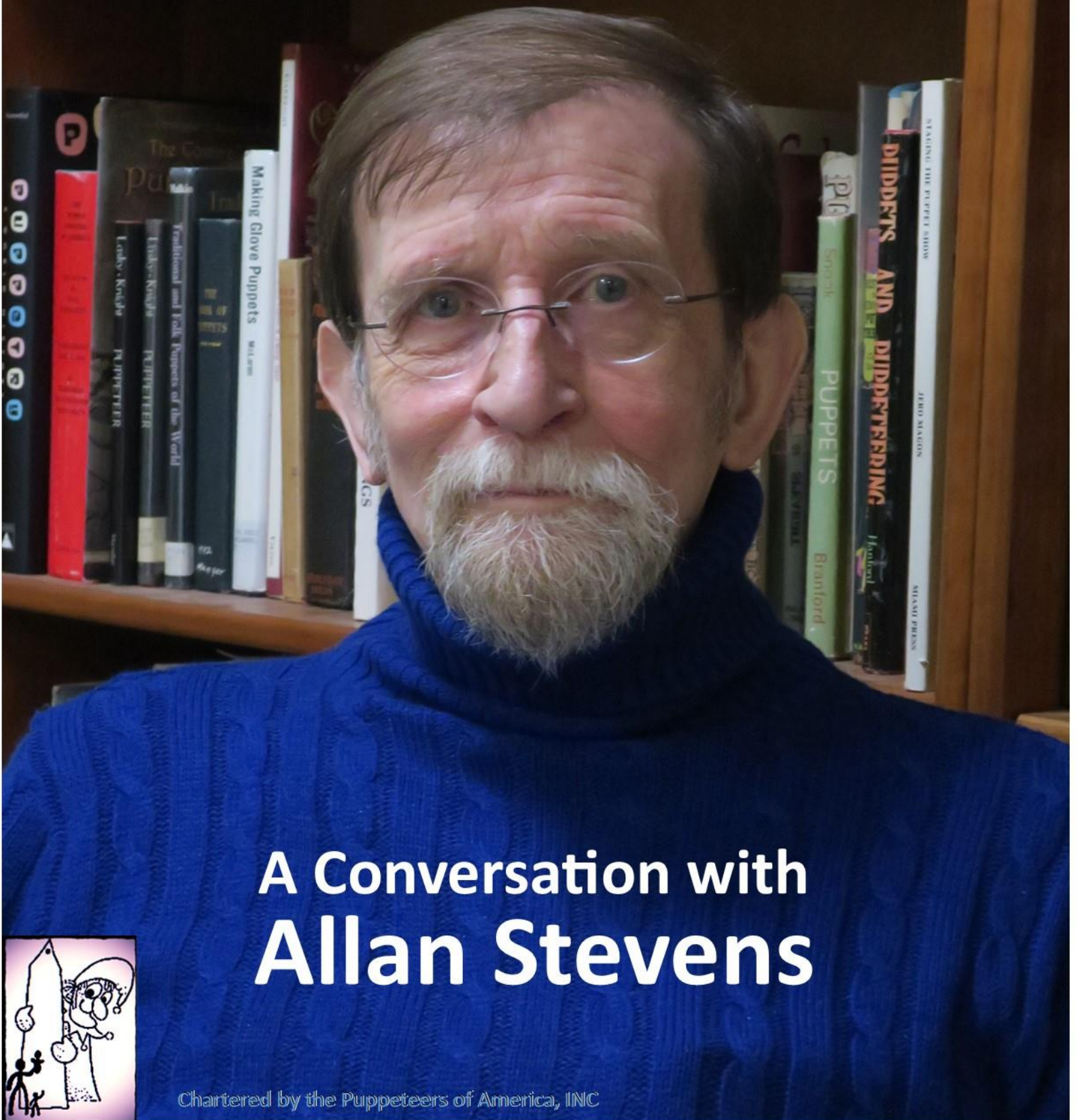


# Puppetimes

The Newsletter of The National Capital Puppetry Guild

Vol. 56 #3

May-June 2020



## A Conversation with Allan Stevens



Chartered by the Puppeteers of America, INC



## Coming Up at the Puppet Co

Through May 10

in Glen Echo Park

7300 MacArthur Blvd, Glen Echo, MD

For Reservations (301)634-5380



Hansel and Gretel

**Live Performances Cancelled**  
please go to website for details on streamed shows.

Humperdink's children's show, full of magic, music and dazzling special effects. The puppet lights, music and effects, are all operated by Christopher Piper, who also performs all the live vocal characterizations. The production has long been a favorite of children and their parents, and is an excellent introduction to musical story for children.

**Recommended Ages: 4 years old - Adult • Show Length: 40 Minutes**

May 15

through June 28

Shows are Thursday and Fridays at 11:00am

Saturday and Sunday at 11:30am



PETER AND THE WOLF

Staged with half life-size marionettes, Peter and the Wolf is one of the Puppet Co.'s best-loved stories. Over a million children and adults have seen this one-man show, based on Prokofiev's popular tale of good versus evil, performed by Puppet Master Christopher Piper. An introduction to the instruments in the orchestra precedes this story of Peter and his animal friends, and their attempts to capture wily "Old Lupus."

**Recommended Ages: 4 years old - Adult • Show Length: 40 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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Elise Handelman - Proofreader

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

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

## 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.

President: Jeff Bragg - Vice President: Yolanda Sampson

Secretary: Heidi Rugg - Treasurer: Leigh Lafosse

Members at Large - Sandy Feulner, Tom Noll, Honey Goodenough, Sarah Olmsted Thomas, Alex Vernon, Cori Leyden-Sussler, Sam Rugg, Vanessa Spring-Frank

NCPG home page: [www.nationalcapitalpuppetry.org](http://www.nationalcapitalpuppetry.org)

Join the NCPG Facebook Group at: [www.facebook.com/nationalcapitalpuppetry](https://www.facebook.com/nationalcapitalpuppetry)

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## The Next Meeting...

of the National Capital Puppetry Guild is being planned. With the covid-19 lockdowns and physical distancing still important to maintain, it is impossible for us to plan any in-person meetings. With so much puppetry content being offered on the web, it is the goal of the NCOG to provide unique programming that will be of interest to our members. If anyone has any great ideas or would like to offer a workshop or other material, please let us know something about it.

We are all being stretched and stressed to our very limits these days. Sometimes, it's just best to do nothing and get out of the constant noise. I think I'll go have a beer.

## President's Note by Jeff Bragg

This issue is dedicated to the work of Allan Stevens. Where to start? Allan's work is legend. He has been creating outstanding work in the art for the national capital area for over half a century. From his childhood to the present, he has never wavered in his passion for, and dedication to, bringing only excellence to the art and craft of puppetry. His designs and their execution are gorgeous.

As he begins a well deserved (at least partial) retirement, we honor him with a full issue interview beginning on page 6.

Also, we have sad news to share. Most of you have already learned that our dear Queen of Potpourri, Bernice Silver, has left us. We share some commiserations on page 29.

More bad news: Puppet Homecoming 2020 has been cancelled. As the covid-19 disaster continues to consume us, it has claimed this year's Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regional festival. There are some rumblings of some kind of virtual event, but we'll only find out in the future.

More bad news: the Puppet Co is closed due to the virus and our in-person meetings are cancelled for the foreseeable future. We're working on alternative programming, so please be patient as we all figure out the weekly new normal we're having to accommodate.

Good news: We have some new members. Welcome to Katherine Zira and David William. Also, we welcome Liz Dapo to our membership. As the new Artistic Director of the Puppet Co she enjoys membership with the company. Oh yes, that's the other good news we have to share. With Allan, Christopher, and MayField set to retire at the end of June, Elizabeth Dapo has been chosen as the new Artistic Director of the Puppet Co.

I also want to give shout out to members Vanessa

Gilbert and David Higgins of Blood From A Turnip for snagging a grant to produce slams in the DC area from Heather Henson's Puppet Slam Network. Congratulations!!

Also, just in case things change in the next few months, the NCPG is still accepting grant applications for this year's O'Neill Puppetry Conference and first time festival attendance. If you're still considering registering for whatever does happen, you are welcome to apply ,if your membership is current.



**PS.** Our next newsletter will feature interviews with Allan, and Christopher and MayField Piper as they begin retirement and invest a new generation of leadership at the Puppet Co.

We will also be talking to Elizabeth Dapo on her new job as the Puppet Co's Artistic Director.

Also, I didn't have room to include it, but here is a picture of the Richmond Theater that Allan talks about transforming into a puppet theater, in his interview. Our back cover is a photo of the Snap puppet that Allan refers to in his interview.





# THE JUDY BARRY BROWN FUND

Providing Financial Assistance to Study the Fine Art of Puppetry

## *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 financial aid to help young puppeteers attend their first festival and a grant for up to two puppeteers 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 .

Go to page 30 to see full information on the grants and scholarship programs.

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!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

My gift:

\$25 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$75 \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my check: \_\_\_\_\_ or

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All gifts to the National Capital Puppetry Guild are fully tax deductible as allowable by law.

# A Conversation With ALLAN STEVENS

Allan Stevens is a puppetry legend. He has been one of the prime movers of the art of puppetry in the nation's capital for more than half a century. This June, Allan, (along with his partners, Christopher and MayField Piper), is retiring and we will all lose an American puppetry giant. There has never been any extensive interview with reserved and humble genius on his work and art.

Until now.

