

The Newsletter of The National Capital Puppetry Guild

Puppetimes

Vol. 54 #6 November-December 2018



A Conversation With Bonnie Erickson



Chartered by the Puppeteers of America, INC

Coming Up at the Puppet Co

Through November 16

in Glen Echo Park

7300 MacArthur Blvd, Glen Echo, MD

For Reservations (301)634-5380



Hansel and Gretel

Humperdink's children's opera, full of magic, music and dazzling special effects. The puppets, 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

November 24 through December 30

Shows are Thursday and Fridays at 11:00am
Saturday and Sunday at 11:30am & 1:00pm



The Nutcracker

A Washington tradition for 26 years, "The Nutcracker" is the story of Clara-Marie's favorite toy, and their adventures together in the Land of the Sugarplum Fairy. Music from Tchaikovsky's famous ballet blends with marionettes and costume characters to create this unique production.

Recommended Ages: 5 years old - Adult • Running Time: 45 Minutes

Our next meeting will be on November 11th at the Puppet Co following the 1pm show of Hansel and Gretel. We will be holding our annual election for the board of directors. Please see the following page for details.

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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

Send all submissions to: 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: Sam Rugg
Secretary: Heidi Rugg - Treasurer: Cori Leyden-Sussler
Members at Large - Sandy Feulner, Tom Noll, Honey Goodenough, Pam McNaughton

NCPG home page: www.nationalcapitalpuppetry.org
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The next meeting of the National Capital Puppetry Guild is November 11th at the Puppet Co following the 1pm performance of Hansel and Gretel. To make your complimentary reservation call (301)364-5380 and press 9 to go directly to voicemail or email: boxoffice@thepuppetco.org

Please remind Betsy, in the Box Office, that you are an NCPG member. Your tickets will be under your name at the Box Office window outside.

Remember: seating starts at 12:45pm (please arrive prior to 12:45pm).

We will be conducting our annual board of directors election and also be having our regular pot luck.

Please contact Sandy Feulner, Mistress of Revels at 703-897-9969 for potluck details.

Holiday party in Richmond this year at the Rugg's new place! More details to follow soon.

President's Note by Jeff Bragg

As I mentioned in the last issue, I get to do some really fun things. September was a whirlwind month. On top of attending the North East and Mid-Atlantic regional festival, I also got to take advantage of my new PGOGNY membership with a wonderful improvisation workshop, given by Tyler Bunch, at the Henson Annex in New York City.

But the biggest thrill was being invited to the home of Wayde Harrison and Bonnie Erickson to interview her for this issue.

Bonnie Erickson is a well-known name for any fan of the Muppets. After working in costuming for nine years in New York City, Jim Henson asked her to join his team in 1970, also as a costumer. But soon, her talents in design, organizing, and administration made her an invaluable member of Henson Associates. Her famous characters, Statler and Waldorf, Zoot, George the Janitor, Miss Piggy and many more, were both designed and sculpted by her. Although she maintained close ties with Henson until his death, she left Henson Associates in 1976 to start her own company along with her husband, Wayde Harrison. Harrison/Erickson has been a major designer and supplier of sports mascots since the late '70s and her work is still being used by many teams. They also did work for toy companies and of course, her old boss called on her frequently.

When we first met, she was Executive Director of the Jim Henson Legacy, overseeing the allocation and distribution of the physical items in the Jim Henson Archives. She has happily moved on from that position to just being on their board and is now busy organizing her own archives. Her interview starts on page 6.

Also in this issue is a review of Sandglass Theatre's Babylon, my favorite show at the Puppets in the Green Mountain/North East and Mid-Atlantic regional puppetry festival held in Brattleboro, Vermont in September. Puppetimes will be offering coverage on that festival in our next issue.

Well, it's that time of year again. Time for me to remind you of our upcoming board of directors election and that nominations are still open for few more days. The current board are all up for re-election and both Alex

Vernon and Sarah Olmsted Thomas have been nominated. Details are on the previous page and page 20. So remember to vote.

Oh, and it's also time to remind you to renew your membership. Which I'm not going to do much this year. You see, I figure that after the last few years, you should know why it's a good idea to continue your membership. No more reminders on every other page (I don't have room), and only a few more not-so-subtle hints by email.

But I'm betting that you do care and that you think what we're doing here is important. We'll see. Keep those cards and letters coming in kids!



PS. Interesting stuff coming up in January. We're going to have our holiday party in Richmond, Virginia this time. It seems that Sam and Heidi Rugg have moved into a new home and will be hosting. Sounds like fun to me. More details soon. Keep your weekends in January clear for this.

Also, just before going to press, I learned that Bonnie and Wayde have joined our guild and also made a nice donation to boot! We welcome them and thank them for their support of our work and vote of confidence in our mission.



Photo courtesy of Wayde Harrison.

THE JUDY BARRY BROWN FUND

Providing Scholarships and Grants 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 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 .

Go to page 16 to see full information on the grants and scholarship programs.

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

THE JUDY FUND

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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Name as shown on card:

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

A Conversation with Bonnie Erickson

Editor's note: In the puppetry world, there are few people who generate as much interest as James Maury Henson. But in Jim Henson's world, there were few people who were as important and essential to his body of work as Bonnie Erickson. Among her creations were Statler and Waldorf, Zoot, the Philly Phanatic, and so many more. Bonnie also has the distinction of designing and sculpting the first Miss Piggy. Puppetimes traveled to New York City last September and spoke with this amazing and wonderful woman about her life and work. (all photos copyright Wayde Harrison and courtesy Bonnie Erickson, unless otherwise noted)

PT: You did not start out in puppetry at all. What led you to that part of your career? Was it costuming or was there something before that?

