

Ancient Art Of Puppetry Being Revived In The West



Pretty Barbara Hurst, one of Perry Dilley's assistants, with two puppets which take part in old-fashioned melodramas.

Puppets Prance For Benefit of Grown-ups and Carefree Children Up and Down Coast

By WHIT WELLMAN

PUPPETRY, most ancient of theatrical entertainments, has been revived in the West. Colorful tales of primitive pageantry, old folk legends, children's fairy stories, and good old-fashioned melodramas are "on the road" again.

Traveling up and down the Pacific Coast, as puppets did in Europe generations ago, from city to city and from town to town, touring under the direction of Perry Dilley, internationally known puppeteer, who is credited with bringing the almost forgotten art into public favor, is a puppet show supreme.

A hundred years ago puppet shows were the tabloid newspapers of France and Italy. Puppets, which began performing mystery plays in the cathedrals, were banned by the church for irreverent by-play (introducing scenes of comedy and horse-play), and turned out into the market place, where they took up the business of satirizing the political events of the day. Today, Perry Dilley's gaily costumed figures entertain children and adults on annual "road

shows" from San Francisco to San Diego, and schedule shows regularly at the universities.

Perry Dilley's idea was to get back to the original purpose of entertainment, to have the audience take a real part in the performance. The revival of puppetry, he says, shows that people of taste are not entirely satisfied with the tinsel, sex and hollow elegance of the movies and radio. With both of these mediums there is a gap between actors and audience that cannot be bridged. Puppet show audiences in direct contact with the "performers" enter into the spirit of the play, and help to create the illusion of reality.

"Only children and a few artists came to our first public performances," Puppeteer Dilley said. "The youngsters came because to them the fantasy was real. Artists came looking for symbolic fantasy. All this has changed. Now, shopkeepers and stenographers, lawyers and stockbrokers, all kinds of people, in act, come because they find it good entertainment. The vice-president of a big corporation had his secretary call

last month to reserve seats. Adults begin to take puppets seriously."

PERRY DILLEY believes that puppets, like folk songs, appeal to the masses. Puppet shows are a true folk art, and cannot be too esthetic or refined. Puppet plots are intended to be simple, unsophisticated, refreshing, and lively. The little figures are not subtle in their play-acting. They're honest and direct, if sometimes noisy.

San Francisco headquarters of the Perry Dilley Puppets is the Studio Theater, the smallest "little theater" in the country, but boasting the largest selection of puppet plays in America—about 25 in all. His theater seats 50 people, but the enthusiasm of the audience makes up for its lack of numbers. The theater itself is only one of a growing chain of different places where Perry Dilley and his assistants, Grace Wickham, Grace Dilley, and pretty Barbara Hurst, present traveling puppet shows, and play every season before a total audience running well over 30,000.

Their complete traveling equipment is contained in two large boxes, which can be fitted into one small car—one of the advantages of a traveling puppet show! Each box holds puppets, drapes, lights, scenery, and stage settings, which can be unpacked and prepared for a show in an hour's time.

The Studio Theater has a modern revolving stage, permitting four stage sets to be prepared at one time—making for brief intermissions. It is fitted with a modern switchboard, "fly-gallery," and specially designed scenery.

PERRY DILLEY'S figures are hand-puppets, about 18 inches high, without strings—a type not generally used. Each is manipulated by hand, the middle finger for the head, other fingers for arms. Dilley experimented with marionettes, and decided upon hand-puppets because the action is less complicated, the illusion being greater without the visible threads. The appeal of stringless puppets is simple and direct, and the essence of art is simplicity. The fact that these figures have no feet detracts from the illusion no more than the threads which manipulate marionettes. Perry Dilley's puppets make no slavish pretensions to realism, although they come as close to reality as any stage figures can.

Successful puppeteers who lend their voice and hands to the moving figures must render sincere and sympathetic interpretation of the puppet's role, as each puppeteer is identified with his or her puppet during the performance. Human manipulators must have an inner conviction of the puppet's individual entity, which makes the play more than merely a mechanical business. Two imaginations contribute to the performance—that of the puppeteers, and that of the audience. The combination produces a perfect puppet.

