

# A Very Electric Christmas

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Presented by Lightwire Theater

Recommended Grades K-6



## About the Performance

Brighten your holidays with Lightwire Theater's *A Very Electric Christmas*. Audiences of all ages will treasure this magical and captivating tale of family, friendship and hope set to timeless holiday hits including Nat King Cole, Mariah Carey and Tchaikovsky. In this wonderful story, Santa's helpers are putting the final touches on presents as a young bird named Max and his family head south for the winter. When Max gets blown off course during a snowstorm, he ends up alone and lost at the North Pole. As he tries to make his way home, his adventure begins when he encounters friendly caroling worms, dancing poinsettias, Nutcracker soldiers, mischievous mice and an evil Rat King. This delightful holiday production will make children wide-eyed with delight and warm even the smallest of hearts.

**Check out clips of Lightwire Theater!**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=20JL\\_yOH\\_UM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20JL_yOH_UM)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqKdCgX7M8g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqKdCgX7M8g)

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## What is Lightwire Theater?

Creators Ian Carney and Corbin Popp met while dancing in Twyla Tharp's Broadway show *Movin' Out*. An immediate connection was made as they discovered their mutual love of art, theater and technology. After coming across a product called electroluminescent wire or "EL wire" for short, the possibilities seemed endless. Together, with their wives Eleanor and Whitney, they began to develop EL wire puppetry based on creatures that quickly gained personality. Their performances are a truly unique, innovative and visually dazzling theatrical experience. Utilizing the talents of four cast members, they strap on EL wire puppetry to their entire bodies and bring the creatures to life through movement and dance.

## Why Is Lightwire Theater Unique?

Each Lightwire Performance is a unique interpretation of a story told by dancers and glow-in-the-dark puppets.

These stories are told solely through movement and puppetry, without words, so it is up to your creative imagination to determine what is happening on stage!



Information in this study guide is adapted from [www.lightwiretheater.com](http://www.lightwiretheater.com) and [www.puppetsnow.com](http://www.puppetsnow.com) and [www.theaterseatstore.com](http://www.theaterseatstore.com).

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## What is electroluminescent wire?

Electroluminescent wire (EL wire) is a thin copper wire coated in a **phosphor**, which glows when an electric current is applied to it. Used in safety and emergency lighting, toys, clothing, and structure decoration, EL wire is unique from other stringed lights that it produces a continuous stream of unbroken visible light. The wire's extreme thinness allows for great flexibility – fantastic for use in designing puppets.



## How are the characters created?

The EL wire is attached to a battery pack that the actors wear. The characters are made from **struts** and **joints** and then covered with black cloth lined in EL wire. The actors must remain invisible during the performance; therefore they will be seen due to the EL wire **backlighting** their bodies. Considering this is a show without words, the characters are brought to life by the actors through movement and dance set to music.

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## History of Puppet Theater

While the precise birth date of puppets is unknown, puppetry dates back over 3,000 years. Probably originating in Egypt, puppets are mentioned in writing as early as 422 B.C.E. Following Egypt, puppetry became popular culture in India, Indonesia, Japan, and Europe. India included the use of stick puppets depicting Indian **epics** such as **Mahabharata** and **Balakanda**. Indonesian puppets were and still are considered sacred and part of ritual ceremonies. In Japan, puppets took on more entertainment with **ornate** designs as well as on a larger scale in street theater. In Europe, puppets acted out **morality** in plays, behaving in ways that would have been unacceptable for humans to portray. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, string puppets had upgraded from two strings to controls that included as many as eight strings. Shortly thereafter, puppetry would be divided from actor theaters and began to compete with **vaudeville** and music hall theater. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a resurgence of popular puppetry was seen with the introduction of The Muppets, created by Jim Hensen, and the musical *The Lion King*, based on the Disney classic tale. Puppets continue to appeal to children and families on television, movies, and stage and are seen as way to relate moral messages about childhood concepts.



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## Types of Puppets

Marionette (String Puppetry)—puppets are suspended by strings from a horizontal bar held in the puppeteer's hand. By manipulating the tilt of the bar, puppeteers make the puppet move.

Hand Puppetry—puppets are controlled by the puppeteer's hand fitting directly inside of the puppet.

Two-man Puppetry—larger puppets are controlled by two puppeteers, typically one operating the head while the other operates the body.

Carnival (Body Puppetry)—these puppets are seen in Lightwire Theater's shows, street spectacles, sporting games or the *Lion King*. Puppets are worn as a full-body suit.

Bunraku Puppetry—based in Japan, a life-sized wooden puppet is illuminated by focused light; however, puppeteers can be seen by the audience.

Shadow Puppetry—a paper cutout on a stick is illuminated onto a piece of white fabric, producing shadows that are viewed by the audience and allow for puppeteers to be hidden.