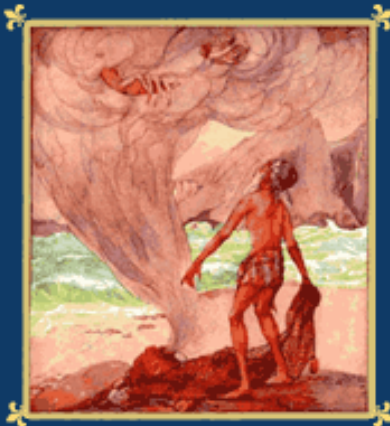




➤ Introduction ➤



One of the oldest, most famous books in the world, the *Tales of the Arabian Nights* is a collection of stories nested within a larger story: in order to keep from being killed the clever Scheherazade must keep the powerful Sultan, Shahriyar, entranced by her stories. These stories come from throughout the Islamic world, and many date back to the ninth century. Because *The Arabian Nights* is so rooted in oral storytelling, it seems a particularly appropriate piece for the theater.

McCarter's production of *The Arabian Nights* uses a variety of puppetry techniques to tell these exciting stories. As you watch, think about how the different styles of puppetry match the different styles of story. This guide will help provide background information on both the culture and the stories of *The Arabian Nights*, as well as on the art and craft of puppetry.

➤ Plot Synopsis ➤

A troupe of traveling storytellers are coming to enchant and delight children and adults with stories from the *Arabian Nights*. Puppetry is their main medium, however, they also employ music, acting, and acrobatic performance to perform and entertain.

The Stories:

Aladdin

An African wizard has knowledge of an enchanted cave which houses a magical lamp. Through his crystal ball, he discovers Aladdin, a vagabond who is down on his luck, as he happens upon the cave and the wonder which exists within. When the wizard rides to Aladdin to demand the lamp of him, a struggle ensues, and a Genie emerges from the lamp to come to the defense of Aladdin.

Abu al Hassan's Embarrassing Moment

Abu al Hassan, who lives in a "sad city," prepares for his wedding day. With nervous excitement, just before the ceremony, he expresses a slight concern that he has eaten a bit too much rich food at his morning wedding banquet. He also expresses his hope that this happy occasion will cheer up the melancholy town.

The wedding begins, and just as Abu al Hassan is about to say "I do," he loudly breaks wind. Abu al Hassan flees the country in embarrassment, fearing that the people have heard his flatulent infraction. At first, the townspeople are shocked, but they soon erupt into laughter.

Forty-nine years later, Abu al Hassan, now an old man, returns from his self-imposed exile on the anniversary of his embarrassing moment. He discovers from some townspeople that the people of the sad city did indeed hear him break wind on the day of the wedding, but that his embarrassing moment caused everyone to laugh and be merry. The town now celebrates the day. Abu Al Hassan soon reveals his identity, and the people of the town praise him, calling him the hero who brought laughter and happiness to save the city of sadness from eternal misery.

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Princess Nouronihar and Her Three Suitors

Three brothers, Ali, Assad and Houssain, love the same beautiful Princess Nouronihar and fight over her constantly. In an effort to finally resolve their conflict, the princess declares that whoever brings her the most enchanted treasure will be her husband, and the three brothers dash off to find a gift that will impress her most.

Months later the brothers meet in a far-off kingdom and compare their gifts. Houssain has acquired a magic carpet that will travel anywhere in the world. Assad has found a mystical apple that will cure anyone of any affliction. Ali has obtained an enchanted tube that will show the bearer any object he desires. Wishing to see the beautiful princess, the three brothers gaze into the tube, and discover that their love has fallen ill. Panicked, they all argue over who should save her until Assad suggests that they all work together. Having used the tube to find her, they will all fly together on Houssain's magic carpet and use Assad's apple to cure her.

The three brothers come to her rescue and Nouronihar is revived with the magic apple and seems grateful. She ponders for a moment, trying to decide which brother to marry, but then announces that she will choose none of the brothers because to choose one would be far more hurtful to the other two than choosing none would be to all of them.

The three brothers walk away in bewilderment and frustration; however, in the princess's rejection, the three of them have discovered a new camaraderie and friendship.

The Fisherman and the Djinn

A fisherman is having bad luck catching anything on one of his daily fishing ventures. He pulls up a shoe, a hubcap and finally a bottle. The fisherman is polishing the bottle in order to get a closer look at it, when suddenly a genie pops out. The genie explains to the fisherman that he has been trapped in the bottle for thousands of years.

The genie claims that he will reward the fisherman for freeing him with death, and explains that while he was trapped in his bottle, he had decided to kill whoever did so. The fisherman prepares for his death but then

has an idea. He accuses him of being a liar, claiming that a genie of his size could never have fit into a bottle so small. He then tricks the genie into shrinking himself into the bottle. The fisherman quickly corks it, trapping the genie inside, and threatens to throw the bottle back in the ocean.

The genie begs to be freed, giving his word that he will do anything for the fisherman in return. Satisfied, the fisherman agrees to free the genie and commands that the genie gives him three wishes. His first two wishes are for valuable gifts for his wife and children. The third is for the genie to simply "be nice," this thwarting his plans for the world's destruction.

