

The Ontario Puppetry Association Newsletter

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OPAL



The Daisy Theatre's Ronnie Burkett - Puppets are best when the venues are small - *page 2*

Looking Back and Moving Forward - OPA Celebrates 60 years with a look back at Nikki Tilroe - *page 4*

Navigating the Trillium Foundation Grant System - One Group's Experience - *page 6*

Giving a Puppetry Talk with Your Performance - *page 8*

PLUS Complete Members Listings - *page 10*

*Celebrating Our
60th Anniversary!*



The Daisy Theatre's Ronnie Burkett:

Puppets are best when (the venues) are small

By Patrick Langston
Published in the Ottawa Citizen, November 24, 2016

For Canadian master puppeteer Ronnie Burkett, success turned out to be too much of a good thing.

Burkett says his goal when he set out years ago was to perform in large regional theatres where audiences of several hundred could applaud his subversive adult puppet shows. Problem was, when he got there he found it wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

"Puppets are best when (the venues) are small," says the Toronto-based artist. "So now, I'm playing smaller venues and drawing in the crowds."

Burkett, now 59, also realized that his audiences were, like himself, aging, and that if he wanted to keep working for another couple of decades (the man does love to work), he'd have to start drawing younger faces to the box office.

"I was too old to be the hot, young thing, but too young to be the elder statesman," he says.

So he blew up his tried and true approach to marionette shows that had a clear through line and set script. Instead, he reached back in time to create The Daisy Theatre, an intimate, semi-improvised, cabaret-style show.

The show changes each night, with Burkett drawing on a stable of more than three dozen marionettes to tell multiple stories. The stories promise to be, by turns or all at once, biting, poignant, topical and funny.

You can expect to see some familiar faces including Mrs. Edna Rural, a lady from Turnip Corners, Alta., who Burkett describes as "that weird Canadian who's confused, racist and political in her own way, but doing her best."

Also on board: Miss Lillian Lunkhead, the inept, aging actress who Burkett says, "represents that terrible period of Canadian theatre called the Dominion Drama Festival when everyone had to have plummy, British accents." Watch, too, for the ultimate innocent, the fairy child Schnitzel.

The show, which has vaudevillian components, had its genesis in Burkett's much-awarded, 1990s show Tinka's New Dress. Like that show, The Daisy Theatre is rooted in underground, anti-Fascist shows that Czech puppeteers performed during the Nazi occupation. Burkett, who'd read about the Czech shows, says Tinka's New Dress grew out of a right-wing swing in some of Canada that saw the rise of the Reform Party and the backlash against victims of the AIDS crisis.



Now he's brought some of that Czech-inspired theatre to life again with The Daisy Theatre.

"I can't believe that my little theatre is relevant again after all these years," says the Toronto-based puppeteer.

The Daisy Theatre isn't a departure from Burkett's earlier work just by virtue of being partially improvised. He's also introduced some audience participation – not an easy thing for a self-confessed control freak (and really, what else could you call a guy who makes a living by yanking on strings to create an entire world?). Inviting a couple of audience members on stage "makes the moment authentic, but that's a weird thing to say because it's puppets and theatre isn't real," says Burkett. He adds that he doesn't make fun of the audience participants, but instead gives them "a job to do."



He says that all these change-ups in the way he creates art were initially nerve-wracking. "I've never been so scared back stage."

Even so, Burkett sees the new show as an important stage in his artistic trajectory. Three decades after starting to perform his own theatre, he says, "I don't feel I've explored the solo show to the maximum yet. The first half (of my career) was about technique and building audiences. Now the thing to explore is, 'What do (I) want to do?'"

- Images**
Cover Puppeteer Ronnie Burkett surrounded by the cast of *The Daisy Theatre*, an intimate, semi-improvised, cabaret-style show
Left Esme Massengill
Top Schnitzel
Bottom Jolie and the band

Mr. Burkett is an Honorary Lifetime Member of The Ontario Puppetry Association.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

OPA Celebrates 60 Years with a look back at Nikki Tilroe

By Karen Waterman

Waterwood

When I was young and just starting my theatrical career, the Ontario Puppetry Association was an inspiring place to visit. You could learn a lot and be totally in awe of the many performances and the wonderful museum! You could attend workshops, see plays, rehearse shows, hold a reception and try out new works. You could even meet Jim Henson when he came to town! You were always among kindred spirits who graciously offered help and advice to new puppeteers. I fondly remember conversations and demonstrations with Ken and Dorothy MacKay, Nancy Cole, Jeff Essery, Maureen Adams and David Smith. There were many enthusiastic people. One of my greatest mentors and guiding lights was Nikki Tilroe.

