

BLAIR THOMAS & COMPANY

THE OX-HERDER'S TALE

November 19–30, 2008



Photo by Stan Barouh

Museum of
Contemporary
Art

mcachicago.org

CHICAGO

BLAIR THOMAS & COMPANY—*THE OX-HERDER'S TALE*

Conceived, directed, and designed by
Blair Thomas

Script by Mickle Maher

Music direction by Michael Zerang

Developed in collaboration with the Company

Chorus

Taylor Bibat, *manipulator*

Clare Dolan, *stilt walker*

David Arden Engel, *magician*

Dan Kerr-Hobert*, *manipulator*

Erica Mott*, *manipulator*

Percussionists

Hamid Drake

Michael Zerang

Puppet crew

Allison Daniel

Stephanie Stewart Bailey

DaxTran-Caffee*

Light designer: Chris Binder

Costume designers: Meredith Miller*,
Tatjana Radisic (The Ox)

Production stage manager: Michelle Perry

Technical director: Chris Wooten*

Puppet designers: Meredith Miller*,
Sara Puzey, Dax Tran-Caffee*

Stage construction: Jenna McDanold,
Chris Wooten*

Interns: Lucy Chinen and Kasey Dodd

The original production of *The Ox-Herder's Tale* was initially co-commissioned by the Silkroad Project Chicago and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2006.

Special thanks to Sheri Doyel, Zen Buddhist Temple, Reverend Samu Sunim, Lauren Harton, Kristin Burrello, Andrea Burke, Kipling Swehla, Chris Lochin, Shu Shubat, Anne and Burt Kaplan, Ginger Farley, Justine Jentes, Liz Frankel, Gigi Pritzker, and Diane Goldin

*Denotes Blair Thomas & Company member

To increase appreciation of *The Ox-Herder's Tale*, the MCA organized these intimate opportunities for audience members to engage with the artists.

On **Saturday, November 8**, Blair Thomas led a roundtable discussion on the Performer's Presence and the Puppet's Possession with special guest Noriyuki Sawa (Prague/Tokyo) and fellow artists working in object-based theater, with emphasis given to contemporary performance practices around the world as well as the fusion of Eastern and Western ancient and traditional art forms.

Featured artists included Michael Montenegro, Jessica Thebus, Erica Mott, and Incurable Theatre's Damien Hinojosa and Jill Summers.

First Night postshow talks

Wednesday, November 19, and
Tuesday, November 25

Join Peter Taub, Director of Performance Programs, and Yolanda Cesta Cursach, Associate Director of performance programs, in a lively discussion with the artists immediately following the performances.

Photo by Stan Barouh



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Blair Thomas

started Blair Thomas & Company in 2002 as a touring theater company. The MCA presentation of Thomas's *The Ox-Herder's Tale* marks his company's inaugural Chicago season, which also included *Cabaret of Desire*, an original work based on writings of Federico García Lorca that ran for five weeks at Storefront Theater and was presented by the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. In summer 2008 the Company debuted at the Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park with *A Rabbit's Tale*, Thomas's original puppet pantomime for young audiences staged to Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and performed with solo piano. In the past four years Blair Thomas & Company has created puppets and visual design collaborations with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Children's Theater, Victory Gardens, and the Trinity Repertory Theater of Providence, Rhode Island.

Thomas has collaborated with the contemporary chamber music group eighth blackbird for an original staging of Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and Jacob Druckman's *Reflections on the Nature of Water*, which was presented by the MCA in 2006 and toured nationally. Thomas's collection of solo shows based on the poetry of Wallace Stevens and García Lorca has toured in Spain and Mexico, as well as nationally from Arizona to Boston, receiving two separate international UNIMA awards for excellence in the art of puppetry.

Before founding Blair Thomas & Company, Thomas staged Manuel de Falla's puppet opera *Master Pedro's Puppet Show* with Chicago Opera Theater and cocurated two International Puppet Theater Festivals, in 2000 and 2001, in Chicago. Thomas founded Redmoon Theater in 1989 and served as

artistic director and coartistic director until his departure in 1998. During his tenure he was principal in the creation of all Redmoon productions, parades, and pageants. He has been awarded two Fellowship Awards from the Illinois Arts Council, in 2002 and 2004, and was the first artist to fill the Jim Henson Artist-in-Residence position at the University of Maryland in 2006–07. He is an adjunct associate professor at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and received a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College.

Taylor Bibat

is a recent graduate of Oberlin College and a Chicago native. Locally, she has worked with Circle Theatre of Forest Park, Illinois; Redmoon Theater; and Victory Gardens and is a former artist-in-residence with Thresholds Theatre Arts Project. She is cocreator and coproducer with Alexis Randolph of Element: A New Plays Festival, inaugurated this September at St. Paul's Cultural Center in Wicker Park to provide resident playwrights with a week of script development with established members of Chicago's theater community. For more information, visit taylorbibat.weebly.com

Allison Daniel

is a puppet designer and performer in the Chicago-land area. She has worked for companies such as Chicago Dramatists; Emerald City Theatre Company; Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire, Illinois; and The Joffrey Ballet. In 2007 she was nominated for a non-equity Jeff Award for her work on *The Nutcracker* with The House Theatre of Chicago.

