

# The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

Report by Susanne Wallace

2005 Churchill Fellow

Research into seven Puppet Centres in the USA, Europe, the UK and Japan in order to develop a working model for a Puppet Centre in Australia.

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Signed: Susanne Wallace

Dated: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006

Index	Page
Introduction	2
Executive Summary	3
Program	4
<b>Main Body of Report</b>	
Northwest Puppet Center, Seattle, USA	5
Center for Puppetry Arts, Atlanta, USA	6
Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre, New York City, USA	7
Lambert Puppet Theatre, Dublin, Ireland	8
Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre, Glasgow, UK	9
Puppet Centre Trust, London, UK	10
Théâtre de la Marionnette à Paris, Paris, France	11
Puppet Theatre Puk, Tokyo, Japan	13
Other related venues	14
Conclusions	14
Recommendations	15

## Introduction

The purpose of the Fellowship was to visit Puppet Centres around the world with a view to creating a working model for a Puppet Centre in Australia. I chose the Centres to visit following my own research and advice from professional colleagues. While on my journey I discovered and visited more puppeteers and puppet theatres than I had originally planned. The journey started in the USA and continued on to Ireland, the UK, Europe and finished in Japan.

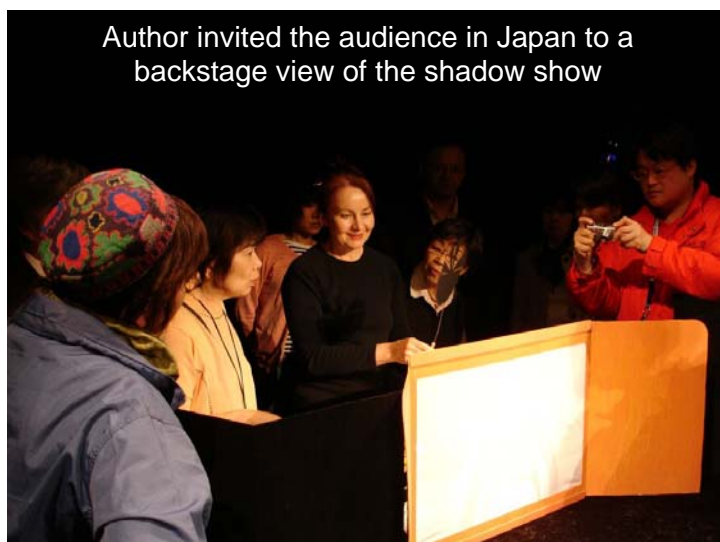
Centre is spelt in two ways in the Report. This is to conform to the spelling in the country of origin.

The purpose of this report is not to make judgments or criticisms about the various Centres. The purpose is to relate an overview of the Centres and to identify features which could be practically applied to the establishment of an Australian Puppet Centre. I gathered the information through interviews, conversations and seeing the Centres at work. To my knowledge I have faithfully recorded what I saw and heard.

It is a testament to the international puppetry community that I was shown such generosity with information, tickets to shows, friendship, shared meals and accommodation. I wish also to acknowledge the international members of UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionette) who are the glue connecting puppeteers around the world, particularly Nancy Staub and Richard Bradshaw for their advice and introductions and Stephen Kaplin and Kuang-Yu Fong from Great Small Works and Chinese Theatre Works for their hospitality.

My gratitude goes to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and to the people of Australia who so generously donated and who continue to donate to the Trust. I travelled with my partner from the Sydney Puppet Theatre, Steve Coupe, and I thank him for the extra ears and eyes and for the technical and moral support.

To say thank you to the Centres and other people visited, I travelled with a 13 minute shadow puppet show which could be quickly set up in many different spaces. It was a pleasure to be able to offer a free performance and field questions about the creation of the show and about puppetry in Australia.



## **Executive Summary**

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### **Project Description:**

To study Puppet Centres around the world with a view to creating a working model for a Puppet Centre in Australia. Travel included visits to the USA, Ireland, UK, Europe and Japan.

### **Highlights:**

It is a very different travelling experience when you are focussing on a particular project. Instead of going to a Broadway show, I ended up performing to a full house in a theatre in downtown New York and hand sewing some precious Chinese silk to help out puppeteers in a studio in Brooklyn's DUMBO district. Instead of booing an opposing team at the international Rugby game in Dublin, I joined in with a theatre full of children hissing at the big bad wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood".

