



The official newsletter of  
**San Francisco Bay Area Puppeteers' Guild**  
*Looking for updates and missed information?*  
Check for it at [SF-BAPG.ORG](http://SF-BAPG.ORG)

*SFBAPG is a charter guild of the Puppeteers of America, Inc., a non-profit, tax exempt organization*

**February 2008**



*One picture is worth a thousand words: Randal Metz delighted young and old with his marionette and rod puppet production at our guild holiday party, mixing the unexpected (here a break-away snowman marionette) with an original north pole adventure story (see Larry Schmidt's review in this issue.) The holiday party this year drew one of the largest crowds ever, a feast of food and wine, gifts and prizes, puppets for Iraqi children, 4 wonderful performances and more.*

*Guild party photos throughout: Sharon Clay and Michael/Valerie Nelson*

### **Inside this issue...**

- ◆ Guild President's message
- ◆ Holiday Party huge success
- ◆ Review of "One Wacky Winter"
- ◆ Review of "Polly Polar Bear and the Prince of the Sea"
- ◆ Review of "Rumpleskiltskin"
- ◆ Board News, New Board Members, Calendar, Classifieds
- ◆ Next Guild Meeting and pre-registration for guild workshop on March 22

## BOARD NEWS

Last August the membership voted to change the guild government structure to a nine member board and entrusted the current officers to work out a transition method to “ease” into the new format. The transition has been arranged and I would like to welcome Lee Armstrong, Mary Decker and Talib Huff, new appointments to the board. Mary and Lee have been working on guild business for years and Talib is a long time, dedicated guild member. They all seemed like naturals to come on board and help direct this guild’s new path.

This gives us 8 guild members currently. At our next election Mike Wick and Herbert Lange will be retiring from the board and we will elect 3 new board members bringing the board to the desired 9 members. After that we will be on track with the 9 member board, with elections each year for 3 of the nine members. At the 2009 election Michael Nelson, Valerie Nelson and Sharon Clay’s terms will expire and they will be eligible for run again, and in 2010 Mary Decker, Lee Armstrong and Talib Huff’s terms will expire and they will all be eligible to run again.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR NEW BOARD:

Your guild is a membership organization. Your board and other guild staff are all volunteers. You can get involved!

- Run for the new board! Elections will be coming up in May/June. Consider joining the team.
- Volunteer for various activities, from offering a performance or workshop for the guild to offering a skill or a little time to help out.
- Give your input or suggestions to the current board (ideas for future guild meetings, activities, enterprises?)
- Attend and enjoy guild activities.

**HELP WANTED:** Person with computer skills to help put guild library catalogue online- contact Lee Armstrong (info at R.)

### 2007-2008 SFBAPG Board of Directors and Staff BOARD

Lee Armstrong, Librarian, Future Meetings C.  
720 Ladera, Sonoma, CA 95474  
707-996-9474 \* images@vom.com

Sharon Clay, Secretary  
925-462-4518 \* sharonclay@comcast.net

Mary Decker, Email Coordinator, Procedures C.  
650-361-1310 \* marydeck57@sbcglobal.net

Talib Huff  
916-484-0606 \* tahuff@dcn.org

Herbert Lange, Vice President, Future Meetings C.  
415-240-6246 \* lange.Herbert@gmx.net

Valerie Nelson, Treasurer & Guild Roster  
Box 1258, Vallejo, CA 94590  
707-363-4573 \* mail@magicalmoonshine.org

Michael Nelson, President, Newsletter Editor  
Box 1258, Vallejo, CA 94590  
707-363-4573 \* mail@magicalmoonshine.org

Mike Wick, Vice President  
510-222-2417 \* trexbunny@aol.com

#### STAFF

Matt Baume, Webmaster  
415-668-7679 \* mattymatt@gmail.com

Conrad Bishop, Calendar Editor  
502 Pleasant Hill Rd., Sebastapol, CA 95472  
707-824-4307 \* eye@independenteye.org

Welcome to new guild members Robert Seidl family, Anne Louise Burdett, Judi Weaser, Ernie Fosselius, and Arthur Grueneberg.

## President's Message

With a trend of each guild meeting being better attended than the last, the guild party last month set a very high bar! Over 50 (one counter said 53) happy puppet enthusiasts gathered to watch four performances, to sample from the veritable feast of food (there was no way we could finish it all), donate puppets for Iraqi children (201 were donated!), to exchange gifts with the guidance of our very own Father Christmas (Talib Huff), and to



participate in a raffle, raising over \$80.00 for the guild and sending home guild members with a variety of rare and unusual puppet collectibles. The San Leandro Community Center once again proved an inviting space for our event, giving us a nice room to eat and gather in and a performance space for our guild meeting and performances. The cost to the guild was zero, thanks to Randal Metz's relationship with the Center. A big thanks also to Randal for performing his holiday show for us (see review by Larry Schmidt in this newsletter.)

