger. It makes them more childlike. Jim's first pass at Snuffy had eyes that were green and yellow - even serpent like.

**PT:** He looked pretty creepy.

**CW:** Creepy, yeah. But those eyes were never used on the show. Kermit Love also suggested the long, soft feathery ostrich feathers for the eyelashes.

**PT:** In the early days everybody pretty much did everything, right?

**CW:** Not really. The puppeteers only performed. Marty Robinson is a terribly talented puppet builder, as well as performer, but he only builds for his own projects, not Sesame Street.

**PT:** You have quite a list of builds.

**CW:** The puppet builders all worked on everything. God knows how many Kermits I've built. As for a movie, there was

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### **Don was a dear guy, but he would buy things and not learn how to operate them.**

---

cup in the tip. The finish was hot gluing them onto a large hollow sort of bell-shaped basic body shape.

The first Ernie and Bert were both only slightly different. Their noses were larger and darker in tone. There was an article, I think, in Natural History magazine on the neotenization of Mickey Mouse [Mickey Mouse Meets Konrad Lorenz, Stephen Jay

a radio-controlled version, versions with and without legs, and an old one from last year as a "throw," one to be thrown and hit a wall, etc.

**PT:** There were so many great scenes in those movies. The Great Muppet Caper, what memories stand out?

**CW:** The bike scene in London was something else

again. One problem was the changing light on the background, and the fishlines would show one way against dark tree trunks and another against sunlit grass. The solution was to mottle them like camouflage - sort of blotchy. It worked pretty well. Besides, if the puppets are fun to watch, the fishlines are not very visible. The bicycling was well done: two cherry-pickers with suspended platforms beneath them. This enabled Piggy and Kermit to circle around towards each other. The motion of the bicycles' pedals was what made the legs move.

**PT:** How about from "The Muppets Take Manhattan."

**CW:** That was interesting for the swim scene, a la Esther Williams. We had two kids in small Piggy costumes - two, because children cannot work too long. The costume could not be used too long, because it would get wet and sag. We took the Piggy legs to a pool to test if the flock would come off with the chlorine, etc. It worked pretty well, but we probably left a slight film of the hairs on the pool.

For the John Denver show in Colorado, Faz [Fazakas] and I had two things to check out ahead of time. First was the effect of Piggy's electronics on a horse - would it bother the horse, would the gait bother the electronics. Yes to both - the horse started trotting off and Piggy's head fell off (not ruined, but educational). The second was Gonzo swimming and coming along like a periscope.

**PT:** With his nose.

**CW:** Yeah. We weighted a plank of wood, put an

extra Gonzo head on it and tested that rig by towing it in the river upstate near us.

**PT:** What is your favorite Bert and Ernie Sketch?

**CW:** My favorite is the one when Bert is asleep and Ernie goes "poke, poke, poke, poke, poke" to

wake Bert to ask him a question. Steve Whitmire does a very good Kermit - good manipulation and accent. But I always felt that Jim was a baritone, so the timbre of Kermit's voice was different. What was so horrible when everyone read of Jim's death, there were



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**My favorite is when Bert is asleep and Ernie goes poke, poke, poke, poke, poke! Ernie was Jim.**

---

many calls the next day, jamming the lines, with people calling to say, "I can do Kermit." Horrible.

**PT:** You were workshop supervisor for a number of years. That must have been a big job. What were some of the responsibilities?

**CW:** Going to production meetings, designing characters, assigning jobs, hiring new crafts people. Some came from art schools. Tim Miller had done costuming before - he was just all-around talented.



Puppet Carol



**PT:** You also trained a lot of the builders.

**CW:** Yes. We did a lot of workshops to try to find new builders. We would have a session with the builders given a chunk of soft urethane foam, and they would be challenged to carve a head and make it manipulable for talking. I also gave lectures on the way I would build animals out of sheets of foam.

**PT:** Let's talk Elmo.

**CW:** Okay. Sesame Street had a song that needed a variety of monsters: little red, fat blue, tall orange. They could be grouped in different ways with the song, "One of These Things is Not Like the Other." And little red was cute, so various puppeteers began to play with him. The first was Brian Muehl, then Richard Hunt. Kevin Clash was the one who started Elmo talking about "Elmo do this" in the third person. He really created the character, and then the writers would start writing for it. One would write a bit with Elmo sitting on a table. So, I would have to make legs and a little bum for Elmo.

