

MANUAL CINEMA'S FRANKENSTEIN

APRIL 3, 2024
THE MOORE THEATRE

PROGRAM NOTE FROM LEAD DEVISER AND CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR DREW DIR

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*—which, among its myriad other contributions to popular culture, single-handedly founded the modern genre of science fiction—casts a long shadow over the medium of cinema. The story of Victor Frankenstein and the unnamed Creature he brings to life has itself being perennially re-animated for movie audiences; from the first 1910 silent film adaptation produced by Thomas Edison's studio, to Boris Karloff's iconic visage in the 1933 Universal Studios monster, to more recent Hollywood reboots, riffs, and parodies. With each new era, *Frankenstein* manages to connect with our sympathy and revulsion at Frankenstein's monster, our ambivalence about the progress of science and technology, and our anxieties about the mysterious threshold between life and death.

This fall, Seattle Theatre Group presents *Frankenstein*, an adaptation by Manual Cinema, a theater company that seeks to create cinema on stage through an ingenious choreography of live music, object theater, and shadow puppetry using old-school overhead projectors. The work of Manual Cinema shares a special affinity with Mary Shelley's story about the reanimation of obsolete materials, and their adaptation aims to capture the breadth of *Frankenstein's* legacy in film: the novel's cinematic afterlife, so to speak. These artists are doing so by taking a cue from Mary Shelley herself, who gave her novel a *gothic* structure—the story is told in a series of narrative frames, like Russian nesting dolls, with each frame narrated by a different character (the centermost frame being an account by the Creature itself). In Manual Cinema's adaptation, each "frame" of the story will be told through a different cinematic genre or style, depending on which character's point-of-view is being presented. Like the Creature itself, the production becomes a pastiche of different visual idioms scavenged from a century of cinema.

Manual Cinema has also written an additional frame for the novel: the story of Mary Shelley herself, and how she came to write a novel of such enduring relevance. *Frankenstein* was originally conceived by Mary as a ghost story—a response to a friendly competition with the poets Percy Shelley and Lord Byron during an unusually stormy summer on Lake Geneva. Manual Cinema's adaptation aims to re-animate their own *Frankenstein* against the backdrop of Mary Shelley's fascinating, tragic, and little-told biography.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

A Manual Cinema Production
Adapted from the novel by Mary Shelley
Concept and Direction by Drew Dir
Devised by Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace, and Julia Miller
Original Music by Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter
Storyboards by Drew Dir
Music and Sound Design by Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter
Shadow Puppet Design by Drew Dir with Lizi Breit
Projections and Scenic Design by Rasean Davonte Johnson
Costume and Wig Design by Mieka van der Ploeg
Lighting Design by Claire Chrzan
3D Creature Puppet Design by Lizi Breit
Prop Design by Lara Musard

Technical Director: Mike Usrey
Stage Manager, Video Mixing and Live Sound Effects: Kyle Vegter
Lighting Director: David Goodman-Edberg
Sound Engineer: Matt Reich

CAST

Puppeteers:
Maren Celest (Lord Byron)
Sarah Fornace (Victor Frankenstein, Mary Shelley)
Julia Miller (The Creature, Elizabeth Frankenstein)
Eunice Woods (Percy Shelley, Vocals)
Myra Su (Puppeteer)

Musicians:
Nora Barton (cello, aux percussion, vocals)
Peter Ferry (percussion)
Jason Gresl (clarinets and aux percussion)
Robin Meiksins (flutes, aux percussion, piano)

For all North, Central, and South American booking enquiries please contact:
Laura Colby, Director, Elsie Management
laurac@elsieman.org
TEL: +1 718 797 4577
www.elsieman.org

MANUAL CINEMA COMPANY BIO

Manual Cinema is an Emmy Award winning performance collective, design studio, and film/video production company founded in 2010 by Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace, Ben Kauffman, Julia Miller, and Kyle Vegter. Manual Cinema combines handmade shadow puppetry, cinematic techniques, and innovative sound and music to create immersive stories for stage and screen.

