

The Newsletter of The National Capital Puppetry Guild

Puppetimes

Vol. 56 #4

July-August 2020



Chartered by the Puppeteers of America, INC.

A Special Message from the Puppet Co.



Dear Friends,

We hope that all of our friends-kids, families, educators, and artists-are remaining safe, healthy, and vigilant in these changing times. The ability of the Puppet Co. Playhouse to be open this season is going to be dependent on meeting the criteria in Governor Hogan's "Roadmap to Recovery". We and all of the Glen Echo Park artists and teachers, are working with the Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture to ensure that when those criteria are met, we can welcome you back to a happy, safe, and healthy environment.

Last fall, our Founders, Allan Stevens, Christopher

Piper, and MayField Piper, made the decision to retire effective June 30, 2020. We believe it is time for a new chapter in the history of the Puppet Co. to be written. By stepping aside, we will make room for new management and new ideas to take the Puppet Co. beyond the foundation we have laid.

We are happy to welcome our new Artistic Director, Elizabeth Dapo. Soon we will properly introduce you to Liz and her programming plans for the pandemic and beyond. For now, we thank you of your patronage and support over the past 37 years.



From left to right. Allan Stevens, Jane Henson, MayField Piper, Christopher Piper at the opening of the Playhouse.

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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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Front cover: Rollie Krewson making Stalk puppets for The Muppet Show pilot, Sex and Violence. Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

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
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The Next Meeting... Is our festival. Please stay tuned for details!

President's Note by Jeff Bragg

Sorry this issue is late. This has been an especially difficult Puppetimes to publish this time. We've all been hit with the difficulties resulting from living through a pandemic. And sometimes doing art feels so futile in what often seems to be an indifferent world. We are all doing the best we can. But there is still fun to be had.

This issue features an interview with Rollie Krewson. Most of you already know who she is. Although she started as a Muppet performer, Rollie has mostly worked as a designer and puppet builder for the Jim Henson Company. She started there in the mid 1970s and has been involved in every production since. Rollie also has received thirteen Daytime Emmy Awards for her contributions to Jim's work. Her interview starts on page 6.

We have started doing virtual meetings for the time being until it's deemed safe for us to gather in large numbers again. We are all hoping that there will be a national festival next year. Only time will tell.

But in the meantime, we are hosting a festival! What with the cancellation of Puppet Homecoming, it was decided that the NCPG would do a virtual event in place of the regional gathering. The Northeast Region is putting together their own virtual event. The more puppet programming the better, I say. Our event is unfolding over the weekend of August 21, 22, and 23 and will include Saturday morning puppet cartoons, a slam, workshops, a

potpourri, and a feature performance. Save the dates and the details will be following shortly. See cool art below.

We have some new members to welcome. Laurie and Cindy Nickerson have joined under their business, Puppet Pelts. As so many of you know, Puppet Pelts is a supplier of fleece, fur and other fine items for puppet fabrication. We also welcome Wendy Walker and Pointless Theater. Pointless Theater is well known for their brilliant theater work with puppets.

I am pleased to announce that Christopher and MayField Piper have been elected to Emeritus status in our guild, but must say goodbye to them as the creative power behind the Puppet Co as they begin their retirement. I had planned to have a parting interview with them both, but alas, that was not to be. Perhaps in a future issue.

But with their departure, we say hello to Elizabeth Dapo as the new Artistic Director and also welcome her to the ranks of guild membership. On page 19, we visit with Liz at the Puppet Co and learn about her plans and dreams for our treasured DC puppet theater, as she assumes her new duties this month.

That's it for this issue. Stay safe, stay healthy.



PS.



August 21, 22. and 23. Details to follow soon!

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 puppeteer. We are always seeking qualified applicants when our programs are open.

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: _____

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My gift:

\$25 _____ \$50 _____ \$75 _____ \$100 _____

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A Conversation with Rollie Krewson

Rollie Krewson is a name any seasoned puppet builder will recognize. Rollie started as an intern for Jim Henson in the fall of 1973. The list of puppet builds and the projects that she's worked on is extensive. The Muppet Show and the Fraggles. Most of the movies. Sesame Street. She did Elmo for 25 years. She did Fizzgig for the Dark Crystal. In mid June, Puppetimes spent a few hours talking to her about her remarkable career and all the fun she's had being a very important part of one of the greatest shows on Earth.

PT: How did this all start? Were there childhood influences?

RK: I grew up watching Shari Lewis and Lambchop, which I adored. Lampchop, Charlie horse, the whole kit and kaboodle. And on Sunday nights, we had family dinners in the living room around the TV and we watched Ed Sullivan, so of course, I got Topo Gigio, and I got Jim and Frank. And then Jimmy Dean I would occasionally see, although I think it was a little late for me, but I think somehow I managed to see Rowlf a few times. I think it was mostly with my grandmother, she liked Jimmy Dean. Rowlf was great.

PT: Yeah, a talking, piano playing dog with a big spherical head and floppy ears! What could be wrong with that?

RK: And the ears would get stuck over on one side!

PT: Were there any cartoons that you liked?

RK: Beany and Cecil, the Jetsons. I was not a great Bugs Bunny fan. I don't know why. I loved the Road Runner. I liked Tweety Bird. Mickey Mouse. The first movie I remember seeing was Bambi. The fire and the mother dying! I was a little-bitty kid!