**PT:** You built the first Elmo, correct?

**CW:** Yes.

**PT:** What was the mouth plate built from birch plywood and gaffer's tape?



**CW:** Yes.

**PT:** What about the flexible mouth plates?

**CW:** Red gasket rubber. It is stiff but flexible. Watch Kermit in particular. His head is only fabric, and Jim got wonderful expressions out of Kermit.

**PT:** What advice do you have for people wanting to learn how to pattern?

**CW:** I recommend that people look at toys and toy patterns, because they have some good ideas. I wound up having a great time making horses, cows, pigs. My animals are actually pretty simple in shape.

**PT:** So many of the folks at work became close friends. You and Bonnie Erickson have been friends for a long time.

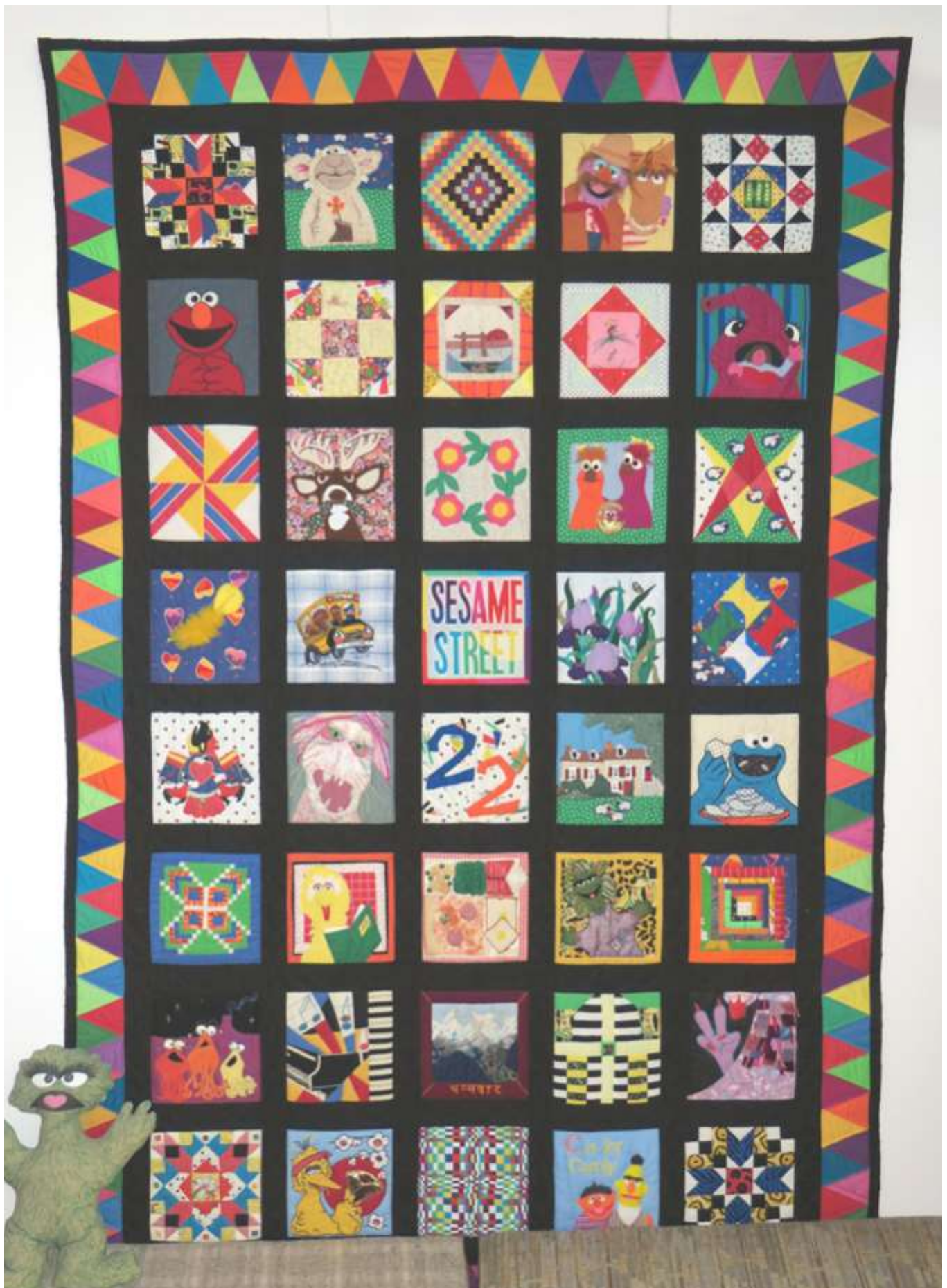
**CW:** Yes.

