

THE PUPPETRY LOG

COLUMBUS PUPPETRY GUILD APRIL 2006

The Columbus Puppetry Guild is chartered by the Puppeteers of America, Inc.

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Enrico Mazzanti's illustration to the first edition of *Pinocchio* (1883)

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NEXT MEETING
Sunday, April 9th
2:00 – 5:00 p.m.
FELLOWSHIP HALL OF
BROOKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
2685 East Livingston Ave.

Directions: Take I-70 to Alum Creek Drive Exit and then take Livingston Ave. east. Turn right on Brookwood Rd. and park in the lot behind (south of) the church. The Fellowship Hall is just below the sanctuary.

IN MEMORIAM: DON KIRK (1927-2006)



We were all saddened by the recent loss of Don Kirk, beloved friend and fellow puppeteer.

To celebrate Don's life and contribution to the puppetry community, Shirley Green has kindly written the following tribute.

DON KIRK, MY FRIEND

Don was my friend but I would have to correctly say "our friend," or even more correctly, "everyone's friend." There was never a person who Don ever met that wasn't instantly his friend. If he was unhappy about a situation or didn't feel well, you wouldn't have known it, because he never complained and was always cheerful with a smile on his face.

Don was such a rare human being--never talked about himself like the majority of performers in the arts. It was never "I." It was always with an interest in what the other person was doing or had to say. Self-importance was never his style. However, if any one ever had reason to feel pride in his life's work it was Don.

He was born in Indiana but grew up in Chicago. He served in the Army and then went to broadcasting school to study Communications. He met Connie, his wife of 56 years, while he was working as a radio announcer in Coshocton, Ohio, at WTNS. Don and Connie moved to Columbus, where Don worked as a radio announcer at WCOL. Later he sold insurance before forming "Kirk's Puppets" in the 1970's. Don and Connie were a team and spent many years writing and performing puppet shows for schools, parties, conferences, Renaissance Fairs, and other events all around Ohio. Their work was so well known and respected throughout the performing arts community that it quickly became a full-time profession, and continued up to their retirement in 2003 due to Don's back problems. They traveled and performed all over Ohio and--as all puppeteers know--to set up a puppet stage requires a good back. When they designed and

built their portable stage, it was back before the light-weight materials now in use were available, so it was all of wood. If there ever was a sad time for Don and Connie, and loss to the art of puppetry in Ohio, it was at his untimely retirement.

Many will remember their versions of the classic "Punch and Judy Show" and their beloved joke-telling dog "Old Rug". Old Rug was a basset hound type dog that came into being years ago when they performed shows on the third floor of the old Worthington Inn, with Bill Bauer and Alice Rhodes. Rug's name then was Old Worthy (named for the Inn) but when they went off on their own, he became Old Rug. He had long floppy ears, a shiny nose, and soulful eyes. I was clowning in those days and occasionally would be performing at the same festival or fund raiser as they were, so I was lucky to get to see them work. Old Rug was a riot. Before the main show, old Rug would warm up the audience. Connie would be standing next to the stage with mike in hand, talking to the children. Suddenly, Old Rug would show up somewhere around the stage--usually on top of it, and carry on a very funny conversation with Connie and the kids. Their most popular show was "The Three Little Pigs." Don was a perfectionist and no one was ever aware of his arm, and his hand in the puppet. Don wrote all their own material and there was never any recorded script. It was all the live voices of Don and Connie. Don also toned down the shows so as not to make children cry, like one time when a little boy was traumatized when the crocodile tried to eat Punch. Don never used the crocodile again.

The only way to describe Don's voice would be warm, friendly, and smooth as honey. Don was also an active member of the Grandparents Living Theater, where he wrote and performed in dramatic, comedic, and musical theater. His writing included several old-time radio spoofs, and he had a life-long interest in humorous and whimsical poetry for his own pleasure. In recent years Don returned to the world of radio with a monthly broadcast on Voice Corps radio, in which he selected a wide range of music, poetry, and fiction that reflected his own broad taste in the arts.

Don was a long-time member of the Puppeteers of America and the Columbus Puppetry Guild, and will be greatly missed. No matter how much in pain Don was in recent years, the Guild could always count on him to perform his "Stone Soup" for variety shows. Don had a gift of loving children, and they responded back with interest and

laughter. The children never felt intimidated or frightened.

Don and Connie have two sons of which they have been very proud. They obviously passed along their talent genes to both of them. Daniel and David both are well-known authors and illustrators of children's books. David's Miss Spider books are now a TV series, "Miss Spider's Sunny Patch Friends," which is the most colorful and best television show that I've ever seen. Among Daniel's over twenty published books is *Dogs Rule* that has a CD that comes with it of songs he composed and sings. Don was so terribly proud of his sons' achievements and just beamed when he shared them with the Guild members. Don and Connie also have six lovely grandchildren.

