

THE WIDER EARTH



A NEW PLAY BY DAVID MORTON

Education resource

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THE STORY



Join the 22-year-old Charles Darwin on HMS Beagle's daring voyage to the far side of the world, and discover the gripping story behind one of the most important discoveries in history. *The Wider Earth* features a cast of seven, remarkable puppetry, an original score and cinematic animations to bring to life uncharted landscapes in the theatrical event of 2018.

CHARACTER LIST

Charles Darwin – A young man.

Reverend John Henslow – His professor and mentor. A botanist.

Adam Sedgwick – A geologist from Cambridge.

Robert Darwin – His father.

Emma Wedgwood – His cousin. Later his wife.

Robert FitzRoy – The Captain of the Beagle.

John Wickham – The first officer of the Beagle.

Jemmy Button – A hostage from Tierra del Fuego, returning as a missionary.

Richard Matthews – Another missionary.

John Herschel – A naturalist and philosopher.

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DARWIN AS A CRITICAL THINKER



'A baby has brains, but it doesn't know much. Experience is the only thing that brings knowledge, and the longer you are on Earth the more experience you are sure to get.'

From *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum

Darwin as a critical thinker is particularly relevant today as society grows increasingly weary of science and is bombarded by fake news. Celebrating Darwin as one of the world's greatest critical thinkers and his pursuit of truth is timely. A risk taker with strong insight and initiative, Darwin's critical thinking as a young man led him to challenge the sometimes static and unimaginative thinking

of his older professors. The audience see this in the rather comical scene with Professor Sedgewick who surmises that the fossil of a marine shell on top of a ridge in the middle of England was probably "dropped there." Determined in his pursuit of naturalism, Darwin knew he needed to leave England and travel the world to uncover more about the evolution of species.

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DARWIN AS A NATURALIST



'How mighty is the power of nature, that it might replace the hand of the Lord?'

Matthews in *The Wider Earth*

Charles Darwin (1809–1882) transformed the way we understand the natural world with his revolutionary theories. On his travels Darwin collected plants, animals and fossils, and took copious field notes. These collections and records provided the evidence he needed to develop his remarkable theory. Darwin discovered the evolutionary theory of natural selection and the tree of life. This theory is based on the general law that “the strongest live and the weakest die” and that environment can naturally manipulate a species. Darwin takes a gentle approach to his theories

in that while the strongest prevail he does not dismiss the suffering or cruelty of the cycle of life and death and marvels at how beauty can exist alongside brutality. Similarly, in humanity, Darwin questions the need for one man to exert their dominance over another through slavery, colonisation and taming the ‘savages’, particularly with the people of Tierra del Fuego. Ultimately, Darwin’s theories not only revealed much about the natural world, but also us as humans.

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RELIGION



'Job 12:7-9 But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the Earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?'

Every culture has a different way of thinking about how the Earth was created whether it be through a higher power as in Christianity or the animals like the Aboriginal Australian dreamtime and Indigenous American stories. Jemmy's people from Tierra del Fuego believe that the Earth was made from the bodies of the Gods. Darwin knew that his theory was in direct conflict with Christianity's belief in divine creation - that God created the Earth and everything

on it. Resolute about the controversy his theories would cause with the Church of England, after years of research Darwin and fellow naturalist Alfred Wallace announced the theory of evolution by natural selection at the Linnean Society London in 1858 and the following year his acclaimed book *On The Origin of Species* was published.

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RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN HARMONY IN THE WORLD OF *THE WIDER EARTH*



'Some things you will think of yourself... some things God will put into your mind.'

The Odyssey by Homer

Playwright David Morton aims for religion and science to exist in harmony inside the world of the play. *The Wider Earth* is not a didactic play that positions science and religion against each other. Rather, the story presents well-rounded characters and views about both theories of evolution which lead us to see how they continue to co-exist in the world today. The Beagle itself is a symbol of this co-existence as the occupants onboard the ship

together navigate the Earth while believing in the different schools of thought with Darwin alongside Christian missionaries Richard Matthews and Jemmy Button who begin the voyage by leading the men in prayer. Morton's dialogue similarly allows the temperate co-existence of the two with lines such as "it was like a Cathedral for the God of nature" when describing Bahia.

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PUPPETRY



Uniting an old-world aesthetic with cutting edge technical elements, Dead Puppet Society conjure an immersive world where the mythic sits alongside reality, and the 'old school' meets the technological. This could not be truer of the intricately crafted animal puppets, both big and small in scale that inhabit *The Wider Earth*. Some of these animals include fish, armadillo, a glyptodont, sharks, whales and a tortoise.

