



# OPAL

Spring 2011

A Newsletter for Members of the Ontario Puppetry Association

*The Ontario Puppetry Association is a strong advocate for the art of puppetry in Ontario. It supports the work of puppeteers of different styles and at all levels of expertise.*



## Celebrating our past... and future!

We are the Ontario Puppetry Association. An organization dedicated to puppeteers and puppet enthusiasts alike, much like you!

Established in 1957, a group of puppeteers decided to unite the guilds of Ontario puppeteers, and formally recognize their talents into one organization. George Merten, spearheaded the creation of the Ontario Puppetry Association, and bingo, our organization is born!

55 years later and the OPA has gone through many transitions and generations of puppetry. Looking back at our past, one of the highlights was OPA's very own Puppet Centre in Toronto's north, where members were:

“featuring activities such as puppetry festivals, weekend series for young audiences and workshops or performances by notable puppeteers, as well as monthly meetings and exhibits of the OPA Collection”.

(Canadian Museum of Civilization)

Today, the OPA continues to be at the forefront of promoting the art of puppetry and local puppeteers

through a strong network of amateur and dedicated professionals. This year, we anticipate a growing trend to have more public performances, more exposure of the OPA through Community festivals and “OPA Day of Puppetry” events, and creating our own niche of “Made in Ontario” puppetry.

We are excited to see fresh ideas presented, discussed, and innovative projects spearheaded by our members. Already we have seen the creation of a portable stage on wheels, and interesting puppets with electronic gadgets. Puppetry is not what it used to be, but rather a conglomerate of arts, technology, science, music and literature... and a sprinkle of magic and imagination!

Already, the OPA has been actively working on projects such as event planning, website and media outreach, and regular (more frequent) meetings. You as a member of the OPA are welcomed to discuss, assist, and participate in sharing ideas and in the planning of any of our projects. Just let one of the executives know.

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From the President



Mike Harding

When I was beginning my career in puppetry it was encouraging to know that there was someone else, in my hometown, who was as enthusiastic about puppetry as I was. Maureen Adams was that person. As you may already know, Maureen's health has deteriorated recently and she is now in the ICU at Trillium Health Centre in Mississauga. On February 18<sup>th</sup> I visited Maureen and although she could only communicate with me by writing things down, we had a lovely conversation about puppetry, just like we always do. What does the OPA mean to me? People like Maureen are what the OPA is all about: puppet enthusiasts, spread throughout the province, offering encouragement to each other and to any new lovers of the art. May there always be another puppeteer nearby!



Hello Puppeteers and Puppet Enthusiasts!

Spring is upon us and for some of us, the countdown to March Break performances is coming close. Spring is a season of births, and the cycle of life beings again. Thus, it is time to dust off that outdoor puppet stage, and remodel some shows. Many of our members just can't wait to hear what you are up to this year. For those of you performing during the March Break, I wish you success. For others, see what our colleagues are doing... see page 5.

Puppets up!

From the Editor



Teddy Dong

**OPA Board Members, 2010-11**

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# WHAT IS UNIMA?

UNIMA CANADA is an affiliate of the **UNION INTERNATIONALE DE LA MARIONNETTE**.

It is a non-governmental organization affiliated with UNESCO. UNIMA was founded in Prague in 1929 and is the oldest theatre organization in the world. It brings people together from around the globe who contribute to the development of the art of puppetry. This is done with the objective of using this art in the pursuit of values such as peace and mutual understanding between peoples regardless of race, political or religious convictions or cultural differences.

UNIMA currently has seventy-one national centres throughout the world. Representatives from these centres meet in different countries every four years. Today there are several special working committees one of which is the North American Commission to promote and develop the art of puppetry through exchanges and meetings between puppeteers, puppet companies and



producers at festivals in Canada, United States, Mexico and the Caribbean islands. UNIMA as recently published A World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts.

UNIMA CANADA is an independent, Canadian, non-profit organization operating under the principles and statutes of the international body. The official languages of UNIMA CANADA are English and French. Its operation, activities and communications are in both languages.

