

PRESS RELEASE**For Immediate Release: December 3, 2024****Media Contact:**

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Children's Theatre Company Announces Complete Cast and Creative Team for***Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster*
Created by Manual Cinema****January 8-March 9, 2025**

Minneapolis—December 3, 2024 — Children's Theatre Company (CTC) is excited to announce the complete cast and creative team for the Minnesota premiere of *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster*, created by Manual Cinema, which will run from January 8-March 9, 2025 on CTC's Cargill Stage. *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster* is inspired by the books *Leonardo*, *The Terrible Monster* and *Sam, The Most Scaredy-Cat Kid in the Whole World* by Mo Willems. The adaptation is by Sarah Fornace and Drew Dir, with music, lyrics and sound design by Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter. The production is directed by Sarah Fornace.

"At CTC we feel it's important to nurture and activate a child's creative life with ingenious storytelling, and Manual Cinema is one of the most imaginative theatre troupes working in America today," said CTC Artistic Director Rick Dildine. "Using vintage overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, live feed cameras, and a live music ensemble, Manual Cinema transforms the experience of attending the cinema and imbues it with liveness, ingenuity, and theatricality."

Monsters have one job and it's to be SCARY! "Booga booga booga!" But as hard as he tries, Leonardo can't scare even a mouse. When the other monsters laugh and make fun of him, Leonardo goes in search of the most scaredy-cat kid in the whole world to try and scare the tuna salad out of him! Manual Cinema breathes innovative life into this beloved story (and its doubly charming sequel), using hundreds of puppets to magically create a movie before your very eyes. Will Leonardo finally become the scary monster he dreams of being? Or will he discover something even better to be? Inspired by the Books *Leonardo*, *The Terrible Monster* and *Sam, The Most Scaredy-Cat Kid in the Whole World* by Mo Willems, *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster* was commissioned by The Kennedy Center for Performing Arts with additional commissioning support from Utah Presents.

"We are so thrilled to bring *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show about a Terrible Monster* to the Twin Cities," said playwright and director Sarah Fornace. "The show adapts two books by everyone's favorite bedtime book author Mo Willems, and it tells an important story about empathy and choosing unexpected friendships. Minneapolis has such a wonderful arts scene and some of the best puppetry in the country! We always love performing here, because the audiences are smart and savvy and seem to love puppet shows! We use paper puppets, fuzzy Muppet-style puppets, live music, and video cameras to bring Mo's books to life in front of the audience's eyes. In every Manual Cinema show, we always show the process of making the performance, and I hope that we inspire the future generation to make their own art and tell their own stories! Also, as a parent, I am always excited to bring this show to other parents. There are jokes for all ages, and the songs are jams - I do not mind singing them 100 times."

Leonardo! A Wonderful Show about a Terrible Monster runs from January 8-March 9, 2025 on CTC's Cargill Stage. This show is best for younger audiences. Tickets can be purchased at

childrenstheatre.org/Leonardo or by calling the ticket office at 612.874.0400. Ticket prices start at \$15.

The cast of *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show about a Terrible Monster* features Karly Gesine Bergmann (Sam, Puppeteer), Leah Casey (Kerry, Puppeteer), Lily Emerson (Narrator, Character Voices, Musician), Kevin Michael Wesson (Leonardo, Voice, and Puppeteer), and Lindsey Noel Whiting (Leonardo, Voice, and Puppeteer).

From January 8 to February 9, the role of Leonardo will be played by Kevin Michael Wesson. From February 13 to March 9, the role of Leonardo will be played by Lindsey Noel Whiting.

In addition to Mo Willems, Sarah Fornace, Drew Dir, Ben Kauffman, and Kyle Vegter, the creative team and production staff for *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show about a Terrible Monster* includes Liz Breit (Hand & Rod Puppet Design), Mieka Van der Ploeg (Costume & Wig Design), Trey Brazeal with Nick Chamernik (Lighting Design), Megan Alrutz (Dramaturg), and Maydi Díaz (Stage Manager, Live Video, Sound and Light Cueing).

Ticket Information

Tickets may be purchase online at childrenstheatre.org/Leonardo or by calling the ticket office at 612.874.0400. Ticket prices start at \$15.

School groups interested in attending *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show about a Terrible Monster* can contact schools@childrenstheatre.org for more information.

Leonardo! A Wonderful Show about a Terrible Monster has a run time of 45 minutes with no intermission.

This production is best enjoyed by younger audiences. Lap passes are available for children 3 years and younger.

Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster

Created by Manual Cinema

Inspired by the Books *Leonardo*, *The Terrible Monster* and *Sam, The Most Scaredy-Cat Kid in the Whole World* by Mo Willems

Images by Manual Cinema, Characters © Mo Willems.

Commissioned by The Kennedy Center for Performing Arts with additional commissioning support from Utah Presents

Directed by Sarah Fornace

Adaptation by Sarah Fornace and Drew Dir

Music and Lyrics by Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter

January 8-March 9, 2025

Cargill Stage

Best for younger audiences!

