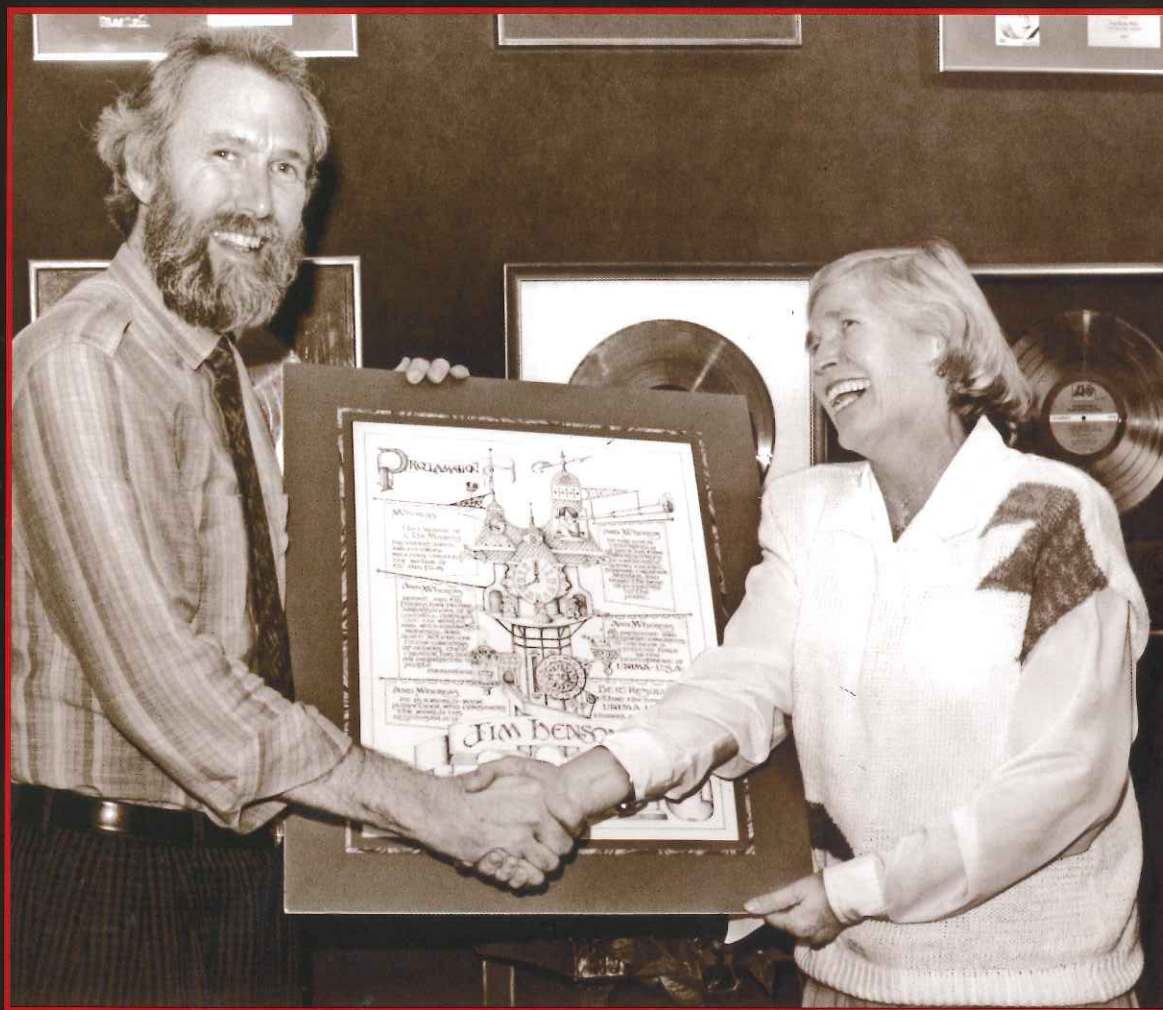


SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



UNIMA-USA

*50 YEARS IN THE MAKING*



## MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH ADVOCACY AND ACTION

### *A Councilor's Account of the 22nd UNIMA Congress*

by Kristin Haverty

The *Union Internationale de la Marionnette* (UNIMA) is the oldest international theater organization in the world. It represents an incredibly strong and diverse network of passionate artists, researchers and educators working in 100 countries.<sup>1</sup> Every four years, representatives from the member countries convene for the Congress and World Puppetry Festival.<sup>2</sup> In June 2016, I had the great honor to serve as an UNIMA-USA councilor for the 22nd UNIMA Congress held in Tolosa, Spain. I share the spirit and some key details of the congress with the hope that those who read this publication as voraciously as I do will be inspired to seek out opportunities to serve this incredible organization and its mission: to promote international peace and understanding through the art of puppetry.

