

BUILDING AMERICAN PUPPETRY
ON THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION

DISSERTATION

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By

Jennifer Kathleen Stoessner, M.A.

The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Examination Committee:

Dr. Joy Reilly, Adviser

Dr. Beth Kattelman

Dr. Alan Woods

Approved by

Adviser
Graduate Program in Theatre

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ABSTRACT

Historically the United States, with the exception of ritual performances by indigenous Americans, did not have a distinct puppetry tradition, utilizing instead the imported techniques of its immigrant population. In the twentieth century, puppeteers began to explore puppetry's capabilities, producing challenging and innovative theatrical work in a distinctly American style. Puppetry was given a stage as popular broadcasting content on the newly invented television. In this media environment, Jim Henson pioneered new techniques, becoming the most famous puppeteer in history. His success enabled him to serve his field as a spokesman and sponsor. In 1982, he established the Jim Henson Foundation, a non-profit organization to support puppetry artists. The Jim Henson Foundation is the only organization in the United States devoted to funding puppet theater and its mission reflects Jim Henson's commitment to the community of artists who make American puppetry the vivid panorama it has become. Without the Foundation, puppetry in the United States would not be experiencing the explosion of creativity and exposure it currently enjoys.

To present a picture of puppetry in the United States and Henson's work, a brief history of puppetry in America as well as an in-depth scrutiny of Jim Henson's career is provided. The dissertation explains the creation of the Jim Henson Foundation and its grant-making procedures, including case studies and interviews with grant recipients and

the Foundation's board of directors as evidence of the contribution that Foundation grants make to contemporary puppet theater. The dissertation explores the creation and productions of the International Festival of Puppet Theater, an event that brought puppet theater to a wider audience in the United States. The Festival performances, coupled with complementary programming, increased puppetry's visibility, affording performers the opportunity to develop their distinct voices. The Jim Henson Legacy, an organization that makes Henson's art viewable through screenings and exhibitions, is profiled as it testifies to the continued role of Henson's work in stimulating American puppetry. The dissertation concludes with an examination of puppetry's present position as a popular theatrical medium and considers the possibilities for the art during the twenty-first century.

To Jim Henson, for obvious reasons,
and
to Jerry Juhl, for other reasons

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VITA

November 3, 1977.....Born - Cleveland, Ohio
2000.....B.A. Theatre and Cinema, Denison University
2005.....M.A. Theatre, The Ohio State University
2003-present..... Graduate Teaching Associate, Ohio State

PUBLICATIONS

1. Stoessner, J. "The Shoebox World of Robert Anton." *Puppetry International* Issue 21 (Spring and Summer 2007): 24-6.
2. Stoessner, J. "Identity." *Puppetry Journal* Vol 56.Issue1 (Fall 2004): 28-29.
3. Stoessner, J. "Starlight Matinee-Family Day of Puppetry." *Puppetry Journal* Vol 55. Issue 2 (Winter 2003): 19.
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PREFACE

When I began to write this dissertation, I was cautious lest it turn into a love letter to Jim Henson. Now that it is complete, I realize that writing a love letter was inevitable. After all, I was raised on *Sesame Street*, *The Muppet Show*, and *Fraggle Rock*. My interest in puppetry was fueled by the amazing work I saw in the television and movies that Henson produced. I became a puppeteer because I was inspired by the achievements of Henson and his colleagues and was intrigued by what I could say using puppets. I have studied the art and craft of puppetry at festivals, in classes, and through instruction books written by masters of the mechanics of puppet theater.¹ These classes have taught me a great deal about the practice and practicalities of the art form. My experience as a performer has afforded me the opportunity to perform for audiences ranging in age from kindergarteners to senior adults in ten states and two countries.

However, my exploration of puppetry has not been exclusively reserved for construction and manipulation technique. As I have progressed in my education, puppetry's historical and cultural role has remained a central research interest. As a scholar-puppeteer, I have a unique perspective on the critical and historical writings

¹ NOTE: The word "theater" and the word "theatre" are often used interchangeably, though many prefer one spelling to another. For the purposes of consistency, in the document "theater" will be used unless spelled differently in a quotation or in a company or building name.

that serve as evidence of the performance of puppetry from antiquity to the present. The uniqueness of my insight into the topic has enabled me to write this dissertation from the viewpoint of the professional puppeteer. The benefits of my expertise cannot be underestimated for my comprehension of the topic and the resources available to me based on my membership in the national organization of puppeteers, the Puppeteers of America. At the same time, I am aware that my involvement in the field can be seen as an interference with the goal of scholarly distance in academic and critical writing. I have tried to separate my passion for puppetry from my pursuit of information in this document, even as I appear as an audience to the performances, a witness to the symposia, and a participant in events that are referenced. My hope is that my presence in the document, when felt, will be one of an expert rather than an enthusiast, though I am certainly both. Any love expressed by my writing is matched by a great respect for the accomplishments and advancements that Jim Henson and his Foundation have brought to the performance and study of puppet theater in America.

CHAPTER 1

THE BLUE PRINT

Avenue Q, a musical about the struggles of life after college and the harsh realities of unemployment, racism, and *schadenfreude*, won the Tony Award for Best New Musical in 2004. Its edgy lyrics and clever storytelling won its creators the Tony for Best Book of a Musical and the catchy tunes garnered Best Score. Ann Harada, Stephanie D'Abruzzo, and John Tartaglia were nominated for Tony Awards for their performances. D'Abruzzo and Tartaglia's nominations, Best Actress and Actor in a Leading Role respectively, were notable, not merely for the excellent performances they acknowledged.¹ The four characters---two per performer---that they portray were puppets. Although each performer is visible from the beginning of the play to the end, they use their talents to make Kate Monster, Lucy the Slut, Princeton, and Rod live for the audience. The puppets, brightly colored and friendly looking, look much like the characters from another famous byway, *Sesame Street*. The resemblance between the characters and Jim Henson's Muppets is undeniable and the nominated performers learned their skills from working on the popular PBS program. Their nominations recognize those skills and the acting task that the

¹ "Avenue Q Awards," *Internet Broadway Database 2001-2008*, The Broadway League. 13 Feb 2008 <<http://www.ibdb.com/awardproduction.asp?id=13502>>.

puppeteers of *Avenue Q* undertake and point to the constantly changing face of the Broadway musical as well as the increased presence of puppetry in the theater capital of the United States.

Despite the perception that puppetry is a new trend, it is one of the oldest of the performing arts. The first written evidence for puppetry comes from the Greek philosopher Plato, writing circa 375 B.C. In *The Republic*, his “Allegory of the Cave,”² creates a comparison between most people’s perception of reality and truth and the viewing of a shadow puppet show. Occupants of the cave saw the world around them in a partially developed manner, reflecting reality without being real. While maligning puppetry for being removed from the truth he perceives, Plato’s allegory reveals that shadow puppets were performed during that early era. Plato also wrote about puppets in his *Laws*, providing evidence for a different form of puppet in use in Greece. In *The Laws*, he compares men to marionettes, playthings and puppets to the gods. Scott Cutler Shershow analyzes Plato’s use of the puppet in *Puppets and “Popular” Culture* saying, “As in *The Republic*, Plato discovers in the puppet a paradigm of representation, so here he discovers a paradigm for the human soul.”³ Writers and theorists used the language of puppetry, not only to explain man’s relationship to the universe surrounding him, but also to illustrate the idea of artistic and mental focus. Zeami Motokiyo, the Noh theorist and master artist, wrote about puppetry in his treatise, “Mirror of the Flower,” in 1424.⁴ The puppet that Zeami describes is a marionette, evidence of the variety of forms that the puppet

² Plato. *The Republic of Plato*. Trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford. 18. London: Oxford U P, 1961. 1945.

³ Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and “Popular” Culture* (INFORMATION) 21

⁴ Shelley Fenno Quinn, *Developing Zeami* (U of Hawaii P: Honolulu, 2005) 4.

takes. His description of puppetry is meant to serve as an inspiration to the aspiring Noh actor.

The player must seek an equivalent to the puppet's strings in his heart, which he should never reveal to the audience or anyone else. In exposing his heart to an outside as he performs, the effect is the same as the public catching sight of a puppet's strings. I could never repeat this too often. The heart is the centre for all connecting strings enabling the performer to orchestrate his movement and synthesize his artistry.⁵

In his explanation, Zeami points to the convention of invisibility in puppetry technique. Like the thought processes of the Noh actor, the mechanics of a puppet should remain interior. An audience should not consider how the performance functions, but rather lose itself in it.

With the arrival of the twentieth century, directors and performers reevaluated the allure of the puppet as an ideal actor. Edward Gordon Craig, Bertolt Brecht, and Antonin Artaud all expressed interest in puppetry, for various reasons and to different effect. For Craig, the puppet provided the model performer, one specifically manufactured to perform with grace and precision at the will of its manipulator.⁶ For Brecht, the puppet was a distancing device, allowing the artist to achieve an alienation effect and to keep the audience constantly aware of the created nature of the theatrical event.⁷ For Artaud, the puppet hearkened back to the primitive rituals by which people worshipped gods and exorcised demons.⁸ While these innovators were considering puppetry in Europe, performers in the United

⁵ Poh Sim Plowright, *Mediums, Puppets, and the Human Actor in the Theatres of the East* (USA: Edwin Mellen P, 2002) 176.

⁶ Edward Gordon Craig, *Craig on Theatre*, Ed. J. Michael Walton, (London: Methuen, 1983).

⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 1957, Trans. John Willett, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

⁸ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and It Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, (New York: Grove P, 1958).

States were making changes to the art form that would alter the way puppetry was approached by puppeteers and received by audiences. Artists such as Remo Bufano, Ralph Chessé, and Tony Sarg were producing challenging and innovative work that brought attention to puppetry as a viable mode of theatrical performance. Aside from their important contributions to performing arts, these men also documented their work for other artists to read and to gain inspiration. *The Tony Sarg Marionette Book*, published in 1921,⁹ gave specific details on how to produce marionette plays for one's own enjoyment and possible career exploration.¹⁰ From this book as well as the wide publication of instructions in boys' and girls' magazines, information about puppetry was available through many channels. Soon puppets began to appear in the classroom and amateur performers, often children, began to create their own work.

While the proliferation of instruction manuals and amateur guidebooks assisted aspiring puppeteers in learning and mastering techniques, a written history of the art form was largely unavailable. A partial explanation for the delay on a thorough written history of puppetry derives from the secrecy under which puppeteers operated in order to preserve the novelty in their trade. Another factor is the wide variety of puppet styles, forms, and trajectories of development from antiquity to the present. Puppetry is an international art form, with no one specific nation of origin and no one specific explanation for its creation or employment. In short, a complete documentation of puppetry would necessarily encompass a great

⁹ Tony Sarg, *The Tony Sarg Marionette Book* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921).

¹⁰ Paul Eide with Alan Cook and Steve Abrams, editor, *A Timeline of Puppetry in America*, special edition of *Puppetry Journal* (Minneapolis: Puppeteers of America Inc., 2003), 15.

many cultures and a very long period of time. In 1949, *The Puppet Theatre in America, A History: 1524 to Now* by puppeteer and scholar Paul McPharlin was published¹¹ and a similar resource entitled *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* by George Speaight followed in 1955.¹² These books provide background and historical evidence for the practice of puppetry in their respective regions. Another book of particular interest is Henryk Jurkowski's encyclopedic¹³ *A History of European Puppetry from Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*. Published in two volumes, the book presents a history that is overwhelmingly complete. *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe* by John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik¹⁴ and *Czech Puppet Theatre Over the Centuries* by Alice Dubska¹⁵ build on the information provided by Jurkowski while narrowing the focus to a specific time period or culture. The puppet theater traditions of central and eastern Asia have been documented in *The Chinese Puppet Theatre* by Segei Obraztsov,¹⁶ *Karagoz: Turkish Shadow Theatre* by Metin And,¹⁷ and *The Puppet Theatre of Asia* by J. Tilakasiri.¹⁸ These books and others have explored the traditions and performances of specific countries to provide insight into a segment of world puppet theater.

¹¹ Paul McPharlin, *The Puppet Theatre in America, A History: 1524 to Now* (USA: Harper & Brothers, 1949).

¹² George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (USA: Southern Illinois U P, 1955).

¹³ Henryk Jurkowski, *A History of European Puppetry from Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century* (New York: Edwin Mellen P, 1996).

¹⁴ John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914* (United Kingdom: Cambridge U P, 1998).

¹⁵ Alice Dubska, *Czech Puppet Theatre Over the Centuries* (Prague: International Institute of Puppet Arts).

¹⁶ Sergei Obraztsov, *The Chinese Puppet Theatre* (Boston: PLAYS, INC., 1975).

¹⁷ Metin And, *Karagoz: Turkish Shadow Theatre* (Istanbul: A Dost Publication, 1975).

¹⁸ J. Tilakasiri, *The Puppet Theatre of Asia* (Ceylon: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1968).

The Art of the Puppet by Bil Baird was one of the first books in English to attempt to document puppetry from both a historical and a global perspective. Published in 1965, the book talks about puppetry traditions as diverse as the marionettes of Sicily, bunraku performance in Japan, shadow puppetry in Indonesia, and totemic performance on the African continent. *The Art of the Puppet* remains a primary source for puppeteers and scholars interested in the development of puppet theater from its ritual origins to contemporary theater.¹⁹ *Puppetry: A World History* by Eileen Blumenthal is the most recent book that approaches the broad spectrum of puppet theater.²⁰ Released in 2005, Blumenthal organizes the diverse traditions of world puppetry topically rather than geographically or chronologically. This organization enables Blumenthal to cover many cultures and styles, sometimes only peripherally. There remains much material to account for and to document.

An excellent way to document puppetry performance came with the development of television and the archiving of recorded broadcasts. The early days of television in the late 1940s and early 1950s found station managers in constant need of new and original material to fill airtime. Puppets were seen as an inexpensive and popular solution to that need. *The Howdy Doody Show* premiered in 1947,²¹ and Burr Tillstrom's puppets worked with Fran Allison on *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie* from 1947 through 1975,²² and Bil Baird produced *Life with Snarky Parker* in 1950.²³ Numerous puppet programs were produced during this period, geared

¹⁹ Bil Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* (New York: MacMillan, 1965).

²⁰ Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry: A World History* (New York: Abrams, 2005).

²¹ Eide 35.

²² Eide 44.

²³ Eide 28.

toward family audiences. It was in this thriving puppet and media environment that the young Jim Henson, an avid television fanatic, brought the art of puppetry to a different place. Henson changed the way puppetry was produced on the television screen, as well as introducing the word “Muppet” into the everyday language of American popular entertainment. Henson’s work earned his company a global audience, but also furthered the perception that puppetry was child’s play, particularly through the Muppet characters designed for the television program *Sesame Street*. The appeal of the Muppets is what initially drew me to puppetry.

INTERNSHIP

In 1998 I went to New York City, spending a semester as an intern with various puppetry artists. I applied to be an intern with the Jim Henson Foundation, the first time I had ever heard of the organization. Although numerous books have been written about Henson’s life, aspects of his career, and individual media projects, they have largely neglected mention of the Foundation. The most comprehensive book about Henson, *Jim Henson: The Works* by Christopher Finch, mentions the Foundation in relation to the International Festival of Puppet Theater that it organized in 1992 after Henson’s death.²⁴ Deanne Durrett references the Festival in *The Importance of Jim Henson* in order to present the reader with background about the Henson children and Cheryl’s involvement with her father’s

²⁴ Christopher Finch, *Jim Henson: The Works* (Random House: New York, 1993) 236.

legacy.²⁵ Even the most recent biography of Henson includes only a passing mention of the Foundation, saying it was “geared to develop and encourage public enthusiasm for the art of puppetry.”²⁶ There is no complete account of the Jim Henson Foundation for the public to familiarize itself with its mission, functions, and history. The Foundation’s website provides historical facts about its inception and information about the winners of grant awards over its twenty-six year lifetime, but it is not assembled to serve as an aid to understand the impact that it has made on puppetry in America. This writing serves as first compilation of the material in a cohesive document.

Due to my unfamiliarity with the Foundation, my disappointment at not getting the Henson internship was temporary and did not prevent me from finding several other artists from whom to learn about the art and craft of puppetry. I worked with Theodora Skipitares and Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater, whose company in residence was Great Small Works. The semester coincided with the 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater, produced under the auspices of the Jim Henson Foundation, and was one of the most exciting times of my professional life. I saw fourteen productions over the three-week festival, all of which raised the standards by which I judge the quality of puppet theater. I also worked closely with Skipitares on her Festival offering, *A Harlot’s Progress*, as well as witnessing the Festival shows performed at Los Kabayitos. The tasks were typical intern work---running errands, sealing envelopes, making coffee---but I was learning a lot about my chosen field at the same time. Fortunately for me, one of the interns that the

²⁵ Deanne Durrett, *The Importance of Jim Henson* (Lucent Books: California, 1994) 55.

²⁶ James Robert Parish, *Jim Henson: Puppeteer and Filmmaker* (Infobase: USA, 2006) 78.

Foundation had employed was dissatisfied with the work and after the intern was released, I was contacted to finish out the term with the Foundation. It was a dream come true. I got to see everything: the Emmy Awards, the workshop where characters were being made and repaired, the famous mural of the Muppets I had seen in photographs, puppets and props from television shows and movies and, most amazingly to me, Jim Henson's office. I walked into the center of the Muppet universe where Henson himself did business. It was a magical place.

Across the hall from Jim Henson's office was his daughter Cheryl's office. Although it did not mean as much to me at the time, magic was also being made there. The International Festival of Puppet Theater and the Jim Henson Foundation, both under Cheryl's watchful eye, were transforming the face of American puppetry. That autumn I had the opportunity to see *The Lion King* performed by its original cast, as well as many of the shows in the Festival. My most memorable task as a Foundation intern was to read reviews of Festival performances and provide information about each one for a final report. I was able to witness first-hand the impact that the Festival was making on theater. I saw that puppetry was much more than just the Muppets. I had never been so proud to call myself a puppeteer, nor so confident that puppetry was my calling. When I returned to college the following spring, I was determined to produce puppet theater that was as provocative as the work I had seen during my semester away.

INVESTIGATION

Now, ten years later, I have had the opportunity to see and to perform exciting puppet theater and have been astounded by the reaction to the work by other audience members. Theatergoers who might not normally be exposed to puppet theater have been enlightened and engaged by puppetry and hunger for more. The growth that the United States is currently experiencing in the field of puppetry would not be possible without the Jim Henson Foundation. It is the sole organization in the United States devoted to funding puppetry artists and projects.²⁷ Henson established his Foundation to respond to the needs of a community of artists with big ideas and little money to spend. In order to demonstrate how the Jim Henson Foundation has enabled puppetry to take its place as a powerful means of theatrical expression, it is necessary to examine the status of puppetry in the United States prior to the Foundation's establishment in 1982. My research begins with a select history of puppetry in America. It highlights specific artists and performances to give a full picture of the variety of work being produced during the beginning decades of the twentieth century. The advent of television provided opportunities and limitations for the theatrical puppeteer. Chapter 3 focuses on Jim Henson's life and career and the significance of his contributions to American culture and to puppetry in the United States. The chapter explains how Henson's sudden death affected his colleagues and company and how they continue his vision.

²⁷ *The Jim Henson Foundation* 2007 Jim Henson Foundation, 1 Oct 2007
<http://www.hensonfoundation.org/home_about.html>.

The beginning chapters establish a context for the introduction of the Henson Foundation. The Foundation's principal function is the awarding of grants to puppetry artists in order to support their production and lend credibility through the use of Henson's name. The grants are divided by category---project, seed, children's show, and presenting---and the chapter includes a case study about each type. The case studies selected come from the connections that my time as an intern at the Jim Henson Foundation and membership in the Puppeteers of America, a national organization for puppet enthusiasts, offer me. Through my work with Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater, I got to know the collective of artists in Great Small Works and remembered their commitment to advancing puppetry while reinforcing what it means to be truly part of a global community. At the Puppeteers of America national festival in 2005, I participated in a playwriting workshop led by Muppet head-writer, Jerry Juhl. The weeklong intensive forged a close bond between the thirteen participants in what would turn out to be his final workshop. Juhl died on September 27, 2005.²⁸ It was through this workshop that I got to know the intelligent writing of Sean Keohane, a performer who blends puppetry with research. I was also introduced to the vivid writing of Nancy Aldrich, the artistic director for Tears of Joy Theatre out of Portland, Oregon. (see Figure 1) The other case study was selected due to HERE Art Center's commitment to presenting challenging adult puppet theater and a chance connection to Basil Twist through other research.

²⁸ Paul Eide, "In the Company of Genius," *Puppetry Journal* 57.1 (2005) 4.

Chapter 5 centers on the International Festival of Puppet Theater, tracing its development from its initial version in 1992 to the final edition in 2000. For each Festival, a performance by one company from the United States and one by an international company are explained in detail, along with associated symposia and exhibitions. Although the possibility of future versions of the International Festival of Puppet Theater is slight, the evidence reinforces the impact that its decade of performance made on American puppetry and its reception in New York City and beyond. The Jim Henson Foundation celebrates American puppetry, without trying to impose the vision of its founder or board of directors on the artists it supports. As Cheryl Henson asserts, “The Foundation is meant to be a facilitator; we’re here to help things, not to be the star.”²⁹ The Jim Henson Legacy, however, was established to celebrate the creativity of Jim Henson and his specific contributions to American and global culture. Through exhibitions, publications, and film screenings, the Jim Henson Legacy places Henson’s work before the public, so that it may continue to inspire and entertain, eighteen years after his death.

The dissertation begins with a summary of the past triumphs and trials of puppetry in America and examines the evolving status of puppetry in the present. I conclude my argument that the Jim Henson Foundation has been the fountainhead for the current revitalization of American puppetry with a review of the place puppetry currently holds in the United States and suggest what might be the next advancement of the form in the future. The chapter examines the recent spate of puppetry performance on Broadway from *Juan Darien* through *Avenue Q*. The

²⁹ Belinda Batson Brown and Cheryl Henson, personal interview, 2 Nov 2007.

adoption of puppet technique by artists outside the field has caused a debate on the future of puppetry within the community of puppeteers. The chapter suggests several positions on the future of American puppetry. The Jim Henson Foundation has elevated the status of puppetry in America for twenty-six years and the chapter suggests what the status of the Foundation might be in the future. Whether the Foundation is able to maintain its focus is never questioned, but its ability to maintain the same momentum is explored.

CHAPTER 2

PAVING THE WAY: AMERICAN PUPPETRY BEFORE JIM HENSON

Puppetry in America has a rich history that begins with the ritual performances of its indigenous people. With the arrival of European immigrants came the folk puppetry traditions of their respective homelands, providing entertainment for the settlers and a livelihood for their practitioners. The puppeteers fiercely guarded the manipulation and construction techniques they used in the interest of preserving their vocation. An appetite for puppet theater was whetted by these performances and, over time, they took on a less rustic character as families of puppeteers developed their art. Several historians have documented the development of American puppetry from these early performers to the twentieth century, notably Paul McPharlin in his 1948 publication, *The Puppet Theater in America: A History from 1524 to Now*, and more recently the Mazzarella Brothers in the PBS documentary *The American Puppet*(2000). It is not my intention here to retell the story of puppetry in the United States. The chapter examines three significant contributions made by Americans to puppetry during the last century--the sharing of information through books and publications, the creation of a community

of artists through puppetry organizations, and the utilization of puppets on television to create new programming. These contributions provide a context for Jim Henson's career and its significance to American puppetry.

The chapter begins with a detailed account of the career of illustrator and puppeteer, Tony Sarg, elaborating on his position as the first American celebrity-puppeteer. His work made an impact on his contemporaries as well as on future puppeteers. In 1921, Sarg was one of the first people to publish a book about the mechanics of puppet construction and performance, removing the shroud of secrecy from the art form in the United States. The chapter continues with an explanation of the atmosphere of collegiality, rather than competition, that emerged as a result of Sarg's book and other puppetry publications. The collaboration of artists, almost as a fraternity of puppeteers, led to the formation of the Puppeteers of America in 1937. The Puppeteers of America, largely through the efforts of Paul McPharlin, enabled professional and amateur puppetry enthusiasts to interact through annual festivals, the publication of a newsletter, *The Grapevine Telegraph* and eventually a magazine, *The Puppetry Journal*. The chapter also explores the role television played in providing opportunities for puppeteers and increased exposure for puppetry on a national level. I contend that without resources such as *The Tony Sarg Marionette Book* providing instruction to amateurs, organizations such as the Puppeteers of America establishing collaborative relationships among puppeteers, and television providing a stage for puppet presentation, Jim Henson's career would have been very different, as would American puppetry.

THE FATHER OF MODERN AMERICAN PUPPETRY

Early in *The Puppet Theatre in America*, McPharlin notes, “There is a dearth of evidence how puppet shows were given in the English colonies in the eighteenth century.”³⁰ He surmises that the practices seen in Europe most likely continued unchanged in the colonies. Punch and Judy shows from England, shadow theater inspired by the Chinese and imported by the French, and marionettes from Spain and Italy soon entertained the colonists and provided a livelihood for their performers. The anarchic antics of Punch were welcomed by the colonies and there is actually a record of a puppet show paid for by General George Washington in 1776.³¹ With the passage of time and the formal establishment of the United States, puppetry continued to entertain Americans and the demand for complicated trick marionettes made puppets a popular act in performance halls of the nineteenth century.³² Although these performances involved deep knowledge of craft, manipulation, and performance, many were more about making a living than about making art.

With the dawn of the twentieth century, performers, inspired by Modernism and the Art Theater Movement, began to consider how their work as artists could express their creativity and make statements as well as draw audiences into the theater building. Performers working in this vein often found that audience outside the commercial theater. Interestingly, the man who would infuse puppetry in the

³⁰ Paul McPharlin, *The Puppet Theatre in America, A History: 1524 to Now* (USA: Harper & Brothers, 1949) 19.

³¹ Paul with Alan Cook and Steve Abrams Eide, editor, *A Timeline of Puppetry in America*, special edition of *Puppetry Journal* (Minneapolis: Puppeteers of America Inc., 2003), 3.

³² McPharlin 86.

United States with this same experimental and pioneering attitude worked in the conventional Broadway theater. Tony Sarg, called by the Mazzarella documentary the “Father of Modern American Puppetry,”³³ came to the United States in 1915. He was born in Guatemala in the late 1880s, had lived in Germany, and made his living as an illustrator in England. It was during his time there that he witnessed performances by the Holden Marionettes, a company well known throughout Europe. In spite of the canvas walls blocking the spectators’ view of the manipulators that Thomas Holden presented to his competitors, Sarg attended his show repeatedly and was able to pick up the mechanics of the work. Sarg wrote, “I followed Holden from theater to theater and saw forty-eight performances from the front row, where I could peer up inside the masking of the stage.”³⁴ Sarg reportedly found the shows “ingenious, but lacking in artistry.”³⁵ He determined to make his own puppet shows.

Once he arrived in New York, Sarg began to produce marionette plays with illustrators, Frank Godwin and Charles E. “Mat” Searle.³⁶ He leased a studio space to develop his marionette construction and performance.³⁷ His first production, *The Three Wishes*, opened during Christmas week of 1916 in the Neighborhood Playhouse.³⁸ Future productions would include *Rip Van Winkle* in 1920, 1929, and

³³ Mazzarella.

³⁴ John Bell, *Strings, Hands, Shadows: A Modern Puppet History* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of the Arts, 2000) 60.

³⁵ Bil Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* (New York: MacMillan, 1965) 176.

³⁶ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 177.

³⁷ Dorothy Main Kern, "An Analysis of the Contributions of Tony Sarg to American Puppetry," thesis, Bowling Green State U, 1948 39.

³⁸ Kern 59.

again in 1937,³⁹ *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* in 1926 and 1927,⁴⁰ and *Punch and Judy* in 1930.⁴¹ “Heralding Christmas as surely as does the tree in Times Square, Tony Sarg’s Marionettes last night began a holiday engagement on Broadway at the Assembly Theatre,” was the response of *The New York Times* to the 1929 edition of *Rip Van Winkle*.⁴² According to former Sarg puppeteer, Margo Rose (nee Skewis),⁴³ when the company was not on tour, they performed six days a week, with two shows per day.⁴⁴ The success of Sarg’s company as well as the animated store windows he designed for Macy’s resulted in his being invited to design an entire parade for the store’s newly formed annual event, begun in 1924 to generate an atmosphere of gaiety and to remove the commercial edge from the holiday season. Sarg had previously designed five floats for that first parade.⁴⁵ The 1927 parade was the first completely designed by Sarg and featured the signature balloons that have been a hallmark of the parade ever since.⁴⁶

Sarg became a celebrity puppeteer and his company was the training ground for those aspiring to use puppetry as a profession. Unlike Holden, Sarg actively encouraged other puppeteers by supplying employment, education, and communication about the form with his colleagues. He had learned figure construction from Ellen Van Volkenburg, who was working at the Chicago Little

³⁹ Kern Appendix A.

⁴⁰ Kern Appendix A.

⁴¹ "Tony Sarg to Discuss Puppets," *New York Times* 2 Jan 1930: 35.

⁴² "Sarg's Puppets Enact Rip Van Winkle Legend," *New York Times* 21 Dec 1929: 24.

⁴³ McPharlin 338.

⁴⁴ Mazzarella.

⁴⁵ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993) 335.

⁴⁶ "Parade Features: Balloons," *The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade 2001*, 7 Jun 2006 <http://www.wm.edu/amst/370/2005F/sp4/home_paradefeatures_balloons.htm>.

Theatre around 1915.⁴⁷ It was she who coined the word “puppeteer” to mean someone who operated puppets.⁴⁸ Van Volkenburg had directed Sarg’s company in its 1919 production of *The Rose and the Ring* and there was a free exchange of information between the two.⁴⁹ His cooperation with Van Volkenburg and Helen Haiman Joseph, who worked with puppets at the Cleveland Playhouse, was endemic of the new art and craft culture of the United States. The development of amateur puppeteers was stimulated by a wave of publications that explained in detail how a puppet could be constructed. Gone was the fear that one’s livelihood would be lost if one’s secrets were divulged. *Boys’ Life* and other youth magazines had features for kids about the construction of puppets, puppet stages, and writing puppet plays. Toy theatres had been popular entertainments in Victorian parlors in the United States even before the turn of the twentieth century and intrepid youngsters built elaborate stages for themselves.⁵⁰

In response to increased puppet construction by amateurs, Sarg published *The Tony Sarg Marionette Book* in 1921 and it was the one of the first books to explain exactly how puppetry was done.⁵¹ It also included two puppet plays for amateurs to attempt at home.⁵² The year prior to its publication, Helen Haiman Joseph published *A Book of Marionettes*, a history of the marionette form with some techniques for their performance. Joseph’s book was the first puppetry book to be published in

⁴⁷ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 177.

⁴⁸ Eide 13.

⁴⁹ Bell 60.

⁵⁰ McPharlin 317.

⁵¹ George Latshaw, *The Complete Book of Puppetry* (USA: Dover, 1978) 17.

⁵² Tony Sarg, *The Tony Sarg Marionette Book* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921).

English.⁵³ The information channels were now opened as a series of books on all aspects of puppetry were written and published. By revealing the secrets so carefully kept by puppeteers for years, Sarg (with co-writer Ann Stoddard) and Joseph began a tradition of cooperation and exchange that would mark American puppetry until the present. In 1927, Winifred Mills and Louise Dunn produced the first “comprehensive American book on puppet making,” *Marionettes, Masks, and Shadows*.⁵⁴ This enthusiasm for puppetry publication beginning in the 1920s has been followed by waves of instruction manuals including George Latshaw’s *Complete Book of Puppetry*,⁵⁵ Cedric Flower and Alan Fortney’s *Puppets: Methods and Materials*,⁵⁶ David Currell’s *An Introduction to Puppets & Puppet Making*,⁵⁷ and Cheryl Henson’s *The Muppets Make Puppets*.⁵⁸

A FOLLOWING AND A FELLOWSHIP

With increased sharing of information about puppetry’s “how-to’s” came increased interest in its utilization across the United States. Puppet theaters and companies began to dot the nation. Performances were aimed toward audiences of all ages and were featured in venues as diverse as Broadway, regional professional theaters, schools, and churches. In New York City, Remo Bufano produced *Orlando*

⁵³ Latshaw 18.

⁵⁴ Eide 17.

⁵⁵ Latshaw.

⁵⁶ Cedric Flower and Alan Fortney, *Puppets: Methods and Materials* (Massachusetts: Davis Publications, 1983).

⁵⁷ David Currell, *An Introduction to Puppets & Puppet-Making* (USA: Quintet Publishing, 1992).

⁵⁸ Cheryl Henson and the Muppet Workshop, *The Muppets Make Puppets* (New York: Jim Henson Productions, Inc., 1994).

Furioso in 1923,⁵⁹ established his own studio theatre in 1926,⁶⁰ and designed costumes for the Walrus and the Carpenter characters for *Alice in Wonderland* at Eva LeGalienne's Civic Repertory Theatre in 1935.⁶¹ In 1935, Bufano's puppetry was featured in the Billy Rose musical production, *Jumbo*, where he crafted a "thirty-five foot telescoping clown"⁶² marionette that was operated from the high ceiling of the Hippodrome. Bufano created large-scale marionettes for a performance entitled *From Sorcery to Science* for the 1939 World's Fair in New York.⁶³ Arthur Richmond, editor of *Remo Bufano's Book of Puppetry*, says, "For almost thirty years in America, the name Remo Bufano was synonymous with marionettes. The theatre, motion pictures, radio, and television were gayer and more colorful for his highly original work. Countless children and adults thrilled to his saucy creations and went away happier from his plays."⁶⁴

On the west coast, puppeteers presented original plays and work adapted from the actor theatre to audiences eager for entertainment. Ralph Chessé made a name for himself by presenting Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* with marionettes in 1928 and the piece would be a regular feature of his repertoire throughout his career.⁶⁵ The success of the O'Neill play prompted Chessé to produce *Macbeth* in 1928, Moliere's *Don Juan* in 1929, and many other plays written for the

⁵⁹ McPharlin 342.

⁶⁰ Bell 61.

⁶¹ McPharlin 343.

⁶² McPharlin 1.

⁶³ McPharlin 343.

⁶⁴ Remo Bufano, *Remo Bufano's Book of Puppetry*, Ed. Arthur Richmond, Tenth, 1950 (USA: Macmillan, 1966) vii.

⁶⁵ Eide 19.

live stage, particularly the work of Shakespeare.⁶⁶ He would document his career and philosophy of puppetry in *The Marionette Actor* in 1987, reiterating his belief that a puppeteer should be an actor as well as a skilled manipulator. “When the solo puppeteer, the skilled manipulator, performs with his marionette, he is an entertainer.... He intrigues his viewers with his subtlety of manipulation.... The dramatic actor/puppeteer differs. His talent lies in his power to use his voice with which he hypnotizes his listeners,” said Chessé.⁶⁷ Whether it was the vocal quality of his performance or the novelty of puppets performing Shakespeare, Chessé’s work proved to be a great success. Another highly successful and distinct venture in puppetry was The Turnabout Theatre, founded by the Yale Puppeteers in 1940.⁶⁸ The Yale Puppeteers were a trio of performers--Forman Brown, Harry Burnett, and Richard Brandon--who met at Yale and toured the United States with marionette shows throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Eventually the company landed in Los Angeles, opening a theater that was frequented by the Hollywood crowd. The type of fare offered by the Yale Puppeteers had a wide appeal and their theatres became popular entertainment venues for the trendy as well as the traditional. In *Small Wonder*, Brown’s 1980 book about his vocation, the puppeteer writes about the humble beginnings of the company through the close of the Turnabout Theatre on March 31, 1956, a venue that showed an amazing 4,535 performances in its fifteen-

⁶⁶ Eide 19.

⁶⁷ Ralph Chesse, *The Marionette Actor* (Virginia: George Mason U P, 1987) 29.

⁶⁸ Forman Brown, *Small Wonder: The Story of the Yale Puppeteers and the Turnabout Theatre* (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1980) 254.

year existence.⁶⁹ Brown claims as a source of pride, “In a city not known for its sophistication, we had managed to build and maintain a place of literate entertainment that is still lovingly remembered by a host of theatre-goers.”⁷⁰

Many companies did not immediately establish their own theater spaces, but toured extensively, spreading puppetry throughout the Midwest. The Tatterman Marionettes produced lavish productions from their Ohio headquarters, eventually creating a marionette version of *Peer Gynt* in 1937.⁷¹ Beginning in 1934, Martin and Olga Stevens created touring shows of Biblical and literary topics, such as the Nativity, Joan of Arc, and *Treasure Island*. The couple established their own theatre in Indiana in 1940 and went on to train many prominent contemporary puppeteers, including the late George Latshaw and Ronnie Burkett.⁷² Rufus and Margo Rose went from their work with Sarg to found their own company in 1931, presenting family fare and variety performances on tour.⁷³ They also performed at the 1933 Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago.⁷⁴ Performances at World’s Fairs and major commercial exhibitions brought puppetry to a larger, commercial stage and offered opportunities for performers to gain national attention. The nation’s attention was also focused on puppeteers as a result of the Depression. The Works Progress Administration was created in 1935 to respond to the rising unemployment in the United States and the Federal Theater Project was created under its auspices to

⁶⁹ Brown 253.

⁷⁰ Brown 254.

⁷¹ Eide 16.

⁷² Eide 22.

⁷³ Eide 18.

⁷⁴ Eide 18.

give theater artists employment.⁷⁵ As a result, twenty puppet theaters were established, employing 358 performers and technicians.⁷⁶ Sarg, Bufano, and Chessé all worked for the Federal Theater Project in their respective hometowns, building a large base of puppeteers and audiences in the United States.

While World's Fairs were important artistic and commercial venues for puppeteers, the most important festival was yet to come, as a result of the efforts of several puppet enthusiasts, particularly Paul McPharlin. In the 1930s, McPharlin, a scholar and performer, made it "his prime goal to know as many other puppeteers as possible."⁷⁷ To that end, he produced a yearbook of puppetry, beginning in 1930, in his attempt to organize puppeteers into a community. *The Puppetry Yearbook* was produced annually throughout the 1930s and 1940s and became "a virtual bible to puppeteers."⁷⁸ With the success of this first formal attempt as a unified body of puppeteers, McPharlin formed the Marionette Fellowship of America in 1930.⁷⁹ The organization did not succeed.⁸⁰ Whether its failure was a result of the relative novelty of collaboration in puppetry or exterior factors such as the country's economic situation is difficult to determine, but McPharlin was not discouraged. In 1936, McPharlin organized a national puppet conference in Detroit, which featured performances, technical discussions, an exhibition, and a dinner.⁸¹ During a keynote address, McPharlin suggested that there should be a national puppetry organization,

⁷⁵ Eide 20.

⁷⁶ Eide 21.

⁷⁷ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory*, Ed. Fred Thompson (Connecticut: Puppeteers of America, 2006-7) 3.

⁷⁸ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory* 3.

⁷⁹ Eide 19.

⁸⁰ McPharlin 387.

⁸¹ McPharlin 387.

but that the timing of its creation should be delayed. The assembled puppeteers, some two hundred from the United States and Canada,⁸² responded, “No! No! No! We want it NOW!” McPharlin’s address concluded and the highly interested puppeteers formed a line of those interested in joining. The enthusiasm of puppeteers for an organization was infectious and McPharlin began supplementing his yearbooks with a newsletter called *The Grapevine Telegraph* to respond to the demand for more puppetry publication.

The Puppeteers of America was informally begun and by 1937, it had become an official organization, holding its first national conference in Cincinnati.⁸³ The site for the conference was the Gibson Hotel and its coordinators were Martin and Olga Stevens. McPharlin said that the Festival’s “purpose was to provide a meeting ground and information center for all interested in puppetry, and so to further the cause of puppetry.”⁸⁴ The Membership Handbook for the POA says that the Festival affords puppetry enthusiasts with “opportunities to see shows in many different styles, to exchange ideas, learn new techniques and methods, and maybe most important to form friendships and associations that can be rewarding and lifelong.”⁸⁵ The momentum that Festivals provided to puppeteers was sustained through the continued publication of *The Puppetry Yearbook* until McPharlin’s death in 1948.⁸⁶ With the loss of its principal founder and guarding spirit, the future of the Puppeteers of America was uncertain. The publication of *The Puppetry Yearbook*

⁸² Eide 23.

⁸³ Eide 25.

⁸⁴ McPharlin 387-8.

⁸⁵ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory* 3.

⁸⁶ Eide 38.

was discontinued. However, the organization had gained a strong base of support and passionate members in its twelve years. In 1949, *The Puppetry Journal* was first printed, with six editions going out to the membership a year.⁸⁷ The Puppeteers of America has lasted for seventy years and has grown to include over forty-five local puppetry guilds as well as members from eighteen countries in addition to the United States.

FILLING THE AIRWAVES WITH FRIENDLY FACES

There was a new atmosphere of community and cooperation in puppetry brought about by the efforts of Paul McPharlin and the Puppeteers of America as well as by the large-scale exposure that fairs and expositions brought artists. As McPharlin noted, “Puppeteers were getting to know each other; the public learned that Tony Sarg was not the only puppeteer.”⁸⁸ A major contribution to the visibility of puppeteers and the viability of puppetry as a way to earn a living came as an outgrowth of an innovation presented formally at the New York World’s Fair. In 1939, television was showcased and early experiments showed that it might be worth exploring the new medium as a way to reach many people simultaneously over great distances.⁸⁹ Radio was already a developed medium and dramatic and variety

⁸⁷ Eide 38.

⁸⁸ McPharlin 385.

⁸⁹ James Von Schilling, *The Magic Window: American Television, 1939-1953* (New York: Haworth Press, 2003) 1.

programs were popular on the airwaves. The idea that television could be developed in the same way to provide entertainment to American homes was intriguing. The moving image on the screen was as captivating as the sounds it accompanied.

As early as 1930, there had been attempts to make television with puppets as their small size seemed well suited to the earliest camera's narrow field of vision.⁹⁰ The involvement of the United States in World War II halted the development of television as every activity became devoted to supporting the war effort. From 1941 until 1946, national festivals of the Puppeteers of America ceased,⁹¹ and performers tended to simplify their shows to facilitate touring performances.⁹² The Macy's parade went on hiatus until 1945 and the balloons were used for scrap rubber.⁹³ When the war ended, the troops returned home to a country no longer devastated by the Depression but one entering an era of innovation and prosperity. The question at the time became not whether people would purchase television sets, but what would they view on their new television screens. Airtime needed to be filled and puppeteers found ways to make a place for themselves on the airwaves.

One of the early experimenters with television puppetry was Burr Tillstrom. He first tried his hand at the medium in 1939 and was eventually given his own show in 1947, the incredibly popular *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*.⁹⁴ Tillstrom was born in Chicago in 1917 and he became a puppet enthusiast, building his own marionettes at

⁹⁰ McPharlin 378-9.

⁹¹ Eide 32.

⁹² McPharlin 383-4.

⁹³ "Parade Features: Balloons."

⁹⁴ Bell 89.

an early age.⁹⁵ He too worked with the Federal Theatre Project and performed at the first puppetry conference in Detroit in 1936.⁹⁶ He created his signature character shortly thereafter, a glove puppet named “Kukla,” the Russian word for puppet.⁹⁷ In 1947, he invited radio actress Fran Allison to join him as the live character to interact with his puppets on the television.⁹⁸ Much like the ‘bottler,’ the person who gathered an audience and their money in a Punch and Judy performance, Allison talked to the puppets as well as to the home audience in the entirely improvised performance.⁹⁹

The show first aired in Chicago on October 13, 1947 and was broadcast nationally in 1949.¹⁰⁰ Kukla, Fran Allison, and Oliver J. Dragon, also known as Ollie, led the rest of Tillstrom’s cast of “Kuklapolitan Players,” through a program seen, in its most successful incarnation, five times a week for fifteen minutes a day.¹⁰¹ Presented live, the material of the show was topical, deriving from whatever Tillstrom decided to talk about each day.¹⁰² Tillstrom reported that he had been asked if he would like to use a writer, but very practically replied, aside from his established habit of adlibbed performance, “How could I turn the pages of a script

⁹⁵ Eide 44.

⁹⁶ Eide 44.

⁹⁷ Mazarella.

⁹⁸ Eide 44.

⁹⁹ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 233.

¹⁰⁰ Eide 44.

¹⁰¹ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 234.

¹⁰² Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 233.

with both my hands busy?”¹⁰³ The audience often generated material for the puppets to work with, as fan letters poured in. Bil Baird notes that one day the show received eleven thousand pieces of mail.¹⁰⁴

Tillstrom’s puppets were a hit and there was also novelty about them. Unlike the marionettes that were performed by most of the large companies on tours and in theatres, Tillstrom’s puppets were glove puppets from the single operator tradition. A single performer had become quite common due to the expense of touring and maintaining a large company, but marionettes were still the most popular puppet form in the United States. Paul McPharlin noted that when Helen Smiley organized an exhibition of puppets at Temple University in 1932 “so strong was the domination of the string-operated type that only one group of hand-puppets was included.”¹⁰⁵ Tillstrom operated all of the glove puppet characters from within a puppet booth, effectively masking his presence from the television camera’s lens. He was able to see Allison as he performed behind a translucent cloth screen and he used a video monitor to tailor his movements to the television frame.¹⁰⁶ The puppet stage made the transition to the television screen, but retained its roots from the live theatre. In fact, Tillstrom transplanted his act to the stage of the Astor Hotel in 1960 to perform a live show entitled, *Kukla, Burr and Ollie*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Von Schilling 118.

¹⁰⁴ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 233.

¹⁰⁵ McPharlin 384.

¹⁰⁶ Bell 91.

¹⁰⁷ Abrams, "Puppets on Broadway" 30.

Kukla, Fran and Ollie ran in several incarnations from 1947 until 1975. The show became so popular at one point that families planned their dinners around its airtime and bars often stopped serving alcohol during the program so that those without televisions at home could watch with their children.¹⁰⁸ However, Burr Tillstrom contributed to puppetry in ways other than being the spirit of *Kukla* and his friends. Between 1936 and 1984, he appeared at eleven POA National Festivals, contributing to the mentorship of other performers, Jim Henson and Shari Lewis included.¹⁰⁹ In 1964, he performed an incredibly moving “hand ballet” about the Berlin Wall. No manufactured actors appeared in the work, the puppets were Tillstrom’s bare hands. Through movement and music, the agony of the separation of East and West Germany that began in 1961 was enacted. Tillstrom’s hands were characters in the piece as well as the wall itself.¹¹⁰ This poignant performance on “That Was the Week That Was” earned an Emmy and a Peabody Award for its creator.¹¹¹ He continued to appear on television and in theatre until his death in 1985. He was posthumously inducted into the TV Hall of Fame in 1986¹¹² and archives of his work are housed at the Chicago Historical Society.

Kukla, Fran and Ollie was not alone in its widespread popularity and longevity. On December 27, 1947, *The Puppet Playhouse* made its debut.¹¹³ It would shortly thereafter be named *The Howdy Doody Show* and this show would become the first television program to reach one thousand and then two thousand

¹⁰⁸ Mazarella.

¹⁰⁹ Eide 44.

¹¹⁰ Mazarella.

¹¹¹ Eide 47.

¹¹² Eide 44.

¹¹³ Stephen Davis, *Say Kids! What Time is It?* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987) 31.

episodes during its thirteen year run.¹¹⁴ It also predated *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie* in national broadcast. The idea for the character originated with his creator “Buffalo” Bob Smith on the radio in a program called *The Triple B Ranch*. Smith developed the voices for the characters that populated the ranch; one was named Elmer. Elmer was friendly, greeting everyone with a “Howdy Doody, kids!”¹¹⁵ Eventually, his greeting became his name. Once the show was picked up for televised broadcast, Smith and the NBC executives had to decide the character’s appearance. On the debut of the program, the marionette was not yet built so Smith played opposite a drawer in which the shy Howdy was hiding.¹¹⁶ Frank Paris, a well-known variety and nightclub performer constructed the original puppet. Paris is remembered as one of the first marionettists to eliminate the elaborate proscenium and puppet bridge from his act.¹¹⁷ The puppet that he built was artistic, but lacked child appeal. Paris also demanded merchandising rights for the puppet he built; the studio refused.¹¹⁸ He took his version of Howdy Doody away and renamed him Peter Pixie to perform on a children’s show of his own.¹¹⁹

Velma Dawson was engaged to create a new Howdy¹²⁰ and he appeared on June 8, 1948.¹²¹ He looked very different from the Paris original but his change was explained as a tactical move because the puppet was running for President. He, like so many politicians then and since, had had a face-lift to make himself more

¹¹⁴ Mazarella.

¹¹⁵ Steven D. Stark, *Glued to the Set* (New York: Free Press, 1997) 17.

¹¹⁶ Phyllis T. Dircks, "Howdy Doody in the Courtroom: A Puppet Custody Case," *American Puppetry*, ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 248.

¹¹⁷ Mazarella.

¹¹⁸ Davis 49.

¹¹⁹ Bell 90.

¹²⁰ Dircks 249.

¹²¹ Davis 52.

appealing to the public.¹²² He had a broad smile, freckles, red hair, and was dressed as a cowboy. Though Howdy's face-lift may not have won him the election, he gained, it is rumored, an astonishing million votes¹²³ from youngsters writing from home and had more actual write-in votes than independent candidate Henry Wallace.¹²⁴ Howdy Doody was inaugurated the President of the Kids of the United States in January of 1949.¹²⁵ It was at this time that the name of the show was officially changed to *The Howdy Doody Show*.¹²⁶ The world of Doodyville was not solely populated by Smith and Howdy, of course; there was an entire cast of regular characters, human and puppet alike. Rounding out the puppet cast were Dilly Dally, a boy who always seemed to make a mess of things, Mayor Phineas T. Bluster, a fuss-budget-y politician, and the Flubadub, an animal composed of the body parts of several other creatures. The Flubadub's development provides another example of just how popular the show was with its young viewers. The character originally claimed that it only ate flowers, but parents wrote in to complain that their children were also eating flowers from the yard. The Flubadub's favorite food was soon changed to spaghetti and meatballs in response.¹²⁷ The human cast was equally appealing. Judy Tyler, a beautiful young actress who had fathers at home watching, played Princess Summerfall Winterspring; Bob Keeshan, a former NBC page, played the first Clarabell the Clown; and Bill Lecornec, an actor who also manipulated

¹²² Davis 50.

¹²³ Davis 58.

¹²⁴ Stark 14.

¹²⁵ Davis 65.

¹²⁶ Davis 66.

¹²⁷ Davis 73.

several of the puppets, played Chief Thunderthud, leader of the Ooragnak tribe. The word is “kangaroo” backward and, in an interesting connection, Keeshan would later rise to national fame as television’s Captain Kangaroo in 1955.¹²⁸

Cast in the silent role of Clarabell, Keeshan was fired from the cast of *Howdy Doody* in 1952 due to contract negotiation issues,¹²⁹ but his ideas about how to appeal to an audience of children led him to an incredible run of thirty years on CBS and an additional six years on PBS on his own show, *Captain Kangaroo*.¹³⁰ The Captain, like Buffalo Bob, had puppet and human friends alike, and served as the anchor for the comings and goings of all these friends. He was gentle and kindly, not at all like the clown character he had created for *Howdy Doody*. Keeshan wanted to foster the idea of conversing with children, rather than riling them up.¹³¹ That was not to say that *Captain Kangaroo* was all quiet conversation. One of the most famous bits of puppet business on the show happened in nearly every episode. Mr. Moose, a hand puppet with a moving mouth, would ask the Captain a knock-knock joke. When the Captain reached the punch line, Bunny Rabbit, a glove puppet that did not speak, would drop a load of ping-pong balls from above onto his head.¹³² This zaniness mixed with Keeshan’s sensitivity created a program that would win six Emmy awards and three Peabody awards.¹³³ *Captain Kangaroo* was a stepping

¹²⁸ Associated Press, *TV's 'Captain Kangaroo,' Bob Keeshan, Dead*. 24 Jan 2004, CNN.Com, 22 May 2007 <<http://www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/TV/01/23/obit.kangaroo/>>.

¹²⁹ Davis 180.

¹³⁰ Associated Press.

¹³¹ Davis 180.

¹³² Billy Ingram, *TV Party: The Captain*. TVParty.Com, 22 May 2007 <<http://www.tvparty.com/lostterrytoons.html>>.

¹³³ Associated Press.

stone for many puppeteers, including Lamb Chop creator Shari Lewis who appeared on the program as a guest in 1957¹³⁴ and Kevin Clash, the performer of Elmo on *Sesame Street*.¹³⁵

The replacement of Keeshan as Clarabell the Clown did not lessen *Howdy Doody*'s appeal with its audience, at home or in the studio. The children in the studio who watched the program were called "The Peanut Gallery" and every day as the show began they answered Smith's question, "Say kids, what time is it?" with a rousing, "It's Howdy Doody time!" The theme song for the program established the interactive nature of the show as the kids in the Peanut Gallery sang it to the well-known tune, "Ta-ra-ra Boom-der-e."¹³⁶ The creation of a strong connection between song and product was extremely important at this time. Howdy's likeness was actually utilized in advertising products, such as Wonder Bread, Blue Bonnet Margarine, and Welch's Grape Juice.¹³⁷ More significantly, Howdy Doody was one of the first mass-marketed television characters, with products ranging from toys to bedclothes to tableware.¹³⁸ The show was aired at 5:30 PM on weekdays, ostensibly to keep kids occupied while their mothers made dinner, but parents were watching appreciatively as well.¹³⁹ As Steven D. Stark observed in *Glued to the Set*, homes in the 1950s and 1960s did not have multiple television sets so everyone in the house watched the same programming.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Kira Albin, *Shari Lewis in the Lamb Light*. 1997, Grandtimes.Com, 22 May 2007 <<http://www.grandtimes.com/lambchop.html>>.

¹³⁵ Kevin Clash with Gary Brozek, *My Life as a Furry Red Monster* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006) 157.

¹³⁶ Stark 16.

¹³⁷ Blumenthal 193.

¹³⁸ Mazzarella.

¹³⁹ Davis 55.

Obviously, the use of puppets to promote products was not a new idea. Sarg's balloons for the Macy's parade created a brand image and drew in plenty of holiday shoppers. Trade show appearances and World's Fair work advertised innovation and advancement through products, such as Bufano's performance in the Pharmacy Pavilion. Many nineteenth century puppeteers began their careers in dentistry, with the puppet serving as a gimmick to draw the customers. Television was merely a new avenue for the puppet to relate itself to some product or other. Marionettist Bil Baird made over four hundred television commercials over his career.¹⁴¹ Baird had established himself by the 1950s as one of America's preeminent puppeteers. Born in 1904, Baird and his family moved to Mason City, Iowa where at age fourteen he made his first set of marionettes for *Treasure Island*.¹⁴² He had the opportunity to see Sarg's touring company perform *Rip Van Winkle* in 1921¹⁴³ and he shortly thereafter decided to pursue puppetry professionally. He moved to New York in 1928 and joined Sarg's troupe, with which he performed for five years.¹⁴⁴ After establishing his own company in 1934, he worked out of his own theatre and then for the Federal Theatre Project, creating puppets of the seven deadly sins for John Houseman and Orson Welles's 1937 production of *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*. Houseman's memoirs, which describe how the puppets materialized, are excerpted with the play text in *Stages of Drama*:

¹⁴⁰ Stark 15.

¹⁴¹ Richard Leet, "The Bil Baird World of Puppets at the Charles H. MacNider Museum," *American Puppetry*, ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 146.

¹⁴² Leet 145.

¹⁴³ Eide 28.

¹⁴⁴ Leet 145.

“... That sinister puppet troupe, the Seven Deadly Sins, who appeared, one by one, through small holes in the apron—obscene, diminutive specimens of evil that flapped and wriggled and squeaked their lewd temptations at the doomed doctor’s feet.”¹⁴⁵

It was while working on the project that Baird would meet Cora Burlar, whom he would marry and with whom he performed until her death in 1967.¹⁴⁶

Baird had a unique design style and his puppets looked excellent on stage or on film. In 1950, Bil and Cora Baird produced a television program entitled *Life with Snarky Parker*, in which he found ingenious ways to eliminate the trappings of the puppet stage by cleverly building marionette bridges unseen by the camera.¹⁴⁷

The incorporation of puppet bridges into the settings for the drama was even more important for “Peter and the Wolf” with Art Carney in 1958.¹⁴⁸ Baird writes of the experience, “We used every device we knew to tell the story.... Tree trunks supported our marionette bridges, with intermittent gaps between the walkways so that we could move a character forward from a distance among the trees or fly a bird about.”¹⁴⁹ The program was seen by thirty-three million people and gained Baird a greater following. Baird crafted puppets for Broadway performances such as *The Ziegfeld Follies of 1943*, *Nellie Bly* in 1946, *Flahooley* in 1951, as well as *Davy Jones Locker* in 1959.¹⁵⁰ The latter was also made into a film and it is through a film

¹⁴⁵ John Houseman, John. "Staging of *Doctor Faustus*." *Stages of Drama*. Ed. Miriam Gilbert Carl H. Klaus, Bradford S. Field. (USA: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1995) 198-9.

¹⁴⁶ Eide 28.

¹⁴⁷ Eide 28.

¹⁴⁸ Eide 28.

¹⁴⁹ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 238.

