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Schroeder Cherry

Performer at the National Capital
Puppetry Guild Festival

A Valuable Book for the Novice and Professional Puppeteer

The Maynard Method of Making Puppets and Marionettes

By James Maynard
A Review By Dave Herzog

For many years when people have asked me what books I recommend on puppet construction, I have always listed *Marionettes: Easy to Make! Fun to Use!* by Edith Flack Ackley, *Marionettes: A Hobby for Everyone* by Mabel and Les Beaton, and *The Puppet Theatre Handbook* by Marjorie Batchelder. I am now going to add a new fourth, 2020 book to that revered line up: *The Maynard Method of Making Puppets and Marionettes*, available on CD-ROM via eBay, list price \$19.95.

At 334 pages, *The Maynard Method of*

The section on animal puppets is perhaps the finest moment of this book. Here James's many years as puppeteer, costumer, and theater designer really shine. What is often an afterthought in other construction manuals is given the full treatment. James covers everything from making puppets from stuffed animals, as well as a section on making many different animal puppets on your own.

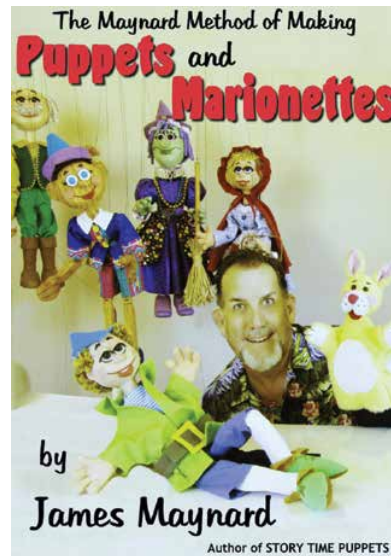
Making Puppets and Marionettes is a treasure trove of creative ideas. What sets this publication apart from its predecessors is that this is truly a puppet-making guide for the 21st century. Wisely, James decided to publish his book as a CD. This gives the book a distinct advantage over other how-to books. Not only does

James give a clear, concise description of each step of puppet building, but he also illustrates each step with a clear color photo. James goes one step further in that for each process, he also includes a pattern that downloads in full size. For example, the section on heads includes not only beautifully illustrated examples of puppet heads easily fashioned from Styrofoam, but also patterns for the individual facial features, all of which can be downloaded. Nothing is left to chance with this format; the basic lesson is fully complete, from head, hands, and body construction, as well as costumes including such items as hats. This makes it possible for even a first-time puppet maker to get a pleasing result. All the materials listed can easily be found in fabric and craft stores. The simple tools used in the book can for the most part be found in any home improvement or hardware store at relatively low cost. Many are tools that most households have on hand.

James includes sections on hand puppets as well as marionettes. He also offers patterns and instructions for both 18- and 22-inch marionettes. In addition, he has an excellent, slightly more advanced section of variety "trick" marionettes, covering classic variety acts, such as the tight-rope walker and trapeze artist. James also includes full-size illustrations of marionette controls. This is a real boon to novice puppeteers.

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and theater designer really shine. What is often an afterthought in other construction manuals is given the full treatment. James covers everything from making puppets from stuffed animals, as well as a section on making many different animal puppets on your own. The chapter covering the



making of an anthropomorphized Big Bad Wolf will allow the reader to create a really first-rate marionette.

Sections on puppet stages and scenery construction are also included in this handy, easy-to-use format. The reader can even save the PDFs to their hard drive. It's very easy to print out sections of the book, as well, for easy reference.

I recommend this book highly to both beginners and pros. I think teachers and those who work with young people will find *The Maynard Method of Making Puppets and Marionettes* to be a must-have guide on the art of puppetry for years to come. Thank you, James, for creating a new modern classic guide to puppet construction.

The Puppet Whisperer

Roxie Myhrum Celebrates 10 Years at Puppet Showplace Theater

by Amy West

Five years ago, I was just beginning my later-in-life love affair with puppetry. I was only vaguely aware of the existence of a puppet theater in the Boston area, and had never heard of its artistic director, Roxanna ("Roxie") Myhrum.