BE: It was theater. When I was in college, even in high school, I had done theater and also taken art courses. When I was in high school, probably my junior year, I started getting the Village Voice just so I could see what was going on in New York. I finally got a job upstate at a camp as the drama coach. Leslie Gore was my Gigi and crooned her way through the whole musical. Who knew she would soon find fame with "It's My Party and I'll Cry If I Want To." We followed that up with West Side Story. It was one of those camps that lasts the whole summer. When it ended I kept postponing going back to Minnesota. I enrolled at the Arts Students League [of New York] and met a lot of people who were involved in the art world. I also started doing accessories for a small dress store. A costume designer, Patricia Quinn Stuart, saw my work there and hired me to help her. I had been sewing everything by hand because I didn't have a sewing machine, so I did a lot of hats, belts and things like that. The first day as I sat at the sewing machine she came by and said, "You know you're sewing backwards." And I said, "Oh yeah, I know, I always do" [laughter]. She laughed! And she kept me! I did finally learn how to maneuver that machine and I worked with her off and on doing any kind of costumes she needed. We did Cry of Players at Lincoln Center, we did an Off-Broadway musical called The Me Nobody Knows, that went to Broadway with Northern Calloway who became a cast member of



Sesame Street. It was a real learning opportunity. I had been in theater at the university, but this was a really valuable work situation. I loved it. I loved New York. I did go to a few auditions. I found I didn't take direction well and realized backstage was much more interesting to me.

PT: But you did have some desire to be onstage...

BE: I did, but then I decided that acting was just not for me. I wasn't very good at it and it didn't satisfy me the way making things did.

PT: So, originally you hadn't intended to become a costumer, it was something that you were doing to make ends meet and to make connections.

BE: Well, I love clothes and I would have focused on being a fashion designer in a heartbeat. But it's one of those things where you never know which direction things are going to go. I was open to opportunities. So when Patricia Quinn Stuart asked me to work for her...well, I learned an enormous amount from her. The portfolio with work I had done for her as well as my own work, got me my first job with Jim Henson. Actually, it was Fran Brill who first told me that Jim was looking for a costumer.

At first I didn't believe her. I knew Jim's work. At that time he was doing some really abstract stuff on the Ed Sullivan Show, the morning shows, the [late] night shows. "Sesame Street" wasn't even on air yet. They had just finished shooting it when I started at Muppets. I wasn't really sure what this job was going to be, but I knew I wanted to work with Jim Henson because I thought his mind was incredible and concepts he'd come up with really hilarious. I started with a freelance job doing the costumes for The Frog Prince...the beginning of working for Jim. When he asked me to stay on and run the shop, it was a little daunting and a bit intimidating because of the talented people working there before me ...Caroly Wilcox...John Lovelady, Faz Fazakas. But it was Don Sahlin who really became my mentor. Funny, sweet, darling Don Sahlin. He taught me about puppetry and puppets because I had no idea! It wasn't part of my training. What especially appealed to me at Henson Associates was the fact that we did everything – we did sets, we did costumes, we did props, we worked with the writers, the performers. At the time there were probably only seven people on staff including the receptionist. Kermit Love and a number of other people came in and out. Faz would work on electronics project by project. As there were more projects, the staff got larger... and larger!

PT: And you started in 1970 with Jim?

BE: Yep.

PT: How many years did you spend in New York City doing costuming before you started with him?

BE: I did costuming for almost eight years. But when I came to New York in 1961, I started doing other freelance jobs...oh, I had a lot of wonderful temp jobs! I worked at 505 5th Avenue. It was an office where I would answer about twenty phones in the name of the company it was supposed to be. I would set up conferences in the little room where we would pretend it was the office of anybody who booked it. That was an education! I worked for Kohler Bathtubs, I worked for Modell's Shoppers World downstairs in the office. I thought I was Judy Holliday, because at lunchtime I got to give a break to the girl who actually answered

the phones and I got to do the "Judy Holliday" switchboard. I had seen the movie [Bells Are Ringing]. I thought it was such a great thing to be able to do for an hour, and not have to do it the rest of your life [laughs]!

PT: Lots of jobs are like that! They're fun as long as you don't have to do it the rest of your life!

BE: Right! I lived in Greenwich Village until I couldn't afford that anymore and then I moved to the Lower East Side, where I stayed until I moved to Brooklyn.

PT: It must have been very interesting to be living in Greenwich Village at that time. There was so much going on then. Bob Dylan was there and Joan Baez.

BE: It was wonderful! Bob Dylan and I knew each other from Dinkytown in Minnesota and he was playing at the Gaslight [Café], just downstairs from where I lived. It was a very exciting time, there were a lot of interesting art and music scenes going on in the Village.

PT: Let's go back further. Tell me about your "growing up" period in Minnesota.

BE: I had a little bit of the best of "both worlds". I had a grandmother in North Dakota and a grandmother in Minnesota, both on farms. So I would spend the summers with them. I would take a train to get there. When I think about it, it was a really very special time. They taught me to embroider, to crochet and to knit. I would walk up town to get the mail for my Grandma Minnie and I'd stay maybe three weeks with her and three weeks with my other Grandma Hilda in Minnesota on a very different



Five rednecks from Muppet Musicians of Bremen - Design Bonnie Erickson, photo Don Sahlin.

kind of farm. I did that until I was well into my teens and had my friends in the city. But those summers were really wonderful - and it was funny, being from St. Paul, to have people think of me as a "city" girl, because I hadn't really thought of myself as a "city" girl before.

PT: Let's talk more about the period before you were hired by Jim.