**PT:** Tell us about your early years.

**AS:** I was born in Alexandria [Virginia]. I grew up in four “environments.” The first was my grandmother’s house, which was in Alexandria, on South Pitt Street. I lived there with my mother because in the very beginning daddy and momma couldn’t afford to live together. Daddy came visiting on weekends and that was about all. Grandma’s house during those early days on Pitt Street, were really kind of wonderful. Grandpap was totally illiterate, couldn’t read or write a thing. Grandma had mastered some writing, so she could communicate and sign things that they needed to have signed. The house had electricity, but the electricity was run “on” the walls, as opposed to “in” the walls and it was not a pretty sight. The only running water in the house was cold water in the kitchen sink and there was an outhouse out back. On a street, in Alexandria, in the nineteen-forties. The house did not have indoor plumbing until the nineteen-fifties, when it became a law, so this was a very primitive kind of existence, with people who were...poor. But I can tell you there was never a harsh word, never a raised voice in that house and people came and went and I hardly even knew who they were. Some were relatives, some were friends.



Allan - 1968 - Working on the Boxwood Theater  
“Alice in Wonderland” - Photo by Gloria Randolph

That was that part of my city living. My dad worked at a place called Hollin Hall Farms. It was a private estate owned by Merle and Lillian Thorpe, whose money was in oil. It was 56 acres off of Fort Hunt Road, in what is now the Mount Vernon area of Fairfax County. We lived in a house in the forest. Right up the road, so to speak, we came to the poultry farm, in which my daddy was a partner with Merle Thorpe. And it WAS a poultry farm! And all the chickens were free range. Then you got further uphill into the gardens and there was a huge formal garden that was walled, and it was surrounded by informal gardens of all sorts. There was a maze that spelled out “Hollin Hall” that you could only possibly see from the air. There was a windmill. There was a kind of magical architecture that surrounded the mansion house itself. But there was nobody but me. There were people at Grandma’s house, but when we

moved to Hollin Hall, we first had an apartment over the garage (Which was an apartment I loved. I lived in it as an adult, as a matter of fact.), before we moved down the hill into a better house. Until I was probably twelve years old, I had no friends, and summers were spent just wandering the grounds at Hollin Hall, in the woods, in the poultry farm, and in the informal gardens. So that was kind of a strange atmosphere, so to speak.

I loved every minute of it. I had a dog. What else did I need? But I did a lot of imagination. That's what it comes down to.

That was my entire role as Brownie Early To Bed.

**PT:** It's around this time that the suburban areas of Washington are starting to grow. How were you navigating this period?

**AS:** Around us, the Hollin Hills subdivision grew up and I commandeered everybody and put on little plays and little puppet shows, in the woods, in the back yard, on the patio, anywhere! We did big shows, little shows, but it was never ending.

**PT:** This is the mid-fifties and television is just starting to happen. Was this also influential?



Costumes sketches for Carlo Gozzi's "The King Stag" for the Smithsonian Children's Theater on the Mall - 1969. The costumes were executed by Jane Stanhope. They looked exactly like the drawings.

**PT:** How old were you?

**AS:** This was my very early life. I couldn't read. Daddy would read to me. This was from the time I was five until I was seven, when we moved down to the bigger house in the wood. By that time, I had school friends, so I was not quite so much in isolation as I had been.

**PT:** You made your theatrical debut in the first grade.

**AS:** "I am Brownie Early To Bed. Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

**AS:** Yes, but in the funniest way. On Pitt Street in Alexandria where Grandma lived, down the block was the first person who had a television set and they positioned it so the kids could look through the window and see what's on. And what was on was Kukla, Fran, and Ollie.

**PT:** Was this the "Aha! I'm going to be a puppeteer!" moment?

**AS:** Nope. But there was a pivotal moment. I couldn't have been more than five. Alexandria was a tiny, little, sleepy southern town. At the corner of King and Washington in Alexandria, on King Street there

was a hardware store. It was Knight's Hardware. I remember it dearly because it was still like an old-fashioned hardware store, with kegs of nails and tools that you had no idea what they're meant to do. Cast-iron skillets hanging on one side of the room and axes on the other. It was really terrific! On this particular occasion, I seem to recall snow or cold and we were walking up the street and as we passed Knight's Hardware, in the window, there was a puppet stage and some puppets, marionettes that had been built by Cub Scouts and apparently the store put it on for display. I said, "That's it." There was a king and queen

came in small jars. So, I got out a small jar and stuck my little puppet head on the cardboard...and it was Vaseline! So, my first puppet was a bit of a disaster, when you come right down to it. But even in the early days, I learned important lessons. I had a little Snap, Crackle, and Pop [Rice Krispies cereal characters], Snap puppet and a Howdy Doody hand puppet, that had a really soft head that I didn't like, and I made a couple of little rag-muffin things, a frog bean-bag which I used extensively. I remember sitting down in our basement with a little stage of piled-up books that I'd made, with Pinocchio, the book, open in my



Smithsonian Puppet Theatre - 1973 - "The Loving dragon," Russell Metheny, Thom Field, Allan, Ingrid Creapeau, Sarah Toth - Puppets by Allan, Stage by Fred Thompson. Photo by Harry Bagdasian

and there were kids, they were wooden ball heads, I do remember that. They were real simple. But they were dressed and had headpieces and all that kind of stuff, but very simple puppet forms, and I think the stage was blue. So as soon as we got home, I went, "I must make one of these puppets, now how shall I do this?" I got out a piece of manila drawing paper and I draw a little circle and I put a little face on it. And then I go, "The paper's too thin. I have to glue this on cardboard and cut it out again." I knew that paste

lap and I'd decided I was going to perform the whole book. So, I'm reading along and going, "This is ridiculous! You can't do this! You got to cut a lot of this stuff out!" And I went, "Aha!" I learned adaptation the hard way.

**PT:** And this continued as you got older?

**AS:** The puppets were always there. The first show that I got paid for, I was twelve and it was a birthday party. The mom asked if I would be interested in





Smithsonian Puppet Theatre - 1974 - "Alice in Wonderland" - Puppets by Allan Stevens, stage by Fred Thompson.

Photo by Harry Bagdasian

doing it and I said, "Yes, of course." So, I did a little Hansel and Gretel, mostly with patterns from Edith Flack Ackley. There may have been a papier-mâché head on the witch. But that earned me five dollars.

**PT:** Which was good money in those days!

**AS:** Indeed! It was the beginning of my career. Now mind you, I'd never seen a live puppet show! I'd seen Paul's Puppets [editor's note: Bernard Paul had a televised puppet show broadcast from Baltimore in the late 1940s and into the 1950s) on WBAL. It was grainy, but I could see them. So, I was making it up as I went along. I had the same books that everybody had. Edith Flack Ackley and Marjorie Bachelor, mostly

from the library. But I started developing a visual style, even though I wasn't sure how to make the mechanics.

**PT:** Let's talk about college. Where did you go?

**AS:** A year at the University of Virginia, which was great for the art and the drama. My wonderful high school, Groveton High School, prepared me in no way for academic life. In no way whatsoever. One of the things I was signed up for was biology. The first term was botany, the second term, zoology. I'm looking forward to this. So, I go into the class and it's taught by Doctor Riopel. Doctor Riopel looked like he was about fifteen years old (editor's note: Dr. James L.

L. Riopel was about a decade older than Allan) and the first thing he did was write on this chalkboard the formula for photosynthesis. And I went like, “The whhaatttt????” I’d never had any biochemistry or any of those things and that’s all the class was. There was a lab and I got to see one of the true miracles of life. There was a microscope with two eyepieces so that you could see in 3D. It was the prothallus of a fern. It’s the thing that the fern germinates from and it was one of the most breathtaking things I’ve ever seen. It was worth it for that moment, And it was very momentary, because everybody was standing in line to look at this thing. That’s the one thing I re

like that and enjoyed it all.

But Bennington was a whole different thing. I was a Fellow. My four years at Bennington cost me not one penny for anything, except getting there and getting home. I *did* have to work. The work consisted of probably a half-hour of work in the workshop and it was usually dusting props or sweeping the studio floor, or something completely innocuous, that you would do anyway. This is what’s earning me this education. But Bill Sherman was the person who really turned me around to everything. He was, at the time, the chairman of the drama department. I went up for an interview and I was the only person who inter-



Smithsonian Puppet Theatre - 1974 - “Alice in Wonderland” - Puppets by Allan Stevens, Stage by Fred Thompson.

Photo by Harry Bagdasian.

member from the year at the University of Virginia. I did lots of stuff in the theater department, almost always relegated to paint. I hadn’t been there a month before I got (to be) in charge of the paint department, which in that time was ground pigment, you just got pigments in big bags and boxes. Hot glue, but not (with) glue guns; rabbit skin glue, hide-glue, and you mix that up and put in the white and you put in the color and it’s a mess. That’s what I did, basically. Did a lot of background painting and stuff

viewed that year. They were supposed to have five boys for the dance department and five boys for the drama department, because Bennington at that time was a girl’s school. It was actually founded as coeducational, but during the wars it became, more and more, a girl’s school and had remained that way. They just brought in men to work with the girl’s in dance and in theater, so they wouldn’t have to be playing “pants parts” all the time. I think he saw the puppeteer in me. When I worked on design with Bill,



Smithsonian Puppet Theatre - 1975 - "The Book of Three" (Hen Wen the oracular pig, and Taran - Puppets by Allan Stevens.  
Photo by Harry Bagdasian .

