



## October 2025



*Above, a happy skeleton from Oakland's on-the-street and free Driveway Follies—More info below*

***Editor's note: If you get to the end and there's a link to read more of your newsletter, click it!***

### Guild Board and Officers

#### President

Talib Huff

[president@sfbapg.org](mailto:president@sfbapg.org)

#### C0-Vice Presidents

CE Choy

[bokchoyspuppets@gmail.com](mailto:bokchoyspuppets@gmail.com)

#### Secretary

Lee Armstrong

[secretary@sfbapg.org](mailto:secretary@sfbapg.org)

#### Treasurer

[treasurer@sfbapg.org](mailto:treasurer@sfbapg.org)

#### Membership

John Arnold

[membership@sfbapg.org](mailto:membership@sfbapg.org)

#### Programming

Samuel McGinnis

[programming@sfbapg.org](mailto:programming@sfbapg.org)

Doug Zesiger

[dczesiger@gmail.com](mailto:dczesiger@gmail.com)

Lisa Zagone

David Garden

Heather Gobbée

#### Library

Lee Armstrong

[library@sfbapg.org](mailto:library@sfbapg.org)

#### Newsletter

Michael Nelson

[newsletter@sfbapg.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbapg.org)

## From the President

Dear Guild Friends,

Back at the beginning of summer, I put out a request asking if folks might send in short videos of their puppets while out on summer adventures. So far, I've received three submissions (though I should confess that two of those came from my wife and me!).

I'd love to see more of your puppets enjoying the wide world beyond our stages, so if you happen to have recorded or snapped something along the way, please don't hesitate to share it with me

at [president@sfbapg.org](mailto:president@sfbapg.org)

This month's letter is on the short side—my apologies! The truth is, I've been out playing, and when you're busy playing, well, the writing tends to wait its turn.

Keep the strings untangled,

Talib Huff

President, SFBAPG

---

### **Programming Meeting in Oct.**

Did you know that you are welcome to attend Guild committee meetings? Our Programming Committee meets the 2nd Tues of each month on Zoom. Next meeting is Tues., Oct14 at 6:30. Come, see what's happening and share your ideas. For zoom link, contact Head of Programming, Uel McGinnis at [programming@sfbapg.org](mailto:programming@sfbapg.org)

### **Your Guild Library**

The Guild library is a treasure trove of puppet books. You can request a specific book(s) from the many books in the library, from the history of puppets, construction, stages, puppets in education, etc. It's easy to see what books are available by going to <https://sfbapg.org/library-online/>. Or if at [www.sfbapg.org](http://www.sfbapg.org) select Resources. Email Lee Armstrong at [library@sfbapg.org](mailto:library@sfbapg.org), and she'll bring your book(s) to the next "in-person" meeting.

**Please bring back any borrowed books.** If you have a book and didn't return it at Puppet Fair, please mail back to Guild Librarian, Lee Armstrong at 720 Ladera Dr., Sonoma, CA 95476.

---

## **Fairyland's 75th: A Festival of Puppets**

**Brie Yarbrough**

Families gathered for a joyful weekend of stories, laughter, and imagination at Children's Fairyland on August 23rd and 24th. Our guild is proud to be part of Fairyland's legacy and this milestone 75th anniversary celebration! From

timeless fairy tales to inventive new performances, we're thrilled to carry on the tradition of enchanting families through the magic of puppetry at one of Oakland's most cherished landmarks.

This year's festivities featured a craft table where kids fashioned their own colorfully decorated bird and fish puppets from paper and wooden skewers. On display were two sample mini puppet theaters, which Wing Shum created from recycled materials. It was fantastic to see young budding puppetry enthusiasts engage with their creations in these little theaters, and to spot them swimming and flying their way throughout the park all weekend!

Visitors to the green in front of Emerald City Stage were treated to a display of puppets from Fairyland's storied history. Also joining the fun was park mascot Quercus, brought to life by Puppet Theater Manager and SFBAPG member Maria Rodriguez. Throughout the weekend, she hosted lively puppet meet-and-greets where children could choose a puppet from the pile and try their hand at performing.





Guild members had a blast putting their improv skills to use during walk-around shifts, reporting many curious kids asking if their puppet characters were “real.” An adorable testament to the talents of our members, who bring their characters to life!

