



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

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

**November 2019**



*Puppeteers around the world can give THANKS for the incredible boost that the Muppets gave us when they became a world-wide puppet phenomenon. This special edition of Life is on sale now.*

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**November Guild Meeting at Fairyland, Sat., Nov. 16 at Fairyland, 699 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, 3:30-6:30 pm**

**Admission:** Admission to Fairyland is free to Guild members. If your membership needs to be renewed, or you would like to join the Guild, please do this by Nov 1<sup>st</sup>, so we can give a current list to Fairyland. Each Guild member may bring a friend/guest at no charge, but they must enter the gate the same time as you. At admissions, say that you're with the Puppet Guild. **You must be inside the entrance gates by 4 pm if you want to attend. The gates close promptly at 4:00.**



**4:00- Viewing of “The Velveteen Rabbit, or How Toys Become Real”**

at the Storybook Puppet Theater

**4:30- PotLuck** of Finger Foods inside the Puppet Theater (everyone must be in the theater so that the park can be cleared of all the other park visitors).

Those who attend should bring finger food, snacks, or drinks to share.

**5:00- Guild Meeting** at the Puppet Theater

**5:30- “Rumplestiltskin.. Or What’s In A Name?”** at the Emerald City Stage, followed by a valuable discussion with Randal Metz on design, construction, and putting together a show for special holidays and libraries. Warren Moten III designed the sets and will also be talking about design.

**6:30-** Approximate end. Departure from the park through the Storybook Puppet Theater back gate (as all other exits will be closed).

*Suggestion: Some attendees may want to arrange to gather for dinner at a nearby restaurant after 6:30.*

### **The Velveteen Rabbit, or How Toys Become Real**

Based on Margery William's lovely tale of "How Toys Become Real", this is the tale of a special relationship between a young boy and his toy bunny. You'll be charmed as the Velveteen Rabbit fearlessly stays by the young boy's side and is rewarded for her loyalty in the end. Witness the march of the toy soldiers, the pranks of the jack-in-the-box, and learn first hand the "nursery wisdom" of the old rocking horse. Puppets and script by Randal Metz. Scenery by Annie Wong. Puppet design by Kacey O'Hare.



### ***Rumplestiltskin***

This is the story of a little spirit that does not wish to be remembered. The classic Grimms Brothers tale comes to life with a Mexican twist. Isabella's father has told the king that she can spin straw into gold! And if she doesn't, her father will suffer. Along comes a little sugar skeleton that does the job for her... if she gives him her little baby girl. But, to be fair, he gives her three days to guess his name. Will she succeed in time for the Day of the Dead celebration? Filled with colorful scenery and authentic Mexican music. Puppets and script by Randal Metz. Set design by Warren Moten III.

**Additional info on directions, parking, etc. is at <https://www.fairyland.org/visit-us/directions/>.**

### **Guild Library will be at Fairyland**

The Guild library has hundreds of books covering a variety of topics. Books & DVDs will be available for checkout at the meeting, to people that have been members for at least 6 months. Are you looking for books or DVD on a particular topic? Contact the Guild Librarian, Lee Armstrong, [images@vom.com](mailto:images@vom.com) 707 738-5906, and she will email the library list or do a search and bring related books to next meeting.

### **Save the Date, January 26, Guild Annual Holiday Celebration**

Mark your calendars for our annual Holiday celebration on Sunday, Jan. 26, mid afternoon to early evening, at Christ Presbyterian Church in Terra Linda.

There will be a special holiday mainstage performance, a family friendly slam (start planning your puppet vignette), scholarship raffle, potluck supper and lots of cheer! More details in the Dec. newsletter.

## Classified Ads

### Job opportunity:

Interviewing for a short term puppetry residence in a San Francisco preschool for Spring 2020.

33 years ago I developed a program of conflict resolution for preschoolers using puppets and the expressive arts.

From March-May 2020 I am taking a temporary leave and would love to help hire a talented puppeteer who has experience with preschoolers in my absence.

Please send your CV or email of interest

to [elyse@pacificprimary.org](mailto:elyse@pacificprimary.org).



Guild Member Gabriel Galdamez is a workshop leader at the Imagine Conference. The Imagine Conference is a volunteer-organized training event for directors, teachers, pastors, leaders, and youth who work in kids, youth, and creative ministries.

