



*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is very newsy newsletter, so use the 'view this email in your browser link at the top or use the 'view the rest of this email' link at the bottom to see the whole newsletter! (It now says "End of Newsletter" at the end so you know you saw it all.)*

Hello Michael

We have your last renewal as 2025-12-30

To renew for 2026, go to <https://sfbapg.org/membership/join/>



**The excitement of the Puppetathlon at the Guild Holiday Party had the crowd of over 100 cheering and laughing. Go Teams!**

### **From the President**

Our recent holiday party was a wonderful reminder of the imagination and generosity that make this guild such a special community. The puppet slam was overflowing with creativity—from experimental moments to laugh-out-loud surprises—and it was a delight to see so many different voices and styles on display. The Puppetathlon added

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#### **Newsletter**

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a playful spirit of friendly competition, and watching teams rise to each challenge was entertaining as they all raced to the finish.

A heartfelt thank-you to everyone who brought food to share, helped set up, and stayed to clean up afterward. Your quiet, practical contributions are what make events like this feel warm, welcoming, and stress-free. As we turn the page into the new year, I encourage you to take a few minutes with the rest of this newsletter. You will find articles about upcoming events, workshops, and opportunities to perform, learn, and connect. I hope you will join in, bring your ideas forward, and continue to shape the future of our **guild** together.

Talib Huff

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## **April Guild Meeting: Folkmanis Puppets 50th Anniversary!**

**Where: Children's Creativity Museum, 221 4th St., S.F.**

**When: April 18th 10 am-4 pm**



Folkmanis Puppets, an iconic Bay Area puppet company, has long supported Puppeteers of America, UNIMA-USA, and the San Francisco Bay Area Puppet Guild. Now the Guild is excited to celebrate this beloved local business with a special event at the innovative Children's Creativity Museum (CCM) in San Francisco.

April 18—World Creativity Day—is a fitting moment to gather at CCM, whose mission is “Imagine, Create, Share,” for the opening of the Folkmanis Puppet exhibit.

Folkmanis' Art Director, Allison Sieber will be welcoming the Guild. She explains, *“For our 50th anniversary, the Folkmanis family is offering an unprecedented backstage pass into the history and artistry of industry legend Folkmanis Puppets with an interactive installation stretching the entire length of the Children's Creativity Museum's elegant Spiral Gallery!”*

For those new to Folkmanis <https://www.folkmanis.com> the company began when Judy Folkmanis started sewing charming, remarkably realistic animal puppets for her two young sons, later selling them near the UC Berkeley campus. In 1976, her

husband, Atis, left his biochemistry career to join her in building Folkmanis Puppets into a family enterprise. Judy's imagination, artistry, and love of nature—along with a growing design and sewing team—led to an ever-expanding menagerie of distinctive animal and character puppets released year after year.

(Photo: Judy Folkmanis selling puppets on Telegraph Ave., Berkeley)

Folkmanis carved out a unique niche in the toy world: as detailed and lifelike as the finest plush animals, yet fully functional as soft performance puppets.



Equally at home on stage, in a librarian's hands at story time, in a therapist's office, or cuddled during bedtime, these puppets quickly found audiences across the country and around the world.

Today, Folkmanis remains a family-run business headquartered in Emeryville, California, led by Judy and Atis's adult sons. Operating from a historic building filled with working designers and five decades of archived puppets, patterns, catalogs, photos, and keepsakes, the company continues to be the premier manufacturer of realistic plush animal puppets worldwide. You will see much of this at the April meeting. As Allison shares, *"Explore the innovative design and intricate craftsmanship of Folkmanis Puppets with rarely-shared historical items and images reaching as far back as 1976, when Judy Folkmanis first began making puppets to sell at a Telegraph Avenue sidewalk stand near UC Berkeley."*

CCM has generously offered Guild members free museum admission and use of a meeting room for an afternoon Guild gathering, where Folkmanis will share more of their work, and we can celebrate their 50th Anniversary. In return, we're seeking Guild volunteers from 10:00 am–2:00 pm to help with "Make a Puppet" tables and serve as walkaround greeters using Folkmanis puppets—similar to our activities at Oakland's Fairyland. A signup link will be posted soon, with additional program details in the April newsletter.