**PT:** How long have you lived here?

**CW:** We've been in this loft since '77. This particular floor manufactured handbags. It was pretty dirty. Frank Misurski and I did the conversion. We've been together since '69.

**PT:** Bonnie told me this wonderful story about Don Sahlin keeping mice at the studio. Let's finish with a memory about him.

"I can't hear you, I don't have my glasses on."



At her retirement in 1990, Carol was given this beautiful Sesame themed quilt.

**CW:** Don built all these structures all over the studio. There were tubes like ventilation tubes, and they were all around, over the walls. The mice sometimes got out the other end. One day they were lost and were found in the pockets of a sweater hung on the wall. Don was a dear man, but he would buy things and not read the instructions so he never really could use them. Something Don did that was wonderful was play, which was great in inventing puppets. There was a sort of hunchback puppet. He would put it on a dressmaker's dummy, in the closet. When you opened the door, it would trundle out at you and scare the living daylights out of you!

I think what was so good about the Muppets or puppetry in general is the chance to create something - especially if you are working with other people - all working together to make it happen. And it DOES happen, one way or another, and that is good. Not all are successes, some are flops, but most work out pretty well. And then, you get to work on the next one.

That was what was great!

*All photos for this interview were provided courtesy of Caroly Wilcox and Puppetimes is grateful for kind permission to publish them. -Ed.*







Smile! You're on Amazon!

Well, we're on Amazon, too. On Amazon Smile, that is.

Got some shopping to do? If you use Amazon Smile you can help support the NCPG at the same time.

Every time you make a purchase at Amazon Smile, a donation is made to the National Capital Puppetry Guild for its work bringing educational opportunities to the public in the fine art of puppetry.

If all our membership did this when making Amazon purchases, it would be possible for us to raise some significant funds.

Here's how you can make an easy donation:

Go to <https://smile.amazon.com>

Go to "Pick your own charitable organization" and click the "Search" button. Find "National Capital Puppetry Guild" and click "Select."

Then go ahead and make your purchases. The guild, which is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, will automatically receive a donation of 0.5% of your normal purchase price on the tens of millions of eligible items and you won't pay anything extra for that.

Bookmark <https://smile.amazon.com>, or click on <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/81-3977781> and remember: whenever you shop there your donations will fund our festivals, puppet slams, newsletters and scholarships.

Now that's something to smile about!

# O'Neill Puppetry Pre-Conference 2019- Kroupa Mechs

By: Vanessa Spring-Frank

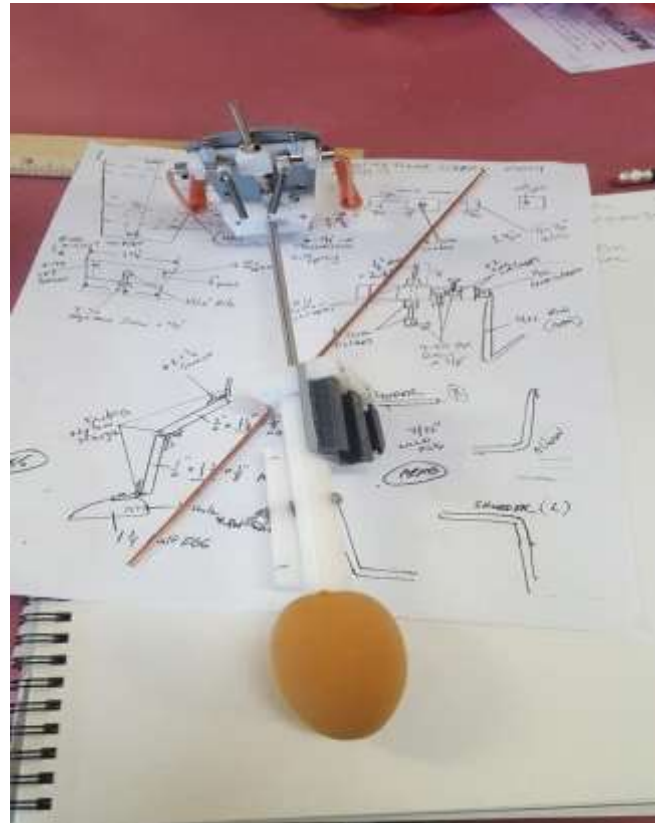
The Eugene O'Neill National Puppetry Conference, located in Waterford Connecticut, is a strange and magical experience that can be hard to describe just what it feels like to be on campus surrounded by nature, beauty and an overwhelming amount of talent and art. To be surrounded by friends, peers, colleagues and hero's is a humbling and inspirational experience that leaves you feeling fulfilled the whole year round.

