

# Garden State Puppetry Guild

August 2011

Issue 6

Dear Fellow Puppeteers,

Summer time and the “living was easy”. Wait until you see all that happened. First and foremost, the Garden State Puppetry Guild had a picnic at Joyce O’Reilly’s house on July 10<sup>th</sup>. It was a great way to end our “season” as a guild and to unfurl our new GSPG banner. Then 4 members of the guild, Penny, Lois, San D and Diane went to the National Puppetry Festival in Atlanta. There we proudly represented our guild in the march of the banners. We also engaged in workshops, saw great performances, and shared ideas with fellow puppeteers. Reviews, articles, and pictures are in this newsletter.

San D Hasselman

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# End of the season Picnic



Robert and Penny unveil the puppet sandwich, and San D unfurls our new guild banner. As a guild we had our last official meeting before the summer with Lois as our President, and Steven as Treasurer. We all went outside and took pictures of each other and our family members.

# Fun on a String Penny Rapicano



Washington Twp. Library hosted their final event in their Summer Reading Program. The library welcomed Miss Penny Rapicano of Fun on a String. Miss Penny performs puppet shows that are intended to engage children and introduce them to the wonderful world of string puppets and marionettes.

Photo: Christopher Costa

# Diane Koszarski

## National Puppetry Festival



Clockwise: Diane Koszarski of Pink Flamingo puppets admires "Mallet the Flamingo at the Festival Exhibit. Amy Rush, Australian busker, presents a toy theater of The Curator, into which, for a donation the audience peers. Puppeteers swarm Clay Martin's booth after his performance. Diane Koszarski and Steven Abrams join others in seeing the gear up close after the show. Sleekly crafted wooden head "Howard Carter" glove puppet from the "Curse of the Mummy" episode from Clay Martin's show.

# National Puppetry Festival

<http://youtu.be/Cf0K-x874NM> Click on this link to see a Youtube video of the Ghastly Dreadfuls.

This video is a small snippet from the Ghastly Dreadfuls' puppet show at the Atlanta Puppetry Center. The Dreadfuls have a full-blown hour plus show of macabre vignettes including music. It is just a small example of the wonderfulness that IS the festival.

The Puppeteers of America is a national organization that supports, educates and showcases American puppeteers. What that means is that we are a group of professionals and amateurs that take inanimate objects and give them life. These "shows" range from birthday party gigs to cabaret acts, and everything, imaginable, in between, from dance, black light to Punch and Judy.

There are puppet troupes and puppet theaters all over the nooks and crannies of the United States. Puppet Slams with renegade puppet acts are cropping up all over as well. Every other year the Puppeteers of America host a National Puppet Festival so that everyone in the art of puppetry can come together, share ideas, and showcase shows. These wonderful shows during the festival are only open to attendees. We, in the audience, all know "how it is done", but are simply amazed at our colleagues' creativity, talent, manipulation techniques and above all, passion for the art. After the show, the artists invite their fellow puppeteers up behind the stage to check out the rigging and ask questions. Puppeteers are usually self-taught and are eager to pass the knowledge on.

Lest you think that these shows are only for children, keep in mind that we see shows that are crafted by the puppeteers who worked on "Strings", "Being John Malkovich", and Muppet Movies. We also see shows, like the one above that are geared for adult audiences. Some rival theater and dance productions.

Also, during the week there are over 30 different workshops to take, everything from building, manipulation, grant writing, setting up businesses to puppetry in education are included. This year I taught a workshop on how to align puppet shows to state and local curriculum standards.

I took two workshops, one by Paul Spirito from UConn's puppet studio on using a variety of materials, and what the pros and cons of those materials were, and the other from Robin Walsh on designing, making and manipulating a scarf marionette. I am eager to use the knowledge that I got, and have a cabaret act in mind using a scarf marionette that I would like to work on and maybe present one potpourri evening. (Potpourri is sort of like open mic night at your local pub, but without the liquor, but WITH the rowdy audience).

So now I look forward to the next festival in 2 years. I have lots of things to work on, and think about.

San D

# Festival Review by Lois Corwin

Dear Members:

For those who have never attended a puppetry festival, there is living history spread in and among the events and workshops. The first shining example that one sees at almost every festival and is a tradition welcomed again and again by all members, young and old, is 97 year old Bernice Silver. Bernice has over the many years gathered a following and has been crowned the "Queen of Potpourri." Bernice performs late at night, an adorable but wacky show peppered with songs she has learned over her many years. Songs of protest, of war, folk songs, and those songs she composes about her puppets, children's stories and much more. Although her puppets are often simple cut outs and maybe a found object or two, Bernice has her fans on their feet cheering her on.

Another slice of history was beautifully performed for us by The Melchior Marionettes. Since 1952 the Melchior women have performed throughout the world, as far away as China. On stage, performing in full view of the audience, mother, daughter and granddaughter, beautifully manipulated the marionettes first created by Erica Melchior and continued with Heidi and Peggy so that all 3 generations were represented. Family photos and history made this performance a poignant memoir.

Festival goers were also treated to an evening with Steve Whitmire, a.k.a Kermit since Jim Henson died. Steve joined The Muppet Show in London during its third season at the tender age of 19. This wonderful performer described his journey from shy beginner to seasoned puppeteer who loves highly improvised live TV appearances and interviews and "anything can happen" programs, similar to his start in local television. He told of his grasp of Kermit's personality and the legacy he feels he wants to pass on through Kermit. His embrace of Jim Henson's unique connection with Kermit and his sense of humor (sort of vaudevillian) was the most warmly delivered message I have ever heard in reference to Kermit and Henson.

