

# **Training for careers in puppetry**

Some notes for potential students and their  
advisors  
prepared by The Puppet Centre Trust

July 1994

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## TRAINING FOR CAREERS IN PUPPETRY

### Careers in puppetry

PUPPETRY itself is a very specialised area of the performing arts, but there are a growing number of puppeteers in the UK working in a wide range of styles and cultural contexts. For example, there are:

- Punch and Judy 'professors'
- one-person shows performing at birthday parties and in small theatres
- companies of 2 - 3 members touring to larger theatres
- permanent puppet theatres with a resident company
- celebratory and processional/carnival puppeteers
- puppeteers who work in television and film
- people who specialise in making puppets for theatre and TV or film
- puppeteers working in education and therapy
- puppeteers who specialise in object animation e.g. for TV adverts  
- dancing milk bottles and the like
- puppeteers working within theatre/mime/visual theatre companies
- designers working in theatre making puppets

### Training for puppeteers

There is comparatively little formalised training **specifically for puppeteers** in the UK at the moment so many puppeteers find training in one (or a combination) of the following ways:

- 1 Making and performing with their own puppets with the help of various books on the subject
- 2 Attending short courses or evening classes to improve their skills
- 3 Persuading a puppeteer or puppet company to take them in as a trainee on placement from college
- 4 Agreeing a placement with a puppeteer or puppet company as part of a college course
- 5 Attending a one-year post-graduate or three-year undergraduate course at Central School in London
- 6 Taking a formal course in another discipline which is relevant to the field of puppetry as a whole
- 7 Taking a puppetry module in an existing performance/drama/design/theatre studies course.

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### How to make a start as a puppeteer

- 1 You need to decide which area of puppetry you want to work in:  
e.g. performer/maker/designer/director/ writer/all  
What kind of puppets do you want to work with?  
e.g. marionettes, rod puppets, glove puppets, giant  
and processional puppets, shadow puppets, body  
puppets, object animation  
All these different types of puppet require different skills to make/operate them.
- 2 Once you have identified an area you are interested in:
  - try to see some performances of this type of puppetry.  
(Check your local theatre or arts centre for details of  
shows near to you)
  - try reading any books your local library may have
  - check with your local education authority or theatre to  
see if there are any introductory classes or workshops  
you can attend.
- 3 If there is nothing specifically about puppetry, do not despair!
  - try classes in movement, mime choreography ,dance, physical theatre  
or voice if you want to perform
  - or classes in drawing, sculpture, toy-making(carving) or sewing if you  
want to be a maker
  - the technical skills of theatre - lighting, sound, carpentry,  
construction/engineering, film/video-making, computer graphics,  
design etc. are all relevant to the worlds of puppetry and object  
animation and skills in any of these areas would be invaluable to  
a puppeteer or a puppet maker.

### The next stage - further/higher education

You may now wish to move on further into full-time training.

- 1 There are at present only two courses focused on puppetry:
  - a) Since October 1992 there has been a one-year **Advanced Diploma in Puppetry** at Central School of Speech and Drama in London
  - b) The Central School has also, recently, received validation for a three-year degree course **BA (Hons) in Theatre Studies (PUPPETRY)** which will begin in October 1994.

For further information and prospectus, please send an A4 size, stamped-addressed envelope, marked with the course title, to:  
Frances Tolley (Ref PCC 94), **Central School of Speech and Drama**, Embassy Theatre, 64 Eton Avenue, London, NW3 3HY telephone: 071 722-8183

3.