And a big thanks to our other performers at the gala: Kevin Menegus who performed a delightful hand and rod puppet piece showing the exuberance of a shock headed orchestra conductor, David Morley (accompanied by Kevin on percussions) who had audience members gasping at his marionette's acrobatics, and Janaki Ranpura who, with her usual engaging

stage presence, presented a new shadow/projected piece that stretched the boundaries of puppetry.



*Kevin Menegus's janitor puppet prepares for the Maestro.*

Mary Decker and Lee Armstrong are to be commended for their planning on the event, managing both the big picture and making sure that such things as napkins, cups, and serving utensils were present. Mary also handled the raffle and the Iraq puppet project, while Lee and Herbert Lange as Future Meeting Committee members, planned the overall concept for the meeting (the success of their efforts over the last two years can be measured tangibly in growth in meeting attendance from 6-12 attendees average when they started, to thirty something last summer, forty something in the fall, and now in the 50s.)



*David Morley and Kevin Menegus*



*Janaki Ranpura*

On another subject: While our guild is growing in influence and effect in the Bay Area, I was extremely impressed at the last year's activities the San Diego Guild had listed in their holiday newsletter. Samples: they participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> celebration of the Children's Theatre of the World Festival, with performances, exhibits, giant puppets, stilt walkers and a workshop for college students plus 2 giant puppet pageants. They build puppets and trained the actors for Diversionary Theatre's production of Paula Bogel's "Long Christmas Ride Home." They received a grant to serve as Artists in the Schools and are working on creating a sequential puppetry arts curriculum for use in California schools. They mounted an adult production with funding from the Henson Foundation ("Goldilocks, the Nursing Home Version.") They created a giant puppet parade with 700 students participating. And they added puppets to their permanent puppet collection. Of course this is not your typical Puppeteers of America Guild. In fact they are no longer a P. of A. Guild as changes in their non-profit structure went against P. of A.'s definition of a guild. But since striking out on their own, they have managed to get grants and jobs so that they are doing great things in their community as well as providing paid work for puppeteers in the San Diego area. They are to be commended for their furtherance of and support of

puppetry in their area, and possibly they can serve as a model for a guild that is very proactive in their community.

## Review of “One Wacky Winter”

By Larry Schmidt

*Ed. Note: “One Wacky Winter” was performed at the guild holiday party in January.*



*Scene from hand puppet portion of “One Wacky Winter.” by Randal Metz.*

Guild members were treated to Randal Metz's extravaganza, "One Wacky Winter". A cunning hand puppet stage was erected at one end of the room with picturesque scenery by Annie Wong of Fairyland. Three kinds of puppets were used to tell the story of how the Grunch (not the Grinch) stole Christmas.



*Randal Metz and Snowman*

Randal effectively swirled and paraded marionettes in full view of the audience, before the stage, starting with a Snow Queen or Lady Winter who began a narration and blew snow glitter through her wrist with a not - so - quiet pneumatic device. There were double (marionette / hand puppet ) versions of several characters throughout the story, like television's Peter and the Wolf by Bil Baird. I instantly recognized the match, and thought the diversity of different kinds of puppets and staging in one show was done as seamlessly as in any show I've seen. The tale follows the Grunch's attempts to spoil Christmas via Santa's toys, and borrows from the Land of Misfit Toys from Television's Rudolph, in this case with broken toys disappearing from a storage repair room. The story comes to a peak when a machine appears that turns good guys into the Grunch's servants bent on the ruination of the holiday. The marionettes augmented the action very nicely and was a variety show of trick puppets in itself. I see marionettes sometimes trading the warmth and intimacy of hand puppets for glitz, glamour and gimmicks. Here there was no sense that the marionettes were just being shown off. Instead the tricks suited the story like nothing else really could - a Jack in the box spits water, Frosty breaks apart and comes back together again, and various toys transform before our eyes. One little girl I was watching in the audience was absolutely enchanted and believed in what was truly a fantasy come to life for her. Like at the end of the Grinch cartoon, a Christmas miracle occurs and the villain's heart is warmed. Frosty is revived from a puddle, everything is set right and a fully decorated Christmas tree gloriously rises up like in the Nutcracker. Though there were no original songs, the production was overflowing with music and sound effects and it didn't seem to infringe on