One of the highlights of the Fellowship was seeing the variety of buildings that have been converted into Puppet Theatres. These included a church, barns and stables, a 15<sup>th</sup> century wine cellar, an old school, an office building and a council cleansing depot. Some places were so beautifully decorated that they were works of art in themselves. They were all well patronised. For the public, it seemed that the focus was on the unique experience of seeing a puppet show, coming for a workshop or in-service training.

It is very difficult to pick out particular people who were more helpful than others. Every centre we visited was incredibly generous. I do want to thank those who spoke English with me when it was not their native language, Virginie Audran in Paris and Tamiko Onagi in Tokyo. Vince Anthony, the director of the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, gave us an astonishingly free rein to explore the Centre and to talk with all the staff. Malcolm Knight and Sarah Lee at the Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre were very generous hosts inviting us to stay at the accommodation facility at the Centre and to partake in all the Centre's activities.

### **Conclusions:**

A Puppet Centre is a very flexible concept. It can be housed in a vast variety of buildings with its own theatre or not. It can be staffed by one person and a group of dedicated volunteers or employ 50 people. A Puppet Centre can become a cultural institution serving generations of audiences and practitioners. The youngest Centre visited has been in operation for 11 years. Most of the Centres have been operating for 25 years or more.

It is rare for a Centre to operate entirely on box office. Most Puppet Centres require some continued sponsorship from the government, corporations or private donors.

### **Dissemination:**

On June 12, 2006, I delivered a paper on this Churchill Fellowship at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Puppetry Summit in Hobart. The Summit attracted national and international puppetry practitioners, colleagues from other arts practices and representatives from funding bodies. A summary of this report will also be published in Australian Puppeteer, the industry magazine.

## Program

Some Centres required many days investigation, in others only one or two days were appropriate. The Fellowship was granted for an 8 week program. I spent 12 weeks away taking the opportunity to combine the Fellowship with visits to other related venues and puppetry friends.

February 6 to 9	Northwest Puppet Center, Seattle, USA
February 10 to 15	Center for Puppetry Arts, Atlanta, USA
February 16 to 22	Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre, New York City, USA Great Small Works, New York City, USA Sandglass Theatre, Putney, Vermont, USA
February 23 to 27	Lambert Puppet Theatre, Dublin, Ireland
March 2	London School of Puppetry, London, UK
March 3 to 13	Scottish Mask and Puppet Theatre, Glasgow, UK
March 14 to 20	Puppet Centre Trust, London, UK Little Angel Theatre, London, UK The Puppet Barge, London, UK
March 21 to 26	Festival of Adult Puppet Theatre, Reutlingen, Germany
March 27 to 31	Theatre de Grenouille, Biel, Switzerland Figurentheater Lupine in Biel, Switzerland Stadelhofen Puppet Theatre, Zurich, Switzerland Blikfelder Theatre Festival for Young People, Zurich, Switzerland
April 1 to 9	Théâtre de la Marionnette à Paris, Paris, France Institut de la Marionnette, Charleville-Meziere, France
April 10 to 15	Animacao, real time animation with Motion Capture digital puppetry, St Martory, France
April 16 to 19	Holiday in Spain
April 20 to 27	Puppet Theatre Puk, Tokyo, Japan

### **Northwest Puppet Center, Seattle, USA**

The Northwest Puppet Centre is the creation of the Carter family. Their beautiful premises is in an old church with a total of 360 square metres. Upstairs, lit by Italian chandeliers, is the theatre with raked seating for up to 180 and a small workshop. Downstairs is the library, the office and a series of display cabinets including a wonderful display of marionettes. Everywhere you look there are details relating to puppetry. Even around the light switches are beautiful paintings of puppets glued to the switch plates.



There is also a well equipped playground outside for children waiting to come into the theatre. Even in February it wasn't too cold for them to play outside for a little while.

The Carters started building up a steady clientele by hiring space in a community centre on a regular basis. Then about 11 years ago they bought the church which they converted into the Puppet Center. Because of its position in a residential area, Council has negotiated with the Center to close for the summer months.

Before buying the church they were negotiating with various government organizations for two different sites. Neither came through and some of those sites still haven't really been developed.

The Center's core activities are regular in-theatre performances for school and family audiences either with their own shows or by promoting visiting puppeteers, a successful, annual production of a new puppet opera for adults (which is performed with live singers and musicians), a touring program of performances and workshops, the changing exhibition of puppets and the library. About 60% of their income is generated from performances and workshops.

