



THE 4TH WITCH

Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival

Biograph Theatre - Chicago, IL

January 22 - January 25, 2026

Manual Cinema is honored to be presented at the 2026 Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival!

This past year, Manual Cinema celebrated our fifteenth year making cinematic puppet theater for the stage and screen. We have toured our productions around the world, but we live and work here in Chicago, operating out of Manual Cinema Studios in the near-southwest neighborhood of Pilsen. We could not make this kind of work in any other city in the world – the talent and vibrancy of the Chicago puppetry community, along with the support of its audiences, is unlike anywhere else. Now, the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival, led by Blair Thomas and Sandy Gerding, has put this city at the vanguard in the art of puppet theater.

This is the Chicago premiere of *The 4th Witch*, Manual Cinema's latest touring production, and a return to our roots of storytelling through shadow puppetry. Originally commissioned by the Spoleto Festival USA with support from the Jim Henson Foundation, Cal Performances, and Arts Emerson, it is loosely inspired by themes of war, witchcraft, dreams, and power in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The puppeteers, all Manual Cinema veterans, manipulate hundreds of paper cut-outs and illustrated slides on four old school overhead projectors. *The 4th Witch*, like most Manual Cinema works, features little to no text; instead, music is central to the narrative, and this production features a live score by a coven of three multi-instrumentalist musicians performing an innovative original score by composers Kyle Vegter and Ben Kauffman.

We hope you enjoy *The 4th Witch*; thank you for supporting the art of puppetry at this extraordinary festival.

Sincerely,
Manual Cinema Co-Artistic Directors
Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace, Ben Kauffman, Julia Miller and Kyle Vegter

Performance Details

Manual Cinema's *The 4th Witch* is a fantastic new tale, inspired by elements of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which a girl escapes war and flees into a dark forest. Told through shadow puppetry, actors in silhouette and live music (without dialogue or narration), *The 4th Witch* begins on the eve of an invasion of a small town by the local warlord, Macbeth. The girl flees the invading army and escapes into the nearby forest. Orphaned and exiled, she is rescued by a witch, who adopts her as an apprentice. As she becomes more skilled in witchcraft, her grief and rage draw her into a nightmarish quest for vengeance against the warlord who killed her parents: Macbeth.

The 4th Witch, an inversion of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, explores themes of grief, war, generational conflict, and cycles of violence through the collateral damage left behind on the battleground.

Run time is 65 minutes.

Recommended for ages 12 and up. There are loud sounds and flashing lights.

Production Credits

The 4th Witch

A Manual Cinema Production

Concept and Direction by Drew Dir

Devised by Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace and Julia Miller

Original Score and Sound Design by Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter

Storyboards and Puppet Design by Drew Dir

Lighting Design by David Goodman-Edberg

Costume and Wig Design by Sully Ratke

Silhouette Masks by Julia Miller

Costume Assistant Griffin DiStasi

Puppet Build Assistant Caitlin McLeod

Lighting Technician Ryn Hardiman

Sound Engineer Mike Usrey

Stage Manager and Board Operator Ben Kauffman

Creative Producer Laura Colby

Cast

Puppeteers:

Lizi Breit (Witch)

Leah Casey (Witch)

Sarah Fornace (Girl)

Julia Miller (Lead Witch)

Jeffrey Paschal (Macbeth)

Musicians:

Lia Kohl - Cello, Vocals

Lucy Little - Violin, Vocals

Alicia Walter - Piano, Keys,

Lead Vocals

BEN KAUFFMAN (Original Score and Sound Design, Stage Manager and Board Operator, 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).

CAITLIN MCLEOD (Puppet Build Assistant) is a Chicago based costume, scenic, and puppet designer. Recent design credits include: *Romeo and Zooliet* (St. Louis Shakespeare); *Fat Ham* (Virginia Stage Co); *The Little Mermaid* (Drury Lane); *Lavender Men* (About Face); *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (Virginia Stage Co); *The Dream King* (Teatro Vista); *Trouble in Mind* (Timeline); *The Seagull* (Steppenwolf); *Exquisite Corpse* (Rough House). Craftwork credits include The Goodman, The Kennedy Center, Lookingglass, and Northlight. Caitlin is a co-curator of NBS: Chicago's Puppet Slam, company member of Rough House, and project manager of the Chicago Puppet Studio. Instagram @CaitlinMcLeodDesign

SULLY RATKE (Costume and Wig Design) is a multi-disciplinary visual story-telling artist with an appetite for compelling language, mystery, whimsy, and spiritual philosophy.

MIKE USREY (Audio Engineer) "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

KYLE VEGTER (Stage Manager and Board Operator Nov 03 - Nov 09, Original Score and Sound Design, 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+.

Staff & Creative Team Bios

LAURA COLBY (Creative Producer) Recipient of NAPAMA's 2016 Liz Silverstein Award, Colby secures funds to create new work via Elsie Management (which she founded in 1995). In 2020, Colby served as Creative Producer in the creation and delivery of *Manual Cinema's Christmas Carol* - a show that was live-streamed for 24 performances in December 2020, during the height of the pandemic closures. She served as Managing Producer for LaTasha Barnes' *The Jazz Continuum* and Monique Martin's *Minty Fresh Circus*. Colby's podcast, *The Middle Woman, a roadmap to managing the performing arts*, is available on all podcast platforms. www.elsieman.org

DREW DIR (Concept, Director, Storyboards and Puppet Design, Co-Deviser, 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.

GRIFFIN DISTASI (Costume Assistant) (they/he) is an illustrator, maker, voice actor, and circus artist who has been spending the years since graduating University of Illinois with a degree in mechanical engineering working to marry engineering and art any way they can. Their work spans from poster design and comic illustration to rigging and puppet design, and they are thrilled to be working with Manual Cinema for the first time.