At present it consists of two sections – Ontario and Quebec each working in cooperation with its provincial organizations – The Ontario Puppetry Association and the Association québécoise des marionnettistes.



The goals of UNIMA CANADA are:

- 1) to promote the art of puppetry through facilitating exchanges and meetings between puppeteers within and outside Canada.
- 2) To promote and preserve the heritage and traditions of the art of puppetry throughout Canada.
- 3) to facilitate and support national and international representation of puppetry by the organization of conferences, round tables, symposia and festivals.
- 4) To publish and distribute articles, research results and data related to the art of puppetry.



*Written by David Smith*

*UNIMA-CANADA  
(Ontario) Counselor  
UNIMA-CANADA Vice  
President  
Member – North  
American Commission*

## Why I Joined The OPA – Or, I Always Rush In Where Angels Fear To Tread.

By Christine Caroppo



Hello, fellow members! As a newbie OPA member and also member of the Board, I thought I'd introduce myself. I live in Toronto and work part time at the Royal Ontario Museum as a Gallery Text Editor. That means I edit

and fact check [some of] the labels you see associated with artifacts when you visit the ROM. My background training is in archaeology.

I decided to join the OPA when my son, Garnet Clarence, also a newbie member, wanted to write and perform a puppet show for one of his courses in high school this year.

Not a logical step, you might argue. Well, we attended the Day of Puppetry [wonderful, BTW, hope we do it again] in the fall of 2010 by way of getting some experience and then later mistakenly attended the AGM thinking it was another workshop. It was all part of the evil plan, I'm sure, to recruit new members to the Board.



While at the AGM (and too polite to bail when we realized that it was a boring meeting and *not* a cool workshop), I couldn't help but apply my previous experience in management of non-profit, volunteer organizations (I was President of the Ontario Archaeological Society <http://www.ontarioarchaeology.on.ca/index.php> for a zillion years) and noticed that the OPA needed some help in updating their Constitution and By-laws to reflect current practice.

Thus was I elected to the Board with absolutely no puppet experience whatsoever! I'm looking forward to working with the OPA Board this year to help update their basic organizational structure and functioning. Boring, I know, but somebody has to do it! ;)

We look forward in reading your story on

**“how your puppet troupe got started!”**

Submissions for the Summer OPAL is **June 1<sup>st</sup>**... just in time for Summer Break.



On behalf of the OPA team,

We wish everyone a safe and fun-filled March Break, as well as festive spring celebrations



# Why Puppets? Why Now? Why Here?: An Interview with Vice President Jamie Ashby

By Susan Brown, originally for *The Chronicle*, Durham College

Puppets. The very word carries so many associations, from children's birthday parties to a playful pastime.

This medium has been entertaining people of all ages for decades and has evolved into musicals and television programs, such as *Avenue Q* and *Puppets Who Kill*, that both satirize issues related to class and racism, for example, and grab the attention of mature audiences.

Fans of the art continue to enjoy its innovation with the ever-growing puppet projects that are emerging due to a contemporary underground performance culture seen across the GTA.

"I think puppetry taps into something essential," said Jamie Ashby, vice president of the Ontario Puppetry Association.

"It is a lot like zombies, vampires and other undead things. In the hands of a skilled manipulator, even a sleeping or thinking puppet seems to be alive, even when it is not moving at all. It has breath to it. This forces us, even unconsciously, to question such binaries as life-and-death and good-and-evil."

Ashby insists true puppetry isn't dead and explains the evolution of puppetry in Canada as having developed a tradition of innovative recycling.

Since specific puppet theatre traditions such as the Punch and Judy show never took off in Canada, puppet artists have had to look elsewhere for techniques and ideas related to the craft.

He says the Bunraku tradition, which was founded in Japan, has proven to be an inspiration for a variety of companies, such as Puppetmongers Theatre in Toronto and Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia, both of which have drawn upon traditional stories from different cultures when developing their productions.

However, Ashby doesn't want Westerners to think ancient traditions are the only forms of puppetry from which artists can develop their style.