¹⁵⁰ Abrams, "Puppets on Broadway" 28.

that Baird's work is most widely known to the general public. Bil Baird designed and operated the marionettes that appeared in the now famous "Lonely Goatherd" sequence of *The Sound of Music* in 1965.¹⁵¹

It was also in 1965 that Baird published his book, *The Art of the Puppet*. This book has been important to puppeteers ever since as it is a most detailed account of puppetry traditions worldwide and attempts to answer the complicated question of "What is a Puppet?" in its first chapter. Baird's response to the query is that the puppet is "an inanimate figure that is made to move by human effort before an audience."¹⁵² He acknowledges in the following paragraph the astonishing diversity of objects that can be perceived as a puppet and the variety of widely different ways in which the movement can occur. In doing so, Baird recognizes the difficulty in answering such a question as he accounts for innovation and change within the world traditions. In concluding his book, he makes a plea for better documentation of puppetry work, lamenting that he knows of only two existing scripts of the fifteen that Tony Sarg wrote and the even fewer left by Remo Bufano for posterity. He also urges international collaboration between puppeteers saying, "Many of us might profit by the opportunity to know what the rest of the world is doing."¹⁵³

The final chapter that includes such a global perspective is entitled "Today & Tomorrow"¹⁵⁴ and it focuses on television as an important source for puppetry. The early experiments of 1939 had developed into a thriving medium and programming

¹⁵¹ Eide 28.

¹⁵² Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 10.

¹⁵³ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 246.

¹⁵⁴ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 224.

was evolving to incorporate new aims and ideas. By the end of *The Howdy Doody Show* in 1960, children's television was no longer being employed merely as a distraction for the kiddies to enable moms to finish the dinner. The idea that programming can and should educate while entertaining was gaining popularity and one person who successfully managed both aims during her forty plus year career was ventriloquist Shari Lewis. Ventriloquism is a different art than puppetry, though they share the use of an object or figure as the focal point for the performance. Ventriloquists additionally perform a vocal sleight of hand to "throw" their voices so that the sound actually seems to emanate from the ventriloquist figure. Ventriloquists had been popular variety performers since the early days of vaudeville. One of the most successful radio programs of the 1930s featured Edgar Bergen and his "dummies," Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd. Bergen and friends successfully made the transition to film and many television appearances. Paul Winchell, with fabricated friends Jerry Mahoney and Knucklehead Smiff, had a television program from 1953 to 1956.¹⁵⁵ Shari Lewis and her alter ego, Lamb Chop appeared on television from 1960 until her death in 1998.¹⁵⁶

Lewis was encouraged to perform from an early age and had extensive training in music. She made her television debut in 1952 and appeared on *Captain Kangaroo* five years later.¹⁵⁷ The appearance featured the diminutive five-foot tall Lewis with a Bergen/Winchell style wooden figure. The producers of *Captain*

¹⁵⁵ "Paul Winchell-Jerry Mahoney," *TVParty.com* 26 Sep 2007
<<http://www.tvparty.com/lostmahoney.html>.>

¹⁵⁶ Jill Brooke, 'Lamb Chop' Creator Shari Lewis Dead at 65. 3 Aug 1998, CNN.Com, 22 May 2007
<<http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/TV/9808/03/shari.lewis.obit/>>.

¹⁵⁷ Albin.

Kangaroo wanted to know if she had a smaller figure to use, one that would not dwarf the young performer quite so much. Lewis began to perform with a soft puppet called Lamb Chop.¹⁵⁸ Lamb Chop is actually a sock puppet so Lewis's hand controlled her mouth movements as well as giving facial expressions to the spunky sheep. Lewis was soon given her own show, *The Shari Lewis Show*, in 1960 and it ran until 1963.¹⁵⁹ Developed around songs and gentle lessons, the program featured Lewis as the adult interlocutor for her puppets, the willful yet adorable Lamb Chop, the wise-talking Charlie Horse, and the slow-on-the-uptake Hush Puppy. The sibling rivalries between the three often resulted in snappy patter and it is amazing to realize that Lewis was always performing two of the three characters at a time, both vocally and physically.¹⁶⁰ When the disagreements could not be resolved, Lewis would intervene and talk the problems over with her "kids," leading them to a rational solution. This gentle approach to learning social values of cooperation, sharing, and forgiveness is what gave Lewis such longevity in her career. "Self esteem comes from doing something and accomplishing something," she once said. "It doesn't come from watching TV. I try to do activities, I try to turn TV into an activity."¹⁶¹ She earned twelve Emmy awards and wrote over sixty children's books,¹⁶² including an early "how-to" book in 1958.¹⁶³ Lewis's career included several other successful programs including *Lamb Chop's Play Along* in the 1990s

¹⁵⁸ Mazarella.

¹⁵⁹ Eide 67.

¹⁶⁰ Albin.

¹⁶¹ Brooke.

¹⁶² Eide 67.

¹⁶³ Shari Lewis, *The Shari Lewis Puppet Book* (New York: California National Productions, Inc., 1958).

and a 1975 program entitled *The Shari Show*, which featured homage to her beginnings in the form of a children's television host kangaroo puppet named "Captain Person."¹⁶⁴

Lewis remembered that the end of *The Shari Lewis Show*, in 1963, came about due to the changing nature of children's television.¹⁶⁵ Everything had changed to animated format. In 1956, the widely popular *Howdy Doody Show* had been cancelled from its daily format and relegated to a Saturday morning slot, due in no small part to competition from *The Mickey Mouse Club*, an animated program with human performers.¹⁶⁶ The early days of puppet experimentation seemed to be at an end. Bil Baird reflected that television was going to continue to be a factor in puppetry performance but cautioned "its ability to create first-rate art consistently remains in doubt."¹⁶⁷ He began to reexamine the direction that the puppeteer in America should best head—perhaps away from the glow of the small screen and return to the live stage. Television, wrote Baird, "is a multiplier, not an art. It can proliferate the tawdry as well as the beautiful It's just that I believe any really artistic experimentation and any positive advances in puppetry are going to be made in the club or theatre before a live audience."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Shari Lewis, "Captain Person Gets His Hopping Papers," DVD, Perf. Shari Lewis, *The Shari Show*, 1975 (Digiview Entertainment, 2006).

¹⁶⁵ Albin.

¹⁶⁶ Davis 192.

¹⁶⁷ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 241.

¹⁶⁸ Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* 234.

CHAPTER 3

MAKING A GROUND PLAN: JIM HENSON'S CAREER

The previous chapter suggests several landmark moments in the development of puppet theater as a distinctly American art form. By the 1950s, puppetry was a successful enterprise in the United States due to the daily presence of televised programs like *The Howdy Doody Show* and *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*. The early work of individuals such as Bil Baird, Shari Lewis, and Burr Tillstrom was pioneering and prepared the way for the man who would revolutionize not only television puppetry, but also the art form itself. Vincent Anthony, general secretary for UNIMA-USA, Inc. and director of the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, notes, “The person of the twentieth century that we can probably thank for what people call a revolution in puppetry right now is Jim Henson.”¹ The narration of the documentary film *The American Puppet* acknowledges, “Jim Henson’s imagination and genius enabled him to reach audiences young and old throughout the world. The magnitude of his vision and achievements will forever influence the art of puppetry.”²

The chapter begins with a history of Henson’s early life, education, and entry into television as a profession. It details the innovations Henson introduced to

¹ Mark Mazarella, *The American Puppet* (Mazarella Bros. Productions, Inc., 2001).

² Mazarella.

television puppetry, innovations that made Henson's work unique. Next, I present information about Henson's first contact with puppetry as a live art form, rather than a commercial or television enterprise. Following, I trace his involvement in the Puppeteers of America and the important collaborations that resulted from his attendance at National Festivals of puppetry. The chapter continues with Henson's career as he became more successful and well known through his work on *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show*. In the midst of Henson's success in the public and commercial sector, he continued to forge bonds with the broader puppetry community and to use his popularity to become a spokesperson for the art form on an international level. The chapter continues with Henson's establishment of the Jim Henson Foundation in 1982 and includes the names of the first group of grant awardees for that year. I explore Henson's continuous work with puppetry on film, including his disappointments with his most ambitious work on *The Dark Crystal*(1982) and *Labyrinth*(1986). The chapter concludes with Henson's sudden and too-early death and the impact his departure had on his creations and company.

A CAREER THAT ONE WOULD PLAN

In a television interview about his career in 1984, Jim Henson was asked, "Looking back on it, does the direction your life took surprise you?" He responded positively, saying, "I think it's certainly not a career that one would plan. You know,

you wouldn't decide to become a puppeteer, I don't think, in your life."³ Henson said that he came to puppetry through art rather than through performance and that his initial puppetry work was more concerned with animating the art he had created than with the presentation of puppets.⁴ He explains that his principal interests were in television, film, and art and how he eventually realized that puppetry was a way to combine all of those elements into one artwork.

Born on September 24, 1936, James Maury Henson was on the edge of the television revolution. He was an avid fan of the movies. The first he ever saw was *The Wizard of Oz* (1939),⁵ which had a profound influence on him. The fantastical world created by L. Frank Baum fed into the boy's imagination and inspired him to create worlds of his own.⁶ Jim Henson also loved to listen to the radio. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy were particular favorites, not because Charlie was a ventriloquist figure but because he was a character in his own right, able to match wits with his creator Bergen. Actress and Henson's long-time friend Candice Bergen remembered, "He would say my father was his first inspiration, in terms of creating a character, writing for that character and not writing down to that character."⁷ It was also true that Bergen successfully created in McCarthy an alter ego, in whom people could absolutely believe and who seemed to have a life independent of his creator. Henson would later establish Kermit the Frog as his own alter ego.

³ David A. Goldsmith, Director, *Henson's Place: The Man Behind the Muppets*, television documentary, Interviewees Jane Henson Jim Henson, Frank Oz (England: Platypus Production, 1984).

⁴ Goldsmith.

⁵ Willow Bay, host, *People Profiles: Jim Henson*, television documentary, Interviewees Jane Henson Candice Bergen, Brian Henson (CNN, 1999).

⁶ James Robert Parish, *Jim Henson, Puppeteer and Filmmaker* (New York: Infobase, Inc., 2006) 11.

⁷ Bay.

Jim Henson became, like the rest of the United States following World War II, a television fanatic. “I loved the idea,” said Henson, “that what you saw was taking place somewhere else at the same time.”⁸ The Henson family got their first television set in 1950, when Jim was a teenager.⁹ As explained in the previous chapter, puppets were a popular and widespread performing medium for the local television networks. At age sixteen, Jim Henson applied to a local station for a position and was turned away. In 1954, after he had graduated from high school, he responded to the local television station’s advertisement for a puppeteer. Though Henson had been exposed to puppetry in his high school through its puppet club,¹⁰ he did not consider himself a puppeteer and knew very little about the form. He conducted some research at the library and he and friend, Russell Wall, made three puppets to bring to the audition. The puppets, Pierre, a French rat and two cowboys named Longhorn and Shorthorn, were well enough put together to earn Henson and Wall the much-desired positions of puppeteers for *The Junior Morning Show*.¹¹

The program that gained Henson his first job in television also proved to be his first failure. Henson remembered, “The show only lasted a few weeks but we were mentioned favorably in a couple of newspaper articles, so I took the puppets over to NBC and they started putting me on these little local shows. It was interesting and kind of fun to do—but I wasn’t really interested in puppetry then. It was just a means to an end.”¹² Continuing with the short appearances, Henson

⁸ James Collins, “Jim Henson,” *People of the Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) 371.

⁹ Bay.

¹⁰ Parish 26.

¹¹ Parish 26.

¹² Christopher Finch, *Jim Henson: The Works* (New York: Random House, 1993) 8-9.

developed a reputation for zaniness with his unique puppets. In 1955, Jim Henson was given a five-minute show twice daily on WRC-TV, the local NBC affiliate. The show was called *Sam and Friends* and was aired at 6:25 PM before *The Huntley-Brinkley Report* and again at 11:25 PM before *The Tonight Show*.¹³ The format of the program was variety based and the puppeteers did not perform live vocals but rather performed lip-synch to records and pre-recorded tape. Henson and his performing partner, Jane Nebel, a fellow student at the University of Maryland, would pantomime to popular songs and it was an opportunity for Henson to experiment with puppets and television and the result of the combination of the two.

Henson's puppets were unlike the puppets that had previously appeared on television. They were not marionettes or glove puppets but rather were a new type of puppet, which have come to be called alternately "hand-and-mouth", "television," or, appropriately, "Muppet-style" puppets. They were made from soft materials like fabric and foam and so allowed their performer to manipulate the jaw in coordination with the lyrics of songs or to make facial expressions. Henson realized that the television camera brought the audience far closer to the puppet than it would be in a theater and so did not utilize the same techniques of theatrical puppetry that Bill Baird or Burr Tillstrom had on their previous successful shows. Daughter Cheryl Henson said, "It had never been done before. It had never been done before because no one had actually ever thought to build puppets in a special way for this new medium of television. They had taken puppets that were built for the theater and put

¹³ Finch 15.

them on television.”¹⁴ As son Brian Henson expressed it, “He created the Muppets to get into television. He didn’t create the Muppets and somebody said, ‘Wow, those Muppets are great. We gotta put them on television.’ It was all calculated the other way.”¹⁵

Because the Muppets were made for the medium, they could be developed to take advantage of the qualities of the television screen. Brian Henson remarked, “And it’s interesting because if you look at the early TV sets and the shape and the rounded corners and stuff like that, it’s a Muppet shape, you know.”¹⁶ Henson embraced the television screen as his puppet stage. Jane Henson (nee Nebel) said, “Puppets on the television screen was a whole different way of approaching puppets [Jim] was particularly intrigued with little, tiny movements. He felt that the puppet face on the screen filled the screen in as important a way as any human face and then, because it was an abstracted face, the puppet was really able to do super human things or beyond human or get away with anything.”¹⁷ Henson developed a performing style that incorporated lip-synch for the puppets. The way in which the puppeteer moved his hand inside the puppet’s head convincingly simulated the way a person’s mouth moves as he or she speaks. Cheryl Henson explains, “They had mouths that moved with your thumb . . . so that they could open and close their mouth to fit the words that were coming out to really make it look like the puppet is

¹⁴ Harry Smith, host and interviewer, *Biography Close-up: Sesame Street*, Television documentary, Interviewees Cheryl Henson Steve Whitmire, Joan Ganz Cooney (New York: Biography Channel, 18 Mar 2001).

¹⁵ Bay.

¹⁶ Bay.

¹⁷ Goldsmith.

saying those words.”¹⁸ Most hand-and-mouth puppeteers have since adopted the technique as the best way to have a puppet speak. “They called it the Henson Punch,” says Muppeteer Steve Whitmire. “It’s really based on a person’s own speech pattern. When you’re talking quietly your mouth opens less and when you hit an emphasis word, the mouth hits harder and it’s kind of, you’re punching that voice.”¹⁹ Puppets had mouths that could move for centuries prior to this innovation, but lip-synch is definitely a result of Jim Henson’s style of television puppetry.

Many have credited Jim Henson with the removal of the puppet stage on television. Henson was not the first to do so, as Baird’s work allowed the camera to pan and track through the puppet sets. Henson’s removal of the proscenium was unique as it allowed the audience a new perspective on the puppet and its relationship to the environment directly surrounding it. Friend and head writer for the Muppets, Jerry Juhl said, “[Television directors] had always kept the puppeteer behind the little proscenium or behind the little ledge Jim threw all that away immediately.”²⁰ No longer did a two-foot deep puppet stage or the picture frame of a proscenium arch restrict the puppet. Henson’s incredibly mobile Muppets, as he named his creations, could move about fairly freely on the television screen. “And now suddenly, you could get very, very close to a puppet,” continued Juhl, “and that

¹⁸ Smith.

¹⁹ Smith.

²⁰ Judy Kinberg, producer and director, *The World of Jim Henson*, Television special program, *Great Performances*, Interviewees Jerry Juhl, Jane Henson, Frank Oz (Thirteen/WNET, 1994).

allowed Jim to start working with these very flexible faces. Watch Kermit the Frog in close-ups and you'll see him run a gamut of emotions with little changes that are just tiny."²¹

With the close proximity of the camera to the puppets' faces, attention to detail became important in a different way. How the home viewer perceived the puppet on television was key to making the character live. "Their eyes stand out more than any other color on the character. They're white and black and they focus and they look at you," says Whitmire. "It was always very important to have characters whose eyes were looking directly at the camera or at another character or whatever so that they can talk to you and you really feel they're talking to you."²² The ability for the puppet to really focus came from another of Henson's major innovations, the use of the monitor. Burr Tillstrom had used a monitor on *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*, but it was a means of keeping the puppets centered on the screen and in the frame of the shot. The use of monitors by Henson's company served a different function. Said Henson, "One of the main reasons that our characters work as well as they do is because we're watching them on the monitors. . . . We're seeing this puppet just exactly as the audience is seeing it."²³ In order for the puppeteer to see exactly what the camera, and subsequently, the audience, was seeing, Henson positioned television monitors linked to the cameras around the studio floor. The monitor saw exactly what the camera recorded and the puppeteers could then see their own performance as it happened and from the point of view of

²¹ Kinberg.

²² Smith.

²³ Kinberg.

the audience. Henson, unlike other puppeteers, always watched a monitor instead of his puppet in order to retain the puppet's eye focus and give a performance that did not expose the performer's secrets or his arm. Jim Henson's earliest work often shows fragments of sleeves or the top of his head and these errors were later eliminated as multiple takes became possible. Henson's style allowed a puppeteer to know immediately if a take was spoiled because he or she could see the action happen in real time.

A COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS

Although Jim Henson had achieved his earliest goal of getting a job in television, he did not feel he was a puppeteer. Puppetry was a way to continue working in the medium he loved and to earn him notice from his peers in the business. "All the time I was in school I didn't take puppetry seriously. I mean, it didn't seem to be the sort of thing a grown man works at for a living."²⁴ Upon graduating from college, Henson took a trip to Europe with the aim to explore and escape, possibly into visual arts by becoming a painter. This was in 1958, and he left *Sam and Friends* literally in the capable hands of Jane Nebel. The two had formed a company, Henson, Inc., in 1957²⁵ and Nebel was half owner of the Muppets. It was she, with the performing assistance of Bob Payne, an old school acquaintance of Jim's,²⁶ which kept the program going while Henson was away. Henson visited

²⁴ Parish 42.

²⁵ Deanne Durrett, *The Importance of Jim Henson* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 1994) 23.

²⁶ Parish 43.

Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and England.²⁷ Everywhere he went, he was drawn to puppet performances, which seemed to be much more common and to occur more frequently in Europe.

Henson noticed several things about the puppet performances in Europe. The audience was composed of people from every age group and walk of life; it was truly a popular folk art. The puppeteers took their craft very seriously and the work was a result of years of training and experience, often a family business. The way the audience responded to the puppets was different to Henson as well. The puppet seemed to be taken seriously and its views were worthy of consideration. Henson said, “I saw that puppetry was truly an art form in Europe. It was something that could be done artistically, with creativity. Back home, there weren’t all that many puppeteers, but in Europe they are everywhere and everybody goes to puppet shows. It’s an integral part of their lives”²⁸ The idea that puppets could speak to everyone interested Henson greatly and he began to reconsider puppetry as a serious enterprise rather than merely a means to an end. He wondered if it might be possible to democratize puppetry in the United States, making it available and entertaining to as wide a public as in Europe.

Henson returned from Europe and began to pursue puppetry with more intensity and focus than he had previously. He said, “It was at that point I realized that puppetry was an art form, a valid way to do interesting things. I came back from that trip all fired up to do wonderful puppetry.”²⁹ In order to learn more about the

²⁷ Durrett 24.

²⁸ Durrett 26.

²⁹ Alison Inches, *Jim Henson's Designs and Doodles* (New York: Abrams, 2001) 32.

craft of puppetry, he made a connection with the Puppeteers of America (POA), the national organization devoted to connecting puppeteers with each other and promoting the art form. His previous belief that there were not many puppeteers in the United States must have been challenged when he attended his first POA National Festival in Detroit in 1960.³⁰ The 1960 National was the twenty-fifth National Festival and it was there that Jim Henson met Burr Tillstrom. Tillstrom remembered it as a meeting that was the beginning of a friendship as well as a creative collaboration between puppet builder Don Sahlin and Jim Henson.³¹ After making the connection with Sahlin, Henson called upon him to create the puppets for a commercial he was making in Canada.³² One of the puppets, Rowlf the Dog, would become the first Muppet to be a household name, appearing on *The Jimmy Dean Show* from 1963 until 1966.³³ The next National Festival was held in Pacific Grove, California³⁴ and would prove to be another chance to meet future collaborators. At the 1961 Festival, Henson met Frank Oz, the performer who would create such characters as Bert, Cookie Monster, Fozzie Bear, and Miss Piggy, as well as Jerry Juhl, a puppeteer who would become the head writer for the Muppets. Juhl said that Henson had shown him his work at the convention and he felt Henson was “like a sailor who had studied the compass and found that there was a fifth direction in which one could sail.”³⁵ Henson’s enthusiasm for puppetry was contagious and, in such a charged atmosphere already devoted to puppetry, Juhl became a member of

³⁰ Durrett 28.

³¹ Durrett 28.

³² Durrett 29.

³³ Durrett 37.

³⁴ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory*, ed. Fred Thompson (Connecticut: Puppeteers of America, 2006-7) 75.

³⁵ Parish 49.

his production team. Henson became such an enthusiastic supporter of the POA National Festival that he served as Chairman, with Earl Wertheim, of the 1963 National in Hurleyville, New York.³⁶ He was also president of the POA at that time, serving from 1962 until 1963. At age twenty-six, he was the youngest person to ever hold the office.³⁷

Henson became involved in another prominent puppetry organization, the Union Internationale de la Marionette (UNIMA). UNIMA was formed in 1929 in Prague and is the oldest theater organization in the world.³⁸ The preamble to the UNIMA statute states that “UNIMA unites the puppeteers of the whole world. They regard puppetry as an art which brings all countries together, an art addressing itself both to children and adults. The members of UNIMA wish to place their art at the service of peace throughout the world.”³⁹ The original members of the organization were Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Belgium, England, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, and the United States. It was adopted as a member of the International Theatre Institute in 1959 and thus was made a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).⁴⁰ In 1966, there were over a hundred members of UNIMA in the U.S. and a new organization, UNIMA-USA, was formed. Jim Henson was its first chairman.⁴¹ UNIMA-USA’s statement of purpose is “to link puppeteers nationally and internationally; publish information

³⁶ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory* 75.

³⁷ Paul Eide with Alan Cook and Steve Abrams, editor, *A Timeline of Puppetry in America*, special edition of *Puppetry Journal* (Minneapolis: Puppeteers of America Inc., 2003), 57.

³⁸ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory*, ed. Lia and Philip Shore Powell (Atlanta: UNIMA-USA, 2006) inside cover.

³⁹ Max Jacob, "Union Internationale Des Marionettes (UNIMA)," *The Puppet Theatre of the Modern World*, ed. Ewald and Elizabeth Strick (trans) Osers (Boston: Plays, Inc., 1967) 49.

⁴⁰ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* 5.

⁴¹ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* 5.

on and for the field; offer support and technical assistance for professional puppeteers through seminars, conferences, and symposia; stimulate the general public's interest in the art of puppetry; and promote the visibility of U.S. puppeteers all over the world."⁴² UNIMA-USA, based in Atlanta, Georgia at the Center for Puppetry Arts, was incorporated into a non-profit organization by a committee led by Jim Henson in 1979.⁴³ Henson served the following two years as president of the organization, elected by his peers on the UNIMA-USA, Inc. board of directors. Henson has also been made a "Member of Honor" by UNIMA, a distinction held by fourteen Americans that recognizes "personalities who have made an extraordinary contribution to the development of the art of puppetry and whose work is of international importance."⁴⁴

Aside from the foundation of UNIMA-USA, 1966 was an important year for Henson's television work. It was on September 18, 1966 that the Muppets made their first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.⁴⁵ Running for twenty-three years, from 1948 until 1971, *The Ed Sullivan Show* was a weekly variety program featuring musicians from the world of classical and popular music, comedians, performances from Broadway shows, dancers, and novelty acts of every flavor. One of the more popular and frequently featured acts was an Italian puppet mouse named Topo Gigio. Topo Gigio first appeared April 14, 1963,⁴⁶ and was featured on the program an

⁴² *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* inside cover.

⁴³ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* 5.

⁴⁴ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* 7.

⁴⁵ *The Muppets, The Muppets, Muppet Magic from The Ed Sullivan Show*, DVD. Perf. Ed Sullivan Jim Henson, Frank Oz (Los Angeles: Sofa Entertainment, 2003).

⁴⁶ Jerry Bowles, *A Thousand Sundays: The Story of The Ed Sullivan Show* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980) 176.

astonishing 50 times.⁴⁷ The puppet was performed in a manner different from the string puppets, glove puppets, and even the Muppets. Three puppeteers dressed in black manipulated the ten-inch tall mouse on a black velour background using small sticks connected to the puppet's head, legs, and arms. The puppeteers, Maria Parego, Federico Gioli, and Annabella Gioli, were invisible as a result of the black clothes on the black background while Giuseppe Mazzullo, offstage, provided the mouse's voice, usually asking "Eddie" for a "kees."⁴⁸ The performers were never introduced to the audience because Sullivan did not wish to spoil the illusion that Topo Gigio was real.⁴⁹ Over the years, Sullivan featured many other puppeteers who did get the opportunity to introduce themselves. Bil Baird appeared on the show thirteen times, once with a puppet of Sullivan himself in 1951.⁵⁰ Ventriloquists were also a favorite act on the program. Shari Lewis appeared five times,⁵¹ Edgar Bergen appeared seven times,⁵² Paul Winchell appeared three times,⁵³ and Señor Wences appeared twenty-three times.⁵⁴ The Muppets performed on the show a total of twenty-five times⁵⁵ affording Henson some wide exposure and the opportunity to experiment with an audience of every demographic group.

The Sullivan pieces varied greatly from one another and are available for scrutiny for the first time in DVD release. Two of the performances are Christmas

⁴⁷ John Leonard, Text author, *Really Big Show*, Ed. Claudia Falkenburg & Andrew Solt (USA: Sarah Lazin Books, 1992) 255.

⁴⁸ Bowles 175-6.

⁴⁹ Bowles 176.

⁵⁰ Leonard 111.

⁵¹ Leonard 254.

⁵² Leonard 252.

⁵³ Leonard 255.

⁵⁴ Leonard 255.

⁵⁵ Leonard 254.

special features, one showcases the newly created *Sesame Street* sensation Big Bird, and some are revivals of tried and true routines from the *Sam and Friends* days. One of the more unusual appearances happened on February 18, 1968 and featured puppets made from tubing, light bulbs, and signature Muppet ping-pong eyeballs. The puppets, four in number, have slogans to offer to each other. Two of them keep chorusing “Business, business, business, business,” and they make the sounds of a cash register in punctuation to their words. The other two attempt to sway them with ideals such as love, beauty, and joy and as they speak, light bulbs on their heads illuminate. Initially, merely annoyed by the idealistic characters, the “businessmen” continue their chant in praise of financial growth and capital gain. Eventually, violence erupts in response to the continued interruption of the puppets that praise “romantic dreams” and “poetic words.” The piece turns into a battleground, where the tube bodies of the puppets double as cannons. The idealists win, having blasted the capitalists away, and say, beginning their own chorus, “Peace, success, victory, opportunity, comfort, security, benefits, growth, wealth, diversity, dividends, profit, capital, economy.” The puppets then end the piece where it began, chanting “business, business, business, business.”⁵⁶ The piece says a great deal about Henson’s awareness of what success can do to an artist and it shows in the care he took with his creations throughout his career.

In 1968, aware that the Muppets were gaining a larger audience, with appearances ranging from Jimmy Dean’s program to variety performances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *The Tonight Show*, Henson created a television special explaining

⁵⁶ *Muppet Magic from The Ed Sullivan Show*.

how he and his team of artists worked. In cooperation with the York City Schools and channel WITF-TV, Jim Henson presented “Adventure in the Arts: The Muppets on Puppets.”⁵⁷ The program featured Henson, Oz, Juhl, and Sahlin and showed their creative process from rough sketch to puppet construction to performance. The program provided the viewer with some history of puppetry, as well as displaying several different forms that the puppet can take from rod puppets to marionettes to finger puppets. The program opened with Henson explaining, “My name is Jim Henson and I am a puppeteer. I’m called a puppeteer because I do puppets. There are all different kinds of puppets There have been puppets almost as long as there have been people.”⁵⁸ The multiple forms that a puppet can take always interested Henson and the different forms could have different functions in his medium as well as on the live puppet stage. Most interestingly, the special showed the use of the monitor to the audience at home, allowing them to see exactly how Henson worked. Rather than protecting his system as a trade secret, Henson openly explained the entire set-up. The spirit of Tony Sarg’s earlier “how-to” publication lived on in Jim Henson. He says that “if any of you are vitally interested in puppetry,” he or she should contact the Puppeteers of America, while providing the organization’s address.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Jim Henson's World of Television*, museum guide (New York: Museum of Television & Radio, 1992), 38.

⁵⁸ Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* (New York: Hyperion, 2005) 51.

⁵⁹ “The Muppets on Puppets,” *Adventure in the Arts*, host Jim Henson, dir. Tim Steele, NET, 1968. NOTE: This special presentation is now available on the DVD release of the third season of *The Muppet Show*.

A COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION

The increased exposure that *The Jimmy Dean Show*, variety appearances and specials like “The Muppets on Puppets” brought Henson his next big opportunity. Joan Ganz Cooney of the Children’s Television Workshop was developing a new program that would serve pre-school children by providing them with simple counting skills and alphabet recognition. The program was to be set in the inner city on a street that came to be called *Sesame Street*. The developers of the program were interested in incorporating puppets into the content because children had previously responded well to puppets on television. The name that was suggested to Cooney was that of Jim Henson. She did not personally know the puppeteer but had seen his work and admired it. The Muppets were brought into the project and, after testing, they became the natural stars of the program. *Sesame Street* debuted on November 10, 1969⁶⁰ and has been running in the United States and internationally ever since.

Sesame Street was an opportunity for the Muppets to interact with humans as if they were real people also living in the neighborhood. It was also an opportunity for Henson to experiment with filmmaking and animation as well as to continue to explore puppetry. Henson had been nominated for an Academy Award for Best Short Film in 1965 for his clever, sound-synch driven film, *Time Piece*. Many of the films that he developed for *Sesame Street* utilized the same quick cut techniques and clever imagery. He was also able to make animated films to supplement number and letter learning, sometimes using puppets, sometimes paper-cuts, sometimes paint.

⁶⁰ David Borgenicht, *Sesame Street Unpaved* (New York: Children's Television Workshop, 1998) 17.

The variety of media the camera could record allowed Henson the freedom to manipulate the images, just as he might manipulate a puppet. *Sesame Street* gave Henson the chance to try something new with his puppetry-full body figures. Though he had made commercials in the 1960s for La Choy Chow Mein that featured a full-body dragon,⁶¹ he wanted to try using a large-scale character to really perform with the actors. The result of his vision was Big Bird, an eight-foot tall yellow bird, performed by puppeteer Carroll Spinney. Big Bird was immediately popular and became the mascot for, not only *Sesame Street*, but the Children's Television Workshop in many ways as well. *Sesame Street* was a success and this success was a mixed-blessing for Henson. It enabled him to have a secure living and a stable base of operations in New York City and allowed him to continue to build a group of artists with whom he wanted to work, keeping Frank Oz and Jerry Juhl as close collaborators. It established the Muppets, however, as the special province of children. Henson's career had always been geared toward family and adult audiences and suddenly he was labeled the number one performer for kids.

Jerry Juhl observed, "Puppeteers, traditionally, are always, certainly in this society, automatically pigeon-holed as children's performers. And it was exactly what Jim didn't want."⁶² Henson had a vision for a variety program featuring the Muppets, but his work on *Sesame Street* narrowed the perception of puppets by potential producers and broadcasters. Son Brian reported, "And at that point I think he was frustrated 'cause he was saying, 'Well, hang on, the Muppets . . . we've been performing in Las Vegas and doing *The Ed Sullivan Show*. This was the only kids'

⁶¹ Finch 24.

⁶² Kinberg.

show we did, just because it was a big hit doesn't mean that's all we can do, that's not what we ever were."⁶³ Try as Henson might, he was unable to avoid being placed in a special category devoted solely to children. Henson himself said, "I think puppetry itself works very well for children It somehow relates to why kids like teddy bears and dolls. I don't know exactly what that is. But there's something about this small figure that you can relate to" ⁶⁴ Henson maintained, however, that puppetry did not only work for children. His travels in Europe and the performances he had seen with the Puppeteers of America had testified to their appeal. Henson believed, "All of this stuff is about mankind trying to see himself in perspective It's trying to figure out what you are and what you're doing here. This is the kind of thing that puppetry does very well. It goes way back to when men first carved little wooden dolls of themselves and drew stick figures on cave walls. . . . Puppetry is part of the real raw essential elements of all that stuff."⁶⁵ In an effort to engage with that essence, Henson continued to produce provocative television projects that placed the Muppets outside the realm of being only children's entertainment.

In 1975, Lorne Michaels, a Canadian television producer, developed the idea for a late night comedy program that would be broadcast live. The cast would be a group of unknowns, taken from the realms of improvisational comedy and stand-up. The show was called *NBC's Saturday Night*, later to become *Saturday Night Live*. Michaels invited the Muppets to be a part of the program, admiring their unusual

⁶³ Bay.

⁶⁴ Goldsmith.

⁶⁵ Henson 164.

humor and the way they engaged the audience. “I had enormous respect for Jim and it was fine for me wherever he was going to head. You know, because it would at least be interesting,” remembered Michaels.⁶⁶ Henson and associates created the “Land of Gorch” and some very un-cuddly Muppet denizens, including King Ploobis and his toady, Scred. Michael Frith, a designer working with Henson, was responsible for the overall appearance of Gorch and its residents.⁶⁷ The characters were fairly repugnant in appearance and perhaps the most realistically detailed that Henson had done to that point. The characters had glass eyes from a taxidermist, making them seem more alive because their eyes reflected light.⁶⁸

The humor incorporated in the Muppet segments of the program was bawdy, with both Ploobis and Peuta, his queen, engaged in extramarital frivolities, and geared absolutely toward the “frank and intelligent . . . young urban adults” in the show’s target audience.⁶⁹ It was the first time since before *Sesame Street* that the Muppets were being broadcast solely to adults. Jane Henson remembered about the *Sam and Friend* days, “We always had a very sophisticated adult audience, right from the beginning, and I think it was very adventurous of the station to be willing to program our puppets at that time.”⁷⁰ As Jim Henson continued to strive to gain acceptance for the Muppets as family, not just children’s, entertainment, he observed, “It’s something I’ve always faced, this slight condescension toward puppets It’s always been practically impossible to talk the networks into any

⁶⁶ Bay.

⁶⁷ Henson Associates, *The Art of the Muppets* (New York: Muppet Press/Bantam, 1980).

⁶⁸ Henson Associates 24.

⁶⁹ Henson Associates 24.

⁷⁰ Bay.

kind of puppet show for adults. We're never thought of for prime time. It's always a vehicle for kids."⁷¹ The target audience of *Saturday Night* was right for Henson, but the Land of Gorch did not make for a good match with the rest of the program.

In 2006, the first season of *Saturday Night Live* became available on DVD for home viewing. For the first time since their original broadcast one may conduct a careful examination of the Muppets' appearances on the program, revealing some of the reasons why the Muppets did not remain a part of the show. The Land of Gorch was an unrecognizable terrain, with "stagnant mud flats" and "rotting forests."⁷² They existed in their own completely separate world and therefore had less relevance to the rest of the program. When *Sesame Street* was in development, there had been a move to keep the Muppets separate from the life of the rest of the program.⁷³ Cooney realized that would have been an error for the children's program, but it turned out to be an error for the late night fare as well. There are episodes where the Muppets are quite funny and the studio audience seems to enjoy them immensely. In six of their fourteen appearances, the Muppets interacted with either the guest host or a member of the human cast of *Saturday Night*. The puppets left the Land of Gorch and crossed into the "real" world of the television show. These instances are the strongest performances given by the Muppets and are the precursor, in many ways, to the format of *The Muppet Show*.

⁷¹ Durrett 48.

⁷² *Saturday Night Live, Saturday Night Live The Complete First Season*, DVD, perf. Gilda Radner Lorne Michaels, Chevy Chase, producer, writers, performers (New York: Universal, 2006).

⁷³ Borgenicht 15-6.

Lily Tomlin was the host on November 22, 1975 and the Muppet appearance begins in the Land of Gorch with Ploobis and Pueta noting that Scred has been behaving differently than usual. Pueta thinks he might be in love with Tomlin. Ploobis replies, “Scred in love? The last time he fell in love was when he went head over heels for Fran Allison. Remember that? He formed the Gorch chapter of the *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie* fan club.”⁷⁴ Pueta’s suspicions about Scred’s feelings are confirmed when she finds a picture of Tomlin over his bed and a picture of his old flame, Fran Allison, in the garbage can. The camera leaves Ploobis and Pueta wondering where Scred might be and finds that he is with Tomlin. He confesses his feelings to her and she diplomatically says, “It’s difficult for a woman in my position to have my name linked romantically with a puppet.”⁷⁵ The two agree to be friends and sing “I’ve Got You Babe.” It is fun, funny, and shows the Muppet character as functional in a “non-Muppet” world. Tomlin would work with the Muppets again in 1981, appearing on a Muppet special entitled “The Muppets Go to the Movies.”⁷⁶

Henson did not have creative freedom with the characters but rather performed the work of *Saturday Night’s* writers, who did not understand how to write for puppets and certainly not how to write for Muppets. Henson reflected on the experience that the writers, often members of the performing ensemble, would “write lovely, far-out things for themselves and square, dull nothingness for our characters.”⁷⁷ As the “Not Ready for Prime-Time Players” gained a following, the residents of Gorch had less and less to do. Candice Bergen, a guest host that first

⁷⁴ *Saturday Night Live*.

⁷⁵ *Saturday Night Live*.

⁷⁶ *Jim Henson’s World of Television* 41.

⁷⁷ Durrett 60.

season and a future guest on *The Muppet Show*, said, “Nobody quite knew what to do with the Muppets on *Saturday Night Live* because And they were, of course, they were given a little more latitude there so what they did was a little weirder, a little more on the edge.”⁷⁸ The Christmas episode from December 20 features Bergen, who is the only human to appear in the actual Land of Gorch set. She sings a Christmas carol with Ploobis and Scred. This episode also features a peripheral Muppet in the form of talking food, a future Muppet mainstay.

The next two episodes of the program keep the denizens of Gorch firmly in Gorch. The episode that aired on January 25, 1976 has Scred confronting Gilda Radner, another future *Muppet Show* host, about the Muppets’ lack of respect on the show. “We’re tired of bein’ second class citizens around here. How come we’re not in any of the major sketches?” He proceeds to do a parody performance of “Weekend Update,” a feature of the program that has been in every episode since its premiere. The appeal of the Muppet parody gets repeated in the March 13 episode where Scred tells Anthony Perkins that he does not always *have* to be a Muppet; he can be Emily Litella, one of Radner’s recurring characters, who consistently misunderstands the spoken word. The writing here is quite funny. Scred, as Emily, says that he was outraged when he overheard someone in a restaurant ordering a “toasted English Muppet.” He continues to say that he felt offended by the comment and that, if one were to eat such a dish, “the burnt fabric would get stuck in your teeth.”⁷⁹ By that appearance, it was clear that the Muppets and the new show were not a good mix. Michaels said, “I would much have preferred Kermit and the sort of

⁷⁸ Bay.

⁷⁹ *Saturday Night Live*.

more joyous characters, but there were really, some really funny characters in it and it had a real freshness to it.”⁸⁰ In spite of the freshness, the Muppets were aware that their time at the show was nearing its end.

On an episode originally aired on April 24, 1976 with guest host Raquel Welch, yet another star to appear on *The Muppet Show*, Scred and Ploobis have sneaked into the studio because the security guard will no longer allow them through the door. Welch spots them and compliments them on being so lovable and cuddly. They immediately begin to make passes at the sex symbol. Welch replies, “Are you talking about making love to me? Because you guys are just puppets, right? I mean, you don’t even exist below the waist.” Both Muppets look down in nervous wonder. Welch continues, “I mean, all you are is just the top half of a person, right?” The Muppets are bewildered and get shuffled offstage by Chevy Chase. Later in the episode, they discover the Mighty Favog, a character who looked like a combination of Jimmy Durante and the Sphinx, backstage. He is covered in dust and cobwebs. When Ploobis and Scred tell him that they have no lower half, Favog replies, “Don’t look down.” He goes on to tell them, “Listen, you’re only puppets. You’re not even real. You just get put away in the trunk It don’t hurt to get put in the trunk. Puppets don’t have feelin’s.”⁸¹

Though the Muppets did not work for *Saturday Night*, Henson was on the brink of his next great success. In fact, in the Anthony Perkins episode, Scred told the actor, “We’ve been gone for a little while. We were over in England, doin’ a

⁸⁰ Bay.

⁸¹ *Saturday Night Live*.

show over there”⁸² The *Saturday Night Muppets* may not actually have been in England, but Henson certainly was. Jim Henson finally got his idea for a variety show accepted, by English entertainment magnate Lew Grade (later to become Lord Grade). Unlike the three networks in the United States, to whom Henson had pitched the project, Grade saw the potential for the Muppets as pre-prime time entertainment and booked Henson to make twenty-four episodes, in England, to be syndicated around the globe. It aired in the United States, being picked up by CBS, at 7:30 p.m., in an excellent position to lead into the prime-time line-up. The first episode of *The Muppet Show* was filmed on January 26, 1976 and featured Juliet Prowse as the guest star.⁸³ The guest star was an idea to reinforce the adult appeal of the show. It was not just an endless array of colorful, fuzzy puppets on the screen, but a legitimate and respected star would perform alongside them. In the first season, it was sometimes difficult to secure a guest star, due to what might be called puppet reluctance, an apprehension about appearing with puppets, as well as the requirement of international travel to shoot the program. Once the show was established as a success, stars were eager to appear. As Frank Oz remarked, “So, *The Muppet Show* to a degree was an overnight success, but like any overnight success, it took twenty years to get there.”⁸⁴

⁸² *Saturday Night Live*.

⁸³ The Muppets, *The Muppet Show*, DVD, Perf. Frank Oz Jim Henson, Richard Hunt, performers, writing staff, 1976-7 (California: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2005).

⁸⁴ Kinberg.

A CONTRIBUTION TO PUPPETRY

Jim Henson had established himself as the most-widely recognized puppeteer in the United States and globally. By 1978, *The Muppet Show* had been seen by 230 million viewers in 106 countries.⁸⁵ During the height of the Muppets' popularity, Henson had remained involved in the POA and UNIMA-USA. In 1969, Henson had won the President's Award from the POA that recognizes puppeteers for excellence over a period of years.⁸⁶ In 1975, he proposed that UNIMA-USA create an award, "Citations for Excellence in the Art of Puppetry."⁸⁷ Since that time, UNIMA-USA has given its Citation to "shows that touch their audiences deeply; that totally engage, enchant and enthrall." The Citation is awarded by a committee of forty reviewers throughout North America, based on favorable reviews sent to the Citations Committee. The Citation provides a performer with "credible recognition" to assist him or her with the creation of audiences and performance venues.⁸⁸ For many puppeteers, the Citation can make an enormous difference in their work being seen and accepted as art. A Citation can come, though, only after the performance has been envisioned, developed, and performed. It does not supply an artist with the resources to begin the process anew.

Jim Henson had an excellent head for business and managed to create artistic and creative work that earned his company its keep. Cooney once said of him, "Jim

⁸⁵ Nathan Aaseng, *Jim Henson: Muppet Master* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Co, 1988) 25.

⁸⁶ Paul with Steve Abrams Eide, "In the Company of Genius--50 Years of Jim Henson's Muppets," *Puppetry Journal* 57.1 (Fall 2005): 5.

⁸⁷ Eide, *A Timeline of Puppetry in America* 57.

⁸⁸ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* 9.

is an idealist, he is a businessman, a real businessman. He can look at his organization, himself and his work and function as if he were an objective agent handling that. He has handled himself extremely well, I think, and extremely carefully.”⁸⁹ Unlike some artists, who eschew commercial success for fear of compromising the creative vision, Henson knew how to balance both sides of his company. “He always knew from the very beginning,” recalled Frank Oz, “that commerce and art were a symbiotic duo. That he had to make the money in commercials to do the stuff he wanted to do.”⁹⁰ The early commercials Henson had created in Washington D.C. for various local products had paid for his experimental film, *Time Piece*. Money and art did not have to be separated in Henson’s company.

Henson maintained that his work was primarily a creative enterprise but recognized “that business enables art “to happen,” and that business plays an essential role in communicating art to a broad audience. As both artists and businesspersons, we understand the value of both worlds, and so we bring them together in a way that facilitates the realization of our artistic vision.”⁹¹ Henson knew an opportunity when one arose and took advantage of each one to advance his vision. He was also aware that his success and the opportunities it afforded him were not available to every puppeteer. Additionally, the success of the Muppets on television generated an array of imitators and enthusiasts. The Muppets had redefined puppetry, but in the act of re-definition, there is always definition. Henson, as the most visible member of the puppetry community, ran the risk of

⁸⁹ Goldsmith.

⁹⁰ Kinberg.

⁹¹ Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* 87.

obscuring, unintentionally, the visions of other puppet artists. In an attempt to preserve the variety of visions and approaches that comprise puppetry, Jim Henson invited guest puppeteers to *The Muppet Show*. In the first season of the show, he invited Richard Bradshaw from Australia to perform his shadow puppets. Kermit introduces Bradshaw on the episode featuring Ethel Merman by saying, “We on *The Muppet Show* are very interested in puppets, for some strange reason. Anyway, tonight we’re really delighted to have with us a man who produces the world’s funniest shadows.”⁹² The 2005 DVD release of the episode includes a feature entitled “Muppet Morsels” which is an additional subtitle track providing information about the show’s filming, the guest star, or other tidbits of interest. The morsel here mentions the Puppeteers of America and provides details about shadow puppetry, further spreading the interest in other forms of puppetry to a home viewing audience. Bradshaw’s shadow puppetry is simple and funny and meshes fairly well with the Muppets humorous style.

As a real privilege for Henson Associates, Edgar Bergen was a guest star on an episode in season two, with Mortimer Snerd and Charlie McCarthy in tow. His work was so inspiring that Fozzie Bear made himself a ventriloquist figure named Chuckie to capitalize on Bergen’s comic success. Fozzie, like so many members of the home audience, so believes in the characters created on the screen that he does not realize that Chuckie will remain silent until he, as ventriloquist, speaks *for* him.⁹³ The subtle acknowledgement of the performer’s role in bringing the character to life

⁹² *The Muppet Show*.

⁹³ *The Muppets, Best of The Muppet Show*, Videocassette. Perf. Frank Oz Jim Henson, Jerry Nelson (Jim Henson Home Entertainment & Time Life Video, 2000).

was always part of the Muppets' humor. Another example comes from the Mummenschanz episode, aired in season one. Kermit introduces them as "distant cousins of the Muppets" and Statler and Waldorf, the two old men who routinely heckle the show, talk about their performance. Waldorf, performed by Henson, says of the Swiss mimes' piece, "Fantastic. Incredible! They remind me of puppets." Statler, performed by Richard Hunt, replies, "Puppets. I've always hated puppets." Waldorf retorts, "Ah, you're a traitor to your class."⁹⁴

The other guest puppeteer who made two appearances on *The Muppet Show* was American Bruce Schwartz. His puppetry did not resemble the Muppets in the slightest, but room was made for him on the Cleo Laine episode in the second season as well as on the Señor Wences episode in season five. The latter episode is of particular interest because Kermit declares it to be a celebration of puppetry. As the episode progresses, he comments, "You know, I just love the show tonight. I think the idea of an all-puppet show is not too shabby."⁹⁵ The episode features a rendition of the Fifth Dimension hit song, "Puppet Man" performed by Pinocchio, in Muppet form. Kermit gets to explain to Gonzo the Great, a character who performs bizarre acts and calls them art, that a puppet is "a doll that's made to look alive by wiggling strings or putting your hand inside it," to which Gonzo replies, "What a stupid idea. Who wants to watch dolls wiggle? I mean, even *I* wouldn't do an act like that. Doll wiggling, talk about boring." As Gonzo leaves, Kermit looks into the camera and says, "I didn't have the heart to tell him."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *The Muppet Show*.

⁹⁵ *Best of The Muppet Show*.

⁹⁶ *Best of The Muppet Show*.

Bruce Schwartz's incredible performance of a Japanese ghost story with a rod puppet, in full view of the audience comes immediately after another Muppet, Beauregard, one of Dave Goetz's characters, performs an amateur Punch and Judy. As Beau performs with Punch and the crocodile, Miss Piggy enters to complain about not being featured on the show that night because the "dolls" are going to be on. Kermit says, "Piggy, these are not just dolls. Puppetry is an art form, Piggy." As Piggy and Kermit's discussion about the merits of puppets in general and puppet violence in particular gets more heated, Beau stops performing his show to watch them. When Piggy characteristically resolves the discussion with a karate chop, Beau calls out, "Bravo, bravo."⁹⁷ The moment establishes, in my estimation, Kermit and Piggy as America's version of Punch and Judy. As the episode nears conclusion, Gonzo, who previously decided that, "Wiggling dolls is weird. In fact, it might even be sick," decides that puppetry might be interesting enough for even his tastes. By proxy, the audience also acknowledges its interest in the form.

The inclusion of the guest puppeteers on *The Muppet Show* presented them within the context of the Muppet world of television. Puppetry is a live theatrical art form and Henson was keenly aware of the many talented artists performing in theaters, schools, and found spaces who needed support for their work. In 1982, he established the Jim Henson Foundation. It was and still is the only grant making institution in the United States with a mission to promote puppetry.⁹⁸ In its first year, the Foundation awarded grants to five artists or groups. One grant was to Julie

⁹⁷ *Best of The Muppet Show*.

⁹⁸ "The Jim Henson Foundation," 2006, The Jim Henson Foundation, 13 Feb 2007 <www.hensonfoundation.org>.

Taymor, the director who would eventually win a Tony Award for her vision of *The Lion King* in 1997, one was to Janie Geiser, who is the now director of the Cotsen Center at the California Institute of the Arts, one was to Vermont's Sandglass Theater, who regularly hold a summer puppetry intensive where participants are able to learn the art of puppetry performance.⁹⁹ These performers have established long careers in which they share what they have learned with beginning puppeteers in order to promote puppetry. The other grants that year went to the Underground Railway Theater in Boston and to UNIMA-USA. The grant to UNIMA-USA enabled the organization to bring Albrecht Roser, a marionette performer from Germany, to the United States for an American tour. The grants were not localized to New York, and the Foundation has since introduced "thousands of adults and families to the magic of puppet theater through grantmaking, artist advocacy and public awareness efforts, and other outreach activities."¹⁰⁰

Jim Henson was always acutely interested in exploring what the puppet could do on film and by 1982 he had already created two successful Muppet films, *The Muppet Movie* in 1979 and *The Great Muppet Caper* in 1981.¹⁰¹ In 1982, Jim Henson's most ambitious project, an all-puppet fantasy film entitled *The Dark Crystal*, was released. It had taken five years to produce and cost about \$20 million dollars.¹⁰² It incorporated the most sophisticated puppets ever seen on film. Henson was building on the recent success of characters such as Yoda from *The Empire Strikes Back*, a character performed by colleague Frank Oz. Henson was convinced

⁹⁹ Eide, *A Timeline of Puppetry in America* 73.

¹⁰⁰ "The Jim Henson Foundation."

¹⁰¹ Durrett 8.

¹⁰² Durrett 79.

that well-acted, highly detailed, fully realized puppet characters could engage audiences in the same way that live actors can. Henson's film gave him the opportunity to build an entire world from top to bottom and populate it with creatures unlike any ever seen before on film. They were manipulated or moved utilizing various techniques, some from puppetry, some from mime and dance, and some using innovations in technology that would be incorporated into the Henson toolkit for future projects. Radio control systems for details like eye blinks and pupil dilation were installed in Kira, the female protagonist of the film, to enable puppeteer Kathryn Mullen to manipulate the character with more freedom.¹⁰³ Other characters were connected to cable control systems and teams of as many as seven puppeteers worked together to bring each creature to life. The constructed actors in the film were referred to as creatures, rather than Muppets or puppets. "I have a feeling that the characters are just not Muppets at all. We hesitate to call them puppets even," said Henson in an interview. He continues to explain that he loves puppetry but feels that *The Dark Crystal* is "trying to go toward a sense of realism - toward a reality of creatures that are actually alive and we're mixing up puppetry and all kinds of other techniques. It's into the same bag as E.T. and Yoda, wherein you're trying to create something that people will actually believe, but it's not so much a symbol of the thing, but you're trying to do the thing itself."¹⁰⁴

The creatures that appeared in the film were among the first of Henson's creations to be based on another artist's designs. Illustrator Brian Froud was the

¹⁰³ Finch 179-80.

¹⁰⁴ Judy Harris, "Muppet Master: An Interview with Jim Henson," *Muppet Central*, Articles, Transcript of Telephone Interview, 21 Sep 1998, Muppet Central.Com, 24 Apr 2007 <<http://www.muppetcentral.com/articles>>.

conceptual designer for *The Dark Crystal* and would later serve the same function on *Labyrinth*.¹⁰⁵ The incorporation of another artist's vision was very important to Henson. He said, "After a while, *The Muppet Show* had gotten into such a mixture of styles that I found the idea of going to an extremely unified style really refreshing. To put all of those design decisions into one person's mind—one person's sense of judgment—I loved that idea."¹⁰⁶ He wanted to create the entire look of the world and Henson began brainstorming in 1978, before *The Muppet Movie* was even begun.¹⁰⁷ "I wanted to create the world first. The visual world. What the creatures looked like... what the whole place was. I wanted to start with that and let the story grow."¹⁰⁸ It was not so much an attempt to distance himself from the fuzzy, crazy world of the Muppets, as an attempt to do something different, something satisfying in a different way. He reflected, "And it's fun for us to try to do these things, which are quite complicated technically. At the same time, I'm not sure if that does anything better than the old sock puppets, which are like Kermit. So it's two different kinds of things."¹⁰⁹ In spite of the possibility that simplicity was best, Henson loved the technological aspect of the work. Son Brian said that his father was a "huge gadget fan" and that he loved "the magical properties of technology."¹¹⁰ Jerry Juhl remembered that aspect of Henson as well; "We always used to kid Jim that after telling everybody 'simple is good,' he would turn around and try to produce the most complicated work in the world and just about wipe out all of us—

¹⁰⁵ Finch 167.

¹⁰⁶ Finch 169.

¹⁰⁷ Matt Bacon, *No Strings Attached* (New York: MacMillan, 1997) 12.

¹⁰⁸ Bacon 21.

¹⁰⁹ Kinberg.

¹¹⁰ Bacon 14.

him most of all—in the process.”¹¹¹ Even with an attraction to technical wizardry, Henson never forgot the importance of the live performer underneath the technology. He discussed the use of radio control on the series *Fraggle Rock*, a children’s programming venture that ran simultaneously on HBO and the Canadian Broadcasting Company from 1983 to 1986,¹¹² saying, that a puppet “can talk while he goes riding across on a motor scooter, but basically, the performance is still coming from the performer. And I think that always has to be a key thing to us. . . . I think it’s that sense of performance that is always essential to everything we’ve ever done.”¹¹³ The humanity and soul of the performer is manifest in the work, whether it be a sock puppet or an animatronic figure.

However, Henson’s enthusiasm for the project did not result in it being a success, in box office terms or critically. Audiences reportedly had difficulty accessing the film, perhaps because of the lack of human beings. Both Yoda and E.T. had been co-actors with living people and were able to be accepted as part of their living world. Henson was disappointed by the failure of *The Dark Crystal* but co-director Frank Oz said, “I think he would have preferred to be in this position by trying something that pushes the envelope than by just being safe.”¹¹⁴ The next project, *Labyrinth* (1986) starring David Bowie and Jennifer Connelly, featured humans as protagonist and antagonist, but it too was a box office flop. Perplexed by the company’s inability to make a fantasy film that “worked,” Jane Henson reported that, “He couldn’t understand it. He talked to Brian [their son] and said, ‘What did

¹¹¹ Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* 27.

¹¹² Durrett 81.

¹¹³ Harris.

¹¹⁴ Bay.

we do wrong?”¹¹⁵ Maurice Sendak, children’s author and illustrator, could sympathize with Henson’s sense of being labeled as only one kind of artist. Said Sendak, “Because all artists are pigeon-holed, everybody, whatever they do for a living, they’re pigeon-holed. . . . He agreed with me about the frustration . . . and it hurt him very much.”¹¹⁶ When *Labyrinth* was not well met by critics and audiences, Henson did enter a solitary, reflective period. “I think that’s the closest I’ve seen him to turning in on himself and getting quite depressed. It was a rather bad time, and went to the south of France for a few days to wallow in it,” reports Brian Henson.¹¹⁷

Although he was facing artistic challenges, Henson never lost his passion for puppetry. In between the release of *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*, Jim Henson had been filming a series that would showcase other puppeteers as they produced their own vision of puppetry. In 1985, he produced a series called “Jim Henson Presents The World of Puppetry.”¹¹⁸ In each episode, Henson spotlighted a master puppeteer and gave audiences a chance to see the work of an artist whose vision was different from Henson’s own. The specials showed the puppeteer’s performance, often from his own perspective as well as the audience’s, a bit about the construction method used by the artist, and often some history of the puppet form he utilizes. The series featured work by six artists, Henk Boerwinkel (with his wife and partner, Ans) from Holland, Philippe Genty and his company from France, Sergei Obraztsov and his company from Russia, Albrecht Roser, and old acquaintances Richard Bradshaw,

¹¹⁵ Durrett 83.

¹¹⁶ Kinberg.

¹¹⁷ Stephen Harrigan, "It's Not Easy Being Blue," *LIFE* Jul 1990: 97.