PT: Did you make puppets as a child?

RK: I did not. I had a Lambchop. I had a Charlie



Rollie with talking grapes, early 1980s Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

Horse. My cousins had puppets. They had those old Stieff ones and I remember playing with those. Every summer we put on a show in the backyard. We had record players and they were all based on records. It was a pantomime to a record. Everybody in the neighborhood would get together and we would all make our costumes or get our moms to make them, and we made antlers for everybody out of tinfoil, and get together in somebody's back yard, and somebody would sell tickets for five cents, and we'd stick the Bambi record on and we put on a show. We probably prepared for a week. We did Bambi, we did Snow White. Whatever was on a record. So (my experience) was more larger-scale, it wasn't exactly puppetry, but it was definitely going the direction that I ended up. I sang in choir and I always liked being in the theater, but I wasn't a great actor or anything. I was mostly backstage.

PT: You attended Denison University in Ohio. Did

you start in theater studies?

RK: I was going to be a social worker, I wasn't going theater, at all. My roommate Barbara was a BFA major and I went to the theater with her one day and decided I was going to be an usher for a show that she was in and I got down there and that was IT. I fell madly in love with it. It was the greatest thing since sliced bread. I was watching them build a set and I thought, I can do that! I got terrible grades, except in theater. I got rid of the courses I had to take as soon as I could and all I did was take theater. We're still good friends, all of us that were in the theater department at the same time. We get together, whoever's in New York at the time, three, four times a year.

PT: Did you get into acting or did you gravitate more to backstage?

RK: It was mostly backstage. That's where I first started learning how to costume. My mother had a sewing machine and she would never teach me how to use it, because she couldn't use it. I had troll dolls and I would make them clothes. I was always making stuff for dolls. But the theater at Denison was great. We had a couple of really good theater professors. I took acting courses and I got to act, but I wasn't that

great. There was a man whose name was Cal Morgan and in my junior year, he did a puppetry course and we learned about all different kinds of puppets, and at the end of the course, we had to do a show. I ended up doing an adaptation of *The Sword in the Stone*, and we designed and built marionettes. I designed the set, which was a big castle and the drawbridge came down and that was the marionette stage. I wrote the script and directed it, and it was great! We had a fabulous time. I don't think there had ever been a puppetry course at Denison before, and I don't think there was a puppetry course after that! But we had a blast! Eventually, I went to New York as an intern for a lady whose name was Judy Licht. Her husband was Manny Azenberg at the time, and Manny and Jim were working on the Broadway Show. I was working with Judy on a show called *Almanac*, on the public broadcasting channel, and she eventually left there and became a newscaster, and couldn't take me with her. She knew I liked puppets and that's when she told me about her husband and working with Jim. At that point I hadn't really seen *Sesame*. I was in college and never watched television, but I made a point of finding a TV in New York City, so I could watch *Sesame Street* before I had my interview.



Rollie in *The Muppet Show* workshop, 1980 . Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

PT: When did your internship at Henson Begin?

RK: It was September through December (1973). It was a whole semester. It was organized by the Great Lakes College Association. I don't know if they exist anymore, but they would send kids specifically to New York to work with Broadway producers and all sorts of people. That was how I got placed with Judy, because I was interested in television. I maybe did a month with her before she went to FOX (and she) couldn't take me with her. That was when she got me the interview with Diana Birkenfield, and that was when I met Bonnie, and Caroly, and John Lovelady, and Faz, and Dave Goelz, and Kermit (Love). Eric Jenkins was there then. Don Sahlin was there. I loved Don, Don was great. I interviewed with Diana and she said, "Let's go talk to Bonnie." I can't even remember what the interview was like. They said, "What have you done?" And I showed them my puppets. And they said, "Oh, go look around. Go look in the drawers."

PT: Was that when you knew you had a job?

RK: Uh huh! And I said, "I guess I'm an intern, okay!"

PT: Was this paid?

RK: No, it was (for) credit. They actually did give me a stipend. I can't remember how much it was, I think when I came on board the stipend was \$50. I know Diana was really good to me.

PT: Where were you living in New York City?

RK: I lived on the Upper West Side on 72nd Street



Rollie and Larry Jameson on the Gorg set of Fraggle Rock, 1980s. Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

between West End (Ave) and Broadway in a place called the Coliseum House [now the Parc Coliseum Apartments] which was awful, especially for somebody who came from Ohio! There were three of us in there and we all had various internships. There was a living room, a kitchenette and a bedroom and a bathroom. We all had beds in the bedroom and you'd come in after a long day and you'd find a big piece of plaster on your bed! And the cockroaches were the size of waterbugs! Okay, welcome to New York.

I never told my parents about that. They would have been horrified!

PT: When I interviewed Bonnie Erickson, she made a similar experience of her early days in the city sound like a grand adventure.

RK: It was! I can remember running around New York and I was never afraid, and I probably should have been, but everything was exciting. I was working for Jim, but one friend was working for Tony Walton and they were doing "Free To Be You And Me,"



Rollie on the set of Fraggles Rock in the 1980s. Rollie is holding one of the scaled-down versions of the Wembley puppet, used for scenes interacting with the Gorg. Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

and I got to put felt stars and moons and hearts on top of a carousel, in Central Park, that they had brought in and they needed somebody small to crawl up on the top of it. So, here I am, crawling around putting up suns and moons and stars on top of the carousel!