Join us on Apr. 18th in commemorating a treasured Bay Area institution and the creativity that continues to inspire generations.

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## **Guild Holiday Extravaganza**



### **A Huge Thank You for Volunteers for Holiday Party Feb 22, 2026**

The Programming Committee would like to thank the many people who volunteered to help with the Holiday party. It is very kind and generous of you!

Heading up the SLAM: Michael & Valerie Nelson

Heading up the Puppetathlon: Heather Gobbée & Moddy Himmel

Heading Up the Raffle & Silent Auction: Valerie Nelson, Talb & Olivia Huff, Hope Rodriguez, Ilene & Michael Kennedy

Our wonderful volunteers (in no particular order) who helped with setup, greeting, taking tickets, hospitality, food, social media, cleanup and the many other tasks that made the party such a success: Stacy Divine, Bill Ferguson, Lisa Zagone, Uel McGinnis, Tom Jensen, David Garden, Pam Wade, Wing & Hugo Shum, Dahlia & Jessie Yarbrough, Jason Adair & Alana Dill, Gabrielle Greenfield, Beth Choy, all the folks that brought snacks for the refreshment table, and anyone that isn't on the list, but who volunteered to make this day special... THANK YOU!

And a special thanks to the Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum and their infinitely patient and helpful Executive Director, Trevor Allen.

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**March 22, 2026**  
**with UNIMA-USA's**  
**presentation**  
**starting the event at 5:00PM**  
**EDT (2pm Pacific time)**

UNIMA-USA will give individual awards to some of our most consistently dedicated and impactful members, award **Citations of Excellence** to select puppetry productions of note, and present the **Nancy Staub Publication Award** to writers who have advanced and illuminated puppetry with their works. There's no fee, but advance registration for the Zoom link is required. **REGISTER NOW** **Special Thanks to the Center for Puppetry Arts for hosting this online event.**

**And news just in from the P of A newsletter...**

This year's World Puppetry Day will be a historic event as all four national puppetry organizations will share in the festivities. PofA, along with UNIMA-USA, Fellowship of Christian Puppeteers, and Vent Haven will have a virtual Zoom on March 22nd at 4:00pm CST. More detailed information and a link will be shared in the next couple of weeks.

We encourage all our Guild members to join P of A <https://www.puppeteers.org/> but the Guild will hopefully get a MailChimp out this month with the link, but the link is probably the one that you can get by registering at UNIMA **REGISTER NOW** as UNIMA starts at 5 pm ET and P of A at 4 pm, both hosted by the Atlanta Center for the Puppetry Arts.

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**The Guild Corner**

## Guild Programming Meeting

If you'd like to join the Guild Programming Committee, it meets on the 2nd Tues or each month at 6:30. The next one will be on Tues., Mar. 10 at 6:30. Contact Programming Chair Samuel "Uel" McGinnis, [3rd.eyed.lion@gmail.com](mailto:3rd.eyed.lion@gmail.com) or Guild Secretary Lee Armstrong, [larms@sfbapg.org](mailto:larms@sfbapg.org) for the Zoom link.

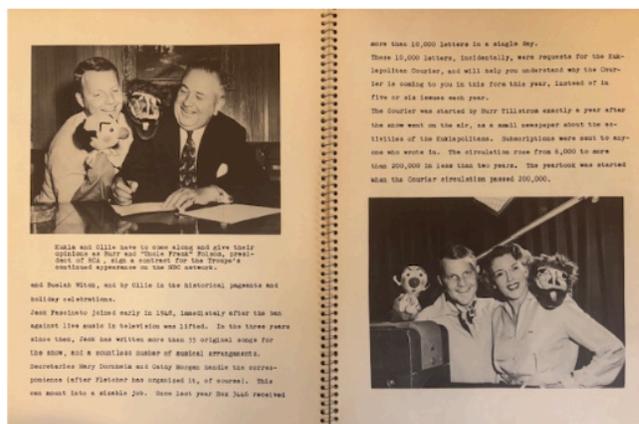
**Guild Events:** Any Guild member can plan a Guild event. You can even plan a Guild event to a show you are giving. If you hear of any activity or show which would be of interest to puppeteers, you can post an announcement in the newsletter. If there are multiple show dates, the person organizing the event selects a day and time for everyone interested to attend as a group. People are responsible for purchasing their own tickets, unless the organizer arranges for block seating, in which case the attendees sometimes pay the organizer or the Guild, depending on who purchased the tickets. Afterwards, members sometimes get together to discuss the show and socialize.

