



presents

Coffeehouse Chronicles #168: Bread and Puppet Theater



Ellen Stewart Theatre
66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003
Dec 10, 2022

**Coffeehouse Chronicles #168:
Bread and Puppet Theater**

**Moderated by
Sam Wilson
and
John Bell**

**Panelists:
Peter Schumann
Mike Romanyshyn
Teresa Camou Guerrero
Amy Trompeter
Margo Lee Sherman
Maria Schumann**

**Live performances by
Bread and Puppet Theater Ensemble**

**Curated and Directed by
Michal Gamily**

Running time 120 minutes with no intermission

The Band leads the audience into the theatre

Slideshow Presentation

Michal welcomes the audience

Film Clip#1: Peter about landscape

Interview Segment #1: Sam introduces herself and Peter

Film Clip #2: Peter about bread

Interview Segment #2: Sam and Peter

Film Clip #3: Elka and the museum

Interview Segment #3: Sam and Peter

Cantastoria #1: By The Light of Man

Panel Discussion #1: John introduces himself + Amy and Marg

Film Clip #4

Panel Discussion #2: John, Maria, Mike, and Teresa

Song: Maria and Gideon Song

Interview Segment #4: Sam and Peter

Film Clip #5: Peter about possibilities

Cantastoria #2

Band Set #2: The band plays on the stage during bread and aioli

Photos by: Tony bacewicz and The Hartford Courant, Massimo Schuster, Greg Cook and Jerome Lipani

Videos by: Robbie Leppzer www.TurningTide.com (This footage will be part of the first feature-length documentary about Bread and Puppet and Wild Travel TV www.wildTravelTv.com)

About B & P's 50 Year History

In the early 1960's, a group of scruffy troubadours rented out a small loft on Delancey Street in New York's Lower East side, and began putting on weekly performances. Headed by Peter Schumann, a sculptor, dancer and baker recently emigrated from Germany, they would distribute Schumann's bread to the audience who would slowly chew the coarse sourdough as the puppet performance ensued. Schumann was just back from a puppet teaching gig at the Putney School in Vermont, where his wife Elka had been teaching Russian language as a means to support her graduate studies in the same field. Unable to successfully pitch a class in choreography and dance, the school administration did accept Schumann's proposal to teach an extra-curricular class in puppetry. Named alternately the Moosach Puppet Theater and People Puppet Theater, Schumann also took the show on the road. He converted his father-in-law's small trailer into a mobile puppet stage, and hauling it with a beat up station wagon, started an improvised solo tour across New England, putting on impromptu performances in random towns and cities along the way.

Back in New York City, friends Bob Nichols and Mabel Dennison underwrote the \$60 a month rent on the Delancey Street space, and Schumann quickly converted it into a theater and puppet museum. Schumann's skills and interest in dance and sculpture were fused in puppetry, and the bread baking and distribution shored up the utilitarian function of an art practice synthesized with daily life. Peter and Elka decided on the name Bread and Puppet Theater. The name stuck. The year was 1963.

The Bread and Puppet Theater would embark on a remarkable 50 year journey, leaving an indelible stamp on the world of theater and the American cultural landscape. From the humble loft on Delancey Street, the Theater took to the streets and beyond. Enmeshed in the radical counterculture of downtown New York, and informed by Elka's heritage of political activism, beginning in 1964 with some of the earliest demonstrations against U.S. Involvement in Southeast Asia, Bread & Puppet became a familiar presence in the protest movement against the Vietnam War over the following decade. The politics were also local - during the summers of '65 and '66, Bread & Puppet created large scale outdoor pageants in some of the poorest neighborhoods of New York City, and in collaboration with the residents addressed urban political and social issues of the day. It was here that some of B&P's most enduring puppet icons - Uncle Fatso, The Dragon, Mother Earth and Uranos - were created with the help of the neighborhood kids.

In 1968, Bread and Puppet presented *Fire*, an understated yet hard hitting indoor piece about the Vietnam war, to critical acclaim at the Nancy Theater festival in France. This launched the theater into international prominence and helped secure over a decade of seasonal touring in Europe and beyond. During this period, Bread & Puppet was often associated with the New American Theater

– a loose-knit avant-garde movement that included companies as diverse as the Living Theater, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, Robert Wilson and others. Schumann had come to the States informed in part by the European avant-garde, and in New York was exposed to the Dada influenced work of Cage and Cunningham; the early happenings of Oldenburg, Kaprow, Grooms, et al; Fluxus; and the Judson Dance theater. But unlike many of his contemporaries, Schumann's experimental sensibility was combined with much older forms and traditions: medieval passion plays, the bible, fairy tales and other folkloric traditions of story telling. Bread and Puppet was also set apart by its economic independence. Guided by a philosophy of living and working within the means available, the Bread and Puppet aesthetic was inextricable from the papermache, burlap, twine, and staples, that made up and literally held the puppets and the shows together.

