



as Part of the La MaMa Puppet Series

presents

# The Tall Keyaki Tree

*Poetic fantasy with dance, live music and shadow puppetry*



Created by  
Watoku Ueno

The Downstairs  
66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003  
September 30 - October 3, 2021

# **The Tall Keyaki (Zelkova) Tree**

**Created and Directed by  
Watoku Ueno**

**Music concept by  
Watoku Ueno and Shu Odamura  
Composed by Shu Odamura  
Performed by  
Shu Odamura and Ryoju Fukushima**

**Performers/Puppeteers:**

**Sophie Gorai  
Shigeko Saga  
Shabbi Sharifi  
Mariko Shibta**

**Voice: Chris Ignacio**

**Set, Lights, and Puppets Designed by  
Watoku Ueno**

**Costume Design by Luba Kierkosz  
Stage Manager: Jacob Ettkin**

**\*The show runs 50 minutes, no intermission\***

*The Tall Keyaki Tree* is a shadow puppet fantasy with live music, inspired by the novel *Five-Storied Pagoda* written by Koda Rohan (1867–1947). A peculiar carpenter named Jubei undertakes the profound task of building a five-storied pagoda using the wood from the Keyaki (Zelkova) tree. Having grown up with the tree, the carpenter's strong spiritual bond with the Keyaki powers the creation of an exceptional pagoda.

Many five storied pagodas have been built in Japan since the Nara period, which is about 1500 years ago. But, none of them fell. Some were burnt or destroyed but never fell down. Besides storms and typhoons, they have to survive earthquakes that happen often there. Not connecting the center pole to the other structure is one of the big innovations. It helps to absorb an impact from the wind or shaking and to keep balance.

**WATOKU UENO (Director)** studied painting in Tokyo, Japan, later working as a set designer in NYC. The last 16 years he has been exploring shadow puppets since he created one for his daughter Sumire's 4th birthday in 2005. He said, "It started in such a wholesome, joyful way but with every new project I went deeper and deeper into the puppet world and grapple to get out of it now. It's such a curious world. It's like between the lines of poetry." His topics are often about trees, also based on Japanese novels and history. His shadow puppet show credits include: The Boy Who Drew Cats, Music In The Wood, Brother Ken, Secret, Gorsch The Cellist, The Curious Case Of The Sidewalk Tree, and On The Waves. Most recently he made the video production A Hillock based on Kenji Miyazawa's story The Earthgod and The Fox. [www.watokuueno.com](http://www.watokuueno.com)

**SHU ODAMURA (Composer / Musician)** Born and raised in Kyoto, Japan, Shu Odamura is a guitarist and composer based in New York City. During his years at Berklee College of Music, he started focusing on fingerstyle technique on nylon string guitar and developed what became his signature voice. He released his debut album "Cloud Illusions" in 2015. Currently, he remains active in the New York Jazz and contemporary music scene and co-leads the chamber Jazz group "Jazz Triangle 65-77," which released their second album in 2021. [www.shuodamura.com](http://www.shuodamura.com)

**RYOJU FUKUSHIRO (Musician)** is a Jazz Saxophonist from Kyoto, Japan. He graduated from Aaron Copland School of Music in Queens, and won third prize in the Winds and Brass category in the George Gershwin International Music Competition 2017 in New York. Ryoju has been performing at a wide variety of music venues and restaurants in New York City.

**SOPHIE GORAI (Puppeteer / Keyaki Tree Spirit)** is a Japanese-Filipina-American actor and artist. She is a graduate of NYU Tisch, and has trained with the Atlantic Acting School, Experimental Theatre Wing, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and SITI Company. She is the co-founder of the collective YES Theater, which uses sustainable practices to create performances highlighting socio-political issues such as climate justice. Upcoming: Real Actors Lab's Original Project Workshop.

**CHRIS IGNACIO (Jubei's voice)** is a Filipino-American Theater artist, currently pursuing an MFA in Theater/Interdisciplinary Digital Media from ASU's Herberger Institute of Design and the Arts. He has worked with Watoku on several past shows, and considers him to be a huge influence in his work. He is so thankful for all he has learned, and so glad to be a part of this piece in a new way!