Creative Team & Production Staff

Director Sarah Fornace

Adaptation | Manual Cinema

Music, Lyrics & Sound Design | Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter

Storyboards and 2D Puppet Design | Drew Dir

Hand and Rod Puppet Design | Lizi Breit

Devised by | Drew Dir, Sarah Forance and Julia Miller with Leah Casey, Lily Emerson and Lindsey Noel Whiting
 Costume & Wig Design | Mieka Van der Ploeg
 Lighting Design | Trey Brazeal with Nick Chamernik
 Dramaturg | Megan Alrutz
 Stage Manager, Live Video, Sound and Light Cueing | Maydi Díaz

Cast

Narrator, Character Voices, Vocals | Lily Emerson
 Leonardo, Voice, and Puppeteer | Kevin Michael Wesson
 Leonardo, Voice, and Puppeteer | Lindsey Noel Whiting
 Sam, Puppeteer | Karly Gesine Bergmann
 Kerry, Puppeteer | Leah Casey

CAST

Narrator, Character Voices, Musician
Lily Emerson

Lily Emerson is the co-creator of Adventure Sandwich, a family-friendly performance group. In addition to Manual Cinema, she has had the honor of working with many esteemed companies and organizations, including Chicago Children's Theater, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Mucca Pazza, Hearts to Art, Opera-Matic, and many others.

Leonardo, Voice, and Puppeteer
Kevin Michael Wesson

Kevin Michael Wesson is a Chicago-based puppeteer and playwright. Originally from Tampa, FL, he holds a B.A. in Theatre Arts from the University of South Florida. Recent credits include Steppenwolf's LookOut and Rough House Theater. He is also an ensemble member with Stop Motion Plant and Theater Unspeakable.

Leonardo, Voice, and Puppeteer
Lindsey Noel Whiting

Lindsey Noel Whiting is a Chicago-based performer and teaching artist. Her theatrical credits include *Lookingglass Alice*, *Mr. & Mrs. Pennyworth*, and *The Great Fire* at Lookingglass Theatre, *The Snow Queen* at Victory Gardens, and *The Year I Didn't Go to School* with Chicago Children's Theatre. She has also appeared in numerous shows with Redmoon Theatre. Additionally, Lindsey is an Associate Artist with The Actor's Gymnasium, where she has performed in over ten original circus productions.

Sam, Puppeteer
Karly Gesine Bergmann

Karly Gesine Bergman is a Minneapolis-based maker and performer whose work has been seen on stages in Chicago, Los Angeles, and across Italy. She is an alumna of The Theatre School at DePaul University, The National Puppetry Conference, and Teatro Gioco Vita's International Shadow Laboratory. Her work has received support from The Claire Rosen & Samuel Edes Prize for Emerging Artists and has received various awards. She firmly believes that silliness is sacred.

Kerry, Puppeteer

Leah Casey

Leah Casey 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.

CREATIVE TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF

Director, Co-Artistic Director of Manual Cinema

Sarah Fornace

Sarah Fornace is a founding co-Artistic Director of Manual Cinema. She has worked as a director, performer, choreographer, writer, and story artist on numerous theatre, immersive, museum, and film projects for Manual Cinema. Her shows with Manual Cinema have toured to every continent except Antarctica. She won an Emmy with Manual Cinema for her work on *The Forger* with *The New York Times*.

Deviser, Co-Artistic Director of Manual Cinema

Julia Miller

Julia Miller is a director, puppeteer, puppet designer and co-Artistic Director of Manual Cinema. 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). 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.

Music, Lyrics & Sound Design

Ben Kauffman

Ben Kauffman is a Chicago-based 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), the University of Wisconsin and CUNY's Baruch College (NYC). He holds a Master's degree from New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP).

Music, Lyrics & Sound Design

Kyle Vegter

Kyle Vegter 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*, The Art Institute of Chicago, and others. He co-founded Chicago's only contemporary classical music cassette label Parlour Tapes+.

2D Puppet Design

Drew Dir

Drew Dir 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.

Hand & Rod Puppet Design

Lizi Breit

Lizi Breit is a Chicago-based artist. She has been performing and designing with Manual Cinema since 2011.

Costume & Wig Design

Mieka Van der Ploeg

Theatre credits include designs with Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Steppenwolf, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Writers Theatre, Lyric Opera Unlimited, Lookingglass Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Second City, Redmoon, Chicago Children's Theatre, among others. She won a non-Equity Jeff award in 2020 for *First Love is the Revolution*, at Steep Theatre. She is proud to be a member of USA829.

Lighting Design

Trey Brazeal

Trey Brazeal is happy to be working with Manual Cinema on *Leonardo!* and thanks Drew and Sarah for this wonderful opportunity! Some of his credits include: *The Illusion*, *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Sweat*, & *Guys and Dolls* (Illinois State University); *This Wide Night* (Shattered Globe Theatre and Interrobang Theatre Project); *Little Shop of Horrors* (Metropolis Performing Arts Center).

