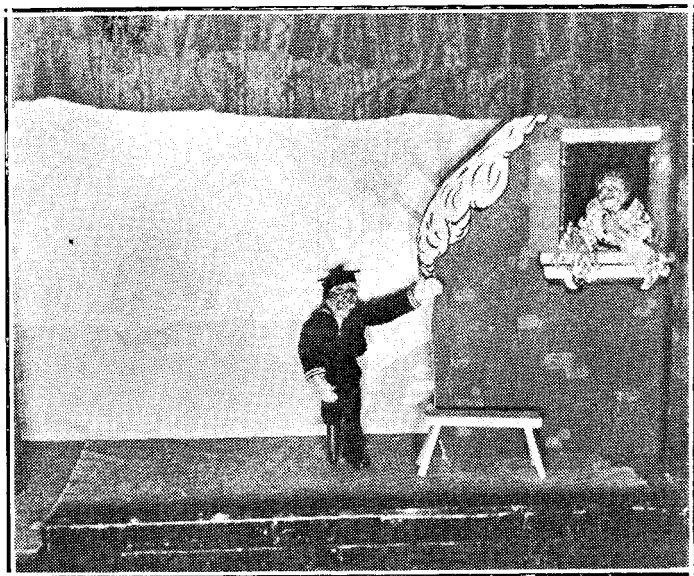


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MARIONETTES » » »



"Barnacle Bill the Sailor"

How To Make and Operate Marionettes

Including Facts About The Pixie
Marionettes

By

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Illustrated By The Author

FIRST EDITION

PN 1972
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PRINTED IN U. S. A.

MAY 28 1934

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—FOREWORD—

This little booklet was written for the benefit of those interested in learning about the fascinating subject of marionettes. The writer has not attempted to go technically into the more complex details of marionette construction; rather, this book was designed to give beginners information as to the fundamentals of puppetry. It is the writer's sincere hope that this booklet will serve its purpose, and he cannot help but wish the reader the best of success in his ventures.

—JOHN C. FAUSTMAN.

1934.

TO MY MOTHER

HOW TO MAKE AND OPERATE MARIONETTES

What a queer, fascinating little creature is the marionette! People of all ages and races have been drawn into his spell throughout the centuries. To our reckoning, the marionette dates back to the tombs of the ancient Egyptians, for it is there that these figures have been found. Punch and Judy, a pair familiar to all of us have tantalized Europe for many hundreds of years.

The term "marionette" originated from the French, meaning "little Mary," who undoubtedly was the main figure in most of the plays of that time.

There are three distinct types of puppets. The first, and perhaps one of the oldest, is the Chinese rod and shadow puppet. They are manipulated by means of rods attached to the main parts of the body and are moved behind a lighted screen, giving a beautiful color shadow effect. The second type of puppet is that constructed of a head and hollow cloth body, into which the hand of the operator is slipped.

This class is operated from below and to it belong Punch and Judy.

The third class of puppet, qualified as the true marionette is operated from above by means of strings or threads. To this type belong the "Paxies." Marionettes originated in Europe and because of their interesting merits, now have a good start in America. At the present time there are several complete companies that often tour the United States.

Needless to say, there is a peculiar spell that comes over the puppet enthusiast, and after making only one of these little figures one finds it a difficult matter not to continue. The perseverant worker will find unlimited opportunities in this field not merely for amusement, but as a profitable means as well.

This article is designed for beginners, and the most simple and practical methods, written so that all can understand them are to be given. The following plans are for a marionette 12 inches high.

The Head (See drawing I)

The head seems to give the majority of beginners the most trouble, so we will first learn how it is to be made. Carving the head from wood is a discouraging task which not only requires skill in wood

carving, but expensive tools as well. Instead, I would suggest that the beginner purchase a small can of plastic wood at the hardware or paint store and modeling an egg shaped head about three inches high including neck, form only the nose and eye sockets instead of attempting any detail. After the fiber has dried, the head may be painted with either water colors or oil paints to give it the desired features. A very small screw eye must be inserted at the base of the neck and also where either ear should be, after the wood is hard. The one in the neck serves as a means of attaching the head to the body, while those at either ear are for attaching the head strings. Hair may be made from yarn or purchased from the theatrical store. To improve its appearance, the entire head may be shellaced after the paint has dried.