### **Outstanding features**

- The beauty of the building and attention to detail with decoration
- The playground
- The fact that the family built up a clientele by hiring another space before they secured their own
- Future plans to set up an endowment in trust where the interest provides seeding money for each year's activities. Their research suggests that you can start by real grass roots amounts topped up by corporation money if you can't initially get a big donor on board

### The Center for Puppetry Arts, Atlanta, USA

This is one of the biggest Centers that I visited and a powerhouse of puppetry activity. At its head is Vince Anthony who was for many years a practising puppeteer. The Center has a staff of more than 50 people including office staff, cleaners and maintenance staff, puppet and set builders, front of house staff, development officers, producers, assistant artistic directors, production staff, composers, education officers, distance learning specialists, museum curator and of course puppeteers. The Center generates 50% of its income from box office and the other 50% from sponsorship including a multi-layered membership program.



The Center for the Puppetry Arts is located in Midtown, Atlanta in an old school building. The original structure dates back to 1911. The Center was started nearly 40 years ago by Vince Anthony (Vagabond Puppets) and has been on its present site for 28 years. In 1978, the city was looking to offload a number of city buildings and was happy for arts organizations to occupy them. But the buildings were ostensibly still up for sale and the occupants could be forced to leave with 30 days notice. This old school was in a rundown area of

town and originally the puppets shared with the Atlanta Ballet and other artists. The Center started with 2 theatre spaces and offices.

Eventually The Center for Puppetry Arts bought the building and the puppets took over the complex.

The character of the three story brick school is still evident in the education and office areas but has been well transformed in the theatre areas with a large, spacious atrium/foyer, two beautiful exhibition spaces and two constantly active theatres. The big theatre seats 350 and the smaller about 170. There is also an experimental black box space which seats about 70.

Downstairs is a dedicated puppet building workshop and sewing area and outside is an annex for storage of past shows and the newly constructed scenery workshop.

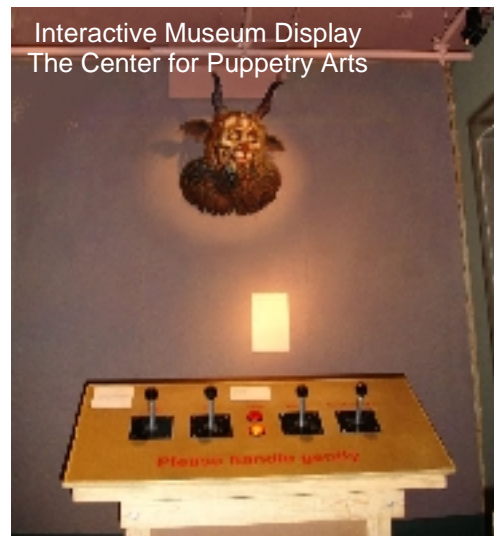
Two full-time employees manage an **in-house education program** which links a puppet making workshop to every family show. The workshops are cleverly planned around a predetermined design and method of construction and all materials are provided.

**The Distance Learning** program has its own on-line, internet studio on site and is a unique program. Schools can book a one hour class that is delivered by telephone cable or wireless broadcast between a presenter in the Center to an individual classroom. The sessions are based around a curriculum topic and at intervals during the session they create a puppet relevant to the topic. Currently, the sessions are available for a fee to any school within the appropriate time zone (schools need to supply their own hardware). They currently broadcast-on-demand to schools in the USA, Mexico and Canada.

**There are two museum spaces.** One is dedicated to puppets from around the world and the puppets are beautifully grouped and presented in showcases. The other called “The Power of Wonder” showcases all kinds of puppets. The entry is quite magical. Opening the door activates a metallic, junk puppet phoenix that rises from an old metal garbage bin complete with sound and lights. The next room is completely crowded with puppets, like an imaginary puppeteer’s attic. Seemingly at random, some of the puppets move and this supports the suspicion that the puppets really do move about when we are not there to watch them.

There are also interactive elements like the two hand shadow booths with diagrams of how to make hand shadows using a light (permanently on) and a white wall. The animatronics displays have joysticks that anyone can play with to remotely manipulate the eye and mouth movements of a puppet. There is also a big rod puppet of a praying mantis encased behind perspex with the rods available for the public to manipulate the puppet. These interactive components have been well designed and are continually maintained to cope with the surprising strength of 4 year olds!

