

International Open Space – What is the future for puppetry and collaboration – does the future growth of puppetry lie outside the arts?

Online Open Space between

Rachel McNally – Puppet Place UK

Nancy Black – Black Hole Theatre, Australia

Jeff Bragg – Puppeteers of America Guild Maryland-D.C.-Virginia Chair

Reflections from Nancy on Australian Puppetry Experience

Australia is well-connected to puppetry traditions from Southern hemisphere including Thailand etc. However, it is less connected with contemporary European and Northern hemisphere puppetry. There is a desire to challenge what they do and become more multi-disciplinary by connecting to the rest of the world. Nancy came to puppetry as a director of theatre, also working with opera and dance.

Reflections on the American Experience from Jeff

Jeff has made his professional career as a musician but has always been interested in puppets and marionettes. He is very aware that it can be very hard for puppeteers to make successful careers in the US and the level of financial remuneration is not good. At the moment the Guild is developing its legal structure from that of a social guild to a charitable guild. This will give it more opportunities to develop into the future. Jeff is concerned that there may be a lack of young puppeteers in the US due to the financial challenges and that there is a real need for investing in future generations and doing more outreach work.

Main Conversation

We talked about the need to “connect to dots” to ensure that the good work that is happening is known about and celebrated. We need to be aware of what exists and bring it together more into a cohesive whole so that both public and puppeteers find it easier to access and get involved.

We talked about the value of arts and culture in politically turbulent times and that maybe “theatrical spaces” are the wrong spaces for this type of work, by taking the work to non-theatre spaces, keeping entry prices low different audiences are attracted and it is more likely to lead to meaningful exchange, rather than talking to the people who exist in the same “bubble”.

Arts and culture give people their heart and sense of community in times of change, violence and uncertainty, despite the challenges it is even more important to keep communities strong and develop an economy/culture based on knowledge exchange rather than continually adhering to a model that is based on scarcity of resources.

Can we use puppetry to show and share skills that are different and to tell the stories of different people?

We talked about how societies create mythologies that explain to themselves who they are...is our world now at a point of new mythology making?

N.B. The Naked Puppet and The Fettig Project.

Puppetry is hugely valuable in this context, it can communicate with audiences by going under their “social radar” so can be radical/challenging/moving etc in ways that are different to other artforms.

This makes puppetry hugely valuable in the education context, for people facing trauma etc...

Due to this quality it also places puppetry at the intersection of all artforms as they begin to blur. This makes it vital for those working with puppetry to understand what is happening in different cultural sectors. It also means that outreach work needs to be more holistic.

Some final questions/thoughts

Are we on the cusp of finding a new definition for puppetry?

How do we stay responsive to the world?

We are responsible for staying relevant

How do we respect and incorporate traditional forms into contemporary culture?

We need to keep mythmaking and refreshing our society!

Can Puppet Place do an online open space for international community to keep the conversations going?

Thank you all.