¹¹⁸ *Jim Henson's World of Television* 42-4.

and Bruce Schwartz. The puppeteer has a conversation with Henson as well, allowing him to speak about his work and to present his philosophy on puppetry. Each interview is delightful because the artist and Henson show each other such respect and there is freedom of exchange. Here puppetry is no longer shrouded in secrecy, though the magic of each artist's performance is preserved. Henson once observed, "When I hear the art of puppetry discussed, I often feel frustrated in that it's one of those pure things that somehow becomes much less interesting when it is overdiscussed or analyzed. I feel it does what it does and even is a bit weakened if you know what it is doing."¹¹⁹

While his concern is a legitimate one for the puppeteer who shares his methods, a moment from the Albrecht Roser program reaffirms the artistry that can never be weakened, even if one knows how it works. Roser presents Henson with a marionette that he has been building and allows him to manipulate it. Henson tells Roser that he has never been good with marionettes. Roser encourages him to try anyway. Henson struggles with the puppet and the work in progress falls to bits in his hands. Roser laughs, amazed that Henson was unable to make it work and assures him that he will teach Henson to operate marionettes one day.¹²⁰ It is a wonderful example of Henson in his role as "appreciator," to quote Frank Oz. ". . . He appreciated the performance and design of a puppet . . . He appreciated beauty.

¹¹⁹ Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* 32.

¹²⁰ "Albrecht Roser," *Jim Henson Presents the World of Puppetry*, Video recording. Puppeteer Albrecht Roser, dir. Jim Henson, CBM Productions and Henson Associates, 1985.

I really don't believe that Jim could have been such an extraordinary creator if he hadn't been such an extraordinary appreciator."¹²¹ Henson's genuine respect for the artistry of others is what made him a joy, by every account, to work beside.

In the late 1980s, Jim Henson continued to explore the boundaries of the advancing medium of television and the capabilities of the puppet. He made nine richly detailed episodes of a series called *The Storyteller* with effects by the Creature Shop, an outgrowth of the work done on *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*. The series retold fairy tales in a way that incorporated both television and the oral tradition, using actor John Hurt as the narrator. The late Anthony Minghella, who would win an Academy Award for his direction of *The English Patient* in 1996¹²² (with prosthetic make-up provided by the Creature Shop), wrote the scripts for each episode. In *Jim Henson: The Works*, Christopher Finch says of the entire series, "Not only do they translate the folk tale into the electronic age with great fidelity, they also demonstrate what the television medium is capable of . . ."¹²³ Although the show was popular in Europe, Japan, and Australia, it was never given a regular air time on NBC and so gained no following, in spite of winning an Emmy Award for the pilot episode.¹²⁴ Henson had another project with NBC at the time and was given an hour-long program, which he called *The Jim Henson Hour*. The show incorporated familiar Muppets like Kermit and Gonzo as well as new Muppet characters into its first half in a format similar to *The Muppet Show*. Kermit was in

¹²¹ Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* 138.

¹²² "Awards for *The English Patient*," *Internet Movie Data Base*, 1990-2007, Internet Movie Data Base, Inc., 26 Apr 2007 <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116209/awards>>.

¹²³ Finch 192.

¹²⁴ Finch 194.

charge of a television network and got to pick and choose programming based on his instincts and complicated things like ratings. Kermit's initial instincts toward what would make good programming often proved to be incorrect as issues like sex and violence seemed to draw more viewers.

In an episode called "The Ratings Game," Kermit witnesses a nature documentary that ends with the animals documented being extremely violent. Kermit says that it was brutal and terrible and his assistant, Vickie, tells him that the ratings were fantastic. Kermit is perplexed by the audience's desire to see violence and is informed that audiences like sex too. On a bump to the commercial break, Kermit, in frustration, says, "After these messages, we'll be back with a lot of funny, great sketches . . . and some neat songs . . . and maybe some sex?" Vickie is shocked but Kermit tells her that it would just be a little sex. The episode spins out of Kermit's control as Waldo C. Graphic, the world's first computer-generated puppet,¹²⁵ an idea with which Henson had been playing since 1983,¹²⁶ introduces a fast paced, ratings driven, programming system into the mix. Kermit makes a stand, finally, and asserts, "Right now what we need is a nice, happy, rousing, warm musical number with the whole Muppet family." The episode concludes with the cast singing and dancing to "La Bamba," and Kermit's closing line, "Yeah, something like that could work."¹²⁷ By directly addressing the ratings game, Henson

¹²⁵ Bacon 133.

¹²⁶ Finch 220.

¹²⁷ Jim Henson, producer, "Ratings," Television broadcast, Perf. Dave Goelz Jim Henson, Jerry Nelson, *The Jim Henson Hour* (New York: Jim Henson Productions, 14 May 1989), 50 minutes.

acknowledges that audiences had changed since his early successes in the 1970s. By ending the episode in a musical number, he was also showing that entertainment could still be fun, family-oriented, and well produced.

This episode includes the series' only guest puppeteer, Marc Weiner, in a segment called "Gorilla Television." Some subversive Muppets tap into Kermit's broadcast in order to showcase Weiner's work. They call him, "a man who decided to become an entertainer so that the little children could hear the political message he carries." Weiner agrees, hesitantly, with that estimation of his choice. Zondra, a slightly Goth female Muppet asks, "And yet you resist the lure of commercial success?" Weiner replies, "I'll pass." Zondra continues disgustedly, "As represented by Jim Henson and his ilk!" Weiner interrupts her and says that he thinks Jim Henson is great. The exchange comments upon the commercialization of art that puppeteers and visual artists have been debating for years. As a commercial success and a puppeteer, Henson always felt that his work was just one of the forms that puppetry could take. "There's not much competition between puppeteers in general because everybody's working their own style. I've never felt any sense of competition with anybody, and we're all friends; we're all good friends."¹²⁸ The lack of competition enabled Henson to see his own work as a part of the broader community. Jane Henson reflected, "I think Jim did make a contribution to puppetry in that, you can approach it and do it in a successful way and that it really can appeal

¹²⁸ Harris.

to everyone.”¹²⁹ Marc Weiner went on to have his own popular television series on the children’s network Nickelodeon. *Weinerville* was populated by puppets very different from the Muppets and ran from 1993 until 1996.¹³⁰

The second half-hour of each episode of *The Jim Henson Hour* was where the innovator in Henson was given free reign. Four episodes of the show featured *Storyteller* episodes that had not yet aired. Some episodes had a theme that was pursued throughout. One was called “The Song of the Cloud Forest,” and dealt with environmental issues, one of Henson’s major concerns, and used complex “green-screen” visual effects. Henson also did a “Secrets of the Muppets” episode, some twenty years after “The Muppets on Puppets” was first aired. One episode, “Dog City,” won Henson an Emmy for Outstanding Directing in a Variety or Music Program.¹³¹ It built a world based on 1930s gangster movies and parody paintings of dogs playing poker. Rowlf, never retired since his dog food commercial days, was a key player in this outing. In spite of these creative successes and six Emmy nominations,¹³² *The Jim Henson Hour* only aired ten times.¹³³ Juhl observed, “. . . One of the problems with that show, the reasons that it wasn’t a success, was that it wasn’t really one show, it was TWO shows. Jim was given an hour of prime time by NBC and he couldn’t resist doing two different things with it—because he wanted to do them both so much! And the audience could never figure that out. So the project

¹²⁹ Bay.

¹³⁰ “*Weinerville*,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, 26 Apr 2007, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 26 Apr 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weinerville>>.

¹³¹ Parish 82.

¹³² Durrett 85.

¹³³ Parish 82.

didn't work.”¹³⁴ Alex Rockwell, Henson's creative assistant during this period, said, “When the show was canceled, Jim was very disappointed . . . but he was not one to look back and indulge in recrimination. He had a way of picking up the pieces and moving on.”¹³⁵

A CONTINUATION

On May 16, 1990, the world was stunned to hear that Jim Henson had suddenly died at age 53. He had an extremely severe case of pneumonia. In the book, *A Timeline of Puppetry in America* produced by the Puppeteers of America, Henson's death is the only event that appears on both the “Puppetry” timeline and the “American/World History” timeline. On the former, it says of Henson's death, “It is a stunning loss for puppeteers, children, and the rest of the world.” The latter says, “A whole world of fans, children and adults, is in mourning.”¹³⁶ Henson, like his creations, had seemed immortal and the fate of the entire Muppet family was up in the air. The company had been in the midst of striking a deal to sell the Muppet characters, aside from those established for *Sesame Street*, to the Disney Company. Henson explained that the sale “releases me from a lot of business problems. As anyone in the business knows, you spend a great deal of your time raising, financing, finding distributors and all. In theory, I'll be able to spend a lot more of my time on

¹³⁴ Sam K. Hale, “Gems and Juhls,” *Puppetry Journal* 52.3 (2001): 11.

¹³⁵ Finch 218.

¹³⁶ Eide, *A Timeline of Puppetry in America* 77.

the creative side of things.”¹³⁷ He also respected the way that Disney manages its characters’ likenesses and the licensing of them. He felt that the Muppets could be at home in the Magic Kingdom and that his vision would be preserved. He eagerly worked on a new Muppet film for the Florida park called *Jim Henson Presents Muppet Vision 3D*. In *Jim Henson: The Works*, Finch writes, “Although [the film] is enormously sophisticated from a technical point of view, in some ways it [harkens] back to the kind of simple devices Jim Henson had employed in the day of *Sam and Friends*.”¹³⁸ Working on a three-dimensional movie proved to be the kind of challenge that Henson loved, letting the illusion on the screen evolve out of the situation rather than relying on huge spectacle to make the effect. It has been called “the ultimate expression of Jim’s fascination with the magical illusionism of film and television—which drew him into show business in the first place.”¹³⁹ A television special, *The Muppets At Walt Disney World*, was also produced in which Kermit and the Muppets visit Disney World and find lots of trouble, fun, and kinship with Mickey Mouse. It was aired only ten days before Henson’s death.¹⁴⁰

The world’s reaction about which *A Timeline . . .* speaks is hardly an exaggeration. Henson’s death happened on the same day as Sammy Davis Jr.’s and *People* magazine ran a cover story about the enduring performances of Davis and three interior pages in the “Tribute” section on Henson’s career in its May 28

¹³⁷ Durrett 86.

¹³⁸ Finch 226.

¹³⁹ Finch 227.

¹⁴⁰ *Jim Henson’s World of Television* 46.

issue.¹⁴¹ In the following issue of *People*, the “Mail” section features a comment by the editors saying, “Readers were saddened by the deaths of Sammy Davis Jr. and Jim Henson, and disturbed that Henson was not given a place on our cover.” One letter from a reader said, “How dare you obscure the contributions of Jim Henson! . . . Mr. Henson deserves praise from parents, children and educators and should have been memorialized with more respect.”¹⁴² The issue in which the comment and letter appeared had a cover story entitled, “The Haunting Last Days of Jim Henson” and an eight page article discussing his career, death, and the future of the Muppets. “If a sense of loss is evident throughout the Henson Empire,” it says, “so is the conviction that his vision will live on.”¹⁴³

In the midst of all the loss was the question of the \$150 million deal with Disney, announced but never completed, and whether it would be made official. At the time Disney spokesman Erwin Okun said, “I’ve talked with the key people involved in the deal, and they expect everything will proceed as usual.”¹⁴⁴ In spite of the assertion, the deal with Disney fell apart and Henson’s children took over the company, with Brian as president. Brian said, “My father had wonderful goals and wonderful dreams. And when he died, I realized that they had become mine. And I saw that in virtually everyone in the company.”¹⁴⁵ Brian Henson directed *The Muppet Christmas Carol* in 1992, the first Muppet movie since 1984’s *The Muppets Take Manhattan*. It was also the first major outing for Steve Whitmire as the new

¹⁴¹ Susan Schindehette, "Kermit, Miss Piggy, Big Bird, Grove and Kids All Over the World Mourn the Loss of Muppetmeister Jim Henson," *People* 28 May 1990: 119.

¹⁴² *People* 18 Jun 1990: 4.

¹⁴³ Susan Schindehette, "Legacy of a Gentle Genius," *People* 18 Jun 1990: 96.

¹⁴⁴ E. Scott Reckard, "Disney Will Help Muppets Go on," *The Plain Dealer* [Cleveland] 18 May 1990, TELEVISION.

¹⁴⁵ Harrigan 96.

performer of Kermit. He had briefly appeared in the role at the conclusion of a television special aired on November 21, 1990 called “The Muppets Celebrate Jim Henson.”¹⁴⁶ Brian Henson said, “It took a while for us to decide what we were going to do with Kermit, as a family. Just the family involved in that decision of how Kermit would continue and how we would do it.”¹⁴⁷

Whitmire, who had been with the Muppets since the late 1970s, struggled with the new character, saying, “I just was freaked out. I couldn’t do it so I took the puppet and put it in another room and I don’t think I picked it up for about a month.” Frank Oz explained, “The reason Steve had a hard time was, it’s just not doing another character. He had to get to the soul of Jim to be Kermit.”¹⁴⁸ To find out who Kermit is was to remember all the things that Henson was. David Lazer, a producer for the Muppets, said in 1984, “I would use the word visionary when I think about Jim. He right now is thinking of stuff ten years from now and executing five things at the same time. His mind works on all those levels.”¹⁴⁹ Film director Francis Ford Coppola said that Henson had “a uniquely American voice that was very human at heart, but which had a humor, a sly humor, a satirical humor”¹⁵⁰ “He presented a very honest and joyful appreciation for life. And I don’t think that he would think that was his invention. And it wasn’t really.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ *Jim Henson's World of Television* 46.

¹⁴⁷ Bay.

¹⁴⁸ Bay.

¹⁴⁹ Goldsmith.

¹⁵⁰ Kinberg.

¹⁵¹ Kinberg.

What Henson had done would continue after his death because of that appreciation of other people's skills and talents. His vision was continually expanding and included the work of scores of other artists, performers, craftspeople, and people who became a family. In 1997, the Puppeteers of America established an award called "The Jim Henson Award for Innovation" and it recognizes "innovation in puppetry that is technological, dramaturgical, or collaborative in nature."¹⁵² Henson's body of work certainly reflects all three of these aspects. Minghella summed up Henson's philosophy saying that it was "a passionate belief that there are stories to tell which don't exclude children and don't insult adults, which don't exclude adults and don't insult children, which can be outrageous and innovative without being arch or misanthropic. There's anarchy here, but it's anarchy that celebrates rather than destroys."¹⁵³ Henson said, "I believe in taking a positive attitude toward the world, toward people, and toward my work. I think I'm here for a purpose. I think it's likely that we all are, but I'm only sure about myself."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory* 66.

¹⁵³ Bacon 6.

¹⁵⁴ Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* 137.

CHAPTER 4

SETTING THE CORNERSTONE: FOUNDATION GRANTS

The previous chapter provided a context for Jim Henson's highly varied and successful career, particularly his commitment to puppetry as an art form. As chapter three illustrates, Henson's initial interest in the puppet as a means to explore the television medium was replaced by a fascination with puppetry itself. Thus the worldwide exposure and popularity that the Muppets enjoy became a tool for Henson to educate the public and expand people's perception of puppet theater. His involvement and leadership role in puppetry organizations such as UNIMA-USA and the Puppeteers of America increased his awareness of the needs of the community of puppeteers as well as his knowledge of the scope of guises that the puppet may assume and the variety of uses for the inanimate object in theater. In response to his enthusiasm for this variety, he began the Henson Foundation in 1982. Its mission, according to the Henson Foundation website, is "to promote and develop the art of puppetry in the United States,"¹ and in order to do so provides, among other support, grant awards for the development of captivating and challenging puppet theater.

¹ "About the Foundation," *The Jim Henson Foundation* 2007 Jim Henson Foundation, 1 Oct 2007 <http://www.hensonfoundation.org/home_about.html>.

In this chapter, I provide historical background into the establishment of the Jim Henson Foundation, including information about the original meetings of the Foundation and its initial board members. Next, I introduce the current officers and members of the board of directors for the Foundation, detailing each member's area of expertise and connection to the Henson family, Company, or Foundation. It is this group of artists and affiliates who consider grant application materials, revise the grant-making process, and select the award recipients at the second board meeting of every year. The chapter continues with details about the grant application process, including the eligibility requirements for letters of intent and the full proposal submission. The elements necessary for each step of the application process are explained as well as the qualities that each must possess in order to meet with success as the board of directors considers them. There are four distinct categories into which the grant awards are divided: project, seed, children's show, and presenting. I describe the focus and development of each grant category, including the amount and year of inception. Each description is coupled with a case study from the 2006 granting cycle that demonstrates the contribution the Jim Henson Foundation grant has made to the artist's work. The case studies feature projects by artists with a widely divergent audience base, geographical sphere of influence, and number of years of experience in the field. Each case study includes biographical information about the recipient artists or company, an explanation of the winning project, a summary of the goals for the performance, and reviews of the work in production. The fourth grant category, the presenting grant, has a different application and award process, accompanied by a case study for a presenting grant

recipient organization. The chapter concludes with the latest group of grant recipients, the changing considerations of the board of directors, and the impact Jim Henson Foundation grants have made on the field.

PRELIMINARIES

In the early 1980s, Jim Henson sat down with Nancy Loman Staub for lunch in London.² The two had recently collaborated on a major UNIMA conference in Washington D.C. and Henson was interested in finding more ways to bring theatrical puppetry to a broad audience. The World Puppetry Festival 1980 was accompanied by the 13th UNIMA Congress in the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts from June 8 until June 15, 1980.³ The international event featured performers from twenty-one countries, as well as exhibits, symposia, and workshop demonstrations. The Festival became a model (or perhaps unattainable ideal) for the planning and direction of future puppetry festivals in the United States. Staub served as the Executive Director for the event.⁴ In *American Puppetry*, a collection of essays on puppetry exhibitions in the United States, her biography states that she is “a *member d’honneur*, a member-at-large, and former president of the Council of UNIMA.”⁵ The theme of the conference was “Puppet Theatre as Cultural Heritage and its Functions in Contemporary Society,” and an attempt was made to include

² Nancy Staub, personal interview, 18 Jul 2007.

³ *UNIMA XIII World Puppetry Festival 1980* (USA: Puppeteers of America, Inc, 1980).

⁴ *UNIMA XIII World Puppetry Festival 1980*.

⁵ Dircks, Phyllis, “About the Contributors,” *American Puppetry* ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 313.

performances from the six inhabited continents of the earth.⁶ Henryk Jurkowski, imminent puppetry historian and UNIMA's Secretary General at the time, notes "The art of the puppet is accomplished in a direct contact with the audience. Its sense depends on a moment of deep emotion experienced by the spectators. As the number of spectators grows, their emotions increase – thus becoming a social phenomenon which fulfills special functions in communal life."⁷ The idea of puppetry as a social functionary as well as the cultural and professional exchange that the Conference stimulated were both inspirational to Jim Henson and his idea of what puppet theater could achieve.

Henson's luncheon with Staub was the beginning of a dialogue between the two about what he could do to help puppeteers to create new work and get that work seen by an audience waiting to experience the type of "deep emotion" that Jurkowski described. He had been supporting Bruce D. Schwartz for several years, through his guest appearances on *The Muppet Show* in 1978 and 1980⁸ and by offering the young artist both financial and moral support. Henson wanted to do more. Staub suggested that he establish a foundation with the sole aim of supporting puppeteers. Prior to this meeting, Henson and Staub had been involved in an attempt to begin a foundation in New Orleans, Staub's home. Rachel Redinger, a puppeteer and organizer of the attempted foundation, wanted to get celebrities such as Henson to serve as spokespeople while the actual functions of the foundation would come down

⁶ *UNIMA XIII World Puppetry Festival 1980.*

⁷ *UNIMA XIII World Puppetry Festival 1980.*

⁸ John Lavalie, "The Muppet Show," *Episode Guides* 1 Dec 2006 Epguides.com 15 Feb 2008 <<http://www.epguides.com/muppetshow>>.

to a group of “worker bees.”⁹ It was, in Staub’s words, an “unruly foundation” and Henson did not like the idea of a big infrastructure.¹⁰ He preferred the idea of starting his own foundation and so the pair began to lay the groundwork for the Henson Foundation. They contacted a lawyer to complete the paperwork in order to establish a legal account. In its first year, Jim Henson provided the money to fund the organization and Staub volunteered to run it. As Staub remembers, “I always said, ‘My time, Jim’s money.’”¹¹

Current board member and Special Events Coordinator for the 1980 UNIMA Festival, Allelu Kurten says that, after that event, Henson and Staub began to focus on the “needs of the field and especially the needs of emerging U.S. artists creating puppet theatre for adult audiences.”¹² Cheryl Henson, the current president of the Jim Henson Foundation notes, “There was a resentment of the popularity of the Muppets. Puppet artists were being asked by producers to do the ‘Muppet style’ and abandon their own.”¹³ Kurten agrees, “Jim started the Foundation in response to those needs so that an artist would have a bit of money and breathing space to develop his own vision without having to give up or copy someone else’s.”¹⁴ The first meeting of the Henson Foundation occurred August 5, 1982. Jim Henson, Jane Henson, Robert Bromberg, Albert Gottesman, Nancy Staub, and Lawrence W. Schilling were in

⁹ Staub.

¹⁰ Staub.

¹¹ Staub.

¹² “Grants,” *Jim Henson Foundation* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008

<<http://www.hensonfoundation.org/grants/>>. NOTE: A web page with a separate, more specific URL exists for each year of grant awards. I have opted to simplify the citation to aid readability.

¹³ Susan Elia, “Life After Kermit,” *TimeOut* (New York) Aug 31-Sep 7 2000.

¹⁴ “Grants.”

attendance.¹⁵ Prior to that first official meeting, a proposal for a certificate of incorporation of the Henson Foundation was drafted February 18, 1982. The bylaws for the Henson Foundation Articles of Incorporation established a group of five directors, each one serving a three-year term, with meetings occurring at the Company's "townhouse" location at 117 East 69th Street, Henson's New York headquarters.¹⁶ When the first meeting occurred, the board members were looking at an available \$25,000 per year to award to grant recipients. It was also decided that the initial directors of the Henson Foundation would be Jim Henson as president, Jane Henson as secretary, Robert Bromberg as treasurer with Albert Gottesman and Lisa Henson, Jim and Jane's eldest child, completing the quintet.¹⁷ Thus the Henson Foundation was established, though it would not be until June 28, 1984 that it was declared exempt from taxes through the award of 501(c) 3 status.¹⁸

PROPOSING A PROJECT

In its first year, the Henson Foundation gave out five grants, using the full \$25,000.¹⁹ The grants were awarded in amounts ranging from \$2,500 to \$7,500. The grant application process is under constant revision according to the needs and capabilities of artists and the board, but at that time Jim Henson was enthusiastic about having the board members meeting with grant applicants to discuss their

¹⁵ *Henson Foundation Articles of Incorporation and Minutes for the Period 6-26-1982—12-22-88* (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 1988).

¹⁶ *Henson Foundation Article*

¹⁷ *Henson Foundation Articles*

¹⁸ *Henson Foundation Articles*

¹⁹ "Grants."

ideas.²⁰ The feasibility of the idea prevented its execution but pointed to Henson's enthusiasm for artists to share their vision and ideas with the Foundation as well as audiences. The application process is under continuing revision, as technology and the field change and grow. For example, the grant application guidelines for 1997, fifteen years after the Foundation's inception, talk about a range of grant amounts from \$1,000 to \$5,000. The materials to be included in the submission were a letter of application, a budget, and artist information. Videotaped examples of work were limited to ten minutes in length, whereas the present guidelines limit the submission to four minutes. The shift in taped material duration reflects the increase in the number of applicants since that time. Interestingly, international productions could be funded by the grant in 1997. The current guidelines emphasize that artists may use the grant to bring productions to international venues but there must be a performance of the work in the United States.²¹ It has only been in the most recent set of grant guidelines that the entire process has become more standardized. Belinda Batson Brown, the manager of the Jim Henson Foundation, says, "We want to be fair," and the guidelines apply to every applicant, whether an established presence in American puppetry or an unknown artist.²²

In order for an artist or theatrical company to apply for a grant from the Jim Henson Foundation, several criteria have been established in order to best serve the artists, the Foundation, and puppetry as a whole. The grant guidelines provided by the Jim Henson Foundation website state:

²⁰ *Henson Foundation Articles*

²¹ Belinda Batson Brown and Cheryl Henson, personal interview, 2 Nov 2007.

²² Brown.

Since we began awarding grants in 1982, there has been astonishing growth in both the quantity and quality of puppet theater in this country. This has made it increasingly difficult to narrow the applicant pool, so we have instituted a new policy that we hope will more evenly distribute our funds among the many artists worthy of support.²³

This new policy refers to applications received from previous grant awardees. A company or artist that receives a grant in a given year may not submit grant proposals, for any type of grant, for the year that immediately follows. The exception to the policy occurs in the case of the seed grant recipient. He or she may apply for project grant funding for the next granting cycle and then only if the project grant will cultivate the seed grant's progress. Another important stipulation of the Foundation's grant awards is that the money must go to the "development of new works of live puppet theater."²⁴ The emphasis on live puppetry rather than video-recorded or filmed puppetry harkens back to Henson's desire to engage an audience with the magic of puppetry that he had experienced in his European travels as a college graduate and through his involvement in puppetry organizations. The Foundation also will not fund the remounting of a previously performed work of puppet theater, nor will it provide money retroactively to an existing project.²⁵ Additionally, as with any grant-award making foundation, the grant recipient must be designated as IRS tax-exempt, and the project must be presented in a non-profit setting.²⁶ As the only organization in the United States devoted solely to the development of puppet theater, it is also a requirement that the primary artist on a

²³ "2007 Grant Guidelines," *The Jim Henson Foundation* 2007 Jim Henson Foundation, 1 Oct 2007 <http://www.hensonfoundation.org/2007/2007_guidelines.html>.

²⁴ "Frequently Asked Questions," *The Jim Henson Foundation* 2007 Jim Henson Foundation, 1 Oct 2007 <http://www.hensonfoundation.org/home_faq.html>.

²⁵ "2007 Grant Guidelines."

²⁶ "2007 Grant Guidelines."

project be American. International collaboration is accepted and encouraged, but, unlike the United States, many countries have other means of subsidizing their puppet artists.

The members of the board of directors of the Jim Henson Foundation are well versed in puppetry and performance. Board members are invited by the president to join, on the basis of experience or expertise in the field or long-time association with the Henson Company or Foundation, generally both. As of this writing, Cheryl Henson is the President and Jane Henson is Vice President. Other board members include two more of the Henson children, Lisa and Heather. Jim Henson had always involved his children in the work he was doing, as a way of family bonding and to get the children to take an active part in their heritage.²⁷ Lisa Henson notes, “As children, we were all invited into his world, into his work, to share and even to help create. He thought it all belonged together; work and family, kids and adults, fun and projects.”²⁸ Lisa, the Hensons’ eldest child was the president of Columbia Pictures from 1994 until 1996 and is currently co-CEO and co-chair of the Jim Henson Company.²⁹ Heather Henson, the youngest of the Henson children, has taken a major role in the promotion of puppetry with the curation of *Handmade Puppet Dreams*, “a rich array of contemporary innovations in the world of puppet film,”³⁰ as well as her active encouragement of the variety and vignette format of the puppet slam. A puppet slam is “a generic term for late-night puppet cabarets, modeled on poetry slams, with short, cutting-edge concepts in performances involving a number

²⁷ Staub.

²⁸ Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green* (New York: Hyperion, 2005) 115.

²⁹ Henson 180.

³⁰ *Puppet Rampage* (St. Paul: Puppeteers of America, Inc., 2007) 23.

of puppeteers.”³¹ Louis Borodinsky, the board’s treasurer, is an associate from Raich Ende Malter & Co, LLP, the company that serves the Jim Henson Foundation as its accounting consultant. Allelu Kurten, the secretary, is an UNIMA citation-winning puppeteer with experience producing work for children as well as for adults. She has served on the board of the POA and on the executive committee of UNIMA-USA.³²

The board of directors includes Leslee Asch whose association with the Jim Henson Company extends back over twenty years. She served as executive director of the Foundation and was producing director for the Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater. She also is the editorial advisor for *Puppetry International*, UNIMA-USA’s official publication.³³ Dan Hurlin is an award-winning director and performer, with an OBIE award for music and a 2004 UNIMA-USA Citation for his *Hiroshima Maiden*.³⁴ Playwright Mark Levenson has written several puppet plays, including a non-violent update of the classic knock-about, *Punch and Judy: Here and Now* as well as serving as editor of a collection of puppet essays entitled *The Language of the Puppet*.³⁵ Martin P. Robinson, the performer of many *Sesame Street* characters such as Mr. Snuffleupagus and Telly Monster, also trains puppeteers for international versions of the program being produced globally. His design for the Audrey II puppets for *Little Shop of Horrors* are iconic to that musical play.³⁶ Richard Termine was the artistic director of the O’Neill Puppetry Conference

³¹ Doreen Carvajal, “Close your eyes, Punch and Judy. It’s too Scary!” *New York Times* 20 Sep 2000: 3.

³² *Puppet Rampage* 65.

³³ Dircks 311.

³⁴ *Puppet Rampage* 37.

³⁵ “Contributors,” *The Language of the Puppet* eds. Laurence R. Kominz and Mark Levenson (1990; Vancouver: Pacific Puppetry Press, 1998) 114.

³⁶ *Puppet Rampage* 44.

and holds an MFA in puppetry from the University of Connecticut. He won an Emmy award for his design work with the Muppets. He is also a performing arts photographer, documenting many of the leading puppetry artists in the world.³⁷ He has been a board member since 1987, asked to join by Jim Henson personally.³⁸ Rounding out the board is Caroly Wilcox, who for twenty years was the workshop supervisor for *Sesame Street*³⁹ and a “puppet builder of exceptional ability.”⁴⁰ Although each board member has his or her own specialty and his or her own favorite artists and style of puppetry, there are certain elements that every proposal must include in order to be considered for a grant.

The first stage in applying for a Jim Henson Foundation grant is to submit a letter of intent, and the due date for this letter comes several months prior to the invitation to write a full application for grant monies. The letter of intent is a fairly recent development, coming with the 2001 granting cycle.⁴¹ Richard Termine remembers that originally the board received so many applications that the Foundation manager would weed through full applications when they arrived. Phone calls to the Foundation often accompanied the application process and, he remembers that it was through phone conversations that people were invited to apply. The letter of intent “was a way of really filtering through those [applications] that were appropriate, that met the guidelines and those that did not.”⁴² The letter of intent should articulate clearly a description of the project, including the contact

³⁷ *2001: A Puppet Odyssey* (St. Paul: Puppeteers of America, Inc., 2001).

³⁸ Richard Termine, telephone interview, 9 Jan 2008.

³⁹ Christopher Finch. *Jim Henson: The Works* (New York: Random House, 1993) 162.

⁴⁰ Finch 64.

⁴¹ Brown.

⁴² Termine.

information of involved artists. The writer may also include information about upcoming performances of his or her work. In addition, a photograph, sketch, or some other visual representation of the concept behind the piece must accompany the letter. The inclusion of the visual reference with the letter of intent was established officially at the December board meeting in 2001.⁴³

The visuals are key to the decision making process and integral to the creation of a strong proposal. With regard to the visuals, Belinda Brown notes that people so often send in “bad sketches, bad photos, bad videos.” She says, “I’m sure for them it says everything,” but to a board member it merely conveys confusion and a lack of attention to detail.⁴⁴ Ultimately, a visual reference of this kind will work against the artist’s letter of intent and application. Additionally, the pictures or sketches need to relate directly to the *puppets* to be built rather than relating to the artist’s vision for the entire show itself. Brown says, “So often, they’re talking about the amazing show, the amazing script, the amazing actors, the amazing set...it’s so important that we see the puppets because, ultimately, that’s what’s being funded.”⁴⁵ Robinson, a member of the board since 1995,⁴⁶ reflects on the importance of the included visual, “the key is to include a visual that means something to them, to help explain their project.” He notes, “Most grant applications I’ve read have a weak visual concept.”⁴⁷ Puppetry is the most visual of the performing arts, closely related to the plastic construction of sculpture and the spatial arrangement of painting.

⁴³ *Henson Foundation Minutes from December 2, 2001*— (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 2007).

⁴⁴ Brown.

⁴⁵ Brown.

⁴⁶ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001* (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 2001).

⁴⁷ Martin P. Robinson, telephone interview, 25 Oct 2007.

Special effort needs to be expended to get effective photographs and videotapes of puppets. Greater care needs to be taken by the grant writers in general so that the artist or company presents itself in the best possible light. An artist needs to be able to sell the work to the board. Most artists are not trained in grant writing, unfortunately, and have difficulty expressing their work succinctly and clearly. It is the strong proposals that get the invitation to submit a full proposal. Robinson says, “What I find is that anybody should be able to draw up a good grant proposal and if you can’t draw one up, oh man, find somebody who can.”⁴⁸ The letters of intent are reviewed by the Foundation board of directors at their June meeting and decisions are made about complete application initiations. In general, the board members see one hundred twenty letters of intent for a granting cycle and, of that number, about half get invited by the board to submit a full proposal.⁴⁹

In response to the question of what gets a letter of intent the invitation to submit a full proposal, Robinson says that everyone on the board has his or her own criteria. One of his particular points of consideration is attention to detail by the letter writer. Misspelled words and grammatical errors do happen in documents produced by the most careful of writers, but they begin to aggregate in Robinson’s mind. He also tends to notice buzzwords, such as “multi-disciplinary.” “Everybody uses that phrase. I don’t dock points for it. But sometimes it’s kind of a phrase they use because it sounds really cool.” In the end, Robinson responds most to clarity in the letter of intent. “Sometimes I get to the end of this long page and I still haven’t got a clue what they’re talking about. I like something that’s direct, honest, to the

⁴⁸ Robinson.

⁴⁹ Brown.

point, that tells you what their kind of vision and theme is about a project. And then it tells you *how* they're going to do it. That's always real important to me."⁵⁰

Richard Termine agrees about the plan for the actual execution of a project being important, adding:

The project applicants are encouraged to present their concepts, ideas, and visions for their proposed productions. And we must always keep in mind that these written concepts and rendered designs are going to exist three dimensionally and in real time. Ultimately, when reviewing production proposals, we're looking for evidence that those elements will come to life on the stage, creating dynamic puppet theater.⁵¹

Once the initial letters of intent are whittled down, the artists are invited to submit a full proposal. The requirements for the full proposal begin with an application cover sheet. The sheet is a standard form to which all applicants adhere. It includes contact information for the company or artist, as well as the same for a fiscal agent of the project. A fiscal agent is a designee with a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) rating in the event that the company applying for the funding does not have non-profit government status. While it is not necessary to have a fiscal sponsor to submit a letter of intent to the Foundation, one is required for the full application process. One of the materials required with the full application therefore is a copy of the IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter for the artist or the fiscal sponsor. In addition, artists using fiscal sponsors must include a letter from the sponsor indicating its willingness to serve. On the first page of the cover sheet, there is also a place for applicants to indicate for which type of grant they are applying-project, seed, or children's show-which will designate the amount of money that the grant award will supply. Beneath

⁵⁰ Robinson.

⁵¹ Termine.

the previous information, applicants supply the name of the project as well as a brief description of the project, two to three sentences at the most. The second page of the cover sheet provides a place for applicants to include details about submitted materials that appear on videotape or other recorded media, if applicable, as well as a list of the other requirements for the full application.⁵² (see Appendix B)

The other documents to include in the full submission serve to provide detail to the board of directors regarding the nature of the project. A full one-page project description should include information about the concept or unifying idea of the piece, as well as the technique intended for its execution. The Jim Henson Foundation has awarded grants to puppeteers incorporating all sorts of techniques- from marionettes to rod puppets to found objects-and most obviously encourages experimentation with style. They say, however, that puppetry must be integral to the work and that the Foundation “must focus on those projects that most closely fulfill our mission to develop new works of puppet theater. The sophistication of the design and the skill of the manipulation are just as important as the degree to which puppetry is utilized in the piece.”⁵³ Puppetry is a hot topic in contemporary theater and many artists attempt to incorporate puppets into their work to utilize the trend. The Jim Henson Foundation discourages these artists from applying for its grants, particularly if the “work is an hour long and features only ten minutes of puppetry, or if the puppets are used as props or manipulated by actors with no training in the art

⁵² “2007 Grant Guidelines.”

⁵³ “Frequently Asked Questions.”

form.”⁵⁴ As Robinson observes:

There are a lot of puppet enthusiasts out there who are just *nuts* for puppetry who haven't gotten any training, that haven't studied acting, haven't studied dance, mime or movement, no design classes, no drafting classes. No historical background or context of the piece. You know, they're 'just puppeteers, dammit, that should be enough.' When you see their shows, it's not enough. Basically, ninety percent of the puppet shows I see are really pretty good five to twenty minute ideas stretched out to an hour and a half. Every once in a while, you find a gem. And then I fall in love with puppetry all over again.⁵⁵

A complete proposal should include a one-page project budget with income and expenses listed. The budget should incorporate the entire project's expenditures and income, not just how the Jim Henson Foundation award would be utilized. Foundations, such as the Jim Henson Foundation, prefer to know that their money is not the only source of funding for a project. The next item is a one-page artist biography, giving the board of directors an idea of the work and experience of the artists. If applicable, the applicant may submit a company description, if it varies greatly from the individual artist's biography. Applicants are advised to submit reviews and/or letters of support for the project, the combined length of which cannot exceed two pages. Also, artists are encouraged to submit videotape footage and photographs of the project. The videotape must run no longer than four minutes and may be accompanied by no more than five other visual representations. Companies without video resources to share may still submit no more than five items. Puppet theater is an extremely visual performing art form so photographs, sketches, designs, and video recordings aid in understanding the nature of a project or a company's work. The Foundation says that its board members “strongly prefer

⁵⁴ “Frequently Asked Questions.”

⁵⁵ Robinson.

video and visuals that pertain to the proposed project, rather than examples of past work.”⁵⁶ Puppetry is a fluid art form and artists may change their style, method of manipulation, or scale of puppet from piece to piece so that examples of past work may have little to do with the project for which the application has been submitted. In some cases, however, there is no visual evidence for the project at hand and the Foundation states, “If we are not yet familiar with your work and you do not have samples from the proposed piece, then it is helpful to send samples from past works.”⁵⁷

All materials must be submitted by a September due date in order to be considered by board members at the December meeting. At this meeting decisions are made about which projects receive funding. Prior to the meeting, the Foundation manager sends out copies of all the materials to the members of the board.⁵⁸ Termine says:

Several weeks prior to our board meeting each foundation board member receives a large package of the project proposals. Each proposal typically includes: the production/project description, designs, photos, a proposed budget, resumes, letters of recommendation and press clippings featuring their past work. A five minute video sampling or excerpt of the artist’s prior production work (or video of earlier incarnations of the proposed project) is also requested of each applicant and is usually provided. This is probably the most informative evidence of the caliber of the applicant’s production work and the viability of the project.⁵⁹

The board members give each proposal a score on a scale of one to five, five being the highest. The manager then compiles the data into a list with the scores each project earned as well as who assigned which number to the project. Termine praises

⁵⁶ “2007 Grant Guidelines.”

⁵⁷ “2007 Grant Guidelines.”

⁵⁸ Brown.

⁵⁹ Termine.

the summary list as a useful reference, a starting point for the discussions at the December meeting.⁶⁰ Having all the information, the board begins to make decisions.

In some cases, the board members are in complete agreement. Robinson observes, “The way we do the selection process is, of course, the ones that everyone likes are in. The ones that no one likes are out. Then we’ve got all these in the middle.”⁶¹ The ones “in the middle” are discussed by the board members, until everyone is satisfied with the decisions and the grant money has been awarded. It often becomes a heated debate about the merits of one project versus another. Robinson notes that, with as many as seventy proposals to review, it can be difficult to remember what exactly it was about the project that earned the score he assigned. “Usually,” he says. “there is a really strong reason. And if it’s something you want to fight for, you fight for it.”⁶² In the meeting, different board members may choose to, in Robinson’s words, champion a certain project, for whatever reason. He continues, “If a member is totally adamant, very often the others will go along. But the thing with that is, you only get a few of those and it’s totally, totally unwritten, or we don’t even realize it.” He cautions about the temptation to champion too many things, saying that if he were to fight for multiple projects, his colleagues would say “Shut up, Marty. Sit down. You had yours,” all in the spirit of friendly cooperation.⁶³

⁶⁰ Termine.

⁶¹ Robinson.

⁶² Robinson.

⁶³ Robinson.

The process is arduous but satisfying and results in interesting discussions about the nature of the puppet and the direction in which puppet theater in America is developing. “And what makes it really interesting is when someone is very much for something and someone else is very much against,” says Robinson.⁶⁴ He notes:

I think that’s what makes the meetings so much fun; because you never know who’s going to ally with whom, or whose tastes are going to be in what direction. Sometimes, Leslee Asch and I are squaring off, screaming at each other, good-naturedly, and sometimes we find ourselves championing the same cause.⁶⁵

Termine loves being present at the meetings, knowing that the discussions will be interesting. He finds great benefit in having such a large group of people with a vast knowledge of puppetry and performance. The experience and expertise of the board increases the chances that someone has seen the applying artist’s work and can speak, albeit subjectively, to his or her ability to make good puppet theater. Termine relates:

Often we’re able to ask another board member what is your reaction to a particular puppet artist’s work or production? Viewing a live puppet performance is important element in the discussion phase of the grant giving process. However, we are not questioning the potential of that artist to succeed, we’re really looking at what that particular artist is intending with that project. . . . A distinction which is always made is . . . that we’re not funding the artist, we’re funding the project. And that’s across the board.⁶⁶

It is probable that everyone on the board has favorite performers but careful consideration goes into every grant proposal decision. Robinson admits to having his own feelings about well-known performers, even past grant recipients, who just strike him as “pretentious,” never, of course, revealing names of the artists. “But I’ll

⁶⁴ Robinson.

⁶⁵ Robinson.

⁶⁶ Termine.

always give them the benefit of the doubt when they have a new show coming up. I've had my opinions changed. Opinions are not something that we should hang onto dearly. We must constantly challenge them."⁶⁷ A consensus of opinion decides the status of every grant application. The advantage to having a board as diverse as that of the Jim Henson Foundation is that everyone comes to the meeting with his or her own area of expertise. Robinson opines that the diversity means that everyone will have a different focus as they review the materials in each submission. Termine for instance Robinson calls,

A brilliant, visual photographer. He's got at least a Master's in puppetry And Caroly Wilcox looks at it very much from a kind of a practical design standpoint, having been the head of the shop for all those years. Mark Levenson is always looking for the depth of a project and the comedy. These are my opinions of course.⁶⁸

Robinson's forte is performance and design. "It's what I do mostly, so if I see things that are hideously designed, slapped together, big bells go off. Likewise, when I see something that's just stunningly designed, very often I will champion it" ⁶⁹

Successful applicants are notified of their awards by December 31. When artists are ready to request the money, they are instructed to contact the Foundation, which will send a check made out to the fiscal sponsor of the project. The Henson Foundation asks that grant recipients provide information, press materials, and the dates of upcoming performances. It also requires the company to discuss any significant project changes with the Foundation and for the artist to credit the Foundation. Finally, after the project has been completed, a final report must be

⁶⁷ Robinson.

⁶⁸ Robinson.

⁶⁹ Robinson.

submitted, detailing how the money was spent, what the outcomes of the project were, and what the grant enabled the artists to accomplish. The Henson Foundation requires programs, press clippings, and supplementary materials be submitted; it is important to include at least one visual in the final submitted materials.⁷⁰ All of the submitted materials are used to determine the effectiveness of the grant money for the fulfillment of the Henson Foundation's mission of furthering puppetry in America.

While the grants provided give much-needed financial support to puppeteers, a Foundation grant is almost more important as a "professional nod."⁷¹ Puppeteer and performance artist Paul Zaloom believes that the Foundation's support has demarginalized many artists. "I feel in a way that we puppeteers now have this giant, invisible wall backing us up, supporting us; actually, not a wall, but a foundation that supports us that we can build on. We are not alone."⁷² Hobey Ford, a past grant recipient, agrees:

The awards were like an invisible hand, which helped carry the production to broader audiences. The awards, perhaps most importantly, were an inspiration to create productions worthy of the honor of receiving a grant. Through the Foundation grants, Jim Henson not only gave money, by association he lent his name, achievement and stature to the field of puppetry. The words 'Funded by the Jim Henson Foundation' have been a gift that keeps on giving."⁷³

⁷⁰ "For Grantees," *Jim Henson Foundation* 2007 Jim Henson Foundation, 1 Oct 2007 <http://www.hensonfoundation.org/home_forgrantees.html>.

⁷¹ Robinson.

⁷² "Grants."

⁷³ "Grants."

PREPARING *THE RAPTURE PROJECT*: PROJECT GRANT

Since its inaugural year in 1982 when it awarded five grants, the Jim Henson Foundation has awarded 291 project grants.⁷⁴ In 2003, the Foundation established \$5,000 as the set amount that accompanied a project grant.⁷⁵ Until then, grant amounts had varied greatly from project to project and year to year and were at the discretion of the board members of the Henson Foundation. For example, Julie Taymor was awarded \$7,500 for her *Liberty's Taken* in 1982 and received \$5,000 for *Juan Darien: A Carnival Mask* in 1987,⁷⁶ a project that would eventually appear on Broadway and be nominated for the Tony Award for Best New Musical in 1997.⁷⁷ Until 2003, project grants had been valued at anywhere from \$1,000 to \$10,000. This highest amount was awarded twice, one time to the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta for a tour of Bruce Schwartz's work in 1983 and to the same institution for an exhibition of puppetry called "Breaking Boundaries," which was displayed at the New York Public Library and would be a feature of the 1992 installment of the International Festival of Puppet Theater.⁷⁸ When totaled over the lifetime of the Foundation, \$1,032,000 has been awarded in project grant money, with an average grant amount of \$3,546.39.

⁷⁴ "Grants."

⁷⁵ "Grants."

⁷⁶ "Grants."

⁷⁷ "Juan Darien Awards," *Internet Broadway Database 2001-7* The League of American Theatres and Producers, 2 Oct 2007 <<http://www.ibdb.com/awardproduction.asp?id=5139>>.

⁷⁸ "Grants."

The 2006 project grants included styles of puppetry ranging from toy theater to bunraku puppets to shadows to “sculptural constructions” and animation.⁷⁹ The fourteen project grants awarded in 2006 reflect a diverse group of artists, some past grant recipients such as Theodora Skipitares’s Skysaver Productions, Janie Geiser, and Chicago’s Redmoon Theater, as well as new grantees such as the Rogue Artists Ensemble out of Los Angeles, California. Geiser, one of the inaugural grant recipients in 1982 and winner of an impressive eight additional grants, notes, “When I first became interested in puppetry, I found that the community that existed was like an extended family. . . . The Henson Foundation stands at the center of that exponentially expanding community, and offered me vital support early in my career, as it continues to do for both emerging and established artists.”⁸⁰ The grant process is standardized so that the project of an established artist is in direct competition with every other applicant. “No one has the luxury of being lazy or making assumptions,” says Cheryl Henson.⁸¹ However, it is often the case that a previous grant winner will be awarded a grant in subsequent years. Belinda Batson Brown, new to puppetry in her role as manager of the Foundation, observes, “It’s cool how you see the same artist pop up.”⁸² The board also tries to keep a broad geographical range in mind as money is dispersed, to widen the sphere of influence that puppet theater and the Foundation’s money reach. In considering whether to fund a project, it is important to the Foundation that the project reaches fruition. Board members look at the application materials and interrogate each proposal with

⁷⁹ “Grants.”

⁸⁰ “Grants.”

⁸¹ Brown.

⁸² Brown.

the question of whether the project can actually be realized in the time allotted and with the proposed budget. “We only do the project grants when they demonstrate that they can pull it off, get it off the ground,” says Cheryl Henson.⁸³

A company that has consistently shown that the work it proposes will be completed is Great Small Works, one recipient of a 2006 project grant for *The Rapture Project*. Great Small Works is a collective of six puppet artists who came together in the wake of the Persian Gulf War in 1991 to present miniature episodes taken from the headlines in a recurring program called *The Toy Theatre of Terror*⁸⁴ for which they earned a project grant from the Henson Foundation in that same year.⁸⁵ The company, then called the Ninth Street Theater, was officially established by its members as “Great Small Works” in 1995. Great Small Works’ website states that its mission is “to renew, cultivate, and strengthen the spirits of their audiences, promoting theater as a model for reanimating the public sphere and participating in democratic life.”⁸⁶ The often surreal and politically charged performances presented by the company are also “largely responsible for the revitalization of toy theater in New York City, bringing paper cut-outs, puppets and tiny proscenium arches to the city’s downtown and outer-borough theater scene.”⁸⁷ Toy theater was a popular home entertainment in the Victorian era and Great Small Works’ use of the form has resulted in their production, design, and curation of “The International Toy Theatre

⁸³ Brown.

⁸⁴ “About Great Small Works,” *Great Small Works* 2007 Great Small Works, Inc., 24 Oct 2007 <<http://www.greatsmallworks.org/about/index.html>>.

⁸⁵ “Grant Recipients 1991,” *Jim Henson Foundation* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfoundation.org/grants/grants.php?year=1991>>.

⁸⁶ “About Great Small Works.”

⁸⁷ Cait Weiss, “*The Rapture Project*,” *Theatre Talk*, 8 Jan 2007 New Theatre Corps, 24 Oct 2007 <http://newtheatercorps.blogspot.com/2007_01_01_archive.html>.

Festival and Temporary Toy Theatre Museum,” at various venues in New York City, for which the company received a 2005 presenting grant from the Jim Henson Foundation. The eighth such festival is planned for September 2008 and will continue to feature artists new to the medium as well as expert practitioners.⁸⁸

The members of Great Small Works might all be deemed experts in their art, with extensive puppetry and theater backgrounds. Dr. John Bell is a contributing editor for *The Drama Review*, the historian for *Puppetry International*, and has published several key works on the puppet theater including *Strings, Hand, and Shadows*, a look at the Paul McPharlin Collection at the Detroit Institute of the Arts.⁸⁹ Aside from his scholarly endeavors, he had an over ten-year tenure with Bread and Puppet Theater, where he first “started making theatre seriously.”⁹⁰ Bread and Puppet was also where Trudi Cohen cut her teeth as a full-time member of the company for over a decade beginning in 1974.⁹¹ She is a writer, performer, director, and musician with various organizations around New York City and further a field.⁹² Stephen Kaplin is a designer and performer who has worked on Broadway with such directors as Julie Taymor and George C. Wolfe, as well as in more intimate Off-Broadway and Off-off-Broadway venues with Theodora Skipitares, Lee Breuer of Mabou Mines, and Ping Chong. He is also a founding member of Chinese Theater Works, a company devoted to exposing audiences to the richness of the Chinese

⁸⁸ “About Great Small Works.”

⁸⁹ “About Great Small Works.”

⁹⁰ “About Great Small Works.”

⁹¹ Trudi Cohen, email interview, 1 Nov 2007.

⁹² “About Great Small Works.”

theatrical tradition.⁹³ Incidentally, Chinese Theater Works is also the recipient of a 2006 project grant from the Jim Henson Foundation for *Songs from the Yellow Earth*.⁹⁴ Chinese Theater Works has also received a seed grant in 2004 and project grants in 2001 and 2002.⁹⁵ The back-to-back project grant awards occurred before the Foundation's rule change regarding successive year applications.

Company member Jenny Romaine is the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship in puppetry and emergent forms and was recognized as a contributor to the "cultivation of new Yiddish culture, theatre, and community based performance art."⁹⁶ She too has performed with Bread and Puppet, as well as Janie Geiser and CIRCUS AMOK, Jennifer Miller's outdoor traveling show. Roberto Rossi, another Bread and Puppet alum, is a director, designer, and avid musician whose most recent directorial effort with Great Small Works, *A Walk in the City*, was performed at the POA National Festival in St. Paul, Minnesota in July 2007. The work capitalizes on the intimacy of toy theater while capturing the magic of everyday life described in the writings of Italo Calvino.⁹⁷ Dr. Mark Sussman is a director, writer, designer, and scholar with an interest in the role of technology, both old and new, in performance. He was a Visiting Artist at the Cotsen Center for Puppetry at CalArts in 1999. He has performed with Bread and Puppet, Mabou Mines, Paul Zaloom, and Janie Geiser, among others.⁹⁸ Great Small Works was given an OBIE grant award in 1997, as well as a Citation of Excellence from

⁹³ "Chinese Theatre Works," 11 Sep 2007 *Chinese Theatre Works, Inc.*, 18 Feb 2008 <<http://www.chinesetheatreworks.org/>>.

⁹⁴ "Grants"

⁹⁵ "Grants."

⁹⁶ "About Great Small Works."

⁹⁷ *Puppet Rampage* 26.

⁹⁸ "About Great Small Works."

UNIMA-USA in the same year for its Traveling Toy Theatre Festival.⁹⁹ Great Small Works also received a New York Foundation for the Arts Community Assets award in 1998.¹⁰⁰ This award “identified, preserved and strengthened existing grassroots community arts initiatives in New York City from 1997-2000.”¹⁰¹ Great Small Works does typify the “grassroots community arts initiative” in its outreach efforts to schools, museums, community centers, and other organizations.

Although the interests of its members are diverse, the company’s connection to the simplicity of expression espoused by its Bread and Puppet background is strong. “I believe that there is no theatrical form as expressive as puppetry,” asserts Trudi Cohen. “It can convey the purest, and therefore strongest, essence of emotion . . . I don’t have to pretend that I am sad—I can show you the essence of sadness in the form of a teardrop and you will understand sadness as deeply as if I cried in front of you.”¹⁰² The clarity that such simplicity gives is a contributing factor to the universality of puppetry and its ability to speak to people of different backgrounds based on their human connection, two things that Jim Henson strongly incorporated in his work. Great Small Works also has a commitment to international puppetry traditions, which is evident in much of its work. Cohen expands on this principle, saying, “I also love puppets because they hearken to global cultural history. There is much we can learn from investigating the powerful traditions of image-based

⁹⁹ “Citations of Excellence Recipients, 1997,” *UNIMA-USA* 2008 UNIMA-USA, 1 Jan 2008 <<http://www.unima-usa.org/citations/97live.html>>.

¹⁰⁰ *Puppet Rampage* 36.

¹⁰¹ “NYFA Interactive,” *New York Foundation for the Arts* 1994-2008 NYFA, 1 Jan 2008 <<http://www.nyfa.org/level4.asp?id=82&fid=5&sid=9&tid=21>>.

¹⁰² Cohen.

storytelling.”¹⁰³ By combining the idea of image-based theater with close collaboration, Great Small Works and Cohen were recognized in 2005 with the Jim Henson Award for Innovation.¹⁰⁴

The incorporation of puppetry into the company’s work has never been a question. Puppets need to be considered an “essential component, together with the overall concept, the script, and the music.” “When puppets are ‘added’ to a production,” says Cohen, “they tend to be decoration. I believe that puppets need to be the heart and soul of the show.”¹⁰⁵ This attitude reflects the feelings of the Jim Henson Foundation as they make grant award decisions. Cheryl Henson comments that the instance of grant applications by theatrical, rather than puppet-based, companies has been on the rise. The company may fully intend to utilize a puppet designer or director. Unfortunately, Henson has seen, more often than not, that if it is not the puppeteer’s production, but rather some other company’s, the puppets get dropped at the last minute.¹⁰⁶ By carefully considering not only the design of the puppets, but their application and manipulation, the Jim Henson Foundation can ensure that the work being offered to the public enlivens and enthralls. It is for this reason that Great Small Works consistently receives grants from the Foundation. Its 2006 grant-award winning show, *The Rapture Project*, marks the seventh Henson Foundation grant the company has received. Two grants were project grants for a total of \$5,000, three were seed grants for a total of \$4,000, and one was the

¹⁰³ Cohen.

¹⁰⁴ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory*, ed. Fred Thompson (Connecticut: Puppeteers of America, 2006-7) 73.

¹⁰⁵ Cohen.

¹⁰⁶ Brown.

aforementioned presenting grant for the seventh edition of the toy theater festival.¹⁰⁷

The company also received project grants in 1989, 1991, and 1992 under the name Ninth Street Theater for a total amount of \$5,500. *The Rapture Project* was also awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Spark Plug Foundation, a group devoted to “funding start-up projects and innovations in music, education and community organizing.”¹⁰⁸

The central idea of *The Rapture Project* is to utilize traditional Sicilian marionettes while examining the role religion plays in American politics, particularly fundamentalism of any kind. *Orlando Furioso*, the Sicilian marionette clash of Christians versus Muslims, provided the inspiration for the group’s realization of the show’s themes. Great Small Works received a seed grant in 2004 to develop a version of the epic battle of Orlando and his cohorts. The group was inspired to take the idea further when they read Esther Kaplan’s *With God on Their Side*.¹⁰⁹ The book details the relationship of George W. Bush’s presidential administration to Christian fundamentalism. Cohen says, “We felt that this issue needed to be exposed and critiqued. We also felt that it lent itself well to satire—extreme characters in outrageous self-created settings.”¹¹⁰ The concept of the production is “loosely based on *The Rapture*, the elaborate Fundamentalist notion of good vs. evil, where the faithful fly up to heaven as the unfaithful are destroyed together with the earth

¹⁰⁷ “Grants.”

¹⁰⁸ “Fall 2006 Grants,” *Spark Plug Foundation* Spark Plug Foundation 24 Oct 2007 <<http://www.sparkplugfoundation.org/pastgrants.html>>.

¹⁰⁹ Cohen.

¹¹⁰ Cohen.

itself.”¹¹¹ The company uses this conception as a framework to discuss contemporary American societal structures. “Ultimately, the play tries to convey our idea that good acts and social justice will be the true salvation of the world,” says Cohen.¹¹²

Eight performers engaged in the action of *The Rapture Project*; four Great Small Works company members with additional performers Shane Baker, Andrea Lomanto, Jessica Lorence and musician Jessica Lurie.¹¹³ The proscenium curtains are painted with intricate drawings taken from a 1920 book about the philosophy behind *The Rapture*.¹¹⁴ The puppets were Sicilian style marionettes, in keeping with its *Orlando* roots, with characters ranging from a Christian missionary to a punk, feminist Muslim to the CEO of a company selling defective body armor to the military to his disgruntled employee who has turned assassin.¹¹⁵ The extreme differences in the character types provide Great Small Works the platform to explore the motivations of fundamentalist groups as well as the motivations of people in powerful profit-making positions. The late Susan Sontag even makes an appearance, battling with the Devil as a “guardian angel to all in dire straits.”¹¹⁶ Such a variety of characters provide the company with many voices for their exploration of the current situation in the Middle East and the United States’ neo-imperialism in that region. Cohen notes, “One character is the ‘doubter’ and the show follows her as she questions the Christian narrative, receives an ‘annunciation’ from heaven, and

¹¹¹ Cohen.

