



Around The World With Mr. Punch

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John Styles gets an honour for punch



"Total shock" was how John Styles expressed the emotion which overcame him when he learned that the Prime Minister was recommending his name to the Queen as a potential recipient of the MBE (an award that baby boomers will recall was made to the The Beatles at the height of their fame, and one bestowed upon many UK citizens from all walks of life in recognition of singular achievements) John's achievements - as officially expressed - are "*For services to the arts. Especially Punch and Judy*". Not since "Signor Bologna" the original puppeteer whose show Samuel Pepys saw, received a gold medal from King Charles 11 in 1662 has a Punch & Judy man been so honoured.

"I thought it was a wind-up at first, a practical joke," says John, "but no. It really was true and it's a tremendous honour" An honour which John has been quick to accept on behalf of the whole Punch tradition. "When you think of all the committees of dignitaries and civil servants who agonise over the lists of names. It would

only take one of them to find Mr. Punch inappropriate, or to think there'd be a controversy and it would just get dropped and that would be it". Instead of which John found that the news of a Punch and Judy man being honoured upstaged many of the more familiar names on the list when it came to media attention - and all of it was favourable. "Award For Punch" ran one story headline, and TV and radio turned our in force to hear John's story. What better ambassador could Old Red Nose have?

For someone who has recently celebrated fifty years in the entertainment business - and whose list of film, TV and stage credits would fill a volume by themselves - the award is an accolade that has been earned by a lifetime of professional endeavours. From society parties to Disney movies John has shown that Mr. Punch hasn't run out of breath after all those centuries as a crowd pleaser and he has taken him into the 21st Century on a high note. Respect for the Punch tradition as something to be valued is a subject about which John feels strongly, and he is proud to have put something back into that tradition. It will certainly be less easy for Punch's unthinking detractors to look down upon a tradition that has had a performer singled out for such high profile official recognition. Which is - of course - an odd position for a Prof to be in as Mr. Punch is himself no respecter of established authority and John is well aware of the contradiction. "It won't make a difference to me", he says, "I won't put it on my notepaper and shove it under people's noses". He is happy, too, to pass on his observations on how to treat the show as a performer. "Treat it with respect", he says, "Structure the show

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to bring out the light and shade. Remember that it's humorous and silly - not macabre and sinister - and that it's like doing a stand-up comedy routine in which you've got to divert when necessary to take in what the audience are doing and saying. It goes without saying that it must be funny and so a feeling for stage comedy and a sense of timing are vital".

Advice you would be foolish to ignore from a master of his art!

PUNCH'S POSTBAG

I am currently on an exchange in DePaul Law School in Chicago, USA from UCD Ireland. This semester I am taking theatre law and for my final paper I have decided to write on the legal history to Punch & Judy, something I hope I won't regret delving into!! Does anyone have any ideas, advice or information on the copyrighting of puppets or anything legally related about a performance of the show - licensing, intellectual property, contracts, tort law etc? I'd love some hints on history (ie) how far back do I really look? What was the contribution to modern theatre proscenium stages etc? Thank you for your time and trouble.

Laura Notley.

Laura has read the relevant issues concerning the new proposed UK Licensing Bill and the Punch and Judy College's victory over the Tate Gallery and has also looked at the various Punch websites. If anyone has additional material to bring to her attention she contacted via the editor.

I have recently purchased a Travelling Punch & Judy Show & I am trying to find as much information as I can on this particular set. I have a small collection (getting larger by the week) of Punch related items..mainly pottery & porcelain figures & this travelling set I am considering keeping. I purchased this at Auction (having paid far too much I'm afraid) & it was catalogued as 'Rare Victorian Travelling Punch & Judy Show, with little in the way of further information. Initially, I thought it was Late Victorian (c 1880-90)



but on closer inspection I am feeling that maybe this set is a bit older. I now also wonder if it is even English as (for instance). what I believe is the Policeman is dressed in an outfit more reminiscent of French or Italian costume. Judy & Baby have large old Lace Mop Caps (Judy has, I believe, real hair) & Punch a vicious pointed hump on his back..

I love the way they ALL look so sinister.. Surely these would have frightened the life out of Children. I also have an issue with these on conservation as unfortunately they have been stored neglectfully in the past (an old barn?) & their clothes have been attacked by the dreaded moth. Here are some photos. I would be grateful for any information anyone can provide.

