
NEWS

*Puppet news from Britain
and around the world*

THE LADY FROM SOCKHOLM

The world's first all-sock puppet feature film, *The Lady from Sockholm*, is a film noir comedy about a sock puppet detective who unravels a case involving the disappearance of high-end hosiery.



Wool War II rages and times are tough for sock puppets. Terrence M. Cotton, a washed-up gumshoe, finds himself knee-high in debt and praying for a big case. Enter Heelda Brum, a finely spun piece of high-end

hosiery who hires Cotton to find Darnell, her missing mate. Cotton takes the missing sock case but the heat gets turned on high when Darnell's unravelled remains are discovered.

The eager young sock detective, Archie Goodfoot (above), and Spats Sinclair (right), Big Toeny's weaselly henchman.



www.sockholm.com

'PUPPETS FOR PEACE' FUNDRAISING APPEAL

Pattaya Orphanage Trust is offering an screensaver which depicts an animated version of a story of peace created by the Thai Nithan Caravan Puppet Troupe. The troupe uses play and storytelling to help young people deal with traumatic events such as the 2004 tsunami and current conflict in the southern provinces of Thailand. To learn about the project, download the screensaver or see video footage of a Nithan Caravan Puppet Troupe performance, contact Ruth Kennedy: Ruth@thirdsectorpr.co.uk Pattaya Orphanage Trust, 124 North End House, Fitzjames Avenue, London W14 0RZ

SLOVAK STAMPS

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THEATRE MUSEUM TO CLOSE?

The Theatre Museum is a branch of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which has announced that it intends to close the Covent Garden site. The museum has a wonderful location at the heart of Theatreland, but the building is problematic: restricted in terms both of public access and flexibility of exhibition space.

In an article in the *Evening Standard*, 'Don't Give Up on the Theatre Museum', Simon Callow argues for the importance and future potential of this museum. He mentions the innovative educational programme, 'smashing small-scale exhibitions' (puppeteers may remember a splendidly interactive exhibition by Theatre-rites with child visitors delightedly becoming humanettes), and the museum's unparalleled video record of 'virtually every significant production of recent times'.

Callow writes: Some 30 years ago, Roy Strong, the splendidly flamboyant director of the V&A, all floppy hats and Zapata moustachios, and as much impresario as scholar, acknowledged the growing pressure from our profession to accept that the magnificent theatre collection, quietly gathering dust in South Kensington for half a century before that, was different in kind from any of his other collections. The theatre collection needed presentation, it needed context and it needed to be located in the heart of the West End'

Callow argues for a concerted campaign for a New Theatre Museum. With collaboration from other organisations such as the Royal Opera House, the National Theatre and the RSC, rarely seen treasures from their archives and stores could be enjoyed by the public: 'Between them, the Mayor's office, the Society of London Theatres, the City of Westminster and VisitLondon should commit themselves to what would surely become an attraction to rival and even outstrip the Eye, Madame Tussauds and the Tower of London. The Olympics gives us the perfect deadline.'

Below is the official position from the V&A:

Information regarding special collections can be accessed via www.backstage.ac.uk as well as the Theatre Museum website. Online guided tours, images and other resources are available via our [peopleplay website](http://peopleplay.org.uk) www.peopleplay.org.uk and the library catalogue contains information on some of

the prompt-book collections, National Video Archive of Performance and books catalogued since 1999: <http://catalogue.nal.vam.ac.uk>.

Our work of documenting performance and developing our collections will continue, and research access will be provided, as now, at our premises in Kensington Olympia. One of the outcomes of the closure of the museum building will be to redirect financial resources into developing a range of online materials and touring exhibitions designed to give the public better access to our collections.

The Collections Centre is open to all researchers (academics, theatre professionals, family historians, students and interested members of the public) by appointment (tel: 0207 943 4727, email tmenquiries@vam.ac.uk). Researchers can use the reading room to watch videos, study documents, designs and photographs, make use of the museum's library and obtain advice and guidance from curatorial staff. In addition, the museum holds regular open days for those interested in larger or more fragile objects which cannot be issued in the reading room, such as costume and stage technology.

The Guardians of the Theatre Museum have launched an online petition at www.theatremuseumguardians.org. They are aiming for 100,000 signatures by Christmas.



AN EAST ANGLIAN ODYSSEY

Chris Abbott's latest book – a history of the DaSilva Puppet Company from 1962 to 2002 – was launched on 29 November at the Wisbech and Fenland Museum.

For more information, see the review on the Mask and Puppet Books website: <http://tinyurl.com/yyeuoz>



BRITISH UNIMA NEWS

British UNIMA held its 2006 AGM at the Charter Theatre, Preston, on 26 October. Chair Meg Amsden reports.

