

Puppetry paradigm – dancing between realities

“A puppet must always be more than his live counterpart – simpler, sadder, more wicked, more supple...an essence and an emphasis.” – Bill Baird, master puppeteer

Of all of the artistic productions I have witnessed in my career, puppetry remains the most mysterious. First, there is the double reality of an inanimate object coming to life and the animistic interplay between the invisible puppeteer and puppet. Add a visible puppeteer and a film background and you have a story within a story within a story.

An even greater mystery is how puppetry



D. QUINCY WHITNEY

works magic. How does an animated figure made of wood, clay or papier mache connect to the audience, make that leap to the imagination, bypass rationality, and speak to

the non-verbal parts of our brain, touching emotions in surprising ways?

New Hampshire is blessed to have two stellar puppetry companies in Pontine Theatre, of Portsmouth, with Marguerite Mathews and Greg Gathers, and Perry Alley Theatre, founded in Strafford by Andrew and Bonnie Periale.

At 2 p.m. on June 24, Pontine will host Andrew Periale in his New Hampshire premiere of “Forman Brown: New Hampshire’s Forgotten Poet/Puppeteer” at the Plains School, Portsmouth – the 1845 brick one-room schoolhouse recently ren-

ovated through a partnership between Pontine and the City of Portsmouth.

The word pontine, derived from the Latin word pontus – means bridge. In psychology, pontine implies a connection activated in sleep – a bridge over which dream images travel. Likewise, for more than three decades Pontine has taken us across the bridge from dream and imagination to storytelling – often including a history or literary lesson as well.

Marguerite Mathews began work in actor-based local theater in 1977 with the New Hampshire Mime Company, renamed

Pontine in 1981. In 1982, Greg Gathers joined the company in costume construction, later as a performer. In 1994, when Mathews and Gathers produced Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* – the infamous play in which the narrator weaves in and out of the play – the need to portray multiple characters spurred Gathers to make puppets. Pontine’s productions have included “Cornish Castles” about New Hampshire illustrator Maxfield Parrish; “The Country of the Pointed Firs” about 19th century maritime

WHITNEY | PAGE A-5