



The official newsletter of
San Francisco Bay Area Puppeteers' Guild
*Looking for updates and missed information?
Check for it at SFBAPG.ORG*

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

January 2011



NEW YEAR, NEW GUILD MEMBER

Mike and Patty Wick are joined by Connor Michael Wick, born on November 15, 2010. Welcome, Connor, to the world and to the Guild and Congratulations Mike and Patty!

Inside this issue...

- ◆ Lemony Snicket's *The Composer is Dead* in Review
- ◆ Fratello Marionettes with *Diablo Symphony*
- ◆ Pixar Exhibit Continues
- ◆ Calendar, Guild Holiday Party and More

Other Great News for the Guild:

Guild board member and newsletter editor (as well as our guild party *Father Christmas*) Talib Huff has finished chemo and has been found to be **CLEAR OF CANCER!** What a great way to start the new year! We all wish Talib continued health improvement!



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**2010-2011 Board of Directors
and Guild Officers**

President
Conrad Bishop
eye@independenteye.org
707-824-4307

Vice President
Art Grueneberger
PuppetArt@aol.com
916-424-4736

Treasurer
Valerie Nelson
magicalmoonshine@gmail.com
707-363-4573

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

Membership Officer
Michael Nelson
magicalmoonshine@gmail.com
707-363-4573

Newsletter Editor
Talib Huff
tahuff@dcn.org
916-484-0606

Barbara Grillo
bgrillo@contracosta.edu
510 964-1513

Randal Metz
puppetcomp@aol.com
510-569-3144

Jesse Vail
jessevail@gmail.com
510-672-6900

Librarian
Lee Armstrong
images@vom.com
707-996-9474

Webmaster
Matt Baum
mattymatt@gmail.com

WHAT is going on here?!



It's the SFBAPG Holiday Party 2011!

WHEN is this shindig supposed to occur?!
>Saturday, Jan 29th from 4:30-8:30 pm

WHERE can I meet up with these crazy fun people?!
>At Christ Presbyterian Church
620 Del Ganado Road in beautiful San Rafael, California!

Ladies and Gents!

Please mark your calendars for this Guild traditional celebration of the Holidays and New Year.

This year will feature, for your viewing pleasure, Images In Motion's Original Production WATERWORKS!

ALSO:
Holiday Potluck Supper, Gift Exchange, and More!

Images in Motion New Show: Creative play abounds as a child and a duck splash through the seasons. WaterWorks is an original show, using a variety of beautifully crafted rod, shadow and hand puppets, presented by the award winning puppet company, Images in Motion.

POTLUCK SUPPER

Please your favorite dish to share with others. Appetizers for the Social and Main courses are always appreciated. Microwave and refrigerator available. Dinnerware will be provided.

ADOPT A TABLE & TRIM THE ROOM

Individuals and companies are invited to adopt a dining table. Bring in any coverings and decorations to make it a wonderful table to dine at. There will be prizes for participation, but the greatest prize of all is knowing that you're lending your artistry to make the holiday party festive! To adopt a table, contact Valerie Nelson at 707 363-4573, mail@magicalmoonshine.org. Also, holiday decorations for the room will be greatly appreciated. Doors open at 4:00, so bring in some decorations (no nails please) to trim the room. At the end you just take your decorations down and take them home.

GIFT EXCHANGE

If you wish to participate in the exchange, bring a puppet related, wrapped gift to add to the pile (in the past, \$10.00 approximate value has been suggested.) All who bring a gift will receive one.



Waterworks will be the featured show at the Guild Holiday Party, January 29!

PUPPET DISPLAY (AT THE HOLIDAY PARTY)

Do you have a puppet that you've made, that you'd like to display? A table will be provided for an informal puppet exhibit, so bring your puppet (on a stand, if needed) and share your puppet(s) with others.

PIXAR: 25 Years of Animation at the Oakland Museum, 1000 Oak St., 510-238-2200, <http://museumca.org/>

From Lee Armstrong

July 31, 2010 - January 9, 2011 The San Francisco Bay Area has emerged as a global center for animation today. *PIXAR: 25 Years of Animation* provides an unprecedented look at the renowned Emeryville-based studio and showcases the creative work behind its wildly successful computer-animated films. After its opening in New York and its five-year international tour, the exhibition comes home to Oakland. The OMCA presentation includes all of the artwork from the original presentation at MOMA, plus art from *Ratatouille*, *WALLE*, *Up*, and Pixar's latest film, *Toy Story 3*.

