

# The Puppet People



## Performance Art

### The Puppet People

Michelle Smith-Carrigan

Mark Carrigan

**Success Magazine:** How did you choose to be a puppeteer?

Michelle Smith-Carrigan: I received my BA in Theatre with a visual art minor. After seeing some great puppet shows in my early 20's, I became very intrigued with the art form. My favorite company, The Bennington Marionettes, hired me and it was with them that I finally found a way to combine my greatest passions—art and performance.

Mark Carrigan: After seeing a puppet show in the 3rd grade I was hooked! I went home and tried making puppets that very day. That got me into sculpture, for which I received a BFA. After graduation, I was hired by The Bennington Marionettes as their company artist where I made puppets and performed. And that's where Michelle and I met...and fell in love.

**SM:** What was your profession prior to being a puppeteer?

MSC: I was an actress, worked in human services, and worked as a teaching artist.

MC: I was a summer camp director and picture framer.

**SM:** What type of shows do you perform?

MSC: We have seven shows in our repertoire. Five of our shows are story based: A Christmas Carol, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, The Elephant Child, The Last Dragon and The Firebird. We have an original variety show, Puppet Potpourri and a bully prevention show, Bully Busters. We use all types of puppets in our shows, from hand puppets to marionettes, and even a nine foot parade puppet. All of our shows are full scale theatrical productions with sets, lights, music, and special effects.

**SM:** Where do you perform?

MC: I would say 60% of our performances are school assemblies, and the remaining 40% are public shows at theatres, museums, libraries, festivals, churches, and concerts in the park.

**SM:** How do you decide what stories to perform?

MSC: A story needs to lend itself to a dramatic interpretation and it needs to be marketable. The first two shows we built (The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and The Elephant Child) were favorite stories of ours when we were young. We built The Last Dragon because Mark wanted to make a big dragon puppet!

**SM:** Do you try to have a message behind your performances when providing a show for children?

MC: Yes, we think it is important that a show have a great message. But that is not the only thing of importance when creating a show. Our overall objective is to inspire; whether it be to make a puppet, use a puppet, do theatre, make scenery, draw a picture, write a story, read a book, or see another live performance.

**SM:** What do you enjoy most about being a puppeteer?

MSC: I enjoy that my work has lots of variety. One day I'll be performing for hundreds of kids, the next day

may be working on a script, designing a flyer, painting a puppet head, or teaching kids. I really love that I get to be creative in many different ways.

MC: I really enjoy designing, engineering, and building the puppets. I also love making kids laugh!

**SM:** What future shows do you have pending?

MSC: We are currently writing and designing a new bully prevention show...a sort of sequel to our popular Bully Buster program. It will be debuting in October 2009.

**SM:** Do you do other work to help support your art work?

MC: No, we are fortunate that The Puppet People is our full-time job. Besides performing, we also conduct puppetry workshops and residencies and will occasionally build puppets for other organizations. We are in the middle of a residency with New Scotland Ave. Elementary School in Albany, NY. They watched our Bully Buster show and now we are helping them create their own bully prevention puppet show. They are

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writing scripts, building puppets, and performing their own puppet skits about bullying.

**SM:** Who inspired you to become a puppeteer?

MSC: The Bennington Marionettes. They were able to create a full theatrical production with puppets—it was magical. And Jim Henson, of course! It is still amazing to me all he accomplished with puppets, making them accessible to both children and adults.

MC: Jim Henson. I grew up watching Sesame Street and The Muppet Show.