## Guild Library:

The Guild Library is a treasure trove of hundreds of books on puppetry. History of puppets, construction, stages, puppets in education, etc. can all be checked out. If you want a specific book, you can pursue the available books online by going to <https://sfbapg.org/library-online/>. Or if at [www.sfbapg.org](http://www.sfbapg.org) select Resources, then Library. If you see a specific book, or want books on a certain topic, contact our Guild librarian, Lee Armstrong at [library@sfbapg.org](mailto:library@sfbapg.org).

## Donated Book for Guild Library

The Guild Library would like to thank Uel McGinnis for donating a wonderful book "Burr Tillstrom's Kuklapolitan Courier Yearbook" "Check out Burr's videos on Youtube. My favorite puppet character was Beulah the Witch" - Lee, Guild Librarian.



Library borrowers need to have been members for at least 6 months or leave a check to cover the cost of the book, if not returned. Books will be brought to the next in-person event, April 18th. **If you have a library book to return**, please return it at the next in person meeting or mail it back ASAP to Lee Armstrong at 720 Ladera Dr., Sonoma, CA 95476.

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**Larry Reed June 21, 1944 – January 30, 2026**  
**Shadow puppeteer, long time guild member**  
**Remembered below by Fred Riley III**

When I think about Larry Reed and the years I worked alongside him at Shadowlight, I think of a curious, passionate and driven man. Larry was a skilled shadow puppeteer and one of the first Western artists to train in traditional Balinese shadow theatre, recognized as a dalang, or shadow master. He never lost sight of his roots in Bali, but he had bigger visions: they would need a bigger screen, a wide breadth of new lights, and countless other innovations. He wanted to bring in stories from all over the world.

I worked with Larry from 2009 until his passing in January and I only got to witness a sliver of his work, but I am so happy and blessed to have had that time with him. When I moved to the Bay Area, he was the only puppet director I had heard of in my time working on the east coast, and he was the one I wanted to work with here. I had worked with the same lights at The Center for Puppetry Arts, but we never delved so deep into their potential. Larry was ever reaching for more. Every show was an experiment in form and I loved it! It was hard. It was

frustrating...and it was exciting!

Larry had a process like I'd never experienced. Everyone did everything until certain talents rose like cream to the surface. The first day, everyone made puppets and cut out scenery and made shadows on the screen and it was a mess. Then we would stop for an extended lunch and talk about the work and get to know each other. The casts were pretty large sometimes, and there were often many cultures represented, and the food was always exceptional. It first struck me as a waste of time and money. "We should be working on the show" I thought to myself, though I did enjoy the down time. But Larry was making a film, in a sense. We would create so much that would later be edited out of the show. We would often be exploring right up to opening night. Then Larry would have some epiphany and reorder the show and make cuts and I would walk out so nervous because it was the first time we had run through the whole thing and we were in front of an audience. But I came to trust Larry completely. If there was ever a doubt, I knew he had some way to remix the show into genius. It was a process that only Larry could pull off. Those long lunches and the many talks we'd have everyday in "the circle" had made us family. We trusted each other and we trusted him. Some of my dearest friends were made at Shadowlight. He was our leader, but he was an amazing community builder as well.

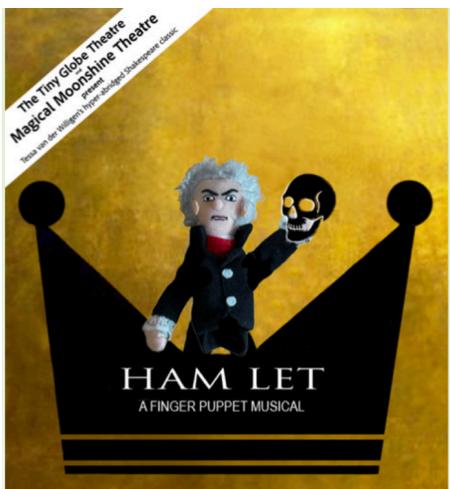
Larry's home was our home. The front door was always unlocked and he was always up for a bite and a drink. Larry loved food and he loved hosting. His house became an informal salon where we gathered to eat, drink, argue, and imagine. The hot pot parties at his house were full of laughter and a place where ideas were debated across the dinner table, and dreams of Larry's next project would often be shared there for the first time, with everyone full of great food and wine. The warmth of those gatherings built something that felt like family. Larry understood that art is sustained not only by technique and vision, but by community. For me, he was not only an innovator in shadow theater, but a leader, colleague, and friend who restored my sense of artistic possibility and sharpened my understanding of why we do this work at all.

