

Why it matters

The short version, then the whole argument. By Jimmy Vee, founder.



The short version

Ventriloquism is the art of giving a voice to something that doesn't have one. Right now, the art itself needs one. Its history is scattered across old programs, letters, photographs, newsletters and boxes that too often get thrown away when the people who made that history are gone. The dummy survives. The story doesn't. And what does exist is hard to access. Here's why ventriloquism's story is worth saving. A ventriloquist's dummy, Stooky Bill, became one of the first recognizable images ever seen on television. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy became radio superstars when nobody could even see the dummy. And nearly a century later, ventriloquists are still winning Got Talent competitions around the world, reaching finals, earning Golden Buzzers and proving the art is anything but dead. This isn't some dusty little sideshow. It's a living, worldwide entertainment art with a remarkable past, working professionals carrying it forward today, and kids out there who haven't discovered it yet. So we preserve the history before it disappears, give today's ventriloquists a place to call home and hand the next generation a book, the puppet and the possibility.

The whole argument

Ventriloquism is the art of giving a voice to something that doesn't have one.

Funny thing is, somewhere along the way, the art itself lost its voice.

The people who built it are disappearing. And when they go, their stories don't always end up in museums or neatly organized archives. They end up in old programs. Newsletters. Letters. Scrapbooks. Photographs with somebody's name scribbled on the back. Boxes in closets nobody has opened in thirty years.

Then somebody cleans out the house.

The dummy gets sold.

The paper gets thrown away.

And suddenly we know **what** survived... but not who made it, who worked it, where it performed, or why it mattered.

That's how history disappears.

Not all at once.

One name. One photograph. One story at a time.

And this is an art worth remembering.

Because ventriloquism hasn't just been standing off to the side of entertainment history.

It keeps showing up right in the middle of it.

When television itself was still an experiment, Scottish inventor John Logie Baird had a problem.

His equipment needed so much light that it was brutally hot, and human faces didn't have enough contrast for his primitive system.

So he reached for a ventriloquist's dummy.

Its name was **Stooky Bill**.

On October 2, 1925, Stooky Bill's painted face appeared on Baird's screen as the first recognizable full-tone television image.

Before television had sitcom stars, news anchors, talk-show hosts, soap operas or reality-TV celebrities...

it had a dummy.

You couldn't make this stuff up.

And ventriloquism kept showing up.

It conquered vaudeville.

It became a sensation on radio, an even stranger accomplishment when you remember nobody listening could actually see the dummy.

It became part of television, advertising, nightclubs, theaters and Las Vegas.

And a century after Stooky Bill helped prove television could work, ventriloquists are still walking onto some of the biggest television stages in the world and winning.

Literally.

Across the international *Got Talent* franchise, ventriloquists have competed against singers, dancers, comedians, magicians, musicians, acrobats and just about every other kind of performer imaginable.

And they've won the whole damn thing.

Terry Fator. Zillah & Totte. Paul Zerdin. Darci Lynne. Le Cas Pucine. Celia Muñoz. Nikolas Bushi.

Ventriloquists have taken home *Got Talent* championships in countries around the world, while many more have reached finals and semifinals, earned Golden Buzzers and become audience favorites.

Think about that arc.

One of the first recognizable faces on television was a ventriloquist's dummy.

Nearly a hundred years later, ventriloquists are still using television to make millions of people fall in love with characters that aren't even alive.

That's not nostalgia. That's staying power. That's an art that keeps reinventing itself.

And that's why preserving the past isn't enough.

We also have to document what's happening **right now**.

There are ventriloquists all over the world building figures, writing acts, creating characters, performing shows, experimenting with technology and taking this wonderfully weird art into places the people who came before them couldn't possibly have imagined.

They deserve to be part of the record.

And somewhere there's a kid who's going to see one of them for the first time and think:

Wait... you can DO that?

That kid deserves a way in.

That's why the Ventriloquism Institute exists.

We preserve the people and stories that built the art.

We document and champion the people practicing it today.

And we teach it to the people who will carry it forward tomorrow.

We find the record before it disappears.

We connect the pieces before they get separated.

We make sure the people who gave voices to characters aren't themselves forgotten.

And we give this strange, funny, remarkable worldwide art the voice it deserves.

After all...

somebody has to speak for the ventriloquists.

Ventriloquism Institute · info@ventriloquisminstitute.org · 407-592-6939 · ventriloquisminstitute.org/press ·
Sources for Stooky Bill (Science Museum Group) and the Got Talent winners are on request.

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