Steve Stevens



Editorial

This month sees the 342nd anniversary of the day in 1662 when Samuel Pepys first saw that special puppet show in Covent Garden - and Punch is still going strong.

He's still very newsworthy in the UK and a recent 'silly season' story has concerned the alleged banning of Punch and Judy from a school seaside project. What has been interesting, however, is that the school has clearly felt wrong-footed by the ensuing publicity and has said it was never its intention to cause offense to the Prof whose booking was cancelled. Similarly the media - in running the story - have not been following an anti-Punch line but more the 'it's a funny old world' line. It so happened that another school was in the news that same week for banning pupils from taking sun-cream to school on the grounds that it was a potential health hazard. Thus it was made it easy to show how the opinions of one set of teachers in one particular staff room don't necessarily represent general public opinion.

Still, Mr. Punch doesn't mind having a few column inches devoted to him. It's when people aren't talking about them that celebrities start to worry!

Glyn Edwards.

CORRECTION

The newsletter of the Punch and Judy Fellowship is called 'The Swazzle' and not 'The Swazzler' as reported in our previous issue.

Beresford's Puppets of Shropshire UK have forwarded this self-explanatory snippet from an undated archive copy of a British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild Publication.

Levi Fox, Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, came across the above description of Mr. Punch in a manuscript Commonplace Book among the collection at the Folger Shakespeare Library when he was in Washington. His impression was that the volume was produced towards the end of the 17th Century- with individual items varying in date. Dr. Fox gave a copy of the verses to Waldo and Muriel Lanchester (who run their puppet centre in Stratford-upon-Avon) and it happened to coincide with our appeal for literary references to puppets so they kindly sent us a copy.

THE SCREEN. A SIMILE.

*Dear Wm. did's't thou never go
To Mimic Farce call'd Puppet show?
There Wm. did's't thou never see
Of Figures great variety?
With a big Belly comes a fellwo,
In blustering mood call'd Punchinello;
He roars, swaggers, bounces, swars,
Giving himself a thousand airs;
Knocks puppets down & makes a Boast
That he alone will rule ye Roast.*

*But when Punch is turned off ye stage,
Some other Puppets come t'engage:
With other Motions, other Faces,
Act some new part to shew their Graces.*

*Alas. Dear Wm. all this while,
A Trickster does your sense beguile:
behind that Screen there stands a wight,
Safely concealed from publick sight;
He was ye Punch at first you saw;
He gives ye other Puppets Law;
And by his secret strings he still
Governs ye others as he will;
And all ye difference that is known
You only hear another tone:
The Puppet man - behind ye Screen,
Is ye same man - altho' not seen.*

A DEGREE OF PUNCH (PART ONE)

Reader Edward Hicks has been writing a dissertation on Punch in the context of violent entertainment for his animation degree. Part of it is reproduced below as a reminder to us of Punch's wider cultural background cultural and the references that come in handy when defending Mr. Punch from criticism born out of ignorance.

Although this paper concerns its self mainly with exploring the dark side of this popular theatre, one is unable to look at Punch without recognising the strong links to the role of the fool and clown.

In the middle ages, the earliest version of the classic fool was represented by the village idiot character in such guises as Tyl Ulenspiegel. There are many versions of the fool within stories but the most interesting factor is that through all the mindless drivel that usually accompanies his ravings, there are often priceless words of wisdom or foresight. This is clearly evident in King Lear where the displaced king wanders through what was once his realm, with his licensed fool as his only apparently trustworthy companion. When Lear encounters Edgar, acting as a lunatic or bedlamite, Lear is convinced that Edgar is the possessor of hidden knowledge and insists upon speaking with him.

It is pleasing to think that at some point in history the mentally ill were endowed

with vaguely shamanistic properties merely by their natural gift as social abnormalities as described in Leach (1985). This idea, that the fool is somehow able to see things in a completely different perspective to the sane, seems to be widespread. References can be found in such widely different cultures as Islam and Native American Indian where the fool was regarded as being, in some way, touched by God. The role of the licensed fool, on the other hand, could be a lucrative career option. The fool was given place at the wealthy houses and in the courts of the Kings as light entertainment. In this role the fool was in a way the second most powerful person in the room, aside from the lord/king. Given licence to answer back and ridicule all and sundry. Like some in house satirist on the payroll, the fool is a reminder to his masters that they are still human. The natural fools gave way to itinerant jesters (often ex-minstrels) who were artificial fools and could be seen as the first public comedians. During the seventeenth century within what was becoming a more democratic society, the king's word began to be questioned freely by parliament and so the role of the jester became less important. It was time to share his talents with the rest of the world, in the theatre.