(This is just a personal reflection. To learn more about Larry and his incredible life visit: <https://www.shadowlight.org/> )

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## Upcoming Events

Hamlet, the Musical (with  
Finger Puppets)



The players are about three inches. The play is about fifty minutes. All of your favorite soliloquies are here, along with a motley of songs adapted for this truncated tragedy. The celebrity finger puppets of the Unemployed Philosopher's Guild make up the cast, including Beethoven in the title role, Emily Dickinson as Ophelia, Robert E. Lee as Claudius, and Albert Einstein as Polonius.

**Saturday, March 21, 4:00 p.m.**

**At the White Barn in St. Helena**

**Ticket price: \$10.00**

Enjoy Shakespeare's masterpiece as you've never seen it before: enlightening, entertaining, shorter (and smaller) than you'd think possible. A mixture of reverence and hijinks, making Shakespeare accessible to all. It is a production for the ages, from 7 to 97.

\* Just added: A short "Cranky" shadow puppet performance.

**Saturday, March 21, 4:00 p.m.**

**Ticket price: \$10.00** *Audience members will receive a free finger puppet* [TICKET LINK](#)

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## **Puppet Themed Films Showing at the Poppy Jasper International Film Festival**



**Horndribbles (USA, 11:45) — dir.**

**Savannah Warrick**

**Wed, Apr 15th, 4:30 PM @ Granada**

**Theater - Hollister**

Step into the handmade world of Horndribbles, a documentary where puppeteer Lucas Richards builds more than characters—he builds connection, community, and meaning through the art

of

puppetry. <https://pjiff2026.eventive.org/films/horndribbles-699bdffa325fee5305a5d5a4>



**Marionette (USA, 2:45)**

**Sat, Apr 11th, 8:00 PM @ The District Theater, Gilroy**

**Sun, Apr 12th, 5:00 PM @ Morgan Hill Community Playhouse**

Music video by Ava Della Pietra.

<https://pjiff2026.eventive.org/films/ava-della-pietra-marionette-699bdffa325fee5305a5d4c8>



**Man and Mattress (USA, 23:35) — dir.**

**Andrew Reinfeld**

**Sat, Apr 11th, 2:00 PM @ The District Theater, Gilroy**

A messy loser is forced to battle his outspoken mattress, after refusing to clean his room.

<https://pjiff2026.eventive.org/films/man-and-mattress-699bdffa325fee5305a5d5fc>



**The Wizard Zone (USA, 45:05) — dir.**

**James & Joel Myrick**

**Thu, Apr 9th, 2:00 PM @ Morgan Hill Community Playhouse**

James and Joel present an anthology of shorts that blur the line between fiction and the world they live in, while struggling to live in the world in general.

<https://pjiff2026.eventive.org/films/the-wizard-zone-episode-1-699bdffb325fee5305a5d711>



For more information about the festival, visit [pjiff.org](https://pjiff.org).

**Las Cosas Que Brillan (USA, 11:45) — dir. Kristal Sotomayor**

**Tue, Apr 14th, 12:00 PM @ Morgan Hill Community Playhouse**

When a curious Trans Latinx mermaid defies her mother’s warnings and ventures to the surface, she is forced to confront the violent legacies of colonialism, environmental destruction, and the danger of being desired in a world that sees her as a possession—not a person.

<https://pjiff2026.eventive.org/films/las-cosas-que-brillan-699bdf6a325fee5305a5d5ce>

## Reviews

### **CLOWN DADDY IN HAMLET - SHORT REVIEWS**

Clown Daddy performed “Hamlet” as a one-person show at the Throckmorton Theatre, Mill Valley in January.



