

PUPPET MASTERS

Portland's Tears of Joy Theatre elevates the art of puppetry with *The Jungle Book*

What was the last puppet show you saw? An after-school special maybe? Or perhaps a storybook hour staged by librarians with their hands stuck up some glorified socks? Portland's Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre wants you to throw out that imagery entirely.

"There are so many puppet shows out there that I've seen that might be great for kids," says Emily Alexander, Tears of Joy's executive director, "but the parents are, how shall I put this — not enjoying it. For anyone whose idea of puppets is either Muppets or socks with googly eyes, we're out to change that."

She adds: "This is a wonderful example of puppetry done right."

First founded in 1972, Tears of Joy has staged tens of thousands of shows in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. The morning of July 9, the theater group brings one of its most popular shows to the Hult Center.

"*The Jungle Book* has been through our touring circuit so many times since it debuted at least 20 years ago, and we've always brought it back," Alexander says. "I'm sure it's had thousands of performances."

The origin of the puppet show may date back to the 20th century, but the look is a good deal more contemporary.

"We refurbished the puppets," Alexander explains. "They look better than they ever did."

Those puppets set the show apart. Relatively speaking, they're huge. In *The Jungle Book*, the boy hero Mowgli is the smallest puppet at two feet tall. Nearly all of the other puppets are to scale, including Mowgli's bubbling bear bestie Baloo, his panther protector Bagheera and his attacker, the massive and menacing tiger Shere Khan.

Although the characters and story are familiar to anyone



who has seen the Disney version, the experience is unique.

"I love movies, but it's like apples and oranges," she says. "There's a completely different energy onstage that comes with that element of the unknown when you have a stage production. It's like an exchange between the audience and the actors onstage."

The inclusion of *The Jungle Book* this year at the Oregon Bach Festival may seem a bit odd because, on its face, the show has just about nothing to do with Bach. Even then, in a program packed with weighty performances from the German master, a trip to the jungles of India offers a welcome and kid-friendly counterpoint to the likes of *Mass in B Minor*.

And just as OBF seeks to re-invigorate the often staid experience of classical music concert-going, Tears of Joy offers a similar reinvention of the puppet show as we've come to know it.

"This is one of our finest productions," Alexander says. "We've brought it back so many times for a reason. It's a great chance for puppetry to redeem itself."

— J.D. Swerzenski

Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre performs The Jungle Book 10:30 am Saturday, July 9, in the Hult Center's Soreng Theater; \$8.

BACH THE HOUSE

Some highlights from the musical cornucopia that is the Oregon Bach Festival

This summer, Oregon Bach Festival's theme could have been "Generations." The fest features a father-and-son team — Jeffrey and Gabriel Kahane; leaders of two generations of historically informed Baroque violin — Monica Huggett and Rachel Podger; old and new music — from Baroque and early Romantic masters to contemporary composers; veteran visitors conductor Anton Armstrong, pianist Robert Levin and organist Paul Jacobs; as well as today's rising stars — the terrific singer Nicholas Phan and Artistic Director Matthew Halls; and tomorrow's musical leaders — Youth Choral Academy, Berwick Academy and more.

To open this summer series, OBF just added a free opening celebration with performances by the Oregon Brass Society, Cullen Vance and the PICFest Choir, as well as a talk with OBF's Halls, 5 to 7:30 pm Thursday, June 23, in and around the Hult Center. Look for food trucks, a photo booth and complimentary champagne.

Oregon Bach Festival runs June 23-July 10, and there's so much to hear and see. To help you decide, here are *EW's* highlights:

CONTEMPORARY COMPOSITIONS

After years of looking mostly backward, OBF resumes its investment in music's future by commissioning the great Scottish composer James MacMillan to write this year's must-see: a major new *European Requiem* premiering July 3. Contemporary music fans should also check out MacMillan's June 28 chamber orchestra concert featuring some of his earlier compositions plus music by Britten, Shostakovich, Gabriel Kahane's "Guide to the 48 States" July 8, and the Oregon Composers Forum's five-concert "New Pathways" series, featuring emerging Oregon composers, new music star performers Molly Barth (flute), former Kronos Quartet cellist Jeffrey Zeigler, Roomful of Teeth singer Esteli Gomez and more. There's even a 20th-century tango show June 26 at Beall Hall.

FAB FIDDLERS

Portland Baroque Orchestra music director Monica Huggett — one of the pioneers of the historically informed performance movement that OBF has come to embrace — remains an electrifying, visceral violinist whose bands move onstage like pop stars. Huggett's June 30 concert features Baroque tunes by Telemann, Bach and more. Also at Beall Hall, Rachel Podger, who tops the next generation of Baroque violin stars, leads the Berwick Academy in music by Baroque masters Bach, Handel, Telemann and more July 6, and plays sonatas and partitas by Bach, Giuseppe Tartini and Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber July 9.



RACHEL PODGER

YOUNG BLOOD

Some of the nation's leading high school choral singers convene under the direction of OBF veteran Armstrong to sing Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass* at the Stangeland Family Youth Choral Academy concert July 3 at the Hult Center. And Portland's Tears of Joy puppet theater entertains kids with *The Jungle Book* July 9.

CORE CLASSICS

Although founder Helmuth Rilling won't be here, his successor Matthew Halls leads two of Western music's landmarks: Bach's career-culminating *B Minor Mass* (for the first time at OBF, at last, on period instruments) in the festival's June 23 opener at the Hult's Silva Hall, and Bach's compilation of vocal-orchestral masterpieces collectively called the *Christmas Oratorio* during the ever-fascinating "Discovery Series" at the Hult's Soreng Theater. Appropriately, between those Baroque masterpieces and the festival's closing Romantic masterpiece, Brahms's consoling *German Requiem* and esteemed music scholar and keyboardist Robert Levin leads a three-part series (June 29, July 1, July 3) of music by Classical-era masters Mozart, Haydn and

Beethoven at Beall Hall. — Brett Campbell

Conventional concerts are only part of what makes the festival special. Check the On the House schedule for various talks, free performances and other events at oregonbachfestival.com.