Another Method of Making Heads

Instead of using the foregoing method, the marionette enthusiast may make his heads from buckram, a heavy cloth material that contains a great deal of starch, which can be purchased at the hat shop. To start with, model the head in modeling clay, and proceed to wet the piece of buckram which is to be placed over the face of the model. With

straight pins, pin part of the cloth over the face, and start working the buckram into the crevices and features with a hairpin or other suitable tool. After completing the job to your own satisfaction, and so that the buckram is smooth, and has no wrinkles upon its surface, set the head and mask aside to dry. Do not set it near to intense heat, however, as the modeling clay is apt to melt. As was previously stated, the buckram contains a great deal of starch. After dry, remove the buckram and you have a small mask of the face. Carefully shellac the mask so that it will keep its shape. When the shellac is dry, the mask may be painted. Hair is next sewed on, and the back of the mask stuffed with rags and covered to form the back of the head. A good many of the early puppets of the Pixie Marionettes were made in this manner, which was indeed very satisfactory. Be sure to shellac all faces again after the paint on the face is dry. This extra coat of shellac adds to the life of the countenance.

The Body

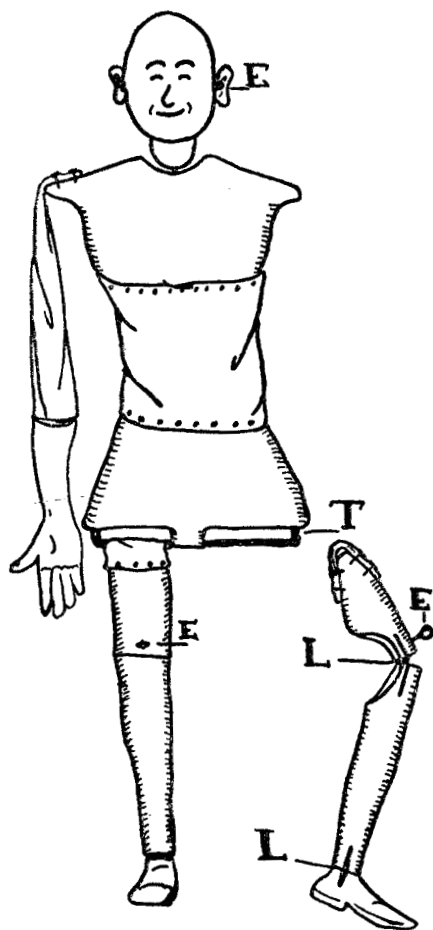
After completing the head, the body is next to be considered. Consulting the drawing, the shoulder piece is of wood, cut as shown and is one and one-half inches high and three inches across. The wood used for both the shoulder and hip pieces should be

at least an inch in thickness. The hip is to cut as shown and should measure one and one-half by two and one-half inches. A piece of thick wire must be inserted as shown (T) at the base of the hip. The shoulder and hip pieces are to be joined together by a section of cloth which will allow an inch and a quarter between the hips and shoulder of the marionette. This cloth section allows the puppet much flexibility in walking and sitting.

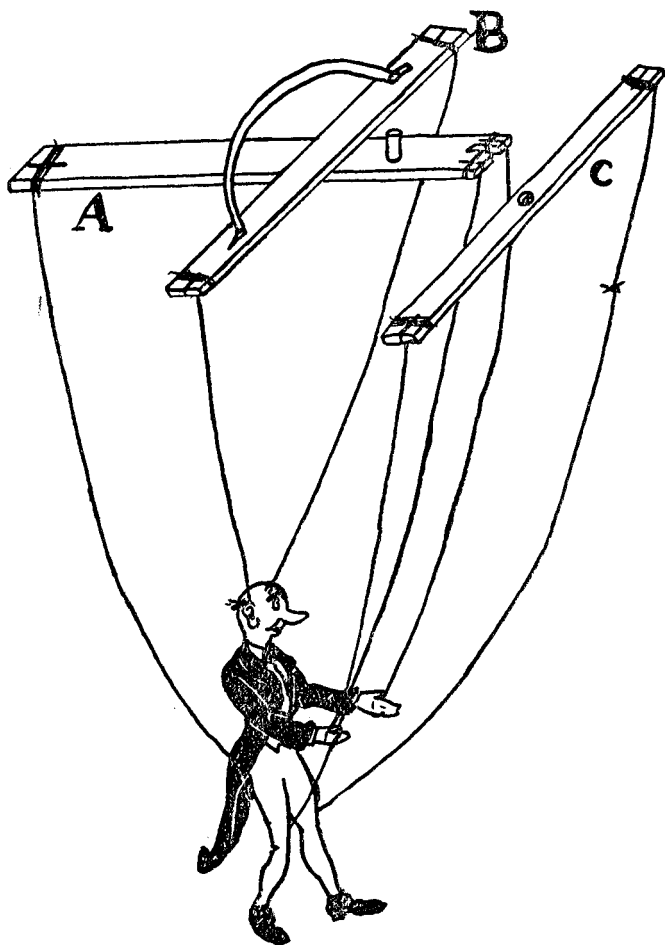
Looking at drawing I, T is the wire hanger for the legs, E screw eyes for string and L the leather joints.