2 If you already have some experience, you can find training on a full-time modular basis accredited by Middlesex University at **The London School of Puppetry**  
Contact: Caroline Astell-Burt/Ronnie LeDrew at the London School of Puppetry,  
2 Legard Road, London, N5 1DE telephone: 071 359 7357

3 Because there are so few courses relating **specifically** to puppetry, you may consider a performing arts/design course at a Drama School or a University where there may be an opportunity to study puppetry as part of a modular course.  
Places where this may be possible include:

University of Glasgow, Department of Theatre, Film & TV,  
Florentine House, 53 Hillhead Street,  
Glasgow, G12 8QF  
Tel: 041 339 8855 Fax: 041 330 4142 (Contact Malcolm Knight)

Middlesex University, Department of Education and Performing Arts,  
(Theatre Arts Course)  
Trent Park, Bramley Road,  
London, N14 4XS  
Tel: 081 362 5121

Nottingham Trent University, (offers puppetry modules as part of Theatre Design  
Degree)  
Burton Street,  
Nottingham, NG1 4BU  
Tel: 0602 41818 Fax: 0602 484266 (Contact Robin Linklater)

Plymouth University, Faculty of Arts & Design, Earl Richards Road North,  
Exeter, EX2 6AS  
Tel: 0752 600600 (Contact Cariad Astles)

Birmingham School of Drama, 45 Church Road, Edgbaston,  
Birmingham, B15 3SW  
Tel: 021 454 3424 (Contact John Blundall)

Arden School of Theatre, Manchester Metropolitan University, Sale Road,  
Northenden,  
Manchester, M23 0DD (Contact Wylie Longmore)

Samuel Beckett Centre for Drama & Theatre Studies, Trinity College,  
College Green,  
Dublin 2, Eire (Contact John McCormick)

At Hull University there is an option in mask-making and mask use as part of the  
BA in Drama (Contact John Harris)

A number of Theatre Design courses also offer the opportunity to make puppets.  
There are also strong links to choreography and physical theatre and puppetry is  
sometimes studied in Dance modules of Performing Arts courses.

### Other Further Education possibilities

There is a puppetry option in some BTEC Performing Arts courses at Colleges of Further Education. One example we know of is in Leeds at

Park Lane College,  
Park Lane,  
Leeds, LS3 1AA  
Tel: 0532 443011/355531 Fax: 0532 446372

but there may well be others elsewhere. It is worth researching what is on offer at other colleges.

Alternatively you might consider courses at Colleges of Art. Many of the technical skills involved in both two- and three-dimensional art are directly relevant to puppetry.

And if your specialism is music, bear in mind that puppetry needs good sound/music and that a puppetry performance need not involve the spoken word at all, so time spent acquiring and further developing skills in that area will not go to waste.

### NVQs

Work is progressing on establishing NVQs related to puppetry but, at the time that this leaflet is being prepared (June 1994), validation has not been finalised. Since these will be based on skills obtained in the workplace, they are likely to be obtained in the context of working (perhaps as a trainee) with a puppet or theatre company.

### Short/Part-time courses

You may not be able to afford to undertake full-time training. It is, then, worth looking out for short courses or part-time courses which may be available.

1 There are occasionally relevant courses arranged by local Community Education and Training Services at locations such as the City Literary Institute (the City Lit) in London. Information may usually be obtained from local public libraries or Education Departments.

2 A number of puppet companies and puppeteers have undertaken individual initiatives and set up training opportunities - usually short courses.

If you are within easy reach of these, it is worthwhile contacting them to find out what is on offer.

**London School of Puppetry**, 2 Legard Road, London, N5 1DE  
Tel: 071 359 7357 (Ronnie LeDrew and Caroline Astell Burt)

**Norwich Puppet Theatre**, St James, Whitefriars, Norwich NR3 1TN  
Tel: 0603 615564 Fax: 0603 61757 (Bob Skinner)

**Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre**, 8-10 Balcarres Avenue, Kelvindale,  
Glasgow, G12 0QF Tel: 041 339 6185 (Malcolm Knight)

**The Bristol Puppet Place**, Hengrove School, Petherton Gardens, Hengrove,  
Bristol, BS14 9BU Tel: 0272 838800 (Kate Pollard)

**Little Angel Marionette Theatre**, 14 Dagmar Passage, Cross Street,  
London, N1 2DN Tel: 071 226 1878 (Andrew Knowles-Harrison)