Codadad and His Brothers

In the Kingdom of Harran lives a sultan who has forty-nine sons. When a fiftieth son, Codadad, is born, the sultan's wife dies giving birth to him. For that, the sultan despises him and treats him poorly. He continues to harass and hurt the boy until one day he decides to exile Codadad.

Many years pass, and the sultan's kingdom falls into desperate times. Enemies have ravaged the land, and the forty-nine sons are now imprisoned by the sultan's enemies. All hope seems lost, until one day a warrior comes to stop the war, bring peace and order to the kingdom and save the imprisoned sons. The sultan and his sons are grateful for the mysterious warrior's heroic efforts, and they praise him. One evening he reveals his identity to his brothers: he is Codadad, the exiled son from so long ago. His brothers are ostensibly grateful and Codadad rejoices in their new acceptance.

The brothers' feigned acceptance of Codadad does not last long, however, and they plot and kill him, fearing their father will favor Codadad for his heroism and make him heir to the throne.

The next day, the sultan asks to see Codadad. The sons lie, saying that the previous evening he was attacked by wild animals and slain. Sensing that this isn't the truth, the sultan asks Rashid, the most honest of his sons, to tell the truth. Rashid confesses to the murder of Codadad, and the sultan weeps tears of grief and rage. The sultan is so angered by the murderous actions of his sons that he decides to slay all of them at dawn.

As morning comes, Codadad, who had enchantments that saved him from death, miraculously appears before his father unharmed. The sultan and Codadad embrace, and the sultan assures his son that his brothers will be put to death as punishment for their treatment of him. But Codadad, who wants to put an end to his family's history of vengeance and violence, begs that his brothers be spared.

Sinbad

A vainglorious Sinbad, renowned as a wealthy adventurer, has an assembly of admirers gathered in his

palace. One of their favorite pastimes, and Sinbad's, is to have Sinbad recount the tale of one of his many voyages. With little prodding, Sinbad launches into the story of his seventh and latest journey.

As it is told, Sinbad and his sailors traveled to a far-away land through tempestuous storms. When they arrive, they encountered some pesky Dwarven savages. When a confrontation seemed imminent, the dwarves were suddenly frightened away by the approach of a horrific Cyclops, who started eating Sinbad's crew. Through Sinbad's seeming ingenuity, the Cyclops was dispatched and Sinbad and his sailors were safe from harm. Before embarking on their journey home, however, Sinbad and his sailors discovered that their island was not what it seemed to be, as it showed itself to be an enormous fish, which Sinbad and his crew barely escaped from.

Glossary

Affliction: a state of great pain, suffering.

Allah: Muslim name for God.

Anguish: to be upset, suffer.

Bazaar: marketplace.

Caliph: Muslim term for community leader, regarded as a successor of Muhammad and by tradition always male.

Camaraderie: friendship, chumminess.

Decipher: to figure out the meaning of something.

Decree: to declare with authority, command.

Discerning: sharp, observant.

Endured: kept on with something or somebody unpleasant, suffered.

Enlightenment: understanding.

Forsaken: deserted, abandoned.

Indebted: thankful, owing a favor.

Infamy: disgrace, bad reputation.

Insolence: rudeness, disrespect.

Judiciously: cautiously, carefully.

Mortified: embarrassed, ashamed.

Preposterous: ridiculous, unbelievable.

Quests: missions, acts of searching for something.

Ravaged: destroyed, damaged.

Reconciliation: compromise, understanding.

Salvation: rescue, recovery from suffering of some kind.

Solace: comfort, relief from disappointment or misery.

Stead: service, the function normally occupied by another.

Sultan: king, ruler of a Muslim country.

Treachery: disloyalty, an act of deliberate betrayal.

Vengeance: punishment, revenge.

Vizier: high-ranking person who answers to the sultan.

Wrath: intense anger, fury.

Wretched: miserable, pitiful, of very poor quality or condition.

✦ Folklore and Oral Traditions - by Sarah Powers ✦

Many of the best and most influential stories we know today, including the stories of *The Arabian Nights*, began as folklore or oral tradition. Until recent times, few people knew how to read and write, and even fewer could afford to buy many books. Instead, they told stories aloud and passed them down through generations without writing them down. Every culture has its own set of folklore and traditional stories that people have used for generations to entertain themselves (both children and adults), to teach moral lessons and to define who they are.

Because stories passed down through oral tradition are not written, they evolve over time. Each storyteller tells the story in a slightly different way and might even adapt it specifically for the audience. A story might also change when people move. They take their stories with them, but they change some of the details to match their new home, and over many years the stories might become very different. They might even make up new stories and mix these in with their old ones. This may explain why *The Arabian Nights* includes stories that originally came from Arabia, Persia, India, Egypt and even China. Many folk tales and myths have now been written down and collected into books like *The Arabian Nights*.

Activity

Think about something funny or exciting that happened to you today. Imagine how you would tell the story to your best friend, then think about how it might be different when you tell it to your parents. Do you think it would be different if you tried to tell it again a week later?