Running along side the Jester and coming from the Medieval mystery plays was the character of Vice as described in Speiaght (1970), yet another

stock character more similar in personality to the Commedia dell' Arte's Pulcinella. Vice, within the play, was again a selfish, anarchic and cowardly loud mouth with a foolish wit about him. Not as cunning as the trickster, but still with a comic stupidity that often resulted in his own gain, he encompassed all the elements of the fool and jester but with added alpha-male qualities. As well as the overtones of moral inferiority and reckless abandon, he provided comic relief, which was possibly his only forgivable quality.

In Elizabethan times the role of Vice did away with most of its malicious aspects, leaving the pure comedy and slapstick humour. The strong points of the role became acrobatic stunts combined with foolish wordplay; a process of development which ultimately led to the persona of the Clown. This persona was regularly introduced into plays, not only for the amusement of the lower classes in the audience, but also to provide dramatic relief, either as a counterpoint to a moment of great tension (generally in tragedy) or, (in comedy) as a either commentator upon, or as a reflection of the higher status characters.

A DEGREE OF PUNCH (PART TWO)

Edward Hicks dissertation makes extensive use of the Punch and Judy College of Professors Slapstick Symposium papers which have been carried as articles in this journal. In particular he picks up the idea of categorising the various types of Punch show that can be seen today. In the following extract he describes a chance encounter with a show he believes must fit the category of Punch Lite. Your Editor (who compiled the original categories) believes that - in fact - Edward has stumbled upon a hitherto unclassified variety which he herewith labels Parasite Punch. Readers are invited to ponder the ghastly travesty of a Punch show described below.

In the summer of 2003, I went with my family to an exhibition at Hardwick Hall, a medieval abbey around Sherwood Forest and to my surprise found a classic example 'Punch-Lite'. The performer in question was Barry Kay. A local children's performer with some twenty years experience. I was personally taken aback when watching his show. After studying in detail the progression and how the show (according to the traditionalists views) is MEANT to be done.

The biggest difference that I saw was his decision to do away with use of the slapstick. The only knocking about that took place was Punch slapping Joey on the head to wake him up and after the policeman was called in to deal with this naughty behaviour, he dealt out a swift blow to Punch's head that sent him falling down the stairs. The use

of a swazzel was also missing from the performance instead replaced with a pre-recorded backing tape that ran throughout. The show was punctuated with synthesizer renditions of classic sea side brass band songs while Punch's voice itself was digitally pitch altered to achieve the high pitched squeak.

What was interesting to me about the whole event was in fact what went on before the show started. Being first and foremost a child's entertainer by his own admission (see interview), the main part of Barry's routine was spent playing games with the children, part of which included the creation of balloon creatures and the like for the children to play with. Naturally he was producing dogs, giraffes and all the things one would expect but for the most part he seemed to be creating mainly swords and guns, no doubt requested by the young audience themselves. And so, quipped with their brightly coloured weapons the children merrily went about attacking each other with all the expected vigour, as parents smiled warmly on at them.

But when it came to the show, very few blows were struck. The traditional slapstick obviously deemed unsuitable material for the children to witness, when five minutes before they were hacking each other apart with weapons constructed by the showman.

It is clear to see that children are of a violent nature, most young animals will spar with each other, so why pretend as if it is not the case?

When asked about the lack of

violence he replies that the old show is too long for performance and that the violence is not needed to still create a good show. He does various charity work and performs for hospitalised children. It would seem by his answers that he fears a child that has witnessed violence in their own life time, would unquestionably react badly to a dramatised depiction of the same. This is a fair point. The young are far more likely to be frightened of Punch's shrill voice, nonsense speech and violent outbreaks. But of course, all of this brings us back again to the question of whether it is a show for children.

*No slapstick? No swazzle? The entire show mimed to a backing track? This is the kind of pap that can only be described as a Punch and Judy Show because poor Old Red Nose is in the public domain and anyone is at liberty to do anything they like with him or to him. I can't think of a Punch performer I've ever known (professional, amateur, good, bad or indifferent) who would even consider it to **be** a Punch and Judy Show. It is parasitical upon the Punch tradition because it feeds off Punch's celebrity whilst actively undermining the very tradition that made his name. If any reader has come across poorer examples of a show then do share them. (And we're not talking here about performers attempting a show in good faith but not quite being up to it. We're talking "What on earth is THAT supposed to be?")*

HARRY POTTER ROUTINE



Fishing line

Velcro on tunic

Velcro wrapping

Ever inventive Profs have always kept Mr. Punch abreast of popular culture. It's part of what keeps him from fossilizing. The article below shows how a little ingenuity can always create a new twist on an old routine. In this instance: Punch and the baby.