On hand for puppet performances were Kevin Menegus of Fratello Marionettes (“Vaudeville Follies”), Valerie and Michael Nelson of Magical Moonshine Theatre (“Three Little Pigs”), Art Grueneberger of Puppet Art Theater Co. (“3 Billy Goats Gruff”), and Rhonda Godwin, “The Puppet Lady.” (“Mrs. Wintergreen’s Birthday Surprise”)

Alex Evans, Head Puppeteer of Bob Baker Marionettes, traveled from Los Angeles for two showcase performances in the Aesop Theatre, which featured historic puppets, including a roller skating Rabbit, which first entertained audiences when Disneyland first opened in 1955.

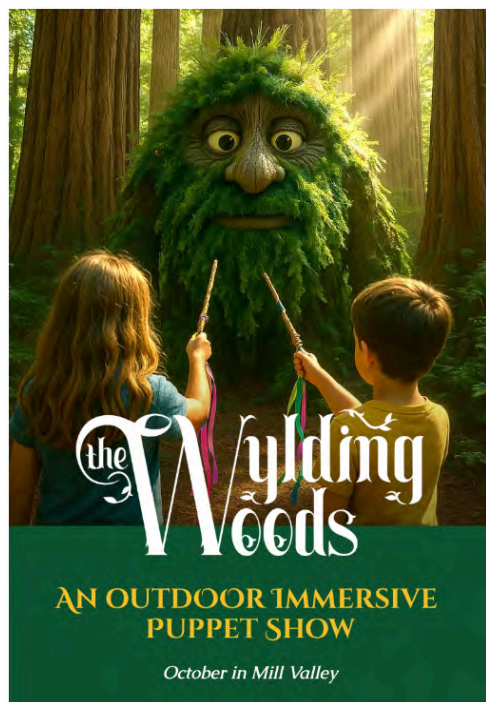
Randal Metz, Fairyland Puppet Master and longtime guild member, along with his talented team, performed their new show, “What Makes a King” — an uplifting story written by Metz that explores the qualities of a good leader, inspired by Maya mythology.



Our info table was buzzing all weekend, with many enthusiastic visitors stopping to learn more about the guild. Here’s to lots of new members joining us in the fun this year!

We'd like to thank our amazing Guild volunteers who welcomed people to Fairyland, helped with setup and tear out, manned the craft table, did puppet walkarounds, share Guild info with the public and made this such a successful event. Please forgive if we've missed anyone - Thank you - Wing & Hugo Shum, Tom Jensen, Matthew Purdon, Mia Ginesi, Dahlia & Brie Yarbrough, Troy Reilly, Marisol Himmel, Gabrielle Greenfield, Allison Sieber, Beth and Norm Choy, Doug Zesiger, Uel McGinnis, Kirk Pearson, Robin Olip-Booth, Talib Huff, John Arnold, and Heather Gobbée

## Upcoming Events (lots of them!)



### Tickets on Sale for October Run of the Wylding Woods

After a development workshop and short weekend run last spring, the Wylding Woods will be returning to the redwoods in Mill Valley for a 3 weekend run.

This outdoor immersive puppet show features puppets by Hobey Ford, UK's Charlie Orchard & the Puppet Kitchen with an ensemble of 9 including guild members Lee Armstrong, Beth Choy, Gabrielle Greenfield, Uel McGinnis & Lisa Zagone.

The Wylding Woods is more than a show, it's an adventure you join. Sent on a mission by the Storybook Fairy, you and your child step into a living story world where even the trees and animals talk. With their own Wylding Stick in hand, children unlock secret words of power, hunt for clues and sing together to help the hidden fairy-tale creatures among the magical Redwoods of Mill Valley.

Saturdays & Sundays

Oct 11,12 — Oct 18,19 — Oct 25,26

10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm

For tickets and more information, go to [wyldingwoods.com](http://wyldingwoods.com)

Use coupon code **GUILDMEMBER** for 20% off.

---



## **Sfpuppetslam Oct 5th (deadline to perform is passed but you can still attend)**

Calling SF Bay Area Puppeteers!

Do you have a weird, wonderful, or totally unexpected puppet act hiding in your workshop?