The Arabian Nights

The stories of *The Arabian Nights* come from the oral traditions of many cultures of the Islamic world of the 9th-13th centuries, which included parts of Spain, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, modern-day Afghanistan and India. These stories were first collected and written around 850 CE under the title *The Thousand Nights*. Most of the stories in this first collection (and there were far fewer than a thousand) were originally from Persia and India. More tales, mostly from Baghdad, were added between the 10th and 12th centuries. In the 13th century, even more stories, mostly from Egypt and particularly Cairo, were added, bringing the total to about a thousand. Some of the most famous tales in the *The Arabian Nights* include those of Aladdin (originally from China), Sindbad



Theatrical poster by The Courier Lithograph Co., 1888. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

the Sailor (probably Arabic but added by Egyptian copyists) and The Enchanted Horse (probably from Persia). Even today there is no single version of *The Arabian Nights*. Only eleven stories, plus the outer story of Scheherazade and Shahriyar, are common to all the versions we have.

The Epics of Homer

Tradition holds that a blind poet named Homer wrote *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, two of the greatest works of literature in history, in the 700s BC. You might know the story of the Trojan Horse from the *The Iliad* or of Odysseus and the Cyclops from *The Odyssey*. There is much debate among scholars as to whether Homer really existed and if so, who he was. Regardless, it is certain that the stories of the Trojan War and Odysseus were an important part of Greek oral tradition long before anyone wrote them down. There were many rhapsodes, professional reciters of these epics and other poetry, who traveled and performed all over the Greek world both before and after this poetry was first written. A rhapsode's visit

would have been a big event in a community, and he would have entertained both adults and children. The epics of Homer are even written with rhymes and rhythms that make the poetry easier to remember. Just think: *The Iliad* alone is about 15,570 lines long – and most rhapsodes knew more than one epic poem!



"Once Upon a Time," poster by Kenneth Whitley, 1939. Courtesy of Library of Congress, LC-USZC2-1177.

Fairy Tales

The fairy tales we now associate with beautifully illustrated storybooks actually began as oral folktales. In the early 1800s, brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm set out to preserve Germanic folktales, collecting stories from friends, neighbors and the ordinary working people who surrounded them. In doing so, they were among the earliest collectors of folktales, and particularly notable as they were among the first collectors to record who told the story to them. First told and published for adults, the tales in their original form were often dark and capricious, with streaks of cruelty. Once they saw how the tales bewitched young readers, the Grimms and editors aplenty after them, edited the stories, which gradually got softer, sweeter and primly moral. In France, Charles Perrault, a 17th century retired civil servant, was one of the first to record French fairy stories. His book, *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé*, was published in 1697. Fairy tales are an important part of the oral traditions of many cultures, and some stories even occur in multiple traditions. Versions of "Little Red Ridinghood," for example, may be found in Italian, French and German traditions.

Native American Folktales

Some Native American tribes did not use written language at all, so in addition to folktales, family and tribal history, religious stories, laws and customs were preserved and passed down orally. The first written record of this folklore came in 1633 when Jesuit Fathers reported some of the legends of the tribes they were working with, particularly the Iroquois. In the early-mid 19th century, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft recorded the stories of the Ojibwa and their neighboring tribes. His work exposed Europeans to the vast body of Native American folklore, but he also changed the stories he recorded to better suit his own taste. In the late 19th century, compilers finally began to record and publish this folklore accurately. Similar stories, patterns and themes occur in the various traditions across North America, though each tribe or culture has its own variations on them. Categories of Native American folklore include: origin myths, trickster stories, hero tales, journeys to the other world, animal stories and stories influenced by Europeans.

Examples of folklore:

Fairy Tales: Cinderella
Legends: Robin Hood
Fables: The Tortoise and the Hare
Myths: Theseus and the Minotaur
Tall Tales: Paul Bunyan
Epics: The story of the Trojan War, written as *The Iliad*
Explanatory Stories: How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin

➤ Core-Curriculum Standards ➤

This production of *The Arabian Nights* and related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Core Curriculum Content Standards in the Arts:

- 1.1** All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater, and visual arts
- 1.3** All students will utilize arts elements and arts media to produce artistic products and performances.
- 1.4** All students will demonstrate knowledge of the process of critique.
- 1.5** All students will identify the various historical, social, and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.

The Arabian Nights is also designed to address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy and Social Studies:

- 3.2** All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.
- 3.5** All students will view, understand, and use nontextual visual information.
- 6.2** All students will learn democratic citizenship through the humanities, by studying literature, art, history and philosophy, and related fields.

✦ Drama Praxis Description ✦



This resource guide enables teachers and leaders to explore drama as a mode of learning. Through this collaborative art form, teachers and students can act out, reflect upon, and transform the stories of *The Arabian Nights*, allowing them to gain a better appreciation of the material through their own individual experience of it. In addition, by engaging with one another, students utilize skills that are vital to communication and interpretive skills in the school setting.

Drama-in-Education seeks to synthesize the activities of creative drama, arts-based curricula and theater convention into experiences aimed at developing imagination, awareness of self and others, aesthetic taste and life skills. Often these goals are achieved through the examination of a particular theme or topic, which contributes to critical thinking about the world in which we live. By providing structures and contexts, which both excite the interest of participants and call for creative problem-solving, Drama-in-

Education promotes deeper thinking about a wide variety of issues.

This guide has been designed for teachers to utilize drama methods in an exploration of the themes and situations presented in the play. We encourage you to adapt these lessons and activities to your individual teaching situations, and thereby to discover the importance and power of drama in the classroom.

