

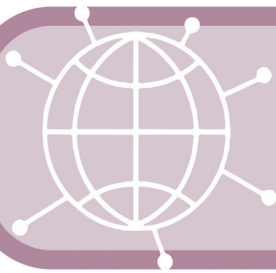
2011 > 2012 Learning Link

# Snowflake

LaJoye Productions

Friday, October 7, 2011, 9:30am & 11:30am

Recommended Grades: PreK-12



McCallum Theatre Institute  
**Field Trip Series**

A WORLD OF MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE & PERFORMANCE

**Learning Links presents**  
**LaJoye Productions: Snowflake**  
**Friday, October 7, 2011**  
**9:30 a.m. & 11:30 a.m.**

*"It's about making the human connection.. art forms and performances that help remind us in new and inventive ways that men are inherently good and people can come together when they need to." — Gale LaJoye*

## **Making Curricular Connections!**

**Social Studies:** family and home; lifestyles; homelessness

**Geography:** Michigan, U.S. inner cities

**Arts:** pantomime, theater, dance, comedy, music, Kabuki

### **What is it?**

When we pass by people who are clearly living on the street, what do we see? What do we avoid seeing? What are the series of thoughts such encounters usually trigger in our minds? What mental adjustments must we make in order to continue down the street, and what would we learn if we didn't at once continue down the street? Gale LaJoye gives us the chance, in theatrical format, to discover just that in his performance of "Snowflake." Drawing on his acquaintance with a street dweller in his native Marquette, Michigan, actor LaJoye has created the character of Snowflake and imagined what an hour in his life, in his world, would be like. Equal parts warm-hearted fantasy and bleak stock-taking of a life lived in solitude, "Snowflake" interweaves skills of mime, comedic timing, balletic movement, and manipulation of props. Along the way, he explores what we mean when we say "home", when we say "relationship", when we say "making a life for ourselves."

### **Who Is It?**

How would your life change if you were suddenly paralyzed in an auto accident, and what action would you --- could you --- take? If you're Gale LaJoye, you work steadily to regain what you've lost --- and end by making your living moving balletically across the stage on a skateboard and skis, buoyed by an infinite grace. But then actor LaJoye has been picking up challenges all his life. Having spent his youth in Marquette, he debated whether to pursue pre-law of the theater, with the latter winning out when he found he could more profoundly impact people's lives from the proscenium than from the courtroom bench. His early ventures into impersonation quickly established a gift in non-verbal communication, and indeed the characters he played spoke loudest through gesture, facial expression, and timing. Following a theme, he studied pantomime and Kabuki theater, honing natural gifts into skills. Perhaps it's a natural progression, then, that in 1973 he ran off and joined the circus. Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. In time, he earned the title Boss Clown.

Where do you go in life once you're Boss Clown? Life responded with a crushing blow. Recovery from the accident was slow, and accomplished with humor and determination.

After some initial exploration into the format of one person shows, LaJoye hit upon the idea of "Snowflake." Modeled on Don, a figure familiar to the denizens of Marquette, Snowflake helped LaJoye excavate possible meanings of lives lived in what are usually thought to be unfortunate circumstances. What began all those years ago as a last minute Christmas show based on a real person has evolved over time into a rich theatrical work which tours the world.

*“[Don] embraced that life and lived with a lot of independence and privileged contact with other human beings.”* — Gale LaJoye

## ROOTS

If we follow the thread backward in time from “Snowflake” to antiquity, we encounter the traditions of mime, Commedia Dell’Arte, and clowning.

Mime extends back very far indeed. In ancient Greek theater, actors signaled thoughts, feelings, and interpersonal communication to audiences of 10,000 and more in huge venues through the use of large gestures readable at great distances. These early mimes were called ethologues. Do you notice the resemble to the word ethics? The scenes these performers enacted were meant to teach moral lessons to the public.

In time, the Romans, drawing on Greek culture, adopted mime as a means of instructing through theater. Of course, the bawdiness which eventually saturated the Roman lifestyle also manifested itself in mime, and after Rome’s fall, the Church banned the art form on moral grounds.

A relaxation of attitudes in later epochs set the stage for the return of mime in mystery and morality plays. By the 1500s, mime had fully flowered in the area we today call Italy in a seminal form of theater, Commedia Dell’Arte. Stock characters --- in the style, say, of Laurel and Hardy, or Lucy and Ricky --- were the central and beloved figures. These characters, called zanni collectively, had names like Harlequin and Columbine. The story lines were familiar and humorous. Performing troupes who presented the zanni sometimes fell afoul of the ruling classes, since they often poked fun at society and its institutions. The more outlaw the troupe, the more popular they grew --- predictably --- with the serving classes. In addition, these troupes traveled far and wide throughout the continent of Europe, presenting their largely visual works successfully to audiences who couldn’t understand Italian.

In the 1800s, mimes like Jean Debureau in Paris developed the earlier crude style of mime into something resembling the art form we recognize today. It was this son of a Bohemian family of acrobats, by the way, who created the character of Pierrot.

In the Twentieth Century, Marcel Marceau has carried the form further, drawing on the silent film techniques advanced by, among others, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton.