¹¹² Cohen.

¹¹³ “*The Rapture Project*” Productions 2007 Great Small Works, Inc., 24 Oct 2007 <<http://www.greatsmallworks.org/productions/index.html#rapture>>.

¹¹⁴ Cohen.

¹¹⁵ David Bacalzo, “*The Rapture Project*,” *Theatre Mania* 1999-2007 TheatreMania Inc., 24 Oct 2007 <<http://www.theatermania.com/content/news.cfm/story/9816>>.

¹¹⁶ Bacalzo.

ultimately decides to reject the Rapture thinking and follow the path of human kindness.”¹¹⁷ The collective makes its opinion very clear with regard to that theme: “Certain documentary theatermakers pride themselves on their ability to present many opposing opinions while masking a true point of view. Great Small Works emphatically rejects this ‘evenhanded’ approach.”¹¹⁸ This clarity of vision and purpose was an asset in the construction of a project grant application and proposal, leaving little doubt in the minds of the board members of the Foundation that the company had a direction in which it was headed. The single-mindedness of Great Small Works serves the production by providing it with a unified vision. Theresa Smalec reviewed the work in *The Performing Arts Journal*, saying, that *The Rapture Project*’s “audacious vignettes invite us to rethink the extent to which fundamentalism influences our lives and institutions. By embodying forces typically viewed as intangible (music, sound, belief), the company evokes chilling residues of the past that help us to concretize future scenarios.”¹¹⁹

Other critics have seen the show as an “earnest, yet imperfectly realized satire about religious fundamentalism and the raging political conflicts in the Middle East”¹²⁰ or “a humorously tongue-in-cheek examination on the perversion of faith, satirically naming both Peace in the Middle East and decent dental care sacrilegious goals of the Anti-Christ.”¹²¹ Although the reviews acknowledge that its content is complex and its construction is clever, *The Rapture Project* also presents its audience

¹¹⁷ Cohen.

¹¹⁸ Theresa Smalec, “Praying for the End of Time,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 29.3 (2007) 55.

¹¹⁹ Smalec 56.

¹²⁰ Bacalzo.

¹²¹ Weiss.

with some major problems. The review of the show by Neil Genzlinger in *The New York Times* says that the multiple storylines presented are “all too disconnected to deliver much punch” and the use of the traditional marionettes is ineffective with a modern audience.¹²² Aaron Riccio, a reviewer for the online New Theatre Corps and one more sympathetic to the performance as a whole, observes, “the show is erratic and, like a jigsaw with missing pieces, starts to become more of an annoyance than an amusement.” He concludes by saying that the piece ends on a “good enough note” and that there are “scenes of ephemeral beauty” with “rare, truly enjoyable moments of total cohesion.”¹²³

That the reviews are so varied speaks to the underlying idea behind quite a lot of Great Small Works’ repertoire, bringing a topic to the fore for discussion and debate. Whether an audience embraces *The Rapture Project*’s style or message, Great Small Works presents the material for consideration. Cohen reports, “We do our work because we feel compelled to do it.”¹²⁴ This compulsion supercedes funding issues, and in response to a query about whether the project would have been produced without grant monies, Cohen replies, “When there is little or no funding, we pay ourselves less. We would not have been able to offer compensation to the artists without the grant.”¹²⁵ She does say that grant money for *The Rapture Project* went to the employment of independent artists to perform with the company, as well as designers and building assistants. Additionally, the grant enabled Great Small

¹²² Neil Genzlinger, “Marionettes, a Saxophone and a Battle to the Death,” *New York Times* 13 Jan 2007.

¹²³ Aaron Riccio, “*The Rapture Project*,” *Theatre Talk*, 8 Jan 2007 New Theatre Corps, 24 Oct 2007 <http://newtheatercorps.blogspot.com/2007_01_01_archive.html>.

¹²⁴ Cohen.

¹²⁵ Cohen.

Works to get the support of dramaturgical consultants and aid with puppet and stage design, particularly the technical aspects of the design. She reports that “many different people were involved in designing and building the marionettes, designing and painting the backdrops, helping in the construction of costumes and set pieces, and writing the script.”¹²⁶ The money also went to the company’s self-producing a performance of *The Rapture Project* in January 2007 at the HERE Arts Center. The costs for such an undertaking are substantial, money going not only to pay artists but also for marketing. If more money were available, Great Small Works would like to perform the show at additional venues. “There are places interested in booking *The Rapture Project*, but they do not have enough money to pay the costs of transporting the company and the luggage, and offer fees to the artists.”¹²⁷ Bringing the show to a wider audience would be a delight for Great Small Works, as the company has plans to perform in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Chapel Hill. Cohen notes, though, that two of the venues are short of funds. Great Small Works wishes that *The Rapture Project*’s audience, however large or small, will take with them a “Love of Sicilian marionettes,” “Mistrust of power,” and “Hope,” in that order.¹²⁸

In order to make that wish come true, the company carefully acknowledged its own role in the creation of the work and its message. The final moments of the show focus on the nature of puppetry and the relationship of “creator to created.” The puppeteers are revealed to the audience, self-consciously making themselves present in the work. As Cait Weiss wrote:

¹²⁶ Cohen.

¹²⁷ Cohen.

¹²⁸ Cohen.

The action of the play suggests the moral that ‘Fundamentalism = Evil, No Questions Asked,’ but with the puppeteers visibly manipulating the puppets below, a second, far more interesting moral surfaces – the moral that simply binary systems (and all the stereotypes that arise from them) need to be deeply questioned as long as someone else is pulling the strings.¹²⁹

Great Small Works has been questioning the “string pullers” and people in positions of power, and ultimately hopes to engage its audience in the ensuing discussion.

That the discussion happens as a result of a puppet show is at once amazing and amusing. Reviewers are taking puppetry seriously, encompassing not only the mechanics and visuals of the form, but the layers of meaning and message that the puppet show relates. The mission of the Jim Henson Foundation encourages this engagement of the critical audience with puppetry on multiple levels and a project grant that invites such a discussion again helps to fulfill part of the mission of the Jim Henson Foundation.

PLANTING *THE TERRIBLE POLICHINELLE*: SEED GRANT

The Jim Henson Foundation had been awarding grants for ten years when it decided to instill a new category, the seed grant. Prior to the seed grant, project grant amounts were designated by the board members and could be for as small an amount as \$1,000. The decisions were based on need, specifically to discern between developing works and works that were ready for a full theatrical production. The seed grant was established to give an artist early support in developing a puppetry project. A seed grant enables the artist to revise the piece, to workshop changes, and

¹²⁹ Weiss.

to raise more money for a completed production.¹³⁰ The Foundation awards seed grants with the hope that the project will progress beyond the developmental stage to apply for the project grant. In 1993, eleven seed grants in the amount of \$1,000 dollars each were awarded. The grant amount was raised to \$2,000 in 2002.¹³¹ In the year prior to the establishment of the seed grant category, several grants had been awarded under the heading of “special.”¹³² Two of these grants provided support for festival performances of established shows, one at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the other at the Puppeteers of America national festival. The third provided \$2,000 to the University of Maryland to conduct a workshop in conjunction with the establishment of the Jim Henson Endowment Fund.¹³³

In order to more effectively spread grant money across the country and to as many artists as possible, the Jim Henson Foundation has introduced a restriction on grant applications from the same artist in successive years. The notable exception to this restriction is the seed grant recipient who applies in the following cycle for a project grant. However, recipients may apply in the following year only if the project is the continued development of the seed grant winning project.¹³⁴ Of the seed grants awarded since 1993, twenty projects of the one hundred forty four awards have successfully applied for project money. It should be noted that the project grant application may not have been accepted in the year immediately following the seed grant award and that there may be more projects grown from seed

¹³⁰ Brown.

¹³¹ “Grants.”

¹³² “Grants.”

¹³³ “Grants.”

¹³⁴ “2007 Grant Guidelines.”

grants that, due to the evolving nature of art, have names that differ from the final productions. There may also be instances where the seed grant money was sufficient to bring the project to completion or other sources of funding were employed to finish the work. In any case, the seed grant is an important contributor to the work of emerging puppetry artists. In the 2006 granting cycle, thirteen shows were awarded seed grant funding. The techniques employed in the winning performances range from black light puppetry to toy theater to shadows to found objects.¹³⁵ While innovation is often the focus of grant winning shows, as several in this cycle incorporate film and the manipulation of light, one of the 2006 seed grant projects, *The Terrible Polichinelle*, is actually a return to traditional French glove puppets.

Polichinelle is a trickster in the tradition of Punchinello or Mr. Punch. He is the French cousin of the stick-wielding fiend, originated in the commedia dell' arte tradition of Italy. The appeal of the character caused him to be adopted by other cultures, a phenomenon that puppeteer and illustrator Judd Palmer explains, "Punch is like an elemental spirit that floats about looking for a performer to possess, and has been a jolly poltergeist since the masked, hook-nosed, rude and rustic character was called Maccus or Dossenus and appeared in Roman farce, or tumbled about with the Doric Mime."¹³⁶ Whatever his origins, Polichinelle was seen in Paris as early as 1630.¹³⁷ France actually has two versions of the character, Polichinelle and Guignol. Guignol appeared in Lyon and was the creation of Laurent Mourguet in the early

¹³⁵ "Grants."

¹³⁶ Sean Keohane, email interview, 31 Aug 2007.

¹³⁷ Bil Baird, *The Art of the Puppet* (New York: MacMillan, 1965) 96.

nineteenth century.¹³⁸ It is from this character that the French puppet theater derives its name. So popular was the character that the Polichinelle tradition began to die as people demanded the stories of their folk hero Guignol.¹³⁹ However, the character of Polichinelle may never fully disappear due to the efforts of Louis Emile Edmond Duranty on his behalf. Duranty preserved Polichinelle's exploits in an 1863 illustrated book of plays entitled *Theatre des Marionnettes du Jardin des Tuileries*.¹⁴⁰ Unlike Punch, whose story is essentially the same from performance to performance, Polichinelle features in a variety of clever stories. The book includes twenty-four Polichinelle plays in which Duranty expresses witty takes on "medicine, marriage, alcohol, the law, money lending," and other topical subjects.¹⁴¹ His desire in recording the plays was to use the character to create a better type of children's entertainment, one that would help to develop a more moral and well-educated child and eventually a better-behaved adult.¹⁴² The collection is valuable to puppet historians because, due to the secretive nature of the puppeteer's trade and the improvisational basis for his performance, few scripts have been passed down from before the twentieth century. In a recent edition of *Puppetry International*, the script was given attention despite guest editor and puppetry scholar John Bell's statement that "Ultimately, puppetry is not a text-based form." He explains, "Whereas the tradition of 'The Drama' supposes and promulgates a process beginning with a playwright, passing through producers, directors, and actors to the realization of a

¹³⁸ John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800-1914* (United Kingdom: Cambridge U P, 1998) 38.

¹³⁹ Baird 111-3.

¹⁴⁰ Baird 103.

¹⁴¹ Baird 104.

¹⁴² Keohane, email interview.

play onstage, puppet theatre is more often ‘devised’”¹⁴³ However, the existence of the script, asserts Bell, in many cases can point to the intense religious or political implications of the puppet, the trend setting nature of object theater in general, and the dramaturgy and execution of historical forms. In this vein, a script entitled *Polichinelle: Corrupter of Youth*, translated by seed grant recipient Sean Keohane appears in the issue.¹⁴⁴

Sean Keohane is a playwright, actor, director, and puppeteer working out of the Bronx, New York. His interest in puppetry was first piqued when he and his brothers put on “mini-plays,” using stuffed animals and action figures, for relatives, neighbors, and anyone who would watch. He was even given permission by the nuns of his parochial school to perform for the younger students. Keohane developed his affinity for puppet theater, and performed Punch and Judy with handmade papier-mâché hand puppets from the age of twelve. However, he stopped performing with puppets when acting became his principal interest around age eighteen.¹⁴⁵ His professional career took him to Florida where he began directing productions for the Disney Theme Parks.¹⁴⁶ He reports that several of the shows he was assigned involved puppets and he was introduced to the puppeteers who worked in the parks. Keohane was impressed by these “people who would seemingly do anything, no matter how physically strenuous, without the ego some actors had!”¹⁴⁷

Working with these committed puppeteers, Keohane put his theory that a theater is a

¹⁴³ John Bell, “Editorial,” *Puppetry International* 20 (2006) 2.

¹⁴⁴ Louis Duranty, “*Polichinelle, Corrupter of Youth*,” trans. Sean Keohane, *Puppetry International* 20 (2006) 34.

¹⁴⁵ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁴⁶ Sean Keohane. “Where in America to See a Punch and Judy Show,” *American Round Up* 17 Dec 2007 Puppet Magic, 18 Feb 2008 <<http://puppetmagic.co.uk/americas/usroundup.htm>>.

¹⁴⁷ Keohane, email interview.

sacred space akin to a church, but also somehow like a scientific laboratory to the test. He says:

In a puppet show, strange creatures come to life in the lab, at least for the duration of the performance. These creatures that do not exist, that may in fact be the amalgam of several people manipulating rags or chunks of foam or blocks of wood, sometimes form such an impression that the audience can think of the puppets' 'lives,' even the continuation of their 'lives' outside of the play, for years after the play is over and the puppets put down or discarded, or even dismantled.¹⁴⁸

Using the amazing power of belief supplied by his audience as well as the talented artists he had met at Disney, he formed a company called "Orlando Furioso!" The name is a geographical reference as well as a reference to the classic puppet theater of Sicily utilized in *The Rapture Project*. With this group he presented *The Torture Chamber of Dr. Bear*, a spoof of children's television shows featuring puppet and human nudity in 2001.¹⁴⁹ The work was about a "fellow who was unhappy in his life, someone who had lost his inner self, and took refuge inside a full body puppet."¹⁵⁰ The metaphor of this loss was best expressed with a puppet and the show was performed at the Orlando Fringe Festival and the Puppeteers of America National Festival. The piece was deeply personal and spoke to many universal concerns for adults who are discontent with their lot in life. Keohane enjoyed presenting such complicated psychological issues but wanted to "move back to traditional, Punch & Judy style European hand puppetry."¹⁵¹ In the 1980s, he had seen a puppet troupe at the Sterling Forest Renaissance Faire perform traditional

¹⁴⁸ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁴⁹ *2001: A Puppet Odyssey* 13.

¹⁵⁰ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁵¹ Keohane, email interview.

Punch and Judy, based on the script recorded by John Payne-Collier in the 1828,¹⁵² as well as a Polichinelle performance based on Bil Baird's translation of "The Cask," featured in *The Art of the Puppet*.¹⁵³ He always remembered the foreign company's spirited performances. In 2005, Keohane traveled to Paris where he chatted to Pascal Pruvost about Duranty's work with Polichinelle. Pruvost is the owner of the Theatre Anatole, which specializes in Guignol performance. As a result of the trip and his conversation with Pruvost, Keohane picked up the collection of scripts in French and began translating them for performers in the United States to use.¹⁵⁴ Although the United States has never had its own "Punch" tradition, there are plenty of people who perform this classic form of fairground entertainment. Keohane maintains an online calendar of Punch and Judy performances by these individuals¹⁵⁵ and thought that the players might appreciate some new material. "I wanted to be able to sit in an audience and watch these funny old plays being performed . . . but there were no takers!" Keohane laments. He reports that one puppeteer told him "no modern audience would have the attention to sit through an ancient, verbal puppet show written for children over a century ago."¹⁵⁶ Faced with such opposition, Keohane found it necessary to stage them himself.

The mission of *The Terrible Polichinelle*, aside from providing another venue for the commedia dell' arte-derived Punch archetype, is "to keep a link to the past alive and raise awareness of the humorous, surreal, and literary 19th century puppet

¹⁵² Baird 93.

¹⁵³ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁵⁴ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁵⁵ Sean Keohane. "Where in America to See a Punch and Judy Show."

¹⁵⁶ Keohane, email interview.

plays of Louis Duranty through new productions of his works.”¹⁵⁷ In order to create this link and allow a contemporary audience to enter the world Duranty created, Keohane appears in the play series as the playwright himself in a costume suggesting the formality of the period or at least “the professional professorial look of the *montreur-animateur* of a puppet cabaret.”¹⁵⁸ His version of Duranty is aware of the audience and the need to adjust his hundred-fifty-year-old scripts to contemporary tastes, while maintaining the qualities of the original scripts. In keeping with the authentic flavor of the older texts, the play has an improvisational feel to it and varies according to its audience. The shows can be performed for family or adult audiences. The puppets employed are standard glove puppets in the Polichinelle custom, created by Petr and Katia Rezac of Prague, Czech Republic.¹⁵⁹ Of the puppets, Keohane says:

I use traditional hand puppets . . . because they are familiar from childhood. Adult audiences react to them as children do, too—and so we like to perform before either audiences of young children, or audiences of uninhibited adults at a puppet slam, especially audiences that have had one-and-a-half beers or glasses of wine apiece. By the end of the show they are usually shouting advice out to the puppets, something which caught me off-guard in early performances, but which happens as a matter-of-course when presenting shows to children.¹⁶⁰

A testament to the show, *Merchant of Blows-with-a-Stick* in this instance, and its ability to adapt itself to the audience and staging conditions occurred when Keohane performed it at the Puppeteers of America National Festival in St. Paul,

¹⁵⁷ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁵⁸ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁵⁹ Sean Keohane. “Where in America to See a Punch and Judy Show.”

¹⁶⁰ Keohane, email interview.

Minnesota in July 2007.¹⁶¹ On the afternoon of July 17, it was played to a general audience in the courtyard of Concordia University. Steven Widerman assisted Keohane behind the puppet booth, supplying both musical accompaniment and an extra pair of hands. The play progressed as expected until in a later scene, the play board—an essential part of a glove puppet stage—fell to the ground. Widerman attempted to assist Keohane but the puppets were quicker to respond. Polichinelle, this time in the guise of salesman, was engaged in an exchange with a customer, also puppeteered by Keohane. The customer remarked that Polichinelle’s shop was not as professional as he expected it to be. Polichinelle wrote off the missing play board by saying that he had just opened and had not yet had time to establish himself.¹⁶² The circumstance provided the line rather than the script and the audience appreciated the charm of the characters’ self-awareness and the speed of its performer’s mind. Keohane observes, “It is fortunate that my Polichinelle puppet is both funnier and quicker on his feet than I am, for he has gotten us both out of tight spots with his clowning.”¹⁶³ The following night, Polichinelle appeared again, this time for an audience of adults, intoxicated and otherwise, at a puppet slam. As the audience settled itself, Polichinelle openly observed them, commenting that he could see Steve Abrams, a former president of the POA; the “inimitable” Bernice Silver, an elder stateswoman of the POA known for her eccentric and performances,¹⁶⁴ and the

¹⁶¹ *Puppet Rampage* 18.

¹⁶² Sean Keohane, perf., *Polichinelle Gets a Big Hand*, by Louis Duranty, trans. Sean Keohane, Concordia University, St. Paul, 17 Jul 2007.

¹⁶³ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁶⁴ Shari Aronson, “Potpourri: the Heart of the Festival,” *Puppetry Journal* 54.4 (2003) 5.

dissertation author.¹⁶⁵ The audience was appreciative of the references to people it knew and laughed as Polichinelle joked openly about Silver's endearing zaniness. The puppet slam's entirely adult audience allowed the performer Polichinelle the license to be his rude and naughty self.

Keohane's project is a developing one and it calls for the creation of a repertory company of glove puppets to play all of the roles in the numerous plays. Actually, Cheryl Henson observes that Keohane's grant award does not fit the standard model for the seed grant. The seed is intended for use to develop a project that would go to full theatrical production. In general, the Foundation does not fund projects based solely on traditional puppetry, puppetry research, or academic work. Keohane's translation project would not have been given grant money in such a case. As he is also performing the work, creating a "living historical document," the board gave him the grant.¹⁶⁶ The Jim Henson Foundation's support of *The Terrible Polichinelle* has enabled the project to evolve at a much quicker pace than if Keohane were to produce it on his own. The money was used to pay for the puppet booth in which the show is performed as well as for many of the puppets in the puppet cast, now numbering fourteen members including a few animal puppets. Additionally, the prestige of a grant from the Jim Henson Foundation has enabled the Terrible Polichinelle Theatre, as Keohane calls his company, to successfully approach performance venues and interest established puppeteers in working on

¹⁶⁵ Sean Keohane, perf., Puppet Slam, Concordia University, St. Paul, 18 Jul 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Brown.

future productions of the shows. Keohane would have continued in his mission without the grant money, he says, but the money helped speed the project. He applied for a 2007 project grant, though he was not awarded the \$5,000 in that cycle.

In a concurrent project dealing with the translation of Duranty's work, Keohane had five of the scripts published, one in *Puppetry International*¹⁶⁷ and a collection of the five by Charlemagne Press in the book *Merchant of Blows-with-a-Stick and Other Plays*.¹⁶⁸ Creating a catalog of puppet plays from which puppeteers can draw is highly desirable to the puppetry community. A puppetry canon will enable beginning performers to hone their skills using the material, much like acting students use scene work to explore their craft and stretch their muscles. That said, Keohane ultimately would like to reach audiences with these funny puppet plays. "If these old texts can be revived, with new life breathed into them, and a part of the literary history of puppetry preserved for another century or so, the project will have been well worth doing."¹⁶⁹ The preservation of puppetry, while not directly the mission of the Jim Henson Foundation, is important to the organization. Henson frequently acknowledged the conventions, characters, and creative people that preceded his monumental career. In order for the art form to advance, an awareness of and connection to its past is necessary and the Jim Henson Foundation's efforts toward this connection is more fully examined in the chapter on the International Festival of Puppet Theater.

¹⁶⁷ Duranty 34-7.

¹⁶⁸ Keohane, email interview.

¹⁶⁹ Keohane, email interview.

PRODUCING *PINOCCHIO*: CHILDREN'S SHOW GRANT

Although the Jim Henson Foundation has contributed to increasing the visibility of puppetry as an art form and supports the further development of innovative puppet theater, whatever its target audience, puppetry in the United States has taken on the guise of youth and family entertainment over the past century. Jim Henson encountered the public's immediate association of puppets with children throughout his career. Cheryl Henson says, "He enjoyed doing the children's program but it was limiting. The full range of puppetry is about ideas, language, images: it's about so much more than being cute and cuddly."¹⁷⁰ The majority of the grants awarded by the Jim Henson Foundation have been to projects for an adult audience. The 2006 granting cycle saw the introduction of a new grant category, one defined specifically for children's shows. The children's show grant awards \$3,000 for the development and production of quality puppetry performance aimed at a child audience. The introduction of the children's show grant sets aside money to promote innovation in work being seen by youngsters, sometimes at a very early age. By exposing children to high quality, well produced, and provocative puppet theater, one assumes and hopes that they would seek out the same as adults. Until 2006, an artist producing a show for children could apply for a project or seed grant, but the competition from other adult-centered shows often made earning the award more difficult.¹⁷¹ Incidentally, a show that is aimed toward a younger audience may still apply for the seed grant, followed by the project grant, for a total of \$7,000. A seed

¹⁷⁰ Elissa Schappell, "No Strings Attached," *Harper's Bazaar* Sep 1998, 405-6.

¹⁷¹ Brown.

grant recipient may not apply for a children's show grant, however, nor may a project grant recipient apply for a children's show grant in the following cycle, or vice versa. The inaugural grant recipients for the children's show grant were the Center for Puppetry Arts with a project entitled *The Great Mummy Mystery*, a musical exploration of ancient Egyptian culture by Jon Ludwig; the Hudson Vagabond Puppets play *Butterfly*, incorporating dance with puppets to tell the story of the insect's life cycle; Jollyship the Whiz-bang's *The Colonists*, a movement and puppetry piece about bees; Nana Projects' show *Luna*, a magic lantern performance; and Erin K. Orr's *It's a Bee, Honey*, also about the microcosmic world of bees, presented in conjunction with puppetry workshops; and Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre's *Pinocchio*.¹⁷²

Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre was established in 1971 by Reg and Janet Bradley in Hawaii. Two years later, the Bradleys relocated to their current home in Portland, Oregon, and Tears of Joy has been producing puppet plays there, annually performing for over 250,000 people.¹⁷³ The company's website proclaims, "The mission of Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre is to produce, develop, and present puppet theatre that celebrates the diversity of world cultures; and to teach children and enrich their lives by helping them experience, create, and perform art with professional artists."¹⁷⁴ Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre performs nationally and internationally in conventional theater spaces, community centers, performing arts festivals, and schools. Founder Reg Bradley began working with puppets when he

¹⁷² "Grants."

¹⁷³ "About Us," *Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre* Tears of Joy, 10 Oct 2007 <http://www.tojt.com/about_us.htm>.

¹⁷⁴ "About Us," *Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre*.

designed a show for the pre-school at his church. Co-founder and managing director, Janet Bradley reports that it was “such a success he began exploring the power of puppets as a teaching tool. He also began exploring puppetry as an art form.”¹⁷⁵ He even devised some puppet theater for adults during his early experimentations. Through these early performances, he and Janet realized that “Puppetry combines the power of vivid imagery with the power of story. It captures the imagination of adults and children alike.”¹⁷⁶

Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre’s Artistic Director Nancy Aldrich has been working with puppets since 1981¹⁷⁷ and has been with Tears of Joy since 1984, becoming artistic director for the theater in 2000.¹⁷⁸ Her attraction to puppetry was driven by realizations similar to those the Bradley experienced through their early work. “Puppetry is a very powerful medium with the ability to communicate through symbol and metaphor, enabling all audience members to become personally invested in the characters and story line on a universal level,” says Aldrich. This idea of a universal communication provided by puppets is a draw for the artists and was thoroughly explored by Tears of Joy in its 1990 publication of *The Language of the Puppet*. This edited book features nineteen articles with the aim of defining how it is that a puppet speaks to an audience and how an audience continues to perceive and receive puppet theater. The preface to the book admits that there is no definitive answer to the question but rather “a rich tapestry of response, with common threads that continually reappear, though they may change color and form depending upon

¹⁷⁵ Janet Bradley, email interview, 21 Aug 2007.

¹⁷⁶ Janet Bradley.

¹⁷⁷ Nancy Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

¹⁷⁸ Nancy Aldrich, email interview, 11 Sep 2007.

the view of the writer.”¹⁷⁹ The book accompanied a conference of the same name in Vancouver, Washington, in May of the same year. *The Language of the Puppet* was awarded a Jim Henson Foundation grant in 1989 for the amount of \$5,000.¹⁸⁰ The conference and book furthered the idea of international cooperation that UNIMA festivals had promoted.

Additionally, it recognized that the adoption by many artists of different international techniques and styles is one of the strengths of the art of puppetry. The incorporation of international techniques into their puppetry work has been acknowledged by Henson Foundation grantees Julie Taymor, Basil Twist, and Larry Reed of ShadowLight Productions. *The Language of the Puppet*, as one of the first collections to celebrate puppetry’s various uses and the meanings each conveys, continues to be a much consulted resource for puppeteers and puppetry scholars. Reg Bradley contributed the closing essay to the book, entitled “The Burning Bush: Dynamics of the Puppet Stage.” In it, he examines an audience’s willingness to believe in the inanimate, particularly as the objects of performance appear next to their manipulator. “The priest is to the chalice as the puppeteer is to the puppet. Both administer with an object endowed with divine significance. Both depend on the god and the vision of the audience member or parishioner for a transcendent experience.”¹⁸¹ He continues to discuss what it is within the puppet and the manipulation of the puppet that leads an audience to believe in the puppet’s “ultimate

¹⁷⁹ “Preface,” *The Language of the Puppet* eds. Laurence R. Kominz and Mark Levenson (1990; Vancouver: Pacific Puppetry Press, 1998) iv.

¹⁸⁰ “Grants.”

¹⁸¹ Reg Bradley, “The Burning Bush,” *The Language of the Puppet* eds. Laurence R. Kominz and Mark Levenson (1990; Vancouver: Pacific Puppetry Press, 1998) 107.

objective,” this transcendence.¹⁸² In his essay, the basic elements of the puppet stage are introduced and the aims of the puppeteer, or Bradley’s explanation of them, are elucidated. The essay closes by returning to the metaphorical priest/puppeteer saying, “The puppet stage is a holy stage where clay is transformed into a living being.”¹⁸³

With such a grand statement of the language of the puppet and the purpose of puppetry, it comes as no surprise that the company is still devoted to producing challenging and thought-provoking puppet theater. Aldrich says, “We always want to surpass the audience’s expectations of puppetry while also telling a compelling story that allows us to better understand our common struggles as human beings, with a greater capacity to think critically, and to inspire creativity in their daily lives.”¹⁸⁴ A commitment to quality has characterized the company’s work and Tears of Joy has received three UNIMA Citations for Excellence.¹⁸⁵ It has also received Jim Henson Foundation grants for *The Miser of Tahoma*, a Native American story awarded \$3,000 in 1987; \$2,000 for *The Old Musician* (later named *Fire on the Mountain*)¹⁸⁶ in 1990; and \$3,000 for *The Day of the Dead*, a collaborative effort with Teatro Milagro/The Miracle Theatre¹⁸⁷ in 2002.¹⁸⁸ The company received a seed grant in 2005 for the amount of \$2,000 to begin development on *Pinocchio*.

¹⁸² Reg Bradley 108.

¹⁸³ Reg Bradley 112.

¹⁸⁴ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

¹⁸⁵ “About Us,” *Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre*.

¹⁸⁶ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

¹⁸⁸ “Grants.”

The seed grant was awarded to the company prior to the institution of the children's show grant, thus explaining how a seed grant earned a children's show grant rather than a project grant in the following year.

The Adventures of Pinocchio: Story of a Puppet was written in serial form by Carlo Collodi in 1881 and was first published as a complete book in 1883.¹⁸⁹ The story has become an enduring tale of morality and valor, interpreted into a notable film version by Walt Disney in 1940.¹⁹⁰ It chronicles the adventures of a marionette who comes to life and has been given the chance to become a real little boy if he can prove himself to be honest, brave, and kind. It is a tale of morality that has been used since its first publication to educate children around the world. The appeal of the story for production by a puppet theater is obvious. Its protagonist is a puppet, one of the most famous in history. That the connection is so evident might also suggest that a production of *Pinocchio* would lack imagination or innovation. In the twenty-six years that the Jim Henson Foundation has given grants, there have only been three given to support productions of *Pinocchio*. Two have gone to Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre for its version of the story and the other, in the amount of \$3,000, was awarded in 2002 to Lee Bryan for a show that would utilize found objects, shadow puppets, and masks to tell the tale.¹⁹¹ Tears of Joy opted to perform *Pinocchio* as a way to celebrate the opening of its 35th anniversary season in Portland.¹⁹² The production, the company's kick-off to its Family Series, opened

¹⁸⁹ Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny* (Johns Hopkins: Baltimore, 1995) 34-5.

¹⁹⁰ "Pinocchio (1940)," *The Internet Movie Database*, 1990-2007, Internet Movie Database, Inc., 26 Sep 2007 <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0032910>>.

¹⁹¹ "Grants."

¹⁹² Janet Bradley.

November 9, 2007 with ten scheduled performances in the Winningstad Theatre in the Portland Center for the Performing Arts through November 25 and a single performance at the Royal Durst Theatre in the Vancouver School of Arts and Academics in Vancouver, Washington December 1.¹⁹³ The 2007-2008 Family Series would also feature “Puppetz vs. People,” an improvisational showdown; a revival of the company’s *Petrouchka*, performed to the Igor Stravinsky score and a winner of the UNIMA Citation in 1987;¹⁹⁴ *Anansi the Spider*, featuring a pair of stories starring the West African trickster; and *Stellaluna* based on the book by Janell Cannon.¹⁹⁵

Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre had never before approached *Pinocchio* and Aldrich says that she had avoided the story in her career for several reasons. Aside from her feeling that puppet theaters have overdone the story in general, the conventions of the original --written episodically—tend toward “choppy productions.”¹⁹⁶ A more complicated problem is “the confusing nature of a story of a puppet performed by puppets.” Aldrich was concerned that the character of Pinocchio, an actual puppet, might not be distinct from the other characters--- Geppetto, the puppet master, the blue fairy---if they too were depicted by puppets. Aldrich continues, “That is to say, if Pinocchio is distinguished as a puppet, then all the other characters . . . should exist in a different reality.”¹⁹⁷ These problems, coupled with how to make Pinocchio a “real boy” were solved, however, once

¹⁹³ “Family Series,” *Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre 2007* Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre, 10 Oct 2007 <<http://www.tojt.com/FamilySeries.html>>

¹⁹⁴ “Citations of Excellence Recipients, 1974-1995,” *UNIMA-USA 2008* UNIMA-USA, 1 Jan 2008 <http://www.unima-usa.org/citations/74_95.html>.

UNIMA 2008 UNIMA-USA 17 Jan 2008 <<http://www.unima-usa.org/citations>>.

¹⁹⁵ “Family Series.”

¹⁹⁶ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

¹⁹⁷ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

Aldrich re-read the Collodi original. She realized that logic and reality were unimportant to the telling of the story, a rather “avant-garde” idea for its time.¹⁹⁸

Janet Bradley looks at the original story as “powerful and touching. It is the story of a child learning to think of others before self.”¹⁹⁹

To address Aldrich’s concern about telling a puppet’s story using puppets, the company decided to utilize a combination of actors, masks, rod marionettes, shadow puppets, and black light puppetry. The company has always been committed to producing plays that puppets can perform better than actors. Bradley says, “A frog can transform to a prince, a dragon can fly, creatures can talk, etc.”²⁰⁰ Aldrich furthers the idea of enabling the puppet’s special traits to come through by noting, “The added visual qualities of the puppet, which can accentuate artistic style, mood, character and theme, enhance the production and spectacle.”²⁰¹ The variety of techniques employed also furthers Tears of Joy’s mission to make the audience aware of the diversity of puppetry forms and the art and potential of the puppet. The question of how to utilize the plastic elements of puppetry to tell the story of *Pinocchio* was answered through an examination of the basic storytelling elements that Tears of Joy decided to embrace in its version. Aldrich decided to make the fox and the cat, recurring characters in the story, more essential to the entire plot. “Let them drive the action,” says Aldrich, “set up Pinocchio’s failures, because, after all, they consciously mislead, whereas Pinocchio is simply undisciplined.”²⁰² In Autumn

¹⁹⁸ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

¹⁹⁹ Janet Bradley.

²⁰⁰ Janet Bradley.

²⁰¹ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²⁰² Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

2005, Aldrich had the good fortune to be discussing the project with Jon Ludwig, Artistic Director of the Center for Puppetry Arts and winner of multiple Citations for Excellence, who offered to write the script.²⁰³ Originally, the script was to be written by Luba Zarembinska, director of the Stacja Szamocin Theatre in Poland,²⁰⁴ but Zarembinska had recently taken a full-time position elsewhere, leaving the company without a playwright. Ludwig took the idea of making the tricksters central and developed it into Tears of Joy's "Cautionary Tale for Girls and Boys."²⁰⁵

In this version, 'Doctor' Fox and 'Professor' Cat are performing for the audience, presenting them with a "cautionary tale," performed with puppets and masks. The two characters are masked actors, "very much over the top, comically bad actors, the kind of villains that you love to hate."²⁰⁶ Pinocchio is their assistant, helping them with the menial tasks and the heavy lifting involved in making the fox and cat's show run. As the cunning duo tells stories from the puppet's life, Pinocchio enjoys taking center stage. The final report submitted to the Henson Foundation explains:

Using Sicilian marionettes, we see Geppetto create Pinocchio, Master Fire Eater's Puppet Show with Punchinello and Harlequino, and the Field of Wonders. A rod puppet is used in the nose-growing scene with the Blue Fairy, a masked actress. Shadow puppets create the Land of Toys, projected through two thin layers of fabric, allowing our spinning carnival to have double projections. Blacklight is used for the underwater scene, and then the puppet stage magically transforms into the whale's mouth.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²⁰⁴ "Luba Zarembinska," *CEC Artslink* LOT Polish Airlines, 16 Oct 2007 <<http://www.polishculture-nyc.org/events.htm>>.

²⁰⁵ Janet Bradley.

²⁰⁶ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²⁰⁷ Nancy Aldrich, "Final report *Pinocchio*," Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre, Portland, Dec 2007.

In between the episodes, Pinocchio returns to assist the fox and the cat. Over time, he tires of the repetitious actions he is forced to perform. Eventually, he rebels against his employers and escapes into the audience. In this way he becomes a real boy—he refuses to be manipulated further by the fox and the cat.²⁰⁸ At the same time, the audience is given the opportunity to see itself in the boy-puppet and to take control of the daily events in its life. Janet Bradley’s hope for the audience is “that each child must become strong enough to say NO to more powerful figures in their life who promise fun and riches rather than doing what is right.”²⁰⁹ Aldrich agrees:

It is our ability to comprehend our actions, and not go by base instincts alone, that makes us human. It is our ability to take responsibility for our actions that make us civilized. In a time when there are so many attacks on individuality, freedom of speech and compassion, it seems that this “new twist” is needed and is, in fact, already in Carlo Collodi’s timeless tale.²¹⁰

Tears of Joy’s 35th Anniversary season might not have included *Pinocchio* had it not been for the Children’s Show Grant. The project did not receive funding from many other grantors so the money was even more essential to Tears of Joy’s process.²¹¹ With the Henson seed grant in 2005, Bradley says that Tears of Joy got “early money so we could plan and commission a script from a wonderful playwright. It also gave us part of the money to work with a great designer and funds to commission an original music score and the recording costs.”²¹² Jon Ludwig’s pedigree as a puppet playwright has been established for both children and adults. *Pinocchio* was the first script Ludwig had written for which he was not also

²⁰⁸ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²⁰⁹ Janet Bradley.

²¹⁰ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²¹¹ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²¹² Janet Bradley.

the director. The playwright came to the final week of rehearsals, in time to make adjustments and revisions to the script. The visit was an occasion at which the company was understandably anxious. He responded to the performance, “You have done an outstanding job. All that is left is the feasting. The table has been gloriously set by you.”²¹³

Ludwig’s “you” includes many artists apart from Aldrich and Bradley. The final report reflects, “With many puppets and effects, we had to increase our production team, making our production expenses greater than usual, and it shows.”²¹⁴ Christopher L. Harris is the designer for the production, with puppets constructed by Bill Holznagel, (though Tears of Joy cites Jason Miranda as the puppet builder on the project,)²¹⁵ and costumes designed by Martha Hines.²¹⁶ Eric Stern of the Vagabond Opera, a Balkan Arabic Klezmer-based ensemble specializing in absurd cabaret style performances, composed the music for *Pinocchio*. He has been called “an unparalleled devo with incendiary stage presence and devilish virtuosity”²¹⁷ and his score incorporates cello, trumpet, accordion, and piano instrumentations to give the production an Italian feel.²¹⁸ Live musicians recorded it for playback during performance, instead of using a computer generated score.

Aldrich recognizes the contribution of the grant money with respect to their artistic

²¹³ Aldrich, “Final report *Pinocchio*.”

²¹⁴ Aldrich, “Final report *Pinocchio*.”

²¹⁵ Aldrich, “Final report *Pinocchio*.”

²¹⁶ Marty Hughley, “As human and marionette, *Pinocchio* is a winner by a nose,” *The Oregonian* 2007 Oregon Live LLC, 12 Nov 2007

<<http://www.oregonlive.com/entertainment/oregonian/index.ssf?/base/entertainment/119482893267260.xml&coll=7>>.

²¹⁷ “Eric Stern,” *Vagabond Opera* 2006 Vagabond Opera, 15 Oct 2007

<<http://www.vagabondopera.com/bios/eric-stern.php>>.

²¹⁸ “*Pinocchio*,” *Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre Curriculum Guide* 2007 Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre, 15 Oct 2007 <<http://www.tajt.com/studyguides/Pinocchio%20curriculum%20guide-1.htm>>.

standards. “The inspiration we gain by being able to collaborate with such talented artists propels us to a higher level of achievement.”²¹⁹ When asked what the company might do with additional money, Aldrich replies that she would add more production staff such as a stage manager, hire additional artists to construct the puppets (a point on which Bradley concurs), and have the music performed live on stage.²²⁰

Regardless of what the company *might* have done with more money, *Pinocchio* opened Tears of Joy’s anniversary season with great success. The final report submitted to the Jim Henson Foundation notes that, instead of ten performances, as initially planned, the show was performed twenty times for at least 4,000 people.²²¹ In addition to these completed performances, Tears of Joy is producing a marketing packet with a promotional DVD to extend the life of the show and the grant’s benefits. “Considering the success we are enjoying both with the school and public audiences, we expect this production to enjoy a very long life as a permanent addition to our touring repertoire.” The final report continues, saying to the Foundation, “Thank you so much for helping us to improve the artistic quality of our work while expanding our options for touring to venues throughout the West.”²²² The quality of the work was the focus of a review entitled, “As Human and Marionette, *Pinocchio* wins by a nose,” published in *The Oregonian*, a Portland newspaper.²²³ Puns abound in the review, perhaps forgivably as it deals with a

²¹⁹ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²²⁰ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²²¹ Aldrich, “Final report *Pinocchio*.”

²²² Aldrich, “Final report *Pinocchio*.”

²²³ Hughley.

family-centered puppet show; for instance, calling the lead character “a blockhead” as he has been carved from a solid block. Another aptly phrased pun points to the strength of Ludwig’s script where “a sometimes musical but never obtrusive rhyme scheme” keeps the dialogue “far from wooden.” The music, costumes, and scenery all get their share of attention, but the article praises the performers most of all. Rollin Carlson, who played both the puppet and the “real boy” versions of Pinocchio, “puts across the puppet's wanna-be boyish enthusiasm with an infectiously floppy physicality.”²²⁴ Ithaca Tells’s vocal talents are praised in her role as the “sweet-natured but self-interested” Professor Cat and Tony Fuemmeler is described as “aristocratically untrustworthy” in the role of Doctor Fox.²²⁵

That the actors and characters get the most attention demonstrates that Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre has accomplished its goal in producing its *Adventures of Pinocchio: A Cautionary Tale for Girls and Boys*. Instead of considering the mechanics of the puppets and masked characters, the critic and, by extension, the audience, reframes the story to see how Pinocchio’s travails might teach them about their lives. Tears of Joy is pleased that the production is able “to get the audience to think for themselves, be aware of themselves and others, and understand their individuality and commonality.”²²⁶ This mission of *Pinocchio* is one that Jim Henson actively pursued when he created *Fraggle Rock*, a television show for children with the idea to “Bring Peace to the World,”²²⁷ through understanding of the things that

²²⁴ Hughley.

²²⁵ Hughley.

²²⁶ Aldrich, email interview, 5 Sep 2007.

²²⁷ Sam Hale, “Gems and Juhls.” *Puppetry Journal* 52.3 (2001) 10.

make the world and its creatures one. The Jim Henson Foundation and Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre believe that such a goal can be achieved through positive people, encouraging messages and, as unlikely as it may sound, puppetry.

PERFORMING AT HERE: PRESENTING GRANT

In 2003, the Jim Henson Foundation created another new grant category, the presenting grant. This grant goes to a theater company or venue to assist it in showcasing puppetry performance. The Foundation realized that great puppetry work could only be appreciated when it has the opportunity to be exposed to an audience in a space suitable for the show's needs. In even numbered years, from 1992 through 2000, the International Festival of Puppet Theater presented by the Jim Henson Foundation served this function. With the cessation of the Festival, the need for venues for puppetry increased. The presenting grant is not as widely advertised by the Foundation as its other grants. The Foundation only awards the presenting grant in New York City, so it prefers to promote the grant locally. Presenting organizations outside of the city may obtain money to assist in the presentation of puppet theater but that money would be awarded as a "special" grant, as the case may dictate.²²⁸ This stipulation appears to have been added after the initial presenting grants were awarded in 2003, as the California Institute of the Arts, the Asheville Puppetry Alliance, and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs all received

²²⁸ Brown.

presenting grants in that year.²²⁹ The grants additionally are limited to the presentation of important international puppetry work or the funding or mounting of shows that the Foundation has previously awarded grant money.²³⁰ Past recipients have included La Mama ETC, the Theater for the New City, and Broadway's New Victory Theater. Every year the Jim Henson Foundation awards \$25,000 in presenting grants.²³¹ The grant provides \$5,000 from the Jim Henson Foundation with a matching donation supplied by Heather Henson, Jim's youngest child. The additional money is not advertised but rather appears in the award letter that comes to explain the funding on receipt of the grant.²³² There are also presenting grants made for \$2,500, an amount also matched by Heather Henson. The award size is based on the needs of the presenting organization and the size of the show being presented.²³³

To apply for a presenting grant, the presenting organization does not write a letter of intent, as other grant hopefuls do, but rather writes a one-to-three page proposal.²³⁴ The proposal takes a narrative form, offering a scenario for the season with information about each project to be included in the grant. The information includes, among other things, the number of projected performances of a show, the time of year it would appear in the season, if the show is a "stand-alone" project or part of a larger whole, a listing of other activities that accompany the show such as workshops, discussions, or talk-backs with artists, a visual to accompany each show,

²²⁹ "Grants."

²³⁰ Brown.

²³¹ Brown.

²³² Barbara Busackino, personal interview, 1 Nov 2007.

²³³ Brown.

²³⁴ Brown.

and a budget proposal.²³⁵ The award money does not come with any stipulation for its use but the Foundation would prefer the money to go to pay for the artists, rather than advertising or other business related expenses. Belinda Brown notes, “We’d love to say, ‘Just use it for the artist,’” but the Foundation realizes that there are often other concerns that require the money in order for the production to occur.²³⁶ The money simply needs to go to *the show*. The award exists because it is so difficult for puppet artists to find spaces in which to perform, and it is so expensive once located. As Brown points out, after the venue is secured, the artist needs to find a place to rehearse and build the show and the Foundation is also able to give advice about these matters.²³⁷ The presenting grant takes the concerns of presenting the show off the shoulders of the artist and places them into the more experienced hands of established theaters.

One such theater to receive a presenting grant in 2006 was the HERE Arts Center, located on the lower west side of Manhattan. It is worth noting that HERE has received a presenting grant every year since the grant’s inception.²³⁸ HERE Arts Center was founded in 1993 with a mission to support artists’ independence within an independent community. HERE’s website maintains, “This community provides the artist with access, arts management innovation, and nonprofit enterprise. We measure our overall success by the lively, active exchange that occurs in our spaces daily. We cultivate adaptability in order to best respond to the needs of our

²³⁵ Busackino.

²³⁶ Brown.

²³⁷ Brown.

²³⁸ “Grants.”

community.”²³⁹ In addition, HERE’s mission is to “support multidisciplinary work that does not fit into a conventional programming agenda.”²⁴⁰ To that end, HERE has several art development programs, the HERE Artistic Residency Program (HARP) and the Dream Music Puppetry Program. The Dream Music Puppetry Program commissions and develops new puppetry work over a one-to-three year period.²⁴¹ These programs provide an outlet for works-in-progress showing, workshop performances, and eventually full-scale productions. HERE attempts to support these burgeoning artists not only by giving them a venue in which to present work, but by equipping them with the tools they need, in areas such as budgeting, grant writing, and public relations, so that they may continue to “grow their careers” after the program has ended.²⁴²

The website for HERE reports, “In 13 years, we've supported over 11,100 artists and attracted over 850,000 arts patrons. We aim to integrate art into daily life and engage our community's needs and interests on as many different levels as possible in order to ensure our regular presence in their lives.”²⁴³ The attempt to engage with the audience in a multidisciplinary setting has enabled HERE to reach 50,000 people annually, an ethnically diverse mix of “20 - 30 something’s” that other theaters often fail to reach.²⁴⁴ HERE is able to accomplish its aims by keeping theater affordable while at the same time being challenging and alternative. The public is allowed many access points to the work from conception to workshop to final

²³⁹ “Mission,” *HERE Arts Center* HERE, 21 Oct 2007 <<http://www.here.org/about/story/#mission>>.

²⁴⁰ “HERE Story,” *HERE Arts Center* HERE, 21 Oct 2007 <<http://www.here.org/about/story/>>.

²⁴¹ “Dream Music Puppetry,” *HERE Arts Center* HERE, 21 Oct 2007 <<http://www.here.org/be/programs/#dreammusic>>.

²⁴² “Dream Music Puppetry.”

²⁴³ “HERE Story.”

²⁴⁴ “HERE Story.”

production and can be a witness to the continued development of a performance.

The formula is effective as HERE was been recognized with an OBIE grant in 1993 as well as with other prestigious awards for the Center and the work it presents.²⁴⁵

The potential for career growth is evident from the names of several artists who have had work developed at HERE. Eve Ensler worked on her award-winning *The Vagina Monologues* at HERE and Basil Twist's underwater interpretation of Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* came to life under the theater's auspices, winning an OBIE award in 1999.²⁴⁶

In 1998, HERE commissioned Twist to create work to be shown in its space. He had previously performed an excerpt of a performance using Eric Satie's music with abstract puppetry. Barbara Busackino, Twist's business partner and an associate to HERE, was inspired by the combination of instrumental music with puppetry and invited Twist to continue his work.²⁴⁷ He received a Henson Foundation seed grant for *Symphonie Fantastique* in 1995²⁴⁸ and a project grant for the same in 1997²⁴⁹ for a total amount of \$4,000. Of the support, he says, "The Henson Foundation has been a critical and nurturing force in my creative life. My relationship with the Foundation connects me to the magic of Jim Henson, which has inspired my creative life since childhood."²⁵⁰ Twist now assumes role of nurturer as the coordinator of the Dream Music Puppetry Program at HERE, cultivating new artists and new work. HERE also offers bi-monthly puppetry parlors to showcase

²⁴⁵ "HERE Story."

²⁴⁶ "HERE Story."

²⁴⁷ Busackino.

²⁴⁸ "Grants."

²⁴⁹ "Grants."

²⁵⁰ "Grants."

the emerging artists.²⁵¹ As Busackino observes, Twist has an excellent curatorial eye and is so aware of puppetry as perhaps the most independent, most challenged, certainly the performing art “so forced into a children’s lens.”

HERE’s relationship to puppetry really came from Twist’s energy and commitment to the art. When one enters the building, which is currently being remodeled, one is immediately greeted by a display of portrait marionettes of musicians such as Cab Calloway, Harry James, Arturo Toscanini, and Griff Williams. The display is called the “Griff Williams Puppet Exhibition,” and these puppets, sculpted and performed by Williams, were a feature of the bandleader’s performances during the Big Band era. The lights would dim during the music and a spotlight would come up on the “guest conductor,” who would lead the orchestra for the duration of the song. It is from the Griff Williams’s orchestra’s theme music that the Dream Music Puppetry Program derives its name. Griff Williams was Basil Twist’s grandfather and his grandmother, Dorothy B. Williams, gave the puppets to him.²⁵² On the wall outside the theater that bears her name there is a framed announcement. It says, in its whimsical way:

Basil’s grandma had some puppets that she gave to Basil and Basil liked the puppets and got really into puppets and did performances with puppets and one time he performed with puppets at HERE and Basil liked HERE so he helped them make a new theatre which they named after Basil’s grandma Dorothy and now they have lots more space to do stuff like stuff with puppets.

The Dorothy B. Williams Theater was designed specifically to meet the needs of puppetry, though Busackino says, “We don’t think it should be a year-round [space

²⁵¹ “Puppetry Parlor Application,” HERE Arts Center, New York, 2007.

²⁵² Jennifer Stoessner, visit to HERE Arts Center, New York, 1 Nov 2007.

for puppetry exclusively]. We want to be producing our own work.”²⁵³ In 2000, HERE presented four of the featured shows in the Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater, three on its main stage and one in the Dorothy B. Williams Theater.²⁵⁴

Busackino firmly believes that the Center should be an outlet for grant recipients to perform. With the close of the Henson Festival in 2000, it has become even more important to have venues in which to showcase the grant award winning work. She says, “The presenting grant is a catalyst for working with puppeteers in an extended way,” making for a “fuller experience.”²⁵⁵ The grant enables HERE to provide support to the artist in the form of resources and time, not only for development of the work but also performance time. The show can enjoy a longer run as a result, spread over several weekends rather than in a single exhausting run.²⁵⁶ The longer run allows the performance a more typical trajectory, with room for growth. It also allows newspaper reviews and word of mouth publicity to contribute to the audience base. Busackino knows that HERE could use the money to present a two-week puppetry festival, but the Center would much rather put the grant toward shows that are ready to be performed. They focus on who needs the money now. “Puppeteers are so independent so if they need it, they *really* need it,” says Busackino. The grant allows HERE to give the most expanded opportunity to

²⁵³ Busackino.

²⁵⁴ 2000 *International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/festival2000>>.

²⁵⁵ Busackino.

²⁵⁶ Busackino.

the work; letting the artist “pull out all the stops.”²⁵⁷ There are different levels of support that the presenters give depending on the project. Some projects are just perfect in one to two nights so they get a smaller budget. HERE gives more support to the major projects. It considers the full life of the project. The presenting grant helps the artist to focus even more, “to make the production an event.”²⁵⁸

The Fortune Teller, an original work by Erik Sanko, was the recipient of a 2005 Jim Henson Foundation project grant and was presented at HERE from October 19 through December 22, 2006.²⁵⁹ The play utilizes marionettes in intricately detailed settings, actually created by an interior design team to create a “level of intricacy most commonly seen in fine art.”²⁶⁰ Sanko, a musician in his own right, and film composer Danny Elfman, best known for his work with film director Tim Burton, composed the score for the piece.²⁶¹ The work, as a whole, was compared to a cross between Burton’s films and the artwork of Edward Gorey in a style *The New York Times* calls, “Victorian ghastly.”²⁶² The story of the piece features the convergence of seven men on an old mansion to hear the reading of a will. The fortune teller of the title figures into their fates, as it is his decree that will determines the estate’s rightful heir.²⁶³ Each of the men, however, are examples of excess akin to the famed deadly sins and each meets his end in an appropriate

²⁵⁷ Busackino.

²⁵⁸ Busackino.

²⁵⁹ “*The Fortune Teller*-Erik Sanko,” *HERE Arts Center* HERE, 21 Oct 2007
<http://www.here.org/who/artists/fortune_teller/>.

²⁶⁰ Sophie Donelson, “The Costumes Are All Vintage. Very Tiny Vintage.” *New York Times* 22 Oct 2006.

²⁶¹ “*The Fortune Teller*-Erik Sanko.”

²⁶² Anne Midgette, “Seven Deadly Sins for Seven Macabre Marionettes,” *New York Times* 30 Oct 2006.

²⁶³ “*The Fortune Teller*-Erik Sanko.”

manner. For example, the gluttonous cook chokes to death on a chicken bone.²⁶⁴ A team of four puppeteers including Sanko performed the play with the vocal support of Irish actor Gavin Friday.²⁶⁵ Friday's "gravelly-voiced" narration "immediately mesmerizes," according to the review of the play in *The Gothamist*.

The amount of interest in the play was enormous. *The Village Voice*, Backstage.com, and *The New York Times* also featured reviews of the work, with two separate articles appearing in *The Times*. Barbara Busackino responds to the reaction by citing the quality of Sanko's work as the reason for such energetic enthusiasm. "He, like Basil, is a unique individual with a background of not doing things in a traditional way," says Busackino.²⁶⁶ Indeed, Sanko has a different experience in puppetry, making marionettes as a hobby in between gigs as a composer and musician, working with artists such as Yoko Ono and John Cale as well as with his own band Skeleton Key.²⁶⁷ He began to take his puppetry seriously when his wife, artist Jessica Grindstaff, invited him to display the marionettes in a gallery show.²⁶⁸ From this and several other showings, Sanko developed his work and received a project grant from the Jim Henson Foundation in 2005.²⁶⁹ A smiling Cheryl Henson claimed Sanko as the Foundation's "discovery" during an interview in November 2007.²⁷⁰ Sanko in turn credits the Foundation for discovering his

²⁶⁴ Andy Propst, "The Fortune Teller at HERE Arts Center," *Backstage.com* 23 Oct 2006 VNU Business Media, Inc. 21 Oct 2007 <<http://www.backstage.com>>.

²⁶⁵ "The Fortune Teller-Erik Sanko."

²⁶⁶ Busackino.

²⁶⁷ Donelson.

²⁶⁸ Donelson.

²⁶⁹ "Grants."

²⁷⁰ Brown.

“secret hobby.” Sanko says, “Cheryl and the Foundation gave me the encouragement and support to brave the public forum and now they have unwittingly contributed to the creation of a ceaseless puppet-making machine.”²⁷¹

Another reason for the critical approval was its highly detailed setting and gorgeous puppets. The team Sanko assembled was of people “completely periphery to puppetry;”²⁷² people with skills they had never before applied to the puppet stage, such as designers working for companies such as Anthropologie, Bergdorf Goodman, and the Cooper Union.²⁷³ The use of such diverse artists gave the project a “feeling of community orientation,” says Busackino. The community delivered a spectacle in miniature that was remarkable. *The Times* describes the scenery as “a regular *wunderkammer* that keeps opening up to reveal new sets and images, little Victorian dioramas.”²⁷⁴ The puppets were intricate, using the popular idea of the seven deadly sins, a scheme that Busackino calls a “no-brainer” in terms of its appeal.²⁷⁵ NYTheatre.com reports, “The design of the puppets is magnificent, each of them embodying their character as easily as a live person. The puppets' costumes are precise but not overstated, resulting in the puppets settling into the world created for them perfectly.”²⁷⁶ Contributing most effectively to this “perfect world” was the music composed by Danny Elfman, a “delightfully eerie score that tickles and alarms” according to *The Village Voice* and “as creaky and haunting as you’d expect” reports *The Gothamist*. Elfman’s score, though a major source for the mood

²⁷¹ Erik Sanko, email interview, 28 Apr 2008.