The art of puppetry itself can often be a lonely one. At the O'Neill it immediately feels like a family reunion with distant relatives you just haven't met yet. We're all chosen family all a part of one big tribe you know? Or at least that is certainly how I felt about it.

This year I attended the pre-conference due to a scholarship generously given by the National Capital Puppetry Guild. The pre-conference is a three day intensive program focused on a primary track. I was part of Jim Kroupa's "Everything you need to know about mechs and more" track. Jim Kroupa is known best for his work as "The Mech Guy" in much of the puppetry world working on *The Muppets*, *Bear in the Big Blue House*, and *Eureeka's Castle* among many other credits.

In a class of about 24 people, we each worked on a very ambitious mech of a humanoid puppet. Two slide triggers for each arm, a short control rod pull to turn the head side to side, and little wire rods to control the feet. While it was one of the most ambitious tutorials Jim has done at the Conference we

were all able to help each other and share the few tools that were available. It was incredibly helpful that John Little was the ever cheerful teacher's assistant in the shop to answer questions and look over the work we had done and still needed to do.



(In process shot made by Vanessa on a page of the drafting directions by Jim Kroupa)

To quote Jim, "all mechs are, are springs and strings." Simple mechanics are often the more reliable and easy to fix.

Going into the shop I was thrilled to see all of his partial mechs, old puppets, mock up builds by the dozen and lined up on the back table that we could pick up and play with (of course which was done often and with so many goofy character voices and bad puns.)



(Vanessa and Jim Kroupa posing with her project)

Jim Kroupa himself is marvelous in that he can capture the attention of the room so quickly with, "oh funny story about that!" Which often trails from one to two to three side tracked stories about his time working with Kermit Love or Henson or Marty Robinson. All of which are dreadfully funny and full of snark. I was consistently impressed by how brave he was on certain shoots and how he took big chances. Understandably he's so charming and brilliant it makes a lot of sense how he could always get away with it.

The class itself was a good mix of maybe 10% tutorial, 60% work time, and 30% story time. Let's be honest we really come for the Kroupa stories and just happen to learn some things about how to make a cool puppet. The group itself was a wide mix of hobbyist to high-end professional with a few international students among us by way of Canada and Singapore. All of us a very captive audience and full of laughter every minute.

Overall I had an incredible time. I felt like I was really able to open up and learn just how to accomplish the tough mechanical elements

that can be really difficult to figure out coming from a book. Being able to see something in person and feel how it moves is exactly what every puppeteer wants to know about building any kind of puppet. Now that I know how to build mechs I want to incorporate them in every puppet I build; moving eyes, popping jaws, anything with a trigger or a pull. I

would highly encourage attending next years' conference just to experience the life changing camaraderie that you can't get anywhere else. Puppets are a plus, all characters encouraged.



Vanessa and Alex Thomas goofing

"If I ever get married again, its gonna be to Wembly."



# U.S. Army 244th Birthday Ball Invaded By Puppets!

by Leigh Lafosse

The U.S. Army just celebrated its 244th birthday, and this year I was given the assignment to design a show for the official Birthday Ball. This is a formal event encompassing dinner, dancing, drinks, and an original production of speeches, live music, and video entertainment, with homages to the history and heritage of those who have served in the oldest branch of the United States military.

A primary focus of the Birthday Ball is to provide an opportunity for the three highest ranking Army Senior Leaders (ASL) the chance to speak directly to soldiers. This year those

leaders were the Secretary of the Army (SA) Mark Esper, Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) General Mark Milley, and Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) Daniel Dailey. This team of three spent the last few years working together in these specific positions, and this Birthday Ball would be their final shared event before each ascended into other roles (like Secretary of Defense and Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.... No big deal.)

Now, anyone who has been involved with production will agree that a great deal goes into transforming a creative idea into reality, and anyone familiar with military hierarchy will agree that a great deal is required to turn a COA <Course of Action> into an AAR <After Action Report>. Navigating the passageways of progress when these two worlds are forced to co-exist can often feel like an exercise in futility, so I would like to share with you the story of how one puppet was able to turn the tide of war on the battlefield of creation.

The initial idea to incorporate puppets into the Birthday Ball germinated as many ideas often do: as a joke that grew legs. Recognizing that there was no way this would ultimately amount to anything tangible, I spent a little time over my Christmas break designing and creating a puppet that was modeled after the Sergeant Major of the Army.