I am a fun loving Punch & Judy amateur. I came to it in my fiftieth year as a birthday present from my daughter. A mystery weekend in Shropshire was the only clue. It transpired to be an introductory session from Professor Glyn Edwards on the art, craft and generally frivolity of life with 'Old Red Nose'. The whys and wherefores are another story.

My gigs tend to be birthday parties (friends' grandchildren) and local fetes with which I have an association. One such fete had a Harry Potter theme and I was challenged to address the theme in the show. I developed a routine for the sequence of Punch looking after the baby.

I have several babies and utilised one that was dressed and looked like a mini-wizard. The storyboard goes:

1. Judy brings up baby and asks Punch to look after him whilst he is sleeping and she

goes shopping for the sausages
2. Bit of business with "Oh no I won't" & "Oh yes you will" between Punch & Judy that involves them throwing the baby to each other

3. Punch succumbs and Judy puts baby down to sleep on the playboard. She then brings up a broom and tells Punch to sweep the floor whilst the baby is sleeping. The broom is witches broomstick style made with twigs.

4. Judy goes off shopping, Punch sweeps the floor for a bit with much complaining. He gets tired, puts the broom down and goes to sleep on the playboard.

5. The baby wakes up and toddles over to the broom, with much gurgling etc. He leans on the broom, which suddenly takes off with him and flies around.

6. Punch wakes up (usually by audience shouting!) and bit of business as he tries to catch the flying broomstick which goes up and down out of his reach.

7. Punch eventually catches broom, drags baby off and throws broom away. Puts baby

back to sleep.

8. Judy reappears and innocent Punch confirms that baby has slept all the time!

The technique I developed was to wrap the broomstick handle in Velcro and stitch a Velcro strip on the front of the baby's tunic. The baby has fishing line attached to his back which goes through a screw eye at in the centre of the proscenium, along the proscenium to one side, through another screw eye and down the upright. When the routine is not in play, a curtain ring at the end of the line secures it in a hook in the upright, the baby hooked onto the rear upright.

The routine generally brings a great gasp and sometimes applause as the broom suddenly takes off.

Please let me know through "Around the World" or e-mail me at michael_a_berg@hotmail.com if you use the routine or have any questions about it.

Michael Berg
March 2004

red nosed miscel l any

Punch and Judy Episode 2: Attack Of The Clowns

This is the working title of a production commissioned from your Editor, with funding from Arts Council England, by the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham (UK) for their season of adult puppetry in October 2004. The work is being written by UK theatre's maverick genius Ken Campbell with collaboration from the two Profs involved - Glyn Edwards and Martin Bridle. Intended as a theatrical piece for two Profs and a ventriloquist it was triggered by the the thought that whilst all manner of artists had drawn inspiration from Punch it didn't seem that any working Profs had looked recently at what the traditional Punch and Judy Show might contain today if it hadn't become a childrens' entertainment. It was also motivated by a Punch and Judy activist's desire to see Arts Council England (who fund the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden etc) stump up some money for Old Red Nose's activities. How the two Profs - plus Mr. Punch and his co-stars - take being forcibly catapulted into the 21st Century at the hands of a playwright whose current one man show is 'Ken Campbell's Meaning of Life' (with the subtitle "I'm not mad, I've just read different books") remains to be seen. And it will, in fact, be seen at MAC (the Midlands Arts Centre) on the evenings of October 6th and 7th this year.