This is your chance to test it, twist it, and bring it up on stage at the Ignite SF Puppet Slam

When: Oct 5, Eclectic Box, San Francisco

What: A night of short puppet performances

Apply by: Sept 7

[#IgniteSFPuppetSlam](#) [#SFPuppets](#) [#PuppetSlam](#)

[#BayAreaPuppeteers](#)



## **Larry Schmidt's Driveway Follies**

**Oct 29-31, 2025**

**Starting at dusk and recurring every 30-40 minutes through the evening**

**3854 Greenwood Ave, Oakland, CA 94602**

Greetings to all bats, cats, witches, ghouls, and human families! Driveway Follies provides professionally staged and family-friendly Halloween performances each year in Oakland. Beginning in 2007 with just three puppeteers performing a three act show, Driveway Follies has expanded to a crew of nine puppeteers performing up to five acts over three nights. Since inception, a diverse audience of over 10,000 Halloween revelers has enjoyed the performances. See you there!

**Also: The Guild has been invited to watch the last rehearsal night on Sunday 10/26, starting at dusk. Come see the magic!**

---



## **“Puppet Building & Performance” & “TV Puppetry” by Images in Motion**

Images in Motion, [www.imagesmedia.com](http://www.imagesmedia.com), Sonoma’s award-winning television puppetry production company, is sharing the art of puppetry with two hands-on workshops this fall. The first, “Explore Puppet Building & Performance,” will take place at the Sonoma Community Center on Sunday, October 5. The second, “TV Puppetry” workshop, will be held at the fully equipped Images in Motion Studio in Sonoma on Saturday, November 8. Participants may register for either session individually or attend both for a complete puppetry experience.

Both workshops will be led by Lee Armstrong, regional Emmy® Award-winning puppeteer and co-owner of Images in Motion. Both workshops are open to teens and adults, and are especially relevant for puppeteers, actors, teachers, librarians, youth leaders, and parents who are seeking creative tools for education and storytelling.

### **“Puppet Building & Performance”**

**Sun. Oct 5, 10 am-3:30 pm ½ hr lunch**

**Sonoma Community Center, 276 E Napa St., Sonoma**

**\$65 for class & \$35 for puppet making kit**

**To Register: [https://sonomacommunitycenter.org/programs/puppet-building-and-performance/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://sonomacommunitycenter.org/programs/puppet-building-and-performance/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)**

Participants of this workshop will build a mouth/rod (Muppet-style) puppet from a kit which includes quality materials – pre-sewn head/body, arms, hands, arms, flexible mouth, eyes, feathers, fur and more! There will also be some Images in Motion puppets to try on, to check out various materials you might want to explore in your puppet building future. The second part of the day will be character development and cover manipulation fundamentals to bring your puppet to life. Please bring some fabric scissors if possible, and a bag lunch as there will only be a ½ hr lunch break.

Here are a few photos from a previous Puppet Building workshop.





## TV Puppetry

**Sat. Nov 8 10-3:30 with ½ hr lunch**

**Images in Motion Studio, 720 Ladera Dr., Sonoma (parking info will be provided for attendees)**

**Register at <https://imagesinmotioninc.ticketspice.com/tv-puppetry-workshop>**

The November workshop will shift from stage to the screen, focusing on TV puppetry, where the “stage” is replaced by the camera frame. Recommended for those with some prior puppetry experience—or who attend the October session—this workshop is designed for performers looking to create engaging video content, enhance social media, and explore puppets as powerful, inclusive spokes characters.

This 5 hour class covers: Use of Monitors, Eye Focus, Breath, Mouth Synchronization, Walks, Armrods, Angles, Sharing Space, Action/Reaction, etc.. The class will also cover some of the important technical aspects, tips and tricks that make for a professional production. Lots of fun, hands-on experience!

This TV workshop is recommended for those with some prior puppetry experience, as we will build on this to develop skills in front of the camera. Or attend the Oct. 5 Build a Puppet & Performance workshop. Please bring a puppet you would like to work with, or puppets will be provided. If you built a puppet in the Oct workshop, that would be perfect! Please bring a bag lunch.

