



THREE HOUSES

STUDY GUIDE

MUSIC, LYRICS, AND BOOK BY
DAVE MALLOY

DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY
ANNIE TIPPE

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INTRODUCTION

Synopsis

Susan has fled to Latvia. Sadie hides in New Mexico. Beckett longs for Ireland. All three are alone; all three are haunted by their grandparents; all three hear the Big Bad Wolf scratching at the door. *Three Houses* is a post-pandemic open mic night parable about magic, madness, and the end of the world.

Characters

Susan (Margo Seibert)

Sadie (Mia Pak)

Beckett (J.D. Mollison)

Wolf (Scott Stangland)

Grandmother (Ching Valdes-Aran)

Grandfather (Henry Stram)



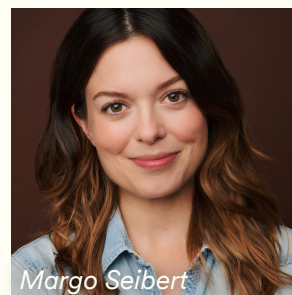
Mia Pak

★ NEW MEXICO



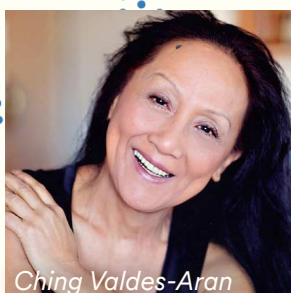
J.D. Mollison

★ BROOKLYN, NY

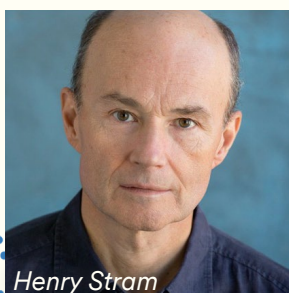


Margo Seibert

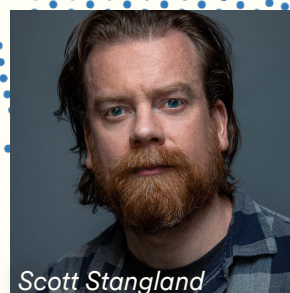
★ LATVIA



Ching Valdes-Aran



Henry Stram



Scott Stangland

A CLOSER LOOK

↪ An Interview with Director Annie Tuppe

How did you get your start in theater? What drew you towards directing?

At my public high school in Los Angeles, we participated in a drama competition called DTASC, which encouraged students to condense great works into 10-minute scenes using only actors and four chairs. It wasn't unlike team sports, something I had spent my whole life doing. The camaraderie, the group mentality, and all the adrenaline it took to put something into 3D. I loved it and found a program at NYU called Playwrights Horizons Theater School, whose focus on collaboration and multi-hyphenate artistry was perfectly up my alley.

Can you give us a window into your approach to directing and how you view your role within the process, particularly when developing a new play like *Three Houses*?

With new plays and musicals, I consider my job to be kind of like a flashlight. I am searching for resonant, emotional moments and connective tissue that the audience can see and feel, even in works that present themselves as "dense." I am trying to lift up a writer's most potent, moving, humorous moments and make sure they are reaching the audience.

"I consider my job to be kind of like a flashlight. I am searching for resonant, emotional moments and connective tissue that the audience can see and feel"

You and Dave are longtime collaborators. What initially drew you to Dave's work? What's most exciting about getting to collaborate with Dave on multiple shows?



Annie Tuppe

We are. We've been working together for 10 years now, and this is our third show together. I was first introduced to Dave's work when I was still performing and got to participate in an early workshop of *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*. There's a bursting liveliness to Dave's work, so much experimentation, but always with a strong, accessible heart. We have fun together.

Speaking of collaborators, there are some amazing folks on the design team and in the cast of *Three Houses*. How have you worked with the designers and the company to build the world of the play?

Yes! It's an incredible design team, which includes [lighting designer] Christopher Bowser, who designed *Octet* and *Ghost Quartet*, my last two shows with Dave. It's been a lot of world building, figuring out what the world feels and sounds

like, and how to make the most sensorial choices to reel the audience in.

Dave began writing *Three Houses* during the pandemic, and you've been collaborating on the project for years. What has it been like working on a piece that addresses our present moment so directly? Has your understanding of the piece and the characters shifted as we've moved further into the pandemic landscape?

While I agree the piece references events we have all been through in the past few years, I think the piece moves past the situation of "pandemic" and speaks to mental health, loneliness, heartbreak and ancestral lines in a way that could allow this play to be set during any moment of collective crisis. In the face of such deep unknowns, we are forced to examine ourselves and reflect on how we live, how we want to live, and how we want to be in community with other people. I think so much of Dave's work is about how we are in community with each other, even as we battle our own personal demons.