The passions and interests of this body are as vast and variegated as our world. A democratic organization, the main task of the congress during this week is to shape the organization's future. Over five days this is achieved through reports from the UNIMA Centers and commissions, election of the Executive Committee and officers, open debate regarding the future of the organization and the formation/continuation of the commissions. The leadership and their selected members are then tasked with carrying out the mission of the organization over the next four years.<sup>3</sup>

**Day 1** dealt with the current state of the union. The outgoing Executive Committee presented the budget, including the reality that funding from the French government, which historically has been the bedrock of UNIMA's financial state, would be considerably less for the foreseeable future. While certainly a cause for concern, puppeteers are resilient, and the Treasurer laid out a groundwork for UNIMA to remain strong. The approval of the budget by the congress satisfied the final duty of the outgoing General Secretary Jacques Trudeau and Executive Committee so that a managing leadership of the congress and ten supplementary councilors were elected. I would be remiss not to make a special mention to the fabulous UNIMA-USA member Kurt Hunter – who was not only elected as a supplementary councilor but, due to his historical prowess with all things budgetary for UNIMA-USA and Puppeteers of America, was also elected to UNIMA's Auditing Commission. This day also saw the induction of Honorary Members, a high distinction of achievement. UNIMA-USA's own Andrew and Bonnie Periale were honored along with an elite group of puppetry's luminaries. UNIMA President Dadi D. Pudumjee concluded his welcome to the congress with the following quotation from Miguel de Cervantes: "When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams – this may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness – and maddest

of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!?"<sup>4</sup> After a day of realities, the congress was tasked to dream about what could be.

**Day 2** served as an opportunity for national centers and commissions to report on the many activities that took place during the term. For anyone interested, I'm happy to provide the complete dossier presented to the congress. As the councilor tasked with presenting UNIMA-USA's activities in four minutes, I sought to highlight UNIMA-USA's 50th anniversary and its beautiful new website, the opening of the Worlds of Puppetry Museum at the Center for Puppetry Arts, the headquarters of UNIMA-USA, and a tribute to our UNIMaMa Allelu Kurten. Other national center reports highlighted the incredible projects, festivals and initiatives to strengthen puppetry across the globe. One of the most exciting projects, just nearing completion, is the translation and digitization of the *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts*, UNIMA's WEPA, originally published in hardcopy in French. Spearheaded by the previous term's Publication and Communication Commission, and led by UNIMA-USA's own Karen Smith, the online WEPA translated into the three languages of UNIMA – French, English, and Spanish – is an incredible resource for the puppetry community. Another major development of the four-year term is the actualization of a new website for UNIMA. As the world becomes ever more connected through the Internet, a dynamic space to collect and disseminate the work of the international centers becomes ever more urgent. Led by a team out of UNIMA's French headquarters in Charleville-Mézières, the national center representatives are now being trained and tasked with carrying on the work so that the website, a huge financial investment for UNIMA, remains relevant to the ongoing developments in the field.



TOPIC, TOLOSA'S FABULOUS PUPPETRY CENTER.

**Day 3** looked toward the future. The election of the Executive Committee and discussion of the current statutes began the day. Each national center may propose candidates for this leadership, and from the nominees eighteen individuals were ultimately

chosen to lead over the next four years. Among the group were UNIMA-USA councilors Manuel Morán (also UNIMA-USA's current President) and Karen Smith, an honor that recognizes their excellent work for the organization. The election of the site for the next UNIMA Congress and World Puppetry Festival also took place. With strong presentations by UNIMA-South Korea and UNIMA-Indonesia, the hosting honor ultimately went to Indonesia. Mark your calendars: UNIMA 2020 will take place in the Gianyar regency of Bali.

**Day 4** began an open discussion on what members felt were the current priorities of the organization. Highlights included the motion by British UNIMA to strengthen ties with UNESCO and to actively support puppeteers persecuted for exercising their right to free speech. This was particularly resonant in Spain, where two puppeteers had recently been arrested in Madrid after a Don Cristobal performance for "glorifying terrorism" – purportedly referring to the Basque separatist group ETA and *al Qaeda*. For anyone familiar with this traditional character and his politically incorrect cousins across the world, the arrest of these puppeteers was a shocking conclusion to a puppet show. We had the opportunity during the festival events to meet the young puppeteers Alfonso Lázaro de la Torre and Raul García Pérez (now out of prison but still embroiled in the judicial process). They spoke passionately about their experience and the importance of free speech without the threat of persecution. The debate that followed the proposal in the congress session was a fascinating lesson on world politics and the mission of UNIMA. The realities "on the ground" are not always those reported in the press. Acting without knowing the full story may come with unintended consequences. By supporting free speech no matter the context, is the organization sanctioning violent action in the eyes of the nations and the citizenry that support it? By not speaking out, are we sanctioning the persecution of puppeteers exercising free speech? How does UNIMA, a non-political organization, navigate these murky waters? A



UNIMA CONGRESS VOTING

proposal to create a commission devoted to these questions was met with overwhelming approval. Another proposal of note came from the newly established UNIMA-Singapore representative who sought greater representation and engagement in UNIMA among young and new members. Finally, the election results were announced. Spain's Idoya Otegui – host for the congress and head of the beautiful TOPIC Center in Tolosa – was elected General Secretary, India's Dadi Pudumjee remained uncontested in his post as President, and UNIMA-USA's Manuel Morán and Karen Smith were elected the committee's Vice Presidents. France's Lucile Bodson also graciously accepted the unanimous vote to remain for a second term as UNIMA's Treasurer. With the new leadership in place and a passionate debate on the future fresh in our minds, the day concluded.