Using vintage overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, live feed cameras, multi-channel sound design, and a live music ensemble, Manual Cinema transforms the experience of attending the cinema and imbues it with liveness, ingenuity, and theatricality. The company was awarded an Emmy in 2017 for "The Forger," a video created for *The New York Times* and named Chicago Artists of the Year in 2018 by the *Chicago Tribune*. Their shadow puppet animations are featured in the film remake of *Candyman*, directed by Nia DaCosta and produced by Jordan Peele's *Monkeypaw Productions*. Recent productions include *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show about a Terrible Monster*, based on books by Mo Willems, and an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

In 2023, they filmed their new original short puppet film, *Future Feeling*, which will have its festival premier in 2024..

CAST BIOS - PUPPETEERS

MAREN CELEST (Lord Byron) is a multi-disciplinary storyteller based in Chicago. Their video work has premiered on NPR music, their photography and experimental portraiture has been featured in publications worldwide, and their large format analogue work can be seen on albums for Ohmme, Ben LaMar Gay and Twin Talk. Maren published a book in tandem with an album and 7" record called "I Saw the Sun" (Pub. Candor Arts) which was accepted into a permanent collection at Yale University - the work compiles personal experience over 5+ years documented on 35mm, writing & lyrics from life on the road with Manual Cinema through 8 different countries. Maren is beyond grateful to perform, sing and cue sound + video on behalf of Manual Cinema's masterful and moving work.
www.marencelest.com

SARAH FORNACE (Mary Shelley, Victor Frankenstein, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a director, puppeteer, choreographer, and narrative designer based in Chicago. She is a co-Artistic Director of Manual Cinema. Outside of Manual Cinema, Sarah has worked as a performer or choreographer with Redmoon Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Court Theatre, Steppenwolf Garage, and Blair Thomas and Co. Most recently, Sarah wrote the story mode for the video game Rivals of Aether. In 2017, she directed and edited the first episode of the web series, The Doula is IN. In 2016, she directed and devised an "animotion" production of Shakespeare's Hamlet with Rokoko Studios for HamletScen at Kromborg Castle in Elsinore, Denmark.

JULIA MILLER (The Creature, Elizabeth Frankenstein) is a director, puppeteer, and puppet designer. With Manual Cinema she has directed *Mementos Mori* and *The End of TV* as well as created original roles in *Frankenstein (The Creature/Elizabeth)*, *Ada/Ava (Ada)*, *Lula del Ray (Lula's Mother)*, *The Magic City (Helen)*, *Hansel und Gretel (Hansel)*, and *Leonardo! (Sam)*. In Chicago, she has worked as a performer and puppeteer with Redmoon Theatre and Blair Thomas and Co. She spent several years training in devised theatre, clown and mask with Double Edge Theatre, Carlos García Estevez and at the Accademia dell'Arte in Arezzo, Italy.

MYRA SU (Puppeteer) is a multimedia artist and puppeteer based in Chicago. She primarily works in 2D forms, often combining paper puppets with crankie, shadow and video. Her most recent project was a 20 minute puppet film for Oregon Shakespeare Festival's THE CYMBELINE PROJECT, which divides the play into separate episodes led by different artists. Previously, she has been a featured artist at the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival, Baltimore Crankie Festival, the National Puppet Slam, and with Handmade Puppet Dreams. In addition to her independent work, she is a co-curator for NASTY, BRUTISH & SHORT: A PUPPET CABARET and a touring puppeteer and builder with Manual Cinema. For her full portfolio visit myrasu.com.

EUNICE WOODS (Puppeteer) Eunice Woods is an actor based in New York who loves to play in the shadows with Manual Cinema when she can! She was part of the original cast of Manual Cinema's *No Blue Memories: The Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*. Her regional theatre credits include productions

at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, American Conservatory Theater, People's Light and Alabama Shakespeare Festival among others. Television credits include *Shameless* and *Chicago PD*. Woods is represented by Gray Talent Group.
IG: @eunicewoods www.eunicewoods.com

CAST BIOS – MUSICIANS

NORA BARTON (cello, aux percussion, vocals) is a Northern Kentucky based cellist, sound artist, event producer and educator. Years of working within the massive artist network of Chicago (Mucca Pazza, Tom Musick, a.pe.ri.od.ic ensemble) allowed Nora to experiment and expand on the purpose of her musical abilities. Since moving to the Cincinnati area she has continued to cultivate collaborative opportunities and further explore the benefits of listening to cello. Beyond accompanying yoga classes and hosting ambient noise jams, Nora performs regularly as Planchette, enriching spaces with her ethereal cello energy.