You're both the director and choreographer of *Three Houses*. Can you tell us about the role of movement within the play?

Choreographing this piece is a delight! I think less about formal dance (which I am not trained in) and more about the exuberant moments our bodies take over in times of both joy and crisis, and how our bodies often offer us a clearer picture of our mental health than we sometimes can mentally fathom. I think the work in this is gestural, silly, and, at times, ritualistic.

Lots of folks in school may be interested to hear about your work as a multi-hyphenate. What has your personal journey been as you balance and develop your artistic practice between writing, directing, and performing?

I think the best thing you can do if you're interested in multiple fields is NOT to choose a path! Do it all! Follow the joy. For years, I got to sing, perform, design costumes, and direct plays. My path narrowed for me, but every other lane I took directly feeds into the way I work now. It's a

"In the face of such deep unknowns, we are forced to examine ourselves and reflect on how we live, how we want to live, and how we want to be in community with other people. I think so much of Dave's work is about how we are in community with each other, even as we battle our own personal demons."

beautiful thing, to have too many passions!

Do you have any advice for aspiring theatermakers?

This career is beautiful and a gift to have. And you have to LOVE it. You cannot underestimate how impactful your personal joy and passion is to a room of other people. It's a communal sport (yes! I still liken it to sports!), and it's your job not only to craft excellent work, but to lift up those around you, and believe enough in the thing that you're making that no matter the results, you can say you were in it 110%. ✨

J.D. Mollison, Mia Pak, and Margo Seibert. Photo by Marc J. Franklin.



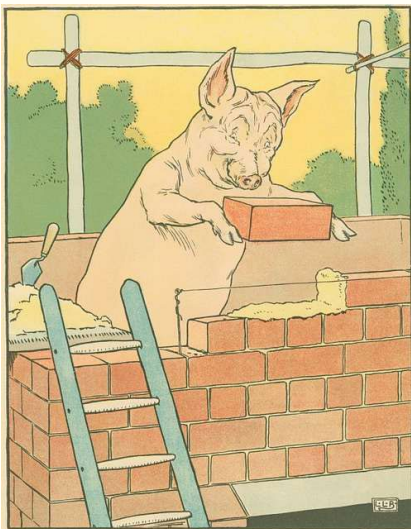
UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

FAIRYTALES AND FABLES

Fairytales and fables are stories within the tradition of folklore that employ elements of myth and magic, often to tell a moral story. Many fairytales and fables come from a long history of oral storytelling passed down between generations. As these stories come from an oral tradition, it's not uncommon to find many different versions of the same tale. While many of the fairytales and fables most familiar to us in the western world come from English, French, or German retellings, folklore is a robust tradition throughout the world. In fact, many English, French, and German fairytales were influenced by other European and non-European stories through trade routes, merchants, and migration.



THE THREE LITTLE PIGS



The most widely known telling of *The Three Little Pigs* comes from Joseph Jacobs's version, published in 1890. The fable recounts three pigs who build their houses out of different materials: straw, sticks, and brick. Then along comes the hungry Big Bad Wolf. He blows down the straw house, then the stick house, but can't blow down the brick house. Various iterations of the story existed in western culture before its official print date.

"Little pig, little pig, let me come in."

"No, not by the hair on my chinny chin chin."

"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in."

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Little Red Riding Hood has been translated and interpreted by many storytellers, most famously the Brothers Grimm. In the fairytale, Little Red makes her way through the forest with a basket of goodies for her grandmother. On her way, Little Red is approached by a Wolf, who asks where she's going. While Little Red is distracted picking flowers, the Wolf finds his way to grandmother's house, where he eats her and awaits Little Red. When Little Red arrives, she realizes something is wrong with her grandmother, but not quickly enough—the Wolf eats her, too. Early versions of the fairytale end here, but the most common retellings include a hunter, who rescues Little Red and her grandmother by cutting open the stomach of the Wolf while he sleeps. They then fill the Wolf's stomach with stones.



“Oh, grandmother, what big ears you have!”

“All the better to hear you with.”

“Oh, grandmother, what big eyes you have!”

“All the better to see you with.”

“Oh, grandmother, what big hands you have!”

“All the better to grab you with.”

“Oh, grandmother, what a horribly big mouth you have!”

“All the better to eat you with!”



THE WOLF

Wolves are recurring antagonists in fairytales and folklore beyond the stories of *The Three Little Pigs* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. Fairytales may have initially focused on wolves to teach children awareness of their surroundings and stay mindful of potential danger. That said, fairytales are more often regarded for their use of metaphor, employing characters or settings as examples of larger human or societal issues. Many fairytales function as parables, or stories intended to deliver a lesson.