The following questions and activities are designed to help students anticipate the performance and then to build on their impressions and interpretations after attending the theater. While most of the exercises provide specific instructions, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs

❖ Pre-Show Questions ❖



1. *The Arabian Nights* is a collection of ancient tales from the Middle East. Characters and symbols from these old stories have passed through the ages and are even evident in our modern entertainment and pop culture. Some examples of modern entertainment adaptations come from the better known tales, such as "Sinbad – Legend of the Seven Seas," "Ali Baba and His Forty Thieves," and "Aladdin and His Lamp," which have been made into Hollywood films, animated features, and children's stories. Research the themes and characters of these ancient stories and try to find them in movies, tv shows and songs of today. What symbols and messages appear in our modern entertainment?

2. In the story of *The Arabian Nights*, the sultan Shahriyar decides to marry a different woman each night and kill her the next morning because his first wife betrayed him. He treats all women the same based on his experience with one. Is it fair to treat people in a certain way based on things that similar people have done to you? Can you think of any instances in your own life when you treated someone in a certain way because of what someone else did to you? Was there a time when you think someone else treated you in a particular way because you were a certain type of person? Why do you think people do this? Can you think of times in history when people were treated a certain way because of the groups that they belonged to?

3. A recurring theme in *The Arabian Nights* is that no one is perfect. What does this mean? Would your life be easier if you were perfect? If you could be perfect at one thing in your life, what would it be? How would this change the way other people act towards you? Would it change the way you deal with others?

Post-show Questions



1. Did anything about the show surprise you? What were you expecting to see? How did that compare to what you really did see on stage? If you were directing the stories, what might you have done differently?
2. Schererazade tells Shahriyar, "One person's actions do not define a race." What does she mean by this? Is she able to convince him that this is true? If yes, how does she accomplish this over the course of the play?
3. Scheherazade is an interesting character. She is chosen to be one of the many wives of the Sultan, and just because she is a woman she must face her death.

Although she is put in this vulnerable position, she demonstrates great intelligence by captivating and teaching the sultan with her stories. Her actions ultimately save her from dying and help her find true love. Step into the shoes of Scheherazade. How might it feel to be faced with death just because of your gender? What are some ways you might try to save yourself?

4. The issues of power and authority are at the forefront of many of these tales. Shahriyar uses his power to decree that every woman he marries will be killed. Prince Achmed must offer to give up his power and freedom to the demon Danhash in order to save his true love Badoura. There are many examples in the play of authority figures and the challenges they face. Imagine that you are a sultan, president, or other kind of leader. What are some ways that you might use your power? What challenges might you face as a ruler?

Enhance the Performance

1. It's Alive!

Part 1: *The Arabian Nights* is a puppet play. A puppet is any inanimate object to which you give life. Have students create "found object puppets" with everyday items found in the classroom. How might a stapler move and talk? What would its personality be? What about a ruler? How could it show emotion? Why might someone choose to tell a story with puppets? Are there things puppets can do that people cannot? What advantages would an actor with a puppet have? What challenges might one encounter when working with a puppet?



Part 2: Now that students are familiar with puppetry, read them a story from *The Arabian Nights*. Have students draw a design for a puppet of one of the characters from the story. What would it look like? What would its voice sound like? What would it be made of? If possible, have students construct their own puppets out of simple materials like socks or paper bags.

2. Don't leave me hanging!

The stories of *The Arabian Nights* are told to the sultan Shahriyar by a woman named Scherazade. In an attempt to keep him from killing her, she tells him a different story each night but stops just before the "good part" so that he will want to hear more the next day and therefore spare her life. Have students create their own stories and tell them to their classmates, stopping at the "good parts," and continuing the next day. What does it feel like to be kept waiting? Does it make you more interested in hearing the rest of the tale? Why do you think that is so?

3. Night Vision

There are many more *Arabian Nights* stories in addition to the ones we tell on stage in our version. Read one of the stories not told in the McCarter version to your class. Have students create tableaux, or frozen pictures, of their favorite scenes from the story. They can portray the characters as well as the settings for the stories. You can also have them show the beginning, middle and end of the story in three separate tableaux. Discuss with the rest of the class what they can tell about the characters by looking at the pictures.

4. Setting the Scene

The Arabian Nights tales are set in the Middle East. Have students find that area of the world on a map. Discuss what they think it might be like there. Then have them research life in those countries. What are the people like? What do they wear? Eat? What do the children do for fun? How might all of these things influence the stories they have to tell? Have students collect pictures and words describing the Middle East and make collages to share with their classmates.

✦ Origins of Puppetry Styles Used in Our Production ✦

Storytellers around the world have used puppets for centuries to educate and entertain. Some of the earliest puppets were tribal ritual masks with hinged jaws or jointed skulls used in religious ceremonies. Puppets have evolved from these masks to doll-like figures with moving limbs. Native Americans used puppets in their corn festivals and ceremonial dances. Egyptians made jointed puppets from terra cotta.



Life sized puppets from *The Tempest, a Puppet Play*.

Puppet theater is mentioned in the writings of both Aristotle and Plato. The Chinese made shadow puppets from a variety of materials. In the Middle Ages, the Church used puppetry to spread the teachings of Christianity; and marionettes were also developed during this time.