²⁷² Busackino.

²⁷³ Donelson.

²⁷⁴ Midgette.

²⁷⁵ Busackino.

²⁷⁶ “*The Fortune Teller*,” *HERE Arts Center* HERE, 21 Oct 2007
<<http://www.here.org/about/press/#FortuneTellerPress>>.

and atmosphere of the piece, was downplayed in the publicity for *The Fortune Teller*. HERE wanted to ensure that the audience would attend the performance for the “correct reason” with the right expectations.²⁷⁷

HERE actually requests each artist it presents to complete a two-page document about their show and their vision. It is almost a “mini-exam of who they are, their piece, what do they want to see, what is its position” This level of depth enables HERE to think of marketing the show in a different way. The goal with *The Fortune Teller* was to present the piece as a “sexy, fun puppet show to come to.”²⁷⁸ The overwhelming response by the press points to the success of HERE’s packaging of the show, playing up the macabre themes and the intricate design details of the show. It is in detail where puppetry often gains strength. Liam Hurley, one of *The Fortune Teller*’s puppeteers, says, “If we scratch our head, it’s not funny; if Peter Sellers scratches his head, it might be funny. But when a puppet does it—and it works—it’s hilarious.”²⁷⁹ However, detail, as *The New York Times* review reflects, was also one of *The Fortune Teller*’s weaknesses. “Even in this small underground theater, the beautifully made puppets and sets are a little hard to read; their features are difficult to make out.”²⁸⁰ The article continues to say that the piece is “fixable” and it could be a “great show;” it closes saying that it is worth seeing and hearing but “more as visual art than as performance.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Busackino.

²⁷⁸ Busackino.

²⁷⁹ Donelson.

²⁸⁰ Midgette.

²⁸¹ Midgette.

Whether *The Fortune Teller* gets revised or not, the production and the attention it received has made an impact on its primary artist Erik Sanko. Sanko has since continued his pursuit of puppetry, presenting work at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's 25th Next Wave Festival in 2007.²⁸² His role in the festival, running from October 3 through 6, was that of "special guest" with the featured performer spot filled by the Kronos Quartet. A publicity card for the event relates that the performance, entitled "More Than Four," would be a world premiere with a performance of "a haunting play featuring a colossal, lovelorn puppet" as well as other collaborations with contemporary artists to complete the evening. The musicians work with their fellow artists to "transcend genre to reach new heights of sense-saturating experience."²⁸³ It is worth noting that Sanko is described as a "marionette maker" rather than musician, in spite of his years of experience in the contemporary music scene in New York.²⁸⁴

The next show presented as part of HERE's 2006 grant was *The Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P*, a performance that had quite a different trajectory than *The Fortune Teller*. A Jim Henson Foundation seed grant recipient in 2006, the play takes as its focus the "extraordinary practice of putting animals through elaborate trials for causing death by a bite or kick in the head" that once was common during the middle ages.²⁸⁵ The play was a product of the Dream Music Puppetry Program and was

²⁸² *Kronos Quartet: More than Four* (New York: BAM, 2007).

²⁸³ *Kronos Quartet: More than Four*.

²⁸⁴ *Kronos Quartet: More than Four*.

²⁸⁵ "The Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P - Susan Yankowitz & Jane Catherine Shaw," *HERE Arts Center* HERE, 21 Oct 2007 <http://ces.here.org/here/who/artists/ludicrous_trial/>.

presented January 18 and 19, 2007.²⁸⁶ It appeared as a part of the Center’s Culturemart, a festival of works in progress, but the show was one that became a full presentation during that time. Susan Yankowitz, the project’s playwright, has worked with Joseph Chaikin and his ensemble gaining a Drama Desk Award, and was a finalist for the 2006 Eugene O’Neill Playwrights Conference.²⁸⁷ She saw the story of the humiliation of “animals” by those in power as one with a “with piercing resonance for our own time.”²⁸⁸ In her artistic statement, Yankowitz says, “Writing for the theatre has never been an exclusively verbal endeavor for me but one that encompasses---and uses---sound and silence, gesture, space, image, movement and the physicality of the performers. All of this is adrenaline for my work.”²⁸⁹ In puppetry, the playwright is able to find a language in which she can, not replicate reality, but rather “create a particular and intensely imagined expression of it.”²⁹⁰ Yankowitz approached HERE because she wanted to write *with* puppets, her idea for the animal trials being an excellent match for the puppet form. The idea was an attack on strange issues and “puppetry perfectly served those facts and topics.”²⁹¹

After Yankowitz articulated her idea to HERE, she was paired with Jane Catherine Shaw, a puppeteer and designer with a pedigree that goes back to 1986 when she began working at the Center for Puppetry Arts.²⁹² While there, Shaw appeared in over 2,000 performances and was the co-author of *Dinosaurs*, a play that

²⁸⁶ “Culturemart,” *HERE Arts Center* HERE, 23 Oct 2007

<<http://www.here.org/see/now/culturemart/>>.

²⁸⁷ “Biography,” <http://ces.here.org/here/who/artists/ludicrous_trial/#bio>.

²⁸⁸ “Artist Statement,” *Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P* HERE, 21 Oct 2007

<http://ces.here.org/here/who/artists/ludicrous_trial/#artist_statement>.

²⁸⁹ “Artist Statement,” *Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P*.

²⁹⁰ “Artist Statement,” *Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P*.

²⁹¹ Busackino.

²⁹² “Biography.”

has become part of the Center repertoire. She also was involved in the Center's XPT (Experimental Puppet Theatre) workshops. These workshops present adult themed puppetry and have become an annual event for over twenty years.²⁹³ She has worked with Mabou Mines, Theodora Skipitares, La Mama ETC, Janie Geiser, and Stephen Kaplin and his work for Julie Taymor's production of *The Green Bird*.²⁹⁴ As a part of her commitment to innovation and experimentation, Shaw co-founded the Voice 4 Vision Puppet Festival, an annual event that she co-curates devoted to presenting New York puppetry artists. In its fourth edition, the Festival offered four separate shows, a puppet slam, and a film festival, *Handmade Puppet Dreams*, curated by Heather Henson.²⁹⁵ Shaw's puppets for *The Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P.* were designed to utilize the idea of size to represent power, with an enormous head and hand representing the judge while the defense attorney was represented by a "humanettes", a technique that dwarfed human actor/manipulator Hyunyup Lee.²⁹⁶ The Dream Music Puppetry Program, through which the play enjoyed a fifteen-month development process,²⁹⁷ attempts to see what it is possible to do with puppets through experimentation. Many ideas begin, as Barbara Busackino notes, by an artist asking a question about the possibility of the puppet. In the case of something like *Symphonie Fantastique*, the question is, "Pairing puppetry with classical music, what does that get you?"²⁹⁸ In the case of *The Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P.*, the result of

²⁹³ "Xperimental Puppetry Theater," *New Directions Series* 2005 Center for Puppetry Arts, 13 Dec 2007 <<http://www.puppet.org/perform/xpt07.shtml>>.

²⁹⁴ "Biography."

²⁹⁵ "Voice 4 Vision Puppet Festival," *Voice4Vision Puppet Theater Festival* 2007 Voice4Vision 18 Feb 2008 <<http://www.voice4vision.org/>>.

²⁹⁶ "*The Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P.*"

²⁹⁷ Busackino.

²⁹⁸ Busackino.

pairing puppetry with the playwright's idea was a "really good puppet play;" as opposed to a fully developed and definitive performance.²⁹⁹ Generating a written text has value for all puppeteers, as *The Terrible Polichinelle* and Keohane can attest. Through Yankowitz's involvement with HERE, she found that she expanded the play and it turned out to be "a lot huger than she thought it could be."³⁰⁰

Projects turning out to be bigger than expected is a problem or, alternatively a blessing that occurred for the third project included in HERE's presenting grant. Although it was originally included in the presenting grant for 2006, *Ice Cream for Diablo*, a work by Oliver Dalzell, will be presented in June 2008. The work has been delayed for several reasons, detailed below, and will accompany the opening of HERE's new space in the summer. Dalzell is the most senior puppeteer working with Basil Twist, so he is often away from the project performing with touring shows around the world.³⁰¹ His biography in the program for Twist's mounting of Manuel de Falla's *Master Peter's Puppet Show* whimsically presents the story of his career beginnings as Twist's cleaner, to his engagement as a performer on larger projects. An echo of Dalzell's sense of fun, it is entirely in verse:

Oliver Dalzell began his career cleaning for Basil Twist,
Who soon discovered Oliver had a mighty magical wrist.
"Oliver," he said, "get off your hands and knees.
Pick up a puppet and swing from the trapeze.
Symphonie Fantastique will be your new home.
None of these puppets uses polyurethane foam.
What success this show will be,
It's off to France and Germany!"³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Busackino.

³⁰⁰ Busackino.

³⁰¹ Busackino.

³⁰² *Red {an orchestra}* (Cleveland: Twist Creative, 2002).

His work with Twist has allowed him to develop his own vision for puppetry and to pursue projects of his own devising. Dalzell received a seed grant for the project in 2004, at which point his project was described as “puppetry for puppetry's sake rather than a traditional narrative story with a plot.”³⁰³ *Ice Cream for Diablo* intends to be a visual story, told through movement, light, and composition using bunraku techniques, rod puppets, and shadows. The incorporation of contemporary electronic music completes the piece.³⁰⁴

The reason for moving the performance to the 2008 slot was to allow Dalzell the time he needed to realize his vision for the work. HERE decides to present a performance because “the artist is ready, [the work] has to come out, they have something unique to say.” In Dalzell’s case, the allowance of more time was granted due to their belief in the work’s potential. “If we don’t somehow get that out of him, it will be a big loss,” says Barbara Busackino.³⁰⁵ As she observes, Dalzell has a super-unique focus. “It’s just impossible what he’s trying to do. It’s meticulous, laborious, time consuming.”³⁰⁶ HERE’s website describes the work as “Comic book panels come to life. Inspired by the low-brow art scene, animation and music videos, Dalzell fuses the edited look of television with the intimacy of theater. Using multiple stages, rapid lighting and creepy urbane puppets with contemporary electronic music of Tosca.”³⁰⁷ There was a public presentation of the piece as a work in progress, a twelve-minute excerpt, in January 2005 and it was performed eight

³⁰³ “Grants.”

³⁰⁴ “Grants.”

³⁰⁵ Busackino.

³⁰⁶ Busackino.

³⁰⁷ “*Ice Cream for Diablo*-Oliver Dalzell,” *HERE Arts Center* 2007 HERE, 21 Oct 2007

<<http://ces.here.org/here/who/artists/diablo/>>.

times in that format.³⁰⁸ Dalzell worked on the show in Basil Twist's studio for four months prior to that workshop performance. The project has been delayed due to the complexity of its realization as well as Dalzell's busy schedule. As HERE is committed to the full life of every production, its artistic staff was able to accommodate Dalzell's need for more time to complete his work. *Ice Cream for Diablo* will be presented in June 2008 to reopen the Center after some remodeling.

For the Jim Henson Foundation, the presenting grant is a work in progress. Instead of the two-part grant application process that the project, seed, and children's show applicants undertake, the recipient theaters are informed of their award after the May board meeting. There are years when further money may be allotted to presenting organizations in the December board meeting but the bulk of the money goes out in May. One of the exceptions to the May allotment is St. Ann's Warehouse. This space, located in Brooklyn, has been the site for a puppet lab for over ten years, a place where:

“. . . Participating artists and their collaborators meet weekly over a period of nine months to develop projects, share puppetry elements and other design and technical ideas, discuss plot structure and character development, and work on narrative. Moderated critical discussion follows each presentation.³⁰⁹

Janie Geiser established the Puppet Lab in 1997 and Henson board member Dan Hurlin followed her as the program's director for nine years.³¹⁰ Each spring, the work is showcased in a miniature festival called "LABAPALOOZA!" and presenting

³⁰⁸ Busackino.

³⁰⁹ "Puppet Lab," *St. Ann's Warehouse* 2008 St. Ann's Warehouse, 14 Jan 2008 <http://www.stannwarehouse.org/puppet_lab.php>.

³¹⁰ Steve Abrams, "Puppetry at St. Ann's Warehouse," *Puppetry Journal* 59.1 (2007) 17.

grant money goes to support the event.³¹¹ In 2007, two different programs of six projects each were presented at the tenth anniversary of the mini-festival.³¹² One of the featured artists was Erik Sanko, performing *Dear Mme*, the work he presented with the Kronos Quartet at BAM later in 2007.³¹³ St. Ann's is also the venue for the Eighth Annual Toy Theatre Festival, under the curation of Great Small Works.³¹⁴ As it enters its eleventh season, the Puppet Lab, with presenting grant support from the Jim Henson Foundation, promises to continue "providing a safe place of bold experiments"³¹⁵ for puppeteers in the city. The momentum that the presenting grant provides to theaters across the city has contributed to a marked puppetry presence in New York. Due to the increased instance of puppet performance, it is proving less difficult for a contemporary theatergoer to find examples of puppet theater and many venues have begun to include puppet performance in their regular schedule. Some spaces, such as Dixon Place, a "laboratory for performing and literary artists since 1986,"³¹⁶ are providing workshop performances of grant-award winning work such as Kevin Augustine's *Bride*. Allowing the work to have the production process is important but allowing an audience to see the process can prove to be rewarding. The Jim Henson Foundation is committed to helping grant-award winning work, experimental and fragmentary at its beginning, become fully developed performances with a fully developed theater in which to perform and, it is to be hoped, a fully developed audience with which to engage.

³¹¹ Brown.

³¹² Abrams 17.

³¹³ Abrams 17.

³¹⁴ Brown.

³¹⁵ Abrams 17.

³¹⁶ *Dixon Place Fall Season* (New York) Fall 2007.

PROGNOSTICATING

American puppetry is in a constant state of revision and revival. New approaches are being created at the same time as classic techniques are being reevaluated and restored. The Jim Henson Foundation is proud to be at the center of such a dynamic community of artists, and the value of the support it provides is immeasurable. Chris Green, an independent designer and puppeteer, eloquently states, “As valuable as anything else, the grant provided moral support for us in a field that is incredibly under-funded. As puppeteers, we have a ravenous appetite for our work, but the strictures of urban life mean that, no matter how passionate we are, funding is going to be an issue. Having a sense of support from an organization that intimately understands the field is humbling and not to be taken for granted.”³¹⁷ Apart from giving a financial boost to artists as the only grant-making institution devoted to puppetry, the Jim Henson Foundation offers a connection to the excellence and innovation that its founder so clearly represents to American and global puppetry. Robert Smythe, artistic director of Mum Puppettheatre in Philadelphia, put it simply, “The Jim Henson Foundation support enabled us to stop, many times, to take a collective breath, and then remember what it means to truly create and not just produce something because we said we would.”³¹⁸

³¹⁷ “Grants.”

³¹⁸ “Grants.”

The 2007 Jim Henson Foundation grants have been awarded, thirty-three grants for a combined amount of \$115,000.³¹⁹ The fourteen project grants range in topic from an examination of water quality to leprosy on the Hawaiian Islands; feature characters as varied as Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, Galileo, and Hansel and Gretel; and come from source materials by well-known writers such as Oscar Wilde and Ray Bradbury. Several companies are perennial grantees, with Sandglass Theater of Vermont earning its fourteenth grant since the Foundation's inaugural year. Two grants are expansions of seed grants given in past cycles. The twelve seed grants went to shows that incorporate marionettes, rod puppets, shadow puppets, video projections, and toy theater, among other techniques. Some tell stories of famous men, such as Henry Hudson and Ronald Reagan, while others use the words of Henrik Ibsen and Franz Kafka, the mythology of the Aztecs, or a translation of an Irish narrative poem. The seed grants feature several collaborations; one is between puppet artists Lance and Kris Woolen, Dragon Art Studio, and a Hawaiian dance master to tell the tale of the battles of the goddess Pele's younger sister, another is ShadowLight Productions' work with Teatro Vision and outreach to San Francisco and San Jose to explore the lives of people affected by immigration and border issues. ShadowLight's grant is the seventh the company has received from the Foundation.

The 2007 grant cycle marks the second year of the children's show grant. The seven projects are attempting to impart lessons about history, society, or personal responsibility as well as to entertain its young audiences. The projects

³¹⁹ "Grants."

range from the regional history of Appalachia, to the challenges facing the contemporary Los Angeles Native American population, Mexican Dia de los Muertos celebrations, and the importance of recycling. Mum Puppettheatre received its ninth Jim Henson Foundation grant with their children's show grant for the 2007 cycle. It speaks to the quality of the work and the originality of the companies such as Sandglass, ShadowLight, and Mum that they have been consistently recognized for their work through Foundation grants. By the same token, for each category of grant there are new and emerging recipients, gaining their first grant award and beginning what the Foundation hopes will be a long career of innovative and entertaining puppet performance. The 2007 presenting grants went to HERE Arts Center, The New 42nd Street Initiative, Theater for the New City, the Japan Society, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, St. Ann's Warehouse, and Great Small Works. The continued connection that each of these presenters has with puppetry demonstrates that the appeal of puppet theater has grown, due to the contributions of the Jim Henson Foundation.

The selection of grant recipients for 2007 marks the beginning of the grant-making cycle for 2008. The grant guidelines and deadlines for letter of intent have been posted on the Foundation's website. Termine emphasizes that the grant-making process has always been a system of honing the application submission and review process.³²⁰ He reports that, even during the December board meeting where decisions about grant awards are made, there is a discussion about how to make the grant application process smoother and more streamlined. "It's always refining the

³²⁰ Termine.

process of what we're presented with as board members," he says.³²¹ There are no changes to the applications between the 2007 and 2008 cycles, perhaps a sign that the granting process has, to use Termine's phrase, "found its stride."³²² Termine says that the biggest change he has seen in the past two decades of his term as a member of the board is the creation of distinct grant categories with predetermined amounts. The addition of the children's show grant was a major development. Changes in the grant dollar amounts and number awarded have been discussed. The Foundation is considering that it may, perhaps, serve the puppetry community better by awarding a higher number of grants with a smaller financial contribution attached to each. The smaller amounts, however, may be too small to be useful and a higher grant amount, with fewer recipients, has also been considered. The question has been continuously under consideration by the Foundation and its board since 2001.³²³

American puppetry has seen much change since the Henson Foundation's inaugural year in 1982. Puppetry is thriving as theater on its own terms rather than as an alternative or novelty act. The days of Henson's performances on television variety shows are past, as puppetry has taken the driver's seat for numerous productions including *The Lion King*, *Avenue Q*, and Cirque du Soleil's *Ka*. The atmosphere would have pleased Henson and the achievements of the Foundation, after twenty-six years, are impressive. As Allelu Kurten observes, "The Foundation is an embodiment of Jim's caring and, for those of us who knew and loved him, the

³²¹ Termine.

³²² Termine.

³²³ *Henson Foundation Minutes from December 2, 2001*—

thought that his unique generosity of spirit continues in this positive and on-going way is immensely cheering.”³²⁴ Generosity of spirit has been partnered with financial generosity. The Jim Henson Foundation has awarded \$1,299,000 in project, seed, children’s show, and special grants. The number does not take into account the contributions, publicized and private, in the name of the presenting grant, which is somewhere around \$1.5 million. It is an amazing amount of money given to puppetry and a gift that is taken seriously by both grant recipients and the board of directors who award them. Marty Robinson explains his philosophy about this gift and the grant-making process, from letter of intent to full proposal to board meeting discussion to final report. He, like Termine, loves to be a part of the process. He says:

It’s great to be in the room with those people with that amount of responsibility. You can’t say, ‘Aw shucks, I can’t do this.’ Aw shucks, you can. You just do. . . . What I get out of it is, I love being with those people, there’s a lot of satisfaction feeling that you’ve done right by artists who are really deserving and who are out there, plugging away, in a vacuum sometimes. But they’ve got this crazy little puppet show that they just have to do. And, . . . they’re not going to make any money off of this. It’s not really going to put food on their tables but, at the end of the day it’s a show that they are driven to do. So therefore, we have to help. It’s great that the Foundation has the mandate and wherewithal to do that.³²⁵

³²⁴ “Grants.”

³²⁵ Robinson.

CHAPTER 5

OPENING A WINDOW: THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF PUPPET THEATER

The previous chapter details the major and continuing function of the Jim Henson Foundation; that of providing grants to support the development of puppet theater. With the creation of the presenting grant category, the Foundation enabled venues to have the support needed to showcase grant award winners from the project, seed, and children's show categories and to allow audiences the opportunity to experience new and interesting puppet performance. Prior to the establishment of the Jim Henson Foundation's presenting grant, opportunities in New York for performances of puppetry were limited due to the scale of puppet performance, oftentimes intimate thus requiring a small audience, and an audience base, unaware of upcoming performances or the puppet's potential for adults. The Jim Henson Foundation provided a venue for these performers, however, in the form of the Jim Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater. The Festival, presented every other year from 1992 until 2000, brought artists, scholars, and audiences to the city to experience the vast variety of styles and modes that comprise contemporary puppet theater and object centered performance. The Festival was an amazing chance for

the Jim Henson Foundation to showcase both national and international artists in such a way that they might be exposed to a broader theater going audience. In this chapter, I explain the initiation of the International Festival of Puppet Theater from its conceptual beginnings by Jim Henson to its realization by Cheryl Henson in 1992. Next, I explain the development of the Festival's programming, with a section for each Festival year-by-year. Each section includes information about and reviews of an international performer's work and a show from the United States, with the exception of the 1998 Festival, which featured international collaborations. For that Festival, I have chosen to elaborate on a show that represents the union of the ideas of an international artist with American puppetry concepts. Each section includes a summary of the additional programming, exhibits, and symposia that accompanied the performances for each Festival. Although the Festival always had a deficit of some amount after its close, financial concerns were not a major factor in its continuation during its first four incarnations. The enormous critical attention paid to puppetry in New York and the generosity of Cheryl and Jane Henson and their annual donations to cover the overhead of the Foundation¹ enabled the board of directors and the Festival's organizers to proceed, largely unaffected by this loss. The chapter continues to explain the factors leading to the cessation of the Festival after its 2000 iteration, with these continual and growing financial concerns one of the primary factors. I finish the chapter by presenting the Foundation's continuing efforts on behalf of puppetry performance in New York City, in spite of the Festival's apparently permanent demise.

¹ Belinda Batson Brown and Cheryl Henson, personal interview, 2 Nov 2007.

ESTABLISHMENT

The First International Festival of Puppet Theater took place in 1992 from September 7 through September 20 at the Public Theater in New York City. For fourteen days, adults and children were treated to performances by seventeen companies representing eight different countries in styles as varied as bunraku puppets to kinetic sculptures.² However, the idea of a puppetry festival in New York had been close to the Henson Foundation's goals since the beginning in 1982. Nancy Staub relates that the UNIMA Festival in Washington D.C. had been used by puppetry to gain recognition as an art form in the United States. The inclusion of puppetry in a major festival in the United States additionally aided artists applying for NEA grants, proving that there was an audience for the work. Roman Paska, a puppet artist who in 1998 would become the first American to lead the world's most prestigious puppetry school, the École Supérieure de Marionnettes,³ reflected on the experience of that Festival as well as the 1984 Dresden UNIMA Congress:

Awed by the previous, 1980 Festival in Washington, which celebrated the grand old world of puppetry as we knew it from our libraries and journals, Dresden opened the gates to a new generation of experimental companies and performers . . . we left Dresden convinced that the stakes were finally high, that the puppet could and would proclaim a new era, that puppeteers would pave the way, and that puppet theatre was indeed destined to be the theatre of the future.⁴

² 1992 *International Festival of Puppet Theater*, Jim Henson Foundation 25 Jan 2008 Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/archives/1992>>. ADD NOTE

³ Anne Dennin, *The International Festival of Puppet Theater Final Report September 9-27, 1998* (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 1999) 5.

⁴ "Grants," *Jim Henson Foundation* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfoundation.org/grants>>.

Paska's passionate belief in the power of puppetry was stimulated by the opportunity for international exchange, and the energy of world puppetry has been motivated by several international festivals aside from UNIMA's Congresses, which occur every four years.⁵ In 2006, there were sixty-five members countries⁶ in UNIMA and the importance of the international relationships established by such conferences cannot be underestimated, particularly the performances that accompany each Congress. Other international puppetry festivals have existed under different auspices and continue bringing the art form to a wide public. In Charlesville-Mézières, France, there is a festival of puppetry every three years, featuring over two hundred different companies for a nine day celebration of puppetry.⁷ In Iida, Japan, there is a puppet festival every August where over 1,500 puppet enthusiasts, amateur and professional, come together to experience the art form, while the IMAGES festival in the Netherlands "featured a broad definition of puppet and visual theater . . ."⁸ With such a strong showing in Europe and Asia, a puppetry festival in the United States would be a welcome expansion of these international events.

Jim Henson had been an active participant on the world stage, but had always wanted a festival in New York to specifically target the theater critics and a broader American theater audience.⁹ The increased exposure of puppetry as a theatrical art form was also highly desirable. Henson wanted Staub, after her triumphant leadership as executive director of the UNIMA Festival, to be involved in the

⁵ "Festivals," *UNIMA-USA* 2008 UNIMA-USA, 17 Jan 2008 <<http://www.unima-usa.org/festivals/index.html>>.

⁶ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory*, compilers Lia Powell and Philip Shore, (Atlanta: UNIMA-USA, 2006): 12-7.

⁷ "A Sampling of International Festivals of Puppet Theater," *Puppetry International* 1 (1994): 14.

⁸ "A Sampling of International Festivals of Puppet Theater," 14.

⁹ Nancy Staub, personal interview, 18 Jul 2007.

planning of the New York festival, even though she had a teaching position in Hawaii. He arranged that she be paid an equivalent salary to return to New York and begin work on the Henson festival. Staub, who had been with the Foundation from its inception, continued to serve in an advisory capacity and was still quite familiar with the New York puppetry community.¹⁰ She felt that the Public Theater would be the right place for a puppetry festival. The Public Theater was opened under that name in 1967,¹¹ though founding artistic director Joseph Papp had been working to make theater accessible to all New Yorkers since 1953, producing Shakespeare in Central Park for the general public at no charge.¹² The Public Theater is “dedicated to embracing the complexities of contemporary society and nurturing both artists and audiences”¹³ and continuing Papp’s “philosophy of inclusion,” his idea to support artistic excellence while remaining relevant to the audience at large.”¹⁴

This mission fully coincides with the mission of the Festival, making puppetry available while building new audiences. The physical building, the former Astor Library, has five theaters, all suited to the intimate needs of puppetry while allowing enough audience attendance per performance that the artist would receive wide exposure. The Brooklyn Academy of Music was also considered as a venue, in Staub’s attempt to keep the Festival localized and manageable. “You have to consider taking things of less quality when you are trying to fill more venues,” she

¹⁰ Staub.

¹¹ “History,” *Public Theatre*, 2005 The Public Theater, 16 Nov 2007
<<http://www.publictheater.org/about/history.php>>.

¹² Joy H. Reilly & M. Scott Phillips. *Introducing Theatre*. 12th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2007) 260.

¹³ “History,” *Public Theatre*.

¹⁴ “Mission,” *Public Theatre*, 2005 The Public Theater, 16 Nov 2007
<<http://www.publictheater.org/about/mission.php>>.

says.¹⁵ Jim Henson approached Joseph Papp, the founder and artistic director of the Public, about utilizing the space for a puppetry festival. Staub reports, “In typical Jim style, they just shook hands. There was no contract.”¹⁶ When Henson died in May 1990, the lack of a contract proved to be a problem as Papp was himself ill. Staub went into the Public to secure the agreed upon dates in writing so that when he passed on October 31, 1991,¹⁷ the Festival could still move forward as planned.¹⁸ As planning for the Festival continued, Staub began looking for someone to take over her role as executive director. She had done a great deal of research into possible candidates and eventually Cheryl Henson took on the job. Cheryl Henson had first appeared as a board member of the Henson Foundation in 1987 and had been on the board ever since that time.¹⁹ Henson remembered, “It was in 1989 that I first started talking with my father about this puppet festival. We had just seen a particularly beautiful show and were struck by how few people would ever have the opportunity to see such an extraordinary performance. . . . What we started to plan in 1989 was a festival that would be for the public, one that would introduce this magical art form to a larger theatre audience.”²⁰ The Henson Foundation had been striving to carry on after its founder’s death and Cheryl Henson’s involvement was crucial to the continuation of her father’s goals. To highlight these goals, a proposal was made at the 1990 December board meeting to change the name of the Henson Foundation to

¹⁵ Staub.

¹⁶ Staub.

¹⁷ “Timeline,” *Public Theater*, 2005 The Public Theater, 16 Nov 2007

<<http://www.publictheater.org/celebrating/timeline.php>>.

¹⁸ Staub.

¹⁹ *Henson Foundation Articles of Incorporation and Minutes for the Period 6-26-1982—12-22-88* (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 1988).

²⁰ *Henson International Festival of Puppet Theatre Program* (New York: TH Publishing, Inc., 2000).

the Jim Henson Foundation.²¹ Jim Henson had become by that time more than just a name but rather a brand name so approval for the change had to come from the Company as well as the Foundation's board. Although the press materials for the 1992 Festival said "Jim Henson Foundation,"²² it was not until the December board meeting in 1994 that the name of the Foundation would be officially changed.²³ Cheryl Henson would become the president of the Jim Henson Foundation, after her mother's nomination, in 1993. Jane Henson had been president until that time but passed the role onto Cheryl, with the idea of the preservation of Jim's legacy in mind.²⁴

Jim Henson's death brought with it new challenges for the Foundation as well as a very generous donation from the Ronald McDonald Children's Charities. In 1990 the Charities made a gift in the amount of \$100,000 in Jim Henson's memory. It was the intention of the donation to support projects that would specifically benefit children through the art of puppetry.²⁵ With the development of the Festival in mind, Jane Henson had proposed foregoing the 1992 grants in order to give the money to support the upcoming Festival. The awards made in 1992 came from the Ronald McDonald Children's Charities' money. Most of the awards went to organizations with missions incorporating puppetry into education or therapy. In 1992 a total of \$61,000 was awarded to organizations focusing on at-risk youth or differently-abled children. One of the projects was an exchange program between

²¹ *Henson Foundation Minutes from 8-10-89—11-30-93* (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 1993).

²² Janie Geiser, *Puppetry at the Public*, Jim Henson Foundation, New York.

²³ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001* (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 2001).

²⁴ *Henson Foundation Minutes from 8-10-89—11-30-93*.

²⁵ "Grants"

Nicaragua, the United States, France, and Puerto Rico. Michael Romanyshyn, a coordinating artist for the program, said, “A traveling circus was created It toured throughout Nicaragua and was performed in cities and remote mountain villages to thousands of spectators. The grant we received from the Henson Foundation was the catalyst for making this project possible.”²⁶ Three special grants were also awarded that year, one to the University of Maryland for a three-credit workshop to launch the Jim Henson Endowment Fund.²⁷ The remaining money went to support the 1992 Festival’s work targeting younger audiences.

In planning the first Festival, Cheryl Henson emphasized the importance of incorporating the word “puppet” into its name, to reinforce “that my father was proud to be a puppeteer.” She continued, “It’s always been a surprise to me when I come up against people who think of puppetry as being limited. That, to me, puppetry is infinite, it can be anything you want it to be.”²⁸ The first International Festival of Puppet Theater opened in September 1992 with a keynote address by Henryk Jurkowski, noted puppet historian and international scholar. It was delivered at a daylong symposium entitled *The Theatrical Inanimate: Changing Perceptions of Puppetry*.²⁹ In his speech, Jurkowski observed that puppetry has long been relegated to the realm of children’s entertainment due to changes in the culture of the nineteenth century and that a theatrical prejudice toward it emerged as realism took over in the early twentieth century. He stated that a “new puppetry” must emerge in

²⁶ “Grants.”

²⁷ “Grants.”

²⁸ *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination*, dir. Joshua Malkin, interviewees Cheryl Henson, Ralph Lee, Michael Curry, Basil Twist, Leslee Asch, Speckled Koi Productions, 2001.

²⁹ Rachel Elfenbein, “1992 Keynote Address by Henryk Jurkowski,” *Puppetry International* 1 (1994): 12.

order for the form to survive.³⁰ “We are looking for the new relationship between object and subject, between man and reality,” he said. To that end, the symposium offered perspectives from historians, practitioners, designers, and performers. Director Peter Sellars commented on the power of the puppet as a form of conscience, observing, “Puppets are always figures of reminding, and that can be very funny or very frightening, but it’s always a little voice that says, ‘By the way. . . We’re watching you.’”³¹ Eileen Blumenthal examined the puppet from the perspective of history, saying with regard to the puppetry “revival,” “I think we probably need to look at why the thing needed reviving. How come it was dead in the first place or at least playing possum or at least marginalized into something to keep kiddies occupied.”³² This discussion was important, of course, but only to those on the inside---the people who already knew puppetry.

There was also a puppetry exhibit at the New York Center for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.³³ It was entitled “Breaking Boundaries,” and had begun its life in Atlanta at the Center for Puppetry Arts, receiving a project grant for \$10,000 from the Henson Foundation in 1991.³⁴ Nancy Staub curated it in its original venue³⁵ before it was transposed to New York City for the 1992 Festival. The content of the exhibition was the work of eleven contemporary artists whose contributions to the field of puppetry in the United States had changed the face of

³⁰ Elfenbein.

³¹ “A Look Back: 1992 Symposium Sessions,” *Puppetry International* 1 (1994): 15.

³² “A Look Back: 1992 Symposium Sessions,” 15.

³³ Elfenbein.

³⁴ “Grants.”

³⁵ Leslee Asch, “Exhibitions and Collections of the Jim Henson Company,” *American Puppetry* ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 243.

puppetry.³⁶ Several of the artists represented had been contributing to the fabric of the American puppetry scene since the 1960s while some had come to the fore during the 1980s. The exhibition featured the work of Eric Bass, Janie Geiser, Ralph Lee, Jon Ludwig, Roman Paska, Peter Schumann, Theodora Skipitares, Julie Taymor, Paul Zaloom and, of course, Jim Henson.³⁷ It is worth noting that all of the represented artists had either already been recipients of Henson Foundation grants or would appear in the International Festival of Puppet Theater during its decade of existence. The exhibit was displayed in the Main Gallery of the Library, an enormous space, and Leslee Asch, in her role as curator, was afforded the opportunity to select additional examples of each artists' creation to "further illustrate the scope of their work."³⁸ The museum and scholarly aspects to both the exhibit and the symposia satisfied a burgeoning academic interest in puppet theater, though it was the living puppet theater that made its impact on the general public.

Although the McDonald's Children's Charities money was used in part to support the family and children's programs presented in the 1992 Festival, as indeed seven of the seventeen shows were suitable for children, much of the programming was intended to create an audience for adult puppetry. In its attempt to refocus the attention of theatergoers on puppetry as an artistic, adult medium, ten of the performances were specifically geared toward adults. These performances were innovative and represented a departure from standard forms and methods. Cheryl Henson said, "Right from the beginning, we made a decision not to present

³⁶ Asch, "Exhibitions..." 243.

³⁷ Asch, "Exhibitions..." 243.

³⁸ Asch, "Exhibitions..." 243.

traditional puppetry because we wanted to focus our energy on the work of contemporary puppeteers. These artists are challenging people's expectations of what puppetry should be."³⁹ Leslee Asch remarked, "What I find interesting in presenting this work and developing a festival is figuring out where the new edge is. It wasn't that we were trying to eradicate other images of puppetry."⁴⁰ She acknowledged that puppetry has been used, successfully, for children's performances and in schools, but wished to also acknowledge that puppetry exists as an art form that can be:

multi-faceted in the same way music is multi-faceted. When you go to see a concert at the Philharmonic, you know it's music. When you go to see your kid's piano recital, you know it's music. They're *really* (her emphasis) different so we didn't have to discredit either ways of looking at puppet theater to start establishing what we were considering the high end."⁴¹

The 1992 International Festival of Puppet Theater featured the "high end" work of world-class artists such as Compagnie Philippe Genty from France and Theatre Drak from the Czech Republic, just two of the seven shows performed to give the Festival its international character. There were also companies from the Netherlands, Japan, Argentina, Finland, and Germany. The Festival also featured ten companies from the United States. Vermont's famous Bread and Puppet Theater performed an opening pageant on the "discovery" of the United States entitled, *Columbus: The New World Order*. The two-part show, half an indoor pageant and the other half an outdoor parade, the performance examined Christopher Columbus as the "perpetrator of crimes that continue to resonate in today's 'new world

³⁹ Lance Gould, "Puppets rule in NY," *Daily News* [New York] 29 Aug 2000.

⁴⁰ *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination*.

⁴¹ *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination*.

order.”⁴² In its review of the show, *The New York Times* identified the company’s strengths, praising its “skill at creating expressionist, and often giant-size, puppet masks that have the impact of strong political cartoons” The article elaborated on the event, praising the work for its “striking images” and “insistent themes.”⁴³ It was an auspicious way to inaugurate the “first public festival of adult puppet theater ever produced in New York”⁴⁴ and the following two weeks would see more challenging and provocative puppetry presentations.

Janie Geiser’s company performed *News Update/When the Wind Blows*, a show that received a \$3,000 project grant in 1991⁴⁵ and Geiser’s artwork was featured on the poster for the festival.⁴⁶ Eric Bass of Sandglass Theater performed *The Village Child*, a project that had received project grants totaling \$10,000 over three granting cycles from 1988 until 1990.⁴⁷ Other artists performing were former grant recipients Paul Zaloom, Roman Paska, Hystopolis Puppet Theater, and Theodora Skipitares—all of whose shows would be reviewed in *The New York Times*. The Festival allowed grant recipients the opportunity to perform for a broader audience, once more highlighting the quality of the work recognized by Henson Foundation grants. Theodora Skipitares’s *Underground* was inspired by the story of a 1960s radical who had been hiding “underground” for twenty years and allowed Skipitares’s fascination

⁴² 1992 *International Festival of Puppet Theater*.

⁴³ Stephen Holden, "Pastiche of Columbus, Politics and Puppets, Tinged with Pathos," *New York Times* 9 Sep 1992: C15.

⁴⁴ Glenn Collins, "A Festival with Some Strings Attached," *New York Times* 30 Aug 1992: 19.

⁴⁵ "Grants."

⁴⁶ Geiser.

⁴⁷ "Grants."

with “people who live, work, and hide underground” to have an outlet.⁴⁸ From it, she created a piece for six manipulators and fifty puppets, with settings as disparate as a tomb in ancient Egypt, utilizing text from the *Book of the Dead* and a 1950s era bomb shelter, diligently detailed with provisions for survival. This scene, “Fallout Shelter,” in particular is praised as a provocative idea in *The New York Times*. “Like characters out of ‘The Brady Bunch,’ the parents and children privately soliloquize about their true feelings toward one another and their confinement. In a moment of crisis, individualism takes precedence over family values,” says reviewer Mel Gussow. The review continued to say that “Fallout Shelter” was the only scene in the piece that did not feel like a work in progress and that “in most of the scenes, the puppetry seems peripheral and adds very little to the storytelling.”⁴⁹ The audience has come expecting puppetry and this critic felt shorted by the “hermetic, chamber piece” offered by Skipitares.

By contrast, the same reviewer felt that Elmer Rice’s play, *The Adding Machine*, performed by the Hystopolis Productions, was “a bold and timely reflection on the perils of an industrialized society.”⁵⁰ By taking a play written for the actor theater, Hystopolis had embraced fully the expressionist style in which the 1923 play was written. Expressionist playwriting made the protagonist seem less like an individual and more like a cog in a machine or automaton, working for another man’s goals—almost the epitome of a puppet. The characters in expressionist plays are all character types rather than dynamic, rounded people; for

⁴⁸ Theodora Skipitares, “Articulations: The History of All Things,” *The Drama Review* 43.3 (1999): 147.

⁴⁹ Mel Gussow, “Two plays with puppets,” *New York Times* 16 Sep 1992: C16.

⁵⁰ Gussow 16.

example, Mr. Zero, the play's protagonist, has a shrewish wife in the grand theatrical tradition beginning with Mrs. Noah. Hystopolis capitalizes on the puppet form with this character in particular. As she delivers a monologue to her husband, "her mouth becomes disembodied and flies across the room, enlarging and then multiplying until the husband is besieged by a chorus of viragos."⁵¹ Gussow praised the company's efforts, stating that the "puppets are artfully conceived and operated," more evidence of the critic's desire to see puppet theater that utilizes puppetry. It is interesting to note that *Puppetry International*, a periodical devoted to the art form and produced by UNIMA-USA, said of the presentation that it was the "only 'play' offered in 1992," the implication being that the other work presented were not plays in the same sense.⁵² Perhaps the comment was merely an acknowledgement of the lack of playwriting specifically done for the medium or a reminder that a recognizable title or theme is often what draws the uninitiated audience member into a puppet show. In either case, future Festivals would feature more plays borrowed from the actor theater and envisioned through puppetry.

One of the international offerings of the 1992 Festival was *Manipulator and Underdog*, presented by Stuffed Puppet Theatre from the Netherlands. In it, Neville Tranter, the sole performer, plays "a clown, who has grown fat on his own success" who "forces his puppets to submit to his own twisted will."⁵³ *American Theatre* published an article entitled, "A Visit with Puppets," in its December 1992 issue that

⁵¹ Gussow 16.

⁵² Robert Boyd, "Festival Overview," *Puppetry International* 1 (1994): 6.

⁵³ *1992 International Festival of Puppet Theater*.

includes details from the experience of reviewer Stephen Haff. Tranter:

Opens the show by asking the audience, and a puppet, if they believe in ‘the illusion of the puppet;’ then he sets about establishing and severing relationships with puppets in a vicious display of control that actually enhances the illusion by acknowledging the terms of a puppet’s life and death—by declaring it a puppet, a creature in its own right.⁵⁴

By consciously playing with qualities inherent in the puppet—immortality and tractability—Stuffed Puppet Theatre is able to engage the audience in an exploration of the nature of cruelty and power. The Festival press materials for the show touted, “This is solo puppet theater at its most powerful and sublime”⁵⁵ In the second half of the show, the power relationships are reversed and the puppets take control of their oppressive master, becoming tormentors of the same ilk. The nature of this relationship between puppet and puppeteer is the focus of the entire Haff article, with Stuffed Puppet Theatre’s work serving to reinforce the dynamic. The article takes particular notice of the power of a puppet’s purity---it is exactly what it was created to be---and how the power of it increases when puppets appear side by side with human beings. It says, “While an adult might never fully believe a puppet is alive, it’s hard to deny the creature entry to our irrational, subconscious world.”⁵⁶

The article concludes with the possibility of puppetry being recognized in as broad a way as the other performing arts, including in this possibility the risk of “assimilation into the system.” In spite of the potential dangers of acceptance and uniformity, the article concludes with the hope that puppetry artists will be

⁵⁴ Stephen Haff, "On a Visit with Puppets," *American Theatre* Dec 1992: 14-9. 17-8.

⁵⁵ *1992 International Festival of Puppet Theater*.

⁵⁶ Haff 16.

acknowledged, applauded, and afforded the opportunity to pursue their livelihood.⁵⁷ The *Times* reviews and this article all point to the success of the 1992 International Festival of Puppet Theater and its accomplishment of Henson's goal of getting the eye of the theater critic and building new audiences for puppetry. Cheryl Henson reflected, "I think of this festival as a tribute to my father and his love for this art form. He and Joe Papp would have loved to be able to see it."⁵⁸ That the level of discourse had advanced beyond mere awareness of puppetry as an adult art form to the examination of its meaning and function speaks even further to the success of the Festival. The opening symposium's aim of "Changing Perceptions of Puppetry" seemed to have become a reality and the "theatrical inanimate" was alive and thriving in New York City. The Jim Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater was awarded a special citation by the OBIE awards in 1992 in recognition of its exceptional collection of performances.⁵⁹ The Henson Foundation had achieved its end and could return once more to the support of puppetry through grants. Robert Boyd, writing for *Puppetry International*, recalled that the Foundation had no plans to craft another Festival after 1992 and wondered, "Why go through such effort to raise the level of discourse, if not to have a good long conversation now and then?"⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Haff 19.

⁵⁸ Collins 19.

⁵⁹ Steve Abrams, "Puppetry OBIE Winners," *Puppetry Journal* 55.2 (2003): 9.

⁶⁰ Boyd 6.

EXPANSION

With the encouraging critical and popular success of the first International Festival of Puppet Theater, the Jim Henson Foundation thought it was necessary to build on the momentum it generated by presenting another festival in 1994. Hanne Tierney, an American artist whose work would appear in the 1994 and 2000 International Festivals, said:

Apart from putting puppetry into the limelight, the festival has been a tremendous force for American puppetry. Not only because performers have been able to perform; much more far reaching has been that performers can work towards an exciting goal. This may sound trivial, but it isn't. It means one pushes harder, works harder and stretches further. Ultimately I would say that a lot of the work that has grown and expanded in the last years has done so because of the possibility that the festival might, and in many ways did, produce it.⁶¹

With such commitment from puppeteers to raising the level of their professional and artistic standards to be worthy of Festival attention, there was no question as to whether to proceed with another International Festival of Puppet Theater. Plans were begun for a 1994 Festival with revisions to the offerings and exposure to a broader audience. Cheryl Henson later reflected on the success of the first installment of the International Festival of Puppet Theater, "We found that if you put enough good-quality small pieces of theater together, you could get the kind of attention you'd get from one big piece of theater."⁶² Producing director Leslee Asch worked closely with Cheryl Henson to gauge which elements of the Festival to enhance and which to eliminate. The pair decided from the beginning to invite

⁶¹ "Grants."

⁶² Karin Lipson, "The World on a String," *Newsday* [New York] 16 Apr 2000.

entirely different puppet companies to perform in 1994. “We felt that with so many great companies still out there, our efforts were probably better spent continuing to introduce and uncover artists unknown to New York audiences, rather than rest on our past successes,” said Asch.⁶³ To that end, sixteen companies, nine from the United States and seven from abroad, performed in New York from September 6 through the 18, 1994.⁶⁴ The Public Theater was once again the venue for the puppet happenings with an after-hours puppet cabaret taking up residence at P.S. 122 on the Lower East Side.⁶⁵ “Late Night at P.S. 122” was created to showcase developing puppeteers and works-in-progress as well as naughty variety acts that would not have a life outside of such a venue. The cabaret format of Late Night allowed “emerging puppet artists to hone their skills and gain greater exposure,” while the informal atmosphere of the Off-off Broadway space served as “a meeting place for the puppet community and for presenters and audiences looking for new voices.”⁶⁶

There was also an exhibit at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts entitled “Revealing Roots: Uncovering Influences on Contemporary American Puppet Theater.”⁶⁷ Like the previous exhibit at the Library, this exhibition attempted to introduce people to the physical art of the puppet by displaying the various forms that the puppet may assume. “Revealing Roots” presented work that uncovered “parallels between the work of contemporary American puppetry artists and

⁶³ Boyd 6.

⁶⁴ Boyd 6.

⁶⁵ Boyd 6.

⁶⁶ Anne Dennin, *The International Festival of Puppet Theater Final Report : September 6-24, 2000* (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 2001) 2.

⁶⁷ Boyd 6.

traditional puppet theater from diverse cultures worldwide.”⁶⁸ The work of twenty-three companies was selected for the exhibit by Kerry McCarthy, the former museum director at the Center for Puppetry Arts; Barbara Stratyner, the curator of exhibitions for the Library; and Leslee Asch, with Don Vlack, the Library’s head designer, to unify the look of the exhibition.⁶⁹ The selected artifacts demonstrated the diversity of approaches to the object while maintaining the primacy of what the object expresses. Co-curator Asch said:

This exhibition sought to examine the cultural roots of contemporary puppet theater. The underlying principle was that contemporary artists did not take something relegated to children’s theater and try to recreate it as an adult form, but rather they found inspiration in cultures in which puppetry’s power and wholeness was always evident.⁷⁰

To express that influence, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater from Minneapolis, Minnesota, showcased its 1989 work, *The Reaper’s Tale*.⁷¹ The company utilized the traditional aesthetic of Mexican Day of the Dead celebratory masks and costumes to implicate Christopher Columbus and other explorers in their conquest of indigenous populations in the Americas, in a theme similar to Bread and Puppet’s 1992 Festival performance. Several companies pulled from their ethnic or cultural heritage to create artifacts of performance. Vit Horejs’s Czechoslovak-American Marionette Company displayed classical Czech marionettes while the Manteo family reflected its background with marionettes in the Sicilian style. The relationship of international puppetry to American creativity is a symbiotic one and work displaying collaboration between cultures was also highlighted. That

⁶⁸ Kerry McCarthy, “Revealing Roots: An Exhibition,” *Puppetry International* 1 (1994): 18.

⁶⁹ Asch, “Exhibitions...” 243.

⁷⁰ Asch, “Exhibitions...” 243.

⁷¹ McCarthy 18.

American artists could make an impact on puppetry in other countries came as no surprise in light of the widespread influence of the Muppets and the increasing adoption of the television style puppets for work in that medium. Seen altogether, the exhibition was a panorama of puppet styles with the result that the “end product for each artist is a highly individual and singular performance.”⁷²

Also, as in the previous festival, symposia were offered to engage audience members and artists in an active conversation about the art of puppetry. The 1994 edition of the Festival, however, offered the discussion in smaller segments, one by the name of “Towards a Visual Theater” and the other under the name, “The Sacred and the Profane.”⁷³ As Asch related in an article in *Puppetry International* about the symposia series, the topics were broad enough to consider puppetry, not merely in its strictest sense, but also in “the ‘edges’ or places where the definition of puppetry is least clear.”⁷⁴ The former symposia topic examined the puppet as an aspect of visual theater and invited puppetry artists such as directors Julie Taymor and Ping Chong, and filmmaker William Kentridge, people who came to the puppet theater through the visual and symbolic connections that puppetry makes. Taymor is attracted to theater because of its connection to personal transformation through character evolution. “And making physical that evolution through the power of the visual image, I think, is the reason to do theater,” she said.⁷⁵ The latter symposia engaged discussants in a conversation about theater as a place of reflection as well as an outlet for baser human instincts and the grotesque. The content of this session emerged

⁷² McCarthy 19.

⁷³ Boyd 6.

⁷⁴ Leslee Asch, “The Symposia Series,” *Puppetry International* 1 (1994): 16.

⁷⁵ Asch, “The Symposia Series,” 16-7.

when Asch and Cheryl Henson realized that there were a great number of performances in the Festival utilizing shadow puppetry and the shadow theater tradition, something both found initially worrisome. “Perhaps, we thought, we were allowing too great an imbalance. But, as we looked more closely at the selections, we became comfortable with the idea that indeed there was a profound range to the explorations of the form”⁷⁶ It struck both as interesting to compare the uses of the shadow between the various companies and to use the symposium to explore their meanings.

Four of the selected performances for the Festival featured shadows in a pronounced way, including performances by American Larry Reed’s Shadow Light Productions, a company that grounds its work in the shadow traditions of Bali, and Italy’s Teatro Gioco Vita, known for its “stunning succession of visual effects.”⁷⁷ Masks were also well represented at the 1994 Festival, with three companies utilizing what might be the earliest form of object theater. Ralph Lee, director of the Mettawee River Theater Company and one of the founders of the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade,⁷⁸ said of masked performance, “The audience is always aware that the actor is wearing a mask. . . . In one sense, this has a distancing effect; in another, the spectator is engaged in the process of making theater, and the experience of the event deepens.”⁷⁹ On the subject of engagement with the audience and its ability to participate in the process, several performances were offered using objects

⁷⁶ Asch, “The Symposia Series,” 17.

⁷⁷ Boyd 8.

⁷⁸ Lowell Swortzell, “A Short View of American Puppetry,” *American Puppetry* ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 33.

⁷⁹ Asch, “The Symposia Series,” 17.

to perform rather than conventional puppets, pointing to the visual theater ideal as well as to 1992's idea of the theatrical inanimate. *Safe as Milk* by American Jon Ludwig made use of "a car crash dummy, a bullhorn, a cyclone fence and assorted animals and dolls" to tell a madcap story of "nutsy nineties anxiety."⁸⁰ Additionally, more traditional forms were represented by the 1994 Festival, including marionettes and Japanese-style bunraku puppetry, offered by the Handspring Puppet Company of South Africa. Thirteen of the shows in the Festival were billed as "For Adults," with three shows geared specifically toward children. Five of the shows, *A Popol Vuh Story* performed by Ralph Lee and company, *A Play Called Not and Now* performed by Hanne Tierney, *Pipe: A Courtroom Drama* by Garland Farwell, *In Xanadu* by the afore mentioned Larry Reed, and *Turtle Island Tales* by Hobey Ford, were presentations of previous grant award winners, the former four receiving a total of \$9,000 in the 1993 granting cycle and the latter show receiving \$3,000 in 1987.⁸¹ *Pipe: A Courtroom Drama*, along with *Safe as Milk*, was presented at PS 122 rather than at the Public. The markedly adult and timely content for Farwell's show was the Clarence Thomas case, to create "a provocative look at the issues of a black man in contemporary American society."⁸² As in the 1992 Festival, the puppet was once again a critic of politics and a tool for creating a discussion of its proper province.

The Festival was in a position to present challenging theatrical puppetry work for adult audiences. The International Festivals of Puppet Theater, however, did not fail to present beautiful and stimulating work for child and family audiences. In

⁸⁰ Boyd 6.

⁸¹ "Grants."

⁸² *1994 International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/archives/1994>>.

1994, Hobe Ford's Golden Rod Puppets performed *Turtle Island Tales*, a retelling of three Native American stories through shadow puppetry.⁸³ Ford recalled being moved as a child by a puppet performance and began to experiment with them in art school. He consulted with Bil Baird about his creations and was further inspired to use puppets as an expression of his art.⁸⁴ The master's generosity and willingness to share with Ford inspired him to share his work with peers at a puppet festival workshop. Much to Ford's delight he found that "among the people at the workshop were some of the folks from the Henson Foundation I got a grant from the Hensons and it was then that I decided to put together a show inspired by Native American songs and stories."⁸⁵ Ford had lived for two years with a Native American family in Nevada and had learned a great deal about their amazing cultural heritage. His performance incorporates the music and the visual art of the cultures his tales represent. "I wanted lots of images in the show, to depict the desert and the mountains and all the different graphic ideas I had."⁸⁶ The individual tales are told with shadow puppets drawn from the Indonesian shadow tradition, while Carlos, a native narrator, serves as a bridge between stories. Carlos is a foam hand puppet, nearly life-sized, who has a 'live' hand free to play a drum during the show. *Turtle Island Tales* won an UNIMA Citation for 1991 to 1992⁸⁷ and has become the central material in a documentary video about Ford's art and performance.

⁸³ *1994 International Festival of Puppet Theater*

⁸⁴ *Turtle Island Tales*, dir. Hobe Ford and Debra Roberts, perf. Hobe Ford, Golden Rod Puppets & Heron Productions, 2000.

⁸⁵ *Turtle Island Tales*.

⁸⁶ *Turtle Island Tales*.

⁸⁷ "Citations of Excellence: 1974-1995," *UNIMA-USA* 2008 UNIMA-USA, 24 Jan 2008 <http://www.unima-usa.org/citations/74_95.html>.

Apart from the adaptation of traditional stories for material, the 1994 Festival included several actor plays adapted to be performed by puppets: the aforementioned Gertrude Stein play, *A Play Called Not and Now*, *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner, *The Ghost Sonata* by August Strindberg, and several literary derivations from William Shakespeare, Lewis Carroll, Alfred Jarry and Bruno Schulz. *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, an adaptation by South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company, was performed five times during the 1994 Festival. The production was a collaboration between the theater company and William Kentridge, an award winning film animator. The company approached the work as a brand new play rather than an interpretation. Kentridge said, "We wanted to say something about present-day South Africa."⁸⁸ Considering the political climate of the nation in 1994, *Woyzeck* makes a bold statement about "the enormous pressures on people—economically, politically, socially, and personally—which pushes people to the extreme. That means also to violence."⁸⁹ The production used three levels of action-incorporating live actors, puppetry, and animation-to "shift the story into the metaphysical realm" that its protagonist faces every day. The puppet gives an unusual resonance to the plight of the hero---another character that is a cog in the societal machine like Mr. Zero. The show was presented in such a ways that "the manipulation of the puppet is completely transparent, where, in spite of seeing the palpable artificiality of the movement of the puppet, one cannot stop believing the puppet's own volition and autonomy."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Margaret Heinlen, "Woyzeck on the Highveld,," *Puppetry International* 1 (1994): 20.

⁸⁹ Heinlen 20.

⁹⁰ Heinlen 20.

The International Festival of Puppet Theater added a touring component in 1994 and *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, along with *Kyohime Mandara* by Japan's Dondoro and *The Adventures of Ginocchio* by Teatro Hugo & Ines of Peru, was seen by audiences in Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Durham, North Carolina, and Lee, Massachusetts.⁹¹ One of the many considerations for the Henson Foundation in the awarding of grant money had always been to expand outside of New York by giving funds to artists working in many different geographical areas. Taking the Festival on tour was an expansion of the idea. Preston Foerder, an artist and project grant recipient in 1997 and 2001, said, "It is an important contribution of the Foundation to enable performances not only in NYC where such work is not uncommon but outside of the metropolitan area. Only by reaching these audiences can adult puppetry truly be accepted."⁹² The touring performances in 1994 appeared at the Center for Puppetry Arts, Performing Arts Chicago, the Duke University Institute of the Arts, Jacob's Pillow Dance, and the Walker Japanese American Cultural & Community Center. The national exposure of audiences to these companies fueled the Foundation in its drive to continue producing the Festival and the tour in 1996.

