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Provocative puppets go green

The Arts Center at Killingworth to host PuppetSpeak! in celebration of Earth Day

By **JULIE ANNE RANCOURT**
PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Forget everything you think you know about puppetry. The artists of PuppetSpeak! want you to come to their upcoming performance with an open mind.

In celebration of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, the Arts Center at Killingworth is hosting a day of provocative puppetry performances and workshops for all ages, which have been designed to inspire awareness and appreciation for the Earth's environment.

PuppetSpeak! will be presented in two parts. The morning program is designed for families and children ages 5 to 11. Rolande Duprey and Purple Rock Productions will perform "Ecological Logic," a tale of the sea that powerfully illustrates the message that if we save the earth, the earth will save us.

Duprey is an award-winning performer, designer and teacher who has worked nationally with numerous schools, colleges and performance groups. Four other puppeteers will join her for the performance and they will be accompanied by live music.

Following the performance, Duprey will lead a workshop for participants who want to learn to make and manipulate their own puppet.

The morning session ends with the screening of the award-winning documentary, "The Puppeteer," which chronicles the life of Igor Fokin, a talented artist and street performer who flees the Soviet Union to pursue his passion in

America. Fokin was trained by the last surviving Master of the Russian Marionette Theater and his life is poignantly depicted in the film and follows a dramatic turn of events, leaving the viewers to reflect on life, art and the

everything from lighting to music and sound for their performances.

Duprey has a MFA in puppetry from The University of Connecticut and Nidz was the first graduate of The Institute of Professional Puppetry Arts MFA degree program at the Eugene O'Neill

Theater Center and Connecticut College.

Barbara Nair, artistic director for the Arts Center at Killingworth, said that most people are unaware of the high level of puppetry going on in Connecticut.

"The state is really a hot spot for this artistry," Nair stated.

And the work of these two artists reflects the current progression of puppetry. Most people are familiar with Elmo and Sesame Street, but with Broadway shows like "Avenue Q" and "Lion King" becoming popular, adults are beginning to appreciate this provoking art form.

PuppetSpeak! will take place Saturday, April 24, at the Deep River Town Hall Theater, 174 Main St., and is made possible with support from the Connecticut

Commission on Culture & Tourism, which receives support from the National

Endowment for the Arts. Seating is limited.

The morning session will take place from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and the evening session will be held from 6:30 to 9 p.m. For tickets, call (860) 663-5593 or purchase online at www.artscenterkillingworth.org.

pursuit of dreams, according to the films promotional materials.

The evening session will work in reverse, with a free screening of "The Puppeteer" first, followed by a workshop led by puppeteer Bobbi Nidz on the handling of a variety of puppets.

Nidz will then be performing a solo original work, "Earth Peace," in which silent puppets move to music and present a message about war, our relationship to the earth and with each other.

The evening session is more appropriate for ages 11 and up. Following the performance, Nidz will take questions from the audience.

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"Ecological Logic," Rolande Duprey with Purple Rock Productions

Puppetry is a unique art form that combines writing, acting, designing sets and building puppets. The artists need to be multi-faceted, providing everything from lighting to music and sound for their performances.

Courtesy photo