The Center For Puppetry Arts
a retrospective
Twenty years ago, I had a vision

for a new arts institution in Atlanta. What started out as a two-man puppet troupe grew into an organization that today employs more than 50 staff members, has a Board of Directors numbering 50, and reaches over 334,000 people annually through puppetry performances, workshops and educational exhibitions.

Dynamic leadership from our Board of Directors has ensured that our ideas, plans and goals were fully integrated and served our community and constituencies. Beginning with Elliot L. Haas, the first Chairman of the Board, and under Barbara B. Wyly’s current leadership, the Center has “Made a World of Difference in Atlanta.” The Chairs of our two successful capital campaigns, Gay M. Love and Thomas D. Hills, guided the transformation of an old school house into a multi-faceted facility accessible to all.

The Center is driven by the commitment and hard work of a dedicated staff, and I am grateful to the many employees who have made the Center what it is today. I want to thank the brilliant performers, directors, designers and composers whose work has graced our stages, and our partners in the local and national communities and in the cultural and funding communities. I am grateful to the many foundations, corporations and individuals who believed in our vision and made the dream a reality.

This Retrospective is a tribute to all of the children, adults and families who visit our facility annually, attending programming in the theaters, in the galleries and in the classrooms. You make it possible for us to do a job we love.

Vincent Anthony
Founder and Executive Director,
Center for Puppetry Arts

Vincent Anthony’s Vagabond Marionettes was the resident company at the Center for Puppetry Arts during its first two seasons.
The Center for Puppetry Arts: a retrospective

The Center for Puppetry Arts opened to the public on September 23, 1978 when Kermit the Frog and Jim Henson cut the ceremonial ribbon. The first puppetry center in the United States and, today, the largest American institution dedicated to the art of puppet theater, the Center is internationally acclaimed for the scope and quality of its performance, museum and educational programming. The Center's story begins in the 1960's when a young puppeteer from Florida made his way to Atlanta.

Early years

Vincent Anthony began touring with puppeteer Nicholas Coppola's Nicolo Marionettes, then he worked for Sid and Marty Krofft's "Les Poupees de Paris" at the New York World's Fair. By 1966, Anthony was ready for a smaller community where he could be an active partner and make a difference. He settled on Atlanta and created Vagabond Marionettes with Mitchell Edmonds and Susan Larkin. The company quickly gained a reputation for its quality family productions.

Vagabond Marionettes presented Cinderella in their early seasons.
Anthony became a traveling center of information on puppetry. He performed in the shows, talked to audiences about the art’s history, led puppet-making workshops, and carried a small global collection of puppets illustrating the many puppetry traditions throughout the world. He began to see the need for an institution that would house a resident company, serve as a venue for outside companies, display the multicultural history of the art, and offer workshops at all skill levels. He met with business, arts and puppetry community leaders, and together, they formulated a mission for a new institution. Anthony presented several seasons at Atlanta’s Woodruff Arts Center and began building an audience that would pave the way for an organization dedicated to puppetry. In 1978, he found a permanent home in Atlanta’s former Spring Street Elementary School, and the Center for Puppetry Arts came to life.

During that first season (1978-79), the Center mounted an exhibition of puppets from the collection of Nancy Lohman Staub and presented shows for adult audiences by Bruce D. Schwartz, David Syrotiak and Steve Hansen. Peter Schumann’s Bread and Puppet Theater led a community-based workshop and performance, and Vagabond Marionettes was the resident company performing for family audiences. Vagabond later donated the sets and puppets from several of its productions, and the Center built a new repertory from this material.
Jim Henson &
The Muppets:

strengthening the center's support

When the blockbuster exhibition *The Art of the Muppets* was traveling the world, Anthony scheduled the exhibit for the Center and seized the opportunity to build a stronger relationship with the local community. The Center raised the funds necessary to create proper galleries and install museum-quality lighting. When the exhibit arrived in 1981, the Center had record-breaking crowds, the museum program was in full swing, and the Center’s Board of Directors and the city had shown their commitment to a national puppet center.

In 1988, Jim Henson returned to celebrate the Center’s tenth anniversary and the completion of the first capital campaign for the purchase and renovation of the building. As the campaign’s Honorary Chair, Henson inspired the local community with his commitment to the Center, and his two live performances of *The Muppets Take Atlanta* sold out quickly. The Center honored his achievements with the exhibition *The Muppets in Atlanta: Vision of Jim Henson* in 1996.

Henson’s family continues to support the Center. In 1994, Jane Henson hosted a screening of *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, and *The Jim Henson Foundation*, under Cheryl Henson’s leadership, continues its support with contributions encouraging presentations of puppetry for adult audiences.

core programming at the center

Since its inception, the Center for Puppetry Arts has worked to serve the diverse populations of the city of Atlanta, the state of Georgia, and the country at large. The Center reaches out to these communities through the Performance, Museum, Education and Outreach programs.
HAPPY 10th ANNIVERSARY

The Muppets Take Atlanta
Performance: innovative puppetry for families and adults

Presenting the works of America's leading puppetry artists is a primary mission, and the Center continues to achieve this goal by programming the best puppetry for family and adult audiences.