**PT:** And this is what launched you after college?

**AS:** It was actually when I was in college. Bennington has a non-resident term in the middle of the winter (because everything gets snowed in and they don't want you snowed in up there), as well as a summer break. In my non-resident terms, I went back to my old high school. Dorthie Kogelman was a teacher there and we were very good friends and that time of year was when she was preparing her festival play, because they had one-act play festivals in high school. And we talked about it and ultimately, I ended up one year working with her on *Prometheus Bound*. The next year was *Everyman*. The *Seven Princesses*, an obscure Maurice Maeterlinck play. *Abraham and Isaac* from the medieval pageants and *Aria Da Capo*,

an Edna St. Vincent Millay play. All of that was wonderful stuff. In the summer, I started doing summer stock. The first year was in Bar Harbor, Maine and I took the puppets with me, so I would do puppet shows on the weekend and scenery and costumes the rest of the week. That was not a bad year. I think it kind of went bust. Obviously, Bar Harbor is a tourist town and the theater just didn't attract as it should have. We had some good audiences, but it was not a blockbuster season, by any stretch of the imagination. I think it was eight shows, eight shows in eight weeks and that was kind-of doable. My next year, one of the directors from Bennington hired a couple of us; myself as designer, another Bennington student as technical director, and a couple of other people as well, for twelve weeks in White Lake, Michigan and they



were all huge shows. Tea House of the August Moon; Bye, Bye Birdie; The Pajama Game; Roberta. One a week. Costumes and scenery. That was a hell of a summer. There was a lot of in-fighting and fuss that went throughout the whole season. The last show was The Fantasticks and I designed it as a commedia [dell'arte] show with kind of unusual costumes. I had discovered in this loft, from God knows when, a set of drapes that were kind-of a medium-dusty teal that had a really wonderful quality to it. So, we used those and we painted the floor the same color and there was a rakish platform and the usual swag sign. It went very well, after this year of horror. At the end of the opening night, everyone in the company came up and kissed me! One of them sat up with me all night long listening to me babble about absolutely nothing!

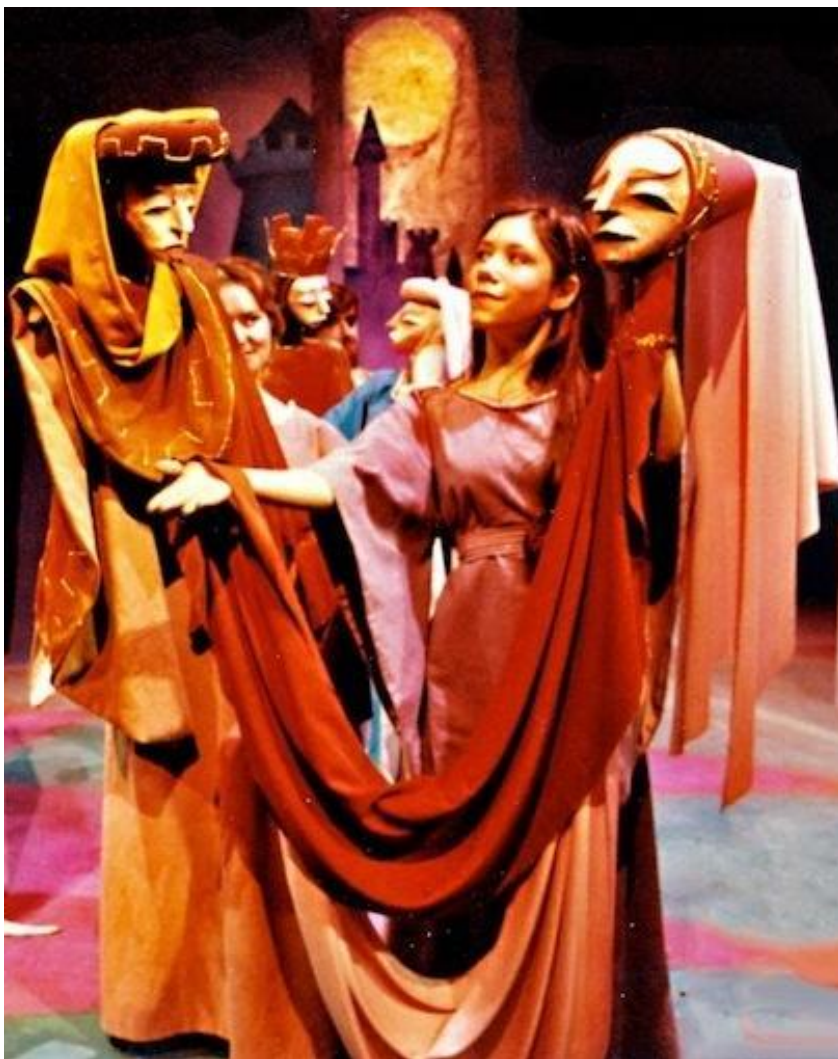
It was actually during this same period that I moved

on. While I was at Bennington, there was a year that Bill Sherman spent in Greece, because we were getting ready to do Hippolyta. During that time, I was the costumer at Bennington College. I also, with my advisor, did a puppet production of Doctor Faustus, which was flawed, but beginning to point the right direction. One of the last shows we did at Bennington was The King's Stag. This is a Carlo Gozzi, seventeenth century, Italian comedy in commedia style. Bill had this wonderful concept: all the costumes were made out of white duvetyne, which pretty much looks like white velvet at a quarter of the price, with brilliantly colored linings and facings and collars. I did masks and props and I played Truffaldino as well. I felt that it looked gorgeous, but there was something I didn't feel was right in the direction and I'm sitting around home one day and I hear that the Smithsonian is going to have a children's theater and I said, "They ARE?"



Smithsonian Puppet Theatre - 1975 - "Treasure Island" - Puppets by Allan Stevens, set by R. Scott Callander.

Photo by Harry Bagdasian.



Adventure Theater - From "Jack and the Beanstalk and other English Folktales" - 1980 - The story is "Cap o' Rushes." Dorit Kushner front left. Puppets by Allan Stevens - Photo by E. Penn Stephens

side than it was out. And there we were, in these amazing, huge costumes that were all lined and velvet and headpieces... melting! We stopped using makeup. It was ridiculous! It wouldn't stay on your face. You had to go by the water fountain and literally stick your face in it to keep from passing out, it was that awful. The tent was supposed to accomplish two things: the children's theater in the daytime and an American musical theater at night. The first production that they did was Annie Get Your Gun. It was a great choice. Ethel Merman had just done a revival on Broadway. They got the Broadway costumes, which were wonderful. The Indian things in particular were just incredible. Ball gowns with all the hoohah and gimcrack you'd ever want to see. The got real firearms. The furniture was all antique stuff. It was all like the real live thing. So, the costumes were hanging back in this backstage area and it being a tent, it had a dirt floor. And

it rained. And there were these Indian blankets and the trains on these incredible dresses in the mud! So, we're running around in ridic-

Now oddly enough, I knew the director of the division of performing arts, so I was able to call him up and say, "Hey, I want to do this." I did some drawings and he said, "Okay, we're going to do this." I chose two shows. One of them was The King Stag, which I hoped to get right this time and it incorporated puppets. The theater was in a tent on the Mall, that had been specially designed. It was a circular tent with kind-of a scooped roof, in blue and white. The roof was supposed to be white on the outside and black on the inside to reflect heat and we were guaranteed it would be ten degrees cooler in the tent. Unfortunately, it was manufactured incorrectly, and it was installed with the black, outside and the white, inside. Which meant that it was ten degrees hotter in-

ulously elaborate outfits trying to rescue the costumes from Annie Get Your Gun. We succeeded only partially. They did get on the second show, which was Of Thee I Sing. Congress stepped in and just closed it. The third show was supposed to be Guys and Dolls, which is one of my two or three favorite shows ever and I was looking forward to that. But for Annie Get Your Gun, the costumes were all destroyed, the guns, the antique furniture, were all destroyed. The losses I can't begin to calculate. Toward the middle of that, I was in a magazine store on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and who should walk in the door but Jim Morris, the Director of the Division of Performing Arts. We said hello and he said to me, "By the way, do you want to do this puppet tour that we have going out



**PT:** Who was doing this before you?

**AS:** Fred Thompson. Fred Thompson had rotten breaks, one after the other and Fred is a wonderful person, he's a wonderful puppet maker, he's a wonderful performer. Besides thinking of what he wanted to do himself, he had the Rufus Rose shows that he could borrow at any time and that was wonderful.

But it all started off with the great Smithsonian fire. My good friend at the time, Vera Hughes, and I were going to go to the opening of Fred's show together. And I'm getting ready to go and the phone rings and it's Vera and she says, "Allan, have you heard the news?" And I went, "What news?" And she said, "Well, there's been a fire at the Smithsonian." And I said, "Oh gee, which building?" And she said, "History and Technology." I said, "Oh, that's awful. Whereabouts?" And she said, "On the third floor." And I said, "What?!?" And she said, "Allan, the fire

was in the puppet theater." We went, "What are we going to do now?" I had been instrumental in bringing Fred to town. He came with his friend Russell Menthony. Vera and I went down to the Mall and we found Russell and Fred. Russell was green and they said, "We haven't been back in." And just about that time a guy came up and said, "You may go in now." So, we crept slowly in. We went up to the third floor. Obviously, the escalators and elevators weren't running. We had to walk up. Everything that had looked like marble, glass, and metal had melted and was hanging off the wall. We apprehensively moved forward. Basically, the puppet theater was gone and on what had been the stage, were Rufus Rose's Puppets...hanging untouched. It was absolutely amazing. They were thoroughly cleaned and dusted, because of course they got soot all over them, and they were restrung. That was the sorry foot on which Fred started, and it got worse. You'll hear different stories



Adventure Theater "Androcles and the Lion," - 1982 - Costumes and Set by Allan, masks by Christopher.

