

Wiley Hausam, Director
Daniel Gurskis, Dean, College of the Arts



PRESENTS

MANUAL CINEMA'S
FRANKENSTEIN

Adapted from the novel by **Mary Shelley**

A Manual Cinema Production

Concept and Direction by **Drew Dir**

Devised by **Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace & Julia Miller**

Original Music & Sound Design by **Ben Kauffman & Kyle Vegter**

A silhouette of a woman in profile, facing right, holding a small child. The background is a warm, golden-yellow glow with several bright, jagged lightning bolts striking across the scene. The woman's hair is styled in an updo, and she is wearing a dark, long-sleeved garment.

SATURDAY MAY 3, 2025 | 8:00 PM

ALEXANDER KASSER THEATER

Staff and Creative Team

A Manual Cinema Production

Adapted from the novel by **Mary Shelley**

Concept and Direction **Drew Dir**

Devised by **Drew Dir**, **Sarah Fornace**, and **Julia Miller**

Original Music **Ben Kauffman** and **Kyle Vegter**

Storyboards **Drew Dir**

Music and Sound Design **Ben Kauffman** and **Kyle Vegter**

Shadow Puppet Design **Drew Dir** with **Lizi Breit**

Projections and Scenic Design **Rasean Davonte Johnson**

Costume and Wig Design **Mieka van der Ploeg**

Lighting Design **Claire Chrzan**

3D Creature Puppet Design **Lizi Breit**

Prop Design **Lara Musard**

Audio Engineer **Mike Usrey**

Technical Director, Stage Manager, Video Mixing and Live Sound Effects **Kyle Vegter**

Lighting Director **David Goodman-Edberg**

Cast

Puppeteers

Percy Shelley, Vocals **Leah Casey**

The Creature, Elizabeth Frankenstein **Kara Davidson**

Victor Frankenstein, Mary Shelley **Sarah Fornace**

Lord Byron **Sara Sawicki**

Puppeteer **Myra Su**

Musicians

Peter Ferry Percussion

Jason Gresl Clarinets and aux percussion

Lia Kohl Cello, aux percussion, vocals

Robin Meiksins Flutes, aux percussion, piano

Representation: Elsie Management

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Running Time: 65 minutes, no intermission.

NOTE: Recommended for ages 8 and up. There are loud sounds, flashing lights and haze.

We understand that certain types of content can be triggering for some viewers.

Please be aware that this production contains a depiction of infant death,

Program Notes

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*—which, among its myriad other contributions to popular culture, single-handedly founded the modern genre of science fiction—casts a long shadow over the medium of cinema. The story of Victor Frankenstein and the unnamed Creature he brings to life has itself being perennially re-animated for movie audiences, from the first 1910 silent film adaptation produced by Thomas Edison's studio, to Boris Karloff's iconic visage in the 1933 Universal Studios monster, to more recent Hollywood reboots, riffs, and parodies. With each new era, *Frankenstein* manages to connect with our sympathy and revulsion at Frankenstein's monster, our ambivalence about the progress of science and technology, and our anxieties about the mysterious threshold between life and death.

Manual Cinema and PEAK Performances present *Frankenstein*, an adaptation by Manual Cinema, a theater company that seeks to create cinema on stage through an ingenious choreography of live music, object theater, and shadow puppetry using old-school overhead projectors. The work of Manual Cinema shares a special affinity with Mary Shelley's story about the reanimation of obsolete materials, and their adaptation aims to capture the breadth of *Frankenstein's* legacy in film: the novel's cinematic afterlife, so to speak. These artists are doing so by taking a cue from Mary Shelley herself, who gave her novel a gothic structure—the story is told in a series of narrative frames, like Russian nesting dolls, with each frame narrated by a different character (the centermost frame being an account by the Creature itself). In Manual Cinema's adaptation, each “frame” of the story will be told through a different cinematic genre or style, depending on which character's point-of-view is being presented. Like the Creature itself, the production becomes a pastiche of different visual idioms scavenged from a century of cinema.