Horse and Bamboo's *In the Shadow of Trees* was a very beautiful and moving piece with live music, and enraptured an audience of families and a bunch of puppeteers. We were then taken on a guided tour of Dynamic New Animation's headquarters at the Watermark, and were updated on their current projects. Later in the evening several of us made it to Waterfoot to the first H&B 'In the Mix' Scratch Night – a very varied programme to a packed and appreciative audience – of which the most admired (though hardly 'scratch') piece was a scene from Thingumajig's award-winning show *WANT*.

The meeting was excellent but could not qualify as an AGM as only 9 attended and we need 15 to be quorate. We decided to carry on with the meeting as if it were an AGM. As a charity we have by law to hold another AGM, but need only three members to be quorate, so we have decided to hold it in Tolosa during the UNIMA Council meeting, as we know that there will be at least three or even four members present. This is quite eccentric, we know, but so far as we can tell, not unconstitutional. The second AGM is merely a formality and we intend to rubberstamp the proposals and accounts etc. presented at the Preston meeting. The only difference between the two meetings is that we shall formally adopt the current committee, of whom half the members are currently co-optees.

Chair's Report

2005 was a year of consolidation after the innovations of 2004. It was the first full year of our website and of *Puppet Notebook*. As a result of these and other developments I'll mention later, membership has begun to increase and we have started to attract significant numbers of younger people.

So far as the committee was concerned, some of the chaos of 2004 continued. We were without a treasurer for four months, which meant I had to fill in until Andrew Colbeck took over in April. As a practising accountant with experience as treasurer of a similar-sized arts charity, he has brought a great deal of

expertise to BrUNIMA. Our financial situation was much clearer by the end of the year and I felt we were in safe hands. Towards the end of the year, our membership secretary Caroline Astell Burt resigned. Through her work at the London School of Puppetry she had been able to recruit many new younger members. She was replaced by Mark Whitaker, who was co-opted onto the committee. He has made the membership run so smoothly we are hardly aware of all the work he is putting into it. He is also a dab hand at recruiting new members. So the year ended with the committee in much better shape than it began.



We continued to hold virtual meetings via an internet chat room, an efficient way to save travel time and expense, though, curiously, usually the same number of people attend virtual as real meetings, and just as many go to the wrong room, or get lost on the way or arrive late. Most committee business was conducted by email or phone. Our only live meeting was at the 2004 AGM at the Puppet Centre in October 2005. This was also our only public event for the year, combined with the John Phillips Memorial Lecture, given by South African puppeteer Gary Friedman. He gave a very interesting and moving illustrated talk about his work in political and development puppetry around the world.

The year began with news of the tsunami in South East Asia, and requests for assistance for puppeteers in financial distress came to us. A generous anonymous donor gave us money to pass on and we agreed to add to it from BrUNIMA funds. However, as the year progressed, the two attempts we made to pass on the donations both failed. The first donation was intended to help the new puppetry museum in Sri Lanka. A member of UNIMA Germany visited the site and found that the situation was not as it had been presented to us and so, on advice from the UNIMA General

Secretary, we did not send any money. The other donation, to Selveraja (a puppeteer identified as in need by Dadi Pudumjee, UNIMA India), also stalled because information we needed to pay money into a bank account was not forthcoming, and then the email links we had also went dead. Our treasurer was most unhappy at the thought of paying cash to Western Union. I humbly ask members what you think I should do next.

An update on 2006

We have a new secretary, co-optee Miriam Murtin, who took over when Diana Bayliss had to retire early in the year. We planned to put on a lecture at this year's AGM, but unfortunately none of the people we invited were able to make this date, so apologies to all. We intend putting on at least one Lecture next year, and already have offers from Ray Da Silva and Robert Fowler to talk about puppet books and Cambodian puppetry respectively. We were very disappointed not to be able to fix a date this year with Nenagh Watson to talk about her recent visit to Japan and the work that has come out of it, and hope to be able to catch up with her later.

Penny Francis, Cariad Astles and I are going to the Tolosa Council meeting next month as your representatives. (I must stress that though we are your UNIMA Councillors, we are not on a BrUNIMA freebie, but are paying all our own expenses!) We shall be talking about the poor level of translation into English of UNIMA publications, the World Encyclopaedia, and our bid for the 2012 Congress to be held in Birmingham. Sally Rew has been co-opted onto the committee specifically to carry this project forward.

IN SEARCH OF FELLOW GIANTS

The International Circle of Giant Puppets (CIAG) has a new website: www.ciag.org/opencms/en/seccions/index.html

Wendy Dacre is considering setting up a network for British based giants as the British Islands Giant Guild (BIGG) has been moribund for some time. She would like to know of anyone else working with or interested in giants, ninnies, beasts etc. She can be contacted on dacre@raventales.co.uk. See also www.raventales.co.uk