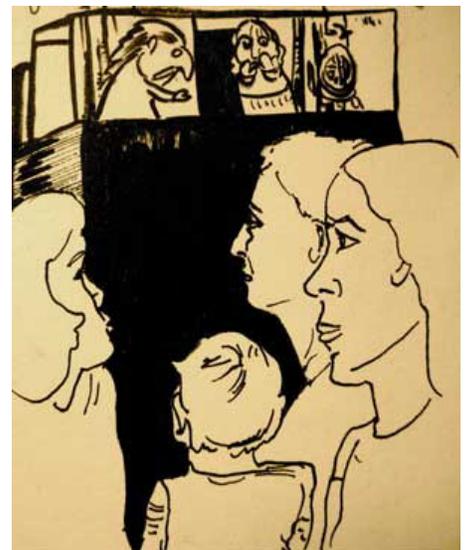
the dialogue. Wonderful voice talents were chosen to play the parts, some of them very cartoon-like. It's really a show of epic proportions, presented effortlessly ( seemingly) by the puppeteer.

## Well-Rolled Package, a Review of Herbert Lange's Rumpelstiltskin

By Janaki Ranpura

Children's shows satisfy best when they have elements that engage both kids and adults. I used to think that meant the content should attain to the sophisticated and the simple, but after seeing Herbert Lange's hand puppet Rumpelstiltskin this past weekend, I've changed my mind on how a showman can handle a range of ages at once.

The show's story is one we all know. It exists before and without us. So what can an audience of today add? Herbert showed us: we can realize afresh what each well-defined role has to offer. In so doing, we define our own roles as people in the room, and we form an interaction amongst ourselves as an alive, immediate audience.



*Janaki's illustration of Herbert's show.*

Each puppet in the performance played not just a character role, but also reliably played a specific form of interaction with the audience. The Miller's Daughter had our sympathy from beginning to end, with her high tender voice and round, innocent eyes. The King seemed to play to our callousness, and also our strength, singing recognizable pop tunes instead of displaying real emotional availability. Rumpelstiltskin, with his weird iridescent green eyes, created a chilling sense of the uncanny - a subtle mark of the original Grimm Germanness coming through.

The King's servant Barry offered a literal representation of audience reaction. This character was the audience foil, bumbling and misapprehending. Every time he came onstage we knew we would laugh and be drawn in. When the Miller's Daughter had to guess Rumpelstiltskin's name, Barry came out from the behind the playboard to collect names from the audience. The children crawled towards the character at the front of the room as if Barry the puppet was tugging them close with strings.

These characters, each with their particular roles, encouraged our affiliation. The King and Queen were the rule makers, and the puppets asked the audience to help keep the subjects under control. In this model of the world, though, the adults keep order with a wink. When the boys in the front of the audience didn't want to sing a lullaby for the Queen's baby, she sang it anyway with the help of the adults. Then she said with queenly gravity: "Thanks to those who sang. To those who didn't, it's not nice. We want to treat our children well."

The puppets, by being very specific, set an example for every-aged audience member to assume specificity in our

reactions and sense of role-playing during the show. I felt as though I was part of a just medieval city run by the wizard hidden in the booth. Herbert was keeping track of us from behind the curtain, relating not just the content of his story, but also creating out of his audience a well-conducted orchestra.

## **"Polly Polar Bear and the Prince of the Sea"** a review by Elisheva Hart

As I waited on line at the Petaluma Library January 3rd, for the performance space to open an adult acquaintance pointed to a little boy and said, "I brought him. Who'd you bring?"

I answered, "Myself. I know the puppeteers," (hoping to keep the exasperation out of my voice.) Typical attitude, as if adults can't admit to enjoying puppets. And can't come without using children as an excuse!

A few moments later Anita Coulter was indeed giving me a big hug. Despite/because of the rain about 120 people came-with or without children-and had an excellent theatre experience.

Pre-show, Anita beautifully "trained" the audience, going from, "How many have seen a puppet show before?" (Many hands are raised.) ".....your first show? Oh, I see many of the same hands!", to instructions to stay seated behind the magic line, to reminding parents if their child was too restless or noisy to please remove them from the room, to thanking the Friends of the Library for funding them, and pointing out a tableful of enticing puppetry library books for checking out after the show. Anita had the children practice clapping and laughing, explaining the appropriate times to do so. They were taught a simple magic phrase to repeat when Polly Polar Bear

asked for help. Throughout, Anita demonstrated her quick thinking which also would continue during this live, non-taped show. She showed her realization that for many youngsters this would be their first theatre experience and they needed to know what was expected of them. And if they truly had



*Past Guild President Anita Coulter performs "Polly Polar Bear and the Prince of the Sea."*

been to another puppet show or six, repetition of the rules never hurts! Taking the time to work with the children certainly paid off. Parents did have to leave with a few children who obviously were not capable of sustaining their focus, but the rest did marvelously.