Manual Cinema has also written an additional frame for the novel: the story of Mary Shelley herself, and how she came to write a novel of such enduring relevance. *Frankenstein* was originally conceived by Mary as a ghost story—a response to a friendly competition with the poets Percy Shelley and Lord Byron during an unusually stormy summer on Lake Geneva. Manual Cinema's adaptation aims to re-animate their own *Frankenstein* against the backdrop of Mary Shelley's fascinating, tragic, and little-told biography.

—*Drew Dir*, Lead Deviser
Manual Cinema Co-Artistic Director

About the 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, multichannel sound design, and live music, 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; an adaptation of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*; and a revamped production of *The Magic City*, based on Edith Nesbit's 1910 novel. In 2023, Manual Cinema completed production on their first self-produced short film, *Future Feeling*, and toured with folk rock band Iron & Wine the following year.

Manual Cinema will premiere their latest feature production, *The 4th Witch*, a bold and imaginative inversion of *Macbeth*, in June 2025 at Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, SC.

About the Artists

Staff & Creative Team

Lizi Breit (Puppet Designer) is an interdisciplinary artist based in Chicago. She has worked with Manual Cinema as a performer, designer, animator, and director since 2011.

Claire Chrzan (Lighting Designer) is excited to collaborate with Manual Cinema again after previously designing *No Blue Memories: The Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* and *The End of TV*. Other credits include *Evening at the Talk House*, *The Mutilated*, and *The Room (A Red Orchid)*; *The? Unicorn? Hour?*, *Saturn Returns (The Neo-Futurists)*; *The Distance, We're Gonna Die (Haven Theatre)*; *Caught (Sideshow Theatre Company)*; *After Miss Julie, The Night Season (Strawdog Theatre Company)*; *Peerless (First Floor Theater)*;

Pinocchio (Neverbird at Chicago Children's Theatre); *Love and Human Remains, Good Person of Szechwan (Cor Theatre)*; *The Terrible (The New Colony)*; *The Guardians, Uncle Bob (Mary-Arrchie)*; *The Hero's Journey, Best Beloved: The Just So Stories*, and *The Pied Piper (Forks and Hope Ensemble)*. Chrzan also works as a production stage manager for various companies including Hubbard Street's HS2, the Joffrey Ballet's Joffrey Academy, and Alonzo King LINES Ballet. clairechrzandesigns.com

Drew Dir (Director, Puppet Designer, Co-Deviser, Storyboards, MC Co-Artistic Director) 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.

David Goodman-Edberg (Lighting Director) is a Chicago-based lighting designer working in the realms of dance, theatrical, and architectural design. He has designed and toured with such companies as Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre, Eisenhower Dance Detroit, Visceral Dance Chicago, and Water Street Dance Milwaukee and lit works set on companies such as Chicago Repertory Ballet, Chicago Tap Theatre, Joel Hall Dancers, and Thodos Dance Chicago. Theatrically, he has designed with puppet- and object-oriented companies such as Rough House and Cabinet of Curiosity as well as with such companies as Adventure Stage, Akvavit Theatre, Factory Theater, the Gift Theatre, Organic Theater, Red Tape Theatre, The Syndicate, and Trap Door Theatre. Architecturally, he has lit pieces at the art space 6018|North and worked as an assistant/associate designer for projects at various Universal Studios theme parks (in Beijing, Hollywood, Orlando, and Osaka), Disney Shanghai, and several Margaritaville restaurants. dglxdesign.com

Rasean Davonte Johnson (Projections and Scenic Design) is delighted to be working with Manual Cinema, for which previous projects include *Lula Del Ray* and *Fjords*. A Chicago-based video artist and theatrical designer, he has had the opportunity to work with institutions such as Steppenwolf Theatre, The Hypocrites, Yale Repertory Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, McCarter Theatre Center, Geva Theatre Center, Berkshire Theatre Group, Alliance Theatre, the Ningbo Song and Dance Company, and B-Floor Theatre. He holds an MFA from Yale School of Drama. raseandavontejohnson.com.

