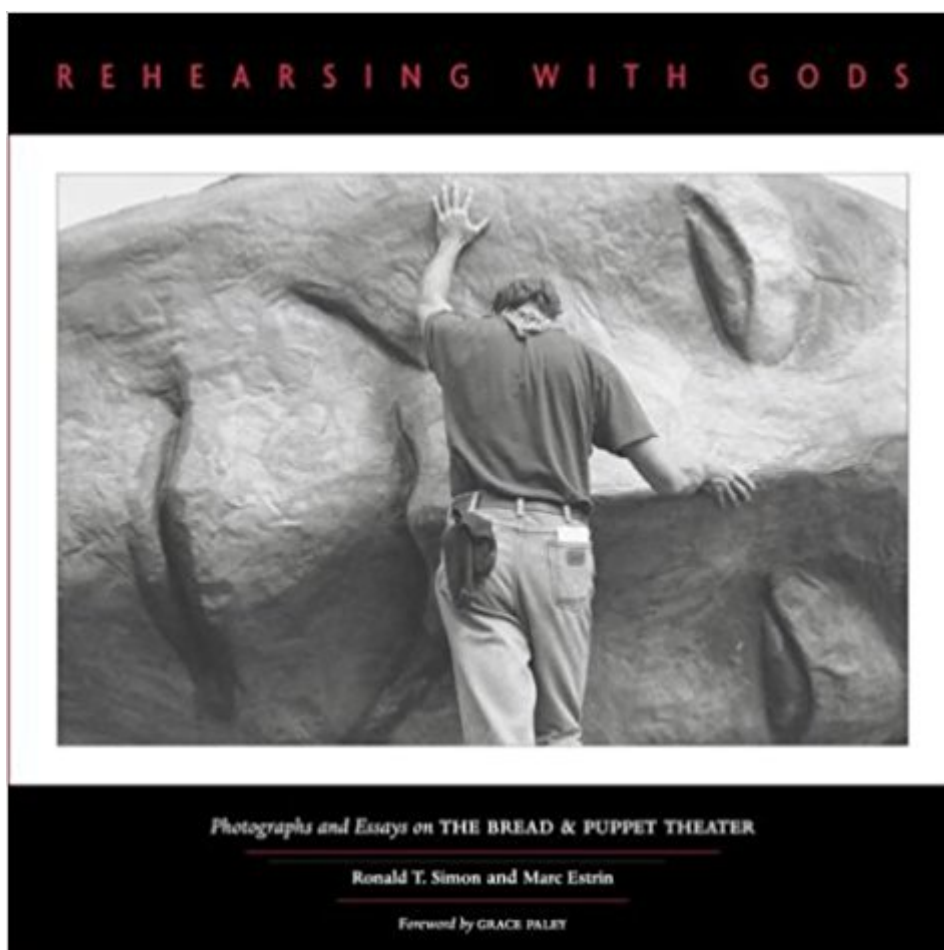


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# Rehearsing With Gods: Photographs And Essays On The Bread & Puppet Theater



## Synopsis

Peter Schumann and his Bread & Puppet Theater are likely the most important, and surely the longest-lasting, contributors to modern American theater history. Since the early sixties Schumann and his puppeteers have been pouring out work after work on every scale: political works, mysterious works, grand works, modest works, works on the street and works in fields, works to be played in every size theater on four continents, books, prints, posters, and banners which live as show-and-tell in so many homes. Now Ron Simon and Marc Estrin, a remarkable photographer, and a long-time puppeteer, who have each in his own way contributed to the shows, recorded events, and reflected on them. Out of their experiences they have created *Rehearsing with Gods: Photographs and Essays on the Bread & Puppet Theater*. Far more than history or documentation, they identify eight archetypes engaged repeatedly by Peter Schumann and his crew. Their book consists of parallel meditations—the texts not commenting on the photos, the photos not illustrating the texts—unified and intertwined by the chapter themes of Death, Fiend, Beast, Human, World, Gift, Bread, and Hope. Altogether, it's a collaboration that reflects their sixty-odd man-years of personal experience in, hidden narratives of, and speculative reflections on Peter Schumann's projects, ever-more relevant to our times. This is a book that will engage both fans and newcomers—an inside-view of Peter Schumann's political-artistic world.

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## Customer Reviews

The Bread and Puppet Theater, which started in the early '60s on New York's Lower East Side,

migrated some years later to its present location in Vermont, and the wide open spaces obviously serve its expansive, anarchic being well. Photographer Simon has conducted a 20-year study of Theater founder Peter Schumann, and Simon's 145 duotone photos show the influences of ancient theater and religions, particularly in the gravity of the massive faces of the puppets, made initially from straw, clay and, "according to some alleged medieval German formula," beer. The book is organized around the eight "archetypical" themes of Death, Fiend, Beast, Human, World, Gift, Bread and Hope; however, like Bread and Puppet itself, which combines the creative with the mysterious, themes eddy into other themes. Estrin (*Insect Dreams: The Half Life of Gregor Samsa*) makes the strong social activist component of the theater clear, in tones that are by turns humorous and revealing, informational and awestruck (especially when it comes to Schumann). But the stars here are the enormous, fantastical creatures that enact possible freedoms each season. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Founded in New York in 1963, Peter Schumann's Bread & Puppet Theatre has never achieved the renown of Jim Henson's Muppets. But Schumann's huge, expressionistic puppets, many of which tower over their operators, are instantly recognizable, and his performances have become so popular that he had to cancel the annual Domestic Resurrection Circus and Pageant in 1998, held on his Vermont farm, because the anticipated audiences were too large. He continues staging smaller public performances across the globe. Simon's gorgeous photographs capture the beauty of Schumann's work: the huge, sculpted heads and hands; the epic "stage" pictures created by dozens of puppets spread across a city- or landscape; the harmonious union of puppets and people, earth and sky. Sadly for theatrical scholars, none of the photos are dated or captioned, and the accompanying short essays by longtime Bread & Puppeteer Estrin are so subjective and self-consciously literary as to frustrate those looking for hard facts about the remarkable company. Grace Paley's enthusiastic foreword contains more information but is all too short. Jack Helbig Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

This is a simply breathtaking book, a wonderful and sorely needed piece of work. It captures in one volume a sample of the beauty and intelligence of the Bread & Puppet Theater which has not been recorded before. This radical puppet theater troupe, directed by the venerated Peter Schumann, is among the most important in the postwar theater; it is influenced by Brecht and hippie culture, but its work is unlike anything else before or since, and its brilliance has not yet been chronicled, much less sufficiently appreciated by criticism. You can use this as a one-stop introduction to the Bread &

Puppet Theater -- something which has long been needed, for the radical puppeteers have been among the most important artists of the last half-century but also the least known (at least outside radical politics and the Northeastern U.S.). And you can, and should, read it to reflect on the beauty of Bread & Puppet even if you already know the theater well. Ronald Simon's photos are stunning examples of spontaneous photography, capturing the essential feeling of being around Bread & Puppet, and are beautifully reproduced here at a decent size. Marc Estrin's essays on clusters of little topics -- World, Bread, Fiend, Human -- capture some lovely details and meditate intelligently on the life and aims of the theater. This is the place your Bread & Puppet reading should begin, but it doesn't have to end here. Stefan Brecht's brilliant study of Bread & Puppet is out of print, but used copies can still be found both of *Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. George Dennison's book *An Existing Better World* is also well worth reading.

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