Pixar artifacts include pencil drawings, paintings in acrylic, castings of sculptures that form the backbone of the computer-generated images, and video interviews with artists. In addition, the exhibit shows behind-the-scenes footage of Pixar's creative process.

A highlight of the exhibition is the two special media installations- Artscape, an immersive, wide-screen projection of digitally processed images that give the viewers the sensation of entering into the original artworks; and the Pixar Zoetrope, a three-dimensional device that displays a rapid succession of images, creating the illusion of motion.

The Pixar exhibit is excellent and well worth a trip to Oakland. Our Images In Motion group went to the exhibit over the holidays and were not disappointed. Perhaps we're prejudice, as there are dozens of wonderful character castings (hard resin of the original clays sculpted by Pixar artists) at the exhibit, and most of these castings were made at the Images In Motion workshop over the past ten years by Mike Wick, Kamela Portuges-Robbins, Kieron Robbins and the rest of the team. One of the most interesting set of castings for me, were the versions of Sullivan from *Monsters Inc.* Over the course of many months, the artist, Jerome Ranft, created dozens of sculpts of the monster Sully, many of them totally different creatures, before the character was finalized. So much care and attention to character development is a good lesson for all puppeteers. Many of the Sullivan versions are



*Pixar revealed until January 9.
See it soon or miss it*

PIXAR ARTIST DISCUSSION

To Infinity and Beyond: Placing Pixar within the History of Art, Present—and Future

Jan 8, 2011 | 2:00 - 4:00 pm

*Is studio animation fine art? Join Dr. Heather Holian, assistant professor of art history at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, as she tackles this question along with artists from Pixar Animation Studios. Don't miss this last chance to see *PIXAR: 25 Years of Animation* before it closes, and hear from the artists that made the exhibition possible. Limited Seating. Included with Museum Admission.*

Heather Holian is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She has been researching Pixar Studios while teaching "The Art of Disney and Pixar." Her essay, "An Animated Debate: Studio Animation as Fine Art?" will appear in Blackwell's forthcoming anthology of animation, edited by Paul Wells and a second essay, "Art, Animation and the Collaborative Process," is currently under publication review.

on display together at the exhibit.

Another hallmark of Pixar films is the story development. There were hundreds of storyboards, encapsulating scenes from memorable movies. The artistry is amazing. One quote (paraphrased) beside the storyboards stayed with me. "If you don't have a great story, then all the technology in the world won't give you a great film" Words of wisdom for any theatrical endeavor. So hurry, the exhibit closes January 9th!

DIABLO SYMPHONY'S "WELCOME TO THE HOLIDAYS"

Review by Sharon Clay

Instead of playing percussion with the Diablo Symphony, as he sometimes does, Kevin Menegus and his partner Fred C. Riley III, performed their wonderful variety of marionettes to the accompaniment of duo pianists Nathan Cheung and Eric Tran and the symphony. OK, it is quite possible that THEY accompanied the pianists, but since we were there to see the puppets, not hear the pianists, we prefer to think that the Fratello Marionettes were the stars. The program started with the orchestra playing *Christmas Overture*, then the *Skier's Waltz* from Cinerama Holiday and the *Festive Sounds of Hanukah* and *Asleep the Snow Came flying*. After a brief pause (not the intermission), to set up the puppet stage and bring on 2 large concert grand pianos, the performance continued with "The Carnival of the Animals" by Camille Saint-Saens. I'm sure the pianists did a wonderful job, they are 2010 Award Winners in the Yen Liang Young Artist Competition, but I didn't really hear them. I was so engrossed in the expertise of the puppeteers.

Kevin started the Fratello Marionettes in 1989. He has studied with puppeteers Tony Urbano, Bob Baker, Randall Metz and Lewis Mahlmann. He has traveled all over the world performing on cruise ships. He received his Bachelor of Music in percussion performance at the University of the Pacific Conservatory of Music and has performed percussion throughout the U.S. Fred C. Riley III started his professional career in puppetry with Tears of Joy Theater where he studied hand puppets with Yang Feng. He then became a resident puppeteer at Atlanta's Center for Puppetry Arts where he performed in more than 10 productions including the title role in Jon Ludwig's groundbreaking *Wrestling Macbeth*. He also produced his own work, *Nox and Bar* as part of the centers Xperimental Puppet Theatre. He also worked with Ping Chong when he toured Japan.

