



# Backstage Pass

STUDENT GUIDE FOR DAYTIME PERFORMANCES

2010/2011

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## THE ALUMINUM SHOW

Mind Over Metal

PRESENT BY

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## METAL AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

“An extraordinary performance!” -LA TRIBUNE

Ask the average person what sorts of shows are presented onstage in a theater and you will get an average answer. Chances are, people will name plays, symphony and orchestra performances, and maybe a ballet or dance recital. However, modern theaters are places for much, much more, and groups like *The Aluminum Show* take various performance elements and surprise materials and weave them together.

**WHO:** Behind every great performance is a team of visionaries – in this case, Israeli visionaries. This includes Artistic Director Ilan Azriel, Special Effects Creator Yuval Kedem, and directors, a choreographer, a producer, and costume and lighting designers. This unique team also includes a robotics expert. A cast of ten performers and additional backstage and support crew join together to make the show a reality.

**WHAT:** *The Aluminum Show* is an entity that cannot be easily contained or defined. It is described as a “combination of magical movement, dance and theater, special effects, creative mechanisms and acrobatic dance.”

**WHEN/WHERE:** *The Aluminum Show* premiered at the 2003 Israel Festival in Jerusalem. Since then, performances have been conducted in Israel, at noted European venues including the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and in many locations in the United States and Mexico. This modern, multi-faceted production truly has universal appeal – and now PASA has brought it to Lafayette and the Heymann Center.

**HOW:** A magical world of costumes, props, and processes come to life on stage to create a luminous and reflective world.



Things to expect at a performance of *The Aluminum Show*:

- Lots and lots of aluminum foil – it changes its shape and purpose to become various things during the show.
- Loud fast-paced music, but no talking. This show has other ways of getting its message across.
- A blend of formats (and many changes) onstage. The standard performance of *The Aluminum Show* contains about twenty segments. Puppetry, dance, movement, and acrobatic moves come together to entertain and delight.
- Audience interaction – *The Aluminum Show*'s performers do not stay on the stage, and neither do their props or puppets.

“There aren’t words, official or otherwise, that can do justice to the fantastic, surreal and enthralling world of aluminum that the production will bring to life.” -THE DAILY TIMES



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## Choreography Quickie

First of all, the main question. What IS choreography? Simply put, choreographers are the inventors of the dance world. They determine how dancers should move their bodies during each dance step that becomes part of a routine. Then choreographers work with those dancers to ensure that the dancers are fulfilling their vision for a piece. In short, they want to make certain that what they have envisioned is what you will see on the stage.

Some choreographers work in conjunction with artistic directors like *The Aluminum Show's* Ilan Azriel. An artistic director takes things a bit further by determining nearly everything about the way a performance will appear. They may move beyond just arranging dance steps and move on to designing costumes, selecting music, or giving special instructions to the people who control the lights during a performance.

When you watch *The Aluminum Show* cast perform, you will see the careful effects of many layers of artistic direction and choreography. Consider all of these things when you view the performance, and ask yourself what makes things look the way they do. Also, consider what message the dance and movement are sending you.

### First, watch the patterns the dancers create on the stage.

- What groupings do you see?
- Which performers seem to be working together or against each other?
- Are all of the cast performing at once? Do some hold still and watch? Do the groups they are in change?
- Do the dancers form any shapes with their bodies? With the aluminum props?
- Do the dancers seem to be imitating any moves or actions from everyday life?

### Next, listen to the music.

- Is the music fast or slow?
- Is the rhythm even, or does it change?
- If you close your eyes and just listen for a moment, what do you picture?
- What message does this music send you?

### Then, notice the set, lights, and costumes.

- What is on the stage with the dancers? Does it make the stage look like another place? What changes to the stage space are made during the performance?
- How do the lights change? Do they get darker or brighter to signal a mood?
- How do the costumes contribute to the message of the performance? Do the outfits the dancers wear tell you anything?

### Finally, reflect on the performance when it is over. Ask yourself what you have learned.

# PUPPETS ALUMINUM STYLE

There are two major elements of puppetry – the puppet and the puppeteer. Many types of puppets exist, and the size, construction, and engineering of the puppet will vary based on type and the theatrical situation in which it is used. The puppeteer is a puppet engineer, or a specially trained theater performer who works specifically with puppets. Puppeteers may construct their own puppets or acquire them from puppet makers. In recent years, puppetry has been a popular element in non-traditional theatrical productions. Some plays feature casts assembled entirely of puppets, and other hybrid shows use elements of puppetry and puppetry tools in their shows.