PETER FERRY (Percussion) called "the ingenious percussionist Peter Ferry," (Chicago Sun-Times) and "an artist of vision" (Democrat and Chronicle), is a young American percussion soloist and artistic collaborator. Following his concerto debut at age 18, Ferry has championed the works of living composers, including Michael Daugherty who has praised Ferry as "one of the most promising and committed soloists of his generation." A TEDx speaker, Ferry has collaborated with choreographer Nick Pupillo at Chicago's Harris Theater and abroad at the European Museum of Modern Glass where he was nominated for the Coburg Prize. An alumnus of the Eastman School of Music, Ferry graduated with the first ever John Beck Percussion Scholarship, an Arts Leadership Program certificate, and the prestigious Performer's Certificate recognizing outstanding performing ability.

JASON GRESL (Clarinets, aux percussion) From playing bass clarinet while upside-down in front of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra to an impromptu performance of Mozart's clarinet quintet just after almost drowning in the Panama Canal, woodwind specialist Jason Gresl spends his days diving from one artistic adventure into another. Recently, Jason has been dividing his time in two directions. On one side, he explores music with his multidisciplinary concert series, The Muses' Workshop, his duo,

Claricello, and through new music commissions. On the other, he plays for musicals (most recently: *Wicked*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Book of Mormon*, and *In The Heights*). Jason teaches at Andrews University, Saint Mary's College and Indiana University - South Bend. In his spare time, Jason attempts to learn feats of wonder with playing cards and enjoys cooking Thai and Indian cuisines.

ROBIN MEIKSINS (Flute) is a freelance contemporary flutist focused on collaboration with living composers. Chicago-based, she uses the Internet and online media to support and create collaboration. In 2017, Robin completed her first year-long collaborative project, *365 Days of Flute*. Each day featured a different work; each video was recorded and posted the same day. In 2018, Robin launched the *52 Weeks of Flute Project*. Each week features different living composer to workshop a submitted work, culminating in a performance on YouTube. Robin has premiered over 100 works and has performed at SPLICE Institute, the SEAMUS national conference, and Oh My Ears New Music Festival 2018, she was a guest artist at University of Illinois for their first annual '24-Hour Compose-a-thon.' Robin holds a masters degree from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music where she studied with Kate Lukas and Thomas Robertello.

STAFF & CREATIVE TEAM BIOS

LIZI BREIT (Puppet Designer) is an interdisciplinary artist based in Chicago. She has worked with Manual Cinema as a performer, designer, animator and director since 2011.

CLAIRE CHRZAN (Lighting Designer) is excited to collaborate with Manual Cinema again after previously designing *No Blue Memories: The Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*, and *The End of TV*. Other credits include; *Evening at the Talk House*, *The Mutilated* and *The Room (A Red Orchid)*; *The? Unicorn? Hour?*, *Saturn Returns*, (The Neo-Futurists); *The Distance*, *We're Gonna Die* (Haven Theatre); *Caught* (Sideshow Theatre Company); *After Miss Julie*, *The Night Season* (Strawdog Theatre Company); *Peerless* (First Floor Theater); *Pinocchio* (Neverbird at Chicago Children's Theatre); *Love and Human Remains*, *Good Person of Szechwan* (Cor Theatre); *The Terrible* (The New Colony); *The Guardians*, *Uncle Bob* (Mary-Arrchie); *The Hero's Journey*, *Best Beloved: The Just So Stories*, *The Pied Piper* (Forks and Hope Ensemble). Claire also

works as a production stage manager for various companies including Hubbard Street's HS2, The Joffrey Ballet's Joffrey Academy and Alonzo King LINES ballet. Clairechrzandesigns.com

DREW DIR (Director, Puppet Designer, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a writer, director, and puppet designer. Previously, he served as the Resident Dramaturg of Court Theatre and a lecturer in theater and performance studies at the University of Chicago. He holds a master's degree in Text and Performance Studies from King's College London and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

