



30 November 2010

Dear LUTSF,

Please find enclosed two printed copies of my report and a CD with the report, this letter and a few photos.

Thank you so much for helping me to participate in this travel and study opportunity.

Sincerely,

Andrew Kim

**Thingumajig Theatre**

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## String Puppet Workshop with Frank Soehnle

INCANTI Production Project,  
Turin, Italy

by Andrew Kim

With the assistance from the Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship, I was able to attend a four-week master class in string puppets with German puppeteer Frank Soehnle. The workshop, which was produced by the INCANTI International Figure Theatre Festival in Turin, Italy, took place for two weeks in September, 2010 and two weeks in October, 2010 and culminated in a workshop production which was the opening performance of the festival. The Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship provided most of my airfare for the first two-week session.

This workshop was attended by eight artists: three from Germany, one from France, three from Italy and myself. Some of the artists were seasoned professional puppeteers, others were earlier in their careers. We met six days a week from 10 am until 5 or 6 pm. The INCANTI Festival provided, accommodations, tuition and fantastic meals for the participants at local restaurants.



"Nothing that isn't to be found in these puppets we see here," he replied: "proportion, flexibility, lightness .... but all to a higher degree. And especially a more natural arrangement of the centres of gravity."

Heinrich von Kleist from *On the Marionette Theatre*

Andrew Kim performs a string puppet by Frank Soehnle

In the workshop, our starting point was a text by German playwright Heinrich von Kleist called "On the Marionette Theatre". From this we explored themes such as gravity, centre of balance and grace. We started simply with rocks on strings, manipulating sheets of paper to string puppets which were either made by our teacher or ones the participants brought.

Over the course of the first two weeks, string puppet exercises and improvisations were shaped and edited into a rough scenario. With

this in mind, the team separated with puppets to assemble or adjust and props and costumes to prepare.

In October we reassembled and revisited the scenes we had created. We shaped and rehearsed further adding live music, costumes, video projection and theatrical lighting.

We had two days in a professional theatre in Turin and opened to an audience of over 200. There was a tremendous response. The festival is now considering remounting the performance for a run at puppet festivals in Germany and Italy in the autumn of 2011.



### Paper Puppet

Participants work together to bring a puppet to life.

## Frank Soehnle

is a puppet maker, performer and director with Figuren Theater Tübingen, Germany. With his innovative use of materials and narrative and his evocative, haunting imagery, Frank is considered to be one of the leading figures in contemporary puppetry. Though well versed in puppet traditions, Frank's world is more poetry than folk tale; much more Kafka than Hans Christian Anderson.



I have seen his work on several occasions in the UK and USA. The last time I saw him at the London International Mime Festival, I approached him after the show and asked him if he ever taught. He later emailed me with information about the

INCANTI Festival; I applied and was accepted. I had no idea this inspiring artist would turn out to be such a generous teacher.

## Reflections on the String Puppet Workshop

There are many styles and sizes of puppets: glove, rod, shadow, string. For some reason, though I have been working as a professional puppeteer for over 18 years, I have never had the opportunity to learn string puppets. Sure I've used strings to make mouths open and close and carved marionette-type joints but to actually manipulate a puppet with nothing but strings and gravity has always been a distant country I'd someday like to visit. At this point in my career, it's more of a sure thing to go with what you know; build on what has worked in the past.

However, when the opportunity to learn from Frank Soehnle came, I knew it was a chance to really learn something new. Here I had the luxury of time, working with people I didn't know, in a place away from my everyday work where I could try something and fail when necessary but keep working on it until I learned how to do it.

I felt like a kid again--I wanted to try everything. I didn't fully understand how and why string puppets worked until I just had the opportunity to try and try and try. I had to learn to be more still. I learned to be more precise with when I sent a force and how to

stop the momentum of a moving object. These basics of working a string puppet will no doubt transfer to my work with any puppet as well as to my own body when I am doing mask and clown work.

Also, the experience of working for four weeks with a team of artists from four different countries (speaking as many different languages) was a tremendous lesson in all the fascinating ways cultures and aesthetics differ but also in all the surprising ways we are alike.

In my work here in the UK, I am part of a two-person partnership where we have a tried and tested way of creating work. It was at times difficult but always interesting to experiment with and create performance with so many different artists of so many different backgrounds.

I know I've learned so much from Frank and the entire program and I am very grateful to the Lisa Ullman Fund for helping to make this happen. I'm very keen to start my next project and see how all the new knowledge mixes with and expands what I know. I hope that I will take forward the spirit of experimentation and openness to new forms which I've learned from those weeks in Turin.

Some of the puppets used in the workshop including a spider made from a bell and piano parts made by Andrew Kim and a 50-year-old Pierrot puppet by Fritz Herbert Bross



Workshop participants enjoy a five-course Italian meal

