

Paula Vogel's  
the long  
christmas  
ride home

A puppet play with actors  
for mature audiences

Directed by Kathleen M. McGeever

Poster design by Sophie Davidson VisualDESIGNLab

March  
2023

Studio Theater	Theater
March	March
2-4	4-5
7:30pm	2:00pm

THREE WAYS TO ORDER TICKETS:

ONLINE: [nau.edu/cto](http://nau.edu/cto)

PHONE: 928-523-5661

IN PERSON: Ticket office at the University Union



[nau.edu/cal/theatre/events](http://nau.edu/cal/theatre/events)

Join us for panel discussions after performances visit  
[nau.edu/theatre/events-ticketing/events/](http://nau.edu/theatre/events-ticketing/events/) for more information.

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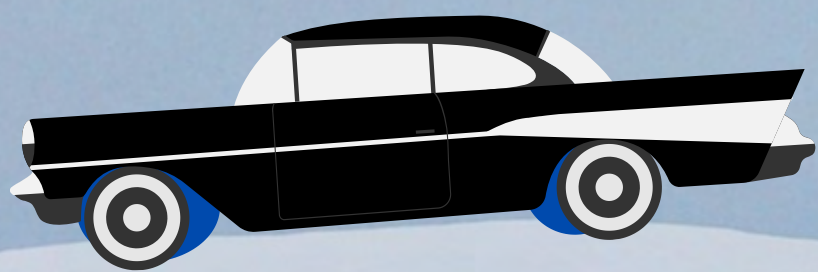
Department of Theatre

# Floating World

For you, dear crew,  
This thistle  
Have you heard of One  
One called Komache?  
We float like seaweed  
She has said,  
Now tangle, next part,  
But I say like thistle  
Are we blown.  
Things of the sea  
Stop at the shore,  
But things of the air  
Roll on always.  
For you, dear crew,  
This thistle.

Carl Vogel

(From his unpublished manuscript)



# A Terrible Beauty

## Kathleen M. McGeever, Director

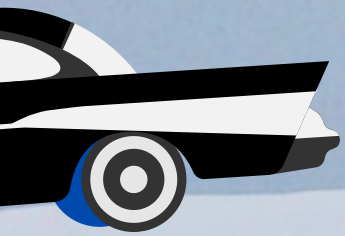
At the precipice, there is a 'Thin Place' and within the mist, the long and cold winter, a family of five's lives are changed forever. "Decades and days ago" (Vogel, 9) the veil lifts, time shifts, and memory is viewed with perspective. Paula Vogel's play, *the long christmas ride home (tlcrh)* is a lyrical and haunting story that portrays love so unbreakable, so resilient that it reaches beyond death and heals the inescapable legacies of childhood. Vogel's powerful imagery is something that stays with me beyond the text and finds its way into every fiber of my being. As one of the narrators says,

"And the fragile arms of the children  
Linked, stretched and strained  
And the thin strands of flesh  
Did not break." (Vogel, 73)

Written as poetry capturing the feel of Haiku, Vogel takes us on a journey that is equally shared and intimate. We breathe her story into our hearts in a collective breath and an individual strand of hope. *tlcrh*, is a breath-giving story where an action of violence shatters the lives of three siblings each struggling to find their balance.

Paula Vogel often explores previous works in her writing, and *the long christmas ride home* is no exception. Our playwright has not been shy about sharing that her play is influenced by Thornton Wilder. She shares in her notes on the play. "In terms of production style, I'd appreciate it if directors would read the one-act plays of Thornton Wilder for guidance: *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*, *Pullman Car Hiawatha*, and *The Long Christmas Dinner*." (5) Vogel has also been influenced by Japanese traditional Noh drama and Bunraku puppet theatre. She summons the ghost of her brother Carl who died of AIDS in 1988, and I believe that she puts herself in this story with the character of Claire. Vogel gifts us a story haunted by the ghosts of Thornton Wilder, her brother Carl, herself, and our own social history.

The play has a circular form told through the lens of the "American family," and by the children. I remember the long drives when my family of seven were crammed into the Ford station wagon – five stair-stepped kids, two parents, 2 dogs and 1 cat. The world changed before us, the games we played, the intense carsickness exacerbated by the cigarette smoke from our mother's habit, the constant need to stop for breaks, where play morphed into fighting, and where my father would threaten to turn the car around. The nostalgia we relive in her play is shattered by the underlying tension and the potential for violence, and where "decades and days" have passed and we have grown beyond the ideas, expectations, and the traumas.