Puppetry International posited:

This outreach may end up being the Jim Henson Foundation's greatest legacy for American puppetry, the artform will be held in greater regard, American artists will be held to a higher standard of excellence, and audiences across the country (like those who have come to the Festival of International Puppetry in New York) will want more, more and MORE!⁹³

⁹¹ "On Tour," *International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/archives/ontour.html>>.

⁹² "Grants."

⁹³ "The Puppets Take Manhattan!" *Puppetry International* 3 (1997): 18.

EXTENSION

The 1994 Festival proved that the public had developed an appetite for puppetry and the 1996 Festival responded to this hunger by inviting twenty puppet companies from eight different countries to perform from September 10 through 22.⁹⁴ The 1996 installment of the Festival established partnerships with several new theaters on top of utilizing the performance spaces at the Public and PS 122. Dance Theater Workshop presented a show, La Mama E.T.C. played host to two shows, and the New Victory Theater hosted two performances.⁹⁵ The incorporation of the New Victory was a major coup for the Festival due to its presence as a Broadway venue, calling itself “NYC’s ultimate theatre for kids and families.”⁹⁶ As *Puppetry International* observed, “The importance of these partnerships rests not only in the enhanced institutional strength which comes from such networking, but in the tangible presence of the highest caliber puppetry over a wider area and for an ever more diverse audience.”⁹⁷ In terms of the programming, a film series showcasing the unusual vision of artists such as Jan Svankmajer was added to supplement the live performances occurring throughout the city. Three companies that had performed in 1992 were invited back, making a total of eleven performances by companies from

⁹⁴ “The Puppets Take Manhattan!” 18.

⁹⁵ “The Puppets Take Manhattan!” 18.

⁹⁶ *The New Victory Theater*, 2005 The New 42nd Street Inc., 17 Jan 2008
<<http://www.newvictory.org/home.html>>.

⁹⁷ “The Puppets Take Manhattan!” 18.

the United States. Of those performances, seven were the recipients of project and seed grants, amounting to \$23,500 from as early as the 1989 granting cycle through the 1995 awards.⁹⁸

One of the winners of a project grant for \$4,000 in 1995 was *Peter and Wendy* by Mabou Mines.⁹⁹ Andrew Periale, editor of *Puppetry International*, wrote about new paradigms in American puppetry and quoted Vincent Anthony, who said:

The model in the '70s was people who'd been drawn to puppetry earnestly working on the techniques by which to express themselves in the medium. In the '80s a lot of new artists were drawn to puppetry from other disciplines and there was a lot of wild experimenting going on—a lot of 'pushing the elastic boundaries.' Now in the '90s artists are interpreting more—really trying to communicate with their audiences.¹⁰⁰

Periale associates Lee Breuer, founder and artistic director of Mabou Mines, with the latter brand of puppetry artist. In the mid 1960s, Joanne Akalaitis, Breuer, Ruth Malaczech, Philip Glass, and David Warrilow worked in Paris to “develop a new theatrical language by embracing emerging concepts in literature, music and visual arts.”¹⁰¹ Mabou Mines was founded in 1970 in a Nova Scotia city by the same name. Its website touts, “Mabou Mines remains an artist-driven collaborative. The common denominator exhibited throughout the work is the shared importance of each artistic element of a piece. The text, the visual, the sound, the acting, and the staging are all given equal consideration.”¹⁰² The fusion of the elements of staging recalls the traditions of Asian theater, where one trains in every area to appreciate the entire art form. Breuer had long been interested in the application of East Asian

⁹⁸ “Grants.”

⁹⁹ “Grants.”

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Periale, “Independence Day,” *Puppetry International* 3 (1997): 2.

¹⁰¹ “History,” *Mabou Mines* Mabou Mines, 21 Jan 2008 <<http://www.maboumines.org/>>.

¹⁰² “History,” *Mabou Mines*.

theatrical conventions in Western theater, having seen a bunraku performance in 1968 in Paris.¹⁰³ He began to write plays for puppets because it was an extension of storytelling. He said, “I wanted a storytelling theater because of the flamboyance, because of the fact that you can paint pictures. It goes back to the old Chinese storytellers—the next step is storytelling with a dancer; next step is storytelling with a puppet, then a storytelling theater. So I think all this stuff connects up to my idea of wanting to write as a storyteller.”¹⁰⁴

Peter and Wendy, however, is not based on Breuer’s own writing but rather takes J.M. Barrie’s original story of Peter Pan as its source material. The script was created by Liza Lorwin, producer and dramaturg, who had the idea of “splicing” the text of the book into a narrative play.¹⁰⁵ The story was told by a single actor, Karen Evans-Kandel, in the role of a grown-up Wendy with bunraku style puppets playing the characters in her story. *Peter and Wendy* “takes place in a five-year-old’s imagination, or rather in the mind of a mature woman calling herself back to the time she was five, in order to recreate the time when she had this imagination and could ‘fly.’”¹⁰⁶ The puppets are seen as her toys, abandoned as she matured to the adult she has become. The settings: Victorian house, pirate ship, and Neverland, are all constructed out of things left in the dusty nursery of the famed girl’s childhood. The puppets, designed by Julie Archer and winning her a Dramalogue and an American

¹⁰³ Stephen Kaplin, “Animations—the Puppet Theater of Lee Breuer,” *Puppetry International* 3 (1997): 14.

¹⁰⁴ Kaplin 16.

¹⁰⁵ Kaplin 17.

¹⁰⁶ Kaplin 17.

Theater Wing Design Award in 1997¹⁰⁷, play with Wendy, and they “often clamber over her like kids on a jungle gym, using her body as an extension of the set.”¹⁰⁸ In the end, however, it is Kandel’s performance that is the “tour-de-force” bringing the production’s storytelling idea to fruition. Kandel plays the role of narrator as well as fifteen to twenty other vocal characters. It is a role for which she was given a Drama League Award and OBIE Award in recognition of her performance in 1997, and a Craig Noel Award (given by San Diego area theater critics) for Excellence in Theater for Best Solo Performance in 2002 and (with Mabou Mines) for which she was the recipient of The Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship in 2006.¹⁰⁹ The entire production won an UNIMA Citation and OBIE Award in recognition of an outstanding production in 1997, plus a Craig Noel Award for Best Special Event in 2002.¹¹⁰ The production, according to *Puppetry International*, culminates Lee Breuer’s “search for a theatrical narrative form that can glide easily between live actors and the animated puppet, between the narrator’s vocal presence and the puppet’s silence, between the techniques of European theater and the traditional forms of Asian puppetry.”¹¹¹ The show proved to be popular with its intended adult audience while remaining appropriate for children and has been remounted by the company on several occasions.

As in previous festivals, the 1996 version continued its commitment to engaging artists and scholars in a discussion of puppetry and contemporary puppet

¹⁰⁷ “Awards/Recognitions/Honors,” *Mabou Mines* Mabou Mines, 21 Jan 2008 <<http://www.maboumines.org/>>.

¹⁰⁸ Kaplin 17.

¹⁰⁹ Awards/Recognitions/Honors.”

¹¹⁰ Awards/Recognitions/Honors.”

¹¹¹ Kaplin 17.

theater. The title of the symposium was “What Makes a Puppet Play?” and it was presented in conjunction with UNIMA-USA.¹¹² UNIMA-USA’s sponsorship of the event enables its members and the international puppetry community to “focus upon topics and issues of international interest in the hope of presenting perspectives that need to be shared and understood.”¹¹³ The symposium occurred September 16 in the Bruno Walter Auditorium and featured Bart P. Roccoberton, the director of the puppet arts program at the University of Connecticut, as moderator with a panel of puppetry artists and educators responding to the topic. The panelists: Pablo Cueto of Teatro Tinglado, John Farrell of Figures of Speech Theatre, Penny Francis from the Central School of Speech and Drama in England, and Michael Schwabe of Hystopolis Productions, all were asked to “explore what goes into the conception and creation of puppet theatre — what is involved, both from a textual point of view and a non-textual point of view.”¹¹⁴ To aid in the discussion, Roccoberton suggested referring to the source material for the play as a “vehicle”, rather than a script to encompass all the possible derivations of a puppet play and to avoid the connotation of “script” as a written document. The discussion rapidly evolved from the place of the vehicle to the place of puppetry in relation to theater. Cueto offered:

I think the puppet theatre is part of the theatre. I don't think it should be considered as something separate. I think it's a mistake to consider it something separate. . . . Puppetry, if it's well developed, is a performing skill, as could be dancing or being able to sing well. . . . Puppetry is also an element of the theatre that will help [a performer] develop characters. So I really don't feel they should be considered separate.

¹¹² “The Puppets Take Manhattan!” 18.

¹¹³ “What Makes a Puppet Play?” transcriber Bonny Hall, 1996 International Festival of Puppet Theatre, Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York, 16 Sep 1996.

¹¹⁴ “What Makes a Puppet Play?”

Schwabe said:

I think that puppetry should avoid trying to pigeonhole itself. Puppets and those sorts of things are just tools of theatre — it's just theatre stuff. I think if we say that there's going to be a difference between a puppet show and any other type of theatre, we're asking for a certain amount of forgiveness, which isn't necessarily something that we need to be asking for.¹¹⁵

Francis was in agreement, adding, “More and more the theatre is asking for puppeteers, and more and more the puppeteer is being asked to produce a whole lot of performing skills.”

The nature of a puppeteer’s collaboration with other artists was brought into question, with the additional query of how and at what point does the puppeteer enter the work. Francis continued to say, “Most puppeteers, I think, want to design and make and perform. Some people have a theory that it's what's holding things back a bit — that puppeteers do try to do too much themselves. One person will try to do everything.”¹¹⁶ In order to prevent this insularity on the part of the puppeteer and to cultivate relationships with other theater artists, particularly good writers, Farrell suggested saying to them, “‘Imagine the possibility of presenting several layers of the spectrum of existence at once: of a spiritual level, of a psychological level, of a physical level. Visualize it like a three-dimensional chess game, in a sense, where the possible relationships are just intriguing.’ I can imagine writers being intrigued by the possibilities for those layered realities.”¹¹⁷ The importance of producing interesting and intriguing work was a consensual point for the panel and a well-rounded skill set for any performer was essential to this production. Roccoberton

¹¹⁵ “What Makes a Puppet Play?”

¹¹⁶ “What Makes a Puppet Play?”

¹¹⁷ “What Makes a Puppet Play?”

concludes the session, thanking the panelists and inviting the audience, some two hundred individuals, to continue to consider and to discuss the issues raised by the session.¹¹⁸ In his afterword, included in the symposium's transcript, he observes that the leading question of "What Makes a Puppet Play?" was never directly answered and that the discussion touched upon many facets of puppet production. He remarks, "This, in itself, says much about the puppet arts. Each creator chooses those pieces that will make up their own voice and mixes them together in their own individual way. We call this 'puppetry'— an encompassing and yet expanding word for many different expressions. Is it the weakness of the form? Or, is it the strength?"¹¹⁹

Building on the increased interest of artists in collaboration with puppeteers during the Modernist era, an exhibit was offered at the New York Public Library entitled "Puppets & Performing Objects in the 20th Century." Nineteen ninety-six marked the hundredth anniversary of Alfred Jarry's ground-breaking *Ubu Roi*, and his avant-garde approach to play-making spearheaded the modernist interest in puppetry that came with the turn of the century. This interest would be adopted by, among others, Edward Gordon Craig, Maurice Maeterlinck, Bertolt Brecht, and Federico Garcia Lorca. Each used puppets in his work as symbols, as "concrete representations of abstract ideas."¹²⁰ The exhibition was co-curated by Barbara Stratyner, John Bell, and Leslee Asch and was mounted in collaboration with the Munich Stadtmuseum, "which houses one of the largest international collections of

¹¹⁸ "What Makes a Puppet Play?"

¹¹⁹ "What Makes a Puppet Play?"

¹²⁰ John Bell, "100 Long Green Candles, or, Happy Birthday, Ubu," *Puppetry International* 3 (1997): 3.

puppetry.”¹²¹ The exhibit united “examples from the various fields of puppet theater, avant-garde performance, visual arts, and projected and broadcast media to examine what they all have in common: the performing object.”¹²² It showcased the many avenues down which the puppet has walked and the many ways it has been a source of inspiration. To further demonstrate his affection for the performing object, Hystopolis Productions also presented Jarry’s play during the Festival. Jarry had used puppets in his work to show that “objects on stage were as important as human actors”¹²³ and Hystopolis delivered a production that reinforced that idea. The press materials for the Festival touted it as a “wildly imaginative, bawdy and outrageous production” that was performed by eight puppeteers using hand, rod, and body puppets.¹²⁴ In the production, Pa and Ma Ubu maintained their personalities as “an amoral and ruthless, but also comic and human couple,”¹²⁵ much in the puppet tradition of Punch and Judy.

The Punchinello tradition was also represented during the Festival in the form of Clotario Demoniac, presented by Teatro Tinglado from Mexico. The company was established in 1980 under the artistic direction of Pablo Cueto, a third generation puppeteer.¹²⁶ Their website proclaims, “A puppet is an object, an extension of the actor, and a character and, in the play of these definitions, they give expressive

¹²¹ Asch, “Exhibitions and...” 243.

¹²² John Bell, “Puppets & Performing Objects in the 20th Century,” *Puppetry International* 3 (1997): 22.

¹²³ Bell, “100 Long Green Candles . . .” 3.

¹²⁴ *1996 International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/archives/1996>>.

¹²⁵ Bell, “100 Long Green Candles . . .” 3.

¹²⁶ *Teatro Tinglado* Teatro Tinglado, 22 Jan 2008 <<http://www.teatrotinglado.com/tinglado2.htm>>.

possibilities to this scenographic art.”¹²⁷ *The Repugnant Story of Clotario Demoniac* is told through hand puppets, humanettes, toy theater, and object performance. The narrative, a fairly straightforward one of “obsessive love and murder most foul,”¹²⁸ is complicated by the interplay of the meaning of the puppet and the use of scale in the performance. Cheryl Henson reported, “You’ll have a Punch and then have the performer who looks very much like Punch. So they do a lot of playing with the levels of reality between the puppets and the performers behind the puppets.”¹²⁹ After Clotario, in hand puppet form, successfully marries the widow of his best friend (whom Clotario killed, incidentally), he is “forced to tell a series of stories involving a whole new set of puppet characters in exchange for a piece of his reluctant bride’s clothing.”¹³⁰ After a genie steals his bride, Clotario journeys to the underworld, in classic Punch and Judy tradition, to reclaim the woman. Lawrence Van Gelder of *The New York Times* wrote, “For all its foul deeds and nasty characters, ‘The Repugnant Story of Clotario Demoniac’ is packed with imagination, invention and, best of all, humor.”¹³¹ It received six performances at the Public in 1996, the final of which was performed in Spanish,¹³² and went on to tour as a part of the 1998 Festival tour schedule.¹³³

¹²⁷ *Teatro Tinglado*. (quotation translated from Spanish by dissertation writer).

¹²⁸ Lawrence Van Gelder, “Human and Humanoid (And Also Half and Half),” *New York Times* 12 Sep 1996: 16.

¹²⁹ Abby Stoll, “Puppets with Attitude,” *Tuscon Monthly* Oct 1998.

¹³⁰ Van Gelder 16.

¹³¹ Van Gelder 16.

¹³² Van Gelder 16.

¹³³ “On Tour.”

The tour for 1996 was expanded to include five productions from four different countries. In addition to the performances in venues located in Illinois, Connecticut, Vermont, North Carolina, New Hampshire, California, and Oregon, most of the performances offered workshops and question and answer sessions with the artists. There was also a symposium at the Hopkins Center in New Hampshire, organized by the New England Foundation for the Arts, with partners New England Presenters and Dartmouth College that explored the possibility of puppetry for adults. “Educating the Presenters” featured Cheryl Henson, Leslee Asch, Lisa Booth, the Festival Tour promoter, and Vincent Anthony of the Center for Puppetry Arts in a discussion about “How to Successfully Present Puppetry.”¹³⁴ As Norman Frisch, a presenter and curator of arts festivals across the United States,¹³⁵ wrote, “If the Symposium is successful, it could certainly be used as a model for events in other regions of the country.”¹³⁶ Symposium participants were also able to attend the performance of *Sunjata: The Manding* by Amoros et Augustin & Ki-Yi M'bock Théâtre and meet the artists. The show proved to be a popular outreach due to the inclusion of live percussion and its performance in French and three African dialects.¹³⁷ The 1996 Festival was particularly multi-cultural, enriching audiences while attracting new financial partners such as the Rockefeller Foundation.¹³⁸ With such ever-increasing momentum, plans for the 1998 edition of the Festival looked to expand even further.

¹³⁴ Norman Frisch, “Presenting Adult Puppetry,” *Puppetry International* 3 (1997): 28.

¹³⁵ Frisch 24.

¹³⁶ Frisch 28.

¹³⁷ “The Puppets Take Manhattan,” 18.

¹³⁸ “The Puppets Take Manhattan,” 18.

EXPLOSION

In 1998, the International Festival of Puppet Theater expanded beyond its previous incarnations in multiple ways. The timeline for the Festival was extended into a third week, running from September 9 through 27. Twenty-eight companies representing sixteen countries performed. Thirteen venues across Manhattan and even into Staten Island presented performances. There were two symposia, held at the Public Theater on September 16, featuring Festival artists considering their stance on issues of interest to their work and to puppet theater. The first was called “Broad Choices,” in which “artists discussed the development of their own personal palette of expressive choices,” and the panel included Larry Reed, Chris and Stephen Carter, John Bell, and Frank Soehnle from Germany.¹³⁹ The second panel met to discuss “Defining Moments,” in a discussion focused on “developing a vocabulary for critiquing a new form.” The participants in the lively discussion were Ping Chong, Theodora Skipitares, Eric Bass, and Neville Tranter of the Netherlands. I recall a particularly lively interchange with the highly educated audience during this panel around puppet theory. Jane Henson was in attendance and contributed examples of puppet criticism from Heinrich Von Kleist and Edward Gordon Craig.¹⁴⁰ The issue of finding ways to discuss the art and craft of the puppeteer had become a central one with the Festival bringing increased recognition to the art form in the United States.

¹³⁹ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 11.

¹⁴⁰ Jennifer Stoessner, journal entry, 16 Sep 1998.

The 1998 Festival featured five exhibitions, none of which appeared at the New York Library for the Performing Arts, as they had for the three previous editions of the Festival. The exhibits were spread throughout the venues of the Festival with a toy theater exhibit at Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater curated by Great Small Works, an exhibit of Richard Termine's puppet photography at the Public Theater, and a sampling of Ralph Lee's work at the Children's Museum of the Arts.¹⁴¹ A two-part exhibition entitled "Puppet Inspiration" was displayed at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center in Staten Island and at Dance Theater Workshop in Manhattan.¹⁴² Both of these exhibits featured the work of puppeteers who are also painters or painters whose work was inspired by puppetry. "The initial inspiration for this show was the discovery that noted Dutch puppeteer Neville Tranter had created an extensive collection of strikingly beautiful paintings while on tour with his performances," said Leslee Asch.¹⁴³ Other artists featured were Janie Geiser, Liz Goldberg, Marguerita, Naomi Tarantal, and Jana Zeller.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, there was a film series at the Guggenheim museum, featuring celluloid puppetry work from, among others, Jiří Trínka, Jan Swankmajer, George Pal, the Brothers Quay, Julie Taymor, Janie Geiser, and Jim Henson, as well as a lecture by South African animator William Kentridge to begin the festivities.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, two productions, coincidentally both from Spain, were featured as part of the

¹⁴¹ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 16.

¹⁴² Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 16.

¹⁴³ Asch, "Exhibitions..." 243.

¹⁴⁴ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 16.

¹⁴⁵ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 14.

Guggenheim Museum's Works and Process Series.¹⁴⁶ This program's purpose was "to provide audiences with a deeper sensitivity to the creative process"¹⁴⁷ and had been a successful venture for three companies in the 1996 Festival.¹⁴⁸ All of these peripheral events showed that the Festival was exploding and had reached a superior level of curatorial sophistication by 1998.

Eighteen of the featured shows in 1998 were specifically geared toward adult audiences while five were geared toward children and families. In addition, five of the performances billed themselves as appropriate for children, depending on their age level.¹⁴⁹ Puppetry in New York was experiencing an explosion of theatrical, critical, and public interest. The 1998 Festival Final Report records that "more than 75,000 attended Festival events; performances alone attracted over 28,000...." It notes that the attendance figures represented a 27 per cent increase over the 1996 Festival.¹⁵⁰ The growth of the Festival's venues spread the resources of the Foundation, finances and personnel, over the city. Field captains Teri Maknauskas and Sara Michelle Zatz were in constant conversation via portable radios and telephones. Maknauskas was rarely seen without her roller blades to facilitate travel between Festival locations.¹⁵¹ As it had previously done, the Festival presented performances at the Public Theater, La Mama E.T.C., Dance Theater Workshop, PS 122, and The New Victory Theater. New venues for 1998 were The Kitchen, the Snug Harbor Cultural Center in Staten Island, Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater,

¹⁴⁶ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 1.

¹⁴⁷ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 11.

¹⁴⁸ "The Puppets Take Manhattan." 18.

¹⁴⁹ *1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/archives/1998>>.

¹⁵⁰ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 1.

¹⁵¹ Stoessner.

Danspace Project at St. Marks, the Children's Museum of the Arts, the Japan Society, and The French Institute/Alliance Francais. The latter venue represents another 1998 Festival debut, international collaborations, of which there were four. The French Institute/Alliance Francais presented *Dieu! God Mother Radio*, an interpretation of Christopher Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*, devised by Roman Paska and Massimo Schuster from France. Larry Reed worked with a dalang, I Wayan Wija, and a composer, I Dewa Berata, both from Indonesia to create *Wayang Listrik/Electric Shadows* at the Newman Theater Space at the Public. The show incorporated classical Balinese shadow puppetry and American storytelling to create a "phantasmagoria of image, light, and sound," with a screen that extended to cover the entire stage.¹⁵² Also at the Newman was *Sigi the Antelope*, a collaboration between the Carter Family Marionettes and Ghana's Ocheami. Japanese scenographer Mitsuru Ishii collaborated with Ping Chong and Jon Ludwig to present *Kwaidan*, a retelling of Japanese ghost stories by Lafcadio Hearn.¹⁵³

Kwaidan began its life at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, receiving a \$4,000 project grant in 1997.¹⁵⁴ Its initial performances took place in June 1998, prior to the Festival, at the Center. Chong, a theatrical innovator for the past thirty years, said of the show that "the connection with my earlier work is that I'm always striving for wonder and astonishment and there's a heck of a lack of that in theatre today."¹⁵⁵ The incorporation of puppetry into the ghost stories was a natural relationship for the director, granting him the magic he missed in contemporary

¹⁵² 1998 *International Festival of Puppet Theater*

¹⁵³ 1998 *International Festival of Puppet Theater*.

¹⁵⁴ "Grants."

¹⁵⁵ Dan Hulbert, "Where spirits stir and talents soar," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 14 Jun 1998.

theater. “I was intrigued by the way the supernatural can be turned into a very evocative device for conveying human longing. And I liked the idea of using puppets. We live in such a rational, pragmatic world. It was refreshing to be able to escape, to inject a bit of innocence---a bit of the magical and transcendental—into our time.”¹⁵⁶ *Kwaidan* selects three of the stories Hearn wrote in 1904 and presents them as a “trptych” of tales. The way in which the stories are presented is what marks the production as unique. Eileen Blumenthal once noted, “Before films, puppetry was the only theatre able to manipulate scale, and this remains one of its fortes.”¹⁵⁷ In *Kwaidan*, Chong and his collaborators make use of conventions of cinema on the live theatrical stage. “To produce such deep, complex and surprising illusions in a film would be an achievement. Onstage they seem miraculous, and part of the entertainment is hearing the gasps and murmurs of the audience.”¹⁵⁸

Some of the illusions play with scale, as the puppets, by Ludwig, “range in size from tiny insects to larger-than-life human heads and hands.”¹⁵⁹ A monk is seen in a “long-shot” as a tiny puppet on the first portion of the set. When it reaches the second panel, it has been replaced by a larger puppet and finally appears as a life-sized puppet when he reaches his destination.¹⁶⁰ Mitsuru Ishii designed the paneled set, inspired by classical Japanese architecture and “filled it with gorgeous allusive artwork that is revealed when its slides and panels move. His sense of humor and his attention to detail are acute, and they are matched by the care and cunning of

¹⁵⁶ Hedy Weiss, “Pulling Strings,” *Chicago Sun Times* 2 Oct 1998.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Solomon, “Inanimate Selves, Other Realities in a Puppet World,” *New York Times* 6 Sep 1998.

¹⁵⁸ D.J.R Bruckner, “Stories With Good Spirits and Bad,” *New York Times* 23 Sep 1998.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Christiansen, “Puppeteer tells stories with style, detail and wit,” *Chicago Times* 6 Oct 1998.

¹⁶⁰ Bruckner.

everyone involved in the production.”¹⁶¹ Another remarkable cinematic technique is Chong’s shift of “camera angle,” deftly changing the audience’s point of view. There are several moments when the puppets are played at a perpendicular angle to the back of the set, creating a view of their world as seen from above.¹⁶² The overall effect of the performance won it enthusiastic audiences at La Mama in New York as well as on tour. *Kwaidan* toured to six venues in 1998 as well as four more as a part of the 2000 Festival on tour. The reactions from critics were identical in either edition of the tour. Michael Feingold of *The Village Voice* perhaps put it most charmingly when he said, “Each moment is exactly as beautiful as the one before. But each is also, cunningly, different; there’s none of the vague pretty-pretty that makes some ‘beautiful’ productions so boring.”¹⁶³

There was nothing boring about the other offerings in the 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater. Indeed, the performances in 1998 included the largest variety of performing objects yet seen in an International Festival of Puppet Theater. The Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes from Canada presented the critically acclaimed *Tinka’s New Dress*, a gorgeously detailed marionette spectacle written in homage to Czech puppeteers during the Nazi occupation.¹⁶⁴ Handspring Puppet Company returned to perform another canonical play with a South African focus, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. It combined bunraku puppetry, William Kentridge’s animation, and *Ubu Roi* with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation

¹⁶¹ Bruckner.

¹⁶² Dan Hulbert, “Mystery and magic of puppetry are told in sublime, moody tales,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 19 Jun 1998.

¹⁶³ Michael Feingold, “Culture Shakes,” *The Village Voice* [New York] 29 Sep 1998.

¹⁶⁴ *1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater*.

Commission, formed following the end of apartheid.¹⁶⁵ Teatro Gioco Vita performed *The Firebird* using shadow puppetry to highlight Stravinsky's rich musical score.¹⁶⁶ Figuren Teatre Tübingen from Germany used "string puppets, stick puppets, fans, shoes and movie seats" to explore the philosophy of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg.¹⁶⁷ The Welsh company Green Ginger returned to offer their *Slaphead: Demon Barber*, a new spin on the "Sweeney Todd" story, told through life-sized hand and mouth puppets and masked actors. *A Harlot's Progress*, conceived and directed by Theodora Skipitares, used large-scale cutout figures of William Hogarth's engravings and an inflatable version of the title character to illustrate a chamber opera about a young girl's eventual ruination in gritty London.¹⁶⁸ Peru's Teatro Hugo & Ines performed *Short Stories*, using their own flexible bodies to create the characters.¹⁶⁹ *Dr. Kronopolis and the Time Keeper Chronicles* by the Cosmic Bicycle Theatre utilized kitchen utensils and other objects to tell a science fiction based tale of adventure.¹⁷⁰ Great Small Works offered an evening of toy theater for adults, with afternoon performances geared toward children and families.¹⁷¹ Spain's Joan Baixas used the ashes from a burned library to perform *Terra Prenyada*, "an

¹⁶⁵ 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater.

¹⁶⁶ 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater.

¹⁶⁷ 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater.

¹⁶⁸ 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater.

¹⁶⁹ 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater.

¹⁷⁰ 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater.

¹⁷¹ 1998 International Festival.

improvisational piece inspired by visits to the Australian desert, the city of St. Petersburg and the ruins of Sarajevo.”¹⁷² The options for puppetry and the definition of the form seemed limitless.

The 1998 Festival received an amazing amount of attention from the press, particularly *The New York Times*, almost in response to the need for criticism articulated by the “Defining Moments” symposium. The newspaper devoted more than five full pages to the Festival, with a total of eight reviews of Festival performances. It published a three-page article in the Sunday Arts and Leisure section¹⁷³ on September 6, 1998, three days prior to the Festival’s opening. The article by Andrew Solomon, entitled “Inanimate Selves, Other Realities in a Puppet World,”¹⁷⁴ detailed the history of American puppetry saying, “The modern American puppetry movement really began with the Muppets’ fantastic success at attracting adult audiences.”¹⁷⁵ The cover art and following article ushered in the Festival’s incredible notice by the print media in New York and elsewhere. The 1998 Final Report’s “Press” section lists the date, the publication, the author, and the circulation of the periodical, as well as some information about its content. When tabulated, the total number of impressions in print about the 1998 Festival was a staggering 152,445,417.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, many television stations featured materials advertising the Festival, frequently in the form of an interview with Cheryl Henson. The television exposure was calculated as reaching an estimated 450 million households

¹⁷² 1998 *International Festival of Puppet Theater*.

¹⁷³ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 4.

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Solomon.

¹⁷⁵ Andrew Solomon.

¹⁷⁶ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 13.

across the country.¹⁷⁷ The amount of publicity for puppetry in America at the time was truly impressive and was in keeping with the mission of the Festival and the Jim Henson Foundation by exposing the public to the variety of guises that the puppet can assume.

EXHAUSTION

By 2000, the International Festival of Puppet Theater had become a New York institution for puppeteers and theatergoers. There was no doubt that it would continue into the future. The final report for the 1998 edition of the Festival states, “There is still much to be done to establish contemporary puppetry as a respectable, viable art form in this country. The Festival remains an excellent vehicle for drawing attention to artists and to the field as a whole.”¹⁷⁸ It continues to make the comparison to the development of dance in the United States, claiming that “puppetry is in the place dance was 30 years ago”¹⁷⁹ It points to the formation of Dance Theater Workshop as a venue for regular dance performances where the art form gained respect. Dance Theater Workshop was founded in 1965 to “identify, present, and support independent contemporary artists and companies to advance dance and live performance in New York and worldwide.”¹⁸⁰ In Cheryl Henson’s welcome note, featured in the Festival program handed out at the Public Theater, she

¹⁷⁷ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 16.

¹⁷⁸ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 5.

¹⁷⁹ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 5.

¹⁸⁰ “About Dance Theater Workshop,” *Dance Theater Workshop* Dance Theater Workshop, 10 Jan 2008 <<http://www.dancetheaterworkshop.org/about>>.

says “The community of artists has grown, branching out to incorporate dance, video, animation, unusual styles of manipulation, new texts and technology—all breaking the boundaries of what had been called ‘puppetry’”.¹⁸¹ Through the work of the Festival, it appeared as if the Jim Henson Foundation had accomplished for puppetry what venues such as Dance Theater Workshop had for dance.

The 2000 Festival offered the work of twenty-six companies from fourteen countries in ten venues from September 6 through 24.¹⁸² The number of performances over that nineteen-day period was 190, an average of ten performances a day. To accommodate the high number of performances, several new venues were added to the 2000 Festival, including HERE Arts Center, The Joyce Theater, and the New York Theatre Workshop.¹⁸³ The New York Theatre Workshop was established in 1982 as a venue with “an abiding interest in fostering the growth of writers and honoring the artistic process . . .” and contributed to the development of theater artists such as Peter Sellars and Jonathan Larson, whose Tony Award-winning musical *Rent* began as a workshop performance at the theater.¹⁸⁴ The New York Theatre Workshop played host to the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes and *Street of Blood*. The show, another virtuosic one-man marionette spectacular played all three weeks of the Festival, for a total of seventeen performances.¹⁸⁵ The show continued for an additional three weeks as the opener to New York Theatre Workshop’s season, marking the first time a Festival performance was included in

¹⁸¹ *Henson International Festival... Program*.

¹⁸² Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 9-11.

¹⁸³ 2000 *International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/festival2000>>.

¹⁸⁴ “History of New York Theatre Workshop,” *New York Theatre Workshop* New York Theatre Workshop, 10 Jan 2008 <<http://www.nytw.org/history.asp>>.

¹⁸⁵ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 9-11.

any theater season. Burkett had been a sensation in the 1998 Festival with *Tinka's New Dress*, a full-length marionette play about a puppeteer in a repressive social system trying to use his art to remain free, and received a special citation from the OBIE Awards for the play.¹⁸⁶ *Tinka's New Dress* established Burkett as a contemporary puppetry "genius" with Michael Feingold of *The Village Voice* saying in his review about the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes that "seeing his troupe every few years has just become a necessity of civilized theatergoing."¹⁸⁷ His 2000 Festival offering, *Street of Blood*, took as its focus "AIDS, religion, celebrity worship, and tainted transfusions"¹⁸⁸ to create a performance charged with controversial issues and sensationalism. The show received a great deal of attention from critics, landing the cover of *American Theatre* magazine in September.¹⁸⁹ Of the production Cheryl Henson said, "There are some very tough moments...it is a brilliant show, but it makes me nervous as a producer. That one is definitely for adults, with lots of disturbing imagery. I would not want children in the audience."¹⁹⁰

With regard to the performance, once again, Burkett's artistry is unquestioned by theater critics calling him "incomparable" and a "one-man dynamo"¹⁹¹ in celebration of the Canadian's intricate performance. The reviews praised the beauty of Burkett's presentation yet pointed to flaws in the script. "There's no question that Burkett is a master marionette maker and operator," says Alissa

¹⁸⁶ Abrams, "Puppetry OBIE Winners."

¹⁸⁷ Michael Feingold, "Puppet States," *The Village Voice* 22 Sep 1998.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Feingold, "First String Players," *The Village Voice* 12 Sep 2000: 100.

¹⁸⁹ *American Theatre* Sep 2000: cover image.

¹⁹⁰ Gould.

¹⁹¹ Irene Backalenick, "Puppets, Poets, Lunatics, and Lovers," *Back Stage* [New York] 29 Sep 2000.

Solomon of *The Village Voice*. Yet her critique of *Street of Blood* continues to say that the script for the show is “preachy” and provokes “boredom and irritability.”¹⁹² Ben Brantley, theater critic for *The New York Times*, lamented that despite the “theological implications of AIDS, the destructiveness of gay anger bred by homophobia and the dangers of identifying with the heroines of old movies” that the script addresses, the production comes across as condescension and the puppets wind up “seeming like little more than a lure, the candy coating on the pill.”¹⁹³ The mixed reception of *Street of Blood*, as well as what Burkett perceived as “his worst audience,”¹⁹⁴ “cemented [Burkett’s] decision to not bring [his] work to the U.S. for a long time” as he felt he was unable to engage the audience in the discussion that he intended for them to have.¹⁹⁵ As Burkett attests, “I also talk about ideas. I think that’s what a growing number of theatre patrons are hungry for. People are surprised to leave a puppet show thinking.”¹⁹⁶ That the reviews were so mixed for Burkett’s epic performance points to the development of a language with which puppetry can be discussed and criticized. Said Andrew Periale, “Perhaps the sculpting, manipulation, and stringing of marionettes only need reviewing when they are bad. Thanks to Burkett’s mastery of his craft, and his personal charisma as a performer, it is easy to look beyond these details to the text”¹⁹⁷ Instead of being totally overwhelmed or charmed by the virtuosity of the artist and the delicacy of his

¹⁹² Alissa Solomon, “I’m Your Puppet,” *The Village Voice* [New York] 19 Sep 2000.

¹⁹³ Ben Brantley, “Jesus May Pull the Strings in This Town, but This Marionette Has Other Ideas,” *New York Times* 8 Sep 2000.

¹⁹⁴ Ronnie Burkett, email interview, 23 Sep 2004.

¹⁹⁵ Burkett.

¹⁹⁶ Mary Brennan, “That String Thing,” *The Scotsman* [Glasgow, UK] 29 May 2002.

¹⁹⁷ “Breaking the Boundaries--The Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater,” *Puppetry Journal* 52.1 (2000): 2.

creations, reviewers began to examine the puppet show as a whole product, finding flaws in the script as they would with any other well-produced piece of theater. Cheryl Henson talked about the essential role of discernment in bringing diversity to the puppet theater in her welcome note to the Festival, “[Leslee Asch and I] put together a wide array of performances ranging in style, subject and tone. We don’t always agree on what we like, but neither does our audience. The puppet theater we present is not a homogenized product, but the work of individual artists. Puppet theater is about ideas, perspectives and telling stories in ways that haven’t been done before.”¹⁹⁸

To that end and for the first time, Asch and Henson commissioned the work of a company for presentation at the 2000 Festival, Redmoon Theater’s *Hunchback*, another offering strictly for adult audiences. Chicago’s Redmoon began creating work in 1990, “incorporating puppetry, imagery, movement, and live music into unique theatrical spectacles.”¹⁹⁹ The company, aware of puppetry’s origins and power, said:

In this age of simulacra no performing art speaks more about who we are and where we’ve come from than puppetry. Debates rage about whether puppetry descended from the sacred statues of religious festivals or ascended from the nursery room of enchanted children. There’s no answer; but what a wonderful audience to be able to appeal to! The fact that an art form could claim two such perfect origins.²⁰⁰

The company engages its audience, creating more evidence for each side of the aforementioned debate, with every production. *Hunchback* was the company’s adaptation of Victor Hugo’s famous novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The

¹⁹⁸ Henson *International Festival... Program*.

¹⁹⁹ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 17.

²⁰⁰ “Grants.”

performance of the show, which had received a project grant in 1997 for \$3,000, was actually commissioned by the Festival, with the aid of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.²⁰¹ By commissioning the new work, the Festival had transformed itself from a presenter to a producer of puppet theater and the show was performed six times in New York and twice on tour at the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth in New Hampshire.²⁰² Redmoon still performs the show; it was the close to the company's 2007 season.²⁰³

The production's scale is enormous. "Large see-saw ladder contraptions serve as bell towers, allowing the actors to climb, swing and cavort high above the stage floor. A giant pop-up book and a row of telephone booth size boxes complete the unorthodox staging," records Donald Devet in *Puppetry International*.²⁰⁴ *Hunchback* proceeds for twenty minutes, appearing to be "a dance performance or a mime show, with the masked actors performing wordlessly to a cacophonous carillon-based score" ²⁰⁵ The show is suddenly interrupted by its author. Hugo bursts "onto the scene to complain—in modern idiom—about the presentation of his story, sneering contemptuously at the 'pretty little puppets, beautiful lighting, funky music.'" ²⁰⁶ Bruce Weber of *The New York Times* thought that the author was there to be a surrogate for the audience, to ask the questions "you're beginning to ask yourself. Why render such a familiar story in such an idiosyncratic way? Is this staging, imaginative and peculiar as it is, meant to reveal anything new about 'The

²⁰¹ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 2.

²⁰² "On Tour," 2000 *International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/festival2000/tour.html>>.

²⁰³ *Redmoon Theater* Redmoon Theater, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.redmoon.org/>>.

²⁰⁴ "Breaking the Boundaries..." 3.

²⁰⁵ Bruce Weber, "Victor Hugo Drops By to Inspect His Story," *New York Times* 16 Sep 2000.

²⁰⁶ Weber.

Hunchback of Notre Dame?’ Or is this just the company showing off?’²⁰⁷ The unexpected presence of the author at the event makes the company, twelve performers with masks and various styles of puppets,²⁰⁸ scramble to suit his intentions and to prove that their work is faithful to his original. In the end, Hugo concedes that his story is being rendered in a way most appropriate. The production succeeded brilliantly with Steve Abrams saying, “The scale of Hunchback, the superb cast, inventive direction and a fresh approach to a literary classic made this a very satisfying work of theatre, not to be missed.”²⁰⁹

The 2000 Festival offered four symposia, from September 17 and 18 at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. The four panels “were a significant step forward in the academic rigor of the Festival’s related programming,” touts the 2000 Final Report, and academic institutions responded by sending their students to Festival programming and performances, in some cases, making attendance mandatory.²¹⁰ The first day’s symposia took the puppet’s place in literature and art as a focus while the second day explored the relationship between technology and performance in puppet theater. The first session was called “Visualizing Text” and dealt with the complexities of adapting and creating new work for the puppet theater. John Bell moderated this erudite panel with Laura Garcia Lorca, Jim Lasko, Hanne Tierney, and Richard Termine as discussants. Garcia Lorca was a particularly interesting participant as her grandfather’s, Federico Garcia Lorca, puppet play, *The Girl Who Waters Basil and the Nosy Prince* was

²⁰⁷ Weber.

²⁰⁸ “Breaking the Boundaries...” 4.

²⁰⁹ “Breaking the Boundaries...” 4.

²¹⁰ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 3.

performed by the Cuban company Teatro de las Estaciones, the evening performances of which included a discussion with Laura.²¹¹ The second panel, “Forms in Motion,” featured Ellen Driscoll, Rhonda Garelick, Kathy Rose, and Theodora Skipitares in a conversation about cross-disciplinary work with puppetry, an art form that “incorporates and transcends many genres.”²¹² On the following day, “From Automata to Animatronics” explored humanity’s “fascination with the machine as art,” from clockwork automatons to remote-control animation with David Barrington-Holt, John Bell, Elizabeth King, and David Todd.²¹³ “Technology in Performance,” the final symposium of the 2000 Festival, focused on “the ways in which technology has been incorporated into live performance.” Leslee Asch moderated the session with Michael Curry, Janie Geiser, Mark Sussman, and Tang Shu-Wing responding.²¹⁴ Asch had gone to great lengths to populate the panels, “to attract a group of panelists with national reputations who are not often heard from in this field.”²¹⁵ The attendance for these events as well as the many post-performance discussions offered throughout the Festival pointed to a broader appreciation for the possibilities offered by the puppet.

The Cooper Union was also one of the venues for the three Festival exhibitions with the others displayed at the World Financial Center and the Public Theater. “Forms in Motion” at the Cooper Union, a two-part exhibition, was a useful visual reference for the symposia series. The first part, “Collaborative Forms, “

²¹¹ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 15.

²¹² Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 15.

²¹³ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 15.

²¹⁴ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 15.

²¹⁵ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 3.

featured the original puppets and set crafted for the Lorca puppet play. Asch reports, “On January 6, 1923 the play ... was performed by Lorca in his living room, with puppets created by [Hermenegildo] Lanz; Manuel de Falla accompanied them on piano. I heard this story four years earlier while assembling the 1996 exhibition and knew that it would be a must to display these puppets and sets.”²¹⁶ That moment in 1923 was an auspicious one for the Spanish avant-garde and preceded the premiere of de Falla’s most famous work, based on *Don Quixote* and an encounter the character has with *El retablo de Maese Pedro (Master Peter’s Puppet Show)*, three months later.²¹⁷ The composition has been restaged in recent years, very prominently by Basil Twist with Red {an orchestra} in 2002.²¹⁸ The display of the puppets and sets from the original performance of *La niña que riega la albahaca y el principe preguntón* marked the first time the artifacts had been seen outside of Spain.²¹⁹ The second part of the exhibition, “Sculptural Forms,” included the work of Ellen Driscoll, Sha Sha Higby, Elizabeth King, Kathy Rose, Theodora Skipitares, and Hanne Tierney. The display “explored the blurred lines between sculpture, kinetic form, and performance.”²²⁰ One of the most prominently displayed sculptures was from Hanne Tierney’s interpretation of *Blood Wedding*, highlighting the Lorca connection once again.²²¹ The brochure for the exhibition summarized the objects in both portions, saying, “Although they have taken different approaches to

²¹⁶ Asch, “Exhibitions...” 244.

²¹⁷ *Forms in Motion* (New York: Furthermore, 2000).

²¹⁸ *Red {an orchestra}* (Cleveland: Twist Creative, 2002).

²¹⁹ *Forms in Motion*.

²²⁰ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 21.

²²¹ *Forms in Motion*.

their art, these artists have all engaged in the exploration of the kinetic power of their sculpture. They are propelled by the age-old urge to endow an object with life and movement, which is at the core of the creation of puppet theater.”²²²

The Cooper Union was able to showcase the “Forms in Motion” exhibit for an extended period, from August 8 through October 8,²²³ enabling the Festival to establish its presence in the city a full month prior to its opening, in turn generating more interest and press attention to the Festival as a whole.²²⁴ Likewise the exhibition, “Sticks, Rags, and Strings,” at the World Financial Center’s Courtyard Gallery had an extended life, from June 22 to September 21 and included the work of Jonathan Cross, Garland Farwell, Dan Hurlin, and Ralph Lee. Cross and Farwell also offered demonstrations and lectures offered on Thursdays during the summer months of June, July, and August.²²⁵ The third exhibit in the 2000 Festival, at the Shiva Gallery of the Public Theater, ran exclusively during the Festival and showcased Jim Henson’s enthusiasm for global puppetry and international cultural exchange. The exhibition was called “a celebration of [Henson’s] love and dedication to the art of puppetry.”²²⁶ It was a photography exhibition, particularly selected to focus on Henson’s work internationally, during his travels to meet puppeteers and attend festivals worldwide.²²⁷ Of the Festival exhibitions across the

²²² *Forms in Motion*.

²²³ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 21.

²²⁴ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 3.

²²⁵ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 21.

²²⁶ *Henson International Festival of Puppet Theatre*. Brochure. (New York: TH Publishing, Inc., 2000).

²²⁷ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 21.

decade during which they occurred, Asch wrote, “I believe it has established a strong base for scholarship and understanding in the field and has exemplified the broad ranging extensions possible through this expansive art form.”²²⁸

EXTINCTION

At the board meeting that followed the 2000 Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater it was revealed that the Festival had a deficit of more than \$98,000.²²⁹ The losses were attributed in part to a malfunction at Ticket Central, the Festival’s ticketing agent. During the first ten days of the Festival, there were failures on the phone lines, due to internal problems with their telephone company.²³⁰ Ticket Central pursued legal action against the provider to recoup some of the losses. The Festival sued Ticket Central for \$10,000.²³¹ With unreliable phone lines, a large number of ticket buyers could not get through to an agent, causing a drop of fifty per cent in ticket sales for the week in question.²³² The ticketing confusion, though, could not account for the entire deficit. Production costs for the Festival had overrun, in every area. The 2000 Festival had presented several productions that were “significantly larger and more elaborate” than in previous Festivals, leading to proportionally larger expenses for crews and equipment.²³³ In response to the deficit, the Festival asked the Jim Henson Foundation for \$100,000 to

²²⁸ Asch, “Exhibitions...” 244.

²²⁹ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²³⁰ Dennin, *Final Report 2000 4.*

²³¹ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²³² *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²³³ Dennin, *Final Report 2000 4.*

pay the debt.²³⁴ During previous Festivals, each of which had a deficit of some amount, \$39,000 in 1998 for example²³⁵ the Festival organizers had asked the Foundation as well as the Jim Henson Company to assist in payment. It was firmly stated in the minutes of the board meeting that the Festival would no longer turn to the Company for financial assistance.²³⁶ This may have been due in no small part to the recent acquisition of the Jim Henson Company by the German marketing and television company, EM T.V in March 2000.²³⁷ The Foundation board passed the proposition of giving the money to pay off the deficit, but the issue of the Festival's future and its impact were the subject of much discussion that day during the meeting.

Jane Henson, Vice-President of the Jim Henson Foundation, remarked, "The first decade [of the Henson Foundation] was the creation of the granting program; and the second decade saw the advent of the Puppet Festival. It is now time to start thinking about what we want to do in the third decade."²³⁸ Unwittingly perhaps, Jane Henson had set up a dynamic opposition: providing grants versus producing the Festival. During the years that the International Festival of Puppet Theater was in production, no grants were awarded in order to give full Foundation support to the organization and production of the Festival. It was argued at the meeting that, as a result, artists had been getting less during the second decade of the Foundation than

²³⁴ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²³⁵ Dennin, *Final Report* 1999 3.

²³⁶ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²³⁷ Asch, "Exhibitions..." 242.

²³⁸ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

they had in previous years.²³⁹ The 2000 Festival paid \$218,850 in fees to American companies, bringing the total amount paid to United States' artists since 1992 to more than \$650,000.²⁴⁰ The board was reminded that Foundation grants had provided less than \$600,000 (approximately \$561,000 including the money donated by the Ronald McDonald Charities) to artists since 1982.²⁴¹ Additionally, the Festival had served to give the American performers greater exposure and more opportunities to perform the featured work after the Festival closed.²⁴² It should also be noted that many of the American artists performing in the Festival had been previously awarded grants to develop the presented works, a testament to the quality of work to which the Foundation grants had contributed. Both programs were of merit to the mission of the Jim Henson Foundation.

The board returned to the topic of the Festival in general, with an eye to planning another edition for 2002. In terms of future Festivals, the board was in agreement that the entire event should be streamlined. In general, the feeling of the Foundation board was that the 2000 Festival had presented too many shows, resulting in a staff, press, and audience that were spread too thinly over the whole.²⁴³ The geographical spread of the Festival, both in 1998 and 2000, had drastically increased the area that Festival staff had to traverse to conduct the business of each production. The widely dispersed audience had a particularly negative effect in the 2000 Festival with regard to the Public Theater, the original venue and “hub for the

²³⁹ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²⁴⁰ Dennin, *Final Report 2000 2.*

²⁴¹ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²⁴² *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

²⁴³ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

Festival.”²⁴⁴ The Public was undergoing renovations at the time of the 2000 Festival, rendering three of its five spaces unusable. As the final report for the 2000 Festival stated, “The Public Theater had been a center of the community that grew up around the Festival, where artists, presenters, funders, journalists, and the general Festival audience could meet to exchange news and informally review shows.”²⁴⁵ The impact of the lost stages was also felt at the box office, where, in past festivals, ticket sellers could attract an audience member to an alternate performance if the chosen show was already at capacity. With only two spaces, the options for the spectator were more limited.

With the concern that the Festival had over grown itself in terms of geography and in terms of programming, there was also the feeling that three weeks was too long, that it was difficult to sustain the energy of the Festival over a longer period. In the past, shows might run into the third week of the Festival, but only if they had already opened in the previous weeks. The 2000 Festival had introduced new shows in the third week of programming and, as a result, these shows did not receive the full benefit of the Festival’s momentum. The board definitely did not want to allow this type of drop-off to occur again and decided against third-week additions.²⁴⁶ The added difficulty of getting press coverage for a festival of this size and length resulted in less overall press coverage. The final report suggested, that there was a “need to manage the press in order to sustain coverage, giving them direction on what to review in response to their complaint that there is simply too

²⁴⁴ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 2.

²⁴⁵ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 2-3.

²⁴⁶ *Henson Foundation Minutes from: June 8, 1994 through June 26, 2001.*

much ground to cover.”²⁴⁷ *The New York Times* said that it could only offer three articles about Festival events, although it was persuaded to review four shows and run two feature stories. Here, too, the issue of the third week became a problem as the prolonged coverage conflicted with other fall arts events. “These issues will need to be addressed for 2002,” the final report says.²⁴⁸

The board discussed the possibility of producing a themed Festival in 2002, possibly centered on more children’s or family oriented programming or highlighting folk puppetry traditions from around the world. The final report even conjectures that more money would be available from such funders as Target Stores if more family programming were offered in future.²⁴⁹ No decision about the inclusion of a theme was made at the time of the December 2000 board meeting, but it is clear that there were plans for a 2002 edition. The final report from the 2000 Festival states that “Audiences and artists alike have come to consider the Festival an established cultural institution and a highly anticipated event that sets an artistic standard for the field.”²⁵⁰ The anticipation of the event, however, was not enough to maintain its focus and intensity and at the board meeting that occurred on December 4, 2001, it was officially decided that there would be no Festival in 2002. The minutes report that the Festival will be kept “on the books” in the event of a revival in future years.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 6.

²⁴⁸ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 6.

²⁴⁹ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 4.

²⁵⁰ Dennin, *Final Report 2000* 7.

²⁵¹ *Henson Foundation Minutes from December 2, 2001*— (New York: Jim Henson Foundation, 2007).

“The idea was never for puppetry to only be shown in New York, once every two years,” said Leslee Asch in an interview in 2001. “It was to really start having it be a possible, viable art form and it’s really important for the longevity of the work. If the Festival went away tomorrow, would it exist on its own? And I think the more that there is an infrastructure like that, the more the answer could be yes.”²⁵² Asch seems to be prognosticating the eventual cessation of the Festival in the interview, though the decision to stop producing the Festival came later. In November 2007, Cheryl Henson said, with regard to the revival of the Festival, that there is no question that work of the caliber of previous Festivals is currently being produced and that, “if someone could fund it, the work would rise to the occasion.”²⁵³ In the end, it was a financial reason that put an end to the Festival. Henson suggests that one of the obstacles to producing a festival is finding work that will continue to appeal to the New York audience and the money to present the selected performances. “A challenge is how to market it, how to tell people about it, how do you get that audience in there in the first place. And probably one of the biggest challenges is funding. We want great artists from all over the world. And we also want to present their work in the best possible light. And that takes money....”²⁵⁴ Even with the corporate support of Phillip Morris and Target, as well as the support of the Jim Henson Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, which contributed \$150,000 for the 2000 Festival,²⁵⁵ a continuation of the Festival was just not feasible. In 2001, Henson reflected, “There are other things we dream about doing in terms of

²⁵² *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination.*

²⁵³ Brown.

²⁵⁴ *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination.*

²⁵⁵ Dennin, *Final Report 2000 4.*

presenting puppetry in new ways to a larger audience. But I don't know whether that's part of the Festival or if that's something outside. We'll see."²⁵⁶ In 2007, she said that producing a festival of the scale of the International Festival of Puppet Theater would be difficult because "it just doesn't have the focus, the marketing, or the curatorial unity anymore."²⁵⁷

In spite of what must be seen as a permanent hiatus, the Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater has succeeded in its aim of creating "a more critically receptive and economically viable future for artists interested in exploring the boundaries of what puppet theatre has to offer."²⁵⁸ The 2000 Festival final report states, "The time is ripe for further development of the art form in this country, and with the continued support of the Jim Henson Foundation, the renaissance in American puppetry, which is due in no small part to the Festival, should continue to flourish."²⁵⁹ In light of the end of the Festival, the Foundation established the presenting grant to support organizations that will continue to present puppet theater in New York City. Cheryl Henson hoped that the presenting partners from the Festival would be interested in the continuation of their presentation of puppet theater.²⁶⁰ Her optimism has been affirmed, as eight of the venues featuring puppetry during Festival years have since earned presenting grants for their programming.²⁶¹ Another effort to keep the momentum of puppet enthusiasm alive in New York City and across the country is "Puppet Happenings," bi-weekly newsletter maintained by

²⁵⁶ *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination.*

²⁵⁷ Brown.

²⁵⁸ *Puppetry: Worlds of Imagination.*

²⁵⁹ Dennin, *Final Report 2000 7.*

²⁶⁰ Brown.

²⁶¹ "Grants."

the Foundation.²⁶² It provides, via email or through the Foundation website, “information on puppetry performances and activities in the greater New York area, along with events involving the Foundation's grant recipients throughout the country.”²⁶³ Through this effort, those who are interested in puppet performance, outside of the mainstream, may find a show to view. Cheryl Henson observed, “You have to be a real puppet enthusiast to find these performances,” so the newsletter is of great assistance to that audience.

Although the International Festival of Puppet Theater is no longer in production, many of the performances it presented have been preserved. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center has a Theater on Film and Tape Archive and is home to the Jim Henson Collection of Puppet Theater. This collection includes nearly seventy tapes of Festival performances, as well as documentation of several of the symposia that accompanied the Festival.²⁶⁴ Along with the Festival materials, “Jim Henson Presents: The World of Puppetry” is available to view. Two of the six artists profiled in the series, Albrecht Roser and Philippe Genty, appeared in the Festival as performers.²⁶⁵ In 1996, Cheryl Henson emphasized the importance of the documentation of live puppetry performance, saying, “You have a very live form of theatre — how you see work, how you continue to be inspired by individual's work as opposed to how you actually imitate somebody's work. One of the best ways of being inspired by work is being able to

²⁶² “About the Foundation.” *Jim Henson Foundation* 2008 Jim Henson Foundation, 24 Jan 2008 <http://www.hensonfoundation.org/home_about.html>.

²⁶³ “About the Foundation.”

²⁶⁴ Dennin, *Final Report 1998* 3.

²⁶⁵ 2000 *International Festival*.

see it, and right here in the library we now have a collection on puppet theatre that includes not only all the companies that have been in all the festivals, but some additional puppet films as well.”²⁶⁶ The entire collection serves the academic and artistic community by “enhancing awareness and understanding of the field among theater students and professionals, the primary users of the archives”²⁶⁷ The documentation of the performances is a testament to the Jim Henson Foundation’s diligence and its appreciation for the ephemeral nature of live performance even when artifacts, the puppets themselves, remain. “Performances need to be documented. In the age of videotape, being able to look back on a particular performance, is surely not the same as the performance. But it’s a great archival tool. Is it the same as live performance? I suppose not, but it is preserving the work,” reflected Leslee Asch.²⁶⁸ The budget for archiving performances was constrained during the 2000 Festival, yet the Foundation was “able to record two shows of particular historic significance.” These shows included Teatro de las Estaciones’s performance of the Federico Garcia Lorca play and the rare performance by Prasanna Rao from India, who uses his hands to create elaborate and charming shadow projections. The former marked a continuation of a tradition of collaboration begun in 1923 while the latter marked the end of an era, as the type of elaborate shadow puppetry practiced by Rao is all but extinct in India due to the incredible complexity of its performance.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Hall.

²⁶⁷ “About the Foundation.”

²⁶⁸ Hall.

²⁶⁹ “Sheer Magic,” *ChennaiBest.com* 2001 India-Best.com, 24 Jan 2008
<<http://www.chennaiBest.com/cityresources/Entertainment/feature.asp>>.

