

## **An East Anglian Odyssey** **by Chris Abbott**

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**An East Anglian Odyssey** tells the story of Ray and Joan DaSilva, magicians, performers, theatre managers and, above all, puppeteers. From early performances in Wisbech to the West End of London, the opening of the Norwich Puppet Theatre, and international success, the story is one of a style of theatrical performance with puppets that is now all but lost. Compiled from interviews with performers who worked with the DaSilva companies from the 1960s to the 1980s, and with access to the DaSilva archives, this book will be of interest to local historians, puppet enthusiasts, and all who remember the childhood joys of going to the theatre

**Chris Abbott** first saw the DaSilva company when they performed Jack and the Beanstalk in Worthing in the 1960s. He has been a member of British UNIMA for thirty years, including spells as Secretary and Journal Editor, and was one of those involved in the early Education activities at the Puppet Centre, where he first met Ray DaSilva. He has written reviews and articles for Puppet Notebook and Animations. He used puppets throughout his career in special education and is now Reader in e-Inclusion at King's College London.



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# **The Story of the DaSilva Puppet Company**

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## **Photos**

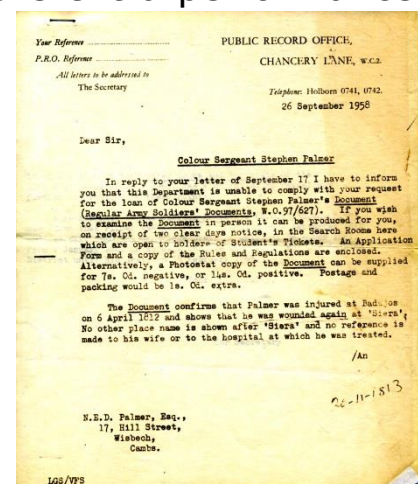
Lillian Ream (Wisbech), Ron Bailey, Royce (Paignton)  
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## Prologue by Ray DaSilva

### Burwell – Sep 8<sup>th</sup> 1727

In childhood, I never really appreciated the phrase “a cold shiver ran down his back” which often seemed to occur to heroes in *The Hotspur* and other penny-dreadfuls. Never having experienced this feeling, I assumed that it was a figure of speech intended to “curdle the blood” of the reader. Of course, I knew what it was like to be afraid or startled suddenly, but it was not until the eventful pilgrimage to Burwell years later that I truly learned what spine-chilling really meant. Even today, when I tell this story, there are tingling reverberations descending down my back. This is how it came about....

It was a summer's day during the period when our company was based at Godmanchester near Huntingdon. The teams were all out on tour and it therefore became necessary for Joan and myself to do the extra performance which had been booked for that afternoon at Newmarket. My father, who was visiting us at the time, had been busy researching the Palmer family history; in particular, the origin of the name DeSilva or DaSilva which had been passed from father to son down the years. He had discovered through records at the Imperial War Museum and The Public Record Office that Colour Sergeant



Stephen Palmer of the 48<sup>th</sup> Foot Regiment was wounded at the battle of Badajos on the Spanish/Portuguese border in 1812 (one of the significant engagements of the Peninsular Wars) and may have met up with a Maria de Silva. My father's searches through parish records revealed that one of our ancestors came from Burwell in Cambridgeshire. So, hearing that we were going to Newmarket that

day, he requested a lift to Burwell, which was on the way. Recalling that there was something about Burwell in George Speaight's *History of the English Puppet Theatre*, I took my copy down and re-read:-

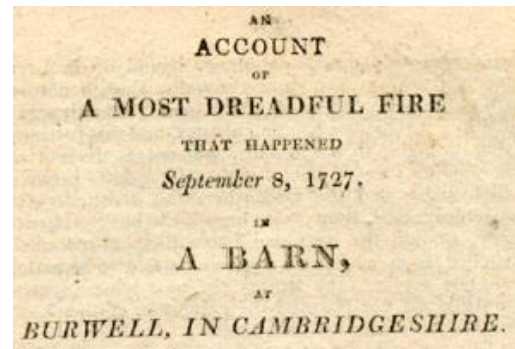
*On September 8, 1727, a puppet showman named Robert Shepherd, with his wife, young daughter, and two manservants, stabled his two horses in one part of a barn that he had hired at Burwell, in Cambridgeshire, and set up his show in the adjoining portion. As an introduction to the performance one of the company performed some conjuring tricks in front of the curtain on an oval gate-legged table, which was then folded up and put out of the way in front of the only door into the barn. In the plays that followed Shepherd and his wife acted a scene of a lover wooing a coy lady, and there then was introduced the famous battle between St George and the Dragon, who seemed to spout real fire out of his mouth, with a noise like thunder and lightning.*

*While this was going on an ostler employed by the owner of the barn came to feed the horses at about nine o'clock in the evening. He seems to have expected to have been admitted free to see the performance, but when the modest admission of one penny was demanded he went back into the stable and, climbing on to some bales of oat straw, clambered over a low partition wall into the main section of the barn, where he could see the show for nothing. In the process the candle he was carrying was upset, set fire to the straw, and in a very short time the entire roof of the barn was ablaze. The audience rushed in panic towards the door, which was completely blocked by the table and—anyhow—opened inward. In the dreadful scene of confusion the only exit from the barn was jammed tight by the panic-stricken, hysterical mob, and the blazing roof fell down upon their heads. Out of about 140 persons present at the show, 80 lost their lives.*

*Hone's Every-day Book states: "those that did escape, which were but very few, were forced to crawl over the heads and bodies of those that lay in a heap at the door"*



and also that the ostler, Richard Whittaker was tried for negligence at Cambridge Assizes in 1728 and acquitted. Nearly 50 years later, the local Press reported that a man at Fordham had confessed, just before his death, that he had set fire to the barn to spite the puppet showman.



from *Dreadful Catastrophe*, Fairburn

The horrific images conjured up by reading the accounts of this factual event were just as vivid as those from the fiction on which I was brought up. The puppet show connection made it even more scary; particularly as one of our teams had recently experienced a small fire on stage during their performance of *Pinocchio* at Bacup Empire. Somehow, I was seized with a morbid curiosity to visit Burwell in order to see the memorial to the victims of the tragedy, which I learnt was there from an early *Puppet Master* (the journal of The British Puppet & Model Theatre Guild).

After searching through the high grass in the village church graveyard I eventually found the carved memorial. It has a winged heart with flames arising from the top and a skull and bones beneath. On the reverse is a simple inscription added in 1910 when the stone was restored: "To the memory of the 78 people who were burnt to death in a barn at Burwell on Sept 8<sup>th</sup> 1727." I did not attach any particular significance to the discrepancy in the number of people (80 in Speaight's account) in my head were the screams of the people who, one minute were watching puppets, and the next, were clambering to escape through the restricted exit. My sober mission was accomplished – or so I thought.

A few minutes later there were whoops of excitement as Joan and my father found a tombstone (strangely the opposite way round to the rest) bearing the inscription "To the memory of Stephen Palmer departed this life February

186? (the registers say 1865) aged 83 and Merear de Silva his wife a native of Portugal who died 15<sup>th</sup> April 18??.” (The registers say April 17 1865, and spell her name Merier). Second mission accomplished – or so we thought.



Grave of Henry and Sarah who died in the fire

We looked around St Mary's Church and found a booklet which referred to "interesting memorials, including tomb vaults to the Palmer family, near the belfry door." My father was anxious to find these, so, with one eye on the time, I agreed to accompany him. We did find some elaborately carved stones, but next to them was a smaller memorial supplanted by two cherubs, a skull and hourglass. The moment I read the following inscription, I truly understood what was meant by "the blood running cold" and "chilling the spine".

You Readers all that doe pass by  
Upon our stone then cast your eye  
When this you read you'll shed a tear  
To think on the dust that slumbers here  
And when you looke you'll plainly see.  
Think on the glass that runs for thee.  
To the memory of two children of Henry and Sarah Palmer.  
John was aged 16 years and 6 months, and Ann was 10  
years and 3 months, who boath died  
**Sep 8 1727.**

A few years after discovering the Burwell story of the puppet theatre fire, one of our teams was booked to play *St George and the Dragon* at Burwell Primary School. I suggested they take a fire extinguisher with them...

## **Beginnings (1933-1951) and first puppet performances (1951-1956)**



The story of Ray DaSilva and the puppet company he formed with his wife Joan is one which begins in East Anglia and in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire in particular. Ray's great great grandfather, Stephen Palmer (1782-1865) went to fight in the Peninsular Wars in Spain, and it was from the name of the Portuguese woman he met there and married, Maria DeSilva, that Ray's name originates. Stephen

**Stephen's grave at Burwell,** returned to Burwell and his family proceeded to make their mark on the area. One of Stephen's sons, Emmanuel (1820-1891) was a millwright and made a velocipede in 1876 (now in the Wisbech and Fenland Museum). His son, Younather DeSilva (1867-1942) who was Ray's grandfather established a garage and ran the Borough Cycle Works in Wisbech and had what was termed at the time a cycle wedding. The bride and groom left the church with a band playing "*Daisy, Daisy*" and riding a "sociable" bicycle which really was made for two, only in this case not a tandem but a machine enabling the two riders to sit side by side.



**Ray's grandparents on a 'Sociable'.**

Ray DaSilva – or Ray Palmer as he then was – developed a taste for performing magic as a boy conjurer while at school in Wisbech. Ray's brother Neville remembers watching him



producing chickens and Brian Payne, of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, remembers his card tricks in the playground of Wisbech Grammar School. Newspaper reports of his early performing years describe how a conjuring set given to him by his mother for his eighth birthday was the starting point. *"She did not realise that she had let herself in for a great deal of expense,"* the article went on to say.



Puppet theatre was an interest too, and Vyvyan Bennett, his then art master, presented a marionette show himself, and this must have been an early influence.



Uncle Dennis and Auntie Jean

Ray remembers watching the Punch & Judy and humanette performances of Jean and Dennis Collins on Hunstanton seafront, and he later made a few marionettes himself and used them alongside his magic performances. As Ray remembered in a recent interview, *"A really bad stammer as a child led me to retire into my own world where I could play with coloured lights and move models about table-top fashion, acting out little dramas; and then I got a box of conjuring tricks."* His first public magic show was given at the age of thirteen, and by 1951, still only 18, he had become a member of the Magic Circle. This provided some useful publicity and he was soon busy performing for local organisations in the Wisbech area as *The Fenland Magician*.

Publicity photographs at the time show him in typical top hat and cloak, or even hypnotising a chicken. The local papers showed great interest in a local lad made good, especially one who was admitted to the Magic Circle





at such an early age. Ray was always assiduous with his record-keeping at the time, ensuring that he recorded the tricks which formed part of each performance, so that he could avoid doing the same items at a repeat booking. In 1949, for example, for the Red Cross, he performed tricks numbered 10, 27, 30, 47 and 53; by December 1950 a children's party were offered 1, 10, 25, 46, 49, 66 and 70. Fees for performances – where they were paid – varied from 5/- to £1/5/-.

Only working semi-professionally at this time, Ray was also employed by the Regional Blood Transfusion Centre at Cambridge as a laboratory technician, and attended evening classes at the University in bacteriology and chemical pathology. He needed the income from this job, since conjuring could be an expensive business, as he told a local newspaper. *"The snag is that it's so expensive; one of my tricks, which takes only a few seconds to do, costs me 50/-, so you can see that a whole programme takes a lot of money."*



Top of an advertising calendar 1954.

Travel began to be a part of Ray's life too, and the local papers also reported that the Fenland Magician had attended a magic convention in Hastings. *"I*

*had the time of my life,"* he told the paper, *"the great thing at the convention is not the new tricks you learn but the many famous magicians you meet. I went there as a complete stranger and left knowing almost everybody."* The papers also reported on his habit of trying out new tricks on the train to Cambridge every day. By 1953, Ray was back at a convention, this time in Edinburgh, and using the opportunity to write to potential bookers from such a prestigious venue:

*"I understand that your organisation runs several social functions during the year... For very special occasions I present a silent magical act with a musical background, and I give you my assurance that this is a delightful act to*

*witness, full of little surprises and something to suit everybody's tastes... Children's parties are also catered for."*

Ray got a lot of local press coverage at this time, and most of it relates to his magical performances. The interest in puppets had continued, but was not yet the major part of the performance. Mailbag escapes at church fetes were featured however, for escapology was another part of magic that Ray began featuring. It is in the report of one his escapes that we see in the final paragraph "*Ray DaSilva also supplied a Punch and Judy show."*

In 1953 Ray Palmer, at the age of 20, met Joan Frances Clayton, a dancer in a local touring group called Barbara Burling's Fenland Follies. A local newspaper reported: "*For the coming season, he will have the help of his new assistant, Joan Frances, another enthusiast in magic."*

They became engaged after, says Ray, he got Joan to audition for him by cooking a Sunday lunch and making an opera cloak for

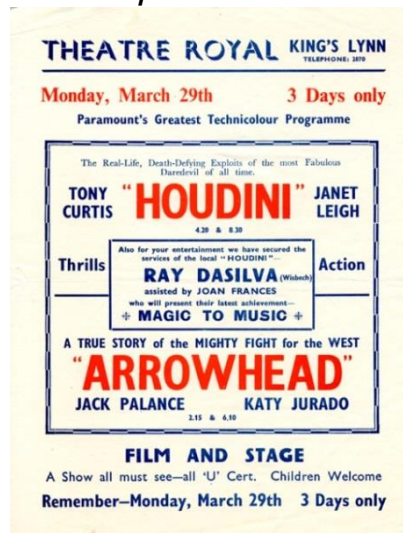


*Multiplying candles*

the magic act. At Ray's home there was a room at the top of the house where they used to rehearse the show. Ray recalls that his mother amused visitors by telling them that the engaged couple were upstairs rehearsing and trying out new tricks. They were married a year later in 1954 at St Peter's Church in Wisbech and Joan made all the dresses for the wedding, just as she would make all the puppet costumes later. At this time Ray was still working as a laboratory technician, by now at Orchard Products, a branch of Chivers, where Joan was also working in the lab.

The decision to spend their honeymoon at a magicians' convention, where they were one of three newly-married couples, resulted in further useful publicity. They were reported in the national press as having performed the

sawing in half illusion on their wedding night. A local reporter, picking up the story, called on Ray's mother who knew nothing about this escapade. She said if she had have done she would never have let them go. The local report says, *"The bride went away in a two-piece and came back in two pieces."*



Joan, unaccustomed to public speaking, developed her own silent magic to music act, and together the couple toured East Anglia entertaining at civic functions and other events. One highlight was three days of live performance given by Ray and Joan onstage at the Theatre Royal, King's Lynn in March 1954, where their magic act was seen before the main feature, the Tony Curtis film of *Houdini*. Another

feat that made the papers was the blindfold street walker illusion, where Ray *"walked blindfold through busy streets in Downham Market, easily avoiding traffic and people."*

A Punch and Judy Show was added for outdoor summer events in 1955. Doing magic at garden fetes was always a precarious business. Apart from various noisy distractions, the least breath of wind would blow the silk handkerchiefs about; thereby



*Anti-Gravity Glasses*

prematurely revealing items intended to be magically produced later. There were dangers of having tables upset by uneven ground or pulled over by a dog running with trailing lead, whereas Punch & Judy shows could make plenty of noise and were well protected from unruly elements. This show marked their first venture into puppetry in public, and the DaSilvas were getting paid to do it.

## North America (1956-1962)

A momentous decision was made in 1956, when Ray and Joan emigrated to Canada. Press coverage of their departure included a photograph of them packing up their Punch and Judy show, so it is clear that puppets were beginning to form a larger part of the performance. They were advised by friends not to take the Punch & Judy Show because there was no Canadian tradition of this form of entertainment. However, as they were packing up everything they took it anyway, and were glad they did. They found that there were many English immigrant families who either remembered Punch from their younger days or they had heard grandparents talk fondly of Punch at every seaside town in the Old Country. Soon after his arrival in Canada, Ray began getting noticed by the local papers in Toronto, and one report adds that *"Ray DaSilva showed one of his fine puppets. Mr DaSilva spends many hours on his hobby, and his work shows great skill and craftsmanship."*



Still working in daytime jobs as well as entertaining – Ray in the research department of General Foods and Joan in the laboratory of a water-softening firm – the couple soon made contact with Canadian and American magicians after settling in Cobourg, Ontario. As in East Anglia, Ray continued to keep careful records of his performances and the fees he received. The familiar round of performances began again, private parties, Rotary and YMCA being just as popular in Canada as in the UK. One report describes how Ray gave 150 Wolf Cubs their first experience of a Punch and Judy Show, at which time he had only been performing Punch for two years.





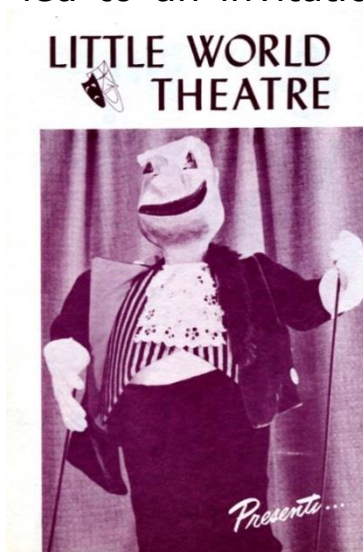
Ray and Joan were invited to perform at the 1957 Convention of the International Brotherhood of Magicians in Houston, Texas. The Convention Report says that "*Ray DaSilva and Joan Frances presented miscellaneous magic that was new to the crowd (mostly) and extremely well presented, fresh, youthful, delightful and extremely well received.*" During the convention, Ray and Joan also appeared with Punch & Judy before a vast audience of 3,000 under-privileged children. Their attendance at the Convention was successful, and they won the prize for Best Stage Setting for their Magic to Music act.

Ray and Joan developed a new act around this time, with a Persian theme and new costumes and illusions. Fire-eating had joined escapology, and Joan found herself the subject of illusions with swords through boxes.



**Persian Act: Ray, Joan and Catherine Facey.**  
*The Temple of Benares.*

A meeting with George and Elizabeth Merten from Toronto led to an invitation to perform at the 1959 *Puppeteers of America Festival*. George Merten, the author of several puppet books, was the co-ordinator of the festival. This chance to perform at such a prestigious festival, and the welcome given by the Toronto Guild of Puppetry, led to a decision by Ray and Joan to concentrate their lives on puppet theatre. They set up their *Little World Theatre* and gave a number of performances in Canada, including at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto.



**Eight page brochure. Photo:**  
*Worldly Goods from Everyman.*

Productions soon became quite ambitious for the DaSilvas – or Palmers as they sometimes billed themselves – and photographs taken at the time show them watching the Hogarth Puppets in performance and preparing their production of *Everyman*, a fifteenth century Morality play. Not that puppets took up all their time; Ray became president of the Cobourg branch of the Anglican Young People's Association and they found themselves teaching people ballroom dancing and in return, learning Canadian square-dancing.



*The Messenger from Everyman*

The magic to music act was presented at dinners and ladies nights of various organisations. On one such occasion Ray was standing in the wings watching Joan in her long evening gown mystifying the audience with her beautiful routine in which the pattern of a decorative plate was transferred to a silk handkerchief. He inadvertently leaned



*Joan vanishes the pattern from a Willow Pattern plate.*

on the take-up spool of the tape-recorder and was quite oblivious to the stream of tape spilling over and piling up on the floor and then inside the player itself. Suddenly the music groaned to a halt. Joan, who was normally too shy to speak to an audience, produced a masterpiece of improvisation. She glanced sideways and seeing Ray frantically tearing tape out of the machine, said to the bemused diners, "I aim zo zorry, I do not speke ze Eenglish" The mangled

tape was extricated, the music started again and all was well, except for the audience member who came up afterwards and asked Joan where she was from.

Photographs from this time show puppets of West Coast Indians, dogs, a rabbit and a xylophone player, so the morality play wasn't the only show developed by the *Little World Theatre*. *The Legend of the Thunderbird* used marionettes made by George and Elizabeth Merten, and shorter plays mostly used hand puppets. *The Summoning of Everyman* used more stylised puppets than the company had previously made, and they were mostly rod-operated. The repertoire grew rapidly, and soon included:

*Punch and Judy*  
*Marionette Cabaret*  
*The Legend of Thunderbird*  
*The Summoning of Everyman*  
*Puppet Varieties*  
*The Haunted Belfry*  
*The Lamb was Sure to Go*  
*The Toymaker*



from *The Thunderbird*

A 1961 press article summed up this period, with its headline "*Magic and Puppetry Mixed.*" By this time Ray and Joan had moved from Cobourg to Guelph. Christmas Day



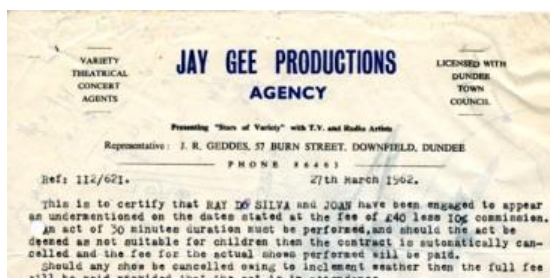
Ray presents *The Toymaker* with Spots and Sripes

1961 was a high spot with the pair appearing on Canadian television; but an even bigger change was around the corner, with a return to the UK and indeed East Anglia.