In the 17th century, hand puppet (a figure with a head and a body made of cloth that fit over the puppeteer's hand) became popular. These puppets were easy to operate, cheap to make and easily portable, making it possible to perform shows on the backs of wagons and from small portable stages. Puppet characters like Punch and Judy were popular, and shows centering around local politics became common. Also in the 17th century, the highly stylized Japanese bunraku puppetry was developed in Osaka, Japan.

As you can see, from shadow puppets to the Muppets, puppetry has found an important home in many cultures and evolved an amazing diversity of styles. The Arabian Nights uses a variety of these styles, sometimes all in the same puppet! Below are descriptions of some traditional styles of puppets and puppetry. While you are watching the play, try to figure out which techniques are being employed. What do all of the puppets have in common?

Rod Puppets: Stick or rod puppets are manipulated from below, but they are full-length, supported by a rod running inside the body to the head. Separate thin rods may move the hands and, if necessary, the legs. Stick or rod puppets require at least one puppeteer to manipulate them, and sometimes two or three for each character on the stage.



Zeus, a giant rod puppet from *The Adventures of Perseus*

Wayang: This term refers to the Balinese tradition of puppet making. Wayang puppets include two-dimensional shadow puppets, three-dimensional rod puppets and flat wooden puppets. They have a distinctive aesthetic style, generally with unnaturally large heads and elongated limbs.

Hand and Rod (Muppet-type): Hand puppets have a hollow cloth body that fits over the manipulator's hand; his fingers fit into the head and arms and give them motion. The figure is seen from the waist upward, and there are normally no legs. In hand-rod



Hermes, a hand and rod puppet from *The Adventures of Perseus*

puppets (like the Muppets) the puppeteer's primary hand passes inside the puppet's body to control the head and face of the puppet. The puppeteer's non-primary hand is used to control the puppet's arms via rods or wires.

Bunraku-Type: Japanese bunraku puppets are named for an 18th century Japanese puppet master, Uemura Bunrakuken. These figures, which are one-half to two-thirds life size, may be operated by as many as three manipulators: the chief manipulator controls head movements with one hand by means of strings inside the body, which may raise the eyebrows or swivel the eyes, while using the other hand to move the right arm of the puppet; the second manipulator moves the left arm of the puppet; and the third moves the legs.



Prospero, a Bunraku puppet from *The Tempest, a Puppet Play*

Czech Black: A style of visual representation in which the manipulators are dressed in black, so that they will blend in with background, and there is a sharply focused "wall of light" for the puppets to play in. The manipulators disappear, and the focus is on the puppet.



Athena with shadow puppets from *The Adventures of Perseus*

Shadow Puppets: Shadow puppetry is a technique in which a puppet is placed between a light source and a screen. The light source is projected at the screen, and the puppets are then seen in shadow. They may be cut from leather or some other opaque material, as in the traditional theatres of Java, Bali and Thailand, in the so-called *ombres chinoises* (French: literally "Chinese shadows") of 18th-century Europe, and in the art theaters of 19th-century Paris; or they may be cut from colored fish skins or some other translucent material, as in the traditional theaters of China, India, Turkey and Greece, and in the recent work of several European theaters. They can be two or three-dimensional. These puppets may be operated by rods from below, as in the Javanese theatres; by rods held at right angles to the screen, as in the Chinese and Greek theatres; or by threads concealed behind the figures, as in the *ombres chinoises* and in its successor that came to be known as the English galanty show. The appearance and action of the puppet can also be manipulated by moving the puppet closer to or farther away from the light source.

Stop Action Animation: Frame by frame filmed animation is employed to create cartoons, computer animation and "claymation." Instead of having puppeteers move puppets in a fluid, real-time motion, either on stage or in film, animators take images, in this case: shadow puppets, and photograph them twenty-four frames per second, moving them each frame only slightly. The cumulative effect is fluid puppetry motion, with no

stirrings or rods attached. For *Aladdin*, in this years production of *The Arabian Nights*, this technique is employed using shadow figures illuminated on a table-mounted shadow screen. The edited group of images tell the visual story of *Aladdin*, which is projected with a video projector onto a shadow screen. The puppeteers and performers, meanwhile, create all of the sound effects and voice live.

❖ Creative Team ❖

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Head Puppeteer</i> | Lorna Howley |
| <i>Puppeteer</i> | Peter Cooper |
| <i>Puppeteer</i> | Kate DeRosa |
| <i>Puppeteer</i> | Dax Valdes |
| <i>Storyteller</i> | Nikole Williams |
| <i>Musician</i> | Josh Titora |
| | |
| <i>Playwright</i> | Christopher T. Parks |
| <i>Director</i> | Jon Ludwig |
| <i>Puppetry Designer / Creator</i> | Emily DeCola |
| <i>Scenic Designer</i> | Mary Robinette Kowal |
| <i>Lighting Designer</i> | Todd Loyd |
| <i>Original Composition</i> | Josh Titora |
| <i>Stop Action Animator</i> | Kristin Jarvis |
| <i>Developmental Dramaturg</i> | Liz Engelman |
| <i>Producing Director</i> | Mara Isaacs |
| <i>Director of Production</i> | David York |
| <i>Casting Director</i> | Laura Stanczyk |
| <i>Artistic Advisor</i> | Kemati Porter |
| <i>Casting Assistant</i> | Chinyere Anyanwu |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Education Programs Manager</i> | Jim Murtha |
| <i>Production Stage Manager</i> | Kathleen Munroe |
| <i>Movement Consultant</i> | Baladevi Chandrashekar |
| <i>Technical Director</i> | Buck Linton |
| <i>Charge Scenic Artis</i> | Carrie Ballenger |
| <i>Master Carpenter</i> | Fred J. Totten |
| <i>Carpenters</i> | Jill Shorrock, Steven Dirolf, Daniel |
| <i>Puppet Construction</i> | Emily DeCola, Owen Malloy, Julia White, Sarah Lafferty, Eric Wright, Patrick Ahern, Brooke Boertzel |
| <i>Education Adminstrator</i> | Francine Schiffman |
| <i>Company Manager</i> | Peter Cooper |