This has been the first time I have shed tears from hearing of a death since my husband died seven years ago. That is how fond I was of Don Kirk.

--Shirley Green

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PEN

To write this column each month is usually a joy for me. This month, however, brings a deep touch of sadness. When we think of the passing of one who so recently lived among us, we do not mourn for the deceased. Indeed most religions regard a death as passing on to another reward, and those without religion see death simply as a mortal's final chapter in this life. We mourn our loss; we sympathize with the sorrow of the bereaved. We search for the good things to remember as solace. The one thing I can vividly remember is Don Kirk's wonderful smile to everyone when they first said "Hello." His beautiful voice that fell like golden shafts on sunlit mountains. His great love for children and puppets. They seemed to go together so well when you saw Don and Connie do *Stone Soup* and many other plays. I did not know that Don wrote poetry. I only was exposed to a few of his poems at his funeral service, but they blew my mind. Eugene Field, John Masefield, and John Keats could not have done any better. Don Kirk was a very talented person. His beautiful family and lovingly devoted wife will deeply miss him. Each of us in our own lives, is the sum of many memories. Each of us learns from what we remember fondly. Each of us, in some measure, looks back to the departed and chooses that which is worth remembering. Generally, what we choose is the best of the past life—and the best is a model, which we try to emulate. "No man is an island," John Donne wrote. But we do not simply share the tolling of

the bell. We share a learning process, a degree of inspiration, a lasting lesson of friendship for some, love for others. And when we say that something of the departed remains with us, we are not speaking allegorically. We are speaking of a part of our own lives.

One of the things which always deserves to be said to those who came to extend their last respects is that they are not your last respects to Don Kirk. You have remembered; and forever filed away in your spirit this is the memory of whatever it was that linked you to him. You have come to the part of the community of mourners—to add to the mutual comfort that arises from knowing that grief is shared and understood.

John Donne also said "When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language." Most of the richness of the human experience is in what is handed down from one life to the next—not simply things of mortar and stone, but memories of what this one did or that one said or this one felt. That is why we remember the good things—because they are worth remembering, and because we, the living, have a need to remember. We have much to remember about Don Kirk.

I should like to paraphrase the words of the great Abraham Lincoln, who in a memorable address said, "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here." In this instance, Don Kirk, a respected and faithful member of the Columbus Puppetry Guild, gave himself unstintingly to the art and promotion of puppetry. The genial personality and generous instincts of this fine man will be missed not only by the officers but by everybody in the organization.

The departed never wholly leave us. We never wholly leave each other. And we remember.

Just-Stringing-Along,

Dave Greenbaum

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 19, 2006 MEETING

There were 15 persons present, including Daniel Kirk, son of Connie and Don Kirk.

David Greenbaum called the meeting to order and asked for any corrections of the last minutes. Pam Spence said that the minutes should indicate that "the discussion of the Constitution should be tabled until after The Day of Puppetry. Pam

Spence had made the motion and Sandy Barton seconded it".

There was no Treasurer's report since Rita Fullen was absent.

Pam gave the updates of what is going to happen on the Day of Puppetry and what is needed.

- There will be three shows for the afternoon.
- We'll need display tables to display puppets and marionettes.
- Frank Banks will need to talk with the custodian for set up.
- There is a need to have greeters at the door and a table set up with pamphlets. This table should be manned.
- The Planning Committee will meet on April 9th at our next puppetry meeting.
- Sandy needs bio information from the puppeteers that are going to perform, so she can put this information out to the public.
- Frank is putting information in the Brookwood's Church Bulletin and in the Church's Newsletter.
- Les Tannenbaum has it already posted on our website.
- There's a sign up for the Puppeteria – shows lasting 3-5 minutes.
- Shirley Green is making 4 large signs as part of our decorations and information.
- Karen Banks was asked to bring the puppet banner that was made approximately 20 years ago.
- The events will be posted on the Yahoo Web Site and on our Puppetry Guild Web Site.
- Karen will wear her walking stage outside, weather permitting, to advertise the Day of Puppetry.
- We'll need 3 other rooms for the workshops, and the workshops will run for 45 minutes.
- There will be no food served or sold.

The next business concerned the Tri- Guild Picnic in May. Two locations were being considered. The first choice was Brookwood Church and the second choice was Antrim Park. The date was suggested for May 21. Karen is to check on the Antrim Park location for availability. Les will negotiate with the other Guilds involved and get back to us.

