

## PERFORMING ARTS/DRAMA: PRACTICAL EXERCISES

[Based on exercises from G Latshaw, *The Complete Book of Puppetry*, Dover Publications, 2000]

These are designed to be used with any type of puppet you can get - balloons or tennis balls with eyes drawn on and held inside items of clothing work well enough.

### BASIC MANIPULATION EXERCISES

1. *Following the partner's finger.* Partner tells operator whether the puppet is really looking at the finger as s/he draws a circle, square, triangle, etc in the air.
2. *Head angles.* Participants try making the puppet say or look sad/tired/say yes and no/as if they're listening/as if they're faint/ excited/being told off, etc. Communicate ONLY with the head.
3. *Hand & head together.* Participants try making the puppet look surprised, bored, embarrassed, greedy, pensive, disbelieving, confused, wicked, nervous, etc. (NB: you might want to point out here that often a hand touching the head or obscuring the eyes is problematic for a puppet, and allow participants to suggest ways of dealing with this).
4. *Breathing.* Try breathing as if asleep, just run a race, watching TV, about to have job interview, relieved, shocked, panicked, sighing, sniffing, yawning, snoring, etc (these become vocal - but start with the really small movement ones).
5. *Moving.* Try strolling, running, walking home late at night, sneaking, dawdling, etc. Try slow, hesitant steps, short bouncy ones, swooping with nose in air, hunched forward or leaning on one side.

### ENTRANCES, EXITS AND MINI SCENES

Puppeteers hide their puppet and then experiment with the way they enter - try differing speeds, head, arm or leg first, a realistic scramble or a "popping" up, etc. Can the same techniques be used for an exit? How can the puppeteer's body be used to assist?

Puppets enter the space (from behind a door, chair, under a table, etc) showing where they have come from or what their mood/character is just by how they move. With each puppet the instruction is simply: You enter, you look around, you see something (or someone) you respond to it, you are changed, you leave. No words permitted, although sounds like sighs etc are ok.



Rehearsals: John & Father Dimley

## TALKING PUPPETS & VOCAL CHARACTERISATION.



Rehearsals - Augusta

Puppets “mill” and greet each other with a specific vocal characteristic. Puppeteers then swap vocal styles, and move off, keeping the same puppet but now with a new voice.

Allow participants to swap puppets from time to time, and now try simple conversations. Encourage them to go to extremes with pitch, speed, accent, emotional state, age, gender etc and discuss how these can change the characterisation of the puppet.

Give pairs opposite types, and have conversations showing these. E.g.: young/old; sick/well; lazy/energetic; bold/shy; sexy/sedate; stingy/generous; goofy/serious; happy/sad.

## USE OF SPACE

Ask the puppeteer to try moving the puppet on different levels, e.g.: on the ground, on tabletops, floating in the air, etc. Different puppets will be effective at different levels, but this makes for interesting playing. How can the puppet move effectively from one level to another?

Have the puppet use another performer’s body as their “stage”. What relationship is set up here? Try different parts of the body, and encourage the performer to move around (probably quite slowly and in negotiation with the puppeteer). Does the changing dynamic suggest a relationship?



Focussing The Lights

Ask one person (with or without puppet) to take a position in the space, and invite a puppet or performer to take another position. This is the classic tableaux or frozen picture exercise, but it takes on a different dynamic when done with puppets, and you can vary it after a while by adding movement and then words. You will find that the status images that come out are quite strong with this combination, and you can point out and experiment with this by giving roles which require it, e.g.: boss and employee; teacher/pupil; parent/child; boyfriend or girlfriend and partner’s parent; doctor/patient; bully/victim; swot/dunce, etc.

Photos by Adam Fuller, Frances Merriman, Rob Pointing

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