**Lee Armstrong** is a co-founder and Producer at [Images in Motion Inc.](#) in Sonoma, where she's helped bring stories to life for clients like the USDA Forest Service, LeapFrog, PBS, and more. Her puppeteering credits include three seasons on Jim Henson's Emmy-winning *Fraggle Rock*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Moneybone*, and a range of PBS shows and commercials. Lee's work has earned her two regional Emmys, and TV/film productions she has contributed to have been recognized by ten national Telly Awards, National Ad Council, KidsFirst, and more. She's also shared her passion through teaching—lecturing for years at UCSC on Jim Henson's legacy, and leading workshops on puppetry nationwide.

---



## Rumpelstilzchen's Fairy Gold

Nevada Theatre

401 Broad St., Nevada City, CA

Price range: \$10 for children, adults \$25-\$35

Dates: October 23rd-26th [Tickets](#)

### ***A Spellbinding New Musical Reimagines Rumpelstilzchen for Adults and Kids Alike***

**NEVADA COUNTY, CA** — This fall, Swazzle and Angie Holm of Heady Lore Productions present *Rumpelstilzchen's Fairy Gold*, an original musical play by local puppeteer, playwright and composer **Dalrymple MacAlpin**, premiering in Nevada County at the Nevada Theatre for only four shows October 23rd-26th.

Dalrymple (pronounced Dal - rimple) has been creating works steeped in the culturally rich heritage of mythology, folklore, faerie tales and the mystical traditions surrounding them for over two decades.

Now MacAlpin brings an enchanting new production to the stage and invites audiences of all ages into the forgotten origins of one of the Brothers Grimm's most enigmatic characters — and flips the fairytale on its



golden head.

We all think we know the story: a mysterious little man who spins straw into gold. But in this fresh retelling, we learn that what Rumpelstilzchen really spins is far more valuable than gold.

What if Rumpelstilzchen was never the villain at all? What if the real danger was a greedy king willing to sacrifice anything for wealth and power? *Rumpelstilzchen's Fairy Gold* explores these questions and more in a heart-filled, genre-defying musical adventure.

With the help of two wise cracking bookworms, a mysterious witch in the woods and a booming operatic book, Rumpelstilzchen embarks on a journey to become a true "story spinner" and answer the question;

*"If stories come from the world of imagination... what would happen if there weren't any stories left?"*

While the show is family-friendly and children are warmly welcomed, *Rumpelstilzchen's Fairy Gold* is **crafted with adult audiences in mind**. Beneath the colorful puppets and magical melodies lies a powerful narrative about truth, creativity, and reclaiming misunderstood histories.

The production features **11 original songs** performed live by MacAlpin (piano, harp, vocals), with **Jiamo Chen** (cello) and **Jesse Krautkramer** (saxophone, vibraphone). The cast includes a talented ensemble of actors, singers, and puppeteers — **Raven Aletheia, Audrey Delgado, Jori Phillips and Vicki Colombo**— who bring to life a vibrant array of characters and handcrafted puppets, designed by MacAlpin himself after studying with Czech puppet master **Miroslav Trejtnar** of Puppets in Prague.

## CRITICAL PRAISE

*"Dalrymple is a storyteller of singular grace and charm, someone we must embrace and celebrate."*

— **Motoko**, Award-Winning Japanese Storyteller

*"Some theater offers an initiation, some seeks to entertain — Dalrymple does both."*

— **Oz Fritz**, Grammy Award-Winning Recording Engineer

*"A modern Bard, who hears the stories told in the wind, who gathers magic from olden days and gifts the audience with it."*

— **Dawn McCarthy**, Drag City Recording Artist (Faun Fables)

## TICKETS & DETAILS

For show times, venue information, and [tickets](#),

<https://share.google/rn6PzpuQcPLCNpz6P>

Don't miss this magical journey that will leave you laughing, thinking, and believing in the power of stories all over again. **[www.dalrymplemacalpin.com](http://www.dalrymplemacalpin.com)**

---

## The Monkey King

SF Opera, San Francisco



He's arrogant. He's disobedient. He's becoming the most powerful being in creation, and he's about to wreak havoc on heaven. Based on the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, *The Monkey King* makes its much-anticipated world premiere at the War Memorial Opera House. This new, action-packed opera combines high-energy music and text with puppetry, dance, Peking opera, and Buddhist sutras to tell the tale of the Monkey King's beginnings.