Photo by E. Penn Stephens



about what life at the Smithsonian was like. I got along. There were only a couple of moments in which I wanted to smack somebody or take them by the shoulders and shake them, but generally, within a perimeter of sorts, I go to do what I wanted to do. The things that was interesting, out of it all, was that I was being protected, so that I was never at the “upper end” meetings, so I never really knew what was going on, on top. What I did finally realize at one point was, apparently, we weren’t making as much money as everybody hoped we would, and apparently, there was some talk about what were we doing that didn’t bring in more money. First of all, after the upstairs theater burned, the new theater opened up in the Carmichael Auditorium, which is on the ground floor of what was History and Technology and is now American History.

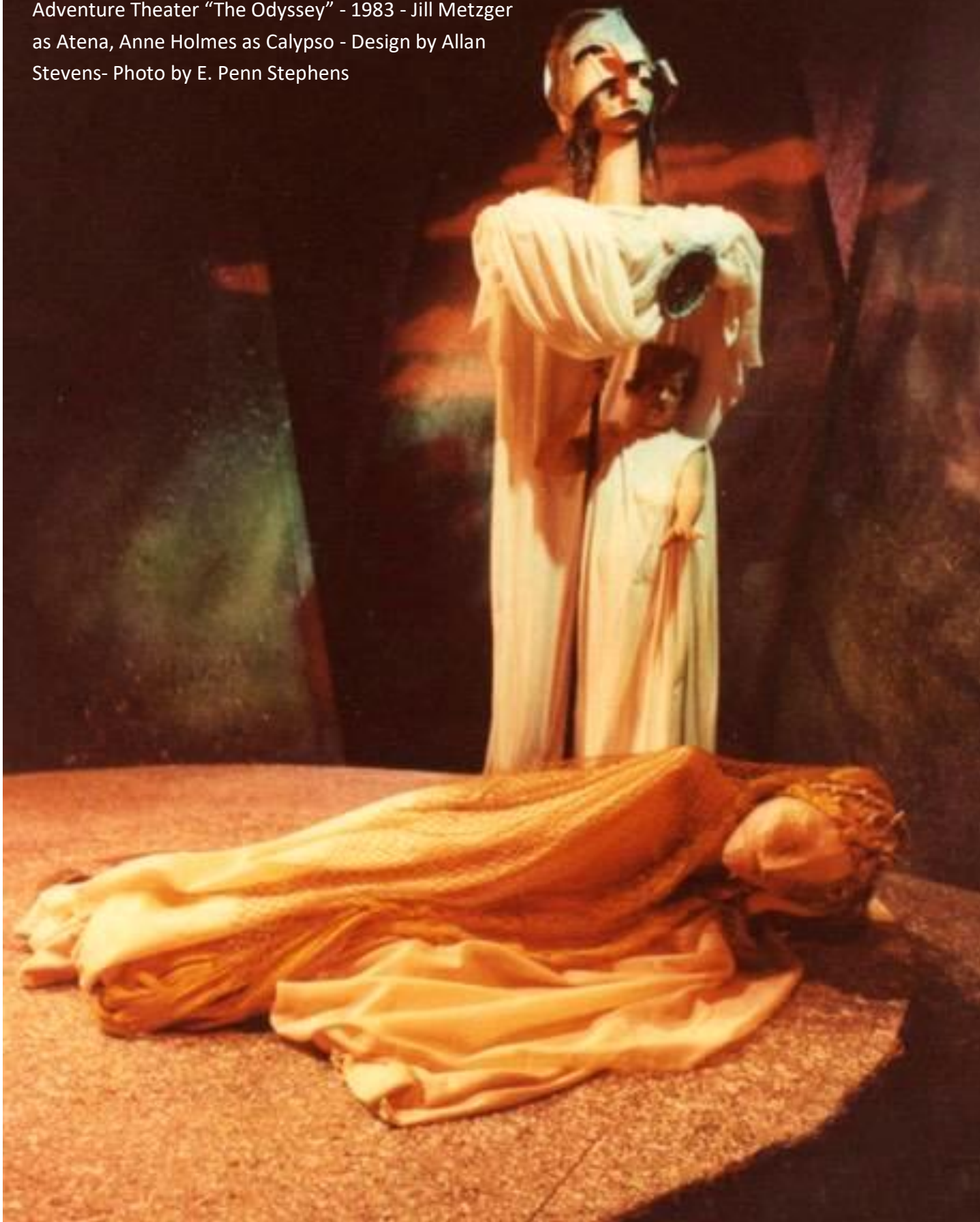
To be in the museum, we had to do museum related shows and how on Earth were we gonna’ do that? We developed a good friend by the name of Judy Morris, who wrote some shows for us. Judy is a wonderful writer and always was, but she inherited it fairly. Her father was Elia Kazan. She was good and it was fun. The first show we did with Judy was The Waywardly Wandering Wagon Full of Banjo and Jack, which was Southern folklore and we did a scavenger hunt related to exhibits in the theater, you know, the wagon that they were performing on, things that they talked about, so there was definitely a link to the museum. In 1972, we did a show which was called The Hullabaloo Election of Osbert or Jess. I was working with Ingrid Crepeau from very early on and she was developing her own puppetry style, so we said hey, we’ll do these puppets together. She did the principal characters and they were Muppet-like, fabric puppets. The whole idea of the show was these two characters, Osbert and Jess, were running for president of the puppet theater and through this we went through the whole process of campaigning, of doing door-to-door, making flyers. And at the end of the show, everybody goes into a voting machine

and votes, and so the kids got to vote, too. Now Osbert was orange, Jess was green, and we learned an important lesson. The white audiences voted for Osbert. The black audiences all voted for Jess. So, the difference between the warm and cool colors actually split on a racial divide. I have borne that piece of information with me ever since that even if you’re avoiding the subject of race, by just using colors, you’re not avoiding it. But those years at the Smithsonian, all the pieces came together. Slowly but surely, I learned how to do all the things I didn’t know how to do before. I knew how to make a wrist joint, the head joint was really kind-of transformational. It’s a very simple thing in which the head is balanced on elastic. Fifty percent rubber, fifty percent cotton elastic, so that the head can be nodded by triggers on the handle of the rod puppet. The first time we did it, we were working on Tom Sawyer. Russell Metheny was working with us at that time. We put the first one together and tried it, and we all went, “Look at that!” We scrambled getting puppets together, left and right! And going, “Hey! It worked again!” It was really a wonderful moment.

**PT:** During this time, you also worked with some other interesting people. Grammy winner Ken Bloom worked as a puppeteer for you.

**AS:** Ken was in the touring shows and I know he did the Marvelous Land of Oz. He may have done Tom Sawyer as well. The only time he performed at the Smithsonian was when we were doing Alice in Wonderland. We did a new show every three months and none of them were little, so everybody was really worn out and they wanted to take a break at the same time that the touring company came back from the tour. So, we let the resident company off on a holiday and the touring company, to earn a few more bucks, got to do the resident show, which was Alice in Wonderland. At that time, Ken started doing shows that were called things like The Unsung Jerome Kern or The Unsung Cole Porter, in which he would put together programs of the lesser known

Adventure Theater "The Odyssey" - 1983 - Jill Metzger  
as Atena, Anne Holmes as Calypso - Design by Allan  
Stevens- Photo by E. Penn Stephens





The Puppet Co. at the Smithsonian 1983 - "The Magic Mirror" Allan (people puppets) and Christopher (creature puppets)

music of these greats of the American musical theater. After the success of the election year show, we developed a show called Patchwork, which was not only a patchwork in terms of little bits of Americana, and short stories and things you've heard, but never saw happen and the patchwork being the fabric that Ingrid used to create the puppets. It was hysterical! Absolutely wonderful! It ran for quite a while. One of the characters was this little girl who liked to put on plays, and so she would get all the other characters out and get them dressed up in outrageous things and put on a little pageant. So, they did a Thanksgiving pageant, they did a holiday pageant. It was wonderful. All I had to do was sit back and watch. But that really launched Ingrid. She went from that into Kids on the Block, the series of puppets that have physical handicaps. She developed puppet for all these disabilities. She and another puppeteer working with us, Sarah Toth, worked out Patchwork Productions which was carrying this whole thing forward

into a new generation. Something happened. I think it was as simple as they wanted to do a national tour, and they did a brochure and a huge mailing, and I think they got absolutely no bites and they just went, "This isn't going to work." And it was at that time Ingrid happened to bump into Michele (Valeri) and Dinorock was born.

**PT:** And Vera Hughes played a big part, too.

**AS:** Vera did a lot of the adaptation. She was good. She did Tom Sawyer, Aladdin, a couple of others. We closed the Smithsonian Puppet Theater, as I knew it, in 1975. The idea was the place was going to be renovated for the bicentennial exhibit, which was the next year. Before we closed they were already working on the building, because it was a huge piece of work that they did in a very short time. The idea was that for the 1976 show, that we'd submit a new application. There were those that thought I could just walk back in the door. Working with one of the guys





The Puppet Co. at the Capital Children's Museum 1984 - Allan and Christopher as Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee telling Alice "The Walrus and the Carpenter" in "Through the Looking Glass." The oysters were in the show soles.

at the Smithsonian, we were going to do The Wizard of Oz, but base it on the stage play that Frank Baum wrote, after the popularity of his book and the popularity of Babes in Toyland. At the same time, Nic Coppola submitted a proposal to actually recreate the 1876 centennial show. The Smithsonian came to both of us. They wanted me to choose something better or him to charge less. (Nic's show was) exactly what it ought to be. So, I withdrew my proposal. And actually, happily. That show ended up being very good. The stage was absolutely gorgeous, stunning. But that put me on the street, so to speak. I had a number of small jobs. A job with Voice of America. A job with the Pentagon, believe it or not, a series of Army training films. We did a puppet for them and operat-

ed it. It took, I think, about four years to get the whole thing done. I had a near-death experience!

