

REGENT'S PARK
OPEN
AIR THEATRE



101 DALMATIANS

PUPPETRY LEARNING PACK

ABOUT THE SHOW

101 Dalmatians premiered at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre on 12th July 2022, running until 28th August.

Watch the trailer [here](#)

CREATIVE TEAM

Shanaé Chisholm

Josie Daxter

Jill Green CDG

Tash Holway

Barbara Houseman

Howard Hudson

Maia Kirkman-Richards

Nick Lidster for Autograph

Katrina Lindsay

Ingrid Mackinnon

Tarek Merchant

Verity Naughton and

Nick Hockday for Verity Naughton Casting

Toby Olié

Colin Richmond

Timothy Sheader

Liam Steel

Sarah Travis

Ella Wahlström

Nic Wass

Casting Assistant

Associate Director

Casting Director

Associate Choreographer

Voice and Text and Season Associate Director

Lighting Designer

Assistant Puppet Director

Sound Designer

Costume Designer

Season Associate Intimacy Support

Musical Director

Children's Casting Directors

Puppetry Designer and Director

Set Designer

Director

Choreographer and Movement Director

Musical Supervisor and Orchestrator

Sound Designer (Content)

Creative Associate

Andy Beardmore

Daisy Beattie

Lisa Buckley & Mary Halliday

Alex Constantin

Georgia Dacey

Charlotte Dukes

Chris Easton

Emily Gaskin

Poppy Hall

Carole Hancock

Sarah Holmes

Natalie Jackson

Surenee Somchit

Jessica Thanki

Production Manager

Puppet Supervisor

Prop Supervisors

Company Manager

Puppet Assistant Stage Manager

Assistant Stage Manager

Assistant Production Manager

Assistant Stage Manager

Co-Costume Supervisor

Wigs, Hair and Make Up Supervisor

Costume Supervisor

Assistant Costume Supervisor

Deputy Stage Manager

Stage Manager

CAST

Jamil Abbasi	Ensemble
Stuart Angell	Captain Head
George Bukhari	Jasper
Danny Collins	Pongo Voice
Sonya Cullingford	Ensemble
Jade Davies	Swing
Karen Fishwick	Danielle
Kate Fleetwood	Cruella De Vil
Joseph Fletcher	Ensemble
Taofique Folarin	Swing
Courtney George	Ensemble
Tash Holway	Swing/Dance Captain
Samantha Hull	Ensemble
CJ Johnson	Ensemble
Emma Lucia	Perdi Voice
Kody Mortimer	Ensemble
Simon Oskarsson	Swing/Assistant Dance Captain
Yana Penrose	Perdi Head
Tom Peters	Captain Voice
Eric Stroud	Dominic
Biancha Szynal	Ensemble
Ben Thompson	Pongo Head
Jonny Weldon	Casper
Grace Wylde	Tabby Ensemble

YOUNG COMPANY

Rebecca Bennett, Harmony Cover-Allicock, Charlie Man Evans	Button
Darcey Fryer-Bovill, Rhiya Rasalingam, Paul Sarte	Lucky
Oscar Cox, Charlie McGonagle, Albie Salter	Patch
George Clarke, Hadlee Snow, Howard Webb	Spud

SYNOPSIS

The children's novel 101 Dalmatians was written by Dodie Smith and published in 1956. It was famously made into an animated film by Disney in 1961, and later became a live action movie in 1996.

This new stage musical adaptation is set in London in the present day.

Act 1 begins in Regent's Park. A Dalmatian called Perdi is walking with her owner Dominic, they meet another Dalmatian called Pongo and his owner Danielle. Both couples fall in love.

Months later, Dominic and Danielle move into their first flat together, much to the approval of Pongo and Perdi. Despite his happiness, Dominic is aware that his work as an artist does not bring in much money, and he constantly worries about providing for himself and Danielle. Perdi tells Pongo that she is expecting puppies, but their owners have no idea what is causing their excitement!

Cruella De Vil arrives at the flat. She is an influencer and owner of the De Vil lifestyle brand. Danielle, Dominic, Pongo and Perdi all notice that she has a very distinctive, peppery smell about her. Cruella asks to borrow Pongo and Perdi for a photoshoot, and it is Cruella who notices that Perdi is expecting puppies.