## Back to the UK and going professional (1962-1967)

When Ray and Joan arrived back in England in 1962 they had just enough money to buy a van to carry their puppets and equipment. A brochure for the *Little World Theatre* at this time states "New to this area! Returning from Canada July 28<sup>th</sup> 1962" and includes all the shows developed while they were abroad. The DaSilvas settled back in Wisbech, turned professional, and life became a round of club engagements on the Midlands circuit and, for five years, summer season at Scarborough.



### The first professional contract

Ferry and Dundee area. The fee was £40 for 12 performances (less the usual 10% for the agent), and the contract states that they should *"report to the Uncle at each park where a pianist and mike will be made available."* This engagement was followed by a number of bookings provided by a Leicester agency with their Marionette Cabaret at various Working Men's Clubs. Particularly memorable was a Club at Grimsby where they played for a week. It was a dismal dive with the same few people in the audience every night, and Ray takes up the story.

*"We were not particularly looking forward to the Friday night when we had invited representatives from Scarborough Corporation to come and see our performance, having heard that they were seeking a children's show for the following summer. It was thick fog and for some reason the bridge across the*

Their first booking was from an agency in Scotland, introduced to them by Fred Barton, a magician friend from the 1950s, and this found the couple appearing in parks in the Broughty

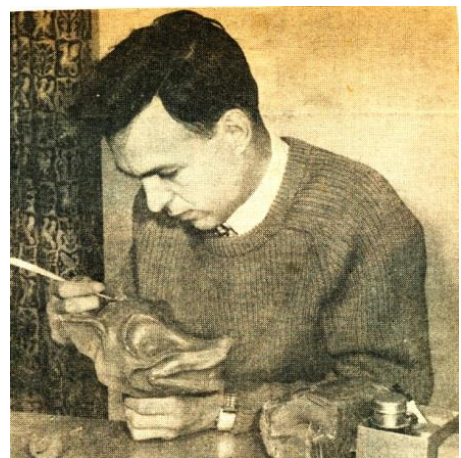




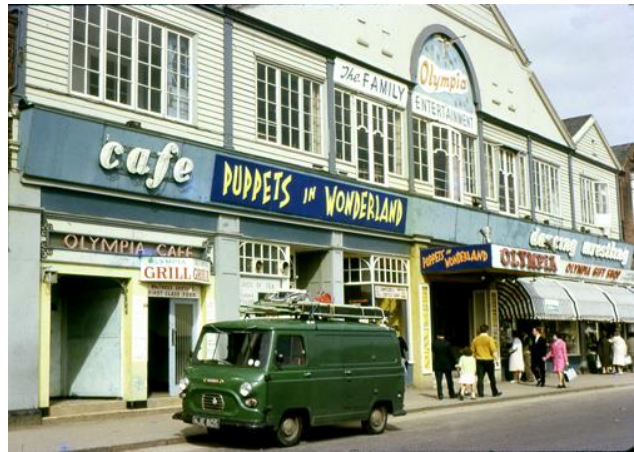
*Humber was closed so it was a surprise that David Easton, Scarborough Entertainments Manager and the Assistant Manager turned up having driven the long way round the estuary. They invited us up to Scarborough to view the venue, the Olympia Ballroom. 1962-1963 was a particularly bad winter with heavy snowfalls and we can still remember vividly the uncontrollable van executing a series of beautiful sine-wave skids from one side of the road to the other as we slid down Staxton hill narrowly missing a milk float on the way. The Olympia was a huge flat floor hall seating almost 700 in front of the stage and a similar number in the balcony which went around three sides. Rather recklessly we signed a contract to perform a 1¼ hour show seven days a week from 16 June to 16 September with a daily change of programme, and then went home wondering how we were possibly going to do it."*



Ray and Joan spent the spring of 1963 frantically building repertoire for the summer which included the construction of a marionette proscenium stage, but still found time to attend the week-long International Puppet Festival at Colwyn Bay, where they made many contacts with the national and international puppetry community. A direct result of this was a booking for a tour of Germany in the forthcoming November. While working flat-out during this time Joan discovered that she was pregnant with the baby due in September. The only thing for it was to try to find someone to learn Joan's parts in the shows and to stand in for her during the latter part of the season. An advert in *The Stage* produced an enquiry from two students at Bingley College who offered to share the £10 a week salary



between them. The pattern of the shows consisted basically of 20 minutes magic, 20 minutes puppets, a 10 minute participatory game with children on the stage and 20 minutes Punch and Judy. On wet days they played to up to a thousand people and on fine days to half a dozen



Our first van outside the Olympia Ballroom, Scarborough

in the front row: one performance was abandoned when not a single audience member turned up. During a couple of fine weeks mid-summer when audiences were thin every day Ray went to see David Easton to ask if anything could be done to enhance the advertising for our shows. It wasn't: instead Ray was informed that they were "*the umbrella of Scarborough*" and that people came to the sea-side for the sun not puppet shows, but that when it rained it was necessary to have somewhere for people to go. So with illusions shattered, they carried on with two performances most days, one on Sunday early evening and a cabaret at the family party night on Fridays hosted by organist Robinson Cleaver for which they were paid an extra five guineas. A rather nice break, and financial cream on the cake, was a one hour children's show at Wallis's holiday camp at Cayton Bay every Sunday afternoon, but it was a mad scramble back to Scarborough to get set up in time for the 6.30pm show.

*"In odd offstage moments between playing her part in the show Joan would be busy bagging up the marionettes which were finished with, and on one occasion a character who was still needed onstage. We worked hard, but we were young and enjoyed it, although it was hard on Joan now heavily pregnant, climbing up the hill to the digs every night. The Olympia staff seemed to be just as excited as we were that a baby was on the way and clubbed together and bought us some premium bonds as a present."*

Ray's parents came to see them at the beginning of September and took Joan back to Wisbech, so Jackie and Susan who had been learning and gradually standing in for her since the beginning of August now took over her role.



Feeding Nik on tour

On the 26th September 1963 Ray and Joan's son Nicholas (Nik) was born, and within six weeks he was touring in Germany with his parents – the beginning of a performing life for him too. Nik's earliest memory of puppets dates from the Wisbech times: *"all the puppets were stored in one room, mostly marionettes bagged up hanging on racks.*

*I was afraid to go into that room: the eerie lifelessness of things that should be living gave me the creeps."* Ray was also surprised to discover from an audience member at one performance that although Nik was happy to play with the Giant puppet from *Jack and the Beanstalk* offstage, he was frightened by it during the performance! The reaction was obviously not permanent, as Nik later performed *Peter and the Wolf* for two schools tours with Sue Leech (now of Cornelius and Jones). Nik eventually set up his own puppet company, Parachute Theatre Company, with his partner Lynne.

The visit to Germany and a festival in Bochum was a further stage in the DaSilva relationship with the UK puppet community, and fellow performers included Violet Phelan, Pantopuck (A. Philpott) and Eric Bramall. The tour was organised by the Deutsches Institut für Puppenspiel and the director Fritz Wortelmann not only proclaimed himself to all as Nik's Godfather but in order to make his festival appear to be more international than it actually was, advertised the DaSilvas as *"aus Kanada"* and even obtained the new

## MEISTER DES PUPPENSPIELS

Donnerstag, 3. November

**Eröffnung der 10. Bochumer Figurentheaterwoche 1966**

**LITTLE WORLD THEATRE, Ray Da Silva Palmer – Kanada**

*"Die Bohnenstange" ("Jack and the beanstalk" – an old english folktale)*

**SPECTACLES D'ANIMATION, Philippe Genty – Paris**

*"Szenen mit Marionetten, dem singenden Pelikan und den Herren im Zylinder"*  
Japanisches Bunraku



Canadian Maple Leaf flag to fly outside the venues where they were performing.



*"It was a very happy time. We were a touring festival and we drove in convoy to each town and helped each other with get-ins. Years later Violet produced a photo of Nik being bathed in a hotel sink and Eric recalled carting him in his carry-cot up several flights of stairs to the auditorium."*

Fritz Wortelmann booked Ray and Joan for another tour three years later but this time, being the only performers from England, they found themselves appearing at various small festivals with companies from other countries. They remember sharing a cabaret show with Philippe Genty. *"His show was beautiful, with two performers, and artistically speaking much better than ours. I will always remember several details of that presentation. It turned out to be a bit embarrassing though, because the audience, judging by their applause, were in a better mood for the razamatazz of ours."*

On that tour they had to travel to Berlin along the pot-holed road through no-man's-land, with manned watchtowers at intervals on either side, in order to perform at the Akademie der Künste. At that venue the management were so



**Giant's castle from *Jack & the Beanstalk***

alarmed by the flash-pots and other electrical devices in the show (*Jack and the Beanstalk*) that they arranged for a number of fire officers to stand in a semi-circle back stage armed with various types of fire-extinguishers just in case anything went wrong. It didn't, but at the hotel that night the lift, a cage affair, got stuck between floors and had to be wound down by hand. After those nerve-wracking



experiences they were glad to get back into West Germany again and went off to Munich where they had a wonderful audience at the Künstlerhaus, sharing the programme with Napsugar, a Hungarian company with rod puppets. The DaSilvas went back to Germany several times after that.



Transformation puppet from the Cabaret

UK performances at this time often took place in working men's clubs in the Midlands. Nik would be left with Joan's mother every weekend and Ray and Joan would drive to either Leicester, Coventry, Birmingham or Nottingham. At that time there were over

two dozen clubs in Leicester alone.

*"We would do two or three 12 minute spots on Saturday night, Sunday lunchtime and again on Sunday night. The atmosphere was a bit like Old Time Music Hall. The Entertainment Secretary usually sat in a kind of pulpit in front of the stage on our left, and would bang with a gavel to get order. The audience, instead of sitting in rows parallel to the stage, would normally sit at long tables at right angles to it. There were usually three acts on the bill, a singer, a comic and a speciality act known as the spesh. The clubs had their own journal in which the leading clubs would advertise the artistes performing each weekend and it was quite usual, having got the show running smoothly, for the Ent Secs (as they were known) to go off to view an act at another club leaving a deputy in charge. On several occasions I remember them queueing up at the end of our show, diaries in hand, in order to book us for their venue. The contract procedure was the simplest possible; having agreed the date, all we had to do was to note the name and address of the club in our diary*



Can-Can from the Cabaret



**Mme Screamy sings Around the World; her skirt flies up and she floats off as a balloon**

which they would sign; we would then sign their diary on the same date and that was it. In the sixties the £25.00 (the rate we started on) for the whole of the weekend, was plenty to sustain us for the rest of the week, even after paying for two nights board. We therefore had

plenty of time to build repertoire for the summer seasons. Conditions at the clubs could vary from a full-equipped stage to a small raised platform. The North Leicestershire Miner's Welfare Club at Coalville, for example, had a very large stage with a fully operational counterweight flying system and an enormous lighting rig; one time the Royal Ballet was appearing there the week previous to us. At the smaller clubs however we found it essential to arrive quite early in order to stake a claim on the stage space. Some Ent Secs found it difficult to visualise the space required when we requested a six foot square, and sometimes thought we meant six square feet. Their stages would invariably have an electric organ installed on our right usually surrounded with plastic boxes containing coloured lights which changed according to the music. On the other side was the bingo machine, a sort of table with a cage on top full of ping-pong balls, at the back of the stage was sometimes a large display board which, when the bingo numbers were called, the appropriate square on the board was illuminated. But more often than not, plonked right in the middle, where we needed to be, would be a collection of drums and cymbals. In order to set up we would carefully edge these upstage and build our stage in front, putting our spot-lights on stands one each side of the stage. By the



**The Gendarme's Duet**



**Lucky Devil from  
Marionette Cabaret**

time the Ent Sec arrived it was a fait accompli and was usually accepted without problems. To allow the drummer to be seen playing behind we would remove our curtains. If they forgot to loosen the snares on the snare drum we used to have to stuff a handkerchief underneath to stop them vibrating during our show. Generally everything worked fine and we got on well with the other artistes, their luggage was usually only a few sheets of music or a set

of funny hats, so they would occasionally lend us a hand getting our equipment out.

I do recall one tense Saturday night when the Ent Sec or his assistant had managed to book three spaces on the same programme, so there was a xylophonist on roller skates, a juggling duo and our marionette stage all wanting the limited space. Get-ins were usually difficult and many of the older clubs were upstairs. You either had to park in the street out front and cart your gear up the stairs and then the length of a hall to the stage at the other end, or it was up a fire-escape at the rear. I remember one particular evening at a club in Leicester having to lug all our paraphernalia up an outside spiral staircase in drizzling rain. By the time we had managed to get the stage set up and the marionettes all unpacked the Ent Sec arrived, with a puzzled look on his face. He could not recall having booked us. I maintained that he had and showed him my diary, whereupon he exclaimed "that club is next door!" Needless to say by the time we had transferred our gear to the adjacent building we were late, and the setting up was tortuous. Normally however the club shows were quite happy and rewarding occasions and we were always well received, mainly I suspect because the audiences were not used to seeing marionettes. It was an exhilarating feeling to be able to prove



**"Life gets teejus' Cabaret**

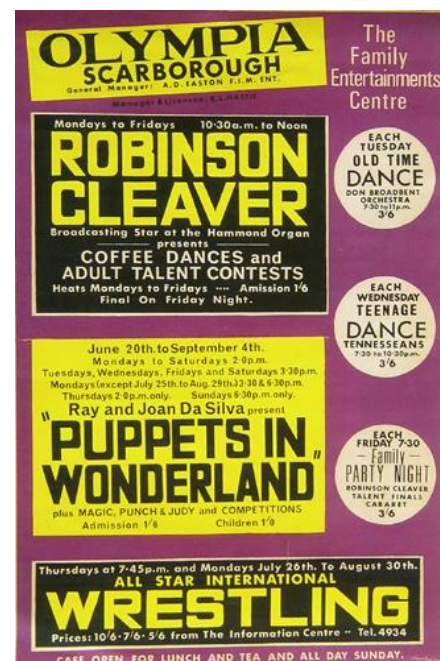




Beetles from *Marionette Cabaret*

every time that the puppets could win the battle against the beer and the bingo." One group of puppets developed at the time were the Beatles, which seemed ideal for the club environment. However, as Ray mentions in a letter to friends at the time, that act seemed to go well on television but not to work as well in a live performance, even though it was short and played to a popular Beatles record. Another development, in 1964, was an approach to Hunstanton Urban District Council about the possibility of setting up a puppet theatre in the town. Unfortunately, the Council were not interested in the idea. A later trip to Brading on the Isle of Wight and a viewing of the redundant Youth Centre there also came to nothing.

Martin Clifford (of whom we will hear more below) has a 1964 poster for the Olympia, Scarborough, advertising *Ray and Joan DaSilva: Puppets in Wonderland plus Magic, Punch and Judy and Competitions*. By this time, the billing was the DaSilvas rather than the Little World Theatre, and shows of up to 90



minutes were performed regularly.

By 1965, *Circus Caprice* had joined the repertoire, with Fred Barton providing the voice of the Stromboli the ringmaster. This show was to continue, in one form or another, for many years to come. Summer was again spent in Scarborough, where competing summer attractions included Al Read, Ronnie Carroll and Morton Fraser's

Harmonica Gang. There were also two other marionette cabaret acts: Martin Granger and his Puppets at the Futurist and the Buckmaster Puppets at nearby Filey. By the time of a performance at the Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds, a Mexican nativity play had been added and a marionette version of *Aladdin*. The Wisbech Advertiser, stealing a march on the rival Wisbech Standard installed a colour press and their first coloured issue featured a centre



double-page interview with the DaSilvas. They received further considerable publicity when Wisbech Chamber of Trades decided to organise a huge Trades Fair. Side attractions included the Emmet Railway, the Guinness

Clock and, in their own marquee, the DaSilva Puppet Theatre. One report headed "*Puppets top Popularity poll*" went on to say "*The organisers were amazed, the performers were astounded and the public just kept packing in. . . Had there been a reward for the most popular attraction Mr and Mrs Ray Palmer would definitely have won hands down!*"

Ray and Joan then joined forces with Keith and Mary Parcs and set up a separate company – Puppets in Wonderland. Clacton Council agreed to build a 75 seat puppet theatre at the Pavilion Centre, and in 1966 the company appeared in Clacton and Scarborough simultaneously, as well as a third team touring for the Butlin's circuit. For these shows, *Jack and the Beanstalk* appeared for the first time, including the character of Wispa the Wizard. Ray and Joan made three complete sets of puppets for these shows and Keith and Mary Parcs recorded the sound



track and made the stages and scenery. A few Saturday shows were added too, including acting as support to Donald Peers. Among those joining the company at that time was Peter Oldham from Tasmania. Other young puppeteers working with the company that year included Anne and David Bedall, Sandra Osbourne and, part-time, Peter Franklin (who was still at school).



One day during the 1966 Scarborough season James Norman, manager of the New Victoria Theatre, Halifax, came to see Ray and Joan perform, and this resulted in a booking for the 1966 Christmas season. Ray, Joan and Peter Oldham had to publish an SOS in the local paper for somewhere to stay during that booking, digs not being easy to find in Halifax: especially when a three year old boy needs somewhere to sleep too. They got some editorial coverage as well with a "No Room in the Inn" story. The performances were very successful although the set-ups looked small on the large theatre stage. The theatre manager asked if they could return with a larger show next Christmas, and of course they agreed, again not fully realising what they were letting themselves in for. Driving back home, they noticed that a cinema was re-running Disney's Snow White and wondered if they could make that story into a puppet musical. By the time they got back to Wisbech, they had discussed the scenario, staging and special features, and had decided to name the seven dwarfs Doh, Ray, Me and so on, and who would sing a parody of the Sound of Music song – with the same Doh appearing at both ends. That very productive journey was to lead to the



company's most successful money-spinner and the show most enjoyed by the puppeteers themselves, although Penny Francis, in a rather mean-spirited remark in *Animations*, described it as "plebeian."



## The company grows (1967-1978)

In 1967, the DaSilva's self-contained portable theatre, resembling the travelling marionette theatres of earlier times, was set up at Heysham Head, Morecambe.



Seating 200, it was constructed with aluminium scaffolding and covered with dark blue canvas which made it suitably dark inside.

There was a flying grid back-stage and full sound and lighting. It was erected on sloping ground with the stage at the lower end, providing a naturally raked auditorium. At the same time as Ray and Joan were performing there, Peter Oldham and Ray's brother Neville (now an artist) were playing the company's shows at Scarborough, including *Rumpelstiltskin* which Peter had written and produced.

Ray remembers that the Morecambe season proved to be a disaster in many ways, mainly due to the weather at



Heysham Head and the noisy go-cart track installed next door.

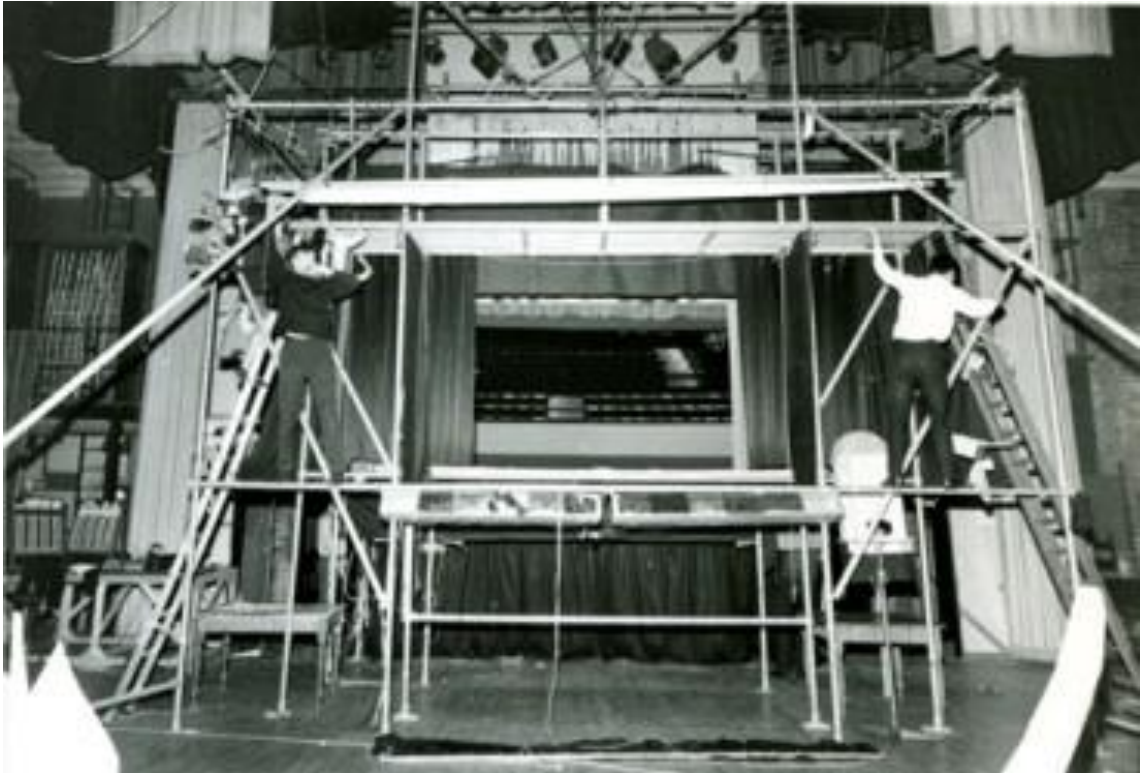
*"Right at the beginning a gale was blowing when we were putting the canvas roof on."*

*A sudden gust snapped all the ties in succession ping, ping, ping and the 40ft x 60ft single piece of canvas flew a few hundred yards up a hill, requiring several men to haul it down again. During the season we would find, on arrival in the mornings, that large pockets of rain water had collected overnight between the scaffolding bars of the sloping roof, and we would have to use brooms to push up the canvas from underneath in order to dislodge them (making sure nobody was close-by outside to be drenched by the waterfalls we caused). One particular morning after a heavy thunderstorm there was quite a lot of this work to do before we could get round to unpacking the puppets stored in a wooden box back-stage. When we finally did unpack them just as the audience were coming in, we discovered that there must have been a flood during the night. The box still had some water in it and the glove and rod puppets were absolutely soaked. We had to wring the poor things out, and despite being horribly cold and nasty, there was nothing for it but to put them on our hands. The only positive thing was an added touch of realism when Jack was vigorously chopping down the Beanstalk, the 'sweat' literally flew off him.*



**Jack's Mum outside their house. This set descended as Jack climbed the beanstalk**

*During that season we were in constant communication with the Scarborough team sorting out the script for Snowwhite. (we decided to avoid all things Disney and shortened the name as in the German original Schneewittchen).*



Ray built a scale model of the staging, and his father then constructed the full scale version from the aluminium scaffolding used for the theatre, having decided that he wanted nothing more to do with portable theatres. The show was called *Snowwhite and the Seven Musical Dwarfs*, and billed as Great Britain's first Puppet Spectacular. It was to be produced on a staging (7m x 6m x 6m) bigger than any the company had used or seen before. Lasting nearly two hours including interval, the show combined marionettes and rod puppets, and used a complex set with three different performing areas. Marionettes appeared on the stage floor, which was 6ft from the ground, there was an apron for hand and rod puppets to perform in front, and the stage floor could be hinged downwards to allow other rod puppet action within the proscenium. There were several diversions from the central story including a Teddy Bear's picnic in the woods; Disney's forest was nightmarish so the DaSilvas determined to make theirs a pleasant place. The apron of the stage for that scene was to



Queen from *Snowwhite*



become a river, and rod puppet bears would punt by whilst a line of marionette bears were doing a Tiller Girls dance routine. In the dwarf's diamond mine there were stalagmites made of fibreglass with coloured bulbs inside. These lit up as they were 'played' by the dwarfs with their pick axes, while behind them was the dancing waters set piece, a fountain with 72 jets controlled by an intricate series of manually operated valves. Currie's Dancing Waters were a popular effect in summer shows and pantomimes at the time.