Thank you to McCarter Production Staff.

he Arabian Nights was originally directed in 2006 by Christopher Parks and Jodi Eichelberger. The Stage Manager was Hannah Woodward. The cast was Lorna Howley, Josh Totoro, William DeMerrit, Andrea Cosley, Brendon Gawel, Justin Jain, and Gretchen Hurst Murtha.

➤ An Interview with Christopher T. Parks, Director and Playwright ➤

What led to your choice of *The Arabian Nights* for this year's touring show?

When we choose a book or story to adapt for our puppetry program, we are looking for something that is going to be exciting for kids, usually something with magic or the supernatural. We also look for stories the students can relate to, ones with themes that exist in their own lives. *The Arabian Nights* contains so many tales that fit these criteria, the hardest part about the whole process was actually narrowing it down to the

ones we chose.

Why do you think puppetry is a good way to tell this story?

There is an artistry and aesthetic about puppetry that lends itself to this ancient, mythical world really nicely. You can certainly create a live-actor version of *The Arabian Nights* that could be fantastic. But, what you most likely lose is the ability to bring us into this enchanted world as fully as you can with puppets. Puppetry is like CGI for live theater. Making genies pop out of lamps and flying carpets whoosh across the stage is elementary puppet magic. Doing that with live actors takes a bit more effort, or it can tend to look really silly.

How did you choose which style of puppets to use for each story?

Throughout the play, the king gradually becomes more and more enlightened, about himself and about the world he lives in. We thought it would be interesting if, as his understanding of this world expands, the puppets would literally expand in complexity. So, in the beginning of the play, the first tale is told with simple colorless shadow puppets, and as the play progresses we add color, dimension and finally more intricate design. It is something the students may or may not actually catch, but the effect should keep them, at least subconsciously, aware that everything keeps changing. Styles of puppetry we use include shadow, rod, hand, Bunraku and Czech Black.

As a director, how do you approach a puppetry production differently from a traditional stage show?

Minutia. Every little arm movement, head tilt, flick of the wrist, etc. is figured out ahead of time, choreographed. It has to be. When you have three puppeteers bringing one puppet to life, they need to know how and why they are doing everything. We spend hours and hours working out every moment of the play because if we didn't, the play would be chaos. This is something you don't need to worry about with live actors, or a traditional stage show, as you put it. The result, though, when done right, is something truly spectacular. Puppetry lives part-way between dance and acting.

How did you go about narrowing the many stories of *The Arabian Nights* to the six Scheherazade tells in this adaptation?

According to the tradition of *The Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade tells the king a different story every night for 1001 nights. In our adaptation, however, it happens in one night. One of the reasons we did that is that we thought the stakes would be higher if her challenge to change his perspective on the world had to happen in this shorter period of time. As such, we chose tales that would have thematic content that would make him really have to evaluate himself, and really think about what is most important in life, and make a decision. Mind you, not preachy stories, which would have a moral attached to them the way so many Western fairy tales do, but just stories that make you think. That's good theater. Kids deserve that. Not preachy stories that say, "...and that's why so-and-so is bad.

You saw what happened to Jimmy, don't let that happen to you." Good theater should leave you with questions at the end, not answers. And good children's theater should do the same. That's very important to us here in McCarter Education.

Also, we always have to think about who our audience is. We knew that there would be certain expectations with the title, *The Arabian Nights*. There had to be at least one story where a genie came out of a bottle, one story with a magic carpet, and somewhere there had to be a dramatic rescue. There had to be magic and cleverness – we love the glints of inspiration in the eyes of our student audiences when they see the cool effects we’ve created, the “oohs and aahs.” Also, on top of everything, there had to be silliness – we especially enjoy all of the laughter. The McCarter Theatre’s mission statement talks about each performance feeling like an event. Not a fleeting entertainment that comes and goes, but something that stays with you for a long while after you’ve experienced it. We strive for this same goal in our touring shows. A lot of schools write to us after we’ve visited them saying that their students are still talking about us having been there weeks later, and when this happens, we know we’ve done our job. That’s just the best feeling.

When we think of stories now, we usually think of them as books, with words on a page and maybe a few pictures. How do you think reading stories is different from telling them or hearing them told, as in *The Arabian Nights*?