At the photoshoot, Captain (a stray dog) tries to warn Perdi and Pongo that they are in danger. Cruella threatens Pongo and Perdi when they won't sit still, so Perdi bites her in self defence. Cruella then attacks the dogs with a stick. Captain helps Perdi and Pongo escape.

Captain introduces the pair to a group of stray dogs who help Perdi and Pongo find their way home via the Twilight Barking: a network of communication between dogs to send messages when help is needed. Perdi and Pongo are reunited with their owners.



Cruella realises that her attack on the dogs has been videoed and has gone viral. Despite criticisms from the media and losing her brand endorsements, Cruella's new controversial status earns her an invitation to the Black and White Ball: the most exclusive event in town. Cruella decides that to get the media's attention, and as payback for what Pongo and Perdi did to her, she will make a coat from their puppies' skins to wear to the ball.



Meanwhile, Perdi has given birth to a litter of 15 puppies which overwhelms Dominic and Danielle. Cruella arrives uninvited whilst Danielle walks Pongo and Perdi. Cruella tells Dominic how much each puppy would be worth if sold and offers him £15,000 – a sum that would solve all their financial worries. Dominic doesn't accept so Cruella instructs her nephews Jasper and Casper to steal the puppies instead.

Pretending to be plumbers, the two men gain access to Dominic and Danielle's flat and attempt to steal the puppies, but are hesitant when they realise that Cruella will kill the puppies rather than looking after them. The threat of their scary auntie overpowers their morals and they take the puppies from the house.

Act Two begins with the local community of dog owners desperately looking for their missing Dalmatians: it seems Cruella needs even more puppies for her coat.

Meanwhile Jasper and Casper are at Hell Hall, an old animal testing laboratory where nearly 100 puppies are being kept in electrified cages. As they leave, Patch, Lucky, Spud and Button (four of Perdi's puppies) escape their cage. Tabby, a cat, enters and the puppies try to persuade her to help them. Tabby overcomes her prejudice against dogs and tells them about the Twilight Barking. Back at home, Perdi and Pongo realise that the 'plumbers' who stole their puppies smelt of pepper - suspiciously like Cruella De Vil. They sneak out of the flat unseen by Dominic and Danielle to ask Captain for help.

On the roof of Hell Hall, Tabby encourages the puppies to bark for help. The puppies are heard by Farm Dogs, Faraway Dogs and Further Away Dogs who are all part of the Twilight Barking. The message reaches Captain who relays the message to Pongo and Perdi. They immediately set off to rescue their puppies. Jasper and Casper admit to Cruella that they have lost four of the puppies. She is furious and sets out in her car with her nephews to track down the runaway Dalmatians.

Out in the dark night, Tabby guides the puppies past many dangers, but they are suddenly attacked by a fox. Perdi and Pongo arrive just in time to defeat the fox and are reunited with the puppies. As Cruella's car is heard approaching, the Dalmatians run back to Hell Hall to free the rest of their family. Tabby and some fellow cats stall Cruella's car and attack her, and Cruella starts having an allergic reaction to the cats. In an effort to provide an anti-histamine, Jasper gives Cruella a mysterious potion that they took from Hell Hall. Once she drinks it, Cruella gets a powerful sense of smell - just like a dog. She starts sniffing the air and sets off in the direction of Hell Hall, tracking the Dalmatians on their rescue mission.

On their way back to Hell Hall with the escaped puppies, Perdi and Pongo notice Button lying in the snow. She is dangerously near death but revives when her family gather around her for warmth. The dogs vow to free every single puppy from Hell Hall, ensuring no-one is left behind.

Cruella arrives at Hell Hall, just as Pongo and Perdi are trying to open the cages. She throws both Perdi and Pongo against the electric bars and moves towards Lucky, Patch Spud and Button to start skinning them. Spud urinates from fear, which short circuits the electric cages. Jasper and Casper follow their kind hearts and rebel against their auntie by opening all of the cage doors and releasing the 95 trapped puppies onto Cruella. Led by Perdi and Pongo, the Dalmatians back Cruella into a cage and Casper re-activates the electric bars, trapping her there. Jasper has live-streamed the whole event. Cruella's social media is de-activated and her fame is lost.

Back in their flat, Dominic and Danielle are miserable without their dogs. Suddenly Perdi and Pongo burst through the door, along with their litter and the other liberated puppies. Dominic and Danielle agree to track down the owners of the other puppies and adopt those who need a home.