*The Aluminum Show* is a prime example of a hybrid-type performance that includes puppetry. Since it is not strictly a puppet show, *The Aluminum Show* blends types of puppets and uses them in non-traditional ways. For example they use them as performance pieces developed to accentuate dancers, work alongside dancers, and convey meaning through their movements. The *Aluminum Show* puppets interact with performers onstage, become props and costumes for performers, and even enter the audience! Sometimes, audience members even act as impromptu puppeteers. How does *The Aluminum Show* manage all that? Study the list of puppetry concept below, and when you see the show, you can see how a variety of types of puppetry come together. You will also see how puppetry and choreography work together to become the language of *The Aluminum Show*.

**WHITE LIGHT THEATER:** In short, this is a type of puppet show in which the puppeteer remains visible. Rather than being a mistake or a flaw in the production, this is simply a style of theater. Either the puppets and performers interact or the puppets remain the center of attention, but the puppeteers and all of their workings are also part of the show. Performers in *The Aluminum Show* wear dark and neutral colored outfits during production, and interact with their puppets and puppet-like creations in many ways. At times, the performers' movements may take the form of a dance, and at other times things seem more natural and unplanned.

**COSTUME (BODY) PUPPETS:** Simply put, these are puppets that are meant to be worn. In some cases, the puppet is large and has multiple parts that are controlled by mechanical means. The Sesame Street character Big Bird is a complex example of a body puppet; a video monitor is actually built into the suit so that the puppeteer can operate. However, anything (even an aluminum tube) can become a body puppet if a performer or puppeteer climbs inside and manipulates it.

**FOUND PUPPETS:** No restrictions for size, shape, or design exist for these puppets. In fact, the only things that might limit the workings of a found puppet are theater size and budget. Found puppets

don't start life as puppets, rather, they are found objects that can be reclaimed as puppets. As long as the object can be manipulated, it can be a puppet. Kitchen tongs, cereal boxes, and plastic shopping bags can all be re-designed as found puppets, and performers and audience members in *The Aluminum Show* transform objects into puppets during the performance.

**MAROTTES:** These are rod puppets whose various segments or body parts are connected to long wooden sticks.

Typically, a group of two to three puppeteers work together to operate these rods. All performer movements must be carefully synchronized so that the puppet moves in a coordinated manner. Marotte puppets are particularly popular in white light theater.

**PARADE PUPPETS:** Supersize these. Parade puppets are large enough to be used in a parade setting (but a large theater or auditorium will work just fine). Due to their size, parade puppets must be controlled by multiple handlers. Parade puppets generally move as if they were walking and combine elements of other types of puppets. For instance, one puppeteer may be inside the costume part of a puppet, but that puppet may have arms and legs that are attached to rods and controlled by other puppeteers.





# Aluminum Meets Art

Strong, changeable, shiny, steely. All of these words describe aluminum, and yet there is one more that is not included in the list. That word is art, and it turns out that aluminum and other metals are the perfect artistic medium. Not only is metal art good for looking at, it is closely related to industrial art and the act of creating things for functional purposes. Sometimes, the question of what is art and what is machine becomes blurred. Want to know more? Consider the examples below.

## Industrial Meets Visual

Consider the work of New Zealand artist Ben Foster. As a child, Foster was fascinated by industrial and factory components like propellers and turbines. Today, he builds a number of large-scale aluminum pieces that represent the general shape and form of these pieces. Foster's work generally displays three major themes: 1) It is erected outdoors and the interplay between nature and man-made becomes part of the message of the piece. 2) His pieces appear different based on the angle from which they are viewed. Since polished aluminum is a reflective surface, Foster's pieces literally act as a mirror. 3) Foster's pieces may seem minimal at first, but closer inspection makes them much more. For instance, a piece called Shift, which features a loop 1700mm in diameter standing upright in a rural landscape, illustrates all three principles. It reminds the viewer to consider the mechanical and farm type equipment that is at work (even on a country farm), it reflects various



aspects out the outdoor landscape, and it forms a frame around a portion of the landscape and asks the viewer to consider that in separate context. Ben Foster's website (<http://www.benfoster.co.nz/index.html>) displays various images of his artwork, including Shift and other pieces from recent shows.