Nikki is probably best known for her work on television as the Mime Lady on T.V.O's Today's Special and on Fraggle Rock but I had the privilege of working with her in her company Frog Print Theatre and with the Paul Gaulin Mime Company. Nikki taught at the University of Hawaii among other places. She was a dancer and a Reiki Master as well.

She studied puppetry with Bohuslav Olshina, a Czech puppeteer who stressed the importance of the breath in giving life to the hand puppet. In 1975 she received a citation of excellence from UNIMA U.S.A. Studying and performing mask and mime with Paul Gaulin gave her a new depth of understanding which she applied to puppet movement. Nikki was an expressive actress, and a challenging director who passed on her great discipline and love of the theatre to all of her students.

At the Puppeteers of America Conference in Ottawa in 1996, Nikki gave two workshops called "Care and Maintenance of the Puppeteer" and "Drama in Puppetry – from Conception to Performance". When Nikki spoke, you listened! She was like a queen holding court and her loving admirers sat at her feet while she spun great stories of her adventures. Of course, you would also have to get up and move around until you were exhausted, but you always learned so much from her sessions.

Nikki created many original puppet shows but two of my favourites were "The Grasshopper and the Ant" and a Japanese Folktale called "The Magic Teapot". We performed them at the Brookline Puppet Showplace in Boston. I will never forget the surprise on the audience's faces when Nikki, Karen Valleau and I came out to take our bows, three small ladies. They must have thought there were more puppeteers backstage because there was so much action in the show. Nikki said, "For every minute seen on stage there must be at least an hour of rehearsal." She influenced so many wonderful puppeteers.

Sadly Nikki passed away on Sept. 1, 2005 at the age of 63. She lived her life so creatively and with great artistic passion. She influenced everyone she met and her dynamic personality will never be forgotten.



Nikki Tilroe 1941-2005

Here are some of Tilroe's words of wisdom to inspire you

On Awareness

- Puppeteers must be aware of what they know and what they need to learn.
- You need muscle strength and control, flexibility, joint mobility, overall endurance, adjustment of energy use, breath control and relaxation techniques.
- Keep yourself healthy! Attend to injuries and muscle strains right away.
- Warm up physically and vocally before performing.
- Develop your skills for visualizing, sensing, listening, stretching and identifying tension in the body.
- Become aware of your muscles needed to animate the puppet expressively.
- Keep in shape! Maintain optimum performing energy and physical readiness.
- Apply relaxation techniques.
- Be gentle with yourself.
- By aligning, nurturing and rebalancing our bodies, it will prepare us for doing our best vocal and movement performing.

On Creating a Show

- A puppet's walk and first entrance must establish his character.
- A puppet show is a piece of theatre.
- Incorporate visual thinking in your script writing and rehearsal development.
- Build suspense, conflict and high personal character stakes.
- Create a specific environment.
- Walks can establish character traits, use the breath to show emotions.
- Use stops, starts, turns and gestures with the hand puppet.
- Build physical puppet body movement into dramatic situations. Play with rhythm and cadences.
- Refine blocking through rehearsal.

Navigating the Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant System – One Group’s Experience

by Kerry Corrigan
Studio Babette



Several years ago, Studio Babette partnered with the Ontario Puppetry Association to apply for an Ontario Trillium Foundation Capital Grant. The Foundation allows groups that are not ‘not-for-profit’ to partner with a group that is. Happily, we were awarded the grant in 2010. Could reading about our experience inspire you to apply?

But first, a bit of history about our group to set the tale. Studio Babette Puppet Theatre was formed in Hamilton in the fall of 2007 and six months later we performed our first play with puppets, Carlos and his 5 Reasons. We were three women on our way, not even breaking even but having a ball! We performed that play 12 times in 2008, and then in 2009 teamed with a local amateur theatre to mount our large-scale play with puppets, A Royal Pain, which required 12 singing and acting puppeteers and a large scrolled set.



