

The Crowds

Entertaining Large Numbers of People

This is not easy to do. However, in a parade setting, it is critical to entertain many people in a short amount of time. There are times when individual handshakes just won't do.

Group hugs works. Practice this and develop a sense of where the puppet's hands are when you bend forward and reach out wide with the arm extensions. Another technique is to "run" along doing high-fives. Adjacent spectators usually catch on and are ready to make contact with the moving puppet's hand.

Keep in mind, however, your puppet is rather fragile and slow to react. Don't underestimate the desire of the crowd to make physical contact with the puppet.

Crowd Response

This varies depending on many factors, most of which are out of the puppeteer's control. These factors include: venue, focus of event, age of crowd, weather, puppet proximity to crowd, time-of-day, etc.

Engaging Spectators

People will point, smile, take pictures, and often want to give you a "high-five" or "shake" the puppet's hand. But, sometimes they don't know how to react.

It cannot be over stressed that these puppets can be intimidating to young children. Even those who smile, could, without warning, panic and experience extreme terror if the puppet comes too close. This is a time to "talk" for the puppet by assuring the child you are okay and then back away gracefully.

To engage physical contact with spectators, you can ask if they want to high-five the puppet or get a hug from it. Some high-fivers, however, can be too aggressive and some children are quite frightened by big, hugging hands around their shoulders. Use wise judgment.

If you have a securely-built puppet and have practiced delicate maneuvering with it, you can engage the aloof spectators with careful consideration of how they might react. Here are examples of what we've done:

- gently rub puppet hand on head of balding guy.
- gently clasp puppet hands around a balloon nearby.
- gently pat top of umbrellas or canopies protecting spectators from drizzle.
- initiate "high-five" with parent or teen.
- give group hug to as many spectators as your puppet hands can reach.
- wave to or high-five people atop a float.

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[inspired by Michael Curry's Big Puppets]

Puppet Interacting With Things

In areas with trees or overhead wires, exercise extreme caution at all times. Your pit crew can better judge clearance. In safe areas, you can interact with inanimate objects and entertain the crowd at the same time. Here are examples of what we've done:

- pretend to "look" into 2nd floor windows.
- touch leaves in trees.
- pretend to "smell" flowers in high-hanging flower baskets.
- touch high parts on bridges.
- touch bottom of goal posts.
- pretend to push large, heavy vehicles.

Miscellaneous Issues

Wind and Walking Speed

Strong wind or rapid walking/jogging by the puppeteer can cause sudden instability. Use caution when the wind picks up this occurs since the puppeteer may be more prone to fall or the stresses may cause the T-joints to come apart. All of which bring things to a halt.

Pit Crew

A lady- (or gentleman-) in-waiting is a must. It is not easy to get into and out of these puppets without assistance. Plan to have a non-puppeteer helper. Should a catastrophic even happen, and it will, the pit crew person can pick up and carry the pieces.

Another benefit from having someone accompany you, ideally blended in with the crowd, is that they will hear and experience audience reaction that the puppeteer might have missed. The pit crew can clarify misconceptions, if any, and give valuable feedback to puppeteer, later. Finally, they can carry water and snacks for the puppeteer.

Storing

If you have not allowed for partial disassembly, then storage may be more complicated. If you have a tall (> 10 feet) storage facility, the puppet can be hung from hooks or brackets. Exercise care so that parts are not damaged.

Transporting

If you minimize glued joints, you can dismantle your puppet for easier storage and transport. Keep in mind how you will transport your puppet when considering adding "bulk." Exercise great care with all parts of the puppet when transporting—especially the carbon-fiber rods (spine and arm extensions).

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Events

Events for your puppet

Local Parades

March or April: Earth Day's Procession of the Species
July: Fourth of July parade
November or December: Holiday parade

Other Opportunities

Grand openings/celebrations at local businesses (by invite only)
School visits (invite only)
Farmer's Markets (invite)
County Fairs (invite)
Artisan Fairs (invite)
Masquerade Balls

Use your imagination but ask permission, first. Also, check for obstructions before performing.

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