I brought the creation into the office, and my boss, Marci-who was once the Miss Piggy puppeteer in a Disneyland live show- thought it was a clever concept, and gave me a green light to pursue it. We knew that SMA Dailey was a jovial jokester, who was notorious for pulling pranks and surprises on the other senior leaders, particularly at previous Birthday Balls. Our office suspected he might be in-

trigued by the suggestion to somehow incorporate a puppet of himself, so my boss arranged a meeting at his office in the Pentagon to reveal the SMA

Dailey puppet to the SMA Dailey human.

I have to pause here and emphasize that this meant I would be taking a homemade, 3-foot puppet of the Sergeant Major of the Army through Pentagon security. That sentence is simply not something I imagined for my timeline when I picked up a clarinet 30 years ago. We really never know what life has in store, do we?

I transported the SMA puppet in a white trash bag that day, as I felt the hint of transparency would ease the security concerns. You could clearly see his little head smooshed against the side of the bag, very obviously the SMA based on the tuft of white hair in the center of the scalp. One woman stopped me as we were navigating the corridors of the Pentagon and asked with a smile if I had an extra bag for her boss too. I chuckled as we continued winding through the honeycomb-esque layout, eventually making our way to the very formal, very intimidating, and



very ‘OHMIGODWHATAMIDOINGHEREWITHAPUPPET’ Army Senior Leader hallway.

Sitting in the SMA’s reception room with a pounding heart and a grin that wouldn’t stop, Marci and I were unsuccessfully endeavoring to maintain some semblance of military bearing in the face of the absurdity of the situation. Enter the smiling SMA human. He excitedly shook our hands, ran us back to his office, and I unveiled the mini-him. This was my first interaction with SMA Dailey, and his positive energy, good nature, and comedic timing was instantly encouraging. He quickly recognized the value and a variety of ways the SMA puppet could be successfully incorporated into the ball, and we started brainstorming viable options. His favorite idea included me creating two additional puppets, one of the CSA and one of the SA, but to not mention the creation to them. Rather, he requested we surprise them with a puppet reveal at the ball, and he would provide top cover if there was any negative fallout.

When I built the SMA puppet it was in an environment of humor and frivolity, thinking that no one would ever

actually see what I built. Now I found myself in the studio initiating work on the CSA and SA puppets, with the full realization that it was entirely possible some Army leaders, if not all Army leaders, would be seeing these creations. This, as a soldier, made me understandably nervous. Puppet look-a-likes tend to possess caricatures of traits and features of the primary model, and I was now tasked to walk the fine, razor thin line between respect and humor with regards to my—MY—Army Senior Leaders. No amount of top cover could protect how badly this would turn out for me in a worst case situation.

Around this time, the 2-star General for whom I worked got wind of the project and requested we brief him on our intentions moving forward. In doing so we mentioned the SMA’s desire to keep the other two puppets a secret. This 2-star had a pretty solid “Helllllllllll



Nooooo!!!!!!” response to the idea of publically surprising the 4-star General Milley with a puppet built in his likeness, which was an absolutely reasonable reaction. Naturally though, the chain of required steps this set in motion resulted in 6 months of slowly acquiring ever-increasing approvals on our way to formally presenting the puppets to the CSA and SA themselves. No person, nor any puppet, gets a meeting with those offices without going through every office between here and them.

So that is what we did. I pitched our puppets again and again, to all the stars and to all the bars. Many were initially concerned the puppets would be seen as disrespectful, with some worrying that the CSA and the SA would be offended themselves. We slowly garnered and gathered support at each briefing, and every meeting drew additional allies backing and encouraging the progression of the project. After many months of inching up-

ward we eventually found ourselves poised to pitch the puppets to the CSA and SA directly. The puppets prepared to fight for their very existence.

The plan of attack was for Marci to sit in the beginning of the formal

Birthday Ball meeting, while I waited in the side office with the three puppets unpacked, prepped, and ready to present. This meant I would be sitting, alone, in a quiet room, with my puppets, waiting, for an undetermined amount of time. To say my anxiety was primed would be a smidge of an understatement.

The first thing to happen as I prepared the puppets for their big unveiling, was that the largest and most unwieldy medal on the CSA puppet shattered from its adhesive and fell to the floor. Military uniforms are highly specific, and the level of detail displayed on the puppet would highlight that the jacket was missing a vital piece. I stared in horror for an eternity of 10 seconds before scanning the empty desks and drawers in an effort to find something sticky. I lucked into discovering three pieces of short gold string, just long enough to tie a knot through the medal and onto the coat’s backing. My hands were shaking as though I

was diffusing an explosive in a James Bond movie, but I was able to eventually secure the medal and exhale the breath I had been holding throughout the operation.