The curtain is removed, revealing a beautifully painted backdrop of snow covered cliffs and icebergs floating in the sea. Polly Polar Bear's humble wooden home is at one corner of the stage apron. She and her pal, Reggie Reindeer, are decorating for a party by stringing garlands of evergreens on the house. This involves plenty of giggles from the audience in response to the slapstick antics of the friends. Soon Polly goes fishing for some refreshments for the party. She catches the Prince of the Fishes himself! He asks her to release him. She does. After telling her fish story to Reggie, he

insists she return and ask the Fish Prince to give her a bigger house. She rejects this idea until Reggie convinces her that she could have a whole room for her fishing gear and each have their own bathroom! She agrees, the Prince of the Fishes agrees, and off we go into the familiar tale of "The Fisherman and his Wife"....but not the same old, same old! This script has enough unexpected surprises, role reversals and fun minor characters to keep those of us who know the story laughing and attentive throughout. Plus, this anti-greed story has a very happy ending.

This show is very cleverly scripted to play at the winter holidays-because of the snow and ice and party-yet does not mention any specific religion or Santa or Frosty, etc. The spirit of friendship is very present. However since the performers are working with live voices they could, if booked by a specific group who might want a show for a Chanukah party for example, work that into the script. And the non-specific holiday/celebration/party theme allows this show to be booked for the whole winter season (or beyond).

The voices are excellent in characterization and consistency, especially so since the show is performed live. Polly's voice, by Anita, is very perky and warm, as befits the character. She is onstage most of the time. Even so Anita does some small parts for minor characters.

Jonathan, who performs with her, displays versatility with many voices. Reggie Reindeer's voice is mellow, simple, deep and with a slight lisp....until he gets power-greed....then it really deepens and becomes authoritarian. The Prince of the Fishes has an "East Coast" voice (think Groucho Marx), a slightly nasal, snappy voice.

Rhythm in speech matched with movement enhances the show. For instance Bonny Bunny's rhythm as she approaches the house goes like this:

hop, hop, hop, hop;  
hop, hop, hop!  
(then) knock, knock, knock, knock;  
knock, knock, knock!

At the end of the story, Polly quickly recaps the events to Reggie. I'm guessing that this helps the younger children grasp the overall plot and makes clear the moral about being appreciative of what you have instead of always wanting more.

After the show the delighted audience had an opportunity to see how the puppets were manipulated and the inside of the stage. Anita gave their website ([www.swazzle.com](http://www.swazzle.com)) and told of films, schedules, and printouts on it. A hint, I would have liked to hear it repeated again after she gave her spiel, with the spelling of swazzle (not in the ordinary person's vocabulary!) And also this would be a good time to refer again to the puppet themed library books conveniently placed by the exit.

Altogether a wonderful experience for us all. Swazzle Puppets are well worth "catching" when they are in your neighborhood.

## CALENDAR

### Storybook Puppet Theater At Children's Fairyland, Oakland Jan. 26-27 February 1-3, 8-10 11 am - 2 pm - 4 pm

Meister Tinkle's Music Box Based on the characters created in his book "Friendship Valley," children's author Wolo Von Trutzler has adapted his creations to explain how Children's Fairyland got its "magic key." After an ogre steals the key, a music box maker and his animal friends ultimately prevail, and send the magic key to Fairyland. Designed and written for Fairyland by Wolo. Puppets by Lewis Mahlmann..

February 15-17, 22-24, 29-Mar.2  
11 am - 2 pm - 4 pm  
The Princess and the Pea  
Prince Timid's mother wants to prevent

his marriage so devises tests for the Princesses who wish to marry him. Enter Princess Maladroite, the most unlikely of choices. Through a series of comic exploits, the Princess passes the test and foils the Queen's plans. Based loosely on the Hans Christian Anderson classic tale. Puppets and script by Randal Metz.

### The Independent Eye February 14 8:00 pm at Coffee Catz, Sebastopol

The Independent Eye presents "Mice," a two-minute multi-finger-puppet piece about true love, featuring the fingers of Conrad Bishop & Elizabeth Fuller as part of the annual Valentine's Day Love Salon, featuring music, song, stand-up and spoken word by top regional artists. Call 707-824-4307 for information. Donation.