He agrees traditions help shape our collective past, but even Japan carries subforms of puppet theatre like *Otome* or "Maiden" Bunraku, which dates from the early 1900s and is performed only by women.

Ashby is influenced by the tradition of bricolage in his own creative endeavors, which is the ability to be resourceful with whatever materials are at hand.

While working on his PhD dissertation, writing conference papers and working as a teaching assistant, Ashby balances his love for puppets with

his other responsibilities and works on reexamining how to create, describing his rough-and-ready performance style as being partly intentional because he wants to give his ideas physical form as soon as possible.

He and his performance partner Grey Muldoon approach productions with an autobiographical feel, telling stories on an emotional and semiotic level.

"Our most ambitious production was *Home and Away* in 2008, which was presented by the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama at the University of Toronto," said Ashby. "It was a largely autobiographical movement and puppet theatre piece that addressed the theme of human migration and the emotions and memories surrounding the ideas of home and away."

Ashby and Muldoon collaborated with Zoe Ludski and Lori Nancy Kalamanski, as well as various other local artists. The workshop performances were in March 2008, but the development process began in February 2007.

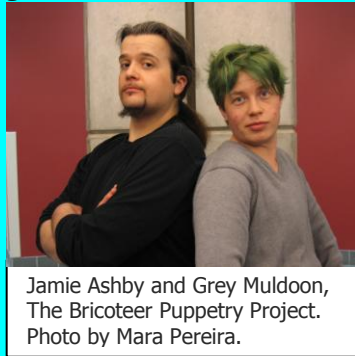
"Like most things in the arts, I think puppet theatre ebbs and flows in terms of popularity and productivity," he said. "There have been several apparent 'revivals' of puppet theatre in North America. Each one has been greeted as some kind of renaissance, but obviously the art never disappeared."

Ashby credits Rosalynde Osborne Stearn as being an important figure in such a revival in Canada, which began in the early 1920s. More recently, a number of young and emerging puppet artists have been inspired by Ronnie Burkett, an internationally renowned performer, puppeteer and playwright, and television programmes featuring puppetry, such as *Nanalan*, which was created by the now disbanded company The Grogs.

"A puppet that is no longer being used to communicate with an audience is not really a puppet anymore," he said. "It is just an object, a thing. That thing still has historical and even sentimental value as an artifact, just like a painting or a sculpture. But it has lost something."

Puppets are anti-celebrity and go against the mainstream theatre culture, which presents advantages for the independent artists of Toronto: the art is cheap and puppets already have larger-than-life personas.

Puppet creators like Ashby see the industry as a vastly expanding investment, and his next major production will be a heavy metal puppet opera based on the stories surrounding the Vikings landing and settling for a time in Newfoundland.



Jamie Ashby and Grey Muldoon,  
The Bricoteer Puppetry Project.  
Photo by Mara Pereira.

# Special Events

## BlueInk Puppetry Saturday March 5<sup>th</sup>, 11:00am Victoria Harbour Public Library

Uh oh, Teddy has lost it (again!)  
He bumped his head on the corner of his bed, and now he tells fractured tales... yikes!

The Three Little Fish and the BIG Shark  
Little Froggy Fu-fu  
Country Mouse & City Mouse

Admission is free (Donations to the local Food Bank is appreciated)



March 15 – 18, 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
**MARCH BREAK PUPPET WORKSHOPS**

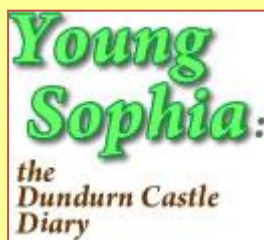
Puppets in the Castle:  
A Children's Puppet Construction and Performance Workshop  
Dundurn National Historic Site, 610 York Blvd, Hamilton, Ontario  
Learn the history and method of the

various types of puppets and practice proper manipulation techniques. In each session, children will construct different types of puppets and will perform short plays with their new puppets before taking them home. Attend one, two, three or all four sessions. Bring a drink and snack.

Ages: 7 years and older.

Cost: \$30.00 per day. \$100.00 for all 4 classes.