As if on cue, a high ranking officer walked into the office and exclaimed “Oh my God, is that General Milley?” I confirmed, and he replied “Wait, are you about to SHOW that to him?” I again confirmed, to which he turned and whistled “Well, damn.... now THAT is some kind of courage.” The whole experience was pretty surreal, waiting to share this random passion and not knowing how the leaders would react to the concept of being honored through puppetry, but the briefing could not have gone better. All three ultimately offered approval to officially include the puppets in the Birthday Ball. It was time to finalize a show.

We worked up a special segment for the SMA and his puppet in Act I: When the announcer introduced the SMA for his speech, the puppet took the stage instead. They then argued over who was “The Real 15th SMA”, which included a little fun with Photoshop, a twitter battle, and a surprise video interview with the SMA’s wife.

We waited to reveal the other two puppets until the end of Act II, and the reception was fantastic. The audience of 2000 seemed to truly enjoy the final product. The three puppets first learned how to sing barbershop quartet style, and then performed a little song and dance to close out the show. The puppets were all available afterwards for photos, and then each senior leader took his own puppet home at the conclusion of the evening.

I am so grateful that there are people in the world willing to engage with imagination in this way, and the experience of bringing puppetry into the realm of an institution like the Army gives my creative spirit hope that anything is possible.

All you need is that first puppet to lead the way.

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All you need is that first puppet to lead the way.

*Editor’s Note: This is Leigh’s first article in Puppetimes. We are looking forward to more great puppet building stories coming from her in the near future.*



The event itself can be viewed at: <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/694453/244th-army-birthday-ball-live-event> (The two puppet features are at 0:16:50 and 1:43:00)



NCPG SCOOP! What’s Up With Our Guild.

Member Emeritus Bob Brown turned 80 last May. We were negligent in acknowledging that milestone in the life of one of America’s premier marionette performers. HAPPY BIRTHDAY BOB!

The National Capital Puppetry Guild welcomed its first international member in July. Welcome to Peter Court of Durbin, South Africa. Peter expressed interest after finding out about our newsletter and joined as an associate member. We here at the NCPG hope you enjoy the benefits of membership from 8,400 miles away! And let us know if you’re ever in town. You’re invited to anything we have going on.

Due to communication issues, our last meeting was cancelled at the last moment. We regret any inconvenience this may have caused.

Our next meeting promises to be special since we are welcoming Barry Gordemer, who will give a workshop on traditional open-foam style puppet building. More details are below.

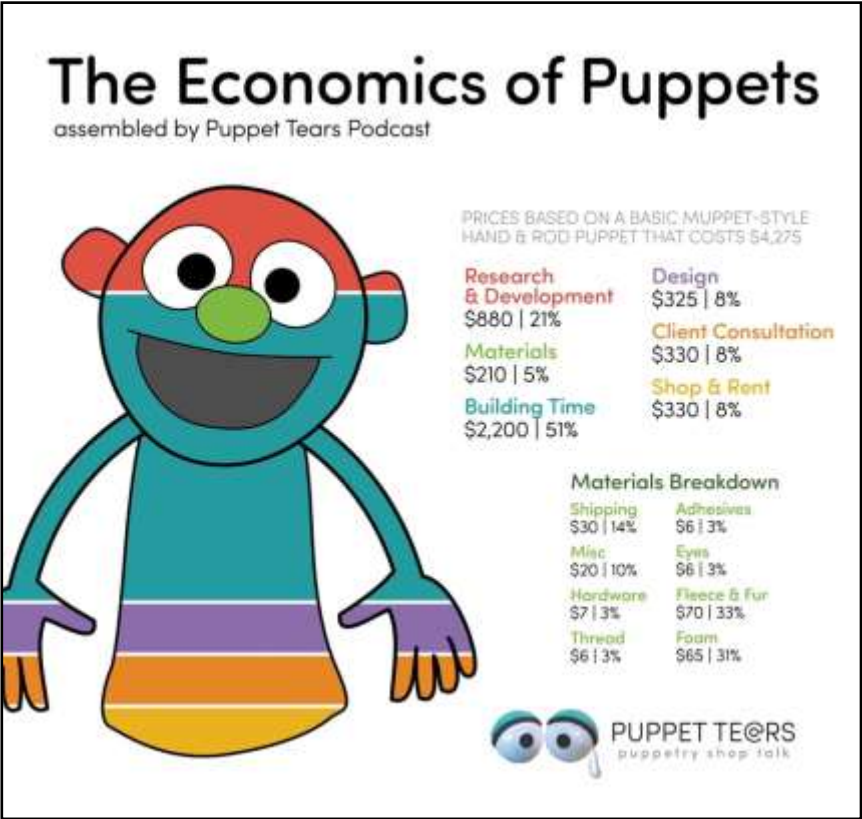
One thing our members have asked over and over is how to go about pricing puppet work when bidding for a job.