BE: I started college at a really active time for students. The '60s were amazing everywhere - the literature, politics, space, art - it was a very exciting time. A whole group of us at the University of Minnesota were protesting about civil rights and worrying about Cuba. We



Bonnie hitch-hiking, photographer unknown

were all progressive and left-leaning. I think my parents thought everybody at the U of M was a communist. [laughs]. When you get to the 1970s, I was in Washington still protesting. But in the 60's I really had my sights set on getting to New York.

PT: How did you get to New York? Train?

BE: I drove out. There was another student from the university who was going to be the tennis coach at the same camp. We bought a 1951 Buick convertible. It was yellow and red, and we had painted "New York or Busted" on the back. It took us two and a half weeks to get to New York.

PT: You must have taken the scenic route!

BE: Well, we stopped a lot. The car died on State Street in Chicago, so that delayed us a little bit. We just had an adventure. It was really fun. When we drove up at this camp, I'm sure they couldn't imagine who was coming in this car! The kids were really fascinated. I'm not so sure that the owners of the camp were as fascinated, but in the end we all got along very well and I enjoyed that summer. I came with this Minnesota trait, so that when the parents came on Parent's Day and offered to "tip" me, I didn't understand and I said, "Oh no, it's my pleasure to take care of your child." When they all went home and all the camp counselors got together and said, "So, how much did you get?" I said, "You kept that money?!" [laughs] I had no idea! But the summer was a good experience. I'm really glad I did it. It got me to New York. It was a road trip! That car, by the way, died the day the insurance ran out on our way back from camp. The rear end literally fell out of the car onto the road in New Hyde Park, New York. We sold it for \$12 junk. A friend of mine from back home came and picked us up and brought us into New York City. He knew of a place to stay in the Village with six other people in a small apartment. The parents who leased the apartment had moved back to Minnesota and their kids were living out the lease. So all these "strays" ended up living in this building. One of my best friends, who now lives in Paris, was the first person I met when we were living in that apartment.

I got on the bus the day after I arrived in the city and saw Saks Fifth Avenue. I had worked from high school through college at a dress shop so I went in, interviewed, and they hired me. I loved that job. More interesting people. I would come home from there and work as an usher at the 5th Avenue Cinema where I got to see all these fabulous movies. Well, not all that many of them, because each one lasted forever at this art theater. If they had a movie, it wasn't there and gone in three days. It was there for a month. I saw *Wrong Arm of the Law*, I saw *Macario*, I saw *Shoot the Piano Player*...all became my favorites, well, not Macario! I posed for a portrait artist in my building when I finished there. I got fired from the theater because I fell asleep behind the retaining wall! And they caught me!

I worked for a bunch of commercial artists. Several were wonderful car illustrators. Another one did "family" kinds

of things. So, I sort-of learned what it took to be an commercial artist while I was going to the Art Students League. I was taking commercial art there. So it was an education every day. The '70s, which are supposed to have been some of the worst days in New York, I felt were wonderful! I didn't have any money, neither did anybody else I knew! The people that I met and the fact that New York is constantly changing was something really interesting to me. I still like to go back to the old neighborhoods. My first apartment on the Lower East Side cost \$25 a month.

PT: Was it a fifth floor, cold water, walk-up?

BE: No, it was second floor, had hot water, but it had no heat. So I had a pot-bellied stove. It was a tenement and you used to have to go out the door, down the stairs, and around the hallway to go to the bathroom, but somebody who lived there didn't like that, so they cut a hole in the living room floor, and there was a trap door! I mean, where do you ever get that? I would have never found these places anywhere else!

PT: These places kind of don't exist anymore.

BE: No! Now they're in the Tenement Museum! That's the problem with New York. It's lovely when places get gentrified, but they put a lot of people out of homes when that happens. New York has some pretty strong housing laws, but when you got an apartment for \$25 a month you could pretty much do whatever you want, because everything was an improvement!

PT: Let's talk a little bit about the weeks leading up to your first interview with Jim. You said Fran Brill told you about the opening. What was going on just before she told you about it?

BE: My friend, designer Bob de Mora was headed to California to work on a film and he asked me to go with him. But I had a son, Christopher, who was only two and I didn't really want to pick him up and relocate. I was trying to figure out how to deal with that when I got the second call saying they really do want somebody to make costumes for this special, so that's when I called Jim. I made the appointment and then came down with a terrible cold. I was so tempted not to go. First of all I didn't feel great, and second, I thought I'd be sure to give it to him.



The London Workshop - photographer unknown.

But I didn't want to miss the opportunity and was afraid I might blow the chance if I didn't go. So I went. (I hope I didn't give him the cold.) I talked to him and Diana Birkenfield, who was the producer at the time and showed my portfolio. I was building these muslin, life-size, female figures and clothing them in antique clothes that were part of a collection I had. I showed the work I'd done with Pat Stuart. One of the things we had just finished doing was this production for the Manhattan School of Music. It was the opera Dido and Aeneas and we had done it all pretty much in plastic. I think Jim may have been impressed that we had used "new" materials, since Jim was very much involved in anything that was a "new" and in the exploration of "new" things. He said, "Hmmm, this has been interesting. Call Diana tomorrow and we'll let you know."

I called from a phone booth and she said, "Yes, we'd like to hire you to do the special." My quandary was solved, I didn't have to worry about leaving for California. Later on I wondered, so what would have happened if I had gone to California? I'd probably live in LA. I'd probably be in the film industry. I don't like LA. I'm very happy things worked out the way they did! Worked out very nicely.

PT: I think we're all very happy things worked out the way they did.