Assistant Lighting Design

Nick Chamernik

Nick Chamernik is a Chicago-based lighting designer, production electrician, and theatre technician, and is thrilled to be working with Manual Cinema on their incredible production of *Leonardo!*. He has also worked with Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Porchlight Music Theatre, Apollo Theater Chicago, The Marriott Theatre, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Dramaturg

Megan Alrutz

Megan Alrutz is an artist, educator, and scholar with over 20 years of experience in theatre, media, and interdisciplinary performance for youth and families. Megan is a long-time collaborator of author/illustrator Mo Willems, working as producer, dramaturg, and/or director on his musicals, interactive engagements, and other live and televised performance work. She is professor and associate chair of Theatre & Dance at the University of Texas at Austin.

Stage Manager, Live Video, Sound and Light Cueing

Maydi Díaz

Maydi Díaz is a Chicago-based stage and tour manager with a BA in Arts Management and MA in Theatre Production. Her credits include work with UrbanTheater, Water People, Aguijón Theater, La Vuelta Ensemble, and Manual Cinema. Offstage, she enjoys folk dancing and calligraphy in coffee shops.

Mo Willems

Mo Willems is an author, illustrator, animator, playwright, and the inaugural Kennedy Center Education Artist-in-Residence, where he collaborates in creating fun new stuff involving classical music, opera,

comedy concerts, dance, painting, and digital works with the National Symphony Orchestra, Ben Folds, Yo-Yo Ma, and others.

Willems is best known for his #1 New York Times bestselling picture books, which have been awarded three Caldecott Honors (*Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, *Knuffle Bunny*, *Knuffle Bunny Too*), two Theodor Geisel Medals, and five Geisel Honors (*The Elephant & Piggie* series).

Mo's art has been exhibited around the world, including major solo retrospectives at the High Museum (Atlanta) and the New-York Historical Society (NYC). Over the last decade, Willems has become the most produced playwright of Theater for Young Audiences in America, having written or co-written four musicals based on his books.

He began his career as a writer and animator on PBS' *Sesame Street*, where he garnered six Emmy Awards (writing). Other television work includes two series on Cartoon Network: *Sheep in the Big City* (creator + head writer) and *Codename: Kids Next Door* (head writer). Mo is creating new TV projects for HBO Max, where his live action comedy special *Don't Let the Pigeon Do Storytime!* currently streams.

His papers reside at Yale University's Beinecke Library.

Manual Cinema Company

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](#). 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, and an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

In 2023, Manual Cinema completed production on their first self produced short film, *Future Feeling*, and toured with folk rock band Iron & Wine in 2024.

Children's Theatre Company (CTC) is the nation's largest and most acclaimed theatre for young people and serves a multigenerational audience. It creates theatre experiences that educate, challenge, and inspire more than 200,000 people annually. CTC is the only theatre focused on young audiences to win the Special Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre and is the only theatre in Minnesota to receive three Tony nominations (for its production of *A Year With Frog and Toad*). CTC is committed to creating world-class productions at the highest level and to developing new works, more than 200 to date, dramatically changing the canon of work for young audiences.

CTC is the most significant provider of theatre education opportunities in the region. Every year, thousands of children experience theatre for the first time at CTC. Our student matinees and education programs demonstrably benefit the community, from the intergenerational conversations sparked by our world premieres, to the sequential skill-building that happens in our Theatre Arts Training, to the pre-K focus of our Early Childhood Initiative. ACT One is CTC's comprehensive platform for access, diversity, and inclusion in our audiences, programs, staff, and board that strives

to ensure the theatre is a home for all people, all families, reflective of our community.
childrenstheatre.org

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: *Leonardo! A Wonderful Show About a Terrible Monster*

Created by Manual Cinema

Inspired by the Books *Leonardo*, *The Terrible Monster* and *Sam, The Most Scaredy-Cat Kid in the Whole World* by Mo Willems

Images by Manual Cinema, Characters © Mo Willems.

Commissioned by The Kennedy Center for Performing Arts with additional commissioning support from Utah Presents

Directed by Sarah Fornace

Adaptation by Sarah Fornace and Drew Dir

Music and Lyrics by Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter

January 8-March 9, 2025

Cargill Stage

Best for younger audiences!

WHEN: January 8-March 9, 2025 (Opening Night is Saturday, January 11, 2025 at 7pm)

WHERE: CTC's Cargill Stage (2400 Third Avenue South Minneapolis MN 55404)

AGE RECOMMENDATION: This production is best enjoyed by younger audiences. Lap passes are available for children 3 years and younger.

RUNNING TIME: 45 minutes with no intermission.

TICKETS: Starting at \$15 and available at childrenstheatre.org/Leonardo or by calling the Ticket Office at 612.874.0400.

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