Basil Twist is the Puppetry Director, Set, and Puppetry Designer for this production. He was responsible for creating the puppets and designing the overall visual world of the production, which transforms the stage with silks, puppets, and projections to bring the fantastical story to life. Guild members Esther de Monteflores and Fred Riley III are puppeteers in this production!

Very few tickets available: <https://www.sfopera.com/buy-tickets/>

Check out their Livestream option: <https://www.sfopera.com/operas/the-monkey-king/livestream/>

### **Check out Dolby Family's \$10 Ticket Deal for Monkey King!**

Two \$10 tickets for “The Monkey King” in great seating locations for Bay Area residents for one performance during the 2025-26 Season. Tickets go on sale one month prior to the opening of each production and are available for a limited time while supplies last!

Monkey King tickets go on sale Oct 7th, noon

Check out details at <https://www.sfopera.com/buy-tickets/dolby-familys-opera-for-the-bay/>

### **Free Films: A *Monkey King* Double Feature**

#### ***Uproar In Heaven* (1961) and *Havoc In Heaven's Palace* (2014)**

November 1, 2025 11:30-4pm Doors: 11:15am

First Film Begins approximately 11:30am

Second Film Begins approximately 2pm

San Francisco Opera's Department of Engagement and Connectivity is thrilled to present a special matinee double-feature in celebration of our World Premiere of *the Monkey King* with two film adaptations of the 16th Century novel *Journey to the West* at the Great Star Theater in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown.

*Uproar In Heaven* (1961) and *The Monkey King: Havoc In Heaven's Palace* (2014) will both be presented in Cantonese with English subtitles. This is a no-cost event with tickets furnished by EventBrite.

[Reserve Your Free Ticket Now](#)

### **Puppet Workshop: Once Upon an Opera, The Monkey King**

with Puppeteer Ramon Abad, a partnership with San Francisco Opera

Richmond, Saturday, November 8, 2025 from 3pm–3:45pm PT

Parkside, Sunday, November 9, 2025 at 2:30pm

Asian Art Museum, Sunday, November 2, 2025 at TBD

Minnesota Street Project, Saturday, November 15, 2025 from 2pm–4pm PT

---



## Manual Cinema’s “The 4th Witch”

**Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley**

**Nov 22, 2025, 8pm**

**(very few tickets available!)**

The amazingly inventive visual storytellers of Manual Cinema return to Cal Performances with another meticulously crafted, gloriously handmade production.

The 4th Witch follows a young girl, orphaned during wartime, who becomes unwittingly apprenticed to the three witches from Shakespeare’s Macbeth. As the truth of her family’s fate is revealed, she must choose between paths of reconciliation and vengeance. Told without text—like a silent film coming to life on stage—the story explores themes of war and generational conflict through shadow puppetry, actors in silhouette, immersive sound design, and live music.

*“Manual Cinema has created a whole new art form. In a digital world, this beguiling analog throwback...has proved enormously popular”* (Chicago Tribune).

[About this Performance](#)

## From Our Members



## Puppeteer Needed

Alameda hosts frequent protest, marches and rallies. I acquired a lovely Street size puppet from Tree, before he moved up to Montana. I am unable to operate a puppet on the street due to physical disabilities. The event organizers are looking for someone to operate this puppet. I know that Tree was hoping it would go to a home that supports a good cause.

I believe Alameda's next big event is a "No Kings" rally on October 18.

If anyone is interested in helping out, please email me at [Alana.dill@gmail.com](mailto:Alana.dill@gmail.com)

or text to Alana Dill, 510-213-4176

---

## Puppet Stage Looking for a Home

I have a relatively large toy theater, made by and for Bay Area puppet legend Seth Eisen! It was passed on to me by Risa Lenore, and tragically, I no longer have room to store it. It's made out of wood, and has draw-able stage curtains and a full LED light rig. It's really wonderful, but it is large (think 5' x 4' x 3'). If you could use a quality theater, please shoot me an email at [kirk@dogbotic.com](mailto:kirk@dogbotic.com) and we'll coordinate a pickup time!