Paula Vogel plays with temporal space in our story. We begin in no time, a Thin Place and float through the 1960's, 1980's. Vogel's thin place captures a concept familiar across the globe. A "thin place," in some cultures is sacred, it is where the veil thins, and our ancestors return to walk amongst us, where they may help us to find perspective. Thin places reflect a spiritual thinness as well. When we face trials, eternity becomes closer. There is a Celtic saying that states, "Heaven and Earth are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter." Vogel's structure disorients the cause and effect, aiding the viewer to see history as perception, allowing for a more critical view of the present.

The play is ritual. Vogel chose Christmas as the catalyst for the play's journey because she states, "In America, whether you are Christian or not, Christmas is the closest we have to a shared mythology." (Mansbridge, 219) She asks us NOT to perform it during the holiday season, but to instead perform it prior to or after the holiday, while maintaining the Noh tradition of performing the piece within the season the story represents. (Vogel, 7) Vogel's deliberate choice displaces the power that festive memory has on the ritual of the holiday.

Paula Vogel is influenced by the traditions of Japanese culture with *tcrh*, however, she shares this caveat, "This play is a fusion of a one-act play and Bunraku puppet theatre techniques – or more importantly, of one Westerner's misunderstanding of Bunraku. The misunderstanding is key." (Vogel, 5) In my analysis, I discovered why misunderstanding is "key." While the traditions are important, copying would appropriate the sacred which was the opposite of what she intended. Instead, we needed to explore how the choices she uses in the text further the story without appropriation.

There were many post WWII playwrights influenced by Asian art and culture and Thornton Wilder was among them. Critics and historians say that in the post WWII writer's quest for truth, they desired a sacred theatre that would be in contrast to Western Theatrical traditions, especially Psychological Realism. Vogel's work borrows the idea of escaping the demands of her culture and the history to find something that rejects aesthetic norms because to do so, allows her to examine the story in a deeper more truthful way. She also asks us to embrace "Wilder's greatest gift to the American theatre in presentational rather than representational" style. As an ardent fan of Mr. Wilder myself, I hope you see his influences in our story.

The Floating World, and the Edo period of Japanese history fascinate our characters. In our pre-rehearsal dramaturgical sessions and research, we found the Floating World represents the coexistence of life as sorrowful and beautiful, ephemeral and impermanent. Joy leads to sorrow as the Minister says in the play, "It is not only Joy to the World! It is Joy in the World!" (27) Paula Vogel's brother Carl, found inspiration with the idea of the floating world, the transcendence of time and place "Joy in the World!" He also deeply understood, through personal tragedy, the impermanence of life.

“But I say like thistle  
Are we blown.  
Things of the sea  
Stop at the shore,  
But things of the air  
Roll on always.”

(Carl Vogel, unpublished manuscript)

Paula Vogel's connection to air and breath are essential in the story. The breath of life existing in moments of need, profound understanding, relief, awe, and hope. Breath is a consistent marker of change – good or bad, we need breath. The animation of puppets is also incomplete without breath. Choosing to employ puppets in the telling of the story is profound. Without breath, a puppet is a lifeless doll, without breath we do not exist either.

The grandparents repeat the idea of “Isn't it amazing what people throw away” (35) and while we chuckle in the present with the grandmother re-gifting trash from the trash room, with time we gain perspective, the children have also been set aside, thrown away. The parents want the façade of the perfect Nuclear Family of the 1950's and 1960, and they have to cover what is discordant with the philosophy, including the pain and internal conflict they suffer. The dispossession of who the children are as human beings is strengthened by the adult parents (woman and man) narrating their thoughts, lines, and feelings, enhanced by the children played by puppets. The children become, disposed, homeless spirits seeking refuge (Mansbridge, 224).

While the play takes us on a journey with deep lows and few highs, we are reminded of Ukiyo-e, *The Floating World*. The terrible beauty, described by Stephen, is the simultaneous beauty and ugliness of HIV/AIDS. If he views the virus as only the antagonist evil, then he is merely existing “in today”. The published play includes a series of letters, from Carl to Paula. We have displayed them in the lobby. They are filled with imagery that is not always happy, but they are inspired with beauty and hope. This is the story we share, the terrible beauty of life and the hope it holds.

We must breathe in life amongst the terrible beauty.