MEET THE PUPPETS



PONGO AND PERDI

Two adult Dalmatians, each operated by two puppeteers. The hind leg puppeteers also sing and speak for their dog

THE PUPPIES

A range of techniques are used to portray the puppies. They start out as beanbag newborns and then grow into more mobile, larger puppy puppets. In act two, four of the puppies are played by child actors who also operate puppet versions of their characters.



CAPTAIN

A Neapolitan Mastiff, operated by three performers. His hind leg puppeteer also provides the characters speaking and singing voice.

TABBY AND THE CATS

Each cat puppet is operated by one puppeteer who then joins with an actor as the puppet becomes their 'tail' so the feline character can speak and sing.



FOX

Three puppeteers operate separate body parts – the head, the front legs, and the tail - but their movements are coordinated to create one unified animal.

MAKING THE PUPPETS

See behind the scenes at Toby Olié's workshop [here](#)

CREATING A CONCEPT

There were two main challenges Toby faced when starting work on *101 Dalmatians*. The first was how to make fully articulate dog puppets that feel like living, breathing animals to the audience. The second was how the dog characters would speak and sing without it detracting from their 'real' animal behaviour.

There are always aesthetic decisions to make when designing a new puppet, but the priority is the movement of the puppet, as its actions and gestures are what is needed for the audience to interpret it. Toby also strives to create puppetry where the puppeteers don't overcrowd or distract from the puppet.

Here are some initial sketches Toby did after reading the script for the first time in September 2018.



Notice how the front of the dog is created by the physical structure of the puppet but the dog's back legs are created by the legs of one of the puppeteers, who also wears a tail. This idea not only reduces the number of puppeteers (sometimes four legged animals have three puppeteers: one on the head and another on each pair of legs) but also gives the dogs a greater sense of naturalistic movement by them having 'real' back legs.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Very often in the early stages of developing a puppet it is helpful to try out ideas in 3D, as practical experimenting allows you to see how certain materials or styles of joint will move or react. Early prototype Dalmatians were created during research and development workshops which not only informed the design of the puppets but also their physicality and movements.



Images from 2019 development workshop

Ideas for how the dogs would speak were also workshopped using the prototypes. At first the puppeteer operating the dog's head spoke the character's text and moved the head in synchronicity to suggest it was talking - but this felt too anthropomorphic. As a result the frequency of movement of the puppet's head was reduced. This way the spoken text felt more like a voice-over or inner monologue. While this felt like an exciting development, it still made the dog's communication very head-based, like a human. Keeping a sense of how an animal's thoughts and emotions are shown in their body language felt essential, so the idea of the back leg puppeteer speaking the text was explored. When the dog noticed something or reacted to another character, the back leg puppeteer stood up and vocalised the dog's thoughts - allowing the rest of the puppet to still behave like a naturalistic animal.

The effect is similar to that of a thought bubble in a cartoon. During moments of heightened emotion the audience are given a momentary insight into the dog's thoughts by the puppeteer speaking – in the same way that an actor might sing a song to express their emotion in a traditional musical.

USING YOUR IMAGINATION

Toby's design style often reflects the notion of 'less is more'. By showing the essential elements of a puppet it encourages the audience to engage their imaginations and complete the form of a character themselves. This simplest example of this is the necks of the Pongo and Perdi puppets, which are discs threaded together with gaps in between to allow for movement. When the puppet is moving, though, the audience's imaginations fill in those gaps to create a solid neck for the dog.



The idea of the audience 'filling in the gaps' is particularly evident in the design of the puppy puppets. Throughout the show the puppies are most often seen in a huge mass or group, either running around Dominic and Danielle's flat or stuffed into a cage in Hell Hall. By having multiple heads, tails and paws that are held (and worn!) in relation to each other by the ensemble, the audience are encouraged to imagine the bodies of the puppies in between the puppeteered elements. This gives the impression of a much bigger group of dogs as the ensemble move around and weave between each other.



The aesthetic finish of a puppet is another area in which the audience is encouraged to use their imaginations: trying to replicate real fur, hair or feathers on a puppet can often result in it looking fake and uninspiring.

Toby strives to use textures that evoke a sense of the animal's skin or fur without being too literal, as the audience can then apply their own idea of what it feels like. A good example of this is Captain, the head of the strays who is a Neapolitan Mastiff.



This breed of dog has very wrinkled skin and short hair, so a soft, velvet-looking fabric was used to cover him. It not only created satisfyingly chunky wrinkles, but also catches the light outdoors and jiggles well when he shakes his head and ears.