toby's tail piece

When gay American puppeteer Paul Zaloom was interviewed in the Fall 03 issue of 'Puppetry International', the magazine of UNIMA USA, about his new show 'Punch and Jimmy' (mentioned here previously) he claimed to have received a letter from The Punch and Judy College of Professors: stating that 'Mr. Punch isn't gay'. Paul's response was to say "My message to these guys, and to that whole world, is "Screw you, you English assholes. How the hell do you know that Punch is not gay. You can kiss my big queer ass. He is now! And that you can print in the magazine" The College (who had not sent the letter referred to) gave a response which was printed in the Spring 04 issue and which is given below for the benefit of historians of quirky footnotes to Punch's career. Your Editor's opinion is that Old Red Nose's sexual history - given his assumed archetypal lineage back to the Ancient Greek satyr plays - is far too steamy even for today's allegedly tolerant society and probably embraces not only both sexes but quite a few species as well. Here, however, is what The College wrote: *Hi, I enjoyed Paul Zaloom's liberating piece on the Punch tradition but I can say he's mistaken in thinking that the Punch and Judy College of Professors says that Punch is not gay. We don't take a view on Punch's sexuality or the sexuality of the performer. Punch is whatever he is and you can make of him whatever you can make of him. I don't think it was from us that he had a letter of rejection as I can't find his application anywhere on file. Perhaps it was from another Punch society. He'd get turned down by us for not using a swazzle (because that's what we think distinguishes between a Punch and Judy Show from any other puppet show that has a Punch character in it) but not on account of gay issues. And as for his "Screw you, English assholes" we'd say "Stop talking out of yours Paul".*

special supplement

To mark the end of Volume 4 of our journal we are fortunate to have received a very detailed and scholarly account by John Morley of Jan Klaassen and Katrijn the Dutch counterparts to Punch and Judy. John has had puppetry research articles published on Mester Jakel of Denmark, Fasulis of Greece and Aragoz of Egypt. A former semi-professional puppeteer and Prof, John is currently Senior Teacher at 'Rose of York' language school, London. He is also working on a proposed book on popular puppetry in the Islamic world.



JAN KLAASSEN AND KATRIJN - Punch and Judy's Closest Cousins?

The names of the protagonists of the old Dutch puppet shows - Jan Klaassen and his wife Katrijn - are instantly recognisable to many people in the Netherlands. While traditional puppet heroes have come and gone over the years, these two quarrelsome but amusing characters have managed to survive the vicissitudes of European history for well over three hundred years.

This should, however, come as no surprise, as there is a rich, long-standing tradition of drama in the Low Countries, with records dating back to the mediaeval period. In fact, there is a wealth of written and pictorial documentation available to the theatre historian, charting the development of various forms of drama in Belgium and The Netherlands. Fortunately, the Jan Klaassen tradition is very well-documented, with published scripts and eyewitness accounts of performances, as well as contemporaneous photos, sketches and film footage.

The earliest evidence we have of the existence of puppetry in the region comes from the wonderful illuminated manuscript of *The Romance of Alexander*, which contains two precious (and oft-reproduced) illustrations of mediaeval glove puppet booths. One of these depicts four young men standing near a booth with four knights engaged in battle inside a castle-like proscenium, while the other depicts three young girls watching two puppets - a female figure being threatened by a male figure wearing a pointed cap and wielding a large club - in a booth of similar design. The illustrator, a certain Jehan de Grise, completed his work in 1344 and was possibly a Fleming from Bruges.

It is naturally very tempting to surmise that these two figures were the precursors of Jan Klaassen and Katrijn but it is still uncertain as to how widespread glove puppetry was in the Middle Ages. However, accounts drawn up in the late 4th century for the Counts of Holland mention the words 'dockenspul' (c.1364) and 'dockespil' (c.1396) (which seem very similar to the modern Danish 'dukke' and Swedish 'docka' for 'doll' or 'puppet'). By the time we reach the 17th and 18th centuries, we have illustrations of actors dressed in *Commedia dell'Arte* costumes dancing on makeshift stages, often alongside puppet shows.

It was not until the 19th century, however, that the stock figures in Jan Klaassen became established. The hero of the piece, Jan Klaassen (pronounced 'Yárn Klársen'), had an open face with a cheeky smile; a red hooked nose and chin; a red floppy cap with a gold



bell or tassel on the end and a red, close-fitting jacket with gold buttons. He often had a hump and usually wore yellow checked trousers - which were slightly too short for him - and small yellow clogs. He was supposed to be the archetypal Amsterdammer, who, although witty and jovial and displaying great natural exuberance, could also be an old-fashioned 'macho' type. He was self-confident to the point of arrogance and always ready to face his opponents with his stick or some kind of verbal retort. (One version had him telling the audience that his wife had such a large mouth that you could easily stuff a sack of potatoes in it!) In addition to his penchant for sarcasm, he was very fond of Dutch gin.