Vogel, Paula, *the long christmas ride home*, Theatre Communications Group, New York, 2004

Memory's Dramas, Modernity's Ghosts: Thornton Wilder, Japanese Theatre, and Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, Joanna Mansbridge, *Comparative Drama*, 2012, Vol 46, No. 2 pp 209-235

# *the long christmas ride home*

By Paula Vogel

## CAST

Narrator/Man - Alexander Furash\*

Narrator/Woman - Kylie Soto\*

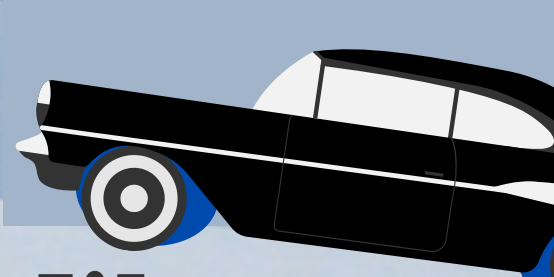
Claire - Elle Zizzi\*

Claire Puppeteer - Arielle Leiser

Rebecca - Madison Lackey

Rebecca Puppeteer - Grace Rich\*

Stephen - Fernando Rubio\*

Stephen Puppeteer - Asher Robinson\*+ 

Minister/Dancer/Grandparents - Isaac Wilson

Puppeteers - Austin Zoerb\*,

Cassie Freedman\*

^ Capstone \*APO +USITT

# Creative Team

Director: Kathleen M. McGeever

Assistant Directors: Hayley Diaz\*

Ian Burnett\*

Puppet Design/Coach: Kate Ellis

Asst. Puppetry Coach: Hayley Diaz\*

Lighting Design: Ben Alexander

Sound Design: Alexis Connell

Costume Design: Jennifer Peterson

Asst. Costume Design: Ainsley Brown

Cutter/Draper: Isabel Dial

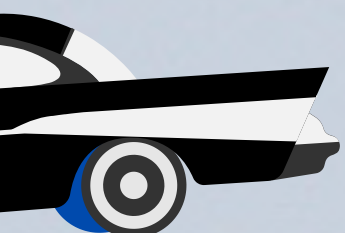
Scenic/Prop Design: Megan Hilton

Voice/Speech/Intimacy Choreography/Fight

Coordinator: Rebecca Whitehurst

Fight Captain: Ian Burnett\*

Dance Choreography: Grace Asaro<sup>^</sup>\*



# Production

Technical Director: Mark Delancey

Stage Manager: Connor Carreon\*

Asst. Stage Managers: Cameron Middaugh\*

Manuel Santanna-Propper

Costume Shop Manager: Sammi Geppert

Event Promotion: Kathleen M. McGeever

# Special Thanks

Chris Boyer

Chris Griffin

Alexandra Carpino

Kareli Vanessa Cota

Jamie Paul

Heather Weisberger

Patricia Murphey

The Visual Design Lab (VDL)

Ruth Solin

Jeff Kennedy

Great Circle Radio

Jamey Hasapis

Dunja Jelesijevic

Rinka Kojima

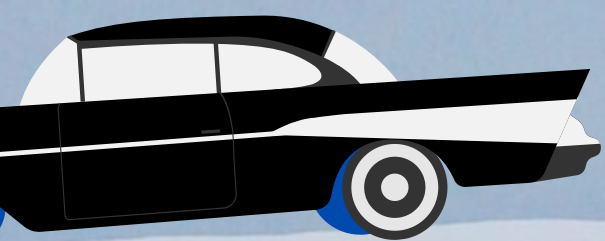
Greg Lella

Leilah Danielson

Heather Martel

Greg Hales

Tom & Ginger McGeever



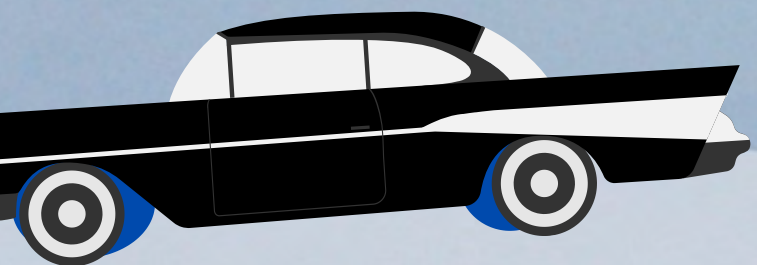


# Scenic Crew

Crew Head: Jordan Hannah  
Zo Walter, MJ Theriault, Kristen Lillie

# Costume Crew

Crew Head: Jizel Gomez  
Jordan King, Amaia Evans, Nya Salahdeen, Jett Poplawski,  
Shane Potts, Olivia Carter, Jose Hernandez, Anna Rivera,  
Conor Steward