## **Before viewing the work of art, research projects might focus on these subjects:**

Pantomime  
Homelessness, or concepts of home  
Props, use of  
Circuses and clowns  
puppetry

## **In Activities prior to the theater, could students...**

create a puppet and explore its manipulation?

fill a miniature "billboard" with images and text referencing "home"?

watch films of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, and Harold Lloyd, and try some of the gestures and ways of moving themselves?

create short silent vignettes around the theme of "making a home on the streets"?

try producing music on items which produce sounds not normally associated with music?

## **After viewing the performance, research could involve:**

One person shows

Kabuki theater

Comic timing

Michigan

Recovery from paralysis

## **In activities after the theater, could students...**

Perform athletic moves in ways which emphasize different qualities?

For example, balletic, angular, awkward, childlike, sad.

Research Kabuki and tell a story from curriculum using one or more elements from Kabuki tradition?

Interview an adult they know, and based on the information gleaned, create a brief non-verbal presentation in which the following things are communicated: where that person lives, how that person relates to his/her environment, and what he/she values in life?

Come up with a personal list of ways in which she/he can make a difference in people's lives?

*"My shows bring a little enlightenment to a situation. We need to follow our dreams and service them continually. A child always needs to be encouraged to do this."* — Gale LaJoye

## **Inquiry:**

What specifically does Gale LaJoye do to show what Snowflake is feeling inside?

What are the various ways in which Gale LaJoye moves?

How has Gale LaJoye structured this work?

How is "Snowflake" similar --- and how is it different --- from other one person shows?

How do the directorial choices of Gale LaJoye "direct your eye?"

What emotions does this work provoke in you --- what specifically does this?

How does this work connect with your own life?

In what ways does this work trouble you? Or does it?

How are "street people" commonly characterized by society, and in what ways does this portrait of Snowflake expand that characterization?

How do you respond to the use of fantasy in exploring a subject like homelessness?

What are some other works of art that address social themes?

How do you define home?

What theatrical elements --- besides movement --- are used? To what effect?

How can this work increase understanding of ourselves and the way we respond to circumstances?  
What props are used and how?

## Internet:

Gale LaJoye  
[www.lajoye.com](http://www.lajoye.com)

Mime  
[mimo.softservei.com/hmimoing.htm](http://mimo.softservei.com/hmimoing.htm)  
[members.tripod.com/~kiko\\_mime/history.html](http://members.tripod.com/~kiko_mime/history.html)

Kabuki  
[www.fix.co.jp/kabuki/kabuki.html](http://www.fix.co.jp/kabuki/kabuki.html)  
[www.japan-guide.com/e/e2090.html](http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2090.html)  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabuki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabuki)

circus & clowns  
[webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/circus.htm](http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/circus.htm)  
[www.charliethejugglingclown.com/clown\\_history.htm](http://www.charliethejugglingclown.com/clown_history.htm)  
[www.shrineclowns.com/html/clown\\_history.html](http://www.shrineclowns.com/html/clown_history.html)

puppetry  
[sunniebunniezz.com/puppetry/puppet.htm](http://sunniebunniezz.com/puppetry/puppet.htm)

## Books:

Puppetry

*Puppet Mania: The World's Most Incredible Puppet Making Book Ever* (Paperback)

by John E. Kennedy

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Paperback: 64 pages Publisher: North Light Books (February, 2004) Language: English ISBN: 1581803729

Homelessness

*Can't Get There from Here* (Paperback)

by Todd Strasser

Reading level: Young Adult

Paperback: 208 pages Publisher: Simon Pulse (September 20, 2005) Language: English ISBN: 0689841701

*December* (Paperback)

by Eve Bunting

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Paperback: 36 pages Publisher: Voyager Books (October 1, 2000) Language: English ISBN: 0152024220

*The Family Under the Bridge* (Paperback)

by Natalie Savage Carlson

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Paperback: 112 pages Publisher: HarperTrophy; Reissue edition (February 15, 1989) Language: English

*Begging for Change* (Paperback)

by Sharon G. Flake

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Paperback: 256 pages Publisher: Jump At The Sun; Reprint edition (May, 2004) Language: English ISBN: 0786814055

*The Lady in the Box* (Hardcover)

by Ann McGovern

Hardcover: 32 pages Publisher: Turtle Books (New York, NY); 1st ed edition (September, 1997) Language: English  
ISBN: 1890515019

Mime

*Bip in a Book* (Hardcover)

by Marcel Marceau (Author)

Hardcover: 64 pages Publisher: Stewart, Tabori and Chang (September 15, 2001) Language: English ISBN: 1584791306

*Be a Mime* (Hardcover)

by Mark Stolzenberg

Hardcover: 128 pages Publisher: Sterling (August 28, 2001) Language: English ISBN: 0806964170

Clown

*Clown* (Paperback)

by Quentin Blake

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Paperback: 32 pages Publisher: Henry Holt and Co. (BYR); Reprint edition (September 15, 1998) Language: English  
ISBN: 0805059334

*Be a Clown: Techniques from a Real Clown* (Quick Starts for Kids!) (Paperback)

by Ron Burgess

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Paperback: 63 pages Publisher: Williamson Publishing Company (May, 2001) Language: English ISBN: 1885593570

## **CDs**

Over The Rainbow: Judy Garland

06/15/2001 Castle/Pie PIESD220

*"The show is about how life is for both objects and people and ...  
how the fringes of society can be full and vital."* — Gale LaJoye

