

## 4: Walking with Wind

“Movement never lies. It is a barometer telling the state of the soul's weather to all who can read it.”

- Martha Graham

In this chapter, you will learn various techniques from around the world that will strengthen your performing style. You will learn to walk, to move your wrist and arm in conjunction with your fingers. Wind can also mean tradition - old traditions and new ones. It is difficult to know oneself unless you know others.

Photo of puppet walking

### **How to Walk**

To walk with your puppet, to move them freely around stage, means that you too must move. Your feet, which are normally firmly planted while the puppets are standing still, must be ready to gently walk around. Remember that a hand puppet must maintain proper posture at all times including during a walk or run. That means your whole body will need to lean, sway, and move.

Stand up. Form a Neutral Stance with your dominant hand. Move your entire arm, from your elbow to your fingertips, up and down, over and over. You must not exceed 2-3 inches going up or down, but also moving too little (under 1 inch) is poor. This is the basis for all walks. Now, while moving your arm up and down, move it 1 meter to the left, then to the right - all while maintaining good posture. Make sure to move your own body to allow your arm the freedom to move without straining.

Finally, while the puppet is walking, twist their body slightly with each step. In the first step, twist their body to the left, ending the twist when their "foot" lands. For the next step, twist their body to the right, and so on. When you walk with your puppeteer body, as your left foot moves forward so does your right hand. Your shoulder moves forward slightly. This is the action we are mimicking in miniature.

Photo of puppet moving up and down,

Photo of puppet twisting left and right

### **Stopping**

Just as every Move has a beginning, middle and end, your walk must terminate somewhere. Decide where your puppet will stop and make it a definitive end. A sloppy ending will ruin the illusion that this character can walk and actually has legs. Remember that below the playboard you must imagine your puppet to have imaginary feet that can trip or kick. As all Moves are exaggerated pantomime, so too must your walk end with a determined final step.

Exercise: walk a puppet around the stage and STOP, then turn to look at something. Walk to that something, keeping the puppet's eyes focused on it at all times. Turn around and repeat. Practice this by using a playboard or do it in front of a mirror.

Photo of puppet moving to Stage Left

### **Secret Technique #2: Turn-Around Twist**

If your puppet is on your right hand and you walk to Stage Left, you will eventually hit a wall. You can go no further left, and if you attempt to turn to the right, your wrist will be unable to fully do so. You might be able to turn the puppet's head and body slightly, but it will cause you great pain to try and force a full turn without moving your own full body to the puppet's left side. In this uncomfortable position you will be unable to perform as well as when the puppet is comfortably in front of you, facing the way your wrist naturally wants to move.

The solution is a technique called 'Turn-Around Twist'. Instead of turning your puppet downstage (facing the audience), turn it the opposite way (upstage, away from the audience). You do not need to move your entire body or arm to turn this way. It may feel unnatural at first, and you must accomplish the turn as quickly as possible as it does not look good to have the audience see the back of the puppet's head. Practice walking with the puppet now facing the opposite direction - this is an important step for learning how to move two puppets at once.

Photo of puppet reaching Stage Left

Photo of puppet turning around Upstage

Photo of puppet now facing backwards

### **The 5 Walks**

One thing we can absolutely borrow from Bu Dai Shi is how their puppets walk. These puppets walk in the same way that Chinese actors playing archetypal characters in Beijing opera have walked for hundreds of years. Each of the four major roles has their own set movement, and it can instantly give the audience a lot of information about the character.

## **Sheng 生**

Sheng is the main male role. Like the other major roles, there are several subtypes (Laosheng - old man, Wu Sheng - warrior man, etc). We are focusing on just 'Sheng', the average ordinary guy. They are respectable people: scholars, nobles, heads of households.

The Sheng Walk is the walk you already learned - perfectly average. The puppet moves up and down within 3 inches while moving left or right on stage. While they move, twist their body slightly to the left or to the right with each step. End the walk with a definitive last step.

Photo of Sheng Walk

## Qingyi 青衣

Any female role is called Dan 旦, and there are many subgroups - warriors are Wu Dan, teenage girls are Hua Dan, etc. We are focusing on Qingyi (also known as Zheng Dan 正旦), the most important role in every opera. Qingyi is usually a wife or mother, a full-figured feminine woman who is virtuous. Their walk is the most difficult to pull off.

Start with a basic walk. Now, your wrist becomes the puppet's hips, and you should sway Qingyi's hips to the left and right with every step. Adding to this, twist their body more than usual as you walk. Imagine your hand is a paintbrush pointed down at a piece of paper that lies flat at the bottom of your wrist. If done correctly, the paintbrush should paint a perfect Figure 8 with every two steps. It is easier to paint the Figure 8 by itself then try to do all the above instructions AND paint it. Slow down time to make it easier on yourself - Qingyi isn't going anywhere fast. If you cannot do the Figure 8, just focus on swinging her hips to indicate femininity.