#### **Quick reviews...**

*“It was a tour de force of character. The troop of actors included Clown Daddy (Ellie Johnson) and her two puppet characters, Conrad and Gratch who brought laughs and edge of the seat enjoyment to the audience!” - Uel McGinnis*

*"I have never laughed so hard at a tragedy in my life! It is hard to select just one memorable moment, but I particularly liked the poisoning scene, where one finger puppet pours poison into the ear of the finger puppet King, Hamlet's deceased father."*

- Lee Armstrong

**A bit about Clown Daddy:** *Bold, brilliant, and a bit bonkers, Clown Daddy, aka Ellie J, will bring your imagination to where it enjoys being. Classically trained in acting at Atlantic Theatre Company in New York and eccentrically educated in dynamics of movement at L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris, she has found a way to brilliantly break the mold of stuffy theatre norms, clasp intense story-telling and character work with humor that defies expectations. She wonderfully balances the profound with the profane, lightheartedness with depth, and sincerity with a beautiful dose of frivolity.*

*If your local theater is looking for puppet performances, check out [www.clown-daddy.com](http://www.clown-daddy.com)*

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## **Puppets Up in SF Jan 17 2026 as part of Sketch Fest- Review**

*"For over 15 years I've wanted to see this show. I watched every clip of it that I could find online so seeing it in person was a dream come true. The performance of the puppeteers combined with what was shown on the monitors created a beautiful interaction with the audience. It was deeply inspiring for me as a puppeteer and producer. I hope to see it again and I recommend it to everyone."* - Uel McGinnis

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*"The Sex Lives of Puppets" by [Blind Summit](#) at [Stanford Live](#). Review by Lisa Zagone*



Blind Summit, a UK-based puppetry troupe founded by [Mark Down](#) and [Nick Barnes](#), has long been known for pushing the expressive and comedic boundaries of contemporary puppetry. This production, which is currently touring after its premiere at the [Edinburgh Festival Fringe](#), continues that tradition of bold humor and theatrical risk-taking.

The piece is framed as a mockumentary: a series of interviews with puppets (and puppet couples) discussing their sexual identities, desires, anxieties, histories, and exploits. What could easily have tipped into crudeness was instead presented with comic timing, tenderness, and generosity of spirit. The awkwardness was the point, and it was handled with intelligence and care.

One of the most memorable moments of the evening was not scripted. A puppet's mouth mechanism broke and became stuck mid-performance. It was one of those rare instances that only live theatre can offer. Rather than derail the scene, Mark Down and the ensemble (Isobel Griffiths, Dale Wylde, and Elliot Liburd) folded the malfunction into the fabric of the show with improvisational wit. It was a reminder of what makes live performance electric: vulnerability, risk, and the visible humanity of the performers alongside the illusion.

The puppets themselves were exquisitely crafted rod puppets, each operated by two puppeteers. The puppets were Designed by Mark Down and Russell Dean. The characters looked, sounded and felt like fully inhabited vessels for confession, absurdity, and longing.

The show builds toward a daftly momentous finale which was both strange yet unexpectedly moving. It is a production that invites laughter while also gently interrogating how we project identity, shame, and desire onto bodies, whether flesh or foam.

I would highly recommend catching this show, or any production by Blind Summit, if you have the opportunity! It is sophisticated puppetry that trusts both its audience and its medium.

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## Under The Puppet

Under The Puppet kicks off Season 10 with an interview with puppeteer, builder and wrangler Amanda Maddock! Amanda Maddock has experience working with puppets of all sizes. From the regular puppets of The Book of Pooh, Bear In the Big Blue House, Between the Lions, Sesame Street and The Muppets to the enormous puppets of Walking with Dinosaurs and How to Train Your Dragon. Amanda's career has taken her across the country and around the world including to Iceland to work on Lazytown and Russia to puppeteer in the opening ceremonies of the 2014 Winter Olympics. Versed in many styles of puppetry from tabletop to hand and rod to the animatronics of the two Five Nights At Freddy's films, she has done it all. It's my pleasure to chat Amanda Maddock about all these projects and more on this episode of Under the puppet. Available wherever you get your podcasts or over at [underthepuppet.com](http://underthepuppet.com) <<http://underthepuppet.com/>>

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