

The fall of 1962 marked still another milestone in the expanding children's theatre program. Madge Miller's dramatization of *Alice In Wonderland* was presented not only in Lawrence, Topeka, and Kansas City, Kansas, but inaugurated a new touring engagement which is thriving today—that of centralized production for the Community Children's Theatre of Kansas City, Missouri. The plays are produced at the Music Hall, a professional house in Kansas City, Missouri.

Following children's productions of *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater* were enjoyed by youngsters in Lawrence, Topeka, Wichita, Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri. *Beauty and the Beast* was seen by delegates at the National Children's Theatre Conference held on the Kansas University campus in August, 1964.

Peter Pan, the fall production of 1964, was the first children's play at KU to be included in the Major Season of the University Theatre series of presentations. This same production was played to capacity crowds in Kansas City, Kansas, and the Kansas City, Missouri, Music Hall. The next children's theatre presentation, *Johnny Moonbeam and the Silver Arrow*, was trouped to Wichita, Topeka, Kansas City, and Salina, Kansas, a new town on the KU touring list. In May of 1964, members of the KU drama department presented *Johnny Moonbeam* for delegates at the first International Children's Theatre Conference in London.

For the children's theatre season of 1965-1966, the KU Children's Theatre will produce *Hurricane Island* by Rosemary Musil and an original Polish musical for children, *Tom Thumb* by Tadeusz Kierski. Both of these plays will be presented on tour.

Over a period of thirteen years, the KU Children's Theatre has grown from a University Players project to an integral part of the total University Theatre operation. In recent years the number of productions has increased, and with it, the scope of the program. The move to the main stage constituted a shift in emphasis on the children's theatre, bringing it to the "major production" category. Roles in children's theatre productions are sought by graduate students as well as undergraduates. The full co-operation and support of the entire theatre staff has given much strength to the growth and



expansion of the children's drama program at the university. Each show averages from 13 to 18 performances and plays to as many as 25,000 children. *Peter Pan* and *Alice In Wonderland* each played 18 performances. The touring operation continues to grow and the children's the-

atre receives more requests for trouping engagements than can be handled at this time. It is fervently hoped that one day the KU Children's Theatre will be able to expand its touring program to smaller towns in the state where children do not have the cultural opportunities and advantages that exist in the larger cities. This perhaps is the goal of all children's theatre directors—to reach *all* children in *all* parts of the country.

PUBLICATIONS

THE FIRST BOOK OF RHYTHMS by Langston Hughes.
New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1954; pp. 1+63.

Richard Boleslavsky states that, "To exist is to have Rhythm." In his book *The First Book of Rhythms*, Langston Hughes, writing for children, applies this principle in writing and illustrations for the entertainment and education of the young.

His application of the idea of rhythm to that which is familiar to youth is this work's strongest element. Starting out with the simple rhythm of drawn patterns on paper he moves into the worlds of nature, sports, automation and music. The entire world of life becomes a well-written symphony by a great composer.

The First Book of Rhythms has all the enchantment of exploration and discovery for a leader interested in new ideas for creative dramatic sessions offering an arena for rhythm and movement. It is also a book which is worth investigating simply for new ideas.

If rhythm is inherent in all of nature as well as an entity in itself surely it deserves some examination by those people who work with the natural "creative instinct" of youth.

Joanne Griggs, Arizona State University at Tempe

ABOUT THE POCKET PLAYERS

by MURIEL SHARON, Director of The Pocket Players, New York City. She co-produced and directed Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat* in the performance that was subsequently recorded by Vox records. She directed Kurt List's opera, *The Wise and the Foolish*. Miss Sharon has worked on several Broadway productions and has acted in summer stock and off-Broadway. She is Chairman of the Children's Drama Department of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA and has recently been appointed Artistic Director of the Junior School of The Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre.



In 1956, a number of my former students at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA expressed a desire to continue their work in drama outside of the department, but on a more or less non-professional basis. As students they had worked with me on a number of departmental productions, such as *The Snow Queen*, *Pinocchio*, and *Horatio the Magnificent* and *A Day at the Beach*, both original plays. Now the students, still in their teens, apparently wanted more of the same. Thus was born The Pocket Players.

The "amateur" phase of The Pocket Players lasted a year, during which time it performed at the Y (*Pierre Patelin*), and toured regional community centers (*The Tale of the Donkey*). In time, however, it became evident to me that sincerity and enthusiasm, despite their appeal, were no substitutes for the focused energy and skill of the professional actor. Consequently, in 1958, The Pocket Players was reorganized as a professional company.

Since then, The Pocket Players has presented productions that have varied greatly in style, content and period: a "nonsense" play involving

Photographs from *Emil and the Detectives*, *Master of All Masters* and *The Tale of the Donkey*.

the substitution of silly words for common objects (*Master of All Masters*); a children's classic done in Restoration style, including ballet (*The Glass Slipper*); a fable after Fontaine in Commedia-cum-burlesque style (*The Tale of the Donkey*); and an adventure story for children set in the Germany of 1930 (*Emil and the Detectives*). *Emil*, incidentally, is now entering its fourth touring year. Throughout we have attempted to observe standards that satisfy both the requirements of the children's audience and those of what are usually so blithely referred to today as "good theatre." This means not only discrimination in the choice of productions, but a "professional" attitude towards them as well. At all times The Pocket Players has called on the best professional assistance it could afford. Miss Marcia Brown, the well-known author and illustrator of children's books, designed both the sets and costumes for *The Glass Slipper*, while Allan Baker, who had danced with Sadlers Wells and The Royal Ballet, was choreographer. The score for *The Tale of the Donkey* was arranged by Irma Jurist, and elsewhere we have given young designers their first professional assignments. John Conklin, who designed the sets for *Emil and the Detectives*, subsequently went on to design sets for a Broadway production.