PT: And you went back to finish college right after your internship?

RK: I did. I went back to Ohio for my last semester. I kept in touch with Bonnie. You have to know about

The Crumpet That Died. When I was working as an intern, they were doing the Valentine's Day special. They actually made me a Production Assistant for that. There's a little thing, it was a crumpet that appears in the Valentine's Day special and somehow it ended up in my bag and I found it when I was on the plane flying home, and I don't know who put it there. This is still a mystery. It was either Bonnie or Don, and I still have it and it's still fine. It's perfectly fine. It's been in the dark the whole time. I go and look at it. It's just soft foam, it's got little bead eyes. It's got a little bit of spray paint on it.

PT: Did you go right back to NYC after you graduated from Denison?

RK: I went back to New York to work for Jim the day after I graduated. I still have the letter. My friends that I graduated with went and we found an apartment on the Upper West Side, more toward the river. It was a Brownstone and we had the whole floor and there were three of us, sometimes four, depending.

PT: So, you're there. What was going on? What was the workshop like in those days?

RK: It was small. We all did everything, which is great. It was a lot more fun than being only a puppet builder. So, we all got a chance to do stuff.

PT: What productions were they working on and what was the first thing that you're given to do?

RK: It was Sex and Violence. I worked on Heaps and Stalks [for the sketch Aggression]. I love Jim's drawings. Jim's drawings are, you know, they're just five lines, and it's a world. But if you don't know how to interpret them, which I didn't at first, it was *soooo* hard! It was like, I don't know how to do this, so it took me a while to find that in myself, that I *could* interpret his lines. He seemed like he was very easy-going, but he knew exactly what he wanted to see and if you weren't doing what he wanted, it was like "Hmmm." We worked on Ice Follies, too, and I get the timeline confused, whether (Sex and Violence) was first or Ice Follies. The Ice Follies story is funny. We built all the Sesame costumes, so it was Ernie and Bert and there was a Snuffleupagus. I was working on shoes that went over ice skates, that was my thing. At that point I wasn't ready to make heads. They do have a way of introducing you; you get to make bodies first, you work your way up to heads and we still kinda' do that, just to make sure everybody's got the right feel for everything and does the style right. But these things were huge, they were really big and they weren't going to ship them out there. You have to get a truck and pack them all up, so Eric Jenkins and I drove a U-Haul truck across the country to San Francisco with all these costumes in the back. Somewhere there's a picture of Kermit pushing the back end of Snuffy into this U-Haul truck. And Eric and I didn't have that long to get there, so it was pretty much straight through, so I'd drive, he'd sleep, he drove, I'd sleep. And he would pick up a really stinky hitchhiker and I was like, *Eric, really?* I only remember stopping overnight and showering a couple of times, so we must have just

trucked through. I figured out that my favorite time of day to drive was early in the morning and there was one morning where we were going through the desert and the mists were kind of rising up and I went, "Eric! Eric! Wake up! We have to take Snuffy out and put him over there!" It would have been a great picture with the mists coming up! And the Snuffleupagus standing in the middle!

PT: Did you do it?

RK: No! No picture! That was also the trip where I picked up a tumbleweed for Caroly (Wilcox). They were beautiful! I'd never really seen one other than cowboy movies. And I picked up this tumbleweed and taped it to the inside of the truck and then found out you weren't supposed to take them across state lines. I managed to get it back home again. I don't know how I did that though because we flew back. It got back somehow. And she had it for the longest time. That trip was great, and I wasn't very far from having been an intern at that point. How many people can say that they've taken a bunch of Ice Follies characters across the country from New York to San Francisco?

PT: Back to Sex and Violence, outside of being sketch based, it seems so different that what it turned into, The Muppet Show.

RK: But the elements are there, and you can kinda' see...I mean Nigel didn't work. I love Nigel. If you ever talk to Dave Goelz, he was trying to make a puppet that could whistle and that was his attempt: Nigel. He was bound and determined that Nigel was going to whistle, and I have a feeling that Dave still wants a puppet that really whistles well.

PT: Both the entire pilot and The Muppet Show have such a raucous, improvised feel. I just watched the John Cleese episode the other day...

RK: I made the parrot!

PT: And you went to England? You weren't shipping stuff over from the New York shop?



Rollie in *The Muppet Show* workshop, circa 1980s. Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.



Rollie prepping Travelling Matt for Fraggle Rock, 1980s .
Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

RK: I went to London for six weeks and ended up living there for six years. When we first got there, our workshop was right off the studio. As you walked through the door into the studio you had to pass where the lighting guys hung out and they had about ten calendars of "calendar girls" and Bonnie especially was just incensed that they should have those up there and we had to pass them all the time. So, we asked them nicely a couple of times to please take them down and then finally I think she had words with somebody, and they disappeared.

PT: What were some of your other responsibilities on The Muppet Show?

