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THE ARCHER

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The power of puppetry

By Angela Anderson

Founded in 1961, the excellent Little Angel marionette theatre has been converted from a former chapel tucked away behind St Mary's Church in Islington. It's known as "the home of British puppetry" and has a well-deserved reputation for high-quality, imaginative productions that tour nationally and internationally.

These puppets are not only for children. I only discovered the theatre four years ago watching a production of Jack and the Beanstalk set in the 1950s with Jack's mother wearing wide skirts and tight belts and one of the baddies driving a large Cadillac. I spent the first two minutes thinking "how delightful for the children" before becoming very engaged with the story myself, feeling dismayed when things went wrong for Jack and shouting with delight when they all lived happily ever after.

Professional puppetry

I work as a volunteer at one of their Saturday morning puppet clubs where children design and make their own puppets before writing and performing a play in the theatre at the end of term. The Little Angel Youth Theatre course, run in conjunction with the National Theatre, is for 11 to 15-year-olds. Adults too can learn professional puppetry skills at Little Angel.

Their Christmas production this year is Alice in Wonderland, featuring all the well-known characters and including hand shadows, Victorian photo portraits and witty songs. Hold On, Mr Rabbit is the accompanying production for younger children, based on Alice but featuring Elsie following her toy rabbit as he disappears through a picture frame.

If you don't have your own children, borrow a friend's and take them along; you will certainly enjoy it as much as they do. Anyone who has seen War Horse, the First World War play with its life-size animals, can attest to the power of puppets and our ability to believe in them. More details can be found at www.littleangeltheatre.com.



No strings? or The Little Angel puppets cast their spell. Photo by Lynette Shanbury



Take charge and recharge

By Adam Justice-Mills

So, it's Christmas morning and as I unwrap the new executive toy I wonder whether batteries are included, and what their green credentials are.

Batteries keep us going when we can't plug in to get electricity, so they are incredibly handy (we use 700 million every year in the UK).

That's provided you don't need much power because they don't hold a lot of energy unless they are big and heavy (a low "energy density") so battery-driven cars have only become viable recently.

Small and smart

Batteries are getting smarter, though. Remember the huge batteries on your old mobile phones and laptops? Smarter means more complex and costly to make, and might also mean more "rare earth" materials too.

The energy they hold has to come from somewhere so that means nasty chemicals during manufacture and - unless you charge them from a solar cell - the electricity grid when they are re-charged. Then there's the energy to re-cycle them when they get to the end of their life.

Battery downcycling

So how can you make sure these nasty chemicals don't escape and that the energy to make and re-charge them is kept to a minimum? Firstly, you can try "downcycling" disposable AA or AAA batteries from high-power devices

like digital cameras and toys into low-power ones like TV remotes and clocks. You'll be amazed how much longer they keep working.

The good news is that, over their whole life cycle, rechargeable batteries are better, having 28 times less impact on the environment than disposable ones. So get loads of rechargeable ones (and an efficient or solar charger) and feel better immediately.

Luckily, there are places you can dispose of dead batteries safely. Retailers should have "battery back" disposal bins for consumer batteries and the council tip at Summers Lane will take complete, undamaged lead-acid (car) batteries too. So, take charge and re-charge!

Diwali delight

A party for senior citizens to celebrate Diwali was almost called off, until a lucky chance meant it could go ahead after all.

The Barnet Elderly Asian Foundation was short of the usual funds for its annual celebration for people from the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities. Then chairman Dipak Jashapara had a stroke of luck when he found a leaflet on a bus.

The leaflet was advertising the Fred Wolfing fund, which makes charitable donations in memory of its namesake, a Jewish refugee whose family fled Nazi persecution and who lived in Barnet towards the end of his life.

The fund's generous help meant that more than 150 over-50s from the foundation celebrated the Festival of Light in early November with dancing, music and socialising at the Shree Aden Depala Mitramandal Centre in Church Lane.

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