**Puppeteers East**, Bulcamp House, Bulcamp, Halesworth,  
Suffolk, IP19 9LG Tel: 0502 70525 (Meg Amsden)

**Beresford's Puppets**, 41 Albert Road, Albrighton, nr Wolverhampton,  
WV7 3QN Tel: 0902 372850 (Ted & Kath Beresford)

**Glyn and Mary Edwards (Punch & Judy)**, Punch's Oak, Cleobury Road,  
Far Forest, Worcestershire, DY14 9EB  
Tel: 0299 266056 Fax: 0299 266561 (Glyn & Mary Edwards)

**North West Puppetry Forum**, 16 Ridgemere Road, Pensby, Wirral, L61 8RL  
Tel: 051 648 6358 (Linda Herbert)

### **New Training Schemes**

The Puppet Centre knows of a number of TECs (Training and Enterprise Councils) which are aiming to provide new forms of training in the arts and entertainments area. It is to be hoped that new partnerships may be forged between puppet companies, formal training institutions and TECs so that new forms of funded training may be made available to prospective puppeteers.

If you are a would-be trainee and there is a puppeteer or puppet company in your area, ask your local Careers Advice Service if anything might be possible.

It may also be worth approaching your local TEC direct for funding to attend training courses. We know of a precedent for a TEC funding Higher Level vocational training through their Adult Training for Work programme for long-term unemployed people.

### **Placement/Traineeship with a company**

This is a very good way to learn about every aspect of puppetry, but it is likely to be difficult to arrange because theatre companies are generally run on a very tight budget and will not have a lot of spare money to take on trainees.

Companies are also wary of taking on people with no experience at all, so try to make the most of the experience you do have when you write or talk to a company. Before you write to them, you must also seem some of their work so that you can talk about it. If possible, try to find out something about the history of the company as well before you meet them.

If you are at college, your course may require you to have a 'work placement' for a few weeks. When you write to a company asking if they will host you, give them some idea of what you would expect to get out of the placement and what you will be able to give to them. It is unlikely that you will be paid wages, but find out if they can help with travel/accommodation.

## HOW THE PUPPET CENTRE CAN HELP

There are several publications produced or sold by the Puppet Centre Trust which will be of help to you:

### The Directory of Professional Puppeteers\*

This is a book containing information about puppet companies, theatres, puppeteers and makers working in the UK. It is useful for contact addresses and as a guide to the type of work UK puppeteers are involved in.

\* available from the Puppet Centre £7.50 inc. post and packing

### 'Animations'\*

This magazine is a bi-monthly review of puppetry and related art forms. It is the best way to keep in touch with puppetry events in the UK and abroad. There is a 'What's On' section with details of performances, exhibitions, and courses all over the UK.

\* available from the Puppet Centre £2.50 per issue/£15 annual subscription

### 'Alive an' Kickin\*' - Puppet Centre education pack

This pack contains 20 double-sided, illustrated, information sheets on all aspects of puppetry.

\* available from the Puppet Centre £7.50 inc. post and packing

### 'On the brink of belonging\*\*

Between January and December 1991, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation undertook a national enquiry into puppetry in the UK. The enquiry was the first attempt to find out about the working conditions of puppeteers in the UK and to examine the potential for its development. This is the resultant report.

\* available from the Puppet Centre (and bookshops) £8.70 inc post and packing.

### 'Starting up a puppet company'

This booklet, which is in preparation at the Puppet Centre at the moment (July 1994), contains key pointers and contacts for setting up as a puppet company/performer. It will be available from October 1994.

\* Cheques etc should be made payable to 'The Puppet Centre Trust'.

(If you can't afford any of these publications yourself, try asking your school, college; or public library if they will get them for you.)

### Updating information

We like to be as up to date as possible with the information we give, but we are a small organisation and must rely on our friends and colleagues to keep us up to scratch. If any of the information in these pages is inaccurate, **please let us know**. And if you have any fresh information about developments in puppetry training or career opportunities for puppeteers, please tell us.

Many thanks

Puppet Centre, London, July 1994

# PUPPETRY

A survey of courses by Juli Mahr

# TRAINING

**P**uppetry training has been having a hard time recently. In the current economic climate the traditional system of apprenticeships is a luxury few companies can afford. But there are alternatives. The last few years have seen the rise and rise of institutional courses. Run by committed tutors, these courses offer a whole spectrum of possibilities, from modular first degrees, which include puppetry as only one element, to advanced specialised courses. The following is a summary of those that are currently available or in the pipeline.