The puppets are the best way to illustrate the exotic animals that Charles Darwin encountered on the voyage. The styles of puppetry and visual theatre go hand in hand. Visual theatre is a style devoted to using the theatrical elements in such a way that visuals are given the same importance as text. Consequently, there often comes a time where non-human performers are necessary. Dead Puppet Society use puppets to expand the possibilities of what can be presented on stage, and by way of invitation to the audience to expand their imaginations to contribute to the story of Charles Darwin that is being told.

The process of bringing a puppet to life on stage takes an incredible degree of commitment and discipline; unlike an actor who spends a rehearsal period developing a character, a puppet must first learn how to be alive before the cast and creatives can even start to wonder what its character might be. Ultimately, the

process isn't completed until the imagination of an audience turns the movement cues that the puppeteer gives into the illusion of real life. The ensemble cast multi-role as characters in the play and puppeteers manipulating the animals. The puppets are direct manipulation puppets made from wood by David Morton and Nicholas Paine, the co-founders of Dead Puppet Society. The puppeteers tirelessly rehearse with the animals perfecting the five elements of manipulation that bring the animals to life and generate the illusion needed for audience engagement. These are focus, breath, gravity, gesture and intelligence. These elements also make the puppet and the puppeteer one on stage.

As Darwin traverses the landscape and watches the animals, his theory of evolution is visually displayed to us through puppetry, lighting and multi-media. At one point, the stage gives way to a primeval landscape that is flooded and reveals a tiny fish, which joins a school of fish, that is ushered through a kelp forest by sharks. The arrival of *The Beagle* in The Galapagos Islands is heralded by a marine iguana eating algae from a rock, the sediment from this rock is eaten by fish who are chased by a water cormorant that is then caught by a blue-footed bobby – and thus the theory of evolution alongside the food chain and the eco-system are all on display in front of us using puppetry.

AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER:

- What did you feel when you saw the puppets appear on stage for the first time?
- Do you focus on the puppet or the puppeteer? Why is this?
- Which moment in the play was the most vivid and why?

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SET



The Wider Earth is set on an end-on stage inside the Jerwood Gallery. In the centre of this stage is a large revolve that turns to signify changes in time and place in moments of transition throughout the story. The revolve is made from wood and features several peaks and small landings which allow the actors to climb up and over it giving the illusion of rocky, mountainous terrain, rainforests and shorelines. In the middle of the mountain are two stairs. Co-designers Aaron Barton and David Morton have designed the revolve so that it can land on either mountain side or ship side. Mountain side is used at the beginning of the show when Charles returns to Shrewsbury and when he is in Cambridge. Later it is used to portray the myriad of different landscapes Darwin traverses as he researches his theories, including, The Pampas, Tierra del Fuego and

the Amazon. The ship side, which includes a door up-stage centre, is used for Cambridge, Darwin's family home and the inside of *The Beagle*. When Darwin visits Emma at her family home, a miniature house lit from the inside is placed by an ensemble member on top of the mountain, giving the idea of a house out in the distance on the moors. Props used to set the *mise-en-scène* include tables, buckets and a steering wheel inside *The Beagle*. When inside *The Beagle* a member of the ensemble is perched above the stage on the mountain and gently swings a lantern back and forth depicting the rocking of the ship across the ocean. The earthy coloured tones of the set create a natural aesthetic that both complements the story and serves a functional purpose of a clean surface for projections and lighting to land on.

AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER:

- Name two locations that *The Beagle* visits and describe how they were created on stage.
- How did the actors interact with the set and props to create a sense of place?
- How did the set aid in portraying the passing of time in the cyclical narrative?

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LIGHTING



Lighting throughout *The Wider Earth* is used in varying ways to portray realistic moments and moments of surreal discovery. When inside *The Beagle* and in England, the lighting is a white wash with a soft yellow tinge across the stage. This realistic lighting choice contrasts with the green and blue washes that cast over the stage as Darwin watches the animals in the places where *The Beagle* lands. A leaf gobo is used when Darwin makes his discoveries in the depths of jungles bringing texture to David Walters and Lee Curran's lighting design. Different types of lights are also used by the ensemble who take on the role of puppeteers. As Darwin writes in his journal about the

cathedral of nature, the stage is a dark blue wash depicting night time. Darwin's journal glows gently from within up onto the actor's face as he writes his theories symbolising the light of knowledge he will bring to the world and the ensemble slowly move long carbon rods with tiny lights on the end of them to depict fireflies in the sky. The symbol of light and knowledge occurs again when Darwin is bathed in light at the epiphany of discovering many fossils on top of the Andes as he realises that the ground must once have been under water and that earthquakes could raise rockpools out of the sea.

AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER:

- How were colours used to signify different locations?
- How did lighting aid transitions?
- How were lighting intensity and angles used?

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SOUND



The show opens with a voice-over narration reciting how the Earth and all its beings were created according to the Holy Bible. This voice-over is layered with orchestral music consisting of a large variety of instruments including marimba, drums and strings co-composed by Lior and Tony Buchen. This style of music underscores the play and creates an inquisitive atmosphere of impending adventure and discovery. Throughout the play there are many moments where music portrays the atmosphere. When Darwin discovers the armadillo in The Pampas the up-beat rhythm of a marimba and drums are heard as the armadillo puppet scuttles along the stage to the delight of Darwin. This is just one example of how music is used to assist

in the creation of place for the audience and reflect the spirit of the animal Darwin discovers. The music featured in each scene is named according to the dramatic action. The music that underscores Darwin telling Emma of the opportunity on The Beagle is entitled "A Chance at Freedom" and the music in the scene where Darwin enters the rainforest in Brazil full of butterflies, iguanas and tropical creatures is entitled "Nature's Cathedral." The sound design of the production is by Tony Brumpton. Diegetic sounds of the animals encountered by Darwin can also be heard including the song of a Southern Right Whale. In the scene where Tierra del Fuego is ravaged by fire, the diegetic sound of fire and flames can be heard.

AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER:

- Name two different atmospheres created through the culmination of lighting and sound.
- Describe two different moments where the sound design echoed the spirit of the animal on stage?
- In what moment did sound evoke tension on stage? Were these diegetic or non-diegetic sounds?

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PROJECTIONS AND MULTI-MEDIA



A long throw projector is used throughout *The Wider Earth* to project images above the set onto a long, narrow screen that represents the ship's sail. The projection work and illustrations were created by Projection Designer, Justin Harrison. Using photos he took of each location and some photoshopped stock photos, Harrison then turned the photos into line drawings which are layers on top of the photos. Following this, photoshop and watercolour were integrated onto the images. These drawings are illustrated in the same style as The Beagle's artist – Conrad Martens. At other times, animated multi-media project realistic images of the locations such as the harbour of Tierra del Fuego or the Andes.

The show opens with the projection of the Earth spinning before coming to a halt and zooming in to the town of Shrewsbury, England denoting the action of the scene. This concept is used throughout the show where a map is projected and lines are drawn from place to place following

the action of the story and The Beagles voyage. At the end of the play, the spinning Earth splits in two, signifying the two worlds of thought – science and religion. The projection of the world turning is a re-occurring motif in the play. As Darwin makes another discovery towards his theory the image of the spinning world is seen. This is a symbol of ever changing world and perhaps even a homage to Galileo who, like Darwin, fought to have his theory of the Earth as round believed in contradiction to the church.

Multi-media is used towards the end of the play to visualise Darwin's discovery of The Tree of Life and the relationships between organism both living and extinct. This is projected up into the sky with points of light in the cosmos showing animals and Earth-like constellations. A cormorant soars through the air above it. Its wing becomes a peninsula. The ocean wears the wing down. The shrunken wing belongs to a cormorant that soars beneath the waves.

AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER:

- How do the projections aid your understanding of The Beagle's journey?
- Which projection images helped your understanding of the theories Darwin discovered?
- How do the images encompass the biographical and historical nature of Darwin's voyage and the magic of the natural world?

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COSTUMES



Co-designed by David Morton and Aaron Barton, the costumes are representative of the Georgian England era in which *The Wider Earth* is set, while also being practical for the use of multi-role and the movement needed for the puppeteers. Male characters are dressed in black trousers and white shirts while FitzRoy and Wickham, the Lieutenant and First Officer of The Beagle, wear

military uniforms embellished with gold buttons, sailor hats and long knee-high boots. Keeping with the context, various ensemble members have ruffles around their necks, waistcoats and suspenders. The natural colour theme of the production is kept in the costumes that are mainly white, black, browns and greys.

AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER:

- How did costumes reflect character and to some extent personality?
- Why do puppeteers need to have their arms and legs fully covered?
- How does Emma Wedgwood's costume reflect the Georgian era?

For more pictures and videos of the production visit www.thewiderearth.com or check out *The Wider Earth* on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram

The Wider Earth is presented by Trish Wadley Productions and Dead Puppet Society in association with Glass Half Full Productions in a partnership project with the Natural History Museum

The education resource was written by Hannah Brown, Theatre Education Consultant
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