You can see in the artwork above that when Toby creates his final concept designs after his initial sketchbook ideas, he uses a collage form. This gives the design more depth and creates a greater sense of the texture and form of the finished puppet.

LINKING WITH SET AND COSTUME DESIGN

When developing a show with central characters played by puppets it is important that the puppetry feels integrated into the visual style of the production. Very often the design of set, costume and the physical staging develop in response to the language of the elements being puppeteered i.e. the ensemble is responsible for the storytelling, and focus the audience's attention by interacting with the set and characters in order to take us to various settings.



Colin Richmond's set design features eight large, moveable letters which are manipulated and puppeteered by the ensemble to show changes of location. Some of the letters also have scenic details on the reverse detail, such as wallpaper that suggests Dominic and Danielle's flat. By interacting with the set in this way, the ensemble encourages the audience to invest further in the storytelling style of the production. This in turn allows for other staging challenges to be puppeteered and animated by the ensemble. This is evident with Cruella De Vil's car or her reaction to drinking the antihistamine, for example. Because the audience are used to seeing the ensemble come and go, these staging techniques are in keeping with the style of the show.



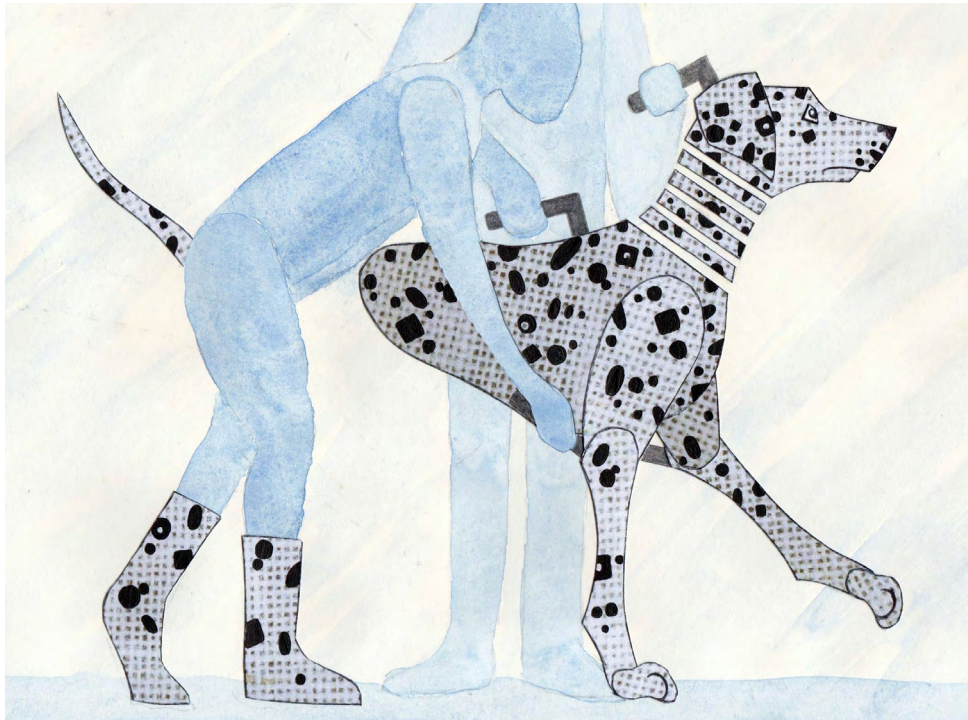
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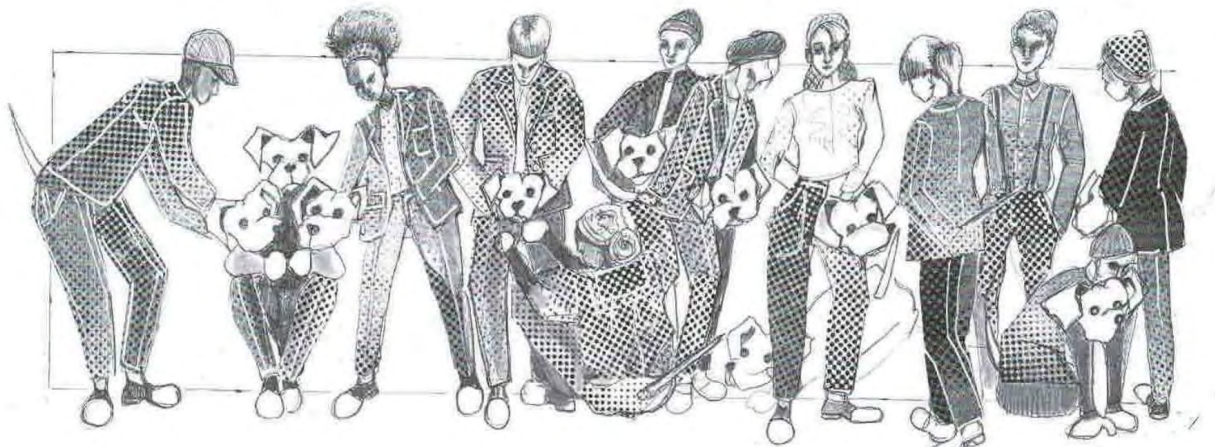
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It was the use of typography and fonts in the set was what inspired Toby to use a more geometric pattern for the spots on the Dalmatian puppets. In fact, the pattern on the Dalmatian puppets is actually a number of different noughts and zeros from computer fonts but with the central holes filled in. This makes the Dalmatians feel visually associated with the world around them and adds to their stylised, imaginative form.