Running continuously is a series of films of puppetry artists from around the world.



**The library**, which is open by appointment, houses a huge collection of puppetry related books and recorded media. There is a viewing area for watching videos and DVDs.

### **Outstanding Features**

- The sheer size of the complex and the number of activities
- The energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the staff
- Two beautifully curated museums, one with interactive displays
- The Distance Learning program is unique
- It is active 7 days a week

### **The Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre, New York City, USA**

This venue was not on my original schedule and although it is more of a theatre than a Puppet Centre it has unique qualities worth mentioning. The theatre is in Central Park and its sign outside says “Imported from Sweden in 1876, the Cottage became home of the travelling Cottage Marionette Theatre in 1947. In 1973, a permanent theatre was constructed inside the Cottage, which has since served hundreds of thousands of New York children with live marionette theatre.” It has provided work for many puppeteers, some of whom have become America’s most respected puppeteers.

It is sponsored by the City of New York Parks and Recreation and programmed by the City Park Foundation in association with the theatre’s Artistic Director. The Cottage is open Tuesday to Sunday with shows running all year for the general public, school groups and private parties. Shows are performed to a recorded soundtrack.

The Cottage has a small but charming theatre (seats 90) specifically designed with a permanent, single marionette bridge. In puppetry language, the bridge is an elevated platform

above the stage for the string puppeteers to stand on while they operate the puppets below. There is a small party room on the same ground floor level as the theatre. The office and a small workshop are upstairs.

### **Outstanding features**

- The beauty of the building and surroundings
- The puppeteers and office staff are city employees
- It is a dedicated marionette (string puppet) theatre

### **Lambert Puppet Theatre and National Puppet Centre, Dublin, Ireland**

Lambert's was the first Puppet Theatre in Ireland. It opened in 1972 and is the creation of the Lambert family. The building is a series of mews (stables) that have been joined together. It is situated in a lane way with very little car activity. Visitors enter the building through brightly coloured doors into a welcoming and decorative open courtyard. This leads to more doors and then into a colourful foyer.

The theatre seats about 300 on rows of long benches. There are regular weekend performances. There is a well curated museum showcasing Lambert's puppets and puppets from all over the world. In many cases these have been purchased especially for the museum. Upstairs is another small performance/rehearsal room with rows of puppets cleverly stored behind black curtains. There is a party room which seats about 40 children. Through the party room is a well equipped puppet building workshop.



Eugene and Mai Lambert had 10 children, many of whom have worked with them over the years either in the theatre or on their TV show "Wanderly Wagon". The words Lambert and puppet seem to be synonymous in Dublin. It really was remarkable to meet the cast after a show and to be introduced to three generations of Lamberts; grandfather, son and grandson all performing together. More of the family are involved in many other aspects of the Centre be it performance, artwork or front of house. A number of

Eugene and Mai's family have their own travelling shows.

Eugene commented that he doesn't really know how they managed to do what they did at the Centre, they never seemed to have the money. They have created a really charming venue with bright colours and beautiful decorations. It is undeniably dedicated to puppets. The Lamberts also run an international Puppet Festival for which they receive some financial support from their government.

### **Outstanding Features**

- This place has a sense of inevitability about it – that it cannot not exist.
- It is a visually engaging building both inside and out and the staff are warm and welcoming.

### **The Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre, Glasgow, UK**

The Centre is housed in an old cleansing depot that belongs to the Council. It was not in use when Centre creator and director Dr. Malcolm Knight negotiated a 99 year lease from the Council. The Centre opened in its current location in 1987.



Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre

The building has a number of discrete usage areas not accessible from other parts of the building. The front door at ground level enters directly onto the box office, puppet display, foyer and party area with tables and chairs and an industrial kitchen. There is also a library room. From here you can access the theatre which seats about 90 people on cushions on the floor at the front and raked seating further back. Accessible only from the back of the theatre is Malcolm's puppet and mask making workshop with attic storage space.

Upstairs, with its own entrance, is a three bedroom caretaker's apartment that has been converted into the main office, the textile room and the mail order, specialist puppetry book shop. There is still one bedroom permanently available for the use of visiting puppeteers (like me).

The back of the property has ample parking and a storage shed. Entering in yet another door at the back is a special effects workshop for film and television puppets and another workshop room that is used for children's puppet making workshops with a tool room next door.