Photo by Stan Barouh



Clare Dolan

is a painter, puppeteer, *cantastoria* performer, and stilt dancer who lives in Vermont. She is a long-time veteran of the Bread and Puppet Theater and is currently living a secret double life as a nurse in her small Vermont town. She is a founding member of The Museum of Everyday Life, a radical museum experiment based in Glover, Vermont and in the minds of participating artists everywhere. A website is forthcoming.

Hamid Drake

is from Monroe, Louisiana, and is internationally renowned for a percussion style that bridges North and West African and Indian impulses as well as reggae and Latin music. In 1974 he began a long-term musical relationship with Chicago's Fred Anderson, leading to introductions to George Lewis and Douglas Ewart of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). His major percussion influences, Ed Blackwell and his childhood friend Adam Rudolph, date from this period, and he maintains an ongoing collaboration with Rudolph with whom he has performed in numerous contexts, including Anderson's 1979 *The Missing Link*.

The broad-based concepts of percussionist Jo Jones impelled Drake to explore earlier forms of drumming that had been drawn into jazz before the advent of free jazz, leading him to play without sticks and use his hands to develop subtly commanding undertones, such as for the *tabla*. In 1978 Drake met Don Cherry, who became another regular collaborator, and at that time he also became a member of the Mandingo Griot Society, appearing on the group's first album. Drake has performed with pianist Borah Bergman, reedist Peter Brötzmann as part of his quartet with William Parker and Toshinori Kondo, Marilyn Crispell, Pierre Dorge, Norwegian

pianist-composer Georg Gräwe, Herbie Hancock, Misha Mengelberg, Pharoah Sanders, Wayne Shorter, Malachi Thompson, and most notably with Kent Kessler and Ken Vandermark in the DKV Trio. For more information, visit hamiddrake.com

David Arden Engel

is a Chicago native based in Brooklyn, New York, where he works as an actor, physical comedian, and sailor. Past collaborations with Blair Thomas include the Redmoon Theater productions *Moby Dick*, *Hunchback*, *Frankie & Johnny*, *Long Live the King*, *The King is Dead*, and several All Hallows-Eve spectacles. From 1989 to 2000 Engel worked with the Chicago-based theater companies 500 Clown (of which he is a founding member), Steppenwolf Theatre, Writers' Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare, Pegasus Players, Oak Park Shakespeare, Stage Left, Piven Theatre, and Buffalo Theatre Ensemble.

Engel has performed the roles of Hamlet, Macbeth, Titus Andronicus, Tybalt, Mercutio, and Valere in *La Bête* and made more than 30 appearances in commercial, television, and film productions. He has performed with Target Margin Theater in New York; Ensemble Theater in Cincinnati, Ohio; Playhouse on the Square in Memphis, Tennessee; and five seasons with CIRCUSundays at the Showboat Barge in Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York.

Engel has developed the character of the magician—originally created for the Redmoon Theater production *Frankie & Johnnie* at Steppenwolf—into *El Magnifico!*, which he has performed in Chicago at the Midnight Cabaret and City of Fools Festival, in New York for the Bindlestiff Cirkus's Palace of Variety on 42nd Street and for Artistic New Directions, and in Liuzhou, China for the opening day parade featuring 48 clowns of the first International Clown Festival in 2007. He has also performed as *El Magnifico!*

World's Worst Magician in festivals in Tiandu City and Shanghai, China.

As a variety performer appearing in corporate, library, and school engagements, Engel earned *New York Magazine's* Best of NY: Kids for *PirateSchool!*. He has toured Europe with his street theater since 1984, and starting in 1999 has performed regularly at pediatric hospitals as the Clown Doctor with The Big Apple Circus's renowned *Clown CareProgram*. When not working he likes to be on his 1915 wooden, gaff-rig catboat *Tang*. For more information, visit davidengel.biz

Dan Kerr-Hobert

is from Berryville, Virginia, and graduated from The Theatre School at DePaul University, where he is an adjunct faculty member. He is an artist-in-residence at Stroger Hospital and works with a number of local companies as an actor, director, and puppeteer. He is Artistic Director of Chicago's Sansculottes Theater Company and the founder of Manifest Theatre in Manningtree, Essex, United Kingdom.

Mickle Maher

is a playwright and actor based in Chicago for the last twenty years. He is a producing company member of Theater Oobleck since cofounding the group in 1987. His plays have been presented Off-Broadway at the Barrow Street Theatre, the Public Theater, and The New Victory Theatre; in Chicago at Steppenwolf Theater, Redmoon Theater, The Goodman Theatre (New Stages Series), the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Spertus Institute, and Links Hall; regionally at the St. Louis Museum of Contemporary Art and DiverseWorks in Houston; and at venues in Finland, Germany, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. His plays are published by Hope and Nonthings (Chicago). Currently, he's working on the libretto for an opera about Don Quixote.

