



WP Puppet Theatre presents
Puppet Power 2020: Puppets Go Existential and ONLINE!**

*** Existentialism: A philosophical inquiry concerned with the experience of being a thinking, feeling, acting, living human. Examining existence. Questioning the meaning of life.*

This year's Puppet Power 2020: Puppets Go Existential conference theme was chosen against a backdrop of Fridays for Future, a rise of machine learning and algorithms, Mars exploration program, genetic engineering on mosquitos, Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, nanotechnology, burning Amazon jungles...

The year 2020, suggested a special time for clarity to examine some of the existential considerations of our time: Climate Action, Artificial Intelligence, Culture & Identity and Hope & Human Agency.

Three months ago, a new existential event brought even greater urgency to examine our vulnerabilities and spurred our decision to offer our biennial conference 100% online.

We had a few advantages embarking on this online venture: Our 2.57 full time equivalent staff typically work remotely, our bookings (March – August) were cancelled so we had more time, we'd already planned to test a webinar with Calgary based RocketHouse Productions supporting our tech, funding was in place from Canadian Heritage and Alberta Community Initiative Plan, and finally both Erin, who looks after our conference logistics, and Wendy, Artistic/Executive Director, are tech curious and committed.

The biggest challenges were shifting gears within a tight timeframe, reworking processes, adjusting our ticketing platform to work with an online production, scheduling and coordinating people, keeping clear communication about changes, areas of responsibility, rethinking marketing, and keeping up with updates, changes and workarounds with online platforms.

We are grateful to our presenters for adapting so quickly. Around the world they have struggled with power cuts and lockdowns (India), chaotic quarantines (Malaysia), street noise forcing videos to be made a midnight (Chile), uncertainty, hardship and worry.

Our closing session will bring our existential themes together, ably demonstrating the special power of puppetry to impact positive social change. Director Reneltta Arluk and designer Daniela Masellis will discuss the impetus, process and influence of The Breathing Hole. This significant piece of theatre centres on the 500-year saga of a polar bear (puppet) named Angu'juaq and prompted its Canadian playwright Colleen Murphy to observe,

"Puppets have a power, an existential hold over us. They are so powerful, as a conduit to human emotion and to our hearts. (They speak) messages that get into us so deep, that they don't get out."

Marketing and Communications Highlights



PROCLAMATION

World Puppetry Day is a day to spark curiosity, promote understanding about the world we live in and inspire audiences to embrace the art of puppetry as a creative platform to express significant social issues and consider solutions.

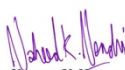
Whereas: Puppets can be a metaphor for the human experience and provide a fun and reassuring platform for exploring some of life's difficult questions;

Whereas: Puppetry is used to educate and empower children by fostering imagination and giving a voice for telling a story;

Whereas: Calgarians are encouraged to promote diversity, exercise tolerance and make meaning of our world today through the power of puppetry.

On behalf of City Council and the citizens of Calgary, I hereby proclaim March 21, 2020 as:

"WORLD PUPPETRY DAY"


NAHEED K. NENSHI
MAYOR



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This boosted FB post on April 24, reached 8,319 people

As part of our launch we also commissioned a short video about Puppet Power from Day One Media who also became a sponsor. Gil Ngai, Chief Storyteller, wrote: *"Now here's something you don't see every day and a culture that frankly, I knew nothing about. There's a whole sub-culture of people who love puppets. Puppets give voice to the voiceless and help people to express deep, heartfelt feelings. Puppets actually help people to express themselves in ways they cannot themselves. They help people open up and find healing and connection".*

Suddenly we had an international market which, among other things, required details like posting our prices in Canadian dollars, and sharing a Time Zone conversion app. with ticket buyers.

Part of our usual pre-conference marketing is to request the Mayor proclaim World Puppetry Day on March 21.

Wendy was interviewed on Global Morning show on March 20, however it turned into a 'How to do puppets in Lockdown' as the conference details were still in flux.

We established a Facebook Puppet Power 2020 Group - and there are currently 54 members. However, we lack capacity to keep it vibrant.

Jenna organized a Facebook Boost reward campaign - which had encouraging results for repeating.

Wendy a great interview with Caro BD on The Puppet Podcast, a lively and far reaching initiative - there were 96 click-throughs to our website.

Five boosted Facebook posts costing \$365, reached 17, 196 people

Wendy had a lovely interview with CKUA and discovered Elvis Presley's "Puppet on A String"
*Every time you look at me
I'm as helpless as can be
I become a puppet on a string*



Amazing, amazing, amazing work--and hats off to you all!