## MARCH 22: NEXT GUILD MEETING AND SPECIAL WORKSHOP

Guild Member Early Registration for Object Animation Puppetry Workshop by Liebe Wetzel  
Date: Sat March 22 2-5 pm  
**This will be a 3 hour workshop, with Guild meeting and Performance Potpourri happening after the workshop.**

There are only 20 spaces available. Guild members can sign up for this exciting workshop before registration is open to the public (before Feb 15th) by contacting Herbert Lange at [lange.herbert@gmx.net](mailto:lange.herbert@gmx.net) or (415) 240-6246 with your name, email or regular address and phone number.

Location: Vallejo Music Theatre building, The Old Post Office, at 823 Marin Street, Vallejo.

Fee: Guild members \$10 and non Guild members \$30 (or they can join Guild and come for \$10) **NOTE: THIS IS A**



*On March 22 Liebe Wetzel will teach a guild sponsored workshop in object theatre. Guild members have priority registration until Feb. 15 when the workshop will be opened to the general public. REGISTER NOW TO HOLD YOUR SPOT. Details above and below and on mailer page of newsletter.*

**FEE FOR THE WORKSHOP. GUILD MEETING IS FREE.**

## WANTED

### SEEKING ACTOR/VENTRILOQUIST OR PUPPETEER . . .

A one-act play, **BLUES FOR NON-SINGER** is in development for fall 2009. I am seeking an actor/ventriloquist or puppeteer here in the San Francisco Bay Area. If interested please contact me by email or forward this to someone who may desire to be involved.

**SCENARIO:** A ventriloquist is in therapy? It's no joke! Alan's career and marriage are in turmoil. Instructed to bring his best friend to a session, he brings Dale, his abusive puppet partner. Humor, revelation and pain force Alan to admit and embrace his inner contradictions. Chris Rock says, "Comedy is blues for people who can't

sing." This is an evening of theatre rather than comic routines. The show will include drama, frivolity and horror. In 2003 Sid Star, my ventriloquist partner, and I wrote and performed **LAST ACT FOR WALTER GORDON** and other plays. (These plays are available.) This time I prefer to direct. Ron of Coulter and Star Ventriloquists, coulter7(at)earthlink.net (ed. Note: replace the (at) with @ for the correct address)

### WANTED: YOUR CREATIVITY AND IDEAS

After the Holiday Party, we received some nice suggestions for upcoming meetings. Thanks a lot. Please feel free to be even more inspired and add, clarify, applaud, offer your own workshop, etc.

This is our list of wishes and offers so far:

1. shadow theater
2. building and using trick marionettes
3. Theater of the Trash - proposed by Janaki for the Fall.

Idea: improvise with "trash", put together a guild show (group project) over the course of 2 further sessions and present it to the public

Here are 3 great ideas from member Robert Seidl:

4. Mold-making and casting puppet parts  
bring in clay or wood heads, hands, feet or prop and during this workshop learn how to make molds and cast copies of your part. Learn about advantages and disadvantages of different materials (plaster, RTV plastics etc.) and what's locally available (Tap plastics etc), how to make the mold, release agents, casting and what to paint it with. A condensed, interactive version of the "classic book" on the subject in an afternoon. Pay to cover the cost of materials used, go home with a copy of your part. For those willing, we could even start a SFBAPG "mold exchange" - like "open source" for puppet parts.

5. Meeting the marionettes - backstage  
It would be very nice to see close-up some marionettes, techniques and movements and their creators comments. I was just watching "The Puppeteer" DVD and found his marionettes and their movement inspiring and different. Unfortunately he is no longer alive and I have no idea where his puppets are but there is a lot of local talent we could similarly learn from. Perhaps we could even videotape some of the artists talking about how/why they came up with certain characters, movements and controls (Not quite Ken Burns for SFBAPG but you get the idea ;)

6. Bringing puppeteering - not just puppet shows - to kids  
Of course, kids love puppet shows. But can we encourage not just the viewing but also the creative aspect of puppeteering in schools etc. ? Nowadays story writing, puppet making, props, etc. have to compete with Nintendos, TV and Myspace... I am not saying either/or but what could we recommend project/curriculum wise to make puppeteering cool for different age groups (obviously much simpler for K-3 but potentially involving technology/video/computers for high schoolers) ? I am always fascinated by how large and multidisciplinary the teams for the robot challenges are. Puppeteering integrates creative writing, crafts, performing, teamwork, technology - quite a variety of skills schools already need to teach. Please go ahead now and **SHOOT US YOUR VERY OWN 25 IDEAS OR SO!**

**WANTED: SHORT PERFORMANCE PIECES FOR THE MARCH 22 MEETING. CONTACT LEE ARMSTRONG OR HERBERT LANGE.**