RK: I did stuff like Scooter's body. I got to do Wayne, of Wayne and Wanda. He was mine. I made a lot of Whatnot puppets. I didn't do any main characters at that point, but I did parts of main characters. At that point, I was still very much Bonnie's Assistant. She did the Newscaster and she clipped him all out of foam. I actually loved to get on the belt sander and I loved to sand the foam and she let me sand (the Newscaster) and normally you get into a Zen mode and you just do it and it's fine, but if you get distracted...if you look at that very first one, there's a little dip in his lip that's not in the center, it's off to the side. We had to use him because she didn't have

time to do another one. It didn't show that much. I doubt anybody but me would notice, but I sat on the stairs and cried for half an hour because I was so afraid to go back and show her. She was fine about it! I was mortified!

PT: What was the turnaround on the show?

RK: Sunday was the read-through. Monday was vocal recording, so we were in the shop doing whatever we had to do to get ready for the show and then the actual show was taped Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, so our weekend was Friday, Saturday. But

again, it was union. They did go late, but they didn't go late all the time. A lot of times you'd get something set up and (not have time to shoot it). Halfway Down the Stairs with little Robin the Frog, that got set up every week to have it done and I swear it took us an like entire season to finally shoot it, because it was like, "If we have a few minutes, we'll shoot it. There was never that few minutes. [editor's note: this beloved scene, performed by the late Jerry Nelson as Robin, appears in season one, episode ten]

PT: Would scripts be arriving well before the read-through so the puppets could be built and be ready in time?

RK: A couple days before. Although Jim would come by and say if he actually needed something, then he would tell us beforehand. We were usually working a week in advance. I did the scientist for Time in a Bottle [song by Jim Croce, performed by Jim Henson; season two, episode seven] and that I did that over a week off or something. I think I stayed and did it, because there were a lot of pieces to that one. I remember I did Foo Foo [fourth and fifth seasons], which had to match the real dog and that I built, it was like Easter break or something. And Foo Foo the puppet was actually built in Wales, because my friend and I went to Wales for the few days, so I was stitching away while I was in Wales.

PT: Not much mention is made of how *English The Muppet Show* really was, and it wasn't just that you had English comedians like Chris Langham writing for it.

RK: We did all the Pearly Kings stuff, too. Which was great, the two-minute things. A lot of them never got seen here, because they stuck in an extra commercial, but we did all the British stuff and all the music. We did a whole musical thing, all of us, one night. We rehearsed it and we rented a hall, invited a whole bunch of people and we all got up and sang songs and did Pearly King stuff. It was weird and wonderful! It was great. I can't remember what I did, but I know that I was up there!

PT: Let's talk about Emmet Otter's Jug Band Christmas a bit. Did you have to make a new batch of puppets for the stage version almost thirty years later?

RK: Some of them were the same. Emmet and Ma were from the TV (version). They were the original Emmet and Ma. They were just basically seen in the rowboat and then they (the characters) were performers dressed in costume. A lot of what we did were larger versions. Dave did the original snake for the TV. I made the snake that was for the stage version and I copied his techniques and made it bigger.

PT: Enlarging the puppet changes things.

RK: It smiled, but not like his did.

PT: The practical jokes you all would play on each other are the stuff

of legend. Tell me some of the practical jokes you'd play on people.

RK: We always were trying to get people with the fake cookies. We got a lot of people with fake cookies! Because they looked pretty good. And Caroly, she would bring in various mice and stuff that were dead and put them in the freezer and then forget that they were in there! And you'd go in for something and go, "Oh...that's Caroly's." She bring it in and go, "Look!



Rollie with P.J. from the Play-Along home video series, late 1980s.
Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.



Rollie Krewson and Dave Goelz performing Fraggles as he watches a performance of San Francisco area puppeteer Jay Frederick, 1982. Photo courtesy of the Jim Henson Company.

Look at what was in my garden! Isn't it cool?" And then she'd put it in the freezer, so it wouldn't be sitting out and it would remain in the freezer for quite some time. I think she brought in a mole once. She had lots of stuff that she brought in.

PT: Was this because they'd be used for puppet design purposes?

RK: She just thought they were interesting and "weren't they cool?" I mean, Caroly built fabulous animal puppets, she's the best animal puppet builder ever and that's why she would do that. She'd just find something that she thought we would find interesting. Caroly would bring basil in and make pesto and we'd all sit around and have pesto lunches. That was the fun thing about the shop and still is, although we don't do it as much.

PT: Let's talk more about puppet building. Talk about the first time you carved a puppet from foam.

RK: The first puppet that I carved out of foam was a Koozie pup. (Dave Goelz) did the male and John

Lovelady did the female. Dave was carving the pups and we were using a hot-wire, which we found out later was really bad for you! But whatever!

PT: I remember Bonnie telling me about smoking over an open can of Barge cement!

RK: We had a shoemaker across the street, a Russian guy who was there for years and years and years, and you'd go in and get your shoes and he (was smoking cigarettes) one right after the other (with) the open Barge can! But Dave was the one that actually helped me do a Koozie pup, so under his eye, I got to do a Koozie pup. That was lots of fun.

PT: Let's talk about Sesame Street and Elmo. Caroly did the first Elmo, when he was called Little Red?

RK: Caroly did the first one. I wasn't around when he was built the first time. I came in (to Sesame Street) in '87, so I think there were two before I got to him. I don't even know how I came to have Elmo. I'm assuming that Caroly said, "She's doing it."

PT: Tell me about his arms.