Legs and Feet

The legs are to be cut of rounded soft wood and joined as shown. The joint should be made of leather to allow for a bend. (L) A section of the leg is removed from the back on both pieces so that the bend in the leg may be made. Small slots form the place for the leather joint to be tacked into. The top section of the leg is to be two and one-fourth inches long and the lower section, two and one-fourth. After joining the two wood sections together, they must be attached to the hip wire by a piece of cloth. Attach the cloth to the leg over the hip wire to allow it to swing freely. (See drawing I.)



Drawing I



Drawing II

Another piece of leather, placed in the same manner as the knee joint must be inserted into the bottom of the leg to serve as a joint at the ankle between the foot and the leg. Feet* can be either modeled from plastic wood or carved from wood.

A suitable place must be allowed at the top of the foot for inserting the leather ankle joint. Another small screw eye (E) must be placed on each knee, above the joint, and also one at the middle of the back of the hip piece for controlling strings to be attached later.

Arms and Hands

The hands can either be modeled from plastic wood or built up of a wire frame with fingers, and covered with tape. A small hole must be placed at the wrist in either case for the hand controlling strings. The arms are simply pieces of cloth tubing attached to the shoulder and hand. Do not allow the arms, including the hands, to hang lower than $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Attach the head by means of a wire run through another screw-eye at the top of the shoulder piece.

*Note: Feet should be weighted with lead shot. This will help greatly in walking.

When all is complete, carefully look over the puppet to be sure that everything is as it should be, and that a screw eye is placed at either knee, the middle of the back of the hip piece, and on the head, as previously discussed, and the marionette is ready for dressing. It is always a good idea to make a working drawing of each marionette before making it, to get proper proportions, etc.

Dressing

The puppet should be dressed of light material such as silk or sateen, and should be dressed as loosely as possible to allow the utmost flexibility. In a puppet as small as this, a great deal must be relied upon costuming and the painting of the head, to bring out character.

The Controller (See drawing II)

Now for the controller, as it is commonly called, or device for attaching the strings that will bring the marionette to life.

As is shown in the drawing (II), the controller is made from strips of wood to form a cross. The main piece (a) is to be 9 inches long. At one end are two slits for the hand strings, and at the other, one slit for the back string. Piece (b) is seven

inches long, and after being slit once at each end, is attached by nails to piece (a) $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the end. Next place a small peg half way between piece (b) and the end of (a). Another strip of wood (c) must be prepared in the same manner as piece (b), and a hole bored through its center, to fit the peg. Piece (c) is called the leg control, and to either end of it are fastened the two knee strings.

Attaching the Strings (See drawing II)

First in order of attachment are the head strings (see drawing). They are fastened to either end of piece (b) by slipping the string through the prepared slot and winding each around several times. Next attach the back string to the extreme end of piece (a) and the hand strings to the opposite end (see drawing II). As previously stated, the leg strings are fastened to the ends of piece (c), the latter being placed over the peg. This peg arrangement is to allow the puppeteer to set the foot control (c) down when operating the hand and other strings.

A thin leather strap may be nailed to either end of strip (b) to hang the puppet up with when not in use. Strings may be of either strong linen carpet thread, or, better still, small black silk fish line.

String the puppet about 30 inches high, this will be about the right height for the average individual.

Operating the Marionette

Next we must teach the marionette to walk, move move his hands, head, and other parts of the body. Holding the main control in your left hand, remove the foot control from its peg with your right hand. By carefully tipping the foot control up and down, first one end, then the other, the puppet's legs will move in the manner of walking. Walking is one of the most difficult feats for a marionette to perform, so the beginner will no doubt have some trouble with this important movement. After a little practice, though, walking will become easy, and before you know it, your little fellow will be parading proudly up and down the room. By pulling on the hand strings either one or both, the puppet will raise and lower his hands. By tipping the whole controller sideways, the puppet will move his head from side to side. If you tip the whole controller down, the puppet will bow. Many other amusing feats may be discovered by the ingenuity of the operator, and must be left to his ability. Don't be discouraged at first if you seem to be helpless with the controller. Remember directions, and you will have no trouble at all after a time. Operating a marionette

will soon seem natural.