**SHIGEKO SAGA (Narration / Father / Jushoku Sama)** has been a part of La Mama and Ellen Stewart's national and international theatrical productions and tours since 1986. She has also been a member of Yara Arts Group since 1993, as well as a Senior Artist at Pan Asian Repertory Theatre. She is grateful to make her debut with Watoku Ueno's Shadow Puppets! <http://www.shigekosuga.com>

**SHABBI SHARIFI (Puppeteer)** is an Iranian American theatre artist based out of Brooklyn. She graduated from LIU Post and since then has toured and has been appearing in shows in the Manhattan area. She is a children's theatre enthusiast and has done a lot of theatrical work for grade school students. She's currently training at Matthew Corozine Studio and has been working on preparing the launch of her theatre company which is scheduled to happen later this year.

**MARIKO SHIBATA (Puppeteer / Jubei)** has been performing for over three decades with many companies nationally and internationally. She currently teaches Yoga, Pilates, and is a mom of three kids. She enjoys creating, dancing, moving, feeling, and performing. Huge thanks to Watoku and his family, also to my family for their support.

**LUBA KIERKOSZ (Costumes)** is a full time librarian and part time costume designer. She has always believed in the magic of storytelling.

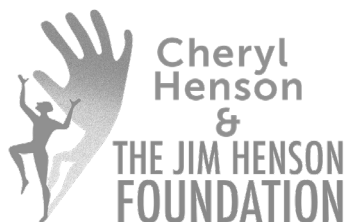
**JACOB ETTKIN they/them (Stage Manager)** is a fat, queer, non-binary theatermaker and arts administrator. A recent graduate of Vassar College, they center queer and underrepresented artists and stories in their work. Previous artistic and admin credits include New York Stage and Film/Powerhouse, The Hangar Theatre, and Poughkeepsie Youth Theatre. They're also a pretty solid cook and baker.

This event was made possible with support from:

### **The Jim Henson Foundation**

Supporting excellence in contemporary American puppet theater. Since 1982 The Jim Henson Foundation has awarded over 1000 grants for the development and presentation of new works of live contemporary American puppet theater. [www.hensonfoundation.org](http://www.hensonfoundation.org)

This project received a process residency at the Jim Henson Carriage House as part of the Puppetry at the Carriage House program.



### **Yara Arts Group**

A resident company at La MaMa established in 1990, was co-founded by Watoku Ueno, who has been the group's resident designer since its foundation. Yara has created almost forty original theatre pieces. Yara's multicultural theatre pieces premiered at La MaMa and have also performed in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Bishkek, Ulaanbaatar, and Ulan Ude. [www.yaraartsgroup.net](http://www.yaraartsgroup.net)

**The 9th La MaMa Puppet Festival Fall 2021** has been made possible with public support by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and New York State Council on the Arts, and support from the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Jane Henson Foundation, the Jim Henson Foundation, Puppet Slam Network, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Shubert Foundation. Additional support from Cheryl Henson is gratefully acknowledged.



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## RESTORE A BUILDING REMAKE A WORLD



*Rendering: 74 East 4th St.*

La MaMa's historic, landmark building at 74 East 4th Street is undergoing an urgently needed complete renovation and restoration to preserve the historic façade, create building-wide ADA accessibility, and provide much needed performance, exhibition and community space for decades to come.

La MaMa, founded by Ellen Stewart in 1961, has been on east 4th Street since 1967. La MaMa embraces every person in its community and is legendary as the place where new artists of all nations, cultures, races, and identities are given opportunities. It is the place where art begins.

To learn more about the renovation, or to make a donation please visit [www.lamama.org/remakeaworld](http://www.lamama.org/remakeaworld)

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September 29 - October 4, 2021  
Ellen Stewart Theatre

### **The Tall Keyaki Tree**

September 30 - October 4, 2021  
The Downstairs

### **The Jim Henson Foundation Presents:**

**American Puppet Theater Today  
The Photography of Richard Termine**  
September 29 - October 10, 2021  
La Galleria

### **Out of the Shadows Panel with Leslee Asch and Cheryl Henson**

October 3, 2021  
Ellen Stewart Theatre

## **COMING SOON**

### **When I put on Your Glove**

October 7 - 10, 2021  
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### **Body Concert**

October 7 - 10, 2021  
Ellen Stewart Theatre

### **Puppet Slam**

October 13 - 15, 2021  
The Downstairs

### **Dreaming**

October 14 - 17, 2021  
Ellen Stewart Theatre

### **Jump Start**

October 21 - 24, 2021  
The Downstairs