When you read a book, you are seeing in your mind’s eye your own interpretation of what is being presented. When you see a play it is someone else’s. That said, in our pre and post-show discussions we try to give students the opportunity to understand that what they are experiencing is just one way of interpreting whatever we bring to them. It is not necessarily the correct way or better than anything else, just what we came up with. If they understand this principle, it will go a long way to help their critical analysis of theater and film they see later in life.

✦ Creative Team Bios ✦

Christopher T. Parks (Playwright) has served as creator and director for the McCarter Education touring productions of *Shakespeare Unplugged; The Tempest, a Puppet Play, The Arabian Nights* and *The Adventures of Perseus*, as well as co-writer for *Lucky Girl* and editor/additional scripter for *Dylan’s Line* by Jack Gelber, both for high school audiences. Christopher has also directed *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer’s Night Dream, The Tempest, Twelfth Night, Hamlet* and *As You Like It* for the Education Department’s Summer Shakespeare Program. Other Puppetry direction includes *Macbeth, The Tempest, and The Wind in the Willows*. He is a graduate of Rutgers University’s Mason Gross School of the Arts theater production program. Christopher was a founding member of the New Jersey Renaissance Kingdom, where he served as writer, director and actor for over 40 productions from 1989-1998. He is also the creator and writer for the Post-Haste Players, a comedy troupe which tours throughout New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Christopher has been the Director of Education at McCarter Theatre since 2001.

Jon Ludwig (Director) is a puppeteer. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia where he works at the Center for

Puppetry Arts, the largest institution dedicated to puppetry in the USA. He writes, directs and performs in plays for puppets and people. His latest creation was a Halloween show called, *"The Ghastly Dreadfuls' Compendium of Graveyard Tales and Other Curiosities"* When not creating new works, he loves to build puppets. He hopes you enjoy the 'Arabian Nights'. These are some his favorite stories in he world and he wishes he had a magic carpet.

Emily DeCola (Puppet Design) is thrilled that puppets are finally hip. Her puppet and mask design work can be seen from east to midwest on the national tour of *Animal Farm – The Musical* (Synapse Productions) and has recently appeared locally in *Revenger's Tragedy* and *Pericles* (Red Bull Theater), *The Tempest* (McCarter Theatre Tour), *Lucas de Bohemia* (Repertorio Español), *Doctor Faustus* (Theater et al) *Katalog* (Cipher Productions) and *Satan's Little Helper* (Shadow Studios). Recent puppetry performance includes *Moonfishing* (Henson Productions), *Huyghe + Le Corbusier* (Pierre Huyghe), *The Bacon/Mingus Triptych* (Theater for a New City), *Rappaccini's Daughter* (Octopus Ensemble), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (HERE Theater), *Saint Arlecchino* (Ten Directions), *Meisterklasse* (Henson Carriage House, ONE Solo Arts Festival), and *Katalog* (Cipher Productions). Emily received the 2004 UNIMA-USA Scholarship for International Study in Puppetry and enjoyed several studio residencies with Chashama during 2003-2005. She holds a B.A. in Anthropology and Theatre Studies from McGill University and has studied in puppetry with Master Marionnettist Albrecht Rose, Alice Therese Bohm and Dan Hurlin. Emily serves as Artistic Director of the Octopus Ensemble and was recently awarded a 2005 Jim Henson Foundation Project Grant for her work with that group.

Mary Robinette Kowal (Set Designer) has worked as a professional puppeteer since 1989. She has performed for The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, GA; Jim Henson Pictures in the movie *Elmo in Grouchland*; Martin P. Robinson (Sesame Street's Telly Monster) in *Jackstraws*, and serves as co-director for Other Hand Productions. Her design work has been recognized with an UNIMA-USA citation of excellence for Mark Levenson's *Between Two Worlds* and Other Hand Productions *Old Man Who Made Trees Blossom*. The Citation of Excellence was founded by Jim Henson and is the highest award possible for an American puppeteer. Mrs. Kowal designed the set for *Tempest* for McCarter's Education Department in 2004. She has enjoyed returning to the design team for *The Arabian Nights*. She took most of her inspiration for *The Arabian Nights* from a 250 year-old illuminated Persian book, which she picked up on a trip to India. For more information about her design work, visit her website: www.otherhandproductions.com.

Lorna Howley (Head Puppeteer) Trained as an actor, Lorna has been a professional Puppeteer for the past thirteen years. Her career as a puppeteer began at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, where she served as head puppeteer for more than thirty productions. In her role at CPA, Lorna oversaw the puppetry performance of all productions, as well as serving as performer, playwright, and director. Lorna migrated north of the mason Dixon Line in 2004, and has since been a pivotal member of The McCarter Education Touring Company, performing in various roles for *The Tempest*, *a Puppet Play*, *The Adventures of Perseus*, *The Arabian Nights*, and as Co-Creator for the 2008 production of *the Odyssey Experience*. Recent credits also include puppeteer for *Boy and His Dog* at Mum Puppet Theatre in Philadelphia and *The Merry Wives of*

Windsor at The California Shakespeare Festival.

Josh Titora (*Original Composition/Live Musician*) is a actor/musician from the Philadelphia area. He has composed original music for various companies including Little Fish Theatre Collaborative and Rowan University's Theatre and Dance Department. As a performer he has recently worked with the Arden Theatre Company, Amaryllis Theatre, Hobhollow Puppets and Hotel Obligade Physical Theatre.