**PT:** Let's hear more about that!

**AS:** The first series was training bartenders, actually.

**PT:** An essential occupation.

**AS:** They set up a whole bar in the Pentagon studio and I'm sitting there doing my puppet stuff and the lighting grid fell. It was just one bar, but all the lights slid straight off of it. Missed me by a foot. We took a deep breath I can tell you. They were great people to work with, they really were. I enjoyed being with the Pentagon. I thought it was sort of ironic, as a matter of fact. At any rate, I've got all these shows that I've

built, I ought to be doing something with them and I'm back in Alexandria and thinking it would be nice to have a little theater in Alexandria, so I was walking around looking for a storefront and wondering what you had to do to it to get it open, as a theater. And I had a little bit of money from the Smithsonian days and I was in downtown D.C. one day and I bumped into a friend who had worked with us at the Smithson-

we did. The roof was gone, which meant that the decorative tin ceiling and the cornices and all that stuff were hanging by a thread. But we talked to the owner and the owner said, "Well, we can do this. We'll replace the roof if you'll do everything else," and then we'll charge you this much rent and so forth and so on. So, this person started a limited partnership in which she was the principle partner and she started



The Puppet Co. Playhouse - "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" 1990 - Puppets and projections by Christopher. Costumes by Allan and MayField. Set by Allan.

ian. And we went and had a drink at a place called the Bavarian, a little downstairs bar and grill. And this person suggested that maybe we should go on from the idea of just my little theater, that would be a storefront and into maybe a national center. And I said, "Well, you know in Alexandria there's the old Richmond Theater that's been sitting there vacant all these years. Let's go and see if we can go inside. Well,

getting investors for a thousand dollars a pop and she basically hired me to be artistic director. Well, we opened, and it was a great opening, it really was. The place looked incredible. And then business wasn't doing so good and we're wondering why, and we are trying to make connections and going, "Well this is strange, because this show did awfully well at the Smithsonian, and nobody comes to it six miles away?"



That's what it was; Alexandria, except for a few dedicated citizens, wasn't ready for a puppet theater. We couldn't get schools to come, although there was bus parking, they kind'a didn't want to deal with it and this person, who was the producer, vanished! We were left alone holding the bag. Around Christmas time, she reappeared, and we talked about converting what had been this limited partnership, into a non-profit. During that time, Donna and David Wisniewski were working for Prince Georges County and I had done Peter and the Wolf with them the year before, and they wanted to do Hansel and Gretel with live singers. The opera, but of course edited way down to forty-five minutes and I thought, "Neat," and so I went and did that and traveled back

and forth, with the theater in Alexandria on Sundays, and Hansel and Gretel on others, to earn a little money to pay people back at the Alexandria theater. We were at a meeting with our attorney and she and her associate producer accused me of dereliction of duty for having gone and done the Hansel and Gretel show and I said, "That's it." But it didn't matter, because there just was not the right attitude in Alexandria. We had some wonderful people come onto the board, but they didn't quite grasp what being a non-profit means, what you have to do with the money, if you get a project grant or you get a regular grant, and what you can repay with what, and all of that stuff. And I had a breakdown. I just went flop! We closed it. We went down, for a short period of time,



First Exhibit in the Puppet Co, Playhouse 1990. Model for "Babes in Toyland in the



and worked at the Torpedo Factory and that finally just literally petered out. I was at loose ends and my health had gone to hell-in-a-handbasket. I had to sell my house to pay off construction bills on the theater in Alexandria. I was penniless, as a matter of fact, not well and drinking an awful lot of alcohol and eating very little food, at which time there was an offer to come out to Glen Echo Park and direct a piece for Adventure Theater. They had what they called their puppetry division. A guy by the name of Ed Tamulevich was in the puppetry division and he wanted me to do the puppets for a piece called Jack and the Beanstalk and Other English Folk Tales, which he produced. And at the auditions, who should be there but Christopher Piper and by the time we got Jack and the Beanstalk open, we were fast friends. Chris was coming from Hawaii, he'd been across the country and to France and back again, so he was really interested in settling here and he had decided he wanted to apply for a yurt studio (at Glen Echo Park), because those applications were coming up. He wanted one of the big ones and he didn't think he could get it by himself. But would I join in with him? And we did. Once together we were contacted by the Smithsonian to do a show. They were doing a season of traditional fairy tales and wanted to know what we could do. I suggested we do a composite fairy tale which we called The Magic Mirror. Chris wrote it. Chris made the creatures. I made the human characters. We were off and here we are.

**PT:** The creation of the Puppet Co was a major undertaking, from its early days in the park, through the construction of this beautiful theater that you and the Pipers are about to hand over to a new artistic director and team. Just how hard was it to make this all possible?

**AS:** We had actually submitted proposals before. One time it was for what was then the rehearsal hall at Adventure Theater, which was big enough to be a small theater. I believe there was another space we applied for as well, but we kept getting turned down.

But our program had become so popular, that we were having up to a hundred thousand people a year. We had managed to get the schedule of the carousel changed. It used to be just Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. We first got Thursdays and then later, Fridays, because we could bring in the visitation. The director from the George Washington Memorial Parkway for the National Park Service said, "We have to find you a space. We have to do this. Obviously, the public wants it." When we were settled over there, it was with good reason, and our relationship with the National Park Service was very good. The whole process of the restoration and the rescue of the park took over seven years from the time Audrey Calhoun said, "We're going to do this," to the time that we walked in the door. And there were promises that couldn't be helped. Originally, we were supposed to be able to walk from the old playhouse into the new one with no interruption in between and it couldn't possibly work. And we really knew that. So, we went into exile, so to speak, in the back room of the ballroom for at least two years. Longer than we wanted to, but through the design of this facility, a lot of which Christopher did...the ground plan of the theater and the stage was really what Christopher offered to the National Park Service and the architect worked those things in, so we had a good deal to say about what was going to happen in this space. It totaled out at \$500,000. More than \$350,000 was to the contractor. Christopher installed all the sound equipment, on the stage and in the house and everywhere else. Dan Brooks, who was our lighting designer for thirty years, did all the installation of the lighting. That we saved money on. There were lots of ways we cut corners, because believe me, we got a lot for our half-million dollars.

**PT:** What was the most difficult thing to deal with?

**AS:** General aggravation. There were people on these various committees that were with Montgomery County who really wanted to slow the process down and there were people like me who wanted to

speed the process up. We could have been a year earlier getting into the process, except there was this group of people, for reasons I don't really understand, thought a slower and more meticulous way would be more beneficial, to whom I don't know. It wasn't beneficial to us, I can tell you. So that was disturbing. Now Audrey Calhoun was the Superintendent at that time. She had been the site manager at Glen Echo Park when we first came on. She actually accomplished miracles in those early days, in the early 1980s. She had said that one of the things she wanted to do was get the infrastructure, the wiring and plumbing and so forth installed in the park so that when we got to actually renovating the buildings, that would be done. So then twenty, thirty years later she comes back as Superintendent, and guess what. She gets her wish, so before the buildings went up, all the utilities had already been installed and that saved a huge amount of money on

that, There were those who said, "She's just fixing the place up so she can sell it." This was never true. Audrey really loved Glen Echo Park, she was eager to see it get back together and blossom. And when the process was over, we had a conversation and she said, "Well Allan, we did it." And I said, "Yes Audrey, we did. But I wish it hadn't been so divisive and cantankerous." And she shocked me when she said, "Oh no, Allan. That's part of the process." Going through that you really find out what people want and you're able to do a better job of reaching the greater public and that input works to your advantage.

**PT:** Let's change the subject for a minute. I understand that you love musicals.

**AS:** Actually, I'm into opera right now. I'm on Tannhäuser right now. I love Wagner. He wrote some of the most boring scenes I've ever read in my life, but with some of the most glorious music. I do like musi-



The Puppet Co. 2004 - "Pinocchio," originally produced by Allan in 1974. Photo by Christopher Piper.



The Puppet Co. 2006 - "A Midsummer Night's Dream" Set by Allan. Lighting by Dan Brooks. Photo by Christopher Piper .

icals, but I'm not crazy about Rogers and Hammerstein. Richard Rogers, I love. I'm not sure what I think about Hammerstein, at all. You know, he never could write a second act.

**PT:** Second acts are where all the problems are anyway.

**AS:** I'll give you two examples, one being *The King and I*, the other being *South Pacific*. In the second act of each of those, we lose a major character *off-stage*. Lun Tha gets killed in a revolution, we just hear about it and Cable, who's extremely important member in *South Pacific*, does the same thing! He goes off and gets killed somewhere and this is the great dramatic moment and oh yeah, he's dead! He got killed over there. Which I can't much tolerate. I've got two favorite shows and it's real simple and real easy. One is *Guys and Dolls* and the other is *She Loves Me*. And they're very similar shows, in which an improbable

romance actually works out.

**PT:** Let's talk more about the partnership with you, and Christopher and MayField Piper.

**AS:** MayField coming into the company was pivotal, absolutely pivotal. She had known Chris's family for a long time and worked for them as a costumer. Chris's dad [Len Piper] did a renaissance heritage fair in Honolulu and he invited us to come out and do *The Magic Mirror*. Chris was also going to perform *Peter and the Wolf*. Then Chris met MayField and even though she had known the other brothers, he was *The One*. And within a couple of years they were married and, of course, she married the Puppet Company as well. The minute she walked in the door, we started making money. I think we were easier to perceive as these two guys doing this very peculiar work when MayField came in. It was more like a family. MayField has succeeded at anything she ever tried. She does





The Puppet Co. 2006 - "Alice in Wonderland" (The Caucus Race). Puppets by Christopher.  
Costumes by Allan and MayField. Set by Allan. Photo by Christopher Piper.

needlepoint that is incredible. She did pottery for a while and it's incredible. She's made an incredible business manager. She's done such a fabulous job. As well as being (Cinderella), she never imagined she was going to play Cinderella. Somebody stuck the puppet in her hand and said, "No! Say it like this!" Her roles in Cinderella and Pinocchio, in particular, are exemplary. Working on costumes with her has been a joy.

