



Archy! is a musical theater work based on the alleged writings of a cockroach poet. His essays began to appear in 1916, in Don Marquis' column in the New York Sun, messages supposedly produced on an old typewriter at night and left for Don Marquis to discover. The musical is a collaboration between Bob Hall, who wrote the music, and Wade Ward, who wrote the book.

After seeing some very expressive puppetry, especially that of Henk Boerwinkel and Phillippe Genty, Bob decided that this was a unique and powerful way to introduce

It embodies much very timely commentary on human arrogance toward other life forms and toward degradation of our planet. There is a very strong implied message in the work, presented with a sardonic, but good-natured humor.

Lisa, the puppeteer and builder, worked with artist Sam Hale to create designs that would maintain the style and message of the lyrics and still manipulate well on camera. The final design of Archy incorporated most elements of cockroach anatomy with a 1920's dress fashion. The wings suggest a tuxedo jacket and buttons mark the symmetrical spots under the cockroach belly. The design for Mars follows a science fictional green Martian. The "space ship", designed and constructed by Sam, is like a stylized UFO with flashing lights. A pre-production meeting allowed us to test the puppet prototypes on



Most of the creative team: L to R--Tom Nores, Mike Pierce, Kristine Jensen, Lisa Sturz, Emerson Murry, Wendy Morton; in front, Bob Hall.

he had just had a delicious drink. Bluescreen method also allowed us to greatly enrich the background with still and moving images. These include pictures representative of the 1920's era, and celestial images and graphically designed space ship interior for Mars. We could also substitute graphics by Sam and archival images for the bluescreen background against which we taped our actor playing Don Marquis, who introduces the audience to his alleged wild discovery: a cockroach who claims to be transmigrated from the soul of a poet, and who will sing for us.

The bluescreen technique requires having a background of a carefully regulated chroma against which each segment is videotaped. An electronic device known as an Ultimatte is used to combine a background image with that seen by the camera. This is presented to the puppeteer who then can place the puppets correctly in relation to the background image that will later, in editing, be substituted for the bluescreen image, which will be "keyed out". This technique called for very careful camera work by Mike with much attention to lighting and continuity. The puppet sequences were shot with them singing and acting to the music pre-recorded by singers and musicians. Puppeteer Wendy Morton, two grips and an engineer assisted at the shoot. It was marked by much spontaneous and creative collaboration, possible with this small crew, in an atmosphere created by our producer, Kristine, who also acted as director.

We expect this video to be aired on PBS, presented at film/video festivals, and we will use it to promote funding for a full hour

Photos by Mike Pierce



Puppeteers Wendy Morton and Lisa Sturz (in the hood) operate Archy. Everything which is that certain shade of blue--hood, backdrop-- disappears electronically so the puppet can be superimposed on any image, like the antique typewriter on which Archy composes.

camera and talk through the technicalities, especially those connected with the bluescreen technology we decided to use.

The bluescreen technique allowed us to place our actors in appropriate environments, and readily deal with the scale issue. We could make our thirty-inch tall cockroach appear tiny in relation to large images of the (antique) typewriter he claimed to use. Thus we could simulate his alleged jumping off the roller to typewrite his poems by butting his head, one key at a time. In another example we had Archy apprehensively emerging from Don Marquis' coffee mug, and then, seeing the coast is clear, smiling and smugly wiping his mouth with the back of his "hand" as if

the work. He then settled on making a puppet production for adult audiences. Vermont Public Television agreed to sponsor, air, and promote this work on PBS. Kristine Jensen as producer, Michael Pierce as camera man, Lisa Sturz as puppeteer, and Sam Hale as graphic artist who contributed drawings to the puppet design, all joined the effort.

The creative team decided to make a video of one of the sixteen songs from the work, choosing "Archy Hears from Mars" as representative of the thrust of the work.