Despite the unlikelihood of the Festival’s revival, the puppetry community still holds it up as an ideal, particularly in the case of younger and emerging artists. Mark Fox of Cincinnati’s Saw Theater, a company that has been awarded Jim Henson Foundation grants in 1997, 1999 and 2002,²⁷⁰ said, “The powerful, ephemeral presence created by these works spoke to the very nature of what was of most interest to me: the relationship between artist and object. The experience of the Henson Festival played an integral part in shaping the work I make today.”²⁷¹ Erin K. Orr, a grant recipient in 2003 and 2006,²⁷² reflected:

The Jim Henson Foundation has supported my work as an artist on many levels. . . . Attending performances at this festival inspired me to work with puppets. These festivals really created an audience for innovative adult puppetry and provided that audience with a wide context about the traditions and possibilities inherent to the art form.²⁷³

Current president of UNIMA-USA and founding member of Drama of Works, a grant recipient in 1999, 2001, 2004, and 2006, Gretchen Van Lente simply stated “The Foundation directly affects the widest group of people out of any puppet organization in the world, including non-puppet people who come to the Festival in New York.”²⁷⁴

The impact of the Festival is also not lost on more established artists. Richard Termine, whose puppet photography had been displayed at the Public in 1998 and who served as documentary photographer for many of the Festival

²⁷⁰ “Grants.”

²⁷¹ “Grants.”

²⁷² “Grants.”

²⁷³ “Grants.”

²⁷⁴ “Grants.”

shows,²⁷⁵ expressed his regret for the demise of the Festival. When asked whether he thinks it will be revived, he replied, “I think it was a major impact on the art form and I hope that someday they will It certainly was a major undertaking.”²⁷⁶ He notes that the opportunity for puppet artists to get exposure in New York City was important both nationally and internationally. He believes that the Festival raised “the awareness of puppetry as a serious art form. In the city, coming to the Festival was incredible.”²⁷⁷ The impact that the exposure of an artist’s work through a Festival performance is evident from the long list of UNIMA Citations that came from Festival performances. Twelve performances earned Citations as a direct result of the Festival as Citations are awarded based on the number of nominations a show receives.²⁷⁸ By providing a greater audience for and more extended run to an artist, the likelihood of his or her work receiving nominations increased. Cheryl Henson was awarded a special UNIMA citation for her work in 2005, earning her the title, “North America’s Ambassador of Puppetry Arts.”²⁷⁹ She was presented with a proclamation of her qualifications for the title. Listed among the many contributions Henson has made on behalf of North American puppetry are “working tirelessly, intelligently and sensitively as Producer of the Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater and President of the Henson Foundation,” “helping to bring the best international artists to the United States and the best of American puppetry to the

²⁷⁵ Richard Termine, telephone interview, 9 Jan 2008.

²⁷⁶ Termine.

²⁷⁷ Termine.

²⁷⁸ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* 9.

²⁷⁹ “UNIMA Citations 2005,” *UNIMA-USA* UNIMA-USA, 13 Dec 2007 <<http://www.unima-usa.org/citations/05live.html>>.

world,” “raising the profile of American Puppetry within the world of American theater,” and “enhancing the image of puppetry by captivating the interest and imagination of the general public.”²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ “UNIMA Citations 2005.”

CHAPTER 6

RAISING THE ROOF: THE JIM HENSON LEGACY

The International Festival of Puppet Theater was a celebration of the diversity in puppetry and world culture that Jim Henson openly embraced during his career. Cheryl Henson's curatorial efforts on the Festival showed her commitment to puppetry as an outgrowth of her parents' devotion to the art form. With her siblings, she had seen the Henson name take the world stage over their lifetimes and their involvement with the puppetry community continues. Henson said, "The joke is that my mother was eight months pregnant with me at a puppet festival in California, and that's where I got started."¹ Indeed, the Henson children have a great deal in which to take pride. The continuation of their father's vision and legacy in the years since his death has been steady and well managed. His body of work reflected the diversity of style and form of puppet and manipulation that was showcased by the Festival, with techniques sampled and adopted based on Jim Henson's interests and needs. In general, the public forgets that Jim Henson was a great innovator with an incredible imagination outside of his most popular creations, the Muppets. He was a filmmaker, an animator, a graphic artist, and a

¹ Abby Stoll, "Puppets with Attitude," *Tucson Monthly*, Oct 2000.

painter. In order to celebrate Jim Henson from the standpoint of placing his art into perspective next to the success of the Muppets, Jane Henson created the Jim Henson Legacy.

The chapter begins with the establishment of the Jim Henson Legacy as well as an explanation of its mission and information about its board of directors. Then, I provide details into the Legacy's continued involvement with the University of Maryland, Jim and Jane Henson's alma mater. The connection of both artists to their beginnings in the Washington D.C. area was not forgotten. Jim Henson was inducted into the Prince George's County Hall Of Fame on April 23, 2006 in recognition of his Maryland upbringing and formal education.² The chapter also presents examples of how Henson's work on film and video has been preserved by the Legacy through screenings and collections housed at major institutions of film study. The increased availability of Henson's lesser-known work has added another dimension to the appreciation of his vision and talent for filmmaking. The following section of the chapter deals with the physical artifacts that the film and television productions generated and the exhibition of these pieces for public study and enjoyment. The most recent initiative in this direction involves the Jim Henson Foundation as well as the Legacy and the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta. I conclude the chapter by looking at the effect that the efforts of the Jim Henson Legacy have had on increasing the public's awareness of Henson's body of work and creative philosophy.

² "Jim Henson Inducted to Prince George's County Hall of Fame," *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 29 Jan 2008
<http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=66&Itemid=38>.

GOING FORWARD

After Jim Henson died in 1990, his children successfully showed that they were equipped to manage the entertainment empire that he had left behind. Brian Henson, then president of the Jim Henson Company, found projects that enabled the Company to build on the technological innovations that Jim Henson had developed while maintaining the family appeal that the Muppet characters had always attracted. He directed the first Muppet movie to be released after Henson's death, *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, in 1992.³ The film was the first major showing of Kermit's new performer, Steve Whitmire, and the Muppeteer rose to the challenge. As president of the Jim Henson Foundation, Cheryl Henson's curation of the International Festival of Puppet Theater maintained her father's interest in the promotion of puppetry in the United States as a viable and adult art form. It was clear that the Muppets would go on and that Jim Henson's legacy and key character were in sure hands. On August 28, 1992, the Leland Chamber of Commerce in Mississippi opened a permanent exhibit with a display of Jim Henson's childhood and his work with the Muppets.⁴ The tribute to Henson in his hometown was another signal that the people were interested in learning more about the man behind or, more accurately, beneath the Muppets. The security of the Company's position as well as the astonishing efforts of the Foundation during this period led to another outgrowth of Jim Henson's gentle generosity and soaring spirit. The Jim Henson Legacy was established in 1993 as a

³ Christopher Finch. *Jim Henson: The Works* (New York: Random House, 1993) 234.

⁴ "The Leland Chamber of Commerce: Birthplace of the Frog," *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 6 Feb 2008
<http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=38>.

way to share both with a curious public in “response to the extraordinary interest in the life and work of Jim Henson.”⁵ Jane Henson was largely responsible for the inception of the Legacy as the founder of the organization. The mission statement of the Legacy explains that it was established with a dedication to “preserving and perpetuating Jim Henson’s contributions to the worlds of puppetry, television, motion pictures, special effects and media technology.”⁶ To that end, the Jim Henson Legacy makes the body of Henson’s work available to the public through film showings, presentations, and exhibits. It is the Jim Henson Legacy’s hope that this outreach “will share the power of his art, his imagination and his positive view of life with generations to come.”⁷

The board of the Jim Henson Legacy includes many experienced associates and trusted counselors that Henson had gathered around him through his life and work. Cheryl Henson says it most aptly in her acknowledgments to the book *It’s Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider*, “Jim’s life was rich with brilliant associates. He loved and relied on so many.”⁸ Jane Henson is the founder of the Legacy but also sits on the board of directors for the organization. Bonnie Erickson, a designer with the Muppets since *The Muppet Show* was being produced in London,⁹ is the president of the Jim Henson Legacy. Craig Shemin, the vice president, began his association with the Jim Henson Company in 1987 as an intern,

⁵ “Mission Statement and Officers,” *The Jim Henson Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 28 Jan 2008 <http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=16&Itemid=16>.

⁶ “Mission Statement...”

⁷ “Mission Statement...”

⁸ Jim Henson, *It’s Not Easy Being Green* (New York: Hyperion, 2005) 193.

⁹ Finch 117.

eventually landing a job in public relations and the company archives.¹⁰ He is also married to Stephanie D’Abruzzo, a Muppeteer and Tony Award nominee for her performance as Kate Monster in *Avenue Q*.¹¹ Fran Brill is the secretary and she has been with the Muppets since 1970. She was the first female puppeteer to work with the Muppets since Jane Henson stopped performing and she is still performing Prairie Dawn and Zoe Monster on *Sesame Street*.¹² Rounding out the officers for the board are treasurer Dick Wedemeyer and associate treasurer Thea Hambricht. The Legacy also has a group of directors, led by executive director Arthur Novell, a publicist for the Company.¹³ Apart from Novell and Jane Henson, the directors of the Legacy include illustrator Lauren Attinello, winner of a National Parenting Publications Award in 1996 for a Muppet based book *Go to Bed, Fred*;¹⁴ Karen Falk, the archivist for the Jim Henson Company; Al Gottesman, one of the original directors of the Jim Henson Foundation; Rollie Krewson, a puppet builder working with Henson since the 1970s and the designer of the puppet that accompanied *Go to Bed, Fred*;¹⁵ as well as Heather Henson, the youngest of the Henson children and a puppeteer in her own right.¹⁶

¹⁰ “Craig Shemin,” *Muppet Wikipedia*, 15 Aug 2007 Wikia, Inc., 29 Jan 2008

<http://muppet.wikia.com/wiki/Craig_Shemin>.

¹¹ “*Avenue Q* Awards,” *Internet Broadway Database*, 2001-2008 The Broadway League, 13 Feb 2008
<<http://www.ibdb.com/awardproduction.asp?id=13502>>.

¹² Finch 59.

¹³ “FAQ,” *News Desk*, 5 May 2006 University of Maryland, 29 Jan 2008
<<http://www.newsdesk.umd.edu/images/Henson/Articles/FAQ.html>>.

¹⁴ “*Go to Bed, Fred*,” *Barnes & Noble*, 1997-2008 Barnesandnoble.com LLC, 29 Jan 2008
<<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbnInquiry.asp?z=y&endeca=1&isbn=0761105255&itm=2>>.

¹⁵ “*Go to Bed, Fred*.”

¹⁶ “Mission Statement...”

Heather Henson's involvement in both the Jim Henson Foundation and the Legacy have made an impact on her work as an artist. Her efforts on behalf of puppetry on film, the series *Handmade Puppet Dreams*, are as much a tribute to her father as her live performances. Henson says:

As much as the Henson Foundation supports Puppet Theater, my father's craft was in mastering the puppet on film genre. I have been disappointed by the lack of originality in many of the puppet film efforts out there---which is in itself a great compliment to my father's work, as it really works so perfectly for film. But I knew that other independent puppet films were out there that just weren't getting exposure.¹⁷

There is little doubt that her father would have appreciated the innovative nature of the films she showcases in the series. She gives a venue to artists trying to create their own vision for the puppet on film, just as Henson did during his career.

Heather Henson's vision for her puppetry performance is different from her father's.

"My work is more female-oriented. It's based on the rhythms and flow of nature,"

says Henson.¹⁸ Henson's performance of *Echo Trace* in the 2000 International

Festival of Puppet Theater was dedicated to her father, who would have been sixty-

four years old on the weekend of the show.¹⁹ The piece "celebrates themes of

universal rhythm and the place of the individual within these cycles."²⁰ She

continues to develop her own language of performance, integrating elements of

dance and movement as well as light and shadows. Of her performance style,

Henson says:

¹⁷ Heather Henson, email interview, 6 Jan 2008.

¹⁸ Susan Elia, "Life After Kermit," *TimeOut* [New York] 31 Aug-7 Sep 2000.

¹⁹ *Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater* (New York: TH Publishing, Inc., 2000).

²⁰ "Heather Henson," *2000 International Festival of Puppet Theater*, Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfestival.org/festival2000/henson>>.

It is uniquely mine, but highly inspired by working with the Jim Henson Legacy and seeing the more raw work my mother & father did at the start of their career. I think by working with the Legacy, I have grown more confident to follow my own heart in my work as my Father so clearly did in his own.²¹

Henson's ability to follow her heart is one of the gifts that both of her parents cultivated in their children, as well as an awareness and appreciation of the contributions that other people (be they family, friends, or teachers), make to a life.

GIVING BACK

On September 24, 2003, there was a dedication ceremony at the University of Maryland in honor of Jim Henson's birthday.²² The event also marked the unveiling of a statue of Henson and Kermit sculpted by Jay Hall Carpenter. The Henson family had selected Carpenter to create the statue in 2000. Jane Henson said, "His grasp of Jim's work and spirit makes him the ideal artist to create this statue of Jim Henson and Kermit the Frog."²³ The addition of the statue and Henson memorial garden to the campus of the University marks its continued relationship with the Henson family and the Legacy. In the issue of the school newspaper, *The Diamondback*, that coincided with the dedication, Jane Henson said:

This is a wonderful honor for Jim. It was at the University of Maryland that Jim explored his interest in the fine and performing arts that would later bring him worldwide recognition and success. Jim never lost sight of that and was forever grateful to his fellow classmates and instructors who encouraged him in his work.²⁴

²¹ Heather Henson.

²² "FAQ."

²³ "FAQ."

²⁴ *The Diamondback* [Maryland: U of Maryland] 8 Jul 2003.

In 1992 to express this gratitude, the Jim Henson Foundation provided a special grant in the amount of \$2,000 for a workshop in conjunction with the launch of the Jim Henson Endowment Fund.²⁵ Richard Termine, who lectured on puppetry's history as well as styles of puppet and puppet construction, led the five-day workshop with additional teaching support from Kathy Mullen, Martin P. Robinson, Caroly Wilcox. On the final day of the workshop, Jane Henson presented an award called the Jim Henson Award for Projects Related to Puppetry.²⁶ Apart from the support of the Jim Henson Foundation, Jane Henson has also been a generous contributor to her alma mater. The Jane Henson Foundation has made several gifts to the University, as well as providing financial support to UNIMA-USA, the University of Connecticut at Storrs, Channel Thirteen (New York's public broadcasting network), and the Eugene O'Neill Puppetry Conference in Waterford, Connecticut.²⁷

Building on the connection that Henson has to the University, there was a celebration called "The Muppets Take Maryland" in 1997.²⁸ During the celebration the University's Campus Drive was renamed "Sesame Street," an honorary re-titling that would be repeated for the 2003 statue unveiling.²⁹ There was an exhibit entitled "The Vision of Jim Henson," that opened on February 6, 1997 at the Stamp Student

²⁵ "Grants," *Jim Henson Foundation*, 25 Jan 2008 <<http://www.hensonfoundation.org/grants/>>.

²⁶ "Henson College Residency Program at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD," *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 6 Feb 2008 <http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=38>.

²⁷ "Jane Henson Foundation, Inc.," *Aidpage*, 2004-7, Aidpage, Inc., 30 Jan 2008 <<http://jane-henson-foundation-inc.idilogic.aidpage.com/jane-henson-foundation-inc/>>.

²⁸ "Events," *The Muppets Take Maryland*, University of Maryland, 30 Jan 2008 <<http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~erikb/frog/events.html>>.

²⁹ "FAQ."

Union and ran until March 21.³⁰ It was a small showcase of some of the creative work of the University's famous alumnus. Cheryl Henson ran a workshop on February 13 called "The Muppets Make Puppets" for children and their families.³¹ The following year, she and the Muppet Workshop would release a book by the same name.³² It is designed to stimulate a child's interest in puppet building and character creation using household objects. The engagement of the imagination continued with a film series shown during February and March 1997, including Henson's more famous films, such as *The Great Muppet Caper* and *The Muppets Take Manhattan*, as well as the ones less frequently connected to the company, such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Babe*.³³

The success of the 1997 events led to similar celebrations in conjunction with the 2003 statue unveiling. The exhibition "Jim Henson's Designs and Doodles" ran from September 15 through December 19 at the Hornbake Library.³⁴ This exhibition was curated by Karen Falk and first appeared at the National Arts Club in New York City in 1996.³⁵ The exhibit, according to Falk, was "a rare peek into the imagination of a creative genius and brilliant innovator who brought delight to audiences around

³⁰ "Jim Henson at Maryland," *The Muppets Take Maryland*, University of Maryland, 30 Jan 2008 <<http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~erikb/frog/exhibit.html>>.

³¹ "Events."

³² Cheryl Henson and the Muppet Workshop, *The Muppets Make Puppets* (New York: Jim Henson Productions, Inc., 1994).

³³ "Muppet Movies at the Hoff," *The Muppets Take Maryland*, University of Maryland, 30 Jan 2008 <<http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~erikb/frog/movies.html>>.

³⁴ "Special Collections at the University of Maryland," *University Libraries*, 8 Jan 2008 University of Maryland, 30 Jan 2008 <<http://www.lib.umd.edu/mdrm/gallery/fall2003.html>>.

³⁵ Allison Inches, *Jim Henson's Designs and Doodles* (New York: Abrams, 2001) 7.

the globe.”³⁶ The Jim Henson Company released a book bearing the same title as the exhibition in 2001 in which author Allison Inches says:

Jim Henson left a paper trail of designs and doodles that lead back to his roots as a graphic artist. Not all of his early works on paper survive, but enough imagery exists to chart Jim’s extraordinary imagination. Traced back to their origins, these drawings unveil his creations and reveal their creator.³⁷

In book form, it is an impressive collection; the exhibition took the idea a step further by placing the three-dimensional puppet next to the sketch that spawned it. As Falk observed, “It’s such a treat to get to know Jim Henson through his doodles and drawings, his puppets and his fantastic performances.”³⁸ Karen Falk joined the Hensons *after* Jim’s death and never knew him personally. Cheryl Henson observed, “Although Karen never met my father, she knows what he left behind better than anyone.”³⁹

In 2003, there was also a “Muppet movie fest” as well as a film festival presented by the American Film Institute in Silver Spring that highlighted Henson’s family films.⁴⁰ In addition on September 25, the AFI presented “an evening of some of his finest television work—all in collaboration with The Jim Henson Legacy. The program [included] THE MUPPET SHOW and examples of Henson’s early television work here in the Washington area, including ‘Sam and Friends.’”⁴¹ To accompany the viewings, several of Henson’s close associates, including Jane Henson and Harry Belafonte, discussed his contributions to the art form and his

³⁶ Inches 7.

³⁷ Inches 9.

³⁸ “Jim Henson’s Fantastic World,” *Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service*, Smithsonian, 31 Jan 2008 <<http://www.sites.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibits/henson/main.htm>>.

³⁹ Jim Henson, *It’s Not Easy Being Green*, 193.

⁴⁰ “FAQ.”

⁴¹ “FAQ.”

continued significance as a media figure. Belafonte had appeared as a guest on *The Muppet Show* and is quite vocal in his appreciation for Jim Henson's work. "Unless you have moved among the peoples of this earth, who have so little hope for the future of their lives, you will never really understand how Jim Henson has made a difference for them," he said.

Those desperate places where parents watch their children grow, knowing they will never be educated, . . . these same parents watch as Jim's creations for the first time not only put smiles on the faces of their children, but develop in them the appetite to learn watching *Sesame Street*, and the ability to love because they see the love and caring that exudes from the Muppets and the Henson family of creatures.⁴²

Such affirmations of the spirit and genius of Jim Henson came from the University faculty as well. Shari Parks, an associate professor of American Studies, shared her assessment of Henson's enormously prolific career in a press release accompanying the events of September 2003. "Jim Henson propelled American puppetry into a sophistication it had never seen. He took the European puppetry theatre tradition and made it uniquely American in language, messages and movement."⁴³

In order to allow the public to appreciate the uniqueness and sophistication of Henson's vision, the Jim Henson Foundation and the Jane Henson Foundation made a gift of over seventy videos and the funding to support what became the Jim Henson Works at the University of Maryland.⁴⁴ Beginning in September 2006, the Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library became the recipient of video materials that reflect the body of Henson's television and film work, the earlier pieces along with the more

⁴² Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green*, 163.

⁴³ "Press release," *University of Maryland News Desk*, 8 Sep 2003 University of Maryland, 29 Jan 2008 <www.newsdesk.umd.edu>.

⁴⁴ "About the Collection," *The Jim Henson Works at the University of Maryland*, 2006 University of Maryland Libraries, 30 Jan 2008 <<http://www.lib.umd.edu/digital/henson/about.jsp>>.

famous. *The Muppet Show* is represented in selected episodes, as are *Sesame Street* and *Fraggle Rock*. The more rare portion of the collection includes *Sam and Friends*, appearances with Dick Cavett and on *The Tonight Show* and *Sixty Minutes*, television commercials for Wilkins Coffee and Esskay Meats, and the Academy Award nominated film, *Time Piece*.⁴⁵ “Through this collection, students, scholars, and the general public can experience Jim Henson’s true legacy, the remarkable body of work he left behind. To accompany the opening of the Jim Henson Works, there was a presentation at the Gildenhorn Recital Hall entitled “Jim Henson: Creativity and Other Inspirational Stuff,” during which Jane Henson talked about her former husband’s roots in Maryland.⁴⁶ There was a screening of a new documentary produced by Legacy board member, Craig Shemin, called *The Story of Sam and Friends*.⁴⁷ There was also a panel discussion called “Jane and Friends: The College Park Legacy-A Casual Conversation with Jane Henson,” in which Henson informally talked about the University of Maryland and the beginning of her association with Jim Henson.⁴⁸ In addition to the video collection, the University has a continued commitment to furthering scholastic and artistic opportunities that might utilize the materials as an inspiration. The library featured an exhibit called “Jim Henson: Performing Artist,” again with the idea of foregrounding the art of Jim Henson rather than merely the popularity. The exhibition included sketches, photos, puppets, and production documents all with the “goal of documenting the development of creative

⁴⁵ “The Jim Henson Film and Television Collection Premieres at the University of Maryland,” *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 29 Jan 2008

<http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=68&Itemid=38>.

⁴⁶ “The Jim Henson Film and Television Collection Premieres . . . ”

⁴⁷ “The Jim Henson Film and Television Collection Premieres . . . ”

⁴⁸ “The Jim Henson Film and Television Collection Premieres . . . ”

work.”⁴⁹ In 2006, a new program was introduced in the Theatre Department: the Jim Henson Artist-in-residence program. The program was inaugurated for the 2006-2007 school year with Blair Thomas, an artist from Chicago, leading students through design and performance classes, as well as a workshop to stage his performance, *A Rabbit’s Tale*.⁵⁰ The artist-in-residence for 2007-2008 is Ralph Lee, who is teaching mask making.⁵¹ All of these activities reinforce the University’s belief in the true contributions of Jim Henson’s generosity: “His legacy of imagination, humor, and creativity is a gift to both young and old alike.”⁵²

GOLDEN IMAGES ON THE SILVER SCREEN

Jim Henson was a prolific filmmaker and a television innovator. Many of the programs in which he was involved are available for home viewing through video and digital media. Even the more rare materials, such as appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Rowlf the Dog on *The Jimmy Dean Show* and the first season of *Saturday Night Live*, are becoming available. The pieces are imaginative and tell the story of Jim Henson’s development as a filmmaker and artist from his earliest days producing *Sam and Friends* while at the University of Maryland. The Museum of Television and Radio has a large video archive of Jim Henson’s work called “Jim Henson’s World of Television.” It is a permanent fixture of the museum’s collection

⁴⁹ “The Jim Henson Film and Television Collection Premieres . . . ”

⁵⁰ “UM Theatre: Spotlight,” *Department of Theatre*, University of Maryland, 30 Jan 2008 <<http://www.theatre.umd.edu/Spotlight/>>.

⁵¹ “UM Theatre: Spotlight.”

⁵² “Jim Henson at UM,” *The Jim Henson Works at the University of Maryland*, 2006 University of Maryland Libraries, 30 Jan 2008 <http://www.lib.umd.edu/digital/henson/henson_um.jsp>.

and can be viewed in New York or Los Angeles. In the book that accompanied the opening of the collection in June 1992,⁵³ Jane Henson observed, “By providing preservation and availability, the Museum of Television & Radio ensures that Jim’s creations will be enjoyed well into the future, inspiring us to keep alive his dreams and visions.”⁵⁴ The collection is called comprehensive, but incomplete by the museum guide but it includes three sections, “‘The Series,’ ‘The Specials,’ and ‘Special Appearances’—that exemplify the range and diversity of Henson’s creative contributions.”⁵⁵ *Time Piece* is not among them.

With portions of the collected works of Jim Henson on each coast as well as frequent screenings of Muppet and Henson movies in family film festivals, the Legacy began to look for a way to make a more cohesive package of Jim Henson’s creative work. To that end, the Jim Henson Legacy, working in conjunction with the Brooklyn Academy of Music, put together a film-series to give the pieces an airing and to allow audiences a peek into the cinematic art behind the Muppets. In November 2004, the Jim Henson Legacy and BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music), presented a two-day series of screenings of these gems. Among the pieces shown were commercials produced in Henson’s earlier career, experimental films, as well as the expected Muppet movies and television programs. The event was entitled “Muppets, Music & Magic: Jim Henson’s Legacy, A Weekend of Movies, TV Shows and Other Fun Stuff!” and, apart from the film screenings, there were workshops and guest speakers to reinforce the creativity behind the featured film

⁵³ *Jim Henson’s World of Television* (New York: Museum of TV & Radio, 1992).

⁵⁴ *Jim Henson’s World of Television* 4.

⁵⁵ *Jim Henson’s World of Television* 5.

clips.⁵⁶ Cheryl, Lisa, and Jane Henson were on hand to celebrate the event, with Gawky Birds, some of the largest Muppets ever constructed and part of the Henson family's personal collection, decorating the lobby.⁵⁷ Speakers included Muppeteers Fran Brill, Kevin Clash, Stephanie D'Abruzzo, John E. Kennedy, Kathy Mullen, Jerry Nelson, and Carroll Spinney. Among the others present to discuss Henson's approach to filmmaking were long-time collaborators Martin Baker, Bonnie Erickson, Michael Frith, and Jerry Juhl.⁵⁸ The event was such a success that the screenings, and most of the events, were standing room only.

With the accomplishment of the "weekend" of movies, the Legacy and BAM looked to expanding the project to encompass a multi-city tour. On March 17, 2007, St. Patrick's Day, the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio was full of people wearing green. The reason was not merely for the Irish holiday but also for the official debut of "Muppets, Music, and Magic: Jim Henson's Legacy." Columbus was the first venue outside of New York City to enjoy the film series exhibition.⁵⁹ The series itself is billed as "the largest package of Henson's work compiled for viewing," ten offerings in all.⁶⁰ The ten selected programs were either full length features such as *The Dark Crystal*, *The Muppet Movie*, and *Labyrinth* or compilations of materials under umbrella-like titles, such as "The Art of Puppetry and Storytelling" and "A Better World: Living in Harmony."⁶¹ One such

⁵⁶ "Muppets, Music & Magic: Jim Henson's Legacy, A Weekend of Movies, TV Shows and Other Fun Stuff!" *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 6 Feb 2008

<http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=38>.

⁵⁷ "Muppets, Music & Magic."

⁵⁸ "Muppets, Music & Magic."

⁵⁹ Bill Mayr, "The Man Behind the Muppets," *Columbus Dispatch* 15 Mar 2007, Weekender: 2.

⁶⁰ Mayr.

⁶¹ *Muppets, Music & Magic: Jim Henson's Legacy* (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2007).

compilation, “Commercials and Experiments,” featured a long series of Wilkins Coffee and Esskay Meats commercials, an advertisement for headache relief medicine featuring Henson’s voice issuing from another actor’s mouth, several animated shorts, and *Time Piece*.⁶² Jerry Juhl, the head writer for *The Muppet Show* and a longtime advocate for the Legacy, said “People are really intrigued by it because it’s so completely different than anything you’d think that Jim would have done! . . . Yeah, and it’s very dark and very strange and surreal. . . . It has nothing to do with puppets, but it has a lot to do with Jim!”⁶³ Pieced together, the materials ran for seventy-one minutes, an astonishing length considering the brevity of those early television commercials.

The events surrounding the Columbus premiere were geared toward generating more creativity and inspiration. In tandem with the opening, I was invited to coordinate a workshop called “Puppet Productions” where children and families produced sock puppets between the filmed programming on two consecutive weekends. The socks were dyed bright colors, with felt, buttons, and plastic eyeballs to personalize their appearance. The sock was also folded in a special way so as to allow the puppet to have a moving mouth like Henson’s television characters. The finished puppets were then performed in front of the camera so that the performers could attempt to work in the same way that Henson did on his puppet productions. The challenge of making the character appear alive on the television screen added to the participants’ appreciation for the ease and affability with which the Muppets

⁶² Jim Henson, director, “Commercials and Experiments,” Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, 17 Mar 2007

⁶³ Sam Hale, “Gems and Juhls—An Intimate Chat with Jerry and Susan Juhl,” *Puppetry Journal* 52.3 (2001): 11.

seem to perform.⁶⁴ “Kids were having such a good time trying to move and share the space on the screen. It really was a lot of fun,” I told Terri Sullivan of Columbus’s FOX 28.⁶⁵ The Fox Television affiliate had invited Erik Pepple, a programming representative from the Wexner Center, and me to talk about the film series as well as to make a sock puppet on air during the morning broadcast.⁶⁶ Sullivan asked about the record-breaking crowds that attended the March 17 opening and workshop. I replied, “My goodness, people just came and the creativity kept bubbling over. It was wonderful. It was such a good time. Families were there, all ages in the family too. It was a really great thing to see; parents were making sock puppets, so were the kids. . . .”⁶⁷

The local newspaper, *The Columbus Dispatch*, placed a stuffed toy Kermit on the front of its “Weekender Section”⁶⁸ as well as printing the explanation of and the graphic for a simple puppet project children could produce at home.⁶⁹ In the “Weekender” article, entitled “The Man Behind the Muppets,” Arthur Novell of the Jim Henson Legacy provided some thoughts on Jim Henson’s career, one whose popularity has never waned. Novell said, “He was very prolific; Jim was always looking at the next project. His imagination was so creative.”⁷⁰ Novell continued to say that his favorite work in the festival is *The Dark Crystal*. “It’s magical; there’s so much of Jim in that movie. Both [*The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*] were ahead of

⁶⁴ *Puppet Productions* (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2007).

⁶⁵ *Good Morning Columbus*, FOX 28, 22 Mar 2007.

⁶⁶ *Good Morning Columbus*.

⁶⁷ *Good Morning Columbus*.

⁶⁸ *Columbus Dispatch* 15 Mar 2007, Weekender: cover.

⁶⁹ “March is time for Muppet madness,” *Columbus Dispatch* 14 Mar 2007, Culture Creature.

⁷⁰ Mayr.

their time with animatronics.”⁷¹ That unique combination of magic and technology is a hallmark of Jim Henson’s work, and Columbus audiences, of all ages, packed the Wexner Center to partake in it. Chris Stults, assistant curator of film and video at the Center claims that the popularity and appeal of the screened materials can be attributed to the high production values of the work. “It’s all rooted in traditional art forms. It’s all very character driven, and that’s always quite timeless, with these instantly recognizable characters that have become quite iconic even if you don’t know them,” said Stults. Iconic or not, the festival treated audiences to a closer look at the genius of Jim Henson and his company. Novell noted that the work needed to be seen, “for the sheer joy of it, the fun aspect, the kindness.”⁷² Columbus audiences enjoyed the presentation and “Muppets, Music, and Magic: Jim Henson’s Legacy” continues to tour the country, in fulfillment of the Jim Henson Legacy’s mission to perpetuate Jim Henson’s contributions to global media and culture.

GEORGIA ON THEIR MINDS

In 2001, the Jim Henson Company’s program for the exhibition of the puppets and materials created over its lifetime came to an end.⁷³ It was in March 2001, one year after the sale of the Company to EM T.V. Until that time, there were regular tours and showcases of the magnificent artifacts and puppets produced by the workshops of the Jim Henson Company for its films and television shows. The

⁷¹ Mayr.

⁷² Mayr.

⁷³ Leslee Asch, “Exhibitions and Collections of the Jim Henson Company,” *American Puppetry* ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 239.

Company had been creating exhibitions of its work since 1979, the first of which was entitled “The Art of the Muppets.” The exhibition opened at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts and grew into a larger version for display at the San Diego Museum of Art.⁷⁴ A book bearing the same title was published to accompany the exhibition in 1980. *The Art of the Muppets* responded to the public’s interest in knowing “more about the Muppets, their history, and the people behind them.”⁷⁵ Even then, in the heyday for the Muppets’ popularity, the inclusion of the word “art” was essential to draw the attention of the public to the incredible artistry of the puppet designers and builders behind these favorite creations. The book includes not only a section for each Muppet project to date, but also includes a history of puppetry with particular attention to the television contributions of Bil and Cora Baird and Burr Tillstrom.⁷⁶ The incredibly popular exhibition ran from 1979 until 1986.⁷⁷ Other such exhibitions followed and toured nationally and internationally to great success. However, with the end of the touring exhibition program in 2001, the puppets in the collection came back into the control of the Henson family, eventually becoming a part of the Jim Henson Legacy. Since 2003, the Henson family, Company, Foundation, and Legacy have assembled exhibitions of Jim Henson’s work, notably the work featured at the University of Maryland. Being able to see the Muppets in person is a unique experience and that so many of them have survived speaks to the craft and talent of the Muppet workshops.

⁷⁴ Henson Associates, *The Art of the Muppets* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980) back cover.

⁷⁵ Henson Associates back cover.

⁷⁶ Henson Associates 1-2.

⁷⁷ Asch 241.

In 2006, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. opened an exhibit to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Muppets, displayed prominently at the National Museum of American History. The exhibit was called “Muppets and Mechanisms: Jim Henson’s Legacy,” and it ran from mid-May through Labor Day.⁷⁸ The exhibition had been a long-time in development and had run into difficulties,⁷⁹ partly due to the EM T.V. purchase and that company’s failure. Once the Hensons had re-purchased the Company, work resumed and the exhibit opened with much *huzzah*. In order to kickoff the festivities, television personality and friend of the Henson family, Willard Scott, gave a speech while the choir from Northwestern High School performed some selections. Northwestern was Henson’s high school and it now features a “Jim Henson School of Arts, Media and Communications.”⁸⁰ The school was dedicated October 2002 and was designed to be an “art themed school that aims to nurture artistic development while encouraging rigor and relevance in all subjects.”⁸¹ To celebrate the naming, there was a lobby exhibit in the school’s main hallway, including pictures from Henson’s high school days. The 2006 exhibition at the Smithsonian was, obviously, more elaborate. Included in the exhibition was the entire cast, ten puppets total, of *Sam and Friends*, the starting point for all of Henson’s television work.⁸² The puppets had aged substantially since 1955, with one

⁷⁸ Margaret Webb Pressler, “Jim Henson’s Muppets to Get the Smithsonian Treatment,” *Washington Post* 19 May 2006: C01.

⁷⁹ Hale 11.

⁸⁰ Pressler.

⁸¹ “Jim Henson School of Arts, Media & Communications, Hyattsville, MD,” *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 6 Feb 2008

<http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=38>.

⁸² Pressler.

of them actually having been a toy for the Henson children at one point.⁸³ Museum conservators worked to restore the puppets to their original brilliance and personality in their glass cases. Even within cases, the dangers to artifacts such as puppets are many including light damage, humidity, and infestation.⁸⁴ Such difficulties may explain why so few museums have puppet collections on permanent display. The Muppets are made from fleece and foam and are subject to wear from performance and storage. Jane Henson reported that the *Sam and Friends* gang had been in boxes for a long time. She said that it was a pleasure to see the old characters again as they “represent so much of the fun that she and Jim Henson had in the early days of their relationship.”⁸⁵ The exhibit included approximately 100 framed works of art, photographs, documents, as well as three five-minute videos showing the puppets in action.⁸⁶ The characters from *Sam and Friends* were not the only Muppets on display. The original Kermit the Frog was there, next to a modern version of the character. Several other popular and “iconic” Henson characters were on display such as Dr. Teeth and the Swedish Chef from *The Muppet Show* as well as a pair of “creature-puppets” from *The Dark Crystal*.⁸⁷ The exhibit proved to be very popular, with over one million people visiting it.⁸⁸

⁸³ Pressler.

⁸⁴ Mina Gregory, Maureen Russell, and Cara Varnell, “The Fundamentals of Marionette Care,” *American Puppetry* ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 260, 262, 263.

⁸⁵ Pressler.

⁸⁶ “Jim Henson’s Fantastic World.”

⁸⁷ Pressler.

⁸⁸ “Muppets & Mechanisms: Jim Henson’s Legacy Exhibit at the Smithsonian,” *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 29 Jan 2008
<http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=67&Itemid=38>.

The importance of Henson's contribution to American history was never intended solely for display in the nation's capital. The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service has offered the exhibition, under the title, "Jim Henson's Fantastic World,"⁸⁹ to other museums and it will be displayed in various locations until 2010.⁹⁰ The first stop on its tour was the Arkansas Art Center in Little Rock; there are ten other cities on the exhibit schedule, so the work will be shared with a wide audience. "I'm delighted to be able to share this inspiring and entertaining experience with people all over the country. Seeing his original work firsthand opens a window into his visual thinking and provides both an appreciation of Jim as an artist and a reason to laugh," noted Falk, in her role as archivist and curator of the exhibition.⁹¹ The involvement of the Jim Henson Legacy in the display of the items allows national audiences the opportunity to enjoy the work. The accompanying pamphlet, says "[Henson's] originality, warmth, and enthusiasm attracted extraordinary collaborators and helped to spread Jim's vision to new generations of artists, writers, performers, and audiences."⁹²

The successful exhibition of the artifacts has led to a unique collaboration between the Jim Henson Legacy and Foundation. The newest project of both organizations is the creation of a Jim Henson Wing at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta. The family has donated between five to seven hundred puppets, as well as "props; scenic elements; posters; sketches; and drawings that Mr. Henson created for shows...." In addition, Cheryl Henson has pledged one million dollars of her own

⁸⁹ *Jim Henson's Fantastic World*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007).

⁹⁰ "Jim Henson's Fantastic World."

⁹¹ "Jim Henson's Fantastic World."

⁹² *Jim Henson's Fantastic World*.

money for the project.⁹³ The Center for Puppetry Arts opened September 23, 1978 with Jim Henson and Kermit the Frog helping Vincent Anthony, the director of the Center, to cut the ribbon.⁹⁴ The Center for Puppetry Arts is the “largest organization in the United States whose sole focus is puppetry,” and it is the headquarters for UNIMA-USA. Apart from live performances for families and adults, the Center has a collection of over nine hundred puppets and over a thousand posters and other graphic artifacts. The displays that grace the Center are placed in either the larger gallery, comprising several rooms for long-term display, or the smaller gallery specializing in rotating exhibits. The posters and photographs are displayed on walls throughout the Center. A research library housing books, video recordings, photographs, and periodicals supplements these materials.⁹⁵ The Center for Puppetry Arts has as its mission the increased recognition of puppetry as an art form, as well as awareness of its educational and aesthetic possibilities. To achieve that mission, the collection of puppets on display “exemplifies myriad types, styles and social functions of puppetry from every continent of the world.”⁹⁶ Nancy Staub, who donated her large collection of one hundred fifty puppets to the Center, said, “There is virtually no culture without some form of puppetry. The historical significance of

⁹³ Brenda Goodman, “Retired Muppets Will Move to Atlanta,” *New York Times* 25 Jul 2007: EO1.

⁹⁴ Nancy Lohman Staub, “The Center for Puppetry Arts Museum Collection,” *American Puppetry* ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004) 73.

⁹⁵ Staub 73.

⁹⁶ Staub 74.

a particular tradition or artist is always a consideration. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate the universality underlying the diversity of puppetry and, through it, of humanity itself.”⁹⁷

Staub attributes the Center’s successful realization of its goals to the leadership of executive director, Vincent Anthony. Anthony also serves as the General Secretary to UNIMA-USA⁹⁸ and has been an active advocate for puppetry for over thirty years. He is quick to credit Jim Henson for his contribution to American puppetry’s visibility. Anthony is aware, of Henson’s deeper goals and mission, closely matched to the mission of the Center for Puppetry Arts. Anthony said:

I met Jim Henson in the 70s when the Muppets were capturing the hearts of the entire world. Even before I met him I was aware of his genius. But until I got to know him I was unaware of his gentle nature and true caring for all that is good and his unselfish love of the entire puppetry field. I believe that his true generosity and concern was the impetus that created the Foundation. The field would not have its vitality today without his vision.⁹⁹

The mutual respect that Henson and Anthony felt led to their close association and the Center for Puppetry Arts embraces Henson’s work with open arms. Soon to be included in that embrace is the combined Foundation/Legacy initiative involving an entirely new space for the current collection plus a space of approximately 7,500 to 10,000 square feet to house the Henson contribution.¹⁰⁰ Henson said, “Our hope is to be able to work with [the Center] in their establishing of a world puppetry museum,

⁹⁷ Staub 74.

⁹⁸ *UNIMA-USA Membership Directory* editors Lia Powell and Philip Shore, (Atlanta: UNIMA-USA, 2006) 1.

⁹⁹ “Grants.”

¹⁰⁰ “Atlanta, Georgia, New Museum with a Jim Henson Wing,” *Puppetry Journal* 58.4 (2007): 32.

with a Jim Henson wing.”¹⁰¹ The interest in the Center for Puppetry Arts comes from its being a “living puppetry center” where they produce new work-for families and adults, perform outreach to schools and the community, and invite guest artists-in-residence. “It’s a full, rounded program,” according to Henson.¹⁰²

The new Henson wing is expected to open in 2012¹⁰³ but there are a few hurdles to jump before the Center is fully able to retain and display the puppets. Initially, the Henson children had wanted to begin their own museum for the artifacts of their father’s career in New York City, but the challenges of running a museum proved to be overwhelming.¹⁰⁴ Foundation board member Richard Termine remarked:

It would be wonderful to create a puppetry center. I hope that someday we can create a puppetry center in New York, for research . . . a museum, library and video archive with an outreach educational component, and also with a small theater for presenting the works of the puppet artists that the Henson Foundation is supporting with its grants . . . that would be wonderful! But it’s very expensive here in New York. I would love to see that happen, but it just doesn’t seem to be feasible right now.¹⁰⁵

That being the case, the Hensons turned their attention to the Center for Puppetry Arts. “There is no better place to celebrate my father’s work than here at the premiere puppetry center in the United States,” said Cheryl Henson.¹⁰⁶ The Foundation and Legacy both believe that the Center can be strengthened to a high enough caliber to be an international destination.¹⁰⁷ In order to make that added

¹⁰¹ Belinda Batson Brown and Cheryl Henson, personal interview, 2 Nov 2007.

¹⁰² Brown.

¹⁰³ “Atlanta, Georgia.”

¹⁰⁴ Goodman.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Termine, telephone interview, 9 Jan 2008.

¹⁰⁶ “Atlanta, Georgia.”

¹⁰⁷ Brown.

strength a reality, the Center needs to conduct a major capital campaign. Jim Henson himself had served as an honorary chairman for the Center's fund drive in 1987, a campaign that raised three million dollars.¹⁰⁸

As recently as 2006, the Center received a \$40,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to fund the planning of the new space with a new interactive exhibition that focuses on puppetry's "global and ancient history."¹⁰⁹ Of the Center's application for the grant, the NEH said, "Reviewers admired the ways in which this application analyzes the various means that puppets are used throughout the world to preserve and transmit cultural values and to comment on social, political and economic conditions."¹¹⁰ Further to this function, the NEH stated that the Center would use its proposed displays "to dispel a widely held public misconception that puppetry is nothing more than frivolous entertainment for children."¹¹¹ The boost that the grant has given the Center contributes to the area's enthusiasm for puppetry. Executive director Anthony said, "We're thrilled to be recognized by the National Endowment for the Humanities with this prestigious grant and consider it a validation of the Center's goal to house the premier(sic) puppetry museum in the country."¹¹² With hope, this validation from the NEH will inspire other contributions and awards to make the new space a reality.

Cheryl Henson also expressed her desire to find a place for her father's work in the context of the broader puppet community and to find a home for it. Vincent

¹⁰⁸ "Atlanta, Georgia."

¹⁰⁹ Shannon Frye, press release, "National Endowment for the Humanities Awards \$40,000 Grant to Center for Puppetry Arts," Center for Puppetry Arts, Atlanta, Apr 2006.

¹¹⁰ Frye.

¹¹¹ Frye.

¹¹² Frye.

Anthony reflected, “This grand opportunity challenges the center and the Atlanta community to make this unique monumental partnership come to fruition.”¹¹³ The opportunity is contingent on the Center’s ability to house and preserve the work. The complications of a collection as fragile as the Henson donation will be a challenge to museum staff because, as Henson related, “Some of our collection has gotten old; even in the last seven years it has deteriorated.”¹¹⁴ Her main concern is that the collection be shown well, in the best possible light.¹¹⁵ She does not, however, want the donated articles to become the primary focus of the new museum space; she and the Foundation are wary of turning the Center into a “Jim Henson Museum.”¹¹⁶ Henson realizes the significance of her father’s contribution to world puppetry but wants to place his work in the broader perspective of the puppetry traditions that the Center already represents. Several Muppets are on display in the Center’s collection, namely Link Hogthrob and Dr. Julius Strangepork from *The Muppet Show*’s science fiction spoof, “Pigs in Space.”¹¹⁷

In addition to this porcine pair, the Center for Puppetry Arts also has two special exhibits on display to celebrate Jim Henson’s work as well as to promote the Center’s connection to the Henson Foundation and Legacy. “Jim Henson: A Man and His Frog” opened in the Love Atrium at the Center’s current Spring Street building to “inaugurate a series of preview exhibitions leading to the proposed Jim Henson Wing....” The photographs in the exhibit showcase Henson with his alter

¹¹³ Goodman.

¹¹⁴ Goodman.

¹¹⁵ Goodman.

¹¹⁶ Brown.

¹¹⁷ Staub 80.

ego over the decades. A “photo puppet” of Kermit is also on display, a full-body version of the frog “used for photographs but with no opening for a puppeteer’s hand.”¹¹⁸ The second exhibit, “Jim Henson: Puppeteer!” opened on September 23, 2007; Jane and Heather Henson were present to cut the ribbon for the event. There was also a question and answer session with the Hensons as well as Brad Clark, the exhibit’s curator, and Vincent Anthony.¹¹⁹ Anthony observed, “As we enter our 30th year it is only fitting that the Henson family continues with us in this remarkable journey to bring a world class puppetry museum to Atlanta for the entire world to enjoy.”¹²⁰ The puppets on display in the “Jim Henson: Puppeteer!” exhibit are characters developed and performed by Henson himself, including Rowlf the Dog, Ernie, Dr. Teeth, the Swedish Chef, as well as the La Choy Dragon from the earliest days of Henson’s television commercial endeavors. To round out the vision behind the exhibit, it also features “personal archival photographs, seldom seen designs and doodles, sketches, quotes and a behind-the-scenes video.”¹²¹ It is the Center’s hope that the excitement of the display will provide “a glimpse of Jim Henson’s many joyful creations that will be on view in the years to come.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ Goodman.

¹¹⁹ “Special Exhibits,” *Center for Puppetry Arts*, 2005 Center for Puppetry Arts, 29 Jan 2008 <<http://www.puppet.org/museum/spec.shtml#henson2>>.

¹²⁰ “Special Exhibits.”

¹²¹ “Special Exhibits.”

¹²² “Special Exhibits.”

GETTING NOTICED

The Jim Henson Legacy continues to create interesting ways to celebrate the art and inspiration of its namesake. While some of these efforts are very localized affairs, in places central to Henson's upbringing or education, some have managed to attract national attention. On September 28, 2005, the United States Postal Service issued a series of commemorative postage stamps to honor Henson's contribution to American culture.¹²³ The ten of the eleven stamps featured new photographs of classic Muppet characters, such as Miss Piggy, Kermit, and Animal, bursting out of the white background. The images capture the sense of fun that the Muppets brought to every project with which they were associated. The eleventh stamp was a beautiful photograph of Jim Henson in black and white, smiling with that same sense of fun.¹²⁴ The entire set was issued on a single sheet with the heading, "Jim Henson: the man behind the Muppets." Beneath it is a black and white photograph image of Henson contemplating Kermit, silhouetted by a window overlooking the city. It is worth noting that this image of Henson and Kermit was manufactured for the stamp set and the original photograph was Henson holding Bert from *Sesame Street*.¹²⁵ Regardless, the created image of the master and his alter-ego frames a beautiful and much repeated quote from Henson: "When I was young, my ambition was to be one of the people who made a difference in the world. My hope is to leave the world a

¹²³ "Jim Henson Commemorative Stamps Featuring Jim and the Muppets," *About the Legacy*, 2007 Jim Henson Legacy, 6 Feb 2008

<http://www.jimhensonlegacy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=62&Itemid=38>.

¹²⁴ *Puppetry Journal* 57.1 (2005): cover image

¹²⁵ Finch 252.

little better for my having been there.”¹²⁶ In celebration of the first day of the stamps’ issue, there was a dedication ceremony at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles, followed by a similar event in New York at the Museum of Television and Radio on October 6, 2005.¹²⁷ The stamps rank twentieth in the United States Postal Services top twenty-five most popular commemorative stamps of all time.¹²⁸ The creation of the stamps with the inclusion of Jim Henson’s image are a testimony not only to the extreme popularity of the Muppets in their fiftieth year, but also a tribute to and acknowledgement of Jim Henson’s genius and lasting impact.

Another way to acknowledge Henson’s genius has been through publication of his thoughts, art, and philosophy. *Jim Henson’s Designs and Doodles* was released in 2001 and the book told the story of Jim Henson’s art and the Muppets until 1976.¹²⁹ Each chapter of the book focuses on a different aspect to Henson’s identity and development as an artist and puppeteer. Titles such as “Up and Down a Swampy River: Mississippi Childhood to College,” “Cartoons to Commercials,” and “Laugh Tracks: Comedy Skethces for Variety Shows”¹³⁰ effectively trace Henson’s career trajectory as well as display his amazing range of creatures and ideas. The book was an excellent way to get to work *behind* the work seen internationally on television and movie screens. The next publication to celebrate Jim Henson’s creativity used his acutal words to explain his way of working, creating, and being. *It’s Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* was released in 2005 and is

¹²⁶ *Puppetry Journal* 57.1.

¹²⁷ “Jim Henson Commemorative Stamps...”

¹²⁸ “Jim Henson Commemorative Stamps...”

¹²⁹ Inches 127.

¹³⁰ Inches 5.

a compilation of quotes and stories from Jim Henson and about Henson by colleagues and family members.¹³¹ Each chapter features an inspirational title that relates to Henson's positive outlook on life, such as "Dynamite Determination" and "Together We'll Nab It."¹³² Apart from attesting to Henson's optimism, the titles refer to song lyrics from Henson productions, the former was featured on *Fraggle Rock* and the latter was from *The Muppet Movie*. Cheryl Henson, the book's editor, writes:

Compiling the quotes for this book has been a great pleasure for me. Reading the beautiful things that people have said about my father, looking through the letters that he wrote and the notes that he made, have brought me closer to him and his way of thinking. It has given me great joy to have the words to the songs that he sang buzzing through my head as I go through my day.¹³³

Her introduction continues by sharing one her father's reflections on the "beauty" of a blank notebook page. She reveals, "Writing did not always come easily to my father. He thought more in images and ideas than he did in words."¹³⁴ The words that Cheryl Henson did find to share speak to the commitment her father had to his work and reveal the real impetus behind the network of collaborators, colleagues, and friends who run the Jim Henson Legacy. They show his drive and the honesty behind the work he and his partners did. "Perhaps one thing that has helped me in achieving my goals is that I sincerely believe in what I do, and get great pleasure from it. I feel very fortunate because I can do what I love to do."¹³⁵ It is, therefore, Jim Henson's love for his work that the Jim Henson Legacy truly celebrates. The

¹³¹ Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green*.

¹³² Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green*, table of contents.

¹³³ Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green*, 5.

¹³⁴ Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green*, 6.

¹³⁵ Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green*, 52.

passionate enthusiasm of the founder of the firm continues to surge through his children, friends, and associates and the public are the lucky recipients of the overflow of creativity and caring.

CHAPTER 7

SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE: AMERICAN PUPPETRY TODAY

The past thirty years have seen great changes in the landscape of American puppetry and the Jim Henson Foundation has been instrumental in inspiring, encouraging, and stimulating these changes. The second chapter of the dissertation dealt with the history of American puppetry, in a general sense by relating the contributions of individuals such as Tony Sarg and Ellen Van Volkenburg as well as organizations such as the Puppeteers of America and the WPA. The third chapter tells the history of a specific puppeteer, Jim Henson, in a specific moment in the history of puppetry in the United States. The remaining chapters have shown the outgrowth and evolution of the work of those earlier pioneers as well as the role played by the generosity and foresight of Henson and his colleagues at the Foundation in enriching theatrical puppetry in America and internationally. Through the continued dedication of the Jim Henson Foundation, puppetry, an art form that evolved from a trade secret to a shared technique for insiders, has become a theatrical powerhouse. The concluding chapter of the dissertation will explore the

developments in puppetry of the first decade of the twenty-first century and will contemplate how puppetry in America will continue to progress, with the continued support of the Jim Henson Foundation (or otherwise).

ANOTHER OPENIN', ANOTHER PUPPET SHOW

In an interview in *Puppetry Journal* about Jim Henson's life and collaborations, Jerry Juhl remarked, "Jim always wanted to do a big show on Broadway, just showing off puppets. It never happened, but he'd keep coming back to it from time to time. He'd be incredibly pleased to see some of the big puppet work being done today."¹ Indeed, the presence of puppetry in the major commercial center of American theatre is more popular than ever. Steve Abrams wrote in *Puppetry Journal*, "Puppets are all over New York City on billboards and taxi cabs, in gossip columns and glowing reviews."² At the time of his article, *Avenue Q*, *The Lion King*, and *Little Shop of Horrors* were all playing in the city. He also lists notable Off-Broadway shows with a major puppet presence, such as Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home* with puppets by Basil Twist and *Mabou Mines Dollhouse* with puppets by Jane Catherine Shaw.³ These productions are certainly not the first major appearances by puppets on the commercial stage; Abrams

¹ Paul Eide, "In the Company of Genius," *Puppetry Journal* 57.1 (2005) 4.

² Steve Abrams, "On Broadway," *Puppetry Journal* 55.2 (2003) 2.

³ Abrams, "On Broadway," 2.

compiled a list of “Puppets on Broadway” later in the issue,⁴ however it has become increasingly clear that puppetry has become a trend worth watching and producing in New York.

The first ripple of this new wave came with Julie Taymor’s production of *Juan Darien*, which received a Tony Award nomination for Best Musical Play in 1996.⁵ The show had closed by the time of the award ceremony, but Taymor was busily creating the work for which she will be remembered. *The Lion King* opened November 13, 1997⁶ and has been running in New York, London, Toronto, and on tour, ever since. The production, a stage interpretation of the Walt Disney film by the same name, incorporates puppetry, music, dance, and African rhythms to tell the coming-of-age story of a young lion cub. The show won six Tony Awards, including Best New Musical and Best Director.⁷ The dynamic production demonstrated the power of puppetry to produce fully realized characters, create vivid visual effects, such as a wildebeest stampede, and to move audiences of every age. Taymor’s award was recognition of her amazing vision as a puppeteer and was also the first of its kind to go to a woman. Taymor, like so many other puppeteers, had received support from the Henson Foundation, enabling her to create her unique mixture of puppetry styles. “[Jim Henson] was a big supporter of Julie Taymor

⁴ Steve Abrams, “Puppets on Broadway,” *Puppetry Journal* 55.2 (2003) 28, 30.

⁵ “*Juan Darien* Awards,” *Internet Broadway Database 2001-7* The League of American Theatres and Producers, 2 Oct 2007 <<http://www.ibdb.com/awardproduction.asp?id=5139>>.

⁶ Abrams, “Puppets on Broadway,” 30.

⁷ Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry: A World History* (New York: Abrams, 2005) 34.

toward the end and the stuff she wound up doing. He would have been so pleased to see it because he always wanted to get puppets on Broadway,” according to Juhl.⁸

As a result of the phenomenal exposure and success *The Lion King* enjoyed, other shows have incorporated puppets and puppetry effects, with varied results. Mel Brooks has interpreted his films, *The Producers* and *Young Frankenstein* into musical comedies, each featuring puppets: life-sized pigeon hand puppets in the former and a pageant-sized version of “The Creature” by Michael Curry,⁹ Taymor’s collaborator on *The Lion King*, in the latter. The musical interpretation of Gregory MacGuire’s *Wicked* utilizes an enormous string puppet of a dragon above the proscenium arch as well as a rod puppet lion cub that eventually grows up to be the Cowardly Lion from L. Frank Baum’s classic *The Wizard of Oz*,¹⁰ *Wicked* debuted in the same year as another inventive new musical, *Avenue Q*, losing the Best New Musical category at the Tony Awards to the irreverent upstart. *Avenue Q* features a cast of television style puppets, with visible puppeteers, interacting with human actors in a format reminiscent of *Sesame Street*. Composers Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, born in 1975 and 1970 respectively,¹¹ grew up watching the children’s programming produced by the people at the Children’s Television Workshop and the Jim Henson Company. Homage rather than parody, *Avenue Q* began as a response to the pressures of life after college. “We started out trying to create a rule book for kids our age, out of college, temping, answering phones, and we thought the way to

⁸ Eide 4.

⁹ “Who’s Who in the Cast-*Young Frankenstein*” *Playbill* (New York: Playbill Inc., 2007).

¹⁰ *Wicked*, composer Stephen Schwartz, Oriental Theatre, Chicago, 13 Mar 2007.