(next column)

To that purpose, we offer below Adam Kreutinger’s fine graphic illustrating the way to go about pricing a job. Adam does the Puppet Tears Podcast and is the well-known builder behind Kreutinger Puppets.

That’s it for this issue.

Signed,  
The Mangement



The beautifully conceived and executed graphic above is provided as a public service to our puppet building community courtesy of the **Puppet Tears Podcast**. Please check out the podcast at [PuppetTears.com](http://PuppetTears.com) and be sure to offer Adam and Maria your congrats on their first child, Winifred Truly Kreutinger.

**The Next Meeting** of the National Capital Puppetry Guild will be held September 29th at the Puppet Co after the 1pm performance of The 3 Billy Goats Gruff. We will be having a workshop with Barry Gordemer on making foam puppets. We will also be enjoying our customary potluck. Please give Sandy Feulner a call or drop her an email for details on what you can bring to the potluck at 703-897-9969 or email [puppetsandmore1@gmail.com](mailto:puppetsandmore1@gmail.com).

To make your complimentary reservation for the 1pm show, call (301)364-5380 and press 9 to go directly to voicemail or email: [boxoffice@thepuppetco.org](mailto:boxoffice@thepuppetco.org). Please remind the Box Office, that you are a NCPG member. Your tickets will be under your name at the Box Office window outside. Remember: seating starts at 12:45pm (you should arrive prior to 12:45pm).

Corrections to our last issue. In our review of Hobey Ford’s Rod Puppetry it was stated that the book was 53 pages. The final print book is 46 pages. The prices were also in error. The price for the print edition is \$32 not \$33, and the digital edition is \$10, not \$15. Sorry for any confusion.

“You can kiss my ass, and I’m just the one to do it.”

# Puppetimes

**Enjoy the issues you've missed!**

We are now offering printed copies of back issues for the last four years.

Each copy is \$10 with shipping included.

Full color copies are also available for \$20 with shipping included.

For issues not on this page email: [puppetimes@gmail.com](mailto:puppetimes@gmail.com)



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July - Aug 2016  
Feature: The Life and  
Work of Ida Jervis



Volume 52 No. 6  
Nov. - Dec 2016  
Feature: Paul Vincent  
Davis Interview



Volume 53 No. 2  
March - April 2017  
Feature: Heidi Spieth  
Rugg Interview



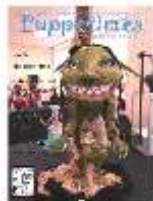
Volume 53 No. 3  
May - June 2017  
Feature: DJ Kid Koala  
Interview, Nufonia  
Must Fall



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Volume 53 No. 6  
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Volume 54 No. 2  
March - April 2018  
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Dinorock



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Puppetry Workshop



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Feature: Karen Falk  
Interview



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interview with  
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Holden Interview



Volume 55 No. 2  
March - April 2019  
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Olmsted Interview



Volume 55 No. 3  
May - June 2019  
Feature: Hobey Ford  
Interview



Volume 55 No. 4  
July - Aug 2019  
Feature: Ole and  
Ingrid Hass of Beech  
Tree Puppets

# The See and Be Seen Scene



## **The Puppet Co. Playhouse** at Glen Echo, MD

Reservations: (301) 634-5380    [thepuppetco.org](http://thepuppetco.org)

Thursdays & Fridays at 11:00 AM

Saturdays & Sundays 11:30 AM & 1:00 PM

## **Three Billy Goats Gruff**

September 20 through October 6

## **Len Piper's Pinocchio**

October 11 through November 23

## **Tiny Tot Time with Bob Brown**

9/1/19 - Teddy Bear's Picnic

Sat - 10:00 AM

9/21, 22/19 - Magic Toyshop

Sat, Sun - 10:00 AM

9/28, 29/19 - Panda-Monium

Sat, Sun - 10:00 AM

10/5, 13, 16/19 - Old McDonald's Farm

Sat, Sun, Wed - 10:00 AM

10/19, 27/19 - Mother Goose Caboose

Sun, Sun - 10:00 AM

## **DC/NOVA AREA**

### **The Durant Center - Alexandria**

Puppets at the Durant Center

September 21 - Beale Street Puppets

October 19 - Beech Tree Puppets

November 16 - Silly Goose and Val

Shows at 10:00 & 11:15 am

Tickets at: [Alexandria.gov/arts](http://Alexandria.gov/arts) and click on Durant Arts Center