DAVID GOODMAN-EDBERG (Lighting Designer) 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

RYN HARDIMAN (Lighting Technician) is a Chicago-based artist, technician, designer, and stage manager. In addition to touring as a Stage Manager with Manual Cinema, Ryn also works as an AV Technician at The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago Humanities Festival, Blue Man Group Chicago, The Second City, and is currently the Technical Director at The Neo-Futurists.

Representation

Elsie Management
Laura Colby, President
Anna Amadei, Vice President
www.elsieman.org
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Commissioning & Support

The 4th Witch received lead commissioning support from Spoleto Festival USA with co-commissioning support from ArtsEmerson (Boston, MA), Cal Performances, University of California (Berkeley, CA), and Wisconsin Union Theater.

The 4th Witch is supported by a Production Grant from the Jim Henson Foundation.

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 live music, 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, an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, and a revamped production of *The Magic City*, based on Edith Nesbit's 1910 novel. In 2023, Manual Cinema completed production on their first self-produced short film, *Future Feeling*, and toured with folk rock band Iron & Wine the following year. Manual Cinema's newest production, *The 4th Witch*, is an inversion of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and premiered at the Spoleto festival in June, 2025.

Manual Cinema has toured throughout North America and to four continents. Highlights include: Under The Radar/The Public Theater (NYC), Adelaide Festival (AUS), Santiago a mil (Chile), Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Singapore International Festival of the Arts, and the Tehran International Puppet Festival (Iran). The company has received commissioning for new performance works from Cal Performances (Berkeley), Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC), The Kennedy Center, ArtsEmerson (Boston), Spoleto Festival (USA), The Poetry Foundation, and La

Monnaie de Munt (Belgium). They have received grant support from the National Theater Project, US Artists International, and ArtsCONNECT.

We'd love to hear from you! Follow us at @manual_cinema; join our newsletter via our website: www.manualcinema.com; and support us via Patreon.

Cast Bios - Puppeteers

LIZI BREIT (Witch, Puppeteer) is a Chicago-based artist. She has been performing and designing with Manual Cinema since 2011.

LEAH CASEY (Witch, Puppeteer) is a Chicago-based actress, dancer, and writer. When not on stage, she can be found lending her voice to all manner of audiobooks, or with the cast of *Project STELLAR*, a science fiction podcast about a group of crazy kids who have close encounters of the awesome kind. Chicago credits: *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Grease*, *Cinderella* (Drury Lane), *A Christmas Carol* (Writers Theatre/Manual Cinema), *Leonardo and Sam* (Chicago Children's Theatre/Manual Cinema), *Frankenstein* (Court Theatre/Manual Cinema), *For Colored Girls...* (Court Theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (Teatro Vista), *STORM* (Walkabout/Moonfool). Leah is represented by the dedicated team at Shirley Hamilton.

SARAH FORNACE (Girl, Puppeteer, Co-Deviser, 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 (Lead Witch, Puppeteer, Co-Deviser, Silhouette Masks, Co-Artistic Director) is a director, puppeteer, and 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.

JEFFREY PASCHAL (Macbeth, Puppeteer) is a Chicago-based actor and filmmaker. Chicago credits: *The Bottle Tree* (Theater Wit), *The Magic City* (Chicago Children's Theatre/ Manual Cinema), *The End of TV* (Chopin Theater/ Manual Cinema), *Solar Storm* (Akvavit Theater), *No Blue Memories* (Studebaker Theater/ Manual Cinema), *A Christmas Carol* (Writers Theatre/ Manual Cinema). Touring credits: *Lula del Rey* (Manual Cinema), *Ada/Ava* (Manual Cinema), *The 4th Witch* (Manual Cinema). Directing credits: *Life of Harold* (available on Youtube) and *Broadcast*. He is represented by BMG Talent.

Cast Bios - Musicians

LIA KOHL (Cello, Vocals) is a cellist, composer, and multidisciplinary artist based in Chicago. She creates and performs music and multimedia performance that incorporates sound, video, movement, theater, and sculptural objects. She has presented work and performed at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Walker Art Center, Chicago Symphony Center, and Eckhart Park Pool, and held residencies at Mana Contemporary Chicago, High Concept Labs, dfbrl8r Performance Art Gallery, Mills College and Stanford University.

LUCY LITTLE (Violin, Vocals) is a musician, improviser, composer, and audio producer currently based in NYC, but with deep and loving roots in Chicago, where she lived for 10 years. As a composer, Lucy has written and recorded scores for theatrical productions and podcasts, including for the Audible Original plays *Daddies* (2022) and *Marrow* (2023). As a performer, Lucy plays violin with the Chicago-based indie rock and folk project Half Gringa, has an electroacoustic solo project, and has performed with musicians from around the world, including with singer/songwriters Aisha Burns, Dani Larkin, MICHA Música, Afarin Nazarijow, and more. Lucy holds a Master's degree from the New England Conservatory, a Bachelor's from the University of Chicago, is an U.S. Fulbright alum and a 2022 OneBeat Fellow.

ALICIA WALTER (Piano, Keys, Lead Vocals) is a singer, composer, and musician from Chicago. Known for her "near-cosmic voice" (WIRED) and "stratosphere of songwriting all her own" (Consequence of Sound), Walter has released two celebrated albums under her own name: *Right Noise* (BIG EGO Records 2023) and *I Am Alicia* (Sooper Records 2021). She's performed in venues across the US and Europe, most recently alongside artists Veronica Swift and Danielle Ponder. Her music has been featured in nationally syndicated TV shows, including the NBC hit drama, "This Is Us," and "All Rise." Walter rose to acclaim as bandleader of beloved Chicago-based art rock group, Oshwa.