Thanks!, [kirkmakesthings.com](http://kirkmakesthings.com)

---



*From Joel Schechter: University of San Francisco theatre class rehearses a puppet play featuring an orange-faced man. Directed by SFBAG member Joel Schechter. Photograph by Florentina Mocanu-Schendel. September 2025.*

---



New episode of Under The Puppet is here and my guest is Marisol Himmel of Moddy Puppets! Marisol Himmel is an educational puppeteer and ventriloquist and the creator of Moddy Puppets, A puppet company that explores new ways to use puppetry in education. I talk with Marisol about her puppetry journey, her explorations of different styles of puppetry, her collaborations with other artists and much more on this episode of Under The Puppet. The SF Guild gets a big shoutout in the episodes as well. The episode is available wherever you get your podcasts or at [underthepuppet.com](http://underthepuppet.com) <<http://underthepuppet.com/>>

Grant Baciocco, Puppeteer. Creator., [grant@throwingtoasters.com](mailto:grant@throwingtoasters.com) MrGrant.com IG - @throwingtoasters

---

## Big changes coming to the National Festival!

By Camilla Henneman

I was privileged to attend the Midwest regional festival this summer. At their regional meeting, Liz Joyce, then president of puppeteers of America was there and she addressed the meeting about changes that will be happening with the national festivals. The last national festival was held at the University of Maryland.

They did an amazing festival, but it was costly and P of A lost a lot of money. The next national festival is planned for 2027 and they are looking at a new model. Traditionally, national festivals have been held at universities, but there are several reasons they want to get away from the university settings. Universities are looking to make a profit and they can be rather impersonal.

So, P of A is looking for a permanent home for national festivals. They want to find a location that has a strong arts community, good venues for workshops and performances and good options for housing. They would like to form a partnership with local arts communities and open up performances to the public.

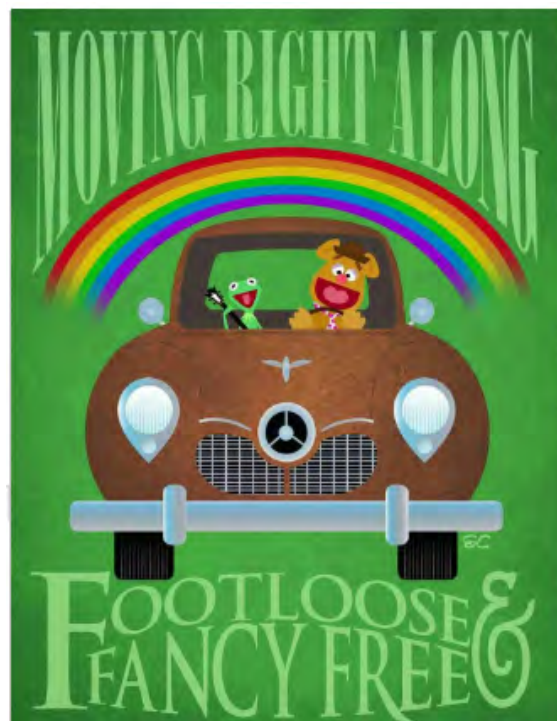
Three possible locations are being considered for the national Festival.

1. **Verona, Wisconsin**, the site of this year's Great Plains regional festival is one possibility. It is a lovely town. They have a strong arts community, good performing and workshop venues, and reasonable hotels within walking distance. The Great Plains regional festival was a great success.

**2. West Liberty, Iowa.** West Liberty is the home of Eulenspiegel puppets. Some advantages to West Liberty would be that they already have a strong relationship with the community. Monica Leo has put on many successful festivals over the years. The drawbacks include: it's not very close to a major airport, no good hotels in the town. At this summer's festival people traveled 20 minutes from a nearby town that had better hotels. There are some theater venues, but outdoor performances in the summer can get very hot. At the children's festival last week temperatures rose to over 100°. There are not a lot of options for large indoor air conditioned venues.

**3. Lawrence, Kansas** Lawrence Kansas is a university town, close to Kansas City airport. They have a strong arts community that would want to partner with us. We have been told they have good hotels. A possible drawback to Lawrence, Kansas is that we do not already have a network of people there, unlike the other two venues.

At this point, it looks like they are planning to hold the next national festival in Lawrence Kansas, but things could change. Although nothing definite is decided, I felt that it was important for our members to know what changes are currently in the works. If I get more information, I will update the guild.



Several of our members attend the national festivals regularly. Many perform and/or teach workshops. I don't know if there will be an opportunity to give input to P of A ,but if it is something you feel strongly about, this might be a goodtime to let your thoughts or concerns be known.