## ANNIESLAND COLLEGE

Hatfield Drive, Glasgow G12 0YE.  
Tel: 0141 357 3969  
Contact: Linda McTavish

### HND Puppet Theatre Arts

Two years, full time, 18 hrs per week. Course aims to provide a thorough first-stage training for aspiring professional puppeteers. Central to the ethos of the course is the belief that puppet skills take decades to acquire. 'Our course intends to provide a comprehensive foundation for this lifelong acquisition of skills.' Training is given in drawing, painting, sculpture, sewing, singing, acting, dancing, movement and how to present information through puppet theatre. Core units include manipulation techniques, theory, dramaturgy and history, puppetry in special needs. Technical skills, eg woodcarving and welding also taught. Work experience projects are set to develop planning and implementation strategies. Students acquire administration and business skills by examining models for starting and operating puppet companies. Tutors include Malcolm Knight, course leader and Mickey Aronoff, special needs consultant. Course currently being accredited by SCOTVEC.

#### Entry requirements

Apply direct to college. 16 places available. 'A personal statement about what attracts you to this course would be regarded as essential, and portfolio evidence would be an advantage.' Interviews held.

#### Facilities

Field centre for the course is the Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre which houses an

80-seat studio theatre, extensive library of specialist books, journals, audio-visual recordings, a database of national and international contacts and the Miles Lee Collection of Puppets and Marionettes. The centre also runs workshops and outreach programmes. College facilities are extensive. Creche available.

#### Fees

£800 per year  
Awards: Students eligible for mandatory grants from local authorities or the Student Awards Agency for Scotland. Access grants and loans available from college for those facing extreme difficulties. EC students may have fees paid by the Scottish Office Education Department.

## BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL OF SPEECH AND DRAMA

45 Church Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3SW. Tel: 0121 771 4582  
Contact: John M Blundall

### Professional Theatre Diploma Course

Three-year, full-time course aimed at developing the skills of actors to meet the needs of the widest range of engagements in the entertainment world. To this end there are specialised course units available in mime, radio, puppetry etc. The puppetry training seeks to develop an awareness of the nature and function of the puppet as a central means of expression, and the highest quality standards of design, technology and performance. Taught by John M Blundall the course unit has been in existence for five years and is a continuation of the training programme which was part of the Cannon

Hill Puppet Theatre for 25 years. Students are involved in self-directed training. 'There is no prescriptive teaching, but a process of drawing out, or revealing the ideas of a student.' Particular emphasis placed on Asian and Oriental performing arts. Individuals with specific talents are identified and encouraged through separate training sessions. Accredited by NCDT. In the future a series of masterclasses and part-time courses will be offered for advanced work.

#### Entry requirements

UCAS. Exam and interview.

#### Facilities

Range of studio and theatre facilities available in three separate buildings. Access to specialised library and international collection of puppet theatre research.

#### Fees

£6,450 per year  
Awards: Students eligible for mandatory grants

## CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH AND DRAMA

Embassy Theatre, 64 Eton Avenue, London NW3 3HY. Tel: 0171 722 8183

### PGDip Advanced Theatre Practice (Puppetry)

Contact: Penny Francis/Maggie Kinloch  
Tel: 0171 388 5768

One-year, full-time postgraduate course. Aim is to enable puppeteers to work alongside six other disciplines (directing, performance, writing, set, costume and lighting design) to experience the making of theatre through collaboration. Puppeteers offered specialised classes, eg animation and manipulation, as well as workshops taken together with other disciplines, eg theatre analysis, contact improvisation. Bulk of year consists of student-led productions (course 70% practical). Tutors include Penny Francis and Mark Pitman. Visiting lecturers in 1995/96 include Gavin Glover (Faulty Optic), and Joseph Krofta (Drak). Course aimed equally at designers and performers with leeway for those wishing to specialise in one or the other. Accredited by Open University.