Queen transforms to a witch

The autumn following the Morecambe season was a difficult time, as everyone raced against the clock to have the show ready for Christmas. Joan sat up all night more than once sewing teddy-bears while Peter organised the tape recording. There were many duplicates of the characters because they had to appear both as rod puppets and marionettes. The music for a great part of the show was specially composed by Johnny Harrison and recorded in a Wakefield night club. David Ford introduced Ray to a London group of actors "*The Around Readers*" who recorded the dialogue, adding many useful improvisations. Rehearsals were conducted in an unused chapel hall with unfinished or substituted puppets, and although each half of the show was rehearsed separately there was never a full dress rehearsal. It was a mad scramble and Ray recalls that one of the witches had only one side of her face painted for the first performance as she



The Around Readers

was only required to run across the stage in one direction.


The show opened at the New Victoria, Halifax on Boxing Day 1967, after a last-minute crisis when Ray was hit in the eye on Christmas Eve by the pointed hat of one of the characters. After hospital treatment, Ray decided that the show could go ahead as planned.



*"The first performance was quite an ordeal, not that the audience knew. I found it impossible to work with one eye bandaged so tore it off and managed much better, but when the show was over and the adrenalin stopped flowing the pain was excruciating. Nevertheless it was a great relief to get through that first performance and I recall turning to Peter Oldham and saying "well we did it" and his reply was "yes, but it was nothing to be proud of though!"*

The work of the DaSilvas came to the attention of Cecil Madden, the President of the British Puppet & Model Theatre Guild, who introduced them to playwright Jill Fenson. She wrote *The Magic Lamp* which was also a musical with voices provided by Peter Cavanagh (*"the voice of them all"*) and Peter Hawkins of Captain Pugwash fame. The production was designed by Ian Allen who was working with the DaSilvas at the time. *Snowwhite* spent the next

The DASILVA Puppet Company  
presents another *Wow* exciting Show



# THE MAGIC LAMP

*An Oriental Puppet Fantasy  
for the young, and not so young*

Book, lyrics and songs: JILL FENSON  
Orchestrations: RONALD SETTLE  
Christmas voices: PETER CAVANAGH

The DaSilva Puppet Company has performed in  
Canada, The United States, Europe, throughout  
Great Britain, and at International Puppet  
Festivals.

Other DaSilva programmes include:-  
*Snowwhite and the Seven Musical Dwarfs*  
*Jack and the Beanstalk*  
*Cinderella*  
*The Thunderbird*  
*Marionette Cabaret*

for full particulars of these attractions  
contact address overleaf.....

Christmas at Chatham after touring the UK to theatres at Wolverhampton, Worthing and St Helens during Spring 1968. Reviews were good everywhere, and every theatre that took *Snowwhite* also booked *The Magic Lamp* for the following year. Despite enthusiastic reviews, evening performances were often poorly supported. The company learnt the hard way that it was in their interests to help managements with publicity rather than

just send them a few posters. Later, they sent someone out as advance manager who not only made sure that the theatre was doing its bit, but went



Sultan and Harem from *The Magic Lamp*.

around issuing posters and free tickets to shop-keepers, putting up window displays with duplicate puppets, and giving interviews on local radio and anything he could to boost ticket sales. *"In those days we made sure that our usual 65% of the box-office receipts worked out better than the alternative guaranteed fee which often only just covered our costs."*

In April 1969, Ray DaSilva made the papers for a different reason, when he was forced to take action after two young boys of 17 and 14 put on a copycat version of *Jack and the Beanstalk*.



The older boy had worked for the DaSilva company the previous summer, and Ray was extremely concerned to see that much of the performance was based on his own, which had been touring for five years by then. They even used the DaSilva photographs on their publicity material to promote it. Eventually, with the help of Equity's legal department, a High Court order was granted in order to halt the plagiarism.

Later in 1969, the Rev David Ford, a close friend of the DaSilvas, suggested that Norwich might make a good base and perhaps they could set up a puppet theatre there? That thought was to lie dormant for many years but was remarkably far-seeing. In the same year, Ray and Joan bought the old school at Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire

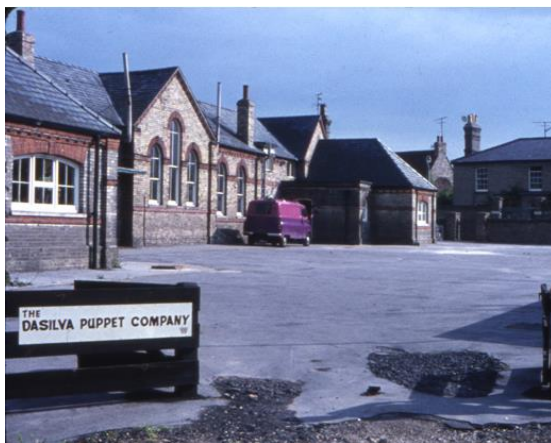




L.R: Peter Franklin, Nik, Steve Lee, Joan, Larry Wilkes, Ray, Dave Gardiner, Jac Ilett, Bruce Williams, June Knight, Susanne Cooke, Kathleen Allgood, Rachel McKay, Richard Drabble, Jan King

and at its height the company they ran from there, with up to 14 puppeteers plus a secretary, administrator and a few part-time helpers became the largest and most successful yet unsubsidised puppet company in Britain.

The DaSilva Company undertook pioneer work in technical staging and the creation of new audiences, making a significant contribution to the UK puppet scene. *"The old school in Godmanchester was a boy's dream come true,"* remembers Nik, *"a school playground all to myself with numerous outbuildings which made for excellent games of hide and seek."* Nik's earliest performance memory is of



*Jack and the Beanstalk*, which he knew well from backstage before he ever saw it as the audience did. He remembers Joan making him up a bed in a box used for carrying the

puppets, and he once ate a whole punnet of strawberries that he found in the same box.

*"One of my favourite rooms in the building was the sound room where the tracks for the shows were created on revox tape recorders, although I was not so happy when I was kept awake at night by the constant replaying of pieces of dialogue as my father and Peter Franklin searched for editing points. Living at the school gave me the opportunity*



Note glazed folding screens between classrooms

*to earn little bits of pocket money by doing odd jobs. My favourite was burning the waste paper from the office in an old pot-belly stove, you could really get it to roar and glow. One other job I was not so keen on was sorting the large box of screws and nails into their respective sizes and types. I think the best aspect of living at the school was being able to mix with the broad range of creative people who worked there.*

*The communal coffee-time was always great and in winter my mum would put a tot of rum in too. I think I found it a little hard to accept that the crew were not there to entertain me and I got told off on more than one occasion for encouraging people to make things for me instead of what they should have been doing. The other thing that was hard to swallow was when props that I would rather have liked were bought from toy shops. I particularly remember an Action Man armoured car was bought, cut up and painted a horrible colour – and all for Pinocchio!"*



The company soon became a training ground for puppeteers who later formed their own companies or went to work for others. There were usually three companies, and sometimes four, performing simultaneously in different locations. One team toured major theatres (including London's West End), the others to small theatres, arts centres and schools. Each team toured for about 35 weeks a year and together they played to an annual audience of around 250,000. This enormous output inevitably brought many incidents, often amusing and sometimes nearly disastrous. There was a very nasty accident on one occasion when the company was performing *Treasure Island* at St Helens. As Ray recalls:



Ray, Martin Clifford, Gordon Jenkins, Steve Lee and Dave Price in *Treasure Island* ship.

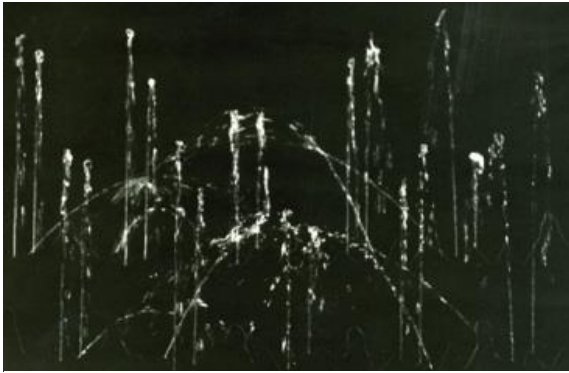
*"It was lucky that Fred Barton who lived nearby was watching the show backstage – he had written the script for us. Our lighting chap was doing a slow cross-fade at the time, and*

*his fingers were spread over several dimmers. These were the old wire-wound type and the windings were exposed within the slot for the dimmer sliding knob. Somehow he managed to make contact with his fingers (probably sweaty) and received a huge electric shock which threw him backwards onto the floor with the lighting board on top of him. Fred picked him up and somehow between them*



*they managed to complete the show. Both his hands were covered in large yellow blisters where they had stuck to the dimmers. Today I guess we would have*





**Dancing Waters in dwarfs' cave**

*had a compensation claim on our hands. Talking of electric shocks reminds me of one of the times I was operating the dancing waters in Snowwhite. The trough which caught the water was about six feet off the ground, consequently the operator of*

*the valves behind and underneath used to get well splashed. I used to perch myself half sitting, half standing on one of the horizontal aluminium bars of the stage. Well, you can see what is coming, I guess I was being rather over exuberant with the height of the jets and possibly hit one of the coloured lights immediately above and although we always took the precaution to make sure the stage was earthed, I received quite a shock to my backside, much to the amusement of the rest of the crew – but it could have been serious."*

Sometimes more unusual one-off bookings took place; in 1969, Peter Oldham appeared with the DaSilva Puppets as part of an Old Time Music Hall bill at the Theatre Royal, Northampton, operating the figures on 20 ft strings from a gantry above the stage. David Easton from Scarborough had now become Director of Entertainments at Worthing and summer 1970 saw companies appearing there and at Margate. Permanent staff at this time were Ray and Joan plus Peter Oldham, and six year old Nicholas was already performing, at least for his

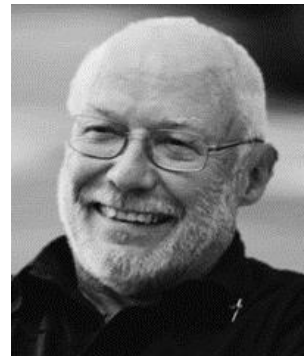


**On Worthing pier**

*"On occasion I was allowed to take part in the shows. I can remember sitting backstage throughout several performances of Snowwhite eagerly waiting to hang a string of sausages onto a fishing rod and when I was lucky I was*

*even allowed to operate the flashing lights on Wispa the Wizard's organ on which he played the overture"*

The DaSilva Company's productions for commercial theatres included such popular subjects as *Pinocchio*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Treasure Island* and *Alice in Wonderland*. All of these combined several puppet techniques on large fit-ups. The company also toured the arts centres and European venues with their smaller shows including *Peter and the Wolf* and *Paper Tiger*. *Peter and the Wolf* joined the repertoire in 1972, and Ray DaSilva remembers how it began during a long car journey with Peter Franklin. They talked about how a ballet company had approached the story and how much better it would be with puppets. Peter Franklin and Ron Brown designed the production after working together in the Green Room for six weeks.



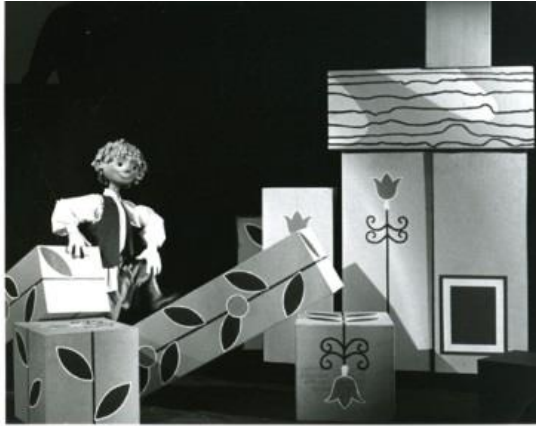
Ron Brown

*"On Monday mornings they would come and talk to me about how they were getting on. The frame we used for the tree had been thrown out of a shop in Wisbech. They would come with all sorts of ideas and I was just a sounding board. At the end of six weeks there were just piles of paper and rough figures made out of filled tights filled with newspapers. The concept was to echo Prokofiev by showing instruments as different types of puppets. Then another six weeks passed, a carpenter got involved and when Steve arrived, his first job was to paint the boxes."*

*We created the performance together. Steve and Peter took it on the road and polished it."*



*Peter and the Wolf with ¾ life-size puppets*



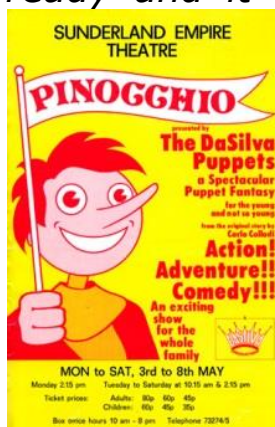
In 1974, when the company were performing at the Theatre Royal Norwich, Dick Condon suggested that Norwich would make a good base and that an old church might be suitable as a puppet theatre. This led to a series of discussions that took place over several years and

eventually led to the setting up of Norwich Puppet Theatre, but that story belongs to a later chapter. Jan King, who was to work for the company again much later at Norwich, first joined DaSilva around this time, working on *Snowwhite*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Hansel and Gretel*, as well as many performances of *Pinocchio*, touring for five weeks at a time. Sometimes this involved a week in each city, at other times there would be a split week. There were five people on the tour – four puppeteers and one technical person. At this time there was one theatre company and three school groups touring. Jan mostly worked with the theatre team and remembers the shows well.



Jan King with frog from *Alice in Wonderland*

*"Pinocchio was a very together show, with two 45 minute parts. It was designed a bit like a film with action moving from one part of the stage to another. The first half built up to a race and everyone had to be ready and it was carefully choreographed – backstage it was a bit like a ballet. You had to keep ahead of the tape of course. The size of some of the theatres, like the Sunderland Empire, was ludicrous; I think it worked much better at somewhere like the Key Peterborough. You needed good sightlines to get a good reaction from the audience. I also played in Snowwhite, and the reaction to that seemed better than for Pinocchio."*







*The audience loved the teddy bears picnic and the bear floating in suspended from a balloon – and I remember seeing the production at the White Rock Pavilion in Hastings when I was 10! Then I operated in Hansel and Gretel, which was not as popular: I did Hansel and Jac (Illett) did Gretel – we struck up a rapport, I remember that vividly. The end of the first half was downbeat though – the audience didn't know whether to clap or not."*

Touring life could be hard of course, and it helped to be young, fit and enthusiastic. Jan remembers the company having to cope with some horrific get-ins, stages that were too small and even double-bookings. One group travelled from Chatham to Aberdeen, with the trailer forever having punctures as it wasn't fitted with the correct tyres.

*"I'm 54 now but I was 25 when I worked at Godmanchester. It was fun, and I was there because I wanted to be a puppeteer – not just to get an Equity card like some people (although I did get that too after we did the West End season)."*

One of the other puppeteers who worked for the company at that time was Martin Clifford, now based in Southport and spending most of his time performing a marionette cabaret on cruise ships. Martin joined the DaSilva company in June 1970 and stayed for three years, and he returned in 1977 for one tour. Martin's introduction to the life of an itinerant puppeteer was appearing at the 100-seat Sun Terrace Theatre at the Cliftonville Lido. Both Mabel Crowther (with the Arno Puppets) and Keith Parcs had used this theatre for puppet performances before.



**Martin Clifford**



Peter Oldham

Martin got the job by answering an advert that Ray DaSilva had placed in the stage. *"I had always been interested in puppetry, so I applied and got an audition"* Martin explains, *"I had my first string puppet at the age of six."* For that summer, Martin worked with Peter Oldham, an older puppeteer who came back to England to join the DaSilva company a second time.

Martin and Peter performed a range of productions at Cliftonville that summer, while Ray and Joan did the same in Worthing on the south coast. There were three shows in the repertoire: *Circus Caprice*, *Funtasia* and *Puss in Boots*. Summer seasons were much longer in those days, with the performances beginning in mid-June and running on into September. The performance schedule could be punishing too, with the curtain up at 10.30am, 12 noon, 2.30pm, 3.15pm, 7.30pm and 8.15pm. The weather was a crucial factor as Martin explains. *"If it was too hot some shows were cancelled, but if it was wet we did more shows. Performing at 9pm as we sometimes did was always the best time, with an almost totally adult audience."*

Peter Oldham was very much in charge at Margate, and it was not an easy season due to the constant hot weather. Despite the weather, they performed 452 shows in eleven weeks; *"a wonderful start for me, and Peter was a good teacher too."* Martin was hoping to stay in puppetry and when Ray came to see how they were doing it was suggested that there might be a possibility of joining a tour of *Snowwhite*.



Entrance to theatre at Margate

*"Eventually, this was agreed and I moved to Godmanchester. There was a problem with accommodation though; the nearby US Air Force base meant that prices were high. In the end I moved into a caravan in the old school play-ground and Ray got planning permission for me to live there till the end of 1971."* After a quick trip home, Martin set out for life in the caravan and by November 1970



**Martin's caravan**

he was occasionally performing in schools with Ray when Joan was busy making costumes and being a mother. Martin has an early photo of Ray's pink and purple van next to the Godmanchester building and the caravan in which he lived for a while.

At that time, the company was involved with fund-raising events for the National Children's Homes (NCH). The NCH would hire a hall and provide a speaker about their work, and to encourage people to come along an entertainer would be booked. Among the regulars were Johnny Morris, Michael Aspel, Harry Corbett with Sooty, and the DaSilva Company. The shows would cover one area at a time and a typical event might be one designed to give an opportunity to local girls to step into the limelight. There was a strong religious element to these events, as can be seen from the following sample programme:

<i>National Anthem</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<i>Reception of Queens</i>	<i>Collection</i>
<i>Mayor &amp; Mayoress</i>	<i>Choir</i>
<i>Hymn</i>	<i>Folk Group</i>
<i>Gifts</i>	<i>Puppets</i>
<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Benediction</i>

The puppet performance given was an adaptation of Ray and Joan's puppet cabaret, and Martin Clifford says he is the only other person to have performed that with Ray.



Another aspect of these events was the sale of small photos of children in NCH homes in order to raise money, an activity familiar to many who were at school in the 1960s and 1970s.



Stage for *Snowwhite* and *Treasure Island*

Back at Godmanchester, the company were refurbishing their production for another tour of *Snowwhite* with a new staging, also in aluminium but with welded prefabricated sections which reduced set-up times considerably. Unfortunately, the school ceiling wasn't high enough for the new set to be assembled, and this was later solved in a rather unorthodox way. *"We smashed out the ceiling to make it possible, and we did it using only two ladders; no scaffolding in those days,"* Martin explains.