Costume design also plays a huge part in enabling the audience to focus on the puppets and not be distracted by their puppeteers. For *101 Dalmatians*, costume designer Katrina Lindsay had the challenge of finding a look for the ensemble which enabled them to feel a part of the spotty, patterned aesthetic of the set – whilst avoiding clashes with the design of the puppies. The solution was the palette of inverted monochrome polka dots (i.e. white dots on a black background). The spotty pattern still links with the puppy puppet elements, but also provides a darker canvas against which the whiter Dalmatian elements can stand out.



The costumes for the performers who both puppeteer and voice the dog characters have to exist in both modes of operation. When in naturalistic 'dog mode' their trousers are spotted to match the front legs of their puppet, while their top half is more muted and darker so they don't 'interrupt' the outline of the dog when leaning forward to puppeteer. When the performer stands up to talk in 'thought bubble mode' they reveal a playful hit of spots on their front and pale streaks in their hair to represent them as the spirit or essence of the dog's personality.



Costume Sketches by Katrina Lindsay

PUPPET CONSTRUCTION

The puppets were made to replicate and suggest the realistic movements of dogs whilst also being lightweight and comfortable enough to operate by the puppeteers. Their construction also ensures that they are strong and durable enough to last the show's entire run.

Here's the construction process for Pongo and Perdi



STEP ONE: A sculpt of the dog's head and body is made in clay. These clay shapes are then covered in layers of masking tape from which puppet makers can draw and cut the pattern pieces to recreate the sculptures in sheet foam. Note the research photographs in the background which guide the process



STEP TWO: These pattern pieces are then enlarged using a photocopier and laid out onto a sheet of plastazote. Once drawn around, the pieces are cut out and reassembled into the original sculpt's shape using contact adhesive along their edges. Using a pattern like this means that the puppet can be reproduced many times, which for a production like *101 Dalmatians* is essential!

PUPPET CONSTRUCTION



STEP THREE: Once the puppet's outer form is assembled, an internal skeleton is cut from plywood. This gives the puppet strength and is the core to which all of the joints and control rods are attached. Extra details, such as mechanisms that create movement like jaw opening or ear lifts, are also assembled and installed onto the internal plywood form. A number of joints in the wooden skeleton - including the dog's shoulders and ankles - are threaded with elastic bungee cord. This gives them extra flex to create more organic movements.



STEP FOUR: The puppets are then covered in a white, woven fabric called hessian. Hessian's open-weave texture gives the audience the impression of the soft texture of the dogs' fur and prevents creating a 'flat' surface on the puppet. Once the dog is entirely covered the spots are then drawn on using templates to ensure each spot's shape is consistent. However, the positioning of the spots on the dog looks random, creating an individual appearance for each Dalmatian.



STEP FIVE: Each of the spots is then hand painted with black acrylic paint, and once they are dry all of the outer hessian is covered in a layer of waterproof PVA glue. This is particularly important as Regent's Park is an open air theatre so the puppets have to withstand all kinds of weather. Finally other details such as their eyes, nose and collars are added. The dogs have very shiny eyes made from resin which creates depth and gives them a sense of movement when the audience sees the light reflecting on them.