# Lighting & Audio Crew

Kayla Black, Lindsey Leonard,  
Mandolin Meilbeck, Hailey Martin, Natalie Zec

# Front Of House

## Events Promotion

Cassie Freedman\*, Elle Zizzi\*, Chaiah Durst\*, Brett Puppilo\*, Shakey Anderson\*, Austin Zoerb\*, Connor Carreon\*

## House Management

Hayley Diaz\*, Brett Puppilo\*, Dayna Bustamante, Hannah Paluch\*, Sydney Libbert\*, Jeffery Holmes, Justin Darvick

## Poster Design

Sophie Davidson

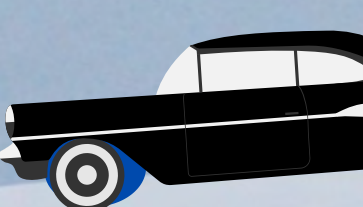
## Program Design

Cassie Freedman\*

## Department Chair

Kathleen M. McGeever

# Process Pictures



# Welcome to the Spring Season

We started the year sharing our season title, PRECIPICE, by describing the image of being perched on a steep and dangerous cliff teetering between harm and hope. The first show of the spring season, Paula Vogel's *the long christmas ride home*, literally takes us to the edge of an abyss where perspective brings promise. Our characters skid toward a precipice, but through great sacrifice they breathe life freshly into bodies that bear meaning. The play's strong themes and thought provoking style has created a wonderful opportunity to connect with campus and community to bring inspiring talks and discussion. Please stay after the following performances, arrive early for our final performance, and take part in the conversations we have planned.

Friday, March 3, **Growing up Gay and Lesbian in the 1960's, Coming of Age in the 1980's** – immediately following the performance.

Panelists: Jamey Hasapis, Franke College of Business, HIV/AIDS outreach coordinator North Country Healthcare, and representatives from NAU's PRISM, and theLGBTQIA Commission.

Saturday, March 4, matinee, **Japanese Theatre, The Floating World, and Edo influences in the Play** – immediately following the performance. Panelists: Dr. Dunja Jalesijevic, CCS and Rinka Kojima, International Student.

Saturday, March 4, evening performance, **The Nuclear Family, Gender Roles, Roles within the Family as Reflected in the Play** – immediately following the performance.

Panelists: Dr Leilah Danielson, History/WGS Dr. Gregory Lella, History History and DrHeather Martel, History/WGS

Sunday, March 5 matinee, Pre -Panel 1:15-1:45pm, curtain 2:00pm, **HIV/AIDS -Progress and the Future/Honoring the Ryan White Foundation**, Panelist: Panelists: Jamey Hasapis, Franke College of Business, HIV/AIDS outreach coordinator North Country Healthcare

In April, we will officially announce our 2023-2024 Season. We are currently checking on rights and making our final selections, but we promise it is going to be a GOOD ONE! We plan to return to our Season Ticket with excellent savings for those who wish to support the department by making a commitment to the coming season.

Wait! The 2022-2023 Season is not over yet, we have the current production *the long christmas ride home* running through March 5th, and *A Rite of Spring: in sound and movement* a celebratory ode to spring, and a sensory exploration of bodies and environment, ritualistic behavior and sacrifice, opening April 27th. We also invite you to see the wonderful work our Design and Technology majors are doing during our Design Expo 2023! Stay tuned for details.

If you have liked what you have seen in the past, please consider giving to the Harper Family Endowment for Production by [visiting the NAU Foundation and giving to Harper Family Endowment](#) . The Harper was founded by two philanthropic alums who saw the power of creating theatre in the educational setting and beyond. Thank you Bill and Jana Harper! The Harper helps us to produce our season and bring amazing stories to life for our audience. Most importantly, the Harper provides opportunities for student actors, designers, stage managers, crews, and front of house staff to learn theatre by doing theatre (#DoingTheatre). Please consider giving any amount to this important fund.

You are all very welcome to our theatre home, where stories emerge, enlighten, entertain, and bring us a little closer to understanding what it is to be human.

Sla'inte (Cheers) and best wishes to all!

Kathleen M. McGeever  
Department Chair  
Professor of Performance, Directing  
NAU Theatre