

Redwing Blackbird Theater and the Child Within Us

By Rochelle Riservato

ROSENDALE – “The Happy Prince,” produced by the Redwing Blackbird Theater, on Sat., Aug. 20 at the Rosendale Theatre motivated one little girl in the audience to say: “I really liked that you can teach the kids something in a show — and I also learned that even though you are old you could still be in a show with kids.” That’s because the performers ran the gamut of ages from the youngest at 3 ½-years to the oldest at 99-years!

Redwing Blackbird Theater owner, Amy Trompetter believes puppetry stimulates people of all ages, and when describing her motives and passions for her business, she echoed almost those exact words: “Audiences drop their protection and start to believe and to invest in the puppets and that returns us to some place that we came from as a child and that we’re going to as an old person. It was great to have a piece with a 5-year old who still believes in the sincerity of the earthworm or the little blade of grass and Kesi, a 99-year old, be so connected to each other in embracing these bigger truths.”

Puppetry Passion

For 22 years, Trompetter taught Theater and World Theatre at Oakland’s Antioch College, Bates College in Maine, and, up until three years ago at Barnard in New York City. Hailing from Ohio she went to the College of New Rochelle and transferred to Berkeley with the Free Speech movement of the early 60s — which she calls her “political awakening.” At Berkley she worked at Oakland’s Catholic Worker and “saw wild kids who had no center” and as a passing thought said to herself, “They’re so talented it would be great to do street theater.”

However, after going to New York she saw the Bread and Puppet Theatre (her artistic awakening) which melded art, politics, spirituality and accountability and she became very interested in their whole approach to puppet the-



The Redwing Blackbird Theater performed The Happy Prince last weekend.

Photos by Rochelle Riservato

atre. In 1967 the theater was also doing anti-Vietnam war protest parades in New York City with giant Vietnamese women puppets and a demon airplane that dropped bombs represented by drum beats — with the women falling down to the ground.

Feeling this changed the method of protesting she said, “I learned that puppets could speak on many levels to the people [providing] both entertainment and reaching the common humanity.”

Then, in 1999, Trompetter came to Rosendale to rent a workshop. The humongous garage door of the former Mullen’s Bus Depot, at 413 Main Street, beckoned. Former owner Bert Johnson showed her gigantic workspaces both in and outdoors and, she said, “It looked so great to me, it took only an hour and a half to realize this was the place for me.”

The Magic of Puppetry

Kesi Mackay, the 99-year old performer in Saturday’s show had much to say about puppets. Having moved from Woodstock two years ago she didn’t know Trompetter and was delighted the two had so much in common.

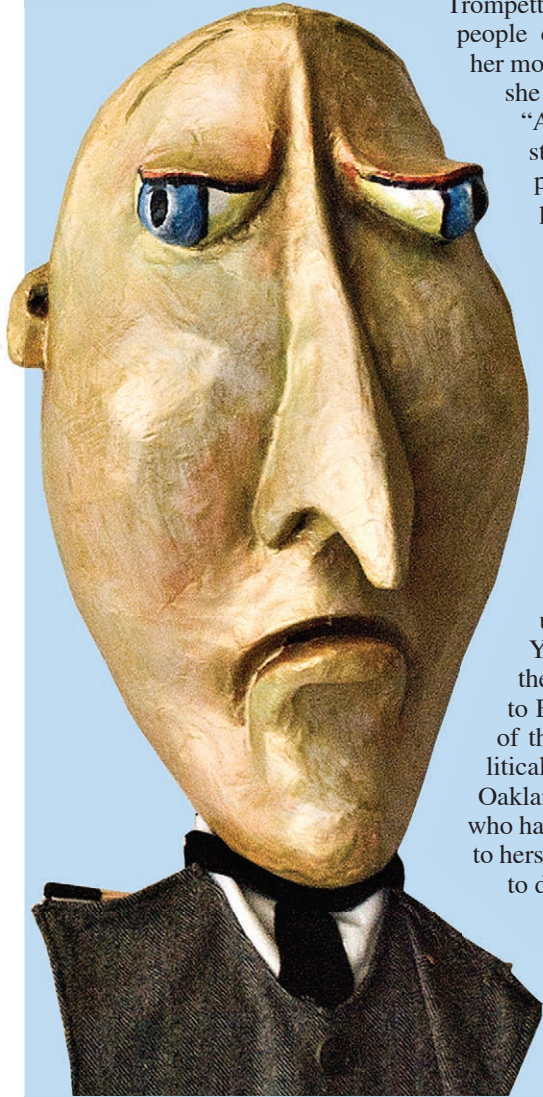
“It was a miracle,” she said, “I worked in puppets in the 1930s; they were a serious part of my life and my way of thinking.”

