

ASHEVILLE

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JOHN FLETCHER/  
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**Red Herring**  
Puppets perform  
parts of Petruska  
at the Folk Art  
Center recently.



Symphony ends  
concert series with

# Puppet play

Arts & Living



# puppet 'petruschka'

Symphony presents  
famous ballet in final  
Masterworks concert

By Paul Clark  
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**ASHEVILLE** — Larger-than-life puppets, not people, will dance the great ballet "Petrushka" Saturday when the Asheville Symphony Orchestra performs its last Masterworks concert of the season.

The concert presents many logistic and dramatic challenges. First, there's coordinating the work of 7- to 9-foot-tall puppets with an 84-piece orchestra. Plus conductor Daniel Meyer will play one of the four main characters.

Lisa Sturz, artistic director of Red Herring Puppets, has been working with Meyer and others to make sure the puppetry, choreography and music happen on the same cues, to



Daniel Meyer

complex, polyrhythmic music by Igor Stravinsky.

The performance is something Sturz has wanted to bring together for a long time.

## Local talent

Red Herring Puppets, an Asheville-based group, has been designing, building and performing puppets for more than 30 years for film, television, theater, opera and elsewhere. Sturz has worked with Walt Disney Imagineering, Jim

Henson Productions and Lucasfilm, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, as well as PBS, NBC, ABC and UNC-TV.

She approached the symphony years ago about her puppets working with it, perhaps doing "Peter and the Wolf" or another symphonic story. When Meyer decided to include "Petrushka" in this season's offerings, orchestra executive director Steve Hageman brought Meyer and Sturz together.

"Petrushka" draws its main character from the hand puppets and marionettes that have been a part of Russian folk puppetry since at least the 17th century. The ballet premiered in 1911 with choreography by Michel Fokine, music by Stravinsky and Vaslav Nijinsky dancing the part of the melancholy puppet Petrushka.

Susan Paul, an acupuncturist in West Asheville, studied ballet with Leon Fokine, Michel Fokine's nephew.

Please see PUPPETS on D10

## IN PERFORMANCE

**What:** Asheville Symphony Orchestra MasterWorks concert, including "Petrushka" with the Red Herring Puppets.

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday.

**Where:** Thomas Wolfe Auditorium, Civic Center, downtown Asheville.

**Cost:** \$17-\$49 (discounts for students).

**Tickets:** Symphony office (87 Haywood St.) or the Asheville Civic Center box office.

**More:** [www.ashevillesymphony.org](http://www.ashevillesymphony.org), 254-7046.



SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN-TIMES

Petrushka, left, the lovelorn romantic, and the Ballerina.

# PUPPETS: Symphony presents its take on ballet

Continued from D1

She is choreographing the puppets for Saturday's performance.

"I'm working hard to maintain the spirit of the original choreography," Paul said.

"I grew up in New York City when a lot of old Russian (ballet) teachers were still teaching. I heard Lisa interviewing last year on WCQS (public radio in Asheville), and I called her and said, 'If you like, I can teach them the original choreography. Petrushka has been in my body for 50 years. I've known it since I was 14 years old.'"

## Love story

"Petrushka" is danced by four principal characters — three puppets and the Magician, who controls their lives. The ballet opens in a street fair outside St. Petersburg, Russia.

The Magician plays his magic flute and Petrushka, the Ballerina and the Moor come to life.

The three entertain the audience, then Petrushka returns to his dark cell to lament his unrequited love for the Ballerina.

The Ballerina isn't nearly as sad — attracted to the Moor, she dances lively in the Moor's opulent quarters in hopes of winning his favor.

The Magician sends Petrushka into the Moor's room to break up the seduction, and the Moor chases him out into the street fair, where certain fateful, not-to-be-revealed-here events occur.

In the finale, which happens at the Magician's feet, Petrushka considers the state and power of his soul.

## A complex performance

Sturz and Gwenn Roberts, a professional vocal soloist from Weaverville, spent about 15

**"It's a Herculean task to manipulate the puppets to the timing of the music."**

GWENN ROBERTS, vocal soloist

hours going over the music.

"It's a complex score, rhythmically and harmonically," said Roberts, who's been reading scores since she was 10.

The music moves more

quickly at times than the puppets can be moved.

"It's a Herculean task to manipulate the puppets to the timing of the music," she said.

Meyer will, through the magic of light, shadow and live performance, play the Magician. Much of the action happens behind a giant shadow screen.

"We have not tried to recreate the ballet. We're doing our take on it," Sturz said. Petrushka the puppet becomes more peaceful in the end than angry, as the original production calls for, she said.

She created the performance around a Petrushka story that she likes better, a children's story that's much gentler than the ballet.

"It's more about Petrushka's love and the idea that the soul is what enables us to feel," Sturz said.