Shows like *Snowwhite*, and *Treasure Island* in

1971/1972, played to audiences of up to 2500 in very large theatres. Martin found the experience of touring these shows to be very different from playing the Sun Terrace in Cliftonville. It took up to three and a half hours get-in for each show when the company arrived at a theatre and up to two and a half hours get-out at the end of the week. *"It was nice when you went back to a theatre where they knew you and where you had the wing space needed. And when you found the requested tables were actually there."* Some of the theatres visited for the first time really didn't understand quite what a puppet production would need, despite having been sent sheets of detailed staging requirements, and this could be trying for all concerned. The shows often played in the evenings as well as for daytime audiences of school children, and usually had the theatre to themselves for one week, although one hectic

booking at the Norwich Theatre Royal saw them sharing the stage with an Ayckbourn play, not an easy experience. Another mistake was the booking by an agent for a week of one-night stands at different venues: an exhausting week for all concerned. There were some interesting combinations though; the DaSilva company once shared the stage at Wimbledon Theatre with Marlene Dietrich – although they were each performing at different times of the day.

Martin Clifford knows how much he learnt from those years however, and he was pleased with the opportunities that came his way. *"For those first eighteen months I was working on so many shows. I did some productions with Ray instead of Joan working with him, so that I could learn them."* The winters could be hard however. *"We did one pre-Christmas Snowwhite and then started again in the New Year. They were always cold those winter tours; especially handling the aluminium scaffolding!"*

Five people worked on *Snowwhite* and *Treasure Island*: four puppeteers and a technician. This was before the company moved on to Equity contracts, and the performers were provided with digs for the week which were sometimes booked ahead by Joan DaSilva. Martin was on £9 a week in 1970, and the company aimed to pay well under £2 per night for somewhere to stay, relying on out-of-season rates. *"At St Helens we couldn't find anywhere below 32/6d and we had to ring Joan and get special permission to spend that much."* By 1973, Martin was on £16.50 per week.



**Doh Ray, Me, Soh, Fah, Lah, Tee.**

The first *Snowwhite* tour took the company far and wide, from the Ilford Community Theatre to the Oswaldtwistle Town Hall – where the theatre was on the first floor. They would have gone to Sheffield too, but the theatre burnt down just before they were due to arrive. Audiences varied, with more families in the evening and mostly schools during the day. Theatres burning down were not the only problem. *"There was one awful event on tour; the technician left the tapes at the previous theatre and there was no spare tape so we had to cancel. And at Bacup Empire we had a fire onstage."*

The Bacup Empire fire is still a clear memory for another young puppeteer who was also involved: Linton Bocock had joined the company straight from school and on the night of the fire his family were in the audience. *Pinocchio* was being performed, with a set involving a platform downstage and three booths further back. It was the needlecord curtains in one of these booths that caught fire, despite being fireproofed, after a flash-box exploded. The stage manager dropped the safety curtain, Linton and the other puppeteers dropped their puppets, and all rushed for the fire extinguishers. Unfortunately, none of them worked and the fire bucket was full of scrap paper. In the end, the fire was put out with the aid of a bottle of lemonade from a nearby dressing room. Linton remembers his relief when it was extinguished, since he was very aware of the acres of dusty black drapes hanging over their heads.

Linton could not have known such excitement was ahead when he joined the company at the age of 17. Unlike most of the others who joined then, Linton had little prior interest in puppet theatre, although he was very keen on



## Puppeteer

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drama at school in St Neots. *"I was in the Sixth Form, at a loss about what to do, and spending most of my time skulking about in corridors."* Although Linton didn't see the



advert in a local paper looking for trainee puppeteers in Godmanchester, both his drama teacher and his tutor did. *"I wasn't that interested, but I was brushed and scrubbed and put in a taxi: I didn't know what to expect."*

Linton speaks engagingly of what followed when he arrived at the DaSilva base – wearing his usual patched Levis and



Linton Bocock

with typical 1970s long hair – only to have the door opened by a beaming man with a short back and sides and wearing a neat little pullover. It was not the kind of environment Linton had expected to find himself in, but he was welcomed despite his uncertainty. Ray was just as uncertain about the morose, uninterested individual before him, but he took him around the premises, where the set was up for rehearsals of *Snowwhite*. *"The huge*

*scaffolding of that set did impress me,"* remembers Linton, *"but I don't think I had ever touched a puppet in my life until Ray began showing me some."*

By that time, Linton found himself getting quite intrigued. Ray left him to have a look at the puppets and the young applicant decided he had better try to improvise a story with them. When Ray came back, he sat and watched what Linton had prepared, before asking him to wait a moment – only to come back again with Joan. They both sat and watched encouragingly – and Linton was offered the job. It was not a conventional audition!

Robbie Lawrence joined the company at the same time. Linton and Robbie began their total apprenticeship in theatre, learning how to use puppets, rehearse *Snowwhite* and build *Pinocchio*, all at the same time. The other members of the company were a varied bunch too. Linton remembers an older man, Ted Callow – described at the time as an antiquarian horologist by Ray – who joined the company as well as running a B&B with his wife Rosie in



**Ted Callow making fawn for Hansel and Gretel.**

Walthamstow. The B&B was often used by the company, despite its alleged past as a villain's retreat of some kind.

The DaSilva teams travelled the length and breadth of the country, and like many other company members, Linton recalls playing the vast spaces of the Sunderland Empire – and in the week following the engagement in which comedy actor Sid James had died on the stage. *“And we had other problems to deal with too – we shared with evening bookings including an Israeli Ballet – which meant bodyguards everywhere – and a country music special with Tex Ritter and Wally Whyton.”* The Sunderland Empire was one of the few theatres left with a resident orchestra. Its members were rather miffed when they discovered that all the music for the show was on tape, and threatened to call in the Musician's Union. Ray was with the team on that occasion and explained that the commissioned music had been composed and played by members of the MU. A compromise was reached whereby they played the 'coming-in' and entr'acte music, and sat through the performances with their instruments on their laps.

The company also played in small village halls and schools, but sometimes a spate of bookings up and down the country would mean a great deal of extra travelling. Linton



**Advertising at Blackburn**

remembers a wintry journey to Blackburn in which he and another member took a wrong turn and found themselves heading up the motorway towards Scotland, and in a blizzard too. They had lost the other vehicle, a Land Rover with a trailer, and eventually the snow got so

bad that they slithered to a halt at the side of the road. After a cold and sleepless night, the first light of dawn appeared – as did the familiar shape of the Land Rover with their colleagues, parked just in front of them. And after all that the get-in at Blackburn was on the second floor – a cold job after a shivery night.

The welcome at weekly digs varied, but was usually good, especially if the house specialised in “*theatricals*.” Ray and Joan usually booked the digs by that time, and the company often found themselves sharing with cabaret performers, leading to some lively late night discussions and tales of events in theatres around the country. Linton remembers only too well the occasional bedbugs, the notices with rules pinned everywhere and the nylon sheets that charged the sleeper with static electricity so that he could easily do a Ken Dodd impression when he got up in the morning.

Some of the theatres had long histories, and Linton remembers the Theatre Royal, Bath in particular. “*The old stage was still there under the present one – you could see the star traps, grave traps and everything, and the original wooden flies. In Victorian times, a dancer in a butterfly costume had caught fire and died on stage, and we were told the story and shown some original scenery from that time – and there was a real butterfly perched on it. Then we all went and watched Princess Anne’s wedding on TV in the pub...*”

Linton enjoyed seeing towns all over England too, and in a time before they all looked the same. He remembers buying different local foods in each city, and the fantastic feasts that followed in the dressing room. A visit to Wiltshire was the opportunity for a visit to the Pelham Puppet Factory, particularly interesting for the rest of the company, many of whom had started with just those puppets. To return the favour, a group of women from the factory came to a performance later in the week.



*Pinocchio* was enjoyed because it was new, and the younger members of the company could make it their own. It opened in Paignton, with hardly a full technical rehearsal, and performed by a very nervous company. The taped soundtrack did provide some security of course, although Linton wonders now whether it also meant something was lost. *"Looking back, maybe the tape was part of the downside; you had no connection with the audience. However, it was good to have it if something went wrong!"*

*Pinocchio* also marked the beginning of DaSilva merchandising, one of the ways in which Linton sees the company as having been innovatory. He remembers the colouring books, badges and Pinocchio masks, vacuum-formed by a friend of Ray's, and which many of the children brought in the interval. As the second half of the performance began, the kids would push their masks on to the tops of their heads, and the puppeteers would be looking out on the surrealist sight of a sea of heads sprouting Pinocchio noses. Having such a young company meant that discipline wasn't always all it might have been, and tricks were played on each other regularly. *"We had to put our hands in the hand puppets and lift them up quickly – only to find, quite often, that someone had filled them with talcum powder... It wasn't malicious, but there was a certain monotony otherwise to doing the shows to a pre-recorded soundtrack."* Sometimes audience members or local puppeteers would ask to come backstage after the performance. Linton would be up on the bridge, setting up for the next performance, and he remembers the hesitation with which some people would approach the puppets, peeping around the set and appearing very anxious.

Mention of the pre-recorded voices reminds Ray that people sometimes seemed unsure if the voices were live or not. When Helen Binyon came to review a show for the Arts Council, she was sure that the voices were live because the performance depended heavily on audience participation, with children responding vocally to the action. The trick was in the clever script written by Keith Parcs. *"We nearly came*



*unstuck once when playing in Germany though," as Ray recalls. "Wispa the Wizard used to peer at the audience through a telescope, and a spider would come down obscuring his vision, the audience would always laugh and he would say "Oh dear,*

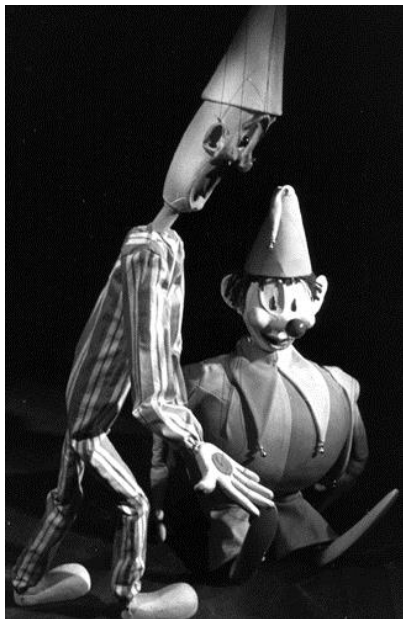


*what's the matter" and the children would call out a mixture of responses all containing the word spider. Wispa would then respond to them incredulously with A Spider!? – I can't see a spider because by this time it had gone. In Germany when we were playing for school children who only knew basic English the response was Eine Spinne so Wispa rather unconvincingly instantly translated that to A Spider? and the children answered Ja."*

Linton was involved in a lot of the making which went on at the DaSilva base. Ray encouraged everybody to have a hand in this making and refurbishing, not only to keep them occupied but because he felt that having made something themselves they would take greater care of it on tour and be able to do running repairs if necessary. Linton made a lot of scenery and puppet bodies, although he never made puppet heads and hands till after he left. He later became Stage Carpenter at the Guildhall School for nine years, where he also ran a student puppet group. *"I read a lot of books on acting at that time, and began to see puppets as the ultimate Stanislavskian method actors. I never ceased to be amazed that people so totally accepted them as characters."* Linton later worked for the Henson and Spitting Image organisations, and now makes stage props. He looks back on his time with the DaSilvas with great fondness. *"My over-riding feeling is that it was a great place to work. Ray and Joan helped me enter the world of theatre; they must have been incredibly determined people. And Ray had such charm that he could get people to do anything."*

Linton eventually left the company, although he is still not sure he made the right decision by doing so. *"I had been there three and a half years, and I was going out with Gaye, my partner. She was in her second year at Kingston Polytechnic, so I moved down to London to be near her. I was also developing an appreciation of things on an artistic level; I began to see some eastern European shows and I think I began to think there were more exciting things to move on to. But now, looking back, I know that they were great shows we were doing, and DaSilva had such an atmosphere of support in exploring your artistic wants and needs. And those shows were so good at trickery; transformations like the witch in Snowwhite often got audible gasps from the audience."* This is confirmed by a 1974 review in the *Kentish Gazette* of a performance at the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury. The transformation, and Wispa the Wizard playing the organ, were seen as the highlights of the performance.

*Snowwhite* was transported at first in an old trailer converted from a caravan and pulled by Ray's father's car. There were many breakdowns however, and finally an irrecoverable one on the road from Weymouth to Plymouth when a crank shaft punctured the engine casing. Ray's father had a



Clowns from large Circus

duplicate Rover which he used for spares and on that occasion Ray had to drive down to a garage in Plymouth for the whole engine to be replaced. The big shows toured through the winter months and until May or June. Then, during the period before the school holidays began, Martin and newcomer Dave Price retrained for new shows and started performing *Jack and the Beanstalk* or *Circus Caprice* in schools. New shows were built during this time, and during breaks in the tour. *Circus*

*Caprice* was a show that was later remade on a larger scale, and performed by Martin Clifford with Steve Lee. *"But I don't think it worked; the larger*



*puppets looked great but they didn't work very well."* However, Richard Gill and Cecil Madden were among those who saw the show, much to Martin's delight.

December 1971 saw the premiere of *Treasure Island*. This was perhaps a less obvious choice for a puppet production than *Snowwhite* had been, and it was less popular. It wasn't the complete R. L. Stevenson story either, and this led to an occasional complaint that events such as the mouse wedding didn't appear in the book. Martin Clifford has his own theory for the reason for choosing this story, "*Ray had this wonderful stereo effect of cannon balls which*



## Captain Stark

*he wanted to use."* Ray, on the other hand, suggests it was because he got hooked on pirates at the time, and liked the excitement of the original story and the fun of the Captain Pugwash cartoon series on television at the time.

*"We certainly did take enormous liberties with Stevenson's work including the introduction of a rival pirate ship with lusty crew, albeit imaginary, at the back of the auditorium. We had a huge loudspeaker capable of delivering loud bass cannon reports which were cross-faded stereophonically with the screech of cannon-balls over the audience heads landing with explosions on-stage. I hoped that the audience would instinctively duck!"*

The ship on stage filled the proscenium and the cannon ports were each fitted with flashpots all facing the audience so that a retaliatory broadside could be fired straight on.



# The Dasilva TREASURE ISLAND

## Avast There All Managements!

The following have been assured safe passage to good family entertainment in 1972.  
(all dates inclusive)

<p><b>Jan</b></p> <p>3-11 St. Anne's Civic</p> <p>4-10 Chesham Town Hall</p> <p>6-8 Withcote Civic</p> <p>12-14 St. Helen's</p> <p>17-24 VACANT</p> <p>25-31 Westwood Pavilion</p> <p><b>Feb</b></p> <p>1-11 Plymouth Theatre</p> <p>12-14 St. Andrew's</p> <p>15-21 Southport Theatre</p> <p>22-24 St. Andrew's</p> <p>25-29 Buxley</p>	<p><b>Mar</b></p> <p>1-11 VACANT</p> <p>4-11 Gillingham Civic</p> <p>13-18 VACANT</p> <p>19-24 VACANT</p> <p>25-31 Lewisham Civic</p> <p><b>Mar/Apr</b></p> <p>4-11 Gillingham Civic</p> <p>12-18 VACANT</p> <p>19-24 VACANT</p> <p>25-31 Lewisham Civic</p>	<p><b>Apr</b></p> <p>1-3 Lewisham Civic</p> <p>4-8 Epsom Civic</p> <p>9-13 Cambridge Civic</p> <p>14-18 VACANT</p> <p>19-23 Southport Civic</p> <p>24-29 VACANT</p> <p><b>May</b></p> <p>1-11 VACANT</p> <p>12-18 Bedford Civic</p> <p>19-21 VACANT</p> <p>22-24 Bedford Civic</p> <p>25-31 Bedford Civic</p> <p>Jun 3 onwards VACANT</p>
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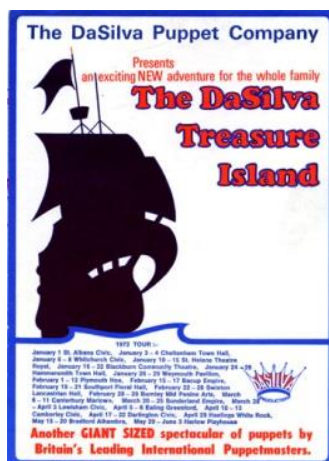


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The stage ship got the worst of it and amid calls to launch the long-boats and general



confusion; it split into two and began to sink as the curtain fell for the end of the first act. Using such large fit-ups meant that puppets had to be not only large but also controlled by 8-foot strings. Many of the characters appeared as hand puppets as well. Scripts were written by Ray DaSilva, Peter Franklin and Fred Barton (the voice of Stromboli in *Circus Caprice*), among others.

Another show that was first seen at this time was *Hood in the Wood*. *Peter and the Wolf* followed in 1972, and proved to be as long-lasting a production as the various versions of *Circus Caprice*. Among the puppeteers in the company at this time were Martin Clifford, David Price, Gordon Jenkins, Ian Thom and Peter Bentley. The 1972 tour of *Treasure Island* gives some indication of the range of venues visited:

Jan 1: St Albans Civic  
 Jan 3-4: Cheltenham Town Hall  
 Jan 6-8: Whitchurch Civic  
 Jan 10-15: St Helens Theatre  
 Jan 18-22: Blackburn Community Theatre  
 Jan 24-26: Hammersmith Town Hall  
 Jan 28-29: Weymouth Pavilion  
 Feb 1-12: Plymouth Hoe  
 Feb 15-17: Bacup Empire  
 Feb 19-21: Southport Floral Hall  
 Feb 22-26: Swinton Lancastrian Hall  
 Feb 28-29: Burnley Mid Pennine Arts  
 Mar 6-11: Canterbury Marlowe Theatre  
 Mar 20-25: Sunderland Empire  
 Mar 28-Apr 3: Lewisham Civic Theatre  
 Apr 5-6: Ealing Greenford  
 Apr 10-13: Camberley Civic  
 Apr 17-22: Darlington Civic  
 April 29: Hastings White Rock  
 May 15-20: Bradford Alhambra  
 May 29-Jun 3: Harlow Playhouse ...and many more.

Ray was encouraged by the enthusiasm and energy of the younger performers, despite upsets like the disappearing sound system at Cheltenham Town Hall.

*Treasure Island* was a difficult get-in for a morning show, but the company couldn't set up

the night before as Mott the Hoople were doing a concert. They did manage to unload equipment into the wings, and then got up early next morning to finish off. Testing the sound got left till last and to Ray's horror, he could get no sound at all out of the massive speakers. He checked everything stage by stage and it all seemed to be working: the connections were OK but when he opened up speakers there was nothing to be seen: someone had carefully unscrewed the covers and stolen the equipment from inside. Ray never discovered who stole the speakers, but Cheltenham paid for two more, and for hiring some emergency equipment for that performance.



Ray, Martin, Peter Bentley, Dave Price, Ian Thom, Gordon Jenkins

The Company also provided the first children's shows at two new theatres in the 1970s: the Crucible in Sheffield and the Shaw in London. DaSilva even managed to produce the best Box Office figures at the Crucible that year, performing to over 97% capacity. By 1973 the company were billed as Britain's biggest puppet company, employing



Nigel, Jolyon, Ted, and Bop with Cat, Pinocchio and Fox.

10 people full-time, and preparing their next show, *Pinocchio*. They even managed to cope with the resident ghost at the Godmanchester school building, which Ray claims never to have seen but Joan was certainly aware of. The puppeteers working on *Pinocchio* included Nigel Lawton, Jolyon Coombs, Ted Callow and Felicity (Bop) White. Bop was not the only female puppeteer to work with the company; others



included Jackie (Jac) Illett, later one half of Jacolly Puppet Theatre, and Judy Preece who left to become a freelance puppeteer. Valerie Ball went into human theatre after working with DaSilva, and Doreen James-Parsons stayed on at Norwich in the later years to work with Barry Smith before setting up her theatrical prop and costume making business.

Jolyon Coombs had joined the company in the autumn of 1972 for a tour of *Snowwhite* that began in Sheffield. He was also involved in the preparation and original tour of *Pinocchio*, which started in Plymouth, and of *Hansel and Gretel*, where he had considerable input into the staging. As Jolyon explains, his eventual break with the company was not a total one. *"I started work as Stage Manager at the Octagon, Bolton, in February 1976, so finished full-time work with Ray late in 1975. However, I did go back several times, notably to revamp Pinocchio when Ray had moved into the Norwich Puppet Theatre, but also to do advisory work on Alice."* Jolyon was mainly involved with the major theatre touring with a company of four and sometimes five puppeteers, where his previous repertory and variety experience was very useful.



**At Harlow Show: Ray, Steve, Nik, Joan, Dave and Martin.**

Steve Lee had also joined the company by this time. His first professional performance with the company was on August Bank Holiday 1971 at the Harlow Show. Steve was to continue with the company until 1980, later taking on the role of Production Manager.

He enjoyed most of his work with the company, especially because of the opportunity to develop his own ideas. *"If we wanted to do a show it was backed financially. Ray gave us free rein. We didn't need to form our own company then – we could do everything we wanted to."* A good example was when Steve became very keen to produce a version of *A Christmas Carol* and after

some persuasion Ray gave the go-ahead for designs and for a working script to be prepared despite having misgivings about its saleability all year round. Ray remembers Steve coming in one day with some early proposals and hesitantly suggesting that a stage with a revolve for scenery might be required. Having experienced the difficulty of working in the awkward space of a segment of a circle, Ray sent a surprised Steve back with the



Marley's Ghost visits Scrooge



Bob Cratchit and Tim

suggestion that there should be not one, but two revolves so that each scene could be more like a box-set. Most members of the company at the time had some input into that production and, under Steve's direction, produced a really beautiful show which faithfully followed the original Dickens story. Ray now feels that it was however technically over-burdened backstage with all the special effects, including projections for the Christmas Past scenes (the ghost had a magic lantern) and white shadow figures for Christmas Future sequences, and snow falling at the end on the Cratchit family singers. The electrical rig was more complicated than the other two handed shows and took longer to get in to venues and set-up; but for the audience it had a truly magical effect, as Ray and Joan found later when they toured it themselves to Norfolk Schools.