RK: Elmo's arms, because they didn't want elbows in them, they have beads, so it's a cord with wooden beads with a knot in between each bead so you get a nice kind of loopy movement to it. The first ones, I'm sure it was Carol found, had little faces on them and so I reuse a lot of those beads and if an Elmo becomes too grotty to use again, then I'll get a new chord and reuse the beads and I still have some of the beads with the faces on them and they're still in the Elmos.

PT: I've read that Cookie Monster is made from a basketball.

RK: It is. I just made a Cookie Monster at home and yes, it's a basketball. I cut it out of a basketball. The eyes go into the basketball, then there's a leather piece that holds them in. Your hands are on the other side of that leather piece. That is the top and the bottom is the opposite curve. It's sort of a clamshell shape. Your hand's in a glove. And your thumb goes on the bottom part. It's got a really loose hinge, with

a little piece of gaffer's tape that holds the two pieces together. The actual mouth itself is just a piece of black velour with a swallow hole.

PT: How about Ernie. Is his neck really a coffee can?

RK: Ernie's neck is still a coffee can. A little more than half a metal coffee can and you sand it all off so you don't get cut and you put gaffer's tape around the bottom. It was hard to find a coffee can that was the same size as Ernie's first one. They vary in size slightly, so you have to be very careful about what coffee can you get. Why change it? It worked. There's no reason to change it. And maybe you can make Cookie Monster out of Plastizote, but it's not going to be the same.

PT: You also did Abby Cadabby, Murray, and Ovejita.

RK: I love Abby. LOVE Abby.

PT: Everyone that meets Leslie loves her, too.

RK: We are Abby's two moms, so we share Abby.



Rollie working on puppets for The Tale of The Bunny Picnic TV special, 1986. Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

PT: If it's any consolation, one of the only two Henson character puppets I own is the Fizzgig that came out recently.

RK: It's a really nice puppet. They did a really nice job.

PT: How many Fizzgigs did you make?

RK: I made three good ones that were "camera perfect." Then a couple that were "stunt" ones that you could pull them along. I made a furry, rolling ball one. There was one that had a big, wide, open mouth. There was one that had a smaller mouth. I ended up cutting one down. They were dreamfasting and they showed a little Fizzgig. I could have used a big Fizzgig and it wouldn't have made any difference, but I cut one down and made it smaller, which I gave to the Museum of the Moving Image. There were probably six or seven of them.

PT: Were there prototypes?

RK: I seemed to have worked on it forever. I don't remember going through a whole lot of prototypes. Building that way was a totally different thing for me at that point. That was the first time I had (worked from) a mold of Dave's hands, so that puppet fit him like a glove. It fit his hand exactly. Somebody else made the mold. I sculpted what he was going to look like under all that fur, and somebody made the mold of that. It was a lot of stuff I hadn't done before, which was a real growth experience. Jim had insisted that I do him, because I was getting the reputation of being the "queen of cute."

PT: And Fizzgig's body was cast in latex?

RK: Yes.

PT: What was Fizzgig covered with?

RK: From the drawings, he looked to me like he was made out of fur, but it wasn't going to be a fake fur, it was going to be real fur. I felt really badly about using real fur, it didn't seem like the thing to do. What I found, in looking around, were some old

collars and stuff off of coats and I thought well, at least I'm recycling.

PT: And this was in London, Right?

RK: This was all in London, yeah. I had gone to the "fur district" and found old pieces that had been taken off of things and that's what Fizzgig was made of. I took some collars for the curly bits, then there were some other pieces that were maybe fox or something, and I intermixed everything. You had to take the skin off the back, so I put it in gelatin and got it hard and then sliced the actual skin off the back of it and then put it on fabric and then melted the gel off. It was a very interesting process, which worked in some ways and not in others. It finally ended up that I cut individual little pieces out and mounted it on net, so it had a "stretch" to it. But we had all the time in the world. Now it's how much can you get done in this amount of time and this amount of money. Jim just let us go and just *do* stuff and if it didn't work, it didn't work, he moved on to something else.

PT: Using all these different collars and furs, it must have been very hard to match stuff.

RK: It *was!* I was going to run into big trouble if he ended up asking me to build yet another one. Which luckily didn't happen. That's why there were some that were "camera" and some that were "background." The background ones got to the point where I was using dribs and drabs of what I had to try and match the camera ones, because I only had so much.

PT: Did Fizzgig have cable control for the eyes?

RK: Yes, it was cable.

PT: I remember when it was released, Dark Crystal didn't do all that well, but now it's a classic.

RK: What was so cool about Dark Crystal is that it was before CG. It was before any of that. It was all built. We built all of it. It was hard work. The hard

part was the actual doing it, crawling around underneath! I worked on Dave Goelz's cables for the Garthim Master and so I was always being dragged around underneath and behind him, so that was hard.

PT: I can see how that must have been difficult. Those Skeksis were much smaller than they are in Age of Resistance.

RK: Just the cables themselves were archaic compared to what they have now. That was when Faz first did the RC controls for Jen and Kira. And Jen was extraordinarily uncomfortable. Jim never complained. Bobby Payne was one of the Skeksis, too, and for some reason he had to get into Jim's Skeksis and he said, "Oh my God this is so uncomfortable! How does he do this?" Jim never complained.