I did not know that she is a Harvard University graduate, a former associate producer for television, an experienced director of more than 20 operas, and a sought-after puppet director and coach with theater credits and teaching credentials all over town.

Roxie grew up in Springfield, Massachusetts, where she studied at The Drama Studio under the tutelage of Derron Wood, whom she credits for sparking her interest in puppetry. As part of Flock Theatre, she worked on emerging artist pieces for Heather Henson and Hua Hua Zhang at her first O'Neill National Puppetry Conference.

Lowell House Opera

I was not aware of any of this until a mutual friend suggested I contact Roxie to find out about the Boston puppet scene. I had a year of puppetry school under my belt (via UConn's Puppet Arts Online Graduate Certificate Program), when I finally worked up the courage to email her to ask about performing in a Puppet Showplace Slam. I wish I hadn't waited so long.

Thanks to Roxie's encouragement, I'm now a regular slam performer, class-taker, and a member of Puppet Showplace Theater's Board of Trustees. In these roles, I have the privilege of witnessing Roxie's dedication, passion, skill, kindness, and commitment to leading the puppet theater first established by Mary Churchill in 1974. Paul Vincent Davis began working with Mary Churchill in 1978, and when Mary passed away in 1997, Paul continued as artistic director until he retired in 2007.

Roxie celebrated her 10th year at Puppet Showplace in January 2020. In March, a week after returning from an international festival, she and the Puppet Showplace team faced the stark realities of school closings and the loss of over \$100,000 in quarterly revenue. The small staff and dedicated team of affiliated artists were rattled, but ready to launch into emergency operations. History had taught them well.

With a wry smile Roxie said, "This is not our first crisis. When I first started at Puppet Showplace, the theater was still in scrappy economic circumstances." Brad Shur was the resident artist at the time, and together they launched an aggressive period of program development, including adult education programs, school residencies, tours, and production partnerships. "We said yes to puppet programs for anyone, and worked within the parameters of whatever they could afford."

Roxie also reimagined the theater's "Incubator" project night as a structured new-works development program that partnered with local artists. "Many of our celebrated New England touring companies and master artists were nearing retirement. As the region's puppetry center, we needed to invest in the next generation of puppeteers." Since then, Incubator has launched 15 full-length touring productions that have been seen by thousands of people across the region and (for some) all over the world. It has also earned Roxie the nickname "The Puppet Whisperer" for the way she encourages

and supports artists through challenging creative projects.

This culture of daring experimentation and a willingness to try, share, learn, and try again has served Puppet Showplace well during COVID-19. As Roxie says, "In our emergency response, we have worked hard to create the financial and operational stability that allows artists to feel safe, supported, and able to take creative risks." Within four months, the Puppet Showplace team, including resident artist Sarah Nolen and resident teaching artist Honey Goodenough, moved everything online: all-ages shows, puppet slams, workshops, tours, and even birthday parties. Outdoor programs and small-group puppetry camps are now underway.

The pandemic and the protests against racism and police brutality also brought clarity to Roxie's core commitments: (1) making sure that the people and puppet characters on stage reflect the diversity of Puppet Showplace Theater's audience, and (2) getting puppetry's uniquely powerful techniques and traditions into the



Roxanna Myhrum at the 40th anniversary celebration of Puppet Showplace. Puppets by Paul Vincent Davis in the foreground. Photo courtesy of Puppet Showplace

hands of people of all backgrounds and abilities. In June, Puppet Showplace launched the Black Puppeteer Empowerment Grant and Creative Research Residency Program, mentored by Brad Brewer. Six artists were selected for the first round of grants. Roxie is especially proud of this initiative. "We believe that puppetry is a liberating, radical art form of great hope and possibility. When you practice puppetry, you have the power to create new worlds and make new rules. Right now, we want that power in the hands of Black artists as we create, innovate, and work towards justice in our world and in our field."
www.puppetshowplace.org

Amy West is a puppeteer, writer, photographer, and wedding DJ in Boston, where she serves on the Board of Trustees at Puppet Showplace Theater and performs semi-regularly at the Puppet Showplace Slam. She has been a member of Puppeteers of America since 2018.