The topic about flowers for funerals was discussed. Frank made a motion of no more than

\$50 be used, and Les seconded it. Pam also discussed that we should have a guideline about flowers. Shirley made a motion that Karen and Frank Banks be reimbursed for the flowers sent for Don Kirk's funeral. It was seconded by David Greenbaum.

Richard McClead brought up about performing the "Christmas Carol" at a high school in Pataskala. It was agreed that all Guild activities should be approved by members of the Guild.

We need to move forward on the archives about interviewing our puppeteers. Les will talk to Nena Couch as soon as possible to get things rolling. Frank's going to call Beth Kattleman about getting materials readied for the Historical archives. If you have any historical information you're to give it to Frank who will see that Beth receives it. Karen made the motion that this should be done, and Brian Windsor seconded it.

David asked the group about making Connie Kirk an Honorary Member of the Guild. Frank made a motion to do this and Matt Studer seconded it.

Elections for Treasurer and Vice President will be held in April. Nominations were taken from the floor. Jackie Herkowitz and Rita Fullen were nominated for Treasurer and Pam Spence was nominated for Vice President.

Frank and Karen shared information about their Benefit for Madison and for the workshop done for a group of mentally challenged adults. They indicated how touching it was to do both of these.

David brought a 30-minute video entitled "Introduction to Puppet Making" by Jim Gamble that concluded the meeting. Karen made a motion for adjourning and Frank seconded it. Refreshments were brought in by Sandy Barton.

Submitted by Karen Rae Banks - Secretary

APRIL ELECTION: CANDIDATES SPEAK

At the April 9th meeting, we will be electing our Vice President and Treasurer for a two-year term. Please make every effort to attend this important meeting.

Listed below are the names of the candidates, along with a statement by each of their qualifications and their vision of the goals of the office that they seek to fill.

Pam Spence: Candidate for Vice President



My desire to become vice president of the Columbus Puppetry Guild stems from my desire to see Central Ohio blossom into a vital puppet area. The primary duty of the vice president is programming, and I plan to organize "hands on" workshops, as well as invite puppet presenters, to help us become better at both the art and business of puppetry. I would like to schedule "work in progress" previews for guild members who desire constructive criticism and feedback from fellow puppeteers.

I also intend to explore potential grant funding and partnerships to assist us with special project—such as the Day of Puppetry—so that we can create puppet events that really pack a punch (and perhaps even a Judy...).

I have been a member of the P of A and the Guild since 2000 and perform mostly hand puppets through my Puppetkind troupe. I am a regular performer with the Columbus Metropolitan Library Summer Reading Program and make frequent appearances at preschools, day care centers and summer camps. As an arts enrichment specialist, I often work thorough grant-funded programs using puppetry, as well as other art modalities, in schools. I look forward to serving in this capacity.

Rita Fullen: Candidate for Treasurer



I feel that I have been an excellent treasurer. My past experience speaks for itself. I will faithfully pay the bills, as I have done in the past. I pay the bills on time, and that's what a treasurer does.

Jackie Herkowitz: Candidate for Treasurer



If elected to the position of Treasurer of the Columbus Puppetry Guild, I would bring a wealth of experience in administrative work involving the handling of finances. As a Professor in the Ohio State University's School of Physical Activity and Educational Services, I have generated and managed grant money from federal and private sources for various research projects. I was also President and General Manager of the Riverlea Condo Association, and a Board Member and member of the Financial Committee of the North Unitarian Universalist Congregation. My expectations as Treasurer would be to manage current funds effectively, keep accurate and readily available records, and also work at generating new sources of funds through various fund-raising activities and through the pursuit of grants for new Guild projects (especially in the areas of arts education and literacy education) from local and national funding organizations.

A PUPPET PERFORMANCE FOR MADISON AND HER FRIENDS



On March 11, Karen Rae and Frank Banks gave a special voluntary puppet performance for Madison and Her Friends at the Buckeye Hall of Fame Café. Their performance was part of an all-day celebration of Madison that included fund raising activities. Money raised at the event is used to support a special medical clinic at the Ohio State University.

When she was six months old, Madison was diagnosed with a relatively unknown genetic neuromuscular disease called Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). SMA is a group of inherited diseases that destroy the nerve cells called motor neurons controlling voluntary movements such as crawling, walking, head and neck control and swallowing. Although children with this disorder are not expected to live past the age of two, Madison is now nine years old.

For their performance, Karen and Frank did a half-hour variety show that included many of their favorite routines. They were aided by a fellow puppeteer Mike Williamson, who has helped out with some other puppet shows with the Banks. Their audience included Madison, members of her family, and her many friends. Karen and Frank felt that it was a very moving and meaningful performance in many ways.