The Center has a 345-seat Mainstage Theater, home to the annual Family Series, which includes three full-stage puppetry performances per year for ages 4 and up. This series has presented adaptations of classic children's literature by directors including Luis Q. Barroso (the Center's first Producer), Nicholas Coppola, Donald Devet, and Pamella O'Connor, and local playwrights such as Eddie Levi Lee, John Stephens and others. In 1990, the series began moving in the direction of educational performance with the break-through production of Dinosaurs, an original play by Associate Artistic Director Jon Ludwig and Jane Catherine Shaw.

To ensure that live puppetry can be seen daily, even when Mainstage shows are in transition, the Center inaugurated a series of one-person performances in the Downstairs Theater in 1991. This series has presented local and national puppeteers such as Lee Bryan, Alice Rhodes, Grey Seal Puppets, Akbar Imhotep, Peter Hart and George Latshaw. Additionally, the Center has always presented an annual Summer Festival featuring the work of visiting puppet companies. These Mainstage productions have included works by Bob Brown, Paul Vincent Davis, Paul Mesmer Puppets, Hystopolis Puppet Theater, Perry Alley Puppets, Oregon Shadow Theater, the Carter Family Marionettes, and many more.
In 1986, the Center presented *Marie Antoinette Tonight!*, Bruce D. Schwartz's poignant and bawdy look at the last days of the infamous queen's life. Schwartz performed with the Center's resident puppeteers.

Recognizing the need to reach adult audiences, the Center inaugurated the New Directions Series in its first season. The program was hailed a success when Bruce D. Schwartz, a MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Fellow, performed to sold-out houses in 1982. The Center continues to present leading puppeteers working on the adult level, such as American artists Paul Zaloom, Eric Bass, Fred Curchak, Roman Paska, Larry Reed and Theodora Skipitares. Leading international puppetry companies presented in this series have traveled from Bosnia, Brazil, Canada, China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, Peru, Spain, Taiwan and elsewhere.

The Center is committed to giving emerging voices an opportunity to experiment with new ideas, materials and techniques. In 1980, Xperimental Puppetry Theatre (XPT) began as a workshop/performance forum giving artists the funds, theater spaces, and audiences they need to create a short work. Several of the artists discovered in XPT were later presented in the New Directions Series, and XPT gave birth to the creative geniuses of Atlanta's own Janie Geiser and Jon Ludwig, among many others.
Visual artist Janie Geiser attended Schwartz's first performances at the Center and soon found herself creating short pieces in XPT. Her puppetry has since been recognized with Obie (Off-Broadway) and Bessie Awards and several Citations of Excellence from UNIMA-USA (an annual award given by the American branch of Union Internationale de la Marionnette, an international service organization for the field). In 1990, the Center honored her with a retrospective exhibition and catalog.

Associate Artistic Director Jon Ludwig got his start in puppetry in 1978 when he joined the Vagabond Marionettes touring production Pinocchio. Two years later he was performing on the Center's Mainstage, and in 1984 he wrote and directed Brer Rabbit, his first work for family audiences. Throughout the 1980's he developed works for adults in XPT, including Visions of St. Lucy (1985) and Beatnik Monsters from Outer Space (1986). In 1987, with Walton Harris and Dirk Hays, Ludwig created Cirque Pataphysique, an adaptation of Alfred Jarry's writings. The smash hit ran an unprecedented nine weeks.
Ludwig was thrown into the middle of a controversy surrounding government support of arts and culture in 1990. When he created *Zeitgeist: der Geist Der Stets Vennient* (*The Spirit of Our Times: The Spirit That Always Denies*), an adult work for the Atlanta Arts Festival, a media frenzy ensued over whether children had access to the show (they did not) and if it was supported by government grants (it was not). Anthony and the Center supported Ludwig during this time and became prominent voices for artistic freedom and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Center remains a leader in the local and national theater and puppetry communities, and Ludwig continues to make award-winning and critically-acclaimed performances for families and adults.

*Jon Ludwig's Klik Klak Man* was a player at the zeitgeist of the 1990 culture wars.
**Museum:**
**exhibiting and collecting puppetry's global history**

In 1978, noted puppetry collector and expert Nancy Lohman Staub lent 150 puppets from diverse cultures and established the Center’s Museum. (She donated them in 1980.) Staub envisioned an encyclopedic puppetry museum, and her vision propels the program to present puppet theater’s global history against a contextual backdrop that illustrates its impact as a teaching tool, a healing implement and communication vehicle in social, political and ritual settings. Since 1986, the Museum has presented exhibitions of its permanent collection that display the depth and breadth of the field. The Center also mounts special temporary exhibitions that explore a particular theme, artist, or culturally-based tradition. The permanent collection now numbers 865 puppets and 900 posters, and is complemented by a research library holding 1,500 volumes of books, periodicals, clippings and videotape recordings documenting puppetry performances at the Center and throughout the world.