Wherever the festival is being held, though, you should make it a point to go if you can. The festivals are where you really get to network with puppeteers around the country as well as all over the world. So go to the festivals! That is where it's happening!

---





## Rediscovering A National Puppetry Treasure: The Puppets of Perry Dilley

By Randal J. Metz

Additional photos contributed by Kevin Menegus

Who wants to find a buried treasure, or unearth a valuable discovery in a cluttered attic? We do! In mid-June this year, Michael Nelson, editor of the San Francisco Bay Area Puppetry Guild newsletter, received an interesting email from a woman named Sarah Dessler. It began, *"Do you know anyone who is interested in a bunch of puppets that belonged to my mother's family?"*

Nelson immediately thought of me, the current historian for the guild. I also wrote the book: [A Century of California Puppetry, or How The West Was Strung](#), with fellow puppeteer Kevin Menegus. He forwarded Dessler's email to me, and we quickly discovered the importance of her request. That "bunch of puppets" turned out to be a treasure trove of Perry Dilley puppets in three suitcases that had been secreted away in an attic for 43 years.

Sarah, daughter of Ellen Dessler, was clearing out her mother's house to put it up for sale. Ellen is the daughter of Berkeley puppeteer Grace Wickham (1901 - 1993), who spent many years performing with Perry Dilley (1896 - 1968) and his wife Grace Stearns-Dilley (1897 - 1982). For close to 30 years Wickham worked side by side with Dilley and his wife, manipulating these memorable figures. When Grace Stearns passed, she bequeathed Perry's remaining puppets to her close friend Grace Wickham.

The Perry Dilley Puppet Theater favored the style of the French Guignol hand puppets. This style gave the puppeteers manipulating Dilley's creations, which were modeled in papier mâché or plastic wood, the ability to better control the puppet's movement, producing an elegant, intimate performance. One critic described it this way: *"Some artists can play upon the emotions of an audience with a violin or a piano, or even a saxophone; Mr. Dilley's instrument is a bit of paper and wood and cloth, but his melody is just as impelling."*

—Wm. Frederick Calkins, California Alumni Monthly, 1937.



## **A Short History of Perry Dilley**

Perry Dilley had a long and fascinating career. He began as an apprentice in puppet theater at the age of 20, under the tutelage of Vaudeville marionettist Daniel Meader (1856 - 1929.) When Meader died, his widow left all his trick marionettes to Dilley, but we don't know what happened to them. Perhaps someday they'll be discovered in another attic?

Dilley went on to study at the University of California in Berkeley. While there he met Grace Stearns and later Grace Wickham, and the three of them opened a puppet theater in a studio setting at 728 Montgomery Street in San Francisco. Dilley and Stearns left California for two years, 1924 and 1925, to present puppet shows in Ohio at the short-lived Cleveland Play House Puppet theater. They then returned to San Francisco and Montgomery Street. Eventually all three moved to Berkeley.

After reestablishing himself in the Bay Area, Dilley taught puppet arts at the University of California and at Mills College in Oakland. Perhaps his finest achievement was making a set of marionettes for Ellen Van Volkenburg's 1924 San Francisco presentation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Van Volkenburg, founder of the famous Chicago Little Theater, is credited with coining the term "puppeteer" for her puppet performers. After all, if men who wrangled mules were called "muleteers," why not call people who wrangle puppets "puppeteers?"

## **Historically Important Women in Puppeteering**

Another important fascinating facet of our discovery was centered around two women of American puppetry: Grace Stearns and Grace Wickham. The two Graces were mostly responsible for performing Dilley's shows at booking events and private parties. Dilley preferred to stay home and make the puppets and teach puppetry at his two academic positions. He mostly performed in the evenings for special showings at the theater, and in his later life for the monthly shows the Dilleys did at their home in Berkeley, which in 2020 was declared a Berkeley Landmark.

Grace Stearns-Dilley was a theatrical actress as well as manager of the theater. She was also a published playwright and wrote many of Dilley's puppet shows. Grace Wickham was an actress, puppeteer, poet, playwright and costumer. She also performed in the '20s with Fannie Goldsmith's traveling marionette shows when they needed an extra hand. During this time period, women master puppeteers were often not given the same recognition as their male counterparts who were in the spotlight, and their contributions often forgotten to history. We are so excited to have learned about their involvement with these historic puppets, and to be able to share some of their stories.