Ideas for a Stage

A simple marionette stage may be made by cutting one side and the top from a large wooden box. The puppeteer stands behind the enclosed back and works the puppet over inside the box. Curtains may be set up in such a manner as to hide the puppeteer, and only the marionette will be seen. There are many other points of interest that could be stated about marionettes, and their making, but limited space does not allow it. However, by a little thought, many clever, and original ideas can be put into use by the ability of the interested marionette producer!

Some Scenery Suggestions

Scenery plays an important part in the successful marionette production. There are several ways of making scenery, and there is some dispute as to which is the best. The scenery used for the Pixie Marionette's productions is made of oilcloth, the back of which is used, painted with alabastine art colors. This serves as a very satisfactory back drop, as any number of colors may be obtained, and blended. For the beginner, I would suggest that he

procure a large piece of cardboard, and either cray-on the scene on, or do it in art water colors. Colored paper may also be cut out and pasted on. This latter is more of a task, but very effective.

In nearly all productions, properties are needed. Small tables and chairs may be purchased from the 10 cent store, and will serve nicely, or furniture may be made of cardboard or wood. For the outside of a house, a piece of heavy cardboard, or beaver board may be used, and painted to suit the play.

No stage is really complete without at least minor lighting facilities. Christmas tree lights may be utilized for footlights, while a large sized socket with reflector may serve as a border light. Border lights are inside, and just above the top of the front proscenium, or opening of the stage. Colored gelines may be used to give different effects, such as green for night, red for sunrise, or amber for daylight. An unlimited amount of opportunity may be found in just the lighting alone and the puppeteer will find many an hour spent producing novel lighting effects.

Presentations

By making enough characters, a complete play may be presented. It is usually best to produce some

simple play, perhaps of the fairy tale nature. This type of play requires little staging and few characters, making it easier for the amateur, and in addition, is more interesting to children. Several plays suitable for puppet presentation are:

“Jack and the Beanstalk”

“Hansel and Gretel”

“Little Red Riding Hood”

“The Three Bears”

Consult the public library for other plays, but be sure to choose one that will be of interest to your audience.

You may even write marionette plays yourself, or revise a play from a story that takes your fancy. In each instance, remember to present the characters in such a way as not to have too many working puppets at once on the stage. Such a scene would be difficult to present, as with a small stage, the less people you have behind the scenes, the easier. Take plenty of time when presenting the production. All lines must be memorized. The use of script behind scenes would detract from the puppeteer's attention on the puppet, and the marionette would be likely to sag, or be lifted into the air when he is not watched closely. Do not rush your lines, and remember to speak very distinctly, as it is often difficult for

the audience to understand what you say when behind a curtain if you do not speak "down and out."

Puppet Animals

Marionette productions are not complete without some form of puppet animal. The audience delights in watching their actions, and often, if the animals are the correct proportion, they will add much realism to the show.

Marionette animals may be made of cloth, or wood; or they may be made from regular animals purchased from the toy store. If you should prefer the latter, which is indeed much easier, carefully disjoint the legs and head (not to forget the tail) and reattach them so that they will move more easily. The making of the controller for these animals must be left to the puppeteer, as controllers differ greatly according to the type of animal used. However, if you moderate the controller used for marionette people, it will do quite nicely. Experience will show you the way in further puppet making, and you must use your own ideas.

A Few Ideas For a Vaudeville Show

Instead of presenting merely plays, a great deal of variety may be had by giving a small vaudeville

show. Although I would not advise this right at the beginning of your marionette career, it may be worked out to advantage by anyone that has ideas.

A clown may perform with a dog; a tiny puppet dancer may flit gracefully before the audience; a marionette orchestra may present well known musical numbers with the help of an offstage phonograph. A juggler, a skeleton, and even a marionette circus may be worked out. Ideas will seem to spring up from nowhere once you have set your interest in the marionette hobby.