Ben Kauffman (Composer, Sound Designer, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a 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), and CUNY's Baruch College (NYC). He has lectured and given workshops at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York University, and Parsons the New School of Design. His past composer/sound designer credits with Manual Cinema include *Ada/Ava*, *The End of TV*, and the *New York Times* documentary *The Forger*. He holds a master's degree from New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP).

Julia Miller (Co-Deviser, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a director, puppeteer, and puppet designer. 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). In Chicago, she has worked as a performer and puppeteer with Redmoon Theater and Blair Thomas and Co. She spent several years training in devised theater, clown, and mask with Double Edge Theatre, Carlos García Estevez, and at the Accademia dell'Arte in Arezzo, Italy.

Lara Musard (Prop Designer) serves as the prop manager at Court Theatre in Chicago, where Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein* first premiered in October of 2018. For this project, she worked with Drew Dir to design and create the majority of the two- and three-dimensional pieces seen in the Victor Frankenstein portion of the storytelling. Having propped nearly 60 shows at Court Theatre over a 12-year period, she found Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein* by far the most unique. She is grateful for the experience of working in this medium and proud to have been part of the team.

Mike Usrey (Audio Engineer) "That may be the most important thing to understand about humans. It is the unknown that defines our existence. We are constantly searching, not just for answers to our questions, but for new questions. We are explorers. We explore our lives day by day, and we explore the galaxy trying to expand the boundaries of our knowledge. And that is why I am here: not to conquer you with weapons or ideas, but to coexist and learn." — Benjamin Lafayette Sisko

Mieka Van Der Ploeg (Costume and Wig Design) has designed costumes for many Chicago theaters, including Lookingglass Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the Hypocrites, Chicago Children's Theatre, About Face Theatre, the House Theatre, Next Theatre, Griffin Theatre, the Building Stage, Albany Park Theater Project, Dog and Pony Theatre, and Manual Cinema. She is proud to be an artistic associate at About Face Theatre. She has received two Jeff Award nominations for *Golden Boy* (Griffin Theater) and *Mr. Burns* (co-designed with Mara Blumenfeld, Theater Wit).

Kyle Vegter (Composer, Sound Designer, Technical Director, Stage Manager, Video Mixing and Live Sound Effects, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a composer, producer, sound designer, and managing artistic director of Manual Cinema. As a composer of concert music, he has 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*, NPR's *Invisibilia*, *Topic* (First Look Media), the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, StoryCorps, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Poetry Foundation, Hubbard Street Dance, the O, Miami Poetry Festival, and others. His past composer/sound designer credits with Manual Cinema include *Lula Del Ray*, *Ada/Ava*, *Fjords*, *Mementos Mori*, *The End of TV*, and various other performance and video projects. He has been an artist in residence at High Concept Laboratories and co-founded Chicago's only contemporary classical music cassette label, Parlour Tapes+.

Puppeteers

Leah Casey (Percy Shelley, Vocals) 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. Chicago credits include *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Grease*, *Cinderella* (Drury Lane), *A Christmas Carol* (Writers Theatre/Manual Cinema), *Leonardo and Sam* (Chicago Children's Theatre/Manual Cinema), *Frankenstein* (Court Theatre/Manual Cinema), *For Colored Girls...* (Court Theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (Teatro Vista), *STORM* (Walkabout/Moonfool). Casey is represented by the dedicated team at Shirley Hamilton.

Kara Davidson (The Creature, Elizabeth Frankenstein) is a playwright, director, performer, puppeteer, and teaching artist and is the current director of new works at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora, IL. Previously, she was the producer of the NOW Lab with the Omaha Playhouse in Nebraska and the co-director of The Lab Chicago, an incubator for new works in a variety of genres. She holds an MFA in Writing for Stage and Screen from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and a BA in Theatre Performance from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. She has been performing with Manual Cinema since 2015; previous touring shows with the company include *Ada/Ava*, *Lula Del Ray*, *The Electric Stage*, *Pop Up Magazine*, and *The End of TV*, and she was an additional puppeteer for the 2021 feature film *Candyman*. Davidson volunteers as a teaching facilitator with the Chicago-based A.B.L.E. Ensemble, which creates theater and film projects for, with, and by individuals with Down syndrome and other intellectual and

developmental disabilities. As a performer she has worked with Lookingglass Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the House Theatre of Chicago, the Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Nebraska Repertory Theatre, among others. Her video game credits as a motion capture performer include *Injustice 2*, *Mortal Kombat 11*, *Mortal Kombat 1*, *Call of Duty*, and *Black Ops: Cold War*.