In 1970 Bread and Puppet moved to Vermont, first to a residency at Goddard College, then in 1975 to an old dairy farm in Glover, in the Northeast Kingdom. In Vermont, the annual Our Domestic Resurrection Circus was created, using the pastoral landscape to stage large scale outdoor productions. As the Theater faded from the contemporary theater spotlight, the two-day festival grew to become Bread and Puppet's central activity, produced by over one hundred volunteers and drawing audiences in the tens of thousands. Seasonal touring became even more diversified, and included more local, regional and third world venues; Bread and Puppet workshops – where shows and circuses were put together using local volunteers – became a more common mode of production and performance; and the Bread and Puppet Press grew to become a staple of the theater's income. Peter decided to end Circus in 1998, after the tragic death of an audience member in one of the teeming campgrounds that had evolved adjacent to the Theater. The Circus was succeeded by a summer program with weekly, smaller scaled performances. In this new format, the Theater continues its prolific output of new shows, addressing the issues of the day – like militarism, capitalism, and ecology – as well as re-staging classic Bread and Puppet shows from the 1960's and 1970's.

Now on the eve of the Theater's 50th anniversary, it is time to take stock of what has been accomplished, and what lays ahead. Over the years, Bread and Puppet has grown into a vast community, adding new layers every summer as new apprentices learn the ropes from returning apprentices and past puppeteers with years and even decades of experience under their belts. An extensive local community participates and lends resources for the summer shows, parades, and the maintenance of the buildings and grounds. Children grow up in the theater and now even some of those children's children are taking part. It is this network of support and volunteerism, as well as the attraction and commitment to an art form that is homemade, and which reflects on and addresses the concerns of the world and celebrates its beauty, that has made the Theater possible and what it is.

As the theater continues to operate within its means on a shoestring budget, the summer program has evolved into a highly organized operation, including larger than ever intern and volunteer participation, and plays to enthusiastic and growing audiences. One of the most enduring legacies of Bread and Puppet is its autonomy, receiving no direct government or corporate funding, but instead relying on its own practice of frugality and a huge amount of volunteerism, along with the merged incomes of performance fees, Press sales and donations to pay its own way. This model is in itself an art form, not only of puppetry and theater making, but also a lived philosophy of art and activism. Bread and Puppet's impact on the greater world of experimental theater is acknowledged by scholars, and evidenced by the hundreds of unique theater companies now in existence that cite Bread and Puppet as an influence, in countries from Nicaragua to Italy, Korea to France, Peru to Poland, and of course the U.S. It is difficult to conceptualize what this past fifty years of work represents: how many thousands of hours of paper-mache, sewing and painting; hundreds of thousands of hours of puppet rehearsal and performance; the countless band rehearsals, meetings, training sessions for volunteers; millions of miles traveled by the many many Bread and Puppet company members across these fifty years. This is a landmark we celebrate with astonishment and humility.

Sam Wilson is a puppeteer, painter, bartender and proud Union member of I.A.T.S.E. local 829. She moved from Buffalo, New York, to New York City 25 years ago to attend school at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn where she earned her B.F.A. Following Pratt she was part of the World War III Arts in Action collective that participated with street art in protesting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. She co-founded and designed art for Milk Not Jails, an organization that fought to change the rural urban relationship in New York State by both advocating for criminal justice reform and building support for local agriculture. She has performed and toured internationally with Bread and Puppet Theater, and Great Small Works and designed and built puppets for various groups including Circus Amok! and the Funhouse Philosophers. She is a founding member of the Boxcutter Collective. Boxcutter Collective writes, builds and performs puppet shows with the aim of taking down the rotten empire one cardboard spectacle at a time. Follow their post-post-consumerist anti-deepfake antics on instagram: @boxcutter_collective.

Puppeteer and theater historian **John Bell** is the Director of the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry and an Associate Professor of Dramatic Arts, both at the University of Connecticut. He learned puppetry as a member of the Bread and Puppet Theater company from 1976 to 1986, and received his doctoral degree in theater history from Columbia University in 1993. He is the author of many books and articles about puppet theater, and is an editor of Puppetry International. John is a founding member of the Brooklyn-based theater collective Great Small Works; one of the creators of the Honk! Festival of Activist Street Bands; and a member of the Second Line Social Aid and Pleasure Society Brass Band.

