



# THE PUPPET PLACE

*Art Form:* Theatre  
*Style:* Puppetry  
*Culture:* American

## Technical Needs

- 12' x 8' space for a puppet stage

## Meet the Artists

One of the oldest companies in the Midwest, for 30 years **The Puppet Place** has been dedicated to bringing this very special style of theatre to adult and children's audiences alike. With the guidance of director Mark Nichols, **The Puppet Place** has performed in many venues, including television, libraries, neighborhood festivals, Ravinia, Taste of Chicago and with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

For the last 22 years, The Puppet Place has been both a touring performance and residency artist for Urban Gateways. The company's original adaptations of classic tales promote positive virtues and attitudes. A variety of puppetry styles such as hand, rod, string and shadow puppets are often worked into each story to add depth and interest. Musical scores using classical and contemporary music are constructed to add power and audio color to the presentations.

## About the Performance

*The Magic Onion* blends a cast of colorful characters in an enchanted blue forest with entertaining plot twists that throw all stereotypes to the wind.

*Peter Rabbit* is Beatrix Potter's gentle story of the little bunny boy who disobeys his mother's advice and ventures into trouble in Farmer McGregor's garden.

Finally, *Hansel and Gretel* tells the story of a brother and sister who get lost in the woods one night and find a beautiful candy house inhabited by a rather nasty witch. This witch has a magic oven that specializes in turning innocent children into yummy gingerbread cookies. However, the children turn the tables and the witch becomes a cookie herself! This delicious story is accompanied by the lovely music from the opera by composer Engelbert Humperdinck.

## Contextual Information

A puppet is a small figure with a hollow cloth body and head that can be manipulated with the hand. Although the origins of puppetry are unknown, people have been entertained and educated by puppets for centuries. It is often thought to be one of the earliest forms of theatre. People who perform with puppets are known as puppeteers.

In addition to being an art, puppetry is also a skill that can take many years to learn. It involves the crafting of puppets, and the creation and performance of puppet theatre, which unites the dramatic and visual arts. Puppeteers are usually involved in every part of a puppet show. They often make their own puppets, set up the stage, design the sets, and write their own scripts.

There are four basic types of puppets:

**Hand (also known as glove) puppets** are the ones commonly used by puppeteers. The puppet's body is usually made of cloth and is hollow, which makes it easy for the puppeteer to fit his/her hand inside. The puppeteer's fingers then control the puppet's head and arms (hand puppets do not have any legs).

**Rod puppets** have complete bodies, with a thick rod that runs inside from the torso through the head. Small, thin rods or wires are attached on the outside to the puppet's arms, legs, and head, which allows the joints to move in a natural manner. As many as three people may be needed to operate some of the larger rod puppets. Kermit the Frog is a hand-rod puppet, where one hand is placed inside to move the head and rods are used to move the body.

**Shadow puppets** have whole bodies like rod puppets, but are usually two-dimensional. They are normally viewed through a screen lit from behind so that the audience only sees a shadow.

**Marionettes** are puppets that are manipulated by strings. With hand, rod, or shadow puppets, the puppeteer is usually below the stage operating the puppet. With a marionette, the puppeteer stands above the stage to operate the strings. Marionettes usually have nine strings—two each for the legs, the hands, the ears,

and the shoulders, and one for the spine. Some larger marionettes may have as many as 30 strings!

## Vocabulary

**Bunraku:** Japanese puppet tradition dating back 300 years; these puppets are known for their elaborate costumes and large size (3-4 feet tall)

**Hand puppet:** most common form of puppet; the puppeteer's hand fits inside the puppet to animate it, moving the head, arms, and mouth of the puppet, either separately or all at the same time

**Marionette:** puppet that is moved by strings; this type of puppet can have up to 30 strings to move its body

**Masking:** draperies hung on the stage to hide the movements of the puppeteers

**Pupa:** Latin word for doll; origin of the word puppet

**Puppeteer:** an artist who performs with puppets

**Rod puppet:** puppet that is manipulated from below the stage by rods or wires that are attached to its head, arms and legs

**Script:** written dialogue of a play

**Sets:** also known as scenery, they are the objects or drawings that suggest the place or action in a play

**Shadow puppet:** a two-dimensional puppet that is lit from behind so the audience sees a shadow cast upon a screen

**Stage:** place of performance