If the four previous days of the congress seemed dizzying, Day 5 trumped them all. The new leadership took their place on the stage and began to propose their vision for the next four years by laying out a plan for the commissions. The commissions, each led by an Executive Committee member, are essential to the goals of the congress as debated and discussed during the previous four days. The activities of the commissions shape UNIMA's presence in the world. The commissions also receive funding from UNIMA to carry out their activities. While most remained as established with a mandate to continue their work, certain proposals to adjust or eliminate certain commissions met with passionate debate. Final votes by the congress led to moving the tasks of the previous term's Strategic Planning Commission under the auspices of the Executive Committee, the creation of a new commission for the Middle East and North Africa, the creation of a Youth Commission, a contentious movement of the Women's Commission under a new Social Justice Commission and the joining of the Commission for Latin America and the North America Commission to create a new Three Americas Commission. The final votes were cast, the presidents of each commission established, and the congress adjourned.

**On the final night of the festival,** a party took place in Donostia/San Sebastián. Tributes were made to the many people who had worked tirelessly to make the 22nd UNIMA Congress and World Puppetry Festival a reality, and then the DJ started his set. It was a lovely thing to watch people who had debated so passionately during the congress dance the night away as one. I thought about my first day in San Sebastián when a small group passed arm in arm as I strolled down the waterfront of that picturesque city. Those are puppeteers, I remarked, and indeed in the following days I had the pleasure to meet them and learn about their work. These personal connections – made through casual conversations on the bus ride to Tolosa, walking to the next performance, or sharing a meal – are the bedrock of cultural diplomacy. So much may divide us, but this art form, in all its various incarnations, unites us. As we begin to see the interconnections in our world more clearly, peace and understanding do seem possible.

I look forward to the next four years as I serve UNIMA and its mission, and I invite everyone reading this to check out the website, find out more about the organization and get involved. And always read the newsletter – you never know what opportunities await!



T-SHIRT PROTESTING THE ARREST OF SPANISH PUPPETEERS  
DESIGN BY ALEX APARICIO



LATE-NIGHT PUPPETRY PHOTO: MORROW



IRREELS

# PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



REPRESENTING UNIMA-USA! MANUEL MORÁN,  
THE AUTHOR, KAREN SMITH, KURT HUNTER

Many thanks to my fellow councilors Dmitri Carter, Kurt Hunter, Manuel Morán and Karen Smith. It was a pleasure to serve with you. Thanks also to Vince Anthony and Lynn Jeffries for offering their sage wisdom as I prepared for the congress and to UNIMA and Cheryl Henson for the generous financial support to offset councilor travel expenses. To Andrew and Bonnie Periale – thank you for your many years of service to UNIMA and congratulations! To Nancy Lohman Staub, you are always and forever an inspiration to me. Finally, a tribute to Allelu Kurten, THE UNIMAmama. It is my hope to continue her legacy as a strong UNIMA-USA member who made a difference to the organization and the world of puppetry through advocacy and action.

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

Kristin Haverty is a puppeteer, stop-motion silhouette animator and musician. She has toured with Tears of Joy Theatre and studied with Dan Hurlin at Sarah Lawrence College and I Wayan Nartha in Bali, Indonesia. She currently serves as Associate Producer at the Center for Puppetry Arts.

## Endnotes

- 1 This number represents both countries which host UNIMA centers and those with UNIMA representatives.
- 2 UNIMA's World Puppetry Festival in Donostia/San Sebastián coincided with the meeting of the Congress. From Saturday, May 28 through Saturday, June 4, 2016, festival performances activated the public spaces along the waterfront boulevard, below towering Baroque cathedrals, within Belle Époque theaters and even the local firehouse. The 2016 festival program consisted of Street Performances, Indoor Performances, a Symposium, Exhibits and late night presentations hosted by puppeteers from the distinct regions of Spain. As an UNIMA-USA councilor, I also had the great opportunity to spend my days in congress meetings at TOPIC, the immaculately designed puppet center in Tolosa, about forty minutes by bus from San Sebastián.
- 3 While the full Congress convenes every four years, Councilors meet every two years and Executive Committee members meet every year at a different host location.
- 4 From *Don Quixote*

For Haverty's account of the Festival that accompanied the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress, see her article in the 2016 summer issue of *The Puppetry Journal*, the publication of *Puppeteers of America*

## UNIMA Members of Honor from the U.S.



VINCE ANTHONY, BIL BAIRD,  
FRANK BALLARD, REMO BUFANO,  
ALAN COOK, MOLLIE FALKENSTEIN,



JIM HENSON, ALLELU KURTEN,  
GEORGE LATSHAW,  
MARJORIE BATCHELDER MCPHARLIN,  
PAUL MCPHARLIN, VIVIAN MICHAEL,



BONNIE & ANDREW PERIALE,  
ROMAIN PROCTOR,  
RUFUS & MARGO ROSE, TONY SARG,  
PETER SCHUMANN, NANCY STAUB