

For Immediate Release

Arts Commons Presents Brings Visually Stunning Stage Adaptation of Beloved Children’s Books Comes to Calgary with Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster

May 2, 2023 - CALGARY – Setting a new bar in excellence for theatre for young audiences, Emmy Award-winning Manual Cinema and Arts Commons Presents bring a ground-breaking performance of ***Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster*** to the **Engineered Air Theatre at Arts Commons, May 26, 27 & 28.**

Translating the whimsical art and heart-warming story of Mo Willems’ classic books, Manual Cinema creates a moving picture book on stage. The performance collective achieves their unique look with a combination of vintage overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, and live feed cameras, all interwoven to mind-bending effect. The characters jump off the page to the stage, further enhanced by onstage sound effects and an original score, all performed live by the Manual Cinema ensemble.

“We wanted to bring the same depth of storytelling and cinematic artistry that is in our adult work to this children’s show. We have found that children are even more discerning and unlike adults will only give attention to the show if it has earned it and is engaging them!” Says Julia Miller, Co-Artistic Director of Manual Cinema and director of Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster. “I want the kids to see magic being made with simple supplies that they have at home, and I hope that they leave the show feeling like they can do it, too.”

Acclaimed children’s author and staple of every classroom library, Mo Willems is best known for his 25-volume series *Elephant and Piggie* which tackles relatable difficulties and anxieties of Elementary School-aged children in a light-hearted manner. *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster* is based on *Leonardo, the Terrible Monster* and its sequel, *Sam, the Most Scaredy-Cat Kid in the Whole World*. It follows the story of Leonardo, a monster who can’t seem to frighten anyone, no matter how hard he tries. One day he meets Sam, a little boy who is afraid of everything! Could this be Leonardo’s chance to finally scare like a real monster, or will he discover a new friend?

Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster is presented as part of [Arts ReimaginED](#), a new program from Arts Commons Education to support arts education in Calgary. To inspire families and children to engage with the show on a deeper level, attendees are invited to the Monster Lab to create their own monsters with designs created by celebrated PuppetStuff Canada creators, Brendan James Boyd and Reese Scott. Audience members can create their puppets to enjoy during the show or stop by after witnessing the inspiring creative techniques by Manual Cinema. Audience members are also invited to a post-show demonstration of the technology implemented by Manual Cinema to share their questions with cast and crew. They may even want to try some of the techniques out in their own puppet shows.

“You can feel the joy, passion, and creativity that Manual Cinema has poured into Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster,” says Karen Youngberg, Associate Director of Education at Arts Commons. “We hope that audience members will be inspired by the technical techniques used in the storytelling and will want to play in our Monster Lab to explore their own stories! Who knows, perhaps the next

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puppeteer/storyteller/musician/creator of magical things will find their calling, here at Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster."

What: Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster
When: May 26, 27 & 28, 2023 (show times vary)
Where: Engineered Air Theatre, Arts Commons
Pre- & Post-Show: Join us to create your own monster in the Monster Lab
Tickets: 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca/presents

To purchase tickets to [Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster](https://artscommons.ca/leonardo) please call 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca/leonardo.

Arts Commons wishes to express our sincere appreciation to the **Teatro Fund for Arts Commons Education** and **Calgary Arts Development** as well as the **Government of Canada** through **Canadian Heritage**, the **Government of Alberta** through the **Alberta Foundation for the Arts**, and our friends at **The City of Calgary**.

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Arts Commons Presents invites you to discover the transformative power of the Arts. As the programming arm of Arts Commons, the largest performing arts centre in Western Canada, Arts Commons Presents is one manifestation of this mandate, achieved through the programming and presenting of our in-house series: BD&P World Stage, National Geographic Live, PCL Blues, TD Amplify Cabarets, and Jazz, as well as the work that we do in the community. Through this work, we are able to do our part to further enrich our city, as well as create opportunities for Calgary-based artists on a multitude of levels.

Arts Commons is the steward of one of Canada's largest arts centres, and the artistic and civic cornerstone of Calgary's downtown core, comprised of six world-class resident companies. The organization's strategic priorities include supporting the artists and arts organizations that call Arts Commons home, including the more than 200 community groups that utilize our facilities, to realize their missions, and to foster opportunities for collaboration across our cultural campus. By championing inclusion and reconciliation and increasing the accessibility and reach of the arts in Calgary, we are reimagining the performing arts and ensuring their rightful place at the center of civic life. Through Arts Commons Education, we share the power of learning through the arts with thousands of students including the award-winning ConocoPhillips Hub for Inspired Learning, Wonder Program, and Student Presentations like National Geographic Live.

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. In 2020 they were included in 50 of Chicago theater "Rising Stars and Storefront Stalwarts" (Newcity). Their shadow puppet animations were

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featured in the 2021 film remake of Candyman, directed by Nia DaCosta and produced by Jordan Peele's Monkeypaw Productions.