Thank you for your unique attention, focus and energy in all things relating to puppetry...it is a boon to the city that we live in.

Pete Balkwill CAMP & Old Trout Puppet Workshop

Overall the conference rated at 4.4 out of 5. Everyone missed the live interactions but many said for reasons of geography or social reasons online was their preferred delivery. Another common wish was for longer Q&A or discussion time. In fact, Kenneth Gross organized an additional hour for participants to meet in his “Conversations about the Uncanny”.

The ticketing platform worked well for 85% of people. Erin worked very hard helping some people. We didn't survey ticket/pass price preferences but no - one commented on them.

All the sessions resonated with participants in different ways and degrees, but they all expressed their deep gratitude to all of the presenters. Here is a sampling of their comments:

I was struck by how responsible and truly caring our arts community is. Understanding trauma-informed practice and implementing it at such a level shows so much respect for our audiences and communities.

The fact that a puppet can enable people to break their silence about trauma and violence is astonishing in some

ways. The company and its work are an exemplary example of how trauma and memory can be approached sensitively with puppetry. Thank you so much for this experience.

PUPPET AN ESSAY ON UNCANNY LIFE - READING WITH KENNETH GROSS

The emphasis of how puppetry involves transgressing roles and a form of 'madness' is still very compelling and pertinent. I was inspired.

GUIDED CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE UNCANNY

The stories that people told were all so memorable, each so different and yet each so evocative of a crucial facet of puppet theater. It was good to hear the voices.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENHANCE PUPPET PERFORMANCES

Techy subject deliverer with lot of care and love for the narrative. Have you thought of using a random chat service like omegle to practice & share your puppet/character improvisation?

PANEL DISCUSSION: AI, PUPPETS & ALL THINGS UNCANNY!

The conversation cascaded around a web of issues and points including; that the theatre is a place of pleasure in the unfamiliar, relationships between people and objects are very serious (including marrying robots) and that we can generally have a very rich conversation between AI and puppetry.

PUPPETRY AS SYMPATHETIC MAGIC: BUILDING THE WORLD WE WANT FROM THE MATERIALS WE DON'T

What a terrific presenter. Great pace, great presence, open and warm but also very assured. Terrific info. BLOWN AWAY by the thought of puppeteers being "citizen shaman"

TENDING TO OUR GRIEF IN TROUBLED TIMES

A very gentle and nurturing opportunity for people to share their thoughts - prompted by the (optional) creation of an art project. It's moving how powerful even a simple object can be.

EMPOWERING PLAY FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

How working with the child soldiers brought out their forgotten and abandoned childhoods - absolutely phenomenal. This practice is a powerful testament to the power of puppetry to enable healing through humour and the therapeutic benefits of object play and theatre.

Puppet POW! FOR PUPPET POWER

Aretta presented a very engaging and accessible set of puppet videos that are a great gift to anyone interested in puppetry. Awesome!

THE BENCH

Your process inspires me, and I love how you use puppetry and storytelling to combat homelessness. Great message! For this company the puppet embodies an idea and puppets are able to express without words this awareness raising about the absurdity of human conflicts and violence over objects and space.

THE BREATHING HOLE: IMPETUS, PROCESS, & IMPACT

Hearing the experience of the sound designer and why she chose certain sounds (for the bear puppet) and how actors created those sounds was profound. I hope to see this production one day, how heartbreaking and beautiful.

CONCORDIS: PERFORMANCE

It was magical, emotional and powerful all at the same time. The blend of nonverbal storytelling with such an enchanting & whimsical little character, the gorgeous music, and the written messages, all held within the creative (and beautiful) "heart", created one of the most moving experiences I've had the privilege of engaging in.

Presenters said:

Being amongst our people could not have come at a better time. You were an amazing host and you and your team pulled off a beautiful experience.

From the beginning, the word Hope presented by Wendy in this call mobilized many emotions in us to be able to be there and be a bridge to the testimonies of those who have been voiceless as a result of political violence.

Thanks to you all for your help in getting me there virtually, and for this tremendous opportunity! I so enjoyed presenting and have been absolutely inspired by all the other presentations today - So many mind-blowing, paradigm shifting moments in the presentations I've seen.

Volunteers said:

Thanks Erin, wow what a great experience. Bravo to you and Wendy, as well as everyone else who brought this online conference to life. I thoroughly enjoyed all the sessions and am so inspired by all the creative work that people are doing!

