

World premiere of *Magic Pearl*

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Photos for publication available upon request

More information and tickets: <https://www.puppetshowplace.org/performances>

(Brookline, MA) Puppet Showplace Theater presents the world premiere of ***Magic Pearl***, a retelling of a classic Chinese folktale about the unlikely friendship between a dragon and a phoenix. Pinwheel, an ensemble of classically trained musicians and puppet artists, brings the story to life through shadow puppetry and live original music. Performances are February 12, and February 18-20 at Puppet Showplace Theater in Brookline; the show can be enjoyed by audiences of all ages, and is recommended for ages 5 and up. A special evening performance on February 18 is presented as part of Puppets at Night, the theater's program for adults and teens.



This dynamic production uses a variety of puppetry techniques and an original score to create a richly textured world. Phoenix and Dragon work together to create the titular pearl, learning to love each other's differences along the way; when the pearl is stolen by the Spirit Queen of the West, they make a perilous journey to retrieve it. Papercut and hand-painted shadow puppets interact in front of scrolling & layered backgrounds, as they "fly" to the top of a mountain, and two light projectors allow materials like glass, fabric, water droplets, and feathers to add further dimension to the scenery. Key moments are emphasized by the juxtaposition of colorful scenes and stark black-and-white figures.

Magic Pearl is a tribute to flute player Bo Jones (Lee)'s mother, who often shared Chinese folktales with Jones as a child and gave her daughters Chinese names inspired by "the pearl." Jones and theater artist Max Gayford initially developed this work as a 25-minute workshop performance in 2018, recruiting Christopher Vu to compose original music. The music became a key and enduring element of the ensemble's interpretation of the Chinese folktale "The Bright Pearl," leading them to

design the puppetry performance to fit the score, which is performed live with flute, cello, and percussion.

In October 2019, the artists had a residency with Puppet Showplace Theater in Brookline, MA to further develop the show, adding artist Veronica Barron to the creative team to lead the puppetry design and direction. With support from the Jim Henson Foundation and LiveArts Boston, Pinwheel had a three-week residency at Floating Tower in North Adams, MA this past summer, and has been in-residence at Puppet Showplace again this winter to finalize ***Magic Pearl*** and bring the show to fruition.

Magic Pearl aims to show the wonder that shadow puppetry can create, while also pulling back the curtain to reveal how the “magic” works. “It’s always an honor to be some young viewer’s very first experience with puppetry or live theater,” says Veronica Barron, ***Magic Pearl***’s director and puppet designer, “So we want to let them in on what we’re doing.” The show begins with a shadow scene in front of the curtain, allowing the audience to see the mechanics of shadow puppetry, before moving behind a screen. Later in the show, a puppeteer guides a puppet through the house to interact with the audience, allowing them to see the puppet’s mechanisms up close. “We can show that yes, puppet theater is magic—but it’s a kind of magic that you can make yourself, anytime, with almost anything,” says Veronica Barron, ***Magic Pearl***’s director and puppet designer.

Leslie Burton, the artistic director of Puppet Showplace Theater, says the theater is excited to see the culmination of Pinwheel’s efforts. “We’re proud to present the premiere performances of ***Magic Pearl*** as part of the theater’s commitment to incubating new works. This show offers a rare opportunity to see handcrafted puppetry partnered with original music, and the story offers a fresh perspective on these ancient characters, whether you’ve heard their story once or a hundred times!”

Magic Pearl will be performed on February 12, 19, and 20 at 10:30 am and 1:00 pm, and on February 18 at 3:00 pm and 8:00 pm. All shows will take place at Puppet Showplace Theater, located at 32 Station Street, Brookline, MA. Tickets are \$15-\$25 and can be purchased at <https://www.puppetshowplace.org/performances>. Contact the Puppet Showplace Box Office at boxoffice@puppetshowplace.org or call 617-731-6400 x 101 for assistance.

Development of this project was supported by the Jim Henson Foundation, LiveArts Boston, the New England Conservatory, Puppet Showplace Theater, and Floating Tower.

About Pinwheel

Pinwheel is an ensemble of classically trained musicians and puppet artists founded in 2018 that creates new collaborative interdisciplinary performances for both young and adult audiences. Pinwheel is led by artistic co-directors Bo Jones (Lee) and Christopher Vu.

About Puppet Showplace Theater

Puppet Showplace Theater is dedicated to presenting outstanding puppetry to diverse audiences through performances, workshops, and community outreach activities. Founded in 1974, the theater is a treasured Boston-area cultural institution and one of the few dedicated puppetry centers in the United States. Puppet Showplace presents over 300 performances a year in its intimate Brookline Village theater, and reaches further audiences through touring productions at schools, libraries, theaters, and cultural centers. From children's birthday party performances to provocative Puppets at Night shows, the theater's programming is designed to connect with a diverse audience of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. Workshops, classes, summer programs, and training opportunities are offered to both children and adults, and partnerships include local and emerging artists to develop new and innovative puppetry productions. www.puppetshowplace.org

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