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Director: André Lalliberté
Puppet Design: Richard Morin
Set and Prop Design: Richard Lacroix
Music: Libert Subirana
Lighting Design: Luc Désilets
Concept and Research: Guy Coderre, Jean Cummings, Richard Lacroix, André Lalliberté, Richard Morin
Movement Coach: Sylvain Emard
Performing Team: Jean Cummings, Amélie Douville, Olivier Perrier, Gilles Perron, Sylvain Racine, Graham Soul
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Théâtre de l’Œil remains faithful to its artistic vision with The Star Keeper, a show without words that combines visual poetry, music and fantasy. Using a variety of puppet styles, this show tells the story of Pretzel, a friendly character whose chivalry draws the audience into a fabulous adventure.

For this Théâtre de l’Œil’s 19th production, artistic director André Laliberté gathered the company’s closest collaborators and shared his idea with them: to create a “theatre of images” that would appeal directly to the audience’s senses.

The Star Keeper won the Chalmers Canadian Play Award: Theatre for Young Audiences in 2001 as well as the Best Production for Young Audiences Award from the Académie québécoise du théâtre in 1999. The same year Richard Morin received the Special Contribution Award for his finely detailed puppets and Richard Lacroix accepted the Best Set Design Award. The Star Keeper takes its place among the most important shows to be produced by this theatre company devoted exclusively to the art of puppetry.

The Star Keeper premiered at the French Theater of the National Arts Center in Ottawa on November 25th, 1997.

With an evergrowing reputation in puppeteering, Théâtre de l’Œil’s capabilities go well beyond the production of shows. Ever since the company’s beginnings in 1973, every new production has been an opportunity to further its skills. Over the years, in addition to an intense activity in Québec, the company has been invited to participate in many international events. Different tours have taken the company to Asia, Europe and North America.

In 1997, Zoé perd son temps by Michelle Allen was awarded a Citation of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry by UNIMA-USA. In 1990, Réjane Charpentier’s Un Autre Monde received the Best Production for Young Audiences Award from the Association québécoise des critiques de théâtre.

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Taking the Story a Little Further

You might enjoy trying to imagine what happens to the characters after they leave the stage. Or perhaps you can invent what went on before they came on stage. For example:

- Imagine what happened to Maggie Mischief before we see her dragging that huge cracker behind her.
- Imagine what happens to Bob after Maggie Mischief topples him off the stage.
- Try to imagine Daisy Bygone’s life:
  - Was she married? Did she have a happy life?
  - Where was she coming from at the beginning of the show?
  - What was in her shopping bag?
  - Why did Pretzel offer to carry her shopping bag?
Here are some examples of questions which may used for discussion:

- What did the character do who came out of the electric socket at the very beginning of the show? Does he remind you of anyone in particular? If so, who?

- Why did the star fall to earth?

- Why did Pretzel put the star in his basket?

- What did Maggy Mischief have with her when she first appeared? Whose big shoe was she wearing? Why did she throw a tantrum? Do you ever get angry like that? If so, in what situations?

- Who was Bob, the enormous character whose belly opened up? Was he mean or kind? Were you afraid when he first appeared?

- What question did Pretzel ask the spider? Why?

- How did Pretzel almost fall off the spider’s thread?

- Who were the three characters dressed in blue who were crossing the sky while Pretzel was on the spider’s thread? What did they foretell?

- Where was Pretzel after he climbed up the spider’s thread?

- What did the mermaid give to Pretzel? Why?

- What happened when the big fish swallowed the star? Why did he spit it out?

As he is lighting up the evening sky, Pierrot accidentally dislodges a star from the heavens. Luckily, Pretzel notices and puts the star in his big basket. However, his adventures are just beginning. To return the star to its proper place, he must climb a spider’s thread, cross the dormitory of dreams, dive to the ocean depths in pursuit of a pearl-fish, and resist the bewitching charms of the bubble tamer. In the end, it is Daisy Bygone, a very old lady, who brings this fabulous story to its conclusion.

The set of The Star Keeper is extremely important to the show. A huge black box, the puppet theatre has been designed expressly to allow for handling various styles of puppets: marionettes, Bunraku-style puppets (operated from behind), shadow puppets, flat puppets, etc. The size of the puppets is variable; some are quite small, while others seem disproportionately large. The puppeteers wear black hoods and clothing so they can’t be seen against the walls of the black box.

The Star Keeper has plenty of surprises in store, as the audience is drawn into a series of different environments, moving from solid ground to a spiderweb, the stars, the moon and the ocean floor. The scene changes are inspired by cinematographic techniques: travelling sets, sudden changes in perspective, optical effects, etc.

Libert Subirana, the composer of the music for The Star Keeper, has previously worked with Théâtre de l’Œil. This time, though, he had to face a greater challenge than in the past. In addition to composing a main musical theme that conveys Pretzel’s feelings and quest, he had to create secondary themes for each character and incidental music to punctuate the action in the show. Furthermore, there was background music required, using sound effects and aural ambiences to evoke the various environments presented in the show (the moon, the ocean floor, etc.).
The Characters

Pierrot — Rather grouchy and clumsy, he is responsible for bringing in the night and lighting the stars in the sky.

Pretzel — A small, friendly worm who loves to help others. A chivalrous knight lost in modern times.

Daisy Bygone — A very old lady whose heart is as fragile as Chinese porcelain.

Maggie Mischief — A spoiled little girl who throws terrible tantrums when she doesn’t get her way.

Uncle Bob — Maggie’s favourite toy. He is enormous, and hidden in his belly is a little theatre with a stage full of surprises.

Sarah the spider — A tap-dancing virtuoso, she can spin threads that reach to the moon. She’s also Maggie’s favourite scapegoat.