Pre-registration required



April 5, 6, 7 11:00 am & 1:00 pm  
**YOUNG SOPHIA:  
THE DUNDURN CASTLE  
DIARY**

Hamilton Academy of Performing Arts  
108 Park Street West, Dundas

The history of Hamilton and Dundurn Castle comes alive with this engaging one-act table-top puppet show that imagines life as described in the 1846 diary of Sophia MacNab in the mansion with her younger sister Minnie, and her famous father Sir Allan Napier MacNab. These shows are designed for school bookings but are also open to the general public.

Ages: all ages

Cost: Students \$5.00, adults \$12.00, teachers FREE

[School bookings include study guide]

## The Bricoteer Puppetry Project Presents a Workshop for Adults for World Storytelling Day

(Theme: Water)

Sunday, March 20, 2011: 10:00 a.m. ♦ 4:00 p.m.

Open Door Designs, 1597 Dupont St., Toronto, ON

Please register at:

<http://www.opendoordesigns.ca/Workshop.html>

To learn more about The Bricoteers, please visit:

<http://web.me.com/jamesashby/>

\$180 (\$120 for students and artists; sliding scale also available, e-mail us at **bricoteer@me.com**. All materials are included, but feel free to bring some of your own!

This storytelling workshop will allow participants to transform ordinary items such as newspaper, tape, and gift wrap into puppets in an exploration of the potential for imagination to transform and reshape the everyday world. We will build our characters and our story together from scratch. We will practice the fine art of collaboration. We will learn to see old things in new ways.

In celebration of World Storytelling Day, we will be exploring the official theme of Water, a very appropriate theme here in Canada, with our oceans, rivers, and lakes!





## BRITISH COLUMBIA

### Juniper Tree Puppets

The Wisdom and Art of Finger Puppet Theater

Vancouver BC workshop April 16, 17 2011

Join us for a weekend workshop to explore the creativity as well as the hidden meaning in Finger Puppet Theater.

cost – \$145 plus \$15 materials for puppet making.

contact [suzanne@junipertreepuppets.com](mailto:suzanne@junipertreepuppets.com) for more information.



## ALBERTA

### The Old Trout Puppet Workshop

The Erotic Anguish of Don Juan.

The Ghost of **Don Juan** is summoned from Hell to repent for his sins, and to tell us the tale of his nefarious life so that we may avoid his fate. But does he truly repent? Is he a monster or a saint? He will attempt to save us from our amorous errors, and deliver a sermon of universal love. In the end, we are liberated from our fears, and what we thought would be a simple evening at the theatre becomes a transcendental orgy that will change us forever. Most nights, anyway. Depends on the audience.

Created by Vanessa Porteous, Mercedes Bádiz-Benét & George Fenwick.

**Premiere:** Alberta Theatre Projects March 29 – April 11, 2009.

### KayBridge Productions

#### THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

It's springtime and the Queen wants to make sure the Prince marries the "Perfect Princess". But when the Prince meets Winnifred, who is all dirty while pruning and planting a garden, the Queen sets out to make it as difficult as possible to prove Winnifred is worthy of royalty. Can Winnifred teach the Queen to leave her castle and stop to smell the roses?

30 minute puppet show plus post-show workshops with Puppeteer and Naturalists.

Preschool-Grade 2 March 7-25

More information and to book, please call 780-496-6955



## QUEBEC

### Théâtre Incliné will be performing Train

With his bowler hat and long coat, Kenji takes the train to bring a bowl of snow to his dying sister. Marie flies to Japan to keep a promise she made to her son. It is the story of a meeting, a trip in a world filled with strange characters and sketches of imagination.

Centre Culturel Andre Malraux

Scène Nationale de Vandeoeuvre

March, 22 - 25

<http://centremalraux.com>



# What's Up With Puppets! - Dan Wood – Feb 9, 2011

## Mirvish Announces War Horse is Coming

**War Horse** is coming to Toronto. If you have heard of this production you can understand my enthusiasm. If you haven't heard of it you are in for a treat. It is an inspiration. It is a story told from the perspective of a horse who participated in World War 1. It was a war where more than 9 million horses died.