**Y o u r S h o w H e r e !** That's right. Tell us what you're up to and we will share with the world! At least the world of our membership. Get your notice in within five weeks after your current issue and we will (most likely) post it here.

## **DC/NOVA AREA**

### **Puppet Lab - Takoma Park**

Rhizome DC - suggested donation \$6

August 24

September 7

October 5

Info: 202-368-1850

### **Franklin Park Arts - Purcellville**

September 18

Madcap Puppets - Pinocchio

October 9

Rosalita's Puppets - In Search of the Unicorn

Tickets at the door. Info: 540-338-7073

## **BALTIMORE AREA**

### **Baltimore Arts Center**

Happenstance Theater

Cabaret Macbre

10/24 - 11/3

Tickets, info: [happenstancetheater.com](http://happenstancetheater.com)

### **Black Cherry Puppet Theater**

September 8, 6:30 - Eric Ruin and Friends

September 14, 12-3pm - Puppet Making at Enoch Pratt Free Library

September 14, 12:30 - Billy Goat's Gruff'kin at Enoch Pratt Free Library

September 21, 6:30 & 9:30 - Puppet Slamwich

October 6, 2:30 & 6:30 Danny's Treehouse (family)

October 13, 20, 27, 1-3:30pm Free Puppet Making workshop w/shows at 1:30 & 3pm

October 18, 8pm Spazzolino and the Fallo Fail by Company Aiello from Philadelphia (Ages 14 and up)

Info: 443-226-6295 or [puppetslamwich@gmail.com](mailto:puppetslamwich@gmail.com)



**If you haven't renewed for 2019, you're really late.**



National  
Capital  
Puppetry  
Guild

# 2020 Membership Renewal Form - Mail In

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

The NCPG is a chartered Guild of the Puppeteers of America

Name:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

E-mail:

Phone (check box prior to the number if  
you don't want it listed in the Directory)

( ) - Home:

Company Name:

Company Web Site:

( ) - Work:

Please send my newsletter as a PDF to my e-mail address!

Annual Dues: Associate ( ) \$10 Junior/Senior ( ) \$15

Regular ( ) \$20 Adult Couple ( ) \$30 Company ( ) \$35

( ) - Mobile:

\_\_\_\_ My check also includes a charitable contribution of \_\_\_\_\_ to the Guild.

Amount enclosed:

Today's Date:

Check #

If you want a print copy of our newsletter,  
please add \$20 to your membership fee  
and check here: \_\_\_\_\_

(Associate Members not eligible)

Please make your check payable to N.C.P.G and send to:

P. McNaughton, NCPG Treasurer, 489 Cameron Station Blvd.,  
Alexandria, VA 22304

Need details? See our website: [www.nationalcapitalpuppetry.org](http://www.nationalcapitalpuppetry.org)

-----CUT HERE AND SAVE BOTTOM SECTION FOR YOUR RECORDS -----

I sent check # \_\_\_\_\_ for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to join The National Capital Puppetry Guild as a \_\_\_\_\_ member, on (date) \_\_\_\_\_

Membership benefits include:

6 informative newsletters a year, in a PDF version. Print edition available.

6 meetings a year, festivals, educational events, pot-luck's, lectures, demonstrations, workshops, show and tell sessions, works-in-progress previews, and meet and greets with guest artists. Free admittance to most shows at our host facility – the Puppet Co. Playhouse in Glen Echo Park.

Access to "Members Only" areas of the Guild Website:  
[nationalcapitalpuppetry.org/](http://nationalcapitalpuppetry.org/)

Public listings of, and a link to, your puppet business from the Guild website, if applicable.

Summer Picnic, Winter Party, and National Day of Puppetry Celebration.

Meetings on selected dates typically follow the 1:00 show at the Puppet Co. Playhouse.

Meeting dates are published in the NCPG Puppetimes newsletter and on the Guild website.

Reservations for the show are recommended.

Membership questions may be directed to: Pam McNaughton • NCPG Treasurer

489 Cameron Station Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22304