

## Susan VandeWeghe and Mountain Marionettes

Susan VandeWeghe began her career as a puppeteer with **AniMart Puppet Theater** in Chicago. There she teamed up with Dave Herzog. They toured throughout the Chicagoland Area for 8 years performing for an average of 350 shows per year for preschools, elementary schools, libraries and family events such as **Arlington International Racecourse's Family Days** and **Navy Pier** in downtown Chicago.

In September of 1999, Ms VandeWeghe moved to Cedar Mountain, North Carolina. She established her own company, **Mountain Marionettes** and has been touring throughout North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Florida and Virginia ever since.

**Mountain Marionettes** is a full time professional puppet company specializing in the *Art of the Marionette* and entertainment for the entire family. Ms VandeWeghe performs with short strung, trick marionettes in a Cabaret style variety show. Each marionette is designed, engineered and handcrafted by hand in her workshop.

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Art - A variety of hand crafted puppets were made by the artist and are demonstrated at the conclusion of the show.
- Music - A very important part of any Mountain Marionettes performance. From Jazz to Blue Grass, each piece of music seem to have been written just for the puppet that performs to it. Check each production sheet for a list of the music used in the show.
- Social Studies - See individual show pages

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Students will see and hear a unique combination of music and puppetry. They will also observe and learn about the distinctive art of marionettes.

## World of Puppets

A puppet is an object that appears to be alive when someone manipulates it. It can do and say things that real people cannot. Puppets can tell stories, educate and entertain the imagination all at the same time.

Almost every culture in the world has some form of puppet tradition. From Asia to Africa, puppets are an important part of their culture. The beginnings of puppetry are lost in the mists of time. We do know however, in prehistoric times the shamans used forms of puppetry and masks to impress upon the tribe his skill in dealing with the mysterious spirit work.

Over the years, each country has developed it's own puppetry tradition. One puppet character that became a common thread through many different countries was Mr. Punch, a braggart and a coward. He has many different names: In Italy he is Pulcinella, in France, Guignol and in Russia, Petrouchka.

There are many types of puppets; hand puppets, rod puppets, shadow puppets and marionettes. Each of these has different categories or can be combined with a different type to become a brand new type of puppet. Most young people today are familiar with the Muppet. These are puppets that were named by Jim Henson who felt that his creations were not just hand puppets, rod puppets or marionettes but a combination of them all.

In Japan there is an ancient tradition of puppetry called BUNRAKU. Classic plays are performed with very large puppets that require three highly trained men to manipulate each figure. It takes twenty years to become a master puppeteer and manipulate the head.

Want more information!

Here are a few books that you may find in your library.

*The Muppets Make Puppets*

A wonderful book by Cheryl Henson, the daughter of Jim Henson of Muppet fame.

*The Art of the Puppet*

By Bil Baird

*Marionettes*

By Edith Flack Ackley

*The Puppet Theatre Handbook*

By Marjorie Batchelder

## Marionettes

Marionettes have been popular in Europe for many centuries. According to legend, they got their name during the Middle Ages when puppeteers (usually the priest) would present the Christmas Story. The most admired character in these Nativity Scenes was always the little string puppet that represented the Virgin Mary. People began calling this type of puppet "Little Mary" or in French, "Marionette". Soon all puppets that were operated by pulling strings were known as Marionettes.

Two of the different ways puppeteers perform with marionettes.

### From a bridge

Many puppeteers that work with marionettes perform from high above the stage. Sometimes the puppeteer is hidden and other times the audience can see them operating the puppets.

### Cabaret Style

Mountain Marionettes performs in the Cabaret Style. Using short strung marionettes with the puppeteer in full view of the audience so they can watch either the puppet or the puppeteer.

This form of puppetry was developed in the 1930's by a puppeteer whose name was Frank Paris. The Great Depression had just begun and it was very difficult to tour with the big rigs and large cast that bridge shows required. Mr. Paris built puppets of the famous people of the time; Carmen Miranda, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and a beautiful ice skater by the name of Sonja Henne. These had short strings and performed at floor level. He booked himself at night clubs where he would perform when the band took a break.

Since then, this style has been reworked to fit into many situations; school gyms and auditoriums, outdoor festivals, Libraries, Senior Centers and Theaters.

## Stories from Aunt Nelly's Mountain Home



Aunt Nelly's porch is the best place to learn about life on the Blue Ridge. Why don't you all come on up and join Nelly and her friends!

**Mountain Marionettes'** newest production features storytelling as well as traditional marionette variety acts. Enjoy the music, from Bluegrass to Classical, that will remind you of the Southern Appalachian. Some of the characters you will meet include Nelly's brother, a fantastic Fiddler, and a farmer that falls apart on the job.

### The Music of Aunt Nelly's Mountain

Shenandoah	Shelvin' Rock
Flop Eared Mule	Dixie
Molly Brooks	Leather Britches
Preacher and the Bear	Drunken Hiccups
Molly Brooks	Keep Your Feet on the Ground
Fast Travelin'	Piney Woods
Tennessee Waltz	Appalachian Spring
Marching Jaybird	

**Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* was one of the major influences in the development of this productions.**

Aaron Copland's life spanned most of the twentieth century, yet he is best-known for music that he wrote during a very short period, from 1938 to 1944. It was during this six years that he wrote his three ballets Billy the Kid (1938), Rodeo (1942) and Appalachian Spring (1943-44) as well as Fanfare for the Common Man and A Lincoln Portrait. This time and style has become known as Copland's populist period. It was not always like this. Copland was one of the first Americans to travel to Paris and absorb the modern rhythms and harmonies of Europe. He brought them back to America, laced it with his own jazzy style and wrote music that was difficult, dissonant and jarring. The most quintessential of his works is Appalachian Spring. This is the music that is most associated with Copland - open and expansive like the landscape he depicts, yet personal and intimate. With folk tunes as his inspiration, Copland defined post-Jazz American music.

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

**Social Studies** - "Stories from Aunt Nelly's Mountain Home" takes a look into the culture of Western North Carolina and the Appalachian Mountains.  
**Music** - Developing understanding of music in relation to history and culture.