Over the years the core activities of the Centre have changed. For 10 years until 2002 it conducted a 2 year diploma course in conjunction with nearby Anniesland College with a yearly intake of students. For professional puppeteers, the Centre used to conduct two master classes each year. During this period, the Centre had eleven people on staff. However, Malcolm always wanted to make sure that the Centre could operate with just two full-time staff and that is how they currently operate, employing part-time staff when needed.



Foyer  
Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre

Saturday is a very busy day at the Centre with one or two, usually sold out, performances that are often preceded or followed by party food for group party bookings. The Centre does not produce its own shows. The performances are by visiting puppeteers (mostly Scottish) and occasionally by other artists like magicians or storytellers. Some group bookings involve a puppet making workshop followed by party food and games.

The proper recording, maintenance and exhibiting of the Centre's large collections of puppets and masks is now one of the Centre's core activities.

#### Current Activities:

1. For the general public – performances and children’s workshops and birthday parties
2. For teachers – in-service classes in puppet making, manipulation and using puppets in the classroom
3. For puppeteers and interested others - a resource centre for research with an extensive library and video collection
4. For puppeteers – a website with a free listing for Scottish puppeteers, a referral service and an annual puppeteers’ day with performances and book shop
5. Maintenance and documentation of puppet and mask collection
6. Maintenance, promotion and installation of a travelling exhibition of puppets

The Centre has had a variety of funding sources during its history. At the moment the Glasgow City Council contributes about 25% of the operational costs. There seems to be another 5% sponsorship from other sources and the other 70% comes from box office either through the Saturday workshops, parties and performances or the workshops and museum activities.

#### Outstanding Features

- The accommodation facility for visiting puppeteers
- The industrial kitchen in the theatre foyer
- The vast collection of well maintained puppets and resource material
- The travelling exhibition

#### Puppet Centre Trust, London, UK

The Centre, staffed by one part-time administrator and knowledgeable volunteers, has permanent premises at the Battersea Arts Centre for peppercorn rent. This is a large studio on the first floor with offices and an open space that can be hired for rehearsals (at a reduced rate to puppeteers). The studio also houses a small collection of puppets and a good library of puppetry books which are available to the public on Wednesday afternoons for in-house research.



The Centre was started 32 years ago largely to unite the various puppetry groups and individuals and to raise the profile of puppetry in the UK. Penny Francis MBE was one of the driving forces in the establishment of the Centre and she instigated a philosophy of saturation getting puppetry and puppeteers in the public eye, “so they can’t not notice us”. The Centre has changed over the years but it has continued this core activity of advocacy for the art form, using every possible medium to promote puppetry. For example, it has encouraged many

puppetry related people to become board members of other arts organizations. It appears that this level of advocacy has proved beneficial in the United Kingdom. There is a lot of puppetry activity and puppets are appearing in surprising places like on stage with the Royal Shakespeare Company.



Inside the London Puppet Centre Trust

The Centre used to receive funding from the City Council and a now defunct scheme called London Grants. Other fundraising came from various foundations and individuals. The Centre originally had 2 full-time staff. Its activities included organizing festivals, commissioning research, producing the puppetry journal “Animations” and holding training events including a regular Saturday workshops for children at the Battersea Arts Centre. They also held exhibitions.

Some years ago the Centre was near bankruptcy. They received Arts Council funding to study the direction of the Puppet Centre and consequently made the staff redundant and changed the focus of the centre.

#### Current Activities:

1. Maintains an active and informative web site
2. Initiates and organizes training programs for professional puppeteers including Master Classes in various English locations often in association with other arts festivals or events
3. Offers two annual bursaries
4. Advocacy
5. Holiday workshops for young people
6. Edits an on-line magazine “Animations”
7. Holds national meetings all over the country - where this is not possible they have chat room meetings via the internet
8. Occasional touring exhibitions of puppets from the collection

The Centre has just received five year core funding from the Arts Council but not as much as they requested so they still need to seek other funding.

#### Outstanding Features

- High level of advocacy
- Commitment to research and training
- Communication centre for puppeteers, producers and general public

#### **Théâtre de la Marionnette à Paris, France**

The Centre has been in operation for 14 years. The physical space is a series of offices including a well organized documentation centre with an attached room for viewing video material. The Centre employs six staff, five full-time and one part-time. These include Artistic Director, Administration, Cultural Action, Public Relations, Co-ordination (Festivals and Workshops) and Documentation.

It does not have a theatre space or workshop facility. The Centre has been lobbying for many years to be provided with its own theatre space. Paris is the only capital city in Europe without a dedicated theatre space for the puppetry arts.