Neck is constructed of segments threaded with elastic bungee cord and beads to create a multi-directional range of movement.

Clip attaches the hind of the dog to the puppeteer's waist, ensure they stay in correct alignment when moving onstage.



Ear mechanism raises both ears: this can create both a sense of tension and alert awareness in the dog's head.

Jaw mechanism allows the mouth to open, allowing the puppeteers to show the dogs' breath, barking and biting!

Tail contains a spring at the base, this allows it to move dynamically in response to the puppeteer's movement

Ankle joint is free moving but held in tension with elastic bungee so it can flex when the dog presses into it, and straighten out when the foot is lifted.

BRINGING THE PUPPETS TO LIFE

When an actor is in rehearsals, their job is to play their character - thinking about what their objective is in each scene and what actions they're playing with every line. When a puppet is in rehearsals it has another job to do before it can start to think about its character or objectives - it has to be alive!



Working as a puppeteer is a juggling act which requires puppeteers to balance the techniques of how the puppet can constantly show signs of 'real' life, while also communicating the thoughts and intentions that show its character. There are three very fundamental techniques that a puppeteer uses to show that a puppet is alive...

BREATH: something we take for granted as human beings, but a puppet needs its puppeteers to show and vocalise its breath. Aside from it being the primary way of showing a puppet is alive, changing the rhythm and intensity of breath allows the puppeteers to show a change in the puppet's emotional state.

FOCUS: where a puppet is looking tells us what it's interested in or what character has its attention. A clear and concise eye-line allows the audience to focus on the puppet's head and read its intentions with every small shift or movement by the puppeteer on the head.

WEIGHT: while a puppet has its own weight, they are often not as heavy as the animal or human they represent. It's the job of the puppeteers to give the puppet a realistic weight, and show its muscles working against gravity - for example, a preparatory sink into its legs in preparation before it jumps.

By being diligent with the above principles, the puppeteers are constantly encouraging the audience to enter into a shared experience with them: a game in which the audience know the puppets aren't real animals, but are willing to suspend their disbelief and fully commit to the game of imagination.

GIVING AND TAKING FOCUS

In this production, the puppeteers need to be particularly skilled in communicating both the action of the dogs, and the dialogue between the animals which cannot be heard by the human characters onstage. Particular attention was paid in rehearsals to ensuring the transition between the puppets in naturalistic 'dog mode', and when the hind leg puppeteers are delivering dialogue in 'thought bubble mode'.

The principle of focus mentioned previously is not only relevant to the puppet, but also the puppeteers: it's the puppeteer's focus that aids the audience's understanding of the dogs' transition between their two modes of communicating. Traditionally puppeteers make themselves 'invisible' to the audience by looking (and therefore giving focus) to their puppet and not themselves. In *101 Dalmatians*, though, the hind leg puppeteer changes their focus to both take and pass the audience's attention between themselves and the puppet.

When they are in 'dog mode' the back leg puppeteer is more neutral and looks at their puppet to pass the audience's focus onto the puppet, but when they stand up to talk as the dog's 'thought bubble' they bring their focus up and away from the puppet, either looking at other characters on stage or out to the audience when singing. This way the audience then focuses on them as a character connected to their puppet.