PT: What other memories do you have of this remarkable film?

RK: On our downtime, we would hang out in peoples dressing rooms and make stop-motion animation

films. Steve (Whitmire) was always doing stuff like that. We had a lot of fun doing that. I loved working on that movie. That was *fabulous!*

PT: Did you have anything to do with Age of Resistance?

RK: They asked me to do the Fizzgigs for that, but I would have been building them in the New York workshop and everybody else was going to be in LA and I said I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be with the group that was doing it. They took Jason Weber, who's the creative supervisor of the New York workshop out there and he was doing a lot of the dyeing of the costumes, but they didn't have enough money to send two people out. I would have done stuff here, had to send it to LA, and they would have had to send it back to me. It just wasn't going to work. Robert (Bennett) ended up making Fizzgig.

PT: Rollie, this has been wonderful. Thank you so much for your time, stories and wisdom.



Rollie at her workstation in the NY workshop, 2008. Photo courtesy of The Jim Henson Company.

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Under New Management

The Puppet Co Selects Elizabeth Dapo as New Artistic Director

In his epic poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, Geoffrey Chaucer gives us the phrase, “But at the laste, as every thing hath ende, she took hir leve, and nedes wolde wende.” Those seventeen almost indecipherable words have since been loosely translated to mean, “All good things must come to an end.”

So too it is with the leadership of Allan Stevens, and Christopher and MayField Piper at the wonderful puppet theater that they created and nurtured for thirty-seven years in Glen Echo Park, The Puppet Company Playhouse. We will miss them and their productions of beautiful, elaborate, classic shows based on mostly the fairy tale canon.

But also, to quote Marianne Williamson, “Every ending is a new beginning.” And so it is with the retirement of the people that have worked so hard to keep live puppet theater happening in our nation’s capital for almost forty years.

Enter the new sheriff in town, Elizabeth Dapo. Liz is well known to any of us that have been regular members of the Puppet Co’s audience over the years. She has been a staple performer with the company for quite a while and has been in more productions than can easily be counted. Her selection as the new Artistic Director is a gift to all of us, for her talent and abilities make her a perfect fit to continue the work of one of the most important jewels-in-the-crown of live American puppet theater.

Liz Dapo grew up on a working cattle ranch in southern Colorado. The youngest of two sisters, she found art and puppetry at an early age, like so many of us, through the medium of television.

“My favorite show as a kid was *Fraggle Rock*, and I think it really did start there, when I was very small. I didn’t really understand even why I really liked it, I just really liked it. And *Eureeka’s Castle* and anything that was practical. I didn’t really watch a lot of animated shows, I watched a lot of puppet shows.”

And she wove puppetry into her school-work.

“I started making my own puppets out of cardboard. I made a life-sized cow that showed where mad cow disease would affect it if it got infected. I think my love of puppetry was always lying under the surface, I just didn’t know what it was for a long time.”

Her family didn’t expect to have an artist.



“Having one person out of a family of ranchers and nurses being an artist was a challenge for them. When I said I was going to college for theater, there was a little bit of... apprehension”

But even more important was the influence of her maternal grandmother.

“I think my grandmother was the one who understood that this would be my path. My grandmother would encourage us to draw. We lived way, way out in the country and anytime she would have to go to Pueblo, an eighty mile drive from our home, I always got something when she came home; I got a sketch pad or I got crayons or I got markers or I got a new dinosaur. Whatever it was, but she encouraged me to continue drawing.”

Liz got her first taste of the theater in Trinidad, Colorado by being an apprentice under Fred and Harriet Vaugeous, and Bill Fegan. While an apprentice as sixteen, she acted in two shows, built scenery, was the assistant to the scenic artist, worked on props, and built a life sized snake puppet for the children’s academy, and after that, she was hooked.

Liz was accepted to Binghamton University for her undergraduate degree and majored in acting, directing and tech theater. It was while at Binghamton, under the guidance of Don Boro's experimental theatre class, that she rediscovered her love of puppetry. When she was accepted into graduate school at a prestigious London school for theater her family stood behind her and began to better understand what it meant to be in the theater.

"I got accepted to the Central School, which is now the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London for Devised Theater and Puppetry. When I called my grandma and told her I was going to grad school in London, she was so excited for me, she was ready to buy my ticket the

from South America. It was beautiful. All of these people came together and we worked in little teams, and we would devise work. It was so fascinating to see what everybody was coming up with. And then we got to have outside performers, people who were actually performing, people who were in the industry who were devising and creating, come in and talk with us and work with us on a module, so for six weeks we might be working with these people who just put up a show in the West End and they would come in and say, 'This is our process. This is how we work.'"

London gave way to a return to the states and auditions for puppetry work which seemed to constantly come her



next day."

And graduate school in London was another amazing experience.

"What was important to me was just living in the city, just being there. I biked to the school every day that I could. What was really interesting about the program, and I really loved it, was we had people from all around the world. There were the Brits, the Americans (you could tell which ones were the Americans because we liked our short sleeve shirts and our baseball hats, which was very funny), we had people from the Middle East, Greece, Italy, all of Europe. There were people from everywhere,

way. She has also brought along her classical training and a unique production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* along with a couple of English classmates.