Our partners and sponsors at Rockethouse:

I think this conference was a win on all fronts. And even if it had been able to go ahead in person, it wouldn't have had some of the heart and global reach that a digital landscape allowed it. Thank you for bringing us in on this experiment and adventure.

Other programming

A new initiative for Puppet Power 2020 was to invite some of the 65 proposal applicants who were not accepted to present this year, to allow their video support material to be screened. Access to view twelve short videos were used as pass buyer rewards. And an additional five longer videos were used as bonus material for the post conference packs. Artists were paid \$50 and a complimentary live pass for the screening rights, and included:

Maribel García Cerrón /Arturo Zárate Polanco
Wagner Gallo/Sara Pedes (Spain)
Meyda Bestari - Flying Balloons Theatre (Indonesia)
Lucy Enskat (England)
Raven Kalliana (England)
Droomtheater (The Netherlands)

Bonnie Duncan (USA)
Orsolya Gal (Romania)
Phylemon Odhiambo Okoth (Kenya)
Manish Sachdeva (India)
Clíodhna Noonan (Ireland)
Dr Dahlen Abdul Ghani (Malaysia)

Analytics (from Eventive ticketing platform)

Tickets came from:

81 Calgary	32 England
211 Canada	4 Australia
88 USA	88 rest of world including Spain, Brazil, Tehran, Holland, India, Argentina, Finland

121 unique paying customers
848 total orders
9 bursary award winners
56 complimentary passes (from which people had to choose their sessions - up to 13 possibilities)
76 full conference passes were sold (from which people had to choose their sessions - up to 13 possibilities)
15 theme pack post conference passes
28 post conference passes were sold
110 standalone tickets

22 artists (12 from Calgary) and 10 rest of Canada and overseas
42 separate presentations with 15 'main stage' presentations
27 one on one performances

Audience numbers by session/views

The drop off between tickets bought (or more likely comped) and actual viewers represents the potentially weaker commitment in digital delivery process.

		Ticket sales	Unique views - Vimeo analytics
1	FREE: CREATING ART WITH CHALLENGING THEMES	73	62
2	PUPPET THERAPY: OBJECTS, MEMORY, ACTIVATION	55	48
3	FREE: PUPPET AN ESSAY ON UNCANNY LIFE - READING WITH KENNETH GROSS	55	41
4	GUIDED CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE UNCANNY	15	15
4A	USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENHANCE PUPPET PERFORMANCES	48	33
5	FREE: PANEL DISCUSSION: AI, PUPPETS & ALL THINGS UNCANNY!	60	40
6	PUPPETRY AS SYMPATHETIC MAGIC:	59	41
7	TENDING TO OUR GRIEF IN TROUBLED TIMES - Saturday	20	20
8	CONCORDIS - the Heart, Lambe-Lambe (IN ENGLISH)	53	43
9	CONCORDIS - le Cœur, Lambe-Lambe (IN FRENCH)	5	7
9A	EMPOWERING PLAY FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE	53	38
10	Puppet POW! FOR PUPPET POWER	51	37
11	TENDING TO OUR GRIEF IN TROUBLED TIMES - REPEATED Sunday	20	20
12	THE BENCH	53	49
13	THE BREATHING HOLE: IMPETUS, PROCESS, & IMPACT	53	44

Special Thanks to:

PP20 Volunteer committee: Carolyn Pogue, Michelle Warkentin, Sky Weir, Jenna Prunner, Kieron Circuit,

Other associated volunteers: Bill Phipps, Rose Jackson,

WPTS Board of Directors: Chris, Dave, Erin, Bethany, Jenna and Salima

Rockethouse Productions, a local Calgary Company for sponsorship and supporting our backend technology needs. They used OBS and Vimeo for the livestream. We used Zoom for a couple of the smaller livestream events, and live one-on-one performances.

Thank you to Donors - Eventive ticket buyers who added a little extra onto their purchase!



Going forward



Our next Puppet Power conference will be scheduled for late spring 2022. Planning will begin in 2021 with a volunteer committee and staff. An international call for proposals will be sent out in June 2021. The theme is yet to be decided, but learning from our 2020 experience, the structure will be a blend of live and online delivery.

We'll also explore hosting more live/video performances.

In the meantime, with our video assets, we are approaching the 2020 presenters to collaborate in developing additional resources. We'll then offer the courses as part of our online programming in a revenue sharing agreement with the artists.