The *Pinocchio* tour continued through the winter of 1973/1974, playing venues like the Southampton Guildhall and the White Rock Pavilion in Hastings. At the same time. Steve Lee and Peter Franklin were touring smaller shows like *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Peter and the Wolf* to schools and arts centres. The Morley Observer noted ruefully that performances of these shows at the Batley Town Hall were well received,



Linton, Robin, Bill, Martin, Jolyon, Ray

although the company were *"difficult to get hold of and also very expensive..."* *Hood in the Wood* and *Circus Caprice* were touring at this time as well, in addition to a revival of the large-scale *Snowwhite*, so the repertoire was a growing one. Some of the reviews of *Snowwhite* were mixed, with particular criticism of the quality of the soundtrack; others were uniformly positive, sometimes noting in some awe that the show cost *"in excess of £3,000."*



**Hood in the Wood**

Steve Lee kept a diary during his time with the company, and one entry for 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1972 tells of an event shared by many other DaSilva performers over the years. It was the tradition for performers appearing at the Pavilion Theatre Bournemouth to be invited round for tea one afternoon by the widow of the theatre chaplain. This kind lady kept up the tradition for many years, and hosted the event with her companion Dorothy. Steve remembers the event well. *"There was always a discussion of where to place the seat for the photo, and when you later saw her albums, the seat was always in the same place. The albums were fascinating as every star who had appeared at the Pavilion seemed to have accepted the invitation, from Max Bygraves to Des O'Connor."* Steve Lee and Peter Franklin were key members of the company, and they remember those times well as Peter remembers.



**Wicked Uncle from first Aladdin**

*"I was very involved in model theatre and puppetry as a child. I went to the same church as Ray and I did my first performances in a marquee. I had a part-time job working on the marionettes for the original production of Aladdin when I was 14. I also did some work on ideas for other productions, and a summer season in Worthing as well as visiting the company in Scarborough. I worked on Thunderbird at the Colwyn Bay Festival when I was 16."* Peter later joined the company full-time and



stayed for eight years, until the recession and the funding problems of opening the Norwich Puppet Theatre meant that he was made redundant.

Life on the road could be arduous, and took up much of the year as Steve's records show:

1974 – 15 weeks on the road

1975 – 28

1976 – 22

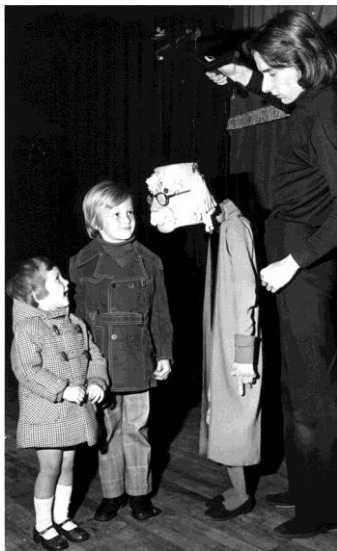
1977 – 15

1978 – 17

1979 – 14.5

Some events were unforgettable; when the company went to Islay in Scotland in 1979, the lifeboat sank the same day. For that show the get-in was at 10am, the shows were at 2pm and 7.30 and get-out was complete by 11. But, as Steve acknowledges, "*we were young, fit and energetic then.*" The theatre shows toured for up to 35 weeks a year in approximately five week periods.

International tours provided a welcome touch of variety. Steve Lee performed *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Circus*



Peter and Grandfather

*Caprice* in Germany with Ray in 1972. In 1974, Steve and Peter toured US bases in Germany playing *Peter and the Wolf*. Ray recalls them returning with a huge bag of American money. The bank would not change the coins, as there were hundreds of dimes and quarters which some schools had collected from the children and given to the puppeteers. Luckily there was an American base nearby at Alconbury so he took them to a bank there who, suspicious at first, did change them into cashable dollars.

Touring a wide range of venues sometimes tested ingenuity – and sets – to the limits. On the Isle of Skye a venue asked Steve Lee to saw part of the set off, and in Yorkshire on one tour two productions would not fit the theatre, as the dimensions provided had ignored the fact that the walls were two feet thick. As a result of

that, one show had to be struck into the van during the interval. At other times the sets seemed to develop a life of their own. At one time part of the *Snowwhite* tower – itself constructed from part of the original Morecambe box office – fell on a performer's car. Luckily he wasn't inside at the time.

Ray remembers that life at Godmanchester was not always too exciting for the staff, some of whom lived on site; there was no night life of any description, so they had to find other things to do.



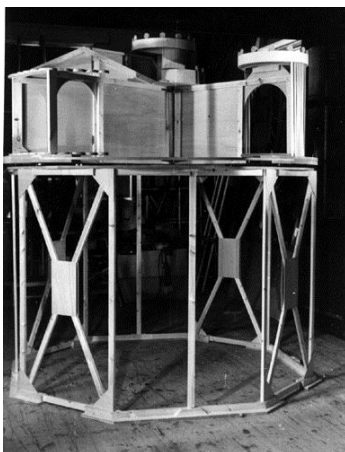
Peter Oldham and Murky

*"Some made their own puppets to their credit and Peter Oldham built his own cabaret show. Jolyon worked evenings for the company making props for the company while listening to Radio 3; he became known as the Professor. Jolyon was into classical history and he was later on Mastermind. But some of them wanted to do different things and to start growing vegetables in the playground. I had drawn a map showing a Roman road went straight through our own playground so some of crew decided to do their own archaeological dig. They found lots of Roman pottery shards, some with nice designs, and lots of oyster shells. I'm not sure if they ever grew vegetables."*

In April 1978, the company was at the Teatro Reggio in Palma performing *Peter and the Wolf* again. This was an eventful trip for Steve and Peter; the van broke down in Paris, and when they finally reached the theatre, the get-in was by use of a rope with a hook on the end. Ray and Steve also played *Peter and the Wolf* at the first International Puppet Festival at Charleville Mézières in France.

*St George and the Dragon* was the first complete production that Steve and Peter worked on together. As Peter remembers, *"It got shelved for a while: the heads*

were made and then put in a box and forgotten." Ray was always going on about the importance of eye-contact between the puppets, so to test this Steve produced the designs for this show using puppets with no visible eyes. St George's were hidden by the visor of his helmet, the Princess' by her long hair, the King's by his crown and so on. They did get the go-ahead though as they all had decent sized noses so you could tell which way they were looking and what they were thinking about. Ray used to say that he liked long noses on puppets because it helped them to think.



St George staging: a revolve on octagonal base

*St George and the Dragon* was a complex production with a lot of sound effects that had to be timed exactly. It was performed, as was *Peter and the Wolf* at the 1979 London Puppet Festival. *Peter and the Wolf* has been a long-lasting performance, and it was even performed with a live orchestra during the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Music Festival. Steve Lee and Peter Franklin, now working as the Puppeteers Company and based in Brighton, later took over the production with which they had been connected for so long. *"We re-made it and toured it last year, 20 years after we first performed it."*

Over their years with the company, Steve and Peter learnt a great deal about performing and coping with the demands of the touring life. *"We were thrown into the deep end,"* remembers Steve, *"and the sustained energy needed was OK then but it's hard work now."* Peter agrees. *"As puppeteers you evolve, you get more out of a performance the more you work on it."* Working with Martin Clifford was productive too. *"We developed an intuitive communication that was there because we all worked together when very*



*young at DaSilva. And Ray was also very keen on letting people take the initiative – although he also liked to be in control."*

Steve was expecting to work on a proposed television series of *Rupert Bear*, but that was eventually done by Christine Glanville's company. *"Peter Oldham came back to work on that production, but he ended up going to Cliftonville for a season instead."* Losing the *Rupert* television show was a disappointment for all concerned, and Steve Lee is sure he can remember Ray sending the head of the pig character to the TV producer to indicate how he felt.



**Rupert Marionette**

Steve did shadow sequences for several shows, and also discovered that even such apparently simple matters as packing the puppets could be fraught with difficulty. *"Joan and I packed Circus Caprice in different ways; I also put some puppets in the top of the lighting box. One day I found we were had left some puppets behind, and we had a midnight planning meeting to decide what to do. Peter could get the missing puppets – but not for the next day's show."* Steve's diary takes up the story.

*Thursday 1 December 1977*

*Final 'Humbug' rehearsal performed to me Peter and Simon. Awful. Drove to Bristol arriving at 5pm. Dropped Simon at Arts Centre where he is being put up by Theatre Manager. Unable to sleep at midnight - rooted round in van and found Slinkies missing. Sat up late planning their retrieval.*

*Friday 2 December 1977*

*Frome. Despatched Simon by rail to Huntingdon to retrieve Slinkies. Merlin Theatre part of college complex. Incredibly we get away with not doing the Slinkies by fading Dandy and us bowing extravagantly to the music!*

Both Peter and Steve also took the opportunity to watch the other more experienced performers. *"We're both agreed that Joan was the better puppeteer, but Ray was the most intuitive. Joan was always consistent and considered."*

An interesting note in one of the press cuttings at this time indicated that the DaSilva company hoped to set up an arts and puppet centre in Barrowford in the Pennines; presumably, one of the other proposed uses won out in the end. Many of the old favourites continued to tour into the mid 1970s, while new shows like *Humbug* and *Hansel and Gretel* were developed alongside them. 1973 also saw the company being solely represented by Alan Crooks Management for a short period. Previously they had managed all the administration themselves, and reverted back to this a year later. The next show to be announced was *Let's Go with Little Joe*, based on the then Daily Mirror cartoon strip. With *Kaleidoscope* also launched in the same year, this was a hectic time for all concerned.

*Let's Go with Little Joe* was not one of the most successful productions, as Peter Franklin remembers. *"There were some limitations on the performing rights, and I think the Theatre Board were not in favour. We had to make the*



**Little Joe cast. L.R: Hoot, Ferdinand, LJ ,?, Mole,The IP, PC Budge**

*show in a hurry; Ray, Joan and I made most of the characters."*

Those characters were not universally liked either, as Peter remembers. *"Little Joe wasn't a well-known character, and I thought he was a borderline fascist really."* Peter often had

responsibility for sound and lighting, and this did cause some concerns. *"The central aim was to improve the quality of the recorded sound. We had old Brennell decks with*

*pressure pads. The sound broke down totally once and we had to give a school a free performance. By the time I became the soundman for the company we did get better tapes. We didn't have a proper dimmer rack and at one Sheffield children's' party I saw someone get a shock backstage."*

Ray remembers that audiences in the 1960s and 1970s were becoming more appreciative of good quality mixing of voices and music in stereo, as a result of developments in cinema. The company therefore aimed to produce a comparable visual and aural experience. The cost of producing the visual half of the production was of course the greatest so it seemed only right not to skimp on the sound in the hope that even a blind person could enjoy the show.

*"We therefore used pre-recorded voices for most of our productions, as did a lot of puppeteers at the time, and engaged good actors to provide them; Marcus D'Amico was playing the lead in Oliver at the London West End when he provided Jack's voice."*

It was also the time when puppeteers were usually hidden from view behind heavy curtains and in DaSilva shows they were often needed to operate their puppets from awkward positions, rush about backstage even up and down ladders, so that being able to concentrate on projecting their voices at the same time (especially if they had a cold or sore throat) to reach people at the back of a big auditorium would have been impossible, and radio-microphones were then new and unreliable.

*Hansel and Gretel* played theatres seating up to 1,500, and shows such as *Humbug* were designed for arts centres and other venues seating up to 500. As one of the performers most responsible for the smaller shows, Peter Franklin now recognises the tensions that were developing. *"We made rods for own backs; in a sense we were in*





*competition with the touring shows. Humbug was a cow of a show with a one and a half hour get-in. It was built for small arts centres but it later went to schools. There was an overall shift of those shows from centres to schools."*



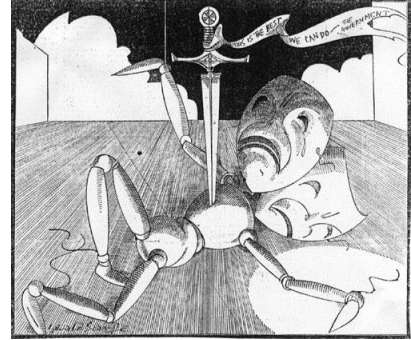
**Peter and Steve working on Hansel & Gretel**

Peter had a lot to do with the technical side of the shows, while Steve Lee was directing. *"It was crazy that I was rehearsing three productions at once and it was sometimes difficult to get a response from Ray as he was so busy. We developed a short-hand for Ray's responses which went something like Rehearsal means Frantic work activity, Dress Rehearsal means Really Frantic Work Activity, First Performance means Dress Rehearsal – and if you asked Ray about something and he said "Good, good" – that meant "Line Busy, try again later..."*

By this time, the DaSilvas were acknowledged experts in their field, and were touring the largest puppet stage in Europe. Ray wrote an article about puppet theatre lighting for *Tabs*, the magazine for members of ABTT, the theatre technicians' organisation. There were also special events as one-offs, including an extravaganza at the Café Royal in London to mark the opening of the 3,000<sup>th</sup> McDonalds and coincidentally the first in England. All this activity meant that the DaSilvas turned their thoughts again to finding a permanent base in which they could also perform; and they advertised for just such a theatre in 1975.

No venue was forthcoming however, and late 1975 saw the usual wide range of shows touring, with *Snowwhite* and *Hansel and Gretel* being booked for the winter season. All was not well however, and the Swindon Evening Advertiser noted in a review of *Hansel and Gretel* in March 1975 that the DaSilva company feared that *"unless the Arts Council changes its policy of not supporting puppet theatre, this may be their last (show) or least the last when relatively*

*low admission prices can be charged."* A month later, Ray had a letter published in *The Times* following an article by prestigious theatre critic J. W. Lambert. As Ray pointed out, Lambert failed to mention puppets in his "*requiem for British theatre*" – even though the accompanying Scarfe cartoon featured a puppet. The Arts Council, Ray suggested, "*by its inflexible attitude of total non-support of puppet theatre is unwittingly engineering the demise of this art form.*"



The Arts Council were under a lot of pressure so they commissioned artist and writer Helen Binyon to write a report on the state of puppet theatre in the country. She saw shows and made notes and wrote a damning report which said that "*watching English puppet shows was a depressing experience*" so she went to see Basil Brush at the Palladium pantomime instead to cheer herself up! She saw the DaSilva company perform *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Circus Caprice*. Ray was surprised to find



that she thought the voices were live. He was expecting her perhaps to ask about the deeper significance of the story but instead, referring to Wispa's cauldron, Binyon's first rather perplexing question to Ray after the performance was "*Tell me Mr DaSilva, how did you make the smoke?*"

Despite these experiences, by 1974 the company were still jumping through hoops in order to try to get support from the Arts Council. First the company became non-profit and then a registered charity. What Ray and Joan didn't know was that all the bids that they were submitting were not even getting to the Drama Panel. They were then told they needed Local Authority support, and then the policy became one of only supporting building-based companies. "*One Arts Council representative came with his five year old daughter,*" remembers Ray, "*and she didn't like it, so that was that. They kept moving the goalposts.*"

At the same time as the company became a Registered Charity for Arts Council purposes, it also received the welcome support of Cambridgeshire drama advisor John Boylan, who was based in Huntingdon. He later joined the external Board of Management and Ray remembers how helpful he was.

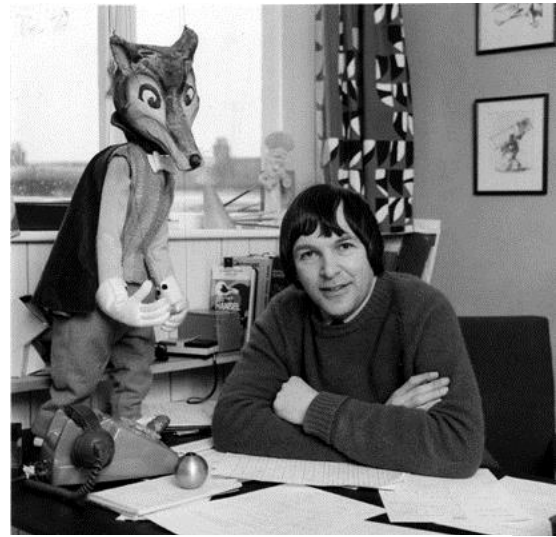
*"We were doing lots of school shows and writing to Drama Advisers and John was secretary of the National Association of Drama Advisers. We don't know whether he put a good word in but we found it quite easy to work with Drama Advisers. We would get the adviser to send a letter to all schools in the country saying we were available – we never did any direct mailing ourselves. Attached to his letter was a booking form. When we performed in a theatre in that county - Lancashire for example, St Helens or Preston - another letter would go out reminding schools that they knew the company but here was an opportunity of a large scale show which would be a completely different experience which should not be missed. In some counties we were in theatres first, and then later the Drama Adviser would encourage school show tours. They were very happy days and we had good relationships. We joined TMA (Theatrical Management Association) as a company and established good relationships with the membership and went to their dinners. Some managers recommended us to their colleagues."*



In April 1975, Ray was writing in *Municipal Entertainment* about the revival of puppet theatre that appeared to be taking place. He also came up with an interesting answer in this piece to the occasional critics who might have suggested that even the large shows were not always big enough in some theatres. As Ray says in the article, *"our puppets are all much bigger than the football used at Wembley Stadium, where one hundred thousand spectators*



*see the Cup Final, and no-one complains of not being able to see the ball."* He also addressed the criticism sometimes made of the DaSilva work as not being of a unified design. *"I have no desire for an overall style which would give a recognisable stamp to a DaSilva puppet but I would rather be recognised by the*



**Puppets bigger than a football**

*total overall standard of performance from both an artistic and entertainment point of view."* In a less upbeat mood, the article also finds Ray bemoaning the fact that finances meant there was no chance that year of building a new large-scale show, which could cost anything up to £7,000. These costs could be written off over three tours of 150 performing days each. Running costs were estimated at £70 a day, not including staff wages or touring expenses.

All of this meant, said Ray, that *"taken separately each team makes a significant loss but with shared overheads we almost manage to make ends meet. Almost – because somehow during the next two years we have to find about £6000 to replace our ageing vehicles, which is less than we shall have to pay in VAT at the present rate."* Once again, Ray noted the Arts Council failure to support puppet theatre in England, even though such support was available in Wales – and for children's theatre in England that might also use puppets. In an interesting aside, Ray also mentioned the newly founded Puppet Centre Trust, and then finished his article with an appeal for an *"imaginative civic fairy godmother (or godfather) who will share with us in founding a municipally supported Puppet Theatre."* Ray also mentions the difficulty of paying reasonable wages; at this time, the company advertised for puppeteers to be paid at the rate of £50 a week. Equity contracts were also available, more of an attraction than the £50 for some of those who applied.

The Arts Council weren't the only obstacle in the company's path; there was the occasional accident too. When playing a double bill at St Albans city hall there was a high get-in and Ray dropped a box full of lights. He fell with it and broke a bone in his foot. The Theatre Manager took him to hospital but he refused to be put into plaster when there was an audience of 400 waiting. He asked the doctor what he would do in time of war, and was told that he would just strap up the foot, so that was done and the performance went ahead as planned.



Geppetto & Pinocchio

More trouble followed in July, when the character of Geppetto ("worth £100") was stolen from a display at a theatre in Dunstable. Despite appeals, the character was never returned. The 1976 tour included three large shows and six medium-sized ones, to many of the venues that were by now well-known to the company. Recruitment continued too: four more young performers joined the company in 1976, and Christmas that year saw the company's first West End season, with *Pinocchio* at the New London Theatre in Drury Lane – before *Cats* took up its residency. The contract stipulated that the company would receive the first £1500 of the net Box Office and 50% of the rest. Advertising costs were split 50/50 with the management. The season was a very successful one, with investors getting a 27% return on their investment over a three-week season.

Performances took place during the day, with other shows in the evening. The first night, however, is not a happy memory for Ray. *"The lighting was controlled by*



*one of the first computerised Rank Strand lighting boards – and it crashed. They couldn't override it manually, and the emergency back-up person for West End theatres couldn't be found. We had to do the whole show in one static light – I was in tears!"* The performance was reviewed by *The Guardian*, which said that it was "mostly successful, with harmoniously-integrated music and some good effects, simply achieved." In its review, *The Daily Telegraph* was charitable enough to admit that expectations were not high, but that in the event it found a "special sort of animation that makes of certain puppets warmer-blooded creatures than crop up on other stages." In a generally favourable review, Eric Shorter went on to describe the performance as "a lesson in synchronisation."

In 1977, when Martin Clifford returned to the DaSilva Company, touring allowances had been introduced and the money had improved with the arrival of Equity contracts. It wasn't quite the same, Martin found. "The structure of the company had changed; I enjoyed it more when it was a little family business. The children in the audience didn't react as much, or they talked as if they were watching TV." Having the ability to gain an Equity card through working with the company led to a variety of motives on the part of those applying to join. "I got tired of working with people who weren't really interested in puppetry, and I left on July 1<sup>st</sup>, St Simeon's day."