Meredith Miller

has a bachelor of fine arts degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and creates costumes, props, and makeup for a number of companies such as Chicago Shakespeare Theater, The Lyric Opera of Chicago, Court Theatre, Writers' Theatre, and Redmoon Theater. She has created puppets and masks for Blair Thomas & Company for more than seven years, including for the productions *The Snow Queen* (nominated for a Jeff Award), *Cabaret of Desire*, *The Selfish Giant*, and the chamber opera *Pierrot Lunaire* in collaboration with the chamber ensemble eighth blackbird. Earlier in 2008 her puppet and mask designs were featured in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's mainstage production of *Willie Wonka*.

Erica Mott

is a performer, director, and self-described deviser of work inspired by observation of her immediate environment. She employs mask, clown, *butoh*-derived movement, and site-specific performance to capture and heighten the magic, mystery, and tragedy of everyday activities and interactions as well as to uncover their universality to reach across social, economic, and cultural barriers. In Chicago, Mott has performed with Synapse Arts Collective, Redmoon Theater, Storybox, and Local Infinities Visual Theater; in Washington, D.C. with WASHINGTON Improv Theatre and the Living Stage; and internationally for MUKA Theater Project in Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa. She has taught performance for Lookingglass Theater, Northeastern Illinois University's Teacher's Center, and The Second City Training Center and has devised workshops and curricula for colleges, corporations, and community groups. For more information, visit ericamott.com.



Photo by Stan Barouh

Michelle Perry

studied production management at The Theatre School at DePaul University and also occupies herself by growing organic vegetables and red wine grapes as the farm manager for Salute! Farm and Vineyard in Woodstock, Illinois. Since Blair Thomas succeeded to pull her out of the dirt long enough to stage manage for *The Ox-Herder's Tale*, she is enjoying playing with puppets again.

Stephanie Stewart Bailey

is completing a bachelor of fine arts degree at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She recently studied ballet, contemporary dance, and choreography at the HAMU Academy and National Conservatoire in Prague. Stewart Bailey is also a photographer, and her work has been shown at Anagram Gallery in Prague, Chicago Artists Month 2007, Colorado State University, and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago performance space.

Dax Tran-Caffee

is an interdisciplinary artist and student in the Performance MFA program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, specializing in large urban game design. He plays accordion with California-based Corpus Callosum, holds a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting and drawing from the California College of Arts & Crafts, and is a former instructor of academic drawing at Ex'pression College for Digital Art. He entered a career in puppetry in 2007 upon meeting Blair Thomas and has an obsession to find the beach that is said to lie beneath the paving stones—if anyone has any leads, please let him know. For more information, visit norestforthewicked.biz.

Michael Zerang

was born in Chicago and is a first-generation American of Assyrian decent. He has been a professional musician, composer, and producer since 1976, focusing on improvised music, free jazz, contemporary composition, puppet theater, experimental theater, and international musical forms. He has collaborated with contemporary theater, dance, and other multidisciplinary artists and has received three Joseph Jefferson Awards for Original Music Composition in Theater, in 1996, 1998, and 2000. He has more than 60 titles in his discography and has toured nationally and internationally since 1981 with an ever-widening pool of collaborators.

From 1985 to 1989, Zerang was the artistic director of the Link's Hall Performance Series, for which he produced over 300 concerts of jazz, traditional ethnic folk music, electronic music, and other forms of forward-thinking music. He produced concerts at Cafe Urbus Orbis from 1994 to 1996, and at his own space, The Candlestick Maker, in Chicago's Albany Park neighborhood from 2001 to 2005. He has taught as a guest artist in performance technique, sound design, and sound/music as it relates to puppetry at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago; rhythmic analysis for dancers at The Dance Center of Columbia College, Northwestern University, and MoMing Dance and Arts Center; courses in composer-choreographer collaborations at Northwestern University; and music to children at the Jane Adams Hull House. He has held workshops in improvisational music and percussion technique and teaches private lessons in the latter as well as in rhythmic analysis and music composition. For more information, visit michaelzerang.com.

Blair Thomas & Company

is a Chicago-based theater whose work is rooted in the language of the puppet, creating a contemporary visual theater that performs locally, nationally, and internationally.

Artistic Company

Dan Kerr-Hobert, Puppeteer/Performer
Erica Mott, Puppeteer/Performer and Movement Coach
Dax Tran-Caffee, Apprentice Puppeteer and Shop Foreman
Meredith Miller, Resident Mask and Puppet Designer
Jesse Mooney-Bullock, Puppet Designer
Chris Wooten, Light Designer and Technical Director

Staff

Blair Thomas, Artistic Director
David Emanuel, Business Manager
Lucy Chinen, Production Intern
Kasie Dodd, Production Intern

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