#### Entry requirements

Application to college. Day-long interview with other students on other strands. Previous degree in any subject and/or relevant experience required. Ideal student is a 'mature, experienced puppet practitioner who wants to deepen his/her understanding of theatre and find out about working in theatre groups with other professionals'.

### BA(Hons) Theatre Studies (Design)(Puppetry)

Contact: Jessica Bowles

Three-year, full-time course. Aims to cross existing barriers between design discipline (set, costume, lighting, sound designs and



puppetry) and to give a broad perspective of all specialisms. Year one provides a firm grounding in the range of design disciplines. Students are encouraged to experiment and to try out their specialism in the third term. In the second year students choose two main options. They are introduced to the conventions that are current within these disciplines. The third year is based on a Learning Agreement. Students submit proposals to tutors on what they wish to undertake during the year. Puppetry tutors include Mark Pitman, Joe Gladwin, Penny Francis, Adam Bennett. Visiting tutors have included Sue Buckmaster, Julian Crouch, Luis Boy. Tutors are keen to point out that there is a very heavy workload.

#### *Entry requirements*

25 places available. Entrance through ADAR. Day-long group interviews. Course 'particularly suited to people who are open minded and explorative and who wish to spend three years developing their abilities'. Course is fundamentally collaborative.

#### *Facilities*

The CSSD is a well established drama school that offers appropriate facilities. These include professionally equipped public performance spaces, rehearsal rooms, workshops, media support services, technical services, a puppetry studio, extensive library etc. The PGDip is currently run on the St Pancras Way site.

#### *Fees*

£2,800 (£5,000 overseas students) per year  
Awards: BA students eligible for mandatory grants; PGDip students, discretionary grants only. College may offer very limited assistance during the year in the form of Access Funds.

### **LONDON SCHOOL OF PUPPETRY**

2 Legard Road, London N5 1DE.

Tel: 0171 359 7357

or

Yorkshire Study Centre, 9 Bridge End,  
Grassington BD23 5NH.

Tel: 01756 753 495

Contact: Caroline Astell-Burt

### **Professional Puppeteers' Diploma**

Eight intensive modules taken over 12 or 24 months. Students may continue to work as they undertake the course, since modules are not necessarily taught back to back. College aims to enable students to develop a full range of puppetry skills. Courses include string marionettes, shadow puppetry, working in a team etc. Although some making is involved, this is a performers' course. Students are recognised at five different levels: novice, 'advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. Teaching methodology varies accordingly. Stress placed on going out to audiences. All students undertake an outreach project (in education or therapy). Principle tutors: Caroline Astell-Burt and Ronnie Le Drew. Accredited by Middlesex University. Full-time and part-time options available.

### **Foundation Certificate**

Tailored to suit the needs of the individual who requires puppetry skills for work in education/therapy etc. Contact LSP for list of available modules. LSP also runs international conferences. These have included Puppetry in Education and Therapy and Christians Working in Puppetry.

#### *Entry requirements*

No formal qualifications required but prefer older/mature students. Applicants are invited to write 'an interesting letter' to LSP and will receive an application form in return. Interviews (2-3 hrs), where appropriate, are held in London or Yorkshire. No limit on student numbers as courses are built accordingly. 7-10 average. Students with disabilities are actively encouraged to apply.

#### *Facilities*

Course is based in London and Yorkshire. Further theatre space arranged as required. Video and literature library.

#### *Fees*

Diploma: between £1,800 and £2,300 depending on interview and past experience. Certificate: modules individually priced.

Awards: Discretionary local authority grants. Bursaries sometimes available.

### **NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY**

Visual and Performing Arts Department,  
Burton Street, Nottingham NG1 4BU.

Tel: 0115 9418418 ext 2833

Contact: Robin Linklater

### **BA Hons Theatre Design**

Three-year, full-time theatre design course with puppetry options in first and second years. Individually negotiated projects form part of third year, where puppetry is also an option. Tutors encourage the view that theatre design provides a visual and physical context for the theatre performers. To this end designers work in close collaboration with performers, directors and technicians. In the first year students are given a broad introductory programme. Later, students choose individual routes from a wide range of design options including opera, dance, costume, puppetry. Theatre for special needs option also available. Tutors include Judith Park, course leader; Prof M Griffiths and Robin Linklater. Past puppetry tutors have included Barry Smith, Jacob Krofta and Petar Todorov. Course accredited.