### WORKSHOP LEADERS



**Sean Marshall**  
Early Elementary Pastor  
Rocklin, CA



**Larry & Vonnie Pratt**  
inFaith Missionaries  
Port Orchard, WA



**Gabriel Galdamez**  
Creative Ministries Director  
San Francisco, CA



**Stacy Divine**  
Ministry Team Director  
San Jose, CA



**Lynn Krogstad**  
Children's Pastor  
Sacramento, CA

**NOTE: Elisheva's review of the Crankie workshop will be in the next issue, delayed by fire and power outages.**



## November 2-Forbidden Puppet Cabaret in Vallejo-A “Puppet Slam”

Forbidden Puppet Cabaret is a puppet slam, supported by Heather Henson’s Puppet Slam Network. For years now, Heather and the Puppet Slam Network have been promoting and supporting puppet slams all over the country. What is a puppet slam, you might ask. A puppet slam is a performance opportunity for a variety of puppeteers to present short works of puppetry for adult audiences.

The Forbidden Puppet Cabaret is a puppet slam that has been going on for about a decade. The name came about because the first venue, the now defunct Fetterly Playhouse, was hidden in the back lot of a strip mall and was very hard to find; thus “forbidden” since you really had to be in the know to find it. The last few Forbidden Puppet Cabarets have been at the Bay Area Stage Theatre on Broadway in Vallejo, an intimate theatre very suitable for some of the up-close puppetry presented at the slam.

Each slam around the country is different, so here’s what you’ll find at Forbidden Puppet Cabaret on Saturday. First of all, as you enter and pay your ticket, we have a complimentary adult beverage (until they run out, so come early), fire and smoke themed for our recent “weather.” Unlike most theatre events, all of the ticket revenue is divided among the performers, similar to a house concert. The more you give, the more you show your appreciation to the excellent and hardworking performers. The doors open at 7:30 to get your seat and start making your puppet with guild member Judy Roberto. Forbidden Puppet has always offered a puppet making craft for the audience as well as a chance to get up on stage and perform at the end, which is very popular with audience members.

The show starts at 8:00 and features guild members as well as non guild members performing a collection of Halloween/Day of the Dead pieces. Conrad and Elizabeth of Independent Eye will be performing “Kill the Johnsons.” They describe it as suburban paranoia in action; Walt thinks their neighbors are out to get them, and recommends a pre-emptive strike in self-defense. His wife Patty takes a lot of convincing, in language



that sounds very familiar from current news, but eventually agrees: "Well, God knows we've got the firepower."

The very popular Brian Narelle (star of the cult film Dark Star and regular on Netflix 13 Reasons Why as well as Sesame St. alum) will bring his canine poet friend who has some Halloween poems to share.

Fratello Marionettes and Bernie Beauchamp will each perform a short set of marionette skits.

We always have live music and this time the LimberJim Bartz Band will bring some of their masterfully carved wooden clog dolls (limberjacks) and play and dance for us (they have a whole Halloween show of music that they will select from.)



The LimberJim Bartz Band provides down-home, ghostly music with some of the finest carved, dancing clog dolls you will ever see.

Vallejo's Shannon O'Hare (Shannon actually grew up at Fairyland, living on the property...no joke!) will improvise with his newest puppet, Snarky the Owl.

And Michael and Valerie (us) will debut a selection from our new (still developing) Crankie show on our new crankie stage.

There will be an intermission; a second chance to make your puppet for the finale and get another drink from the bar.

## **Saturday, November 2**

**7:30pm**

**Vallejo: Night of the Living Puppet (for adults)**

**When**Sat, November 2, 7:30pm – 10:30pm

**Where**Bay Area Stage Theatre, 515 Broadway St Studio H, Vallejo, CA 94590, USA ([map](#))

**Description** Forbidden Puppet Cabaret-Night of the Living Puppet Puppets come to life in this horrifying (hilarious) celebration of puppetry for grown-ups! Music, adult beverages and stupendous puppeteers from all over, gathering to entertain and amaze. The Forbidden Puppet Cabarets usually sells out so get tickets ahead of time! Advance Tickets (highly recommended to make sure you get in) <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4386561> more info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/643794926113398/>

**Puppetry as a Storytelling Tool, Michael Nelson, written for the puppetry issue of Storytelling Magazine**

One of the most important tools used by the storyteller is the imagination of the listener. The teller provides the basis of the story for the listener as well as details and embellishments and the listener fills in whatever is needed to make the story work for them. When we hear that Little Red Riding Hood is walking through a forest, we don't need a list and description of trees; our imagination can instantly fill that in so that the teller can get to the more important parts of the tale.

Storytelling with puppets works the same way, with the puppeteer/storyteller providing the basis of the story and some details (puppets, sets) and the audience imagines the rest. In this case the puppets and any scenery add to the details of the story. Human beings are able to project life and meaning onto inanimate objects like puppets in the same way we are able to project meaning onto words in a story. We might think of stories told with puppets as being akin to a picture book; an artist has added imagery to the story that we might enjoy the story in a more visual way as well as through the words. I would also posit that the puppeteer/storyteller brings an intensity to a performance as they focus on inhabiting and animating a group of puppets, taking on separate characters, creating voices and movement. Audiences respond to this intensity and focus in kind, and the story gains power from it as the listener/watchers are engaged with more senses.