We continued to build our repertoire that year and the next, with a commedia dell’arte Puclinella, and some small scale Fairy Tales for really young audiences. It was in the fall of 2009 that we started to think about another story that we were keen to mount. This show would explore the rich history of Hamilton, and possibly be a good source of educational entertainment for local students. In 1846, young Sophia MacNab, aged 13, had written a diary while growing up in Dundurn Castle. Her papa was prominent local and federal politician and society fixture Sir Alan Napier MacNab. During the nine month course of the diary,

Sophia’s dear mama passed away after a lengthy illness and Sophia and her little sister Minnie carried on in the large mansion, supported by the remaining family, their poodle puppies, Finn and Finette, and the doting staff.

We knew that to do this magnificent story justice, we would need to seriously upgrade our tech equipment, which until that point consisted of a portable CD player and some clip-on lights from Staples.

Grant opportunities all seemed to have the same requirement, we had to be registered as a ‘not-for-profit’ company. We investigated doing that but decided against the idea for a number of reasons. We didn’t feel we could pull together the manpower to form a governing board willing to oversee our little endeavour, and we weren’t intending to build a company that would carry on after we had retired. We simply wanted to create puppetshows as long as we were supported by audiences and bookers (which was happening!).

Phil Arnold, then president of the OPA, suggested a solution. Studio Babette could apply to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for a Capital Grant by collaborating with the not-for-profit Ontario Puppetry Association. Studio Babette would do all of the (considerable) work of applying for the grant, and the OPA would act as our collaborator. It sounded too good to be true! We quickly arranged a meeting with our local Trillium Rep, who confirmed everything that Phil had told us, and we were on our way.



We asked for money to buy light and sound equipment. We needed to light up a dark room, and include colour effects and shadow play,. We also wanted high-quality sound capable of precise effects timing. We had come from the world of theatre where tech greatly adds to a production. We got three quotes, and put together past and projected budgets. The OPA provided us with a list of officers and their yearly financial statement.

The hardest part of the grant was explaining what we wanted to do and how it fit into the mandate of worthwhile theatre! We emphasized that we would be performing for mostly students, and that Dundurn National Historic Site would act as historical advisers and fact checkers. Indeed heir support was invaluable in getting this site-specific project off the ground.

We asked for \$9500. and that’s what we got! (Unfortunately, when submitting the quote, we forgot to add the tax, so we were short for our wish list, and cordless body mics had to be dropped from the order. We still need them and hopefully will find a way soon to afford them.)

Anyone who has ever written a grant proposal knows how much work it is. It’s not something you do in an evening. You have to spread the work out over many days, as you gather up all of your letters of recommendation and your media coverage. You need everyone’s resume and personal data, plus you must be able to convey your plans concisely and fervently. You also need solid financial projections, with confirmed bookings, and support from other sources. The Trillium staff are, as expected, extremely helpful and accommodating.



We have since performed Young Sophia: the Dundurn Castle Diary many times, in seven different venues. We perform shows for students at Dundurn Castle that include a tour of the castle. We also use the reliable technical equipment for our other shows, a total of ten unique shows, in a variety of styles, which we tour.

The Ontario Puppetry Association is available to partner with members who need a not-for-profit partnership, upon approval of the project by the OPA Board of Directors. All grant writing and follow-up is the responsibility of the applicant.

For The Ontario Trillium Foundation, groups who aren’t Not-For-Profit may partner with the OPA for:

- Seed Grants:** Starting projects at the idea or conceptual stage
- Grow Grants:** Building on the success of a proven model or program
- Capital Grants:** Broadening access to & improving community spaces
- Collective Impact Grants:** Bringing about fundamental change with collective action

***note:** Unfortunately the \$25 million promised by Prime Minister Trudeau for 2017 applies only to Capital Grants that are for community spaces that are not mobile (i.e. buildings), which means that, for the moment, you can’t apply for equipment as we did. However, granting guidelines are always evolving so keep an eye on the OTF website.*

Images
Left Helena Adamczyk, Marie Franek & Kerry Corrigan with Minnie & Sophia and their puppies Finn & Finette
Top Sir Alan Napier MacNab, with his daughters, accepts the Trillium Foundation Plaque from MPP Ted McMeekin in 2010
Top Stage Manager Filomena Sienna always enjoys running Studio Babette’s Sound & Light Board

Giving a Puppetry Talk with your Performance

by **Elise Handelman**
Puppets To Go

Recently a temple in Miami, Florida, called my husband, Bob Nathanson, for a repeat performance of Little Red Riding Hood, for 100 children in Grades K-2, as he had performed for the temple previously.