PUPPET WORKSHOP FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTION

At the invitation of Community Connection, our Puppet Guild held a workshop for 12 Developmentally Delayed Adults, which was held from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on March 10 at Fairmoor Presbyterian Church. The workshop was conducted by Karen Rae Banks and Shirley Green. Each adult was instructed and shown how to build two simple puppets. Karen and Frank also did a short puppet performance.

FRISCH MARIONETTES: CRACKING THOSE CHESTNUTS

A Review by Pam Spence



Photo: Frisch Marionette Company

We were recently treated to a performance of The Frisch Marionettes at Abbey Theatre, in Dublin, Ohio. And what a rare treat it was! Kevin Frisch opened the show with a demonstration of his hand-carved marionette, Old King Cole. He managed to teach us volumes about how the puppet worked, how it was designed and many of the movements it was capable of performing,

without destroying the magic and illusion for the children—a marvelous accomplishment indeed. As he talked about weight and design and stringing—of interest to the older children and adults—he nevertheless kept the King animated and interacting with the children, charming them utterly.

He also demonstrated a simple scarf puppet, in the manner of Albrecht Roser. Frisch explained to the children that they could easily make such a puppet for themselves from fabric and wooden beads and then demonstrated the capability of the puppet by having the little scarf do sit-ups, play drums, and dance.

The show proper opened with a zingy hand puppet piece about a little fellow and his attempts to grow a sunflower. The next time I spend hours belaboring my dialog and script, I'm going to remember this piece because it was a beautiful example of what a puppet show does best: action! energy! humor!—fast-paced and wordless. The story was told with ACTION and the puppets were simple and highly effective (note to self: ACTION, not WORDS, makes for a great puppet show!).

Then on with the marionettes! I was sitting with Kevin Fish and Brian Windsor and their respective families. I can tell you first hand, the boys (big and little) LOVED the skeleton, as well as the acrobat, the juggler, and the snake charmer. I was even more impressed since I had had the conversation with Kevin Fish (not Frisch, although they do sound a lot alike!) a few weeks previously about how ho-hum it is that everyone has to do the skeleton and acrobat in their variety shows. Well, hush my mouth; I got to eat my words with a fork and spoon! Here were the same old chestnuts, but in a master's hand they were exquisite. Kevin Frisch takes those stock characters that some of us have seen WAY too many times and infuses them with wry humor and contagious energy. You have the sense that this is a puppeteer who never tires of thinking of new ways to work with his puppets, of adding a new wrinkle to a standard routine, of playing with the possibilities. He is obviously delighted with what he is doing, and that delight is transmitted directly to the audience.

Frisch's marionettes are a visual treat as well, whose bodies and faces put me in mind of Bil Baird's puppets. The faces are deadly caricatures—and each body and posture distinctive and appropriate to the character. The juggler's comical screwed up face and big feet provide a nice contrast to the trim, elegant acrobat; the rotund snake charmer performs a silly

dance with his mischievous snake; and the skeleton drew shouts of appreciation as he pulled himself painfully across the desert, only to leap up and cavort about, losing his head more than once. My personal favorite was the suave "entertainer" puppet who himself, manipulated a miniature "Mr. Punch" marionette.

For the finale, Kevin brought out his much larger scale, soft sculpture bear. To the delight of the children, the bear's eyes blink and the eyebrows shoot up and waggle in surprise. The baggy old bear was more than willing to have several children come up and sit with him, patting them and playing with them amid squeals of laughter.

Kevin Frisch has been a puppeteer for twenty years and got his training on the job with Nick Coppola and Puppetworks of Brooklyn. For nine years, he performed all over the metropolitan New York area, perfecting his skills and artistry as a puppeteer. In 1995, Kevin moved back to Cincinnati where he began his own company, Frisch Marionettes, styled in the tradition of the great 19th-century European puppet troupes.

The Frisch Marionettes brought home the truth that we forget at our peril: the artistry of puppetry is not simply in a clever or technically sophisticated puppet—although these puppets are incredible works of art. Rather, the real magic rests in the hands and imagination of the puppeteer. The Frisch marionettes have performed at the Abbey Theatre three times in the last two years, and considering the packed house and shining, happy faces of the children in the audience, they will undoubtedly be back again. Don't miss them!

Check out the gallery pages of their web page at www.frischmarionettes.com and prepare to be enchanted.

CALL FOR REVIEWS AND ARTICLES

Please send in any reviews, notices of upcoming puppet events or your own recent puppet-related activities. The preferred method would be an email message or attachment, but a phone call or snail mail is fine, too. Thanks, Les
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