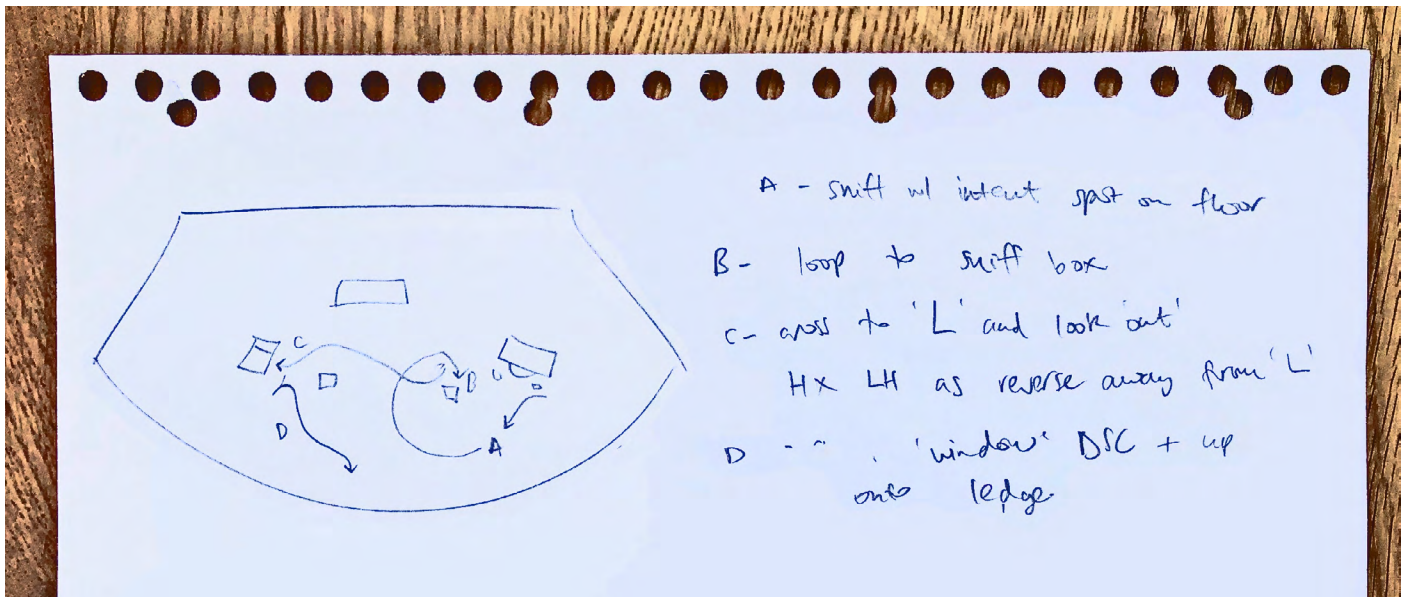


During the opening scenes of the show, the focus-shifting style of the puppetry used in *101 Dalmatians* is introduced when Pongo and Perdi first meet and discuss their two owners. It is important that the audience understand and quickly become familiar with the different modes of the dog's communication so they can completely engage with the puppets as characters and start investing in the story.

DIRECTING PUPPETS

Although the dogs in *101 Dalmatians* do speak and sing, the most important language for the puppets remains their movement. The puppets need a physical story in every scene and be able to show rather than tell the emotional journey through the story. As Toby says, "the puppets need to affect the narrative and be affected by it."

Initially Toby and the performers did a lot of research to inform the puppets' movements. This included watching a lot of video content. By looking closely at the physics and basic biology of a dog's movements the team were able to see how dogs' bodies show different emotions with changes in posture or gestures. The movement of the puppets needs to be rooted in reality, and then decisions can be made to heighten (or even anthropomorphise) the movements during key moments. Every sniff, every footstep, every jump, every movement of the tail, head or paw must be devised and then conveyed by the puppeteer.



Pongo puppeteer Ben Thompson's rehearsal script

As the language of the dog's movements and gestures was created, Toby and the puppeteers considered the script that they'd been given and explored the physical story beats the puppets have alongside the human characters' text and blocking in the scenes. Throughout rehearsal, a 'visual script' was created by Toby and the puppeteers, outlining not only decisions made about their blocking, but also where specific movements or gestures occur so that the spoken text and physical story beats work in parallel without overlapping. That way the audience can experience both the human and dog characters' stories simultaneously.

LEARN MORE

Here are some other shows that used puppets to bring their animal characters to life:

The Lion King (West End/Disney Theatrical)

His Dark Materials (National Theatre)

War Horse (National Theatre)

Running Wild (Chichester Festival Theatre/Regent's Park)

The Magician's Elephant (RSC)

Life of Pi (Sheffield Crucible/West End)

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (UK tour/West End)

Animal Farm (UK tour)

Check out the following links for more puppetry inspiration:

<https://www.tobyolie.com/>

<https://www.gyreandgimble.com>

<https://www.littleangeltheatre.com>

<https://nickbarnespuppets.co.uk/>

<http://www.curiouspuppetry.com>

CREDITS

This pack has been created by **Puppetry in Motion** in collaboration with Regent's Park Open Air Theatre.

Puppetry in Motion creates online resources to inspire and nurture a passion for puppetry, whether you're at school, in a rehearsal room or at home.

Combining Toby Olié's experience as a puppetry designer/director and Susie Ferguson's work as a Drama teacher and practitioner, **Puppetry In Motion** shines a spotlight on professional productions past & present and provides the tools to encourage the exploration of puppetry in its many forms.

Production Photography by Mark Senior