These three lovely reminders of the rich history and tradition that is carried forward in puppetry in this country is most gratifying to me. In more regimented and traditional cultures in the far east, only family members would inherit the knowledge of the secret skills necessary to make the puppets. Only family would be able to learn the performance skills from the previous generation as well. Modern times has loosened traditions, of course, but I feel proud to be a part of the multi-generational puppetry tradition in America.

No festival would be without a Punch and Judy show where each company or puppeteer gives his or her own twist. At this festival there was a charming performance by the Dallas Puppet Theater. I've also seen Cinderella performed at every festival but this year's was the most unusual. "Cinderella Della Circus" involved a circus performing Cinderella with extremely large feet, a cruel ringmaster with jealous daughters who won't let Cinderella perform her incredible acrobatic maneuvers and instead make her clean. Her fairy godmother is P.T. Barnum, but the ending is the same and she fits the shoe and wins the prince. The show was performed in the beautiful Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta and was adapted by the very talented Jon Ludwig.

But my personal favorite, that is everyone's favorite, "The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow" by the Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers. This group is always featured as the last show of the convention because everyone leaves laughing. You have to see this mirthful romp featuring an amicable Headless Horseman who takes suggestions from Icabod on how to improve his spookiness by finding a new head. Everyone in the audience can't help but laugh out loud at the feckless, jealous but brawny Brom Bones. You want to get up and dance with Icabod and his love interest, Katrina van Tassel in the best puppet choreography I've been privileged to see. Who said, "Leave 'um laughing"? How right they are. I left uplifted and laughing.

Lois Corwin

# Puppet Slam

CoLAB Arts' current Puppet Slam proved an amusing mix of accomplished and amateur puppetry with the decided aim of grabbing our attention. Mary Gragen Rogers, Props Manager for The George Street Theater curated a wide range of puppetry forms (and did yeoman work on stage setting up for each performer). We also met her co-producers in this hands-on community arts organization, taking tickets, recording the show, meeting and greeting: John Ford-Harrison, Chairman, Board of Directors; Theresa Francisco, Gallery Manager; and Dan Swern, Producing Director. (Small world footnote: Dan attended high school with our president Lois Corwin's older daughter!)

Many performers from the downtown New York scene were included, courtesy of Marsian De Lellis' Puppet Slam Network listserv and Heather Henson's Ibex Foundation, which offers grants to experienced puppet slam locales to support performer fees. Richard and I chatted afterwards with Atlanta performer Beau Brown, whom we recognized as the engaging host of late night events at the recent National Puppetry Festival. Casey O'Neill, our host at The George, had a great gimmick for energizing the audience with a flip sign reading "BOO/HURRAY." Brown wowed 'em in Atlanta by tossing handfuls of candy to an audience of demanding puppeteers.

The actual pieces varied greatly in effect. Some were technically impressive, but lacked much point. Others had punch, but weren't adequately developed or edited. Brown, a veteran organizer of slams in Atlanta, mentioned he likes to set up a contest for three prizes of \$75, \$50 and \$25 (rather than each performer getting a paltry \$7 or so).

How would GPSG have scored the show? Penny nominated *Sweet Dreams*, Honey Goodenough's touching marionette meditation on an empty cradle; *Marry Me*, Alissa Hunnicutt's rollicking, tongue-in-cheek toy theater rendition of the Dolly Parton ballad. Lois also singled these out, the first for its honest emotion, the second for its lively caricature puppets and witty ending. Penny voted in Fergus Walsh's *Bu Dai Xi Wu Da (Irish Style)*. Direct from this year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Walsh manipulates the traditional weighted acrobatic hand puppets of Taiwan with great skill in his affectionate but decidedly irreverent tribute to kung-fu warrior dramas

Diane and Bob also liked Walsh's piece. Another top pick for Diane (seconded by Bob and Lois) was Travis Lope and Leah's *The Enchanted Vanity Set*, a fractured fairy tale complete with doofus costumed narrators unfolding an elaborate toy theater cottage/castle set. For sheer outrageousness, she liked Beau Brown's *Diary of Ann Frankenstein*, which took less time to perform than to set up. To boil down the Frank saga to three short lines and a funny ending (as the eponymous heroine crunches up the bad Nazis) felt like the essence of slam style: short, punchy, puppets perhaps incidental. Bob liked the work by Walsh and Lope, as mentioned above, and *Sockmates* by Jake Bazel, a sweet fable of like meets like in the laundry bin, brought to life with some nice object manipulation. Walsh and Lope tie for winners, with Hunnicutt and Goodenough following up. All our favorites are well-crafted works that travel the slam circuit; catch them when you can!

Robert Culek, Penny Rapicano, Lois Corwin  
and Diane Kaszarski at the CoLab Puppet Slam.



# Join, Renew, and Visit

## Garden State Puppetry Guild

### Meetings in 2011-12

September 18

October 16

Meetings are held 2:00-4:00 at the Library of the Chathams, Main St., Chatham, New Jersey.

Meetings are subject to change.

## Membership Information

Individual: \$15.00 yr

Troupe: \$25.00 yr

Junior (18 and under): \$10.00 yr

Send checks to:

Penny Rapicano, Membership Chair

12 Brookview Road

Denville, New Jersey 07834

**Guild Website: <http://www.gardenstatepuppetryguild.com/>**

## **Puppeteers of America**

**<http://www.puppeteers.org/>**