Finally, we want to exemplify dignity and softness with every movement. Instead of using Poke or Chop, this character uses Sweeps and slower, fluid Moves.

Photo of Qingyi walk

## Lao Dan 老旦

Lao Dan is the old woman, which for our purposes will be extremely old. You can also use this walk for an old man.

Start with your puppet standing straight up with perfect posture. Now slowly curl their spine down towards the ground until they are looking at the floor. Their back should not be parallel to the ground but be curved. This is the beginning stance for Lao Dan. Now, every step begins with the puppet's head moving up as their hips move forward. As their body steps forward, their head comes back down to the beginning pose. This motion resembles the movement of an inchworm or caterpillar. The b-boy dance move "the worm" comes to mind.

This movement should be subtle in order for the audience to register that it is an old person with back problems and not a silly dancer, so once you know the basic movements try doing it only slightly. Also, since they are old and withered, every step they take is a great effort. Sometimes this character must stop and rest or take a breath before continuing to walk.

Photo of Lao Dan

## Jing 净

Jing is a male role with a painted face, a very forceful character with exaggerated movements. Jing is rough and mighty, strong and sometimes bull-headed. He moves with a confident swagger, punching the air as he walks with almost exclusively Strong and Fierce Moves.

Jing walk is like Sheng walk, but with every movement isolated and injected with a strong feeling. Every turn, every step with Jing must be extremely crisp. Think of military precision, how a trained soldier moves. Instead of merely twisting their body with every step, Jing also extends their fists into the air in front of them. You can also have them say “Hah!” with certain Moves to emphasize their strength and battle-readiness.

Photo of Jing



## Chou 丑

Chou is the clown of Beijing opera, recognizable by a large circle of white makeup on their face and their silly demeanor. Chou is the most physically demanding role as they perform incredible feats of acrobatics while entertaining and making the audience laugh. They are always lighthearted and fun, foolish and likable.

The Chou walk is two-fold. With every step, your puppet must tilt to the side 15 degrees while reaching out one arm in that same direction - almost like a one-armed Arms Up stance. The unused arm tucks in to the chest. Then into the next step, tilt to the other side while extending the other arm, tucking in the unused arm to the chest. Repeat this pattern faster and faster.

When you walk with Chou, you must embody a fun spirit! Even when they turn to face the audience, it must be with a silly flourish. It's okay to smile and have fun with every Move.

Photo of Chou walk

Remember that just like Moves, walks can be performed to three different intensities: Jab, Strong, and Fierce. How pronounced your puppet character walks tells the audience a lot of information about them. Are they a Fierce Old Woman, or a Strong Clown, a Weak Man, etc. Mix and match different characteristics and use these roles as a starting point for your original characters.

### **Running**

Once you can perform each walk with ease, try doing the same thing but twice as fast. Maintain the specific movements that make each walk recognizable. This is a run. Now try the walks at half speed. You can achieve more beautiful and purposeful movement when you slow down time.

### **Entering and Exiting**

Human actors on a stage are in character the moment they first set foot in the wings - as soon as the audience can see even a small part of them, they are expected to walk, act and behave as their characters. Puppets do not just appear on stage - they walk, run or slide there. They can teleport in or jump, they can fall in or ride an unseen elevator, but every entrance or exit must be a choice. The puppet must begin moving in character before the audience can see it (below the playboard). Remember: no dead puppets.

### **Lessons from Mister Punch**

The Punch & Judy tradition from England is world famous. Punch, who evolved over centuries from Pulcinella in Italy, has dangly legs in front of his bottom sleeve. This gives him the ability to sit with his legs splayed out on the playboard. When a puppet has an extra appendage, a gimmick or special effect, the audience expects to see it in action. However, you should only use this type of thing once. Every time the puppet does something extraordinary, the next time they repeat this half of its power will be gone. The same is true for jokes. Every time you use the same joke or gag on stage, its power is halved.

Let's apply that to walks. The first time you have a really dynamic chase scene in your show, it will be a really special and fun moment. If you do the same type of chase scene again, or if you have puppets move in a similar manner again, both it and the previous incarnation will seem less special. If you choose to have a specific movement that draws attention, remember that you should find a different way or variation instead of repeating the same thing again. Mister Punch only sits and crosses his legs once.

Photo of Jim's Punch sitting.

### **Other Walks**

There are many other ways to move your puppet around on stage. A ghost character can float, a magician can teleport from place to place, a baby can crawl. Try many different ways of moving around and think of a character or moment that would serve that walk best. Try to have as much variety of movement in your show as possible.

Once you are comfortable walking your puppet on stage, moving around and looking around, try to incorporate everything you have learned thus far. Remember that your puppet can breathe, can STOP, can gesture and utilize different Moves to communicate. Face the audience and prepare yourself to begin talking.