**War Horse** is a Production of the National Theatre of England with Handspring Puppet Company of South Africa. I haven't seen a live production but the DVD **Making War Horse** is great. It shows the development and production of the show and how they used a novel as inspiration. The puppet construction was well documented and performances are layered with emotion and

technique.

Handspring Puppet Company ( [handspringpuppet.co.za/](http://handspringpuppet.co.za/)) was founded in 1981 and has produced eleven plays and two operas. They received the prestigious Olivier Award in England for **War Horse**. Their book **Handspring Puppet Company** is an amazing book and should be on the shelf of any puppeteers' library.

It is great to see puppetry elevated to such a level. It shows clearly how puppetry is an integrated art form of dance, acting, mime and animation. I can't wait to see the show in person.



Here is the exciting part. The show will be built and produced in Toronto according to the Mirvish press release. That means they will need people for a variety of things. Puppet builders, puppet wranglers, repair and maintenance, performers and more will be needed. The whole thing will raise the profile of puppetry.

*Dan Wood is a Board of Trustees for the Ontario Puppetry Association.*



## AN INVITATION TO ALL OPA MEMBERS AND ANY OTHER 'PUPPET PEOPLE'

UNIMA CANADA members, the Puppetmongers in Toronto will be hosting our second Annual General Meeting on Sunday June 5th in conjunction with their FRESH IDEAS IN PUPPETRY WORKSHOP & PUPPET SLAM at the University of Toronto Drama Department. Arrangements are being made to transport a contingent of Quebec puppeteers for this event. We will continue to rotate our AGM between Ontario and Quebec.

The morning and early afternoon sessions will be 'Fresh Ideas' presented by a series of selected delegates responding to a Call for Ideas. At 4:00 PM there will be UNIMA-CANADA reception and AGM in the foyer outside the theatre for all delegates and any interested parties. There will be no charge for non "Fresh Ideas" registrants. In the evening there will be a PUPPET SLAM presented by selected delegates. The admission to the Slam is included in the Fresh Ideas fee and for others there will be a \$25 admission

UNIMA-CANADA (Quebec) are arranging for a group of Montreal puppeteers to come to Toronto for this event. This is a wonderful opportunity to expand your connections!

Mark this date on your calendar and look for more details from Puppetmongers.

### ANOTHER UNIMA-CANADA EVENT:

The UNIMA North American Commission will be meeting at the PUPPETS UP! International Puppet Festival in Almonte August 5- 7, 2011. The principal objective of the UNIMA North American Commission is to work for the promotion and development of puppetry art in North America by creating opportunities for exchanges and encounters between puppeteers, puppet companies, organizers and puppet festivals in Canada, United States and Mexico.

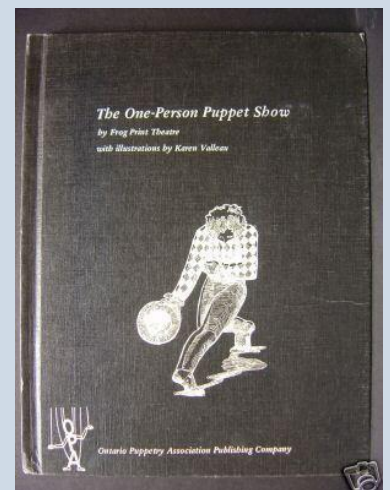
Presently there are thirteen members in the commission representing Canada, USA, Mexico and Puerto Rico all of whom are involved in various aspects of puppetry. The Commission first met in Jonquiere, Quebec in 2006 and since then they have met each year Atlanta, Mexico City, in rotation and now it is Canada's turn once again. Since now UNIMA CANADA once again represents the entire country it is appropriate that we meet at the only established Canadian international puppet festival outside of Quebec.

## For the eyes

**HEYYYYY!** Recently, I became interested in conducting one-person puppet shows. So I went to the local library and **look what I found!** A book all about how folks who did puppet shows by themselves, and lookie-lookie... it is published by the Ontario Puppetry Association!