"I made really good friends with this girl named Emma, and she and I did our thesis project and we brought it back to the States. We took a ten-mile walk around London just chit-chatting about what we wanted to do and what we wanted to see in theater. What we ended up doing is a *Midsummer Night's Dream* as a site specific production in a cemetery, so all of the sprites were puppets that looked like they were carved out of stone. Titania and Oberon were very ethereal, just floating amongst the tombstones, and it was a very small promenade

performance. You started at the beginning of the cemetery and Puck was your guide and he led you through all of the scenes. The way that it worked was you could see a scene with the lovers here, they would go over the top of the hill, you would turn the corner, see a scene with the mechanicals and then you'd be back to see the lovers, so the path worked really well and at the very end was the final performance. The mechanicals do their thing, the lovers are all there and you walked outside and Puck and all the other actors were holding candles and gave the 'If these shadows offended...' speech and that was the end."

Then there were other important opportunities.

"I worked for the Henson Company at the Philly Zoo for nine months which was awesome, and then I got a job with NatGeo (National Geographic) as a frog. I've been a frog a lot. I'm ready for a female "Kermit." Let's just step that up, just say-in'. Then I ended up here, after my Nat Geo job was done."

Moving to the DC area brought her to the attention of the creative team at the Puppet Co where Liz became a puppeteer in many of their productions. When the time had come for Allan, Christopher, and MayField to retire, they decided Liz was the obvious choice.

"Christopher had mentioned it a couple of times before like, 'Hey, we want to pass this on and we're looking at you,' but nothing ever came of it and you get to a point where you go, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen or if it's not, it's not. So, I think it was in November or December, MayField called and said, 'Hey, we're retiring! You want to do this?' And I was like, 'Wait, what? This is still on the table? Okay, let's talk!'"

The rest is history, and now, the future.

Although the lights have been dimmed at all our theaters due to Covid 19, Liz is still working tirelessly to keep ready for the day when live theater is again viable. She has been working to secure funding and grants to this end, and is also devising innovative strategies to make sure that

when the doors once again open, there will be a show ready to be seen and seats ready to be filled.

"There are a lot of unknowns. Being in the park is fantastic, but there's a lot of income that's lost because of covid. And there's the hope that we can get our hands on some grants and

figure out some ways to reach out for donations. All so we can get something going until we can open up, again. We're going to record some of the shows. We're going to stream some shows. We're going to make sure the audience remembers we exist. You plan for the best things to happen."

And she is determined to innovate, starting with the theater's décor.

"I'm going to paint the theater. I'm going to paint the lobby. I'm going to make it all bright and shiny new, so when people walk through the door it's still the Puppet Company, but it's like the next generation. Here's the next iteration of it. We're still doing the classical shows that you love, but we decided to throw up a coat of paint, put up some pictures, give it a refresh."

But it won't stop there.

"For the immediate future we have online classes that are being offered, which is new territory for the company. We are working with six really great teaching artists to do a bunch of classes in July and August. We'll probably do another set in October, November, December as well, which is really exciting because we haven't done that to this scale at all before. We're going to be offering new content online until the doors can open, and intending to continue even after the doors open."



And other changes are planned.

“I want to have more representation on stage, and all of this was in my five-year plan before we went into quarantine. I want more people to have more access, more voices on the stage. I want to create programs so that actors in the DC area can come and learn how to be a puppeteer at little to no cost. Finding ways to pay what you can, come sit for three hours and we’ll show you how to use rod puppets, because a lot of people don’t know how to do it and it shouldn’t be a club, it should be a resource. And part of what I’d like to do is more adult programming at night. Doing slams. Slams are fun. Opening it up so people who might not currently be puppet people will understand what they’re coming to see. Midsummer might be the first adult show that we do next September [2021]. Then I want to do a version of Little Shop (of Horrors) that has the street urchins puppeteering marionettes basically set in a window box, and they’re puppeteering and telling the story, but you see them the whole time. So, I have a lot of big ideas.”

And her first live performance?

“Sleeping Beauty is the one I chose to reopen the theater with because I think we’re all coming out of our own kind of slumber and I think there’s something sort of poetic

about that.”

And everyone else can be of help, too.

“We’re doing a donation campaign that will start in the next couple of weeks that’s an adopt-a-puppet campaign. You can pick a puppet and donate, you’ll get a little certificate that says that you’ve helped with the adoption process and then you’ll get a free ticket to a show later on in the year and the puppet does a little personalized, “Hey! Thanks so much!” kind of greeting back to them and I’ve built the season around those puppets, so I chose the [Three] Billy Goats [Gruff], Oz, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella amongst other shows that just “feel right” and don’t feel too lofty for coming back. I’m also hoping to have new works ready to go by next fall, as well as inviting guest artists to perform at the playhouse. And any one of them could be the season opener, we just don’t know, so we have to sort of be prepared to put up any one of them, when the shows actually start up again. I made a whole season, it’s gonna’ be listed on the website, but if we open in January or we open in May, it’s going to be different.”

We all wish her all the best at this exciting new endeavor. Please stop by the Puppet Co website to find out ways that you can be a part of this renaissance.