The Fratello Marionettes also performed "The Carnival of the Animals" at the Guild's Puppet Day at Fairyland in August, so you may have seen them there. Many of the marionettes for this show were made specifically for this show and were wonderfully performed with incredible skill. One of the most fascinating aspects of their movements of the puppets is the way each puppet walks. Their feet touch the ground - they don't skim the ground or sail across the stage. It add so much to the believability of the performance. After the intermission and two musical numbers by the orchestra, the Marionettes returned for two selections from the Nutcracker and Dance of the Tumblers by Rimsky-Korsakov. Then they finished the show with selections from the Vaudeville Follies, the star of which is their trapeze performing marionette.



Carnival of the Animals images from Fratello Marionettes website

<http://www.fratellom.com>



Berkeley Rep premiered a major puppet production in December, Lemony Snicket's "The Composer is Dead." Below are some comments and reviews from guild members who saw the show.

From Conrad Bishop:

Amazing and sad to see a supremely gifted clown, a wonderfully quirky writer, and an orchestra pit of imaginatively designed puppets come to naught. Sheer nonsense can be fun but still requires some guiding premise and surprise, some sort of comic incongruity. The night we were there was scarcely any unified laughter - just speckles here and there - until the filmed credits played at the end. It's structured along the lines of a child's guide to the theatre, then to the orchestra, with parodies of an egocentric MC and a stuffy detective - and the sum total, for me was, "Who cares?"

It's astonishing to see Geoff Hoyle - God's gift to the Bay Area - not remotely funny: a "demonstrated" performance, very finished, but lifelessly energetic. You saw talented people working very earnestly to be nutty, but it was the work that showed, not the madness. I recalled the genius of Compagnie La Pendue at the Atlanta festival, the wildest Punch & Judy on record, I'm sure, yet exquisitely, madly precise *and* present. And I recalled "The Goon Show." (For younger souls, this was a BBC radio show with three guys, including Peter Sellers, portraying a wild array of characters, total nonsense, deliciously crazy, way beyond what Monty Python could have ever imagined. The madness was all, and the simple truth at the center was what we all feel at some point: "THIS WORLD IS CRAAAAAZY!" This show needed that.

(By the way, I posted something in this regard on the Puptcrit list. Seeing this show made me realize that several of the pieces in our new show HANDS UP! really needed much more "madness," the danger of the unpredictable, the slightly out-of-control. We all want to be respected professionals, and sometimes that's a trap.)

As for the puppets. In the first part, it's a series of filmed encounters with various puppets representing a theatre's production staff. Nice design, minimal expressiveness. In the second part, there's a large number of puppets representing the instruments of an orchestra. Nice design, no expressiveness. Why use puppets? It's cute, I guess. Nothing wrong with 'em, just nothing interesting.



Guild Member Michael Wick worked with the team at Kerner Optical in San Rafael to build the adorable Yakault mascot, for Yakault probiotic drinks. He was then head puppeteer for a two day commercial shoot with the puppet, in Sausalito and other scenic locations.

Finally, though, you can't have an interesting evening of theatre without a good script. That can be nonsensical, it can be non-verbal or magniloquent, it can be conventional or experimental, but it's gotta be surprising and fun and ... well, just GOOD. As theatre writing, this was predictable, flat, boring.

Berkeley Rep does some wonderful stuff, and is constantly trying new things. But it's very hard for a large institution to simply be lovably silly. Give a bunch of dedicated high school kids the same script and total license, and it'd have been ten times more interesting. Sometimes at even the wildest party, nobody's really having fun. All that being said, I was glad to see it.

From Eli Nash:

Here's my "why" I had issues with "The Composer is Dead"

The puppets used in the production were beautifully crafted to the tiniest detail. However, the puppets hardly ever moved and even when they did, they seemed lifeless just hanging in the air. The puppets weren't necessary, they didn't enhance the performance at all by doing things only puppets can do. They just sat in their seats, and stood up when they were being questioned, then sat down again. I never saw life in the puppets, they sat stiffly, very unnaturally gazing off into space, and they seemed more like set pieces than characters.

From Wendy Morton:

It was paced too slowly as if children wouldn't follow if it otherwise. Like a yellow sign that says "slow children". Geoff Hoyle is an amazing master of physical comedy but his skills were not used. Let him fiddle with a slipping wig or struggle with a slippery spot on the stage, dance with a life sized puppet. His best moment was a short interpretive dance to the music. Just advertising that he is in the show creates an expectation of seeing some clever clowning. The puppets were beautiful and well manipulated but it was sad to see them just sitting for most of the performance. A lot of money was spent on this show but it lacked life.