What are some of the attributes you associate with wolves, or “wolf-like” behavior? Which are positive? Which are negative? Are some attributes positive in certain scenarios and negative in others?

In *Three Houses*, Susan says, “I think maybe I’m not the hero of this story. I think maybe I’m the wolf.” What does this admission tell you about how Susan sees herself in this moment?

Later, Grandfather says, “respect your demons. Respect your wolf.” What do you think Grandfather means here?

PŪĶIS

In *Three Houses*, Susan encounters Pookie, a pūķis, or a mythological Latvian household spirit, often in the form of a dragon. The concept of household spirits like pūķis existed throughout Europe in various forms. Pūķis were sometimes regarded as demons, stealing from others for their masters. Without proper treatment, pūķis were also believed to cause harm to their masters.

Mia Pak. Photo by Marc J. Franklin.



THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC

While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the loneliness epidemic, self-reported instances of loneliness and isolation were on the rise prior to 2020.

Some of the highest reports of isolation come from young adults aged 15-24, with a reported 70% decrease in social activities among friends. Some studies attribute growing isolation to the rise of time online, while others argue that online communities can help strengthen relationships across distance and combat loneliness.

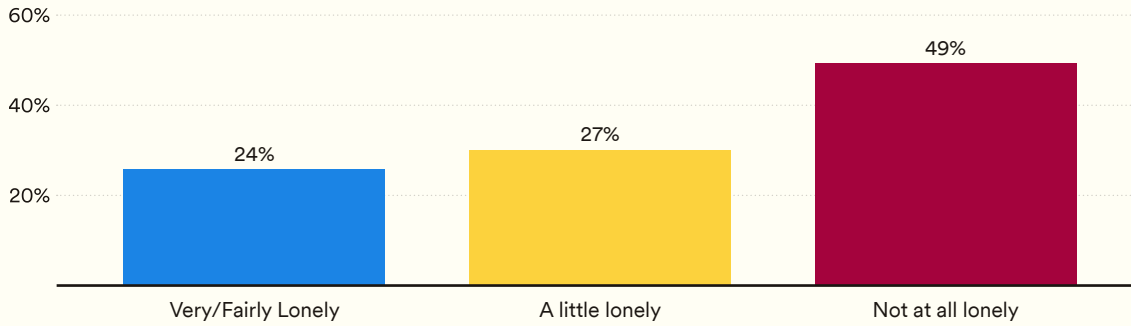
Loneliness has become a focus of U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy. Murthy and his team released a report detailing the impacts of loneliness on health and wellbeing with the goal of improving American connectivity, community, and belonging.



Scientists studying ways to combat loneliness prioritize focusing on self and community care. What are some ways you can practice caring for yourself within your community? What are ways you can support and care for others who may be experiencing loneliness?

A Quarter of Adults Worldwide Feel Very or Fairly Lonely

In general, how lonely do you feel?

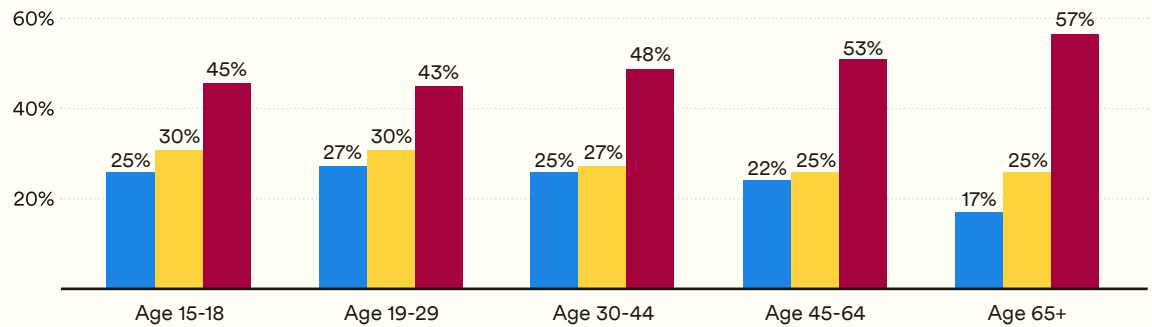


Across 142 countries and territories surveyed. Global percentages are weighted to reflect the global population. Percentages may not sum to 100% as "Don't know" and no response percentages are not shown.

10-Point Gap in Reported Loneliness Among Older vs. Younger Adults

In general, how lonely do you feel?

Very/Fairly Lonely A little lonely Not at all lonely



Across 142 countries and territories surveyed. Global percentages are weighted to reflect the global population. Percentages may not sum to 100% as "Don't know" and no response percentages are not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ± 1 percentage point.