Theater Artist Spotlight: -Puppetry, *An Interview with Lorna Howley, Head Puppeteer*

What does it mean to be a puppeteer?

As a stage actor, you're thinking, "Am I loud enough? Am I hitting my mark?" You have to know your lines, and be aware of the audience, especially in a comedy. If you're doing a musical, you're aware of your pitch, the orchestra, your tempo, your brain is working on all these different levels at the same time. If you do a stage combat scene, you want to be emotionally involved in the scene, but you also have to stick to your choreography for safety. There are all of these different layers that your brain works on. With puppetry, it's all that, and then another fifty things. You have to find all the things that you have to do with your body, and all those levels you have to work on, practically and emotionally, and then put them into the puppets. So in a way, you're like a mini-director for each puppet. You have to feel all those things because you're playing the character, and then you have to watch it and make sure it hits its mark and it's where it's supposed to be and it's interacting with the other things it's supposed to be interacting with. It's all the things I love about being an actor and then doubled again.

Why puppets? What made you, or makes you want to work with puppets?

I fell into puppetry sort of by accident; I trained in the theater department throughout college and at the graduate level as an actor. I was later cast in a play with puppets at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta. I played the Wicked Witch in a production of *Hansel and Gretel*, and Hansel and Gretel were puppets. So I developed a relationship with the Center. About two or three years later one of the puppeteers who was in that show [*Hansel and Gretel*] called me and said, "I'd like you to be in this show I'm directing, but you'll have to use some puppets, too." And I said, "I don't think I can learn that. It looks really hard. I love it, but I don't really understand how it works." He said, "No, no, no I feel like I can teach you everything you need to know for this particular production. But you're really right for this role, and I enjoy working with you blah, blah, blah." So I went to go do that show and ended up staying at the Center For Puppetry Arts for the next ten years. One of the things that I love about theater is that you can look at the world in a totally different way, and I feel that puppetry adds another layer onto that. It is one of the most challenging things that I've ever done as a performer. It took me a long time to get better. You know you get better at it in increments because every puppet show is different, because every puppet is different because every puppet builder is different. What's interesting with puppetry, though, is that you can be anything. I've been a taxi cab. I've

been an alien. I've been a princess. I've been a queen. I've been a little girl. No matter what my age to truly be able to play anything is very exciting.

You work with so many different kinds of puppets. Can you talk about the different and most challenging types of puppet you work with?

I haven't worked a lot with marionettes. They are difficult. You're very far away from your puppet if you're in a regular marionette stage. That doesn't really appeal to me. I like to do hand-and-rod puppets, which are what you think of as the Muppet-style puppets, with the mouth and arms that move (well, at least one of the arms moves). But my favorite form of puppetry is shadow. I like very plain, black silhouettes; sometimes the very simple shadow puppets, or flat cutout type of puppets, can make only one or two movements. They're very simple. And so those one or two movements are very meaningful. Your brain has to fill in all the other movements in between. Also, in puppetry, it's not always the gesture that you make, but the stillness in between that is important. You use your imagination more.

What do you typically do in rehearsal to create a puppet show? Where do you start?

Ohhh lordy! One of the unique things about puppetry is there's no set way. With classical ballet there are about ten moves, and you arrange those moves. With oil paint, there are certain things, certain rules one follows. With puppetry, it's all very different. A lot of it really comes from the puppet builder and what the puppets are made out of and how they're going to move. And then it also comes from the director. What is the director's vision of the show? What trip does she want to take the audience on? And then we decide the style in which we'll take the audience on that trip. Will we use music? Silence? Will it be a funny trip? It changes a lot from show to show.

Can you talk about the choreography of your puppetry performance?

There are two levels of choreography for the puppeteer. There is the part that the audience sees and the part that the audience does not see. You're dealing with objects and puppets and also scenery as a puppeteer, because you're moving things around. And sometimes the scenery also becomes a puppet in the show; it certainly does in *The Arabian Nights*. Frankly, 98% of your job is figuring out all the stuff that the audience never sees. How do you get to your next place? How do you get your puppet up on stage? How do you get your puppet off stage? Where do you put your puppet when you're through with it? Where do you pick your puppet up from? Do we ever use that puppet again? Does somebody else need to use it? Should we put it on the back table? Do we put it away? And, all of those things are as important as what it does when it's on stage. How many steps does it take? Does it laugh? Does it move? They're both very important. Because you can't always see what the puppet is doing and your point of view is different from the audience's, it's a lot of muscle memory. A lot of times you won't be able to see your puppet really well. Or you're working the puppet with someone else. You're only doing the arms, so you don't feel the weight of the body, and you have to keep up with the other person as they move. So not only do you have to move the puppet, but you have to move yourself; and not only yourself but with another puppeteer. And so again that goes back to all the different levels that your brain works on and all the things you're doing at one time, which can be very exciting. And when you have a really good team together, you really feel like there's not a leader. Everyone's just moving together. When you feel like there's no leader, then you know that you've done some good work.

Additional Resources

Further Reading: Puppetry

- Exner, Carol R. *Practical Puppetry A-Z: A Guide for Librarians and Teachers*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005.

Further Reading: Folklore

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