From Kevin Menegus:

The Composer is Dead is a modern adaptation of the classic Peter and the Wolf musical production which explores the wondrous music of the symphony orchestra. Several years ago I saw a very early production of this story with a narrator and the San Francisco Symphony. This new Berkeley Rep production combines elements of Victorian toy theater, puppetry, clowning, music and vaudeville. The toy theater was well organized and visually appealing. The orchestra of marionettes were cleverly costumed in musical fabric, even incorporating long thin ties with stripes for the stringed instruments. Unfortunately, it was impossible to see the detail even sitting in the 6th row of the orchestra. The manipulation of the puppets was forgettable - a suggestion would be to have the instruments try to play their own bodies rather than simply waving their arms in the air.

After sitting through 15 minutes of video production introducing characters I assumed we would revisit again in the story, the curtain went up to reveal a large Victorian toy theater. This was the only element of the production that I felt worked very well. The sets slid in from the wings, even having flat dancers spin onstage. But, during this middle section of the production there was no clear storyline trying to locate the missing composer, neither were the characters we met in the opening video presentation incorporated.

Finally, after the live actor declares that "the conductor must have killed the composer, because he has been killing composers for years," the show has reached an end. The final indignity is forcing the audience to sit through ten more minutes of video outtakes from the beginning video section. This last section fleshes the brief production out to 65 minutes. I would rather have Berkeley Rep charge a little less for ticket prices and concentrate the production to a quality 45 minute production which would be impressive and memorable.



**Guild 50 Anniversary Celebration..
Cha-Cha-Cha-Changes!
New Date: Fall 2011**

This year your puppetry guild turns 50 and a big bash is planned. The Guild 50 Celebration Committee has reorganized with a new chair, more committee members and a new timeline. The celebration is now slated for either September 24 or October 1. There will be food and performances and a celebration of one half century of the puppet guild in the Bay Area.

The committee chairperson, Michael Nelson, is looking for guild members who want to help make this a most memorable celebration. All levels of skill and expertise are welcome. If you are interested contact Michael at sfbapg@gmail.com or 707-363-4573. Immediate timeline includes identifying the perfect (or near perfect) venue in the perfect (or near perfect) location, figuring out food vs. budget, and then setting up what kind of fun will take place.

CALENDAR

Storybook Puppet Theatre

Cinderella

Jan. 1-211 am, 2 pm, 4 pmChildren's Fairyland, OaklandThe beautiful tale of Cinderella makes its debut at Fairyland this month. Set in France at the height of royal fashions, this is the story of a young girl who finds true love with the help of her Fairy Godmother. You will believe in magic as Cinderella thwarts her evil family and wins the love of Prince Charming. The show features the music of the ballet by Serge Prokofiev. Puppets designed and created by William Stewart Jones and Lewis Mahlmann.

The Gingerbread Boy

Jan. 8-9, 15-16, 22-23, 29-3011 am, 2 pm, 4 pmOur bad little gingerbread boy just wants to run away from everyone who wants to help him. This is the story of how he learns to behave, and appreciate the meaning of family. Based on the style of German "Jumping Jack" toys. Puppets by Lewis Mahlmann, adapted by Lewis Mahlmann.

January 29

**Guild Holiday Party
from 4:30-8:30 pm**

**At Christ Presbyterian Church
620 Del Ganado Road in beautiful San
Rafael, California!**

**This year will feature, for your viewing
pleasure, Images In Motion's Original
Production WATERWORKS!**

ALSO:

**Holiday Potluck Supper,
Gift Exchange,
and More!**

Directions on the Last Page!

Directions to the Holiday Party

Christ Presbyterian Church, 620 Del Ganado Road, San Rafael.

**The church is in Terra Linda, a suburb at the north end of town.
<http://cpcterralinda.org/directions.htm>. As always, check your maps.**

Traveling From San Francisco and South

101 N to Terra Linda, 0.2 mi.

Merge onto Manuel Freitas Pkwy, 1.2 mi.

Turn right at Del Ganado Rd, 203 ft

Traveling from Santa Rosa and North

101 S to Terra Linda, 0.2 mi.

Merge onto Manuel Freitas Pkwy, .9 mi.

Turn right at Del Ganado Rd, 203 ft.



San Francisco Bay Area Puppeteers Guild
PO Box 1258
Vallejo, CA 94590