



□ **Traditional Dutch puppet theatre scenes**

The puppet theatre scenes with *Jan Klaassen* (Mr Punch), *Katrijn* (Judy) and the *baby*, with the *General*, with the *Hangman* and his gallows, and Jan Klaassen with *Death* are centuries old. They belong to an international repertoire.

The show is played with *glove-puppets*. Each country has its own variations. Death with his long neck is typically Dutch, he is called *Pierlala*. He rises silently alongside Jan Klaassen, who is quick to curse him, calling him *chalky beak*.

Death's neck becomes increasingly longer. At last his head even reaches above the theatre. But Jan pulls Death back.

Pierlala is a *stick puppet* and therefore eminently suitable for this up-and-down game.

Jan Klaassen, the principal figure of Dutch folk puppet theatre, probably originated in the second half of the seventeenth century. He bears some resemblance to the French *Polichinelle*, to *Mr Punch* from Britain and to the German *Kasperl*.

The forefather of all these incorrigible buffoons is the Italian *Pulcinella*.



□ **Props**

Standard props such as the *stick* and the *gallows* are used widely in folk puppet theatre. Most of the props are disproportionately large for the characters on the tiny puppet stage, but some are in fact too small, take the gallows, for instance. This adds to the 'slapstick' character of the play.

The club is sometimes used to beat a rhythm on the back of the head of one of the opponents on the stage, or to poke him or her in the stomach. Once the enemy has been beaten, and is lying helpless on the floor, the victor runs his stick over the former's neck.

You may wonder if puppet theatre is cruel. Of course not, it is just a question of practicalities. The puppeteer in a street puppet theatre must entice his audience from passers-by, the plays must be short and full of action. Performances like these can still be found in folk puppet theatre in Europe even today.

□ *Illustration: Jan Klaassen and the General. Painted by: Hetty Paërl, Amsterdam (2001)*

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