Sarah Fornace (Mary Shelley, Victor Frankenstein, Co-Deviser, MC Co-Artistic Director) is a director, puppeteer, choreographer, and narrative designer based in Chicago. She is a co-artistic director of Manual Cinema. Outside of Manual Cinema, Fornace has worked as a performer or choreographer with Redmoon Theater, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Court Theatre, Steppenwolf Garage, and Blair Thomas and Co. Most recently, Fornace wrote the story mode for the video game *Rivals of Aether*. In 2017, she directed and edited the first episode of the web series *The Doula Is IN*. In 2016, she directed and devised an “animotion” production of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* with Rokoko Studios for HamletScen at Kromborg Castle in Elsinore, Denmark.

Sara Sawicki (Lord Byron) is a director and performer based in Saint Paul, MN. She has been performing internationally with Manual Cinema since 2015. Outside of Manual Cinema, her ongoing and past projects include work with NetherRealm Studios (cinematic performance capture); Actors Gymnasium (Youth Circus co-director and writer); and one step at a time like this in collaboration with Chicago Shakespeare Theater (performer). Sawicki is the national program manager at Springboard for the Arts.

Myra Su (Puppeteer) is a multimedia artist and puppeteer based in Chicago. She primarily works in 2D forms, often combining paper puppets with crankie, shadow, and video. Her most recent project was a 20-minute puppet film for Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s *The Cymbeline Project*, which divides the play into separate episodes led by different artists. Previously, she has been a featured artist at the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival, Baltimore Crankie Festival, the National Puppet Slam, and with Handmade Puppet Dreams. In addition to her independent work, she is a co-curator for *Nasty, Brutish & Short: A Puppet Cabaret* and a touring puppeteer and builder with Manual Cinema. For her full portfolio visit myrasu.com.

Musicians

Peter Ferry (Percussion), called “the ingenious percussionist Peter Ferry” (*Chicago Sun-Times*) and “an artist of vision” (*Democrat and Chronicle*), is a young American percussion soloist and artistic collaborator. Following his concerto debut at age 18, Ferry has championed the works of living composers, including Michael Daugherty, who has praised Ferry as “one

of the most promising and committed soloists of his generation.” A TEDx speaker, Ferry has collaborated with choreographer Nick Pupillo at Chicago’s Harris Theater and abroad at the European Museum of Modern Glass, where he was nominated for the Coburg Prize. An alumnus of the Eastman School of Music, Ferry graduated with the first ever John Beck Percussion Scholarship, an Arts Leadership Program certificate, and the prestigious Performer’s Certificate recognizing outstanding performing ability.

Jason Gresl (Clarinets and aux percussion) From playing bass clarinet while upside-down in front of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra to an impromptu performance of Mozart’s clarinet quintet just after almost drowning in the Panama Canal, woodwind specialist Jason Gresl spends his days diving from one artistic adventure into another. Recently, Gresl has been dividing his time in two directions. On one side, he explores music with his multidisciplinary concert series, The Muses’ Workshop; his duo, Claricello; and through new music commissions. On the other, he plays for musicals (most recently: *Wicked*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Book of Mormon*, and *In the Heights*). Gresl teaches at Andrews University, Saint Mary’s College, and Indiana University–South Bend. In his spare time, Gresl attempts to learn feats of wonder with playing cards and enjoys cooking Thai and Indian cuisines.

Lia Kohl (Cello, aux percussion, vocals) is a cellist, composer, and multidisciplinary artist based in Chicago. She creates and performs music and multimedia performance that incorporates sound, video, movement, theater, and sculptural objects. She has presented work and performed at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Walker Art Center, Chicago Symphony Center, and Eckhart Park Pool and held residencies at Mana Contemporary Chicago, High Concept Labs, dfbrl8r Performance Art Gallery, Mills College, and Stanford University.

