



Stravinsky's

PETRUSHKA

Feature Artist • Lisa Sturz
Red Herring Puppets

They'll make it look easy on the night of May 10—but you should go ahead and be impressed. After all, huge puppets don't just happen. And they certainly don't dance and frolic on their own. There is magic behind this magic—namely, Lisa Sturz and her company of puppeteers, Red Herring Puppets.

On May 10, Red Herring Puppets will collaborate with the Asheville Symphony Orchestra to perform the story of *Petrushka the Clown*. Written in the early 1900s by Igor Stravinsky, this short musical performance takes us to the Shrovetide Fair in Russia where we watch a puppet show with *Petrushka*, the pretty ballerina, and the brutish Moor.

Using shadows, projection, and a few tricks of the trade, Red Herring Puppets will transform





STORY BY JENNIFER MCNALLY • PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSAN STANTON

symphony conductor Daniel Meyer into the "Shady Magician" who conducts the puppet show. Lording over the puppets and the orchestra, he will bring the characters to life.

At eight feet tall, each puppet is a work of art unto itself. Each took almost a month to construct, and requires two or three people for operation. The puppets were built new for this performance, using extremely lightweight fabrics, foam, and aluminum.

"The story is basically a love triangle with Petrushka, a melancholy clown, who is in love with the ballerina, who is fascinated with the Moor," says Lisa. "Personally, I have always loved the character of Petrushka. He's a real romantic, so it's easy to empathize with him."

If she were the boasting type, Lisa would have plenty to share with the world. Working in Los Angeles for almost 20 years, she has endless experience in television, film, and theatre.

While she's worked with the Jim Henson crew, Disney, PBS, NBC, and others, those experiences aren't what get her excited about her art. For her, the real highlight was working with the Lyric Opera in Chicago, collaborating with a choreographer friend from Cirque du Soleil, bringing German composer Richard Wagner's mythic "Ring Cycle" to life, complete with 40-foot dragons, 16-foot giants, a black-light monster, and origami-inspired wood birds.

Thinking back, Lisa has been involved with puppetry her entire life. Even as a child, she would entertain herself by creating scenic murals and piecing together doll clothes.

During college, Lisa double majored in theatre and religion. Ultimately, she earned her masters degree from the exclusive National Puppetry Institute in Connecticut, followed up with an additional masters in fine arts degree in puppetry from the University of California—Los Angeles (UCLA).

While she seemed to be on the right track, there was one experience that let her know puppetry would be her life. While studying directing at the National Theatre Institute, Lisa studied under Margo and Rufus Rose, creators of the 1950s *Howdy Doody Show*.

"I remember visiting their house for the first time. My life suddenly made sense," Lisa laughs. "Rufus had built his house as a huge convertible puppet stage that could accommodate rod puppets, hand puppets, or marionettes by folding down walls. And there were hundreds of cuckoo clocks, all set to different times. Everything kind of came together for me at that moment."

Obviously, puppetry holds a serious place in her heart. It is Carl Jung's theory on archetypes and the unconscious that expresses her feelings best—for Lisa, puppets are a representation of the metaphysical connection between man and god, or the individual with the collective.

"I do think puppets can focus the mind and the heart. I think there's something to the idea of taking an inanimate object and giving it life. And that's part of what I love about the story of Petrushka—the idea that the soul lives on."

Red Herring Puppets will perform "Petrushka" in collaboration with the Asheville Symphony Orchestra at 8 P.M. on Saturday, May 10, at the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium. Visit ashevillesymphony.org or call 254.7046. For more on Red Herring Puppets, visit the company website at redherringpuppets.com.

The crew: Standing, from left—Robin Stevens, puppeteer, puppet builder; Lisa Sturz, designer, director, puppet builder; Shane Meador, puppeteer, lighting assistant; Gwenn Roberts, puppeteer, musical coach; Pete Koschnick, puppeteer, lighting designer. Sitting, from left: Meda Thurston, puppeteer; Nathaniel Humphries, puppeteer; Susan Paul, choreographer; Patrick Saxe, puppeteer. Not pictured, C.J. Randall, puppeteer.