Sources:

- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Surgeon General Social Connection Report](#)
- [Almost a Quarter of the World Feels Lonely - Gallup](#)
- [America has a loneliness epidemic. Here are 6 steps to address it - NPR](#)

Henry Stram and Ching Valdes-Aran. Photo by Marc J. Franklin.



BEHIND THE SCENES



An Interview with Actor J.D. Mollison

How did you get your start in theater?

I started in high school. I was a somewhat rambunctious youth, and during a study hall one day the drama teacher who was monitoring took me aside and suggested I channel all my excess energy into theater, where it could be utilized in a productive way. She told me all about the spring musical, *Pippin*, and I was enchanted. I ended up being in that show, had a blast, and the rest is history!

This is your second collaboration at Signature with Dave and Annie (and Margo, and several of the designers!). What's special about getting to return to work on a new piece with so many familiar faces?

This team is such a special group of collaborators, and I feel super blessed to be working with everyone again. There was such a vibrancy in the room in *Octet* with Annie, Dave, Or, Margo, and Bowser, and that energy is very much present in *Three Houses*. Everyone is so good at what they do and equally generous in giving space to others. It really brings out the best in all departments. I look forward to coming to work each day and building better than the day before. It's such an inspiring environment to create.

“Exploring uncharted territory can be thrilling as well as nerve wracking for the very same reason—it hasn't been done yet.”

When did you first get involved in *Three Houses*? Were there certain moments or themes that resonated with you when you first read the script?



J.D. Mollison

I started my journey with *Three Houses* in a reading over Zoom during the pandemic! I was in lockdown solo just like Beckett (the character I will be playing), so there was so much to relate to. It was definitely a life imitating art imitating life situation. We all had our routines and reorientations during that time, and I think people will find shades of themselves and their respective quarantine experiences in all three houses.

As an actor, what's most exciting about developing new work? What's most challenging?

I love the process of building a new work. Exploring uncharted territory can be thrilling as well as nerve wracking for the very same reason—it hasn't been done yet. We're all discovering the piece and learning how it lives on the go, so it feels important to approach the process with an

adventurous spirit and a sense of grace, as there's lots of experimentation happening. Having arrived at the later stages of performance, the feeling of having helped build an original experience that moves people is ultimately incredibly rewarding.

You're still in rehearsal right now. Can you take us behind the scenes of what's happening in the room at this stage of the process?

As I write this, we have just ended our first day of tech, in which all the departments come together to put the show into the space. Lights, costumes, sound, and scenic design all come into the picture to enhance the work that the company has been doing in the rehearsal hall for the last three weeks. It's an exciting time to see the show taking shape!

As an open mic night, your scene partner in *Three Houses* is often the audience. How have you approached rehearsing a piece so dependent on audience and direct address?

I enjoy engaging the audience directly. It really brings a sense of aliveness, since there's no illusory barrier between us. Dave does a wonderful job in writing to making the sharing both very personal and also entertaining and fun for both the actor and crowd; and Annie is amazing at utilizing the space and cast to discover the story in real time so even when I'm "alone" in a moment, there is support and connection in every direction. Ultimately, as with all plays, the true form is found with an audience.

***Three Houses* is largely sung through. Can you take us through your process for working through a song as an actor? Are you breaking each song into acting beats? How do you navigate the lyrics, melody, and orchestrations as you're developing your character?**

Dave Malloy is masterful at seamlessly threading text and music to integrate melody and thought into a comprehensive whole. So many nuances are present, even in the orchestrations, that help support the work of the actor. Trusting in the architecture inherent in the text and score is of paramount importance to me, so that a clarity can be distilled and the joy of discovery comes forth.

"Trusting in the architecture inherent in the text and score is of paramount importance to me, so that a clarity can be distilled and the joy of discovery comes forth."

I've always found speech and song to come from the same space, and so I try to approach them that way—what is the intention/need, and how am I being affected by the journey?

Many of the students reading this guide may have artistic pursuits of their own. Do you have anything else to share with students who are interested in a career in the arts?

A life in the arts can be a very fulfilling, if not sometimes arduous, journey. But if you love to collaborate and make great things, I find it a wonderful way to make your way in the world. I would say a big lesson I have learned throughout my time is to be your authentic self however and whenever you can. There's only one of you, and that special quality that only you possess yearns for expression, so I recommend being thankful for yourself and letting your light truly shine as only you can! ✨

J.D. Mollison. Photo by Marc J. Franklin.



BEHIND THE SCENES



An Interview with Puppet Designer James Ortiz

How did you get started in theater? How did you find your way to puppet design?