Robin Meiksins (Flutes, aux percussion, piano) is a freelance contemporary flutist focused on collaboration with living composers. Chicago-based, she uses the Internet and online media to support and create collaboration. In 2017, Meiksins completed her first year-long collaborative project, 365 Days of Flute. Each day featured a different work; each video was recorded and posted the same day. In 2018, Meiksins launched the 52 Weeks of Flute Project. Each week features different living composers to workshop a submitted work, culminating in a performance on YouTube. Meiksins has premiered over 100 works and has performed at SPLICE Institute, the SEAMUS national conference, and Oh My Ears New Music Festival 2018 and she was a guest artist at University of Illinois for their first annual “24-Hour Compose-a-thon.” Meiksins holds a master’s degree from Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music, where she studied with Kate Lukas and Thomas Robertello.



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Special Thanks

Special thanks to **Wendy C. Nielsen, PhD**, Montclair State University Professor, English Department; Honors Program & Medical Humanities, affiliated faculty.



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College of the Arts

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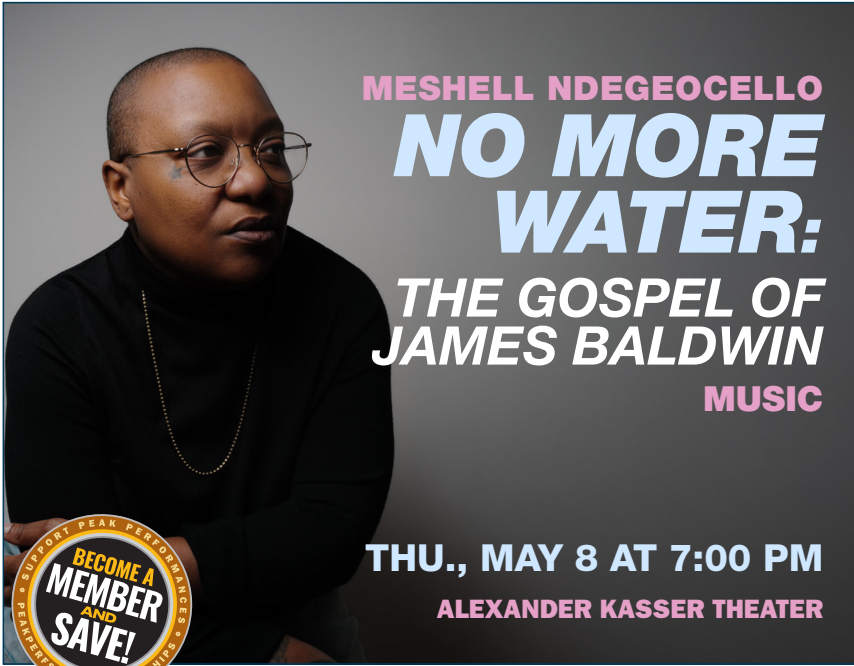
Programs in this season were made possible, in part, by the Alexander Kasser Theater Endowment Fund, PEAK Patrons, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

PEAK Performances develops, presents, and produces a broad range of world-class dance, film, master classes, music, opera and music theater, talks, and theater in the Alexander Kasser Theater on the campus of Montclair State University for students, faculty, staff, and the general public. We are building community through live performance. PEAK Performances is a program of the university's Arts + Cultural Programming Department.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

We respectfully acknowledge that Montclair State University occupies land in Lenapehoking, the traditional and expropriated territory of the Lenape. As a state institution, we recognize and support the sovereignty of New Jersey's three state-recognized tribes: the Ramapough Lenape, Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape, and Powhatan Renape nations. We recognize the sovereign nations of the Lenape diaspora elsewhere in North America, as well as other Indigenous individuals and communities now residing in New Jersey. By offering this land acknowledgement, we commit to addressing the historical legacies of Indigenous dispossession and dismantling practices of erasure that persist today. We recognize the resilience and persistence of contemporary Indigenous communities and their role in educating all of us about justice, equity, and the stewardship of the land throughout the generations.

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