St Simeon:

St Simeon is the patron saint of puppeteers. Martin went off to work with Roger Stevenson in TV and cabaret and then started working the cruise ships. "It was a natural progression and I've stayed with it ever since, working on everything from twenty minute cabarets to big production shows."

Even now, Martin knows how much he owes to what he learnt from the DaSilva days. "Roger Stevenson told me he could recognise the DaSilva style in how I worked, and he accused me of the DaSilva wave at the curtain call! I enjoyed the variety most of all: doing repairs at Godmanchester or a week of school shows as well as the

*cabarets and the big tours. No-one tours puppet shows like that now; there are lots of small companies but no-one is touring anything that big."* Martin also still uses on his own puppets the diagonal control introduced by Peter Oldham and taught to him back in 1970 in Cliftonville.



**Jackie Illett at a School  
with Peter (and the Wolf)**

Jackie Illett – now known as Jac and one half (with Holly) of the Jacolly Puppet Theatre since 1977, was one of the female puppeteers working for the company at the time. *"I was mostly with the smaller group and then towards the end of my time there I joined the larger company,"* she remembers, *"and principally because there was a problem with driving licences,"* she adds cryptically. Holly has a slight link with the company too.

Round about the time that Jac joined, Holly was running a craft shop in Dartmouth, and also selling puppets that she made. One of the large DaSilva companies was playing *Treasure Island* nearby and they came in and she got to know them – and that included Ray. *"This was probably in 1975-76"* says Holly *"and I'd never met a puppeteer before and the shop filled up with them. And I thought the production of Treasure Island was completely magic."* Jac joined the company after an audition. *"My first job had been with a travelling marionette company called Lilliput, which was also a route that many people went I think, they got through a lot of puppeteers. Then I worked at the Little Angel for nine months and then I strayed into acting for a little while. And I did puppet-making jobs for Polka. I auditioned for DaSilva because at that time I was a freelance puppeteer and it was a company I wanted to work for. They were auditioning quite a few people at the time."* Jac was only with the company for about nine months, and during that time she worked on *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Peter and the Wolf* and then with the large company on *Hansel and Gretel*. She remembers working with Jan King – later of Romany Puppets – on *Hansel and Gretel*. She also remembers *George and the Dragon* being made at this



time, and *Paper Tiger* was made just after she left. *Alice in Wonderland* was also being built. "What I did mostly was *Peter and the Wolf*, which was a delicious show. I enjoyed that so much. It was particularly inventive, going beyond conventions of puppetry that I'd seen at the time. I particularly enjoyed working *Peter*. That character had such a sense of fun. I remember *Jack and the Beanstalk*, of course, because it had *Wispa the Wizard*. What we would do is follow each show with a little talk for schools. It was mostly schools that I performed in; I can't recall any public shows. The large show made so much less impression on me than touring the two small shows: I'm not even completely sure it was *Hansel and Gretel*! *Jack and the Beanstalk* was much more conventional, basically miming to tapes. As was *Peter and the Wolf* of course, but that was narrative with music – with *Jack and the Beanstalk* it was miming other people's dialogue. I felt that was a bit of a straitjacket." Jac played *Jack and the Beanstalk* first with Larry Wilkes and then *Peter and the Wolf* with Kazuro (Kazu) Yasuda and had some communication problems. "I loved *Peter and the Wolf*, *Peter* was such a



Larry Wilkes



Kazuro Yasuda

gorgeous character. But it wasn't entirely easy working with Kazu; his English wasn't terrific. When we did the improvised bits at the end everything would rely on timing. I would expect him to be there and he just wouldn't appear – it was a continual rug-pulling exercise!" That was where the misunderstanding with driving licences came in: Jac was on L-plates and Kazu's licence had long been invalid. "You would have three weeks on the road and then one or two weeks back at base patching up, and then you would go on the road again. They were long-standing shows, the two that I was touring. What I really loved about working for Ray was that there was absolutely no feeling of proprietorship. He was completely encouraging; there was

*no ego issue for him there. It wasn't this is how you must do it, but let's see what you want to bring to it."*

Not all of Jac's memories deal with performing of course. *"Quite a large hunk of each day was spent driving around trying to find somewhere to stay,"* she remembers ruefully. *"We had to find our own digs and find somewhere that we could afford. You had a ceiling of £3 or so. It was quite hard to find two single rooms at that price."* Performing with the large show was an emergency swap for Jac after the problem with driving licences arose. *"It was a whole different feeling touring large venues. We played on the Isle of Wight, and at Malvern. The only thing I remember about Malvern was that it was very snowy – and Malvern is very hilly – and I'd just come out of a show and people were just slithering and sliding everywhere. I felt like Superman, because I had gumboots on and I was soon pushing cars out of ditches."* Looking back now, Jac is clear that she gained a great deal from working with DaSilva. *"What I remember most is the encouragement from Ray. He would expect the best that you could do, and would take for granted that it was going to be good."*

Working with the company at the same time as Jac was Larry Wilkes. He remembers a performance of Peter and the Wolf which was followed by two boys bursting into the hall carrying what he describes as *"an astounding concoction of cardboard boxes and toilet roll tubes, all tied together to resemble a full-size Grandfather and dripping with poster paint!"*

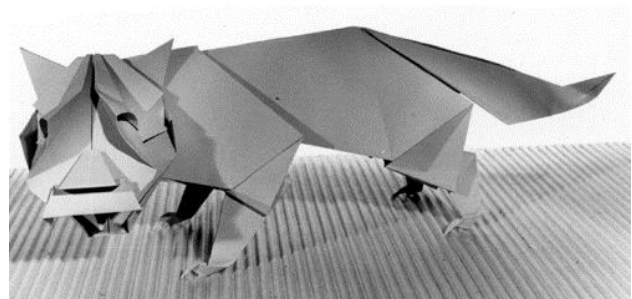
*"The boys looked like two small policemen who had collared a vagabond and then dragged him through a multi-coloured pond for resisting arrest. This spectacle was then improved by the sudden appearance of a pursuing teacher, coming up behind them with an even more amazed look on her face than we had on ours. She said she couldn't believe it, as the two boys had never shown such enthusiasm for anything before. And they all stood there as pleased as anything. And so did we."*

Larry also remembers well the school in Ringwood, Hampshire with a marvellous collection of musical instruments from around the world, and the small group of children he allowed to come backstage after a performance of Pinocchio. The teacher had pleaded for this to be allowed as the children had shown such interest in the technicalities involved.

*"I expected that they might want to know how Pinocchio's nose grew, but when a ten year old asked me if we needed three phase electricity I was rather taken aback, as I was by the casual comment from another child that the black velvet had to be used behind Pinocchio during the nose-growing because it wouldn't reflect light. Another lad came up with a faultless analysis of how some marionette or other had been constructed and had me blinking towards their teacher in wonderment. The teacher explained that these were pupils with dyslexia, and that they often possessed an unusual level of practical understanding of materials, equipment and how things work."*

When Kazuro Yasuda joined the company, Ray was impressed by the beauty and simplicity of some of his origami models and the intriguing concept that a single square of paper could be transformed into so many different shapes, especially animals. Experiments confirmed that some of the designs could be made as puppet figures, and that being able to transform one design to another echoed transformation themes found in many Japanese folk tales – so here was the basis of a new production.

Ray put this idea together with a proposed title, *Paper Tiger*, to Kazu and Larry Wilkes in order that they should develop a scenario together, working on their own in the Green



Room. However, this system of seclusion which had produced such a good result with *Peter and the Wolf*, did not work so well this time. The suggested scenario lacked a

strong dramatic structure and the story had departed from the transformation theme which Ray felt should be central.

*"Other members of the company started coming up with different solutions and it was in danger of becoming a 'too many cooks' situation. So despite protests all round I decided to tuck myself away and develop the theme myself. The transformation idea was applied to the villain of the piece by giving him the power to change into any creature, and the significance of a 'paper tiger' gave a suitable basis for the story for children about facing problems – things which seem formidable may, on examination prove to be insignificant when you look behind the mask. To their credit, after I had come up with the barebones of a storyline and some technical ideas, the company all mucked in and we produced what was judged by school heads to be one of our best productions."*

Kazuro Yasuda provided a lot of Japanese background information. Ray had considered having the whole thing done in Japanese language with English narration when required, rather like watching a foreign film with English sub-titles, but in the end the show mixed Japanese and English dialogue which worked well thanks, says Ray, to Peter Franklin's sensitive script. The mode of operation was



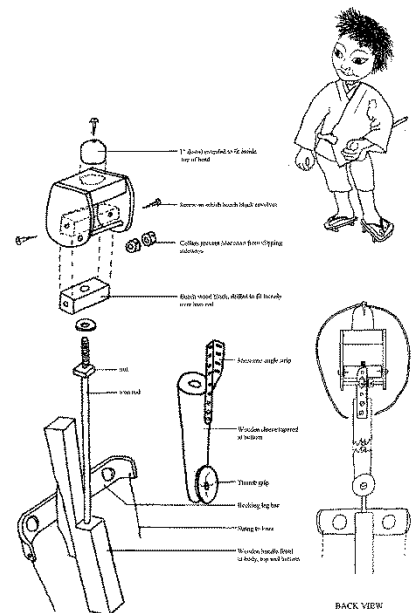
**Paper Tiger: Matsu and Samurai**

to be similar to *Bunraku*, a unique style of Japanese puppetry. Traditionally, this style requires three people operating each puppet, but in this case, economics could only allow for two performers to present the whole show. Ray therefore had to devise a puppet which could be operated by one person.

*"I made a prototype which then became used for the main character Matsu, a boy who was starting work in a paper-making factory. The figure was operated at table height with the operator visible. There were internal mechanisms for head-turning and nodding movements and a rocking bar*



attached with strings to the knees, which produced a suitable walk. We built a special staging like a gateway at the entrance of a Shinto temple incorporating a large shadow screen with two superimposed overhead projectors behind. Steve Lee spent many hours producing some excellent shadow slides in a contemporary Japanese style and designed a long panoramic roll several feet long which was rolled over the projector while a paper bird, made in view of the audience at the beginning of the



**Paper Tiger with Simon and Kazu**

show, was seen in shadow, flying to Japan. The Japanese Embassy library provided much inspirational material, Kazu produced some authentic fabrics and Joan made all the Japanese-style costumes for the human figures. Peter Franklin was responsible for all the recording and intricate sound mixing which included dialogue by Japanese actors, a musician playing a shakuhachi, and a marching song by children at the Japanese school in London to accompany a processional dragon in a paper festival at the finale of the show. Kazu and Simon Spencer were involved in making the large size origami puppets, scenery and properties, and became the first puppeteers to present the show."

Just down the road from Godmanchester, at St Neots, was a branch of Wiggins Teape, the paper-manufacturing company. They gave the company educational materials about paper making which were added to the follow-up notes for distribution to teachers. Wiggins Teape then gave £2,000 as post-sponsorship money with the proviso that the show was performed in areas where their factories were situated. As the company normally visited those areas

anyway it made no difference and the money went towards building the next production.

Steve Lee still has a contract from the 1970s showing his basic salary as £2160, with three weeks off per year plus Bank Holidays. His diary gives some idea of what life was like for the company towards the end of the 1970s. These extracts start in the last 15 weeks of the production period of *St George and the Dragon*. The first performance was on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1977, but Steve Lee was still directing *Peter and the Wolf* just before the opening.

*Thursday 14 April 1977*

*Ray has booked 'St George' out even earlier - we now have barely 15 weeks before rehearsals!*



*Thursday 5 May 1977*

*'Peter and the Wolf' in Bedford. In afternoon an appalling 'Jack' and 'Figgers & Fums'\* rehearsal. Must have depressed Ray enormously, it certainly depressed us enormously. (\*'Figgers and Fums' was a short filler of existing repertoire items to extend performance length at the theatre's request.)*

*Friday 6 May 1977*

*Rehearsed 'Jack' and 'Figgers and Fums' first thing, then dismantled big Jack stage. To Sandy for a 'Peter and the Wolf' performance. Then grotty load of Big Jack and Peter and the Wolf into a van and the landrover.*

*Monday 9 May 1977*

*Theatre Royal Darlington. Stage crew and Peter Tod (director) almost die of shock when only two puppeteers turn up. Jack tab track jammed in evening show.*

*Tuesday 10 May 1977*

*Peter Tod asks us to wear hoods as they can see our heads (we have been!). Also wants to know whether we always do PW second – so presumably he doesn't like it.*

*Wednesday 11 May 1977*

*Jack tab track jammed twice and we lose all power 11 seconds from end of PW.*

*Thursday 12 May 1977*

*Dashboard of landrover bursts into flames, only internal light seems affected.*

*Friday 13 May 1977*

*Performances at 9.45; 2.00 and 7.30. Landrover repaired - fault caused by metal tin ashtray touching bare wires. Very nice audience this evening.*

*Saturday 14 May 1977*

*Peter Tod almost redeemed himself by wishing us 'good luck' and ruined it by saying the show was all right as a 'stop gap' but he'd want better in future. I told him that I felt we had been treated as a 'stop gap' and left! Bought tow-rope in case van clutch went, and the exhaust fell off instead!*

*Tuesday 31 May 1977*

*Ray and Joan to dinner - very pleasant evening. We didn't talk shop until the last half hour.*

*Tuesday 5 July 1977*

*Recorded 'St George' script at Theatre Projects with Peter, Rosemary Miller, Peter Hawkins.*

*Monday 8 August 1977*

*Ray and Joan back. June Knight our secretary is in hospital with a suspected brain haemorrhage. Ray all enthused about possible site for a permanent puppet theatre in Norwich of all places!*

*Monday 15 August 1977*

*Cannot abide the thought of touring 'St George' and 'Circus Caprice' to grotty venues in impersonal new towns and second class digs. Joan bursts into tears today having miscut a pattern in expensive velvet.*

*Tuesday 23 August 1977*

*Today I have been with the DaSilva company for six years! Joan said 'It seems like only yesterday, and you know what an awful day yesterday was!' Many a true word spoken in jest.*

*Tuesday 6 September 1977*

*Peter's birthday and his first evening off in over a fortnight.*

*Sunday 11 September 1977*

*Started painting (SG) sets today. Not very successful at present. Not as much done as I hoped owing to a long 'Peter and the Wolf' rehearsal at Martin (Vernon) and Sheena's request.*



*St George puppets in jig-saw set*

*Monday 12 September 1977*

*Martin and Sheena first (rehearsal) performance. Quite good, very hopeful really. Spent 8 p.m. till midnight perched up a ladder painting jigsaw pieces. Peter had worked right through the night and up to the next midnight.*

*Tuesday 13 September 1977*

*Went back to work in evening and stayed until 1 a.m. - left Peter there - having none of his youth and stamina.*

*Black Wednesday 14 September 1977*

*Martin and Sheena happily launched. Peter blows his top at me then at Ray and storms out because of lack of interest*



*and support over tape. I try and explain to Ray and only make matters worse by raking up ancient sores right back to 'Humbug' at John Paxton. Joan has screaming hysterics and we all have a jolly good time.*

*Friday 23 September 1977*

*At 11.15 am today we actually began a sort of run-through of SG. No hint of when we'll rehearse the Circus!*



**Peter and Steve with some St George characters.**

*Sunday 25 September 1977*

*Due to leave for Chesham at 2 p.m. - we eventually went home from work at 3.15 a.m. Monday! Had four hours sleep and off!*

*Monday 26 September 1977*

*SG first performance. Ray must have loathed it for he burst into tears not long after. Took us out for a meal. Digs awful £4!!!! and NO washbasin or central heating and a 15p charge for a bath!*

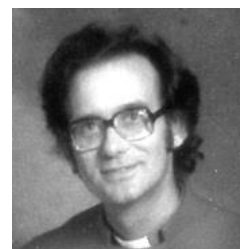
Mention of the digs that were sometimes so awful reminds Steve of the parts of those touring days that he would never want to re-live. "We had to work around where there was cheap accommodation, sometimes staying with parents. The touring allowance was never realistic and there was no incentive for us to go away from our home base. The allowance did once go up to £7 a day and we rented a house in Southport. In Edinburgh, on the other hand, accommodation was so expensive that we had to eat in Spud-u-Like for a week. I am never going to do that again." Despite the hardships, Steve Lee and Peter Franklin remain grateful for the opportunities that working with the DaSilva company gave them. "We were both totally committed to the projects and happy to work right through the night on three different productions. The shows we toured were our babies; Ray let us get on with it."

## **The Norwich Puppet Theatre (1978-1986)**

By 1978, the DaSilvas had reconstituted themselves as a non-profit-distributing company, registered as a charity. The external board of management included Patrick Boyd Maunsell, Director of the Key Theatre Peterborough; John Boylan, County Drama Adviser for Cambridgeshire; The Rev David Ford of St James Cambridge; William Godfrey, solicitor in Huntingdon and Ian Watson, Director of the South West Arts Association. However, despite having jumped through the latest bureaucratic hoops, the company was still not eligible for Arts Council funding because by now the policy was only to support building-based companies.

The prospect of a theatre dedicated to puppetry comparable to some that Ray and Joan had seen in Europe appeared to be an unattainable dream. In such a building they would be able to create a magical atmosphere and to control an environment specifically suitable for their work. No longer would they have to put up with venues where a decent grey-out had been promised only to find that the window curtains had inadvertently been sent to the cleaners on the day of the performance. It would also mean that the amount of time spent travelling to far-flung unsuitable venues could be put to better use, and they would still do limited touring but only to places they chose: *"What a dream!"* says Ray now.

Although David Ford had suggested a move to Norwich as early as 1969, it was a similar suggestion from Norwich Theatre Royal's Dick Condon in 1974, and his mention of the use of a redundant church as a possible theatre building, that really started off discussions.



**Rev David Ford**

When Ray and Joan were again performing in Norwich in 1977 they took the opportunity to see how feasible the idea might be. Dick Condon introduced them to Rowan Hare, chair of the Norwich Historic Churches Trust, who drove them around Norwich on a conducted tour of several available unused churches. Norwich has more pre-

Reformation churches than London, Bristol and York put together, far too many for the Church to keep up. They had been passed over into the care of the city council and the Historic Churches Trust had been given the job of finding new uses for them. As Ray remembers, *"We looked at St. Swithins which later became an Arts Centre, St. Saviours which later became a badminton court and others. But it was while driving round the inner ring road over the hill of the flyover on the North side of the city that St James' rose dramatically into view. It looked so inviting, easily accessible from the ring road, a huge car-park nearby and just a few minutes' walk from the Norman cathedral and the city centre."* The dream was turning into a reality. Although many windows were broken on the south side, the place covered in rubbish with remnants of its previous use



Rowan Hare, Ray,  
Patrick Boyd Maunsell

as a night shelter, it was immediately obvious that it was exactly the right size and, says Joan, *"It had a nice homely atmosphere"*. A meeting was set up between the Trust looking after the churches and Patrick Boyd Maunsell, then Chairman of the DaSilva Puppet Theatre.

The process of getting the church converted to a puppet theatre was a long and expensive one, and there were several points at which it looked as though the whole enterprise might fall through. A feasibility committee was set up with local people and started meeting in 1978. Ray and Joan set to work cleaning out St James', removing leaves, cobwebs and the remains of the night shelter. Contacts were made with local schools, an exhibition was set up in the building and performances were given in this temporary space to invited audiences consisting of city and county councillors, heads of schools and industries, representatives of local professional organisations, in fact anyone the committee felt had influence. Every night for a week Ray and Joan presented *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Marionette Cabaret* to a wonderful reception which was

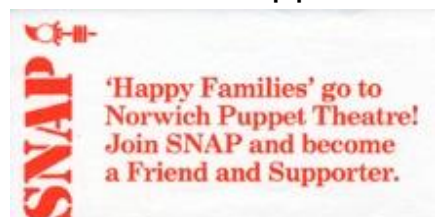


Tony Ede

followed by an enthusiastic address by Tony Ede, the committee chairman. He talked about a puppet theatre being the jewel in the crown of Norwich just as in Salzburg, he talked about the company and repertoire and pointed out that they had just seen two items presented by two people, and just imagine the effect of a company of puppeteers on a stage filling the whole chancel area. Within two weeks of these show-case performances an anonymous donor gave the first £1,000 and there were already promised gifts totalling £15,000. With this overwhelming indication of support the Board of DaSilva Puppet Theatre had no option but to agree to follow Ray and Joan's dream, and shortly afterwards the registered name of the charity was changed to Norwich Puppet Theatre. Ray and Joan moved to Norwich in September, the rest of the company remaining at Godmanchester, and the feasibility committee turned itself into the Norwich Puppet Theatre steering committee consisting of Ann Brown, Jeremy Brown, Tony Cooper, Tony Ede (chair), Ann Farrant, Peter Gage, John Snape, Rosemary Sewell, Arthur Paxton, Linde Katritzky, Joan DaSilva, Ray DaSilva, Peter Salt, and Bettina Smallpeice..

The move from Godmanchester to Norwich took place over a period of months. Once a week Ray would drive back to see how the company was getting on and, using the 19ft theatre trailer, take a load of scenery back to Norwich where it was stored in yet another empty church there. On the final load the trailer was so full that a number of puppets not required at the time were left behind in one of the outbuildings where Nik used to play with his friends, including the large octopus from *Treasure Island*, and on the assumption that the local children would find them.

