



Performance That Involves the Manipulation of Puppets

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COMMENTARY

Puppeteers use movements from hands and arms to control devices such as rods or strings to move the body, head, limbs, and in some cases the mouth and eyes of the puppet. The puppeteer sometimes speaks in the voice of the character of the puppet, while at other times they perform to a recorded soundtrack.

There are many different varieties of puppets, and they are made of a wide range of materials, depending on their form and intended use. They can be extremely complex or very simple in their construction. The simplest puppets are finger puppets, which are tiny puppets that fit onto a single finger, and sock puppets, which are formed from a sock and operated by inserting one's hand inside the sock, with the opening and closing of the hand simulating the movement of the puppet's "mouth". A hand puppet or glove puppet is controlled by one hand which occupies the interior of the puppet and moves the puppet around. Punch and Judy puppets are familiar examples. Other hand or glove puppets are larger and require two puppeteers for each puppet.

Puppetry is a very ancient form of theatre which was first recorded in the 5th century BC in Ancient Greece. Some forms of puppetry may have originated as long ago as 3000 years BC. Puppetry takes many forms, but they all share the process of animating inanimate performing objects to tell a story. Puppetry occurs in almost all human societies where puppets are used for the purpose of entertainment through performance, as sacred objects in rituals, as symbolic effigies in celebrations such as carnivals, and as a catalyst for social and psychological change in transformative arts.

China has a history of puppetry dating back 3000 years, originally in pi-yung xi, the "theatre of the lantern shadows", or as it is more commonly known today, Chinese shadow theatre.

By the Song dynasty (960–1279 AD), puppets played to all social classes including the courts, yet puppeteers, as in Europe, were considered to be from a lower social stratum. In Taiwan, budaixi puppet shows, somewhat similar to the Japanese bunraku, occur with puppeteers working in the background or underground. Some very experienced puppeteers can manipulate their puppets to perform various stunts, for example, somersaults in the air.

Vietnam developed the art form of water puppetry, unique to that country. The puppets are built out of wood and the shows are performed in a waist-high pool. A large rod under the water is used by puppeteers to support and control the puppets, creating the appearance of the puppets moving over water. The origin of this form of puppetry dates back seven hundred years when the rice fields would flood and the villagers would entertain each other. Puppet show competitions between Vietnamese villages eventually led to the creation of secretive and exclusive puppet societies. In Burma, today called Myanmar, an elaborate form of puppet shows, called Yoke the, evolved, based on royal patronage. The probable date of the origin of Burmese marionettes is given as around 1780, during the reign of King Singu Min, and their introduction is credited to the Minister of Royal Entertainment, U Thaw.