BE: Well, I am! I couldn't have worked for a better person than Jim. He was really incredibly confident and inventive and the people he had around him were such fun. Jerry Juhl, Jim's head writer, for instance. We met at the workshop when I first started, because he was working on Frog Prince. And he said, "So, where are you from?" I said "Minnesota," he said, "Oh, me too!" And I said, "Well, where in Minnesota?" "Oh, St. Paul." "Well, me too!" "Where in St. Paul?" "Well, Falcon Heights." "Me too!" Well, it turned out that my parents knew his parents. My father bought the big old house that I loved, from the superintendent of his father's nursery there in St. Paul. And my mother knew his mother. He was a couple years older, so we probably didn't meet because at that time, two years made a big difference. But we all went to the same drugstore after school. It was really weird to have this connection! Wayde and I spent a fair amount of time with him just months before he died.



An original Charles Shultz drawing of Charlie Brown that hangs in Bonnie and Wayde's library.

In fact, Jerry and I were working on a book ...I always wanted to call it Hired Hands...about all the people who worked behind the scenes with Jim, the people putting it all together. Jerry and I had talked about it a lot. We made lists. The time has passed, but it was an exciting idea. There were so many wonderful people. Caroly and I are still friends. John Lovelady, I just talked to him. I miss Donald (Sahlin) every day.

PT: And I guess Dave Goelz is on his way here, now. [He had just called and we'd overheard one side of a conversation her husband Wayde had just had with him]

BE: Yes, right! Recently we were neighbors in New Zealand. I should explain. Nicola Marshall produced The Jim Henson Retrospectacle, an almost a month-long celebration of Jim Henson in Wellington. Wayde calls it Muppet Woodstock. There must have been about twenty of us, from Sesame Street, from Henson, from Disney, from Puppet Heap - all together in the same hotel. It was just extraordinary. Dave and I have been good friends since he first came to work at (the) Muppets. And here we were...next door neighbors! I was always a little upset with Jim for taking him away from the shop and making him a puppeteer. He was a puppeteer to start with, but he was a fantastic (puppet) designer/builder. He built Zoot from my sketch. He's a multi-talented human being.

PT: Most of you trained the next generation of puppet builders at the Muppets. People who came and they

already had skills, but it was Faz and Don and Dave and you who trained the next generation, right?

BE: Yes, and Caroly. Faz did all the mechanics and remote-control. It became such an important part of Jim's work. And Caroly trained I don't know how many people when she was overseeing Sesame Street. So many people who went through the workshop learned their skills from her. Now, Rollie Krewson, who was the first intern in a program that I'd started at Henson Associates, is training even more. But everybody who worked there brought their own skills and came from different disciplines. All the people who loved craftsmanship, who were problem solvers, who were process oriented, got great satisfaction from the work. It was a engaged shop but at first our safety habits could be pretty relaxed. At first we had no idea of the toxicity of some of these materials...



PT: Barge Cement!

BE: ...until I got a book about health hazards for artists. Barge IS the best contact cement. We thought that must be the reason we all were so happy all the time! We were using hot wires to carve foam, you know how toxic that can be. So, at a certain point, when I realized the dangers, first, the windows got opened, but then we got real exhaust systems in the shop.

Initially we were just doing whatever was needed to get things done. Now people are much more aware of it, which is a good thing. I wonder what problems there are with 3D printing. I keep thinking, oh my, if we just had 3D printing back in those days! I saw an extraordinary exhibit of 3D printed furniture. There was no way to do this work any other way. I know Jim would have been the first to buy a printer for us to use.



Wayde and Bonnie at Henson Masquerade party - 1985 photographer unknown

PT: Let's talk about how Harrison/Erickson, the company you founded with your husband Wayde, evolved. How did that start? How did that get going?

BE: I did some costumes in 1970 for Twyla Tharp [choreographer]. Kermit Love designed them and I built them. I was freelance, and I wanted to stay freelance. But after I had done Frog Prince, Jim called me up to his office and said, "I'd really like

you to run the shop." And I said, "I really like being freelance. I like taking different jobs because I love being in the theater, too." And he said, "Just try it." Well, I did. It was a great fit for me. But several years later, I was divorced and had left the Lower East Side and moved to Brooklyn with my son. I met Wayde through a friend in the neighborhood and when I'd take my son to nursery school, I'd go past his building. We fell in love walking

Christopher to nursery school and riding the same subway to work every day. Lucky me! Wayde was a biologist doing cancer research and ready for a change. It was perfect timing for both of us. As much as I loved working for Jim, by that time The Muppet Show was a big hit and I knew it was going to be done in London for four more years. Christopher and Wayde lived there for part of the first year. I had been living there longer. But I really wanted Christopher to go to school back in the U.S.



Bonnie at a Phillie's baseball game checking up her mascot creation, The Phillie Phanatic.

PT: When was this?

BE: It was late '76. And when we came back, Wayde resigned from his job and I told Jim I was leaving. I cried, but he said, "Don't worry, we're not going to lose touch." Well, Jim became one of our first clients. We worked out of here [their apartment] to begin with and took any job we could get. Then we found this fabulous space on 17th Street and 5th Avenue in Manhattan. We had 24 windows. It was 110 feet long and anywhere from 11 feet wide to 21 feet wide. We got hold of Hardy Holtzman Pfeiffer, a very hot, new architectural firm. They had just finished redesigning the Brooklyn Children's Museum and they were around the corner. We had very little money but we saw this article in the New York Times about the

museum and said, "What have we got to lose?" So, we went over there and asked them to look at the space. I think they liked it because it was so weird. They built this most wonderful studio for us. There were little 'buildings' all along one side, one of them was a kitchen, one of them was a dye facility, and we had a dressing room and shower for performers coming in for rehearsals or fittings. We had a conference room in the front with a garage door that was clear glass. We had a traffic light at the elevator.