Long story short, I was the painting, drawing, sculpting, introverted child growing up. In my hometown in Richardson, Texas, there was a marionette theater that would perform every summer through the parks and recreation program. I saw the shows when I was young and thought it was cool, but I didn't think much about it. Then when I was discovering my voice via acting in middle school, I got signed up to do this program where I started learning about puppetry. I later realized it was the Venn diagram of all my passions and interests. Puppetry is the center of fine art and live performance. It was so exciting that puppetry allowed me to completely invent from scratch who a character was through design. My mother is also an English teacher, so there was always a strong emphasis on literary analysis and dramaturgy, which completely affected the way I design.

Puppetry is such a broad and beautiful art form. Are there certain styles of puppetry that drew you in?

I found my way through marionettes and Bunraku puppetry. Bunraku is a type of Japanese puppetry that's used quite a lot in the States. It's in *The Lion King*, for example. It's a type of almost full-sized puppet that's operated by several people. Bunraku works well in larger theater spaces. A lot of puppetry is designed to be on a tabletop or small theatrical spaces. There are only a few types of puppets that fit inside a large-scale theater.

How did you come to work on *Three Houses*? What excited you about designing puppets for this piece?



James Ortiz

What I love about puppetry is that it's basically being an inventor. Working on *Three Houses* was exciting because when I showed up, the script and story were still in flux. We were still trying to determine the function of these three animal [puppet] characters. There was an open dialogue with Dave and Annie, asking, "Who is this character? What do they want?" I got to develop these characters with them on the ground floor, which was really special.

We started from the beginning. I read [the script], I listened to some of the songs that existed at that point, we had a lovely chat, and I started by showing them sketches, images, and artwork, trying to get closer to the creatures in their minds. The whole show takes place inside the communal subconscious of these three characters who are recounting internal experiences from inside their lockdowns. Each protagonist has their own

inner saboteur or inner child that manifests during lockdown, so it became clear that the puppets are manifestations of their inner lives—which was great fodder for the imagination.

I was involved with one of the developmental readings before rehearsals started and said, “Hey, guys, I just want to make some crappy mockups. Do you think I could get a little bit of time with each of those performers and work some puppetry with them? I can also find out their aptitudes, their ability, and we can start tailoring puppets to these performers.” Annie and Dave were totally on board. We found a little bit of time and added these little puppet flourishes for the reading. It really helped make sense of the approach for the show. Then we were cooking with gas!

You mentioned that the puppets are manifestations of Susan, Sadie, and Beckett’s inner lives. How did you approach building puppets that are manifestations of each character’s imagination?

Given that we’re playing in the subconscious and imagination, I didn’t want the puppet designs to remind us of a crafted work of theater. In another show, the dragon [might be] made of a collection of spoons and a colander. In this one, it needs to be the dragon that you imagine when you think about a dragon. We don’t stylize our imagination; our imagination is pure. Puppetry is an inherently theatrical and stylized art form. While we know a puppet is artificial, it was important for me from a design standpoint to not remind you that they’re puppets. Which is an odd exercise, certainly. In any other show we would spend a lot of time trying to remind you that the puppets belong to the aesthetic, created world of the play.

“We don’t stylize our imagination; our imagination is pure.”

Can you tell us a bit more about each of the puppets?

There are four big puppets.

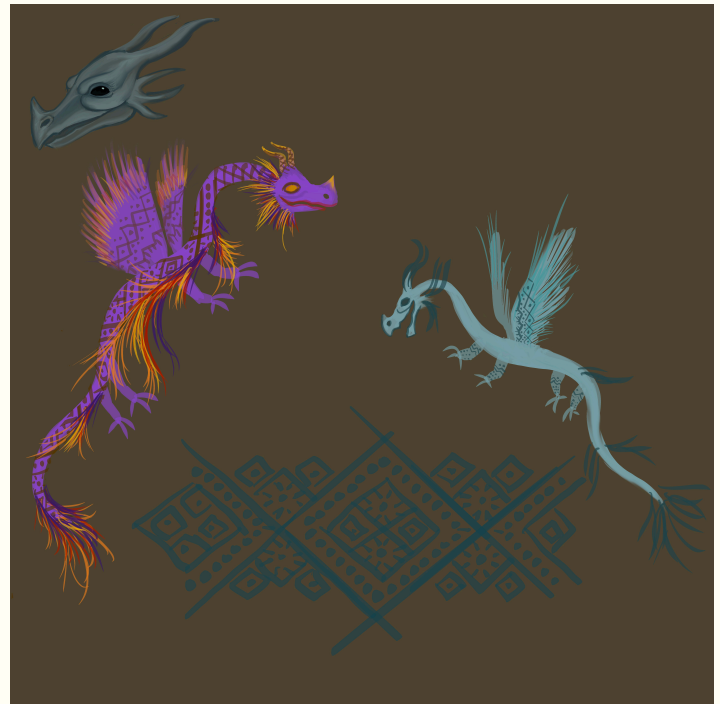


Illustration by James Ortiz

POOKIE

Pookie comes from the mythology of pūķis—Latvian house dragons. Every home in Latvia would conceivably have one. It’s a protector or guardian spirit, and collects treasure for its owners...kind of like a pet. But you don’t want to anger your pūķis. You have to leave offerings for the pūķis, otherwise it’ll be angry.

