



**TAPS MASTER CLASS RESOURCE PACK: Shadow Puppetry with Puppet Pizzazz**  
**by Greg Ruhe**  
**June 2012, Florida**

## **Shadow Puppetry with Puppet Pizzazz**

**Presented by Director and Creator of Puppet Pizzazz, Greg Ruhe**

Shadow puppetry with Puppet Pizzazz is an exploration of an ancient art form that predates written language. Imagine Stone Age puppeteers entertaining each other during the ice age by making shadow images on cave walls. Using bare hands and perhaps some crude objects, the cave man created the beginnings of theatre.

Early man's cave fires were most likely very effective in creating dramatic shadow images, however using an overhead projector is professional puppeteer, Greg Ruhe's preferred method of turning light and shadows into puppet drama and proving that with shadow puppetry the possibilities are endless.

With shadow puppetry you can create theatre of enormous proportions in a simple, imaginative way. A character can suddenly fly, swim, grow 20 feet tall, transform into a monster; a princess, a frog or suddenly be anywhere in the world or beyond. Shadow puppetry is a fast and affordable way to create amazing effects, environments, characters or entire plays, ballets or operas.

During this two hour workshop, Greg will demonstrate several shadow puppets from around the world as well as share the history of the art form. The students will have hands on experiences with two different styles of shadow puppetry.

The class will first explore a more traditional approach to shadow puppetry in which large cut out figures are manipulated behind a white screen. A light source coming from behind the puppets makes a shadow image on the screen.

Ancient Asian shadow puppeteers most likely made a shadow puppetry stage by stretching a light color linen or cotton fabric over a frame made from bamboo and banana stalk. Greg uses a white stretch Lycra fabric over a plastic PVC frame. The Lycra fabric easily stretches taut over the frame, machine washes well and remains wrinkle free. White shower curtains or wide white art craft papers are good materials to make a fast and affordable shadow stage.

Traditionally a flame from coconut oil lamp would have cast the light that produced the shadow image, but we will work with a 500-watt halogen work lamp that can easily be purchased at most hardware stores. Please be aware that the halogen lights get very hot and can burn the puppets or the performer if you touch the light's surface.

The puppets were traditionally made from translucent dyed leather. A typical traditional Chinese human puppet figure is made from 12 separate pieces that are jointed together with silk thread. Greg makes his shadow puppets from

card stock paper, poster board, or cereal boxes and color enhances them with recycled theatrical light gels. Greg's moveable puppet pieces are jointed with brass paper braids.

This technique of holding the shadow puppets behind a screen most likely began in Asia. India, China and Indonesia have ancient shadow puppetry traditions that still use this technique today. Greece also carries on the tradition of Shadow puppetry being a popular form of entertainment.

The class will explore this style of puppetry while creating an underwater ballet as they manipulate a variety of sea creature shadow puppets.

The second style of shadow puppetry to be explored in this class will be a modern take on the ancient art form and use an overhead projector as the stage and light source to project giant shadow images.

The projector and puppeteer can be positioned either in front or behind a shadow screen. Sometimes, Greg prefers performing in front of the screen. The audience can enjoy watching the physical animation of the performer as well as watching the shadow animation. In the Indonesian traditional Wang Kulit performance, the audience is encouraged to change vantage points. They are welcome to view the shadow show from the front and therefore they see only the shadow action or to view the performance from back stage where they can see the puppeteer at work.

If you are using an overhead projector to create shadow images it may not be necessary to create a shadow stage. Shadow images from the overhead projector can be projected directly on a wall, light colored drapery, or white paper adhered directly to a wall.

Overhead projectors are becoming obsolete in many technically up to date teaching facilities. This excellent tool for creating puppet magic can often be found pushed to the back of a storage closet or for sale very cheaply on eBay or at flea markets.

Greg will demonstrate how to make a fast and easy shadow puppet and how to manipulate it with dramatic effect. The class will then make their own puppets. Afterwards, they will break down into small groups. Each group will work together as a team to create a short performance piece.

### **Workshop Objectives:**

1. To share knowledge, as well as enthusiasm, about the world of shadow puppetry.
2. To share simple shadow puppetry techniques that can be useful in creating a dramatic element or an entire theatrical production.

3. To allow participants to lose inhibitions and to find freedom in a performance based medium.
  4. To create a unique theatrical experience that will appeal to multiple generations of theatergoers.
  5. To expand the boundaries of modern storytelling.
  6. To develop teamwork and collaborative skills.
  7. To help students develop self esteem and tools for self expression in the arts, performance, and language arts such as writing and public speaking.
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## **Helpful Puppetry related organizations**

### **UNIMA- USA (Union International de la Marionnette)**

The organization's mission is to link puppeteers nationally and internationally, to publish information about and for the field, to offer support and technical assistance for professional puppeteers through seminars, conferences, and symposia; to stimulate the general public's interest in the art of puppetry; and to promote the visibility of American puppeteers all over the world.