DAVID GOODMAN-EDBERG (Lighting Director) is a Chicago based lighting designer working in the realms of dance, theatrical, and architectural design. He has designed and toured with such companies as Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre, Eisenhower Dance Detroit, Visceral Dance Chicago, and Water Street Dance Milwaukee, and lit works set on companies such as Chicago Repertory Ballet, Chicago Tap Theater, Joel Hall Dancers, and Thodos Dance Chicago. Theatrically, he has designed with puppet & object oriented companies such as Rough House and Cabinet of Curiosity as well as with such companies as Adventure Stage, Akvavit Theatre, Factory Theater, The Gift Theater, Organic Theater, Red Tape Theater, The Syndicate, and Trap Door Theatre. Architecturally, he has lit pieces at the art space 6018|North and worked as an assistant/associate designer for projects at various Universal Studios theme parks (in Beijing, Hollywood, Orlando, and Osaka), Disney Shanghai, and several Margaritaville restaurants. dglxdesign.com

RASEAN DAVONTE JOHNSON (Projections & Scenic Design) is delighted to be working with Manual Cinema to which previous projects include *Lula Del Ray* and *Fjords*. A Chicago-based video artist and theatrical designer, he has had the opportunity to work with institutions such as Steppenwolf Theatre, The Hypocrites, Yale Repertory Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, McCarter Theatre Center, Geva Theatre Center, Berkshire Theatre Group, Alliance Theatre, the Ningbo Song and Dance Company, and B-Floor Theatre. MFA Yale School of Drama. raseandavontejohnson.com.

BEN KAUFFMAN (Composer, Sound Designer, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a composer, director, interactive media artist and co-Artistic Director of Manual Cinema. His film and interactive work has been shown at The Jay Pritzker Pavilion (Chicago),

The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (Chicago), and CUNY's Baruch College (NYC). He has lectured and given workshops at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York University and Parsons the New School of Design. His past Composer/ Sound Designer credits with Manual Cinema include *Ada/ Ava*, *The End of TV*, and the New York Times documentary *The Forger*. He holds a Master's degree from New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP).

LARA MUSARD (Prop Designer) Ms. Musard serves as the Prop Manager at Court Theatre in Chicago where Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein* first premiered in October of 2018. For this project, she worked with Mr. Dir to design and create the majority of the two and three dimensional pieces seen in the Victor Frankenstein portion of the storytelling. Having propped nearly 60 shows at Court Theatre over a twelve year period, Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein* was by far the most unique. She is grateful for the experience of working in this medium and proud to have been part of the team.

MATT REICH (Sound Engineer) is so thrilled to be working with Manual Cinema. He is a Chicago-based audio engineer and sound designer for theatre. He has sound-designed over sixty theatrical productions and received two Joseph Jefferson Award nominations for his work. He is currently the Sound Supervisor for Chicago Children's Theatre and Audio/Video Director for Porchlight Music Theatre. He has a degree in Sound Design for Theatre from The Theatre School at DePaul University.

MIKE USREY (Technical Director) "That may be the most important thing to understand about humans. It is the unknown that defines our existence. We are constantly searching, not just for answers to our questions, but for new questions. We are explorers. We explore our lives day by day, and we explore the galaxy trying to expand the boundaries of our knowledge. And that is why I am here: not to conquer you with weapons or ideas, but to coexist and learn." – Benjamin Lafayette Sisko

MIEKA VAN DER PLOEG (Costume Designer) has designed costumes for many Chicago theaters, including Lookingglass Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, *The Hypocrites*, About Face, Chicago Children's Theatre, About Face Theatre, The House Theatre, Next Theatre, Griffin Theatre, The Building Stage, Albany Park Theater Project, Dog and Pony Theatre, and Manual Cinema. She

is proud to be an Artistic Associate at About Face Theatre. She has received two Jeff Award nominations for *Golden Boy* (Griffin Theater) and *Mr. Burns* (co-designed with Mara Blumenfeld, Theater Wit).

KYLE VEGTER (Composer, Sound Designer, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a composer, producer, sound designer, and Managing Artistic Director of Manual Cinema. As a composer of concert music he's been commissioned by such groups as The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's MusicNOW series, The Pacific Northwest Ballet, and TIGUE. His music and sound design for theater and film has been performed worldwide and commissioned by the New York Times, NPR's *Invisibilia*, Topic (First Look Media), the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, StoryCorps, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Poetry Foundation, Hubbard Street Dance, the O, Miami Poetry Festival, and others. His past Composer/ Sound Designer credits with Manual Cinema include *Lula Del Ray*, *Ada/ Ava*, *FJORDS*, *Mementos Mori*, *The End of TV* and various other performance and video projects. He has been an artist in residence at High Concept Laboratories, and co-founded Chicago's only contemporary classical music cassette label Parlour Tapes+.