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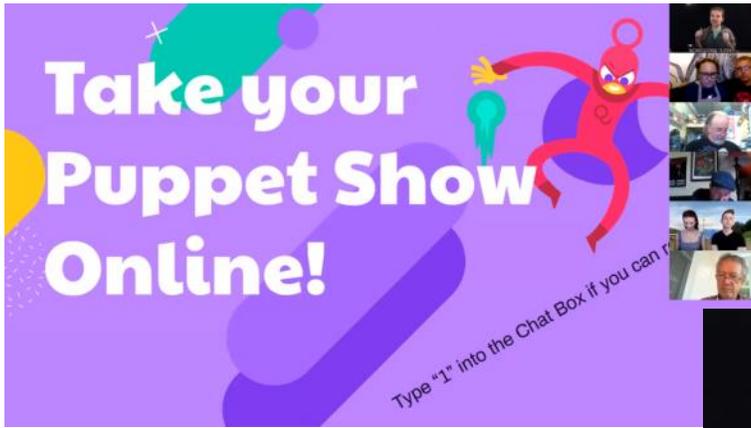
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The NCPG Scoop

What's Up With Our Guild

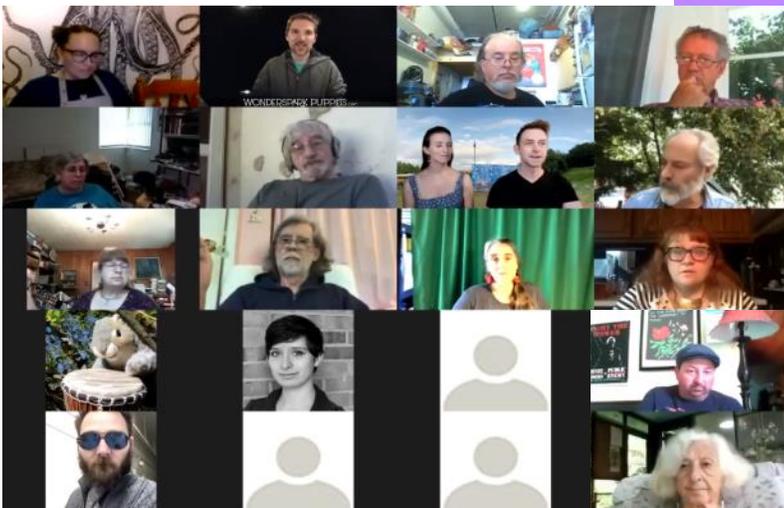
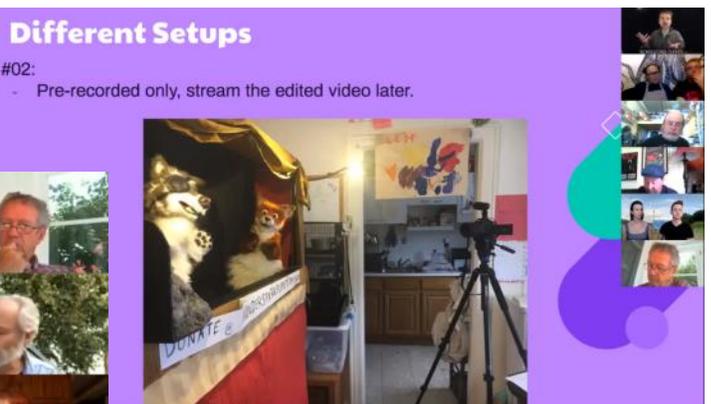
The pandemic is forcing the issue of virtual meetings. Although the NCPG has had virtual meetings and visited other puppeteers online, we've never had a full-blown virtual meeting. Until now. Now we are going online, as is almost everything else. The beginning of our June 14th meeting was held through ZOOM, with our members holding a show-and-tell and a general get-together before we all transferred over to a great workshop by Chad Williams of the Puppetry Guild of Greater New York on the techniques of live-streaming for puppeteers.

Chad discussed camera, light and microphone usage, and types of and also sources for these items. He shared valuable techniques for doing a show online and the software needed to live-stream your productions.



Attending were Rob D'Arc, Marriane Ross, Justin Dupont, Elise Handelman, Mark Segal, Deb and Matthew Miller, Alex Vernon, Sarah Olmsted Thomas, Heidi and Sam Rugg, Kat Pleviak, Jill Kyle-Keith, Dave Goboff, Rachel Gates, Michael Lamason, Vanessa Spring-Frank, Leigh Lafosse, and Jeff Bragg.

The Manglement



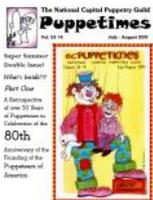
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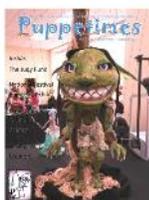
We are now offering printed copies of the last four years of our newsletter.

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



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 Cre-
peau 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: Caroly
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



Volume 56 No. 3
May - June 2020
Feature: Allan
Stevens Interview

THE SEE AND BE SEEN SCENE

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. When we're doing shows again, that is.

*Everything's Still Cancelled Due to the
Pandemic and the Incredibly Poor
Response From Our Leadership.*

But there is a lot of great puppetry online right now. It's happening so fast that we can't keep up with it. And there's so much more than could ever be listed here. Some of it is spectacularly good.

Just look about a bit. Oh, and don't forget....



August 21, 22. and 23. Details to follow soon!



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Access to "Members Only" areas of the Guild Website:
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