#### Core Activities:

1. Cultural Action – this is keeping the art of the puppet in the foreground of cultural activity principally through bringing artists and their audience together and always searching for new ways to expand the audience base by building public awareness of the art form. The Centre actively cultivates a relationship with the media and builds and maintains associations with other cultural organisations. As part of this cultural action it organizes two festivals each bi-annually. In 2006 will be the festival for newly trained artists and 2007 will be the festival showcasing established artists.
2. Workshop program – the Centre organizes professional artists to give workshops and conferences about puppetry in schools and tertiary institutions including providing publications for teachers.
3. Documentation Centre – the Centre maintains an extensive and well referenced collection of books, video material, photographs, scripts and press cuttings/fliers for French and foreign companies. The book collection also includes reference books on other arts e.g. film, dance and the visual arts. The Documentation Centre will include all material that is sent to them without censorship. It is open, by appointment, to all members of the public.

The primary focus of the Centre is on contemporary techniques in puppetry for the adult audience. The Artistic Director, Isabelle Bertola, referred to their preference for “Theatre of the Object”. The Centre produces OMNI, a magazine for the Centre’s activities, three times a year. All the documents coming out of the Centre have high production values.



The Centre does not actually create any shows but directs an artistic program and acts as producer bringing the artists, the venues and the funding together. One of their Cultural Action strategies is to ask performers to do their shows in unusual spaces. For example, the Centre organized a company which had created a show dealing with pregnancy to perform it in a hospital for the patients and staff. There is a lot of work in encouraging these new spaces to participate and making the circumstances possible for the performers. The audience is charged an entry fee.

The Centre is funded by three levels of government; city, regional and national. Each year new funding applications have to be made and this is a constant activity of the Centre. It must provide good documentation on the numbers of people coming to presentations and put forward a strong case to support its artistic decisions. It seems it is uncommon in France to receive corporate funding.

#### Outstanding Features

- Its high level of Cultural Action and advocacy
- Its active role as a producer providing opportunities for a variety of companies and individuals to develop and showcase their work
- It is unusual for a Puppet Centre to be so heavily focused on the adult audience and this Centre has made an aesthetic choice to promote contemporary techniques only

### **Puppet Theatre Puk, Tokyo, Japan**

With an Esperanto name for a Japanese company, Puk Pupa Teatro (Puppet Theatre Puk) began in 1929 and its choice of an international name reflects its commitment to free expression and anti-war ideals. In 2001, the company celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in its current building in Shinjuku in the heart of Tokyo. This five storey building, now owned by the company, houses the administration offices (including a staffed UNIMA office), a rehearsal room and a very well designed and equipped puppet theatre.

There are three main sections to Puk Puppet Theatre.

1. Puppet Theatre Troupe – the touring section that tours nationally and overseas
2. Theatre House Section – producing in-house productions
3. Studio Nova – the television/film/commercial production section which began in 1970

The company started using marionettes (string puppets) but now incorporates many different puppet styles. They create shows for adults and children and occasionally host performances by other puppet companies, music and variety shows. Their annual theatre program includes revived shows from their repertoire and new work. The theatre is open to the public for at least 120 days annually.



Outside Puppet Theatre Puk

The company also operates out of two other buildings. It has rehearsal and theatrical production space in an outer suburb of Tokyo and just two doors down from the theatre is Studio Nova where a team of people devise and build puppet shows for television.

I was fortunate to visit all sections of the company seeing three different shows in rehearsal, in three different spaces. I was also able to see a production of “Pink Dragon” by the touring troupe in a modern, city-owned complex with a library and very well equipped theatre.

Studio Nova operates on two floors of an office building. There are two puppet building workshops, office space and meeting rooms. It is here that the company devises new puppet shows for television

and continues the development of successful existing shows. It also creates works for film and commercials. It has created 215 serialised puppet programs and at present is involved with 10 regular television programs. Studio Nova has developed a long standing relationship with the government television station NHK which is the production house for the actual filming and editing. I was very fortunate to have been invited to watch a puppetry program being filmed at NHK.

Puppet Theatre Puk does not receive government funding except to support their touring program. All other income comes from box office and through Studio Nova. The company has a public membership of 700 who pay an annual contribution for which they receive one free ticket a year and ticket discounts. Puk wants to increase this membership to at least 1,000.