It was everything we ever wanted. And Jim, as I said, became one of our first clients. I oversaw the build for Fraggle Rock. I spent a year overseeing new projects and scouting new talent. For thirteen years I did creative direction for Henson and the domestic product group at Sesame Workshop as well as product concepts for licensees. Those sketches and all that work has been donated to The Strong Museum of Play up in Rochester, NY. Like Jim, we had people in and out as we did projects. We found a lot of interesting people. Ronnie Burkett was one of the first people we hired, dear Ronnie, brilliant then, brilliant now. We were lucky to have so many talented people around.

We started out doing toys, puppets, and commercials here and in Europe...Burger King... Budweiser. We did the first talking Happy Meal! Fran Brill and Erin Ozker, a puppeteer for The Muppet Show, and I went out to California to do one of those commercials. I did puppeteer for our commercials. We were under a mound, green with flowers and on top, our talking happy meal puppets and Ronald McDonald. All of a sudden, it's very quiet and Fran peeked her head out. They'd forgotten us under the mound and gone to lunch. It's such a puppeteer story. When the Phillies [baseball team] came to Jim to ask if he would create a mascot for them Jim said, "No, but Bonnie Erickson is the person you need to talk to." (Thank you, Jim.) They came to us. So I was thinking, we'll do a character, give it a back story, and we'll do merchandising if they want it. We'll set it all up so that they're ready to go. They liked my design. We offered to sell it to them for a very reasonable price, copyright and all. But they said, no. They thought it would be just a one year thing. Well, the Phillie Phanatic is now 40 years old. At first we leased it to



At home in her studio with a photo of Jim in the shop.

them for personal appearances around town and on the field and we did the merchandising and paid them a royalty for the use of the logo. We gave the team the back story, a mascot manual, and information on setting up personal appearances. The first year of merchandising, we did \$2,000,000 worth of retail sales. We were amazed. We designed all the merchandise. Soon, the Montreal Expos came to us and asked for a mascot. We did Youppi! the next year. This time, we didn't offer to sell it to them. We just leased it to them. We did the licensing and did the same thing - another \$2,000,000 in retail sales. In the end we sold both to the teams.

In all we've done sixteen mascots. There are still six of them that we created that are running around. We became known for mascot design, which we did not expect. We even had our own mascot for more than seven years. "Sport" traveled around doing personal appearances and

an act at these minor league clubs across the country. So, we have this whole history in sports, something I knew very little about. Wayde would say, "Don't talk about sports when we're there. Just leave that part to me." It became a very reliable business for us.

PT: So when you design one of these characters, how much of it is your design? Do the representative of the teams ever come to you to specify specific things, outside of the Jersey?

BE: No, but we would ask about the fans and make a presentation of our ideas. The Phillies wanted a super fan - a Phanatic. That's how he got his megaphone snout. We've only worked with national sports teams. We knew colleges probably couldn't afford an experienced performer. A performer would be in costume for a while and then graduate. We wrote bits and sketches for these characters to do. We did costumes for the costume! The

merchandising potential was a big part of it. We got to the point where we didn't even lease any longer. We just made the copyright part of the sales to the team along with the costume.

PT: So, this is still ongoing. Do you still maintain a shop?

BE: No, we don't. We haven't done any new ones for a long time.

PT: Are you still responsible for the maintenance of the characters?

BE: Well, we've maintained the Phanatic and Slyly, our mascot for The Carp baseball team in Hiroshima, Japan for many years. Others use other people. But we have people who've worked for us for a long time. They have their own studios now. While I do most of the sourcing of the materials and any sketches, the people we work with are very experienced craftsmen.

PT: Talk about your work for toy companies a little.

BE: Well, we did a number of toys for others. We did the original toy patterns for Maurice Sendak's Wild Things. But we did two of our own lines of toys. One of the lines was for Applause called Central Casting. It had animals from all your favorite fairy tales. The other line we did with Nolan Bushnell whose first animatronic toy was Teddy Ruxpin. For his company we did a group called Party Animals. They were puppets with a solar chip that made the sound of the animal when you opened their mouths. We did a gorilla, a frog, a turkey, a goose, a dolphin, and I forget what the last one was. Oh, mosquito! How can I forget the mosquito? Because Nolan

said, "Oh, nobody's going to buy a mosquito." I said, "They're going to sell out." And they were the fastest sellers because they were so annoying. Everybody wanted them for gifts. I still get letters from people who had them in the '80s. When Wayde and I started donating our toys to the Strong Museum, one of the women at a meeting brought a dolphin that she'd had since she was a