Peter Codling was appointed as architect and a supporters club (SNAP) was formed, and working parties removed wooden floors, knocked out a chimney and laid floor tiles. SNAP was named after a processional dragon puppet





in Norwich Museum used in previous centuries at mayor-making ceremonies. Actually there were two dragons as there was also a rival produced by the citizens of Pockthorpe, the Norwich area where St James' Church was situated. Much of the conversion work was done by unemployed youngsters under the Youth Opportunities Programme. The Manpower Services Commission paid for three supervisors and 14 youngsters to work on the project for 40 weeks. They earned the motto "*Give us the job and we'll finish the tools*", after Ray arrived one morning to find a dozen trowels stuck fast in a barrow-load of cement from the day before. Much church history came to light during the process, including a rood staircase which had been lost for hundreds of years and some medieval wall paintings.



Steve Lee designed the first logo for the theatre. The head was always seen to be the 'o' in Norwich. Ray later added the marotte's hat and removed the nose. Not everyone approved of Steve's design, however, as his diary recorded.



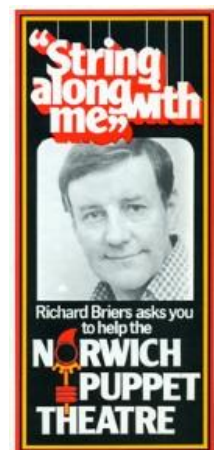
*Wednesday 18 October 1978*

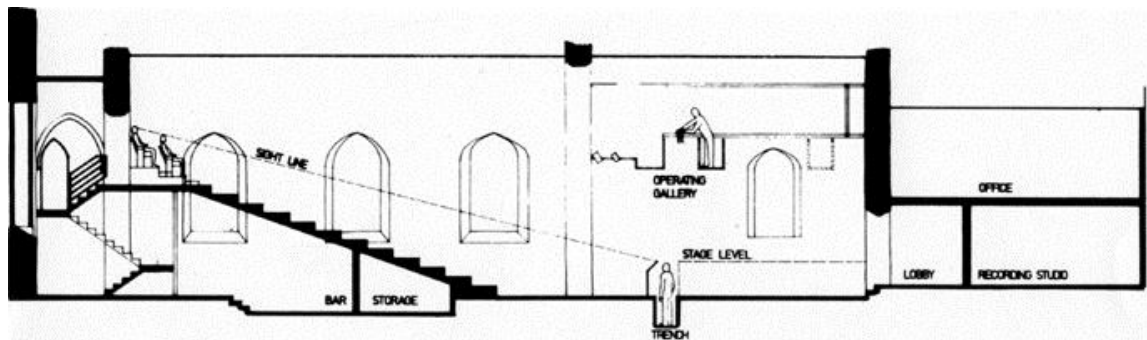
*Worked on logo for Norwich Theatre - I'm quite pleased with it but Ray, as usual, not ecstatic.*

*Thursday 5 April 1979*

*Saw Tim Bartlett re NPT logo - he and his firm show the first animosity I've seen to NPT because they feel they've been conned into providing professional services free.*

A fund-raising leaflet, with a message from Richard Briers (appearing in the Theatre Royal pantomime), was issued and much publicity continued to be generated. A local school held a spell-in and raised the money for a theatre flag!





The raked auditorium built for the theatre could seat 200 and the stage was planned to be suitable for live actors and a variety of types of puppet. The operators' bridge can be tracked backwards and forwards, a unique facility in the isometric? UK. It can also be split into two sections, allowing marionettes to make centre entrances and exits – and it is height adjustable to allow for visiting companies and their different string lengths. The stage floor was made of height-adjustable trolleys, and a trench allowed rod puppet operation. A movable proscenium was also included.

The purchase of proper tip-up seats for the theatre at £40 each was way beyond what could be afforded. The story of how the theatre was eventually furnished is probably the best example of the way the local community was involved in the fund-raising, and the enterprise of Tony Ede, the chair of steering committee. Following an advertisement in *The Stage*, Ray purchased 170 second-hand theatre seats at £1 each from a cinema in Crewe and donated them to the cause. The ironmongery was sound, but the seats themselves were in dire condition with holes and cigarette marks in the fabric. Tony Ede was a buyer for Harmers, a local clothing manufacturer, and through various contacts he discovered a firm which made fabric for bus seats. Apparently they had a large delivery of a high quality moquette returned from Germany because of a repeating flaw in the pattern and were selling it off cheaply. Instead of placing an order, Tony then went to Taskers, a local furniture store just round the corner from the theatre, and persuaded them to purchase it as their donation to the building of the theatre. Then through another Manpower Services Scheme the services of a professional upholsterer and two trainees were obtained. They refurbished them all

plus six large benches for the front of the auditorium. When the seats came to be assembled it was discovered that they were short of special supports for the ends of rows. There were plenty of supports for between two seats but these were unsuitable for ends because of nasty projections for attaching the seat bottoms. Undaunted, Ray wondered if they could make some wooden ones thinking that they would look appropriately like pew ends. Tony remembered that some beech trees had been felled several years



Before and After

previously at a local school and that they were still in storage there. He got the school to donate sufficient timber and persuaded North Heigham sawmill to cut it up for free into the right sizes. The carpentry shop of neighbouring Jarrolds Printing then did all the finishing, and a gang from another local school assembled the seats and screwed them to the floor. So the whole exercise cost nothing in money and had intimately involved the local community – it was truly their theatre. At the end of this, in true theatrical tradition, the seats were offered for sponsorship at £25 each with a local engraving firm supplying all the brass plates free. Ray is clear about the great contribution made by Tony to the setting up of the theatre. *"We owe a great debt to Tony Ede, as well as to the rest of the Steering Committee, and his death just before the theatre opened was a tragic loss not only to the Norwich Puppet Theatre but to several other local enterprises in which he was involved."*

By 1979 more work was going ahead and the DaSilva Company completed the move from Godmanchester to offices and studio at the old Pockthorpe Brewery. Press coverage at the time showed a concocted photograph of Steve and Peter arriving by train at Norwich station with armfuls of puppets leaning out of carriage windows, and



being greeted by local schoolchildren. British Rail would only agree to the exercise if the puppeteers actually travelled; which they did by purchasing tickets from the nearest station down the line: the puppets travelled free.

In the meantime, the touring schedule continued, with new performers taking over well-established productions like *Snowwhite*. In September 1979, the company and supporters arranged a silver wedding party for Ray and Joan. They secretly invited their family and friends from Wisbech and even arranged a phone call from Ray's mother, now in Australia. *"It was a wonderful occasion, Joan and I were quite overwhelmed by the kind thought and impressed by the arrangements they had made"*. By June 1980, Ray and



**Humbug: Lamplighter, Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit, Cratchit family Ghost of Christmas Present, Scrooge**

Joan were able to write to SNAP members announcing the first performance at Norwich Puppet Theatre – *Humbug Humbug* on 1<sup>st</sup> December – and the Arts Council had also given £5,000 towards the project – a very significant event given their previous attitude to puppet theatre. Joan suggested that they ought to frame it and hang it in the foyer. *Humbug*

*Humbug* was supported by *A Mexican Nativity* and a *Marionette Cabaret*. After the gala civic opening, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1980 the show opened next day to the public, and was then followed by *Pinocchio* after Christmas.

Meanwhile, fund-raising continued, so that the studios and workshops planned for the site alongside the church could be completed. Within a year of the opening, the *Norwich Mercury* carried a front page story stating that *"Norwich Puppet Theatre – one year old this month – is in difficulties. And if city people do not support it the theatre could fold."*



However, a newsletter to supporters made it clear that things were not quite that bad, although money was certainly tight and there were staff reductions. A year later, and the second birthday saw similar stories, with £50,000 still to be raised. A number of donations flooded in including an unsolicited £1000 from the Henson Foundation who had heard about the enterprise. This acknowledgement of the importance of what they were doing meant more to Ray and Joan than the money. They had met Jim Henson a few years before at the Elstree Studio where *The Muppet Show* was being recorded. A surprise visitor to the theatre was Marcel Marceau accompanied by Hubert Mitchell, Norfolk drama officer. In a report to the press afterwards, Marceau said that he was particularly impressed with the amount of space available at the theatre and by the quality of the DaSilva's work. *"It is a work of taste, I believe that quality and taste are vital for the success of any form of the arts."*



**June Hutton**

One of those with clearest memories of the NPT years is June Hutton, who was Secretary to Ray DaSilva and stayed on at the theatre for more than 21 years. *"I didn't know about the theatre but once I got through the door and into the foyer, I just wanted the job and to work there. It looked an unusual and intriguing place with fairy story characters looking down on visitors and peeking from every corner – and the atmosphere was so warm and welcoming."*

June got the job less than a year after the theatre opened and remembers that technology was more basic then, despite the excitements of a second-hand electric typewriter and a Gestetner duplicator. Her main memory of Ray is that he never stopped working and she doesn't recall Ray and Joan ever taking a holiday in the time they were at Norwich Puppet Theatre.

*"He was a workaholic. Joan would nearly always have to drive him to work from their home in Marsham so that he could start working from his seat, writing or reading"*

something up. Then Ray and Joan would do a day's work at the theatre, grab something to eat and then would drive, sometimes halfway across the county, two or three times a week to give talks to Women's Institutes. Ray was always in demand as a speaker because he took along a number of puppet characters. When we cut the talks to just one evening a week, people started trying to book him two years ahead! Joan was known for her cooking as well as her driving, and she made a huge Black Forest gateau for a Hansel and Gretel after-show party. Puppeteers are usually multi-talented so entertainment at parties could be anything from magic tricks, fire eating, juggling, singing, and clowning to any amount of unusual musical instruments. We had some great times."



Witch conjures up demons in Hansel & Gretel show

One newcomer working on *Snowwhite* was Michael Bayliss, a 16 year old who had first seen the production ten years before as a small child at Portsmouth Guildhall. By 1983, he found himself performing in the same production, much to his delight. It was not Michael's first contact with the company however. "I wrote to Ray as a child. He was always very forthcoming and thoughtful."



Alice in Wonderland Team:  
Valerie Ball Richard Marriott,  
Michael Bayliss, Sean King, Peter  
O'Rourke, Kim Bergsagel

It was no surprise then that Michael Bayliss, on purchasing his first ever copy of *The Stage* and seeing an advertisement for a puppeteer with DaSilva, decided to apply straightaway. The puppeteer was needed for the tour of *Alice in Wonderland* but to Michael's great disappointment Ray wrote back to say that he was too young, but he might wish to apply again later. However, a month later another letter arrived from Ray; it seemed that there was another vacancy, initially as ASM/Lighting and paid for by the YTS (Youth

Training Scheme) – and would Michael be interested? He certainly was – and the tour of *Alice* was followed by working at Norwich before setting off on the road again.



The production of *Alice in Wonderland* (the puppets from which were later used by Anglia Television for another version) was a complex one and used a live actor to play Alice. *"And that technical and complex set was my*

*downfall. We were resetting and a piece of scenery fell, a rope snapped and I fell into a stage trap."* Michael was concussed, nearly passed out and was kept in hospital for observation for a week. As he remembers, the trap was not the only hazard that DaSilva performers learnt to deal with: *"The dancing waters in Snowwhite could give you a nasty shock too."*

Michael's accident happened in Harlow, one of many touring venues he visited, but not his least favourite theatre. That accolade would go to Brent Town Hall, of which he has no good memories at all. *"The dressing rooms were broken into, kids threw chairs at the stage and someone stole the dormouse..."* He enjoyed some of the other tour dates though. *"Cambridge Corn Exchange was a nice venue, and Warrington Arts Festival was fun to play. The audiences appreciated Alice in Wonderland but it wasn't as much fun to play as Pinocchio or Hansel and Gretel."*



Michael was always disappointed that DaSilva didn't use live sound. *"To me it was always a bit like watching a film, even though there were five or six live performers. Recorded sound does rob the show of something."* Ray remembers that, during rehearsals, the soundtrack was at first a real slave-driver and usually the puppeteers

struggled for a while to keep up with the sound. However they very soon learnt to keep the action ahead of the sound and then in performance, with a live responsive audience, they were able to make the tape work for them and to respond visibly to audience reactions. Relying on tapes also meant that there were a few fraught incidents from time to time. Michael recalls: *"I once dropped a marionette onto*



**Snowwhite rehearsal in another church on a cold day Peter O'Rourke, Richard Marriott, Michael Bayliss and Joan.**

*the tape deck. It was a version of Alice with a long neck and it landed smack on one of the spools. We had to use the back-up tapes. I worked with Joan on Snowwhite and that was a huge amount of fun. There*

*were fireworks, dancing fountains and it was in a much more knockabout style. The smoke machine was very old though, and one time when we were using it at Norwich in a trench in the floor it leaked oil and turned the stage into a skating rink."* As a young beginner, there were other lessons to be learnt. *"We never usually did midweek morning shows but one morning the phone rang and I was told I was on in five minutes. It was a Wednesday morning and I ran from the hotel to the theatre; when I got there, Ray was ready to go on in my place."*

As a Youth Training Scheme trainee, Michael was on an even lower salary than the rest of the company, and by this time they all had to find their own places to stay on tour. *"We stayed in some very ropey places; we were often split up between two or three guest houses. In Thurrock we all stayed in one room above a fish shop. Bury St Edmunds was lovely though, proper theatrical digs: but the fumes from the brewery stunk the theatre out."* Sometimes there were people to meet on tour too; the Lewis Carroll Society came to one performance of *Alice in Wonderland*. The company was also kept busy with the badge machine on that tour, making





souvenirs to sell to the audience. *"I had a lovely time, especially working with Joan. On the Alice tour we had to get in an extra puppeteer and that caused some clashes – and there were liaisons among company members going on left, right and centre. But I was young and green then and I think a lot of it passed me by."*

Michael Bayliss spent 14 months working with the DaSilva company, and it is a time he looks back to fondly. Not all the performers felt the same way however, and the strains of attempting to set up Norwich and run the touring company were beginning to show. Steve Lee's diary over the Godmanchester/Norwich period gives some flavour of how high feelings were running, although he looks back now rather more charitably.

*Godmanchester:*

*Monday 17 October 1977*

*First two school shows with 'Saint George' in Cambridge. This necessitated 11 hours non-stop without lunch. A bloody chore and still have severe hand cramp at 11 p.m.*



*Thursday 10 November 1977*

*Ray is employing someone called Simon Spencer to perform S.G. with Martin Vernon.*

*Thursday 17 November 1977*

*Wakefield. Total audience this week 240 patrons, venue took about £96 and paid us £800! 'Looking forward to a return visit' - my eye!*

*Monday 21 November 1977*

*Assisted Ray and Joan with a 'Humbug' rehearsal.*

*Tuesday 22 November 1977*

*'Humbug' rehearsal in morning. Putrid. Board meeting (the first we attended) in the afternoon. Peter more vociferous and articulate than I - he certainly scored on points. My contribution minimal.*

*Friday 25 November 1977*

*Paid a bonus of £80 for additional SG work.*

*Monday 6 February 1978*

*Ray goes over 'Paper Tiger' storyline which I dislike -mainly because there seems to be little potential for puppetry! I'm meant to 'tidy up and develop' Ray's design.*

*Wednesday 8 February 1978*

*Board meeting in Cambridge. Hilarious afternoon listening to four moral, honest men talking about how to screw the Arts Council!*

*Sunday 14 May 1978*

*Drove to Norwich in readiness for three free shows tomorrow to try and stimulate interest in the St James' Church project.*

*Friday 7 July 1978*

*Peter and Ray in London recording 'Jack & Beanstalk' and 'Paper Tiger'.*



**Matsu**

*Tuesday 1 August 1978*

*Day spent on 'Paper Tiger' scroll. Ray working up north all week. He has done very little on PT and worked mainly on Norwich for months. PF and I know little about PT and what we know we dislike.*

*Saturday 21 October 1978*

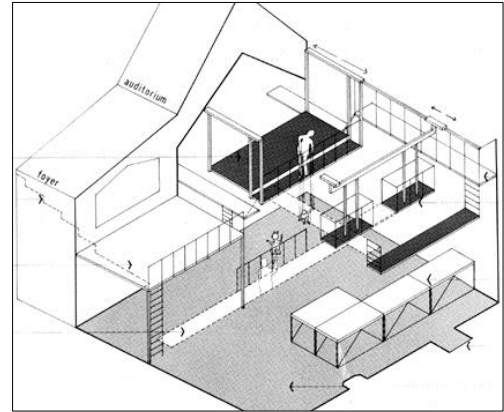
*Drove to Norwich. Saw round St James' and Tony (Ede) took us to see the Sainsbury Centre. Dinner with the Edes (Tony, Janet, Andrew, Joanna) and Peter and Rosemary Salt and Arthur Paxton.*

*Thursday 23 November 1978*

*Ray invited himself round for a meal. Talked about Green Room in Norwich etc. Next year's budgets show an increase of nearly 50% in salaries to £3400 - I'll believe it when I see it!*

*Tuesday 20 February 1979*

*All morning spent with Ray poring over Norwich plans. Ray had not realised that he & Joan are only in temporary building for 6 months whilst P & I are in it for 2 years!*



*Norwich:*

*Tuesday 6 March 1979*

*Our pay rise of £1000 is ratified so we'll now earn £3400 p. a. – fan-bloody-tastic.*

Steve Lee and Peter Franklin left the company one year later in April 1980, when financial difficulties caused the company to shed staff.

Jonathan Barclay was one of the local people who joined the Board of NPT and he later became Chair in the mid 1980s. He well remembers the financial difficulties in the early days and the growing realisation that running a permanent company and touring at the same time just didn't seem to be financially sustainable. The only way to cut staff costs was to limit performances, and Jonathan is convinced that if cuts had not been made in the early years, the Theatre would have collapsed. He always worried that running the building was taking up too much of Ray's time, and wasn't making best use of his talents.



**"A letter for the Duchess"**

The financial problems reached crisis point at one time and a quorum of the Board wanted to sell control of everything to Norwich Theatre Royal, but Ray and the rest of the staff were very opposed to this idea. To save the day, Ray bought personally the *Alice in Wonderland* production and then leased it back to the theatre for a percentage of the box office receipts. A No 1 tour had been booked and Ray more than got his money back. He later sold the show to Richard Gill, director of Polka Theatre,

Wimbledon, and the proceeds funded his living costs for some time. *Alice in Wonderland* took four years to create,



"Silence in Court"

and received many appreciative reviews, with most agreeing that the spirit of Tenniel had been well re-created. Having been responsible for making costumes for the company over the years, Joan found the ones for this production

the most challenging, but very rewarding. After its opening at Norwich, it toured far and wide and was well received. The Gala opening of *Alice in Wonderland* at Norwich saw an audience in evening dress with Ray and Joan in the front row with Lord Mayor and the local MP. Ray remembers that a few things fell down during the performance but people were kind about it and said they didn't notice.

Jan King, who had worked for the DaSilva Company in the Godmanchester days, came back at Norwich to help revive *Pinocchio* and then became production designer for *Alice in Wonderland*. He remembers that *Pinocchio* had to be pared down to fit into NPT, and it took almost three weeks rehearsal to get it ready for the smaller space. Jan remembers the show as running quite smoothly after that, despite his misgivings that sections such as the dance with the toy soldiers seemed like padding. The audience always enjoyed the fish swallowing Pinocchio and the Italian chef with the cat and the fox, but there was one effect that he always thought was technically very effective and well-lit.



Italian Chef and Waiter

*"Pinocchio looked as if he was being carved out of wood by Geppetto. The string puppet Pinocchio was actually set inside a square box looking like a block of wood. As*



*Geppetto chipped away, the character was gradually revealed."*

The saga of getting the building complete continued for many years. In 1983, Norfolk County Council offered £10,000 over three years so that the roof of the studio could be completed. By 1983, the DaSilva puppets were celebrating their twenty-first anniversary, and a long article by Millie Comesford appeared in *Animations*. She described the DaSilvas as being *"in the great travelling showmen tradition of pre-1914 Professor Skupa or even Podrecca who in the 1950s was still producing large scale marionette variety at La Scala..."* and then went on to deliver a considered criticism of Arts Council policy. The article also considered the high costs of having a permanent base, and the alternative path taken by John Blundall at the Midlands Arts Centre, who had based himself within an existing Arts Centre. *"Meanwhile foolhardy companies, like DaSilva, are fighting for their lives through lack of sensible funding... The achievement of Norwich Puppet Theatre cannot be underestimated and the DaSilvas are perhaps best summed up as consummate puppet impresarios."*

At this time Ray and Joan were still performing at venues around the country and on one occasion just happened to be passing through Godmanchester, so out of curiosity they decided to take a look at their old HQ which had been taken over by a firm which made loud-speakers. *"We discovered the playground full of large holes and trenches; an archaeological dig was underway prior to the site being used for building old people's homes. We peeped inside the outbuilding where Nik used to play and to our amazement the Treasure Island octopus left there a few years previously was still there and in good condition. So we stole it, intending to use it in the new version of the show for the theatre - this time with puppet animals (including pi-rats) instead of puppet humans."*



Nik, Joan, Ray with PiRats

1984 came along, and the roof was on the Octagon and the building was wired. At last, the space was under cover and could be used, at least in a basic way. *Snowwhite*



was still touring but had been built in 1966 and was getting near the end of its life. Following the publication of a report that seemed to suggest the possibility of support for puppet theatre, a direct approach was made to the Arts Council. At this time, and thanks to a NPT Board member who worked at Anglia Television, the *Highway* religious television programme with Harry Secombe came to the theatre and included a puppet setting of the 150th Psalm – the one with trumpets, cymbals and dances. The performance was repeated shortly afterwards at a special Holy Communion service held in the theatre with a choir from the cathedral.