One week a smoky dragon will tread the boards of this traveling theater in the rollicking play, "The Dragon That Wouldn't Say Please." The green monster does say "please" in the last act with a great roar of satisfaction from the audience. Another week sees the thrilling rescue of a blonde beauty from under the wheels of a cardboard train, in "Under the Gaslight." Augustin Daly's famous melodrama, first played in New York in 1867. A third week may be Red Ridinghood's turn to be deceived by the wolf. Other stories played by the Dilley puppets are: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Pierrot's Wedding," and "King of the Golden River."

EACH puppet is made by Perry Dilley himself. Character heads are carefully modeled in soft clay, from which plaster molds are made. Then the head is reproduced in papier-mache, fitted with a proper wig, and the face shadowed and painted. Puppet modeling is a special art in



Above: Barbara Hurst and Perry Dilley painting the faces of newly molded puppet heads.



Perry Dilley, internationally known puppeteer, who molds the heads of every puppet himself. Each must be fashioned for the play in which it will act. Character heads are modeled in soft clay, then plaster molds are made, and the head is reproduced in papier-mache.

Perry Dilley Says Puppets Appeal To Masses Who Want A True Folk Art

itself, requiring years of training and experimentation.

Perry Dilley became interested in the subject at the Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles, where he made stages, designed scenery, and modeled puppet figures. In the past few years he has toured most of the towns in the San Joaquin Valley from Tulare to Taft, and as far north as Red Bluff. His shows have been presented in the Pasadena Community Playhouse, and at U. C. L. A. Every summer his puppet troupe gives plays at the University of California in Wheeler Hall. His puppets have played to big audiences at Mills College, College of the Pacific and Stanford University. For several years he has given courses in puppetry for the University Extension in his studio theater.

As a master puppeteer, Perry Dilley's reputation is more than local. His original work is known in Berlin, Tokio, and in eastern states. A number of German, Japanese, and American books on the art of puppetry include illustrations of his little figures.

The family tree of puppets is as old as civilization. Carved movable figures of ivory were

buried with ancient Egyptian rulers. No one knows whether India or Egypt was the first home of puppets. Hindus say that puppets lived with the great gods before they came down to earth. The little figures came from India to China, then to Japan, in plays about Chinese heroes and animals that talked. Japanese poets have written thousands of puppet plays, where children dance, fly kites, and girl puppets carry dolls. Even in early Greece puppets attended feasts and acted for their hosts.

Perhaps the first passion play was acted by puppets, before the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, with emotion and tragic incidents from the life of Christ. In Italy puppet shows exhibited feats of knights in armor conquering an incredible array of foes. Italian puppets were invited to visit the castles of the nobles, very much like wandering minstrels.

GREAT authors were not above writing plays especially for the puppet stage. Shakespeare wrote "Julius Caesar" and "Midsummer Night's Dream" for puppets, and Ben Jonson contributed "Every Man in His Humor." George Sand, famous novelist, was so interested that she made a puppet theater for her young son.

These dignified, mysterious little figures of the miniature theater have had famous friends—men who appreciated the fact that stage and human actors and scenery were all subordinate to the puppets themselves, which live in proportion to the actor's art and the enthusiasm of their audience. Perry Dilley expects them to have more important friends among modern writers, when they realize the possibilities of these small figures which almost "come to life."

"Buried Treasure" Found In Sand



A NOVEL way of adding to her income is practiced by pretty Gene Milnor of Long Beach, California, who decided that buried treasure could be recovered from the white sands of southern beaches.

Working a few hours one afternoon with her efficient sand-sifting machine proved her to be right. She has recovered from the playground of the multitude diamond rings, coins, fountain

pens, semi-precious stones, paper money, and other valuables which considerably increase her weekly pocket money.

Her device scoops up six inches of sand with each operation, strains it through the coarse wire mesh—and her treasure reveals itself.

An unusually lovely type of beachcomber herself, Gene has found that "combing the beaches" pays more dividends than sun-tan.

Singer Gets Novel Makeup Box

A N UNUSUAL voice is often rewarded by more than the applause of enthusiastic audiences, a pleasant fact discovered by Marion Talley, Metropolitan Opera star, when she received a valuable antique Japanese makeup box from an admirer who heard her sing "Madame Butterfly."

This conveniently made box was once the property of an Oriental matinee idol, and is so prized by Miss Talley that she used it exclusively when preparing for her recent debut in the films.

Makeup, particularly in cinemaland, is of the

utmost importance, requiring not only skill but all the adjuncts of beauty contained in the folding compartments of what is probably the most unusual box of its kind in Hollywood.