## **Dilley and The Puppeteers of America**

One last historical tidbit I'd like to mention is Perry Dilley's importance in the development of American puppetry and The Puppeteers of America in the 1930s - '40s. While most puppet companies featured marionettes, during this decade Dilley became an expert on hand puppets. He and his close friend Paul McPharlin (1904 - 1948), puppeteer, publisher, and an honorary president of the Puppeteers of America, published many articles about Dilley's work for The Puppetry Yearbooks and other special edition books printed by McPharlin.

There are quite a few photos of Dilley's work in these editions. Dilley wrote articles about how to work a hand puppet, designing puppet productions, and the history of puppetry, as well as an historical bio-article on his beloved mentor Daniel Meader. As someone who has personally studied these writings and enjoyed the few available photos of his work, it was exhilarating to be able to touch, perform, and study the puppets and personal memorabilia that were unearthed in the three suitcases from the Dessler family attic. To be able to put my own hand into, and bring to life, a puppet that these three puppet masters had performed so well decades ago, is humbling.

## **A Treasure Trove of Puppet History**

Of course you want to know what was in the suitcases from Ellen Dessler's attic. We found approximately 68 puppets, 36 black and white photos from Dilley productions, 29 very carefully typed original puppet plays, and 30 printed programs, many of which featured Dilley woodcut illustrations, as well as articles from magazines, newspapers and reviews. The puppets, although well preserved since the Wickham family did not allow the kids to play with them, are in various degrees of disrepair from the constant performances they endured.

For many years, older San Francisco guild puppeteers have lamented the disappearance of these puppets, although many others found their way into private collections and puppetry museums such as The Center For Puppetry Arts in Georgia, The Detroit Institute of Arts in Michigan and The International Puppetry Museum in Washington. Perhaps some of these recently rediscovered items will eventually find a home there? The Wickham family has honored me and Kevin Menegus with the responsibility of cleaning, some restoration, and finding loving homes for these long-lost friends. Some of these puppets are 100years old, and some possibly even older. They are a valuable part of our puppeteering history, both in California and beyond.

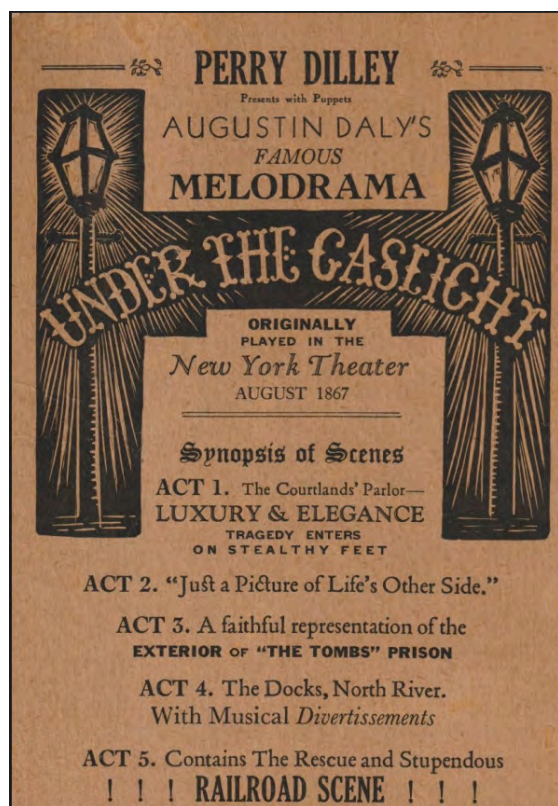
We're happy to share some photos of the magnificent work presented by The Perry Dilley Puppet Theater. And we'd like to thank Ellen Dessler and her family for their significant donation to our history of puppet



theater in America.

***Randal J. Metz is the founder of The Puppet Company, and director of The Storybook Puppet Theater in Children's Fairyland, Oakland.***

***Kevin Menegus is founder and director of The Fratello Marionettes, an established puppet theater in the San Francisco Bay Area.***



Copyright (C) 2025 San Francisco Bay Area Puppeteers Guild. All rights reserved.