Jean Walker Abrams donated these **Asian shadow puppets** in 1995.

The Center’s global collection now numbers 865 puppets because of contributions from leading collectors.
The Education Program is an integral component of the Center. Since 1980, Create-A-Puppet Workshops have been offered daily. These in-house workshops change quarterly, modifying design and content to reflect the current Mainstage productions and museum exhibitions. Realizing the need to reach all ages, the Center began offering puppet manipulation and construction clinics for teen-agers and adults in 1983, and workshops for pre-school age children were established in 1995.

The Center also provides career development workshops for American puppeteers and has presented master classes by such notable performers as Kukla, Fran and Ollie’s Burr Tillstrom, Germany’s leading marionettist Albrecht Roser, and Anna and Enno Podehl of Theater Im Wind of Germany. In 1990, a year-long apprenticeship program was established to provide hands-on training for young adults interested in puppetry careers. This program produced Peter Linz and Alice Dinnean, two of Sesame Street’s newest puppeteers, and Basil Twist, a hit at the Jim Henson Foundation’s 1996 International Festival of Puppet Theater in New York.
Outreach: sharing puppetry with regional and national partners

In addition to giving Atlanta audiences a complete puppetry experience, the Center shares its programming with audiences and partners throughout the country. From 1984 to 1993, the Center annually mounted a national tour of its Mainstage productions to leading children’s theater venues, including the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Today, the Center continues to tour one-person shows throughout the region. Since 1980, the Center has provided off-site workshops and residencies for schools, school systems, arts councils and special needs groups; and, in 1983, with the exhibition African Puppetry, the Center began sharing its permanent collection of puppets with other museums. The following year Puppetry of China began a three-year international museum tour, and the museum continues to offer new touring exhibits biennially.

Often the most successful projects the Center presents are those that fully integrate all three departments. In 1994, under the auspices of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games Cultural Olympiad, The Fulton County Arts Council, and the National Black Arts Festival, the Center presented the exhibition African and African-American Puppetry and complementary performances by Atlanta puppeteer Akbar Imhotep and workshop and residency activities. When the exhibition toured in 1995-96 to African-American museums nationally, each venue also hosted educational residencies and performances by the exhibited artists.

David Chapman, John McDonough and Winnie Wilson donated their puppets to the Center after a one and a half year tour of the exhibition African and African-American Puppetry.
leadership in the puppetry field
Since its inception, the Center has been a leading voice in the field, hosting national and international artists, festivals, conferences and puppetry service organizations.

In 1982, the Center co-hosted the annual Puppeteers of America Festival, and in 1988 the Center and UNIMA-USA co-hosted the first Puppetry of the Americas Conference and Festival. Performances were presented by companies from Canada, Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela and the United States. For the first time, puppeteers and the public gathered to strengthen ties between the Americas through the exchange of puppetry ideas, performances and information.

Anthony has also provided leadership for the field as President of the Puppeteers of America from 1978-81, and as General Secretary of UNIMA-USA from 1992-present. The Center now houses UNIMA-USA's archives, and, for the first time, the General Secretary is associated with a national center.

host to the world
In preparation for Atlanta's 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, the Center launched a capital campaign in 1992 to renovate the building and construct a modern and hands-on exhibition of its permanent collection, Puppets: The Power of Wonder. The Center also built a new atrium and lobby, expanded and upgraded its Mainstage Theater, added a new gallery for rotating exhibitions and a new Downstairs Theater, and published a catalog documenting its permanent collection.

As a prominent presenter during the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games Cultural Olympiad (a four-year festival preceding the arrival of the Games), the Center brought leading international puppetry artists to Atlanta each summer. When the 1996 Olympic Arts Festival arrived, the Center had captured the world's attention. Newsweek magazine singled out Ludwig's adult production of Frankenstein and hailed the Center as "one of the most exciting companies in American theater."
Through the leadership of its staff and Board, the Center for Puppetry Arts has grown from the vision of one man to the vision of one community, eager to share its work with the region, nation and world. The Center plans to add a comprehensive study center to facilitate research by puppetry artists, scholars and patrons on a global level, and it will continue to reach larger audiences through increased touring and outreach programs. After years of hard work and determination, the Center for Puppetry Arts is now an established, innovative and vibrant institution that will continue presenting the best puppetry performances, exhibitions and workshops into the next millennium.

_Puppets: The Power of Wonder_ opened to the public in September 1995 and displays a portion of the puppets in the permanent collection.

Photo by Richard Termine
In 1994, Jane Henson and Kermit the Frog presented Center for Puppetry Arts founder and director, Vincent Anthony, with the first Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Award honoring leading arts organizations within the community.
The Center for Puppetry Arts: A Retrospective

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FULTON COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL

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