

ABOUT US

THE CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL PUPPET THEATER FESTIVAL advances the art of puppetry by presenting sophisticated programs vital to the cultural life of Chicago. Engaging and inspiring the largest and most diverse audiences for puppetry possible, the Festival is the biggest event dedicated to puppetry in North America and offers more than 100 activities over 12 days annually including performances, workshops, artist intensives, free neighborhood events and symposia to audiences up to **25,000+ each January**. The organization is also home to other key initiatives, including the Chicago Puppet Studio and Chicago Puppet Lab, that nurture the development of puppeteers and deepen the field locally, nationally and internationally with the ultimate goal of promoting peace, equality, mutual understanding, and justice locally and globally.

TEAM + BOARDS

CHICAGO PUPPET LAB TEAM

Tom Lee	<i>Chicago Puppet Lab Co-Director</i>
Grace Needlman	<i>Chicago Puppet Lab Co-Director</i>
Vanessa Valliere	<i>Chicago Puppet Lab Co-Director</i>
Anastar Alvarez	<i>Chicago Puppet Lab Coordinator, Production and Stage Manager</i>
Quinn Chisenhall	<i>Lighting Designer</i>
August Boyne	<i>Sound Designer</i>
Jackie Walter	<i>Audio Engineer</i>
Richie Schiraldi	<i>Technical Director</i>
Rachel Hartmann	<i>Technical Director</i>
Josiah Croegaert	<i>Lighting Crew</i>
Mark Brown	<i>Lighting Crew</i>

BOARD of DIRECTORS

Kristy Moran, *Chair*
Jordan Shields, *Treasurer*
Blair Thomas
Alicia Bird
Cheryl Lynn Bruce
Jin Ivacic
Julie Moller
Jes Sherborne
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Angel Ysaguirre
Pat Yuzawa-Rubin

ADVISORY BOARD

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YEAR-ROUND FESTIVAL TEAM

Blair Thomas	<i>Artistic Director, Festival Founder, Chicago Puppet Studio Co-Director</i>
Sandy Smith Gerding	<i>Executive Director</i>
Taylor Bibat	<i>Festival Coordinator & Director of Education</i>
Cameron Heinze	<i>Business Manager</i>
Deidre Huckabay	<i>Grants & Giving Manager</i>
Jess Mott Wickstrom	<i>Web + Visual Communication Designer</i>
La Mar Brown	<i>Business Manager</i>
Zach Sun	<i>Studio Coordinator</i>
Caitlin McLeod	<i>Chicago Puppet Studio Project Manager</i>
Tom Lee	<i>Chicago Puppet Studio & Puppet Lab Co-Director</i>
Jay Kelly	<i>Press Relations</i>
Shawn Lent	<i>Marketing/Communications Support</i>

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival takes place on the traditional unceded homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations. Many other tribes, such as the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, and Sac and Fox, also called this area home. The region has long been a center for Indigenous people to gather, trade, and maintain kinship ties. Today, one of the largest urban American Indian communities in the United States resides in Chicago. Members of this community continue to contribute to the life of this city and to celebrate their heritage, practice traditions, and care for the land and waterways.

**Join us for the next Festival:
January 20-31, 2027**



2026

Chicago Puppet Lab Works-in-Progress Showcase

August 20 - 23

Runtime: 90 minutes (no intermission)

CHICAGO PUPPET LAB is a developmental lab for Chicago artists creating new, original puppet theater work. This cohort of artists from a variety of creative backgrounds and with a range of puppetry experience has been meeting weekly with Co-directors Tom Lee, Grace Needlman, and Vanessa Valliere. Thank you for joining us to celebrate their growth and discoveries at this showing of works-in-progress.

Special thanks to Kristy & Brandon Moran

ChicagoPuppetFest.org

Read artist bios
and learn more
about Chicago
Puppet Lab



PROGRAM A

Featuring works by Rachel Healy, Raven See, Mikayla Wilson, and Zachary Sun

Friday, August 21 at 7 p.m.

Saturday, August 22 at 3 p.m.

Sunday, August 23 at 7 p.m.

Lights in the Attic

by **Rachel Healy**

with Kyra Tatge and Annika Halonen

"Lights in the Attic" (loosely inspired by Shel Silverstein's whimsical poetry) explores the complexities of the human mind where the metaphor of an attic space illuminates a place of discovery, memories and wonder.

In gratitude to my Parents, Grandma & Grandpa Valvo, Aunt Rose, Jennifer and Brendan whose voices in harmony allowed me to discover my own and to Todd who celebrates my puppet nerdiness!

BECOME

by **Raven See**

with Lulu Walkowicz

Music by Lulu Walkowicz

Welcome to the artist's void space. Here we are golden- expansive and precious, fluid and queer, in a constant state of becoming and unbecoming.

Special thanks to my Puppet Lab cohort and directors and to my creative collaborator and composer Lulu.

Spinning A Yarn

by **Mikayla Wilson**

Craft is usually seen as an activity for little old ladies, but what's wrong with little old ladies? So, pick up a needle and sit for a while while learning some craft history with Ms. Weaver!

I want to thank my sister, my partner, my cats, and the entire Puppet Lab cohort for helping this piece come to life in such a fun and beautiful way!

To Produce Oytseas

by **Zachary Sun**

To Produce Oytseas moves between body, city, and oyster, following a shoreline repeatedly occupied, consumed, renamed, and rewritten. Through memory, migration, and commerce, the work asks how bodies and places record experience—and how another form of life might sense, remember, and look back.

To Produce Oytseas is Chapter III of Fortuitous Peaks of Almanac, an ongoing project exploring shifting relationships among body, place, history, and nonhuman life.

PROGRAM B

Featuring works by Ashwaty Chennat, Jerrell L. Henderson, Abby Palen, and Justin D'Acci

Thursday, August 20 at 7 p.m.

Saturday, August 22 at 7 p.m.

Sunday, August 23 at 3 p.m.

little fears

by **Ashwaty Chennat**

with music by P.M. Tummala

In a blue glow, solace may be found in the private rituals of the night when no one is watching. What are the thresholds of consumption, comfort and memory?

Special thanks to my puppet build collaborators Grace Needlman & Couchy by Jacky Kelsey. Video work by me, my dad, apuppa, Abhijeet, and the voids. Special thanks to Irene Hsiao, whose performance with Dominic Kießling's Blob was an important inspiration for this piece.

Flight

by **Jerrell L. Henderson**

with Sharaina Turnage

To explore myth and society is to examine the self, yet looking inward often yields more questions than answers: *Flight* embraces that internal murkiness as a necessary threshold, asking what it takes to expose hidden wounds, achieve true liberation, and find joy and fun in the process of discovery.

Many thanks goes to Shay, Grace, Tom, Vanessa, Anastar, the CELEB Center at Beloit College, and all lab peers whose insight and support helped shape this journey.

Spiral

by **Abby Palen**

with music by Eli Hecht, Garrett Frank

Spiral is about perfect circles moving in time. cups, wheels, curves, bends, stars, eyes, red lights, rings, moving away from itself just to find itself all over again.

I am surrounded by shining stars. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

The Fallen (Clown qua Clown)

by **Justin D'Acci**

with Savannah Bell

There is a man who believes that the Nephilim looked like clowns, that circuses are occult rituals, and that we, unconscious, stumble through the rot of some eternal dying beast.

Special thanks to Paul Guizar, Pilsen Vintage, and Koryū Nishikawa V. Mad love to Momo and Mōmo.