UNIMA was adopted as a member of the International Theatre Institute in 1959, making it a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

<http://www.unima-usa.org>

### **Puppeteers of America**

A national nonprofit organization founded in 1937 that provides information, encourages performances, and builds a community of people who love puppet theatre.

Share the enchantment of puppetry with professional puppeteers, puppet builders, teachers, librarians, therapists, youth leaders, hobbyists and audience members who are enthusiastic about puppetry.

Puppeteers of America publishes an official magazine four times a year. It runs an online puppetry store and library and offers regional and national puppetry festivals.

<http://www.puppeteers.org>

## **Houston Puppetry Guild**

Puppeteers of America encourages local puppet groups known as “guilds.” The guilds are chartered by puppeteers of America but are independently run. The Houston guild has bi-monthly newsletters and educational meetings. They also organize an annual festival day of puppetry.

For more information contact: David Carranza is the Houston guild president  
[Carranza62@juno.com](mailto:Carranza62@juno.com)

## **The O’Neill National Puppetry Conference**

The National Puppetry Conference at the O’Neill Theatre Center provides a venue in which to collaborate, experiment, explore and develop ideas and talents related to Puppet Arts. Open to puppeteers, theatre designers, actors, musicians, directors, artists, producers, playwrights, and students, the goal of the conference is to develop new works for the Puppet Theatre, while advancing the standards and skills necessary for the puppet artist.

<http://www.oneillpuppetryconference.com>

## **Puppet Pizzazz**

A professional puppet performance company dedicated to creating educational and entertaining puppetry experiences worldwide.

1718 Alamo Street, Houston ,TX 77007 phone 713-862-1108

<http://www.puppetpizzazz.com>

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### **Practitioner's Pathway**

Greg Ruhe is the creator of the unique entertainment company Puppet Pizzazz. This 50 year old puppeteer has happily settled in Houston since arriving there to participate as an actor in the Alley Theatre's Young Company for the 1984-1985 Season. He had plans to become an actor and with two talented new acquaintances, quickly cofounded the Children's Theatre of Houston, a non profit

educational company which was twice awarded the number one status in arts education by the Cultural Arts Council of Houston.

Greg first developed his puppeteering skills while earning his degree from West Virginia University and applied these learnings to his work with the Children's Theatre of Houston. He further honed his skills at the Eugene O'Neil Theatre Center where he participated in eight seasons of the National Puppetry Conference. As his passion turned into a vocation, Greg founded Puppet Pizzazz in 1993 as a company dedicated to fostering all the many forms of the ancient art of puppetry. Since then he has been performing nationally and around the world, enlivening events with his exciting style of modified Bunraku puppets.

The making of and performing with puppets allows for great diversity in Greg's day. "Mr. Greg" is often the first person to arrive at any particular school or library, ready to perform his unique and very energetic puppetry demonstration, or to conduct a creative workshop. In the afternoon, while preparing his next performance or making a new puppet, he is the person most likely to answer your phone call. The evening will usually find him entertaining with his larger than life puppet creations at some lavish special event. If not, he will be practicing yoga to prepare his body for the rigorous schedule and to summon the positive energy he must communicate to his audiences.

Greg worked ten years for the Texas Institute for Arts in Education as a teaching artist. His strong commitment to education has earned him clients which include The Children's Museum of Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts Museum, The Bayou Bend Museum, The Houston Grand Opera, The Harris County Board of Education's Project GRAD, The Merry Go Round School of Drama, U.T. Medical Branch, The River Performing and Visual Arts Center for Special Needs Children, and Texas and Delaware Public Libraries. Greg was the most booked act for the Houston Summer Reading Programs of 2008, 2009, and 2010. He continually inspires creativity in his young audiences while stressing cooperation, self-esteem, and global awareness. A particular project that he encourages is the making of puppets from recycled materials. This is one of his most requested workshops.

In 1996 Greg was recruited by Very Special Arts India to share his artistry with educators who teach special needs students in India, Thailand, and Hong Kong. Traveling and teaching abroad has been Greg's most fulfilling work thus far.

Six years ago Greg instigated a sister company in Paris, Les Marionettes En Folies, which is directed by the French puppeteer, Charles Rabhi. The new company, which began with special event entertainment, has recently added an

educational branch. This partnership is one of Greg's favourite and most rewarding accomplishments, and provides endless creative satisfaction.

Both Greg and Charles were guest artists at the Khartoum International and Community School in 2009. The staff at this extraordinary IB world class school introduced Greg to ISTA, International Schools Theatre Association. This lead to Greg's teaching the 2010's ISTA, Texas Taps master class.

Greg is a proud member of UNIMA – USA, Puppeteers of America, The Greater Houston Puppetry Guild, and The International Society of Event Professionals, and is also on the staff for the National Puppetry Festival.

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