Katrijn (pronounced 'Kartráin') was very much like our Judy. She had a red hooked nose and chin and wore a white, frilly mobcap and had a dress with a floral pattern and a long, white apron. A hypocrite who also liked her alcohol, she often engaged in jocular banter with her husband and was prepared to stand her ground with her acerbic tongue.

The regular cast also included the baby, who seems to have been unnamed. As in *Punch and Judy*, it was sometimes thrown out of the window by Jan Klaassen. There was also the army general; the police constable; the Jew (often a second-hand clothes dealer); the landlord; the monster (a crocodile-like creature with large jaws); the hangman; the Devil and 'Snikhals' (literally 'Gaspneck'). This was a ghostly figure, who originally looked like a white-faced clown, with the disconcerting habit of elongating his neck, either in total silence or to the sound of gasping. This trick figure, dressed in a long, white, pleated shroud, later became known as 'De Dood van Pierlala' ('the Death (i.e. Ghost) of Pierlala'). It is quite possible that it was known to *Punch* performers in Britain and that Piccini himself was aware of it and later adapted it as the Courtier for his shows. If so, this might lend weight to the idea - prevalent in the 18th century - that the Dutch were the finest puppeteers in Europe at that time.

In addition to these stock figures, there was a prop known as a 'magic box' from which might emerge the Monster, Death or even the Devil himself. This, as well as several other elements, would seem to be of German origin. Occasionally, there might also be a small performing monkey (or dressed-up dog) on the playboard before the show started, to attract passers-by. There was also a bottler (known as a 'manser' in Amsterdam dialect), who was usually the showman's wife.

Jan Klaassen was traditionally performed in a folding wooden booth, with a brightly-decorated proscenium and curtains, which could be wheeled along in the street or strapped to the showman's shoulders. The backdrop showed a typical Amsterdam scene of houses on either side of a canal with a small bridge. To one side there was Jan Klaassen's house; to the other, there was his local pub, called 'The Little Swan'.

The dialogue, which contained feeble puns and misunderstandings, was often quite stilted, with

quaint expressions and idiosyncratic vocabulary, all spoken in Amsterdam dialect, with its predilection for the special diminutive '-ie' and '-tje' suffixes on names and nouns. The use of the swazzle, known in Dutch as a 'piepertje' ('little squeaker') or 'keelfluitje' ('throat whistle'), does not seem to have been widespread in the Netherlands and was reportedly on the decline in the early 1900s.

There is much speculation as to the possible provenance of Jan Klaassen but he probably first appeared in the second half of the 17th century. This was the Golden Age of Holland, when it was expanding as a maritime power. It was also a time when there was an unprecedented flowering of science, trade and art in the Low Countries.

There are three plausible theories regarding the origin of Jan Klaassen and Katrijn. The first is based on the fact that the names Jan Claeszen and Catharina Pieters appear in church records from 1706, referring to actual people. Jan was a weaver who married Catharina in Amsterdam in 1686 but he later turned out to be a drunk and an adulterer, which inevitably led to a great deal of marital strife. The second concerns a comedy by Thomas Asselijn entitled Jan Klaesz or the False Maidservant, which was performed in Amsterdam in 1682. However, in this play, the wife was known as Saartje. The third suggests that Jan Klaassen may have been a trumpet player in the service of either Prince William II or III. Having been discharged from military duties in 1652, he fell on hard times and in order to earn a living, decided to become a puppet showman, perhaps starting off with Polichinelle. Whether or not this story is true, Jan's typical red jacket and yellow trousers are associated with trumpet players in 17th century Holland. Alternatively, Jan and Trijn (short for Katrijn) might originally have been chosen simply because they are very common Dutch names. Whatever the case, it seems likely that Jan Klaassen's immediate predecessor was Hansworst, Pekelharing or Polichinel. We cannot be certain but he may first have appeared as a comic servant to Polichinelle and later assumed his physical appearance, complete with bicorn hat, fancy costume, clogs, pot belly and prominent hump. He certainly looks very similar to Polichinelle in early illustrations but seems to have lost his famous hump between about 1850 and the end of the 19th century.

Looking at the repertoire as a whole, it is difficult to ascertain what elements are purely Dutch, as it would appear that most of the characters and themes were borrowed from foreign sources. (Even the Death of Pierlala had a counterpart in Belgium). However, the stock figure of Snikhals may have been based on Jan de Witt, Grand Pensionary and first minister of Holland and Zeeland (1650-1672). Although ruthless and widely feared, he was by all accounts a brilliant statesman who wielded considerable political power. He was finally murdered by Orange supporters in 1672. This ghostly white rod puppet may therefore be a satirical version of this historical figure, with a pun on his surname ('wit(t)' meaning 'white' in Dutch).