## Functional Art

The Beer Can House, which is located in Houston, Texas, is an example of art that serves a utilitarian purpose. This house is not a house made of beer cans, but a house covered in them. Its creator, John Milkovisch, was a retired upholsterer who tired of having to paint and maintain the exterior of his home. He also preferred not to waste things,



and throwing away beer cans seemed like a waste to him. Rather than heading for his local recycling facility, Milkovisch saved beer cans, sliced off the ends, and unrolled the cans to make

simple aluminum squares. He began nailing these like shingles all over the outside of his home. In keeping with his no-waste philosophy, Milkovisch created long decorative chains out of the tops and bottoms of cans and hung these from his roof. When asked about his own work, Milkovisch replied "Some people say this is sculpture but I didn't go to no expensive school to get these crazy notions." Milkovisch's project took 18 years to complete, and Ripley's Believe It or Not has estimated that 50,000 aluminum beer cans adorn the house (and keep it energy efficient). Despite Milkovisch's notion that the aluminum can siding was "just a good idea," Houston-area arts foundation The Orange Show saw it as much more. Following the deaths of Milkovisch and his wife, they purchased the house and have maintained it as an art piece. The website <http://www.beercanhouse.org/> shows pictures of the house and tells more about John Milkovisch and The Orange Show's mission.

## More than Manufacturing

Like Ilan Azriel, who saw the potential in a package of aluminum tubes and developed props, puppets, costumes, dances, and an engaging story from that one moment of inspiration, Ben Foster, John Milkovisch, and the artistic scientists who build robots are willing to bend the boundaries between art and industry, function and form, and man and machine. And all because of aluminum – it is art and so much more.

## Laws of the Language of Motion

and sentence formation, the physical concepts of forces and motion govern the movements of people and objects that speak together in *The Aluminum Show's* landscape.

At any advanced level, the study of forces and motion becomes complex and blends disciplines like math and science into complicated equations. Mechanics is a field devoted entirely to the area of motion and its

In the world of *The Aluminum Show*, motion is language. However, just as the rules of grammar and mechanics govern our speech

causes. While studying mechanics, a researcher would look at falling objects, spinning objects, and stationary objects and study the impact of things like weight and friction on the objects in question. However, one does not need to be a mechanics expert to study physics.

Once any object is in motion, it can be studied following another set of laws developed by visionary scientist Isaac Newton. Newton discovered that when solid objects move through space, they follow certain rules that let us predict how they will act. These three basic rules are known as Newton's Laws of Motion, and they are:

- An object in motion tends to remain in motion, and an object at rest tends to remain at rest.
- Force equals mass times acceleration.
- For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Think about the puppets and puppet-like objects used in *The Aluminum Show*. They are not alive and therefore cannot move on their own, but they are solid objects that can be moved through space by puppeteers. Therefore, Newton's laws of motion apply to them. Imagine a long aluminum tube lying on the floor. While on the floor, it experiences inertia, or the tendency of an object not to accelerate (or move) unless acted upon by an outside force. However, if a puppeteer picks up that tube and swings it through the air, it will move forward until an outside force acts upon it. Maybe the swinging tube will hit a wall, or maybe another performer will grab the end of it and lower it to the floor. Whether the wall or another person stops the movement of the tube, it will then remain at rest until acted upon again.

Suppose that a new scene begins onstage. Now, the aluminum tube has been replaced by a large metal



## [ THE GOLDEN RULE FOR GOOD THEATER BEHAVIOR ]

*Theater behavior falls somewhere in between that expected for a church and a movie theater.  
If you wouldn't do it in one of the above, don't do it here.*

The Golden Rule is a concept that was recognized as early as 1780 BCE, and simply states the idea that all human beings should treat each other how they would like to be treated. The concept of the golden rule has been adapted for many specific situations, and one of those situations is the performing arts arena. More detailed rules can be found at [www.pasa-online.org](http://www.pasa-online.org). Follow these and you will have the wonderful experience at the theater.

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## THE ALUMINUM SHOW

EVENING  
PERFORMANCE

WEDNESDAY  
APRIL 20  
7:30 PM

AT THE HEYMANN PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

STUDENT  
PERFORMANCE

THURSDAY  
APRIL 21  
10:30 AM

## Laws of the Language of Motion (continued)

box. This box is heavy, but it needs to be moved around the stage during the performance. Therefore, the performers must prepare to push it. However, one person pushing the box cannot create much force and acceleration (or speed) will be difficult to achieve. One person alone might simply stay in the middle of the stage, pushing on the heavy box with no visible effect. If many performers join together and push that box, its mass remains unchanged but the force acting on it increases. The box can then achieve acceleration and be moved to a new location.