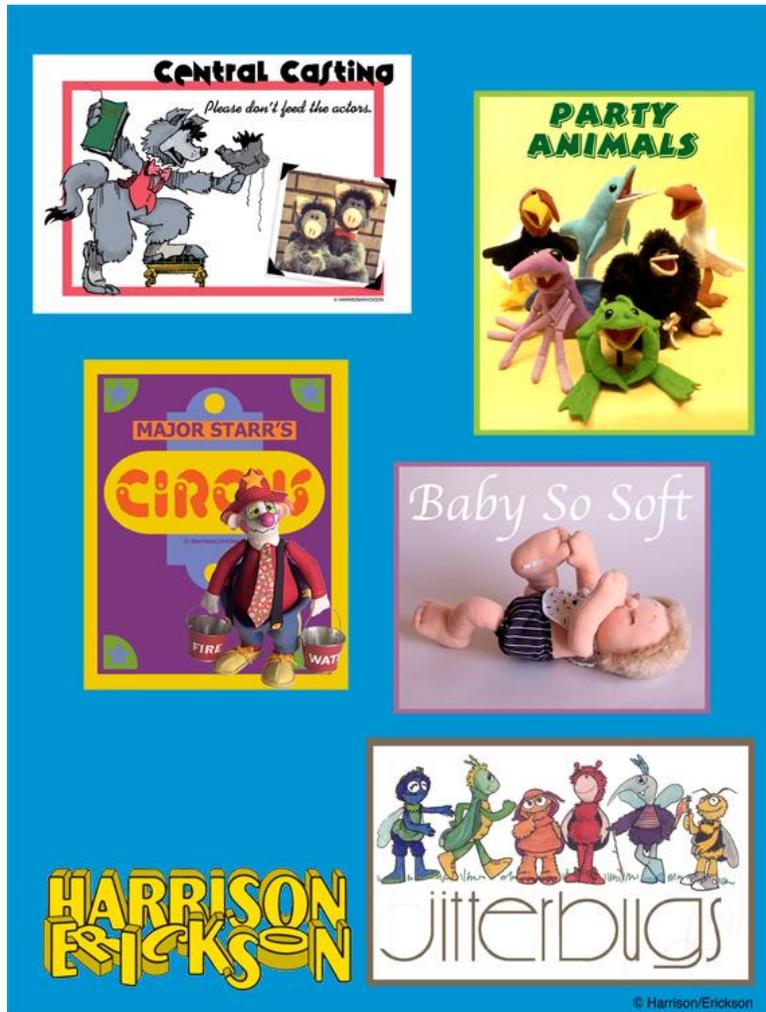
child, and her brother still had the mosquito. I thought, this is crazy. It makes me feel really good that somebody cared enough to hang on to these animals!

PT: Let's talk about your work for The Jim Henson Legacy a little bit.

BE: Of course. By 1992, there were so many awards coming in to Jim posthumously, there was no way the company had the time to deal with them all. So Jane Henson set up The Jim Henson Legacy with colleagues Arthur Novell, Al Gottesman, and Dick Wedemeyer. Arthur became executive director and initiated projects to fulfill The Legacy's mission.

He was responsible for getting the stamp done, the

US Muppet stamp, that was all Arthur. There was a Legacy exhibit called Designs and Doodles. The exhibit became a book. There was a Jim Henson concert in Carnegie Hall. There was Jim Henson's Fantastic World touring exhibit that traveled for six years and reached almost a million people. And there was The Legacy's oversight of the Henson family's permanent donations to the various museums. More recently in April, after trying for almost ten years to reach out to Jim's audience in New Zealand, The Jim Henson Retrospectacle took place there. People were



A selection of Harrison/Erickson toy lines.

so touched by Jim and his work that they wept hearing stories about him. The support of the founders and all who have served on the board of The Legacy have made these things possible. As you can see, The Legacy has been lucky that Jim started keeping things early on. Bob Payne was one of the first puppeteers with Jim in Washington, D.C. and when he came to New York, he began saving things in a more organized way. I remember getting a call from Al Gottesman asking if I would return the sketch I made of the two old men. Since they were my sketches, I had kept them. I was happy to return them. So, the company was always thinking about keeping things for the archives. And of course, the shop, when they were finished with something, would put it in a box if it wasn't going to be used for a while. It would go to a warehouse storage, until it was needed. So, there was always an archive of precious stuff that had been used and maybe not going to be used again. All of that was part of the storage The Legacy took on. Around 2001, the Jim Henson Company gave The Legacy responsibility of overseeing the warehouse collection and really reviewing it. Rhoda [Cosme], our collections manager, and I went to the warehouse and looked at just about everything. Karen [Falk] had looked at a lot of storage as well. Rhoda and I put together the database that eventually encompassed everything that was in the archives and in the warehouses in New Jersey and London. We went to London and looked at everything there. I believe it was around that time Jane and the Henson family became interested in making donations of some of these objects.

PT: Who was involved in deciding where all the physical items would go?

BE: I was really responsible for recommending where a lot of it would go. Jane, Karen, and several other people would look at the lists Rhoda and I would prepare. But it was often obvious where things should go. That became The Legacy's responsibility for all the years until most everything was distributed. Karen did the works on paper that were stored at the company. I did the three-dimensional things from the warehouses - puppets, props, sets. Every box a surprise! The database was huge. It took us probably two years to get it all together. We had to include categories like color, female or male,

puppet, costume, dates, loans, projects. And by the time we finished it, there were over 6,000 items in that database. Plus, where does it go? Where has it been? Is it out on loan? Because we did loans, we had to know when something was out, where it was and when it was due back. It was set up to kick in and give us a notice when we needed to get something back. It was a pretty big job. Rhoda was indispensable.

PT: This must have been a giant task. Were you doing anything else during this period? Other creative work?



A peek in one of the display cases in Bonnie's studio. Photo JB.

BE: Well, until 2000, Harrison/Erickson was under contract to Sesame Workshop. For over a year I traveled to Hong Kong each month to work with a Sesame Street product staff there. I continued doing concepts and product designs for Harrison/Erickson clients and we continued to do the maintenance for our mascots. And then, once the museums began installing the Jim Henson exhibits, I became a stylist or sort of Essence Checker, a role inherited from Don Sahlin. I've also helped with traveling exhibits. But much of my time now is spent organizing donations of our own work to museums. Toys to the Strong and puppets to The Center for Puppetry Arts.

PT: Karen told me the physical objects have all been sent out. Almost all the puppets and props, that there's almost nothing about left. The only thing that hasn't been given away is the historical paperwork.

BE: Pretty much. Works on paper are still there and they go out on loan, but works on paper are much more delicate than anything else, which is sort of interesting, since a lot of materials we used for puppets just turned to dust.