Fairgrounds provided the usual pitches for puppet shows, which were often used to attract audiences to plays with live actors. Very little is known about these early showmen but it seems likely that Italian performers were operating in the Low Countries in the 17th century, as the influence of the Commedia dell' Arte is very much in evidence from this period onwards. Early 17th century fairground booths would often have signboards with three crowns painted on them. These may have had some connection with the coat of arms of Cologne, perhaps an indication that German puppeteers were also active in Holland at the same time. However, by the early 1700s, itinerant Dutch fairground entertainers and puppeteers had come to be held in high regard on the continent.

Jan Klaassen, like many of his foreign cousins, enjoyed his greatest popularity in the 19th century. Several 'dynasties' of performers emerged and continued the tradition well into the 20th century, with trade secrets being passed down from generation to generation, in time-honoured fashion. The earliest-known family were the Capaldis (later to become the Cabalts or Kabalts),

who came to Holland from Italy at the end of the 18th century and started out with a dog show. Other early Jan Klaassen players were Sampimon, Mullens, La Haye and Verhoeven.

Prompted by the pressing need to earn better money, several Dutch showmen decided to follow the French vogue for marionette-playing - a curious development - and began performing for wealthy, middle-class families at children's birthday parties and the like. They were therefore obliged to tone down both the language and content of their repertoire and had to dream up new situations for Jan Klaassen now that he could no longer hit out with his stick. This unusual transformation took place sometime in the latter half of the 19th century and different repertoires were devised. Showmen charged higher fees for their polite, drawing-room versions and often employed euphemistic language so as not to offend the sensibilities of their more refined patrons.

Meanwhile, the much cruder street versions continued, using stock figures such as the Chinaman and Black Man. These characters - and the manner in which they were treated by Jan - would doubtless be regarded by modern audiences as utterly distasteful and politically incorrect. They would certainly be offended by the scenes with the Jew, which contained overt or implied anti-Semitic overtones.

The tradition remained largely within the boundaries of what is now the Netherlands but there was at one time a version which was occasionally performed at the Friday market in Ghent, Belgium. This city is also home to the 'spelleken' shows, which use rod and string puppets, including a figure called Karelke de Bult ('Charlie Hump'), who clearly evolved from Polichinelle. There is also the marionette Pierke Pierlala, who has an unusually long arm.

The major exponent of Jan Klaassen at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries was the hugely popular Janus - or Jan - Cabalt (1869-1935). A member of the old Capaldi family, he was brought up in a rough quarter of Amsterdam, known as the Duvelshoek (literally 'Devil's Corner'), where many families of entertainers were forced to live. By about 1900, Cabalt was already a familiar sight on Dam Square. His shows were characterised by their amusing dialogue and idiosyncratic vocabulary, much of which defies translation (such as 'moffendoos' for the Devil's box or coffin and 'ronsebonsie' for the booth or fit-up, which derives from 'ronsebonsen', a verb meaning to 'knock about'). His Jan Klaassen had a stock of weird and wonderful terms of endearment for Katrijn and the dialogue often contained allusions to various aspects of Dutch folklore, particularly old songs. Unlike other performers before him, he actively encouraged audience participation - an essential ingredient in this type of live theatre.

Cabalt's Jan Klaassen often displayed amazing cruelty towards Katrijn (he would, for example, try to stuff her into the monster's mouth or into the coffin!) and he would occasionally throw the baby out of the window. On disposing of a body, Jan Klaassen would utter the catchphrase: 'There! That's taught him a thing or two, hasn't it, boys and girls?' (roughly the equivalent of 'That's the way to do it!').

The repertoire also included well-known scenes, such as Jan announcing he was married to a wonderful lady but going on to criticise her in public; the rod puppet 'Kleine Ko' ('Little Ko') - his own special version of the Death of Pierlala; the trunk into which he would shove both the Jewish merchant and Katrijn; the general who tried to enlist Jan in the army, only to be killed by him, with two gravediggers coming on to remove the body in a coffin; and the hangman from Haarlem, to whom Jan would make the remark: 'You shouldn't rush a hanging, you know!'