Aims and ideals, however, do not necessarily guarantee their realization, and besides, incompetent companies can claim them as well. The Pocket Players must, therefore, point to its production schedule—only four plays in seven years—as evidence of its effort to maintain its standards. The caliber of most plays written for children leaves little alternative. The unfortunate fact is that not only are very few new plays being created for the children's market, but most of these are, ironically, "childish." Most scripts which are sent to me for consideration, either lack theatrical conviction, or confuse the flashiness of commercial theatre with style. Such plays seem to be aimed at parents and sponsors, rather than children.

The difficulties inherent in professional theatre for children are not unlike those of "show biz" in general. The problems are both artistic and financial, and it is difficult to say which of these has precedence. If, as I have indicated, good scripts are hard to come by, some of the best scripts call for large casts, large at least by the standards of most professional children's theatre. Thus, in mounting productions of *The Glass Slipper* with a cast of 14, and *Emil and the Detectives* with 17, The Pocket Players could only recoup the pre-production costs of both productions by taking them on the road after they had both had substantial runs in "off-Broadway" houses. The Pocket Players is principally a touring company simply because the scale and expense of its productions requires the guaranteed fees it receives from contracted performances. As such, it receives higher rates than the average touring company; but sponsors have shown themselves willing to make sacrifices in order to book our relatively lavish productions.

In fact, without the fees of touring, The Pocket Players would have been unable to repay the backers of *Emil and the Detectives*, perhaps The Pocket Players's most successful performance to date. *Emil* was capitalized by a procedure that is relatively rare in children's theatre; it called on "angels" who purchased shares, or partial shares, at the rate of \$60 per share, after they had attended a backer's audition. Even so, it took two and a half years to repay these backers, who also received a 5% return on their investment—to both their surprise and pleasure, I gather. It should be pointed out that The Pocket Players is essentially a non-profit organization whose "officials" receive salaries like the rest of the members of the company. I should also add that the actors in our company receive the minimum as required by Actor's Equity. Finally, further indication of the expense involved in productions like *Emil* and *The Glass Slipper*, can be gained from the fact that each road performance necessitates the rental of a half-ton panel truck for scenery and props, as well as a chartered bus for the company.

It is understandable, then, why most professional children's theatre is limited to productions requiring small casts and simple sets. But financial pressures, coupled with what has to be described as a generally passive attitude on the part of parents towards the quality of productions their children see, have led to a condensation of dramatic substance that even improved technique cannot replenish. Not that size and lavishness in themselves guarantee excellence, but if the play's the thing, economy packaging will not replace it. The Pocket Players has not sought out the big production; it has simply happened that way.

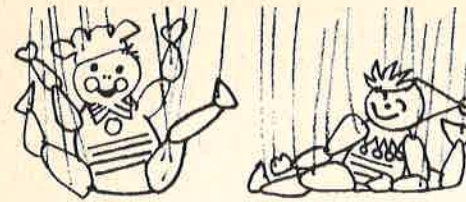
The Pocket Players performs on weekends and holidays. With occasional exceptions, it has confined its touring radius to within 75 or 80 miles of New York in order to accommodate members of the cast who frequently have other professional commitments. This in turn assures a relatively stable company of accomplished professionals, some of whom have worked with the company since its inception.

Since 1963, The Pocket Players has been a legally incorporated theatrical company. As it is not primarily oriented to profit-making, and since the conflict between the financial capabilities of children's theatre and desirable standards of production show no sign of easing, efforts are now being made to have The Pocket Players established as a non-profit organization.

AN APPRAISAL OF CREATIVE DRAMATICS

by *Geraldine Brain Siks*

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FROM GEORGE LATSHAW—PUPPETS

The Detroit Institute of Arts mounted a spectacular exhibition titled "Puppet Cavalcade" for the Puppeteers of America Festival last June. Audley M. Grossman, Jr., Curator of Theatre Arts, was in charge, and was elected the new President of the P. of A. Lea Wallace was appointed the new AETA-P of A Liaison.

The Lytton Center for the Visual Arts exhibition of International Puppetry which originated in Los Angeles, and moved to Palo Alto during the summer, was "held over" to become the first exhibition to open the new Lytton Center in Oakland, California, in December. Alan Cook and Betsy Brown, Hollywood puppeteers, and Roberto Lago of Mexico City have acted as consultants.

The third International Festival of Puppet Theatres to be held in Bucharest, Rumania, in September, will see an original musical of Hawthorne's "Feathertop" presented by San Francisco puppeteer Lewis Mahlmann. Mollie Falkenstein, Alan Cook and Roberto Lago will also attend.

The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild is organizing a Festival and Exhibition at Hastings for May of this year as part of the celebration to commemorate 900 years since the Norman Conquest. The beloved "Mr. Punch," Percy Press, is Festival Director, and Vice-President Waldo Lanchester has designed and produced a Festival "Sticker Stamp" based on the Bayreux Tapestry to assist the promotion of the event.

FROM BOB STEWART

Bill Baird is designing a puppet theatre for use in the Children's Library of the recently opened Library and Museum of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York City.