According to this nonagenarian, puppetry gives people the opportunity to address the child that’s still within — and feels one always *has* to revisit that child.

“You buy into the emotions of the puppet — there’s nothing to be compromised with puppetry. Puppetry is a universal language,” said Mackay.



continued on page 13



Nature’s Bounty

By JJ Murphy

Spending Time in Deep Woods: Journal Notes

I’m sitting in my hammock on the fifth day of a six-day solo trek into one of my favorite haunts in all of New York State. It’s a place that feels like home, even after years of being away.

Everywhere I step there’s a profusion of black trumpet mushrooms (*Craterellus fallax*). I carry a camp stove, cookware, my home-made dehydrated and foraged food — and Larabars, but nothing like butter or olive oil. So I crushed a number of shagbark hickory nuts and the oils blended beautifully with the smoky flavor of the black trumpet.

While black trumpets, which look like little kisses to me, put a smile on my face, the abundance of edibles including bi-color boletes (*Boletus bicolor*), gilled boletes (*Phylloporus rhodoxanthus*), black velvet boletes (*Tylopilus alboater*), hygrophorus milky mushroom (*Lactarius hygrophoroides*), and even a few chanterelles made every day a mycophagy. I didn’t even bother with the russulas, although there were a lot of green and several mild red ones.

I love my hammock for the air circulation and the fact that it does not fold around me the way nylon hammocks do. It takes up more weight and space, but comfort is worth this concession. My 800-fill down sleeping bag is too much for this weather, but it packs down smaller



Black trumpet mushroom.

than any sleeping bag I have ever used. I have an Equinox bivy for it when I need a moisture barrier.

I set up my tarp in a pup-tent shape, anchored on one side, with the other side folded back, but ready to be put in place in case of rain. This way I could look at the sky. It rained once — at night — my little plan was effective. The inventor of Grip Clips will also always be in my prayers — these little attachments let me pull the sides of the tarp out, creating more room inside where the hammock hangs. I have an eight-by-ten foot Equinox silnylon tarp that folds up really small and is a perfect water barrier. I’m thinking I might want a 10 X 12 foot tarp, because I tend to get claustrophobic in plastic shelters.

I’ve spent the last two years researching and acquiring American-made, light-weight gear. What I brought with me on this trip is ideal for a summertime trek. I would need more clothing and food in other seasons.

The weather was so cooperative, that after the nighttime thunderstorm, the air was cool and a light breeze dried out my tarp and tarp lines. I love the paracord I use for a ridge line, but I don’t like the memory in the mason twine I use on the tarp grommets — I need to find better cordage. My friend Barry Keegan would tell me to get a supply of dogbane or cedar bark and make my own cordage. He’s already encouraging me to make my own hammock.

One thing I learned from previous treks is that my gear is three times heavier when it’s wet than when it’s dry. Right

now I’m feeling really pleased with myself because I did not pack anything extraneous. Everything I packed I have needed to use.

As I gaze up into the treetops, the tanager who calls so vividly has managed to elude my sight. The hemlocks, beeches, gray birches and chestnut oaks are lush and green.

I savor each moment of this peaceful trek. I love that I can still go out and immerse myself in the primal ooze, wonder at the sight of fireflies and feel a depth of gratitude I cannot even find words to express that the natural world was part of my early life and has continued to guide me ever since.

Photo by JJ Murphy