Susan is visiting her grandmother’s home in Latvia. This little Latvian dragon comes out of her imagination and is all her worst and best attributes. It’s like a dream—and it begins to manifest Susan’s own judgmental qualities of her personality and her OCD perfectionist traits. Completely unrelatable to many of us, I’m sure. Not me, of course.

What was interesting about researching pūķis in mythology is there’s no formal version of what that dragon looks like. For me, it was about creating a dragon that would be instantly recognizable as a dragon but trying to weave in Latvian traditional textiles. Latvian textiles include a lot of needlepoint and woven embroidery, usually in very intricate grid patterns, sometimes in a diamond shape, sometimes in squares. It’s quite beautiful and ornate. [I thought], I have to find a way to weave this textile into the dragon scale.

ZIPPY

The second puppet in the show is Zippy, who is a video game character. For Sadie, her pandemic was mostly influenced by playing a version of a game like *Animal Crossing*, where everybody's a cute and cuddly animal. We knew we wanted to make a cuddly animal character with that very classic, clean video game style, where it's more about cuteness and less about detail. I was pulling references from *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Animal Crossing*, *The Sims*, and some of the older versions of *Zelda*—just bringing it all together and doing a bunch of sketches. Annie, Dave, and I spent a fair amount of time just trying to find the right colors combinations. We landed on vibrant, electric pastels, almost like a Care Bear. We went through so many different versions until we ultimately picked the color combos that felt right.

I worked with an incredible puppet fabricator named Jamie Bressler, who works at the Henson studio. She makes Muppets, and she also makes clothing for the Muppets. I approached her because I knew I wanted this very soft, fleecy, felty, Muppet-y creation that she's so good at making. I said, "Well maybe we can buy different pieces of fabric in these colors, and we can just sew it together. It's fine if it's not exactly matching my sketches." And Jamie said, "No, the way we

do it at the Henson's is that we use a specially made type of Muppet fleece and we hand dye it exactly to the shade that you're looking for." So, we got this glorious Muppet treatment for Zippy, and I think he's very charming and kind of steals the show!

From a construction standpoint, it was important to me that he didn't have a lot of points of movement. Normally with a puppet, you want to make sure there are lots of opportunities for movement. For Zippy, because he's meant to be made of a handful of pixels [in this] flat, almost 2D, video game, it was important that he couldn't do crazy, amazing things with his body. He only has a few points of movement on him, which allow him to move stiffly and foolishly, the way that the *Animal Crossing* characters move.

SHELOB

Then there's Shelob. There's a character in the show, Beckett, who has recently separated from his wife. He was the one in the relationship that couldn't kill the spiders, so his ex-wife did. There's always one person in the relationship that will step on the bug, and Beckett couldn't do it. Now he's not with her and there's a spider in his new apartment. He can't kill it, so he names it Shelob, like the spider from *The Lord of the Rings*.

Mia Pak and Margo Seibert. Photo by Marc J. Franklin.



It was important that there was a connection to the sacred feminine about this spider. It was important for Annie that there was something old world, mid-Atlantic, classic, and kind of sinister. We kept talking about Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman as a point of reference, along with some other grand dames of Hollywood—Rita Hayworth, Kate Hepburn, etc. Dripping in femininity.

I designed the spider as a reverse marionette. With a marionette, you're operating from above. In this version, all the strings are underneath. The puppet is hanging above the performer's head. You pull strings underneath, and it animates the many legs of the spider. It's a fun way to do something a little different. It was skinned in this reflective, shiny black faux leather that glistens in the light.

THE WOLF

There's one more puppet in the show, which is more of a headpiece. So much of the show is about facing your demons, since ignoring them makes them stronger. I think we all learned in the pandemic that our demons might swallow us up if we don't face them.

The Big Bad Wolf is a running motif throughout the show. I wanted to take it to a Freudian place... sort of the wolf inside us all. I wanted the wolf to feel very old—very Brothers Grimm. I wanted him to feel ancient and kind of sad—he's been there the whole time waiting for you to either fight him or befriend him. He's meant to look like gnarled bark and wood and feels like an old German forest.