¹¹ “Give ‘Em a Hand,” *CBS Sunday Morning*, presenter Rita Braver, prod. Jill Rosenbaum, CBS, 2005.

do that was to go back to friendly characters like [we had] in our youths, when we had friends on television teaching us how to spell and teaching us that we were special,” said Marx. The lessons in *Avenue Q* come through its Tony Award winning book and score with songs such as “Everyone’s A Little Bit Racist” and “The Internet is for Porn.”¹² In utilizing the beautiful characters designed by puppeteer Rick Lyon,¹³ Lopez reported, “There’s something about puppets. They can say the truth, shocking truths that no one really talks about. Instead of hearing the offensive side, since it’s a puppet saying it, audiences hear the truth and laugh.”¹⁴ Critic John Bell agreed, saying, “It’s the unabashed simplicity and straightforwardness of *Avenue Q*’s message which truly seizes the audience’s emotions, impelling them to burst from their seats in heartfelt applause. Puppets make this possible.”¹⁵

Like *Rent* before it and *Spring Awakening* after, *Avenue Q* is part of the new face of the American musical theatre, drawing youthful audiences along with other productions geared toward the babies of the boomers. Steve Abrams observed that the traditional work of Rodgers and Hammerstein and even the edgier output of Stephen Sondheim “is getting farther and farther away from the mainstream music of pop culture. As a result Broadway audiences tend to glitter with silver hair.”¹⁶ Although one might also venture that soaring ticket prices tend to prevent the post-collegiate crowd from seeing theatre on Broadway, his point is clear. Finding ways

¹² *Avenue Q* Original Broadway Cast Recording, music and lyrics Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, Victor, 2003.

¹³ *Avenue Q*.

¹⁴ “Give ‘Em a Hand.”

¹⁵ John Bell, “The Rediscovery of Puppets on Post-9/11 Broadway,” *Puppetry Journal* 55.2 (2005) 9.

¹⁶ Abrams, “On Broadway” 2.

to reach to a younger audience base will certainly result in higher attendance.

Ironically, American puppetry's long connection to youth once again rears its head, perhaps as a benefit to the form. These "new" audiences are prepared to accept innovation in puppetry and the opportunity for artistry in that direction is on the rise.

Bell explained the evolution of puppetry on the Broadway stage:

A lively world of 'adult' and 'serious' puppet theatre as a twentieth century art form was fostered and celebrated in the nineties by the International Festivals of Puppet Theater produced by the Jim Henson Foundation, whose always sold-out audiences realized what *Avenue Q* audiences understand today. That is, that puppets, because they are not human, because they are made of wood, paper, leather or plastic, somehow allow us access to emotions and ideas otherwise inaccessible through actors' theater alone.¹⁷

It was for this reason that Lopez and Marx, as creators of musical theatre rather than puppeteers, came to puppetry. *Avenue Q* was an outgrowth of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, an institution devoted to "advancing the American Theater through programs that encourage creative excellence and develop diverse voices and new work,"¹⁸ where it was developed in 2002.¹⁹ The production came into being under the auspices of the National Musical Theater Conference, rather than those of the O'Neill Puppetry Conference. This exterior approach to puppet theatre has been widely adopted by dance companies, orchestras, and theatre practitioners from every background. Visual artist and project grant recipient, Ellen Driscoll observed, "Puppet theater is an art form that integrates so many disciplines, in our case dance, poetry, music, sculpture and drawing through the art of shadow play. I will never forget the sense of critical mass and synergy of all these elements coming

¹⁷ Bell 9.

¹⁸ "The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center," *The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center* 2002-7 Gombos Consulting, LLC, 10 Mar 2008 <<http://www.oneilltheatercenter.org>>.

¹⁹ *Avenue Q*.

together.”²⁰ Her work, *Ahab’s Wife*, was produced as a collaborative effort including her art, the poetry of Tom Sleight and the choreography of Amy Spencer and Richard Colton and was a featured performance in the 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater.²¹ The collaboration of artists from such diverse disciplines points to an observation made by Richard Termine, that “Puppetry is part of the collective consciousness of artists.”²² In response, artists of every order and milieu have been attracted to puppetry as another means of expressing their creativity.

ALL TOGETHER NOW

The performing arts have never been completely isolated from one another, as operas often feature ballet, stage plays may incorporate songs, and dance performance can include spoken word. It only follows that puppetry would become another mode with which performers would experiment. The attention given to the puppet as a performance medium by dancers and choreographers was the focus of a 2005 issue of *Puppetry International*, in which editor Andrew Periale observed that “the universes of puppetry and dance have many galaxies in common.” There had been an earlier edition in 2002 that similarly examined puppetry’s relationship to opera, high and low, explaining the appeal of the puppet for that performing art.²³ Recent years have seen productions of *The Magic Flute*, *Madama Butterfly*, and

²⁰ “Grants.” *Jim Henson Foundation* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008
<<http://www.hensonfoundation.org/grants>>.

²¹ *1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater* Jim Henson Foundation, 25 Jan 2008
<<http://www.hensonfestival.org/archives/1998>>.

²² Richard Termine, telephone interview, 7 Jan 2008.

²³ “Puppetry and Opera,” *Puppetry International* 12 (2002).

Satyagraha with puppets playing major and minor roles. So many performing artists, such as Mabou Mines and Robert Wilson, have borrowed from puppetry in recent years that it is sometimes difficult to know what type of work—dance, theatre, or puppetry—is the group’s principal mode of production. Jim Henson Foundation board member Dan Hurlin has remarked that he thinks puppetry and dance are, in fact, the same thing.²⁴ In “Puppetry and Dance,” Periale continued to say, “There are so many combinations and permutations of the dance/puppetry equation, that at some point a reasonable person will simply say, ‘To heck with it! . . . ,’²⁵ and stop trying to define which form is which. Lake Simons, a three-time Henson grant recipient, explains the puppet’s appeal for young artists such as herself. “Making theatre using puppetry has melded my interests in the visual and the physical. I am excited about continuing these experiments combining puppetry, live music, and physical storytelling.”²⁶

Simons’s excitement is replicated within the puppet community, in the experienced members as well as the newcomers to the field. It is an asset to the community that puppeteers revere their veterans and that these elder artists engage in the discussion based on their experiences, which have always been part of the conversation. However, the level of discourse has shifted from the “hows” of the form to an exploration of the “whys.” As a group, puppeteers seem just as interested in the useful integration of the puppet into effective theatre as in the practicalities of construction and manipulation. The discussion, sometimes initiated by and always

²⁴ Peter Goodman, “No Strings Attached,” *Newsday* (New York) 3 Sep 2000.

²⁵ Andrew Periale, “The Editor’s Page,” *Puppetry International* 18 (2005) 2.

²⁶ “Grants.”

facilitated through the numerous panels of the symposia series in the International Festivals of Puppet Theater, has really just begun. In 2000, Hanne Tierney said “Puppetry was a folk art for hundreds of years. It is now ready for ballet status. In the Henson International Puppet festival we see a field reaching for its own high art.”²⁷ Defining and refining that “high art” has become the occupation of many puppeteers, eliciting the comparison of the position now occupied by puppetry to the position dance was in thirty years ago.

The ongoing conversation was brought to the fore at the most recent Puppeteers of America national festival when Ronnie Burkett delivered a keynote address in St. Paul, Minnesota. His speech, entitled “On Puppetry Organizations and Whether We Even Need Them . . . ,”²⁸ addressed the issue of where puppetry in America has been, where it is presently, and where it will be in the future. His address urged the assembled puppeteers to acknowledge their shared heritage, saying that the POA was formed for the puppeteers, who Burkett calls “kindred spirits,” to make connections with each other. He referred to the origins of the POA festivals as a place where “human beings with a common passion for puppetry could congregate in person and perform and teach and share and gossip”²⁹ Among those human beings with whom Burkett claimed commonality were Martin Stevens, Bil Baird,

²⁷ Goodman.

²⁸ Ronnie Burkett, “On Puppetry Organizations and Whether We Even Need Them . . . ,” *Puppetry Journal* 58.4 (2007) 17.

²⁹ Burkett 23.

Albrecht Roser, and Jim Henson—all of whom he remembered “eaves-dropping on” in his youth.³⁰ He affirmed the existence of puppetry organizations, but also said that he was uncertain what the next step for puppetry would be.

The 2007 Puppet Rampage, as the POA national festival was called, was a place for much discussion of the future of American puppetry. In a session called “Fantoccini and the Future of Puppetry,” past Henson Foundation grant winners Andrew Periale and Robert Smythe explored the staging of short pieces as a “model of puppetry presentation to be examined by puppeteers everywhere as a new way of thinking about [the] field.”³¹ The presentation was followed by a lively discussion that began where Burkett had ended and asked “Where now?” Also at the Rampage, Allelu Kurten continued her documentary series, “Meet the Artist,” inviting festival performers to talk about their careers, shedding light on “the realities of their work and the inspiration behind it,” while offering insight to others on how to have a career in this “unique profession.”³² Kurten has been videotaping her interviews in an effort to show the puppet community itself and its work *as* it happens, rather than trying to assemble the data as an afterthought. Heather Henson and Marsian De Lellis presented a workshop about puppet slams, which seem to be the wave of the future for the younger generation of American puppeteers. “Puppet Slam Nation” attempted to provoke discussion, provide strategies, and bring together performers and presenters to enliven puppetry across the country.³³ The latest wave of trendy

³⁰ Burkett 18.

³¹ *Puppet Rampage* (Minnesota: Puppeteers of America, 2007) 21.

³² *Puppet Rampage* 52.

³³ *Puppet Rampage* 56-7.

puppetry served as a perfect complement to the long-established techniques and performances, demonstrating that innovation has a place with a form derived from folk traditions.

The Puppet Rampage concluded with an award ceremony, recognizing members of the puppetry community for their contribution to the image and stature of puppetry in America and internationally. Among the other awards given was the “Jim Henson Award,” presented under that name for the sixth time in 2007. Originally named the “Vice-President’s Award for Innovation,” it was renamed in 1997.³⁴ The award “recognizes innovation in puppetry that is technological, dramaturgical, or collaborative in nature.”³⁵ The most recent recipient of the award was Brian Windsor, an artist who combines motion-capture technology with real-time puppetry, all driven by modified video game controllers.³⁶ The controllers are then placed into the hands of puppeteers, of any age, allowing the digital images to be manipulated directly and to respond instantly to the situation as well as the script. By building puppetry into the computer, Windsor has added to the discussion of what puppetry is, and of what it can be. The question of whether Windsor’s work is puppetry may linger in the minds of traditionalists but Jim Henson’s legacy remains present.

This legacy is present too in the work of one company of younger performers, The Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers of Bar Harbor, Maine. Using hand-and-mouth puppets in the Muppet vein, the company of three performs dynamic

³⁴ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory*, ed. Fred Thompson (Connecticut: Puppeteers of America, 2006-7).

³⁵ *Puppeteers of America Membership Handbook and Directory* 72.

³⁶ Brian Windsor, personal interview, 24 Sep 2007.

spectacles that display ingenuity, humanity, and good-natured silliness. David Stephens, a 2007 children's show grant winner,³⁷ reviewed *Everybody Loves Pirates*, a show presented at the 2005 Puppet Fest in St. Paul. His praise for the performance was high, though he felt compelled to defend the performance style of the troupe. Stephens said, "I realize there may be some who would call this show a Henson clone and dismiss it based on style. The fact remains that the work of Jim Henson has shaped a whole generation of puppeteers Punch and Judy influenced traditional hand puppetry just as the work of such European marionette artists as John Bullock and Thomas Holden inspired aspiring marionette performers such as Tony Sarg. Utilizing television, the Muppets were destined to have the same, if not a greater, impact on the art of puppetry."³⁸ This impact is openly acknowledged by the Jim Henson Foundation in its continued efforts "to give something back to a community that has viewed the Muppet family as both a blessing and a mild curse."³⁹

The Jim Henson Foundation is continually evolving to serve the artists with which it works as well as the audience that it has developed. The latest feature of the Foundation website expands upon its grant-making function while contributing to the curatorial role that it has taken in the past. A new page has been added entitled, "Tourable Puppet Theatre."⁴⁰ The information on the page connects potential audiences with pieces of high quality puppet theatre that extend beyond the

³⁷ "Grants."

³⁸ David Stephens, "Everybody Loves Pirates," *Puppetry Journal* 56.4 (2005) 12-3.

³⁹ Elissa Schappell, "No Strings Attached," *Harper's Bazaar* Sep 1998 405.

⁴⁰ "Tourable Puppet Theatre," *Jim Henson Foundation* 2008 Jim Henson Foundation 25 Feb 2008 <http://www.hensonfoundation.org/home_tour.php>.

geographical range that the company calls home. Each show has previously been awarded a Foundation grant, giving a continued life to the money invested by the Foundation as well as allowing artists to further develop the work while spreading puppetry's sphere of influence to a broader base. Included in the list of those shows available to tour are *The Rapture Project* by Great Small Works and *The Terrible Polichinelle* by Sean Keohane. Contact information for all of the listed companies and artists are supplied, and the Jim Henson Foundation encourages interested parties to contact the companies directly to arrange performances and check schedules. The Foundation is not a presenter for these shows, but rather a conduit of information to possible presenters and venues. No doubt, the thirteen companies currently listed will be joined by future grant recipients and the opportunities to perform will also increase, giving an extended life to many worthy shows.

AFTER THE FOUNDATION

It is necessary to consider the question of whether this extended life applies to the Jim Henson Foundation itself. Its twenty-six years have seen meetings and partings as well as restructures and reconfigurations. It has survived the passing of its founder. The Jim Henson Foundation has grown for eighteen years without him due to the enthusiasm and energy of his family and long-time associates, as well as through people who never knew him. Its specific mission, rather than the vision of a single man, has kept it in operation. As the Foundation has grown so has American puppetry. This growth is due to the Foundation's financial support and

encouragement, fulfilling its goals of promoting and developing puppetry in the United States. American puppetry, as previous examples show, is no longer the province of the itinerant puppeteer and it does not experience the degree of marginalization that once dogged its proponents. Puppetry is reaching a point in the United States where people, in the arts and otherwise, notice it and acknowledge the art in it. The Jim Henson Foundation has been a launching pad for careers and the art form. Roman Paska passionately stated:

For inveterate puppet people the Henson Foundation is not a foundation in the abstract, it is Their foundation, Our foundation, the One foundation for whom the prickly P-word is a password and not an impediment, the foundation with (ironically?) the most human face. With the Foundation's blessing, artists of every stripe have entered the puppet fold, and the practice of puppetry flourished in a myriad of disciplines. Without it (Our One Special Foundation), puppet life would be neither what nor where it is today.⁴¹

The elevation of puppetry to a viable professional and artistic medium has been the result of the Foundation's quarter-century of effort.

The next wave of American puppetry has been stimulated, supported, and set on the path toward whatever lies in store for the art form. At a board meeting in 2000, Jane Henson wondered what the third decade of the Foundation would bring. By all accounts, the stated mission of the Foundation has been accomplished. The number of grant applicants has increased from the early days when Jim Henson suggested meeting with each artist individually to discuss the proposed project. Due to the increased marketability and exposure resulting from the efforts of the Foundation, puppeteers have opportunities for funding from organizations that have not previously funded puppetry. Puppetry has joined the other performing arts as a

⁴¹ "Grants."

recognized vehicle for artistic expression, on a par with dance, music, and actor theater. The art of the puppeteer has evolved to incorporate new audiences and new technologies. Within the community of puppeteers, the conversation has been changed, embracing new methods and ideas while retaining the aim of quality puppetry performance. Associates of Henson have said that he would have been thrilled with the work being produced, both in live puppetry and in film. Colleague and writer Jocelyn Stevenson observed:

He changed our lives. He changed the world. And we'll continue his work, because that's how inspiration operates. People die, but inspiration lives and grows. Inspired by his gentleness, we'll fill the world with gentleness. Inspired by his vision, we'll fill the world with vision. Inspired by his chicken imitation, we'll fill the world with laughter.⁴²

AMERICAN PUPPETRY IN CONCLUSION

Puppetry no longer exists in a vacuum, exclusively the province of puppeteers performing puppet shows. With puppetry taking a central place in theatre, dance, and cinema, it is appropriate to suggest what that place means to performers, designers, directors, and scholars. Puppeteers have many new opportunities available to share their vision but should ask what role they play when working in tandem with a theatre or dance company. The engagement of a puppeteer by a theatrical company could entail designing the puppets, constructing them, directing the puppet movement, and performing the puppets for the run of the show. Any of these jobs would be suited to the puppeteer's art. The requirements of the job

⁴² Jim Henson, *It's Not Easy Being Green and Other Things to Consider* (New York: Hyperion, 2005) 169.

will vary by production. Perhaps the puppeteer is responsible for the design of the puppet while craftspeople will build the object and actors or dancers will perform with it. In order to successfully collaborate, puppeteers need to be prepared for this circumstance and accept their role in the production.

Contemporary puppet artists need to acknowledge that collaboration with designers and practitioners from other areas of specialization can enhance his or her puppetry work. In the past, the independent puppeteer was expected to deal with every aspect of the show---from construction of the sets, costumes, and puppets to publicity to the technical run of the performance. It has been a source of pride to many to operate as a “one-man band.” In some cases, that attitude can be a detriment to the creation of a fully realized, artistic product. Puppeteers must learn to seek and accept help while recognizing that doing so does not diminish their art. Puppetry is a specialty like lighting design and stage management. Using a specialist in these areas can give the puppeteer more time and energy to expend on the realization of his or her vision. A puppeteer might also consider employing other artists to perform or construct aspects of the production. Being an expert craftsman does not always translate into being an expert manipulator and vice versa. Finding people who can make objects express the artist’s vision results in stronger puppetry performances.

The next step for puppetry scholarship is to approach puppets as they exist relative to broader theatrical enterprise and the cultures and social systems from which they spring. Puppet theater reflects the thoughts, interests, and concerns of the people who create it as well as the audience it entertains. The study of puppetry has

been limited to the compilation of a historical timeline. Much of this rewarding type of work has been done and there is no longer a lack of written histories for puppetry performance. Puppetry research should now search through the field to find connections to topics relevant to the entire theatrical canon, exploring puppetry's role within popular culture. In this way, puppets will not seem like an anomaly, but rather one tool of many to present, expose, and discuss other topics of interest to a wide spectrum of researchers.

A GLOSSARY OF PUPPETRY RELATED TERMS¹

actor theater-theater written for and performed by human beings (as opposed to human beings manipulating constructed or found objects)

body puppet-a puppet into which the performer puts his or her entire body, essentially disappearing inside the character completely; Big Bird from *Sesame Street* is an example of a body puppet

bottler-in Punch and Judy shows, this person remained visible to the audience and collected money throughout the performance as well as interacting with the puppets as they performed

bunraku-a form of puppetry distinct to Japan in which three manipulators collaborate to create the performance of a $\frac{3}{4}$ human-sized character, one performer operates the feet, one the left arm, and the master operates the head and right arm of the figure; the technique requires years of training and apprenticeship to become a master

table-top-in recent years, the manipulation techniques of bunraku have been adapted and scaled-down to enable performers to manipulate full figures on a tabletop stage, generally one performer to one puppet

Czech black puppetry-a technique associated with the Czech Republic in which the performers wear black clothing (generally velvet) in front of a black velvet background; the clothing allows the puppeteers to be virtually invisible and the objects that they hold appear to float or move on their own volition

finger puppet-a puppet directly manipulated by a performer's fingers, with the fingers either filling the torso and head of the figure or providing motion for the figure's legs

found object theater-a form of object performance where the artist does not manufacture a puppet but rather uses a preexisting object, often drawing on its qualities or the connotations it bears

¹ The glossary is not exhaustive and the definitions are simplified to facilitate understanding of the wide variety of puppet styles and manipulation techniques.

glove/hand puppet-a puppet in which the performer places his or her hand, generally with the thumb in one of the character's arms and the smaller fingers in the other allowing the head to be manipulated by the middle finger or fingers; more often called a glove puppet in Europe, this is the style of puppet most associate with Punch and Judy shows

hand and mouth/television puppet-created by Jim Henson specifically for television broadcast, the puppet has an articulated mouth into which the performer puts his or her hand; by moving the thumb independently of the remaining fingers, the puppet appears to talk or sing, particularly if the performer attempt to synch the sound of his or her voice with the movement of the mouth

humanette-a puppet body constructed on a small scale without a head, manipulated from behind with the performer's head serving as the figure's; due to the contrast in scale between the head and body, the performer looks like a very small person

marionette-a puppet manipulated from above by strings, allowing the figure to be seen from head to toe and the puppeteer to be hidden from view above the playing space; the number of strings and the controllers used to manipulate them vary greatly from figure to figure

Czech-a distinct style of marionette, traditional to the Czech Republic, that incorporate a central rod to support the head and torso of the puppet and a controller designed to facilitate the movement of the figure's legs

Sicilian (rod)-a style of marionette, traditional to Sicily, with two wire rods as controllers-one to the head and torso, the second to the dominant arm of the figure, and a single string to the second arm; the marionette's legs move through the secondary movement of jostling the puppet rather than being pulled by strings; used to enact *Orlando Furioso*

pageant/parade puppet-larger than life-sized puppets operated by one performer or often a team of performers, used in parades or large-scale spectacles; the form perhaps originated in religious and civic ritual, where a totem or icon took the place of the deity; used in the performances of Bread and Puppet Theater and In the Heart of the Beast

play board-part of a glove puppet stage, equivalent to the apron of the live actor theater; the play board is a surface upon which the puppets and performers may rest items such as props and scenic elements

rod puppet-a puppet operated from below by a series of rods, a central one for the head and body, as well as rods for each arm; a rod puppet may also incorporate other limbs as well as intricate features such as eye, mouth, and head movements, as well as special effects; with origins in Indonesia, called a wayang-golek, this form has become popular in the United States, in part through the efforts of Marjorie Batchelder and Nina Efimova

shadow puppet-a flat puppet that is performed behind a screen; the screen is lit from behind to allow the audience to see the puppet as a projected silhouette; the use of a screen and light source allow for special effects such as growing and shrinking and transformations; many cultures have used shadow puppets for centuries

French (opaque)-a shadow puppet that does not allow light to shine through its body, but rather produces a solid block of darkness on the screen; the word “Silhouette” originated in France

Indonesian-called a wayang-kulit, the Indonesian dalangs (puppeteers) use an intricate shadow puppet with lace-like details cut into the body, made of leather or some other hide; these puppets are used to tell epic stories such as *The Mahabarata* and *The Ramayana*

Turkish-a shadow puppet made of a translucent animal skin, enabling it to produce a colored silhouette when light is projected through the puppet; these puppets are used to tell the escapades of Karagosz, the trickster hero of Turkey

toy theater-a form of table top performance begun in the homes of individuals during the Victorian period, characters and settings are cut from card or tag board and plays are reenacted on a small scale, often including lights, curtains, and special effects; in recent years the form has been adopted by puppeteers to enable them to create miniature spectacles for intimate audiences

ventriloquism-a vocal performance technique that allows a performer to project his or her voice, making the listener believe that the sound is issuing from a source separate from the performer; ventriloquists often incorporate puppets or figures as the source of the projected voice

ventriloquist figures-previously called “dummies”, ventriloquist figures have traditionally been constructed of wood with details such as a moving mouth (cut into the wood in a way similar to a nutcracker figure) and moving eyes; in recent years, the rigid wooden figures have gone out of vogue in favor of softer fabric puppets

APPENDIX A

TIME LINE FOR JIM HENSON'S LIFE AND CAREER

September 28, 1936 born, Greenville, Mississippi

1947 Henson family relocates to Maryland

1950 Henson family purchases first television set

1954 graduates from Northwestern High School,
enrolls in the University of Maryland

1955 *Sam and Friends* airs on WRC-TV (through 1961)

1957 Henson and Jane Nebel form Henson, Inc.

1958 graduates from college, travels to Europe

1959 marries Jane Nebel

1960 attends Puppeteers of America (POA) National Festival in Detroit,
daughter Lisa is born

1961 daughter Cheryl is born

1962 serves as youngest president of POA

1963 Rowlf appears on *The Jimmy Dean Show* (though 1966),
serves as co-chairman for POA National Festival, Hurleyville, NY
son Brian is born

1965 nominated for Academy Award for *Time Piece*,
son John is born

1966 serves as first chairman of UNIMA-USA

September 18, 1966 Muppets appear for first time on *The Ed Sullivan Show*
(regular appearances through 1971)

1968 records “Adventure in the Arts: The Muppets on Puppets”

1969 wins President’s Award from POA

November 10, 1969 *Sesame Street* debuts on PBS (still in production)

1970 daughter Heather is born

1975 suggests UNIMA-USA establish “Citation for Excellence”

1975	“The Land of Gorch” appears on <i>NBC’s Saturday Night</i>
1976	<i>The Muppet Show</i> airs (through 1981)
1979	<i>The Muppet Movie</i> premieres
1981	<i>The Great Muppet Caper</i> premieres
1982	establishes the Henson Foundation
1982	<i>The Dark Crystal</i> premieres
1983	<i>Fraggle Rock</i> airs (through 1986)
1984	<i>The Muppets Take Manhattan</i> premieres
1985	records “Jim Henson Presents the World of Puppetry” series
1986	<i>Labyrinth</i> premieres
1989	<i>The Jim Henson Hour</i> airs (through 1990)
May 16, 1990	dies of pneumonia

APPENDIX B

2007 JIM HENSON FOUNDATION GRANT APPLICATION

2007 Grant Application (Please Type)

Organization/Artist Name		Fiscal Agent (if different)	
Address		Address	
City, State, Zip Code		City, State, Zip Code	
Phone	Fax	Phone	
E-mail		<input type="checkbox"/> Project Grant	<input type="checkbox"/> Seed Grant
		<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Show	(check one)
Contact/Title		\$ Total Project Budget	\$ Request

Project Name

Project Summary (2-3 short sentences maximum):

Complete this section only if you are submitting a videotape:

Title of work	Date
Primary Artists (Please specify roles: director, puppeteer, etc.)	
One-line description of work sample	

Please attach the following materials to this application (do not staple or bind). All pages/attachments must be clearly labeled with your name and project title. Please use only standard letter-size paper (8 1/2 x 11). Be sure to refer to our application guidelines for specifics about these materials.

- * A one-page project description
- * A one-page project budget, with both income and expense
- * A one-page artist description and, if necessary, a one-page company description
- * A maximum of two pages of reviews and/or letters of support
- * A videotape and/or up to five photographs, sketches, or other visuals relevant to proposed project
- * Evidence of 501(c)(3) tax status and letter from fiscal sponsor if necessary

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CASE STUDIES

**Building American Puppetry on the Jim Henson Foundation
Grant Making Function**

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

ARTIST INFORMATION- _____

Is puppetry a regular feature of your work? If not, why use puppets for this project?

When did you begin performing with puppets and objects?

Why do you utilize puppetry in the work you do?

What do you think puppets and performing objects add to a production?

PROJECT INFORMATION

How did you come to be working on this project at this time?

What is the concept of this production?

What means are you using to convey this concept?

What do you hope to leave audiences with through the performance of this project?

FUNDING INFORMATION

Have you previously been awarded a Foundation grant of any kind? What type and for which project?

Would this project be produced without the grant?

What difference does the money make to your process?

What would you add to the project if more money were available?

APPENDIX D

GRANT FIGURES FOR THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION

TOTAL AMOUNT (SINCE 1982, EXCLUDES PRESENTING GRANT²)

Total Awards	\$1,299,000.00
Total Number	458
Average Amount Per Year	\$59,045.45
Average Number Per Year	20.8

PROJECT TOTALS

Total Awards	\$1,032,000.00
Total Number	291
Average Amount by Year	\$46,909.09
Average Grant Amount	\$3,546.39

SEED TOTALS (BEGINNING 1993)

Total Awards	\$223,000.00
Total Number	144
Average Amount by Year	\$20,272.73
Average Grant Amount	\$1,548.61

CHILDREN'S SHOW (BEGINNING 2006)

Total Awards	\$39,000.00
Total Number	13
Average Amount by Year	\$19,500.00
Average Grant Amount	\$3,000.00

PRESENTING GRANTS (BEGINNING 2003)

Total Number	49
Average Number by Year	9.8

SPECIAL GRANTS (AWARDED IN 1992)

Total Amount	\$5,000.00
Total Number	3
Average Grant Amount	\$1,666.67

² The presenting grant amounts vary between \$2,500.00 and \$5,000.00 based on the needs of the venues. This information is currently unavailable.

APPENDIX E
THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF PUPPET THEATER
PERFORMANCES

1992 International Festival Of Puppet Theater

Company	Show	Country of Origin	Venue	Target Audience
Eric Bass	<i>The Village Child</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Bread & Puppet Theater	<i>Columbus: The New World Order</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Compagnie Philippe Genty	<i>Derives (Driftings)</i>	France	Public Theater	Adults
Diablolmundo	<i>Memories, Dreams, and Illusions</i>	Argentina	Public Theater	Family
Paul Vincent Davis	<i>Androcles and the Lion/ The Golden Touch of Midas</i>	United States	Public Theater	Children
Yang Feng	<i>Traditional Chinese Hand Puppetry</i>	United States	Public Theater	Children
George Latshaw Puppets	<i>Wilbur and the Giant</i>	United States	Public Theater	Children
The Green Apple Puppet Theatre	<i>The Far Away Land</i>	United States	Public Theater	Family
Hystopolis Puppet Theatre	<i>The Adding Machine</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Janie Geiser & Company	<i>News Update/ When the Wind Blows</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Roman Paska	<i>The End of the World Roman</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Theodora Skipitares	<i>Underground</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Stuffed Puppet Theatre	<i>Manipulator and Underdog</i>	Netherlands	Public Theater	Adults
Theater im Wind	<i>Hermann</i>	Germany	Public Theater	Adults
Theatre Drak	<i>Pinokio</i>	Czech Republic	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Jusaburo Tsujimura	<i>Kecho</i>	Japan	Public Theater	Adults
Paul Zaloom	<i>Sick but True: A Fabulous Evening with Paul Zaloom</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults

1994 International Festival of Puppet Theater

Company	Show	Country of Origin	Venue	Target Audience
Fred Curchack	<i>What Fools These Mortals Be</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Dondoro	<i>Kiyohime Mandara</i>	Japan	Public Theater	Adults
Garland Farwell	<i>Pipe: A Courtroom Drama</i>	United States	PS 122	Adults
Suzy Ferriss	<i>The Box of Night and Other Works</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Handspring Puppet Company	<i>Woyzeck on the Highveld</i>	South Africa	Public Theater	Adults
Hobey Ford's Golden Rod Puppets	<i>Turtle Island Tales</i>	United States	Public Theater	Children
Ralph Lee	<i>A Popol Vuh Story</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Jon Ludwig	<i>Safe as Milk</i>	United States	PS 122	Adults
Marionetteatern	<i>The Ghost Sonata</i>	Sweden	Public Theater	Adults
Penny Jones & Company	<i>Puppet and the Pop-Up Dragon</i>	United States	Public Theater	Children
Larry Reed	<i>In Xanadu</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Theatr Banialuka	<i>Solitude</i>	Poland	Public Theater	Adults
Teatro Gioco Vita	<i>Pescetopocodrillo</i>	Italy	Public Theater	Children
Teatro Hugo & Ines	<i>The Adventures of Ginocchio</i>	Peru	Public Theater	Adults
Hanne Tierney	<i>A Play Called Not and Now</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Velo Theatre	<i>Enveloppes et Deballages</i>	France	Public Theater	Adults

1996 International Festival of Puppet Theater

Company	Show	Country of Origin	Venue	Target Audience
Alchemilla Puppetworks	<i>Puppets, Music and the Unexpected Puppeteer</i>	Germany	Public Theater	Children
Amoros et Augustin & Ki-Yi M'bock Theatre	<i>Sunjata: The Manding</i>	France	New Victory	Children
Warner Blake	<i>The Soup Talks Trilogy: Voice of the Turtledove, Voice of the Hollow Man, Voice of the Machine</i>	United States	La Mama ETC	Adults
Compagnie Nicole Mossoux & Patrick Bonte	<i>Twin Houses</i>	France	Public Theater	Adults
Evolve Productions	<i>A Rare Performance</i>	Australia	Public Theater	Children
Alice Farley/ Henry Threadgill	<i>Erotec (The Human Life of Machines)</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Figures of Speech Theatre	<i>Nightingale</i>	United States	New Victory	Children
Forman Brothers	<i>The Baroque Opera</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Frantisek & Vera	<i>Piskanderdula</i>	Czech Republic	La Mama ETC	Adults
Green Ginger	<i>Frankeinstein (Born to Be Wired)</i>	Wales	Public Theater	Children
Hystopolis Productions	<i>Ubu Roi</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Janie Geiser & Company	<i>Evidence of Floods</i>	United States	Dance Theater Workshop	Adults
Mabou Mines	<i>Peter and Wendy</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Roman Paska/ Theater for the Birds	<i>Moby Dick in Venice</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
El Periferico de Objetos	<i>Gesell Chamber</i>	Argentina	Public Theater	Adults
Pumpnickel Puppets	<i>Frog Prince</i>	United States	Public Theater	Children
Eric Bass/ Sandglass Theater	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults

Teatro Tinglado	<i>The Repugnant Tale of Clotario Demonaix</i>	Mexico	Public Theater	Adults
Theater Laku Paka	<i>Rapunzel and Other Stories</i>	Germany	Public Theater	Children
Basil Twist	<i>The Araneidae Show and Other Pieces</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults

1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater

Company	Show	Country of Origin	Venue	Target Audience
Joan Baixas	<i>Terra Prenyada</i>	Spain	Danspace Project	Adults
Carter Family Marionettes/Ocheami	<i>Sigi the Antelope</i>	United States/Ghana	Public Theater	Children
Ping Chong, Jon Ludwig, Mitsus Ishii	<i>Kwaidan</i>	United States/Japan	La Mama ETC	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Cosmic Bicycle Theater	<i>Dr. Kronopolis and the Timekeeper Chronicles</i>	United States	Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theater	<i>The Golem</i>	United States	Danspace Project	Adults
Ellen Driscoll/Tom Sleigh & Spencer/Colton Dance	<i>Ahab's Wife</i>	United States	Snug Harbor Cultural Center	Adults
Faulty Optic	<i>Bubbly Beds</i>	United Kingdom	Public Theater	Adults
Figuren Theater Tubingen	<i>Flamingo Bar</i>	Germany	La Mama ETC	Adults
Great Small Works	<i>Toy Theatre</i>	United States	Los Kabayitos	Adults (Children's Matinee)
Green Ginger	<i>Slaphead: Demon Barber</i>	Wales	PS 122	Adults
Handspring Puppet Company	<i>Ubu and the Truth Commission</i>	South Africa	Public Theater	Adults
Indefinite Articles	<i>Pinocchio</i>	United Kingdom	Public Theater	Children
LOCO 7/Federico Restrepo	<i>Colores</i>	Columbia	La Mama ETC	Adults
Perry Alley Theater	<i>Chinese Take-Out Theater</i>	United States	Los Kabayitos	Adults
Larry Reed, I Wayan Wija & I Dewa Berata	<i>Wayang Listrik/Electric Shadows</i>	United States/Indonesia	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)

Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes	<i>Tinka's New Dress</i>	Canada	Public Theater	Adults
Sandglass Theater	<i>Never Been Anywhere</i>	United States	Dance Theatre Workshop	Adults
Massimo Schuster & Roman Paska	<i>Dieu! God Mother Radio</i>	France/ United States	French Institute/ Alliance Francaise	Adults
Theodora Skipitares	<i>A Harlot's Progress</i>	United States	The Kitchen	Adults
Stuffed Puppet Theater	<i>Salome</i>	Netherlands	Public Theater	Adults
Teatro Gioco Vita	<i>The Firebird</i>	Italy	New Victory	Children
Teatro Hugo & Ines	<i>Short Stories</i>	Peru	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Teatron Theater	<i>Kafka, or the Search Goes On</i>	Israel	Dance Theatre Workshop	Adults
Titiriteros de Binefar	<i>The Fable of the Fox</i>	Spain	Public Theater	Children
Youki-Za	<i>Fishing for a Wife/ Meiboku Sendai Hagi</i>	Japan	Japan Society	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Paul Zaloom	<i>The House of Horror</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Ines Zeller Bass	<i>Isidor's Cheek</i>	United States	Children's Museum of the Arts	Children

2000 International Festival of Puppet Theater

Company	Show	Country of Origin	Venue	Target Audience
Batoto Yetu	<i>The Mukishi</i>	Angola/Portugal/ United States	New Victory	Children
Cashore Marionettes	<i>Simple Gifts</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Compagnie Philippe Genty	<i>Stowaways</i>	France	Joyce Theater	Adults
Cosmic Bicycle Theater	<i>Assemblage of Souls</i>	United States	HERE Arts Center	Adults
Damiet van Dalsum	<i>Hollehollebeer</i>	Netherlands	Public Theater	Children
Ex Machina/ Robert Lepage	<i>The Far Side of the Moon</i>	Canada	Public Theater	Adults
Faulty Optic	<i>Snuffhouse Dustlouse</i>	United Kingdom	PS 122	Adults
Heather Henson	<i>Echo Trace</i>	United States	HERE Arts Center	Adults
Dan Hurlin	<i>Everyday Uses for Sight: Nos.3 and 7</i>	United States	The Kitchen	Adults
Janie Geiser & Company	<i>Night Behind Windows</i>	United States	La Mama ETC	Adults
Mettawee River Theatre Company	<i>Psyche</i>	United States	The Kitchen	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Valere Novarina/ Allen S. Weiss/Zaven Pare	<i>Theatre of the Ears</i>	France/United States	La Mama ETC	Adults
Otome Bunraku	<i>Two Tales from Japan</i>	Japan	Japan Society	Adults
Paul Mesner Puppets	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	United States	Public Theater	Children
Puppetsweat	<i>Three Tales by Poe/Der Signal</i>	United States	La Mama ETC	Adults
Prasanna Rao	<i>Hand Shadows</i>	India	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Redmoon Theater	<i>Hunchback</i>	United States	Public Theater	Adults
Albrecht Roser	<i>Gustaf and His Ensemble</i>	Germany	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes	<i>Street of Blood</i>	Canada	New York Theatre Workshop	Adults

Tang Shu-wing	<i>Millennium Autopsy</i>	Hong Kong	Public Theater	Adults
Michael Sommers	<i>A Prelude to Faust</i>	United States	HERE Arts Center	Adults
Rudi Stern	<i>Theater of Light</i>	United States	La Mama ETC	Adults
Teatro de las Estaciones	<i>The Girl Who Waters Basil and the Nosy Prince</i>	Cuba	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Teatro Hugo & Ines	<i>Short Stories</i>	Peru	Public Theater	Adults (Suitable for Children)
Hanne Tierney	<i>Salome</i>	United States	Danspace Project	Adults
White Goat	<i>Women's Songs</i>	Russia	HERE Arts Center	Adults

International Festival of Puppet Theater on Tour

Year	Company	Show	Venue(s)
1994	Dondoro	<i>Kiyohime Mandara</i>	Center for Puppetry Arts, Duke University Institute of the Arts, Jacob's Pillow Dance, Walker Japanese American Cultural & Community Center
1994	Handspring Puppet Company	<i>Woyzeck on the Highveld</i>	Performing Arts Chicago
1994	Teatro Hugo & Ines	<i>The Adventures of Ginocchio</i>	Duke University Institute of the Arts, Performing Arts Chicago
1996	Amoros et Augustin/ Ki-Yi M'bock Theatre	<i>Sunjata: The Manding</i>	Children's Theatre Board, Duke University Institute of the Arts, Flynn Theatre, Hopkins Center at Dartmouth, Hult Center for the Performing Arts, Keene State College, Performing Arts Chicago, University of North Carolina-Asheville
1996	Compagnie Nicole Mossoux & Patrick Bonte	<i>Twin Houses</i>	Hopkins Center at Dartmouth, Performing Arts Chicago, Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts At Fairfield University, University of Connecticut-Storrs
1996	Frantisek & Vera	<i>Pickanderdula</i>	Flynn Theatre
1996	Teatro Tinglado	<i>The Repugnant Tale of Clotario Demonaix</i>	Hopkins Center at Dartmouth, UCLA Center for the Performing Arts
1996	Theater Laku Paka	<i>Rapunzel and Other Stories</i>	Fitchburg State College, Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts at Fairfield University
1998	Ping Chong, Jon Ludwig, Mitsuru Ishii	<i>Kwaidan</i>	Culver Academies, Duke University Institute of the Arts, Hopkins Center at Dartmouth, Staller Center at SUNY, Walker Arts Center
1998	Handspring Puppet Company	<i>Ubu and the Truth Commission</i>	Center for the Arts at UCLA, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

1998	Larry Reed, I Wayan Wija & I Dewa Berata	<i>Wayang Listrik/Electric Shadows</i>	Britt Festival, Center for the Arts at UCLA, Flynn Theatre, Hopkins Center at Dartmouth, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust/ Benedum Center, Rhode Island College, Sorenson Center at Babson College, Swarthmore College, Washington Performing Arts Society
1998	Sandglass Theater	<i>Never Been Anywhere</i>	Bryn Mawr College, Hopkins Center at Dartmouth
1998	Teatro Hugo & Ines	<i>Short Stories</i>	Center for the Arts at UCLA, Hopkins Center at Dartmouth, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Perishable Theater, UA Presents at University of Arizona, The Wagon Train Project
1998	Teatro Tinglado	<i>The Repugnant Tale of Clotario Demonaix</i>	UA Presents at University of Arizona
2000	Ping Chong, Jon Ludwig, Mitsuru Ishii	<i>Kwaidan</i>	John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Lied Center, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's Byham Theater
2000	Redmoon Theater	<i>Hunchback</i>	Hopkins Center at Dartmouth
2000	Teatro Hugo & Ines	<i>Short Stories</i>	Hopkins Center at Dartmouth, Lipinsky Auditorium, Rand Theater, Silver Cultural Arts Center
2000	White Goat	<i>Women's Stories</i>	Perishable Theater

APPENDIX F

FIGURES



Figure 1: Jerry Juhl's playwriting workshop, Puppet Fest 2005
Front(from left)-Gail McKay, Chris Fehring, Jon Ludwig, Nancy Aldrich,
Jennifer Stoessner, Amy Strickland
Back(from left)-Peggy Melchior Pearson, Debbie Stutzman, Steve Mark, Jerry Juhl,
Drew Allison, Sean Keohane, Kat Pleviak, James Groetsch



Figure 2: Jim and Jane Henson, National Capital Puppet Guild Meeting,
Arlington, VA, 1962, (Florence Backus, photographer)
Photo property of author



Figure 3: Proscenium arch, marionettes, and performers in *The Rapture Project*, Photo courtesy of Great Small Works



Figure 4: The company of *The Rapture Project*,
Photo courtesy of Great Small Works



Figure 5: Susan Sontag and the Devil battle over Wanda in *The Rapture Project*,
Photo by Orlando Marra



Figure 6: Polichinelle and Madame Triffouillon from *The Terrible Polichinelle*,
Photo by Wayne Hampton



Figure 7: Work in progress shot for *Pinocchio*,
Photo courtesy of Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre



Figure 8: Cat, Fox, and Pinocchio in puppet form,
Photo courtesy of Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre



Figure 9: Cat, Pinocchio, and Fox in human form,
Photo courtesy of Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre



Figure 10: Exterior view of HERE Arts Center,
Photo by author



Figure 11: Close shot of HERE exterior with season listing,
Photo by author



Figure 12: Marionette of Griff Williams at HERE Arts Center,
Photo by author



Figure 13: Character from *The Fortune Teller*,
Photo by Oliver Dalzell



Figure 14: “Gluttony” Character from *The Fortune Teller*,
Photo by Oliver Dalzell



Figure 15: Giant head of judge with defense attorney (Hyunyup Lee),
The Ludicrous Trial of Mr. P.
Photo by Oliver Dalzell

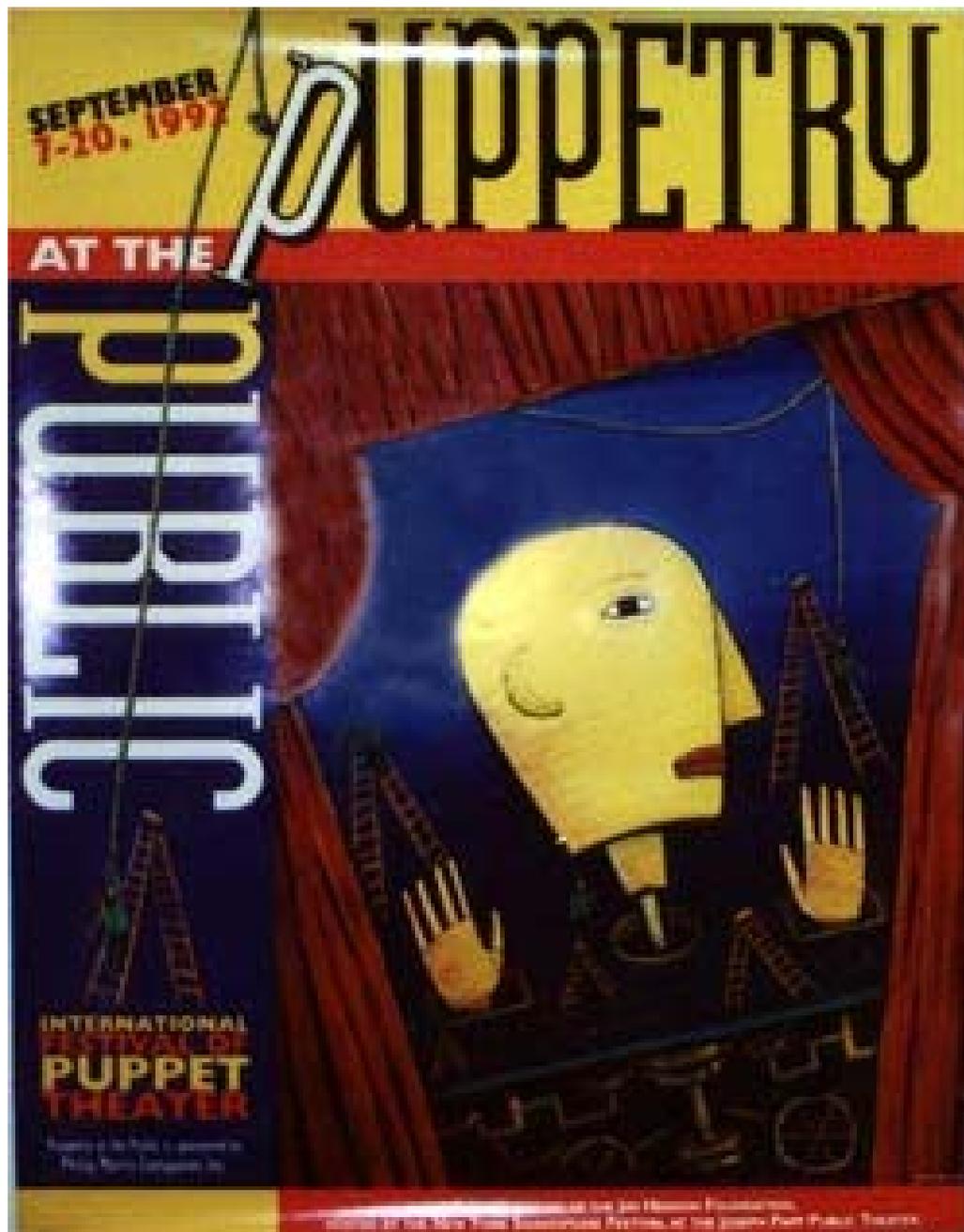


Figure 16: Promotional poster from
The 1992 International Festival of Puppet Theater,
Art by Janie Geiser
Courtesy of the Jim Henson Foundation

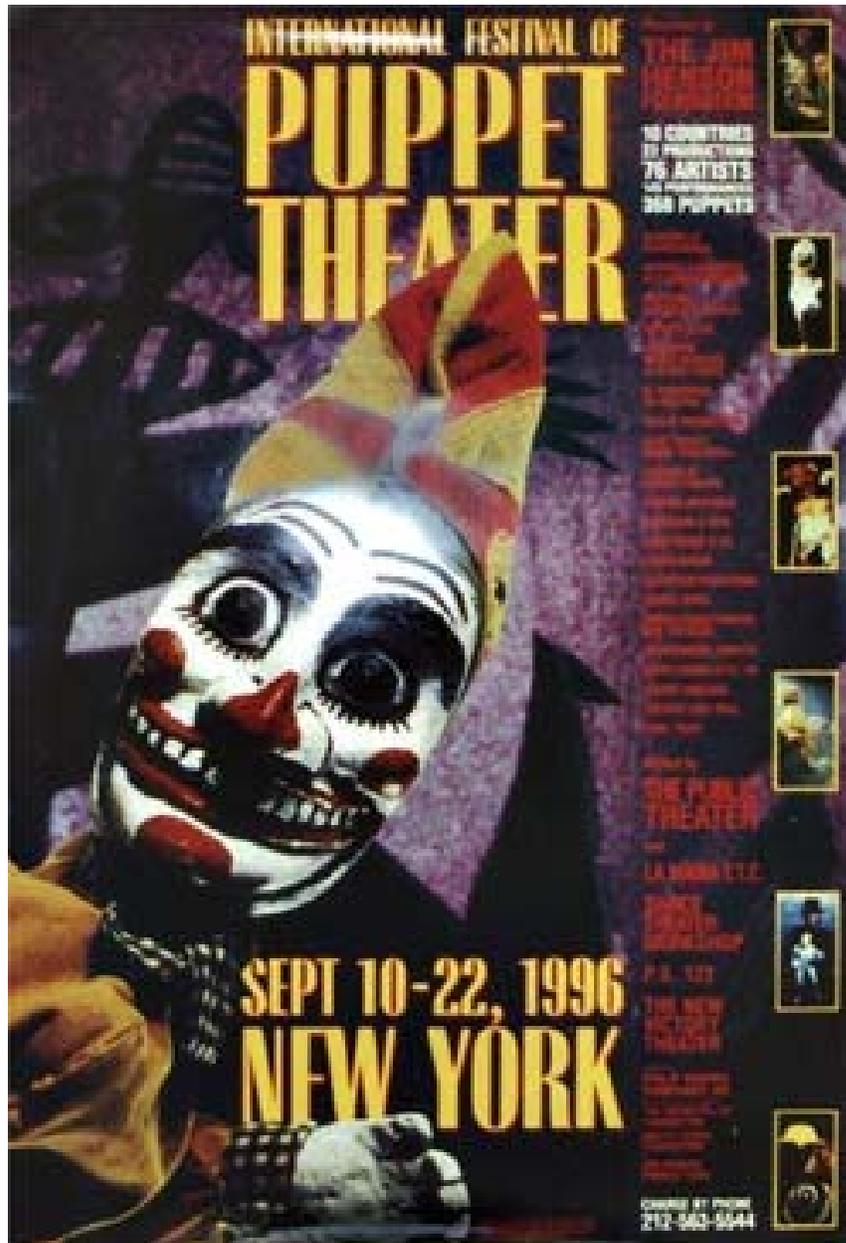


Figure 18: Promotional poster from The 1996 International Festival of Puppet Theater, Central Figure-Clotario Dernaix by Teatro Tínglado
Courtesy of the Jim Henson Foundation

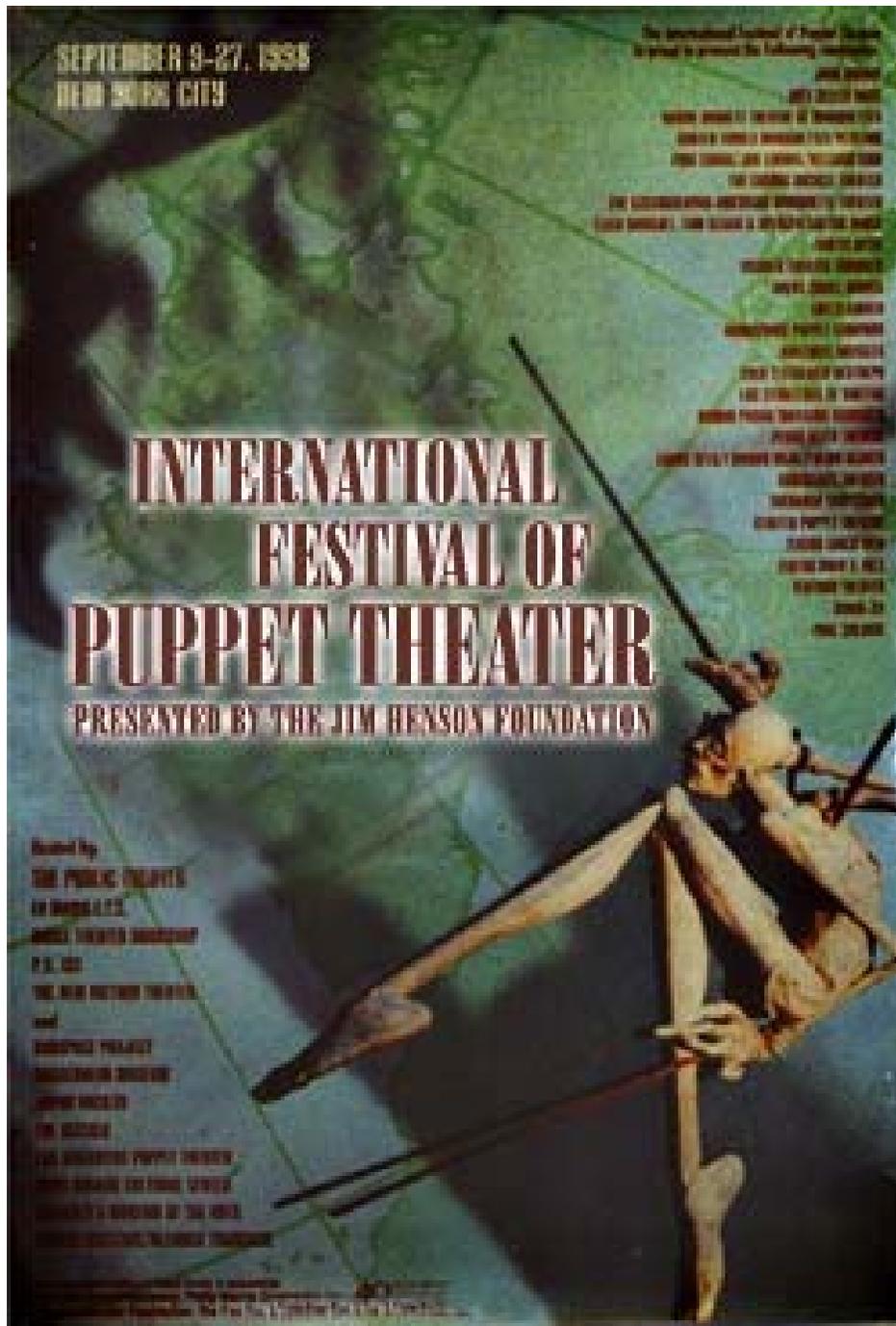


Figure 19: Promotional Art from The 1998 International Festival of Puppet Theater
Central figure-Figuren Theatre Tübingen
Courtesy of the Jim Henson Foundation



Figure 20: Promotional Art from The 2000 International Festival of Puppet Theater,
Puppet by Elizabeth King
Courtesy of the Jim Henson Foundation



Figure 21: “Puppet Productions” with Jennifer Stoessner
Photo property of author

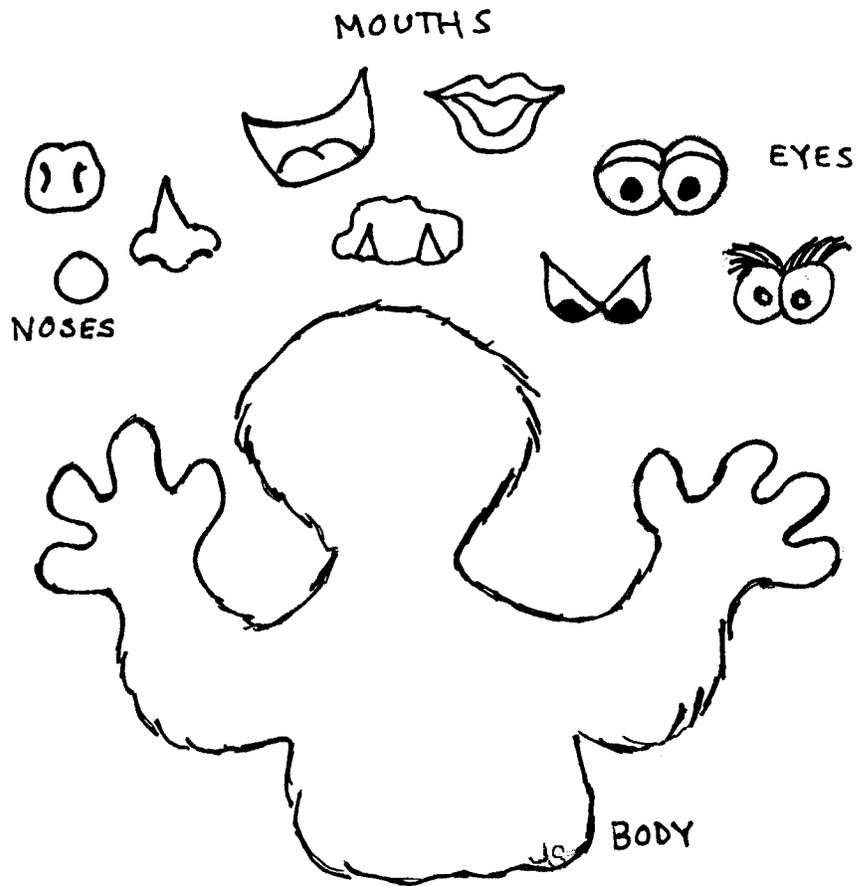


Figure 22: "Culture Creature" project featured in *The Columbus Dispatch*,
Project illustration by author

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