Storytelling with puppets can be a powerful device to engage an audience but perhaps not all stories are augmented by the addition of puppets. As a professional puppeteer/storyteller of 40 years I have learned a few things that I consider important when choosing a story to perform.

- First of all, do I like the story? If I am going to put considerable effort into creating a performance (making puppets and sets and often stages, writing and learning the show, etc.) then I am planning to perform this show over and over. Am I going to enjoy performing this tale for the umpteenth time? As a performer I need to be able to keep my story fresh and vibrant, as usually my audience will be seeing it for the first time even if I have performed it 300 times before.
- Does the story have something I want to say or share; why am I telling this particular story?
- Is this a story where puppets would be a good addition to the tale? Not all stories warrant the addition of puppets, so here an understanding of the puppet's strengths and weaknesses would be useful.

In many situations, just the bringing out of a puppet will get the attention of those around you. People are inherently fascinated with puppets and dolls and when in the vicinity of an object animated to give it the illusion of life, they will watch until they lose interest (and one of the tasks of a puppeteer is to make sure they don't lose interest as the novelty of the puppet wears off.) This initial fascination we have with puppets is a puppet strength that a puppeteer/storyteller can use to draw in the focus and engage the imagination of the audience. Keeping that attention depends on the skill of the puppeteer and also on the appropriateness of the story to the medium of puppets. Since the puppeteers' skill set is developed over time and practice, let's take a look at story selection.

One question I often ask myself is, "Is this a story that puppets can tell well?" Puppets, for example, can do movement well; dialogue or monologue is much more challenging for a puppet, than, for example, a human actor who can add a range of facial expression that is challenging for most puppets. On the other hand puppets are great at portraying animals or mythical beings. When an actor portrays an animal on stage, the audience is always somewhat aware that it is an actor playing an animal, but there is no actor to get in the way

of a puppet taking an animal role. Somehow that leap of projection is a little bit easier when it is a puppet animal.

Another thing to consider in choosing a story for puppets is the visual element of the tale. If it is a story from a culture with interesting or iconic art, then the design elements of the story's culture can inform the puppets and sets to guide the audience to a fuller imagining of the story. Also along the visual lines...what happens in the story? Is it something visual that would allow puppets to shine? Here is one good example of using puppets to visually strengthen a story: some years ago we produced a folktale about a fox and an elk who decide to exchange arms and legs. This is something that would be hard to do in many other media but we were able to create puppets with universal arm and leg connections and the resulting hybrid creatures were visually hilarious as well as fully illustrating the point of the story. Puppets were a natural choice for telling this story.

As already mentioned, any story with anthropomorphic animals can also be an excellent choice for puppets due to the audience's willingness to believe in puppets in order to enjoy a story.

Puppets also work very well with stories set out of time and place, or in another time and place. Fairytales (in a land far away and long, long ago), folktales, cautionary tales, ballads can all be good stories for puppets to take on. In addition puppets can work well in tales where the content might be controversial or intense or where one might want to step back a bit from the original idea rather than confront the audience directly. This might include tales about murder or crime, war, incest, racism, politics, etc. There are reasons that stories like this should be told but sometimes moving them a little bit farther from the audience provides a safety buffer than allows the idea to get across where a direct confrontation would only erect barriers in the listener.

Using the visual elements of puppetry as a storytelling tool requires an understanding of the idea that puppetry is a language itself. A puppeteer doesn't necessarily need words to tell a story; much can be conveyed with movement and design. Our own approach to puppetry is to start with the visual story (How much of the story can we tell without words?) and then add text to strengthen the visuals. Thus we are not writing the spoken script until we are already in rehearsal with the puppets. For us, this technique developed as we began to tour internationally, performing for non-English speaking audiences. We found that every show we adapted or created to perform abroad (trying to tell the story first without any words) became much stronger, both for home audiences and abroad.

About 15 years ago I became interested in toy theatre, also known as paper theatre. This is a Victorian parlor theatre which can be described as the theatre of paper dolls, as the characters as well as the stage and sets are printed on paper. The challenge that drew me here was telling a theatre story without the degree of movement and expression that puppets often innately possess. With toy theatre I found myself going the more traditional theatre script route, writing the story first and then using the paper puppets and stages to illustrate it, much like a picture book. Our toy theatre career took an interesting turn when we unexpectedly became the house theatre troupe for an aphrodisiac factory, creating little erotic shows for visitors to the factory. The use of tiny theatres and figures to tell erotic stories was humorous to begin with due to the innate desire to see the nudity and the physical challenges of doing so from any distance. Thus these shows take us back to the first paragraph, highlighting the use of the imagination of the audience as storytellers' most important tool.

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