FACTS ABOUT THE PIXIE MARIONETTES

Glancing through a magazine one day, the author discovered a short article telling how marionettes were made. The idea seemed to beckon him into a world of tiny figures all dancing merrily to the tune of little flutes. The idea was carried out to the best of his ability, and before the year was over, "Jack and the Beanstalk," the first production, was presented in the basement of the writer's home. Interest swelled, new marionettes and productions took form, and many improvements took place. Before long, friends were asking for performances at their parties, schools wished to have exhibitions for their pupils, and numerous other engagements came up. With a small portable stage, fully equipped with lighting system and scenery, the Pixie Marionettes presented their first outside performance. Needless to say, it was a success and many other engagements resulted from the first.

It is not, as yet, the writer's purpose to carry the marionette producing business out to an extremely profitable means, as it is still merely a hobby, but all indications point to a way of satisfaction in life with puppetry.

The first engagement of the Pixie Marionettes was in 1928. Since that time they have had engagements at many theaters, clubs, churches, schools and department stores. During the Christmas season several weeks' engagements are held at department stores for the benefit of the children.

At present there are nearly 75 marionettes com-

posing the troupe. The present repertoire consists of fairy tales, mysteries, and many vaudeville acts.

How the Pixie Marionettes are Made

The puppets of the Pixie Marionettes are made entirely of the wood putty mentioned in the instructions of this book, although instead of modeling the putty itself, the desired article is modeled in standard modeling clay, and then a plaster of paris cast is made over the model. After the mold is hard, it is thoroughly soaked in water, and lined with the plastic wood. After dry, the wood is removed from the mold, trimmed and painted, and prepared for attaching to the body or other part of the puppet. The entire puppet is made from this plastic wood, each part being cast first. There are many advantages in using this type of material, since it is easily worked and stays firmly in any shape originally placed. The standard size marionette used by the Pixie Marionettes at present is 24 inches.

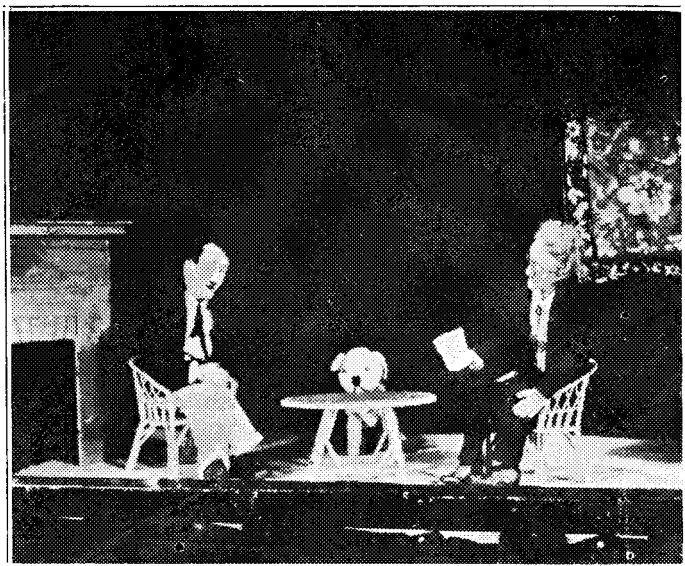
There is a certain distinction of marionette work and that is, that puppet making is one enterprise that seems unlimited. Its branches lead out into art, drama, music, play writing, and numerous other arts and crafts. One thing is sure: It is very seldom that one working with marionettes has been known to get tired of his work. One is led on and on by the fantastical, amusing antics of "little Mary!"

How Some Marionette Tricks Are Performed

Many have come to us after a performance and asked numerous questions such as, "How does the



The Author and Two Puppets from the
"Three Wishes"



Scene from "The Gold Bug," one of the presentations of the Pixie Marionettes

juggler catch those balls so cleverly?" and "How does the skeleton fall apart, and then come back together again?"

Since everyone in general seems to be interested in how these tricks are done, I shall now attempt to explain a few matters regarding them.

The balls the juggler uses have a small hole thru the center of each. A string running from the controller continues down through the ball, and is fastened to the palm of the hand. By pulling on the hand string, the balls shoot up into the air in a most satisfying manner.

All of the skeleton's limbs are held on by strings attached to the end of the limb and run up through a hole at the shoulder or hip to the controller. When the strings are dropped, the limbs fall off. When the strings are drawn up, the limbs return to their original places.

To make the sausages appear on Mary's nose in the "Three Wishes," a string is run from the sausages, which are concealed in Mary's pocket, through her nose, and to the controller. When the time comes, a gentle pull of the string is all that is necessary to "sausage" Mary's nose!

Any questions will be gladly answered by writing to John Faustman,

THE PIXIE MARIONETTES

Ripon, Wisconsin

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