But props, costumes, everything either went to The Smithsonian, The Center for Puppetry Arts, the Museum of the Moving Image and The Academy in Los Angeles. There's a Fozzie Bear in England, but the bulk of the exhibitible things are really (at) The Center for Puppetry Arts and MoMI. The Smithsonian has probably 30 puppets there. Jim gave them, I think, a Bert and maybe an Oscar, but the family gave them the original Sam and Friends from Jim and Jane's early days in D.C. And I have to say, I'm so very proud of both MoMI and The Center for Puppetry Arts. They've both done beautiful shows. They both continue to do exhibits using alternate puppets because

I lived on the Lower East Side, so I was always on Orchard Street and I knew all the people who sold fabrics there. I was very careful about prices. I found this great fabric for Jerry Juhl's favorite character [Taminella Grinderfall]. Anyway, I was doing her costume for the Frog Prince and it was this wonderful fabric. It was sparkly, and it was perfect for her. I'd written down all the yardage and how much we'd need and what the prices were. At that point Jim was involved in everything, so I went up to his office and I said, "Here's what I've got, this is what I'd like to do, here's the sketch." He looked at it and said, "Hmmm, that's fine, that sounds good." When I went to buy the



A view of Bonnie and Wayde's kitchen, where all their great notions (and our lunch) are cooked up! Photo JB.

they have more than one exhibit's worth of puppets, and now MOMI is doing traveling shows. So, Jim's work continues to draw big crowds.

PT: Karen told me this wonderful story. I asked her the question, what was the most amazing thing you found when you were digging all this stuff up? And she told me that she got to take the original Kermit home with her for a night. Do you have a story like that? What was a truly wonderful moment that happened to you?

BE: It's a small thing, but it was so Jim and it's something I never forgot, and it sort of set the tone for my whole life working with Henson and with Jim. I came in to do the costumes for Frog Prince and I did a lot of shopping first.

fabric it turned out to be twice as expensive as I had told him and I was petrified. So I had to go tell him and I said, "Jim, the fabric is twice as expensive as what I thought it was." And he said, "If you think it's right, you get it." And I know it's a little thing, but if that was your judgment, he was behind you, he had your back. And so, I bought that fabric. I want to tell you that we unpacked that dress in Atlanta after more than forty years in storage and put it on Taminella, it looked like it had been made yesterday. He held himself and us all to a high standard. Quality and details mattered.

PT: You're pretty much retired now, at least as retired as someone like you can be. I'm sure you can't stand still. What's on your horizon?

BE: We have plenty to do. As I said, we're archiving our own stuff now. That's why I have Rhoda here, because we've saved everything too! I learned a lot from Jim. Wayde and I both feel we owe him a lot. I've always been a keeper. We have collections, so now it feels like the time to be sharing things. From time to time I appear on a panel. During Women's Month, Fran Brill, Sonia Manzano and I were on a panel moderated by Karen Falk at The Center for Puppetry Arts. We all had such a good time. We learned things about each other we didn't know, and we've known each other for years. So it was...it was great

fun. That's what I mean about the people that you meet on the street...

PT: ...the people that you meet each day. Thank you for such a wonderful talk. Let's finish with one last fun story. Just a fun memory.

BE: It has to be the mice! We had mice at Muppets. Wayde would free them from cancer research. And Donald loved making houses for them out of different materials to see how fast they could eat them. Well, I decided that a line from Fraggles Rock came from Don's experiments. And when somebody, I think it's Mokie, is worried that the Fraggles were eating all the Doozer's constructions, the Doozer says to Mokie, "We feel architecture is to be enjoyed."

I think that's what Don thought about all the houses he built for the mice.

So, when we had our studio on Fifth Avenue, we continued the practice. We had parties...even a wedding for the mice when we realized that one was pregnant. Cause for celebration! We had a great group of people partying with us through our lives. We're still in touch with many of them. It was just wonderful because of the people that you meet along the way. They have made our lives very, very rich. Yes. Yes. Been a good, good, good run.

Editor's note: And so concludes our almost year long focus on women in puppetry. It has been my honor and privilege to interview these remarkable people, and their work and contributions they have made to the art of puppetry.

I want to thank Bonnie and Wayde for inviting me into their home, feeding me lunch, and giving me the chance to ask hours of questions of one of the arts' most important puppet creators. I also welcome them as new members of the National Capital Puppetry Guild. Thanks!



A view inside Bonnie's home studio space. Photo JB

Review - Babylon from Sandglass Theater

★★★★★

The power of good theater is that it brings people in the audience into the work, sharing the experience of the characters portrayed. Good theater persuades you to share the characters' world view.

The world view of a refugee can be stark, with stories of fleeing violence, enduring emotional and physical abuse, and loss as these people must give up all they once had, for something they have not yet gained.

Babylon is the story of the relationship of refugees to their homelands, lost and hoped for. It also reflects the conflicts that exist within the America to which they have fled.

The refugees portrayed are archetypal and iconic: Khaled, comes from Syria; Sima, an Afghani mother; Kevin, a boy from El Salvador; and Desiré and Esperance, a father and daughter Burundi. Another is a voiceless caterpillar slowly crawling across stage through unknown terrain, making an inexorable journey. The last, the most heartbreaking, is Gretel, a ghost from a war past who is still on her journey. Their stories are told in

original four-part choral songs.

The first five refugees reach officials who subject them to questions that are often random, presumptively biased, and offensive. The absurdity of the immigration form's questions and its underlying assumptions. As they are questioned and then either accepted or rejected, each character moves on to a destination to their destination; a new country, back to their own, or limbo. The show's manipulation is deft, imbuing a solid substance into the puppets driving the believability of their humanity. When puppets are equally as real in their power and authenticity as living

creatures, as any of their human actors, a successful wedding of puppet to performer has been achieved.