However, she asked if we could also do a Puppetry Talk for 100 children in Grades 3 - 5. The Temple was having an Enrichment Day a few weeks later. The following week, the Art Teacher would have them make different types of puppets, as they'd be writing and performing fractured fairytales.

Our answer was “yes,” and we designed a program perfect for this group.

While the K-2 students were watching Little Red Riding Hood, the children had “fake” screams when they saw the wolf. It was really funny hearing them scream, knowing they weren’t really scared. Following the performance, he demonstrated the hand, rod and mouth puppets he used. And as Bob does after all his performances, he asked the children if they had questions for him. They had very good questions.

For the students in Grades 3-5, the session started with Bob performing seven minutes of his show, The Tortoise & the Hare, to give the students an overview of puppets in performance. Bob performed with hand puppets (the Tortoise & the Hare) and rod puppets (caterpillar & butterflies). This skit includes a few minutes of scenery (flowers and mushrooms) coming on to the stage, moving like a puppet, before becoming permanent scenery. This gave us the opportunity to talk to the group about whether or not they thought the flowers and mushrooms were puppets or not. Following their responses, we gave them the definition of a puppet.



At the end of the skit, Bob removed the stage curtains of his puppet booth, and demonstrated how he performed with his puppets and scenery.

Afterward, we demonstrated a variety of puppetry styles. These included: finger puppets (fingers in the legs of the elephant, so it could dance); a pop-up puppet; a dog marionette; puppets made of plastic bags that are used for tabletop puppetry (bunraku style); shadow puppets (Billy Goats) behind a shadow screen, with demonstrated use of flashlight & desktop lamp as samples; an Indonesian shadow puppet; a Caveman hand & rod puppet with trigger mechanized eyes; and a rod-mouth-hand puppet chef.

When we asked how many kids had seen the stage version of The Lion King, many hands went up. We told them that Julie Taymor designed the puppets in that production. Then we told them that Taymor designed the giant Rat that we were showing them from Elizabeth Swados’ 1980 play, The Haggadah.

Following the demonstration of these different styles of puppetry, we showed some ‘found objects puppets’ by showing them two Tide detergent bottles turned upside down with fake fur ‘hair’ and stick-on-eyes, as well as a grocery grabber that had two foam balls with stick-on-eyes. I also showed them a variety of plastic bowls (turned upside down, they can be used as puppet hats), bottle caps, etc. while explaining that, whatever every-day object they see, they should try thinking if they can get ideas to use these items in different ways.



We also allowed time for questions and they had some excellent ones. One child asked “How did we get inspired to get into puppetry?”

What was satisfying was that before we even arrived home, we received an email that we were inspiring and that they were very happy that we gave the students creative ideas. The sponsor promised to send photos of the student’s puppets once they completed their Enrichment Day. She did indeed send them and it was so thrilling to know how much the sponsor appreciated our presentation. Bob and I were extremely happy we were part of their project.

It made us happy to be puppeteers who could pass on our passion for this beautiful art form!!

Left Above **Images**
Left Below *Scene from Little Red Riding Hood*
Above *Materials for Puppets to Go Puppetry Talk*
 More Materials for Puppetry Talk

Ontario Puppetry Association Membership List

Honorary Lifetime Members

David Smith Marionettes	David & Muriel Smith	Kingston
Famous People Players	Diane Dupuy	Toronto
Lampoon Puppet Theatre	Johan Vandergun	Toronto
Ken McKay	Ken McKay	Toronto
Merry Folklorists	Connie Calvert	Bradford
Theatre Marionettes	Ronnie Burkett	Toronto