Michael Romanyshyn joined the Bread and Puppet Theater in 1975 and was a member of the company until 1992. He serves on the board of directors. He co-founded Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater at The Clemente in 1996 and was Executive Director until 1999 when he moved with his wife, Susie Dennison, to her family home in Temple, Maine. They built the Temple Stream Theater into a former church in Temple and ran a program of puppet theater and music until 2018. From 2008-2014 he was the Musical Director of the Allstar Refujdzi Band in-residence at the Archa Theatre in Prague. Since 2013, he has been a birch tapper producing birch syrup on the family's farm as the Temple Tappers where he lives with his wife and two sons.

Born and raised in México, **Teresa Camou Guerrero** is a film director and producer, her recent documentary films are CRUZ (2021) and SUNÚ (2015). She is the founder and director of El Teatro Indígena de la Sierra Tarahumara (2002-2011), a puppet theatre company based in Mexico's Sierra Madre and has been part of Bread and Puppet Theater since 1996. She studied visual arts at Bennington College.

Amy Trompetter is a puppeteer, trumpeter, World Theater historian, teacher & community organizer. She founded Redwing Blackbird Theater in the late 90's as a workshop and performance space in the Hudson Valley. Her roots are in Bread & Puppet Theater in the 1960's in NYC. She has taught, directed & performed all over the globe. She is the driving force behind the theater's drive to invent new forms, connect with the broad range of world theater traditions & address the urgency of local and global issues. Amy taught as an Assistant Professor of Theater at Antioch (tenure), Bates, Bard & Barnard Colleges. For several years she taught as part of the Bard Prison Initiative.

Margo Lee Sherman was one of the original members of the Bread and Puppet Theater. She joined in 1966 when its activities were centered in NYC. She created many of the major women's characters in which women often represented humanity in distress or struggling against the odds or fighting back. She performed with Bread and Puppet at international festivals throughout Europe. She was part of their historic visit to Iran under the Shah. She then turned to solo theater. Margo creates and premieres her shows at Theater for the New City. In that capacity, she has performed at festivals throughout Eastern and Western Europe, and in Russia, Egypt, Colombia, Cuba and Mexico. Her show TEREZKA is inspired by a photo of a disturbed child in a Polish orphanage after WWII. A CURIOUS TALE is based on a French peasants' tale about a prince who devoured his brides. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT WAR? is based on first-hand accounts of American soldiers in Iraq. A NIGHT WITHOUT A BLANKET is a dramatization of two stories by the great Palestinian writer, Ghassan Kanafani. George Bartnieff said of her: "Margo has an ability to transform herself into men and women as if she were literally able to live their lives from inside out."

Maria Schumann is a folklorist, farmer, singer and ritual practitioner. She milks sheep, leads singing groups, and practices bringing to life ancient calendrical agricultural rituals of our ancestors, through community, song, and dance. Website: <https://catehillorchard.com/farm-and-sing-folk-camp/>

Massimo Schuster, born in Lodi, Italy, in 1950, is a puppeteer, actor, and storyteller. He graduated from the Actors School of the Piccolo Teatro, Milan in 1969 and started working with Bread & Puppet Theater in 1969. Back in Europe in 1975, he moved to Southern France and started his own puppet company, Théâtre de l'Arc-en Terre. He has performed his shows in 60 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas and has directed shows in France, Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, and Ethiopia. He has been teaching puppetry in Italy, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Ethiopia, Niger, Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Canada. He has been President of UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette) and has written various articles for theatre magazines in France, Italy, and Hungary as well as a published book of photos, "Bread and Puppet Museum" (2006). He retired from the theatre in 2016, has published a book of poetry, and worked as a photographer for various Italian jazz festivals.

Independent documentary filmmaker **Robbie Leppzer** (www.TurningTide.com) is directing the first feature-length documentary film about Bread and Puppet in over 20 years, entitled BREAD AND PUPPET: THEATER OF THE POSSIBILITARIANS, which will be released in 2023. For more information: www.BreadandPuppetMovie.com

**A full program with information on this
production can be found on the
*Coffeehouse Chronicles #168:
Bread and Puppet Theater*
page of the La MaMa website.**

**In addition you can scan the
QR code Poster located in the theatre
lobby for access to the digital program.**

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Rendering: 74 East 4th St.

La MaMa's historic, landmark building at 74 East 4th Street is undergoing an urgently needed complete renovation and restoration to preserve the historic façade, create building-wide ADA accessibility, and provide much needed performance, exhibition and community space for decades to come.

La MaMa, founded by Ellen Stewart in 1961, has been on east 4th Street since 1967. La MaMa embraces every person in its community and is legendary as the place where new artists of all nations, cultures, races, and identities are given opportunities. It is the place where art begins.

To learn more about the renovation, or to make a donation please visit www.lamama.org/remakeworld

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The Downstairs

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