Huey the unicyclist — As you can see by his name, he gets around on a one-wheeler, and he loves zooming along on spider threads.

Cedrick the centaur — So big that his head is literally in the clouds, he occasionally leans down to help those smaller than him.

This exercise is a good way to develop non-verbal communication as the children are obliged to resort to symbolism and body movement in order to be understood.

You may want to suggest some themes for your students. Here are some examples of simple situations:

• I’m cold!
• I’m hot!
• I’m hungry!
• I’m afraid!
• I’m in a hurry!
• A visit to the dentist...
• Being lost in a snow storm...
• I’m in bed and hear noises and I don’t know what it is...
• And so on...

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Having Fun with the Characters from the Show

Ask the children to explain what motivates the different characters. This exercise may be done orally or as a written assignment for older children. To start things off, ask the students how they found this show different in comparison with others that they have seen.
Here are some suggestions which you may use for in-class follow-up activities. These suggestions serve as examples and can be easily adapted for your own educational purposes. The merit of this show is that it was conceived in such a playful way that we feel it lends itself to many uses and explorations.

The Relativity Game

Ask the children to tell the play’s story in their own words. Their versions are often quite different as each child has his or her own understanding of what happened.

A show of this kind requires audience members to play a role in constructing the story according to their particular sensitivities and experiences.

The various interpretations lead to discussion and serve as a good opportunity to let the children understand the relativity of things. As we are all different, we each construct our own story and all of them are right.

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Artistic Expression

Ask the children to draw their favourite characters or situations.

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Games without Words

Suggest that the children (individually or in groups of two or three) relate an incident of their own invention without using spoken language. The rest of the class will guess what the skit is about.

The three sleepwalkers — Triplets with two faces, who alternate between fantasies and dreams. Their feet never really touch the ground.

The moon — Often thought to be made of cheese, this character needs no introduction, does it?

The boarders in the dormitory of dreams — Their main activity is to sleep, sleep, and sleep some more. Zzzzzzzzzz ....

The accordion-fish — The grand champions of underwater ping-pong, they’re always together, no matter what they’re looking for: a bubble, a ball, or a shipwrecked star.

The pearl-fish — A food-loving fish who adores pearls, he sometimes suffers from hiccups and heartburn.

Marlene the mermaid — She likes to take her naps at the very bottom of the ocean, where the fish sometimes mistake her hair for a bouquet of algae.

The seahorse family — World travellers and litterers, they travel around the ocean floor with their camper, leaving heaps of garbage in their wake.

The bubble charmer — He captures, tames and collects all bubbles that come within his reach. A real “bubblyphile.”
In an oft-repeated ritual, Pierrot brings in the night and lights the stars in the sky. But this time, without noticing, he lets a star fall just as he’s going home to bed.

As he passes by, Pretzel finds the star, weeping. He comforts it then tries to put it back in the sky, without success.

Just then, Daisy Bygone walks past, carrying a grocery bag. She is very tired. Seeing how weak she is, Pretzel offers to carry her bag home for her.

Maggie Mischief appears, dragging a huge cracker behind her. Pulling on it with all her might, she tears it apart and a garland of stars flies up to form a circus tent over her head.

Enchanted, Maggie calls Uncle Bob. When he arrives, he opens the curtains that cover his belly, revealing a miniature stage on which Sarah the spider performs a tapdance. Then Maggie climbs onto the stage and sings a song (if one can call it singing!).

Seeing the garland of stars, Pretzel thinks he has found a home for the star. But Maggie invites him to perform on the stage too. He juggles with the star, and Maggie, jealous because she wants the star for herself, throws a tantrum. Suspicious, Pretzel refuses to give it to her. Maggie is so angry that she ends up tipping Uncle Bob over and tears down the garland of stars. Then she storms off to sulk.

Hoping to help Pretzel, the spider begins to spin a very long thread stretching to the sky. Pretzel starts to climb it, the star on his back.

On the thread, Pretzel meets Huey the unicyclist, who does not want to let him by. Pretzel almost falls right off the thread, but he manages to hold on with one hand. Cedrick the centaur strolls by and helps him back onto the thread. Then the three sleepwalkers float by, oblivious to everything going on around them.

Pretzel climbs all the way up the thread and reaches the moon. He finds himself in the dormitory of dreams, where he sees an empty bed. He decides to take a nap with the star. As he is sleeping, the dormitory is gradually flooded. The water rises and rises, lapping at Pretzel’s bed, and the star falls out and sinks to the bottom of the ocean.

The two accordion-fish begin to play ping-pong with the star. They quickly flee when the pearl-fish enters and swallows the star. It swims off, hiccuping, with the star in his belly.

Pretzel’s bed sinks to the bottom of the ocean too, landing on Marlene, the sleeping mermaid. When she wakes up, Pretzel explains his quest to her, and she offers him a diving mask and a fishing rod so that he can recover the star.

Suffering from heartburn, the pearl-fish returns and spits up the star near where the seahorse family is camping. When they find it, they decide to use it in a game of baseball. Using his tail as a bat, the seahorse boy hits the star far, far away in the ocean.

The star lands near the bubble charmer, who mistakes it for a bubble and begins to juggle with it. Pretzel arrives and manages to catch the star with his fishing rod. He reels in the star and heads for the surface.

Meanwhile, Daisy Bygone arrives home with her shopping bag. She is terribly, terribly tired, so she sits down in her armchair and begins to doze. In an aquarium against the wall, the star is swinging slowly back and forth. It leaps out of the aquarium and curls up in Daisy’s hand. The star then slowly lifts the sleeping old lady and draws her slowly up into the starry sky.

Pretzel reappears. Looking up, he sees that the star has found its place in the sky. He waves in its direction. The End.