**The One-Person Puppet Show**, by Frog Print Theatre  
ISBN: 0919065074

A must read for all OPA members!



Membership dues are to be mailed to the new mailing address.  
**Ontario Puppetry Association**  
c/o: 301- 570 Eglinton Avenue West  
Toronto, Ontario M5N 1B7

OPAL submissions may be mailed to:  
**OPAL Editor.**  
c/o: Teddy Dong  
106 Hastings Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M4L 2L2

Or through e-mail:  
puppeteer@live.ca

OPAL  
Street.

OPAL,  
The info  
road



The fast lane to puppetry-related information!

Share something today!

**Due date** for the Summer OPAL is

**June 1st,**

just in time for Summer Break

Have you made the switch?

Your OPAL is also available in digital format; to cut down on postage costs and unnecessary paper use. Several internet service providers offer free e-mail accounts. Also, with the digital format, members can print off several copies or electronically forward the OPAL to interested individuals. Register today by sending an e-mail to: puppeteer@live.ca and enjoy your OPAL electronically.

List your  
event here  
in the next  
OPAL!

Board of Trustees' Meeting  
April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011

**Please contact a board member if  
there is something that you to be  
discussed.**



**More than just a puppeteer!** by Teddy Dong

I run a puppet troupe. And like many others worldwide who believe in the art, I have fun performing, and enjoy sharing creativity and imagination with others. Yes, that makes me a part-time puppeteer, running my own troupe that has the potential to grow... and being my own boss!

# “That’s Weird!”

Sure it’s easy to poke fun, ridicule, or tease... puppeters endure all-too-frequent taunting, bullying, and negativity toward our profession. But think about this: puppets are another medium to present a story... for some troupes it is even in 3D and surround sound! Television will never replace the puppet stage, and animation will never replace puppetry.

As a puppeteer, I feel many of our grown-ups [and children!] have forgotten what it was like to be kids. Remember a world that is innocent, but also based on simple rules such as being good, staying healthy, positive manners, and looking after our planet.

**Puppeteers illustrate the need to laugh and to become silly.** Despite of how the show is produced, the audience often loses itself to the current world around them and enters into a world of make-believe. Hey, we are the ones educating and entertaining *your* kids!

**We are more than just puppeteers!** I recently witnessed an elderly couple who watched a puppet performance, “Three Little Pigs”. They became so engaged into the program that not only were they bursting in laughter midway, but also became the more youthful members in the audience!

At another venue this happened in the audience during a puppet performance:

[Mom]: Honey, he’s fallen asleep.  
[Dad]: Ok, let him sleep.  
[Mom]: Let’s go, then.  
[Dad]: No! I want to see this!  
[Mom]: C’mon...  
[Dad]: Wait, dear... I really want to see this!  
[Mom drags both son and Dad out]



And those moments are again, why I feel it is more than just being a puppeteer. After all, I enjoy being a story-teller, making people laugh, being my own boss...and best of all: getting paid for it!

Got something to say?

Photos of your latest and greatest performance?

A story or idea to share?

Submit all OPAL editorials and columns to:

[puppeteer@live.ca](mailto:puppeteer@live.ca)

Or mail them to:

OPAL Editor

c/o: Teddy Dong

106 Hastings Avenue

Toronto, Ontario M4L 2L2

**This space is reserved for  
OPA members’ stories!**



## *Ontario Puppetry Association*

### **Membership Form**

One Year Membership is \$30 Cdn. Please make cheque or money order payable to the Ontario Puppetry Association and mail to:

Ontario Puppetry Association  
c/o 301-570 Eglinton Avenue West  
Toronto, Ontario M5N 1B7

Name:.....

Company / Group (optional):.....

Address:..... Phone: (.....).....

City:..... Prov.:..... Fax: (.....).....

Postal Code:..... E-Mail:.....

Website:.....

.....

### **Contact the OPA**

**By Phone:** 1-800-379-0446

**On the Web:** [www.onpuppet.ca](http://www.onpuppet.ca)



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