

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

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'Raven & the Box of Daylight' is rich with Makah tribal lore

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By **DOREE ARMSTRONG**

SPECIAL TO THE POST-INTELLIGENCER

As winter sets in and it seems as if it's dark most of the time, the story of "Raven & the Box of Daylight" seems especially appropriate. Produced by Carter Family Marionettes at the Northwest Puppet Center, in collaboration with Nuu-chah-nulth artist George David, "Raven" tells the story of a greedy Native American chief who steals the sun and keeps it inside a box.

"As they say in the story, life was very difficult to do your chores and get through life without the sun," explains co-director Chris Carter.

Raven, the notable trickster of Native American lore, finds a way to steal back the sun and put it into the sky for everyone. He breaks off a chunk that becomes the moon, and smaller bits that he throws upwards to become stars.

Carter says she and husband and co-director Stephen had to come up with special effects to depict the sun glowing in the box, and stars being thrown into the sky.

"One of the challenges was trying to make this show magical. It took place in the old times, when there was a lot of magic in the world," Carter says. "I can't give away my secrets, but I can tell you we used a lot of flashlights and a lot of balloons and made a lot of trips to the magic store."

The Carters first produced the show in 1999, but made quite a few changes for this new version. Scenes were cut or added, some were rearranged, and the soundtrack was redone.

"We don't just slavishly reproduce the show. We say, 'Now, how can we make this show better?'"

The musical score was created by the Hottowe and Greene families of Neah Bay, who are well-known for keeping alive the culture of the Makah Tribe. Both families also collaborated with the Carters on the internationally acclaimed, award-winning "Q'we-ti - Tales of the Makah Tribe."

The music includes drumming, singing and rattles. Some of the music is traditional, while some was created especially for this show, including sound effects such as when the Chief does his magic spell to bring the sun out of its box.

Artist David and Stephen Carter carved the puppets and masks, with David carving the heads of all the major characters, as well as painting them, plus the large sun and raven masks.

"Each one is a work of art," Chris Carter says.

David's work can be seen at the University of Washington's Burke Museum, as well as many Native American

COMING UP
RAVEN & THE BOX OF
DAYLIGHT

WHEN: Through Nov. 20

WHERE: Northwest Puppet
Center, 9123 15th Ave. N.E.,
206-523-2579;
www.nwpuppet.org

TICKETS: \$7.50 children 1-16,
\$8 seniors 65+, \$9.50 adults

art galleries. He also carved a totem pole in honor of his parents. It now stands at Tillicum Village on Blake Island.

This story has been told for generations by many tribes along the Northwest Coast. The Carters read and listened to many different versions before coming up with their own story line.

David and the Carters spent a month camping out on Lopez Island, singing songs, telling stories and carving the puppets.

"We were able to hear and see ravens every day as inspiration for the show. I feel that experience really brought us closer to the story," Chris Carter says. "This show is a really good introduction to the cultures of the Northwest Coast, because it has a bentwood box, it has cedar, button blankets, it has a couple masks in it and dancing."

The narration was recorded by John Hottowe, a Makah elder who has since passed away. "In some ways it makes it stronger, his voice telling it to new bunches of kids," she says. "Even though he's gone, he's still telling his stories."

"Raven" lasts just under an hour and is recommended for ages 4 and up. While younger children are always welcome, they could be frightened by some of the big masks.

Doree Armstrong is a Seattle-based free-lance writer. She can be reached at doreearmstrong@yahoo.com.

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