The television version of *Alice in Wonderland* in 1985 is remembered well by theatre secretary June Hutton. Anglia used the puppets from the DaSilva production to make a five-part adaptation which was shown nationwide. More than fifty rod puppets and marionettes were used, together with the voices of performers such as Michael Bentine,



Richard, Joan, Ray, Valerie, Joe Gladwin, Kim, Peter O'Rourke

Bernard Cribbins, Leslie Crowther, Windsor Davies, Paul Eddington, Leonard Rossiter, Eleanor Bron and Eric Sykes. Puppeteers had to wear 'chromakey' blue costumes for the television cameras, and it must have been a

memorable time for them. June, however, remembers the stage version of *Alice in Wonderland*, and for a rather different reason.

*"The puppeteer who played the live Alice was staying with me. We happened to be the same dress size and one night I borrowed her costume and wig to go to a fancy dress party.*



Valerie as Alice

*The next day I returned it early and I don't think Ray ever found out anything about this little escapade."*

Also in 1985, *Peter and the Wolf* was performed at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in a shared engagement with the London Sinfonietta conducted by Simon Rattle, and sections of the ILEA orchestra. In the same year, the Octagon finally opened (although there was still some work to be done and funds to be raised). In a development that may have come as a surprise to many supporters, this was also the year when Ray and Joan announced their intention to move on from Norwich Puppet Theatre the following year. *"We had found ourselves in an awkward position. The word reached us that other puppeteers had also been applying to the Arts Council for grants only to be told that puppets were regarded, at that time, as 'commercial' pointing to the DaSilvas as an example. With this big commercial label it was obvious that we were never to receive revenue funding and it would be better to get a new artistic director who might be looked upon more kindly. Also by that time we were having puppets for breakfast as well as for dinner and tea."*

As they said in their letter announcing this, *"the time and energies expended in arguing the case for an educational wing and workshop adjacent to the theatre, raising the funds for it and getting it built, has left us not only rather exhausted, but also somewhat behind the times... has not allowed us any free time to keep an eye on artistic and technical developments elsewhere in order to keep abreast with current international theatre thinking..."* The Eastern Evening News leader reacted with alarm. *"So it was with sinking hearts that we learned this week of the decision by Ray and Joan DaSilva, creators and leaders of the theatre, that enough is enough. The all-powerful Arts Council does not deem them worthy of more than token support and they are sick and tired of trying to persuade it otherwise. They will leave the theatre in a healthy and dynamic state, both artistically and financially, but we*

8 Eastern Evening News, Saturday, Oc

## Eastern Evening News

Saturday, October 26, 1985

### DaSilvas a hard act to follow

THERE are some outsiders for whom the name Norwich is synonymous not with the Cathedral, or even the Mustard Shop, but with the Puppet Theatre. They see our city as one of the few in the country — if not the world — which takes seriously this most ancient kind of drama, so often relegated to the realms of childhood.

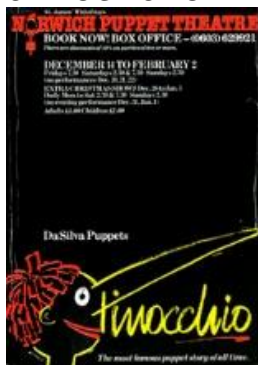
Go to Russia or Poland and you can see puppets used not as trivial seaside entertainment, but as an important part of life, with all the significance of a true art-form. And so it seems in Norwich.

*cannot suppress the fear that without their inspiration, expertise and direction, something vital will go out of it."*

The weather was still capable of causing problems even to a company which spent some of its life in a permanent building. At the Royal Norfolk Show in the same year, Ray and Joan performed puppet demonstrations every half hour in a small marquee. As June Hutton remembers, "*They were constantly crowded out and proved very popular with visitors taking shelter from the heavy rain which fell for most of the day. The marquee got very warm and uncomfortable, steam started rising from the damp bodies and the grass under foot turned into such thick mud making it nearly impossible to move. But the show went on of course...*"



The weather didn't improve much for the rest of that summer, so it was quite appropriate that the main production at NPT was Noah's Ark – which got full houses. As June points out, "*The last thing an indoor attraction in Norfolk needs is nice sunny school holidays when everyone heads for the beaches. We were always twice as busy when it was cloudy and wet!*" Later that year the theatre itself was flooded when the outside drains were unable to cope with an enormous cloud-burst. The confectionery store under the auditorium was flooded and when the water continued to rise, approaching the electrical boxes in the same area, the Fire Brigade were called. Ray vividly recalls a flotilla of Kit-Kats sailing down the foyer. The last show



with the DaSilvas in charge was *Pinocchio* for the 1985-86 Christmas season, which broke all previous box-office records at the theatre. After having directed this company together with the touring groups for another six years, Ray and Joan left the Norwich Puppet Theatre in 1986, leaving the theatre to continue to merit its international reputation under its later directors Barrie Smith and Luis Boy.



## Travels, books and semi-retirement (1986-2006)

After leaving the Norwich Puppet Theatre to stand on its own feet, Ray then began to concentrate on his other preoccupation: books on puppet theatre. This led to the beginning of the first second-hand book service for puppeteers. This subsequently expanded to include new books and later the publishing of new titles. The book activities led to many new contacts and developing friendships, including Pat Minnaugh, a researcher from the Fine Arts Department of Barry University, Florida. Sadly, Pat died in a road accident after one of her trips to the UK to consult Ray and his book collection. At the same time, Ray and Joan were touring their smaller shows to several countries, and helping to arrange other performances at puppet weekends at Marsham. Ray remembers one near disaster that involved a French marionette company. *"Years ago in our heyday, we used to find that despite sending detailed diagrams and instructions covering every contingency we could think of, things would still occasionally go astray. I therefore vowed to myself when I opened Norwich Puppet Theatre that I would never do the same to any of the visiting companies, and I didn't... until now!"* When the



Puppeteers Weekend at Marsham

company arrived to do an evening performance, Ray found there was no way it would fit inside the performing space, and it had to be moved outside. However, the sight lines were better there, it stayed warm and dry, and the audience were happy. During the performance, however a complaint came from a local curate who had a group of children trying to sleep in the neighbouring Diocesan Conference Centre, but it was all sorted out amicably. Similar things happened to the DaSilvas of course: at the 1991 Cheltenham Literature Festival no-one had read the requirements, as usual, and nothing was ready. The staff

were unhelpful and there was no proper blackout. Ray and Joan under pressure from the caretakers had to get out very fast, and ended up with everything bundled in the wrong order onto the Town Hall steps where Ray was obliged to finish changing from his working clothes.

Ray also took part, with Henryk Jurkowski and Margareta Niculescu, as a tutor at a puppeteers' master class held in Norwich. He was recommended for the position by Barry



Smith, who was by now running NPT. Ray and Joan also performed the Fanfare at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London as part of the Art of the Puppet event and also, for the first time, appeared in someone else's show. This happened when Ray

played the part of the Boy in *Master Peter's Puppet Show* at the QEH, directed by Barry Smith and with Simon Rattle as Musical Director.

International travelling with puppets presented its own incidents. Ray and Joan were once stopped by suspicious customs officers in Belgium and they had to reassure them that the contents of mysterious bags were what they said they were by taking two gendarme marionettes out and walking them up and down the customs shed. Coming back from Barcelona, sniffer dogs got very interested in the van, but perhaps the most difficult experience was at Heathrow on the way to Palestine with *Peter and the Wolf*. Flying with El Al included very strict security even then. The set included a thin metal frame for the tree blocks, and this was carried in special box they called the coffin. They also put the 5ft Grandfather puppet inside. Ray and Joan could not see what was happening as their cases went through the x-ray machine but there was a scream and someone said "*There's a hand.*"

*"It was Grandfather's hand. I got summoned and asked what was in the box and I said Grandfather but they didn't laugh. They insisted that we opened everything up although*

*it was well screwed down; we only made the plane with ten minutes to spare."*

Ray remembers that the whole Palestine trip was tense, with some travel involving UN vehicles and having to change vehicles at the Israel/Palestine border on the way to Gaza. The Palestinians were very poor but extremely generous to Ray and Joan.



After having a trailer made, Ray and Joan also toured with *Humbug*; this show was eventually passed on to the Purves Puppet at Biggar Little Theatre in Scotland. In a case of taking coals to Newcastle, they also took Peter and the Wolf to Moscow, just after the huge staff reductions at the famous Moscow State Puppet Theatre. The Russian puppeteers who booked the show could not understand how it could possibly be presented by only two people, and one was most concerned that the wolf appeared to have no



**Joan & Ray take the wolf walkies in Japanese street festival.**

legs, something which had never troubled anybody else before. A six week Japanese tour with the same show was rebooked for the next year, so the show was left there in the knowledge that they had another version at home. Their Japanese hosts asked for recommendations of other British companies doing material with little or no language, and Ray recommended Steve & Peter's *Coppelia*. Steve and Peter were there the following year with Ray and Joan. While they were in Japan, Ray and Joan went to many other shows and attended the Congress of Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA). In 1987 they started work on a show solely with shadow puppets, *The Cat that Walked by Himself*, which was designed by Anna Welbourne. After having seen many highly coloured Japanese shows,



Ray preferred to do a show almost entirely in black, white and grey silhouette with occasional pieces in pale pastel, believing it to be more attractive.

*"We had never done a complete shadow show and wondered what our audiences would think of it. One child said it was like black and white television! Nevertheless I think that show was among the best shows we produced primarily because of Anna's designs."*



While the DaSilvas were performing at NPT one autumn half-term their trailer was stolen from outside their home. Luckily, two other shows had been unpacked from the trailer, but the stage for *The Cat that Walked by Himself* was lost forever along with the trailer. Unfortunately, Ray's efforts to make the show as minimal as possible had involved much cutting down and condensing, with the result that when the stage was stolen there were no drawings. *"However, we had the puppets the lights and the carpet with a cut-out the exact size of the stage floor, so we had a ground plan. I re-built it and added more refinements just in time for a performance in Philadelphia."*

A bout of puppeteer's elbow in 1989 was followed by a trip to New Zealand the following year at a Youth Festival to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, where the only other English representative was Jon Pertwee. *"We did Peter and the Wolf with the Christchurch Youth Orchestra for four nights. It was the only time in our lives when we were applauded when we walked on – as concert audiences were used to doing."*



In 1991 they received the biggest payment of his career: £11,630 for a single performance at the Warwick Festival. Despite the fact that the cheque had been signed by three people, it was of course a mistake... Ray saw quite a few



changes in how payments were made during his career, and reflects now on the system that was in place at the touring theatres.

*"We always liked to get our money at the time of the performance. In theatres we were usually on a guaranteed fee or a box-office percentage, whichever was greater. At the time when most theatres were privately-owned the Front of House Manager would come on stage with an envelope in the interval and ask for our Touring Manager. This would contain detailed returns for how many were in the theatre, giving you time to check if you wanted to – we never did. At the end of the week, all the returns were added up and you got your money. When local government reorganisation and civic ownership came along all the returns had to go to town hall to be audited. Then we got the money a month later!"*

Most of the productions found new homes as Ray and Joan cut down on performing. Norwich Puppet Theatre purchased *Paper Tiger* and performed the production during Barrie Smith's time as Director, although Luis Boys' more recent production of the same name is completely different. Presto Puppets (Nigel and Robin) bought *Pinocchio*, and Puppeteers Company (Steve and Peter) acquired *Peter and the Wolf* and *St George and the Dragon*. One version of *Jack and the Beanstalk* went to Watermouth Castle in Cornwall as a tourist attraction, and Ray directed rehearsals; the other version went to Purves Puppets at Biggar. There must be very few other UK companies that have sold complete shows in this way. All of this means that many DaSilva puppets are still performing, with the last DaSilva show, *The Cat that Walked by Himself*, now at Cardiff in the hands of Jane Phillips.

Many performers continued their careers with Ray and Joan before moving on to other things. The Stage and Touring Company Manager at Norwich, Sean King, later became Manager of the Civic Theatre, Barnsley. Sometimes people moved on to a similar job but working with people rather than puppets: Peter Bentley, Lighting Designer for DaSilva,

later took up the same position at the Harlow Playhouse, and Jolyon Coombs became stage manager at the Octagon Theatre, Bolton.

When he looks back now, Ray remembers – as does Joan – all kinds of performances at all sorts of venues and times: the Circus in a farm-yard, Jack and the Beanstalk at 1am at a Magician's Convention and Punch and Judy mid-Atlantic: but nothing was as strange as their visit to a puppet festival in Ghent, Belgium. As a result of sponsorship deals the venues were rather unusual. Ray takes up the story:



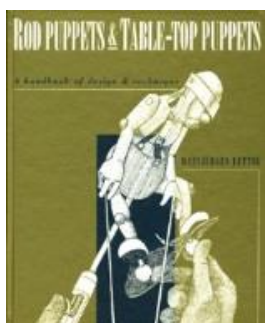
Outdoor show at Ghent

*"Our first venue was the huge marble-tiled hall of a large bank on a Sunday afternoon. The scanty audience seemed to enjoy what they saw but the sound was just awful because it echoed and reverberated several times from all the hard surfaces. The second venue was almost surreal. We were in the dining room of a large hotel at 8am. The ceiling was low; our staging specifications had been ignored and we needed to be able to stand on our table high stage. The performance would have been impossible had we not discovered that the large polystyrene ceiling tiles were loosely fitted in a metal framework with a large void above. We removed some of the tiles and performed with our head and shoulders above the ceiling during a buffet-style breakfast, while a stream of guests walked past the front of the stage with their orange juice and toast."*

The DaSilvas continued to work as puppeteers and occasionally presented performances, although as Ray explains, it was a very different scale. *"I made a deliberate decision to quit professional work while the going was good and we sold the van. I have seen a number of my dear friends, older than I, whose work I have applauded in the past, who because of old age and infirmity were not later able to perform as well, and then the applause they received seemed like sympathy. I don't criticise them for*

*doing what they do, but that road is not for me. Joan and I owe a huge debt to the puppets and I don't want to let them down with a second-rate performance, or be remembered for one. It may be selfish, but I prefer to leave audiences wanting more. Contrary to that, I do now enjoy being an amateur, still dreaming up ideas, dabbling in the workshop and occasionally performing for puppeteers."*

Ray has also pondered the question of recorded soundtracks and whether he would approach that area differently if he were starting out now. *"I would have liked to have used live voices and music in the more intimate performances for shows but even then it was impractical and too costly. To employ Japanese actors for Paper Tiger (because some of the speech was in Japanese language) and musicians who played traditional Japanese instruments never crossed our minds. On a few special occasions we were able to perform Peter and the Wolf with a live narrator and orchestra, but by using recorded sound we were able to take that show to many hundreds of schools. Today with new technologies, visible performers, small scale shows, grants for puppetry, and the need to offer a contrasting experience to the computerised imagery of cinema and television, I would most likely produce simple shows with live sound."*



For much of this period Ray ran a book agency selling new and second-hand puppet books as well as publishing a number of volumes. One huge book 'Rod Puppets & Table-Top Puppets' by Hansjürgen Fettig originally sold in 1997 for £27.60; the 1000 copies sold out in three years and now, in 2006, second-hand copies are sought after by puppeteers and fetch £60 or more. It was an enormous undertaking, and much credit is due to Rene Baker who translated the work from German into English and did much of the layout. As part of his phased retirement Ray has now chosen to concentrate on second-hand books relating to puppetry. This means that the DaSilvas continue to have a key role in providing information for their professional colleagues.



They continue to own a large reference library and archive relating to most aspects of puppet theatre in many languages. It is a personal collection but is available by appointment to puppeteers. Ray takes an active role in the British puppetry organisations. He was co-founder and later vice-chair of the Puppet Centre Trust, General Secretary and then Chair of British UNIMA, Librarian and Council Member of the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild, and co-founder of PuppeteersEast. In the 1980's he organised Puppeteers' Weekends in Norfolk, mini festivals which were even attended by foreign performers. He initiated the Puppeteers Support Organisations Group that later evolved into PuppeteersUK, a forum for representatives from all the regional and national puppetry organisations. Until recently Ray has been Secretary of PUK and is still responsible for editing its weekly email newsletter and the organisation's website.

In 2004, Ray DaSilva was made a Member of Honour of UNIMA at the Croatia Congress. In that year, Ray and Joan also celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary, which they spent in Gillingham, Dorset where they now live. Ray is now in his third retirement, and the last words in this story should perhaps come from him.



**Puppeteers at a Marsham weekend**

*"Perhaps the most satisfying times were the Marsham Weekends when we brought together about a hundred puppeteers from the various disparate puppet organisations into the same social event (such a thing was unheard of in the 1980s). The most rewarding thing is to be able to see today many of the wonderful people who trained and learnt their puppetry whilst in our employment and now doing their own shows in various parts of the world. We are considerably indebted to them – without their input, the company could not have achieved what it did."*



## **Production Listing**

### **Canada**

1955 Punch and Judy  
1958 The Lamb was sure to go  
1958 The Summoning of Everyman (not performed)  
1958 The Toymaker  
1958 Jungle Drums  
1959 Little Bunny Redhood  
1960 Winter Wonderland  
1960 Marionette Cabaret  
1961 The Haunted Belfry

### **Wisbech**

1963 Circus Caprice  
1963 The Legend of the Thunderbird  
1964 Aladdin  
1964 How the Jellyfish lost his bones  
1965 The Small One  
1966 Jack and the Beanstalk  
1967 Snowwhite and the Seven Musical Dwarfs  
1967 Rumpelstiltskin  
1968 The Magic Lamp

### **Godmanchester**

1969 Hood in the Wood  
1970 Funtasia  
1970 Puss in Boots  
1971 DaSilva Treasure Island  
1971 Peter and the Wolf  
1973 Pinocchio  
1974 Hansel and Gretel  
1974 Humbug  
1974 Kaleidoscope  
1975 Let's Go with Little Joe  
1977 St George and the Dragon  
1977 Figurs and Fums  
1978 Paper Tiger

### **Norwich**

1982 Alice in Wonderland  
1983 Snowwhite v.2  
1983 Legend of Thunderbird v.2  
1984 Treasure Island v.2  
1985 James and the Giant Peach  
1985 Pinocchio v.2

### **Marsham**

1991 The Cat that Walked by Himself

## **Performer Listing**

Naomi Adler  
Ian Allen  
Justin Barnes  
Sheena Barnett  
Michael Bayliss  
Vyvyan Bennett  
Peter Bentley  
Kim Bergsagel  
Alison Biggs  
Linton Bocock  
Chris Bradley  
Martin Bridle  
Ron Brown  
Ted Callow  
Linda Chapple aka Rosmary  
Franklyn  
Martin Clifford  
Jolyon Coombs  
Lindsay Cousens  
Janet Cratchley  
Ben Darlow  
Richard Drabble  
Bill Fawcett  
Peter Franklin  
Trevor Freeborn  
Dave Gardiner  
Nicholas Gautama  
Judy Hall  
Martin Haradine  
Lucy Hawthorne  
Nick Hirst  
Gordon Hunter  
Jacqueline Ilett  
Michael Jefford  
Gordon Jenkins  
Jan King  
Sean King  
Andrew Knowles Harrison  
Robin Lawrence  
Nigel Lawton  
Graham Lee  
Steve Lee  
Sue Leech  
Cathy Lowe  
Stephen Lowe

Rory Lister  
Daniel MacLennan  
Robert Mack  
Sean Manners  
Richard Marriott  
Rachel McKay  
Elizabeth McKenna aka Mandy  
Jaquarello  
John Murdoch  
Stephen Mottram  
Peter O'Rourke  
Peter Oldham  
Nik Palmer  
Graham Pollet  
Judy Preece  
Dave Price  
Anne Schweir  
Chris Sheret  
Stephen Smart  
Richard Solly  
Simon Spencer  
Alan Swales  
Greg Temple  
Ian Thom  
Martin Vernon  
Felicity White  
John White  
Larry Wilkes  
Bruce Williams  
Kasuro Yasuda

*Apologies to anyone left off the above list by mistake. Ray and Joan also wish to gratefully acknowledge those many people who worked behind the scenes in an administrative or office capacity and to thank the numerous volunteers and supporters at Norwich Puppet Theatre and the voluntary board members of DaSilva Puppet Theatre Ltd and Norwich Puppet Theatre Trust all of whose contributions to the life of the company was essential.*

## **Publications by DaSilva Puppet Books**

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REUSCH, R. Puppet Making: Technical Information Pack. 1994 English Edition.

DASILVA, R The Marionettes of Barcelona. 1995

BYROM. M. Puppets In Antiquity. 1996

TILROE, N. Movement in Puppetry Performance. 1996. Revised Reprint

FETTIG, HJ. Rod Puppets and Table-Top Puppets. 1997. English edition.

SPEAIGHT, G. The Earliest English Puppet Play? 1997.

SPEAIGHT, G. The Juvenile Drama: A Union Catalogue. 1999. (with Society for Theatre Research)

EDWARDS, G. Successful Punch & Judy. 2000

PEATIE, S. 68 Ways to make Really Big Puppets. 2000

FRASER, P. Punch & Judy: The Script, the characters and their construction. 2001. Revised edition.

WOODENSCONCE, P. The Wonderful Drama of Punch and Judy. 2001. Reprint of 1854.

Plus various booklets for British Centre of Union Internationale de la Marionnette