

WOLF TRAP FOUNDATION PRESENTS

Pernilla's Amazing Inventions

MELISSA RICHARDSON



**WOLF
TRAP**

INSTITUTE FOR
EARLY LEARNING
THROUGH THE ARTS



ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Melissa Richardson is a director, stage manager, and teaching artist specializing in theater. She has worked with the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts since 2005. She is passionate about telling stories, whether they are published children's literature, folktales from around the world, or stories created with children on the spot! She has taught children and adults through Arena Stage, Shakespeare Theatre, Round House Theatre, Adventure Theatre, and Lenore Blank Kelner & Co. She directs the Main Street Theatre Company, a teen performance ensemble based out of the Alden Theatre in McLean, Virginia. She also directs the Heyday Players, Round House Theatre's acting troupe for senior citizens. She holds a B.F.A. in Directing from Carnegie Mellon University.

ARTIST'S CREATIVE PROCESS FOR THIS PERFORMANCE

"One of my favorite experiences is creating costumes, props, and sets with children for their own theatrical performances. We use mostly cardboard, paper, scrap fabric, and other recyclable materials. A cardboard tube becomes a telescope, a microphone, a stirring spoon, a staff. A small box becomes a steering wheel, a robot's control panel, a jukebox, a treasure chest, a dog kennel, a helmet. The possibilities are endless! The first element of the story I created was the gorilla character, inspired by this spirit of ingenuity. I usually don't perform with many props. I think it's important for children to understand that they naturally have everything they need to create theatre: a body, a voice, and an imagination. However, with this story's emphasis on building, design elements play an important role. I chose to explore the theme of seeing the potential in everyday objects. I tried to gather materials with the same spirit of fun and belief in possibilities as Pernilla herself would have and asked myself which objects would be the most surprising of the story.

This performance contains elements of both storytelling and theatre. In the art form of storytelling, images are created mostly with word choice and vocal inflection, with support from gestures. When a storyteller fully acts out a character, it can hinder the audience's ability to form their own images. In contrast, in theatre, it is preferable to show the story through movement and dialogue rather than telling it through use of a narrator. A large part of my process was deciding how to strike a balance between these two art forms. I ultimately chose to fully act out the character of Pernilla Gorilla while more subtly suggesting the other characters with physical and vocal choices."

- Melissa Richardson

FOR THE TEACHER... BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

- Talk about the word "invention." Discuss important inventions that the children know such as electric lights, cars, or computers. Discuss and define an inventor.
- Invite the children to invent their own imaginary machines by drawing pictures or building them with blocks or other manipulatives.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

- Read one or more of the stories suggested in Recommended Resources. Discuss the theme of helping and accepting help from others. Why did the characters in each of the stories not want to accept help from the main character? Or why did the main character not think they would be good at helping? What did they learn?
- Costumes played an important role in this performance. How did Miss Melissa use scarves to create the different animal characters? What animals could we create using just one or two scarves? What kind of scarves (colors, texture) could we use to make the animal come alive and why? This can be any animal the children know, or you can look at pictures of rainforest animals for inspiration.
- Each character in the performance had a different voice. What do you remember about the characters' voices? Can you say hello in the voice of Hippo, Mother Hornbill, Leopard, or Pernilla Gorilla? What other animal voices can you create? This can be any animal the children know, or you can look at pictures of rainforest animals for inspiration.
- What words did Miss Melissa use to describe how the animals moved? Some examples are scramble, slink, and coil. Move like animals using these words as inspiration. Scramble like a golden monkey. Slink like a leopard. Coil like a forest cobra. What other words can you use to describe how animals move?
- Look at some of Miss Melissa's props. How could you use them in a different way (object transformation)?
- Invite children to invent their own imaginary machines by drawing pictures or building them with blocks or other manipulatives. This is a great activity to do both before and after the performance.
- Pernilla used simple machines to roll, lift, and move the rocks and trees. Let the children explore simple machines like wheels, ramps, and levers.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Lester, Helen. Tacky the Penguin. Illustrated by Lynn Munsinger. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988
- Piper, Watty. The Little Engine That Could. Illustrated by Loren Long. New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2005
- Seeger, Pete. Abiyoyo. Illustrated by Michael Hays. New York, NY: Aladdin, 1994.
- "The Lion and the Mouse" an Aesop fable.
- Information about Simple Machines.
Online: <http://www.mikids.com/Smachines.htm>
- Invention-Related Computer Games for Children.
Online: http://inventionatplay.org/playhouse_main.html
- Rainforest Information and Pictures. Online: <http://kids.mongabay.com/>

The possibilities are endless!

- Melissa Richardson

ABOUT THIS PERFORMANCE

This performance is a dramatization of an original story. Pernilla Gorilla loves to invent, but the other animals in the rainforest don't always appreciate her creations. Through Pernilla's determination and creativity, children will learn about the value of learning from mistakes, always being willing to try again, and believing in yourself and your uniqueness.

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A unique arts experience modeled on an original program from the Arts Centre Melbourne, Australia.

ABOUT WOLF TRAP INSTITUTE FOR EARLY LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

Research has proven that the arts are a powerful tool through which children can learn. Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts was established in 1981 under a grant from Head Start, a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to support teachers' professional development and young children's learning. Through residencies and workshops across the country, early childhood professionals in partnership with Wolf Trap Teaching Artists learn arts-based techniques and strategies that empower them to integrate the arts in all developmental domains of curriculum. Age-appropriate experiences in music, movement, drama, and puppetry foster a love of learning and help support young children's skill development in social relations, creative representation, initiative, logic, mathematics, language, literacy, movement, and music.

WOLF TRAP INSTITUTE OFFERS A VARIETY OF SERVICES INCLUDING:

Professional Development Workshops for teachers that are designed to provide age-appropriate performing arts strategies that are linked to early childhood curricular learning outcomes.

Family Involvement Workshops offer parents and caregivers of young children an introduction to performing arts activities that can be employed at home, in the car, and even in line at the grocery store.

Wolf Trap Institute operates successful programs across the United States and has taken its services to nearly 100,000 children, educators, and parents/caregivers throughout 28 states.

For more information about Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, please visit: www.wolftrap.org/Education, or call 703.255.1933 or 1.800.404.8461.

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