**PT:** The three of you have made a great team.

**AS:** I've often thought, how have we managed to do this without killing each other? Living together and working together. We all three think on both sides of our brains. We have a creative end, as well as a cognitive end and it's through that, that we've been able to do this three-person show here, thirty-seven years later.

**PT:** Let's talk about the current state of puppetry.

**AS:** I think there's a pivotal moment. Jim Henson produced an extraordinary experience for children and for families through his television shows, but he always espoused a more sophisticated theater for adults, with puppets. But it really didn't happen. What's odd is just after his death, all of a sudden, little theaters started springing up here and there. When we started here, the nearest was Boston, to the north and Atlanta, to the south. Well, that's not true anymore. I find that interesting. A lot of it is through people like Heather (Henson).

**PT:** Her own beautiful work and the series of short puppet films, *Handmade Puppet Dreams*, come to mind.

**AS:** That and sponsoring slams and all of those things. Julie Taymor has to get some credit. I'm sorry she doesn't like to hire puppeteers and hires dancers instead, but certainly her design and the way she's

integrated into stage-play has resulted in things like the boy in *Madame Butterfly* being (a puppet). Olney, in the past couple of years, did *Our Town* with puppets. It's almost difficult to see a show that doesn't have a puppet hanging around somewhere or other. Which is a good thing, because people like Matt McGee. He gets all kinds of work making puppets that are being incorporated into other things. Dre Moore, at Adventure Theater, is turning out some wonderful stuff as well. She's a prop person who's moved into puppetry and very successfully. I don't think that the puppetry disciplines are always applied to what goes on onstage. There is a Philip Glass opera about Gandhi [Satyagraha]. It has fantastic puppets in it. Huge! They're made out of newspaper. They're absolutely gorgeous. Warhorse. Shows like that.

**PT:** There's also *The Oldest Boy* by Sarah Ruhl, about a young boy who is recognized as a reborn Tibetan Buddhist teacher. The entire cast alternated as puppeteers to invisibly integrate the manipulation into the show. A couple of years ago, I saw *The Woodsman*, James Ortiz's adaptation of the back story of the Tin Woodsman from the Oz stories. Brilliant. It's a joy to see puppetry effect an adult audience as if they were children, to see the suspension of disbelief.

**AS:** You know seeing is believing and we have experiences here (where) the adults don't know what's going to happen when they walk in the door. Particularly in the first decade or two of *The Nutcracker*, dads would come and say, "All these times I've been dragged to *The Nutcracker* and at last I know what the story is about." That conversation happened timed after time. It's kind of a magical thing and this reflects on the adult response to what's happening on the stage. When we first did *Cinderella*, one of the early difficulties was how we were going to do the transformations. We bought our first really expensive piece of fabric, which was called Cracked Ice, for *Cinderella's* ball dress. It was a hundred dollars a yard and I think we got three-quarters of a yard. Then how

are we going to reveal it? Well, we'll just over-dress it and she'll spin around, and it'll come off. So, we started doing the show and people were having their minds blown, because we're tearing a rag off this shiny thing. And the device shows! I've watched it on tape and it's right there, but the audience (doesn't want) to see it and so they erase the rough edges and it just goes from wham to sparkle. The same is true for the transformation in *Snow White*, when the queen turns into the hag and it's a turnaround and there's nothing complicated in what actually happens except the audience is ready for it and so *they* make the magic!

**PT:** Let's talk a little about the Rapunzel gallery show.

**AS:** Boy, that was a funny thing. First of all, it was for the Museum of Women and the Arts and it was (in) their library. I got a phone call from the curator who wondered if we happened to have puppets of Rapunzel because they were doing a Rapunzel exhibit. Rapunzel from every possible point of view. She came over and looked and said, "That's exactly what I want." I had no idea how they were going to be displayed and they ended up in flat library cases that weren't that deep, with glass tops. We had to tuck their costumes under them. They all fit, and they all stood up, but was not the way I would have preferred they be displayed. But, you know, that was fun. The big gallery thing came out of the 1980 puppetry exhibit. That exhibit toured practically every major gallery in the United States. My caterpillar from *Alice in Wonderland* was in that exhibit, so I got included a lot of other places.

**PT:** You also were the Director of Capital Fireworks, the 2008 regional Puppeteers of America Festival.

**AS:** What I was pleased with was in that festival all of the shows were first time, none of the shows had been performed at a festival before. My pet project, a day of solo performances, was great because people don't really realize the range of things that a solo



exhibit. We had an extraordinary store. But the thing lost money and part of the reason it lost money was because we were trying so hard to not interfere with anything else going on, but Peter Allen and his wife had PuppetFest MidWest, which ended up being exactly the same time as our festival and we lost what would have been the difference in breaking even.

**PT:** You, along with Christopher and MayField are poised to retire in two months and we plan to feature the three of you along with your new artistic director Liz Dapo, in our next newsletter. How do you feel about retiring?

**AS:** It was a surprise. This is important to know. We had talked about retiring when Chris reached his seventieth birthday, but as we've gone into this period in which we have had audiences diminishing and finding it really difficult to make ends meet, we're all played out. I'll give this example which I gave to the County Arts Council and they got a big laugh out of it. Here am I, I'm sitting at my computer in a dimly lit

room and I'm writing the Great American Novel or the Great American Puppet Play or whatever, and I know I've just got a couple more lines to write. And I think like, oh God, do I need a cup of coffee or what? But I don't have the wherewithal to get up. And I go, oh my God, this chair is breaking my back! But I don't have the wherewithal to get up and change chairs. And all of a sudden, here comes the Glen Echo Partnership in the door and they go, "Look at you! You look terrible! Let me get you a cushion." Then Liz comes in the other door and says, "Ah, you look awful. Let me get you a cup of coffee I'll put the kettle on!" And all of a sudden, the lights come on and I write, "And they all lived happily ever after."

**PT:** You've had such an amazing career, what amazing things do you plan to do after June 30<sup>th</sup>?

**AS:** Probably a couple of days a week, at least through the end of the year, I'm going to be doing archives. The pictures that I sent you [included in this interview] are the tip of an iceberg. I can't do more



than four or five hours a day. It doesn't work, that's all. I have emphysema, and that's puppetry related. Acetone. Back when we were building the Smithsonian puppets, the only instruction you got was "use in a ventilated space" and my studio was in a basement. So, for five or six years, every day, I had my nose over an acetone bucket.

**PT:** But now that it's here, how do you feel about retirement?

**AS:** You know, I was ready to plod through for another two years. I would have and it would have been a diminishing return, but I still would have done it, but I am actually much relieved. And it's not that there aren't shows that I wouldn't like to do. As a matter of fact, I've been giving Liz a challenge of real theater pieces. I'm going to challenge her to do things like Archy and Mehitabel to Prometheus Bound, other complicated shows, all of which can lend themselves to puppetry very well. It's the sort of thing she'd want to do. She's done a lot of adult theater using puppets.

**PT:** I can tell you that you will be missed in retirement. Allan, it's been an honor to speak with you. What other thoughts would you like to leave us with?

**AS:** I like to define terms. I like to know where I am. First thing, I divide puppeteers into two categories, professionals and hobbyists. Professionals make all, or the greater part of their income from puppetry, the hobbyists do not. There's no such thing as an amateur puppeteer. It doesn't exist. Anybody, for me, giving a first read to a new script to some twelve year old sitting at the kitchen table, with two library books and a shoebox full of dreams, there's no difference, because the path toward the production itself is going to be the same. I will say this, from time to time you will have amateurish behaviors, but that can happen to the professionals or the hobbyist. Part of my reason for doing this is I used to be so amused (by) Mabel Beaton's book, *Marionettes: A Hobby for*

Everyone. And you go like, a hobby for everyone?!? Who's got these talents and that workshop and knows how to use these materials and everything else! But the fact is, her husband never quit his job. They never lived off puppetry. They did the puppetry mostly for fun. They did the parables, I think it was called *Lamp Unto My Feet* (editor's note: apparently this show was called *Bible Puppets*), a religious television show. I always gathered that they were probably being paid for it, but I don't know that. Even if they were paid for it, it probably wasn't very much. Have you seen the parables?