What if the performers onstage were using a large marotte, a puppet with jointed body parts attached to sticks? Suppose something happened, and they dropped the puppet onto the stage floor. As soon as the puppet made contact with the stage floor, the floor would act upon it and it would stop moving. However, the floor is not the only thing in this equation applying force. The just as the floor applies force to the puppet, the puppet applies force to the floor. Floors and puppets react to forces differently, and one knows that the puppet could be broken or damaged. While a hard floor might simply absorb the force of the puppet, a heavier object (like the metal box) might act more strongly upon the floor and damages might result there as well. Therefore, there has been an action and a reaction, and Newton's third law has been observed.

**More examples of forces and motion can be observed every day in the real world. Consider this – what goes up must come down.**

You have probably heard this phrase before, and the simple explanation for it is gravity. Gravity is a force that acts on all objects in accordance to their weight and draws them back down to earth. Many have probably heard of the early scientist Galileo dropping weights from the Leaning Tower of Pisa (which looks like a tilting pile of blocks and leaned even in his day) to see if a one pound weight would fall faster than a ten pound weight. Some say that this is merely a myth and that Galileo never really performed the experiment, but Galileo did conclude in his writings that objects all fall at the same rate, no matter what their weight.

**Will you see the Leaning Tower of Pisa onstage at *The Aluminum Show*?** The answer is no. But you will see many examples of forces and motion. In fact, every concept that is described here will somehow be demonstrated. Watch carefully, and you will see the effects of gravity, friction, and inertia upon aluminum.

## [ PERFORMANCE TERMINOLOGY 101 ]

### You'll want to be able to talk the talk... performance talk, that is.

The terms below are used by professionals to describe some of the types of movement, the styles of music and performance, and the theatrical elements you will see during *The Aluminum Show's* performance. Being familiar with these will allow you to accurately describe and evaluate what you see on the stage.

#### BODILY MOTIONS

**Abduction:** Abduction of a joint moves a bone away from the midline of the body.

**Adduction:** Adduction of a joint moves a bone toward the midline of the body.

**Flexion:** Flexion of a joint is to bend it or decrease the angle between the bones of the joint.

**Extension:** Extension of a joint is generally to straighten it.

**Hyperextension:** Hyperextension is extreme extension of a joint or the spine.

**Lateral:** Movement away from the median plane or longitudinal center of the body.

**Latéral:** Movement away from the median plane or longitudinal center of the body.

**Rotation:** Movement around a central axis.

**Plié:** Bent or bending; coordinated flexion at the hip and knee joints and dorsiflexion at the ankle joint.

#### MUSICAL AND PERFORMANCE STYLE

**Accent:** In music, accent refers to a stress or an emphasis on a musical event. Accents can be created by changes in loudness, by extreme pitches and by rhythmic placement.

**Meter:** Sets of beats grouped together according to a consistent accent pattern.

**Musicality:** 1. The ability of a dancer to move responsibly to music. 2. Independent of music, the ability of a dancer to move with nuanced coherency where all movement materials are given specific physical and dynamic expression in and of themselves and in relationship to each other.

**Phrasing:** The use of weight, space flow and time to create a sequence of movement in time.

**Presence:** The ability to be

aware and fully invested in the present moment.

**Rhythm:** A sequence of varied accents and durations in either motion or sound.

#### THEATRICAL ELEMENTS

**Lighting:** Stage lights work with sets, costumes, props, and performers to create pictures or to tell stories. In some cases, shadows are deliberately created for visual effect. A few basic lighting functions are:

- Bump up: Quick increase in light
- Dim down: Sudden decrease in light
- Kill: lights switched off
- Wash-out: low-level lighting that appears to drain color

**Costumes:** Clothing, make-up, hairstyles, etc. worn by the performers to make them appear to be the people or things they are taking the role of for the performance.

**Props:** Although props can refer to furniture and hand-held objects used on the stage, in a performance like *The Aluminum Show* props are anything the performers use to "become" something else. In many cases, the props and the costumes work together and cannot be distinguished from one another.