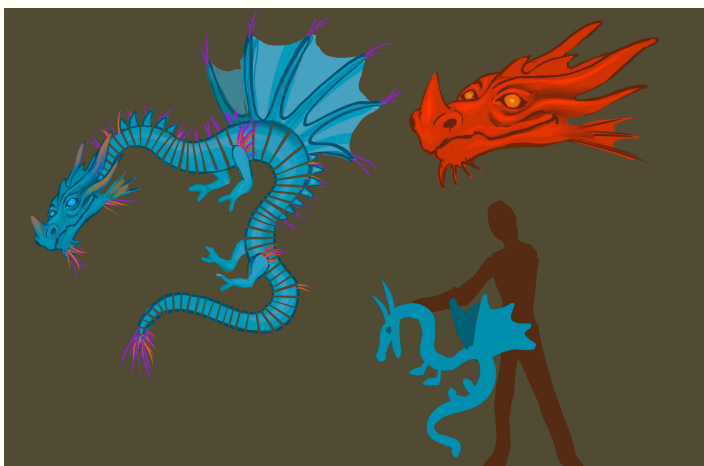


Illustration by James Ortiz

“So much of the show is about facing your demons, since ignoring them makes them stronger. I think we all learned in the pandemic that our demons might swallow us up if we don't face them.”

Do you have any collaborators during the construction phase? How do you help actors get acquainted and comfortable with their puppets?

Myself and two others (*puppet fabricators Jamie Bressler and Collin Miclon*) built everything based upon my designs, and I did some finishing details on a few of them. Jamie and Collin are both fantastic makers.

In terms of getting actors comfortable with puppetry, it's a really fun process. My job is twofold: I design puppets and I also puppet direct, which is a way of saying that I'm the puppeteers' acting coach. Sometimes I'll choreograph the scene. Other times it's about the actor's impulse. We talk about how they want to play the scene and how to treat [the puppet] like a character, not like some complicated mechanism that's outside of you. Imagine you're bringing life to this thing. How do you want to play this character? What do you want the scene to be? How do you want them to sound? How do you want them to move? What are your instincts?

We just play. Most of a puppet director's job (and I have another puppet director on the show named Emma Wiseman, who is also fantastic) is about creating parameters. It's a collaborative process, and it's about empowering the performer to follow their instincts. Then [we] are outside tidying it up and helping, going, “Ah, I see you're trying to do this. What if we transitioned by going ‘whoop, whoop, whoop,’ and moving over there?” There's a lot of onomatopoeia in puppet direction.

What are some important considerations when designing a puppet?

A big consideration whenever I'm designing a puppet is the weight. I can make a puppet look like it's made out of anything, but it always has to be made out of durable, lightweight, strong (but not heavy) materials. Usually, I'm using different types of foam. Sometimes lightweight plastics, sometimes fabric. I'm more of a sculptural designer. I use a lot of techniques that are similar to ones you would see in the cosplay community, actually. Cosplayers have been using foam, plastics, and other lightweight materials to make anime armor (or what have you) for different Comic Cons. A lot of those methodologies are simple, but they last and are durable. Also, because cosplay has become huge in the past decade, so many of those materials are readily available everywhere.

Do you have any other thoughts or resources to share with students who may be interested in learning more about puppetry and puppet design?

I'm self-taught. I know a lot of people that work as puppet designers/puppeteers/puppet directors/puppet fabricators and very few of them went to school for puppetry. There are great schools, but a lot of puppeteers are self-taught.

If anybody's interested in puppetry, there are a million fantastic resources. The [Puppet Kitchen](#) has amazing videos online of how you can make your own puppets. If you're interested in exploring puppetry, or any artistic medium, the only way to explore it is to do it. So, make

something! Figure it out. There isn't really a wrong way to make a puppet. I would say, if it's too heavy, or doesn't move very well, that's not great. But the reason puppetry is so accessible and exciting is that nine times out of 10, puppets can be made of materials you can find around [the house].

When I'm building something for a show, it's a different series of considerations. I have to build something that lasts the extent of the run and can sustain eight shows a week. It's different than making a puppet out of paper in your bedroom. But the best way to start working in puppetry is to make a puppet out of paper in your bedroom. Can you make something inanimate come to life? Is that exciting? If so, great. Explore it! ✨

RESOURCE CORNER

[The Art of the Puppet by Bil Baird](#)

[Puppets and Puppet Theatre by David Currell](#)

[James's Website](#)

Other Inspiring Puppet Designers:

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[Nick Barnes,](#)

[Gyre & Gimble,](#)

[Handspring Puppet Company,](#)

and more!