**PT:** Most of them. That sort of thing was big where I grew up.

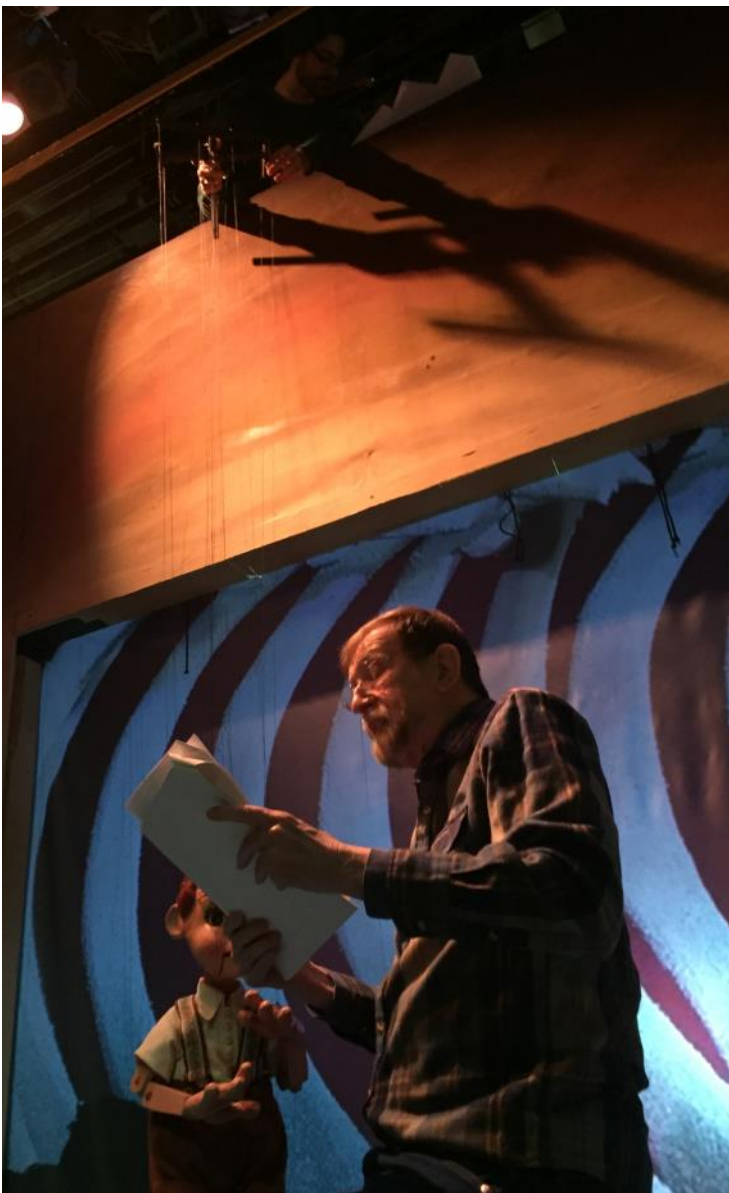
**AS:** They're really quite wonderful. The original piece, *The Nativity*, is a little bit creaky, quite frankly. They are beautiful things to look at, but some of the manipulation...the *Three Kings* look like they've got loads in their britches. But they got past that when they got to the parables and they're very well done. Also, the story of Moses and the story of Joseph, those are also very well done. I think both of those are in color. The parables are in black and white. But it's all very worth seeing. At a workshop recently, I did my definition of puppetry. Now I have to tell you, all these definitions are fluid. They're fluid because I think puppetry is a moving target and you know you can't say puppetry is only this or only this, because you're only going to get caught in your own trap sooner or later. To me, a puppet is any inanimate object, disassociated body part, or shadow image made to move by a puppeteer and create the illusion of life and personality. I add the personality along with it because if the personality ain't there, you're just moving a chair around. You're moving the furniture and that's all. When you think of Kermit, you don't look at him and think, oh yeah, isn't that a piece of old coat? Which he is. You think about this wonderful character, not what he's made out of or the fact that he has a hand in his face. It's the personality of the character that comes through and it's what has made

the Muppets and The Muppet Show overwhelmingly successful.

Puppetry is a process of distillation and purification. In a way, it is the same for the puppeteer as it is for the show, that it is a process that has a catharsis whether you realize it or not. The you will be changed by your experience. You start with a story and you say, "Alright, do I need a script?" And then you look at the script. Do I need all these words? Do I think that I can just do silence there? Or how about do a little dance there or maybe sing a little song there? What color is going to suit this moment the best? What about the lighting? If I want this to be translated in some way, how do I do that? Just to keep tearing stuff away. I saw a show recently, this was a show that included puppets and it was a popular, but very complicated children's piece, that you wonder whether it's really for children at all. (It was) done by an extremely reputable company and they were in concert with the Washington Ballet and it was a show that was a long time coming together. I go to see it and I expect to see the dance incorporated into the story. What happened was the actors would play out a scene, and then the dancers would come out and dance the same scene! And what's more, the actors when they spoke, intoned the lines. There was no inflection whatsoever. I can tell you that no child that went into that theater, not knowing the story, came out knowing it any better! Which is too bad. Don't do that. Don't complicate matters! You get rid of (things) until you've got...Snow White has a blue dress and she has a medallion that's a snowflake. *That's* what it *must* be. Generally, I think there is a difference between looking at art and looking at illustration. If you go into a gallery and you turn a corner and you see Renoir's Luncheon of the Boating Party, chances are the first thing you're going to do is step back because there's a shield between you and the extraordinary experience going on in the painting. With an Illustration, it's the opposite. You see the image and you're drawn to

it. That accounts for most of our repertory. We want to embrace the audience; we *want* to give them this treat. I have very different feelings about Snow White, I don't know why. Snow White has that particular power. From the first time I started reading the script and the fact that the name takes on major proportions; your name means something, and the idea is that the queen knows your name. She can use it as a weapon, so everybody is just brother and sister, until unfortunately, Snow White slips and tells the prince her name and then two-hundred kids in the audience go, "!!!!" That's very rewarding.

Editor's note: If anyone is interested, Renoir's Luncheon of the Boating Party hangs in the Phillips Gallery in Washington, DC.



# Goodbye, Bernice.

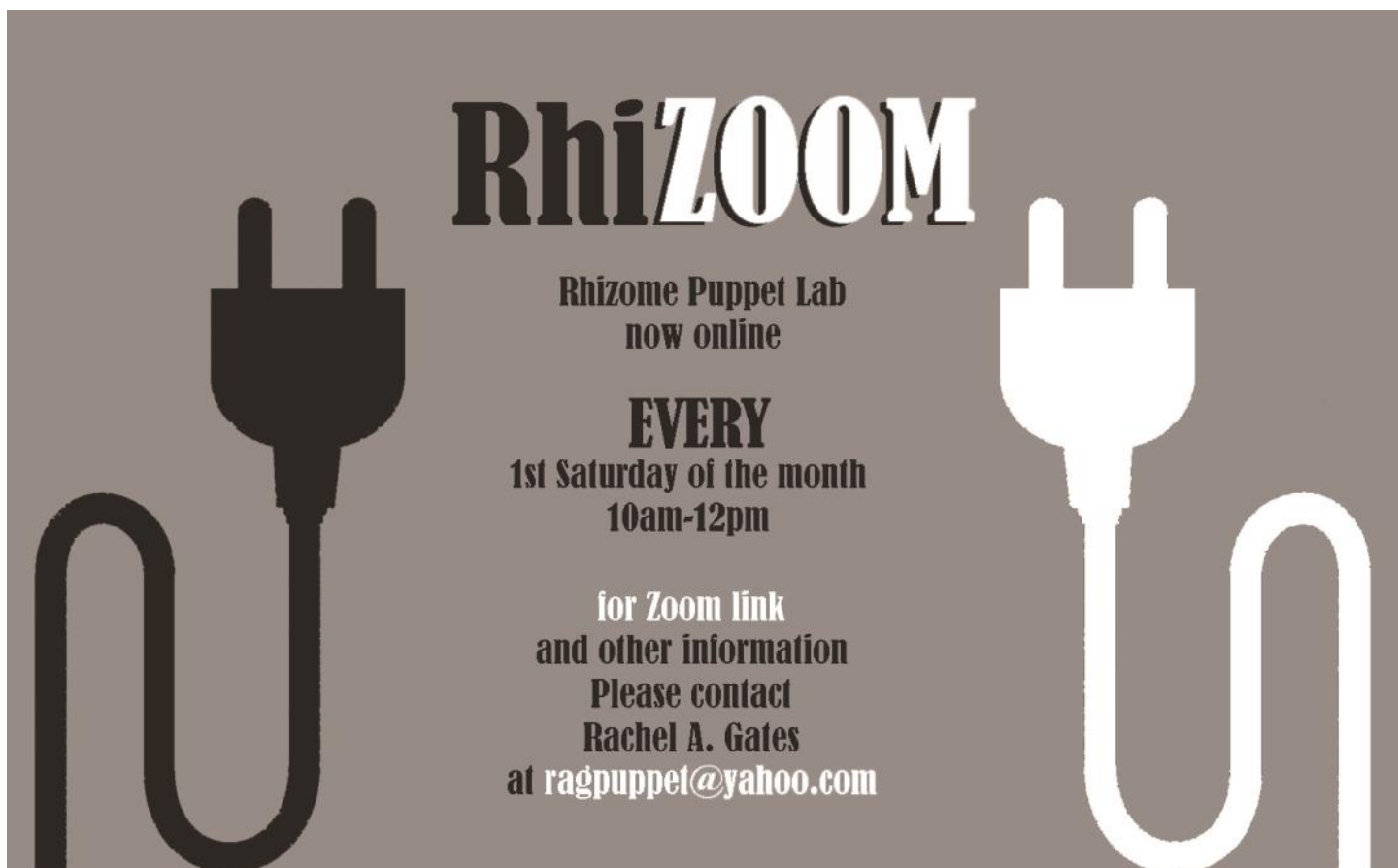


**We have lost our Queen. On the morning of April 18, 2020 Bernice Silver left us, another victim of covid-19. If you had only just met her, you were amazed by the energy and zest of someone decades your senior. If you knew her, you knew the love and fun that constantly poured from her every action. If you were her friend, you will mourn her passing forever.**

Bernice Silver was born in Brooklyn on October 7th, 1913. From a very young age she was involved with theater. She was one of the townspeople in the original cast of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, she collaborated with Lea Wallace and she was truly an American puppetry legend. She was a charter member of the Puppetry Guild of Greater New York. She had a natural talent for performing art synthesis. Music, history, sociology, science, economics, recipes, poetry, with simple handmade puppets and found objects were her tools and she spoke as she wished. Throughout her long life she was always performing and networking. She knew everyone who was anyone in puppetry and everyone knew her. Her address book was a publicist's dream. We all loved her dearly.