Groups

The Abstractions	Grant Harding	Ottawa
Applefun Puppetry	Michael Harding	Brampton
Arm's Length Puppets	Cathy Lee Keogh Hammond	Georgetown
Blue Door Marionettes	Carol Anne Gieske	Combermere
Bricoteer Experiments Theatre	Jamie Ashby	Toronto
The Creature Works	Tom Stewart	Hamilton
Dark Island Shadows	Catherine White	Toronto
Deanna Lyn Productions	Deanna Lyn Micallef	Gananoque
The Fairytale Theatre	Hugh Phillips	Toronto
Jan-Bo's Puppets	Janna Munkittrick-Colton	Belleville
KRCreativity	Ujval Dave	Brampton
PUPPET-A-GO-GO	Christine Cosby	Toronto
	Alexa Fraser	
	Trisha Lavoie	
	Clelia Scala	
Puppet n' Paints	Ellen Webb	Guelph
Puppet Pals	Chris Thompson	Pickering
Puppets Elora	Annerose Schmidt	Elora
Puppets For Goodness Sake	Brenda Reimer	New Tecumseth
Puppets to Go	Bob Nathanson	Coconut Creek, FL USA
Roundabout Exceptional Puppeteers	Elizabeth Kanski	Elliott Lake
SNAFU Dance Theatre	Ingrid Hanson	Kelowna, BC
Studio Babette	Helena Adamczyk	Hamilton
	Kerry Corrigan	
	Marie Franek	
Toronto Puppetry Collective	Joanne Bigham	Toronto
	Kimberley Howe	
	Robin Polfuss	
	Shawna Reiter	
	Marcus Sampaio	
Waterwood	Dan Wood	Toronto
W.P. Puppet Theatre	Wendy Passmore-Godfrey	Calgary, AB

Ontario Puppetry Association Membership List

Independents

Pia Banzhaf	St. Phillips, NL
Matthew Bould	Toronto
Marilyn Anne Campbell	Etobicoke
Naomi Kates	Toronto
Dahlia Katz	Toronto
Annie LaPlante	Toronto
Pat Lewis	Toronto
Nina Pariser	Hampstead, QC
Jennifer Schmidt	Toronto
Jennifer Tessier	Kitchener

In Memorium

The Perfect Birthday Party Puppet Show	Jeff Essery	Toronto
The Puppetry Guild of Peel	Maureen Adams	Brampton

Puppet Festivals 2017

Ontario

**Puppets Up! International
Puppet Festival**
August 12 & 13
Almonte, Ontario

**SpringWorks Festival
indie theatre and arts
Spring Into Fall**
October 12- 22
Stratford, ON

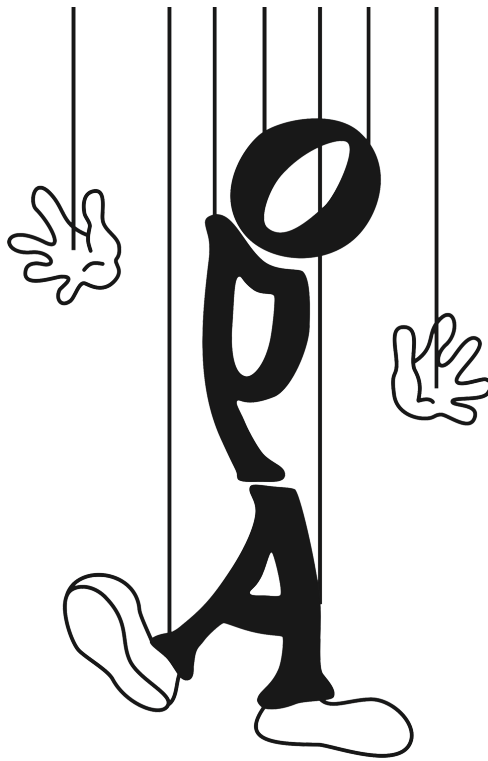
Canada

**Festival de Casteliers
Marionnetees pour
adultes et enfants**
March 8 - 12
Montreal, QB

**Theatre Alberta
Calgary Puppetry Day 2017**
March, 2017
Calgary, AB

USA

**Puppeteers of America
2017 National
Puppetry Festival**
July 17 - 22
Concordia University,
St Paul, Minnesota



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