The simple set, composed of common worn and distressed

items, such as shipping pallets, supported by the inclusion of crankies (by Ines Zeller Bass and Jana Zeller) and projected information to illustrate the travel across hostile terrains and other linguistic and cultural barriers, complete an aesthetic of austerity reinforcing the sense of lack, a feeling that must be profound and deep. They lack almost all: a country, friends, family, means.



Khaled above, Desiré and Esperance left. They sometimes have a language to help communicate or a family member they have escaped with or to, but almost all

else is gone. And they are almost always alone. Shoshana Bass, Keila K. Ching, Kalob Martinez, Divyamaan Sahoo, Alan White* comprised the talented ensemble that brought these stories of hardship, of acceptance and rejection to life.



Sima above, Kevin left, and Gretel below. Puppets by Ines Zeller Bass with Jana Zeller



Babylon was conceived and created by Sandglass Theater and directed by Eric Bass and Roberto Salomon. Songs composed by Brendan Taaffe, lyrics by Eric Bass. Percussion score by Julian Gerstin. Projection and Sound design by Maria Pugnetti. Set building Zak Grace. Technical Direction

by Jamie Keithline. Photos by Kiqe Bosch.

*Actors Equity



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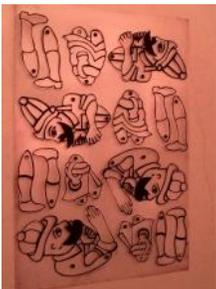
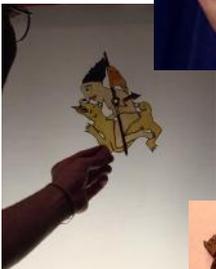
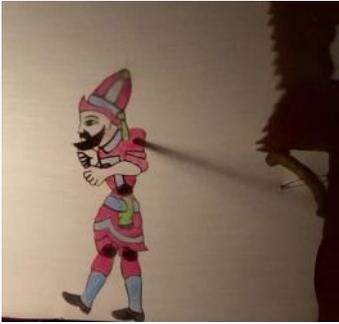
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Now that's something to smile about!

OUR AUGUST MEETING!!

Featured Ayhan Hulagu and a wonderful performance and workshop of the great tradition of Karagoz puppetry from Turkey. Here are a few MORE photos from that meeting.



And that brings another issue of Puppetimes to a close.

NCPG SCOOP! What's Up With Our Guild.

Another busy couple of months. The regional festival held in September in Vermont was a blast! And we just had our second Puppet MakerFEST at the Durant Center in Alexandria, VA.



New member Matt Muirhead performed his Big Cranky Show, Sandy Feulner performed Witches Adventure and



we had three great puppet building workshops. Here are a few photos.

We also want to welcome new members Dustin Curtis, Matt Muirhead,

and Bonnie Erickson and Wayde Harrison! For those of you who don't know Dustin, he is a Seattle, Washington based puppeteer and the founder and artistic director of Trivia Puppet Company. He is also the president of the Puppeteers of Puget Sound Guild and also sits on the board of directors for the PofA as Treasurer. Matt Muirhead is a musician and "crankie" artist who is featured in two of the photos above from our recent MakerFEST. Bonnie Erickson (who is featured in this issue's interview) and Wayde Harrison are well known in the puppetry community. Welcome all!!



Signed,
The Mangement

Our next meeting will be November 11th at the Puppet Co following the 1pm performance of Hansel and Gretel. We will be conducting our yearly board of directors election and enjoying a potluck lunch. Make your complimentary reservation (301)364-5380 and press 9 to go directly to voicemail or email: boxoffice@thepuppetco.org. Please remind Betsy, in 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).

Puppetimes

Enjoy the issues you've missed!

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

Each copy is \$10 with shipping included. Full color copies are also available for \$20 with shipping included.

For issues not on this pages., email: puppetimes@gmail.com



Volume 52 No. 2 March - April 2016
Feature: Don Becker Interview



Volume 52 No. 4 July - August 2016
Feature: A Remembrance of the Life and Work of Founding Member Ida Jervis



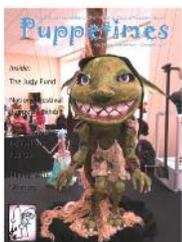
Volume 52 No. 6 Nov. - Dec 2016
Feature: Paul Vincent Davis Interview



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



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

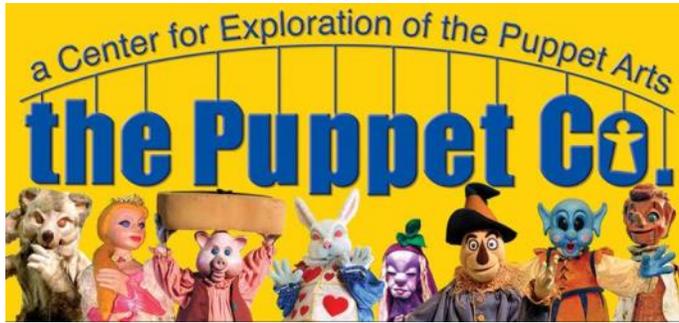


Volume 54 No. 4 July - August 2018
Feature: The Life and Work of Founding Member Jean Reges Burn



Volume 54 No. 5 Sept - Oct 2018
Feature: Karen Falk Interview SE Puppet Paradise Photo Essay

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11/3, 7, 11/18- Old MacDonald's Farm

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11/23, 24, 25/18 - Nutcracker Fantasy

Fri, Sat, Sun - 10:00 AM

12/1, 2, 5/18 - Nutcracker Fantasy

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Public listings of, and a link to, your puppet business from the
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Meetings on selected dates typically follow the 1:00
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Meeting dates are published in the NCPG Pup-
petimes newsletter and on the Guild website.

Membership questions may be directed to:

Jeff Bragg - President NCPG

64 Southall Court, Sterling, VA 20165