Puppet Theatre Puk in rehearsal

Puk has always been keen to create international links and has developed relationships with puppet companies in other countries. For example, the script for “Pink Dragon” was sent to the theatre, along with other scripts, by a company in Sophia, Bulgaria. Puk translated it and adapted it to its own style of performance.

Puk used to have its own school for training puppeteers but now it seems to have quite a pool of talented puppeteers to draw from. Occasionally, it runs in-

house training for professional puppeteers. There is a puppetry school in Japan on an island some distance from Tokyo. Two newly graduated puppet builders from this school had just started employment with Puk on the day we visited Studio Nova.

### **Outstanding Features**

- This is a very active company which employs not only creative and administration staff but also full-time producers. It was quite incredible that the company had three shows in rehearsal and one in performance at the same time. There was a great deal of respect and good humour in evidence at all levels.
- Having a television production house is unique to Puk and a very good way to maintain quality control in the presentation of puppetry to the broader community.
- The in-house theatre has two unique features, the fold away marionette bridge and the facility to lower a large section of the stage for scenery changes and as a stage device.

### **Other Venues**

I also had the opportunity to visit other dedicated puppet theatres. These are not Puppet Centres but are active in making puppetry available to the general public and therefore create an awareness of and interest in the art form. These included Sandglass Theatre’s Barn Theatre in Putney, Vermont, USA, the Little Angel Theatre in Islington, London, the Puppet Barge (a theatre on a boat) in London, the Biggar Puppet Theatre, Biggar, Scotland and the Zurich Puppet Theatre (Stadelhofen) in Switzerland.

I was also able to briefly visit the Institut de la Marionette in Charleville-Mezieres, France and will be able to continue research into this Centre in September 2006.

### **Conclusions**

All of the Centres visited are not-for-profit organisations with a board of directors. They are all accessible by public transport.

No two Centres are alike however there are some features in common with the majority of Centres. Most have their own theatre venue, puppet exhibition and library of puppetry books and recorded media. Most Centres welcome group bookings by offering some facilities for birthday party celebrations. In all cases the Puppet Centres are successful in bringing puppetry artists and their audience together.

A Puppet Centre can have as many features as one can imagine. Features I saw working included performance venues, rehearsal spaces, professional and public puppet building

workshops, puppet shops, static and touring exhibitions, puppetry specific libraries and documentation centres, a Distance Learning studio and an in-house television production studio. For those Centres without a performance venue, cultural advocacy is one of the primary activities, promoting puppetry and attracting new audiences. Without box office income, these Centres rely more heavily on outside funding.

In visiting the Puppet Centres, what was constant was the sense of wonder and joy experienced by the audiences whether they were adults or children, whether they were seeing a show or creating their own puppet in a workshop. Seeing the Centres at work reinforced my understanding that puppetry is a magical art form that attracts all ages and all cultures.

In many cases I was able to speak directly to the people who were the driving forces behind the creation of their Centres. These face-to-face conversations were always informative and inspirational. It was encouraging to hear how some of the Centres had adjusted over the years either creating programs that were more relevant or more needed or changing their focus as a response to funding opportunities.

### **Recommendations**

- It is important to articulate the core values of the Centre from which to develop the program of activities.
- In the creation of a Puppet Centre, a dedicated building is vital for the public to connect with. It gives stability and increases the possibilities of attracting funding, especially corporate funding.
- Staging puppet theatre can have unique needs. It is important to consider this before building or converting an existing space into a theatre. It may need a marionette bridge, flexible raked seating and wing space.
- It is essential to offer puppetry workshops to the general public to reinvigorate an amateur interest in puppetry allowing people to become much more aware of the art form through hands on experience.
- Following on the model of all the Centres visited, it is preferable if the Centre is a not-for-profit organisation with an active and enthusiastic Board of Directors who respect the artistic process.
- Access to public transport is highly recommended.
- It is important for the Centre to promote a variety of puppetry styles and puppet performers and to maintain good rapport with existing puppetry networks.
- A high level of advocacy is needed to build relationships with artists, producers, venues, funding bodies and the media.
- The Centre can build up its activities over time. It may be more possible to start with performances and workshops before creating other features like a multi-media studio, a rural outreach program, a museum, a documentation centre or a puppet shop.
- A Puppet Centre also has the opportunity to connect with the greater arts community for the cross fertilisation of ideas and talent. It may also create partnerships with other arts and industry events and festivals.