The fan-founded Bernice Silver Appreciation Society continues its work to help bring senior PofA members to festivals. If you would like to support this effort, go to: [puppeteers.org/product/bernice-silver-festival-grant/](https://puppeteers.org/product/bernice-silver-festival-grant/)





## **APPLICATIONS for THE NATIONAL CAPITAL PUPPETRY GUILD 2020 SCHOLARSHIP AND GRANT PROGRAM**

The following two pages contain applications for this year's Judy Barry Brown Festival Grant, and the O'Neill Conference Grant.

Part of our core mission at the National Capital Puppetry Guild is to provide support for education in the puppetry arts. To that end, we have established a program of grants and scholarships to help deserving puppeteers further their study and practice.

The Judy Barry Brown Festival Grant is offered to a younger guild member to help offset the cost of attending their first festival.

It is awarded on a needs basis. Many young puppet-

eers just need that little push to convince them they have a life in puppetry.

The O'Neill Conference Grant provides a small grant to help defray the cost of attending the conference, for artists that have been accepted into one of the puppet tracks of the program. It is designed to help further a puppeteers continuing education in the art.

If you have any interest in any of these scholarship or grants, please consider applying. If you have any questions please contact us through the Puppetimes email at [puppetimes@gmail.com](mailto:puppetimes@gmail.com).

# Application for First Time Festival Attendance Grant 2020

Every year the National Capital Puppetry Guild makes available a need based grant for any member (associate members excluded) over the age of seventeen who is attending their first regional or national festival.

This grant application form must be submitted to the National Capital Puppetry Guild. See the General Instructions below for additional information about completing this application.

General Instructions to Applicant:

1. Make a copy of the blank application form and complete a draft copy first.
2. Which Festival do you want to attend. Please give festival name and dates.

---

### 3. Personal Information

Full name of applicant \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Home telephone number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Present home address

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years as an NCPG member \_\_\_\_\_ Citizenship \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Education - please use extra sheets to elaborate, if needed.

- a. Name all secondary and/or technical schools you have attended. List the school you are presently attending first.

### 5. Puppetry Education and Experience - please use extra sheets to elaborate, if needed.

- a. Please discuss your puppetry education. Include any classes, workshops you've taken.

- b. Please discuss any performances you have participated in.

### 6. Please write a short essay on why we should send you to your first puppetry festival.

**Please complete and send to:**

**National Capital Puppetry Guild**

**Scholarship Committee**

**64 Southall Court**

**Sterling, VA 20165**

**Submit no later than one month before the proposed festival.** You will be notified within 10 days whether or not you have been selected.

## National Capital Puppetry Guild O'Neill Grant Application 2020

The National Capital Puppetry Guild has established this grant to provide financial support to members of our guild wishing to attend the **National Puppetry Conference** at the **O'Neill Center for Theatre** in Waterford, Connecticut. All full members (associate members excluded) in good standing are invited to apply. Scholarship funds are contingent upon acceptance into the chosen NPC program.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Best Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Circle Type: Home Cell Work

Website: (if available) \_\_\_\_\_

Please thoroughly answer the following questions. Type your responses and attach.

- Have you attended the O'Neill in the past? If so, when? What tracks did you study?
- What track(s) do you plan to explore at the National Puppetry Conference? Please describe.
- How will this course of study align with your future plans and your professional development in the art of puppetry?
- Provide the committee with at least two references (full name and contact information) who can speak to your work/interest in the art of puppetry.
- Please attach the following (if you are mailing your application via post, please send a CD, DVD, or physical printouts of your supporting documentation):
  - Resume detailing your puppetry/theatrical work, education, and relevant history.
  - Links to photo galleries or video clips that represent your work.  
You may also send images as attachments. Be sure to describe the images/video clips to the committee as an attached index. (If you are mailing your application via post, please send a CD, DVD, or print copies.)

Please submit the completed scholarship application and ALL supporting documentation via email to [jeffbragg1@verizon.net](mailto:jeffbragg1@verizon.net) or mail to:

National Capital Puppetry Guild  
Scholarship Committee  
64 Southall Court  
Sterling, VA 20165



# Puppetimes

Enjoy the newsletters you've missed!

We are now offering printed copies of the last four years of our newsletter.

Each copy is \$6 with shipping included. Full color copies are also available for \$20 with shipping included. PDF copies are also available for \$1 each.

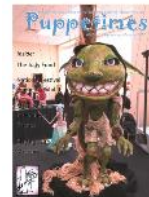
For issues not on this pages, email: [puppetimes@gmail.com](mailto:puppetimes@gmail.com)



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



Volume 53 No. 4-A & B  
July - Aug 2017  
NCPG Retrospective  
Issue #1 and #2



Volume 53 No. 5  
Sept. - Oct. 2017  
Feature: The Judy Fund,  
National Festival  
Puppetry Exhibit



Volume 53 No. 6  
Nov. - Dec. 2017  
Feature: The Beauty  
of Difficult Shows



Volume 54 No. 1  
Jan. - Feb. 2018  
Feature: Bob Brown  
Part Two



Volume 54 No. 2  
March - April 2018  
Feature: Ingrid Crepeau  
and Michele Valeri of  
Dinorock



Volume 54 No. 3  
May - June 2018  
Feature: Sesame Street  
Puppetry Workshop



Volume 54 No. 4  
July - Aug 2018  
Feature: The Life and  
Work of Jean Reges  
Burn



Volume 54 No. 5  
Sept - Oct 2018  
Feature: Karen Falk  
Interview



Volume 54 No. 6  
Nov - Dec 2018  
Feature: Exclusive  
interview with  
Bonnie Erickson



Volume 55 No. 1  
Jan - Feb 2019  
Feature: Joshua  
Holden Interview



Volume 55 No. 2  
March - April 2019  
Feature: Alex and  
Olmsted Interview



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



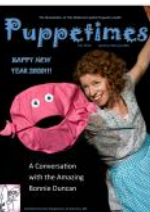
Volume 55 No. 4  
July - Aug 2019  
Feature: Ole and  
Ingrid Hass of Beech  
Tree Puppets



Volume 55 No. 5  
Sept - Oct 2019  
Feature: Carolyn  
Wilcox Interview



Volume 55 No. 6  
Nov - Dec 2019  
Feature: Craig Marin  
and Olga Felgemacher  
Interview

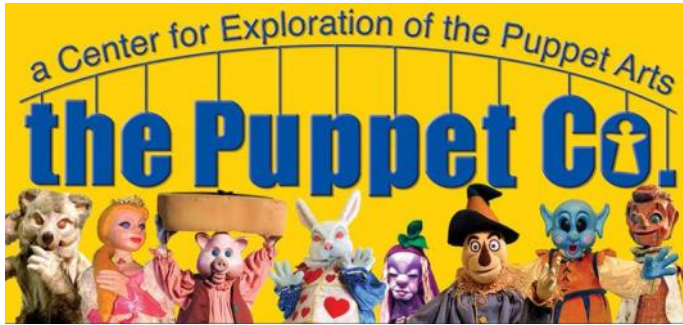


Volume 56 No. 1  
Jan - Feb 2020  
Feature: Bonnie  
Duncan Interview



Volume 56 No. 2  
March - April 2020  
Feature: Cindy and  
Laurie Nickerson of  
Puppet Pelts

# THE SEE AND BE SEEN SCENE



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

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

ALL IN-PERSON PERFORMANCES CANCELLED

Please see their website for up to date information and online offerings.

## **Black Cherry Puppet Theater**

is doing online slams. Checkout their website for details.

<http://blackcherrypuppettheater.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

## **Puppet Lab at RhiZoom**

Is continuing online. For up to date information please contact: [ragpuppet@yahoo.com](mailto:ragpuppet@yahoo.com)

**YOUR SHOW HERE!** 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.

**Timely note: While all venues are currently closed, most companies are planning to move forward however they can. Please contact each of them to get up-to-the-minute information on their situations.**

**STILL BEING PLANNED**

## **POINTLESS THEATER**

**THE LEGEND OF HANG TUAH**

July 15 - August 1, 2020

Wednesday - Friday @ 8PM

Saturday @ 3 + 8PM

Sunday @ 3PM

Spooky Action Theater

1810 16th St NW, Washington, DC 20009

Tickets: <https://www.artful.ly/store/events/20000>

## **NCPG SCOOP! What's Up With Our Guild**

With this issue we welcome new members Katherine Zira, David William, and the new Artistic Director of the Puppet Co, Elizabeth Dapo.

Sorry, but there's not much to write about. Our last meeting was canceled due to the covid-19 virus pandemic and we do not have the next meeting planned at this point. Our in-person meetings have been cancelled for the foreseeable future. We are currently working on providing virtual meetings and programming and will let you know when we have this in place.

Kudos to Vanessa Gilbert and David Higgins of Blood From A Turnip for receiving a grant to produce slams in the DC area from Heather Henson's Puppet Slam Network. They've already done one and are planning a virtual slam soon.

Signed,  
The Mangement

# Have You Renewed Yet?



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:

Company Name:

Company Web Site:

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

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

Amount enclosed:

Today's Date:

Check #

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

L. Lafosse, NCPG Treasurer,

13921 Piscataway Drive, Fort Washington, MD 20744

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

( ) - Home:

( ) - Work:

( ) - Mobile:

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

(Associate Members not eligible)

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, work-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: leigh Lafosse • NCPG Treasurer

[leighlafosse@gmail.com](mailto:leighlafosse@gmail.com)