

1. Watching wooden dolls come to life may not be one of the most popular forms of entertainment today, but with over twenty years' experience, talented puppeteer (ку-кольник) Peter Roberts has earned himself the title 'master puppeteer' due to his extraordinary ability to transform puppets into believable, almost living characters. "People are quite often surprised to hear what I do for a living and have little appreciation of puppetry as a form of entertainment. But puppet theatre has been popular in many cultures and may have been the very first kind of theatre," he explains.

2. As Roberts writes his own scripts and musical scores, his shows are highly original. "A puppet show can involve anything from clowning to storytelling," he explains. Equally varied is the audience he performs for. Roberts believes that this form of entertainment crosses international boundaries and can be appreciated by people of all ages and cultures.

3. Roberts' fascination for puppets started when he received some beautiful glove puppets one Christmas. He started putting on shows with these for family and friends and then moved on to handmade Chinese string puppets. Learning mostly from books and personal experience, he continued with his 'hobby' while studying for a degree in architecture. "By the time I left university," he explains, "I was already spending most of my free time carving puppets and putting on shows in the community, so I hardly noticed the transition from student to full-time professional puppeteer. I realised I had long since abandoned all thoughts of pursuing any other career!"

4. The puppets are designed specifically for each show, which is extremely time-consuming. Each one is out of English limewood and then painted. Some of his 'characters' appear in exhibitions; others are used for puppeteering workshops. Anyone interested in puppetry can be trained to assist, and not just with the actual puppet making. Puppet theatre companies in the UK are usually small, but each one still needs writers, performers, musicians and even sound and lighting engineers.

5. When most people hear the word 'puppetry', they more than likely think of a way of keeping children entertained at birthday parties. However, Roberts is keen to point out that puppet theatre can often be used as an effective educational tool. "Through the mouths of pup sets come serious messages sometimes," he says.

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What would Roberts like people to understand about puppet theatre?

- 1) It can be educational as well as entertaining.
- 2) It's not just a thing of the past.
- 3) Its main purpose should be to educate.