Illustration by James Ortiz

DEEPER DIVE

Discussion Questions

→ *Post-Show*

- * How did each character's songs contribute to your understanding of their identity? What were some moments that surprised you?
- * Why do you think Dave Malloy and Annie Tappe were interested in using puppetry to represent Pookie, Zippy, and Shelob? How does puppetry contribute to the world being built on stage?
- * What did you recognize from fairytales and fables like *The Three Little Pigs* and *Little Red Riding Hood* in *Three Houses*?
- * Throughout *Three Houses* the actors often speak to the audience, also known as direct address. What impact did this have on you as an audience member? Why do you think the creatives in this production decided to direct the actors to address the audience, rather than each other?

Classroom Exercises

- * Each character in *Three Houses* begins their story of the pandemic with a similar set of lyrics and melody. This is known as a *leitmotif*, or a recurring musical theme. Using the *Three Houses* leitmotif as a springboard, spend some time crafting your own character narrative of the pandemic. Feel free to draw from your own experience or create a fictional character.

*During the pandemic
When the lock down hit
I had...*

- * Susan, Sadie, and Beckett each have a counterpart to their story: Susan finds Pookie in her grandmother's house, Sadie meets Zippy in her game, and Beckett has Shelob, a house spider. Think of how you spent your time during the pandemic. Did you have a Pookie, Zippy, or Shelob? Spend some time thinking about what shape your imaginary friend, or demon, may take. How large are they? How do they move? How do they speak? Write a brief scripted conversation with your imaginary character.



Dave Malloy

is a composer/writer/performer/orchestrator. He has written music for eighteen musicals, including *The Witches*, an adaptation of Roald Dahl's novel at the National Theater in London; *Moby-Dick*, a four-part musical reckoning with Herman Melville's epic; *Octet*, a chamber choir musical about internet addiction; *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*, an electropop opera based on a slice of Leo Tolstoy's *War & Peace* (12 Tony nominations, including Best Musical, Score, Book, and Orchestrations); *Ghost Quartet*, a song cycle about love, death, and whiskey; *Preludes*, a musical fantasia set in the hypnotized mind of Sergei Rachmaninoff; *Three Pianos*, a drunken romp through Schubert's "Winterreise"; and *Beowulf—A Thousand Years of Baggage*, an anti-academia rock opera. He has won three Obie Awards, a Smithsonian Ingenuity Award, a Drama Desk Award, a Lortel Award, a Theater World

Award, the Richard Rodgers Award, an ASCAP New Horizons Award, and a Jonathan Larson Grant; has been a MacDowell fellow and Composer-in-Residence at Ars Nova; and is a Premiere Residency Writer at the Signature Theatre. Upcoming: *Black Swan*. He lives in New York. Davemalloy.com.

Available at the New York Public Library:

[*Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* Score](#)

Listen on Spotify to Other Works by Dave Malloy:

[*Octet*](#)

[*Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*](#)

[*Ghost Quartet*](#)

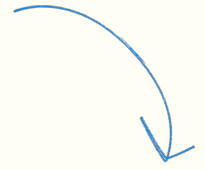
[*Preludes*](#)

Margo Seibert, J.D. Mollison, and Mia Pak. Photo by Marc J. Franklin.



ABOUT SIGNATURE

A HOME FOR STORYTELLERS. A SPACE FOR ALL.



The Pershing Square Signature Center. Photo © David Sundberg / Esto

Our Mission

Signature Theatre is an artistic home for storytellers. By producing several plays from each Resident Writer, we offer a deep dive into their bodies of work.

What We Do

Signature Theatre is a space for artists and audiences to call home. Signature creates opportunities through the spaces and support it offers the theater community. For playwrights, Signature's unique playwright-in-residence model offers the stability and support of home. For audiences, Signature offers access to all, offering a welcoming creative community and affordable ticketing programs. Only Signature Theatre offers an immersive journey through a playwright's body of work to theatergoers seeking intimate human connection and extraordinary cultural experiences.

Our History

Signature Theatre was founded in 1991 by James Houghton and its resident playwrights include: Edward Albee, Annie Baker, Lee Blessing, Martha Clarke, Will Eno, Horton Foote, María Irene Fornés, Athol Fugard, John Guare, Stephen Adly Guirgis, A.R. Gurney, Katori Hall, Quiara Alegría Hudes, Samuel D. Hunter, David Henry Hwang, Bill Irwin, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Adrienne Kennedy, Tony Kushner, Romulus Linney, Kenneth Lonergan, Dave Malloy, Charles Mee, Arthur Miller, Dominique Morisseau, Lynn Nottage, Suzan-Lori Parks, Sarah Ruhl, Sam Shepard, Anna Deavere Smith, Regina Taylor, Paula Vogel, Naomi Wallace, August Wilson, Lanford Wilson, Lauren Yee, The Mad Ones, and members of the historic Negro Ensemble Company: Charles Fuller, Leslie Lee, and Samm-Art Williams.

A very special thank you to the New York City Department of Education

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Student Membership



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