Cabalt also had an indoor version of Jan Klaassen using marionettes with a stylised, somewhat naive design (which, by strange coincidence, look remarkably similar to the simple string puppets current at that time in Iran and Uzbekistan). The characters included Jan and Katrijn; their five babies; Pierrot, their older son; the landlord (whose wig was set on fire by Pierrot!); a doctor; a

female neighbour; the Death of Pierlala; the 'Lang-Kortman' ('Long-Short Man'), a trick figure with an extendable neck; an acrobat and a juggler. These old marionettes are now housed at the Theatre Institute, Amsterdam.

Jan Klaassen has appeared in various works of Dutch literature, ranging from the chapbooks of the 18th century to plays, short stories and children's books in the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, an early reference to him comes from the pen of Jacob van Lennep (1802-1868), who featured him in his *Musings in and about Amsterdam*, published in Holland - Almanac for 1857. Justus van Maurik (1846--1904) also wrote about him in his *Three Childhood Friends*, part of a collection of short stories and sketches, which came out in 1884. Of particular interest is a children's easy reader, *The Children Next Door (Part Four)*, by J.Ligthart and H.Scheepstra (originally published in 1913), which contains a delightful set of illustrations by C.Jetses of an old Jan Klaassen show of around 1900. Finally, mention should be made of another well-known children's book, entitled *Jan Klaassen Cures the King* (1927), for which the author, Leonard Roggeveen, invented several new characters.

Despite the upheaval of the two World Wars, puppet activities continued in the Netherlands, with Jan Klaassen being performed in the 1930s and 40s by Hofman of Utrecht and Remmert of Rotterdam. Janus Cabalt died in 1935 and it was not until about 1952 that Dam Square had another regular show, this time in the hands of Dirk and Coby Kersbergen, who seem to have performed the traditional repertoire for over thirty years. Feike Boschma, the grand old man of Dutch puppetry, was also active at this time.

Perhaps the most well-known Jan Klaassen player in recent times was Wim Kerkhove, a witty and talented artist (whom I met on Dam Square back in May, 1992). He originally trained in drama studies and soon developed an interest in puppetry. Together with Klaas Bakker, a professional concert pianist, he set up a small company, which he called 'Pantijn' (from the French 'pantin' - 'jumping jack') and by 1981 had moved from the Vondelpark to Dam Square. He had a tall, visually striking booth, covered in red and brown striped material and used stylised figures with bold features. The shows were usually accompanied by three musicians.

Folk traditions are liable to die out if they become anachronistic and may only continue to be relevant if they are able to adapt to changing circumstances. Kerkhove dearly recognised this and made a conscious effort to update the show so that the content was more accessible to modern audiences. He found he was able to preserve the show's anarchic spirit by using satire of a social and often overtly political nature. He also removed several of the controversial or macabre elements and replaced them with more topical allusions.

Kerkhove's Jan Klaassen was altogether less violent than his predecessors, while his Katrijn took more of a centre-stage role. He retained many of the stock figures but introduced several colourful new characters, such as Jantje, Jan's badly behaved Punk son; the neighbour, Mrs. Pengel, from Surinam (a former Dutch colonial territory), who was Jantje's tutor; Peet, a young lad from Harlem, New York and Jan's Turkish cousin, Karagöz, a guest worker who had to pay rent to the greedy landlord. There was also Arie Pieper, the taxi-driver, who was supposed to represent resentment towards foreign workers. Having made a pact with the Devil, he would try to sow discord among the local residents. Kerkhove gave up performing on the Dam about four years ago and subsequently donated his figures to the Amsterdam Historical Museum, which also houses Cabalt's old glove puppets.

I am reliably informed that there are a number of Jan Klaassen players currently operating in the Netherlands, among them a promising young artist in his early twenties called Misha Kluff. He has been performing the standard version on Dam Square for about three years, having learnt the mechanics of the show from Wim Kerkhove. He is surely to be commended, as it is no easy

task to persuade younger people to take up such a precarious profession.

As this wonderful puppet drama has developed along similar lines to our own Punch and Judy, I think it may reasonably be argued that Jan Klaassen and Katrijn are their oldest - and possibly closest - cousins. They are clearly part of a robust and well- established tradition, which looks set to continue for a good many years to come.

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The author operating Orlando Furioso at an evening of Sicilian folklore in Sicily in 1999.

The images on the two following pages were supplied by the author as photocopies and are of a traditional Jan Klaassen show (circa 1900) from a children's reader *Buurkinderen Part 4* (1913/1957) by J. Ligthart and H.Scheepstra. Drawn by C. Jetses.