#### *Entry requirements*

ADAR. 37 places available. Foundation/BTEC in Art and Design required. Interviews, though overseas applicants can be accepted on portfolio.

### **MA/PGDip Puppetry**

This course has been validated but is not yet running. Possible start date January 1997. Ring college for update. MA 42 weeks. PGDip 25wks. Nottingham has already established close links with puppet compa-

nies and schools in eastern Europe. The course will utilise and extend these contacts. It is intended that two weeks will be spent travelling around eastern Europe visiting puppet companies and at least 4-5 weeks will be spent at a summer school in Bulgaria. This will be a practice-centred course for puppet/object/alternative theatre. It will be suitable for both makers and performers. Tutors to be appointed.

#### *Entry requirements*

Direct application to college. Interview. 10 places. First degree in art/design/music/education or similar required.

#### *Facilities*

Institutional support and facilities available. For BA, dedicated workshops, performance studio, technical support, departmental facilities. It is intended that similar facilities will be made available for the MA/PGDip.

#### *Fees*

For BA: approx £1,600 (£5,950 overseas students)

For MA/PGDip: To be announced  
Awards: Mandatory grants for BA. Discretionary grants for MA/PGDip.

### **UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH**

Douglas Avenue, Exmouth, Devon

EX8 2AT. Tel: 01395 255411

Contact: Cariad Astles

### **BA Theatre Arts and Performance Studies**

Three-year, full-time course. Broad performance course with emphasis placed on creativity, analysis and practical performance. Stress on inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary nature of performance. Second and third-year students choose from a large selection of options including political theatre, African theatre, arts in the community, mask and puppet theatre. Puppetry unit offered over one or two semesters. Involves theory-based seminars leading to practical experimentation and a major practical project. Tutor: Cariad Astles. An MA programme is being developed that will offer students the chance to specialise in puppetry.

#### *Entry requirements*

UCAS. Practical interview to identify applicants who possess 'intellectual curiosity, liveliness of approach, motivation and commitment'.

#### *Facilities available*

The University of Plymouth is spread over several sites. BA in Theatre Arts and Performance Studies based at Exmouth. College facilities include a media workshop, performance spaces and open access computing site. The workshop at Plymouth is still fairly basic as these are early days for the puppetry course.

#### *Fees*

£1,080 (£5,800 overseas students)

Awards: Mandatory grants available.

# the directory of professional puppeteers 1997/1998

The 1997/1998 edition of the **Directory of Professional Puppeteers** (published by the **Puppet Centre Trust**) will introduce you to the wide variety of puppetry which is available today. It is bigger and better than ever, in a clearer format with a stylish new design.

## The new directory contains:

- Descriptions of over 100 companies and individuals around the UK
- Details of all the regional and national puppetry support organisations (who can give further information)
- Information on the major training institutions for puppetry
- Lists of other useful support and funding agencies
- Articles by leading touring companies and by programmers on how to book and incorporate puppetry into a venue's artistic programme, and on the unique qualities of the artform which can make it an exciting experience for audiences of all ages
- A quick guide to all the puppeteers listed, to make booking as easy and speedy as possible.

This one publication will provide you with "all you ever needed to know about booking puppetry", and at only £7.50 (plus £1 post and packing) - an increase of just 50p on the 1994/1995 price - it is a bargain!

**Can you afford to be without it?** - Place your order by completing and returning the form below, along with your cheque to: The Puppet Centre Trust, BAC, Lavender Hill, London SW11 5TN. Telephone: 0171 228 5335 Fax: 0171 978 5207

Please send me ..... copy/ies of the **Directory of Professional Puppeteers 1997/1998**

at **£7.50 plus £1 post and packing** each.

I enclose a cheque for ..... made payable to the **Puppet Centre Trust**.

Name .....

Company .....

Address .....

Post code .....

Telephone number: .....

Fax number: .....