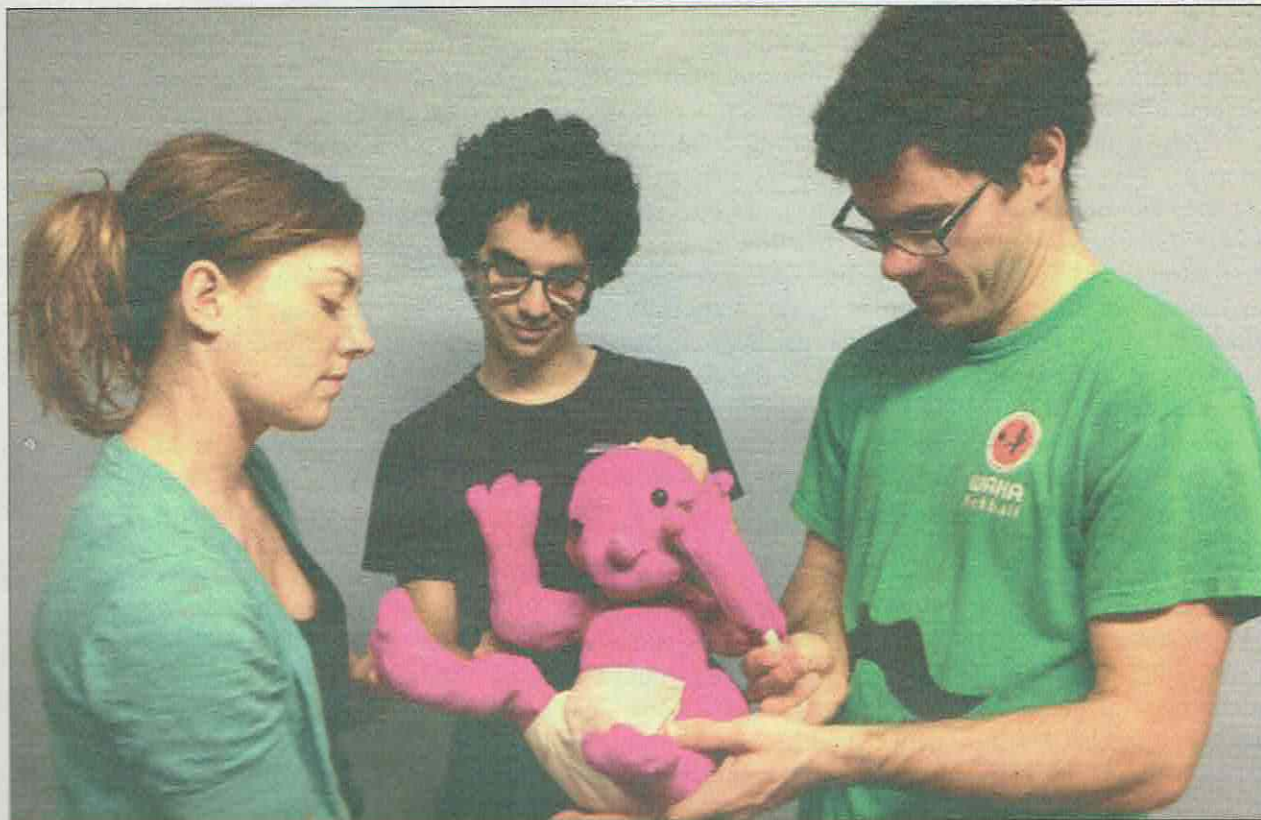


Theatre for Young Audiences brings 'Zagazoo' to Edison Stage



Left to right, Jennice Butler, Zach Schwartz, and Doug Oliphant hold baby Zagazoo, the main character in the Mammoth Lakes Repertory Theatre's production of its annual Theatre for Young Audiences program. There will be one live performance open to the public Saturday, Nov. 9, at 2 p.m. Photo/Submitted

Los Angeles director creates puppets from scratch for performance

By Lesley-Anne Hoxie
Mammoth Times Staff

For the past six years, Mammoth Lakes Repertory Theatre has been engaging and educating Eastern Sierra children in theater arts with the annual Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) program.

TYA is a national association that seldom is organized in rural communities, and for the staff at the local theater, it's one of the most rewarding times of the year.

Each year, TYA provides elementary school teachers, whose classes are attending the program, with an Educator's Resource Guide that helps them prepare the students for the experience of live theatre.

Next week, the teachers and their classes will come to The Edison Theatre to see a professional performance designed just for them. Although the performances during the week are open only to the classes participating in the program, there will be a special performance open to anyone interested on Saturday, Nov. 9.

Last year's "Bluenose" was an adventurous pirate tale outlining the importance of accepting differences in others. This year's show is the story of "Zagazoo," told

dy," Disney's "Lion King" and of course, Jim Henson who created the puppets for stories like "Sesame Street" and "Star Wars."

Much like the tradition of puppets, Cofield didn't start out designing puppet shows for child audiences. His first shows were open to all ages containing "subject matter more accessible to adults."

"I love adapting for children's books," he said. "I want my interpretation to be as close to the book as possible."

For months leading up to next week's performances, Cofield has been busy directing his small cast and crew, and creating all the puppets from scratch.

"Zagazoo," adapted by Mike Kenny, is based off the book of the same title written by Quentin Blake. It is the story of George and Bella who receive a package with a pink creature inside labeled Zagazoo. The illustrations of the original book are done in watercolor, and are the inspirations from Cofield's puppets, which are made mostly out of paper mache and other paper products.

"Anyone who's raised a child will love this play," Dubrovner said. "The adults will enjoy it—and get the metaphors. The children will appreciate the artistry."

Dubrovner also said the original music by Thu Tran is "quite amazing" and it was written specifically for this production.

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with several beautifully crafted puppets.

Director Park Cofield, from Los Angeles, became involved with "Zagazoo" after meeting MLRT's Artistic Director Shira Dubrovner at Director's Lab West, a prestigious program where directors or choreographers must apply in order to attend. Dubrovner found the material and knew Cofield would be the right person to bring the show to Mammoth Lakes.

Cofield grew up in Atlanta, Ga., where as a child he attended his first theatrical performance, "The Jungle Book," presented by the Center for Puppetry.

It was a moment he credits to starting the life-long learning of performance arts.

While he studied various performance styles during college, he was drawn back to puppetry, and it's where he has excelled the most.

"Puppets can do things that people can't," Cofield said. "It's a misconception that it's for youth. Puppetry can be found all over the world."

In contemporary American culture, puppetry is all around us. There are television shows like "Howdy Doo-

The show will incorporate several different types of puppets but the most common is the Japanese style of puppetry known as bunraku, which are traditionally life-size puppets with more than one person operating it.

Zagazoo in the story does not remain a cute pink little baby for long, but transforms into several animals, including a vulture, elephant, dragon, and a 10-foot tall hairy creature.

While the book is written for children, the play certainly has messages for adults as well. As Cofield said, "[The story] is about raising children, and the changes that families go through."

A one-time performance of "Zagazoo" will be presented at The Edison Theatre on Saturday, Nov. 9, at 2 p.m. Cofield and the other puppeteers will provide a puppet demo at the end of the show. For those interested, the puppeteers will also help audience members make their own screeching bat rod-puppet. Admission is \$10 to \$12. For more information, visit edisontheatre.org.

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